

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Internationalising Palestine:
UNRWA and Palestinian nationalism in the refugee camps,
1967-82

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Palestinian nationalist movement in the refugee camps from 1967-82. It argues that UNRWA had a quasi-governmental role in the camps, and therefore inadvertently helped shape the development of Palestinian political nationalism in these spaces. Despite its formally apolitical standing as a humanitarian UN body, UNRWA's impact on the ground was politically loaded; it was an international organisation whose work was juxtaposed with the camps' nationalistic environments. This resulted in a symbiotic process, whereby Palestinian nationalist politics came to influence UNRWA's work, and vice versa.

Such an outcome was the result of UNRWA's long-standing intimate involvement with the Palestinian refugee camps, ever since it began operations in 1950 in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza. Yet it was also due in part to the agency of the refugees themselves, who were politically active and organised despite their structural disadvantage. When it came to UNRWA, they drew on their limited leverage as beneficiaries and lower-level employees. Just as Israel, the Western donor states and the Arab host states sought to use UNRWA to influence Palestinian politics, so the refugees challenged the Agency whenever they believed it to be acting against their political interests. UNRWA accordingly came to act as an intersection between the international sphere and Palestinian refugee politics.

In examining these dynamics, this thesis highlights the distinctiveness of the Palestinian refugee experience, as encapsulated by UNRWA's unique institutional nature. It also provides an important case study of themes relevant beyond Palestinian history, including the politics of humanitarianism; the intersection between nationalism and internationalism; and the relationship of identity to territoriality. This thesis thus speaks to modern international history writ large, while also enriching understandings of

Palestinian and Levantine history in relation to the refugee camps, the UN and UNRWA.

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List of Abbreviations

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

GUPT	General Union of Palestinian Teachers
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
IPS	Institute for Palestine Studies
IRC	International Red Cross
JA	Jewish Agency
LORCS	League of Red Cross Societies
MECA	Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College, Oxford, UK
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Lebanon]
OIB	Orient-Institut Beirut
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories [West Bank and Gaza Strip after 1967]
PA	Palestinian Authority
PARI	Palestine Arab Refugee Institute [in Syria before 1974]
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command
PLA	Palestine Liberation Army
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PPC	Palestine Planning Centre

PPPA	Palestine Poster Project Archive
PRC	Palestinian Research Centre
RSC	Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University, UK
TNA	The National Archives, London, UK [previously Public Records Office]
UAR	United Arab Republic [Egypt and Syria, 1958-61]
UHA	UNRWA Headquarters' Archive, Amman, Jordan
UN	United Nations
UNA	United Nations Archives, New York, USA
UNCCP	United Nations Conciliation Committee for Palestine
UNDRP	United Nations Disaster Relief Project
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNRPR	United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee for Palestine
USNA	United States National Archive, College Park, USA
VTC	Vocational Training Centre [UNRWA]

Glossary

<i>'amda</i>	return
<i>'ayyām al-UNRWA</i>	'days of UNRWA'; refugees' term for 1950s
<i>ṣalāḥīn</i>	peasants, farmers
<i>ḥida'īyyīn</i>	lit. 'those who sacrifice themselves'; used to denote Palestinian militants. Singular <i>ḥida'ī</i> (m), <i>ḥida'īyya</i> (f)
<i>filasṭīn</i>	Palestine
<i>ghurba</i>	exile, dispossession from home
<i>hijra</i>	lit. 'emigration'; used by some Palestinians to describe their journey out of Palestine in 1948
<i>intifāda</i>	uprising by Palestinians, first in 1987 and then in 2000
<i>jīl al-thawra</i>	the generation of the revolution
<i>jīl al-Nakba</i>	the Nakba generation
<i>karāma</i>	dignity
<i>kuṣṣīya</i>	traditional Arab peasant headdress, adopted as symbol of the Palestinian nationalist movement
<i>Nakba</i>	'disaster' or 'catastrophe'; used to denote the 1948 Palestinian dispossession
<i>Naksa</i>	'setback'; Arab term for the 1967 defeat
<i>mukhtār</i>	head of a town or village; term used for local refugee camp leaders
<i>shatāt</i>	diaspora
<i>ṣumūd</i>	steadfastness
<i>tahrīr</i>	liberation

<i>tanṭīn</i>	integration or naturalisation (lit. 'becoming a national')
<i>thawra</i>	revolution; sometimes used to denote the Palestinian uprisings in the camps in 1969, and/or the nationalist movement of the long 1970s
<i>waṭan</i>	homeland

Note on Transliteration and Translation

The Arabic transliterations in this thesis generally follow the guide of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES), except for common spellings of personal names and common English forms such as Beirut, Damascus, mufti etc.

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

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

Introduction

*'UNRWA can do at once less and more than a State.'*¹
UNRWA Chef de Cabinet, memo to Commissioner-General, 1970

These words are as revealing as they are succinct. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) holds a role that is unique, complex and nebulous. Mandated by the UN and funded largely by Western states, UNRWA has served as the primary service provider for registered Palestinian refugees in the Levant since the early days of their collective dispossession. While the details of its large-scale relief programmes have changed over time, its presence in the region has been virtually coterminous with the Palestinians' statelessness. Comparing the Agency's work to that of a state thus alludes not only to its condition, but also to that of the Palestinian refugees whom it serves.

Created in 1949 – the year after the Palestinian national dispossession known as the Nakba² – UNRWA operates in the geographical areas home to the largest gatherings of Palestinian refugees: the West Bank and Gaza Strip (known after 1967 as the Occupied Palestinian Territories or OPT), along with Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. These areas are collectively known as the 'five fields' of UNRWA's operations, and form the geographical scope of this thesis. The five fields are particularly significant as they host not only substantial Palestinian populations, but also the Palestinian refugee camps, administered by UNRWA, numbering 58 in total.³ These camps, while historically home to only a minority of Palestinian refugees,⁴ have a significance disproportionate to their numbers, and as such constitute the

¹ Memo from UNRWA Chef de Cabinet to Commissioner-General, 6 August 1970, File RE230(WB) I, Box RE22, UNRWA Headquarters Archive (UHA), Amman.

² 'Nakba' is an Arabic term literally meaning 'catastrophe' or 'disaster', but most often used to denote the Palestinian dispossession of 1948. It was coined soon after the event by Syrian intellectual Constantine Zureik. See: Constantine Zureik, *Ma'nā al-Nakba* (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm lil-malayin, 1948).

³ There are 58 formally recognised Palestinian refugee camps, not including numerous 'unofficial' camps, also known as settlements. See Appendices A-E.

⁴ As will be explained over the course of this thesis, the majority of Palestinian refugees live not in camps but in towns and cities, both within UNRWA's fields of operation and elsewhere.

setting with which this thesis is most concerned. It is in the camps, home to thousands of stateless refugees, that UNRWA's role has been the most influential and significant. As the host states have largely restricted their intervention in the camps to matters of security and policing, the onus has fallen on UNRWA to provide the services that are usually the domain of the modern nation-state: not only emergency relief but also healthcare, education and municipal services.

In this sense, and as the opening quotation shows, UNRWA's role has transcended that of a simple aid agency. In theory, it was established as an apolitical relief organisation working to alleviate suffering among vulnerable refugees. In practice, it increasingly came to function as a quasi-government. While this was most noticeable in the Agency's services, it could also be seen in how the Agency was responsible for identifying and registering Palestinian refugees, providing formal verification of their status, and issuing what was often their only official documentation. This made it a vital part of Palestinian history, and rendered it especially key to questions of their national identity as a stateless and scattered people. In the light of the Palestinians' dispersal across the Middle East, UNRWA served – however inadvertently – as a commonality in the refugees' experiences of exile, its work providing a shared frame of reference to counter the geographical and political variations of the five fields.

As an international aid agency, UNRWA typified many global post-war norms about shared international responsibility and humanitarian intervention. Yet at the same time, it was noticeably unique. The Agency was and remains the only UN body mandated to serve one particular group of people, namely the Palestinian refugees. As a result, the latter were barred from receiving services from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which was created shortly after UNRWA with responsibility for all other refugees worldwide. UNRWA's set-up thus created a distinctive

regime for the Palestinian refugees, which brought them both benefits and considerable disadvantages.

Most importantly, UNRWA's role in the camps placed it in a unique position vis-à-vis the politics of Palestinian exile. The Nakba was a watershed moment for Palestinian national consciousness and political identity. The fate of the refugees became the most potent symbol of Palestinian dispossession, as the loss of Palestine came to partially level the earlier divisions of Palestinian society, and unite the people by way of their shared loss.⁵ Those who had lost the most, and who had the least to fall back on, ended up in the refugee camps that were quickly set up across the five fields, and then continuously administered by UNRWA after it began operations in May 1950.

The camps became central to the development of the Palestinian nationalist movement in exile, most noticeably when the latter took on a new ascendance in the period after 1967.⁶ As entirely Palestinian spaces, the camps were vital to the formation and incubation of nationalist ideas in exile, and strategies for bringing these ideas to fruition. They also provided the testing ground for post-1967 attempts by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to create a Palestinian para-state-in-exile, by building its own infrastructure and establishing some degree of territorial authority. A disproportionately high number of Palestinians who signed up to join the nationalist fighters known as *ḥida'iyīn*⁷ originated from the camps.

The post-1967 ascendance of the nationalist movement in the camps created new challenges for UNRWA, as the primary service provider and quasi-governmental authority in these spaces. A formally apolitical aid organisation, it now had to grapple with the intense politicisation of its areas

⁵ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 193.

⁶ Karma Nabulsi, 'Our strength is in the camps', *The Guardian*, 17 September 2002, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/sep/17/comment>, accessed 31 August 2017.

⁷ Literally meaning 'those who sacrifice themselves', this term is generally used to denote Palestinian nationalist guerrillas.

of operation. Raising the stakes even further, the camps' politicisation formed a central element of one of the most contentious conflicts of the modern era - a conflict that engaged not only the Middle Eastern region but also much of the wider world. All of this meant that the implicitly political nature of UNRWA's work became increasingly noticeable, as heightened attention fell on the factors shaping Palestinian national identity and activism. As the significance of UNRWA's work became increasingly loaded, the Agency faced intensifying yet conflicting demands from numerous parties: the Palestinian refugees it served, the Middle Eastern governments that hosted it, and the (largely Western) states that funded it.

The Agency's struggles on this front signified the paradoxes that existed at the heart of its work. It was an international agency ensconced in a setting that was both national and, from the late 1960s, increasingly nationalist. Moreover, it was an apolitical organisation tasked with working in an environment that could not have been more politically charged. These paradoxes in turn speak to wider themes in the global norms of the later twentieth century and their relationship to Palestinian history. As a UN agency mandated to serve one group of vulnerable people, UNRWA signified not only international (in practice Western-dominated) interventionism in the name of humanitarianism, but also the UN's long-standing involvement in the fate of Palestine and its people. It was thus representative of how modern Palestinian history has so often been characterised by the juxtaposition of nationalist and internationalist themes.

With such themes in mind, this thesis investigates UNRWA's role in the refugee camps during the Palestinian nationalist movement's heyday, from 1967-82. It is premised on two notions: the camps' central driving function in that movement at this time; and the vital role that UNRWA itself played in the camps. To unpack the dynamics of this set-up, the thesis asks a series of interrelated questions. What were the implications of the

camps' nationalistic politicisation in this period for UNRWA, the international apolitical UN agency running them? How did the Agency interact with and influence the nationalist movement that became so prominent in the camps? Finally, how did these shifting dynamics affect UNRWA's relations with the refugees it served, the Middle Eastern states that hosted it, and the 'international community' to which it was answerable?

The 'international community' itself is a complex and contested term requiring some further explanation here. Supposedly denoting global consensus and world opinion, it is in practice often dominated by Western powers, particularly the US, and thus rarely represents the true majority of international opinion. This was certainly true when it came to the historical actions of the so-called 'international community' in Palestine, which were driven largely by the strategic concerns of the US and the UK. It was accordingly noted on the previous page that supposedly 'international' humanitarian intervention via UNRWA was in practice Western-dominated. This thesis will use the term 'international community', largely in lieu of replacing it with another term that would be equally problematic, but with the awareness that the term refers to a Western-dominated system. For clarification, the term 'wider world' will be used when referring to the international sphere as a whole and not simply the Western-dominated powersphere.

Such considerations are especially pertinent to this thesis because it concerns an agency of the United Nations, which in theory is supposed to function as a formal representative of internationalist ideas and global consensus. In practice of course, the positioning of the UN has shared many of the wider problems inherent in the concept of the 'international community', with its positioning often determined by the Western global powers and the US in particular. To this day, the UN's binding policies are determined by the Security Council (UNSC), comprised of the five

permanent members of Russia, China, France, the US and the UK. There are also ten rotating non-permanent members, which are structurally disempowered and do not hold the veto. It is the UNSC, and particularly its permanent members, that have the power to issue binding resolutions and determine supposedly ‘international’ military action, sanctions and peacekeeping options.⁸

The UN’s other central body, the General Assembly (UNGA), could be described much more accurately as international. It is made up of all UN Member States, with each holding equal representation therein. The nature of this set-up became increasingly significant from the late 1960s, when widespread decolonisation across Africa and Asia led to the admission of large numbers of newly-independent member states, drastically changing the UNGA’s make-up. As a result, its membership became increasingly distinct from that of the UNSC, in both size and political positioning. Many ex-colonies were aligned with the politics of the Global South, and in particular tended to be sympathetic to the Palestinian national cause.

The UNGA has therefore been largely free of the superpower dominance that characterises the UNSC. However, it also holds considerably less power than the UNSC; while the UNGA can issue resolutions, they are not binding, and its main role in setting policy is to make recommendations.⁹ In perhaps the clearest single indication of the unequal balance of power between the two bodies, admission of new UN Member States must be approved by two-thirds of the UNGA and 9 of the UNSC’s 15 members – but can be barred by a simple veto from any of the UNSC’s five permanent members.

This uneven power distribution means that the Western domination of the UNSC has a knock-on effect on the nature of the UN as a whole. As shall be shown in this thesis, it resulted in a tendency for many Middle

⁸ UN, ‘The Security Council’, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/>, accessed 12 November 2018.

⁹ UN, ‘About the General Assembly’, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/> accessed 12 November 2018.

Easterners to view the UN with the suspicion that it ultimately served to further Western interests around the world. However, at the same time it should be noted that the UN is not and has never been a monolithic body. It is rather a complex and hybrid organisation driven by the competing interests of various Member States, and itself consisting of numerous bodies and agencies, albeit with some holding considerably more power than others. In view of the UN's internal complexity, this thesis refers to its specific bodies (eg. UNSC or UNGA) wherever possible, to avoid oversimplifying and reducing it.

These distinctions are particularly significant when analysing UNRWA, which is mandated by and answerable to the UNGA. This set-up fuelled Western criticism of the Agency in the late 1960s and 1970s, as the UNGA made its aforementioned shift towards the Global South and an increasingly pro-Palestinian position. The fact that UNRWA was created by and answerable to the UNGA is therefore highly significant when analysing the Agency's historical international positioning. However, there is a further layer of complexity derived from the fact that UNRWA's mandatory accountability to the UNGA has always been juxtaposed with a financial reliance on overwhelmingly Western donor states. In other words, UNRWA was entwined with the 'international community' in both senses: the Western-dominated structures that drove the formal manifestations of this concept; and the more equitable representation of nations around the world through the UNGA. As such, UNRWA perfectly embodies the tensions inherent in the very concept of internationalism. As mentioned above, to avoid conflation this thesis uses precise and careful terminology that distinguishes between the so-called 'international community', the wider world, the UNSC and the UNGA.

Understanding this nuance about UNRWA's positioning is particularly important when examining a period that saw major shifts in both the

internal dynamics of the UN and the nature of the Palestinian nationalist movement. In the case of the latter, the years 1967-82 were pivotal, sometimes dubbed the era of the *thawra* ('revolution'). This period saw the re-emergence and ascendance of Palestinian nationalism, grounded in the UNRWA-administered refugee camps. It was bookended by two watershed moments. First, the Arab states' devastating defeat by Israel in 1967 – known in Arabic as *al-Naksa* or 'the setback' – cleared the way for Palestinian nationalist organisations to take charge of their own struggle for statehood. As Palestinian nationalism increasingly diverged from pan-Arabism, militants known as *fida'iyyīn* seized the opportunity to take over the PLO and emancipate it from the command of the Arab League. The newly 'Palestinianised' PLO drew considerable support from the refugee camps, where it established its authority against the host states in a movement known as the *thawra*, based in Lebanon but with an impact felt across the region. Over the following decade, the PLO rose to global prominence and in 1974 even gained formal recognition at the UN – the very organisation from which UNRWA itself had emerged. Its heyday came to an abrupt end in 1982, when the Israeli siege of Beirut resulted in the PLO's expulsion to Tunisia, and the dismantling of the quasi-state structures it had established inside Lebanon.

The fifteen-year period from 1967-82 was thus crucial to the histories of both the Palestinian nationalist movement and the refugee camps. It was also crucial for UNRWA, as a time when the Agency was compelled to contend with the double challenge posed by the Palestinian *thawra* in the Arab host states, and the onset of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza (hereafter the Occupied Palestinian Territories: OPT). The 'long 1970s' saw the Agency navigate the dynamics of the occupation and the need to cooperate directly with the Israeli government, alongside the repercussions of the PLO's new ascendance in the camps. As such, the

period marked the most acute phase of UNRWA's intersection with Palestinian national politics. It also brought the inherent contradictions of UNRWA's work to the fore, as the disconnect between its ostensible purpose and the realities on the ground became increasingly glaring.

With such considerations in mind, this thesis probes the nature and impact of UNRWA's interactions with the Palestinian nationalist movement in the refugee camps from 1967-82. In particular, it investigates the extent to which, and the ways in which, UNRWA's central role in the camps helped shape Palestinian national identity among the refugees. In so doing it engages directly with the juxtaposition between nationalism and internationalism in Palestinian history. UNRWA has not only defined and determined who can be counted as a Palestinian refugee, but has also governed and shaped their spaces, transmitting international conventions and norms through its practices, policies and programmes in the camps. By exploring UNRWA's impact within the framework of its status as a UN body, this PhD examines how far and in what ways the Agency acted as a conduit between the Palestinian refugees and the wider world.

Thesis arguments

The central contention of this thesis is that UNRWA functioned as a key factor in shaping the development of Palestinian political nationalism in the refugee camps from 1967-82. In other words, it argues that the Agency's impact and influence was politically loaded in practice, if not ostensibly. To make this case, the thesis establishes and connects the two premises mentioned earlier: that the camps were central to the Palestinian nationalist movement during the *thawra* era; and that UNRWA acted as the quasi-government in these camps. Having explained these points, the thesis then advances three arguments to expound how and why this set-up made

UNRWA a central, if overlooked, factor in the nationalist movement during this period.

Firstly, it is argued that UNRWA, in its quasi-governmental role, came to act as a point of connection between the international sphere, which authorised and funded the Agency, and the Palestinian nationalist movement, which dominated and subsumed the camps where it worked. The intimate nature of UNRWA's involvement in the camps meant that its work fused with the nationalist movement as it overtook these spaces during the *thanra*. This resulted in a symbiotic process, whereby Palestinian nationalist politics influenced the Agency's work while at the same time the Agency's work helped shape the development of Palestinian nationalist politics. Developments on the ground thus belied UNRWA's official designation as an apolitical body.

Much of the discussion in this thesis focuses on the specific ways in which UNRWA's influence on the Palestinian nationalist movement manifested itself. Particular attention is paid to two areas of the Agency's work: its registration policy, which determined who 'counted' in official terms as a Palestinian refugee; and its education programme, which facilitated the dissemination of nationalist ideas in exclusively Palestinian spaces. Both elements show how the content of Palestinian nationalism at this time came to be influenced and shaped by international norms via UNRWA. The Agency's programmes and policies all had to be approved by the UN, the donor states, and to a lesser extent the host states that allowed UNRWA to operate in their territories. As such, international standards and models regarding the nation-state, sovereignty, and national self-determination became especially prominent in the otherwise often insular refugee camps. At the same time, UNRWA's inherently transnational nature – as an organisation that operated consistently across numerous states –

helped reinforced the Palestinians' shared national consciousness across the dispersal of their exile.

The thesis' second argument holds that all the parties involved with UNRWA's work recognised and understood its function in essentially political terms, regardless of its formally apolitical status. The nature and content of the Agency's interactions with the Arab host states, the Western donor states, Israel, the PLO and the Palestinian refugees themselves all signified that its work had an underlying political quality to it. This is particularly important in view of the fact that UNRWA was intrinsically dependent on the continuing support of these parties to be able to operate. As such, they actively helped shape the Agency, and had a direct influence on the continuation of its work over the decades.

The third and final argument concentrates this broader analysis on the institutional representation of the Palestinian nationalist movement: the PLO. It contends that the PLO, like the host states and donor states, observed the political significance of UNRWA's work and how it connected Palestinian nationalism to the international sphere. As a result, the PLO sought to use UNRWA as a tool for gaining greater legitimacy on the world stage. In particular, UNRWA's prominent role in the refugee camps was a key component of the PLO's internationalist strategy and its fixation on achieving legitimacy at the UN in the 1970s.

A number of themes underpin these arguments. In particular, the thesis affirms and explicates the considerable agency of the refugee camp communities themselves. Despite their extraordinary structural vulnerabilities, the refugees were politically organised and active from an early stage of their dispossession. Within the restricted framework of their disadvantage, they acted wherever possible to challenge the situation in which they found themselves and re-shape it along their own preferred lines.

Accordingly, this thesis includes numerous examples of how the refugees' agency manifested itself over the years. In particular, it was a constant theme in their relationship with UNRWA, as they consistently challenged the Agency when they believed that it was acting against their political interests.

Furthermore, the political development of the camps in the years 1967-82 – and particularly the role of UNRWA at this time – demonstrates the intersection between nationalism and internationalism that was a continuous feature of the Palestinian refugee camps in the Levant. As nationalistic environments organised and administered by an international body, the camps served as spaces for the quotidian interface between these theoretically opposing notions. As the nationalist movement came to consume the camps in the period from 1967 to 1982, its fusion with internationalism became particularly pronounced. The result was a construction of Palestinian nationalism with an evident international inflection.

In making these points, the thesis also highlights the distinctiveness of the Palestinian refugee experience, as encapsulated by UNRWA's unique nature as an institution. It focuses in particular on the political implications of this distinctiveness, as the Palestinian nationalist movement navigated the dynamics of establishing its legitimacy in the international sphere. As is discussed below, many of these themes have heretofore been overlooked or insufficiently discussed in the scholarship. By examining them in depth, this thesis will fill this gap in the literature, and make an important contribution to understanding Palestinian history in relation to the refugee camps, the UN and UNRWA.

Original contribution

By explicating UNRWA's importance as a factor in the development of Palestinian nationalism, this PhD establishes a new historical narrative that enriches scholarly understanding of numerous subjects. In particular, it advances a more comprehensive characterisation of the Palestinian nationalist movement, as being deliberately situated in the international setting. Indeed, this thesis shows that the historical development of Palestinian nationalism cannot be fully understood outside of an international context. Such a depiction belies perceptions of Palestinian nationalism as atavistic, rooted in nostalgia, and detached from modern international history. This thesis shows that far from relying on a romanticised vision of a lost golden age, Palestinian nationalism was shaped by the workings of a contemporary, internationally-mandated and internationally-funded Agency. It was a modern movement, shaped by global conceptions of the nation-state that were standardised and expressed with institutions like the UN.

In this way, the research presented here challenges wider interpretations about what has driven the Palestinian national consciousness. Specifically, it augments understandings of the PLO, presenting it as a movement that engaged directly and consistently with the global order. Such an assessment provides an important counter to tendencies to treat Palestinian history in isolation. In fact, Palestine has long been integrated into international history; UNRWA is one manifestation of a long-term trend across the twentieth century, previously evidenced by the international nature of the British Mandate.

By recasting the nature of the Palestinian nationalist movement, this thesis also portrays UNRWA as an organisation of historical political significance. It depicts the Agency's creation and operations as being

symptomatic of the long-running Palestinian entwinement with internationalism, manifested from 1945 in the form of continual UN interventions in the country - most notably, the Partition Plan of 1947.¹⁰ As such, UNRWA should be fully incorporated into Palestinian political histories despite its ostensibly apolitical status. Such a reconsideration of UNRWA's role is one of this thesis' most distinctive contributions to the scholarship, challenging the tendency to take the Agency's formally apolitical status at face value.

This re-assessment of UNRWA also carries major implications for understanding the refugee camps that it has administered since 1950. As is outlined below, much of the analysis here focuses on the camps *as spaces*, probing how their spatial set-up enabled and incubated the Palestinian nationalist movement in exile. This engagement with the camps' territorial distinctiveness breaks new ground in evaluating the Palestinian diaspora's national consciousness, by analysing the intersection between territoriality, political dynamics, and social history.

Furthermore, by focussing on the history of the camp populations, this thesis lays the groundwork for moving away from conventional paradigms in modern Middle Eastern history. Israeli-Palestinian history in particular is usually constructed around the periodisation of the wars from 1948 onwards. Yet by focusing on the camp refugees, this thesis approaches the region's history within the frame of social history rather than merely the dynamics of high politics, diplomacy and war. As will be shown here, the camps' histories were marked not only by the well-known landmarks of 1948 and 1967, but also by more grassroots developments such as the *thawra* of 1969, and shifts in UNRWA's policies and programmes. Moreover, this thesis complicates the usual paradigm of the Arab-Israeli conflict that

¹⁰ UNGA Resolution 181 included the infamous 'Partition Plan' for Mandate Palestine. See: UNGA Resolution 181, A/RES/181(II), 29 November 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253>, accessed 31 August 2017.

assumes a constant underlying division between Israel and the Arab states. Here, the division is often placed instead between the Palestinian refugees and the states governing them – meaning that Israel is categorised with the Arab host governments of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

In the contemporary context of the Syrian refugee crisis in the Middle East, findings about the history of the Palestinian camps are especially pertinent. The research presented here not only illuminates the nature of the refugee camp as a space, but also elucidates how and why international and regional approaches to refugee crises have changed over time. The subject has a particular contemporary relevance in view of the fact that many of the Middle Eastern states now hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees are also host to Palestinian camps. Moreover, their experience of the Palestinian precedent has had a direct bearing on these states' policies towards Syrian refugees.¹¹

Finally, the significance of this research transcends disciplinary boundaries. It is relevant not only to Palestinian history but also to broader scholarship on nationalism, international development, humanitarianism, and the UN itself. In particular, it is pertinent to understanding the emergence and development of international humanitarianism in the decades after the Second World War. UNRWA constituted the UN's response to the first large-scale humanitarian crisis it directly encountered. As such, it was both formative and exceptional - making it a vital case study for understanding the international dynamics of this era.

¹¹ Anne Irfan, 'The Palestinian precedent and the Syrian refugee crisis', *Your Middle East*, 30 November 2016, <http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/culture/the-palestinian-precedent-and-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-44193>, accessed 1 November 2017.

Historiography

Palestinian political history is one of the most widely-studied areas of the modern Middle East. Its complexity, controversy, and connection to numerous regional and global issues all make it the subject of considerable scholarly attention, not least because of its potential political implications. Indeed, Gilbert Achcar noted in 2016 that more PhD theses are completed each year on Palestine than on the rest of the Middle East combined.¹² Moreover, a substantial proportion of this scholarship is devoted to the Palestinian national struggle, national identity and consciousness. This makes the particular subjects of the thesis especially contested in historiographical terms. Nevertheless, the concentration and clustering of the historiography around particular themes means that space remains for studies that approach these well-worn areas from a new angle – such as this one.

Palestinian national history

Works on Palestinian history have come not only from historians but also from scholars in the fields of anthropology, political science, international relations and international development. As a result, this is a subject with a strongly cross-disciplinary feel. It is also, of course, a highly controversial subject, with contemporary politics often directly or indirectly influencing knowledge production. While historiographical debates have now largely moved past the early contestations of the supposed ‘validity’ of Palestinian national identity, divisions remain over how it is conceptualised, assessed and interpreted.

Nationalism itself is the subject of considerable scholarly debate. There are generally three schools of thought on the subject: primordialism,

¹² Gilbert Achcar, ‘The importance of Palestine studies’, *The Middle East in London: SOAS Centenary Special Issue*, 12:5, Oct-Nov 2016, pp. 10-11.

(sometimes known as ‘perennialism’), modernism, and ethno-symbolism. Differences between these three groups are centred on the causal origins of nationalism. Primordialists posit that the concept of ‘the nation’ is historically rooted in pre-modern ethnic foundations,¹³ while modernists see it as a construct made possible only by the distinctive conditions of modernity.¹⁴ Bringing some synthesis to the debate, ethno-symbolists argue that while broad-based nationalism is a modern phenomenon, the nation itself predates modernity.¹⁵

The primordialist-modernist debate is particularly prescient when it comes to Palestinian nationalism. In keeping with Israeli premier Golda Meir’s famous claim in 1969 that there was ‘no such thing’ as the Palestinian people,¹⁶ the contention that Palestinian national identity is constructed rather than historically rooted has sometimes been used to undermine their national rights. Political commentators like Asaf Romirowsky have suggested that the Palestinians’ national identity is a construct and therefore fake, while Jewish Israeli identity is deep-rooted and fixed.¹⁷ Such ideas are more common in the political than the academic world, but scholarly assessments of the two nationalisms can still become loaded and highly charged.¹⁸ For example, the political scientist Azar Gat – himself a perennialist – describes Jewish Israeli identity as ‘robust’, while neglecting to mention the Palestinians other than as part of the Arab peoples.¹⁹

However, Gat is in the minority. Most scholars apply modernist conceptions of nationalism to the Palestinian case while contending that this

¹³ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); T. O. Ranger and Eric J. Hobsbawm (ed.s), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ Anthony D. Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations* (Oxford: Polity, 2004).

¹⁶ *The Sunday Times*, 15 June 1969.

¹⁷ See for example: Asaf Romirowsky, 'The Real Palestinian Refugee Problem', <http://www.thetower.org/artide/the-real-palestinian-refugee-crisis>, accessed 25 July 2017.

¹⁸ Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 16-19.

¹⁹ Azar Gat, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 311, 372.

approach does not invalidate the Palestinian nation's legitimacy. In particular, the ideas of modernist theorist Benedict Anderson have been hugely influential in scholarly understandings of Palestinian national identity. Anderson conceptualises a nation as an 'imagined political community'. He contends that the conditions of modernity make it possible for people to conceive of themselves as belonging to a community that is 'both inherently limited and sovereign'; in other words, a nation.²⁰

Historians Rashid Khalidi and Yezid Sayigh have taken direct inspiration from Anderson in their works on Palestinian nationalism. Both write of 'an imagined Palestinian community' forged by the formative experiences of modernity.²¹ Moreover, Khalidi implicitly invokes Anderson's ideas about the importance of symbols and institutions when he underlines the role of 'education, postage stamps and coins' in disseminating national identity in Mandate Palestine.²² More explicitly, Helen Lindholm Schulz applies the core elements of Anderson's theory to the Palestinian case; where Anderson wrote of the nationalistic 'pilgrimage' in social space, Schulz argues that the Palestinians' shared experience of 'wandering' and exclusion is constitutive of their own imagined community. Similarly, she contends that the veneration of the land in Palestinian rhetoric is an example of the political self-love that Anderson cites as crucial to nationalism.²³

Such prevalent use of modernist ideas means that the primary debate among scholars of Palestinian nationalism is not about the latter's nature as primordialist or modernist, but rather about *which* elements of modernity inculcated a broad-based nationalist feeling among the Palestinians. In particular, there is a divide between those who attribute its rise to the impact

²⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 5-7.

²¹ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 27; R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 28.

²² R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 10.

²³ Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 18, 88.

of Zionism, thus portraying Palestinian nationalism as essentially reactive, and those who argue that Palestinian nationalism emerged independently of Zionism. Almost without exception, every scholar who has worked on modern Palestinian history has engaged in one way or another with this fundamental historiographical divide.

Those who argue that Palestinian nationalism developed in reaction to Zionism include Colin Shindler,²⁴ Ann Mosely Lesch²⁵ and Yehoshua Porath.²⁶ These scholars provide different chronologies for the emergence of Palestinian nationalism but nevertheless all hold that it came about in response to the arrival of Zionism in Palestine. Conversely, Muhammad Muslih,²⁷ Ghassan Shabaneh,²⁸ and the aforementioned Rashid Khalidi,²⁹ along with Ilan Pappé³⁰ and Tom Segev,³¹ contend that Zionism was only one of a range of factors that precipitated the development of Palestinian nationalism. They suggest that Palestinian nationalism had a complex and multi-faceted trajectory that transcended the impact of Zionism alone.

In keeping with such an analysis, these scholars also contend that the Palestinian national consciousness emerged much earlier than Zionist-centric interpretations suggest. Khalidi and Muslih trace it back to the late Ottoman period, citing examples of national newspapers and political discourse to demonstrate the existence of a Palestinian consciousness.³² In line with such ideas, this thesis presupposes that Palestinian nationalism long predated the establishment of Israel. The years 1967-82, which are the

²⁴ Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 49.

²⁵ Ann M. Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917-1939: The Frustration of a Nationalist Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

²⁶ Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement 1918-1929* (London: Cass, 1974).

²⁷ Muhammad Muslih, 'Arab Politics and the Rise of Palestinian Nationalism', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 16:4, 1987, pp. 77-94.

²⁸ Ghassan Shabaneh, 'Education and Identity: The Role of UNRWA's Education Programmes in the Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25:4, 2012, pp. 491-513.

²⁹ R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 10, 28.

³⁰ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), p. 236.

³¹ Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the Mandate* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), Part I.

³² R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, pp. 28-34. Muslih, 'Arab Politics and the Rise of Palestinian Nationalism', pp. 77-83.

focus of this study, thus saw the revival and renewal of the nationalist movement rather than its creation *ex nibilo*.

There is much more scholarly consensus when it comes to periodising the development of Palestinian nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century. Both the Nakba of 1948 and the Naksa of 1967 are commonly identified as watershed moments for the nationalist movement. Helga Baumgarten's work exemplifies this periodisation in how she identifies three key 'phases/faces' in the Palestinian nationalist movement since 1948. Baumgarten writes that what originated as pan-Arabism transmuted into exclusively Palestinian nationalism after 1967, before ultimately being overtaken by political Islam from the late 1980s. Each of these 'phases' of Palestinian nationalism grew out of the failure of its immediate predecessor, such that they all ultimately emanate from the Nakba.³³

The periodisation presented in this thesis is similarly anchored in the identification of 1948 as a watershed moment for Palestinian nationalism. As this thesis is most fundamentally concerned with the political history of the refugee camps, it follows that its analysis should adhere to the consensus around the Nakba's significance (although it must be stressed that the original emergence of Palestinian nationalism predated 1948). Where this thesis takes an original route is in its analytical focus, which is concerned not with high politics or inter-state dynamics, but with the grass roots of both the Palestinian diaspora and the nationalist movement: the refugee camps. In incorporating an analysis based on grass roots developments, as well as those stemming from high politics, this thesis adds more layers to the periodisation laid out by Baumgarten and widely adopted in the existing historiography.

³³ Helga Baumgarten, 'The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 34:4, 2005, pp. 25-48.

Finally, more recent scholarship on nationalism has been characterised by two trends highly relevant to this thesis. First, reactions to the Eurocentrism of conventional theories of nationalism have resulted in an increasing fixation on African and Asian nationalisms.³⁴ The last twenty years have accordingly seen a rising number of studies of Arab nationalisms, most notably pioneered by Fred Halliday, as well as James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni in their joint edited volume.³⁵ Such works have sought to reformulate understandings of nationalism on the basis of its development in the modern Middle East, thus moving away from the specificities of a Eurocentric approach. In the Palestinian case, works by Rashid Khalidi and Musa Budeiri have highlighted the role of overlapping identities; namely, that region, religion, kin and Arabism can coexist alongside the Palestinian nation in one's self-identification without any necessary contradiction.³⁶ This thesis uses the space created by such historiographical shifts to use the case of Palestinian nationalism as a means for questioning many conventional assumptions about nationalism and identity.

The second and most recent trend in scholarship on nationalism concerns an increasing focus on the place of transnationalism. Rogers Brubaker and Craig Calhoun have both worked to revise earlier understandings of nationalism by considering how late 20th century developments have challenged conventional ideas of the nation-state, in

³⁴ See for example: Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Bruce J. Berman, 'Nationalism in Post-Colonial Africa', in John Breuilly (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the history of nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 359-376; William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the language of politics in late colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁵ James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, 'Introduction', in James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (ed.s), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. ix-xxvi. See also: Fred Halliday, 'Nationalism in the Arab World since 1945', in Breuilly (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, pp. 435-452.

³⁶ Rashid Khalidi, 'The Formation of Palestinian Identity: The Critical Years 1917-23', in Jankowski and Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, pp. 171-190; Musa Budeiri, 'The Palestinians: Tensions between Nationalist and Religious Identities', in Jankowski and Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, pp. 191-206.

view of the increasing transnationalism in both politics and business.³⁷ In terms of specific case studies, Matthew Connelly provided one of the most influential models with his groundbreaking 2002 analysis of how the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) used transnational alignments as a core element of its nationalist strategy for achieving Algerian independence in 1962.³⁸

Transnationalism has been most noticeably prevalent as a theme in scholarship on Kurdish nationalism - perhaps unsurprisingly, in view of the Kurdish people's dispersal across numerous state borders. Martin van Bruinessen, Cengiz Gunes and Hamit Borzaslan have all highlighted the transnational nature of Kurdish national identity, and the corresponding transnationalism of institutions like the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Kurdish National Congress.³⁹ Their work is especially pertinent here in view of the significant parallels between the Kurdish and Palestinian cases. This thesis accordingly makes particular use of van Bruinessen's emphasis on the strong causal connection between exile and nationalism.⁴⁰

Furthermore, recent years have seen an increasing tendency for scholars to engage with the theme of transnationalism when analysing Palestinian nationalism specifically. For the purposes of this thesis, the most relevant of such works is Paul Chamberlin's 2012 monograph *The Global Offensive*. Here, Chamberlin analyses the historical relationships between the PLO and Third Worldist movements, looking at how the Palestinian nationalist movement was situated on the world stage, including at the

³⁷ Craig Calhoun, 'Nationalism and the Contradictions of Modernity', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 42, 1997-98, pp. 1-30; Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 edn).

³⁸ Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origin of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, 'Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question', Working Paper, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence, 2000; Marlies Casier and Olivier Grojean, 'Between integration, autonomization and radicalisation. Hamit Borzaslan on the Kurdish Movement and the Turkish Left', *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 14, 2012, <https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4663>, accessed 29 October 2018; Cengiz Gunes, 'Kurdish Politics in Turkey: "A Question of Identity"', *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, 21:1-2, 2007, pp. 17-36.

⁴⁰ Van Bruinessen, 'Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question'.

UN.⁴¹ He accordingly makes use of some of Connelly's aforementioned ideas about the connections between the internationalist order and nationalist movements. This thesis builds on such interpretations by examining UNRWA's place in this setup.

Other recent historiography on Palestinian transnationalism is less directly relevant to this thesis, but has nevertheless informed the thinking behind it. Miriyam Aouragh, for example, argues that the internet has been crucial in facilitating transnational political activism in and around Palestine⁴² - making a claim more commonly found in studies of the Arab Spring.⁴³ This thesis similarly engages with the transnational nature of Palestinian political activism across the refugee camps, although its findings indicate that the internet provided a new tool for what was long-running trend, rather than initiating it.

Elsewhere, recent historiographical contributions provide analyses of particular transnational connections between the Palestinians and other marginalised groups. Thus Steven Salaita looks at the former's connections with Native Americans,⁴⁴ while Michael Fischbach and Keith Feldman focus on their transnational solidarity with Black Power activists in the US.⁴⁵ Salaita goes furthest in explicitly developing notions of transnationalism; his analysis is based around the concept of 'inter/nationalism', a term he explains as 'an amalgamation of... solidarity, transnationalism,

⁴¹ Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴² Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the internet and the construction of identity* (London: IB Tauris, 2011).

⁴³ See for example: Nahed Eltantawy and Julie B. Wiest, 'Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory', *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 2011, pp. 1207-1224. Gadi Wolfsfeld, Elad Segev and Tamir Sheafer, 'Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics comes first', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18:2, 2013, pp. 115-137; Habibul Haque Khonkher, 'Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring', *Globalizations*, 8:5, 2011, pp. 675-679.

⁴⁴ Steven Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

⁴⁵ Michael Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2018). Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), ch. 2.

intersectionality, kinship, or intercommunalism' among national communities rather than nation-states.⁴⁶

In keeping with such works, this thesis is based on the premise that Palestinian politics have long been characterised by transnationalist and internationalist elements. It draws on such themes with regard to both the transnational nature of UNRWA's work – as it transcends the borders of the host states – and the related transnationalism of Palestinian nationalism at this time, as it organised itself across the borders of the *shatāt* (diaspora) and engaged with the wider world at the UN. Moreover, as much of the existing literature has a contemporary focus - Feldman and Salaita examine the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign as an instance of transnationalism,⁴⁷ while Aouragh takes a similar approach to the International Solidarity Movement (ISM)⁴⁸ - this thesis contextualises such cases by demonstrating the long-term presence of transnationalism in Palestinian national activism.

Palestinian refugee camps

The multi-faceted significance of the Palestinian refugee camps is widely acknowledged by scholars. While the camps were never home to the majority of Palestinians, or even the majority of Palestinian refugees, their function in sheltering the poorest and most desperate meant that they historically served as the largest recruiting grounds for the *fida'īyyīn*. Moreover, they hold a symbolic importance, as the refugees' decades-long entrenchment in the camps is taken to signify the Palestinian dedication to the right of return, as well as the national condition of statelessness. Khalidi,

⁴⁶ Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism*, p. ix, xiv-xvii.

⁴⁷ Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine*, pp. 227-228. Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism*, ch. 2.

⁴⁸ Aouragh, *Palestine Online*, p. 19.

Schulz and Yezid Sayigh, along with Julie Peteet, Jeroen Gunning, Laleh Khalili and Rosemary Sayigh, among others, have all noted these points.⁴⁹

However, it is rare for analyses to extend far beyond this baseline acknowledgement of the refugees' significance. Instead, they tend to relegate the refugee camp communities to a subsidiary role, whereby their importance to the nationalist movement is limited to providing the numbers to populate it. Detailed analyses of the camps' place in Palestinian nationalism are rarely found in historical studies. Instead, the camp refugees are characterised as the 'masses' who followed behind the nationalist leaders – an interpretation encapsulated by Lebanese academic Samir Franjeh in 1971,⁵⁰ and most recently presented by Faris Giacaman in his 2013 article on the subject.⁵¹ Many other historians address the political history of Palestinian camp communities only insofar as they have become entangled in the politics of the various host states. Kamal Salibi and Roger Owen have taken this approach concerning Lebanon; the same is true of journalists Robert Fisk and David Hirst, who specialise in the country.⁵² There is a smaller but still significant body of equivalent work on Jordan, such as that

⁴⁹ Schulz, *The reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism*; Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007 edn); Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*; Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*; Rashid Khalidi, 'Observations on the Right of Return', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 21:2, 1992, pp. 29–40; Jeroen Gunning, *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007); Baumgarten, 'The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism'; Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Adil Yahya, 'The Role of the Refugee Camps', in Jamal Raji Nasser and Roger Heacock (ed.s), *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads* (New York: Greenwood, 1990), pp. 91–106.

⁵⁰ Samir Franjeh, 'How Revolutionary Is the Palestinian Resistance? A Marxist Interpretation', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 1:2, 1972, pp. 52–60.

⁵¹ Faris Giacaman, 'Political Representation and Armed Struggle', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 43:1, 2013, pp. 24–40.

⁵² Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Roger Owen (ed.), *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976); Augustus R. Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002); David Hirst, *Benure of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2010).

by Shaul Mishal, Naseer Aruri and Nigel Ashton.⁵³ Such studies pay little attention to the histories of the camps themselves.

The works that do focus specifically on the refugees and the camps come not from historians but from scholars in other fields, chiefly anthropologists. In 1979 Rosemary Sayigh published her groundbreaking work *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*.⁵⁴ With this, Sayigh challenged conventional depictions of the camp refugees as passive and parochial victims of fate. On the basis of extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, she convincingly characterised the refugees as politically aware and engaged. Sayigh's work was hugely influential in anthropology and the social sciences, leading to several revisions of previously conventional scholarly wisdom. Julie Peteet,⁵⁵ Nell Gabiam,⁵⁶ Rochelle Davis⁵⁷ and Diana Allan⁵⁸ all followed in Sayigh's footsteps when producing later anthropological studies of the camps, often from a micro perspective and usually concerned with Lebanon. This thesis builds on Sayigh's primary contention regarding the camp communities' political agency and organisation, with three important additions: first, the expansion of the geographical scope beyond Lebanon; second, the analysis of the camps' spatial functionality; and third, the in-depth analysis of UNRWA's role.

As the aforementioned anthropological works exemplify, there is an overwhelming tendency in the existing literature to focus on the camps in Lebanon. In many ways, this is understandable; it was in Lebanon that the

⁵³ See for example: Shaul Mishal, *West Bank/East Bank: The Palestinians in Jordan, 1949-1967* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Naseer Aruri, 'The PLO and the Jordan Option', *Third World Quarterly*, 7:4, 1985, pp. 882–906; Nigel J. Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁵⁴ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*.

⁵⁵ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*.

⁵⁶ Nell Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering: Syria's Palestinian refugee camps* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2016).

⁵⁷ Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁸ Diana Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

PLO established and ran its 'state-within-a-state' in the 1970s, and in Lebanon that the camps have had arguably the greatest impact on both Palestinian politics and those of the region as a whole. However, this 'Lebanon-centrism' within the literature, has resulted in the framing of these studies by the specific circumstances of the Lebanese state, rather than an analysis of the driving features of the camps themselves. A wider examination of the Palestinian camps across the Levant will allow for a closer scrutiny of these spaces, including some consideration of the institutional framework of the Agency responsible for them: UNRWA.

With this in mind, this thesis breaks new ground by examining the camps not only in Lebanon but also across the four other geographical fields in which they are located: Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza. As such it is the first macro study of the camps' history across the region. Parts of the thesis do retain a particular focus on Lebanon (chiefly in Chapters Two and Five), in view of its historical importance as outlined above. However, this focus is positioned within the framework of a broader transnational study. In this way the thesis acknowledges and unpacks the field's distinct significance as part of a wider examination of the region as a whole, rather than simply in isolation.

Moreover, this thesis engages closely what defines the camps *as spaces*. This aspect of their importance is largely overlooked; few existing studies address their spatial function, and certainly not using a historical approach and methodology. As already mentioned, the existing literature acknowledges the camps' symbolic importance, but only in terms of the remaining presence of the refugees therein. Like the refugees, the camps themselves usually feature in the historiography in a subsidiary capacity, as launching pads or recruiting grounds for the nationalist organisations.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See for example: Zeev Schiff and Ehud Yaari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising - Israel's Third Front* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); Zeev Schiff and Ehud Yaari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985); Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For a discussion of the camps' role in the *thawra* see: Rosemary

The consideration and assessment of the camps *as spaces* accordingly constitutes one of this thesis' most important contributions to the historiography. It will situate the Palestinian refugee camps within broader relevant literature, particularly that of anthropologist Liisa Malkki on displacement and humanitarianism. In her 1995 book *Purity and Exile*, Malkki argued that the distinctive spatial nature of Hutu refugee camps in Tanzania serves to generate a much stronger sense of ethnic identity than can be found among those who have settled in the towns.⁶⁰ This thesis takes a similar approach in looking at the significance of the spatial construction of the Palestinian refugee camps vis-à-vis national identity in exile.

Furthermore, the analysis here engages with scholarship about the cognitive connection between defined territories and people's perceptions of themselves in relation to the nation-state. David Newman, Anssi Paasi and Hanne Eggen Røislien have all written in different ways about this subject, examining the intersection between political geography and national identity - a theme with strong relevance here.⁶¹ However, while Newman, Paasi and Røislien are concerned with the territoriality of states, this thesis applies such an approach to the territoriality of the Palestinian refugee camps. In so doing, it sheds new light on these camps' transformation from spaces of external control to spaces of Palestinian autonomy.

UNRWA

As noted above, the research presented here is not exclusively concerned with the camps, but also engages with their institutional framework as

Sayigh, 'The Palestinian Identity Among Camp Residents', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 6:3, 1977, pp. 3–22; Fuad Jabber, 'The Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Revolution, 1967-71', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2:2, 1973, pp. 79–101; Moshe Shemesh, 'The West Bank : Rise and Decline of Traditional Leadership, June 1967 to October 1973', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 20:3, 1984, pp. 290–323; Franjeh, 'How Revolutionary Is the Palestinian Resistance? A Marxist Interpretation'.

⁶⁰ See for example: R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*; Shabaneh, 'Education and Identity'.

⁶¹ David Newman and Anssi Paasi, 'Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography', *Progress in Human Geography*, 22:2, 1998, pp. 186-207. Hanne Eggen Røislien, 'Where is the state of Israel? Testimonies from IDF Nachal soldiers on Israel's territorial integrity', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 44:1, January 2017, pp. 130-145.

provided by UNRWA. The Agency has been largely absent from historical scholarship on Palestinian politics, perhaps due to its ostensibly apolitical status. Academic studies of the Agency come mostly from social scientists concerned with its relief services and socio-economic impact rather than its political significance.⁶² For example, Michael Dumper, Randa Farah and Sari Hanafi have all examined the Agency's work in the camps in relation to housing, employment and health.⁶³

The literature on UNRWA has come foremost from social scientists looking at its organisational and departmental structures. Maya Rosenfeld, Benjamin Schiff and Jalal Al Hussein have all taken this approach in order to assess how the Agency operates.⁶⁴ Their work includes examinations of UNRWA's policy developments across the years, particularly its shift in focus from relief to resettlement and later to development and capacity-building. Many have focused on more recent decades, with few scholars looking in depth at the period prior to the first *intifada* in 1987. Schiff's 1995 monograph *Refugees unto the Third Generation* is an exception, providing a near-comprehensive account of UNRWA's operational development and challenges from 1950 to the late 1980s.⁶⁵ However, Schiff's work is an institutional study rather than an analysis of UNRWA's historical role in Palestinian politics.

⁶² See for example: Phillip Misselwitz and Sari Hanafi, 'Testing a New Paradigm: UNRWA's Camp Improvement Programme', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3, March 2010, pp. 360–88; Hisham Jabr, 'Housing Conditions in the Refugee Camps of the West Bank', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2:1, 1989, pp. 75–87.

⁶³ Michael Dumper (ed.), *Palestinian Refugee Repatriation: Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2006); Randa Farah, 'UNRWA: Through the Eyes of Its Refugee Employees in Jordan', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3, March 2010, pp. 389–411; Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi, *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁶⁴ Maya Rosenfeld, 'From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back: UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees, 1950–2009', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3, March 2010, pp. 286–317; Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Jalal Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40:1, 2010, pp. 6–26.

⁶⁵ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*.

Analyses that do address UNRWA's political importance have tended to come in the form of highly partisan critiques.⁶⁶ Many of the most striking such works come from the aforementioned Asaf Romirowsky, who positions himself as both a political analyst and an academic researcher. According to Romirowsky, UNRWA is an essentially political organisation that has not only enabled Palestinian nationalism but actually facilitated acts of terrorism, all the while deliberately maintaining the Palestinian refugee problem for political motives.⁶⁷ Unsurprisingly, Romirowsky's arguments are controversial and appear irreconcilable with the fact that until the beginning of 2018, UNRWA consistently received most of its funding from Israel's closest ally, the US.⁶⁸ Romirowsky's failure to address this fundamental contradiction means that his attempts to examine UNRWA's political role are plagued by a lack of intellectual rigour.

Aside from Romirowsky, recent years have seen a small number of scholars start to examine UNRWA within the framework of Palestinian political nationalism. Here too there has been a preponderance of political science, resulting in a contemporary focus. Jalal Al Hussein has written about UNRWA's role in Palestinian politics from a top-down perspective, focussing on the relationship between UNRWA and the PLO.⁶⁹ Along with Riccardo Bocco and Randa Farah, Al Hussein has also explored the political

⁶⁶ See for example: David Bedein, *Roadblock to Peace. How the UN Perpetuates the Arab-Israeli Conflict: UNRWA Policies Reconsidered* (Jerusalem: Center for Near East Policy Research, 2014); Einat Wilf, 'UNRWA: An Obstacle to Peace?', *Fathom*, Autumn 2013, <http://fathomjournal.org/unrwa-an-obstacle-to-peace>, accessed 2 November 2017; Seth Mandel, 'Why UNRWA Perpetuates the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', *Commentary*, 25 November 2014, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2014/11/25/why-unrwa-perpetuates-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict>, accessed 2 November 2017.

⁶⁷ For Romirowsky's arguments see: Asaf Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Asaf Romirowsky and Nicole Bradman, 'United Nations Agency Exposed as a Tool for Hamas', 30 August 2014, <http://www.romirowsky.com/15291/united-nations-agency-hamas>, accessed 2 November 2017.

⁶⁸ In January 2018, President Trump announced that the US would more than halve its contributions to UNRWA. See: 'US cuts UNRWA funding by more than half', *Al Jazeera*, 17 January 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/cuts-unrwa-funding-180116193513823.html>; Anne Irfan, 'Trump cuts aid to Palestinian refugees – and throws their future into doubt', *The Conversation*, 23 January 2018, <https://theconversation.com/trump-cuts-aid-to-palestinian-refugees-and-throws-their-future-into-doubt-90282>, both accessed 23 March 2018.

⁶⁹ Jalal Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29:2, 2000, pp. 51–64. Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Refugees.'

tension between the Agency and the refugees over issues such as school syllabi and camp development.⁷⁰ Moreover, Michael Fischbach has examined the implications of UNRWA's work for the fulfilment of the Palestinian refugees' political rights.⁷¹ Yet they have all done so from a top-down perspective, without any in-depth analysis of Palestinian nationalist consciousness among the refugees.

The most explicit study of the connection between UNRWA and Palestinian nationalism comes from Ghassan Shabaneh, who argues that the Agency's fulfilment of state functions directly facilitated the reconstruction of Palestinian political nationalism after 1948.⁷² In focussing so explicitly on UNRWA's role in Palestinian nationalism, Shabaneh takes a major step forward for studies of the Agency. He has significantly developed the ideas of some of the aforementioned scholars, who have looked at the Agency's place in Palestinian politics to a lesser extent, and he convincingly makes the case for the significance of UNRWA schools in fostering a national identity among refugees. He also shows how the continuing existence of the camps facilitated national cohesion. However, Shabaneh's analysis is limited to the contemporary era and does not probe historical developments in any depth.

This thesis builds on Shabaneh's foundation in order to do so. It explores not only how UNRWA operated as a quasi-state force to facilitate the development of nationalism in the camps, but also how its services influenced the movement in terms of both ideology and strategy. How did UNRWA's large-scale education programme – acknowledged by Shabaneh as a vitally important force in the camps – affect conceptions of the state among Palestinian refugees? It is known that the nationalist organisations

⁷⁰ Jalal Al Hussein and Riccardo Bocco, 'The Status of the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East: The Right of Return and UNRWA in Perspective', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3, March 2010, pp. 260–85. Riccardo Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3, March 2010, pp. 229–52. Farah, 'UNRWA: Through the Eyes of Its Refugee Employees in Jordan.'

⁷¹ Michael Fischbach, 'The United Nations and Palestinian Refugee Property Compensation Author', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 31:2, 2011, pp. 34–50.

⁷² Ghassan Shabaneh, 'Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity: The Case of Palestine', *New Political Science*, 32:2, 2010, pp. 215–36. Shabaneh, 'Education and Identity'.

recruited their members largely from the camps; how did the long-term presence of an international Agency in those same camps affect their strategy? The examination of these questions here will challenge the existing scholarship, but also build on it, and develop it. The thesis will draw upon these studies to better understand how UNRWA's shifting services affected the refugees' sense of national identity and their struggle for statehood.

This thesis will also make use of the core analysis of UNRWA provided by several legal scholars. Susan Akram, Jeff Handmaker and Lex Takkenberg⁷³ have all examined how the Agency's mandate functions and what this means for the Palestinian refugees. In the process, they explain how UNRWA has inadvertently shaped Palestinian identity in exile by determining who 'counts' as a 'Palestinian refugee'. Their explanations often include some consideration of how UNRWA's mandate and operations have maintained the Palestinians' distinctiveness – partly because they are the only refugee population in the world not served by UNHCR.⁷⁴ This thesis builds on such analyses so as to challenge the scholarly tendency to take at face value UNRWA's self-definition as apolitical. In so doing it will advance the historiography, both by highlighting UNRWA's multi-faceted significance, and by reaching before the first *intifada* to analyse the Agency's historical role in shaping Palestinian political nationalism in the camps.

Three pertinent points have been established by scholars thus far: that the refugee camps were central to the rise of Palestinian political nationalism after 1967; that the UN has played a significant role in Palestinian history since the dying days of the British Mandate; and that UNRWA has been a pivotal force in managing the refugee camps since it was established in 1949

⁷³ Takkenberg is himself a long-term UNRWA employee, currently head of the Ethics Office.

⁷⁴ Lex Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998). Susan Akram, 'Palestinian Refugees and Their Legal Status: Rights, Politics, and Implications for a Just Solution', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 31:3, 2002, pp. 36–51; Jeff Handmaker, 'Beyond Exclusion: Assessing Palestinian Refugees' Struggle for Protection and Recognition and Their Potential Contribution to a Peace Settlement', in Kim Van der Borght, Koen Byttebier, and Cailin Mackenzie (ed.s), *Imagining a Shared Future: perspectives on law, conflict and economic development in the Middle East* (London: Cameron May, 2011), pp. 197–222.

(albeit this third point has been made mostly by social scientists rather than historians).⁷⁵ Yet the implications of these points remain unexamined. How did UNRWA contribute intentionally or inadvertently to the Palestinian political nationalism that developed in the camps after 1967? How did its place within the UN influence the strategy of the nationalist movement? Despite its absence from the historiography, UNRWA has great relevance to Palestinian national history. In demonstrating how, this research facilitates a greater understanding of the true nature of Palestinian nationalism and the factors that shaped it.

Analytical framework

The analysis undertaken in this thesis is grounded in theories of nationalism, national identity and national consciousness, and the relationship of these concepts to the state, transnationalism and internationalism. The analytical framework is constructed using particular conceptions of these complex terms, drawing on the theories outlined below.

Nations, nationalism and the state

Modernist conceptions of nationalism form the backbone of this thesis. The analytical framework is adopted from Benedict Anderson's aforementioned theory of nationalism as a shared collective 'imagining' of one's communal identity. Not all of Anderson's ideas are applied here; Eurocentric elements such as his fixation on 'print-capitalism' are left out. Nevertheless, this thesis broadly aligns with Anderson's definition of the national community as 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' that is not predetermined and fixed, but rather shaped by historical developments.⁷⁶ The particular focus here is on

⁷⁵ See for example: Benjamin Schiff, 'Between Occupier and Occupied: UNRWA in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18:3, 1989, pp. 60–75; Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process'; Shabaneh, 'Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity'.

⁷⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 5-7.

which developments shaped it, at what times and in what ways. This thesis argues that one key factor was the presence of the international organisation that came to partially fill the role of the state in the Palestinian refugee camps: UNRWA.

In its assessment of UNRWA's role in the Palestinians' national consciousness, this thesis also applies the ideas of another modernist theorist of nationalism: Ernest Gellner. Like Anderson, Gellner sees national identity as the variable product of particular conditions, but unlike Anderson he is less concerned with national communities' self-perception and more focussed on the role of the state. Gellner defines nationalism as 'a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones.' Nationalism therefore presupposes political-ethnic congruence - a presupposition promoted and driven by modern states as a tool for promoting their own power and legitimacy. Accordingly, Gellner argues that nationalism has generally emerged in the state's 'conspicuous presence', and very rarely in its absence.⁷⁷

Ostensibly, the Palestinian case poses a challenge to Gellner's state-centric theory; here is a pervasive national identity that has not only survived but in fact flourished in the decades-long *absence* of a state. Accordingly, this thesis does not adopt Gellner's ideas unquestioningly but rather takes a critical approach that synthesises his state-centric theory with more populist conceptualisations of nationalism. Using a critical evaluation of Gellner's modernist framework, this thesis looks at how UNRWA's quasi-governmental role facilitated the *development* of this pre-existing nationalism across the camps. In investigating UNRWA in this guise, this thesis also adopts and applies the ideas of Michael Kagan, who contends that the UN often acts as a quasi-state in refugee situations.⁷⁸ While Kagan's work

⁷⁷ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 1-4.

⁷⁸ Michael Kagan, "We live in a country of UNHCR": The UN surrogate state and refugee policy in the Middle East' Research Paper No. 201, February 2011.

focuses on UNHCR, his ideas are arguably better suited to UNRWA, to which they are applied here.

Transnationalism and internationalism

To examine UNRWA's transnationalist role, this thesis draws on the ideas of Michael Kearney. Kearney defines 'transnationalism' in terms of processes that are anchored in numerous nation-states while simultaneously transcending them.⁷⁹ The former point is crucial, as it means that transnationalism is not separate to or detached from the concept of the nation-state, but rather embedded in it. Raka Ray similarly argues that the concept of transnationalism presupposes the existence of the nation-state – or more accurately, of numerous nation-states.⁸⁰ This thesis applies such ideas to the transnational aspect of UNRWA's work, as the latter implemented the same structures across the state borders of the five fields. Kearney also cites migration itself as an obvious example of transnationalism, thus underlining its applicability to the Palestinian refugee case.⁸¹

UNRWA's transnationalism is juxtaposed with its internationalism. To assess the latter, the analysis here is grounded in notions of the post-1945 new global order, in which power was increasingly expressed through certified international dynamics - a development examined in depth by historian Mark Mazower.⁸² Various historians have previously made use of such ideas, mostly notably Matthew Connelly in his aforementioned study of how the FLN won the Algerian campaign for independence not on the

⁷⁹ M. Kearney, 'The local and the Global: Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1995, 24, pp. 547-565.

⁸⁰ Craig Calhoun, Pheng Cheah, Peter Evans and Raka Ray, 'Discourse of Nationalism and Transnationalism in Political Mobilization', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 47, 2003, p. 178.

⁸¹ Kearney, 'The local and the Global', p. 548-564.

⁸² Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea from 1815 to Present* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

battlefield but on the global diplomatic stage.⁸³ Paul Chamberlin has made similar points when studying the historical strategies of the PLO, although UNRWA was absent from his analysis.⁸⁴ In keeping with such approaches, this thesis assesses how UNRWA fitted into the internationalist strategy of the Palestinian nationalist movement.

The refugee camp as a space

In addition to UNRWA's work, the other unit of analysis here is that of the Palestinian refugee camp. To assess the latter, this thesis applies a modified version of Giorgio Agamben's ideas about camps as 'spaces of exception'. Agamben contends that 'the camp' – meaning any demarcated area containing a concentrated population – is a space that exists outside the usual socio-political norms. As a result, exceptional standards become the norm therein.⁸⁵ This conceptualisation is arguably applicable to the Palestinian refugee camps, the separateness of which has become embedded over many decades and is reinforced in some host states (most notably Lebanon) by their exclusion from the government's jurisdiction.

However, Agamben's theory is flawed in how it depoliticises the camps and underplays the refugees themselves. It is also ahistorical; in treating the camp as a standard unit and drawing generalities accordingly, Agamben impedes the possibility of analysing the specific contextual factors shaping particular camps. This thesis therefore modifies Agamben's theory so as to acknowledge the exceptionalism of the Palestinian refugee camps without disregarding the influence of the states that host them, the UN agency that administers them, and the refugees who reside in them. In the process, it is further informed by the ideas of Adam Ramadan and Simon Turner, who

⁸³ Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*.

⁸⁴ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*.

⁸⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). On the applicability of Agamben's ideas see: Richard Ek, 'The Spatialities of the Camp: An Introduction', *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, 88:4, 2006, pp. 363-386.

speak of ‘overlapping’ and ‘hybrid’ sovereignties in refugee camps, rather than treating them as hermetically sealed from their surroundings.⁸⁶ The resulting analytical framework makes it possible to assess the Palestinian refugee camps as unique spaces whilst still taking a historical approach to understanding the particular reasons for their development over time.

Methodology and sources

While Palestinian history is one of the most intensively studied subjects in academia, it is also one of the most difficult to examine. The ongoing nature of the Palestinian refugee crisis – still unresolved 70 years after it began – makes it especially imperative to approach any historical study of the subject with care. This is exacerbated further by the heavy politicisation and major controversies of Palestinian and Israeli history, not to mention the Arab-Israeli conflict more broadly, which risk clouding any objective historical work.

Researching a stateless and dispersed people like the Palestinians creates particular methodological changes. The findings of this thesis are based on empirical research and qualitative methodology, investigating questions about experiences, causation and impact in a particular socio-political setting. Archival documents form the backbone of this thesis, supplemented with a small number of non-archival written sources as well as oral history. However, the peculiarities of the Palestinian situation have made locating and accessing these sources a complex process. Most significantly, the absence of a Palestinian national archive means that sources must be pieced together instead from a range of different

⁸⁶ Adam Ramadan, ‘Spatialising the Refugee Camp’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38:1, January 2013, pp. 65–77. Simon Turner, ‘Suspended Spaces - Contesting Sovereignties in a Refugee Camp’, in Thomas Blom and Finn Stepputat (ed.s), *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 312-332.

collections around the region and the world.⁸⁷ To these practical challenges can be added the complex implications of archival curation and classification, as discussed by Ann Laura Stoler in her influential work, and the resulting need for care when working with documentary collections.⁸⁸

Recent years have seen an increasing focus on the issues surrounding Palestinian archives, particularly in the context of continuing political upheaval and conflict in the Middle East. In 2009, Beshara Doumani commented on the rising interest in archives in Palestinian society, tying it to the ongoing national dispossession and the democratising impact of archival digitisation.⁸⁹ Three years later, historian Lauren Banko built on both Doumani's observations and the earlier work of anthropologist Ted Swedenburg⁹⁰ to write an in-depth account of the methodological challenges that academics encounter when seeking to research Palestinian history.⁹¹ Banko contended that the rising interest in archives is juxtaposed with a serious set of obstacles to accessing archival collections in the West Bank and Jerusalem, particularly but not exclusively for Palestinian historians.

Such scholarship from Banko, Swedenburg and Doumani has helped inform the organisation of this research. Aware of the methodological repercussions of this subject's heavy politicisation, I sought to construct my research questions in such a way that they could be investigated using sources that are sufficiently plentiful, accessible and reliable. In planning my research, I drew particularly heavily on the discussions in Salim Tamari's

⁸⁷ Anne Irfan, 'Stateless History: Connecting Palestinian archives', The National Archives Blog, 9 March 2017, http://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/stateless-history-connecting-palestinian-archives/?utm_campaign=300760_Research%20newsletter%20Mar%2017&utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20National%20Archives&dm_i=3PUB,6G2G,2CU4D0,MDKE,1, accessed 7 August 2017.

⁸⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, 2, 2002, pp. 87-109.

⁸⁹ Beshara Doumani, 'Archiving Palestine and the Palestinians: The Patrimony of Ihsan Nimr', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 36, Winter 2009, pp. 3-12.

⁹⁰ Ted Swedenburg, 'Occupational Hazards: Palestinian Ethnography', *Cultural Anthropology*, 4:3, August 1989, pp. 265-272.

⁹¹ Lauren Banko, 'Occupational Hazards, Revisited: Palestinian Historiography', *Middle East Journal*, 66:3, Summer 2012, pp. 440-452.

edited volume on researching Palestinian refugee history.⁹² This volume sees Tamari et al assess the scholarly implications of the sources' global dispersal, and the challenges of compiling a comprehensive narrative in view of this. As Tamari is one of the few scholars to have conducted research in UNRWA's archive, his analysis is particularly pertinent to this thesis.

When it comes to this research project, matters are complicated further by the fact that the contemporary situation in UNRWA's five fields is hardly conducive to academic research of any kind. When I began my PhD in 2014, Syria was in its third year of civil war, while Gaza had been under a continuous blockade for seven years. Both situations are ongoing at the time of writing today. While I had hoped to conduct research in the West Bank and Israel, I was unfortunately denied access at the Allenby Bridge.⁹³ This was particularly regrettable as the Israeli State Archives house a considerable collection of documents relevant to Palestinian history both before and after 1948.⁹⁴ As a result, my research has mostly been conducted in UNRWA's remaining two fields of operation: Lebanon and Jordan.

Fortunately, these two fields contain considerable archival material. Lebanon, probably the most open country in the Arab world, has a range of archival collections, detailed comprehensively by Sara Scalenghe and Nadya Sbaiti in their 2004 series of articles.⁹⁵ Having hosted the PLO headquarters for much of the period discussed in this thesis, Lebanon is still home to a number of important documents about Palestinian history. Of particular

⁹² Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik (ed.s), *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2001).

⁹³ Israeli denial of access to academic researchers has received mounting attention in recent years. See for example: Rachael Pells and James Smith, 'London university condemns Israeli government after senior lecturer ban', *The Independent*, 17 October 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/london-university-condemns-israeli-government-baroness-lady-valerie-amos-senior-lecturer-ban-dr-adam-a7366391.html>, accessed 2 November 2017.

⁹⁴ On the Israeli acquisition of files covering the West Bank before 1967, see: Musa Budeiri, 'Controlling the Archive: Captured Jordanian Security Files in the Israeli State Archives', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 66, Summer 2016, pp. 87-98.

⁹⁵ Sara Scalenghe and Nadya Sbaiti, 'Conducting Research in Lebanon: An Overview of Historical Sources in Beirut (Part I)', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 37:1 (Summer 2003), pp. 68-79. Sara Scalenghe and Nadya Sbaiti, 'Conducting Research in Lebanon: An Overview of Historical Sources outside Beirut (Part II)', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 38:2 (December 2004), pp. 187-195.

relevance to this thesis are those held by the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), and the American University of Beirut (AUB) archive at the Nami Jafet Memorial Library.

In particular, the IPS holds the back catalogues of Palestinian nationalist journals including the PLO's *Palestine: PLO Information Bulletin* (1975-91) and *Samed* (1978-2013), as well as the back catalogue of UNRWA's newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today* (first published in 1960). Used in tandem with UNRWA's internal documentation, the latter collection is particularly useful for illuminating the nature of the Agency's external communications and the differences between its private and public faces. Indeed, this latter contrast is reflected in the variation between the contents of the public communications found at the IPS, and that of the behind-the-scenes documents in UNRWA's own collection, discussed below.

There is a further contrast with the sources found at the AUB archive, which contains historical posters and literature from Palestinian nationalist organisations during the *thawra* era. These provide important information about the Palestinian political discourse at this critical time, which often serves as vital context for understanding the UNRWA documents discussed above. This serves as just one example of the value of using various archival collections in tandem. While AUB has been working for several years on its Palestinian Oral History Archive, it is not yet available to researchers and therefore did not form part of this research.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, Jordan is home to the primary archive of UNRWA itself, which is situated in the Agency's Headquarters compound on the outskirts of Amman. Known as the Central Registry, this archive constitutes a huge and largely untapped resource, containing a vast span of data and records about Palestinian refugee history since the late 1940s. As it is usually closed, much of its material remains unknown to researchers, and I was lucky to be

⁹⁶ For more on the Palestinian Oral History Archive see: <http://website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/programs/poha/Pages/index.aspx>, accessed 2 November 2017.

granted access for the purposes of this project. As a result, this thesis is based on a considerable quantity of material previously unseen by academics. The sources in question include internal memos, planning documents, meeting notes and correspondence. Policy records and legal advisory letters provide evidence of UNRWA's activities and impact in the camps over the years. Historical memoranda and meeting notes reveal the nature of internal discussions over the Agency's work and its relations with the refugee communities across the various camps.

Moreover, the Central Registry holds planning documents for UNRWA's large-scale education programme, which by the 1970s had become an increasingly central element of both Agency activity and refugee life in the camps. The school syllabi and documentation about staff strikes indicate the major struggles that went on between the Agency's attempts to enforce international protocols, and the refugees' efforts to incorporate nationalist ideology into their education system. Many documents in the Central Registry also illuminate the perspective of the refugees themselves, as the trail of correspondence between camp representatives and UNRWA staff demonstrates how this relationship evolved over time and indicates the major points of tension. Finally, correspondence between senior Agency management, host state authorities and donor governments provides important information about international perceptions of UNRWA's evolving role and relationships.

The Central Registry is not without methodological challenges, however. As a closed archive, it lacks comprehensive organisation and has no classification system in place. As Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik note in the aforementioned volume, institutional failure to implement a coherent system of record-keeping over the years has resulted in gaps. Repeated geographical relocations have compounded this. To this day, the UNRWA Central Registry does not serve as the Agency's comprehensive archive;

some files are housed at UNRWA's centre in Gaza instead, although these cover more recent years and were therefore not needed for this thesis.⁹⁷ Of bigger methodological concern were the possible gaps in its records, made worse by insufficient information about what had been maintained and disposed of over the years. The absence of an archivist in Amman exacerbates the issues; instead, researchers like myself must liaise with different administrators over which files they wish to consult.

Partly to counter these archival limitations, I consulted further UNRWA documents at the UN's main archive in New York. This archive contains records of the Agency's communications with UN Headquarters, and thus provides crucial background information for analysing the context in which UNRWA's policies were planned, as well as details about the Agency's intended strategic purpose and its relationships with central UN departments. Correspondence with and about the PLO also illuminates this perspective, revealing how those within the PLO perceived UNRWA's role and vice versa. Moreover, the UN's online record collection includes resolutions, statements and annual reports highly relevant to the study of UNRWA's work in the camps.⁹⁸

My work in the New York archive alongside the Amman collection turned out to be especially significant in view of the distinctions between their contents. While several files are duplicated in both collections, there are also noticeable differences. I viewed certain documents in New York to which I was denied access in Amman, usually concerning relations with the PLO. Sources from the New York archive were also particularly illuminating about the UN Secretariat's concerns over UNRWA's potential politicisation, and thus indicated the complexity and variation within the UN. The fact that it was permissible to photograph and copy sources in New York, but

⁹⁷ Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik, 'UNRWA Archives on Palestinian Refugees', in Tamari and Zureik (ed.s), *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2001), pp. 25-60.

⁹⁸ UN Documentation, <http://research.un.org/en/docs>, accessed 2 November 2017.

not in Amman – even when viewing the same documents – further highlighting the differentiation. Again, this demonstrates the methodological value in using various archival collections in tandem, particularly when they contain significant gaps.

In addition to these sources, this thesis also draws on a small number of archival collections in the UK, which is pertinent as the former Mandate power in Palestine and UNRWA's second biggest donor state, after the US. The British National Archives in London hold accounts of discussions in government and diplomatic circles about UNRWA, the refugee camps and Palestinian politics. They also have records of historical UN debates over UNRWA, discussions among the Agency's donor states, and information about high points of tension and difficulties in the Agency's operations.

Meanwhile Oxford University's Middle East Centre Archive (MECA) holds numerous records from independent organisations – chiefly aid agencies – that operated in the Levant in the mid-twentieth century. These include reports about the Palestinian refugee camps in the early years of UNRWA's operations, which are useful for tracing the camps' development across the decades. The reports also feature observations about the refugees' reactions to the Agency's creation and operations. Additionally, Oxford University's website 'The Palestinian Revolution' contains a wealth of primary source material pertinent to this study, including memoirs, declarations, communiqués, and excerpts from nationalist publications.⁹⁹

There are other archival collections relevant to the history of Palestinian nationalism that have regrettably been lost to researchers. As part of its moves to establish a government-in-exile, the PLO itself created an archive in Lebanon in the 1970s. Its Beirut-based Palestinian Research Centre (PRC) worked to produce literature about the national cause, publishing monographs and essays about Palestine and Israel. When the

⁹⁹ The Palestinian Revolution, <http://leampalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/>, accessed 17 May 2018.

Israeli army besieged Beirut in 1982, it looted the PRC archives and destroyed the buildings housing these materials.¹⁰⁰ Israeli scholar Raphael Israeli, who subsequently gained access to the seized files, published some of them in his edited volume *PLO in Lebanon: Selected documents*, along with his own analysis.¹⁰¹ The publication was highly controversial, with Yezid Sayigh and Rashid Khalidi contending that it was selective, inaccurate, poorly translated, and deliberately misleading.¹⁰² The scarcity of PLO sources has compelled me to use Israeli's book for my research here, although I have relied on my own translations.

Of course, Israeli's book contains only a tiny proportion of the full body of PLO archival documents. Although the Israeli government returned some of seized PLO documents as part of a prisoner swap in 1983, the material has not been preserved for posterity. In a detailed study in 2016, archivist Hana Sleiman succeeded in tracing the remains of the PLO archive to the Algerian desert, where it is now damaged and inaccessible.¹⁰³ Many other Palestinian sources, from the PLO and otherwise, are in Israel, although not necessarily accessible to researchers. The process of making them so is ongoing; historian Rona Sela recently gained access to Palestinian photos and films that were seized in 1982, and has been working to make them available.¹⁰⁴

It is important to note that a considerable number of sources relevant to Palestinian history are in fact non-literate. In recent decades, oral history has become a hugely popular methodology for researching Palestinian

¹⁰⁰ Jihane Sfeir, 'L'historiographie Palestinienne entre histoire et mémoire', in N. Amara, C. Raymond and J. Sfeir (ed.s), *Ecritures Historiennes du Maghreb et du Machrek* (Hors-Série: NAQD, 2015), p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Raphael Israeli, *PLO in Lebanon: Selected documents* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983).

¹⁰² Rashid Khalidi, 'Review of *PLO in Lebanon: Selected Documents* by Raphael Israeli', *Middle East Journal*, 39:1 (Winter 1985), pp. 162-164. Yezid Sayigh, 'Documentary Misrepresentation: Review of *PLO in Lebanon: Selected Documents*', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 15:1 (Autumn 1985), pp. 120-123.

¹⁰³ Hana Sleiman, 'The Paper Trail of a Liberation Movement', *Arab Studies Journal*, 24:1, Spring 2016, pp. 42-67.

¹⁰⁴ See: Ofer Aderet, 'Why are countless Palestinian photos and films buried in Israeli archives?', *Haaretz*, 1 July 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.798565>, accessed 17 July 2017; Rona Sela, 'Scouting Palestinian Territory 1940-48: Haganah Village Files, Aerial Photos and Surveys', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 52, Winter 2013, pp. 38-50; Rona Sela, 'Presence and Absence in "Abandoned" Palestinian villages', *History of Photography*, 33:1, 2009, pp. 71-79.

topics, particularly in the refugee camps. A substantial proportion of scholarship on the Palestinian refugee camps, much of it very influential, has drawn on oral history ethnographies. This formed the basis of Rosemary Sayigh's groundbreaking work *The Palestinians*,¹⁰⁵ first published in 1979, and was also used in aforementioned more recent anthropological studies by Peteet, Davis, Allan, and Gabiam.¹⁰⁶

The use of oral history has numerous advantages in reducing researchers' reliance on the aforementioned problematic archives. However, it is not free of problems either. Like documentary sources – and particularly written memoirs and testimonies – oral history interviews and questionnaires can be blighted by faulty memories, dishonesty and reticence, as well as 'retrospective bias' whereby individuals' memories of historical events are influenced by subsequent developments. Furthermore, there are specific criticisms and controversies attached to the use of oral history methodology when researching the Palestinian refugee camps. In 2012, Maysoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock published an influential article arguing that fieldwork has now become damaging to the refugee camps, using Shatila as an example.¹⁰⁷ The article triggered new discussions in the academy about the impact of intensive fieldwork in Palestinian camps,¹⁰⁸ with calls from some refugees for an end to the practice.¹⁰⁹

Partly because of these concerns, oral history interviews are used as a supplementary source in this thesis, rather than forming the backbone of the research. In Jordan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, the US and the UK, I conducted interviews with current and former senior UNRWA management

¹⁰⁵ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*.

¹⁰⁶ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*; Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories*; Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution*; Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering*.

¹⁰⁷ Maysoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock, 'On the Problem of Over-researched Communities: The Case of the Shatila Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon', *Sociology*, 47:3, 2012, pp. 494-508.

¹⁰⁸ Moe Ali Nayel, 'Palestinian refugees are not at your service', 17 May 2013, *Electronic Intifada*, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-refugees-are-not-your-service/12464>, accessed 17 July 2017.

¹⁰⁹ These issues have become so significant that in May 2016 the Institute for Palestine Studies organised a workshop in Beirut to discuss them, attended by the author. The workshop, entitled 'Towards Responsible and Engaged Research' brought together academics, researchers, interpreters and refugees.

to find out more about the Agency. My interviewees included the former UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi; the Director of UNRWA's Representative Office in New York; the Head of the UNRWA Ethics Office; the Director of UNRWA's Representative Office in Washington DC; and a former Gaza Programme Officer. I was also able to speak to some Palestinian refugees who had encountered UNRWA in various guises, including Abdel Bari Atwan, Afif Safieh, Salman Abu Sitta and Abdelfattah Abu Srouf. Their testimonies enriched the documentary evidence with personal anecdotes and accounts of the daily reality of Palestinian exile.

In addition to these archival documents and oral evidence, the research here is supplemented with a small number of published primary sources. These largely consist of memoirs published by Palestinian refugees, nationalist leaders and UN officials. Of particular value is the burgeoning genre of Anglophone memoirs by Palestinian refugees, often recounting life in the camps. First pioneered by Fawaz Turki with *The Disinherited* in 1972, this field has become increasingly populated over the years.¹¹⁰ Turki himself went on to publish two more autobiographical accounts,¹¹¹ and has since been joined by Ghada Karmi, Abdel Bari Atwan, Ramzy Baroud and Salman Abu Sitta, all Palestinian refugees themselves.¹¹² Palestinian nationalist figures Abu Iyad, Bassam Abu Sharif, Shafiq al Hout, Leila Khaled and Mu'in Basisu have also published their memoirs.¹¹³ An important recent

¹¹⁰ Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

¹¹¹ Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988).

Fawaz Turki, *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

¹¹² Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (London: Verso, 2009 edn). Abdel Bari Atwan, *A Country of Words: A Palestinian Journey from the Refugee Camp to the Front Page* (London: Saqi, 2008). Ramzy Baroud, *My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). Salman Abu Sitta, *Mapping My Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (New York: American University of Cairo Press, 2016).

¹¹³ Abu Iyad with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1978), trans. Linda Butler Koseoglu. Bassam Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine: An Insider's Account* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Shafiq Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), trans. Hader Al Hout and Leila Othman. Leila Khaled with George Hajjar, *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973). Mu'in Basisu, *Descent into the Water: Palestinian Notes from Arab Exile* (Wilmette: Medina Press, 1980), trans. Saleh Omar.

contribution came with Yasir Suleiman's 2016 edited collection of testimonies from Palestinians around the world, including several who had grown up in camps during the *thawra* period.¹¹⁴ As such, it has proved invaluable for this thesis. From UNRWA's side, only John Davis (Commissioner-General from 1959-63) has published a memoir, which is also used as a source here.¹¹⁵

As is the case with all primary sources, published memoirs should be approached critically. In common with oral history sources in particular, they can be subject to the flaws of memory and the potential for retrospective bias. Nevertheless, they comprise an important source for retaining the refugees' agency by relaying their experiences and perceptions of UNRWA. All these testimonies and recollections are used to enrich the archival findings. It is clear that there is no straightforward route to researching Palestinian history. Without disregarding the numerous potential pitfalls, this thesis seeks to counter the methodological challenges by way of careful research that draws on a broad base of primary source material, comprising both written and oral elements and taken from a wide geographical range of national and organisational archives.

Chapter structure

This thesis is organised into six chapters, each of which probes a different element of the dynamics between UNRWA, the Palestinian refugees, and the nationalist movement during the *thawra* period. Chapter One covers the establishment of UNRWA and the basics of its set-up in the camps. It identifies and analyses the key developments of the first period of UNRWA's operations, from its creation in 1949 until 1957, when it

¹¹⁴ Yasir Suleiman (ed.), *Being Palestinian: Personal Reflections on Palestinian Identity in the Diaspora* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

¹¹⁵ John Davis, *The Evasive Peace: A study of the Zionist/ Arab problem* (London: John Murray, 1970 edn).

abandoned the resettlement drive that characterised its early work. The chapter thus establishes the objectives with which UNRWA was originally created, the foundations of its relationship with the refugees themselves, and the early components of its role in the camps. In so doing, it shows that this early period established the foundational framework of UNRWA's operations in three ways: the Agency's formative and quasi-governmental role in the refugees' experiences of exile; the refugees' view of UNRWA as a political body; and the complex and intimate nature of the relationship between the two.

Building on this, Chapter Two then examines the nationalistic transformation of the refugee camps, brought about by the impact of the 1967 War and the resulting Palestinian *thawra*. It defines the content and nature of the Palestinian nationalist movement that became so dominant at this time, and in doing so sets the scene for the subsequent analysis of how this movement intersected with UNRWA. Chapter Two establishes a number of points that are critical to this thesis' central argument: that UNRWA played a key role in shaping the identity of the camps; that the camps as spaces were central to the Palestinian nationalist movement's re-emergence after 1967; and that the refugees themselves, far from being passive victims, were active in driving events and shaping the dynamics of the environment in which they found themselves.

The remaining chapters are organised thematically, each addressing different elements of the Agency's relationships, function and impact in the years 1967-82. Chapter Three looks at UNRWA's 'international relations' with the Arab host states, the Western donor states, and Israel. It asks how UNRWA's inherent reliance on the global order shaped its role in the camps and its political positioning after 1967. Central to this chapter is the argument that UNRWA's international relations reflected its hybrid identity as a quasi-state, an aid agency, and an international body consumed in a

nationalistic environment. The chapter also highlights common themes in UNRWA's relations, particularly the fact that it was consistently perceived on all sides as a political body, albeit in different ways and with different implications. It underlines the Agency's inherent internationalism, which is juxtaposed elsewhere in the thesis with the fervent nationalism of its environment.

Chapter Four probes many of the same questions but from a different angle. It focuses on UNRWA's relationship with the Palestinian refugees it served, asking how the latter perceived and related to the Agency at a time of nationalist fervour in the camps. Flagging up the complexity of UNRWA's role – a point previously highlighted in Chapter Three – Chapter Four argues that the refugees saw the Agency's work as international evidence of their political rights. This meant that despite its claims to be apolitical, UNRWA played an essential, if inadvertent, role in the refugees' understanding of their national identity and their national struggle – two concepts with highly political meanings.

Chapter Five builds on the foundations established in the previous chapters to engage closely with the dynamics and questions at the heart of this thesis. It examines how UNRWA's long-term presence and programmes in the camps affected nationalist ideas and national identity among the Palestinian refugees. Drawing on modernist theories of nationalism, Chapter Five argues that as the closest thing the refugees had to a national government in the camp, UNRWA played an essential role in how nationalist ideas were constructed at this time and in this setting. The Agency's registration policy and education programme had an especially potent impact, with the result that its work became 'Palestinianised' just as the nationalist movement became to some extent 'internationalised'.

Finally, Chapter Six drills down on this latter point to probe how the Palestinian nationalist structures of the PLO saw and made use of UNRWA

at this time. Underlying this analysis is the supposition that the PLO institutionalised Palestinian nationalism; as such, its interactions with UNRWA are vital for understanding the latter's relationship with this movement. With this in mind, Chapter Six argues that the PLO formally represented the paradoxical nature of the refugees' views of UNRWA; while criticising the Agency's politics and seeking to contain its power in the camps, the PLO simultaneously recognised the need for its services. It accordingly sought to make use of the potential that UNRWA's international status provided to its political cause, by using the Agency as a tool for accessing the 'international community' and gaining legitimacy for its struggle at the UN.

Over the course of these six chapters, this thesis breaks new ground in the scholarly understanding of Palestinian national history, and the place of UNRWA and the refugee camps therein. In recasting UNRWA as a body of political significance, and recasting Palestinian nationalism as an internationally-engaged movement, it challenges the conventional understanding of a topic with far-reaching historical and contemporary importance. The resulting analysis is one with deep-seated relevance not only to Palestinian history, but also to the wider history of the Levant, as well as the UN, the notion of the refugee camp, and the intersection between migration and national identity in the twentieth century.

Chapter One: The Establishment of UNRWA, c.1949-57

[UNRWA] was created for the purpose of transferring the refugees from direct relief to works projects.... By so doing it was felt that the morale of the refugees would be improved and that they would be reintegrated into the economy of the Near East instead of deteriorating in idleness...¹

Howard Kennedy, UNRWA director, June 1950

From a very early stage, UNRWA played an essential formative role in the refugees' experiences of exile. The Agency was established the year after the Nakba to serve the refugees' needs, and quickly became the closest thing many of them had to a government. Its quasi-governmental function was particularly noticeable in the refugee camps, which the host states largely disregarded except when it came to security. As the Palestinian refugees remained stateless, UNRWA became an intricate part of their daily lives, administering large-scale healthcare and education programmes. Its presence and services would later gain a heavily politicised significance, inadvertently contributing to the new forms of Palestinian political nationalism that emerged after the 1967 Arab defeat. Yet the foundations for this were established much earlier, during the first period of UNRWA's operations.

This chapter examines UNRWA's origins and its role among the Palestinians in the first era of its work, from the beginning of the refugee crisis until the Agency's abandonment of its early resettlement policy in 1957. It explores the impact of UNRWA's creation and services, the refugees' responses to the latter, and the lasting significance of these years. It is argued here that the developments of this period laid the foundations for UNRWA's later role in Palestinian political nationalism, in two key ways.

Firstly, this period saw UNRWA establish itself as a quasi-governmental body, closely entwined with the refugees' lives and the nature

¹ Press Statement by Howard Kennedy, UNRWA Director, 15 June 1950, FO 1018/73, The National Archives, London, UK (TNA).

of their exile. This was most markedly the case in the refugee camps, where UNRWA had the highest visibility and where its beneficiaries faced the greatest need. Secondly, and more importantly, this chapter will show that from the beginning of the Agency's operations, the Palestinian refugees perceived and responded to it as a political body rather than a mere aid agency - with some justification. The disputes over UNRWA's resettlement schemes, which dominated much of this early period, showed this most clearly. The resulting changes in UNRWA's programmes remained a fixture of its work for decades to come. The dynamics and developments of this early period thus set the tone for the following decades, in which UNRWA would play a significant role in the refugees' political nationalism.

These findings will be presented here over the course of three sections. First, this chapter examines how the beginning of the Palestinian refugee crisis left thousands destitute and paved the way for UNRWA's creation. The second section then looks at the formation of UNRWA and the significance of its early operations, including its evolution into a quasi-governmental body. Finally, the third section turns to the Palestinian refugees themselves, examining their responses to their new 'quasi-government'. In this way, this chapter will show that UNRWA's omission from political studies of Palestinian history has been not only erroneous but also misleading, resulting in an incomplete understanding of Palestinian nationalism. UNRWA played a vital role in shaping Palestinian exile, and the foundations for this were laid in the first seven years of its operations.

The Beginning of the Palestinian Refugee Crisis

The Palestinians' decades-long history as a large-scale refugee population began with the war of 1948, which resulted in the creation of the state of Israel and the mass exodus of around three-quarters of the Arab population

of Palestine. The history of this war has been highly contested, due in large part to its serious political implications. However, the nature of these contestations has changed over time. Older historiographical debates about the Nakba focused on how many Palestinians went into exile in 1948, the reasons for their flight, and the question of culpability. While these subjects are undoubtedly important, they also come with limitations. More recent scholarship has accordingly paid greater attention to the social history and experiences of Palestinians themselves, often also providing important evidence and documentation.

When it comes to the older historiographical debates about the Nakba, the dividing lines have usually been drawn between traditionalist and neo-traditionalist Israeli historians on one side, and Arab historians and Israeli revisionists (sometimes known as the Israeli 'New Historians') on the other.² One of the most central disputes concerns the simple question of how many Palestinians were exiled in 1948. Estimates for the figure range from around 500,000 to nearly one million, with a great deal of political significance often attached to the number; unsurprisingly, critics of Israel tend towards higher estimates.³ This thesis uses the figure of 750,000, which has been verified by independent observers at the UN as a plausible approximation.⁴

Aside from the question of numbers, much of the conventional historiographical debate focussed on the reasons for the Palestinian flight in 1948. Israeli traditionalist historians like Jon and David Kimche – and post-revisionists who came later, like Shabtai Teveth and Efraim Karsh – have

² Michal Ben-Josef Hirsch, 'From Taboo to the Negotiable: The Israeli New Historians and the Changing Representation of the Palestinian Refugee Problem', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5:2, June 2007, pp. 241-258.

³ For lower estimates see: Efraim Karsh, 'How many Palestinian refugees were there?'

<http://www.meforum.org/2875/how-many-palestinian-arab-refugees>, accessed 25 July 2017; Shabtai Teveth, 'Review: The Palestine Arab Refugee Problem and Its Origins', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26:2, April 1990, pp. 214-249. For higher estimates see: Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1; Ilan Pappé, 'The 1948 Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 36:1, Autumn 2006, p. 6; Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of 'Transfer' in Zionist Political Thought 1882-1948* (Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), p. 175.

⁴ UN Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East, First Interim Report, No. 66979, 16 November 1949, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/648C3D9CF58AF0888525753C00746F31>, accessed 4 June 2017.

cited Arab evacuation orders as the cause of the Palestinians' flight, contending that Israel bears no responsibility for the refugee crisis.⁵ The opposing interpretation attributes the exodus to Zionist expulsion; Israeli New Historians Simha Flapan, Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim and Ilan Pappé concur with Arab traditionalists like Constantine Zureik and A.W. Kayyali that the Palestinians were driven out by planned Zionist military campaigns.⁶ Pappé even contends that their expulsion should be treated as a case of ethnic cleansing.⁷ It is certainly clear from the considerable archival evidence unearthed by the New Historians that Zionist forces did organise and execute plans to expel the Palestinians in 1947-49.

However, one striking shared feature of these otherwise conflicting interpretations is that they all underplay the agency of the Palestinian people themselves, depicting them as mere respondents to either the Arab regimes or the Zionist forces. Even Walid Khalidi and Nur Masalha, who centralise the plight of the Palestinian refugees, still rely heavily on Israeli and Zionist sources to make their arguments, with the result that they focus on Zionist actions and minimise the role of the Palestinians.⁸ The Israeli New Historians similarly continue to depict the Palestinian refugees as largely passive, presenting interpretations that evoke sympathy for them but still deny them agency.

In fact, the refugees' own accounts clearly undermine any suggestion that they were purely passive in the Nakba. On the contrary, the events of the late 1940s were comparable to subsequent decades in how the

⁵ Jon and David Kimche, *Both Sides of the Hill: Britain and the Palestine War* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960). Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The 'New Historians'* (London: Frank Cass, 1997). Teveth, 'Review'.

⁶ Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (London: Croom Helm, 1987). Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-49* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Avi Shlaim, *The Politics of Partition: King Abdullah, the Zionists, and Palestine, 1921-51* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1992). Constantine Zureik, *Ma'nā al-Nakba* (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm lil-malayin, 1948); A. W. Kayyali, *Palestine: A Modern History* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

⁷ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

⁸ Walid Khalidi, 'Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18:1, Autumn 1988, pp. 4-33. Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*.

Palestinians exercised whatever agency they had, however limited. A useful conceptual framework here is Rashid Khalidi's idea of a structural 'iron cage' constraining the Palestinians' movements but not restricting them altogether.⁹ When it came to the Nakba, many refugees recall initially deciding to arm themselves and defend their land, before later fleeing upon hearing of massacres elsewhere. News of the Deir Yassin massacre in April 1948 had a particularly significant impact in causing people to flee.¹⁰ Elias Shoufani, a Palestinian from the Galilee, recalls the intense fear triggered in his village by reports of rapes taking place nearby, with many men consequently choosing to evacuate their families in order to protect the women's honour.¹¹ Abu Iyad, a refugee from Jaffa and later co-founder of Fatah, has similar recollections.¹²

Dilemmas over whether to stay and defend the land or leave to protect one's family are a common theme in many refugees' testimonies. In several cases, men sent their families abroad while staying on themselves to fight.¹³ Others judged that fighting would be futile in view of the devastating losses of the 1936-39 Revolt. All left with a view to returning imminently.¹⁴ The consciousness of these decisions must be considered in order for analyses of the Nakba to be comprehensive. This is especially important in view of the fact that Palestinian agency was a continuous theme of subsequent events, not least concerning UNRWA and the refugee camps. The Palestinian refugees' vulnerability did not automatically translate into passivity.

<Figure 1 unavailable due to copyright>

⁹ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

¹⁰ The Palestinian response to the Deir Yassin massacre is recorded in: Leila Khaled with George Hajjar, *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), p. 25; Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 125; Menachem Begin, *The Revolt*, trans. Samuel Katz (London: Butler & Tanner, 1979), p. 165.

¹¹ Elias Shoufani, 'The Fall of a Village', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 1:4, Summer 1972, pp. 108-121.

¹² Abu Iyad with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1978), p. 4.

¹³ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁴ Shafiq al-Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), trans. Hader Al Hout and Leila Othman, p. 19.

While many earlier works on the Nakba tended to overlook this, recent decades have seen an increasing scholarly focus on the Palestinians themselves. Rashid Khalidi and Issa Khalaf both emphasise the importance of the Palestinians' actions and choices in events. They point out that Palestinian society was not merely the static recipient of external events but was itself active and changing in ways that ultimately, if inadvertently, facilitated its collapse. Khalidi argues that the unsuccessful outcome of the Palestinians' activism during the 1936-39 Revolt caused lasting damage to their military, political, social and economic capabilities, leaving them greatly weakened when facing the Zionists' sophisticated infrastructure.¹⁵ Similarly, Khalaf contends that the decision of many Palestinian peasants to seek urban work in the decades prior to the Nakba created social dislocation that rendered them divided and vulnerable.¹⁶ Both Khalidi and Khalaf thus present the Palestinians as active participants in events.

A similar approach can be found in some ethnographic works, which highlight how the Palestinian refugees continued to show their agency even as they faced life in exile, with very little formal power. In particular, Rosemary Sayigh has emphasised the experiences of women and other subalterns, particularly those from the poorest backgrounds who ended up in camps.¹⁷ Sayigh's work has been highly influential in encouraging a greater scholarly focus on the voices of the most marginalised refugees. More recently, for example, Rochelle Davis has examined how the local dynamics of Palestinian villages helped shape the events of 1948, and how refugees subsequently worked to retain their village histories in exile.¹⁸ Such studies

¹⁵ Rashid Khalidi, 'The Palestinians and 1948: the underlying causes of failure', in Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (ed.s), *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 12-36.

¹⁶ Issa Khalaf, 'The effect of socio-economic change on Arab societal collapse in Mandate Palestine' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29:1, February 1997, pp. 93-112.

¹⁷ Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007 edn). Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

¹⁸ Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

enrich the historiography of the Nakba by placing the refugees' own testimonies at its centre – an approach that also forms the basis of this thesis.

Early Exile

Notwithstanding the serious disagreements between historians over what happened in 1948, none dispute that the Nakba was a seismic event in Palestinian history. Scholars on all sides have described the mass exodus as a trauma,¹⁹ a humiliation,²⁰ cataclysmic,²¹ shattering,²² 'a great human and national tragedy',²³ and a 'turning point'.²⁴ It is clear that however it happened, the Nakba was *the* seminal event in modern Palestinian history, with lasting political, social, economic and psychological effects. The conditions of early exile ushered in a new era for the Palestinians, and as will be shown here, ultimately provided the foundations for their political regeneration. It thus encapsulated the common connection between exile and nationalism.²⁵

All Palestinians felt the devastation of the Nakba, albeit to different degrees. Only a small number (around 150,000) remained in their homes, in the land that became Israel.²⁶ The majority became refugees, leaving Palestine on a journey sometimes referred to as *al-hijra* (Fig.s 1-3). The less fortunate had to make this journey on foot, enduring exhaustion, hunger and sickness over hundreds of miles. As most Palestinians left during the summer, they had to contend with extreme heat and dehydration. Children

¹⁹ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 22.

²⁰ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 100.

²¹ Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta, 1999), p. 109.

²² Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, p. 14.

²³ Teveth, 'Review', p. 248.

²⁴ Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 4.

²⁵ For more on this generic connection, see: Martin van Bruinessen, 'Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question', Working Paper, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence, 2000; Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).

²⁶ R. Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 136.

and the elderly were the most vulnerable, sometimes succumbing to illness or even dying *en route*. Survivors later recalled having to eat grass and drink their own urine.²⁷ Many were left with horrifying stories; one refugee from Galilee has told of how she carried both her babies in a bowl on her head, only to discover when she arrived in Lebanon that they were both dead.²⁸ Another, aged eight at the time of the Nakba, remembers a woman giving birth on the side of the road as they trekked north to Lebanon.²⁹ Abu Iyad recalls people drowning while attempting to flee coastal Palestine by sea.³⁰ The experience of the *hijra* would become an essential element of the Palestinian collective memory in the years to come.³¹

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After completing the journey, the refugees then had to contend with their new lives in exile. The fortunate ones had the money, connections and in some cases the foreign passports to re-build their lives and businesses in new homes, all the while hoping to return. Others were not so lucky, and had to survive in makeshift shelters, tents or caves (Fig.s 4-5).³²

The Palestinian diaspora spread across Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, into the Gulf and out of the Middle East to Europe and parts of North and South America. Thousands of refugees remained in historic Palestine, but in towns and regions far away from their homes. None of the land remained under Palestinian control, as it was now divided between Israel, Egypt and Jordan (which annexed the West Bank in 1950). As

²⁷ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 106

²⁸ John Halaka, 'Ghosts of Comfort and Chaos', *Jadaliyya*, 31 March 2013, <http://ci.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10784/ghosts-of-comfort-and-chaos>, accessed 12 June 2017.

²⁹ Fawaz Turki, *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American* (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 3.

³⁰ Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, p. 4.

³¹ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, pp. 105-107. Ilana Feldman, 'Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza', *History and Memory*, 18:2, 2006, pp. 23-28.

³² UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 76, December 1973, Institute of Palestine Studies, Beirut (IPS).

Miriyam Aouragh writes, 1948 thus engendered the creation of the Palestinian ‘transnational community’.³³

Reflecting this division, the Palestinians themselves were now assigned a complex set of legal statuses, which differed depending on their location. Those who remained in what became Israel could apply for citizenship from 1952, but were placed under martial law until 1966.³⁴ Those in the West Bank and Jordan could take Jordanian citizenship from 1949, but most other Palestinian refugees in the Arab world now found themselves stateless, with their Palestinian passports and identity documents defunct.³⁵ Palestinians in Gaza received identity and travel documents from the Egyptian military administration that ruled the territory until 1967.³⁶ Meanwhile Palestinians who had fled elsewhere in the region, including Lebanon and Syria, were reliant on their respective host states to issue them with the necessary documentation – which was not always forthcoming.³⁷

The early years of Palestinian exile (called *al-ghurba*) saw many of the refugees surviving in dire conditions,³⁸ with international aid workers commenting on the situation’s unsustainability.³⁹ All faced the emotional and psychological trauma of having lost their homes, land, and in some cases loved ones.⁴⁰ On top of this, many also had to deal with destitution, as they now found themselves poverty-stricken, homeless and hungry.⁴¹ The poorest refugees took shelter in tents provided by the UN and relied on international aid agencies for emergency relief (Fig. 5). Inadequate food and

³³ Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the internet and the construction of identity* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), p. 77.

³⁴ R. Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 136, 191. On the restrictions faced by Palestinian citizens of Israel, see: Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-93* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 37-38.

³⁵ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, pp. 40-41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41. See also: Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History* (London: Hurst, 2015), p. 77.

³⁷ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 41.

³⁸ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 19.

³⁹ See for example: Statement by A. Willard Jones, Executive Secretary of the Near East Christian Council Committee for Refugee Work, May 1955, Jerusalem and East Mission Collection GB165-0161, File 2, Box 73, Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony’s College, Oxford (MECA).

⁴⁰ Edward Said, ‘Afterword: the consequences of 1948’ in Rogan and Shlaim, *The War for Palestine*, p. 248.

⁴¹ Letter from UK Embassy in Washington DC to UK Foreign Office, 10 January 1950, FO 371/82242, TNA.

poor hygiene caused considerable health and developmental problems, particularly among children.⁴² International observers reported that the situation was creating widespread disillusionment and depression among the refugees.⁴³ Yet there were also signs of activism and determination; some refugees even wrote formal letters to international governments, imploring them to address the situation and implement their lawful rights.⁴⁴

The UN intervened to organise the refugee camps that were emerging to shelter Palestinians in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza. In the early years, international observers noted the grim nature of life inside the camps (Fig. 5), which the UNESCO Director described in late 1949 as 'wretched'.⁴⁵ The refugees' own accounts underline this.⁴⁶ Fawaz Turki, a refugee from Haifa, describes in his memoir the hardship of his early life in Burj al-Barajneh camp in Lebanon, where residents faced an alternation of torrential rain, bitter frost and fierce heat. In such conditions the tents deteriorated quickly, leaving many refugees exposed to the elements. Turki recalls how everyone in the camp was unemployed and hungry, and families were so poor that mothers used the sacks of UN flour rations to make underwear for their children.⁴⁷ Even other Palestinian refugees were horrified by life in the camps.⁴⁸ In her memoir, Leila Khaled, also a refugee from Haifa, recalls visiting a friend in an unnamed camp in Lebanon during her childhood. There Khaled observed 'the despair of deprivation' in the form of 'bare-footed children with swollen stomachs, pale mothers with

⁴² Dr Leslie Houseden, Report on the Refugee Children in the Middle East, 28 August 1953, Sir Edward Spears Collection, GB165-0269, File 2, Box 15, MECA.

⁴³ See for example: Letter from British Embassy in Washington DC to UK Foreign Office, 10 January 1950, FO 371/82242; UK Foreign Office Brief on Palestine Refugees, 1950, FO 371/82243, both TNA.

⁴⁴ See for example: Letter from Ali Ahmed al-Abed, Wavell Refugee Camp, to Clement Attlee, 21 June 1950; Letter from U. E. Ammar to British Consul in Beirut, 10 June 1950, both in FO 1018/73, TNA [Arabic].

⁴⁵ Letter from Jaime Torres Bodet, UNESCO Director-General, to Ministry of External Affairs in Colombo, 18 November 1949, ED 157/366, TNA.

⁴⁶ 'Refugee reminiscences III: Nuseirat's Abu Hisham', in UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today*, 126, May 1990, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University (RSC).

⁴⁷ Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), pp. 35-44. See also: Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), pp. 18-19.

⁴⁸ See for example: Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, p. 13.

sickly babies [and] poverty and hunger.⁴⁹ The camps thus encapsulated the worst elements of Palestinian suffering in exile, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Nakba.

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As Khaled's account indicates, it was by no means the case that all Palestinian refugees lived in the camps. In the years after the Nakba, the UN estimated that less than 40% of all registered Palestinian refugees were living in sixty official camps.⁵⁰ This estimate did not take account of the thousands of exiled Palestinians who had not registered with the UN, so the true proportion was even lower. However, the camp refugees held a significance disproportionate to their numbers. They comprised the poorest and most disadvantaged social groups, who had suffered the most as a result of exile. Their continuing survival in the camps came to symbolise the lasting effects of the Nakba, and would have serious repercussions in the years to come.

The Creation of UNRWA

The severe need among Palestinian refugees did not go unnoticed. In the immediate aftermath of the Nakba, the League of Red Cross Societies and other international aid agencies, including some American Christian charities, worked with the host governments to provide services to alleviate

⁴⁹ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁰ In 1951, UNRWA recorded that one-third of the refugees were living in the camps. See: John Blandford Jr., Report of the UNRWA Director, A/1905, 28 September 1951, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/8D26108AF518CE7E052565A6006E8948>, accessed 24 July 2017. Two years later, Dr Leslie Houseden recorded a figure of 36% for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. See: Dr Leslie Houseden, 1953 Report, MECA. Data about the camps can be found in Appendices A-E.

the situation.⁵¹ Having been formally responsible for Palestine since February 1947, when the British had announced plans to terminate the Mandate, the UN played a central role from the beginning.⁵² In July 1948 it established the sixty-day Disaster Relief Project (UNDRP), which was succeeded in November by UN Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR).⁵³ UNRPR coordinated the aid effort by recruiting other organisations to distribute UN supplies. In January 1949, it commissioned the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to run an organised relief programme in Gaza, which had the highest proportion of refugees and the fewest resources.⁵⁴ By the beginning of 1950, there were more than 950,000 Palestinian refugees on UNRPR's ration rolls.⁵⁵

As well as addressing the humanitarian elements of the refugee crisis, the UN also sought to resolve its political causes. On 11 December 1948, the UNGA passed Resolution 194, calling for the Palestine refugees to be allowed to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours. The Resolution also created the Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) to mediate the conflict.⁵⁶ In theory, the UNCCP should have worked to implement Resolution 194, in line with the official stance of the UN.⁵⁷ In practice, it quickly encountered strong resistance from the newly-formed Israeli government, with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion making

⁵¹ Confidential Memo from P. Haycock to Director of Relief Services, OP/AD/100, 3 March 1970, File RE400 II [No Box], UNRWA Headquarters' Archive, Amman (UHA). The Council for the Relief of Palestine Arab Refugees provides a list of the Christian charities providing aid in the camps in its 1950 documentary *Sands of Sorrow*. See: https://archive.org/details/sands_of_sorrow, accessed 6 June 2017.

⁵² Edward Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees: A study in Non-territorial Administration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 3.

⁵³ UNGA Resolution 212, A/RES/212(III), 19 November 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/EDC284B4A5508FD7852560E500670213>, accessed 24 July 2017.

⁵⁴ Ilana Feldman, 'Difficult Distinctions: Refugee Law, Humanitarian Practice, and Political Identification in Gaza', *Cultural Anthropology*, 22:1, 2007, p. 134. On the AFSC's records of Gaza at this time see: Julie Peteet, 'The AFSC Refugee Archives on Palestine 1948-50', in Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik (ed.s), *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Use of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2001), pp. 109-128.

⁵⁵ Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 237.

⁵⁶ UNGA Resolution 194, A/RES/194(III), 11 December 1948, S-0470-0047-0010, UN Headquarters' Archive, New York (UNA).

⁵⁷ On the UNCCP's history see: Michael Fischbach, *Records of Dispossession: Palestinian Refugee Property and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

it clear that the return of the refugees *en masse* was inconceivable.⁵⁸ Seeking alternative solutions, in August 1949 the UNCCP created the Economic Survey Mission (ESM, known informally as the ‘Clapp Commission’ after its leader Gordon Clapp) to tour the Arab countries and investigate ways to alleviate the refugees’ suffering.

The ESM’s first report, submitted in November 1949, had lasting repercussions for the Palestinian refugees and their relationship with the UN. While still speaking of ‘repatriation’, it engaged much more closely with the idea of settling the refugees permanently outside Palestine. To facilitate this, the report recommended the creation of a specific agency to direct a works programme that would integrate the refugees into the host countries.⁵⁹ The UN accordingly now looked at replacing UNRPR, which was premised on the presumed imminent resolution of the refugee crisis,⁶⁰ with a more comprehensive relief system.⁶¹ In December 1949, the UNGA adopted the ESM’s recommendations in Resolution 302(IV):

The General Assembly.... establishes the United Nations and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programmes as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission.⁶²

All the Arab governments, as well as Israel itself, voted in support of the resolution,⁶³ with the latter well-disposed towards the ESM’s work.⁶⁴ UNRWA was thus created.

⁵⁸ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, pp. 49-53, 58. See also: Simon Waldman, ‘UNRWA’s First Years, 1949-51: The Anatomy of Failed Expectations’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 25:4, 2014, pp. 630-645; Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 18; Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees*, p. 15.

⁵⁹ ESM, First Interim Report.

⁶⁰ Feldman, ‘Difficult Distinctions’, p. 135.

⁶¹ See: Letter from Arnold Rirholt, Norwegian Red Cross Secretary-General, to Trygve Lie, 17 June 1949; Report submitted by the Technical Committee to the Conciliation Commission, 4 July 1949, both in Box 197, Andrew Cordier collection, Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts (CURBM).

⁶² UNGA Resolution 302(IV), A/RES/302(IV), 8 December 1949, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/AF5F909791DE7FB0852560E500687282>, accessed 24 July 2017.

⁶³ Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees*, p. 36.

⁶⁴ Waldman, ‘UNRWA’s First Years, 1949-51’, p. 636.



Figure 1: Map of UNRWA's Fields of Operation, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work>, accessed 1 June 2018.

The Agency began operations on 1 May 1950 in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and Jordan (which at that time included the West Bank). It did not work in Egypt, despite the significant number of Palestinians there,⁶⁵ or in Iraq, although UNRWA did run a placement office in Baghdad until the late 1950s.⁶⁶ It also provided assistance to Jewish refugees in Israel until 1952, when it closed its office there at the request of the Israeli government.⁶⁷ Basic agreements with the Arab host governments established the terms of UNRWA's role, with responsibilities divided on the basis that 'the Agency provides a camp administration staff and operates certain facilities and programmes within the camps in co-ordination with the host Government [which is] responsible for the security services'.⁶⁸ The terms of this agreement show the major role that UNRWA's work played in the camps –

⁶⁵ Oroub El-Abed, *Unprotected: Palestinians in Egypt since 1948* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), p. 36. Lance Bartholomeusz, 'The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, 2010, pp. 457-460.

⁶⁶ Ghada Hashem Talhami, *Palestinian Refugees: Pawns to Political Actors* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2003), p. 113.

⁶⁷ Bartholomeusz, 'Mandate of UNRWA', p. 460. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 183-184. For information on Jewish refugees registered with UNRWA in this time, see: Incoming code cable, Jamieson to Labouisse, 19 November 1957, S-0169-0011-0001, UNA.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Memo from E/Bank Field Relief Services Officer to Director of Relief Services, 'Camps and Buildings', OP/AD/100, 3 March 1970, File RE400 II, No Box, UHA.

and vice versa – from the beginning. As a visible element of camp life from the early 1950s, the Agency quickly became a formative element of Palestinian exile, at least in the fields where it was operative.

The Agency's large-scale new services came with caveats. Across all four of its fields, UNRWA was mandated to serve *Palestine* refugees, not *Palestinian* refugees. The distinction was crucial, meaning that the Agency served refugees from Palestine, rather than those who happened to be Palestinian. It was this that enabled UNRWA to provide services to Jewish refugees in Israel in its early years. Importantly, neither UNGA Resolution 194 nor 302 contained any definition of exactly who constituted a 'Palestine refugee'.⁶⁹ Instead, UNRWA adopted a working definition of a 'refugee from Palestine' as:

a person whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the conflict in 1948, and who, as a result of this conflict, lost both his home and his means of livelihood and took refuge in 1948 in one of the countries where UNRWA provides relief.⁷⁰

In formally codifying the definition of a 'refugee from Palestine' like this, UNRWA played an important part in shaping their identity at an official level early on. In effect, this definition generated exclusions as well as providing some official endorsement. This was not entirely accidental; donor pressure for UNRWA to limit the number of relief recipients had informed the construction of such a narrowly drawn definition.⁷¹ As a result, UNRWA services were rendered out of bounds to those Palestinians who had left after 1948, or who had sought refuge outside its fields of operation.⁷² These exclusions caused some resentment, not least because

⁶⁹ Lex Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 69-70.

⁷⁰ 'UNRWA: A Brief History 1950-82', File RE 100 III, Box RE2, UHA.

⁷¹ Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, p. 71.

⁷² Randa Farah, 'The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees' in Niklaus Steiner, Mark Gibney and Gil Loescher (ed.s), *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 163-164.

many of those who were ineligible were as destitute as the formally-registered Palestine refugees – or in some cases, even more so.⁷³ Moreover, UNRPR's comparatively loose criteria meant that some refugees lost out when UNRWA's stricter definition came into force. Nevertheless, the Agency maintained that some limitations were necessary in order for it to provide effective services.⁷⁴

Early Operations: UNRWA as quasi-government

The difference in criteria was not the only thing that distinguished UNRWA from UNRPR. Other differences included the fact that UNRWA provided services to the refugees directly, rather than acting as a coordinator in the vein of UNRPR. Moreover, while UNRWA remained – at least in theory – a temporary Agency with a short-term mandate, it nevertheless took a more comprehensive approach than UNRPR to meeting the refugees' needs. UNRWA ran major relief programmes through which it established its own schools, clinics and health centres, as well as systems for procuring and distributing rations.⁷⁵ Accordingly, the Agency quickly became the primary service provider across the refugee camps in the 1950s, with a much more visible presence than UNRPR. Tellingly, the refugees themselves would later refer to this period as *'ayyām al-UNRWA* ('the days of UNRWA'), signifying the Agency's centrality to their lives.⁷⁶

UNRWA's comprehensive approach to relief meant that observers often described it as a small-scale government, with some even dubbing it 'the Blue State'.⁷⁷ Senior UNRWA management themselves characterised their work as 'quasi-governmental', both internally and in official external

⁷³ Norman Corkill, 'Nutrition of Palestinian Refugees', Spring 1951, GB165-0063, File 5, Box 1, MECA.

⁷⁴ Interview with Zizette Dardakally, UNRWA Chief Communications Officer, Beirut, 26 January 2015.

⁷⁵ Letter from UNRPR Director James Keen to American Mission in Beirut, 6 April 1950, GB165-0161, File 3, Box 73, MECA.

⁷⁶ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 98.

⁷⁷ Βοσσι, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 234.

communications.⁷⁸ The term accurately reflected the nature of UNRWA's work in the camps, where it administered services that would usually be the domain of the state, from health and education to sanitation and roads. While the host governments retained legislative and judicial power over the camps – a point that UNRWA officials were continually keen to emphasise – they did not actively manage them other than in matters of security.⁷⁹ Moreover, unlike most other relief organisations – including UNHCR, the other UN refugee agency – UNRWA served the Palestine refugees exclusively. This set-up facilitated its fast evolution into a quasi-government, made easier still by the statelessness of its beneficiaries.⁸⁰ As the only internationally-recognised authority that connected the Palestinians across national borders, UNRWA's significance went far beyond that of a typical aid agency.⁸¹

In one display of UNRWA's quasi-state functioning, a key element of its work in these early years was the planned resettlement of the refugees in the host countries, as originally recommended by the ESM.⁸² Although UNGA Resolution 194 had called for the return of the Palestine refugees to their homes – a point often highlighted by the refugees themselves – behind the scenes UN officials were increasingly looking to the refugees' integration into the host countries as an alternative solution.⁸³ This was encouraged by the US and the UK, which were the biggest global powers involved. They both looked unfavourably on the idea of return and publicly voiced support

⁷⁸ See for example: Confidential Memo from UNRWA OPT Directors to Acting DARI, 'Refugee Camps', IN/C 104/C, n.d., File RE 410(WB) II, Box RE65, UHA. The term is also used in UNRWA's official newsletter. See: UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* [back catalogue], IPS.

⁷⁹ UNRWA, 'Draft Paper on Administration of Refugee Camps Since 1970', 12 September 1970, File RE 400 II, No Box, UHA. On Lebanon, the host state most actively hostile to the Palestinian camps, see: David Hirst, *Benure of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), pp. 77-78.

⁸⁰ Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 19 January 2015.

⁸¹ Philipp Misselwitz and Sari Hanafi, 'Testing a New Paradigm: UNRWA's Camp Improvement Programme', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, 2009, p. 362, 378.

⁸² S. A. Morrison, Circular Letter to Members of the Beirut Conference and others interested in the work for the Arab Refugees, 21 December 1951, GB165-0161, File 2, Box 73, MECA.

⁸³ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 16-21.

for the refugees' resettlement in Arab states.⁸⁴ In line with the ESM's aforementioned report, they saw UNRWA as a tool for achieving this; the UK government even stated internally that UNRWA had in fact been created as a means to implement resettlement.⁸⁵

The UNGA, to which UNRWA reported, officially endorsed the resettlement policy in Resolution 513, also authorising a \$200 million 'Reintegration Fund' with which the Agency could implement the full integration of the Palestine refugees into the host countries over a three-year period.⁸⁶ UNRWA quickly established employment schemes to facilitate the refugees' economic integration - this was the 'Works' that went alongside the 'Relief' in its title.⁸⁷ In this way, UNRWA was working not merely to provide relief but to actually implement a political solution to the Palestine refugee crisis, despite the official insistence that it had no mandate to do so.⁸⁸ Four decades later, UNRWA Commissioner-General Giorgio Giacomelli would acknowledge in an interview that the Agency had initially been created in part to facilitate the refugees' resettlement.⁸⁹

Indeed, the evidence shows that many of UNRWA's activities in the 1950s were driven by the objective of implementing resettlement.⁹⁰ In keeping with the aims of integration and long-term development, UNRWA worked to stabilise the infrastructure in the refugee camps. By 1955, it had

⁸⁴ Jalal Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40:1, Autumn 2010, p. 8. See for example: Lord Macdonald, Speech in the Ad hoc Political Committee, 29 November 1950, FO1018/73, TNA.

⁸⁵ Letter from UK Foreign Office to Ministry of Education, USE 1748/2, 27 August 1952, ED 157/366, TNA.

⁸⁶ UNGA Resolution 513, A/RES/513(VI), 26 January 1952, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/83B95395F3058956852560EB006E3227>, accessed 24 July 2017. See also: Maya Rosenfeld, 'From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back: UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees, 1950-2009', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3 (2010), p. 295.

⁸⁷ Special Report of the UNRWA Director and Advisory Commission, A/2717/ADD.1, 5 November 1954, GB165-0161, File 3, Box 73, MECA.

⁸⁸ Soon after UNRWA's creation, Director Howard Kennedy stated 'It must be realised that our Agency has no mandate to deal with the political settlement of the problem.' Press Statement by Howard Kennedy, 15 June 1950, FO 1018/73, TNA.

⁸⁹ Interview with Giorgio Giacomelli, *Refugees*, September 1987, DC/OR/UNR/PR/1, File DC/OR/UNR/ICI/IPU/IPR, Box UNR 1, Cooper archive, RSC.

⁹⁰ Βοκο, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 231.

replaced all the refugee tents in Gaza with huts (Fig. 7).⁹¹ Four years later, the Director reported the same achievement across all of UNRWA's fields of operation.⁹² In undertaking this kind of structural improvement work, UNRWA was unmistakably acting in the guise of government – despite its persistent claims that the camps were the domain of the host governments. However, UNRWA's quasi-governmental approach was inherently problematic. It may have been the *de facto* government in the camps, but it had been installed by an international body, and as such lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the refugees whom it served. While most camp refugees saw UNRWA as being far more significant than a standard aid agency, this was not necessarily a good thing. They regarded UNRWA as a political body, and responded to it accordingly. This remained the cornerstone of their attitude towards the Agency throughout the twentieth century.

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The Refugees' Responses to UNRWA

The Palestinian refugees' responses to UNRWA's operations cannot be properly understood outside the context of their relationship with the UN. From early on, the Palestinian refugees viewed the UN with serious hostility. Elfan Rees, a British aid worker who visited the Palestinian camps across the Middle East in 1949, reported that he encountered 'at least as much criticism of United Nations [sic] as I found anti-Semitism'. According to his report, 'a visit from someone suspected of representing United Nations [sic] produces an immediate display of black flags and almost inevitably a hostile

⁹¹ UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 53, April 1967, IPS.

⁹² Hisham Jabr, 'Housing Conditions in the Refugee Camps of the West Bank', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2:1, 1989, p. 76.

demonstration.⁹³ As Rees and other international aid workers found, many Palestinian refugees saw the UN as their enemy; in fact, they commonly blamed it for their dispossession.⁹⁴ UNRWA management themselves were well aware of this. Director John Blandford Jr. noted in his 1951 Report to the UNGA that ‘the United Nations...are considered by the refugee to be entirely responsible for both his past and present misfortunes [sic]’.⁹⁵

The Palestinian refugees’ general opinion of the UN was thus not only hostile but also mistrustful. In directing their ire at the UN in this way, the refugees implicitly acknowledged the internationalisation of their situation. Many understood that Palestine’s fate had been dominated and determined by the world powers for many decades, and they wanted those same world powers to remedy the injustice that they had suffered. For this, they looked to the UN, which had proposed and endorsed the partition of Palestine in the first place with Resolution 181 in 1947.⁹⁶ As Lori Allen points out, the UN’s central role in Palestinian affairs was also acknowledged by the world powers, albeit not publicly.⁹⁷ In 1949, the Foreign Secretary of the UK, the former Mandate power in Palestine, wrote that the country had been ‘governed from the UN’ for much of the late 1940s.⁹⁸ As those years had not ended positively for the Palestinians, it followed that they should view the UN with antagonism.

The Palestinians’ hostility towards the UN had serious ramifications for UNRWA, which was tarred with the same brush. In the refugees’ eyes, the UN and UNRWA were part of the same power base that had created

⁹³ Elfan Rees, Report to the Department of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees of the World Council of Churches, November 1949, GB0165-0161, File 2, Box 73, MECA.

⁹⁴ Dr Houseden, 1953 Report.

⁹⁵ Blandford, 1951 Report.

⁹⁶ UNGA Resolution 181, A/RES/181(II), 29 November 1947,

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253>, accessed 24 July 2017.

⁹⁷ Lori Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Politics and Cynicism in Occupied Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 13.

⁹⁸ Confidential Note from Ernest Bevin to Clement Attlee, PM/49/101, 22 July 1949, PREM 8/1050, TNA.

Israel and turned them into refugees.⁹⁹ Fawaz Turki recalls that during his childhood in the 1950s, the residents of Burj al-Barajneh camp identified their enemies as ‘the UNRWA officials, the American governments, the Zionists, the British...’¹⁰⁰ In other words, they were all bracketed together. Similarly, in 1963 the former Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin al-Husseini told the Director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon that many refugees approached the Agency with suspicion because it ‘is a subsidiary Agency of the UN which is responsible for the Palestine problem as a whole’.¹⁰¹ To make matters worse, UNRWA was known to receive ongoing financial and diplomatic support from the US and the UK, which many Palestinians saw as their primary political foes.¹⁰² The UK in particular could not be trusted, having supported Zionism in the Balfour Declaration and incorporated this into its Mandate for Palestine.¹⁰³ Many refugees worried that British influence at the UN in general and UNRWA in particular was causing the Agency to work against their national interests.¹⁰⁴

UNRWA’s status as a UN body created a perception among the refugees that would become a hallmark of Palestinian attitudes for decades to come: the belief that UNRWA was a political organisation rather than simply an aid agency. UNRWA’s insistence that it was apolitical and merely concerned with relief fell on deaf ears. Many refugees feared that UNRWA’s operations had a furtive political purpose and that it was secretly working to keep them in exile. Strikingly, this theme could be found across the region. In 1955, for example, a group of refugee students in Lebanon declared to UNRWA, ‘you have come... to complete the conspiracy and deprive us of any chance to return to our usurped paradise.’¹⁰⁵ The same year, Gaza camp

⁹⁹ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 101. See also: Turki, *Exile’s Return*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁰ Turki, *Soul In Exile*, p. 38.

¹⁰¹ UNRWA Note DUA/L-1, 21 November 1963, File RE150 II, Box RE3, UHA.

¹⁰² See for example: Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 56, 128.

¹⁰³ Council of the League of Nations, ‘The Palestine Mandate’, 24 July 1922, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp, accessed 29 December 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Dr Houseden, 1953 Report.

¹⁰⁵ Declaration from Palestinian Pupils in Lebanon, L/510, n.d., Inactive Files Box 7, UHA.

community leader Ahmad al Yamani distributed a pamphlet accusing UNRWA of conspiring with Israel to prevent return - which was particularly significant in view of the fact that Yamani was himself an UNRWA schoolteacher. The publication *Al Thar*, an organ of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), regularly made similar accusations that the Agency sought to settle the Palestinians in exile.¹⁰⁶ In doing so it articulated the suspicions of many refugees that the real motive behind UNRWA's relief operations was to block their return to their homeland, as per the wishes of the Western powers.

The dynamics were further complicated by the fact that the majority of UNRWA employees at lower levels were themselves Palestine refugees, while senior management were exclusively 'international' and in practice overwhelmingly Western.¹⁰⁷ This hierarchy reinforced the refugees' feeling that the Agency was neo-colonial. Indeed, despite the 'Palestinianised' nature of much of the Agency's workforce, even its Palestinian employees were largely suspicious of its true motives, as the case of Yamani indicates.¹⁰⁸ Many shared the fear that UNRWA's creation had been contrived to keep them in exile while the new state of Israel established itself – indeed, the UNGA Resolution that had created UNRWA spoke of the need not only 'to prevent conditions of starvation and distress' among the refugees but also 'to further conditions of peace and stability.'¹⁰⁹ As one Palestinian UNRWA employee in Lebanon told anthropologist Rosemary Sayigh, 'UNRWA and the host governments intend that we should be absorbed in seeking our daily bread and never have time to work seriously to regain our country.'¹¹⁰ Although she was herself part of the Agency, the refugee in question still did

¹⁰⁶ Phillip Issa, 'Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian Leadership in 1950s Lebanon', MA Thesis, 2015, University of Texas, pp. 60-66.

¹⁰⁷ Nell Gabiam, 'When "Humanitarianism" becomes "Development": The Politics of International Aid in Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps', *American Anthropologist*, 114:1, 2012, p. 100.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Zizette Dardakally, UNRWA Chief Communications Officer, Beirut, 26 January 2015.

¹⁰⁹ UNGA Resolution 302(IV), A/RES/302(IV), 8 December 1949, paragraph 5, <http://www.unrwa.org/content/general-assembly-resolution-302>, accessed 6 September 2016.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 113.

not trust it. In her study of 1950s Gaza, Ilana Feldman identified similar sentiments.¹¹¹ Many feared that UNRWA belonged to the pro-Israeli side, seeking to distract the Palestinians from political campaigning by making them eternal victims, dependent on aid.

The behaviour of UNRWA's management sometimes fuelled these fears, albeit unintentionally. Despite their continuous insistence that their work was apolitical, they were still happy to allude to its political effects when it suited them. In particular, UNRWA directors frequently emphasised the Agency's positive impact on political stability in the Middle East when appealing for funding from donor states, which were nearly all Western. In 1951, Blandford spoke proudly of how the Agency 'kept the situation [in the camps] under control', stating that this was 'not one of the less significant performances of UNRWA.'¹¹² The Agency's official newsletters regularly extolled its stabilising effects, not least when exhorting UN Member States to provide or increase their financial support.¹¹³ Similarly, from the very beginning the UK government, one of UNRWA's major donors, justified its financial support for the Agency on the grounds of a feared 'threat to stability in the Middle East'.¹¹⁴ It implored other Western states to provide funding for the same reason.¹¹⁵ As many of the refugees saw it, UNRWA's work was therefore delivering outcomes that were politically desirable to those world powers that supported Israel, and to Israel itself.

UNRWA's continuous failure to consult the refugees on its work in the 1950s tended to exacerbate their suspicion and concern. As a group calling itself the Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon complained, 'the

¹¹¹ Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority and the Work of Rule, 1917-67* (London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 142.

¹¹² Quoted in UNRWA, Draft Paper 'Get out of the camps business', n.d., File RE400 II [No Box], UHA.

¹¹³ UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* [back catalogue], IPS.

¹¹⁴ Letter from G. Furlonge, UK Foreign Office, to A. H. Clough, Treasury, 11 April 1950, FCO 371/82236, TNA.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Ernest Bevin to Foreign Ministers of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, 26 May 1950, FCO 371/82236, TNA. See also: UK Brief for Colombo, 'Palestine Refugees', n.d., FCO 371/82243, TNA.

Relief Agency behave as if it was a Government having a fixed aspect [sic], enacting rules and regulations to apply to the emigrants (as if they were its subjects).¹¹⁶ The nature of this complaint clearly reflects the refugees' feeling that UNRWA lacked legitimacy as a pseudo-government. Similarly, Turki objected in his memoir to the time and energy that the UNRWA Director devoted to meeting Arab League committees, while ignoring Palestinian representatives. The Agency's perceived disinterest in discussing its services with the refugees led him to dub it 'our contemptuous stepmother'.¹¹⁷ Turki's choice of phrase perfectly encapsulates the combination of intimacy and hostility that characterised the refugees' relationship with UNRWA, starting in the first decade of its operations and continuing thereafter.

Rejecting Resettlement

The refugees' fears about UNRWA's politicised motives were not entirely groundless.¹¹⁸ As already mentioned, UNRWA's main objective in the 1950s was to resettle the refugees in the Arab host countries, largely through the job programmes and 'reintegration' schemes proposed by the ESM.¹¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, many Palestinians were highly suspicious of the schemes, taking them as evidence that the Agency's real purpose was to counter and ultimately obliterate their right of return by permanently settling them outside Palestine. As early as 1950, a Palestinian refugee organisation claimed that the Agency's Works programme was 'a project prepared by the Imperialists [sic]'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon, Statement, 1 January 1960, File RE150 I, Box RE3, UHA [UNRWA translation].

¹¹⁷ Turki, *The Disinherited*, p. 36, 58.

¹¹⁸ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 46.

¹¹⁹ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 86.

¹²⁰ Letter from the Committee of Action for the Congress of the Palestinian Refugees to the Soviet government, 29 November 1950, FO1018/73, TNA.

Arguably their suspicions were justified. In a private meeting with UNESCO in 1952, UNRWA Director Blandford said that he was ‘doing his best’ to persuade the Arab governments to agree to Palestinian resettlement.¹²¹ John Davis, who served as Commissioner-General from 1959-63, later wrote in his memoir that the Agency had gone wrong in not focussing sufficiently on economic development and integrating the refugees.¹²² Yet in the eyes of the refugees, even a minimal focus on their integration outside Palestine was unacceptable. Resettlement quickly became a major source of tension in UNRWA’s relationship with the refugees, whose reactions to the Agency’s job schemes varied from passive reluctance to outright hostility.¹²³

The refugees’ opposition meant that UNRWA experienced considerable problems in carrying out its work. A British doctor working in the camps in the early 1950s observed how the Agency was facing difficulties in implementing some of its projects because it lacked the cooperation of the people.¹²⁴ Blandford confirmed as much in his 1951 Report to the General Assembly, where he recorded:

demonstrations over the census operation, strikes against the medical and welfare services, strikes for cash payment instead of relief, strikes against making any improvements, such as school buildings, in camps in case this might mean permanent resettlement.¹²⁵

As a result of these obstacles, UNRWA made little progress in its attempts to resettle the refugees, and its Works and reintegration schemes ultimately failed.¹²⁶ Of the 878,000 refugees registered with the Agency in the early 1950s, the largest number ever employed under its Works Programme was

¹²¹ Extract from a report submitted to the Director General by Dr Matta Akrawi, UNESCO Rep, 12 May 1952, ED 157/366, TNA.

¹²² John Davis, *The Evasive Peace: A study of the Zionist/ Arab problem* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1970), p. 68.

¹²³ S. A. Morrison, Circular Letter, 21 December 1951, GB165-0161, File 2, Box 73, MECA.

¹²⁴ Dr Houseden, 1953 Report.

¹²⁵ Blandford, 1951 Report.

¹²⁶ Report by Bishop Weston, 27 December 1950, GB165-0161, File 2, Box 73, MECA.

12,000, and in less than a year this had dwindled to 812.¹²⁷ In 1956, Commissioner-General Henry Labouisse stated in his Report to the General Assembly that the refugees 'have remained opposed to the development of large scale projects for self-support, which they erroneously link with permanent resettlement...'¹²⁸ Whether the link was erroneous or not, the refugees' opposition was palpable and apparently unbreakable.

As Blandford had noted, the refugees' hostility extended to UNRWA's camp improvement programmes. They saw these schemes in a similar light, as a strategy designed to prevent their return to Palestine by making them more comfortable in exile. As a result, UNRWA's efforts to develop and even beautify the camps often met with opposition so fierce that they became impossible to implement. Turki recalls in his memoir how the residents of Burj al-Barajneh camp uprooted the trees planted by UNRWA in protest at the perceived attempt to settle them permanently outside Palestine.¹²⁹ As shown in Blandford's Report, such demonstrations were by no means limited to that camp alone.¹³⁰ Using the same rationale, some refugees also rejected early attempts to replace their tents with solid houses. Interestingly Gaza was the only field in which UNRWA was able to do so without fierce resistance – perhaps because its high population density had partially defused the refugees' concerns about reintegration. Yet even in Gaza, the refugees still fervently opposed other proposals for resettlement.¹³¹

As time went on, the Agency increasingly found that its focus on jobs and resettlement was not only unpopular, but also costly and inefficient.¹³²

¹²⁷ Turki, *The Disinherited*, p. 36.

¹²⁸ Henry Labouisse, Report of the UNRWA Director, A/3212, 30 June 1956, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/9a798adb322aff38525617b006d88d7/3e55412b18aacd5f0525659100536f27?OpenDocument>, accessed 18 February 2015.

¹²⁹ Turki, *Soul In Exile*, p. 38.

¹³⁰ Blandford, 1951 Report.

¹³¹ Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 150.

¹³² Benjamin Schiff, 'Between Occupier and Occupied: UNRWA in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18:3 (Spring 1989), p. 62. See also: UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 123, May 1989, RSC.

Consequently, it came to consider a change in focus¹³³ – although only much later would it acknowledge that the refugees’ resistance to resettlement had been the major reason for this.¹³⁴ From the mid-1950s, the management was focussing on education as an alternative approach.¹³⁵ By 1957, it had quietly dispensed with its Works schemes.¹³⁶ Schools were now declared the new priority.¹³⁷ 1957 thus marked the end of what could be considered the first era of UNRWA’s work, as distinguished by a preoccupation with employment schemes as a long-term solution to the immediate emergency of the refugee crisis. The subsequent shift to education injected a new steadiness and routine into UNRWA’s operations over the ensuing decade, until the 1967 War upturned everything in the region once again and returned both UNRWA and the refugees to a state of emergency.¹³⁸

The Agency’s shift in emphasis to education was momentous. Although UNRWA had been responsible for camp schools since it began operations in 1950, it had run its education programme on a small scale for the first half of that decade.¹³⁹ That now changed, as the education programme, developed in partnership with UNESCO and based on the host country curricula, expanded significantly (Fig. 9).¹⁴⁰ The number of UNRWA schools increased from 61 in 1950 to 386 in 1958.¹⁴¹ In subsequent years, UNRWA’s school programme developed into a modern-style education system, operating at elementary and middle school level and also providing university scholarships to exceptional students. From 1960,

¹³³ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 64.

¹³⁴ Interview with Giorgio Giacomelli, *Refugees*, September 1987, File DC/OR/UNR/PR5, Box UNR 1; ‘UNRWA 1950-90: Serving Palestine Refugees’, April 1990, Box GP59.3 UNRWA, both RSC.

¹³⁵ Takkenberg, ‘UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees After Sixty Years’, p. 255.

¹³⁶ Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, p. 21.

¹³⁷ David P. Forsythe, ‘The Palestine Question: Dealing with a Long-Term Refugee Situation’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467, May 1983, p. 92.

¹³⁸ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 81.

¹³⁹ Memo from J. Robbins, Chief of UNRWA Education Division, to Director Blandford, 12.10/c/103, 24 March 1952. UNESCO letter, ‘Schools for Arab Refugees’, 19 May 1952, both in ED 157/366, TNA.

¹⁴⁰ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 28. Al Hussein, ‘UNRWA and the Refugees’, p. 13.

¹⁴¹ Rosenfeld, ‘From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back’, pp. 289-300.

education became the largest single UNRWA programme in terms of investment, funding and personnel.¹⁴²

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It is crucial to note that UNRWA's shift in focus to education came partly in response to demands from the refugees themselves. While the latter were overwhelmingly averse to the Works schemes, they responded to the prospect of education with great enthusiasm, shared by everyone from teachers and administrators to the students themselves and their parents.¹⁴³ Indeed, the earliest camp schooling predated UNRWA, as refugees had set up makeshift lessons in tents or even the open air (Fig. 8).¹⁴⁴ In his memoir, Turki describes how most camp residents saw education as a way out of poverty and deprivation, and were consequently always seeking academic and training opportunities.¹⁴⁵ Scholars Maya Rosenfeld and Yezid Sayigh argue that having lost the land that had defined them and been their main currency for generations, the camp refugees – overwhelmingly of peasant origin – looked to education as the key to improving their prospects.¹⁴⁶ However, there was also a deeper rationale at play. Many felt that they had lost their country in 1948 because of ignorance.¹⁴⁷ Education was thus not only the key to better employment opportunities, but also a tool for reclaiming Palestine. As such, it was the polar opposite of the hated 'reintegration' schemes.

¹⁴² Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 232.

¹⁴³ R. Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁴ Charlotte Johnson, Red Cross Chief Social Welfare Advisor, Report on Schools Directed by the League of Red Cross Societies in Lebanon, Syria & Jordan, May 12, 1950, ED 157/366, TNA.

¹⁴⁵ Turki, *The Disinherited*, pp. 39-41.

¹⁴⁶ Rosenfeld, 'From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back', p. 312. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 47. Abu Iyad, *My Home My Land*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴⁷ R. Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, p. 54, 55.

The significance of UNRWA's policy shifts in this period can be observed by way of three lasting effects. First, the refugees' collective memory of the Agency's early resettlement policy cast a long shadow over its reputation in their eyes. Years later, the legacy of resettlement still had a serious impact on UNRWA's policies. Any attempts by the Agency to improve the camps faced an uphill struggle, as such projects were tainted by their perceived association with resettlement.¹⁴⁸ UNRWA management continually worried about whether particular camp policies might be conflated with resettlement.¹⁴⁹ Most refugees only came to embrace the idea of camp improvement after several decades, and there is considerable scholarly debate over exactly when they ceased to see it as mutually exclusive with return to Palestine. Riccardo Bocco and Lex Takkenberg place the shift in the late 1980s, meaning that the resettlement policy still shaped refugee attitudes for decades after it ended.¹⁵⁰ Most other scholars, such as Nell Gabiam, Sari Hanafi and Phillip Misselwitz, argue that the refugees continued resisting camp improvement until the early twenty-first century, and in some cases still do.¹⁵¹

Secondly, UNRWA's switch in focus to schooling in this period established the organisation as what a later Commissioner-General would term 'an institution predominantly concerned with education'.¹⁵² This became the badge of the Agency's work in future years. UNRWA's comprehensive education system meant that a generation of Palestinian

¹⁴⁸ Milton Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East* (Washington DC: Middle East Institute, 1984), p. 34.

¹⁴⁹ See for example: Strictly Confidential Memos from R. Skinner and S.F. Hussein, 20 February 1971, File RE400 III, No Box; Note for the Record of Meeting of DUO/WB with General Shelev and Major Naboth, 1 March 1976, File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, both UHA.

¹⁵⁰ Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 247. Takkenberg, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees', pp. 256-257.

¹⁵¹ Gabiam, 'When "Humanitarianism" becomes "Development"', p. 97. Misselwitz and Hanafi, 'Testing a New Paradigm', p. 361.

¹⁵² Olof Rydbeck, quoted in Summary record of the 6th meeting of the UN General Assembly (34th Session) in New York, 17 October 1979, FCO 93/2243, TNA.

refugees overtook their Arab counterparts in educational attainment.¹⁵³ The developments of the years 1949-57 thus established the programme that would become the core of the Agency's work, and indeed of its significance, for much of its existence. However, by involving itself in education, UNRWA increasingly, if inadvertently, became incorporated into Palestinian politics. Its education programme was vital in reaffirming and strengthening the Palestinian national identity in exile¹⁵⁴ – as is discussed in depth in Chapter Five. The seeds of this were sown in the 1950s.

Thirdly and perhaps most interestingly, UNRWA's repudiation of resettlement in favour of education is an early example of the impact of Palestinian agency. The refugees' popular demand for schooling was well-known even at UN level - as early as 1952, a UN Working Group spoke of the great pressure coming from Palestinian refugees for adequate education.¹⁵⁵ In abandoning resettlement for greater investment in education, UNRWA ultimately capitulated to this demand. Accordingly, the shift signifies the intricate and complex relationship between UNRWA and the refugees, which were to become increasingly enmeshed over the decades. In particular, the latter's demand for education demonstrates the sense of entitlement they felt with regard to the Agency. As shall be explored next, this was a hallmark of their behaviour towards UNRWA from very early on.

¹⁵³ Michael Dumper (ed.), *Palestinian Refugee Repatriation. Global Perspectives* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Forsythe, 'The Palestine Question', p. 93; Gabiam 'When "Humanitarianism" becomes "Development"', p. 100; Lamis Alami, 'Educating Palestinian Refugees: The Role of UNRWA', *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, 3:2, Spring 1996, p. 70; Ghassan Shabaneh, 'Education and Identity: The Role of UNRWA's Education Programmes in the Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25:4, 2012, pp. 491-513; R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, pp. 140-143.

¹⁵⁵ Report of the Working Party convened by UNESCO to make recommendations on the possible development of the UNRWA-UNESCO Education Programme for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 28-30 April 1952, ED 157/366, TNA.

Entitlement and Responsibility: UNRWA as validation

Although the Palestine refugees were undeniably hostile towards UNRWA, it is important to note that this did not translate into a wholesale rejection of its work. While the refugees largely viewed the Agency with suspicion, they did not seek to remove themselves from its orbit entirely. On the contrary, many Palestinian refugees saw UNRWA's existence and programmes as a sign of international responsibility for their plight.¹⁵⁶ Accordingly, they felt entitled to its services.¹⁵⁷ The aforementioned Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth even explicitly declared that 'the Services of our Agency are our rights and not favours or charity from her [sic]'.¹⁵⁸ This attitude was inherently tied to the refugees' view of the UN. The thinking went that until the Palestinians were afforded the repatriation guaranteed in Resolution 194, it was the UN's duty to provide them with essential services.

External observers quickly picked up on this perception of UNRWA services as rights, which took hold soon after the Agency began operations. One international aid worker in the camps recorded in a 1953 Report that the refugees saw the UN as culpable for their dispossession and accordingly responsible for their wellbeing until they could return.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, UNRWA officials themselves understood that the refugees accepted their provision of services on these terms. As early as 1951, Blandford wrote in his Report to the UNGA:

[The Palestine refugees] say that they have lost faith in United Nations action since, after more than thirty months, the General Assembly resolution recommending their return home...has never been implemented.... The relief given by the Agency is therefore considered as a right....¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Gabiam, 'When "Humanitarianism" becomes "Development"', p. 96.

¹⁵⁷ Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 142.

¹⁵⁸ Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon, Statement, 1 January 1960, File RE150 I, Box RE3, UHA [UNRWA translation].

¹⁵⁹ Dr Houseden, 1953 Report.

¹⁶⁰ Blandford, 1951 Report.

The Palestinian refugees thus saw UNRWA as being much more than a simple aid agency. It was a symbol of the international debt towards them and therefore of their rights. Importantly, these rights were not only humanitarian, but also political, relating as they did to the lost national homeland.¹⁶¹ In this way, UNRWA's significance easily transcended the humanitarian field.

This understanding was not limited to the general principle of UNRWA's work but also applied to specific services. In the 1950s, UNRWA staff reported that the refugees saw their ration cards as proof of their eligibility for repatriation in Palestine - in other words, as a sign of their national rights.¹⁶² This belief directly influenced their behaviour. When the Jordanian government offered the Palestinian refugees full economic integration in exchange for their UNRWA cards in 1959, only 8,000 took up the offer out of hundreds of thousands.¹⁶³ UNRWA services were thus treated not just as a right but as actual *evidence* of the Palestine refugees' identity.¹⁶⁴ UNRWA itself was seen as a symbol of the continuing after-effects of the Nakba, the refugees' ongoing plight and the international responsibility for finding a solution.¹⁶⁵ In this way the fact of UNRWA's existence – not to mention its presence in the camps - came to represent Palestinian political and legal rights.¹⁶⁶

The significance that the refugees attached to their ration cards is especially intriguing in view of the fact that in the early years, UNRWA's provision of rations was a major source of resentment. Many refugees complained that the rations were insufficient. Turki recalls that UNRWA's

¹⁶¹ Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 138.

¹⁶² Memo from Mr T. Jamieson, UNRWA AD/OPS, to Acting UNRWA Director, 2 January 1959, File RE120 I, Box RE3, UHA.

¹⁶³ Najeh Jarrar, 'Citizenship and Palestinian Refugees', *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, 3:3-4, Summer/Autumn 1996, p. 66.

¹⁶⁴ Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁵ Nabil Marshood, *Voices from the Camps: A People's History of Palestinian Refugees in Jordan* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), p. 20. Gabiam, 'When "Humanitarianism" becomes "Development"', p. 101.

¹⁶⁶ Farah, 'The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees', p. 167.

monthly ration supplies only provided families in the camp with enough food to last a week.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Khaled describes the rations she received from UNRWA as meagre, providing only a bare subsistence.¹⁶⁸ Such claims are supported by external evidence. In 1953, Dr Leslie Houseden carried out a comprehensive study of the Palestinian camps across the Middle East, reporting that many refugees were surviving on insufficient food supplies.¹⁶⁹ Blandford himself acknowledged in his 1951 Report that ‘the diet provided by the standard ration is not by any means a balanced one’ – although he added that the refugees receiving it were still nutritionally better-off than many of their neighbours.¹⁷⁰

The refugees expressed their grievances by framing the rations’ insufficiency as an infringement of their rights. The provision of rations signified an entitlement and not a privilege, so many refugees saw the limitations on them as unacceptable. In view of the perceived international debt owed to them, they were unmoved by the explanation that the Agency’s severe financial difficulties necessitated such cuts. Discerning that the required money could be found within the UN system as a whole, they did not accept that it could not be channelled towards their needs – especially when they observed the high salaries of UNRWA’s international staff.¹⁷¹ In the refugees’ eyes, UNRWA’s services were granted in lieu of the land they had lost, and as such should be fixed and non-negotiable.¹⁷² The long-term repercussions of this idea are discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

One final point needs to be emphasised here. Although the refugees felt entitled to UNRWA’s services, this did not mean that they were happy about it. In fact, many refugees strongly resented the Agency, which Turki

¹⁶⁷ Turki, *The Disinherited*, p. 45.

¹⁶⁸ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁹ Dr Houseden, 1953 Report.

¹⁷⁰ Blandford, 1951 Report.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Zizette Dardakally, UNRWA Chief Communications Officer, Beirut, 26 January 2015.

¹⁷² Adel H. Yahya, *The Palestinian Refugees 1948-88: An Oral History* (Ramallah: PACE, 1999), pp. 73-77.

Many refugees continued to feel this way decades later. See for example: Petition from Balata Camp Mukhtar to UNRWA Commissioner-General, 8 August 1981, File RE500 VII, Box RE67, UHA.

described as ‘that ubiquitous symbol of shame in our lives’.¹⁷³ There was a strong sense among the refugees that life in the camps was fundamentally humiliating and that UNRWA’s services stripped them of their dignity.¹⁷⁴ Abdel Bari Atwan, who grew up in Deir al-Balah camp in Gaza, writes in his memoir of how reliance on UNRWA invoked feelings of impotence and frustration in his father.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, both Khaled and Turki recall the shame and degradation that their parents felt over having to collect their rations from the UNRWA provisions bureau.¹⁷⁶ The Agency’s aid may have represented the Palestinians’ international rights, but it also signified their national defeat. The refugees thus generally sought to draw whatever meagre benefits they could from the Agency – relief, healthcare, education – while keeping up their demands for real justice. Their attitude towards UNRWA services tended to be one of grudging entitlement, not gratitude; the Agency’s programmes were rights, not charity, and as such they did not merit anything more.

Conclusion

The years 1949-57 were highly significant for UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees, establishing the foundations of their relationship and respective roles. While this was a relatively quiet time for Palestinian nationalist activity, it was crucial in laying the basis for UNRWA’s significance, its interactions with the refugees, and the broader relationship of both to the UN itself. Created four years after the UN, UNRWA constituted the latter’s first approach to a major humanitarian crisis. Uniquely formed to serve only the

¹⁷³ Turki, *Soul in Exile*, p. 55.

¹⁷⁴ Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 129. The Council for the Relief of Palestine Arab Refugees also highlighted the refugees’ feelings of humiliation in its 1950 documentary *Sands of Sorrow*. https://archive.org/details/sands_of_sorrow, accessed 6 June 2017.

¹⁷⁵ Abdel Bari Atwan, *A Country of Words: A Palestinian Journey from the Refugee Camp to the Front Page* (London: Saqi, 2007), p. 27.

¹⁷⁶ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, pp. 28-36. Turki, *Exile’s Return*, pp. 56-57.

Palestine refugees, UNRWA was closely entwined with their daily lives from the beginning, quickly becoming a formative element of the Palestinian exile. Its work signified the ongoing ‘internationalisation’ of the ‘Palestine question’, which had started when the League of Nations created the British Mandate in 1922. It also demonstrated the complex relationship between politics and humanitarianism that came to characterise much of the Palestinian refugees’ exile.

Soon after UNRWA began operations in 1950, its first Director Howard Kennedy declared that the Agency had been created to ‘reintegrate’ the Palestine refugees into the region.¹⁷⁷ Seven years later, the Agency’s management recognised this policy as a failure and quietly discarded it in favour of a new focus on education. This would prove a successful and momentous move, as the Agency quickly became known primarily for its schools. Moreover, this development was due in no small part to the refugees’ hostility to resettlement, and their resulting opposition to the Agency’s early Works schemes. In replacing resettlement with education, UNRWA recognised the need to work in tandem with the refugees. This exemplified the intimacy of their relationship, which was driven by a combination of dependency, hostility and entitlement.

The Palestinian refugees always saw UNRWA as being much more than a simple aid agency. It was, in their view, a sign of the ‘international community’s’ debt to them; its services were entitlements rather than acts of generosity. Most importantly, they viewed UNRWA as a politicised and even a political organisation, despite the management’s continuous insistence that its work was purely humanitarian and entirely apolitical.¹⁷⁸ As has been shown here, many refugees saw the Agency as being in league with the pro-Israeli Western powers. They accordingly feared that its real purpose was to undermine their national cause. UNRWA’s early resettlement policy

¹⁷⁷ Press Statement by Howard Kennedy, 15 June 1950, FO 1018/73, TNA.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

was taken as proof of this, and its legacy had a lasting impact as this perception became deeply embedded in the Palestinian refugees' collective consciousness.

This chapter has further established that from the beginning, UNRWA's work was tied most closely to the refugee camps. Although not all Palestinian refugees lived in the camps, this was where the greatest need could be found and accordingly where the Agency acted in its most pronounced quasi-governmental role. However, UNRWA's intimacy with the camps was to have serious consequences. As the host states remained largely uninvolved in running the camps, UNRWA came to be seen as responsible for them. This became problematic for the supposedly-apolitical Agency as the camps subsequently came to take centre stage in the Palestinians' nationalist campaign. The fact that the Palestinian refugees themselves largely viewed UNRWA as a political body did not help matters. With this in mind, the significance of the camps' politicisation is examined in depth in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

From Refuge to Revolution: The Impact of 1967

*'We are dispersed from our country, our homes, and our people.... Use your powers to send us back.'*¹

Ali Ahmed Al 'Abed, Palestinian refugee in Wavel Camp, Lebanon, 1950

*'We waited for 20 full years. Nothing happened. Our people remained in their camps, in their tents.'*²

George Habash, PFLP leader, 1968

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

This chapter examines Palestinian politics in the refugee camps in the decades after the Nakba. Acknowledging the importance of the 1967 defeat for Palestinian nationalism, it studies the form and nature of camp politics before and after this turning point. It will therefore temporarily move away from the thesis' general focus on UNRWA. By investigating questions about the camps' distinctiveness and significance as political spaces, this chapter lays the foundation for subsequently considering UNRWA's political role.

¹ Letter from Ali Ahmed Al 'Abed, Wavel refugee camp, Lebanon, to Clement Attlee, 21 June 1950, FO 1018/73, TNA [Arabic and English].

² George Habash in documentary *The Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSAD9pS8NIw>, accessed 25 April 2018.

The question of the Naksa's impact is tied to core historiographical disputes about Palestinian nationalism. While there is broad consensus about the momentousness of 1967, what it meant for Palestinian nationalism is disputed. In keeping with Golda Meir's infamous statement that 'there is no such people as the Palestinians',³ several political commentators and a smaller number of scholars have argued that a distinctive Palestinian national identity did not exist prior to 1967.⁴ According to this interpretation, the idea of the Palestinians as a separate national people only took hold once the 1967 War had destroyed many of the tenets of pan-Arabism.

However, this argument has been effectively discredited. Most notably, Rashid Khalidi has drawn on the evidence of Palestinian historical institutions, newspapers and publications to show definitively that a Palestinian national consciousness and identity existed not only before 1967 but well before the Nakba.⁵ Rather than ushering in the creation of this national identity from scratch, both the Nakba and the Naksa acted as pivotal events in shaping the development of a consciousness that was already deeply rooted. As Khalidi, Pappé and Lindholm Schulz all argue, the Naksa prompted Palestinian nationalism to *re-emerge in a new form*, but did not give birth to it.⁶

³ Golda Meir, statement to *The Sunday Times*, 15 June 1969.

⁴ Some Israeli traditionalist and neo-traditionalist historians denied that the Palestinians were a distinctive people, speaking of them instead as 'the Arabs of Palestine'. See for example: Jon and David Kimche, *Both Sides of the Hill: Britain and the Palestine War* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960); Shabtai Tevet, 'Review: The Palestinian Arab Refugee Problem and Its Origins', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26:2 (April 1990), pp. 214-249. For more recent examples of this viewpoint see: Asaf Romirowsky, 'The Real Palestinian Refugee Problem', May 2014, <http://www.thetower.org/artide/the-real-palestinian-refugee-crisis>, accessed 25 July 2017; Bruce Thornton, 'The Middle East and Orwellian Historical Arguments', 16 October 2015, <http://www.horowitzfreedomcenter.org/bruce-thornton-the-middle-east-and-orwellian-historical-arguments>, accessed 28 April 2016. See also: 'Empty Book on Palestinian History becomes Instant Bestseller on Amazon', *Haaretz*, 22 June 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/1.797333>, accessed 29 June 2017.

⁵ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

⁶ R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, ch. 8; Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2006), p. 236; Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 36-39.

This chapter builds on Khalidi's interpretation with a view to understanding Palestinian national identity, consciousness and politics in the refugee camps before and after 1967. Based on evidence from refugee testimonies and memoirs, as well as archival documents from UNRWA and the UN, it is argued here that the camps' significance within Palestinian nationalism stemmed from their long-running distinctiveness, in which UNRWA played a key role. This distinctiveness enabled the camps to play an essential 'incubating' role in the nationalist movement that *re*-emerged after 1967. It will thus be shown here that the camps were more significant to this movement's development than is often understood. As the quasi-governmental authority in the camps, UNRWA comprised a key element in the role they played.

These arguments are presented here over the course of three sections. First, this chapter looks at the state of politics in the refugee camps before 1967. It examines how UNRWA shaped the camps and helped render them distinctive spaces, thus inadvertently enabling their vital political role later on. The second section then focuses on the impact of the Naksa, examining how this devastating defeat destroyed Palestinian faith in the Arab regimes and ushered in new forms of Palestinian nationalism. Finally, the third section considers what this meant for the form and nature of nationalistic camp politics after 1967. In so doing, the chapter will establish the camps' centrality to Palestinian nationalist politics in this period.

Waiting to Return: The refugee camps before 1967

The camps' spatial function and distinctiveness is crucial to their particular significance. From the early aftermath of the Nakba, the camps across the region were distinguished from surrounding areas by variables including socio-economic conditions, physical infrastructure and appearance, and

governance and administration. Of these, the first factor was the most obvious difference. Poverty levels were noticeably higher inside the camps than elsewhere, and as discussed in Chapter One, conditions therein were usually dire. Abdel Bari Atwan recalls that his family's mud hut in Deir al-Balah camp in Gaza, also inhabited by scorpions and rats, was 'luxury' compared to the tents around it.⁷ Food was limited and physical sickness was rife, while poverty, homelessness and high unemployment meant that mental illness was often common too.⁸

<Figure 10 unavailable due to copyright>

Poverty also gave the camps' distinctiveness a physical dimension, as the presence of tents, slum-like structures and narrow alleys distinguished them from neighbouring towns and villages (Fig. 10). In some cases the camps were also formally demarcated, although the extent of this varied between the camps and across the five fields. In Lebanon, where it was probably greatest, refugees needed permits to leave their camps and venture into the surrounding areas. By contrast, the West Bank saw considerable movement and integration between camps, towns and villages. For this reason, the sociologist Sari Hanafi has distinguished between 'open' and 'closed' camps, arguing that the former were standard in the West Bank and the latter were the norm in Lebanon.⁹

The demarcation of the camps enabled the host governments to treat them as sites of control. Yet it also enabled the refugees to retain the feeling of a national community in exile. Recalling his 1950s childhood in Burj al Barajneh camp, Fawaz Turki writes that the latter's physical isolation

⁷ Abdel Bari Atwan, *A Country of Words: A Palestinian Journey from the Refugee Camp to the Front Page* (London: Saqi, 2008), p. 15, 27, 33.

⁸ Shafiq Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Pluto, 2011), trans. Hader Al Hout and Leila Othman, p. 78.

⁹ Sari Hanafi, 'Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon: Laboratory of Inchoate Identity Formation', in Muhammad Ali Khalidi (ed.), *Manifestations of Identity: The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010), p. 48, 58.

provided shelter and a form of protection for Palestinian identity, which was otherwise vulnerable to erosion. In Turki's eyes, the camps' set-up enabled the refugees to maintain their connections to Palestine,¹⁰ ultimately reinforcing their traditions and customs:

As we grew up [in the camps], we lived Palestine every day. We talked Palestine every day. For we had not, in fact, left it in 1948. We had simply taken it with us.¹¹

Rosemary Sayigh agrees that the camps became 'foci of Palestinianism', as their cordoning off from the outside areas inevitably crystallised and reinforced the residents' Palestinian identity.¹² She writes that as a result, 'town refugees' tended to feel a far greater affinity with the host nation and culture than those in the camps.¹³

In practical terms, older generations of refugees helped preserve the collective memory of Palestine in the camps by passing down not only their memories, but also the deeds and keys to the houses left behind in 1948. As a result, the generations born in the camps continued to identify themselves as belonging to whichever town or village their parents had left during the Nakba.¹⁴ Remembrance of the pre-Nakba days was a crucial element of camp life, both as a coping mechanism and as a way to keep the Palestinian identity alive. Matar 'Abdelrahim, a refugee from Akka who lived in an unnamed camp in Syria, recalls how reliving former village life helped the community withstand the difficulties of exile and camp life.¹⁵ This fixation

¹⁰ Fawaz Turki, *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 167.

¹¹ Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), p. 36.

¹² Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007), p. 112.

¹³ Rosemary Sayigh, 'The Palestinian Identity among Camp Residents', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 6:3, 1977, p. 7. In fact, this phenomenon is not unique to the Palestinian refugees. When observing Hutu refugees in Tanzania, anthropologist Lissa Malkki found that the camps served as sites of separateness and functioned to preserve a 'pure' national identity in much the same way. Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), pp. 3-4.

¹⁴ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 18.

¹⁵ Rochelle Davis, 'Matar 'Abdelrahim: From a Palestinian Village to a Syrian Refugee Camp' in Mark LeVine and Gershon Shafir (ed.s), *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel* (London: University of California Press, 2012), p. 16.

on their former homeland meant that, as Turki observes, it was the camp refugees more than anyone else who kept ‘the notion of *al-‘awda* [return] alive’.¹⁶

This was signified by the ways in which many refugees further exacerbated the camps’ distinctiveness by imprinting signs of their presence inside. As discussed in Chapter One, in the early post-Nakba days it was common for Palestinian refugees to resist the development and beautification of the camps, which they saw as tied to plans for their permanent resettlement outside Palestine. However, they were willing to impose their presence on their surroundings in other ways - most notably, by physically re-creating pre-1948 Palestine in the camps. Customary remembrance practices saw many camp streets and quarters named after places left behind in 1948.¹⁷ This was even true of some camps themselves; Wavel refugee camp in Lebanon and Jerash refugee camp in Jordan were known informally as al-Jalil and Gaza respectively, after the origins of their residents. This function of the camps in ‘re-creating’ Palestine after the Nakba proved important in maintaining the consciousness of a national community in exile.

In some cases the refugees took this further, and subdivided their camps such that neighbourhoods housed people from the same parts of Palestine.¹⁸ Accordingly, the Tarashha quarter of Burj al-Barajneh camp was named after the hometown of its residents, who originated from the village of Tarshiha; the same logic applied to ‘Amqa quarter of Ein el-Helweh

¹⁶ Turki, *Exile’s Return*, p. 10, 63-66, 167-169.

¹⁷ These remembrance practices are recalled and discussed in: Salman Abu Sitta, ‘The Invisible Face of the Occupier’, in Yasir Suleiman (ed), *Being Palestinian: Personal Reflections on Palestinian Identity in the Diaspora* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 40-43; Muhammad Ali Khalidi and Diane Riskedahl, ‘The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon’, in M. A. Khalidi, *Manifestations of Identity*, p. 6; Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 111-112; Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 214.

¹⁸ Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories*, p. 214

camp.¹⁹ People also tended to apply village social norms to these camp quarters; Julie Peteet writes of how women often wore their informal house clothes when in their own neighbourhood quarters, but changed into formal visiting clothes when going to other parts of the camp.²⁰ This kind of set-up turned the camps into their own internal realms, clearly distinct from elsewhere.

UNRWA itself also played a central role in establishing the camps' distinctiveness. As the administering authority across the camps, in many it was also the main provider of social services, and the main employer. It thus constituted a vital characteristic and distinguishing feature of their internal culture.²¹ In physical terms, the presence of UNRWA institutions, such as schools, clinics and ration centres, helped demarcate the camps from surrounding areas (Fig. 11). Entrances to the camps were marked by prominent signs in the UN's shade of blue, providing the name of the Agency and of the camp in English and Arabic. It was physical features such as these that led some observers to speak of 'the Blue State'.²²

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In more conceptual terms, UNRWA's work also helped codify the separateness of the camp refugees. By limiting its services only to those formally acknowledged as 'Palestine refugees', it provided a concrete practical indication of their status and thus fuelled the formation of a 'Palestinian refugee' identity. In this sense, the Agency's work was particularly significant in Palestinian fields like Gaza, where, as Ilana Feldman argues, it helped formalise the distinction between 'native'

¹⁹ M.A. Khalidi and Riskedahl, 'The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon', p. 6. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, pp. 111-112.

²⁰ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 119.

²¹ UNRWA Department of Operations, Technical Instruction No. 1, nd, File RE 230 Part II, Box 65, UHA. See also: Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History* (London: Hurst, 2015), p. 79.

²² Riccardo Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees: A History within History', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, 2010, p. 234.

Palestinians and refugees.²³ This in turn augmented the separateness of the camps, which were of course inhabited almost entirely by registered refugees. As such, they came to encapsulate the latter's distinctiveness. Moreover, UNRWA's formative role in shaping the camps' identification signified the continuous presence of internationalism in modern Palestinian history.

In the Arab host states, many of the local populations acted to reinforce the refugees' separateness. This was most pronounced in Lebanon, where sectarianism and internal tensions combined to create widespread hostility towards the Palestinian refugees soon after their arrival.²⁴ Rosemary Sayigh has written at length on the Lebanese population's antipathy towards the Palestinians, which she argues began soon after the Nakba.²⁵ Sayigh recorded testimonies in which Palestinian refugees recalled receiving abuse from southern Lebanese villagers during the *hijra*.²⁶ The conceptualisation of the refugee camps as 'Other' started at this base level; some Lebanese locals even referred to them as 'zoos'.²⁷

Disdain towards the camps was not limited to host populations. Leila Khaled recounts in her memoir how she and other 'town' refugees in Lebanon looked down on those in the camps as 'the scum of the earth'.²⁸ Even Palestinian regions saw palpable tensions between 'natives' and refugees, with those in the camps at the bottom of the hierarchy. UNRWA's codification of the differences inadvertently aided this differentiation. The divisions were particularly pronounced in Gaza, where the population

²³ Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 128.

²⁴ This is observed in: Dr Leslie Houseden, 1953 Report, MECA. See also: Jihane Sfeir, 'Palestinians in Lebanon: The Birth of the "Enemy Within"' in M. A. Khalidi, *Manifestations of Identity*, pp. 13-31; Turki, *Exile's Return*, p. 132, 185.

²⁵ Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books, 1993). See also: Maysoun Sukarieh, 'Speaking Palestinian: An Interview with Rosemary Sayigh', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 38:4, Summer 2009, p. 28; R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 132.

²⁶ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 106.

²⁷ Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of identities and politics of homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 60.

²⁸ Leila Khaled, *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), p. 34.

increased more than threefold as a result of the Nakba.²⁹ Ramzy Baroud, a refugee from an unnamed camp in the Strip, recalls in his memoir how the influx of more than 200,000 refugees into the Gaza Strip in 1948, set against a ‘native’ population of just 80,000, ‘opened the door wide for hostility towards the vulnerable refugees’.³⁰ Feldman writes similarly that many ‘native’ Gazans felt resentment towards the refugees, as the latter were eligible for more aid and relief services, which many of the former desperately needed.³¹

These social and communal tensions further reinforced the camps’ separateness. Widespread anti-Palestinian hostility engendered a shared solidarity among many camp residents, regardless of which particular camp they came from, as to varying extents they all experienced this distancing from the rest of society.³² In other words, the refugee camps were distinctive even within the Palestinian diaspora before 1967. This would prove important in the post-Naksa period, as the camps’ containment facilitated the promotion and expression of Palestinian national identity, while simultaneously providing nationalist organisations with ready-made bases for their operations.

Camp politics before the Naksa

The camps’ physical and social separation went hand-in-hand with the detachment of many refugees from politics in the early years of exile. As they grappled with the trauma and aftermath of losing their homes and livelihoods, many focussed on survival in the face of the dire conditions that characterised life in the camps. For this reason Jean-Pierre Filiu has called them ‘the generation of mourning.’³³ Their apolitical approach was

²⁹ Filiu, *Gaza*, pp. 69-71, 74.

³⁰ Ramzy Baroud, *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story* (London: Pluto, 2010), p. 41.

³¹ Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, pp. 128-135, 148-149. See also: Ilana Feldman, ‘Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza’, *History and Memory*, 18:2, Fall-Winter 2006, p. 27.

³² Turki, *Exile's Return*, p. 167.

³³ Filiu, *Gaza*, p. 55.

facilitated by the fact that many camp refugees were *falahīn* (peasants) who lacked political consciousness and the resulting inclination to activism.³⁴ Moreover, as Atwan writes, the executions and exiles of most Palestinian leaders during the 1936-39 Revolt had left the refugees with little means of political organisation.³⁵ Indeed, Khalidi argues that the fallout from the Revolt's failure was critical to subsequent weaknesses in Palestinian national politics, as it resulted in the loss of large numbers of men, the confiscation of weapons, and serious damage to the economy.³⁶

The precariousness of the Palestinians' situation in the Arab host states – covered in depth in Chapter Three – fuelled this reluctance to participate in politics. After the outcome of the 1936-39 Revolt, many feared that such activity would imperil them. Turki recalls that when he and his sister first became interested in politics as teenagers, their mother admonished them for endangering their educations. Turki himself provides some rationale for this, writing that 'till the emergence of the Palestinian Revolution in 1967, it was illegal for Palestinians to engage in any kind of political activity.'³⁷ The refugees' feeling of vulnerability was augmented by their perception that in 1948 they had fallen victim to the plans of major international powers, which had resources far beyond their reach. This led many to conclude that political activity was both futile and dangerous.

As a result, political activism in the camps was relatively limited in the years 1948-67. Palestinian identity was expressed in the form of opposition to Zionism and calls for return, which remained the ultimate goal and dream,³⁸ in another instance of political naming practices, refugees sought to call Jabal al-Hussein camp in Jordan the Camp of Return, but were barred

³⁴ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 90, 129.

³⁵ Atwan, *A Country of Words*, p. 24.

³⁶ Rashid Khalidi, 'The Palestinians and 1948: the underlying causes of failure' in Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (ed.s), *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 12-36.

³⁷ Turki, *Soul In Exile*, pp. 41-44.

³⁸ For discussion of the near-reverence with which the right of return is treated in the camps, see: Turki, *Exile's Return*, p. 63; Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 18; Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 26.

from doing so by the government.³⁹ The refugees' desire for return was significant enough to be noted at the international level. In 1950, the Jordanian delegation to a UN meeting on Palestinian refugees contended that 'nothing could be more unrealistic than to believe that the refugees would abandon hope of returning to their homes.'⁴⁰ Aid agencies working in the camps reported similar observations.⁴¹ Tellingly, many refugees continued to look to the international community to deliver this; in the 1950s, UNRWA recorded repeated fierce calls from the refugees for the right of return to be implemented in line with UN Resolution 194.⁴²

These calls were not merely rhetorical. In the early post-Nakba years, some refugees actually tried to make return a reality, risking their lives by attempting to cross into what was now Israel.⁴³ Benny Morris has examined the history of these so-called 'infiltrations' into Israel in detail, writing that thousands of Palestinians crossed the border illegally every year from 1949-56, with a peak of 16,000 recorded cases in 1952. Although these were sometimes ambush or vengeance operations, Morris writes that many Palestinian 'infiltrators' were motivated by more basic desires: to retrieve possessions, visit relatives, reap their crops – especially as many were acutely hungry in exile – or simply look at their old homes. In some cases refugees attempted to cross Israel in order to reach the West Bank from Gaza, or vice versa.⁴⁴

Numerous refugees have provided personal accounts of such return journeys. Atwan and 'Abdelrahim both write that their fathers successfully

³⁹ Elise G. Young, *Gender and Nation Building in the Middle East: The Political Economy of Health from Mandate Palestine to Refugee Camps in Jordan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 134.

⁴⁰ Telegram from UK Delegation in New York to Foreign Office, 1 December 1950, FO 1018/73, TNA.

⁴¹ See for example: Report of the Bishop's Relief Committee, 27 December 1950, File 2, Box 73, GB165-0161, MECA.

⁴² See for example: UNRWA Translation of Article in *Journal de Genève*, 6 March 1956; 'The Palestinians in Lebanon' statement 'We are returning', 29 November 1962, both in File RE 150 1, Box RE3, UHA [UNRWA translation].

⁴³ For more on Palestinian 'infiltrations' at this time see: Filiu, *Gaza*, pp. 79-81; Avner Yaniv and Robert J. Lieber, 'Personal Whim or Strategic Imperative? The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon', *International Security*, 8:2, Autumn 1983, p. 121; Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, pp. 22-23; Elias Shoufani, 'The Fall of a Village', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 1:4, Summer 1972, pp. 116-118.

⁴⁴ Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-56* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 2.

made brief visits to their former homes after the Nakba to collect possessions they had left behind during the original flight.⁴⁵ Many more died trying. In June 1950, the *New York Times* reported that dozens of civilians had died of thirst and exhaustion in the desert, while attempting to enter Israel from Gaza and elsewhere.⁴⁶ Those who survived the journey were often shot and killed on entering Israel.⁴⁷ Baroud recalls hearing horror stories in his childhood of a cousin who was captured and brutally killed when crossing over.⁴⁸

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

Many of the structures in question were imposed by the Arab host states, which continually oppressed and disempowered the Palestinian refugees while outwardly claiming to serve their interests. As is discussed in Chapter Three, all three of the Arab host regimes opposed Palestinian nationalist activism, for varying reasons. The resulting repression goes a long way to explaining the reluctance of many refugees to become involved in political activism in the years 1948-67. It also explains their vocal calls for return, which was uncontroversial in the political context of the Arab host states. In fact, with the possible exception of Jordan, the Arab states saw return as the preferable course of action for the Palestinians. Calling for it

⁴⁵ Atwan, *A Country of Words*, p. 24. Davis, ‘Matar ‘Abdelrahim’, p. 188.

⁴⁶ Gene Currihan, ‘Torture Reports Studied by Israel’, 8 June 1950, and ‘Israel Is Adamant over Frontier Ban’, 9 June 1950, both in *New York Times*. For more on the Israeli response see: Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars*, ch. 5.

⁴⁷ Adel Yahya, *The Palestinian Refugees 1948-98: An Oral History* (Ramallah: PACE, 1999), pp. 48-53.

⁴⁸ Baroud, *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter*, p. 42.

was therefore relatively straightforward and, most importantly, low-risk for the vulnerable camp refugees.

However, the situation was quite different when it came to other forms of political activism that might pose a threat to the Arab regimes. As a result, it was usually suppressed. Journalist David Hirst has recorded that the Lebanese authorities frequently told Palestinian refugees at this time, ‘all you have to do is eat and sleep... the Arab armies will get your country back for you.’⁴⁹ In the years after the Nakba, many Palestinian refugees believed this. Often traumatised by the devastating losses of 1948, many sought solace in the promises of the Arab regimes to defeat Israel and win them back their old homes. As a result, those Palestinians who were politically active at this time were often affiliated with the pan-Arab movement, inspired by Constantine Zureik’s argument that Arab disunity had enabled the Nakba.⁵⁰ For example, George Habash, a refugee from Lydda, founded the Arab Nationalist Movement (*ḥarakat al-qawmiyyin al-‘arab* or ANM) in Beirut in 1953 with the explicit purpose of uniting the Arab peoples.⁵¹

Palestinian-centric exceptions had only a minor role in this period. The most obvious example is Yasir Arafat’s Fatah, which was established in 1959 by exiled Palestinians in Kuwait.⁵² Fatah gained some traction in the early 1960s as first the breakup of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1961 and then the success of the Algerian revolution the following year made the first challenges to pan-Arabism. However, Fatah’s role continued to be relatively marginal as the majority of Palestinian activists remained subordinate to the Arab states at this time.⁵³ Meanwhile Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the most

⁴⁹ David Hirst, *Benure of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), p. 80.

⁵⁰ Constantine Zureik, *Ma'nā al-Nakba* (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm lil-malayin, 1948).

⁵¹ Helga Baumgarten, ‘The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948-2005’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 34:4, 2005, pp. 26-31.

⁵² Fatah, *Bayan Harakatuna*, 1959, trans. *The Palestinian Revolution*, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/589650629afd4.pdf>, accessed 17 May 2018.

⁵³ David Forsythe, ‘The Palestine Question: Dealing with a Long-Term Refugee Situation’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467, 1983, p. 94.

prominent Palestinian nationalist leader in the 1930s and 1940s, saw his authority completely truncated after the Nakba; he was compelled to defer to the Egyptian regime as a *de facto* condition of his exile in Cairo, and then had to move to Beirut in 1959 after falling out with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.⁵⁴

Indeed, it was Nasser who directed both the pan-Arab movement and the subjugation of Palestinian nationalism at this time. His rise to power after the 1952 Egyptian revolution provided huge impetus for the Arab nationalist movement, as he promised a turnaround in Arab fortunes. His successful nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company in 1956 consolidated his position as the darling of the Arab people; Filu writes that after this it became 'sacrilegious' to criticise Nasser, with even his communist critics now feting his achievements.⁵⁵ Nasser himself was determined to maintain this position of unrivalled dominance; in 1964, the Arab League created the PLO at his behest, as a way of containing any potential threats to his power.⁵⁶

For the Palestinians, Nasser's success with Suez provided hope that the great powers could be defeated.⁵⁷ Fatah founding member Abu Iyad recalls how he consequently came to believe that 'everything was now possible, including the liberation of Palestine'.⁵⁸ Nasser was particularly popular in Palestinian refugee camps, where people pinned their hopes of return on him⁵⁹ (with the exception of some in Gaza who experienced political repression under his regime).⁶⁰ Atwan writes that Nasser was the hero of his camp in Gaza,⁶¹ while Turki recalls seeing his picture displayed on mud

⁵⁴ Said Aburish, *Arafat: From Defender to Dictator* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 37. On Husseini see also: Ilan Pappé, *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis, 1700-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), ch.s 10-11.

⁵⁵ Filu, *Gaza*, p. 93

⁵⁶ Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 344.

⁵⁷ Davis, 'Mater 'Abdelrahim', p. 19.

⁵⁸ Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981), p. 23.

⁵⁹ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 97

⁶⁰ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 126. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 183. Aburish, *Arafat*, p. 34.

⁶¹ Atwan, *A Country of Words*, pp. 31-33.

houses and makeshift shelters everywhere in the camps in Lebanon.⁶² In Jordan, where the Palestinian refugees constituted more than half the population after 1948, their support for Nasser was potent enough to become a factor in prompting King Hussein's involvement in the 1967 War.⁶³ He feared that distancing himself from Nasser's battle against Israel might trigger a popular uprising against his regime in Jordan.

The camp refugees' faith in Nasser's promises to defeat Israel and liberate Palestine shows that they had certainly not given up on politics in the years 1948-67 – quite the opposite. However, they tended to express their political convictions at this time through the Arab regimes, rather than by way of direct action. Indeed, in her periodisation of the Palestinian nationalist movement, Baumgarten writes that the dominant form of Palestinian nationalism in the years 1948-67 was pan-Arabism.⁶⁴ The camp residents' profound belief in this approach would be shaken severely in the June 1967 War, with serious repercussions for the entire region.

Al Naksa: The Setback

1967 was a turning point for the Middle East. In six days, Israel defeated the Arab coalition of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, and nearly quadrupled its size. It seized East Jerusalem, and occupied the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the Sinai, thus acquiring land from all three Arab states. At least 300,000 Palestinians fled their homes, more than half for the second time;⁶⁵ UNRWA reported that most went to Jordan (Fig. 12).⁶⁶ The 614,110

⁶² Turki, *Soulin Exile*, pp. 34-36.

⁶³ Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 36.

⁶⁴ Baumgarten, 'The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism', pp. 26-31.

⁶⁵ Forsythe, 'The Palestine Question', p. 94. See also: Derek Cooper, 'Refugee Report', May 1969, File DC/OR/UNR/IR, Box UNR 1; 'UNRWA 1950-90: Serving Palestine Refugees', April 1990, Box GP59.3 UNRWA, both RSC.

⁶⁶ UNRWA Director in Jordan, 'Numbers of Refugees and Displaced Persons, Jordan (East Bank), as of 1 August 1968', File DC/OR/UNR/IR, Box UNR 1, RSC.

registered Palestinian refugees who remained in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (now the OPT) found their lives now governed by the occupying Israeli army.⁶⁷

<Figure 12 unavailable due to copyright>

The Naksa sent shockwaves throughout the region.⁶⁸ For the Palestinians, it engendered feelings of despondency, frustration, and renewed shame and humiliation, as the losses of the Nakba were extended and magnified.⁶⁹ The refugees' resulting devastation and trauma was widespread and visceral, its significance continually emphasised in Palestinian memoirs and testimonies.⁷⁰ Abu Iyad described the defeat as 'overwhelming, crushing, humiliating.'⁷¹ In particular, it seriously undermined the power and status of the Arab regimes in the eyes of many Palestinians. Not only had they failed in their promises to reverse the Nakba, but they had significantly worsened its impact. Palestinian nationalist Mustafa Barghouti, who was living in Ramallah at the time, recalled the aftershock in a 2005 interview:

The feeling of injustice was very strong... There was also the sense of failure – that the Nasserite approach had failed, and we had to find something else. How had such a tiny country as Israel been able to beat all the Arab armies?⁷²

⁶⁷ John Rennie, 30 June 1974, 'Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA', FCO 93/570 B, TNA.

⁶⁸ For in-depth discussions of the 1967 war and Arab defeat see: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (ed.), *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective* (Evanston: Evanston, 1970); Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007); Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard B Parker (ed.), *The Six-Day War: A Retrospective* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).

⁶⁹ Such feelings are recalled in: Bassam Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine: An Insider's Account* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 9-11, 19; Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 371. See also: Sami Al-Arian, 'No Land's Man Determined to Return to Palestine', p. 49; Reja-e Busailah, 'The Tree', p. 117; Randa Farah, 'Darker Shades of Exile', p. 153, all in Suleiman, *Being Palestinian*.

⁷⁰ See for example: Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, pp. 1-3; Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, pp. 90-91, 97; Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, pp. 371-372; Atwan, *A Country of Words*, pp. 49-53; Turki, *Soul In Exile*, p. 85; Baroud, *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter*, ch. 7; Najwa Al Qattan, 'An Ornithologist from Iceland', in Suleiman, *Being Palestinian*, p. 55.

⁷¹ Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, p. 51.

⁷² Eric Hazan, 'Palestinian Defiance: An Interview with Mustafa Barghouti', *New Left Review*, 32, March-April 2005, pp. 117-131.

Like Barghouti, many Palestinians now ceased to believe the Arab regimes' promises that they would liberate their homeland. Conversely, the feeling took hold that trusting the Arab leaders had been one of the major mistakes of the first war. Leila Khaled states that the effect was visceral, leading the Arab armies to lose their 'moral credibility' in the eyes of the Palestinians.⁷³

As Barghouti's comment indicates, the cult of Nasser was one of the biggest victims of the defeat. While Nasser retained immense popularity - UNRWA officials reported widespread school absenteeism in the West Bank following his death in 1970⁷⁴ - the Naksa nevertheless led increasing numbers of young Palestinians to question whether he could really win back Palestine for them.⁷⁵ This included those who had previously been affiliated to his pan-Arab movement; in Gaza, where the ANM had had 1,200 active members before the Naksa, only 213 confirmed their membership in the summer after the War.⁷⁶ Similarly, Palestinian nationalist Bassam Abu Sharif recalls that the defeat seriously damaged George Habash's previously close relationship with Nasser, whom he no longer trusted.⁷⁷ Habash now abandoned the ANM and formed a new organisation, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (*al-jabha al-sha'biya li-tahrir filastin* or PFLP).⁷⁸ To make matters worse, after 1967 Nasser himself lessened his support for the Palestinian nationalist fighters (known as *fidā'iyyīn*) to avoid any greater reputational damage, as he considered the potential advantages of a

⁷³ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 90, 98.

⁷⁴ Cassels, letter to Acting Commissioner-General, 25 September 1970, 'Situation in Schools', File RE230(WB-3) I, Box RE22; Gaza Director, Memo to Acting C-G, 6 October 1971, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, both UHA.

⁷⁵ Khaled recalls the disillusionment with Nasser in her memoir. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 97.

⁷⁶ Filii, *Gaza*, p. 128.

⁷⁷ Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, p. 17.

⁷⁸ PFLP, 'First Political Statement', 1 December 1967, trans. *The Palestinian Revolution*, <http://lempalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/588c773adfc29.pdf>, accessed 17 May 2018.

diplomatic agreement with Israel instead.⁷⁹ Many *ḥidaʿiyyīn* reacted with dismay.

As the Palestinians grew disillusioned with the Arab regimes' unfulfilled promises of liberation, their national struggle against Israel became increasingly framed in Palestinian rather than pan-Arab terms.⁸⁰ The refugees in particular now sought to seize control of their own destinies by taking direct action against Israel. The rising number of attacks on Israel by non-state actors signified the Palestinian nationalist movement's growing independence from the rest of the Arab world.⁸¹ As the 'question of Palestine' continued to be entwined with the international community, both UNRWA and the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) formally acknowledged the catalysing effect of 1967 on the Palestinian nationalist movement.⁸² The refugee camps took a leading role in the latter's new manifestations.

New forms of Palestinian nationalism: the rise of the ḥidaʿiyyīn

Palestinian disenchantment with the Arab governments in general and Nasser in particular created an unofficial vacancy for new heroes and leaders in refugee communities after 1967. This enabled the *ḥidaʿiyyīn* to come to the forefront. Although Palestinian nationalist guerrilla groups had existed before 1967 – Fatah proclaimed 1965 as the official starting date of its 'revolution'⁸³ – the Naksa amplified their prominence and propelled them to

⁷⁹ American Embassy to Jordan, Confidential Memorandum of Conversation, 16 December 1969, File POL-23-8, Box 20, Entry A1-5632, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, US National Archives (USNA). See also: Salman Abu Sitta, *Mapping My Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (New York: American University of Cairo Press, 2016), p. 180.

⁸⁰ Turki speaks of 1967 as a seminal moment in the Palestinian struggle for this reason. Turki, *Exile's Return*, p. 189. See also: Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 90, 98; Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, p. 1.

⁸¹ Jeroen Gunning, *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 29.

⁸² Rennie, 1974 Report. 'The Question of Palestine', Pamphlet prepared for and under the guidance of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, 1979, OP.309.55.25, Cambridge University Official Publications Archive (CUOPA).

⁸³ PLO Poster 6, Palestine Political Posters Collection, Nami Jafet Library Archive & Special Collections, American University of Beirut (AUB).

a new status as leaders of the nationalist struggle. In this setting, the *ḥidāʿiyyīn* found some of their greatest success in the refugee camps, in terms of both recruitment and popularity.⁸⁴ British Army official Major Derek Cooper, who coordinated aid efforts for refugees in Amman in 1967, identified camp-born refugees as ‘the hard core of the Resistance and Commando groups’ at that time.⁸⁵

The *ḥidāʿiyyīn*’s particular success in the camps can be explained by the latter’s disempowerment, which made Palestinian proponents of direct action especially appealing. Rex Brynen argues that the *ḥidāʿiyyīn* had three main objectives at this time: revitalising Palestinian national identity; reminding Israel and the world of the Palestinian people’s existence; and stoking the Arab-Israeli confrontation in order to ultimately liberate historic Palestine.⁸⁶ Brynen’s reference to ‘revitalising’ Palestinian national identity chimes with the arguments of Khalidi, Pappé and Schulz that it *re-emerged* in this period.⁸⁷ All three objectives appealed particularly to the Palestinians living in the camps, who were disillusioned, dispirited, and seeking an antidote to the devastations of the Nakba and the Naksa. The *ḥidāʿiyyīn*’s direct action provided a way of countering their widespread feelings of helplessness. Indeed, Ramzy Baroud writes that his father Mohammed joined the *ḥidāʿiyyīn* precisely because he saw their actions as a way to overcome his humiliation.⁸⁸ In a controversial statement in 1972, even the Israeli politician Arye Eliav, a Labor Member of the Knesset, said that the *ḥidāʿiyyīn* had ‘raised the Arabs’ morale for some time, by becoming symbols

⁸⁴ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, p. 44.

⁸⁵ Derek Cooper, ‘Refugee Report’, May 1969, File DC/OR/UNR/IR, Box UNR 1, RSC.

⁸⁶ Rex Brynen, ‘PLO Policy in Lebanon: Legacies and Lessons’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18:2, Winter 1989, p. 58.

⁸⁷ R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, ch. 8; Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, p. 236; Schulz, *The reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism*, pp. 36-39.

⁸⁸ Ramzy Baroud, ‘The Trees Die Standing: A Story of a Palestinian Refugee’ in LeVine and Shafir, *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*, p. 225.

of heroism and self-sacrifice' (in keeping with the literal meaning of *fiḍāʿiyyīn*).⁸⁹

The *fiḍāʿiyyīn* also benefited from the practical repercussions of the Naksa. The discrediting of the Arab regimes – in the eyes of the Arab populations as well as the Palestinian diaspora – meant that they could no longer repress Palestinian nationalist activity, when their own attempts to defeat Israel had been so shamefully unsuccessful.⁹⁰ On the contrary, many regimes believed that the *fiḍāʿiyyīn* served as a useful diversion from the defeat, and provided an alternative source of hope to the general population. Across the Arab world they were accordingly now given permission to openly recruit, train, and publicise their activities.⁹¹ According to Abu Iyad, the weakness of the Jordanian regime after the Naksa led King Hussein to release many militants and 'close his eyes' to *fiḍāʿiyyīn* bases along the Jordan River.⁹² In Gaza, the removal of the Egyptian regime gave more freedom to the Palestinian movements that Nasser had suppressed.

The change was epitomised by the *fiḍāʿiyyīn*'s takeover of the very structure that the Arab regimes had established to contain them: the PLO. While it had functioned from 1964-67 as a subordinate to Nasser, its position was now transformed. Late in 1967, Ahmed Shuqairi, Nasser's favoured PLO Chairman, resigned. The following year, the *fiḍāʿiyyīn* organisations formally took control of the PLO and in doing so fully emancipated it from Nasser's grip. It was now dominated by Fatah, the PFLP, and later Nayef Hawatmeh's breakaway Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (*al-jabha al-dīmuqrāṭīya li-taḥrīr filasṭīn* or DFLP).

This PLO was exclusively Palestinian in its concerns, and explicitly militant in its actions, taking a leading role in the emergence of what

⁸⁹ 'Lyova drops a bombshell', *Jerusalem Post*, 28 July 1972, File POL 15-1, Box 20, Entry A1-5632, RG 59, USNA.

⁹⁰ Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, pp. 1-3.

⁹¹ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 148.

⁹² Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, p. 57.

Rosemary Sayigh terms ‘political Palestinianism.’⁹³ In 1968, it adopted a new Covenant calling on all Palestinians to fight for their rights. In an indication of the ongoing internationalism of the Palestinian struggle, it did so on the very grounds that the international community had failed to secure these rights for them.⁹⁴ Symbolically, the PLO also came to establish its own radio station, *ṣawt filasṭīn* (‘The Voice of Palestine’) which for many Palestinians took the place of Nasser’s legendary *ṣawt al-‘arab*.⁹⁵ The radio station played a crucial part in spreading Fatah’s discourse of nationalism, armed struggle and revolution, through speeches and songs.⁹⁶ Specifically, it fuelled the iconisation of the *fiḍaṭīyyīn* with its regular tributes to martyrs and battles.⁹⁷

The *fiḍaṭīyyīn*’s rising prominence at this time was not limited to the Palestinian diaspora or even to the Arab world. Indeed, while the nationalist movement emphasised its ‘Palestinian-ness’ and its distinctiveness from the Arab regimes, it was neither insular nor solely inward-looking. Strategically, the *fiḍaṭīyyīn* actively engaged with the wider world, launching an increasing number of international operations from the late 1960s. As a result, their profile on the world stage rose. Most famously, in 1969 PFLP militants Leila Khaled and Salim Issawi hijacked a plane flying from Rome to Tel Aviv, in the mistaken belief that Yitzhak Rabin was on board.⁹⁸ After the plane made an emergency landing in Damascus, the story made news worldwide, with added interest stemming from the fact that Khaled was a woman. Indeed, one of the passengers later spoke of being struck by Khaled’s youth and

⁹³ R. Sayigh, ‘The Palestinian Identity among Camp Residents’, pp. 9-11.

⁹⁴ ‘The Question of Palestine’ Pamphlet, 1979, CUOPA.

⁹⁵ R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, pp. 199-200. Arafat had also previously published a magazine also called *ṣawt filasṭīn* in Cairo in 1949. Aburish, *Arafat*, p. 23.

⁹⁶ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-93* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 195-196.

⁹⁷ Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 76.

⁹⁸ For Khaled’s account of the hijacking see: Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, ch. 5.

glamour.⁹⁹ Khaled quickly gained an international profile, becoming so recognised that she even had plastic surgery to enable her to undertake further hijackings undetected.¹⁰⁰

However, Khaled was by no means the most high-profile *fidāʿī(a)* of this era. The same year that she hijacked the plane, Fatah leader Yasir Arafat (also known as Abu ‘Ammar) was elected the new Chairman of the PLO. Retaining the position continuously until his death 35 years later, Arafat quickly became the most well-known and recognisable Palestinian in the world, as well as in the camps. Unlike Nasser, Arafat was relatively unconcerned with pan-Arab politics. He focussed exclusively on Palestinian liberation – albeit often with an appeal to the world stage. This was a welcome change to many Palestinian refugees in the aftermath of the Naksa. Fatah’s operations against Israel made Arafat a rising star and a hero among many Palestinians; Atwan recalls widespread hero-worship of him in the Gaza camps, with Fatah’s revolutionary songs sung at camp parties and even in schools.¹⁰¹ Nor was Arafat’s following limited to the Palestinians, as he also enjoyed the admiration of many other Arabs at this time. As the Lebanese Army General Escort Jonny Abdo later put it, ‘before 1967 everyone wanted to be photographed with Abdel Nasser. After 67 Abdel Nasser wanted to be photographed with Abu ‘Ammar’.¹⁰² However, the Naksa alone was not sufficient to make Arafat into a hero of this magnitude. That status was conferred as a result of the Battle of Karama nine months later.

⁹⁹ Mae O’Driscoll, ‘Experience: my plane was hijacked’, *The Guardian*, 19 February 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/feb/19/my-plane-was-hijacked-experience>, accessed 25 July 2017.

¹⁰⁰ BBC Interview with Leila Khaled, 1 January 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk/2000/uk_confidential/1090986.stm, accessed 7 September 2017.

¹⁰¹ Atwan, *A Country of Words*, p. 231.

¹⁰² Jonny Abdo, Escort of the Lebanese Army General, in documentary *Harb Libnan*, 2002, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb-ui3wr1Ns&index=2&list=PL-4q83GqA53A9edWPQK7ijo3JOoKLD1_c, accessed 7 September 2017.

The Battle of Karama

The infamous Battle of Karama was fought between the Israeli army, the Jordanian army, and Fatah. Karama was a Jordanian town close to the river, where Fatah had established a base from which it launched attacks on Israeli forces in the West Bank. Following months of continuing clashes, the Israeli army crossed the River Jordan on 21 March 1968 with the aim of destroying the *ḥidaʿiyyīn*'s bases in Karama. Confident of a victory, they were surprised to face considerable resistance from both Fatah and the Jordanian army. Although Israel succeeded in dismantling the Karama military camp, it endured surprisingly high casualties, with 32 soldiers killed and 70 wounded.¹⁰³ The Israeli army inflicted far higher losses on Fatah – an estimated 170 killed and another 100 captured¹⁰⁴ – but, crucially, it failed in its goal of destroying the organisation.¹⁰⁵ Fatah thus quickly claimed the Battle as a victory over Israel, quietly disregarding the fact that the Jordanian army had played the bigger part in the outcome, and giving the Palestinian people a much-needed morale boost in the process.

The impact of the Battle of Karama was immediate across the Palestinian diaspora. Atwan, who was living in Amman at the time, recalls how the city 'erupted in jubilation' at the news, with thousands pouring onto the streets to celebrate as captured Israeli tanks were paraded and displayed.¹⁰⁶ The *ḥidaʿiyyīn* quickly gained an almost-mythical status, enjoying a popular legitimacy that had never applied to Shuqairi's PLO. Photos of the Karama martyrs were now displayed throughout refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and inside many homes in the OPT. Pictures of Arafat in particular were common – his biographer Said Aburish contends that this

¹⁰³ Shabtai Teveth, *The Cursed Blessing: The Story of Israel's occupation of the West Bank* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), trans. Myra Banks, p. 261.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Arafat, King Hussein, Fatah fighter Abu Ali Shaheen, Jordanian Army General Haditha, and Israeli Commanders General Tal and General Narkiss recall the Battle of Karama in documentary *The Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSAD9pS8NIw&t=3034s>, accessed 25 April 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Atwan, *A Country of Words*, p. 73.

marked the moment when Arafat became ‘Mr Palestine’.¹⁰⁷ Hani al-Hasan, a Fatah official from Yarmouk camp in Syria, has said that Arafat’s leadership was unchallengeable after Karama.¹⁰⁸

Both Abu Iyad and Bassam Abu Sharif write that the Battle was also crucial in restoring Palestinian dignity – which, fittingly, is the literal meaning of *karāma* – after the devastation and humiliation of the Nakba.¹⁰⁹ The victory had a major impact on the Palestinian psyche, with many seeing it as a precursor to the pending full recovery of Palestine.¹¹⁰ In practical terms, Karama was hugely important in giving rise to a much greater degree of political activism across the diaspora, and ‘recasting’ the Palestinian image as one associated with courage and sacrifice, rather than dispossession and victimhood.¹¹¹

There was a strongly generational element to the post-Karama dynamic in the camps. It particularly inspired those who were too young to remember life in Palestine. The ‘Nakba generation’ (*jīl al-Nakba*) was now overtaken by the ‘revolutionary generation’ (*jīl al-thawra*).¹¹² Turki writes that after Karama, ‘all of us [in the camps] wanted to join the resistance and struggle for freedom. As it turns out, most of us did.’¹¹³ Flooded with donations and volunteers, Fatah became a mass movement virtually overnight.¹¹⁴ A reported 5,000 Palestinians tried to join in the subsequent 48 hours;¹¹⁵ according to Abu Iyad, its limited capacity meant that only 900 could be accepted. Fatah went on to expand its average number of monthly operations from 12 in 1967 to 279 in the first eight months of 1970.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁷ Aburish, *Arafat*, p. 82-86.

¹⁰⁸ Alan Hart, *Arafat: Terrorist or Peacemaker?* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1987), p. 264.

¹⁰⁹ Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, p. 22. Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, p. 60.

¹¹⁰ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 107.

¹¹¹ Anastasia Valassopoulos, ‘The international Palestine resistance: Documentary and revolt’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50:2, 2014, p. 150.

¹¹² Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora*, p. 37.

¹¹³ Turki, *Exile’s Return*, p. 110.

¹¹⁴ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 217.

¹¹⁵ Atwan, *A Country of Words*, p. 73.

¹¹⁶ Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, p. 60.

The Battle of Karama thus became a powerful symbol for Palestinian strength and steadfastness (*ṣummūd*) and effectively launched Fatah as a major player on the world stage. On 13 December 1968, *Time* magazine covered the Battle in detail, featuring Arafat on the cover with the strapline ‘The Arab Commandos: Defiant New Force in the Middle East.’¹¹⁷ The accompanying article acknowledged the *ḥidāʿiyyīn*’s international significance, having even drawn in the US State Department during the course of production.¹¹⁸

The new recruitment and prestige also bought the PLO considerably more clout in its negotiations with the Arab regimes. It now successfully pressured the latter to allow the *ḥidāʿiyyīn* greater freedom of action. Rashid Khalidi argues that the PLO leadership was aided in this by its widespread support among the Arab populations, buoyed by the perceived contrast between Fatah’s success at Karama, and the inability of the Syrian, Jordanian and Egyptian armies to hold their ground against Israel in the 1967 War less than a year earlier.¹¹⁹ As a result, many Arab governments were keen to share in Fatah’s popularity and started supplying the *ḥidāʿiyyīn* with rockets, military transport and artillery. Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Algeria also expanded the *ḥidāʿiyyīn*’s training facilities, while many of the wealthy Gulf states contributed millions of dollars.¹²⁰ In the clearest single sign of Arab attempts to capitalise on the *ḥidāʿiyyīn*’s new popularity, King Hussein even declared himself a *ḥidāʿī*.¹²¹ Five years after the Battle of Karama, the Jordanian government issued a commemorative stamp, keen to share in the glory.¹²²

¹¹⁷ *Time*, 13 December 1968, <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19681213,00.html>, accessed 22 January 2016.

¹¹⁸ Department of State, Memorandum for the Record, 29 October 1969, File POL-23-8, Box 20, Entry A1-5632, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁹ R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 197.

¹²⁰ Aburish, *Arafat*, p. 84.

¹²¹ King Hussein’s infamous statement is recalled in: Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, p. 73; Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 107. See also: Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 48; Aburish, *Arafat*, p. 84.

¹²² Stamps of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, <http://www.jordanstamps.com/index.php?sr=2026,2027,2028>, accessed 31 August 2017.

Khalidi characterises the Battle of Karama as a classic foundation myth, and with good reason.¹²³ Alongside the Balfour Declaration, the UN Partition Resolution, the Deir Yassin massacre, and the Nakba itself, Karama became a significant reference point in narratives of Palestinian history.¹²⁴ Khaled describes it as ‘a turning point’, Atwan as an event ‘etched in the collective memory of the Palestinian people.’¹²⁵ Many Palestinian refugees continued to celebrate its anniversary as a national holiday thereafter; on 21 March 1970, UNRWA staff reported significant school absenteeism due to commemorations of the Battle’s second anniversary.¹²⁶ Observations such as this have led Laleh Khalili to argue that the commemoration of Karama, which continued for decades, was far more significant than the Battle itself. The refugee camps were key to its iconisation, with many camp neighbourhoods subsequently named ‘Karama’.¹²⁷

Both Fatah in particular and the PLO in general made great use of the Karama myth, capitalising on its positive reception.¹²⁸ On the Battle’s first anniversary, Fatah produced commemorative postage stamps. For years it continued to organise commemorations among the Palestinian population, using photos and tokens to help mythologise the Battle further.¹²⁹ Nor was this invocation merely symbolic. Eleven years after Karama, the PLO invoked its memory in order to denounce the Camp David Accords, producing posters that proclaimed *abṭāl al karama sahibz̧mūn al khiyāna* (‘the

¹²³ R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, pp. 196-198.

¹²⁴ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, p. 162

¹²⁵ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 107. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, p. 73.

¹²⁶ See: Letter from Cassels to Acting Commissioner-General, 30 March 1970, File RE 230(WB-3) I, Box RE 22, UHA.

¹²⁷ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, p. 80-81, 152.

¹²⁸ See for example: Fatah poster 36, Palestine Poster Project Archive (PPPA),

<http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/al-karameh-1968>;

Fatah poster 42, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/al-karameh-exhibition>;

PLO poster 142, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/steadfastness-and-victory-al-karameh>;

Fatah poster 1278, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/al-karameh-the-symbol>, all accessed 28 April 2016.

¹²⁹ Fatah poster 494, 1977, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-cubs-of-the-revolution-celebrate-the-anniversary-of-al-karameh>, accessed 6 April 2016.

heroes of Karama will overcome the treason’).¹³⁰ Even other PLO parties made use of its memory in their own narratives; the DFLP organ *Al Huriya* described Karama as the ‘beginning of the real *ṣumūd* (steadfastness)’.¹³¹



Figure 2: Fatah commemorative stamp for the first anniversary of the Battle of Karama, 1969, The Palestine Poster Project Archives, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/al-karameh-battle-anniversary-stamps>, accessed 6 April 2016.

Explanations vary as to how and why this mythology developed. Khalidi sees it as a classic case of the PLO claiming victory from defeat, as they would later do following their eviction from Lebanon in 1982.¹³² Inversely, security analyst W. Andrew Terrill attributes the mythologising of Karama to the Palestinian people’s receptiveness to positive national news in the aftermath of the Naksa.¹³³ Either way, it is universally agreed that Karama became a seminal moment in the Palestinian national narrative.

¹³⁰ PLO poster 393, 1979, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-heroes-of-al-karameh>, accessed 6 April 2016.

¹³¹ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, p. 94.

¹³² R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, pp. 197-198.

¹³³ W. Andrew Terrill, ‘The Political Mythology of the Battle of Karamah’, *Middle East Journal*, 55:1, Winter 2001, pp. 94-95.

Indeed, four months later, the Palestinian National Council (PNC) amended the PLO Charter to reflect a shift towards armed struggle.¹³⁴ Its campaign had now been established beyond all possible doubt as specifically *Palestinian*, rather than broadly Arab.

‘Nests of the Resistance’: Camp Politics after 1967

The camp refugees’ participation in the post-Naksa struggle was fervent, immediate, and wide-ranging. As the Naksa facilitated the necessary shifts in Palestinian politics, the camps’ potential for political activism was realised. They now developed into what one refugee would describe decades later as ‘nests of the resistance’.¹³⁵ This was demonstrated most immediately by the camp refugees’ overwhelming enthusiasm for joining the *ḥidaʿiyyīn*. Fatah, the PFLP and the DFLP all found their most fertile recruiting grounds in the camps, where *ḥidaʿiyyīn* activity was most prominent.¹³⁶ In the aforementioned recruitment rush that followed the Battle of Karama, the camps provided numerous fighters and in some cases went on to function as bases for *ḥidaʿiyyīn* operations. This latter function was made possible by a development that characterised the post-Naksa shift and centred entirely around the camps: the ‘Palestinian revolution’.¹³⁷

Al-thawra al-filasṭīniya: The Palestinian Revolution

The Palestinian revolution was the clearest demonstration of the refugee camps’ centrality to the nationalist movement that re-emerged after 1967. With the Arab regimes discredited, the Palestinians now sought to challenge

¹³⁴ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, p. 43.

¹³⁵ Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srouf, Palestinian refugee, Aida camp, West Bank, 4 August 2011.

¹³⁶ Baumgarten, ‘The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism’, p. 26, 44. Filu, *Gaza*, p. 141.

¹³⁷ On the concept of the ‘Palestinian Revolution’, see: R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, ch. 4; R. Sayigh, ‘The Palestinian Identity Among Camp Residents’, pp. 3–22; Fuad Jabber, ‘The Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Revolution, 1967–71’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2:2, 1973, pp. 79–101; Samir Franjeh, ‘How Revolutionary Is the Palestinian Resistance? A Marxist Interpretation’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 1:2, 1972, pp. 52–60.

their power in the camps and take control of their own spaces. Across the Arab host states, and most notably in Lebanon, the late 1960s saw Palestinian fighters force out the Arab regimes' security forces and take charge of the camps themselves. State attempts to regain control were unsuccessful; when Lebanese police entered Nahr el-Bared camp in 1969 in a bid to demolish the Fatah office, the residents took them hostage. By October that year, refugees in all 17 camps in Lebanon¹³⁸ had ejected the police, the army and the state security forces, with armed Palestinians taking control instead.¹³⁹

This was not a temporary change. In November 1969, Nasser brokered a deal between the Lebanese Army and the PLO that formally recognised the *ḥidaʿiyyīn*'s control of the refugee camps in Lebanon. The Cairo Agreement, as it became known, placed the UNRWA-run camps under the authority of the PLO instead of the Lebanese state. It also sanctioned *ḥidaʿiyyīn* activity in south-east Lebanon and permitted Palestinians to participate in armed struggle – including launching attacks on Israel from Lebanese soil.¹⁴⁰ It therefore legitimised the new status quo and gave formal cover for the *ḥidaʿiyyīn* to act independently of the Lebanese state.

Lebanon therefore served as the base for the Palestinian insurrection in this period. Its historical centrality within the development of the Palestinian nationalist movement can be explained chiefly by the weakness of the central Lebanese state, which enabled the *ḥidaʿiyyīn* to take control of the refugee camps there and legitimise this new arrangement via the Cairo Agreement. In turn, this meant that from the late 1960s UNRWA had to pay particular attention to events in the camps in Lebanon, which often drove bigger developments in Palestinian politics. As a result, Lebanon holds a particular significance to the history of both the Palestinian refugee

¹³⁸ See Appendix C for a list of camps in Lebanon.

¹³⁹ Hirst, *Benure of Small States*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁰ For the text of the Cairo Agreement see: *Al-Nabāʿ*, 20 April 1970, Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB) [Arabic].

camps and, by extension, the more general activities of UNRWA – a significance that is reflected in Lebanon’s centrality throughout much of this chapter.

However, while the *thawra* was based in the camps in Lebanon, it was not limited to these spaces. Instead, the movement transcended national borders, albeit with varying degrees of impact. As Miriyam Aouragh writes, this period saw increasing expressions of solidarity among Palestinians across borders.¹⁴¹ From late 1969 until 1972, a wave of agitation and strikes in solidarity with Lebanon swept the Gaza camps,¹⁴² spreading to a lesser extent to the West Bank as well.¹⁴³ In 1972, UNRWA’s Gaza Director reported that around 500 young men had travelled from Gaza to Lebanon on illegally purchased Omani passports, with the intention of joining the *thawra* in its hub.¹⁴⁴ Their journeys signified both the solidarity that existed between Palestinian refugees across the region, and the increasing internationalism of their nationalist movement.

With the camps in the Arab states now guarded by armed Palestinians, residents could freely engage in political activity and openly express their national identity. The impact was immediate and transformative. As the camps were released from the authority of the host states, internal activities became demonstrably ‘Palestinianised’. The *fiṭā’iyyīn* established popular committees to organise defence, public hygiene, sports and cultural facilities, all with a strongly nationalist tilt. Education had a particular importance, seen as key to the struggle, and so the popular committees established out-of-school training programmes to inculcate a nationalist consciousness in refugee children from a young age.¹⁴⁵ These programmes, of which Fatah’s

¹⁴¹ Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the internet and the construction of identity* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), p. 17.

¹⁴² Filu, *Gaza*, pp. 136-137. See also: Press Extracts from *Al Quds*, 24 October 1969, File RE230(G-3)I, Box RE19, UHA [UNRWA translation]; UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 124, September 1989, RSC.

¹⁴³ Cable from West Bank Director to Commissioner-General, 8 February 1969, File RE230(WB-3)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹⁴⁴ Gaza Director, Memo to Commissioner-General, 22 March 1972, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, UHA.

¹⁴⁵ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, pp. 174-186.

ashbāl ('lion cubs', for boys) and *zabrāt* ('flowers', for girls) were the largest, provided basic military training as well as education in Palestinian and political history. They would have major ramifications for UNRWA's education programme in the camps, as is discussed in depth in Chapter Five. With the camps now under full Palestinian control, they became hubs of transnational activism, both within the *shatāt* and beyond. In the 1970s, various camp communities received visits from a range of international actors; both Keith Feldman and Michael Fischbach note that these visitors included Black Power leaders from the US, as well as activists from communist organisations in Italy and Germany.¹⁴⁶

It is revealing that camp residents commonly use the term *thawra* ('revolution') to describe these events. Although the 'Palestinian revolution' did not fit the conventional criteria of overthrowing a national government, it did involve the ousting and replacement of state security authorities in the camps. In so doing, it turned the camps' spatial separateness on its head, from being a feature that enabled state control to one that facilitated and incubated autonomous political activism. From the perspective of many refugees, it was therefore just as significant as a change in central government. The use of the term *thawra* also indicates the magnitude of the psychological impact, as the perception of Palestinian 'self-rule' in the camps was important in overcoming the feelings of powerlessness that had plagued many refugees since the Nakba. Fatah's slogan 'revolution until victory (*thawra ḥatā al-naṣr*)' now prevailed.

The resulting shift in the refugees' self-perception was shaped by the role of the *fidā'iyyīn*. Many exiled Palestinians now constructed their identity as that of fighters rather than refugees, rejecting the UNRWA imagery that

¹⁴⁶ Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. 100; Michael Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Colour* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), pp. 126-127, 140-141, 196, 203-204, 208, 217.

focused on the latter.¹⁴⁷ For this reason, the sociologist Mohammad Bamyeh has argued that the major effect of the 1967 War was to transform the refugee issue from a humanitarian one to a political one.¹⁴⁸ This had long been a sore point; Leila Khaled complained that constantly categorising Palestinians as ‘refugees’ served to deny them their national peoplehood and with it their political rights.¹⁴⁹ The PLO endorsed and encouraged the change, with Fatah in particular keen to associate the *thawra* with the rejection of the Palestinians’ post-1948 psychology.¹⁵⁰ In 1964, the PNC passed a resolution to describe refugees as ‘returners’, in order to stress their agency; the term was subsequently used in PLO publications.¹⁵¹ Speaking in January 1971, Arafat said, ‘we create a new people, instead of being refugees to be fighters. This is very important. We were refugees, homeless, we become now fighters, freedom fighters [sic].’¹⁵²

As Arafat’s comment shows, the ‘new’ identity of the refugees was inextricably linked with the armed and militant nature of the nationalist struggle. Arafat himself firmly believed that only violence would win results for the Palestinians.¹⁵³ Assessing this, Yezid Sayigh has argued that after the Battle of Karama, armed struggle came to form the core of the Palestinian nationalist movement, with the result that participation in it became the main source of nationalist legitimacy for most Palestinians.¹⁵⁴ Militarisation was most evident in the refugee camps, which were now guarded and to some degree managed by armed fighters, with mixed results. On the one hand, the presence of armed *fidāʿiyyīn* gave the camps new levels of protection and defence against hostile agents like the Lebanese state security

¹⁴⁷ Valassopoulos, ‘The international Palestine resistance’, p. 149.

¹⁴⁸ Mohammad Bamyeh, ‘Palestine. Listening to the Inaudible’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102:4, 2003, p. 831.

¹⁴⁹ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 100. See also: Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 124.

¹⁵⁰ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 196.

¹⁵¹ Rashed Hamid (ed.), *Muqarrarat al-majlis al-natani al-filastini, 1964-74*, p. 146, quoted in d Rashid Khalidi, ‘Observations on the Right of Return’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 21:2 (Winter, 1992), p. 30.

¹⁵² Yasir Arafat, in documentary *The Fifty Years War*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSAD9pS8NIw>, accessed 25 April 2018.

¹⁵³ Aburish, *Arafat*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁴ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, pp. 23, 195, 667-670.

forces. In her research, Rosemary Sayigh encountered many refugees who spoke positively of the *thawra*'s liberating and empowering effects in this way.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, as time went on there were reports that some camp residents were tiring of the clashes and violence resulting from the *fidā'iyyīn*'s presence, particularly as the latter splintered and in-fighting increased.¹⁵⁶

For UNRWA, the camps' new militancy had highly problematic repercussions. As discussed in detail in Chapter Three, the international attention given to the *fidā'iyyīn* takeover meant that UNRWA now found itself caught in the diplomatic crossfire, with rising concerns about what the US State Department spoke of as 'the role of fedayeen in UNRWA's camps [sic]'.¹⁵⁷ As UNRWA depended on Western funding to operate, the implications were potentially serious. This would become an ongoing problem for UNRWA in the years to come, as the camps became tied in the international consciousness to both the Agency and the militant nationalist movement.

These associations also permeated the Palestinian world. In negotiations with Israel decades later, Arafat refused to renounce the right of return on the explicit grounds that the Palestinian nationalist revolution had arisen from the refugee camps in the first place. According to one of his advisors, Arafat stated that 'any [peace] agreement [with Israel] that did not include a just solution for the refugee problem would engender an even stronger revolution'.¹⁵⁸ As this comment shows, the image of the camps as bastions of militant nationalism was lasting. As a result, they also gained a lasting respect in much of the diaspora, where they were characterised as the 'true' Palestinians.

¹⁵⁵ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, ch. 4.

¹⁵⁶ US Embassy in Lebanon to Department of State, Confidential Letter NEA/IAI, 28 July 1972, File REF3, Box 20, Entry A1-5632, RG:59, USNA.

¹⁵⁷ Alfred Atherton Jr. to Joseph Sisco, Memorandum, 14 November 1969, File POL 17, Box 20, Entry A1-5632, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁵⁸ Akram Hanieh, 'The Camp David Papers', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 30:2, Winter 2001, pp. 76-77.

The 'Insider Diaspora': Camps in the West Bank and Gaza after 1967

While the Palestinian revolution was underway in much of the Arab world, the refugee camps in the newly-occupied West Bank and Gaza (OPT) were experiencing a different change in authority. Of all the camps, it was these that were the most directly affected by the 1967 War. Many had been seriously damaged by the fighting, to the point that UNRWA made claims to the Israeli government for \$323,400 in property damage in 1967.¹⁵⁹ Even more significantly, these camps were now under Israeli occupation, meaning that the refugees were governed by the newly-established Israeli military governorate. As a result, they had regular direct contact with the enemy state for the first time since 1948.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, they were distanced from the camps in the rest of the diaspora, which remained under Arab administration. UNRWA unofficially acknowledged the difference, commenting internally that 'for political reasons the situation should not be entirely equated in the occupied territories to that in the other three Fields [sic].'¹⁶¹

Somewhat ironically, the Israeli occupation meant that the West Bank and Gaza were re-united under the same sovereign power, making it easier for nationalists to organise across the two fields. In fact, it was this territory that the PLO was initially determined to dominate, pressing the population to take a more assertive stance against the Israeli occupation.¹⁶² Within this context, the refugee camps had a particular potential for functioning as hubs of Palestinian nationalism and militancy. Accordingly, they quickly became

¹⁵⁹ Laurence Michelmores, 'Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General', A/6713, 30 June 1967, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/ced216406b50bf6485256ce10072f637/>, accessed 31 August 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Rennie, 1974 Report.

¹⁶¹ See for example: A. Brown, memo to S. Sinha, 'Status of Camps in the Occupied Territories', 5 February 1982, File RE410(WB) III, Box RE65, UHA.

¹⁶² Jabber, 'The Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Revolution', p. 81.

the main target of Israeli crackdowns, as the Israeli military recognised the politicisation of the camps and tried to act to quell any potential disorder.

Its approach took numerous forms. In 1969 for example, the army demolished shelters in Amary and Kalandia camps in the West Bank on the grounds that ‘occupants had been aiding and abetting terrorist activities.’¹⁶³ This became the standard rationalisation for such practices; five years later, Israeli representatives claimed at a meeting of the UN Special Political Committee that ‘attack[s on] refugee camps...had been directed solely against bases and other installations of the terrorist organisations.’¹⁶⁴ Nor was the approach short-lived; into the late 1970s and thereafter, Israel continued to impose curfews and closures on the camps, a point noted by the UNRWA Commissioner-General in his 1979 report to the UNGA.¹⁶⁵

However, Israeli policy was not standardised across the West Bank and Gaza. Israel saw the West Bank as a far more desirable acquisition than Gaza; the former was home to a number of sacred religious sites and could also provide it with significant strategic depth. Accordingly, the late 1960s saw numerous discussions in the Israeli government about whether to annex the West Bank, where the first Israeli settlement was built soon after the June War.¹⁶⁶ The matter was complicated by the fact that the West Bank’s administrative status was more complex than that of Gaza; Jordan had annexed the territory in 1950, and would not relinquish its claim until 1988. In the case of the refugee camps, there was an additional quasi-state layer in the form of UNRWA.

Compared to the West Bank, the situation in Gaza was administratively more straightforward. In 19 years of governance, Egypt had never annexed

¹⁶³ DUO/WB, memo to A/COM, 4 October 1969, File RE230 (WB-3) I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹⁶⁴ UN Summary Record of 947th Meeting of Special Political Committee, A/SPC/SR. 947, 12 December 1974, FCO 93/571B, TNA.

¹⁶⁵ See: Olof Rydbeck, ‘Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General’, A/34/13, 30 June 1979, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/E8149C637F38D5398525684200539E62>, accessed 31 August 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin, 2014), pp. 272-274.

the territory, meaning that its status was theoretically less disputed. However, Israel considered Gaza much less desirable than the West Bank as a possible site of annexation. There was a long-standing view in Israeli governmental circles – held with some justification – that Gaza’s acute poverty, high proportion of refugees, and population density rendered it exceptionally radical.¹⁶⁷ Israeli policy in Gaza was therefore fundamentally different to its approach to the West Bank. While in both cases it targeted the refugee camps, its operations were more piecemeal in the West Bank, consisting of clampdowns, closures and curfews.¹⁶⁸ In Gaza, Israel went further and sought to remove the camps’ potential for militancy altogether by dismantling their structures.

Israel pursued this objective through a combination of policies. In order to ‘dilute’ the concentration of refugees that was seen as a direct cause of radicalisation, the Israeli authorities annexed some camps to towns and sought to integrate the refugees into local neighbourhoods.¹⁶⁹ In the most crowded camps, the military authorities demolished housing and shelters, widened the roads to facilitate patrolling, and – most controversially – sought to resettle some of the refugee population in the Sinai and the West Bank.¹⁷⁰ In total, almost 38,000 refugees were uprooted for the second or third time and resettled elsewhere in Gaza, or in Jordan and the Sinai.

As a result of both this policy and the impact of the June War, the population of Gaza fell dramatically from 385,000 in 1967 to 334,000 the following year. Moreover, Israel continued the policy into the next decade.

¹⁶⁷ Filii, *Gaza*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁸ DUO/WB, memo to A/COM, 4 October 1969, File RE230(WB-3)I, Box RE22, UHA. Olof Rydbeck, ‘Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General’, A/34/13, 30 June 1979, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/E8149C637F38D5398525684200539E62>, accessed 31 August 2017.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Peres: We will aid the refugees, but cannot solve entire problem’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 February 1970; Acting DUO/Gaza, Note for the Record, 19 October 1971; both File OR215(IS)I, Box OR59, UHA. See also: Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 171, 228.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from R.E. Skinner, Director of UNRWA Operations, West Bank, to Chief Relief Operations Division HQ, 1 February 1971, OP/RE/223, File RE210/03(WB) II, Box RE7, UHA. UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 125, February 1990, Box GP3 PALESTINE, RSC. See also: Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, pp. 227-228. Sara Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development* (Beirut: IPS, 2016 edn), p. 105.

From July 1971, more than 2,500 houses were demolished in Jabalia, Rafah and Shati camps, and 320 km of road were cleared to make them suitable for patrols.¹⁷¹ UNRWA estimated that more than 15,000 refugees were affected by demolitions in the summer of 1971 alone.¹⁷² Many complained about increased overcrowding as a result of Israeli demolitions.¹⁷³

Ostensibly, the Israeli government justified these actions as ‘measures necessary to restore law and order in the camps and security [sic]’, and insisted that they had been successful in reducing terrorist activity in Gaza.¹⁷⁴ In private, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the US Embassy in Tel Aviv that the moves were part of a plan to ‘thin out the population’.¹⁷⁵ This was politically-motivated, as Gaza’s high population density was seen to be directly connected to its politicisation and militancy. As the most densely-populated spaces, the camps lay at the heart of this. In his comprehensive history of the Gaza Strip, Jean-Pierre Filiu argues that these policies were in fact designed to forcibly integrate the refugee camps into Gaza’s existing urban fabric, and thus weaken their militant potential.¹⁷⁶ Among Palestinians, the policies were seen to be part of a plan to dissolve the refugees’ political identity and undermine the right of return. Some protested openly; in 1972 the Gaza City mayor was dismissed after he refused to provide municipal services to Shati camp on these grounds.¹⁷⁷

Twelve years into the occupation, the Israeli government affirmed again that its policy towards the Gaza camps had been justified. In a letter to the UN Secretary General, the Permanent Representative of Israel Yehuda

¹⁷¹ Filiu, *Gaza*, pp. 141-143, 389.

¹⁷² ‘Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, report of the Secretary-General’, DC/OR/UNR/PR/5, File DC/OR/UNR/ICI/IPU/IPR, Box UNR 1, Cooper Archive, RSC.

¹⁷³ Rafah Refugee Services Officer, memo to DUO/Gaza, 20 June 1972, 20 June 1971, File OR 215(IS) II, Box OR59, UHA.

¹⁷⁴ Stadhouse/US Embassy Israel to Sisco/US State Dept, Confidential Memo, 16 August 1971, File POL 28, Box 21, Entry A1-5632, RG59, USNA. See also: Letter dated 28 September 1971 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, A/8432, 28 September 1971, S-1066-0065-0007, UNA.

¹⁷⁵ Stadhouse/US Embassy Israel to Sisco/US State Dept, Confidential Memo, 16 August 1971, File POL 28, Box 21, Entry A1-5632, RG59, USNA.

¹⁷⁶ Filiu, *Gaza*, p. 145.

¹⁷⁷ Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 171, 228.

Blum wrote that Israeli policy had created ‘a vast amelioration in the economic and social condition of the refugees [in the Gaza camps].’ He added that Israeli housing projects had enabled refugees to move outside ‘the squalid conditions of the camps.’¹⁷⁸ Yet whatever the socio-economic effect of the policy, it had definitively failed to quell the potential for political organisation and activism. The centrality of the camps within the Palestinian nationalist movement would prove enduring across all five fields, with far-reaching consequences for Israel, UNRWA, the Arab host states, and the Palestinians themselves.

Falaḥīn and fidaʿīyyīn

It has already been noted that the rise of the *fidaʿīyyīn* shaped the camp refugees’ new self-identification as active fighters. At the same time, the camps’ central role within the nationalist movement directly informed the re-emerging ideological conception of ‘Palestinian-ism’. In keeping with the camps’ significance, the idea of ‘Palestinian-ness’ became imbued with the cultural customs and norms of those social groups that dominated the refugee camps. The vast majority of camp refugees were *falaḥīn* (peasants or farmers) from rural villages in pre-1948 Palestine.¹⁷⁹ These people had had the least means to support themselves after the Nakba, and consequently mostly ended up in camps. As they and their descendants swelled the ranks of the *fidaʿīyyīn*, so Palestinian nationalist expression tapped into older ideas about rural village culture.

These ideas often centred around the perceived purity of the peasant lifestyle. In her memoir, Leila Khaled paraphrases what a middle-class Palestinian teacher in Lebanon told her about the *falaḥīn*:

¹⁷⁸ Israeli Permanent Representative to UN Secretary-General, Letter, 12 September 1979, File PO230 PAL(2)7, S-0442-0239-0005, UNA.

¹⁷⁹ Edward Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees: A Study in non-territorial administration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 31.

[The *falahīn*] are the true children of Palestine because they live on the land, and cultivate and harvest it. Virtue is a part of the people of the land, and the simple folk are the backbone of all societies. Those peasants did not leave Palestine willingly like the rich people who now live in villas in Cairo and Beirut... those are the people of Palestine.¹⁸⁰

As this comment shows, the peasants' close and explicit link to the Palestinian land made them the perfect emblem of the nationalist campaign to reclaim it. With the struggle focussed so intensely on the land, the *falahīn*'s attachment to it was seen as a sign of their virtue. Such perceptions were widespread; with striking similarities to Khaled's recollection, Ghada Karmi, a refugee from Jerusalem, describes how her urban middle-class family and their circles perceived this social group:

The fellahin [sic], judged uneducated and backward on the one hand, were also seen as symbols of tenacity, simplicity and steadfastness on the other. They represented continuity and tradition and the essence of what is was to be Palestinian.¹⁸¹

It is this latter point that is most important. Ideas of 'what it was to be Palestinian' were anchored in the perceived characteristics of the *falahīn* – who, by no coincidence, were now largely living in the refugee camps.

Karmi points out elsewhere that it was the traditions and customs of the *falahīn*, not those of the urban elites, that distinguished Palestinian culture from its neighbours.¹⁸² This meant that *falahīn* culture proved particularly effective when asserting a specifically *Palestinian* national identity – which was of course a key idea after 1967.¹⁸³ Accordingly, the *fidāʿīyyīn* drew heavily on the typical imagery of the fellahin in order to convey a sense of 'Palestinian-ness'. Arafat, who came from an urban background and had

¹⁸⁰ Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 35.

¹⁸¹ Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁸³ For more on this see: Jihane Sfeir, 'L'historiographie Palestinienne entre histoire et mémoire', in N. Amara, C. Raymond and J. Sfeir (ed.s), *Écritures Historiennes du Maghreb et du Machrek* (Hors-Série: NAQD, 2015), p. 9.

grown up in Cairo and Jerusalem, led the *fidāʿīyyīn*'s widespread adoption of the *kuṣṣyā* as a throwback to the peasant headdress of the 1936 Revolt.¹⁸⁴ Political posters and songs made use of peasant imagery that related to the land and portrayed the Palestinians as deeply rooted therein.¹⁸⁵ Some nationalist organisations explicitly linked the peasant tending of the land to the struggle to reclaim it; the PFLP presented Palestine as the 'land of oranges, land of revolutionaries [*arḍ al-burtaqaḷ, arḍ al-thawār*]',¹⁸⁶

Conceptually, both the *falaḥīn* and the camp refugees were also central to the idea of *ṣummūd*, a core element of the Palestinian nationalist struggle in this period. Meaning 'steadfastness' or 'perseverance', *ṣummūd* was used to denote steady and determined resistance, and accordingly drew on many of the commonly-understood characteristics of *falaḥīn* culture as described by Karmi and Khaled. The word was a mainstay of PLO literature and artwork, alongside imagery of the *falaḥīn* and *fidāʿīyyīn* – both of which were seen as demonstrating *ṣummūd* in their respective forms of commitment to the Palestinian land.¹⁸⁷ Particular visual expressions of *ṣummūd* included the olive tree, with its obvious connection to *falaḥīn* culture.¹⁸⁸

After 1948, the *falaḥīn* were effectively 'urbanised' by way of their relocation in concentrated refugee camps, usually located close to built-up areas. However, the idea that they constituted the 'true' Palestinians was extended in turn to the camp refugees, whose refusal to give up on the right

¹⁸⁴ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, pp. 195-196.

¹⁸⁵ See for example: PLO Poster 19, AUB; PLO poster 'Palestine our Holy Land', PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/our-blessed-land>; Fatah poster 211, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/30-march-1976-land-day-in-palestine>, both accessed 14 May 2016.

¹⁸⁶ PFLP poster 'Land of Oranges', PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/land-of-oranges-land-of-revolutionaries>. See also Fatah poster 254, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-land-is-for-those-who-liberate-it>, both accessed 14 May 2016.

¹⁸⁷ Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 243.

¹⁸⁸ See for example: PFLP poster 100, AUB; Fatah poster 486, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-call-of-the-land>; PFLP poster 1630, 1970, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/support-the-steadfastness-of-gaza>, both accessed 14 May 2016.

of return became a new sign of *ṣumūd*. In 1978, Arafat wrote in a letter to UN Secretary-General Waldheim:

the fact that [the refugees] have continued to live in tents for over 30 years is eloquent testimony to the determination of our people and their tenacity with regard to their right to return to their homes...¹⁸⁹

Of course, at the time of writing it had been many years since the Palestinian camps had consisted of tents. Arafat's references to the latter is indicative of the near-romantic symbolism sometimes ascribed to the camps in nationalist rhetoric.

This notion of the camps as the most authentically Palestinian spaces was far-reaching. Najwa Al Qattan, a Palestinian who grew up in Beirut, recalls how her family felt shame over the fact that they did *not* live in the camps and were therefore 'abandoning' their 'Palestinian-ness'.¹⁹⁰ As this shows, the camps came to serve in the minds of many as 'Palestine in exile', not least because of their connection to first the *falāḥīn*, and later the *ḥadāḥīyīn*. By 1967, an entire generation had grown up away from the traditional agricultural life of the villages. This made it impossible for agricultural traditions to continue in the same way, and yet they took on a hallowed significance as symbols of the lost motherland.

Conclusion

The politics of the Palestinian refugee camps are typical of the wider region in that they can be periodised using 1967 as a watershed. In the camps, as in the wider Arab world, the Naksa served as a turning point for political expression, ideas and activism. Its transformative effect on Palestinian nationalist activity thus changed the political culture in the camps. Whereas in the 1950s refugees like Ali Ahmed Al 'Abed had called on governments

¹⁸⁹ Arafat, letter to Waldheim, 22 March 1978, S-0899-0013-07, UNA.

¹⁹⁰ Najwa Al Qattan, 'An Ornithologist from Iceland', in Suleiman, *Being Palestinian*, pp. 54-55.

to implement the right of return, by the late 1960s they had lost faith in the latter's willingness and ability to do so.¹⁹¹ Before 1967, Palestinian efforts to reverse the Nakba had usually been small-scale, consisting of individual 'infiltration' attempts and limited early *fiddā'iyyīn* operations, with the latter largely subordinate to the Arab regimes. After 1967, the Palestinian national movement became self-driven, organised and highly active. In both ideological and practical terms, the refugee camps were central to driving this new movement.

Yet this paradigm of the 1967 watershed risks obscuring another truth about the history of the refugee camps. Notwithstanding the fact that the Naksa's significance was common to both the camps and the wider Arab world, this chapter has also shown that in many ways the camps functioned as distinctive spaces, even within the Palestinian diaspora and certainly before the Naksa. Indeed, it is the camps' uniqueness and particularities that merit the specific study of them missing from much of the existing literature. Distinguished from surrounding areas by their makeshift physical appearances, high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, and the presence of UNRWA institutions, the camps could be easily identified. In some cases, their demarcation was formalised, as permits were required to enter and leave the camps.

It was this long-established distinctiveness that enabled the camps to function so effectively as bases for the post-67 Palestinian *thawra*. Their role in the latter has commonly been understated, as historical studies of Palestinian nationalism tend to take a top-down approach, focussing on organisations like the Palestine Arab Higher Committee (AHC) and later the PLO and Fatah.¹⁹² As a result, the camps have too often been depicted as mere respondents to external events, rather than as an essential element of

¹⁹¹ Letter from Ali Ahmed Al 'Abed, FO 1018/73, TNA.

¹⁹² See for example: R. Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*; Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*; Baumgarten, 'The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism'; Franjeh, 'How Revolutionary Is the Palestinian Resistance?'

the developments taking place. In fact, they were a formative part of the movement that emerged after 1967, as manifested in the nationalistic mythologising of the *ṣalāḥīn*, the refugees, and the connection of both to the *ḥidāʿiyyīn*.

The question remains of what this meant for UNRWA, as the *de facto* quasi-government in the refugee camps. As the latter became not only politicised but also militarised, the Agency struggled to retain its supposedly apolitical nature and neutral reputation. From 1969 it faced increasing calls to advocate for the Palestinian refugees' cause on the world stage. Yet when responding to such demands, it was severely constrained by the nature of its set-up. As an international organisation mandated by the UN and funded by Western donor states, UNRWA was bound by multiple considerations. Both the Western states that funded the Agency and the Arab states that hosted it were highly bemused by the possible implications of the camps' politicisation during this period. Their relationships with UNRWA, and their views of its quasi-state role in the camps during the *ṭhanra* years, are examined in depth in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: UNRWA's International Relations

*UNRWA walks a tightrope between the aspirations of the Palestinians and the stance of the host Governments and Arab contributors on the one hand and, on the other, the requirements which its major contributors wish to see satisfied and on which their support is to some degree dependent. On occasion the two are compatible; more often they are not.*¹
Office of the UNRWA Commissioner-General, 1979

The political significance of UNRWA's work in the refugee camps did not go unnoticed. On the contrary, its intersection with the Palestinian nationalist movement became a key constituent of its relations with the host and donor states, which were for various reasons all hostile to the PLO's ascent and accordingly suspicious of the Agency's role in the camps. Their qualms created unending problems for UNRWA. Despite the quasi-state nature of its work in the camps, the Agency had no real independence financially or operatively. Without a regular income, it relied entirely on voluntary donations from UN member states (chiefly the US) to fund its programmes. At the same time, its lack of legal jurisdiction meant that it could only operate at the invitation of the host states: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Israeli occupying power in the West Bank and Gaza.² As a result, UNRWA's essential internationalism generated added tensions as its work became increasingly ensconced in the camps' nationalism during the *thanra* years.

This chapter probes the complications that stemmed from this inherent tension in UNRWA's positioning. It seeks to explicate how the camps' politicisation affected UNRWA's relations with the host and donor states, particularly in terms of how they perceived the Agency's connection to and impact on the Palestinian nationalist movement. In the process, it also asks how UNRWA's internationalism shaped its activities and political

¹ Office of the Commissioner-General, memo, 'UNRWA's Mandate', 16 May 1979, File OR110 II, Box OR1, UHA.

² Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 19 January 2015.

positioning in the camps. Finally, it considers the extent to which UNRWA's international relations reflected its quasi-state role in the camps, and the ways in which it did so.

The archives of both UNRWA and the UN headquarters provide ample evidence to illuminate these questions. Drawing on the relevant documents, this chapter argues that the complexity of UNRWA's relationships with the host states and the donor states was demonstrative of its hybrid identity, as an international quasi-state consumed in the camps' nationalist environments. In keeping with such internal conflict, its difficulties were not limited to a clash with one government alone; instead it faced conflicts on numerous fronts sometimes simultaneously.

Yet despite the variety of disagreements and accusations, there were certain underlying commonalities. None of the donor or host states saw the Agency as solely humanitarian; on the contrary, they all treated it as an organisation that was essentially political in its purpose and significance. They accordingly assessed its impact through a political lens – albeit with varying priorities – and, tellingly, tended to focus on the camps. When it came to the latter, the host states and donor states all saw Palestinian nationalism as an unwelcome development, and feared that UNRWA's work was fuelling the refugees' national identity and consciousness. At the same time, they preferred the Agency to the Palestinian organisations that might otherwise run the camps.

In the case of the Arab host states and Israel, they also benefited fiscally from UNRWA's operations, which saved them the cost of providing services to the refugees themselves. In this regard, there were fewer differences between Israel and the Arab host states than between the donor and host states; while the latter wanted the Agency to deliver as many services as possible, the former wanted the reverse.³ UNRWA's relations

³ *Ibid.*

with these states therefore challenge conventional paradigms about political dynamics in the Middle East that assume a constant polarity between Israel and the Arab states. In this case, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria in fact held common concerns and interests, albeit without acknowledging their similar positioning in this regard. This chapter's examination of UNRWA's international relations therefore holds a broader significance relevant to more general understandings of political dynamics and machinations in the twentieth-century Levant.

In presenting such analyses, this chapter provides an important historiographical contribution to scholarship that is surprisingly limited. Benjamin Schiff's comprehensive survey of the Agency includes an extensive discussion of how its operations were shaped by its relations with the Arab host states, Israel, and the donor states.⁴ However, much of the other literature mentions the subject only passingly. Brief discussions can be found in works by Rex Brynen,⁵ Lex Takkenberg,⁶ Rosemary Sayigh⁷ and Yezid Sayigh,⁸ but there is no in-depth analysis of how UNRWA's international relations signified and shaped the politics of its work vis-à-vis Palestinian nationalism. In addressing this subject, this chapter deepens the current historiographical understanding by providing a deeper analysis of the conflicting characteristics at the heart of the Agency's role: international yet national, apolitical yet political, local yet global.

The chapter also illuminates some of this thesis' key underlying themes. UNRWA's international relations illustrate the importance of the camps to the *thawra*, and the significance of UNRWA's quasi-state role

⁴ Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

⁵ Rex Brynen, 'UNRWA as Avatar: Current debates on the Agency – and their Implications', in Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal and Lex Takkenberg (ed.s), *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees: From Relief and Works to Human Development* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 263-283.

⁶ Lex Takkenberg, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees after Sixty Years: Some Reflections', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, 2010, pp. 253-259.

⁷ Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007), pp. 113-117.

⁸ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 41-54.

therein. The Agency could not remain detached from these spaces' heavy politicisation, and in fact increasingly came to serve as their *de facto* representative on the world stage. Studying the Agency's international relations thus provides a way to understand and analyse its political role from another angle. Hemmed in by politics on all sides, UNRWA's international relations in the years 1967-82 showed decisively that it had become inextricably entangled with the rise of Palestinian nationalism in the refugee camps.

The Arab Host States and UNRWA: Power and Paradox

The Arab host states' relationships with UNRWA were shaped by their remarkably complex and at times inconsistent policies towards their Palestinian populations. While Arab leaders all imbued their public speeches with calls for Palestinian liberation, internally they feared the repercussions of hosting a powerful nationalist movement. The exact reasons for this anxiety varied from state to state, but they were always tied to concerns about instability and threats to the regimes' power, particularly if Palestinian militancy attracted Israeli retaliation. Similarly, their approaches to UNRWA were framed by concerns about the potential threat it might pose to the power and authority of the state. Jordan, Syria and Lebanon all frequently disagreed with the Agency over the limits of its jurisdiction. In turn, the latter complained about host state interference in its staff appointments, programmes and freedom of movement.

These tensions were most acute when it came to the refugee camps, where UNRWA's dependence on the host states was greatest. Although the camps were administered by the Agency, they never existed independently

and were not extra-territorial spaces.⁹ Instead they came under the legal jurisdiction of the state in which they were located, with ‘the host Government responsible for the security services within the camp[s].’¹⁰ As UNRWA had no legislative or police power, it was reliant on the host states to maintain order in the camps, while it provided quasi-state services. This set-up caused endless problems for UNRWA, as the host states often blamed it for disorder among the camp residents. The increasing prominence of *fidāʿiyyīn* organisations in the camps after 1967 only worsened relations, especially when the latter clashed with government forces. In essence, the Arab host states wanted the Agency to serve their interests, and became frustrated and hostile when it did not.

Alongside such power struggles was the Arab host states’ common concern that UNRWA should continue to provide its services to the Palestinian refugees. They had voted for the Agency’s creation in 1949 and certainly did not want to see it disbanded.¹¹ Its work benefited the Arab host states by relieving them of the financial burden of caring for the refugees; it even paid them subsidies for the Palestinian refugee children who were educated in state schools.¹² Its dissolution would therefore have highly undesirable consequences for the Arab governments, who consequently all supported the view that the international community (by which they meant the West) should bear responsibility for the needs of the refugees while their plight remained unresolved – and that this responsibility was enacted in the form of the UN and UNRWA.¹³ As a result, the Arab states’ clampdowns

⁹ See for example: John Rennie, ‘Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA’, A/8413, 30 June 1971, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/A81D27231BA0BF4985256AA8006C6BFD>, accessed 31 August 2017.

¹⁰ UNRWA General Cabinet, ‘Administration of Refugee Camps’, 12 September 1970; E/Bank Field Relief Services Officer, memo to Director of Relief Services, ‘Agency Camps’, OP/AD/100, 3 March 1970, both File RE400 II, No Box, UHA.

¹¹ Takkenberg, ‘UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees after Sixty Years’, p. 255.

¹² UNRWA Education Subsidies, June 1979, File RE230(G-2)II, Box RE91, UHA.

¹³ Brynen, ‘UNRWA as Avatar’, p. 6.

on the Agency's power and authority were juxtaposed with demands for it to maximise its service provision.

To complicate matters further still, the Arab host states' attitudes to UNRWA were framed by their perception of it as a force underlining Palestinian separateness. Officially, they supported this notion; all three governments spoke publicly of Palestinian nationhood and made calls for the refugees to be allowed to return home. In reality, the Arab host states responded to the idea of a separate Palestinian nationhood with varying degrees of hostility. Both the Jordanian and Syrian regimes wanted to absorb the Palestinian refugees into a greater state, albeit in different ways. Meanwhile the Lebanese government wanted the Palestinians to remain separate from the rest of society, but feared that a strong sense of Palestinian nationhood might threaten the already-weak central government in Beirut. Accordingly, all three were instinctively dubious of any organisation that might reinforce Palestinian nationalism – including UNRWA. Yet at the same time, they ultimately supported UNRWA's work for the benefits it brought them. The policies that stemmed from this inconsistent basis were complicated and sometimes even erratic. The details could vary considerably from state to state, and accordingly each shall be examined in turn here.

Syria and UNRWA: Control and interference

Syria was consistently the most welcoming Arab host state for Palestinian refugees. As Nell Gabiam observes, the country provided its Palestinian population with more benefits and entitlements than either Jordan or Lebanon.¹⁴ Just a few years after the Nakba, most of the Palestinian population in Syria were working and, unlike in neighbouring countries,

¹⁴ Nell Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering: Syria's Palestinian refugee camps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 18-25.

were relatively settled.¹⁵ Law No. 260, passed in 1956, gave Palestinians the same rights and obligations as Syrian citizens, except for voting and standing for political office.¹⁶ They had full access to state education and healthcare services, with their affairs administered by the Palestine Arab Refugee Institute (PARI).¹⁷ Despite the frequent upheavals of Syria's numerous coups in the 1950s and 1960s, these entitlements remained constant.

The coups finally came to an end with the ascendancy of Hafiz al-Asad. The Ba'ath Party to which Asad belonged first took power in 1963, with an internal coup three years later. Air Force General Asad rose through the ranks to become Defence Minister in 1966, Prime Minister in 1970 and President the following year - a position he retained until his death in 2000. Throughout this time Asad's primary concern remained that of regime maintenance, as he fixated on removing any potential threat to his authority - including that which might be posed by a powerful Palestinian nationalist movement. This was twinned with his determination to claim the mantle of leader of the Arab world, a position that had been vacated with Nasser's death in 1970. As a result, his regime keenly promoted the notion that he would defend the Arabs against the perceived threat posed by Israel, which went hand-in-hand with presenting Asad as the saviour of the Palestinians.¹⁸

Accordingly, when Asad took power he keenly continued with policies granting entitlements to Palestinians in Syria. While PARI was renamed the General Administration for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) in 1974, this was more of a rebranding exercise than a strategic change. Indeed, Asad was eager to highlight Syrian support for the Palestinian refugees when extolling his regime's pan-Arab solidarity. Unsurprisingly, this had direct ramifications

¹⁵ Dr Leslie Houseden, Report on the Refugee Children in the Middle East, 28 August 1953, Sir Edward Spears Collection, GB165-0269, File 2, Box 15, MECA.

¹⁶ Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering*, p. 21.

¹⁷ UNRWA Inter Office Memo, 'Preparatory Education - Syria', 13 February 1961, File RE230(S)I, Box RE21, UHA.

¹⁸ Patrick Seale with Maureen McConville, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990), p. 348.

for UNRWA; Asad also cited his government's support for UNRWA's programmes in Syria as evidence of both his pro-Palestinian credentials, and his respect for the UN and the international community.¹⁹ The policies had a noticeable impact, with senior UNRWA officials commenting internally on how Palestinian refugees in Syria benefited from enjoying the same opportunities as Syrian citizens.²⁰

Syria's plentiful provision of services to Palestinian refugees also directly benefited UNRWA, by relieving it of the need to provide the intensive services required elsewhere. As a result, UNRWA was less active in this field than in others, with staff commenting, 'it is not possible to deny that the Agency does benefit [in Syria] from the exceptionally generous arrangement...'²¹ GAPAR officials were often keen to underline the point in their interactions with the Agency, as Syrian generosity towards Palestinian refugees put them in a stronger negotiating position than either Jordan or Lebanon. When campaigning for UNRWA to implement new programmes, for example, the Syrian government highlighted the savings that the Agency had made as a result of the government's provision of free education to Palestinian refugees.²²

Yet the consequences for UNRWA were not entirely positive. The Syrian government's close involvement in service provision to Palestinian refugees also meant that UNRWA faced considerable encroachments on its autonomy in the country. As well as being the most generous Arab host state in terms of its services towards the Palestinian refugees, Syria was also the most authoritarian regional regime and accordingly the most draconian in how it approached outsider entities like UNRWA.²³ Asad consistently

¹⁹ See for example: Syrian Foreign Minister Ibrahim Makhos, letter to Secretary-General Thant, 9 August 1967, File LEG480/4(S) IV, Box LEG23, UHA.

²⁰ John Defrates, letter to Magnus Ehrenstrom, 4 August 1972, PU140/3, File LEG480/4(S) IV, Box LEG23, UHA.

²¹ UNRWA Confidential Cabinet Memo No. 76/61, 18 September 1961, File RE230(S)I, Box RE21, UHA.

²² See for example: Notes of a Meeting between PARI and UNRWA, 12 September 1961, File RE230(S)I, Box RE21, UHA.

²³ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 90, 109.

clamped down on any potential threats to his authority, and despite its UN status, UNRWA was not immune to the suppression that characterised much of Syrian state policy at this time. The Agency may have been apolitical – at least in theory – but it was still an internationally-supported quasi-governmental authority, in charge of self-contained camps that housed hundreds of thousands of foreigners. As such, the Asad regime quickly concluded that UNRWA’s power needed to be contained.

The totalitarian nature of the Syrian regime gave it several routes to achieving this. It continually imposed restraints on the Agency’s autonomy and immunity by clamping down on its rights and entitlements as a UN body, and thus asserting its own greater power.²⁴ In 1967, for instance, the Syrian government enacted a decree excluding local UN staff from the usual privileges and immunities, meaning *inter alia* that they could now be inducted into the military and needed PARI-issued permits to travel.²⁵ This caused no end of problems for UNRWA when managing personnel, the vast majority of whom were local. The situation became so challenging that in 1973 the Agency appealed to the UN Office of Legal Affairs for assistance.²⁶ In a similar vein, the Syrian government frequently refused the transfer of refugees to other UNRWA fields.²⁷ It further ignored the Agency’s immunities as a UN body by failing to acknowledge its special position vis-à-vis taxation on imports.²⁸

As well as disregarding UNRWA’s UN privileges, the Syrian regime also constantly interfered in its internal affairs. This was not new – as early as 1954, Director Henry Labouisse had seen fit to note in his report to the UNGA that the Syrian authorities had a tendency ‘to treat [UNRWA] as a

²⁴ DUA/Syria, Memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 9 October 1969, File OR130/2(S)IV, Box OR17, UHA.

²⁵ Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, p. 86

²⁶ UNRWA General Counsel, letter to Director of UN General Legal Division, 22 September 1973, S-1066-0065-06, UNA.

²⁷ M. Beroudiaux, letter to Chief of Relief Operations Division, 11 February 1970, File RE210(S)I, Box RE7, UHA.

²⁸ DUA/Syria, memo to Director of Personnel, 2 May 1983, File LEG480/4(S)IV, Box LEG23, UHA.

quasi-national institution subject to the control and authority of the Syrian Government'.²⁹ Three years later, Labouisse reported to the UN Special Political Committee about numerous incidents whereby Syrian military police had entered UNRWA premises without permission, and seized and deported Agency officials.³⁰ However, although Syrian denial of UNRWA's autonomy predated the Asad presidency, such interventionism became particularly marked under his rule.

As Schiff observes in detail, Asad's regime frequently meddled in UNRWA's personnel matters, placing strong pressure on the Agency to hire its preferred candidates,³¹ who were often government employees.³² At other times the regime pushed aggressively for the employment of Syrian staff rather than internationals, partly as a show of force, partly as a matter of prestige, and partly as a way of ensuring its own continued power over the Agency's internal affairs.³³ Robert Gallagher, who worked as Director of UNRWA Operations in Syria in the 1980s, later stated that:

GAPAR doesn't really have to control the Agency because they control the staff. Basically, in Syria the Syrians are in control, and they really are. And they are ruthlessly in control.... People owe their loyalty more to them, or to the Ba'ath Party in positions on our staff [than to the Agency]...³⁴

In other words, the Syrian government enacted its authority over UNRWA by integrating its contingent directly within the Agency's internal affairs. This gave the UNRWA-host state relationship a totalitarian character that could not be found elsewhere.

²⁹ Henry Labouisse, 'Report of the UNRWA Director', A/2717, 30 June 1954, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/1ce874ab1832a53e852570bb006dfaf6/29b65fb0fee24daa052565a10059d678?OpenDocument>, accessed 3 September 2017.

³⁰ Statement of UNRWA Director Henry Labouisse before the Special Political Committee, 11 February 1957, Box 195, Andrew Cordier Collection, CU.

³¹ Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, pp. 91-93

³² See for example: UNRWA Commissioner-General, letter to PARI Director General, 19 August 1972, File LEG480/4(S)IV, Box LEG23, UHA.

³³ See for example: UNRWA DUA/Syria, letter to UNRWA Commissioner-General, 22 August 1978; Deputy Commissioner-General, memo to Acting Director of Personnel, 11 November 1980, both File LEG480/4(S)IV, Box LEG23, UHA.

³⁴ Quoted in Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, p. 93

As a result, the Agency had to perform a balancing act between resisting the government's interference and cooperating with its service provision. Management expressed repeated concerns that they were becoming a mere wing of the Syrian government. As early as 1969, UNRWA's Director of Affairs in Syria wrote formally that the Agency had 'lost practically all semblance of independence' in the Field, and asked the UN Headquarters in New York to take action.³⁵ Three years later, the Commissioner-General raised the issue directly with the PARI Director General:

UNRWA can only operate, and obtain the funds for, its programmes for the Palestine refugees if it functions as a United Nations organisation, and to do so it must adhere to the principles and the practices that regulate United Nations organisations.³⁶

Such calls made little impact. Ten years later, UNRWA directors in Syria were still facing the same problems, as the Agency's Field Director wrote of his frustrations over 'direct interference in appointment of staff' and claimed that 'we have not pursued [our] privileges and immunities with sufficient vigour in the past.'³⁷ His observations strongly implied that the Syrian regime had been largely successful in its attempts to restrain UNRWA's autonomy.

The situation was complicated further by Asad's paradoxical stance on Palestinian nationalism itself. Ostensibly, his regime was the leading backer of the Palestinian national cause, frequently denouncing Israel and calling for the refugees to be allowed to return home. Moreover, as both Rosemary Sayigh and Asad's biographer Patrick Seale note, the Syrian government substantiated this stance with action.³⁸ Unlike Jordan and Lebanon, but in common with Egypt and Algeria, it provided the *fidāʿiyyīn* with arms and

³⁵ DUA/Syria, memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 9 October 1969, File OR130/2(S) IV, Box OR17, UHA.

³⁶ UNRWA Commissioner-General, letter to PARI Director General, 19 August 1972, File LEG480/4(S)IV, Box LEG23, UHA.

³⁷ DUA/Syria, memo to UNRWA Director of Personnel, 2 May 1983, File LEG/480/4(S)IV, Box LEG23, UHA.

³⁸ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 140. Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 123-124.

training facilities. Syria was also the only Arab state that attempted to protect the *ḥida'yīyīn* in Jordan during Black September.³⁹ Asad reinforced this position with his strong support for the 1974 Rabat declaration, in which the Arab League recognised the PLO as 'the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people'.⁴⁰

However, behind the scenes, Asad's stance on the Palestinian national cause in general, and the PLO in particular, was much more complicated.⁴¹ Although the Ba'athists preached pan-Arab unity and their own form of secular socialism, Asad's real priority was regime maintenance. Indeed, even his pro-Palestinian positioning on Black September and the Rabat Declaration was driven in part by the desire to buttress his power against that of rival King Hussein. When it came to internal Syrian affairs, stability was maintained at the price of Asad's total monopolisation of power, and the brutal suppression of any opposition or unrest.

Such subjugation extended to the regime's approach to the Palestinian refugee camps.⁴² Asad clamped down on any Palestinian militancy that might rival his power by threatening his regime directly or more generally endangering state security. His pro-Palestinian stance did not temper the brutal suppression of their political activism. The Syrian government accordingly paid stipends to camp *mukhtārs* (community leaders) and informers who kept control and clamped down on political agitation among the refugees. This policy also had direct implications for UNRWA. Whenever possible, the Asad regime used the Agency to enforce its repression of Palestinian nationalism, for example by making registration with UNRWA a prerequisite for Palestinians to be issued with identity cards or travel documents.⁴³ This served the dual purpose of subordinating

³⁹ Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 157-159. See pp. 166-167 on Black September.

⁴⁰ Seale, *Asad of Syria*, p. 254.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 254, 282, 462.

⁴² See Appendix D on the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria.

⁴³ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, pp. 41-49.

UNRWA's authority to that of the state, and simultaneously clamping down on any risk of independent Palestinian activism. Despite UNRWA's claims to be apolitical, it could not avoid being co-opted even indirectly into the Syrian state's policies.

Asad's concerns about the Palestinian nationalist movement grew as the *thawra* brought the *ḥidā'iyīn* new power. To maintain control, he pursued a policy of divide and rule, providing material support to some nationalist organisations while opposing and confining others. As Defence Minister in 1969, he lay down new directives that prohibited certain *ḥidā'iyīn* groups from operating in Syria. Those that were allowed in the country still saw their training areas limited, and were banned from carrying arms in public or marching without a permit.⁴⁴

As the largest and most prominent *ḥidā'iyīn* organisation, Fatah was one of Asad's earliest and most consistent targets. His hostility towards it was fuelled by his personal dislike of Arafat.⁴⁵ The animosity between the two men dated back to the late 1960s, when Defence Minister Asad had imprisoned Arafat and his associates for insubordination. Their antipathy subsequently ebbed and flowed over the years, with Asad variously supporting Arafat in his battles against Habash and King Hussein, and then seeking to undermine him when he became too dominant.⁴⁶ During the Lebanese Civil War, their hostility escalated into open warfare, as Syria sided with the Maronite forces against the Palestinians. A Syrian-Palestinian battle in south Lebanon in 1976 served to crystallise Arafat's enmity with Asad.⁴⁷ Seven years later, Arafat's forces in Tripoli clashed with the Syrian-backed

⁴⁴ Seale, *Asad of Syria*, p. 156.

⁴⁵ On Asad's relationship with Arafat, see: Abu Iyad with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981), p. 46, 180-187, 199-201; Bassam Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine: An Insider's Account* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 110-111, 114-118; Alan Hart, *Arafat: Terrorist or Peacemaker?* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1987), pp. 138-139, 170, 196, 212-213, 324-325, 458-483.

⁴⁶ Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 125, 257, 269, 282-284, 288, 348, 378, 386, 411.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 284, 378, 411.

PFLP-GC and various Fatah splinter groups, supported by Asad. Arafat went on to openly accuse Syria of seeking to control the Palestinians.⁴⁸

Asad's selective support for the *fiḍā'iyyīn* in Lebanon is indicative of his policy's paradoxes when it came to the Palestinian nationalist movement. While he restricted the *fiḍā'iyyīn*'s activities in Syria, he not only allowed them to act in Lebanon but actually directed them to proceed there. This apparent inconsistency is in fact unsurprising; Asad's suppression of Palestinian militancy was driven by his desire to preserve his authority, and as such could be reversed whenever – or wherever – he judged that the *fiḍā'iyyīn* could be used as an instrument for extending his power. In Lebanon, he judged that Fatah posed a threat to his authority, and therefore aided rival Palestinian factions. In particular, Asad made use of the Syrian-Palestinian faction al-Saiqa, established by the Ba'ath Party in 1966, to challenge Fatah's authority within the PLO. Staffed only by those loyal to the Syrian regime, al-Saiqa became a key tool in Asad's intervention in Lebanon.⁴⁹ Observing how Syria was using al-Saiqa to undermine his power, Arafat briefly expelled the organisation from the PLO in 1976.

Al-Saiqa encapsulates the complexity of Asad's stance on Palestinian nationalism, as he pursued vastly different relationships with the various Palestinian factions, practising *realpolitik* rather than holding firm to any particular principle. His take on UNRWA was similarly double-edged. On the one hand, his government favoured the counterweight that the Agency could provide to the Fatah-dominated PLO in the refugee camps. It certainly preferred UNRWA to the alternatives, which were likely to be far less malleable and politically docile than the formally-neutral Agency. On the other hand, the Syrian government was concerned that the Agency's presence and work created an alternative quasi-governmental authority

⁴⁸ Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, p. 130.

⁴⁹ Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 282-284.

within the country and ultimately underlined Palestinian separateness, which in turn placed implicit limitations on the state's authority.

UNRWA's Deputy Commissioner-General privately acknowledged the problems in 1980, when he wrote that the Agency's tensions with the Syrian regime were 'a product of the continuation after 30 years of programmes which are normally conducted by a government'.⁵⁰ The Syrian-UNRWA relationship thus encapsulated the difficulties of the Agency's quasi-state positioning, whereby it balanced its supposed autonomy in the camps with its ultimate dependence on the host states' support and acquiescence. In the Syrian context, Asad's inconsistent approach to the Palestinian nationalist movement added an extra layer of complication. Struggling to maintain its balance in such a setting, UNRWA found itself unable to avoid the politics from which it claimed to be entirely detached.

Lebanon and UNRWA: Conflict and insecurity

The Lebanese government tended to support UNRWA's work more wholeheartedly than its Syrian counterpart. However, the weak and fragmented nature of the Lebanese state, combined with the tensions within its confessional political system, made the situation inherently difficult. Lebanese society was precariously balanced between numerous different ethno-religious groups, each with its own insularity and unfriendliness to outsiders – including Palestinians.⁵¹ Observers noted that from the beginning, the Lebanese general population were more hostile than either the Syrian or the Jordanian populations towards the Palestinian refugees.⁵² This had inevitable consequences for UNRWA, as the refugees' main service provider and unofficial representative.

⁵⁰ Deputy Commissioner-General, memo to Acting Director of Personnel, 11 November 1980, File LEG/480/4(S)IV, Box LEG23, UHA.

⁵¹ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 132.

⁵² Dr Houseden, 1953 Report, MECA. See also: Fawaz Turki, *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 132, 185.

Internal developments in Lebanon in this period complicated UNRWA's work there further still. From the late 1960s, the PLO established a state-within-a-state in the south of the country, which became informally known as 'Fatahland' and was legitimised by the 1969 Cairo Agreement discussed in Chapter Two. Then in 1975, the entire country descended into a fifteen-year-long civil war. For much of the period 1967-82, Lebanon was thus characterised by varying degrees of instability, with the Palestinian refugees often at the centre of it. As the central government increasingly lost its hold on much of the country, it also lost its authority in coordinating UNRWA's operations on the ground. Nevertheless, its stance remained structurally significant for the Agency, not least when the latter was pleading its case on the world stage.

The Lebanese government's approach to UNRWA is best understood within the framework of its views regarding the Palestinian refugees in general and the camps in particular.⁵³ PLO official Shafiq Al Hout has contended that 'the basis that has always underpinned Lebanese policy towards the [Palestinian] refugees has been fear.'⁵⁴ Specifically, there were three fears at play. Firstly, as Al Hout himself notes, the Lebanese government was anxious that militancy in the Palestinian camps might provoke an Israeli attack on the country.⁵⁵ Secondly, there were concerns that if the overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim Palestinians became integrated into Lebanese society (a process known as *tawtīn*), they would threaten the country's delicately balanced consociational system. This fear was particularly acute among the political establishment, which was dominated disproportionately, if by no means exclusively, by Maronite Christians. Linked to this was the third fear: that the Palestinian population might become sufficiently strong to rise up and threaten the authority of the state

⁵³ See Appendix C on the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

⁵⁴ Shafiq Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Pluto, 2011), trans. Hader Al Hout and Leila Othman, p. 40,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

altogether.⁵⁶ The Lebanese government accordingly sought to suppress any activity that might lead to the realisation of these fears.

In the years before 1967, it was able to do so relatively easily. The Nakba saw roughly 100,000 Palestinians flee to Lebanon, making them around a tenth of the population at the time.⁵⁷ Over the next two decades, the Lebanese government targeted the camp refugees, whom it deemed the most likely to form a nationalist movement in the post-Nakba era. On this point, the Lebanese government's assessment was correct – the first Palestinian political movement after 1948 did indeed emerge in the camps, in the form of the aforementioned ANM.

<Figure 14 unavailable due to copyright>

As non-citizens without visas, the Palestinian refugees came under the domain of the Lebanese army's security agency, the Deuxième Bureau (DB). The DB had a notorious reputation among Palestinians in the 1950s and 1960s. Al Hout described it as an 'absolute ruler... [with] an iron fist'; Fawaz Turki recalls DB agents intruding into refugee shelters to terrorise the residents.⁵⁸ The DB clamped down tightly on any attempts at Palestinian nationalist activism in the camps, banning the display of Palestinian flags and insignia.⁵⁹ Its Head Joseph Kaylani explained his mantra thus: 'The Palestinian is like a spring: if you step on him he stays quiet, but if you take your foot off, he'll hit you in the face.'⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 19 January 2015.

⁵⁷ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 100. Jihane Sfeir, 'Palestinians in Lebanon: The Birth of the "Enemy Within"', in Muhammad Ali Khalidi (ed.), *Manifestations of Identity: The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010), p. 13.

⁵⁸ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 40, 62. Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. 40-53.

⁵⁹ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 63.

⁶⁰ Quoted in R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, pp. 113-117, 140.

In particular, the DB used its power to grant or deny permits as a way of containing any potential agitation.⁶¹ Far more than in Syria or Jordan, the Palestinians in Lebanon faced severe restrictions on their right to work, move or travel, which only the DB could allow. They were so disempowered that permission was required even for refugees in one camp to visit relatives or friends in another.⁶² Anyone who attended political meetings in the camps was subsequently denied such permits; the same measure was later implemented for those activists who had taken refuge in Lebanon after Black September. Any Palestinian who left Lebanon for military training abroad found themselves barred from returning.⁶³

Like its Syrian counterpart, the Lebanese government paid stipends to camp *mukhtārs* and informers who kept control and maintained order inside.⁶⁴ From 1959-74, it also used Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the former Mufti of Jerusalem, as an instrument of control. In exchange for the residency permit that allowed him to live in Beirut until his death, the Lebanese authorities allegedly made use of the standing he still had in some parts of the Palestinian diaspora by recruiting him to pacify refugee discontent and potential nationalist agitation in the camps.⁶⁵

The repressive Lebanese policy had a multi-faceted effect on UNRWA. On the one hand, it fostered relative stability in the camps for much of the first two decades of the Agency's operations, though this came at the cost of serious blowback thereafter. More significantly, the Lebanese government had judged that UNRWA's work complemented its approach to the Palestinians, which led it to give more open support to the Agency's work than some of the other host states.⁶⁶ Indeed, Lebanon was the only Arab

⁶¹ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 41.

⁶² David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), pp. 77-79.

⁶³ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, pp. 113-117, 156.

⁶⁴ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 41.

⁶⁵ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 113.

⁶⁶ UNRWA publicly acknowledged the support received from the Lebanese government. See: Laurence Michelmore, 'Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General', A/7213, 15 September 1968, paragraph 5,

host state to join the UN Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA when this was set up at the end of 1970.⁶⁷

In the eyes of the Lebanese government, UNRWA's work benefited its interests regarding the Palestinians in two ways. Firstly, it helped prevent *tawān* by underlining the Palestinian refugees' separateness from the Lebanese population.⁶⁸ Secondly, its provision of basic services promoted stability among the refugees, and, in theory at least, minimised the chances of agitation and violence. Moreover in practical terms, UNRWA's registration system provided a way for the Lebanese government to keep tabs on the refugees and to enforce its permit policy; as in Syria, Palestinians in Lebanon needed UNRWA registration cards to be eligible for permits.⁶⁹ Again, the Agency found itself co-opted into the policies and ploys of the host state, unable to avoid their essentially political nature despite its supposedly apolitical status.

Lebanese policy towards the Palestinian refugees also had explicitly negative repercussions for UNRWA. The refugees' difficulties in acquiring Lebanese work permits resulted in extremely high levels of unemployment among the Palestinian population there, which in turn generated a greater need for UNRWA's relief programmes.⁷⁰ Of the three Arab host states, it was only in Lebanon that the proportion of Palestinian refugees living in camps actually increased in the post-Nakba decades.⁷¹ Although this was partly due to influxes of new refugees after 1967 and 1970 (discussed below), it was also a clear indicator of poverty levels. The Palestinian

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/9b785fa02fe8316f85256a7d00560076?OpenDocument>, accessed 3 September 2017.

⁶⁷ The eight other member states at that time were: Turkey, France, Ghana, Japan, Norway, Trinidad & Tobago, the US and the UK. See: UNGA Resolution 2656, A/RES/2656(XXV), 7 December 1970, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/2D3AFB77D53D2A87852560DE006E5636>, accessed 31 August 2017.

⁶⁸ Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 41.

⁷⁰ Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, pp. 98-99

⁷¹ According to UNRWA annual reports around 51% of the registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon lived in the camps at this time. See: UNRWA Annual reports, 1969-82, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/udc.htm?OpenForm>, accessed 3 September 2017. See also: Sfeir, 'Palestinians in Lebanon', p. 16.

refugees who did not live in the camps were those who had prospered sufficiently to move into permanent accommodation in towns and cities, and in Lebanon this group was notably smaller than in Jordan or Syria. As UNRWA faced rising financial problems from the 1960s, high demands on its services became an increasing problem.

Moreover, the repressive nature of the Lebanese policy towards the refugees resulted in frequent police interventions inside the camps, which impaired UNRWA's operations. Local Agency personnel were not exempt from police interrogations, and it was not uncommon for Palestinian staff members to be arrested, questioned or even expelled from the camps.⁷² On one particularly difficult occasion, UNRWA staff were unable to access any camps in Lebanon after the governmental Department of Affairs of Palestinian Refugees (DAPR) implemented particularly severe repressive measures.⁷³

Furthermore, the Lebanese government's relatively supportive position on UNRWA's work had its limitations. Although Lebanon was less intrusive in UNRWA's operations than either Jordan or Syria - partly because of the weakness of the state - this did not mean that the Agency escaped interference altogether. As in Syria, the government often tried to interfere in the Agency's recruitment decisions, despite the formal agreement that it would only ever intervene on security grounds.⁷⁴ On one occasion, DAPR temporarily suspended communications with UNRWA in protest at its hiring decisions.⁷⁵

There was also tension over the scope of the Agency's activities. Despite the fact that UNRWA provided some of its most extensive

⁷² See for example: UNRWA, letter to Lebanese authorities, 9 December 1968, File LEG/480/4(L)I, Box LEG23, UHA [French].

⁷³ Extract from Deputy Commissioner-General's letter to the Commissioner-General, 10 December 1968, File LEG/480/4(L)I, Box LEG23, UHA.

⁷⁴ See for example: UNRWA memo, 'Siblin Appointments', 21 January 1969, File LEG/480/4(L)I; UNRWA, letter to Lebanon Foreign Ministry, 3 March 1970, File LEG/480/4(L) II, both Box LEG23, UHA.

⁷⁵ UNRWA Note for the Record, 13 March 1970, File LEG/480/4(L)II, Box LEG23, UNRWA.

programmes in Lebanon, the government still pushed it to go further.⁷⁶ For example, the 1970s saw continuous disagreements over Palestinian refugees born after 1965. The Agency initially claimed that its budget deficit prevented it from serving them while the Lebanese government insisted that they were UNRWA's responsibility.⁷⁷ Their relationship was thus blighted by the same tensions over jurisdiction and services that existed in Syria, differing in degree rather than kind.

The rise of the PLO in Lebanon in the late 1960s added an extra layer of complexity to UNRWA's relationship with this host state, which could not be found elsewhere. As discussed in Chapter Two, the *thanra* of 1969 saw the *fida'iyyīn* take over the camps and oust the Lebanese authorities that had been policing them.⁷⁸ In many cases, the residents of the camps themselves took up arms to contest Lebanese control, retaliating against years of being targeted by the authorities.⁷⁹ The weak Lebanese government had little choice but to accept the situation, which was formalised in the 1969 Cairo Agreement explained in Chapter Two.⁸⁰ Lebanon was now central to the Palestinian struggle; in a press interview, Abu Iyad said that 'Lebanon is the lung through which we breathe politically... and it is also the lung which sustains the existence of the Palestinian Revolution.'⁸¹

Needless to say, this had major implications for UNRWA. Commissioner-General Michelmore noted in his 1970 Report that the 'enhanced political consciousness of the Palestinian refugee community.... [had] raised basic questions of authority and identification [in the camps].'⁸²

⁷⁶ The former UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi cites the Agency's additional four school grades in its Lebanon programme as an example of this. Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 19 January 2015.

⁷⁷ Lebanese Interior Ministry, highly confidential letter to Commissioner-General, 20 December 1974, File LEG/480/4(L)II, Box LEG23, UHA.

⁷⁸ Dana Adams Schmidt, 'Commandos Rule 14 Refugee Camps', *New York Times*, 13 November 1969.

⁷⁹ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*. p. 161.

⁸⁰ The Cairo Agreement, S-0899-0013-0007, UNA [English and Arabic].

⁸¹ 'We'll talk with the Phalangists, but...', *Monday Morning*, 23 June 1975, S-0359-0002-02, UNA.

⁸² Laurence Michelmore, 'Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General', A/8013, 30 June 1970, paragraphs 16, 39, 164,

In practical terms, the takeover extended to some of the Agency's installations, which were now occupied by militant organisations.⁸³ With the *ḥidaḥḥiyīn* in charge of the camps, the Agency's position became increasingly precarious.

The situation intensified after Black September in 1970 (covered in the next section). The Palestinian defeat in Jordan saw thousands of *ḥidaḥḥiyīn* flood into Lebanon with their families, boosting the number of Palestinians there by many thousands and creating further challenges for the authorities in trying to control them. By some estimates, the number of Palestinians who entered Lebanon after Black September was almost as high as the influx at the time of the Nakba.⁸⁴ The camps, which the Lebanese authorities had always seen as a cause for concern, now became 'factories of men for the Palestinian revolution'.⁸⁵ All this meant that UNRWA was prevented from carrying out its functions in Lebanon even before the civil war formally began in 1975. Once the war was underway, the deteriorating security situation made UNRWA's operations almost impossible.⁸⁶

These difficulties solidified the Agency's generally cooperative relationship with the Lebanese government. The latter certainly did not favour a Palestinian takeover, and accordingly supported UNRWA's attempts to regain control of its installations.⁸⁷ However, its power was increasingly on the wane, and would only shrink further in subsequent years. Ostensibly the Agency still recognised and deferred to the government's authority, but in practice it was the Palestinian factions who were in

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/519871909FA2913885256A5700565639> accessed 26 June 2017; Rennie, 1971 Report, paragraph 170.

⁸³ Michelmores, 1970 Report, paragraphs 16, 39, 164; Rennie, 1971 Report, paragraph 170.

⁸⁴ The exact figure is disputed. Milton Viorst suggests that as many as 100,000 Palestinians came to Lebanon as a result of Black September, while Benjamin Schiff contends it was a few tens of thousands at most. Milton Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1984), p. 86. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, p. 70. See also: Quarterly Report from UNRWA Syria Director, July/September 1970, File OR130/2(S)IV, Box OR53, UHA.

⁸⁵ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 161.

⁸⁶ UNRWA General Staff Circular No. 1/79, 9 January 1979, File OR131 II, Box OR17, UHA.

⁸⁷ Michelmores, 1970 report, paragraph 17.

charge.⁸⁸ The Agency now dealt increasingly with the PLO, especially when it came to the south of the country.⁸⁹ As Rosemary Sayigh points out, authority in the camps lay not with the national government but with the PLO-organised Palestinian popular committees.⁹⁰ The Lebanese government was extremely unhappy about this, but in reality there was little it could do. Its long-standing support for UNRWA's work may have been gratefully received, but in the years 1967-82 it became increasingly irrelevant.

Jordan and UNRWA: Containment and integration

Jordan is an unusual case in numerous ways. While Lebanon and Syria both have significant Palestinian populations, only in Jordan do the Palestinians form the demographic majority. It is estimated that approximately 60% of the refugee population outside historic Palestine can be found in Jordan, and around a third of the Jordanian population carry UNRWA registration cards.⁹¹ This has raised repeated questions about the nature of Jordanian national identity, with scholars including Laurie Brand and Karma Nabulsi writing in depth about the extent to which a 'Jordanian people' can be distinguished from the country's Palestinian population.⁹² Moreover, Jordan was historically much more entwined with Palestine than either Syria or Lebanon. It had formed part of the British Mandate of Palestine, albeit with autonomous government under the separate emirate of Transjordan. After Israel was created, Jordan shared the longest border with it. Unlike either Syria or Lebanon, the Jordanian government staked a claim to part of historic Palestine, having annexed the West Bank in 1950 to the chagrin of

⁸⁸ Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, p. 88.

⁸⁹ On UNRWA's relationship with the PLO in Lebanon at this time, see Chapter Six.

⁹⁰ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 179.

⁹¹ Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 30.

⁹² For more discussion of this issue see: Karma Nabulsi(ed.), *Palestinians Register: Laying Foundations and Setting Directions* (Oxford University: Report of the Civitas Project, August 2006), pp. 74-115; Adnan Abu Odeh, *Jordanians, Palestinians and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Peace Process* (Washington DC: Institute of Peace Press, 1999); Laurie Brand, 'Palestinians and Jordanians. A Crisis of Identity', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 34:4, 1995, pp. 46-61; Shaul Mishal, *West Bank/East Bank: The Palestinians in Jordan, 1949-1965* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1978).

many Palestinians.⁹³ All this meant that Jordan was more intimately connected to the fate of the Palestinian refugees than any other Arab state.

Jordan is further unique in that unlike Lebanon and Syria, it was governed by the same regime continuously in the post-Nakba period. Notwithstanding the upheaval of Abdullah I's assassination in 1951, the Hashemite dynasty retained power continuously, most notably with the long rule of King Hussein from 1952 until his death in 1999. This resulted in a notable consistency in Jordanian policy towards its Palestinian population. Moreover, unlike Lebanon and to a lesser degree Syria, Jordan sought not to exclude or separate the Palestinian refugees, but rather to absorb them.

Jordan had pursued this objective since the 1940s, when Abdullah I had made a secret deal with the Jewish Agency to divide Palestine between them.⁹⁴ The aftermath of the Nakba provided his government with an opportunity to push for this formally on the diplomatic stage. At a meeting of the UN Ad Hoc Political Committee in December 1950, the Jordanian delegation insisted that the 'vast majority' of Palestinian refugees favoured unification of the two banks⁹⁵ – which of course had already been rendered a *fait accompli* by the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank earlier that year. This went hand-in-hand with the suppression of a distinctive Palestinian national identity; Yezid Sayigh writes that at the time of the annexation, Abdullah also issued a royal decree banning the use of the term 'Palestine' in any official document, in favour of 'East Bank' and 'West Bank'.⁹⁶

Jordanian domestic policy towards the Palestinian refugees was grounded in the same principles, seeking to obliterate any trace of 'Palestinian separateness' among the refugees. As explained in Chapter One,

⁹³ Leila Khaled recalls her fury at the annexation in her memoir. Leila Khaled with George Hajjar, *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), p. 28.

⁹⁴ For more on this see: Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁹⁵ UK Delegation in New York, telegram to UK Foreign Office, 1 December 1950, FO 1018/73, TNA.

⁹⁶ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 41.

Jordan was the only Arab host state to offer them citizenship;⁹⁷ Rosemary Sayigh writes that although this was technically optional, the government placed strong pressure on Palestinians to accept it, by making citizenship a prerequisite for working in the public sector, registering births, and acquiring travel documents.⁹⁸ It was keen for Palestinians to identify primarily as Jordanian citizens, not refugees, and even prohibited the use of the term 'refugee' in political reports in the 1950s.⁹⁹ Such moves reinforced the idea that despite its official calls for the refugees' return, Jordan really favoured their permanent reintegration. Indeed Western diplomats noted that, unlike every other Arab state, Jordanian officials did not express any opposition to resettlement in early meetings after the Nakba.¹⁰⁰

Like his grandfather, King Hussein favoured the incorporation of the West Bank into the Hashemite kingdom, and the expansion and assertion of his own power over the Palestinian population therein. His biographer Nigel Ashton has observed how these objectives informed his response to the rise of the Palestinian nationalist movement in the early decades of his reign.¹⁰¹ Hussein's government opposed the nationalist affirmation of the refugees' separateness, and accordingly sought to contain the movement. Accordingly, in the early 1960s Jordan threatened to cancel the passports of anyone involved in Palestinian political agitation. As Leila Khaled recalls angrily in her autobiography, the Jordanian authorities also barred nationalist activists considered too 'radical' from attending the Palestine National Congress in Jerusalem in 1964.¹⁰²

After the Naksa, Jordanian concerns about the Palestinian nationalist movement increased markedly. The PLO's assertion of a separate

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 100.

⁹⁹ Najeh Jarrar, 'Citizenship and Palestinian Refugees', *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, 3:3-4, Summer/Autumn 1996, p. 65.

¹⁰⁰ British Embassy in US, letter to Trevor Evans, UK Foreign Office, 10 January 1950, FO 371/82242, TNA.

¹⁰¹ Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 18.

¹⁰² Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, p. 61, 83.

Palestinian identity was now buoyed by its heightened stature across the Arab world. Of particular alarm to the Jordanian regime were the radical demands of the PLO's most hardline factions, the PFLP and the DFLP. Both groups sought a full revolution in the Arab world as a necessary precursor to Palestinian liberation. Habash and Hawatmeh were Marxists openly committed to the overthrow of King Hussein, whom they considered a reactionary.¹⁰³ As the PLO came to take control of the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan after the Naksa, the Jordanian regime became increasingly concerned that the organisation's assertion of Palestinian separateness could threaten the state.

Matters came to a head in 1970, when the PFLP hijacked four planes and held the foreign hostages in Palestinian-controlled areas of the country, directly challenging Jordanian sovereignty. As the Jordanian army sought to free the hostages, King Hussein declared martial law and went to war with the *ḥida'yyīn*, surrounding and shelling the areas where they were based – including the refugee camps.¹⁰⁴ Black September, as it came to be known, ended with the *ḥida'yyīn*'s surrender and exile to Lebanon, and was thus a victory for the Jordanian government. However, it caused lasting damage to Hussein's reputation in the eyes of many Palestinians across the region and around the world. Fawaz Turki later wrote that 'the confrontations with Hussein's troops in September 1970 were the most traumatic experience in modern Palestinian history'¹⁰⁵ – apparently putting it even above the Nakba.

<Figure 15 unavailable due to copyright>

¹⁰³ Fuad Jabber, 'The Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Revolution, 1967-71', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2:2, 1973, p. 88.

¹⁰⁴ King Hussein recalls his response to the hijackings in documentary *The Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSAD9pS8NIw>, accessed 25 April 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), p. 52, 99, 109, 120.

The Jordanian government's relationship with UNRWA unfolded within this setting. Having signed an agreement with the Agency in 1951, the government formally facilitated its operations in the country.¹⁰⁶ Yet at the same time, UNRWA's work implicitly challenged the Jordanian objective of Palestinian integration. The very premise of the Agency's existence was based on the idea of the Palestinian refugees' distinctiveness within the host states - and in catering exclusively to the Palestinians, UNRWA underlined their separateness. As such, it inadvertently placed itself at odds with Jordanian government policy. In 1956, King Hussein had said that 'the organisations which seek to separate Palestinians from Jordanians are traitors helping Zionism in its aim of undermining the Arab camp.'¹⁰⁷ As Avi Plascow argues, UNRWA could be seen as one such organisation. In recognising and treating the Palestinians as a group in their own right, the Agency inadvertently preserved and boosted their separateness and with it their sense of unique identity.¹⁰⁸

The refugees' approach to UNRWA fortified such concerns. Many Palestinians in Jordan continued to identify primarily as refugees from Palestine, not Jordanian citizens. Indeed, many reacted uneasily to receiving Jordanian citizenship, for fear that it would undermine their right to return to Palestine. Some even sent petitions to the Arab League calling for a revision of the Jordanian policy.¹⁰⁹ This affected UNRWA because in the absence of valid Palestinian documentation, many refugees turned to their UNRWA registration cards as a preferred alternative form of identity. Najeh Jarrar and Jalal Al Hussein both write that this preference was tied to the nationalistic symbolism of the cards, discussed in depth in Chapter Five.¹¹⁰ It

¹⁰⁶ UN Department of Political and Security Council Affairs, Note on Jordan, 19 July 1956, Box 77, Andrew Cordier Collection, CURBM.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Mishal, *West Bank/East Bank*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁸ Avi Plascow, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, 1948-57* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 71.

¹⁰⁹ Jarrar, 'Citizenship and Palestinian Refugees', p. 66.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66; Jalal Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29:2, 2000), p. 52.

inevitably drew UNRWA directly into the discussion over Palestinian-Jordanian identity, and was a further nail in the coffin of the Agency's claims to be separate from politics. From the perspective of the Jordanian regime, then, UNRWA could be seen as a potential hindrance to the realisation of its objectives.

Yet at the same time, the Jordanian government was in no way equipped to get rid of the Agency. In the 1960s, UNRWA was feeding about one-third of the country's population and thus relieving the government of a substantial financial burden.¹¹¹ Expelling UNRWA and taking over its services was simply not an option; indeed, like other host states, Jordan actually complained when UNRWA made cuts to its service provision.¹¹² Therefore instead of opposing UNRWA outright, the Jordanian government sought to contain its significance and authority by continually asserting its own power. In this sense, the Jordanian government's approach had much in common with that of its Syrian counterpart. Like Syria, Jordan was apprehensive about allowing UNRWA to develop into a fully-fledged rival authority – an apprehension that became particularly pronounced in the aftermath of Black September.¹¹³

As the Jordanian government worked to decisively reassert its authority, UNRWA faced repeated encroachments on its immunities, most often in the form of searches and detentions of staff members.¹¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, the government was most concerned with any UNRWA employees who had a history of activism. On occasion, it tried unsuccessfully to deport such staff members. As a result, UNRWA repeatedly issued 'reminders' of the principle of UN inviolability, continually

¹¹¹ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 52.

¹¹² Director of UNRWA Liaison New York, memo to Urquhart, 16 March 1970, S-1066-0065-0006; Charge d'Affaires of Jordanian UN Mission, letter to Kurt Waldheim, 17 February 1972, S-0911-0008-0004, both UNA.

¹¹³ DUA/Jordan, memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 16 December 1970, File LEG 480/4 J II, Box LEG23, UHA.

¹¹⁴ See for example: DUA/Jordan, confidential memo to General Counsel, 7 March 1973; Letter to Jordanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 12 March 1973, both File LEG 480/4 J II, Box LEG23, UHA.

notifying staff that they could not get involved in politics.¹¹⁵ As in Syria and Lebanon, UNRWA had to maintain a difficult balance in Jordan between cooperating with the government while maintaining its own autonomy.¹¹⁶

Jordanian hostility towards UNRWA manifested itself most clearly in the years 1967-82 in disagreements over the West Bank. Despite Jordan's loss of the territory during the Naksa, King Hussein did not formally renounce his claim on it for another 21 years. In 1969, he stated, 'I can never renounce the West Bank... This idea of a so-called [separate Palestinian] entity has no reality'.¹¹⁷ Three years later, he announced a plan to establish a federation of the two banks, to be known as the United Arab Kingdom.¹¹⁸ In view of this, he was strongly opposed to UNRWA's designation of the West Bank as a separate Field of Operations after 1967, and to its establishment of a new Field Office in Jerusalem. In 1969 his government joined with those of Syria and Lebanon to declare that 'the East and West banks of Jordan are integral parts of one entity; therefore, the centre of all the Agency's operations on both banks should be confined to Amman.'¹¹⁹ Again, UNRWA's provision of welfare services became inescapably tainted with political significance.

Furthermore, the Jordanian government alleged that in working with Israel in the West Bank, UNRWA was legitimising the occupation.¹²⁰ In a sign of its continuing involvement in the territory, Jordan also protested at the Israeli policy of relocating families from Gaza to the West Bank in

¹¹⁵ Extract from a Note for the Record of a Meeting with the Minister of R&D on 23 June 1976 in Amman; UNRWA Note to MFA, 9 February 1977, both File LEG/480/4 J III, Box LEG23, UHA.

¹¹⁶ UNRWA Legal Advisor, memo to Director of Education, 29 October 1980, File RE230(J-3) II, Box RE21, UHA.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Abu Odeh, *Jordanians, Palestinians, & the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process*, p. 174.

¹¹⁸ Frances Susan Hasso, *Resistance, Repression, and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), p. 18.

¹¹⁹ Recommendations of the Conference of Arab Host Countries and UNRWA/UNESCO on the Educational Curriculum for Children of Palestine Arab Refugees, 5-8 March 1969, File RE230(3)II, Box RE28, UHA.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

1970.¹²¹ As the Jordanian government continued to claim rightful jurisdiction over the West Bank throughout this period, the Agency had to proceed with extreme care. Even in the 1980s, UNRWA still had to issue clarifications that its use of the term ‘east Jordan’ referred to a geographical area and not a legal status,¹²² and continued to include a similar disclaimer in its annual reports.¹²³

It is thus clear that Jordan saw UNRWA’s significance to extend far beyond that of a mere aid agency. There was a general feeling that the Agency’s work had the effect of bolstering Palestinian nationhood, and for varying reasons all three Arab host states saw this as undesirable. However, there was no easy solution. Like Syria and Lebanon, Jordan faced a quandary when it came to dealing with UNRWA; it badly needed the financial relief of the Agency’s services, yet it did not want the resulting headache of a potential rival authority in the country. Moreover, all three Arab host states ultimately saw UNRWA as preferable to any of the alternative sources of authority in the Palestinian refugee camps. Their relationships with the Agency were accordingly characterised by a paradoxical combination of hostility, suspicion, control, and dependency.

Israel and UNRWA: Suspicion and self-interest

UNRWA’s relationship with Israel was distinctive. Notwithstanding the many difficulties that the Agency encountered with the Arab host states, the latter all endorsed the same official line as UNRWA in calling for the refugees’ return to their pre-1948 homes. By contrast, Israel was virulently

¹²¹ Director of UNRWA Liaison New York, memo to Urquhart, 16 March 1970, S-1066-0065-0006, UNA.

¹²² Under Secretary-General of the Legal Counsel, letter to Jordanian Ambassador to the UN, 8 December 1981, File LEG480(IS) I, Box LEG22, UHA.

¹²³ See for example: Olof Rydbeck, ‘Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General’, A/38/13, 30 June 1983,

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/53936ddf3dd093a1852575530073f2e6/9b371b1e35e5b30985256866006a88ec?OpenDocument>, accessed 31 August 2017.

opposed to the refugees' return; in common with some of the Western donor states, it favoured an end to their refugee status to facilitate their permanent resettlement elsewhere. In its political positioning, Israel was therefore fundamentally at odds with the Agency. Moreover, as an occupying power rather than a conventional host state, the very premise of its relationship with the Agency was antagonistic. It was inherently suspicious of the Palestinian refugees and by extension UNRWA. In fact, Rex Brynen writes that successive Israeli governments believed that the Agency perpetuated the refugee crisis and in doing so encouraged Palestinian agitation against them.¹²⁴ In 1978, for example, the Israel Information Centre, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, issued a pamphlet claiming that UNRWA had compelled Palestinians to retain their refugee status, and 'refused to challenge the Arabs' exploitation of refugee misery'.¹²⁵

While this would appear to suggest that Israel's relationship with UNRWA was relentlessly combative, the reality was more complicated; in this sense too, Israel's relationship with the Agency was similar to those of the Arab host states. Despite its suspicions, the Israeli state generally supported UNRWA's work. Takkenberg points out that it had voted for the Agency's creation in 1949 and requested the continuation of its services in the OPT after 1967.¹²⁶ At the heart of Israel's policy towards UNRWA lay a paradox; it suspected the Agency of supporting and empowering political nationalism among Palestinian refugees, but also recognised that UNRWA's programmes ultimately served Israeli interests.

These interests were numerous. By providing quasi-state services to more than half the population in the West Bank and Gaza, UNRWA relieved Israel of the financial burden it would otherwise have incurred as

¹²⁴ Brynen, 'UNRWA as Avatar', pp. 7-12.

¹²⁵ Israel Information Centre, 'Refugee Problems can be solved' pamphlet, 1978, OR215(IS), Box OR59, UHA.

¹²⁶ Takkenberg, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees after Sixty Years', p. 255.

the occupying power (for the same reason, many Palestinian nationalists later accused the Agency of facilitating the occupation).¹²⁷ As a result, Israel's view of the Agency came to mirror those of the Arab host states in being essentially paradoxical: it performed a balancing act between critiquing UNRWA's politics and welcoming its service provision. In a further similarity, many Israeli officials believed that UNRWA's services ultimately created stability in the OPT and lessened the Palestinians' resentment of the occupation by improving their economic conditions.¹²⁸ As a result, they did not want to see UNRWA's services discontinued, despite their concerns. Like the Arab host states, Israel was far more invested in the status quo than its rhetoric suggested.

The Occupation and the Camps

For the first 19 years of its existence, Israel had limited direct dealings with UNRWA. From 1950-52, the Agency provided services to Jewish refugees inside Israel, who qualified for support as 'refugees from Palestine' after the 1948 War.¹²⁹ At the time of the 1949 Israeli-Arab armistice agreements, the UN counted around 45,000 Jewish refugees in Israel, mostly from the West Bank.¹³⁰ When UNRWA began operations the following year, it found 17,000 Jewish refugees and 28,000 Arab refugees inside Israel on its registration rolls.¹³¹ UNRWA worked with the new Israeli government to provide services to these people until 1952, when its programmes inside Israel were discontinued at the latter's request. Aside from negotiations during the brief Israeli occupation of Gaza in 1956, the two bodies subsequently had minimal contact until 1967.

¹²⁷ In 1968, the number of registered refugees in the OPT constituted 51% of the total population. See: Michelmores, 1968 report, paragraphs 7, 8, 62.

¹²⁸ Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 12, 44. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 186.

¹²⁹ Lance Bartholomeusz, 'The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, March 2010, p. 460.

¹³⁰ Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 35.

¹³¹ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 183.

The events of that year dramatically changed their relationship. Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza brought more than half a million registered Palestinian refugees and 27 camps¹³² under Israeli military rule.¹³³ In order to continue providing its services in these areas, UNRWA now had to work with the Israeli authorities, but doing so came with risks. Any visible cooperation with Israel would damage the Agency's reputation among the Palestinians, who blamed the Israeli state for their exile. It also risked jeopardising UNRWA's relations with the Arab host states, who accused it of collaborating with the occupation.¹³⁴ Those within UNRWA were well aware of the difficulties. In 1968, the Agency's West Bank Director wrote in a private letter that UNRWA's work in an Israeli-occupied area served to 'compound' the refugee problem 'rather than contributing to a satisfactory solution.'¹³⁵ Yet there was no real alternative other than for UNRWA to neglect its mandate.

The situation was made even more difficult by the long-standing Israeli perception that UNRWA was politically aligned to the cause of Palestinian nationalism. Michael Comay, the lead Israeli negotiator with UNRWA in 1967, remarked that this feeling was widespread: 'we'd worked up a lot of grievances against UNRWA. In general we thought that UNRWA had simply become an instrument to perpetuate the Arab refugee problem.'¹³⁶ Despite the government's subsequent decision to support UNRWA's work, such feelings never went away.¹³⁷ Labor politician Shimon Peres, who went on to become President of Israel, wrote in 1970:

¹³² See Appendix A on the refugee camps in Gaza; Appendix E on the refugee camps in the West Bank.

¹³³ Laurence Michelmore, 'Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General', A/6713, 30 June 1967, paragraph 1, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/eed216406b50bf6485256ce10072f637/>, accessed 31 August 2017.

¹³⁴ DUO/WB, memo to Commissioner-General, RE/C 600/S, 31 October 1968, File RE140(6)I, Box RE3, UHA.

¹³⁵ DUO/WB, memo to Drs Doron, Moses and Rosenfield, 25 November 1968, File RE140(6)I, Box RE3, UHA.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 185.

¹³⁷ See for example: Acting Commissioner-General, letter to Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 May 1978, File OR21(IS)I, Box OR59, UHA.

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

As Peres’ words show, senior Israeli politicians held UNRWA’s extensive services directly responsible for the continuing existence of a large Palestinian refugee population.

At the same time, the Israeli authorities realised the serious practical and financial problems they would incur if they eliminated the Agency in the OPT.¹³⁹ Accordingly, the two sides quickly reached an understanding in June 1967. In what became known as the Michelmores-Comay Agreement, Israel requested that UNRWA continue to provide services to refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, and agreed to facilitate its operations.¹⁴⁰ To avoid accusations of partisanship from the Arab host states, UNRWA’s Legal Department explicitly stated that this Agreement did ‘not imply any recognition’ of the Israeli occupation as legitimate.¹⁴¹ Indeed, UNRWA emphasised continually that it held to the UN’s condemnation of the occupation laid out in Security Council Resolution 242.¹⁴² Such an approach risked aggravating Israel, but at least enabled UNRWA to remain within the guidelines of the UN and thus minimise the criticism directed exclusively at the Agency.

Nevertheless, there were problems inherent in the Michelmores-Comay Agreement from the beginning. Its ambiguous division of responsibilities in

¹³⁸ Shimon Peres, *David’s Sling: The Arming of Israel* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 272.

¹³⁹ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 185-186

¹⁴⁰ Agreement reached between UNRWA and Israel on Aid to Palestine Refugees, 14 June 1967, File OR210(IS), Box OR59, UHA.

¹⁴¹ UN Legal Department Telegram, New York, 11 June 1987, File LEG480(IS)I, Box LEG22, UHA.

¹⁴² UNSC Resolution 242, S/RES/242, 22 November 1967,

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136>, accessed 31 August 2017.

the refugee camps was particularly troublesome – perhaps unsurprisingly, in view of these spaces’ importance as political hubs. In theory, tasks were divided such that UNRWA maintained ‘custody’ rights and continued to provide services in the camps, while Israel took charge of affairs relating to security and law and order.¹⁴³ In practice, this left a great deal up to interpretation. In the following years, Israel and UNRWA clashed repeatedly over the issue of jurisdiction in the camps. These clashes were inherently tied to two central themes of UNRWA’s work: its political significance and its quasi-state role.

Like the Arab host states, Israel was keen to emphasise UNRWA’s duty to provide services to the refugees and play down its own responsibility. It therefore declared the camps to be ‘essentially the responsibility of UNRWA’.¹⁴⁴ In fact, the Agency did expand its work in the OPT camps after 1967, and its Legal Adviser notified staff that due to the situation there, ‘the Agency may have to assume a larger profile in [governmental functions in the OPT] than in the [Arab] host countries.’¹⁴⁵ UNRWA-appointed Camp Services Officers were thus made responsible for maintaining internal order and ensuring ‘that camp residents comply with the Agency’s camp rules and regulations... initiating enforcement procedures when necessary.’¹⁴⁶ In these ways, the quasi-state characteristics of UNRWA’s work expanded and became particularly pronounced in the OPT camps, as it not only provided welfare services but also acted as the quasi-judiciary and arbiter.

However, this increasing movement into the usual domain of a state carried with it particular risks for UNRWA. If UNRWA-appointed officers were responsible for the camp residents’ compliance with rules, then it

¹⁴³ Note for the Record of Meeting, 1 March 1976, File RE410(WB)II, Box RE65, UHA.

¹⁴⁴ Record of meeting between DUO/WB and Israeli Senior Liaison Officers, 1 March 1976, File RE410(WB)II, Box RE65, UHA.

¹⁴⁵ Sinha, memo to Director of Relief Services, ‘Vacant Shelters’, 16 July 1981, File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, UHA.

¹⁴⁶ Fisher, memo to Michelmores, ‘Camps’, 1 April 1970, File RE400II, No Box, UHA.

followed that the Agency could also be held responsible for the refugees' behaviour if they broke the law or became involved in militant political activism - as was common. In this way, the two most loaded aspects of UNRWA's work coincided; the more it evolved into a quasi-state, the more it entered politicised territory and found its actions tinged with an increasingly political significance. Nowhere was this pronounced than in the highly charged and confrontational environment of the OPT.

The consequences were especially problematic because, as discussed in Chapter Two, the Israeli government tended to target the camps in its crackdowns on nationalist activity. This frequently led to heightened tensions with UNRWA. While Israel insisted that its actions were consistent with the Michelmores-Comay Agreement, it regularly disagreed with the Agency over what should come under the domain of 'security'. In the Israeli government's view, this included the right to take measures against politically-active camp residents who were hostile to the authorities.¹⁴⁷ However, UNRWA management complained that the Israeli interventions in the camps showed a disregard for the UN-granted immunity of their installations.¹⁴⁸ In 1981, for instance, the Agency's West Bank Director opposed the construction of a new road through Ein El Sultan Camp, claiming that this would encroach on a site 'held and operated by the Agency in trust.'¹⁴⁹ The following year, he complained to the Commissioner-General that the Israeli authorities were infringing on the terms of Michelmores-Comay by continually entering the camps, and stated that the Israeli army's actions were impeding the Agency from carrying out its work.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ UNRWA General Counsel, memo to UNRWA Legal Officer, RE 410/2, 21 December 1973, File RE410(WB) I, Box RE65, UHA.

¹⁴⁸ Director of UN General Legal Division, memo to UNRWA General Counsel, 3 December 1974, File 230(8)II, Box RE91, UHA.

¹⁴⁹ DUO/WB, letter to Major Mendes, 15 December 1981, File RE410(WB)II, Box RE65, UHA.

¹⁵⁰ DUO/WB, memo to Commissioner-General, OR/C 211/6, 29 January 1982, File RE410(WB)II, Box RE65, UHA.

In turn, the Israeli authorities resented what they perceived as UNRWA's inappropriate level of interference in security matters. They accused UNRWA of showing bias in its willingness to condemn Israeli action while not taking issue with aggression from the Palestinians.¹⁵¹ Moreover, Israeli officials argued that their actions in the camps were justified in view of UNRWA's poor record on maintaining security. Addressing the clash of jurisdictions in the camps, the Israeli Senior Liaison Officer for Civil Administration in the West Bank contended at one point that 'law and order in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] is under IDF responsibility', on the grounds that 'ever since 1967 experience has shown that UNRWA is not capable of handling security problems.'¹⁵² Israel claimed further justification for its policy in the camps after its invasion of Lebanon in 1982 brought forth evidence that the PLO was using UNRWA facilities for political and military purposes.¹⁵³ Protesting directly to the UN, the Israeli government declared not only that the camps were terrorist hotbeds, but also that UNRWA could not be trusted to maintain order inside.¹⁵⁴

These grievances are indicative of the commonalities between Israel and the Arab host states in their dealings with UNRWA. Their relationships were all characterised by clashes over jurisdiction, autonomy and immunity – although of course in Israel's case, the issue was rendered even tenser by its fundamentally antagonistic relationship with UNRWA's beneficiaries. Moreover, Israel, like the Arab host states, perceived UNRWA as a political body, and thus reacted to its activities through a political lens. Yet in other ways the dynamics of UNRWA's work in Israel were distinctive; in the setting of the occupation, the Agency increasingly came to represent and

¹⁵¹ Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 4.

¹⁵² Mendes, letter to Skinner, 2 December 1984, File LEG480(IS)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹⁵³ See Chapter Six on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

¹⁵⁴ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, letter to UNRWA, 29 June 1982, File RE 230/1(11), No Box, UHA. See also: *Palestine Refugees Today*, 101, January 1983, IPS, p. 6; 'Israel to protest PLO's use of UN Refugee Installations', *New York Times*, 30 June 1982, in Raphael Israeli, *PLO in Lebanon: Selected documents* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), pp. 294-296.

advocate for the Palestinian refugees and the camps, implicitly treating the latter as its own spheres. This was illustrative of both the Agency's quasi-state role and the camps' significance as distinctive spaces, in political as well as geographical and social terms.

The politics of UNRWA's work

When it came to UNRWA's services, its education programme proved the biggest source of tension in its relations with Israel. Successive Israeli governments complained that the UNRWA schools taught a 'Palestinian narrative'.¹⁵⁵ In fact, the Agency's schools in the OPT did not follow a particular UNRWA syllabus, but rather subscribed to the Jordanian curriculum in the West Bank and the Egyptian one in Gaza. Nevertheless, the Israeli authorities contended that the Agency's use of these countries' textbooks and maps constituted an endorsement of their content. This was especially problematic because of the strong perception that the said content advocated hostility to Israel.¹⁵⁶

Accordingly, the Israeli government closely examined the situation in UNRWA's OPT schools after 1967. It alleged that the textbooks promoted anti-Semitism through biased historical narratives and maps.¹⁵⁷ The clearance system that UNRWA had set up with UNESCO was deemed insufficient, and all textbooks now had to be approved by the Israeli Education Ministry as well.¹⁵⁸ The latter regularly refused the importation of certain books even after they had been cleared by UNESCO.¹⁵⁹ Some were reprinted with the offending passages left out.¹⁶⁰ Again, the issue of

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 27 January 2015.

¹⁵⁶ DUO/WB, 'Note for the Record', 22 March 1968, File RE140(6)I, Box RE3, UHA.

¹⁵⁷ Central Committee of Israel Teachers' Union to Confederation of Teaching Organisations, letter forwarded to UN Secretary-General, 8 July 1968, File RE230(WB)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin Schiff, 'Between Occupier and Occupied: UNRWA in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18:3, 1989, p. 65.

¹⁵⁹ UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today*, 65, December 1970, IPS, p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ Abraham Rabinovich, 'Back to Jordan curriculum in East Jerusalem schools', *Jerusalem Post*, 4 February 1976, File OR214(IS), Box OR59, UHA.

jurisdiction was raised, with the Commissioner-General instructing field staff to ‘maintain local autonomy... [and] maximum independence in our operations’, while avoiding action that would damage their relations with Israel.¹⁶¹

Further controversy arose over the findings of Israeli school inspectors, who were mostly concerned with maps, books and mottos.¹⁶² In 1969, they found slogans on the walls of camp schools, declaring ‘this is my land and my father died here/ we should destroy our enemies’, as well as ‘the Jews conquered our holy Jerusalem’, ‘we are all *fidā’iyyīn*’, ‘the jails are for heroes’, and ‘it is our duty to sacrifice ourselves for our country.’¹⁶³ The Agency played down the slogans’ significance in discussions with Israel, but internal correspondence reveals serious concern. In a letter to the Commissioner-General in 1969, the West Bank Director confided, ‘I believe UNRWA to be vulnerable in these matters’.¹⁶⁴

UNRWA’s status as a UN agency did not help matters. Many Israelis believed that the UNGA of the 1970s was in the hands of the pro-Palestinian ‘Third Worldist’ states, and was therefore biased against them.¹⁶⁵ They took UNGA Resolution 3379, which declared Zionism to be a form of racism, as proof of this.¹⁶⁶ As one of only two UN agencies to report directly to the UNGA, UNRWA was closely tied to it and was therefore tarred with the same brush.¹⁶⁷ The accusations of anti-Israeli bias grew from 1974 onwards, as the UNGA repeatedly called on UNRWA to report on Israel’s

¹⁶¹ Commissioner-General, memo to DUO/Gaza, 18 April 1978, File OR214(IS), Box OR59, UHA.

¹⁶² See for example: DUO/WB, Strictly Confidential Memo to Commissioner-General, RE/C 410/INSP, 18 March 1978, File OR214(IS), Box OR59, UHA.

¹⁶³ UNRWA Jerusalem Area Officer, memo to DUO/WB, CON/4/2, 27 March 1969 [Arabic]; Jerusalem Area Officer, confidential memo to DUO/WB, CON/4/2, 11 June 1969, both File RE 230(WB-3)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹⁶⁴ DUO/WB, letter to Commissioner-General, 23 June 1969, File RE230(WB-3)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹⁶⁵ Bruce Russett and Soo Yeon Kim, ‘The New Politics of Voting Alignments in the United Nations General Assembly’, *International Organization*, 50:4, 1996, pp. 636-639.

¹⁶⁶ UNGA Resolution 3379, A/RES/3379(XXX), 10 November 1975, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/761C1063530766A7052566A2005B74D1>, accessed 31 August 2017. For more on the reaction to UNGA Resolution 3379, see: Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. 23-27.

¹⁶⁷ Bartholomeusz, ‘The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty’, p. 454.

compliance with resolutions, thus essentially forcing it into a political role and making it increasingly difficult to characterise the Agency as solely humanitarian (a development discussed further in Chapter Six).¹⁶⁸

More than once, Israel complained to the UN about the Agency's politicisation. In 1974, the Israeli Permanent Representative to the UN claimed that 'for years the annual debates in the General Assembly on the reports of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA have been exploited by Arab and other delegations for political and propaganda purposes.'¹⁶⁹ The Israeli government also condemned the monitoring role that the UN had assigned to UNRWA, claiming that this contravened the Agency's humanitarian mandate by politicising it. Yet Israel always stopped short of calling for the Agency's dissolution, as the benefits of its work continued to outweigh the drawbacks.

Moreover, Israel was at times guilty itself of drawing UNRWA into a political role. As part of its protests about the presence of Palestinian nationalist ideology in UNRWA schools, Israel complained to UNRWA about students' political demonstrations.¹⁷⁰ It pressured the Agency to dismiss headteachers who were perceived to be encouraging political disorder,¹⁷¹ and at times threatened to close schools for this reason.¹⁷² These overtures are particularly interesting because of what they reveal about how the Israeli government perceived UNRWA's role. While it formally objected to the UN giving UNRWA a monitoring role in the OPT, the Israeli government itself nevertheless called the Agency to acts of political monitoring when it wanted to see its policies enforced.

¹⁶⁸ See for example: Kurt Waldheim, 'Report under resolution 3089C', A/9740, 17 September 1974, FCO 93/570, TNA. For more on the UNGA's instructions to UNRWA after 1974, see Chapter Six.

¹⁶⁹ Note by Israeli Permanent Representative to the UN, quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ UNRWA General Counsel, Inter-Office memo to Chief of Personnel & Administration Division, 'Temporary Closing of Schools', 3 April 1969, File RE 30(WB-3)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹⁷¹ DUO/Gaza, memo to Commissioner-General, 3 July 1971; Gaza Director, memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 6 October 1971; Refugee Services Officer in Khan Younis, memo to Gaza Director, 14 December 1971; Extract from letter from Gaza Director to Commissioner-General, 28 December 1971, all File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, UHA.

¹⁷² Gaza Director, memo to Field Education Officer, 7 September 1971, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, UHA.

It is thus evident that in common with the Arab host states, Israel walked a tightrope in its relationship with UNRWA. On the one hand, it was highly suspicious of UNRWA's embedded role in the refugee camps, which it saw as nests of Palestinian militancy. On the other hand, UNRWA's operations in the OPT saved Israel millions of dollars in service provision. Israel's dealings with the Agency were accordingly inconsistent and complicated, as it sought to limit UNRWA's power while always ensuring that its core programmes could and would continue.

The Donor States and UNRWA: Leverage through welfare

UNRWA's operations were ultimately dependent on donor aid. Funding came from a small number of donor states, which were overwhelmingly Western; the US consistently provided the largest proportion of UNRWA's budget, followed by the UK, Canada and France.¹⁷³ These states provided the Agency with substantial donations that were reasonably consistent but ultimately voluntary, giving them considerable leverage over the Agency's work. By contrast, the Arab states consistently refused to contribute to the Agency's General Fund,¹⁷⁴ contending that the Western states had enabled the Palestinian dispossession in 1948 and were therefore responsible for supporting the refugees.¹⁷⁵

The Western donor states strongly denied that their financial support for UNRWA constituted any form of penance for their actions in 1948. As Brynen notes, they instead framed their donations in utilitarian terms.¹⁷⁶ However, the fact that UNRWA's funding came largely from Western states

¹⁷³ UNRWA Annual reports, 1969-82,

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/udc.htm?OpenForm>, accessed 3 September 2017.

¹⁷⁴ Takkenberg, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees after Sixty years', p. 255. See also: Review of UNRWA by the twentieth session of the General Assembly, nd, S-1066-0065-0007, UNA.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 27 January 2015. On similar grounds, the Soviet Union also refrained from contributing in these years. See: Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁶ Brynen, 'UNRWA as Avatar', p. 6.

undoubtedly influenced its standing, and unsurprisingly generated suspicions among the refugees about the Agency's real motives. Such suspicions were reinforced by the preponderance of American, British and Canadian nationals within the Agency's top personnel, as well as the presence of the UK, US, France and Belgium on the UNRWA Advisory Commission, alongside Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Turkey. Indeed, when the UK invited Canada to join the Commission in 1958, British diplomats expressed concern that the Western over-representation might provoke Arab complaints.¹⁷⁷

There is some scholarly agreement that UNRWA's background and funding imbued it with a certain kind of politicisation. Schiff argues that Western financial support for UNRWA automatically gave the Agency a quasi-colonial feel, which was reinforced by the internal hierarchy between international and local staff.¹⁷⁸ Going further, Rosemary Sayigh points out that UNRWA's biggest donor states were all allies of Israel, and suggests that they sought to use the Agency as a way of phasing out the 'refugee problem'.¹⁷⁹ As shown in Chapter One, there is evidence to substantiate this; for at least the first decade of UNRWA's operations, it was fixated on engineering the Palestinian refugees' permanent resettlement in the Arab host countries through its 'Works' schemes. Yet even after these schemes failed, the same Western states continued to fund the Agency's operations, largely because they still saw it as an important stabilising force in a volatile region.

As this shows, UNRWA's critics were correct in their contentions that the Western states' motives for funding the Agency were not simply humanitarian, but came with a political edge. Most statesmen understood that without basic services, the refugees would be more likely to turn to

¹⁷⁷ N. Costar, Commonwealth Relations Office, letter to Francis Cumming-Bruce, UK High Commissioner in Canada, ME 242/55/5, 10 June 1958, DO 35/10092, TNA.

¹⁷⁸ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, ch. 6.

¹⁷⁹ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 111.

political extremism. In the context of the Cold War, the political extremism they feared most was communism, and as Schiff argues, there was a particular anxiety that without aid many Palestinian refugees might be susceptible to its charms.¹⁸⁰ In providing basic services to forestall absolute poverty, UNRWA's work became a crucial part of the strategy for combating communism and preventing revolution within the Middle East.¹⁸¹ Indeed, in diplomatic circles the US and UK made the case for funding the Agency on these very grounds, alerting statesmen of the potential 'threat to stability' that might otherwise arise.¹⁸² Internally, UK government officials openly acknowledged that their reasons for supporting UNRWA were 'overwhelmingly political'.¹⁸³ The Foreign Office described the Agency in 1977 as 'an important humanitarian *and political* priority' [italics added].¹⁸⁴

UNRWA management took heed of these motives. When appealing for the voluntary donations it desperately needed, the Agency continually emphasised its importance as a stabilising force in the Middle East. Its newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today* made the point repeatedly, explicitly stating that cuts in UNRWA's funding and services could lead to 'very serious effects on stability'.¹⁸⁵ In 1971, a UN Appeal to address UNRWA's funding shortages stated similarly that continued shortages would 'increase the tensions and contribute to the instability of the situation in the area'.¹⁸⁶ To

¹⁸⁰ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁸¹ British Embassy in US, letter to Trevor Evans, UK Foreign Office, 10 January 1950, File EE 1825, FO 371/82242, TNA.

¹⁸² See: Foreign Office, letter to Treasury, EE 1822/14, 11 April 1950; Ernest Bevin, letters to Foreign Ministers of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, 26 May 1950, both File EE 1822, FO 371/82236; Brief for Colombo: Palestine Refugees, nd, File EE 1825, FO 371/82243, all TNA.

¹⁸³ J.P.L. Gwynn, Treasury staff, letter to UN Department of FCO, Ref 2FD 541/91/01, 14 November 1974, FO 53/570 A, TNA.

¹⁸⁴ J. McDonough, Ministry of Overseas Development, letter to J. Everett, FCO, FAO 284/358/01, 15 February 1977, FCO 93/1303 A, TNA.

¹⁸⁵ UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today*, 52, February 1967, IPS, p. 2. The same point was repeated in numerous future issues across the years. See for example: *Palestine Refugees Today*, 64, October 1970, p. 9; 69, October 1971, p. 5; 91, January 1980, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Joint Appeal by Assembly President and Secretary-General for Funds to Ensure Continuation of Assistance Provided by UNRWA to Palestine Refugees, 17 November 1971, in UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today*, 70, December 1971, IPS, p. 14. The point was also made in the Agency's 1980 Report. See: Olof Rydbeck, Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General, A/35/13, 30 June 1980, paragraph 4,

many Palestinians, this was exactly the problem with UNRWA; it sought to mollify them and thus quieten their nationalist ardour.¹⁸⁷ Yet for the Agency, it was the most effective way to secure funding and ensure that its operations could continue.

The politics of aid

The years 1967-82 saw discernible changes in UNRWA's relations with the donor states, which had been smooth and effective for the first two decades of its operations. From the late 1960s, the donor states became increasingly concerned about the impact of the *thawra* in the refugee camps, and the implications for UNRWA. The US, UNRWA's largest donor, considered the PLO a terrorist organisation and virulently opposed any cooperation with it. Many Western European states took a similar position, albeit less forcefully. As their motivations for funding UNRWA were tied to its perceived value in preventing political extremism, its apparent connections to the PLO led many to question the purpose of continuing to support it.

Essentially, the donor states feared that UNRWA was becoming a markedly political Palestinian organisation rather than an international aid agency. At UN meetings in the 1970s, international parties expressed concerns about funding an Agency that had become, in their eyes, inappropriately political. In his 1974 Report, Commissioner-General Rennie himself acknowledged 'growing [international] recognition of the political dimension of the Palestine refugee problem' and added that this was adversely affecting perceptions of the Agency.¹⁸⁸ The British Foreign Office, while admitting internally that it contributed to UNRWA for 'overwhelmingly political' reasons, also realised the dangers of going too far

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/48F376B1C7E53E378525684D0069280A>, accessed 3 September 2017.

¹⁸⁷ See Chapter Four on the refugees' views of UNRWA.

¹⁸⁸ John Rennie, 'Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA', A/9613, 30 June 1974, FCO 93/570 B, TNA.

in this direction and was ‘anxious to reduce [UNRWA’s] political overtones to the minimum.’¹⁸⁹ In 1978 nine nations, including the US, UK and France, abstained to vote on renewing UNRWA’s mandate after several Arab states amended the resolution to include the assertion that ‘any attempt to restrict, or attach conditions to... the right of return’ was ‘inadmissible’.¹⁹⁰ The nine nations contended that this was inappropriately political for the mandate of a welfare agency. Although the mandate was successfully renewed nevertheless, the abstention was indicative of how the politics question was increasingly creating practical problems for UNRWA.

The subject was particularly controversial when it came to the US, UNRWA’s largest donor. As the *thawra* brought new international attention to the *fidā’iyyīn* and the camps, some American critics of UNRWA charged it with providing aid to refugees who belonged to anti-Israeli terrorist groups.¹⁹¹ In 1970, the US government attached to its financial support the condition that:

UNRWA take all possible measures to assure that no part of the United States contribution shall be used to furnish assistance to any refugee who is receiving military training as a member of the so-called Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) or any other guerrilla-type organization.¹⁹²

American concerns about UNRWA’s political positioning reached a crescendo in the early 1980s, during the most ideological period of the Reagan administration. Although some diplomats at the time argued that Washington’s leading support for UNRWA enhanced its relations with the Arab world, others objected that the Agency was anti-Israel and pro-PLO. Tensions came to a head when the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 led

¹⁸⁹ D. E. Blatherwick, FCO Near East and North Africa Department, letter to C. Battiscombe, 18 November 1974, FCO93/571B; J.P.L. Glwynn, letter to UN Department of FCO, 2FD 541/91/01, 14 November 1974, FO93/570A, both TNA.

¹⁹⁰ ‘UNRWA at the UNGA: Near East and North Africa’, 1978, FCO93/1776, TNA.

¹⁹¹ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 103.

¹⁹² US Representative UN to U Thant, Note A98USUN, 18 December 1970, File UN 10-4 1/1/71 Subject-Numeric File, RG 59, USNA.

to the discovery of a PLO training camp at the UNRWA Vocational Training Centre (VTC) in Sibliin.¹⁹³ The Reagan administration condemned UNRWA for having allowed the PLO to use the Centre for improper activities, including allegedly storing military equipment and indoctrinating students. At this stage the US reiterated its warning that funding for the Agency must not go towards guerrilla organisations.¹⁹⁴ Yet it did not speak of defunding UNRWA, conscious that the status quo gave it considerable leverage, and that the Agency was still far preferable to the alternatives.

Unsurprisingly, UNRWA management were alarmed by the donor states' criticisms. Tellingly, they identified the Agency's quasi-governmental role in the camps as the main reason for concerns about its politicisation. The notes from an internal UNRWA meeting in 1970 reveal 'concern about the effect of UNRWA's reputation of identification with the camps, with its implication of responsibility for the activities of refugees residing in them.'¹⁹⁵ In response, senior Agency staff tried to distance UNRWA from the camps in the international consciousness. In repeated official statements from the mid-1970s, they publicly emphasised the limitations of the Agency's power in the camps, and sought to highlight its work with non-camp refugees instead. Successive Commissioner-Generals emphasised that UNRWA had no legislative power over the camps and did not control or supervise camp residents.¹⁹⁶

To underline this further, UNRWA management even attempted to modify official terminology in order to create distance between the Agency and the camps. In 1970, the Director of Relief Services suggested to the Commissioner-General that it would be preferable to say that UNRWA 'supervises' rather than 'operates' or 'administers' the camps, in order to play

¹⁹³ See Chapter Six on the Sibliin controversy.

¹⁹⁴ Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, pp. 59-69.

¹⁹⁵ Extract from notes of General Cabinet Meeting, 14 September 1970, File RE400 II, No Box, UHA.

¹⁹⁶ See for example: UNIDO Cable, 20 July 1976, File RE 230(1)VII, Box RE91, UHA; UNRWA Annual reports, 1969-82, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/udchtm?OpenForm>, accessed 3 September 2017.

down its power.¹⁹⁷ The following year, the Deputy Commissioner-General issued a memo to Directors in all fields, telling them to ‘adopt terminology which will... discourage total identification of UNRWA with refugee camps.’ Accordingly, a ‘Camp Leader’ became an ‘UNRWA Services Officer’, although the accompanying suggestion of making a ‘refugee camp’ into a ‘refugee community’ was ineffectual.¹⁹⁸ From 1969 until the 1980s, Commissioner-Generals repeatedly stated in their annual reports that ‘the expression “UNRWA refugee camps” is misleading’.¹⁹⁹

Yet despite these efforts, the term ‘UNRWA refugee camp’ remained in use informally, much to the dismay of those trying to instigate the changes. These attempts to create distance, while ultimately unsuccessful, are important in demonstrating the camps’ centrality to the Palestinian nationalist movement, and the extent to which they defined broader perceptions of UNRWA – not to mention the increasing impossibility of presenting the Agency’s work as entirely detached from the quagmire of Palestinian politics.

Conclusion

The state of UNRWA’s international relations in the years 1967-82 is highly revealing. These years saw UNRWA’s work in the refugee camps come to define its purpose in the eyes of the world, despite the protestations of senior management that the Agency’s role in the camps was limited. Moreover, UNRWA’s association with the camps caused the Agency particular problems in view of the latter’s centrality to the *thawra*. As the host states and donor states all opposed the rising Palestinian nationalist movement – albeit for differing reasons and to different degrees – they

¹⁹⁷ Fisher, memo to Michelmores, RE400, 1 April 1970, File RE400 II, No Box, UHA.

¹⁹⁸ Rennie, memo to all DUOs, 11 February 1971, File RE400 III, No Box, UHA.

¹⁹⁹ UNRWA Annual reports, 1969-82, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/udc.htm?OpenForm>, accessed 3 September 2017.

became increasingly suspicious of UNRWA's operations, which they feared might be enabling the movement's ascendance in the camps.

Yet at the same time none of these states wanted to see the Agency abolished. Even Israel, which was the most vocally critical of UNRWA's work, supported the continuation of its services; like the Arab host states, it was more invested in the status quo than its rhetoric suggested. Similarly, the donor states' relationship with the Agency was characterised by a paradox, as their frequent criticism of UNRWA was juxtaposed with a refusal to countenance any alternatives. In this sense, UNRWA's international relations also challenges paradigms about regional dynamics; despite the enmity between Israel and the Arab states, their relationships with both the Agency and the Palestinian nationalist movement were characterised by a striking degree of similarity. As an example, then, this topic is indicative of how examining UNRWA's history can produce findings of wider relevance to the region, in this case by challenging simplistic binaries about the positioning of different states.

Furthermore, UNRWA's foreign relations in the years 1967-82 underline both the Agency's internationalism and its quasi-state nature. Despite UNRWA's limited autonomy and ultimate dependency on international funding, its unique place vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugee situation gave it a discernibly quasi-state positioning in many of its international relations. UNRWA often acted as the refugees' *de facto* diplomatic representative, and the host states and donor states tended to look to it to undertake matters of jurisdiction in the camps. While regularly complaining about its unreasonable politicisation, they were all happy to use it to their own ends when it suited them. As such, UNRWA's inter-state dynamics reinforced its quasi-state positioning and its *de facto* political significance – in line with how the donor states and the host states perceived it.

The pressures on UNRWA did not only come from the host states and donor states. Over the years, the Agency also experienced numerous challenges in its relationship with the refugees it served. While this group's leverage was structurally far more limited than that of the host or donor states, UNRWA was ultimately unable to function on a day-to-day basis without the basic cooperation of the refugees themselves. As such, this was a relationship no less critical to the Agency's operations. The tensions and characteristics of this more intimate relationship are accordingly examined in depth in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

UNRWA's domestic relations: The refugees and the Agency

*"The Jews got Israel and we got UNRWA."*¹
Salah Salah, Head of PNC Refugee Committee, 2014

Leading PLO figure Salah Salah once remarked that two major grievances dogged UNRWA's relationship with the Palestinian refugees. The first was operational; the refugees frequently complained that UNRWA's service provision was inadequate for their needs. The second was political; they regularly protested the Agency's political positioning, or lack thereof, in representing and protecting their rights.² The nature of these grievances reflects the refugees' perceptions of UNRWA, as both a Palestinian quasi-state and a local address for the UN. The Palestinians overwhelmingly saw the UN to be a political stakeholder in their situation, meaning that they perceived UNRWA as a fundamentally political organisation. Such a viewpoint was at odds with UNRWA's formal status as an apolitical aid agency. The resulting divergence in understanding UNRWA's purpose made its relationship with the refugees just as complex and paradoxical as the international relations detailed in Chapter Three – and just as centred around the Agency's international status.

This chapter probes the nature of UNRWA's relationship with the Palestinian refugees from 1967-82. It asks how the refugees perceived UNRWA's role and purpose, with a particular focus on their understanding of its quasi-state nature and its relation to the Palestinian nationalist cause. It also examines how UNRWA responded to these perceptions and tensions, both in terms of formal policy and through the informal behaviour of senior staff. This chapter thus addresses many of the same themes as the previous

¹ Quoted in Asger Gorup Nielsen, 'Is this UN agency merely a political tool for Western governments?', 11 November 2014, http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/culture/unrwa-in-lebanon-a-political-tool-for-western-governments_27855, accessed 13 March 2017.

² Interview with Salah Salah, Head of PNC Refugees' Commission, Beirut, 3 December 2016.

one, but from the perspective of UNRWA's beneficiaries rather than its hosts and providers. UNRWA's functioning as a Palestinian quasi-state and its resulting relationship with the Palestinian nationalist movement, which is the central concern of this thesis, cannot be understood without considering the key tenets and tensions of its interactions with the refugee community. In examining the latter, the chapter establishes a key aspect of the framework for this thesis.

UNRWA has been intimately connected with the refugees' daily lives since 1950. Accordingly, its relationship with them has been vulnerable to the impact of wider changes in the region, including an array of political, geographical and historical factors. The set-up is complicated further by the fact that neither the Palestinian refugees nor UNRWA itself is monolithic. The former are a diverse community whose experiences can vary considerably. The latter is a messy hybrid of the Western states that fund it and populate its senior ranks, the Arab states that host it, and the Palestinian refugees that staff its junior levels and receive its services. As a result, UNRWA's relationship with the refugees is not fixed or static, but dynamic and mutable. The paradoxical and at times even contradictory nature of the refugees' attitudes towards UNRWA has been mirrored in the Agency's responses to them, which were variously patronising, dismissive, loyal, protective, and solicitous.

Such complexities can be explained by disparities in the parties' respective understandings of the Agency's role. While figures on all sides have described UNRWA as a 'quasi-state', interpretations of what this means differ considerably. The Agency – here meaning UNRWA senior management, who were exclusively 'international' and in practice almost entirely Western citizens – tended to speak of UNRWA as a 'quasi-state' to denote the governmental nature of its health and education programmes. By contrast, most Palestinian refugees saw UNRWA as a quasi-state not only in

terms of its services, but in how it constituted a substitute for the real state lost in 1948 – a feeling encapsulated in Salah Salah’s comment that ‘the Jews got Israel and we got UNRWA’.³ This perception is grounded in UNRWA’s UN status, which led many refugees to see its work as compensation for the UN’s culpability in enabling the original partition of Palestine by way of UNGA Resolution 181.⁴ According to this viewpoint, UNRWA signified international responsibility for the Palestinian plight; as such, the refugees treated it as not a welfare agency but a political symbol of their rights.

As this chapter will show, such ideas directly informed the Palestinian refugees’ expectations. They saw UNRWA’s services not as charity but as entitlements; an UNRWA registration card signified not only one’s eligibility for services, but also one’s political rights as an internationally-recognised refugee. Accordingly, any moves by the Agency to reduce its services were greeted with horrified protests, as the refugees feared that their political rights were being undermined. On the same grounds, many held UNRWA responsible for their protection and resented its perceived failure to advocate for them politically on the world stage. In some cases, this fuelled suspicions that the Agency was a foreign implant, which served the objectives of its Western donor states and the Western-dominated UN. The case of the Palestinians thus rebuts many common assumptions about refugees and aid, as the former’s structural vulnerability did not prevent them from actively shaping the terms of their relationship with UNRWA.

It is argued here that UNRWA’s international status was key to its relationship with the Palestinian refugees, driving their perceptions and interactions. In making such an argument, this chapter contributes an important angle to the historiography. Peteet, Gabiam, Al Hussein, Brynen and Schiff have all acknowledged the Agency’s historical significance in the

³ Nielsen, ‘Is this UN agency merely a political tool for Western governments?’.

⁴ UNGA Resolution 181, *Future government of Palestine*, A/RES/181(II), 29 November 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253>, accessed 31 August 2017.

refugees' daily lives.⁵ Moreover, Schiff and Gabiam, along with Randa Farah, Sari Hanafi and Esmat Elhalaby have effectively shown the complex dynamics of the UNRWA-refugee relationship.⁶ However, they have generally neglected the significance of UNRWA's internationalism in this relationship – an omission which is redressed here.

This chapter is organised into three sections. The first looks at the underlying notions that drove the refugees' perceptions of UNRWA, focussing on how its UN affiliation was seen to mark it out as inescapably political and suspiciously close to the West. The second and third sections then examine the dominant representations of UNRWA, as shaped by both the refugees and the Agency itself. Specifically, the second section investigates the feelings of entitlement and ownership that stemmed from the refugees' views of UNRWA's quasi-state role, while the third focuses on their suspicion that UNRWA was a foreign implant. Accordingly, this chapter will demonstrate the reasons for the refugees' paradoxical relationship with the Agency, whereby they simultaneously regarded it as a manifestation of their political rights and a suspicious foreign implant. In doing so it will uncover the key elements of the relationship that provided the framework and foundations for UNRWA's interactions with the Palestinian nationalist movement during the *thawra*.

⁵ Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian refugee camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Nell Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering: Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2016); Jalal Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40:1, Autumn 2010, pp. 6-26; Rex Brynen, 'UNRWA as Avatar: Current debates on the Agency – and their Implications' in Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal and Lex Takkenberg (ed.s), *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees: From Relief and Works to Human Development* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 263-283; Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

⁶ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*; Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering*; Randa Farah, 'Uneasy but Necessary: The UNRWA-Palestinian relationship', Al Shabaka policy brief, 30 November 2010, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/uneasy-necessary-unrwa-palestinian-relationship/>, accessed 21 August 2017; Sari Hanafi, 'UNRWA as a "phantom sovereign": Governance practices in Lebanon' in Hanafi, Hilal and Takkenberg, *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees*, pp. 129-142; Esmat Elhalaby, 'Paradoxes of UNRWA', *Dissent*, 2 March 2018, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/paradoxes-unrwa-palestine-refugees-israel-usa-trump-cuts, accessed 5 March 2018.

The refugees' perceptions: UNRWA as UN body

For many refugees, the circumstances of UNRWA's set-up were pivotal to how they understood its significance. In particular, many of their judgements about the Agency were based on the fact that it was a UN body reliant on Western funding. Their grievances and sense of entitlement were regularly framed in terms of the Agency's affiliation to the UN, which they understood in overwhelmingly political terms. As discussed in Chapter One, this association did not bode well for the Agency. The Palestinians had been largely hostile towards the UN ever since UNGA Resolution 181 had approved the partition of Palestine in November 1947.⁷ In the eyes of some, it was further tainted by the actions of its predecessor, the League of Nations, in legitimising British rule from 1922.⁸ Moreover, as Farah has pointed out, suspicion towards the UN from Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular was exacerbated by its decision to admit Israel as a full Member State in May 1949, while the refugees remained dispossessed and stateless.⁹

The resulting Palestinian hostility towards the UN also extended to UNRWA.¹⁰ To many refugees, the Agency was simply the local face of the Western-dominated international community that oversaw the UN.¹¹ They accordingly approached it with considerable suspicion and sometimes outright hostility; indeed, Hanafi has identified mistrust as the dominant feature of the relationship.¹² Schiff writes of how many refugees suspected that UNRWA was functioning as a tool of imperialist Western diplomacy in the Middle East, and refugees' testimonies corroborate this.¹³ In his

⁷ UNGA Resolution 181, *Future government of Palestine*, A/RES/181(II), 29 November 1947.

⁸ The Palestine Mandate, 24 July 1922, GB165-0161, File 1, Box 69, MECA.

⁹ Farah, 'Uneasy but necessary', p. 5.

¹⁰ Philip Issa, 'Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian leadership in 1950s Lebanon', MA thesis, University of Texas, 2015, p. 67.

¹¹ Interview with Zizette Darkazally, UNRWA Chief Communications Officer, Beirut, 26 January 2015.

¹² Hanafi, 'UNRWA as a "phantom sovereign"', p. 132.

¹³ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 101.

autobiography, for example, Fawaz Turki disdainfully described UNRWA as an agency of ‘the very body [the UN] that was responsible for our original displacement.’¹⁴ Hajj Amin el Husseini made the same point to the Director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon in 1963, when asked why so many Palestinians mistrusted the Agency.¹⁵

Such suspicion did not only manifest itself in the refugees’ words. Some saw UNRWA’s UN status as sufficient grounds to organise against it. In 1960, a group calling themselves the ‘Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon’ – previously mentioned in Chapter One – issued the following statement:

the UN who is in the origin a cause in the disaster cannot be considered the suitable Organisation to solve the Palestine Problem... the Relief Agency [UNRWA] is a danger threatening [the Palestinian] cause particularly because it executes the many projects according to an Imperialistic Jewish plan [sic].¹⁶

It is clear from this statement that UNRWA’s UN status led some refugees to perceive it as a political organisation and not merely a welfare agency as it claimed. Such perceptions were fuelled by the knowledge that UNRWA received the bulk of its funding from Western states which were allied to Israel. As explained in Chapter Three, UNRWA’s operations relied on voluntary donations from Western governments, chiefly the US and UK.¹⁷ In the eyes of many refugees, these were the two states most hostile to their interests.¹⁸ As a result, their financial power over the Agency created suspicions about its real intentions.¹⁹

¹⁴ Fawaz Turki, *Exile’s Return: The Making of a Palestinian-American* (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 153.

¹⁵ Note DUA/L-1, 21 November 1963, File RE 150 II, Box RE 3, UHA.

¹⁶ Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon, Statement, 1 January 1960, File RE150 I, Box RE3, UHA [UNRWA translation].

¹⁷ Review of UNRWA by the twentieth session of the General Assembly, nd, S-1066-0065-0007, UNA.

¹⁸ On the US’ historical policy in Palestine, see: Irene Gendzier, *Dying to Forget: Oil, Power, Palestine, and the Foundations of US Policy in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). When it came to the UK, many Palestinians continued to feel aggrieved over the Balfour Declaration. See for example: Issa Nakhleh, Statement to the UNGA, 14 November 1974, S-0907-0012-0006, UNA; *PLO information bulletin*, 3, 16, 1 November 1977, IPS.

¹⁹ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 46.

To make matters worse, UNRWA's internal staffing structures ensured that power remained in the hands of its 'international' employees – who were in reality nearly always Western. The Palestinian refugees who constituted the vast majority of UNRWA employees were consistently, if unofficially, blocked from positions of senior management.²⁰ This caused considerable resentment, and gave added weight to the feeling that the Agency was really a neo-colonial body imposed on the Middle East by the West. Further evidence of the latter was drawn from the fact that until the appointment of Turkish diplomat İlder Türkmen in 1991, every UNRWA Director and Commissioner-General had been North American or Western European²¹ - and the same has been true since Türkmen's departure in 1996.

The refugees' suspicions about UNRWA were thus clearly and closely tied to its international set-up at the UN. Yet as Peteet points out, the refugees' views of the latter were often ambiguous,²² and suspicion was not the only sentiment. UNRWA's status as a UN body also created a strong sense of entitlement. Many refugees felt that UNRWA existed as an international obligation, even a meagre form of compensation, for the world's abandonment of them in 1947-48; and as previously explained, they held the Western powers largely responsible, in view of their dominant position in global politics.²³ Interestingly John Davis, who served as UNRWA's Commissioner-General from 1959-63, later made a similar point, describing the Agency as 'one of the prices – and perhaps the cheapest – that the international community was paying for not having to solve with equity the political problems of the refugees.'²⁴

²⁰ On proportions of Palestinian staff at UNRWA see: *Palestine Refugees Today*, 74, December 1972; 80, December 1974, both at IPS. *Palestine Refugees Today* 93, July 1980, RSC.

²¹ 'UNRWA, 1950-90: Serving Palestine refugees', Box GP59.3 UNRWA, RSC.

²² Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 91.

²³ Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority and the Work of Rule* (London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 138.

²⁴ Elhalaby, 'Paradoxes of UNRWA'.

In the eyes of the refugees, this made UNRWA an international symbol and signifier of their political and legal rights.²⁵ As such, its services were their entitlement, its registration cards proof of their political rights.²⁶ This idea remained pervasive despite UNRWA's denials of such an interpretation.²⁷ Consequently, the refugees were keen for the Agency's work to continue, despite their criticisms of it, and tended to react with alarm to any suggestion that it might be dissolved before their plight was resolved.²⁸

Moreover, many refugees were keen to take advantage of having a 'local address' for the UN in their midst. They saw UNRWA's affiliation as sufficiently significant to try to use the Agency as a medium for reaching the UN. In 1961, a group of refugees in Jordan wrote to the Commissioner-General, first asking him for water and then requesting that he:

Inform the United Nations that we will never be able to forget our dear homeland, no matter how long we shall have to endure this miserable condition. We shall not accept any substitute for our homeland, nor relinquish it for any bribe.²⁹

Then on the fifteenth anniversary of the Partition Plan, a group of refugees in Lebanon distributed a pamphlet around the camps calling for a boycott of UNRWA services in order to 'make our objections and persistence heard by the United Nations.'³⁰ This conception of UNRWA continued to hold sway in later years. In 1968, Palestinian women's associations across the OPT sent petitions protesting the occupation to both UNRWA Commissioner-General Michelmore and Secretary-General Thant.³¹ Three years later,

²⁵ Brynen, 'UNRWA as Avatar', pp. 267-269. Randa Farah, 'UNRWA: Through the Eyes of Its Refugee Employees in Jordan', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, March 2010, p. 390.

²⁶ Nell Gabiam, 'When "Humanitarianism" becomes "development": The Politics of International Aid in Syria's Palestinian refugee camps', *American Anthropologist*, 114, 1, 2012, p. 101.

²⁷ Interview with Matthew Reynolds, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in Washington, and Chris McGrath, UNRWA Liaison Officer, Washington DC, 7 April 2016.

²⁸ Interview with Hasna Rida, former UNRWA Education Research Assistant, Beirut, 7 December 2016.

²⁹ Quoted in Elhalaby, 'Paradoxes of UNRWA'.

³⁰ 'The Palestinians in Lebanon', Statement, 29 November 1962, File RE150 I, Box RE3, UHA.

³¹ Petitions from citizens of the Jordan West Bank and Gaza Strip – Arab sector of Jerusalem, 20 May 1968, S-0667-0006-03, UNA.

refugees in Gaza appealed unsuccessfully to UNRWA to compel the UN to stop Israeli house demolitions.³² The idea of reaching the UN via UNRWA was therefore a pervasive one.

The nature of the refugees' most major grievances against the Agency reflects this simultaneous presence of suspicion and entitlement. Their complaints were usually expressed within the framework of UNRWA's international status, with the refugees pointing to the Agency's place at the UN when complaining about its inadequacies. Their feelings of entitlement stemmed from the UN's failings in 1947-48; their suspicion was based on the UN's perceived neo-colonial structures.³³ The implications of each of these elements for the refugee-Agency relationship shall now be examined in turn.

Entitlement and ownership: UNRWA as quasi-state

The Palestinian refugees were not alone in probing the political meaning of aid programmes. Many scholars have asked similar questions. Anthropologist Lissa Malkki argues that aid-based humanitarian interventions tend to depoliticise refugees by treating them as individual humanitarian subjects outside of their collective historical and geographical contexts.³⁴ Didier Fassin similarly writes that humanitarian regimes compel recipients to become 'not political subjects but moral objects', losing agency and autonomy.³⁵ The Palestinian refugees comprise an instructive case study here, as their situation is both highly political and governed by a decades-long aid regime in the form of UNRWA. By examining the latter's historical

³² Code cable 53, Rennie to Guyer/Urquhart, 13 August 1971, S-0169-0009-09, UNA.

³³ On the UN's neo-colonial dynamics see: Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³⁴ Lissa H. Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11:3, August 1996, pp. 377-404.

³⁵ Didier Fassin, 'Inequality of Lives, Hierarchies of Humanity: Moral commitments and ethical dilemmas of humanitarianism', in Ilana Feldman (ed.), *The Government of Threat and Care* (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 238-255.

development, this thesis contributes a new angle to the broader scholarly discussion on the politics of aid, through a long-term case study.

The political significance of aid is particularly acute in the Palestinian case, in view of the tendency for international political discourse in the decades after the Nakba to separate the humanitarian ‘Arab refugee’ issue from the political Palestinian nationalist struggle.³⁶ As Hanafi writes, such a distinction meant that UNRWA’s work risked undermining the refugees’ political resistance, by presenting their plight in purely humanitarian terms.³⁷ It is argued here that the refugees were themselves aware of this risk, and accordingly consistently rejected the notion that UNRWA’s services constituted aid. Instead, they insistently saw it as a political organisation, and accepted its relief services as rights, not charity.

Their approach was fuelled by the fact that many Palestinian refugees found the idea of receiving aid to be shameful and humiliating, particularly if they had previously been self-sufficient agriculturalists in pre-1948 Palestine.³⁸ They further resented the implication that their plight was humanitarian rather than political. In 1953, notables from villages in southern Palestine held a conference for refugees in Gaza, where they stated that ‘we want to return home. We do not want [UN] food and shelter.’³⁹ With these words, they made it clear that aid could never be a substitute for political action, and that they would not accept it as such. This would prove a lasting motif among the Palestinian refugees. As discussed in Chapter

³⁶ Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 34-35. Brynen, ‘UNRWA as Avatar’, pp. 263-264. Petecet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 124. For an example of depoliticised Western depictions of the Palestinian refugee problem see: *Sands of Sorrow* (1950), https://archive.org/details/sands_of_sorrow, accessed 6 June 2017.

³⁷ Hanafi, ‘UNRWA as “phantom sovereign”’, pp. 132-133.

³⁸ On the refugees’ feelings of humiliation see: Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), p. 55; Turki, *The Disinherited*, pp. 56-57; Leila Khaled, *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), pp. 28-36; Abdel Bari Atwan, *A Country of Words: A Palestinian Journey from the Refugee Camp to the Front Page* (London: Saqi, 2008), p. 27; Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 129.

³⁹ Quoted in Salman Abu Sitta, *Mapping My Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (New York: American University of Cairo Press, 2016), p. 118.

Two, even the term ‘refugee’ itself was unpopular due to its connotations of powerlessness and denationalisation.⁴⁰

Such foundations shaped how the refugees responded to UNRWA’s services. While they did not refuse the Agency’s provisions, they were adamant in accepting them on their own terms, as entitlements rather than charity.⁴¹ Provisions such as rations were not considered welfare but political proof of their refugee status and resulting political rights – a persistent construction noted by Peteet, Gabiam, Feldman and Kagan.⁴² As discussed in Chapter One, the Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon proclaimed in its 1960 statement that ‘the services of our Agency are our rights and not favours or charity from her’.⁴³ The language of this phrase is doubly telling, even in translation – not only do the refugees speak of services as rights, but they also refer to UNRWA as ‘our’ Agency [*wikālatna*], indicating a sense of ownership over its operations. This reflects a long-running intimacy between the two, which was so pronounced that their relationship has often been characterised in familial terms. Al Husseini calls it ‘a difficult but lasting marriage’,⁴⁴ while Turki used the aforementioned less positive moniker of ‘our contemptuous stepmother’ to describe the Agency.⁴⁵

Al Husseini further argues that the kind of sustained politicisation outlined above was crucial in enabling the refugees to avoid mass psychological dependence on aid and retain a sense of autonomy.⁴⁶ Yet Farah points out that there is an inherent paradox in the UNRWA-refugee

⁴⁰ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 124.

⁴¹ Interview with Maria Kekeliova, former UNRWA Operations Support Officer in Gaza, Almere, 18 September 2015.

⁴² Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 138. Gabiam, ‘When “Humanitarianism” becomes “development”’, p. 96, 101. Michael Kagan, ‘“We live in a country of UNHCR:” The UN surrogate state and refugee policy in the Middle East’, Research Paper No. 201, February 2011, p. 4. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 81.

⁴³ Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon, Statement, 1 January 1960, File RE150 I, Box RE3, UHA [UNRWA translation].

⁴⁴ Jalal Al Husseini, ‘UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40:1, Autumn 2010, pp. 6-26.

⁴⁵ Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 58.

⁴⁶ Al Husseini, ‘UNRWA and the Refugees’, p. 8.

relationship as a result; the Agency's work is based on providing services to beneficiaries, but the refugees conceptualise themselves in fundamentally political terms.⁴⁷ It is argued here that the most important feature of this paradox was the refugees' success in establishing and maintaining their contrarian view of the Agency's services, despite their position of vulnerability and structural powerlessness. The following sections outline the ways in which they managed to do so.

UNRWA Services: Demands, complaints and cuts

UNRWA's provision of services constituted its *raison d'être* in the camps, and was in many ways the backbone of its relationship with the Palestinian refugees. Maria Kekeliova, a former UNRWA employee in Gaza, has commented on the direct correlation between the Agency's provision of services and the level of harmony in UNRWA-refugee relations; whenever cuts in the former were announced, problems in the latter ensued.⁴⁸ Again, this was usually based on the notion of services as rights, with the refugees tending to argue that they were entitled to more than they were receiving.⁴⁹

This understanding was deep-seated enough for the refugees to organise formal protests on its basis from very early on. In 1961, the Chairman of the Damascus branch of the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) wrote to the UNRWA Area Director complaining about the Agency's 'trifle assistance', and calling for increased services for the refugees. He framed these demands in terms of the refugees' political entitlements:

It is the duty of UNRWA to alleviate the pains of [the Palestine refugees]... The responsible persons in UNRWA are called not to forget that the people of Palestine have been wronged and oppressed.

⁴⁷ Farah, 'Uneasy but Necessary', p. 5.

⁴⁸ Interview with Maria Kekeliova, former UNRWA Operations Support Officer in Gaza, Almere, 18 September 2015.

⁴⁹ Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, p. 101.

It is the duty of humanity which caused this oppression to secure for this people the means of tranquillity and easiness. [sic]⁵⁰

In other words, UNRWA services were a form of penance from the international community and as such, there could be no excuse for their inadequacy.⁵¹

In keeping with this perspective, any reductions in UNRWA services were met not only with fierce protests, but with outrage and alarm over their implications. If the services were evidence of international duty towards the refugees, then it followed that service reductions may be a sign of this duty being relinquished. UNRWA itself was long aware of how dominant this idea was. As early as 1956, Director Labouisse had expressed his concern that the refugees would perceive programme cuts as ‘part of a politically inspired programme of gradual withdrawal of UN support.’⁵² Around the same time, the Jordanian government protested UNRWA’s investigations into its registration rolls, fearing that the move would precipitate mass protests.⁵³ This intervention by a host government shows how such ideas were not only long-standing, but also significant enough to be noted by numerous parties.

The refugees’ alarm over cuts tended to be particularly acute when it came to actions by the Agency to restrict its eligibility criteria, which generated fears of a greater plan to dissolve UNRWA and abandon the refugees altogether.⁵⁴ As a result, the latter were always quick to organise against any such measures. In the West Bank, camp residents refused rations

⁵⁰ Chairman of the Damascus Branch of the General Union of Palestine Students, letter to DUO/Damascus, 27 August 1961, File RE230(S)1, Box RE21, UHA.

⁵¹ Milton Viorst, *Reaching for the Olive Branch: UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East* (Washington DC: Middle East Institute, 1984), p. 66. Brynen, ‘UNRWA as Avatar’, pp. 267-269.

⁵² Henry Labouisse, Memo of Conversation with UN Secretary-General, 25 July 1956, File OR 100 I, Box OR1, UHA.

⁵³ John Reddaway, ‘UNRWA: a second look at the record – were the critics mistaken?’, *New Middle East*, 16, January 1970, p. 21. Ilana Feldman, ‘The Challenges of Categories: UNRWA and the Definition of a “Palestine Refugee”’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25:3, 2012, p. 396.

⁵⁴ Interview with Yazid Zahda, UNRWA West Bank Officer, The Hague, 16 September 2015. Interview with Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in New York and former UNRWA Director in Lebanon, New York, 24 February 2017.

in November 1967 in protest at intensified eligibility checks and attempts by UNRWA to reduce its recipient lists.⁵⁵ Six years later, unregistered refugees in Syria protested an UNRWA directive for them to pay school fees, insisting that an UNRWA education was their right as Palestinian refugees.⁵⁶

Such anxieties intensified after UNRWA began making systematic service cuts in the 1970s, in an attempt to tackle its funding shortfall. This fed directly into fears that its work was being gradually dissolved. Agency management were aware of this, but reasoned that the deficit left them with no other option. Voicing internal concerns about the possible repercussions, UNRWA official Thomas Jamieson wrote to a colleague that any termination in services ‘would most probably create major despair...and suspicion.’⁵⁷

Unsurprisingly, he was proven correct. The late 1970s saw the refugees organise mass protests against the UNRWA cuts, doing everything possible to voice their opposition. Abdullah Bishaway, the *mukhtār* of Balata camp in the West Bank, reiterated the refugees’ sense of entitlement regarding UNRWA when he wrote to the Commissioner-General in 1979 that ‘we are your responsibility and you should provide us with relief, care and services.’⁵⁸ That same year, Bishawy and other *mukhtārs* from camps in the West Bank organised strikes and sit-ins to protest UNRWA reductions in services and rations.⁵⁹ Agency staff on the ground reported to the UN Secretariat in New York that the large-scale strikes were hindering operations.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ UNRWA Public Information Office, Press note, 11 November 1967, File RE140-1(3)I, Box RE3, UHA.

⁵⁶ DUA/Lebanon, Memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 19 December 1970, File RE210-03(L), Box RE7, UHA.

⁵⁷ Thomas Jamieson, Statement ‘Palestine Refugee Problem’, nd, File OR110 II, Box OR1, UHA.

⁵⁸ Abdullah Bishawy, letter to UNRWA Commissioner-General, 22 October 1979, File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, UHA.

⁵⁹ UNRWA Jordan Public Information Office, Press Review 49/79, 21 March 1979, File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, UHA.

⁶⁰ See for example: Code cable, Sharif to Van Wijk, 27 May 1976, S-0169-0010-0001, UNA.

From the Agency's perspective, it found itself stuck on the receiving end of the refugees' complaints without having the power to properly address them. As noted at the outset of Chapter Three, the Commissioner-General's office stated in 1979 that 'UNRWA walks a tightrope between the aspirations of the Palestinians and the stance of the host Governments ... on the one hand and, on the other, the requirements [of] its major contributors.'⁶¹ As a result, senior management responded to the West Bank protests that year with some frustration. In his reply to Bishawy, UNRWA's Director of Administration, Relief and Information wrote:

Contrary to your belief, the Commissioner-General has drawn attention to the plight of the Palestine refugees in his Annual Report to the UN General Assembly and has just appealed once again to Member States of the UN for the funds necessary to maintain and improve UNRWA's services to the refugees.⁶²

This response is telling. While rebutting the suggestion that UNRWA was doing nothing to support the Palestinian refugees, Director Defrates also highlights the Agency's place in the wider picture. He implicitly points out that while UNRWA has highlighted the refugees' plight to the UN, it is ultimately dependent on the latter's Member States to provide it with the necessary funding in order for it to act. In making this point, Defrates seeks to assert the Agency's concern for the refugees while at the same time emphasising the limitations of what it can do. As Ghida Frangieh writes, it was essentially committed to an obligation for which it was not the decision-maker.⁶³ However, such protestations from Agency staff failed to quell the refugees' complaints.

As explained in Chapter One, the refugees placed a special importance on education. They therefore reacted to cuts in this programme with

⁶¹ Office of UNRWA Commissioner-General, Memo, 16 May 1979, File OR110 II, Box OR1, UHA.

⁶² John F. Defrates, letter to Abdullah Bishawy, 6 November 1979, File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, UHA.

⁶³ Ghida Frangieh, 'Relations between UNHCR and Arab Governments: Memoranda of Understanding in Lebanon and Jordan', in *The Long-Term Challenges of Forced Migration: Perspectives from Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq*, LSE Middle East Centre Collected Papers, vol. 6, September 2016, pp. 33-39.

particular alarm. In 1970, refugees at two camps in Jordan organised strikes in response to rumours that eligibility for registration at UNRWA schools was to be restricted.⁶⁴ The rumours turned out to be false; in fact UNRWA management were aware of education's importance and accordingly tried to protect it from the cuts for as long as possible.⁶⁵ However they could not do so completely. The 1970s saw the Agency decrease its education grants, prompting student sit-ins at schools in Lebanon.⁶⁶ As its financial situation worsened, UNRWA introduced double- and triple-shifting in its schools from 1978, meaning that two or three different groups of students would be taught over the course of a single day (Fig. 16). This allowed UNRWA to save resources but reduced the students' access to teaching. In 1981 the Agency went even further, distributing provisional termination notices to 5,000 teachers in Jordan and Syria. In keeping with their long-term concerns, many refugees took this as the first move in a greater plan to liquidate the Agency completely and consign their cause to international oblivion.⁶⁷

The variation in the assistance that host states provided to the refugees, detailed in Chapter Three, meant that the UNRWA cuts did not have an equal impact across the fields. Yet the refugees' opposition to them, and the grounds on which it was based, tended to be universal. Across the Agency's fields, the refugees maintained the line that its services were their right. They consistently rejected the Agency's defence that its funding shortfall compelled it to distinguish between them and prioritise some beneficiaries over others.⁶⁸ This marked one way in which UNRWA helped maintain the

⁶⁴ Note for the Record of a Meeting with the Minister of Development & Reconstruction at 10:00 on 6 April 1970, File RE230(J)III, Box RE20, UHA.

⁶⁵ This was explained in an article of the UNRWA newsletter in 1970. *Palestine Refugees Today*, 65, December 1970, IPS, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Field Administrative Officer Lebanon, Memo to Commissioner General, 30 May 1970, File RE230(L-1) II, Box RE20, UHA. See also: DUA/Lebanon, Memo to Comptroller, 5 March 1970, File RE210/03(L), Box RE7, UHA.

⁶⁷ 'UNRWA's mid-life crisis', *Middle East International*, 13 November 1981.

⁶⁸ Interview with Zizette Darkazally, UNRWA Chief Communications Officer, Beirut, 26 January 2015.

refugees' shared Palestinian consciousness across the borders of the host states, as is discussed in more depth in Chapter Five. As Ghassan Shabaneh argues, this was a key part of the Agency's significance, regardless of the fact that from UNRWA's perspective such an effect was inadvertent and unintended.⁶⁹

<Figure 16 unavailable due to copyright>

UNRWA and refugee rights

The depth and nature of the refugees' feelings of entitlement towards UNRWA's services are indicative of its *de facto* role as their quasi-state government. Salah Salah's comment that 'the Jews got Israel and we got UNRWA', quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is highly revealing in this sense.⁷⁰ In juxtaposing the creation of Israel with the establishment of UNRWA, Salah alludes to the idea that the Agency emerged directly out of the UN's failure to guarantee the Palestinian state envisioned in Resolution 181. He also invokes a deeper idea prevalent among many refugees: that UNRWA is an inferior compensation prize given to the Palestinians while their Jewish counterparts got a fully-fledged nation-state with a full infrastructure and army. Such thinking has fuelled criticism of UNRWA as a toothless quasi-state that lacked sufficient funding and, in the eyes of many refugees, failed to properly advocate for their rights on the world stage.

This analysis of course begs the question of what really constitutes a 'state' at all. Max Weber famously defined the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in a particular territory'.⁷¹ More recently Anthony D. Smith has

⁶⁹ Ghassan Shabaneh, 'Refugees, International Organizations, and National identity: The Case of Palestine', *New Political Science*, 32, 3, June 2010, p. 219.

⁷⁰ Nielsen, 'Is this UN agency merely a political tool for Western governments?'

⁷¹ Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991 edn), p. 78.

similarly emphasised the state's monopolisation of coercion.⁷² Using these definitions, UNRWA obviously falls far short of being anything close to a state. It lacks any kind of security or policing apparatus to impose its will, does not hold territory and remains a guest at the invitation of the various host states. The Agency itself has consistently highlighted this when trying to distance itself from the camps' militancy, emphasising that it was not involved in the domain of security services, and as such did not manage the camps as extra-territorial spaces.⁷³

However, UNRWA does fulfil some of the other functions of the modern state in its provision of services. In taking responsibility for providing large-scale health and education programmes to a particular group of people in certain demarcated territories, UNRWA holds some of the roles that would otherwise fall to a state. Hanafi speaks of it as a 'phantom sovereign', highlighting the *effects* of state-like power that emanate from UNRWA's services, and the way in which the refugees perceive its role as a result.⁷⁴ UNRWA thus holds some of the governmental features of a state without its security functions – hence being referred to here as a 'quasi-state'. This makes it worthy of consideration in discussions about the relationship between state, government, citizens and national identity.

The implications of UNRWA's quasi-state nature for Palestinian national identity are examined in depth in the next chapter. The focus here is on the more fundamental question of how this role was understood by the Agency and refugees respectively, and what the resulting contestations meant for their relationship. It was generally agreed by all parties that UNRWA's large-scale health and education programmes were in many ways

⁷² Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 12.

⁷³ See for example: Haycock, Memo OP/AD/100 to Director of Relief Services, 3 March 1970; Extract from General Cabinet Meeting, 14 September 1970, both in File RE400 II, No Box, UHA. Sinha, Memo to Deputy Commissioner-General, 5 March 1980; Memo CM13/80, Office of the Commissioner-General, 3 June 1980, both in File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, UHA. UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today*, 69, October 1971; 80, December 1974; 83, March 1977, all in IPS. Letter from C. William Kontos, UNRWA Acting Commissioner-General, *New York Times*, 8 July 1972.

⁷⁴ Hanafi, 'UNRWA as "phantom sovereign"'.

equivalent to those usually provided by a functioning state to its citizens.⁷⁵ Matthias Schmale, the former UNRWA Director in Lebanon, has commented that Palestinian refugees often told him that they saw the Agency as akin to a government in its provision of services.⁷⁶ However, UNRWA management diverged from the refugees when it came to how they interpreted the repercussions of this.

For many refugees, the quasi-state nature of UNRWA's work fed directly into their aforementioned sense of entitlement to its services. When non-registered Palestinian refugees in Syria protested at having to pay UNRWA school fees, they did so on the grounds that 'it is their *right, as Palestinians*, to have their education at UNRWA schools free of charge [emphasis added].⁷⁷ The reference to their Palestinian nationality is telling; the terminology implies that UNRWA has an obligation to *all* Palestinians, just as a national government would to all its citizens. In a more explicit expression of this idea, the Lebanon Branch of the GUPS spoke of UNRWA's 'commitments towards its populace,' stating that 'right of tuition should be granted to all Palestinians who simply hold the Palestine nationality...'⁷⁸

Interestingly, the former UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi recently expounded a similar idea when defending the Agency's practice of providing free healthcare education to all registered refugees, regardless of their individual financial circumstances. Grandi argued that all registered refugees should be entitled to use UNRWA schools and hospitals, just as any Italian citizen can access free state education and healthcare in

⁷⁵ See for example: J.S. McKenzie Pollock, Memo to Director, 29 June 1959, File OR100 II, Box OR1; 'The Needs of UNRWA in the Fields of Education and Training', 10 February 1967, File RE230 V, Box RE19; 'The Extent of UNRWA Responsibility in Regard to Refugee Camps', 3 April 1970, File RE400 II, No Box, all UHA. See also: Thomas McElhiney's comments to the Special Political Committee, quoted in *Palestine Refugees Today*, 88, March 1979, IPS, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Matthias Schmale, 'UNRWA's perspective on the challenges facing Palestine refugees in living a dignified life in particular in Lebanon and Syria', lecture, UN Headquarters, New York, 10 February 2017.

⁷⁷ DUA/Lebanon, Memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 19 December 1970, File RE210-03(L), Box RE7, UHA.

⁷⁸ Lebanon Branch of General Union of Palestine Studies, Note to DUA/Lebanon, 23 October 1970, File RE210-03(L), Box RE7, UHA.

Italy. By using the Italian state analogy, he made a direct if unacknowledged reference to UNRWA's quasi-state nature.⁷⁹ Schmale did the same when explaining the rationale behind universal entitlement to UNRWA's health and education programmes, as opposed to its more specialised services.⁸⁰

This perception of UNRWA as a quasi-state has also generated an expectation of protection from many refugees, especially in times of particular vulnerability. Roy Skinner, the Agency's former Director in Jerusalem, has said that the refugees instinctively look to UNRWA in times of trouble, and there is clear evidence of this from very early on.⁸¹ As early as 1955, when Israeli forces killed a Palestinian boy during an attack on Gaza known as the Gaza Raid, the community responded with demonstrations that targeted the Agency as well as the Egyptian administration.⁸² This is a highly telling indication of how the refugees saw UNRWA as a form of government even on a par with the Egyptian state. It also shows how they understood the Agency's role in a way that extended beyond merely providing services; in their eyes, UNRWA's quasi-state role meant that it was responsible for protecting them. The boy's death was therefore a failing on the Agency's part as well as on that of the Egyptian government.

It is crucial to note that the response to the Gaza Raid was not a one-off but rather an early example of numerous lasting trends in the refugees' relationship with UNRWA. It exemplified both their attempts to turn the conventional aid relationship on its head by using the Agency to demand their rights; and their charge that it not only provided insufficient services but also failed to protect them. These themes only intensified after 1967, particularly in the OPT. As discussed in Chapter Two, this period saw the

⁷⁹ Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 19 January 2015.

⁸⁰ Interview with Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in New York and former UNRWA Director in Lebanon, New York, 24 February 2017.

⁸¹ Viorst, *Reaching for the Olive Branch*, p. 47.

⁸² Ilana Feldman, 'Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza', *History & Memory*, 18, 2, Fall/Winter 2006, p. 35. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 89.

Israeli occupying authorities demolish camp structures in Gaza and forcibly transfer refugees to new residences, sometimes outside Gaza altogether.⁸³ The refugees, highly vulnerable and lacking any substantive representative authority, implored UNRWA to take action on their behalf.

In fact, the Agency was not completely unresponsive to such calls. Senior management sometimes advocated for the refugees' rights – albeit not as frequently or forcefully as the refugees wanted them to. Commissioner-Generals regularly called for the implementation of the right of return in their annual reports to the UNGA,⁸⁴ in keeping with Resolution 194.⁸⁵ After the onset of the Israeli occupation, successive Commissioner-Generals also used their reports to highlight rights abuses in the OPT, such as restrictions on freedom of movement and militaristic punitive measures against the camps.⁸⁶ In 1968, Michelmore formally spoke out on disagreements over the status of those Palestinians displaced by the 1967 War, demanding that the right of return be implemented for *all* refugees from Palestine.⁸⁷ Later years saw senior UNRWA management take their complaints over the treatment of refugees in the OPT - including over the aforementioned policies in Gaza - directly to the Israeli authorities.⁸⁸

With such acts of advocacy, UNRWA management fuelled notions that the Agency was a quasi-state representing the Palestinian refugees. In so doing, they also challenged – inadvertently or otherwise – the formal restrictions on the Agency's role. Unlike UNHCR, UNRWA never had a formal mandate for protection. Its forays into the field of protection were

⁸³ Special report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General on the effect on Palestine refugees of recent operations carried out by the Israeli military authorities in the Gaza Strip, 6 September 1971, S-0169-0005-06, UNA.

⁸⁴ The annual reports can be accessed via <http://unbisnet.un.org>, accessed 30 December 2017.

⁸⁵ General Assembly Resolution 194, *Palestine – Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator*, A/RES/194(III), 11 December 1948.

⁸⁶ The annual reports can be accessed via <http://unbisnet.un.org>, accessed 30 December 2017.

⁸⁷ Laurence Michelmore, 'Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA', 30 June 1968, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/9a798adb322aff38525617b006d88d7/9b785fa02fe8316f85256a7d00560076?OpenDocument>, accessed 27 March 2017, paragraphs 11, 40.

⁸⁸ See for example: Code cable UNRWA 59, Rennie to Urquhart, 23 August 1971, S-0169-0005-06, UNA; Code cable, Rennie to Kontos, 15 November 1972, S-0667-0006-03, UNA. Sinha, Cable 4629L, 20 August 1985, File RE410(WB) III, Box RE65, UHA.

therefore always ad hoc and informal. While this arguably left the Palestinians at a disadvantage when compared to other refugees,⁸⁹ it would be inaccurate to say that the Agency did not pursue protection activities at all. In fact, its advocacy was often driven by senior management themselves, who privately expressed sympathy and even outrage over the politics of the refugees' plight.⁹⁰

On occasion, staff sympathy for the refugees even extended to empathy for their criticisms of UNRWA. In his 1975 report to the UNGA, Commissioner-General Rennie wrote that the refugees' tendency to view the Agency's financial and logistic problems through a political lens was 'understandable'.⁹¹ In a statement four years later, his successor Olof Rydbeck similarly demonstrated a clear grasp of the refugees' understanding of UNRWA's role:

...because of the quasi-governmental nature of the services that UNRWA provides, the acknowledged status as a refugee under UNRWA rules to many refugees has come to acquire the character of an internationally recognized proof of their Palestinian identity....⁹²

It is particularly significant here that Rydbeck acknowledged the implications of UNRWA's quasi-governmental nature. In the same statement he noted that ceasing UNRWA's services before the refugees' situation had been resolved 'would be seen by all refugees, yes by all Palestinians, as a failure of the international community to meet its moral and political obligations towards [them].'⁹³

Such perceptions, as noted by Rydbeck, were ultimately the product of UNRWA's limitations as a quasi-state. In addition to lacking the monopoly

⁸⁹ On this 'protection gap' see: Susan Akram, 'Reinterpreting Refugee Rights under International Law', in Nasser Aruri (ed.), *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), pp. 165-194; Randa Farah, 'The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees' in Niklaus Steiner, Mark Gibney and Gil Loescher (ed.s) *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 155-178.

⁹⁰ See for example: Reddaway, letter to Michelmores, 24 October 1967, File RE140/1(3) I, Box RE3, UHA.

⁹¹ Rennie, 'Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA', 30 June 1975, paragraph 30.

⁹² Olof Rydbeck, UNRWA Statement No. 16, November 1979, FCO 93/2243, TNA.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

on force that usually characterises the modern state, it also faced particular deficiencies in its relationship with its ‘citizens’, namely the refugees. As the latter did not fund UNRWA’s work through taxes or any equivalent payment, they did not have the direct investment in the Agency’s operations that would have created accountability in the relationship. Instead UNRWA was funded by, and answerable to, the Western donor states.⁹⁴ This created a lopsided dynamic whereby the refugees saw UNRWA as ‘their’ Agency but did not have the financial leverage to call it to account or make it genuinely answerable to their demands – fuelling the notion that the Agency was ultimately a foreign implant controlled by the West. The latter perception is examined in depth next.

Suspicion and hostility: UNRWA as foreign implant

As already discussed, the Palestinian refugees saw both the UN and UNRWA as essentially political organisations. Moreover, the Western domination of international politics led many to fear that UNRWA was positioned against their political interests. UNRWA itself has always insisted that it has an entirely apolitical mandate, consistently rejecting calls to take on a political role.⁹⁵ However, the reality is rather more complicated. Gabiam argues that there is a fundamental incompatibility between UNRWA’s claims to be apolitical and its engagement with such a highly politicised arena – an incompatibility which the Agency has sometimes privately acknowledged.⁹⁶ Aware of this and sceptical of UNRWA’s claims to be apolitical, the refugees have long called for it to be more active in

⁹⁴ Interview with Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in New York and former UNRWA Director in Lebanon, New York, 24 February 2017.

⁹⁵ Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering*, p. 57. See for example: Howard Kennedy, Press Statement, 15 June 1950, FO1018/73, TNA; Dr D. W. Bowett, ‘Opinion on the Effect of the Jordanian Education Law on UNRWA’s Educational Programme’, 30 March 1968, File RE230(8)I, Box RE28, UHA; UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today*, 70, December 1971, IPS, p. 16.

⁹⁶ Gabiam, ‘When “humanitarianism” becomes “development”’, p. 99. See for example: Michelmores, letter to Thant, 28 December 1967, S-1066-0065-0004, UNA.

political campaigning and advocacy.⁹⁷ UNRWA's perceived shortcomings in this area, combined with its UN affiliation and Western funding, have fuelled the concern among many refugees that it might be a foreign implant with antagonistic ulterior motives. This suspicion sat uncomfortably alongside the aforementioned intimacy with the Agency as a state substitute, and the resulting paradox generated many of the inconsistencies and complexities in the relationship.

UNRWA's early involvement in the 'reintegration' projects of the 1950s, discussed in Chapter One, did nothing to allay such suspicions. The projects, while ultimately unsuccessful, played a formative role in the refugees' impressions of UNRWA, and did lasting harm to the relationship.⁹⁸ As the American journalist Milton Viorst noted, they also served to highlight the inherent contradiction between the UN's commitment to repatriation and UNRWA's mission of economic development.⁹⁹ As a result, the refugees concluded that UNRWA's actions were not only political, but politically hostile to their own interests – particularly as the reintegration programme was supported by the US.¹⁰⁰ The episode was thus pivotal to the refugees' long-running suspicion that UNRWA was operating with a hidden political purpose foreign to their interests.

UNRWA's paternalistic approach did nothing to diminish the perception that it was a neo-colonial body. The Agency's frequent failure to consult the refugees about its programmes had been a major grievance during the 'reintegration' schemes, and remained a sore point in later years.¹⁰¹ While UNRWA consulted more with Palestinians in camps in Lebanon during the *thawra* period – as is discussed in depth in Chapter Five

⁹⁷ Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering*, p. 55.

⁹⁸ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 46. Farah, 'Uneasy but Necessary', p. 5.

⁹⁹ Viorst, *Reaching for the Olive Branch*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Shabaneh, 'Refugees, International Organizations and National identity', p. 219

¹⁰¹ Turki, *The Disinherited*, pp. 35-36.

– it otherwise tended to exclude them from its programme design and implementation.¹⁰² After spending time observing UNRWA’s operations in the early 1980s, Viorst remarked that the biggest stain on the Agency’s record was its persistent ‘paternalism’. He added that every Commissioner-General acknowledged this, with Rydbeck telling him in a formal interview that UNRWA had made too many decisions over the years on behalf of the Palestinians.¹⁰³ Yet Viorst did not discuss the particularly problematic nature of such paternalism in a setting where many refugees already feared that UNRWA had been sent in as a foreign implant to suppress their national cause.

This representation of UNRWA appeared to be exemplified by its internal staffing structure. While registered Palestinian refugees formed the bulk of the Agency’s personnel, they were consistently denied senior positions.¹⁰⁴ Although this was not an official rule, management spoke openly in internal communications of the need to exclude Palestinians from high-level roles. In 1957, UNRWA’s Chief Administrative Officer wrote to the UN Chief of Purchase and Transportation:

Most of the [UNRWA] staff is locally recruited and their training and approach to any situation follows the customs and practices of the Middle East. The same results cannot be obtained from locally recruited staff as could be expected from a European or American staff. We find this to be true at our own Headquarters here [in Gaza], I regret to say.¹⁰⁵

Such condescension was typical and not confined to the time. Ten years later, when navigating the new reality of Israeli occupation, the Director of Education wrote to the Commissioner-General that UNRWA education in the OPT should be headed by ‘an Arabic-speaking non-Arab International’,

¹⁰² Marie-Louise Weighill points out that this is in stark contrast to UNHCR’s partnerships with other refugee groups like the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and the African National Congress (ANC). Weighill, ‘Palestinians in Exile’, p. 12.

¹⁰³ Viorst, *Reaching for the Olive Branch*, p. 108.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in New York and former UNRWA Director in Lebanon, New York, 24 February 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Olver, letter to Seward, 4 September 1957, S-1713-0000-0046, UNA.

as the required relationship with the Israeli authorities would 'be beyond the capacity of a Palestinian Area staff member to cope with satisfactorily'.¹⁰⁶

In turn, Palestinian staff often resented the perceived snobbery and arrogance of their international colleagues, seeing the latter's behaviour as disrespectful.¹⁰⁷ While the level of tension between local and international staff ebbed and flowed, the causes were fairly consistent, always stemming from the differential status and salaries of international and local staff.¹⁰⁸ This meant that UNRWA's international staffing system tended to come in for particular criticism at times of service cuts. Knowing that international staff received higher salaries, many locals felt that funds were being wrongly allocated to the top tier of wages rather than going to services for the refugees.¹⁰⁹ In 1973, the Jordanian publication *Al Lewa* claimed that the UNRWA deficit was 'imaginary' if one considered the gross inequality between the salaries of foreign staff and the costs of services to refugees.¹¹⁰ Tensions were exacerbated by the short-term nature of most international postings with the Agency, which hindered the potential for staff familiarity and acclimatisation.¹¹¹

In many ways, Palestinian employees of UNRWA encapsulated the paradoxes of the Agency-refugee relationship. They tended to identify primarily as Palestinian refugees rather than UN staff - an identification that was reinforced by UNRWA's exclusive two-tiered structure. As such they were often unable to separate themselves from the complicated feelings that many refugees had about the Agency, and generally did not differ from the

¹⁰⁶ Memo, Ardill to Michelmore, 27 July 1967, File RE230(WB)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in New York and former UNRWA Director in Lebanon, New York, 24 February 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Maria Kekeliova, former UNRWA Operations Support Officer in Gaza, Almere, 18 September 2015. Interview with Yazid Zahda, UNRWA West Bank Officer, The Hague, 16 September 2015. Farah, 'UNRWA', p. 405.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Zizette Darkazally, UNRWA Chief Communications Officer, Beirut, 26 January 2015.

¹¹⁰ UNRWA Jordan(East Bank) Press Review No 238/73, 25 September 1973, File RE230(J)IV, Box RE20, UHA.

¹¹¹ Interview with Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in New York and former UNRWA Director in Lebanon, New York, 24 February 2017.

rest of the Palestinian community in being frequently critical of it.¹¹² Farah notes that Palestinian UNRWA staff often spoke with a dual voice, switching between ‘us’ (refugees) and ‘it’ (the Agency), with ‘them’ used to denote UNRWA’s international staff.¹¹³ Yet despite this sense of separateness, Palestinian staff’s UNRWA affiliation could still affect how they were perceived in the community. On occasion, they were cast as ‘traitors’ for colluding with a pro-Western body.¹¹⁴ More often, they were the subject of envy due to their comparatively good wages, conditions and job security.¹¹⁵ Again, complexity and paradox dominated the situation.

After 1967: UNRWA as Israeli collaborator

The notion of UNRWA as a foreign implant, and the accompanying criticisms of its political positioning, grew legs after 1967. There were two key reasons for this. Firstly, the new reality in the OPT meant that UNRWA was now working with the Israeli authorities to implement its services there. Some regarded this as an act of collaboration, or even an endorsement of the Israeli occupation.¹¹⁶ Secondly, the Palestinian *thawra* in the camps outside the OPT led to increasingly overt politicisation and activism among the refugees, which in turn created new difficulties for the supposedly apolitical UNRWA.¹¹⁷

UNRWA’s Palestinian staff were at the heart of both issues. A particular point of tension in the OPT concerned Israeli interference in the running of UNRWA schools. The introduction of new screenings and school inspections were seen as evidence that the Agency was in league with

¹¹² Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering*, p. 71.

¹¹³ Farah, ‘UNRWA’, p. 401.

¹¹⁴ See for example: El Fatah Returnee, letter to Madhoun, 21 December 1967, File RE140-1(3)I, Box RE3, UHA. Code cable NY 339, nd, S-0069-0010-01, UNA.

¹¹⁵ Atwan, *A Country of Words*, p. 34. Shafiq Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), trans. Hader Al Hout and Leila Othman, p. 291. Interview with Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in New York and former UNRWA Director in Lebanon, New York, 24 February 2017. Farah, ‘UNRWA’, p. 402.

¹¹⁶ Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, p. 66.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Hasna Rida, former UNRWA Education Research Assistant, Beirut, 7 December 2016.

the refugees' enemies. The UNRWA schoolteachers were themselves overwhelmingly Palestinian; they were also unionised, and already in regular conflict with the Agency over pay and conditions.¹¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, they became central to the controversy. Many joined the students in going on strike to protest the Israeli interventions.¹¹⁹ New Israeli policies heightened tensions further, as UNRWA teachers found themselves screened for security, with the Agency unable to stop the practice.¹²⁰

Some of the biggest tensions erupted over the Israeli insistence on inspecting textbooks before they could be used. This created long delays that left teachers without the resources they needed to work. In February 1970, teachers' committees in the West Bank sent a series of letters and petitions to UNRWA complaining that the terms of the Agency's agreement with Israel were leaving them unable to do their jobs. The UNRWA Education Officer for the West Bank noted that 'the tone of all [the teachers' communications] was full of bitterness.'¹²¹ A memo from the Nablus Area Teachers' Committee accused UNRWA of failing to fulfil its obligations, in another manifestation of the refugees' underlying views of the Agency as their *de facto* government.¹²²

Meanwhile, UNRWA was facing related tensions with its Palestinian staff outside the OPT. As the *thawra* took hold, the struggle to liberate Palestine came to dominate the discourse in the camps.¹²³ UNRWA staff increasingly took issue with the Agency's refusal to formally engage with the politics of their plight. While they were prohibited from politicising their work for the Agency, many were unwilling to stay out of politics altogether,

¹¹⁸ From the 1950s, the teachers had organised informal networks that would later prove the basis for arranging strikes. See: Issa, 'Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian leadership in 1950s Lebanon', p. 47.

¹¹⁹ Union of Arab Students, Declaration No 2, nd, File RE230(WB)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹²⁰ Director of Education, Memo to Commissioner General, CON/ED/165 CON/ER/106/I, 17 August 1967, File RE230(WB)I, Box RE22, UHA.

¹²¹ Salama Khalili, Inter-Office Memo to DUO/WB, ED/17/4, 28 February 1970, File RE 230(1)J 1, Box RE27, UHA.

¹²² Area Teachers Committee and Headteachers of Nablus Area, Memo, February 1970, File RE230(1) J, Box RE27, UHA.

¹²³ Interview with Hasna Rida, former UNRWA Education Research Assistant, Beirut, 7 December 2016.

and in fact sought to fuse their humanitarianism with nationalism, for example by informally incorporating nationalist ideas into their teaching.¹²⁴ The problem was significant enough for UNRWA to acknowledge it publicly. A 1970 issue of its newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today* stated that local staff's attitudes had come to reflect the rise of 'the Palestine politico-military organisations' in the camps, raising concerns about how to maintain the Agency's apolitical status in Lebanon and Jordan.¹²⁵

Tensions came to a head in 1970 with the so-called 'memorandum controversy'. Following the PFLP's high-profile plane hijackings, covered in Chapter Two, UN Secretary-General Thant issued a statement condemning such activities as 'deplorable criminal acts [that] are savage and inhuman.'¹²⁶ Many Palestinians, regarding the PFLP as a resistance movement, took umbrage at what they saw as the latest case of the UN siding with Israel. In response, 125 Palestinian staff at the UNRWA Headquarters in Beirut sent a memorandum to Thant and Commissioner-General Michelmore, condemning the former's statement.¹²⁷ The memo was also published in the Arabic press.

The reaction from management was severe. Both Michelmore and the UN Secretariat in New York ruled that the memo was irreconcilable with the signatories' positions as UN staff members.¹²⁸ UNRWA insisted on impartiality and independence among its staff, regardless of their private political beliefs.¹²⁹ Accordingly, the Agency ordered those who had signed the memo to withdraw their signatures immediately; those who refused to do so were dismissed.¹³⁰ From the perspective of UN management, the

¹²⁴ Farah, 'UNRWA', p. 396, 403. Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007), p. 143, 193.

¹²⁵ UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today*, 65, Dec 1970, IPS.

¹²⁶ Text of Statement by Secretary-General on 8 September 1970, Press Release SG/SM/1326, S-0290-0028-05, UNA.

¹²⁷ Code Cable No. 61, Michelmore to Thant, 11 September 1970, S-0290-0028-05, UNA.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, p. 87.

¹³⁰ Ralph J. Bunche, Andrew A. Stark and Constantin A. Stavropoulos, Memo to Michlemore, 27 September 1970, S-0290-0028-05, UNA.

matter was straightforward and even obvious: employees could not engage in political activism contrary to the stance of the Agency, much less openly condemn the Secretary-General, while they served as its staff. Yet for the staff members involved, the incident exemplified the difficulties of their positions and the complexities of their affiliation to the Agency.

The reaction of UNRWA management to the memo appeared to typify the dismissive and patronising attitude prevalent in the culture of development work in the later twentieth century – an attitude which further aggrieved many refugees.¹³¹ When dealing with the controversy, Michelmore commented to Thant that some Palestinian staff members may have signed the memo in question under duress, and that many others had refused to sign it. While this may or may not have been true – Michelmore provided no evidence – the dismissive tone does not suggest any engagement with the strength of feeling behind the memo, or the reasons for it. This was not helped by the fact that like many other Commissioner-Generals, Michelmore did not speak Arabic and could not communicate directly with many of the refugees.¹³² In the same cable, he mentions that he has been informed of the various translation options for the memo, without being sure of which is the most accurate.¹³³ The controversy thus encapsulated many of the tensions at the heart of the relationship between the UN, UNRWA, the Palestinian refugees whom it served, and the Palestinian refugees who served it.

The memorandum controversy was far from the end of the problems. The following year, further political confrontations erupted when refugees at camps across the five fields went on strike in solidarity with Palestinians

¹³¹ Similarly, Julie Peteet notes how mid-twentieth-century humanitarian culture led the AFSC in Gaza to perceive the refugees as objects to be administered, with little regard for their participation or autonomy. Julie Peteet, 'The AFSC Refugee Archives on Palestine, 1948-50', in Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik (ed.s), *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2001), p. 114.

¹³² See for example: Director of Education, memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 12 November 1969, File RE230 VI, Box RE19, UHA.

¹³³ Code cable 61, Michelmore to Thant, 11 September 1970, S-0290-0028-05, UNA.

in Jordan. The strikes targeted UNRWA on the grounds that it was in league with the political enemies of the *fida'iyyīn*. In a statement, the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT) condemned the Agency's 'conspiracies' to 'liquefy this revolution', and contended that the strike was a 'warning' to UNRWA's 'malignant methods'.¹³⁴ The 'revolution' in question was of course the Palestinian *thawra* in Jordan, although the statement did not specify what the Agency's 'malignant methods' were. The GUPT's hostility towards UNRWA was particularly significant in view of their simultaneous standing as registered refugees, UNRWA employees and nationalist activists. In this sense it served as another case study of the fundamental difficulties of the relationship.

In 1974, Commissioner-General Rennie took the unusual step of raising the Agency's tensions with its local staff with the UNGA. In his annual report, he stated that 'staff relations weigh heavily' and that 'a disquieting feature of the year has been increasing resort by staff to action intended to coerce the Agency into meeting their demands [sic]'.¹³⁵ That Rennie chose to raise this issue at such a high and public level is indicative of its seriousness. As he himself noted, the problem could not be easily overcome as it was rooted in the foundations of the situation, which made it extremely difficult for Palestinian staff members to be indifferent to political flashpoints. The following year, he reported to the UNGA that the staff now 'relied on reasoned argument and orderly procedure... rather than the more coercive tactics'.¹³⁶ Yet while Rennie presented this as an improvement, the essence of the situation remained unchanged. There would be many more incidents to come.

¹³⁴ General Union of Palestinian Teachers, Statement, 21 February 1971, File RE230(L-5), Box RE21, UHA.

¹³⁵ John Rennie, 'Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA', A/9613, 30 June 1974, FCO 93/570 B, TNA, paragraphs 19, 166, 167.

¹³⁶ John Rennie, 'Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA', A/10013, 30 June 1975, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N75/213/46/PDF/N7521346.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed 27 March 2017, paragraph 158.

Relocation of HQ: UNRWA as neo-colonial

Palestinian suspicions that UNRWA was a foreign implant were heightened when the Agency moved its headquarters from Beirut to Vienna in 1978, following a previous temporary transfer out of Lebanon two years earlier.¹³⁷ Commissioner-General Thomas McElhiney had expected the move to be uncontroversial, in view of the muted Arab response to the 1976 transfer and the evident impossibility of continuing to operate in the middle of the Lebanese Civil War.¹³⁸ However, he was proven wrong. When the move was announced,¹³⁹ all three Arab host governments, along with Egypt and Qatar, publicly voiced their opposition to the UN Secretary-General on 'psychological, political and financial' grounds.¹⁴⁰ They argued that the presence of UNRWA headquarters in an Arab country indicated the UN's continuing involvement in the Palestinians' plight and 'helped to counter rumours that UNRWA might be relinquishing its responsibilities.'¹⁴¹ In making such a statement, the Arab governments tapped into the Palestinian refugees' long-running anxieties and situated the issue of the headquarters' location within wider political concerns.

This became a definitive strategy for the Arab host states when it came to the struggle over UNRWA's location. The Jordanian Foreign Minister subsequently sent a note to Secretary-General Waldheim, expressing his government's disapproval of the headquarters' transfer and arguing that the Agency could have found suitable premises in Amman instead. He contended that the transfer 'has implications connected with a tendency [for UNRWA] to disengage gradually from its responsibilities towards the

¹³⁷ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 70-71.

¹³⁸ McElhiney, letter to Waldheim, 15 April 1978; Code cable No. 10, McElhiney to 1 May 1978, both S-1066-0066-04, UNA.

¹³⁹ UN Press Release PAL/1420, 'Relocation of UNRWA Headquarters', 13 June 1978, S-1066-0066-04, UNA.

¹⁴⁰ Miles to McElhiney, code cable, 20 June 1978, S-1066-0066-04, UNA.

¹⁴¹ Notes of the meeting between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives from the Arab Group, 19 June, S-1079-0005-09, UNA.

refugees.’¹⁴² While UNRWA dismissed such suggestions as unjustified, international actors including Oxfam endorsed the Jordanian stance.¹⁴³

The refugees themselves were deeply unhappy about the move, none more so than UNRWA’s Palestinian staff. In keeping with the Arab states’ protestations, they feared that the headquarters’ transfer signified UNRWA’s long-suspected manipulation by the West, and was designed to usher in its gradual withdrawal of services ahead of the international abandonment of the Palestinian refugees.¹⁴⁴ Aligning itself with such feelings, the PLO responded to the transfer announcement by sending its own direct note to Waldheim, arguing that the terms of UNRWA’s work required it to be based in the Middle East:

...this decision involves serious political and social consequences and seems to imply that, henceforward, UNRWA will progressively abandon the provision of humanitarian services to the Palestinian refugees... The PLO believes that this decision has been taken in response to pressures from imperialist and Zionist forces to compel UNRWA to shirk its international responsibilities and obligations towards the Palestinian refugees.... There is now a widespread fear among the Palestinian refugees that UNRWA might soon completely abolish all the services it provides, and the decision of the Commissioner-General to transfer UNRWA’s headquarters to Europe has especially increased this fear.¹⁴⁵

Dismissing the Agency’s security concerns about remaining in the Middle East, the PLO called on Waldheim to reverse the relocation. Its campaign had some success at the UN level; in 1978 and 1979, the UNGA passed resolutions requesting that UNRWA headquarters be reunified in its area of operations as soon as possible. Although the Agency agreed to do so in theory,¹⁴⁶ the headquarters remained in Vienna from 1979 until 1991, when

¹⁴² Permanent Representative of Jordan, Note to Waldheim, 28 June 1978, S-1066-0066-04, UNA.

¹⁴³ Brian Walker, letter to McElhiney, 5 July 1978; Code cable, McElhiney to Miles 29, 15 July 1978, both S-1066-0066-04, UNA.

¹⁴⁴ ‘UNRWA’s mid-life crisis’, *Middle East International*, 13 November 1981.

¹⁴⁵ PLO Political Department, Note to Waldheim, 26 June 1978, S-1066-0066-04, UNA.

¹⁴⁶ Waldheim, letter to Hasan Ibrahim, 18 September 1980; Note for the Record of Meeting between Deputy Commissioner-General and Hassan Ibrahim, 15 June 1981, both S-0354-0003-0012, UNA.

it was relocated to Gaza in the context of the Oslo Agreement.¹⁴⁷ Its long stretch in Europe did nothing to alleviate the refugees' anxieties and suspicions about UNRWA's true political purpose and affiliation.

Conclusion

The nature and tensions of UNRWA's relationship with the Palestinian refugees are central to its history. UNRWA needed the refugees' acceptance and cooperation to be able to function. In some ways this was no problem; with the occasional exception, the refugees generally supported UNRWA's existence and favoured its continuation until their plight was resolved. Indeed, as this chapter has shown, many deeply feared its dissolution and vehemently protested any indication that UNRWA might be diminished. At least in this sense, they strongly supported the Agency and its work.

Problems thus arose not over the *fact* of UNRWA's work, but rather over its nature and purpose. Tensions stemmed from the fundamentally different interpretations of the latter held by the refugees and the Agency respectively. From the perspective of the Agency's senior management, UNRWA was a purely humanitarian body that existed to provide apolitical welfare services. For the refugees, including many of those who worked for the Agency, this was a misnomer; their situation was essentially political and an organisation like UNRWA could not engage with it so intricately while remaining entirely apolitical. As a result, many refugees criticised UNRWA for insufficiently advocating for their rights, or worried that it was operating with the ulterior motive of undermining their political interests.

In detailing the complexities of UNRWA's relationship with the Palestinian refugees, this chapter has challenged many common assumptions about refugees and aid more generally. As a case study, it provides a clear

¹⁴⁷ Miles, Memo to Urquhart, 30 August 1979, S-0354-0003-0012, UNA. See also: <https://www.unrwa.org/content/unrwa-moves-its-headquarters-gaza-city>, accessed 27 March 2017.

rebuttal to the idea that refugees' vulnerability automatically leads them to passive welfare dependency. In complete contrast to the latter assumption, the Palestinian refugees actively shaped the terms of their relationship with UNRWA and their receipt of its provisions. Rejecting any suggestion that the latter constituted aid, they instead insisted on receiving UNRWA's services as legal entitlements and evidence of their political rights on the international stage. They thus made themselves into active participants in shaping UNRWA's work.

The notion of UNRWA services as rights also meant that its work took on a more loaded and politicised meaning, despite the continual insistence from Agency management that it was apolitical. As otherwise routine services such as education and rations were treated as political evidence, the Agency's work was drawn into the developing Palestinian nationalist campaign and its demands. It is within this framework that UNRWA became inextricably linked with the nationalist movement that took hold in the camps after 1967. Its activities were treated as symbols of a political situation, and its very existence became politicised. The Agency's resulting interactions with the Palestinian nationalist movement, and the impact that each had on the other, are examined in depth in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

UNRWA's nationalist role: Internationalising Palestinian identity

“The acknowledged status as a refugee under UNRWA rules to many refugees has come to acquire the character of an internationally recognised proof of their Palestinian identity”¹

Olof Rydbeck, UNRWA Commissioner-General, 1979

The quasi-state nature of UNRWA's role in the refugee camps raised questions about its intersection with the fervent nationalism that overtook these spaces during the *thawra*. Many of these questions strike at the heart of theories of nations and nationalism in general. Accordingly, this chapter examines how UNRWA acted as one of several factors that shaped Palestinian nationalism and national identity in the camps during the period 1967-87. In so doing, it draws on the ideas of modernist theorists of nationalism, many of whom emphasise the role of the state in inculcating a collective national identity.

As discussed in the introduction, Ernest Gellner contends that modern states have driven and promoted nationalism to serve their own ends, chiefly when it comes to supporting their claims to legitimacy. Gellner writes that nationalism has generally arisen in the state's 'conspicuous presence', and very rarely in its absence.² Similarly, Benedict Anderson ties the rise of nationalism to the emergence and growth of the modern state, arguing that the latter's control of popular institutions enabled a collective 'imagining' of a shared communal identity.³ From a post-colonial perspective, Robert Malley posits the state as the source of national sovereignty and sentiment.⁴ Even studies of transnational nationalism can retain this fixation on the role of the state. For example, when seeking to

¹ UNRWA, Statement No. 16, November 1979, FCO 93/2243, TNA.

² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), ch. 1.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), ch.s 5-7, 10.

⁴ Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 58, 106-107, 158-59.

reframe understandings of nationalism, Rogers Brubaker conceptualised ‘transborder nationalisms’ solely in terms of the relationship between a state and ‘its ethnonationalkin in other states’.⁵

The Palestinian case poses several challenges to such theories. As a people, the Palestinians have been firmly nationalistic over the last century. Indeed, the Palestinian national identity was pervasive and highly effective in uniting a people who were dispersed across national borders and had no formal sources of power. Yet since at least 1948, the Palestinians have lacked the very nation-state that according to the theories outlined above, makes such national identity possible. How is this apparent paradox to be explained?

To address this conundrum, this chapter synthesises populist theories of nationalism with those focused on the role of the state. As shown throughout this thesis, Palestinian nationalism was not solely or even predominantly the product of state-like structures. It was a nationalist movement driven strongly by grass-roots action in the camps. Yet as this movement developed and enveloped the camps, it inevitably intersected with the Agency that administered them. As detailed in Chapter Four, the Agency acted as a ‘phantom sovereign’ or ‘shadow state’ for the refugees. While there is considerable scholarship on the PLO’s role in popular Palestinian nationalism,⁶ there are insufficient studies of this subject vis-à-vis the other Palestinian state substitute: UNRWA.

This chapter argues that UNRWA’s influence on Palestinian nationalism manifested itself in a number of ways. Firstly, the Agency had a

⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 edn), pp. 5-6.

⁶ See for example: Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Kemal Kirisci, *The PLO and world politics: A study of the mobilization of support for the Palestinian cause* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986). More recently, Laleh Khalili has written that the ‘quasi-state structure of the Palestinian Authority’ later became a crucial such institution. Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 220.

direct role in shaping the Palestinian refugee identity, which was central to the nationalist movement in exile, through its registration criteria, and its provision of official identity cards. Crucially, these measures transcended the state borders of the five geographical fields in which UNRWA worked, thus facilitating a shared national consciousness across the Palestinian diaspora. UNRWA's transnational registration policy therefore shaped the Palestinian refugee identity both conceptually and practically.

In terms of its activities, UNRWA had the greatest impact on the refugees' thinking through its large-scale education programme. Its schools, first set up in the early aftermath of the Nakba, were a formative part of the refugees' experiences of exile. The fact that the camp populations received their schooling from UNRWA generated another commonality of experience that was important for their collective consciousness. The schools further facilitated a sense of shared identity by serving as exclusively Palestinian environments, populated by students and teachers who were nearly all Palestinian refugees. Moreover, the content of the education programme epitomised the fusion of nationalism and internationalism that characterised the UNRWA-administered camps. As successive generations of Palestinians received their education through an internationally-managed programme, their ties with the wider world were magnified. This fuelled the internationalist tilt of the Palestinian nationalist movement.

There were also subtler aspects to UNRWA's impact on Palestinian refugee identity. The Agency was keen to present itself as a positive influence, highlighting its work in promoting gender equity in the camps. Again, education was central here; UNRWA's provision of free education to all children meant that female literacy skyrocketed within a generation, with resulting repercussions for women's socio-economic status in the camps. Gendered ideas among the refugees, while still largely conforming to Arab traditions, were shaped accordingly. The 1970s saw many women participate

in the *thawra* – albeit usually in non-combative roles – as the PLO’s rhetoric promoted the importance of their role.

Finally, the intimate set-up of UNRWA’s role in the camps, and the primacy of the nationalist movement at this time, meant that the Agency’s programmes melded with the camps’ nationalist expression and became ‘Palestinianised’. Not only were UNRWA schools named after villages in pre-Nakba Palestine, but the 1970s also saw the Agency’s curriculum infused with Palestinian history and geography, at the urging of the refugees themselves. The development of this national syllabus within the framework of an internationally-devised education programme was the clearest example of how the camps were characterised by this paradoxical fusion. The Agency, while still international and officially apolitical, was in practice increasingly ‘national’ and Palestinian.

This chapter thus demonstrates the argument at the heart of this thesis: that UNRWA acted as an intersection between the international sphere and the Palestinian nationalist movement in the camps, resulting in a blend between the two during the *thawra*. To explicate this, the chapter’s first section examines UNRWA’s conceptual influence, specifically on the question of how Palestinian refugee identity was defined. The second section then assesses in more practical terms how UNRWA’s education programme helped create a collective Palestinian consciousness in exile, and became a conduit for transmitting nationalist ideas and discourse. By exploring these areas, this chapter establishes both the theoretical and the concrete meaning of UNRWA’s entanglement with Palestinian nationalism in the camps, and the consequences of this unique set-up.

UNRWA's conceptual influence: Who is a Palestinian refugee?

As outlined in Chapter One, it was the events of the Nakba that first ushered in the identity category of the Palestinian refugee. By turning the Palestinians into a stateless people, the Nakba destroyed the previous structures of their national society and upturned the former bases of national identity.⁷ Addressing this, Rashid Khalidi writes that the catastrophe served as a 'great leveller', uniting the people around their shared experiences of collective loss, dispossession and exile.⁸ Previously all-important identifiers like class and region were subjugated as the notion of the 'Palestinian refugee' became central to the post-1948 national identity – a process that Schulz refers to as the 'recreation of identity'.⁹ This process was not fixed but mutable, and the identity category of the Palestinian refugee was continually shaped by the impact of subsequent changes like the Naksa and the *thawra*. This section examines another factor that was continuously present in shaping the development of this new identity category: UNRWA.

UNRWA's role in this regard has been overlooked in much of the literature, and its influence on identification practices was often unofficial. None of the UN Resolutions detailing its mandate to serve 'Palestine refugees' ever defined who was covered by this term.¹⁰ Instead UNRWA used a narrow definition that restricted its services to people - not explicitly Palestinians¹¹ - who had been living in Palestine from June 1946-May 1948,

⁷ On earlier notions of Palestinian national identity, see: R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, ch. 7; Lauren Banko, *The Invention of Palestinian Citizenship, 1917-47* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), ch.s 3, 6.

⁸ R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 194. On the functioning of this phenomenon beyond the Palestinian case, see: Martin van Bruinessen, 'Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question', Working Paper, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence, 2000.

⁹ Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 37.

¹⁰ Lex Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 69-70.

¹¹ The absence of any explicit reference to nationality was deliberate. See: Director of UNRWA Liaison New York, memo to Director of Administration, Relief & Information, 9 October 1978, File RE210/03(WB) III, Box RE7, UHA.

who had lost both home and livelihood in the 1948 War, and who had sought refuge in one of the Agency's five areas of operation.¹² This excluded significant numbers of people who continued to consider themselves refugees and to be considered as such by the majority of the Palestinian *shatāt* (diaspora).¹³ Accordingly, registration with UNRWA was never synonymous with identification as a Palestinian refugee – a point that the Agency itself noted in its first annual report.¹⁴ Yet as will be shown here, it was hugely important in affirming and codifying their identity in the absence of any formal governmental structures.

UNRWA management, ever mindful of the dangers of potential politicisation, continually downplayed the importance of the definition, insisting that it was not legal and merely served to aid the Agency's operations.¹⁵ However, in practice the definition had a much wider significance, creating a new conceptual category. UNRWA registration became a key characteristic, if not a necessary condition, of Palestinian refugee identity. As Peteet writes, the Agency's registration practices were 'identity affirming' for the Palestinian refugees.¹⁶ Going further, Feldman contends that UNRWA's categorisation practices directly shaped Palestinian experiences of exile by determining whether or not they were entitled to assistance, protection, and recognition.¹⁷ It is argued here that the content of UNRWA's definition had a conceptual as well as a practical impact, helping

¹² 'UNRWA: A Brief History 1950-82', File RE100 III, Box RE2, UHA.

¹³ Randa Farah, 'The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees' in Niklaus Steiner, Mark Gibney and Gil Loescher (ed.s), *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 163-164.

¹⁴ Howard Kennedy, 'Interim Report of the Director of UNRWA', A/1451/Rev/1, 6 October 1950, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/EC8DE7912121FCE5052565B1006B5152>, accessed 18 July 2017. On the same grounds John Davis, UNRWA Commissioner-General from 1959-63, explicitly argued that the right of return should not be limited to registered refugees. John Davis, *The Evasive Peace: A study of the Zionist/ Arab problem* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1970), p. 110.

¹⁵ Ilana Feldman, 'The Challenges of Categories: UNRWA and the Definition of a "Palestine Refugee"', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25:3, 2012, p. 388.

¹⁶ Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian refugee camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 64-65.

¹⁷ Feldman, 'The Challenges of Categories', pp. 387-406.

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

At the heart of Feldman's analysis lies the point that UNRWA's definition functioned as a process rather than a singular event.¹⁸ As ever, the Palestinian refugees themselves were actively involved in this, frequently challenging the Agency's classification policies and pushing their own definitions of who constituted a refugee. They particularly disputed the exclusions generated by UNRWA's narrow definition; during protests of the kind discussed in Chapter Four, Palestinians demanded that UNRWA provide services to *all* Palestinian refugees, regardless of their registration status. As Feldman argues, this further demonstrates the significance of UNRWA's definition and the complex ways in which many Palestinians perceived their refugee status, as a signifier of both loss and entitlement.¹⁹

Defining a Palestine refugee: UNRWA's identity cards

The meaning of UNRWA's definition was manifested practically by way of official identity cards issued to registered refugees who met its eligibility criteria. The cards were originally intended to be used as evidence of this eligibility when refugees went to collect rations from the Agency's offices. As such, they were a core element of the Palestinian refugee experience and the new form of nationalism that emerged in exile. The content of the cards further transcended the impact of Palestinian dispossession by reinforcing the refugees' connections to their shared geographical heritage; UNRWA stated in a copy of its newsletter that the cards recorded the refugees' respective places of origin in pre-Nakba Palestine.²⁰ In this way, they codified the refugees' deep-seated attachments to their ancestral towns and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 389, 392.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 388, 389.

²⁰ Extract from *Palestine Refugees Today*, nd, Box GP3 PALESTINE UNRWA PUBLICATIONS, RSC. See also: Ilana Feldman, 'Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza', *History and Memory*, 18, 2, Fall-Winter 2006, p. 39.

villages. While UNRWA did not *invent* such attachments – they were the result of the historical and political factors discussed in Chapters One and Two – policies such as this did serve to underline and systematise them.

In keeping with international political sensitivities, UNRWA continually emphasised that its ID cards were simply a practical means of establishing eligibility and held no further significance. Management reiterated that issuing such cards was standard humanitarian practice, pointing out that UNHCR did the same.²¹ UNRWA arguably underlined the cards' operational function with their increasing stratification over the years, as budgetary restraints compelled the Agency to restrict the refugees' levels of entitlement. From 1956, refugees were not simply marked as 'registered' but also issued with a letter (R, E, M or N) to denote their entitlements, including whether they could claim rations. 'R' indicated eligibility for rations and services; 'E' for services; 'M' for medical aid; and 'N' meant that a refugee was registered with UNRWA but no longer eligible to receive services.²² The result was that despite the continuing nomenclature 'ration cards', numerous card-carrying refugees were not in fact able to claim rations.²³

Yet despite UNRWA's claims, it is undeniable that the cards' significance was not simply operational. The context gave them a far greater meaning; the majority of Palestinian refugees were stateless, with their Palestinian passports having lost formal international recognition after 1948.²⁴ With the exception of those who had taken Jordanian citizenship,²⁵ most registered Palestinian refugees lacked any official identification –

²¹ Interview with Matthew Reynolds, Director of UNRWA Representative Office in Washington, and Chris McGrath, UNRWA Liaison Officer, Washington DC, 7 April 2016.

²² Feldman, 'The Challenge of Categories', p. 394.

²³ Later stratifications are detailed in: Note from DUA/Jordan to Jordanian Minister of Development, 11 July 1968, File RE210/03(J); Resume of Criteria for Services provided to Refugees in the West Bank, 16 November 1978, File RE210(WB) III; both Box RE7, UHA.

²⁴ On Palestinian passports during the Mandate, see: Banko, *The Invention of Palestinian Citizenship*, ch. 5.

²⁵ The vast majority of Palestinians in Jordan hold citizenship of that country, but there are significant exceptions, including those who arrived from Gaza in 1967. See Rochelle Davis, Grace Benton, Will Todman and Emma Murphy, 'Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens: Models of Refugee Administration in Jordan and Egypt', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 36, 1-32, p. 13.

except for their UNRWA cards.²⁶ Accordingly, they used them not only to claim UNRWA services but also to verify their identity to the host states when applying for a *laissez-passer* or for permission to work.²⁷ In this sense the cards took on the status of *de facto* passports, as vital documents in the processes of state bureaucracy. In fact, some Palestinian refugees in Jordan opted to use their UNRWA cards instead of Jordanian passports,²⁸ preferring what Al Hussein describes as the ‘symbol of Palestinian identity’.²⁹

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UNRWA management were aware that the refugees attached this symbolic meaning to the cards.³⁰ They were further aware of the practical implications, whereby many refugees were unwilling to give up their cards for fear that they would be left with no evidence of their political status and attached rights.³¹ As early as 1961, UNRWA’s Acting Director in Jordan had internally described the ration card as a ‘status symbol’ among refugees. He observed to a colleague that refugees whose circumstances had improved would not mind a reduction in their entitlements but would ‘resist most strongly’ the loss of the card itself, with petitions and protests likely if this were to happen.³² Outsiders observed the same phenomenon. In a 1968

²⁶ Abdel Bari Atwan, *A Country of Words: A Palestinian Journey from the Refugee Camp to the Front Page* (London: Saqi, 2008), p. 34.

²⁷ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 41-49.

²⁸ Najeh Jarrar, ‘Citizenship and Palestinian Refugees’, *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, 3:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1996), pp. 65-66.

²⁹ Jalal Al Hussein, ‘UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29:2, (2000), p. 52.

³⁰ Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA-Commissioner-General, Beirut. 19 January 2015.

Interview with Matthew Reynolds, UNRWA Director in DC, and Chris McGrath, Liaison Officer, Washington DC, 7 April 2016.

³¹ See for example: T. Jamieson, ‘After June 1960’, memo to Acting Director, 2 January 1959, File RE120 I, Box RE3, UHA.

³² D.F. Mant, Acting DUA/Jordan, memo to Director of Relief Programmes, 20 July 1961, File RE210/03(WB) I, Box RE7, UHA.

study, AUB scholar Usama Khalidi – himself Palestinian – noted that some refugees had refused employment because of anxieties about being removed from the ration rolls. While he argued that the politicisation of the ration cards had been overstated, he concluded that the refugees’ general association of political rights with UNRWA registration was undeniable.³³

As a result, UNRWA management held continual discussions over the decades about the possibility of creating a separate identification document that would verify the refugees’ status without automatically entitling them to services. Feldman writes that such a possibility was first raised with the Agency’s introduction in 1956 of registration category ‘N’, denoting refugees who remained registered but had lost their entitlement to UNRWA rations and certain other services because of increased income.³⁴ This paved the way for later discussions about the possible introduction of a card that would serve to simply recognise refugee status and nothing else. In 1979, the Commissioner-General’s Office acknowledged that the rations programme had become ‘primarily political’ in its purpose, and floated the possibility of replacing it with a simple registration card.³⁵ From UNRWA’s perspective, this would have the practical benefit of enabling them to rectify the ration rolls without triggering wider political anxieties among the refugees.³⁶ Yet from the refugees’ perspective, the impact of such a move would be highly political, making their repatriation more plausible.³⁷ The discussion is thus indicative of how UNRWA’s registration policies were consistently and unavoidably political in their repercussions.

The idea of a registration card for all Palestinian refugees gathered momentum as nations sympathetic to the Palestinians came to join the

³³ Usama Khalidi, ‘The Diet of Palestine Arab Refugees Receiving UNRWA Rations, up to 31st May 1967’, 1968, IPS.

³⁴ Feldman, ‘The Challenge of Categories’, p. 394.

³⁵ ‘UNRWA’s Mandate’, Memo prepared by the Office of UNRWA Commissioner-General, 16 May 1979, File OR110 II, Box OR1, UHA.

³⁶ See for example: Louis Gendron, Confidential Memo to Chief of Eligibility & Distribution Division, 28 May 1960, File RE120 I, Box RE3, UHA.

³⁷ Feldman, ‘The Challenge of Categories’, p. 400.

UNGA in the post-colonial era. In 1982, the UNGA formally requested that UNRWA issue identity cards to *all* Palestine refugees displaced in 1948 and 1967, as well as their descendants, ‘irrespective of whether they are recipients or not of rations and services from the Agency’.³⁸ In practice this was hampered by the practical difficulties of identifying Palestinian refugees worldwide, the attached political controversies, and the question of whether such a move was beyond the Agency’s mandate.³⁹ Yet the fact that the UNGA raised this issue in the 1980s demonstrates its continuing prevalence.

Moreover, while the UNGA’s request was not implemented, recent decades have seen less comprehensive changes made to UNRWA’s registration system. Following the Sabra-Shatila massacre in 1982, the UNGA mandated UNRWA to expand its services to unregistered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, albeit without changing its core practices of registration and identification.⁴⁰ In 1993, UNRWA eligibility rules were expanded to allow the belated inclusion of people who fitted its definition but had not registered in the early years after the Nakba.⁴¹ Yet these changes were tweaks rather than comprehensive reforms, and they all occurred after the *thawra* period considered in this thesis. The years 1967-82 saw UNRWA’s registration system remain restricted to the same narrow definition, with ration cards providing the only official identification for most of the stateless refugees.

³⁸ UNGA Resolution 37/120, A/RES/37/120, 16 December 1982, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/37/a37r120.htm>, accessed 13 August 2017.

³⁹ The practical difficulties were highlighted in: Report of the Secretary-General, ‘Special identification cards for all Palestine refugees’, A/38/382, 12 September 1983, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/0BF8283D4BB0851D85256EE100531E9E>, accessed 13 August 2017. On the question of UNRWA’s mandate see Feldman, ‘The Challenge of Categories’, pp. 400-401.

⁴⁰ Lance Bartholomeusz, ‘The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty’, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3, March 2010, pp. 459-460.

⁴¹ Oroub el-Abed, *Unprotected: Palestinians in Egypt since 1948* (Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), p. 9.

Aspects of refugee identity: Geography, generations and gender

The restrictive nature of UNRWA's definition of a 'Palestine refugee' was juxtaposed with the breadth of its work. UNRWA's transnationalism, as a quasi-governmental body operating across five geographical fields, was crucial to its significance - yet this has been insufficiently studied in the existing literature. Feldman's work, while providing an in-depth study of UNRWA's categorisation practices, neglects to mention the importance of how they transcended state boundaries in the Middle East.⁴² Ghassan Shabaneh hints at the latter when he writes of UNRWA 'bringing the Palestinian refugees under one umbrella', but does not analyse the implications of this.⁴³ This section fills the historiographical gap by examining the conceptual importance of UNRWA's common registration policy for the Palestinian population across the Levant.

In order to probe this effectively, it is necessary to consider what is meant by the term 'transnationalism'. According to Michael Kearney's definition, transnationalism refers to processes that are anchored in and transcend one or more nation-states. Kearney cites migration itself as an obvious example of transnationalism, which underlines its applicability to the Palestinian case.⁴⁴ Yet while the inherently transnational nature of Palestinian nationalist solidarity after 1948 is an implicit theme in numerous works on the subject, there are few explicit studies of it. Political scientist Daniel Meier has provided one exception, writing that transnationalism has been present in the Palestinian nationalist movement in a number of guises. According to Meier, the refugees' depth of connection to their homeland, their construction of an idealised understanding of this homeland, and their non-territorialised collective identity in exile, are all instances of

⁴² Feldman, 'The Challenge of Categories'.

⁴³ Ghassan Shabaneh, 'Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity: The Case of Palestine', *New Political Science*, 32:2, 2010, pp. 215, 218.

⁴⁴ M. Kearney, 'The local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995), pp. 547-548.

transnationalism. He specifically argues that the *ḥdaṭ* functioned as a 'transnational icon' in the 1970s, enabling Palestinian mobilisation across numerous nation-states.⁴⁵ More recently, Miriyam Aouragh has provided another example with her work on online activism as a case of Palestinian transnationalism.⁴⁶

It is argued here that UNRWA's registration system served as another instance of transnationalism. It transcended the region's borders by providing a common frame of reference for registered Palestinian refugees across the five fields, albeit inadvertently. In constructing a standardised arrangement for Palestinians in five different geographical areas, UNRWA helped combat the differentiation created by state borders and the structures of the Israeli occupation. A 'Palestine refugee' by UNRWA's definition was the same whether the individual in question lived in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. This was vital in preserving Palestinian refugee identity as both distinctive and communal. It helped unite Palestinians across the fragmentation of dispossession and reinforced the transnationalism that had characterised Palestinian political history ever since the Nakba caused their dispersal. In this sense, UNRWA's work actually served to counter the objective of 'reintegration' for which it had originally been established, as discussed in Chapter One. Palestinian nationalists quickly picked up on the implications, with Shafiq Al Hout describing UNRWA as a 'crucial hub' for the PLO's work.⁴⁷

The breadth of UNRWA's registration system was not only geographical, but also inter-generational. Its hereditary rules enabled registered refugee men to pass the family ID card on to their children (as

⁴⁵ Daniel Meier, 'The Palestinian *Fiday'i* as an Icon of Transnational Struggle: The Lebanese Experience', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2014, 41:3, pp. 322-334.

⁴⁶ Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the internet and the construction of identity* (London: IB Tauris, 2011).

⁴⁷ Shafiq Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), trans. Hader Al Hout and Leila Othman, p. 44.

will be discussed shortly, this right did not extend to women).⁴⁸ In one of the clearest manifestations of how UNRWA functioned as a quasi-state, refugee children born in exile could be issued with an 'UNRWA birth certificate'. The appearance of these certificates further illustrated UNRWA's fusion with Palestinian refugee ID, as they were annotated with the UNRWA emblem and the family's card number, and signed by the relevant UNRWA Registration Officer. Along with ID cards, the birth certificates were used to verify the children's refugee status when they enrolled in UNRWA schools (Fig. 19).⁴⁹ UNRWA justified its hereditary policy on both principled and pragmatic grounds; the alternative would have generated hierarchies even within families, with services limited to those born before 1948.⁵⁰

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Critics of UNRWA contend that the hereditary nature of its work has enabled the continuance of the Palestinian refugee situation by hindering their integration into the Arab host states. Commentators Asaf Romirowsky and Einat Wilf, and senior Israeli politicians Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu, have repeatedly attributed the refugees' continuing Palestinian self-identification to UNRWA's registration policy.⁵¹ The supporting evidence for such an interpretation is flimsy at best. While UNRWA did play a role in shaping Palestinian national identity in exile, it was not

⁴⁸ Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 19 January 2015.

⁴⁹ Acting DUA/Jordan, letter to Comptroller, 4 February 1973, File RE210/03(J), Box RE7, UHA.

⁵⁰ Interview with Lex Takkenberg, Head of UNRWA Ethics Office, 9 August 2015, Amman. See also: 'Palestine Refugees: Review of UNRWA by the twentieth session of the General Assembly', S-1066-0065-07, UNA.

⁵¹ Asaf Romirowsky, 'The Real Palestinian Refugee Crisis', *The Tower*, May 2014, <http://www.thetower.org/artide/the-real-palestinian-refugee-crisis/>, accessed 25 July 2017; Einat Wilf, 'UNRWA: An Obstacle to Peace?' *Fathom*, 2013, <http://fathomjournal.org/unrwa-an-obstacle-to-peace/>, accessed 20 November 2014; Shimon Peres, *David's Sling: The arming of Israel* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1970), pp. 272-274. See also: 'Israeli PM calls for UN to dismantle Palestinian aid agency', 11 June 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/11/israeli-pm-calls-un-dismantle-palestinian-aid-agency/?WT.mc_id=tmg_share_fb, accessed 12 June 2017.

responsible for creating it. Palestinian nationalism already existed when UNRWA was created, and its subsequent development was predominantly driven by the refugees and the *fida'iyyīn* - between whom there was often considerable overlap. The notion that Palestinian national identity would not exist without UNRWA cannot be reconciled with the long list of political, cultural and social factors that have provided the basis for the former. However, while UNRWA did not create Palestinian national identity, it did act as a significant factor in shaping its development in the decades after the Nakba. The role of UNRWA was thus that of influencer, not originator.

The details of its hereditary policy drove the nature of this influence. Most obviously, it made possible the continuation of UNRWA's work across generations. Accordingly, it facilitated UNRWA's centrality to many refugee families, which was particularly significant in a setting where the family comprised a key social unit. It also codified existing notions of Palestinian refugee identity as something that could be removed only by resolution of their plight, and not simply phased out over time.⁵²

UNRWA's registration system also affected societal dynamics within the camps. In particular, its patrilineal nature helped shape the gendered aspect of Palestinian identity in exile. It meant that while women could register with the Agency, they were unable to pass that status onto their children and were thus effectively second-class 'citizens' within the system.⁵³ This was in keeping with UNRWA's aforementioned 'working definition', which referred to eligible Palestine refugees by way of male pronouns only.⁵⁴ Its approach thus reinforced patriarchal social structures, both by

⁵² In Article 4 of its 1968 National Charter, the PLO similarly characterised Palestinian identity as an inherent characteristic transmitted from parents to children. See PLO National Charter, OP.32072.956.7, CUOPA.

⁵³ The policy preventing female refugees from registering their children was confirmed in: P.M. Holdaway, Director of UNRWA Relief Services, to Denis Prescott, 24 August 1984, File A/RE/210(S), Box RE7, UHA.

⁵⁴ See for example: John Rennie, 'Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General', A/8413, 30 June 1971, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/A81D27231BA0BF4985256AA8006C6BFD>, accessed 31 August 2017; 'UNRWA: A Brief History 1950-82', File RE 100 III, Box RE2, UHA.

subjugating the position of women and by operating on the basis of the family unit, always headed by a man, rather than on equal individual rights. Until 1983 the Agency issued ID cards to families, not individuals.⁵⁵

The Agency justified the sexism of its hereditary policy on ‘cultural’ grounds, citing the need to be consistent with norms in the Arab host states, where citizenship was also passed down exclusively through the male line.⁵⁶ That UNRWA established its eligibility criteria with the aim of making it analogous to Arab nationality laws is highly revealing. The parallel with state policy shows the extent to which UNRWA functioned as a quasi-state, with its registration taking the place of citizenship and its ID cards serving as sub-standard passports. It was also indicative of how the Agency relied on goodwill from the Arab host states, which opposed any suggestion of introducing a gender-blind registration system. Finally, the fact that UNRWA management spoke of a need to be consistent with Arab culture highlights the extent to which the Agency was ‘Palestinianised’. By contrast UNHCR – and accordingly all other refugees – use a registration system that does not distinguish on the basis of gender and allows both men and women to pass on their status to their children.⁵⁷

In broader terms, UNRWA’s patrilineal policy also typified its general conservatism. In keeping with boasts to Western donor states about its positive impact in facilitating stability, it was not in the Agency’s interests to promote any policy that might create ruptures by engendering significant social change. Yet notwithstanding this, it is undeniable that the nature and context of UNRWA’s work *did* affect and shape the socio-political attributes of the Palestinian camp communities. As explained here, its registration system simultaneously broadened the Palestinian refugee identity across the region, and narrowed it according to gender and other criteria, creating its

⁵⁵ Extract from *Palestine Refugees Today*, nd, Box GP3 PALESTINE UNRWA PUBLICATIONS, RSC.

⁵⁶ Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA Commissioner-General, Beirut, 19 January 2015.

Interview with Ardi Imseis, former UNRWA Field Legal Officer, by Skype, 23 May 2017.

⁵⁷ Interview with Ardi Imseis, former UNRWA Field Legal Officer, by Skype, 23 May 2017.

own specific policy for who was entitled to its services. The question remains of what impact these services themselves then had on those who could access them. With this in mind, the next section analyses the UNRWA relief programme that was most influential in its reach: education.

UNRWA's practical influence: Education

Of all UNRWA's programmes and activities, the most important was its standardised education system. Former Commissioner-General Davis described the education programme as the Agency's 'most significant contribution towards solving the refugee problem'.⁵⁸ In particular, it was crucial in aiding the formation of a community in exile, and enabling the politicisation of this community. Fawaz Turki, himself a graduate of the UNRWA education programme, described it as one of the factors that 'preserved and buoyed' the refugees' Palestinian consciousness in exile.⁵⁹

Similarly, numerous scholars have characterised UNRWA's education programme as the most influential of all its services. Ibrahim Abu Lughod, Rashid Khalidi, Julie Peteet and Maya Rosenfeld, among others, all emphasise the transformative impact that UNRWA's introduction of free education had on Palestinian society.⁶⁰ They point out that it was particularly significant given the historical context in Mandatory Palestine, where less than 30% of Arab school-age children had received an education.⁶¹ By contrast, UNRWA's comprehensive education programme meant that near-

⁵⁸ Davis, *The Evasive Peace*, p. 65.

⁵⁹ Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 53.

⁶⁰ Ibrahim Abu Lughod, 'Educating a Community in Exile: The Palestinian Experience', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2:3, Spring 1973, p. 103. R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, pp. 193-194. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 87. Milton Viorst, *Reaching for the Olive Branch: UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East* (Washington DC: Middle East Institute, 1984), p. 17. Maya Rosenfeld, 'From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back: UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees, 1950-2009', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, March 2010, p. 317. Edward Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees: A Study in non-territorial administration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 8-9.

⁶¹ Tom Segev, *One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs under the Mandate* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), p. 514.

universal literacy was achieved among the refugees within a generation, opening up new employment opportunities.⁶²

However, these scholarly assessments of UNRWA's education programme largely focus on its socio-economic effects rather than its political significance. Such a focus is especially limited in view of the fact that education is essentially a political force, not least with regard to nationalism; modernist theorists have often identified it as central to the dissemination of a common national identity. Benedict Anderson names mass education as one of the 'policy levers of official nationalism', vital in enabling an 'imagined community' to emerge.⁶³ Eric Hobsbawm writes similarly of how schools spread national consciousness and heritage, and inculcate an attachment to such things in people from a young age.⁶⁴ In the Palestinian case of course, education had an especially loaded importance - as noted in Chapter One, Palestinian nationalist discourse often tied education directly to the political cause.

The Palestinian belief that education formed part of their nationalist struggle was expressed repeatedly over the decades. In 1960, the Head of the AHC Office had stated that 'the only weapon with which the Palestinians arm themselves...is education... which kindles enthusiasm in their hearts to return to their usurped homeland and liberate it from its usurpers.' The AHC concluded that without education, the refugees' 'blazing spirit of patriotism will be extinguished'.⁶⁵ Nine years later, the PLO affirmed similarly in its Charter that education was a national duty, vital to the struggle for Palestine.⁶⁶ Such ideas could also be found among the grass roots. In 1971, a refugee group calling itself the Palestinian Organisation for Solidarity and Moral Guidance distributed a tract around UNRWA schools

⁶² R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 194.

⁶³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 101, 115, 167.

⁶⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 91-92.

⁶⁵ Extract from *Al Ayyam*, 6 September 1960, File RE230(S)I, Box RE21, UHA [UNRWA translation].

⁶⁶ Article 7, PLO National Charter 1968, OP.32072.956.7, CUOPA.

in Gaza, calling on refugees to commit themselves to education as the ultimate act of patriotism, the ‘first necessary requirement’ for nationalist goals to be achieved, and a ‘true expression for our love to our beloved usurped home’.⁶⁷

This connection between education and Palestinian political nationalism was also observed externally. During the first *intifada*, social scientists Zeev Schiff and Ehud Yaari noted that the UNRWA education system had been significant in giving Palestinians an awareness of injustice and a motivation to improve their situation.⁶⁸ It was no coincidence that the refugees tended to be the prime agents of change; nearly all registered refugee children attended UNRWA schools for their elementary education.⁶⁹ Nationalist figures including Naji al ‘Ali, Khalil Wazir (better known as Abu Jihad) and Ghassan Kanafani, along with countless *ḥidaʿiyyīn*, were all graduates of UNRWA schools.⁷⁰ In view of this, the UNRWA education programme’s connection to Palestinian national identity and the nationalist movement is undeniably worthy of greater investigation.

Yet there are few in-depth studies of how UNRWA’s education programme shaped Palestinian nationalism in the camps. While Abu Lughod and Peteet, along with Rosemary Sayigh and Riccardo Bocco, have all written of the refugees’ widespread belief in education as a national duty, assessments of UNRWA’s role have often been marginal.⁷¹ Peteet, Bocco and David Forsythe all argue that UNRWA’s education programme was typical of schooling systems everywhere in that it helped inculcate

⁶⁷ Tract from Palestinian Organisation for Solidarity and Moral Guidance, February 1971, File RE230(G-3) II, Box RE19, UHA [UNRWA translation].

⁶⁸ Zeev Schiff and Ehud Yaari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising - Israel's Third Front* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 85.

⁶⁹ Michael Dumper (ed.), *Palestinian Refugee Repatriation: Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

⁷⁰ Ghada Karmi recalls in her memoir meeting *ḥidaʿiyyīn* in 1970s Lebanon who had all been educated in UNRWA schools. Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 403.

⁷¹ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 64, 88, 125, 129. Riccardo Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3, March 2010, p. 245. Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007), p. 121, 186. Abu Lughod, 'Educating a Community in Exile', p. 103.

nationalism and construct national subjects - but their analyses do not explain the specificities of how and why it had this effect.⁷² Even more fleetingly, Kemal Kirisci writes in passing that UNRWA's educational programme precipitated social and political modernisation that aided the nationalist movement, without unpacking this any further.⁷³

In-depth studies of the politics of UNRWA's education programme are therefore few in number. Of particular value to this thesis are those by Ghassan Shabaneh and Rosemary Sayigh. The former contends that UNRWA's schooling system has provided a crucial structure for the refugees' national identity, while the latter recently paved the way for new research when she assessed UNRWA's role in supplying Palestinian history books to refugee children.⁷⁴ This section builds on the foundations of both scholars' works to engage with the historicity and specificities of UNRWA's education programme. It extends the existing analysis so as to include an explicit consideration of the intersection between an internationally-mandated schooling system and a nationalist setting. In doing so, it examines how the operation of the UNRWA schools impacted the nationalist movement in the camps.

The UNRWA schools network

One of UNRWA's greatest contributions to the Palestinian nationalist movement was structural. As discussed in Chapter Four, the Agency established a standardised transnational system that helped maintain a shared Palestinian consciousness among the refugees, despite their dispersal

⁷² Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 245. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 128. David P. Forsythe, 'The Palestine Question: Dealing with a Long-Term Refugee Situation', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467, May 1983, p. 93.

⁷³ Kirisci, *The PLO and world politics*, pp. 42-43.

⁷⁴ Ghassan Shabaneh, 'Education and Identity: The Role of UNRWA's Education Programmes in the Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25:4, 2012, pp. 491-513. See also: Shabaneh, 'Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity'. Rosemary Sayigh, 'What history books for children in Palestinian camps?', *Jadaliyya*, 7 July 2014, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/18421/what-history-books-for-children-in-palestinian-cam>, accessed 3 July 2017.

across state borders. Yet it did not only do so in conceptual terms. As Shabaneh has examined in some detail, UNRWA also established institutions that helped maintain a Palestinian identity, among which its schools were the most important.⁷⁵ The details of the buildings often reinforced this, with individual schools and even classrooms frequently named after towns and villages in pre-Nakba Palestine.⁷⁶ In physical terms, the UNRWA schools were the first permanent structures to be built inside the refugee camps, meaning that they helped institutionalise the latter and reinforce their function as separate Palestinian spaces.⁷⁷

Bocco and Peteet both argue that the physicality of the schools was fused with a more conceptual significance. Bocco contends that the schools offered both the space and the means to reconstitute the fabric of Palestinian society in exile, by creating new networks of solidarity.⁷⁸ Meanwhile Peteet emphasises how they brought Palestinians together in spaces where their identity and collective consciousness was heightened. The refugees accordingly found in the schools a means to transmit a Palestinian national identity – and the result, unforeseen by UNRWA, was that its education programme inadvertently helped prepare a generation for what Peteet calls the ‘secular, militant nationalist activities’ of the *thawra*.⁷⁹

Put simply, the UNRWA schools were effective as a means for transmitting nationalism because they functioned as spaces that were almost entirely Palestinian in both personnel and ethos,⁸⁰ with the added bonus of being internationally-legitimised. In this sense it can be argued that one of UNRWA’s most important contributions to the nationalist movement was

⁷⁵ Shabaneh, ‘Education and Identity’. See also: Shabaneh, ‘Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity’, p. 216.

⁷⁶ See for example: Gaza Director, Memo to Field Education Officer, 7 September 1971, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, UHA. See also: Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, p. 407.

⁷⁷ Maya Rosenfeld, ‘From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back’, p. 300.

⁷⁸ Bocco, ‘UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees’, p. 239.

⁷⁹ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 88, 128.

⁸⁰ Anaheed Al-Hardan, *Palestinians in Syria: Nakba memories of shattered communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 59.

indirect and inadvertent; in establishing common institutions for the Palestinian refugees in exile, it provided spaces where both ideology and strategy could be disseminated among a community whose presence was defined primarily by their Palestinian identity.

Even UNRWA management themselves acknowledged this. In a 1974 article in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, UNRWA Public Information Officer George Dickerson wrote:

One of the by-products of the UNRWA/UNESCO education programme has been its contribution towards the preservation of the Palestine refugees' identity with the Palestine culture and within the wider context of Arab culture. This is partly because so many of them have been able to attend schools in which almost all the children are Palestine refugees and virtually all of the teachers are also Palestinians.⁸¹

The importance of such majority-Palestinian environments should not be underestimated. The Palestinian refugees, and especially those in the camps, were usually marginalised in the structures of the host states, particularly Lebanon (as explained in Chapter Three). Although they were in the majority in the camps, these spaces were not formally institutionalised in the same way as state structures. The existence of internationally-sanctioned majority-Palestinian institutions was thus vital.

Most importantly, these institutions could be found across the *shatāt* (diaspora), or at least across those parts of it in which UNRWA worked. In this way the schools served as another manifestation of UNRWA's standardisation of the Palestinian refugees' experiences, with individuals everywhere participating in the same education programme, albeit with some regional variations. UNRWA management themselves described the

⁸¹ George Dickerson, 'Education for the Palestine Refugees: the UNRWA/UNESCO Programme', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 3:3, Spring 1973, p. 128.

programme as a 'national system of education'⁸² operating 'across frontiers' and thus providing the Palestinian refugees with another shared feature of their exile, another common frame of reference, and another means by which they could create a network across the diaspora.⁸³ Yet this was not the only way in which the Agency's education shaped the burgeoning nationalist movement in the camps. UNRWA's guidelines over *who* could be taught, and *what* they were taught, were also vitally influential features, which this thesis breaks new grounds in examining. Each of these features is now considered in turn.

Educating girls

Like UNRWA's registration system, its education programme influenced notions of gender in relation to Palestinian refugee identity. However, it did so in a very different way. Unlike its registration system, UNRWA's education programme operated on a gender-blind basis, with schooling available free of charge to *all* registered refugee children regardless of sex.⁸⁴ As UNESCO observed early on, this meant that families no longer saved up to educate their sons while keeping their daughters at home, as many had done previously.⁸⁵ As a result, rates of female education among Palestinians increased hugely in both relative and absolute terms in the 1950s and 1960s.⁸⁶

Both this aspect of UNRWA's impact, and its connection to the Palestinian nationalist movement, have been insufficiently examined in the existing literature. The most relevant work comes from anthropologists

⁸² This phrase was used by senior UNRWA officials in: 'The Needs of UNRWA in the Fields of Education and Training', 10 February 1968, File RE230 V, Box RE19, UHA; Dickerson, 'Education for the Palestine refugees', p. 124.

⁸³ Education Director, Memo to Commissioner-General, 26 June 1967, File RE230(L-1)IV, Box RE21, UHA.

⁸⁴ In 1961 UNRWA had formally accepted the principle of free preparatory education 'for all refugee children capable of benefiting from it', although it had been running schools across the fields long before this. 'UNRWA 1950-90: Serving Palestine Refugees', April 1990, Box GP59.3 UNRWA, RSC.

⁸⁵ UNESCO, 'The Education of Palestine Arab Refugees', UNESCO/ED/31, 31 August 1953, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001261/126137EB.pdf>, accessed 20 January 2017.

⁸⁶ Abu Lughod, 'Educating a Community in Exile', p. 111.

Rosemary Sayigh and Julie Peteet, who look at how the UNRWA-driven upsurge in female education gave girls of the *thawra* generation a greater voice in both family affairs and the resistance campaign.⁸⁷ In this way, it can be argued that the Agency's provision of girls' schooling was a facilitating factor – although by no means a primary cause – in refugee women's involvement in the Palestinian nationalist movement. Their participation in the *thawra* was highly active, as women played a vital role in organising demonstrations and petitions, carrying secret messages, transporting arms, and in some cases carrying out militant attacks directly.⁸⁸

This is not to say that social conservatism disappeared completely with the onset of girls' education. On the contrary, conservative ideas remained influential in both refugee society and the UNRWA education programme itself. UNRWA schools were nearly all single-sex, with boys and girls taught separately in deference to most parents' wishes. There is an argument that such gender segregation may have been indirectly progressive in facilitating girls' education, as many families objected to any suggestion of sending their daughters to mixed schools. Indeed, UNRWA's one coeducational school in Karama faced strong objections from parents.⁸⁹

Further social conservatism could be found in the Agency's curriculum, which was organised along gendered lines when it came to vocational subjects. Thus in the 1960s and 1970s, boys received training in woodwork and metalwork, while girls learnt home economics (Fig. 20).⁹⁰ In 1971, the UNRWA West Bank Director deemed the latter to be 'more vital

⁸⁷ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 88, 128. Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books, 1993), p. 55.

⁸⁸ On female participation in the *thawra* see: Abu Iyad with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981), p. 60; *PLO information bulletin*, 1:4, July 1975, IPS. For examples of women's petitions, see: Petitions from citizens of the Jordan West Bank and Gaza Strip, submitted to UN and UNRWA, 6 February 1968, S-0667-0006-03; Letter from 'The Palestinian Women in the Occupied Lands' to the UN Secretary-General, 25 March 1979, S-1808-0094-0008, both UNA.

⁸⁹ See: Memo from Jordan Field Education Officer to Director of Education, 17 July 1975; Memo from Lloyd Callow to DUA/Jordan, 11 August 1975; Memo from Acting Director of Education, 11 August 1975, all in File RE 230J) IV, Box RE20, UHA.

⁹⁰ UNRWA, 'The Needs of UNRWA in the Fields of Education and Training', February 1967, File RE230 V, Box RE19, UHA.

to girls' education perhaps than any other subject', signifying the presence of conservative ideas on gender at a high Agency level.⁹¹ In this arrangement, UNRWA was being consistent with not only the Arab host states but also numerous Western education systems at the time.

<Figure 20 unavailable due to copyright>

Notwithstanding this segregation, UNRWA management proudly cited the gender equality of the education programme as one of its most positive effects. Former Commissioner-General John Davis wrote in his 1970 book of the Agency's positive progress towards girls' education among the refugees.⁹² That same year, the Agency's Education Director travelled to Marrakech to address the Third Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States. In his speech he highlighted how the UNRWA/UNESCO schooling system gave 'equal educational opportunities' to boys and girls, with a resulting major increase in female enrolment and access to higher education.⁹³ His successors similarly cited the gender parity in UNRWA schools as a key achievement,⁹⁴ and the point was also highlighted in the Agency's newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today*, sent to donor states.⁹⁵

However, the story was not entirely positive. Writing in 1973 – three years after the Education Director had spoken in Marrakech – scholar Ibrahim Abu Lughod argued that the gender gap in UNRWA schools remained unsatisfactory. Enrolment figures in the early 1970s continued to show more boys than girls, albeit at a declining rate. The gender gap

⁹¹ UNRWA West Bank Director, Memo to Comptroller and Director of Education, RE/C410/A, 21 October 1971, File RE230(L-4), Box RE21, UHA.

⁹² Davis, *The Evasive Peace*, pp. 71-72.

⁹³ Address by R.H. Ardill, Director of UNRWA/UNESCO Department of Education, at the Third Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States, Marrakesh, 12-20 January 1970, File OR 230 (1-3) PART III, Box OR71, UHA.

⁹⁴ Assistant to UNRWA Director of Education, Memo to Chief of Secretariat, ED/199, 19 June 1981, File OR150/2-EDU, Box OR29, UHA.

⁹⁵ UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 93, July 1980, RSC.

widened at higher levels, due to higher drop-out rates among more advanced female students.⁹⁶ Writing in response to the critique, UNRWA Public Information Officer George Dickerson contended that Abu Lughod had overstated the gender inequality in the Agency's Education programme - although he conceded that as late as 1964, boys comprised 73% of UNRWA's secondary pupils.⁹⁷ It is thus clear that UNRWA's impact in facilitating gender parity should not be overstated, particularly in view of the fact that its promotion of female education was juxtaposed with its sexist registration policy. Nevertheless, the mass education of refugee girls was undeniably significant in helping enable the increasingly public role of refugee women. Furthermore, the enrolment of girls as well as boys in UNRWA schools would become particularly important in Lebanon, the home of the *thawra*, where the education programme went furthest in its dissemination of Palestinian nationalism. This is examined in depth next.

'Palestinianising' UNRWA's curriculum

UNRWA's school curriculum long served as a source of tension. From the beginning, the Agency had adopted the curricula of the respective host states in its schools.⁹⁸ This was in keeping with the policy implemented by the Red Cross before the Agency took over,⁹⁹ and was justified on the grounds that it would enable refugee children to later integrate into the higher education institutions and job markets of the various countries in which they lived.¹⁰⁰ Yet Palestinian nationalists had long argued that the policy undermined their cause by ignoring the need to teach younger

⁹⁶ Abu Lughod, 'Educating a Community in Exile', pp. 106-9.

⁹⁷ Dickerson, 'Education for the Palestine Refugees', p. 123.

⁹⁸ Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 28.

⁹⁹ Red Cross Report on Palestine Refugees, 12 May 1950, ED 157/366, TNA.

¹⁰⁰ Director of UNRWA Education, Memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 9 December 1964, CON/ED/165, File RE230(G)I, Box RE19; UNESCO booklet, 'The in-service training programme for UNRWA/Unesco teaching', 1967, File RE230(L-1) Box RE21; Deputy Commissioner-General, Memo to Special Consultant to Commissioner-General, 27 March 1968, File RE230(1)G I, Box RE27, all UHA. See also Dickerson, 'Education for the Palestine Refugees', p. 128.

generations about their own history and the reasons for their plight.¹⁰¹ The Arab host state curricula only covered Palestinian events as a fleeting part of wider Arab history – or, in the case of Lebanon, not at all. Fawaz Turki, who attended an UNRWA school in Lebanon in the 1950s, later recalled:

The schools that UNRWA sponsored were designed – unwittingly or not – to raise Palestinian children on, and educate them in, accepting their plight of life as a preordained thing. They degraded the minds of Palestinian youngsters and trained, indeed pressured, them into viewing their reality as the norm of existence, never transcendable [sic] in its dimensions.... No attempt was made to explain the situation and the forces behind it that ruled their lives, or how they were to respond to them.... No courses were offered to show where they came from, the history of Palestine.....¹⁰²

Turki's recollection typifies the fact that Palestinian complaints about the curriculum were often fiercest in Lebanon, where the history of Palestine was entirely absent from the syllabi. In the 1970s, the *thawra* brought such complaints to the forefront, with the greatest amplification in Lebanon – largely due to the fact that the country was the base of the *thawra* and the headquarters of the PLO at this time. The fixation on Lebanon thus signified the latter's centrality to Palestinian politics; accordingly, this subsection focuses much of its analysis on events in Lebanon.

However, it should be noted that developments in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon in the 1970s also had a wider significance across the *shatāt*. Nationalist-driven debates over what should be taught in UNRWA schools came to epitomise the *thawra's* impact on camp norms across the region, while also exemplifying the agency displayed by the Palestinian refugees throughout their exile, and the influence that they gained over UNRWA's programmes as a result. These years saw UNRWA use Lebanon as a testing ground in which it developed policy with the intention of later rollout across all fields of operations.

¹⁰¹ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 90.

¹⁰² Turki, *The Disinherited*, p. 58.

The selection of Lebanon for this purpose can be easily explained by the impact of the *thawra* and the resulting Cairo Agreement. These developments not only gave the Palestinians greater leverage in Lebanon than elsewhere, but also enabled UNRWA could experiment with its programmes here more freely, without the possibility of direct tension with the host state. UNRWA's consequential use of the country as a test field means that changes here still hold a wider significance, as they were intended to ultimately be implemented across all fields. Studying events in Lebanon in this era can therefore illuminate developments within the Agency's operations at this time.

The *thawra* did not create pressures on the UNRWA curriculum that had been hitherto non-existent. Palestinian civil society had long been active in camp education, ever since refugees had pioneered the early makeshift camp schools in the 1940s.¹⁰³ After UNRWA took over in 1950, the vast majority of teachers in its schools continued to be registered Palestinian refugees themselves.¹⁰⁴ Many remained politically organised, forming the activist UNRWA Teachers' Association in 1952.¹⁰⁵ They often also belonged to the fledgling nationalist movement;¹⁰⁶ Fatah co-founder Abu Iyad, communist activist Mu'in Basisu, ANM official Ahmad Husayn al Yamani and PFLP figure Ghassan Kanafani all worked as UNRWA teachers in the 1950s, the former two in Gaza and the latter two in Lebanon.¹⁰⁷ Their

¹⁰³ The earliest camp schools are depicted in the documentary *Sands of Sorrow* (1950). See: https://archive.org/details/sands_of_sorrow, accessed 6 June 2017.

¹⁰⁴ The high proportion of Palestinian teachers in UNRWA schools has been consistent over the decades. In 1971, UNRWA estimated that 99% of its staff were Palestinian, and half its employees were teachers. Press Briefing by UNRWA Commissioner-General, 8 June 1971, S-1066-0065-0006, UNA. Two years later, UNRWA reported that all its school headteachers were Palestinian refugees themselves. Gaza Director, letter to Colonel Liran, 9 April 1973, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, UHA.

¹⁰⁵ Philip Issa, 'Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian leadership in 1950s Lebanon', MA thesis, University of Texas, 2015, p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁷ Abu Iyad, *My Home My Land*, pp. 25-28. Issa, 'Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian leadership in 1950s Lebanon', pp. 38-41. Mu'in Basisu, *Descent into the Water: Palestinian Notes from Arab Exile* (Wilmette: Medina Press, 1980), pp. 21-22. Esmat Elhalaby, 'Paradoxes of UNRWA', *Dissent*, 2 March 2018, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/paradoxes-unrwa-palestine-refugees-israel-usa-trump-cuts, accessed 5 March 2018.

political commitments had a direct effect on how they conducted their work, and drove their frequent activism vis-à-vis UNRWA.

Numerous scholars have noted the teachers' informal importance in this sense. Feldman, Al Hussein and Peteet, alongside Laleh Khalili, Riccardo Bocco, Oroub El-Abed and Yezid Sayigh, have all written of the fervent nationalism of many UNRWA teachers, and its consequences.¹⁰⁸ Sayigh contends that the backgrounds of most UNRWA teachers made their role especially significant; as they were usually from the camps and often very young, they instilled a sense of urgency and political commitment in their students. According to Sayigh, many teachers acted as a link between camp schools and political parties, even recruiting for the latter.¹⁰⁹ That so many teachers sought to further the nationalist cause through their work is typical of the ongoing attempts by many refugees to challenge the situation in which they found themselves, and re-shape it along their own preferred lines. It is also indicative of the depth of their attachment to Palestinian nationalism - particularly in view of the fact that, as Peteet notes, they risked dismissal from UNRWA if caught engaging in overt political activism.¹¹⁰

What much of the existing literature does not explore sufficiently is how central UNRWA's curriculum was to many of the teachers' early demands. The 1950s saw both Basisu and Yamani, among others, lobby UNRWA to introduce Palestinian history and geography into its schools. When these efforts proved unsuccessful, they set about developing such curricula informally themselves.¹¹¹ Although Basisu and Yamani were both later fired by the Agency for their political activities – the latter after distributing a pamphlet accusing UNRWA of serving Zionism – their efforts

¹⁰⁸ Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 216-217; Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-building Process', p. 54; Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 239, 245; El Abed, *Unprotected*, p. 178. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, pp. 71-72. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 90, 125, 128.

¹⁰⁹ Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 53.

¹¹⁰ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, p. 128.

¹¹¹ Issa, 'Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian leadership in 1950s Lebanon', p. 6.

had a long-term legacy.¹¹² In 1954, students at UNRWA schools in Nahr el-Bared camp in Lebanon demonstrated against the history curriculum, demanding instruction in the geography and history of Palestine.¹¹³ The following year, UNRWA teachers in Lebanon put this at the forefront of their demands during a strike, which would be a recurrent tactic over the years.¹¹⁴

Although the teachers were unsuccessful in their attempts to formally change UNRWA's curriculum in the 1950s, some scholars have identified the subtler ways in which they inflected the education system with nationalist ideas. Rosemary Sayigh has interviewed students who attended UNRWA schools in this period and recall starting the day with patriotic songs at the teachers' urging.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Philip Issa writes that Yamani and his colleagues had their students recite national anthems and a Palestinian oath, and rehearse nationalist plays.¹¹⁶ The teachers thus made effective use of the schools' potential as an arena for inculcating a strong sense of Palestinian collective identity among the students. They were crucial in imparting a national consciousness to younger generations, countering the neutral stance that UNRWA formally promoted in its educational ethos.¹¹⁷

The teachers' politicisation, which had been present from the camps' early days, gained a new resonance after 1967. In the OPT, the onset of the Israeli occupation triggered a renewed attention on what was taught in UNRWA schools. While the Agency continued to use the Jordanian curriculum in the West Bank and the Egyptian curriculum in Gaza, the

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 60. Basisu, *Descent into the Water*, p. 23. Basisu's political activism had been a source of concern to UNRWA management for some time. See: Labouisse to Lalive, cable 429, 16 November 1957, S-0169-0010-0007, UNA.

¹¹³ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 140.

¹¹⁴ Issa, 'Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian leadership in 1950s Lebanon', p. 59.

¹¹⁵ R. Sayigh, 'What history books for children in Palestinian camps?'. R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 143.

¹¹⁶ Issa, 'Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian leadership in 1950s Lebanon', p. 6, 48.

¹¹⁷ Mu'in Basisu writes of this in his memoir. Basisu, *Descent into the Water*, p. 21.

Israeli government was now involved in monitoring the content.¹¹⁸ As discussed in Chapter Three, textbooks had to be approved by Israeli inspectors, who censored any material deemed bellicose or hostile to Israel.¹¹⁹

Meanwhile in the Arab host states, the same period saw the *thanra* give a new impetus to long-running Palestinian grievances about the curriculum. As explained above, this was particularly pronounced in Lebanon, where the *thanra* was centred and the nationalist movement was most powerful.¹²⁰ 1969 accordingly saw teachers and students at UNRWA schools in Lebanon go on strike to demand that Palestinian history and geography be included in the curriculum.¹²¹ They received formal support from the Arab League, which officially recommended in November that year that the refugees should be taught in UNRWA schools about their rights to their land, ‘its usurpal and aggression by the Zionists, and the fight for its redemption’.¹²² The PLO was also vocal on the issue, after a study by its Palestine Planning Centre (PPC) found that UNRWA’s history and geography textbooks were deficient and even inaccurate.¹²³

The persistence and accumulation of these demands eventually bore fruit, at least in Lebanon. As outlined above, numerous factors combined to make Lebanon the site of ‘Palestinianisation’ efforts vis-à-vis the curriculum; not only was it the centre of the Palestinian nationalist movement at this time, but it also had a state curriculum with significant flexibility. Although there was one formal national curriculum for all Lebanese public and private

¹¹⁸ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, p. 71. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 63-64. Lamis Alami, ‘Educating Palestinian Refugees: The Role of UNRWA’, *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, 3:2, Spring 1996, p. 71.

¹¹⁹ Director of Education, Memo to Commissioner-General, 17 August 1967, File RE230 V, Box RE19, UHA.

¹²⁰ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, pp. 71-72.

¹²¹ Director of Education, letter to supervisor, 20 November 1969, File RE230(WB-3)I, Box RE22; Acting Commissioner-General, letters to Unesco Director-General, 22 October 1969, 18 December 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, all UHA.

¹²² Director of Education, memo to Acting Commissioner-General, 12 November 1969, File RE230 VI, Box RE19, UHA.

¹²³ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, p. 184.

schools, the latter could choose their own textbooks. In keeping with the country's sectarian system, they often opted for books that reflected the relevant community's political culture; for example, it was not uncommon for Maronite schools to teach the history of France rather than Lebanon. Schools in Lebanon therefore often reinforced separate communal identities – and in such a setting, the idea of having a different Palestinian curriculum did not seem especially strange.

A combination of political and practical circumstances thus made Lebanon the most feasible field in which to 'Palestinianise' UNRWA's curriculum. From UNRWA's perspective, it was the ideal testing ground for this potentially-controversial change, in view of both the aforementioned fragmentation of the Lebanese curriculum and the weakness of the Lebanese state. Lebanon thus became central to the 'Palestinianisation' of the UNRWA curriculum. Changes followed quickly after the Naksa; in 1969, UNRWA's Head of Press stated to the Beirut weekly *Al Abad* that the Agency had no objection to teaching Palestinian history and geography in its schools in the country.¹²⁴ In fact, archival documents indicate that it had already quietly started looking into ways to adapt the curriculum.¹²⁵ In October that year, UNRWA's Deputy Commissioner-General wrote to the UNESCO Director-General, seeking his formal agreement to teach the history and geography of Palestine to the refugees in Lebanon. In his letter, he cited pressure from both teachers and the Arab League as factors behind the change, showing once again the effectiveness of the former's persistent tactics.¹²⁶

With the conditional agreement of the UNESCO Director, UNRWA formed several committees to examine how to 'Palestinianise' the

¹²⁴ Head of UNRWA Press and Publications, letter to editor of *Al Abad*, 3 April 1969, File RE230(3)II, Box RE28, UHA.

¹²⁵ 'New training activities proposed to be taken by the UNRWA/Unesco Institute of Education', memo 35/69, 26 November 1969, File RE230(L-1)IV, Box RE21, UHA.

¹²⁶ Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, 22 October 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA.

curriculum.¹²⁷ The decision was made to teach Palestinian history and geography as a 'special expanded subject' within the existing social studies framework, thus avoiding the need to either replace Lebanese content or create additional periods.¹²⁸ At the same time, the UNRWA/UNESCO Institute of Education in Beirut¹²⁹ hired Palestinian educators to develop a Palestinian history syllabus for the elementary and preparatory levels. The resulting syllabus, which is now held in UNRWA's Central Registry in Amman, covered Palestinian history from ancient times to the 20th century, and also provided instruction on Palestinian cities, agriculture, archaeology, holy places and social life.¹³⁰ The Institute produced several new textbooks, and one of the consultants, Ali Othman, developed a Teachers' Guide for teaching Palestinian history.¹³¹

There is some uncertainty over exactly when these new subjects were introduced to UNRWA schools in Lebanon. A 1967 UNESCO booklet claimed that the changes were made as early as the 1965/66 school year,¹³² but most of the evidence belies this. The new syllabus could not be implemented until both UNESCO and the Lebanese government had approved it,¹³³ and documents from the UNRWA archive show that this

¹²⁷ UNESCO Director-General, letter to Acting Commissioner-General, 9 December 1969, 30 December 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA.

¹²⁸ Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, 22 Oct 1969, Box RE27; Director of Education, letter to Lebanon Director, 22 October 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27; Memo from Lebanon Director, 17 June 1970, File RE230(L-1)II, Box RE20; all UHA.

¹²⁹ UNRWA established this Institute in 1964 to develop an in-service teacher training programme. Dickerson, 'Education for the Palestine Refugees', p. 127. 'UNRWA 1950-90: Serving Palestine Refugees', Box GP59.3 UNRWA, RSC.

¹³⁰ Acting Commissioner-General, letter to Unesco Director-General, 22 October 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA.

¹³¹ Interview with Hasna Rida, former UNRWA Education Research Assistant, 7 December 2016, Beirut. In early 1970, UNRWA's Deputy Commissioner-General also wrote to academic historians in Oxford, seeking recommendations for teachers' background reading on the history of Palestine. See: Deputy Commissioner-General, letter to Peter Lienhardt, 8 January 1970; Lienhardt, letter to Deputy Commissioner-General, 22 January 1970; Albert Hourani, letter to Deputy Commissioner-General, 5 February 1970, all File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA.

¹³² UNESCO booklet, 'The in-service training programme for UNRWA/Unesco teaching', 1967, File RE230(L-1) Box RE21, UHA.

¹³³ Deputy Commissioner-General, letter to Lienhardt, 8 January 1970, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA.

process involved significant delays stretching into the 1970s.¹³⁴ As late as 1973, there was still material pending clearance from either the Lebanese Ministry of Education or the UNESCO Director-General.¹³⁵ While Commissioner-General Michelmores stated in his 1970 report to the UNGA that the subjects had been introduced from January that year, some parts of the new syllabus were still awaiting approval.¹³⁶

Moreover, many refugees continued to complain about UNRWA's curriculum in the early 1970s. The long waits for approval from UNESCO and the Lebanese government prompted further agitation from teachers and students, and accusations that UNRWA was indulging in delaying tactics. The hostility was so severe that UNRWA's Acting Commissioner-General requested that UNESCO treat the clearance as a priority to speed up the process.¹³⁷ Abu Lughod's aforementioned critique of UNRWA's education system, in which he argued that its curriculum served to 'weaken Palestinianism', was published as late as 1973.¹³⁸ Such evidence indicates that the implementation of the new syllabus was a drawn-out and difficult process. This may have been due to the turmoil and nervousness surrounding such a sensitive issue, exacerbated by the complexities involved in implementing change across a large bureaucracy.

Just as the date of the syllabus' introduction is unclear, so it is similarly uncertain as to when Palestinian history and geography disappeared from the UNRWA curriculum in Lebanon. After the Commissioner-General's comments on the new syllabus in his reports to the UNGA in 1970 and

¹³⁴ Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, 18 December 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA.

¹³⁵ Extract from UNRWA's Comments on Memo of 29 August 1973 submitted to Secretary-General on the occasion of his visit to Lebanon by the Higher Political Committee for Palestinians in Lebanon, File RE230(L-1)II, Box RE20; Lebanon Field Education Officer, cable to Chief Education Officer, 24 April 1973, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, both UHA.

¹³⁶ Laurence Michelmores, Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General, A/8013, 30 June 1970, paragraph 109, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/519871909FA2913885256A5700565639> accessed 26 June 2017.

¹³⁷ Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, 18 December 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA.

¹³⁸ Abu Lughod, 'Educating a Community in Exile', pp. 96-97.

1971, there was no further mention of the subject in UNRWA annual reports in the later part of that decade and the 1980s.¹³⁹ As Rosemary Sayigh notes, the subjects are not taught at UNRWA schools in Lebanon today.¹⁴⁰ It is unconfirmed exactly when and why they were removed, but the evidence points to some likely possibilities. Laleh Khalili writes that the PLO's departure from Lebanon in 1982 marked a downturn in the nationalist pedagogy that had characterised UNRWA schools there during the *thawra*,¹⁴¹ and Rosemary Sayigh suggests that Palestinian history and geography disappeared from the UNRWA curriculum around the same time.¹⁴² This is a reasonable assumption, not because demand for the subjects would have lessened, but because the Palestinians in Lebanon lost considerable leverage when the PLO's power base collapsed.

Furthermore, the teaching of these new subjects was limited geographically as well as temporally. Despite early suggestions that UNRWA's 'Palestinianised' curriculum would eventually be rolled out across its five fields of operation, after using Lebanon as a testing ground, there is no evidence that this ever happened. Formally, the Agency justified this geographical containment on the grounds that Lebanon was the only host state whose curriculum included no mention of Palestine, while the Jordanian, Syrian and Egyptian curricula all featured some consideration of the Nakba (albeit fleetingly).¹⁴³ In reality the Agency's reasoning may also have had a political element; Lebanon was the home of the *thawra* and the only field in which the PLO held power by formal agreement, meaning that UNRWA was under more pressure to listen to Palestinian demands there.

¹³⁹ The full record of UNRWA annual reports can be viewed at: <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/udc.htm?OpenForm>, accessed 14 July 2017.

¹⁴⁰ R. Sayigh, 'What History Books for Children in Palestinian camps?'

¹⁴¹ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, p. 72.

¹⁴² R. Sayigh, 'What History Books for Children in Palestinian camps?'

¹⁴³ Deputy Commissioner-General, letter to Leinhardt, 8 January 1970, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA. See also: John Rennie, 'Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General', A/8413, 30 June 1971, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/A81D27231BA0BF4985256AA8006C6BFD>, accessed 31 August 2017.

As Khalili argues, this gave an added leverage to the threat of teachers' strikes in Lebanon, as UNRWA feared that staff across the region would follow suit.¹⁴⁴ In other words, it was no coincidence that UNRWA agreed to change its curriculum at the time and in the place where the *thawra* was most powerful.

However, it should not be assumed as a result that the significance of 'Palestinianising' the UNRWA curriculum was limited to Lebanon. In fact, the adaptation of UNRWA's curriculum along nationalist lines is emblematic of two key points about the history of the Agency and the camps across the Levant. Firstly, it is indicative of the refugees' ongoing political agency. They rarely accepted conditions that they considered intolerable, and UNRWA often found itself in the crossfire of the resulting agitation. The unionised teachers were particularly effective in utilising their leverage against the Agency, seeking to counter the potentially depoliticising impact of humanitarianism by politicising UNRWA's services in practice. The power of their political organisation was acknowledged at a high level; Commissioner-General Michelmores stated on more than one occasion that the Agency had opted to introduce Palestinian history and geography to its schools in response to pressures from the teachers.¹⁴⁵

Secondly, the 'Palestinianisation' of the UNRWA curriculum in this period is a clear manifestation of the increasing fusion of Palestinian nationalism with UNRWA - an international organisation that had by this stage spent three decades closely entwined with the lives of the Palestinian refugees. The set-up saw the Agency become increasingly 'Palestinianised' over time, with the educational changes discussed here providing the clearest example of what this looked like in practice. The result was that by the later part of the *thawra* period, UNRWA was facilitating the

¹⁴⁴ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, pp. 71-72.

¹⁴⁵ 'Comments on Appeal from Secretary-General of the Federation of Arab Teachers', 5 June 1970, File RE230(1)S, Box RE27, UHA. Michelmores, 1970 Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General, paragraph 109.

dissemination of Palestinian nationalism not only through its transnational structures, but also through its programmes' contents. Although this was most pronounced in the curriculum changes in Lebanon, it was by no means limited to this field. Instead, events in Lebanon signified a broader trend whereby the Agency was becoming increasingly fused with nationalist politics in the refugee camps across the Levant.

Conclusion

The history of Palestinian nationalism in the refugee camps both enriches and complicates conventional understandings of the relationship between the state and nationalism. In the Palestinian case, nationalism developed in the absence of a state, and was fuelled by a popular longing for it. It thus disproves any notion that a state is a necessary condition for a collective national identity to take hold. At the same time, UNRWA's role shows how a 'shadow state' can emerge to fulfil some of these functions in a setting of statelessness. While UNRWA did not create or intentionally fuel Palestinian nationalism, its quasi-state role in the camps gave it an important role in how nationalist ideas developed and were communicated in these spaces. The intimacy and longevity of its presence and operations tied it inextricably to the shaping of the Palestinian national identity in exile.

As well as being the closest thing to a government for the refugees, UNRWA was also the only structure common to all Palestinian camps across the Levant. The transnational nature of its work served to unite Palestinian refugees across the five fields - an important and often underemphasised element of its importance. Although the Nakba levelled and unified Palestinian society, the population subsequently endured decades of geographical dispersal whereby they were separated by state borders and subject to the laws of their respective host governments. As the

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

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

This chapter has reiterated and highlighted many of the long-term themes of the camps' history. In particular, UNRWA's acquiescence to demands about its curriculum is a further example of how dynamics in the camps were characterised by the refugees' agency. Their political organisation and expression were constant features of the camps' history; despite the refugees' formal disempowerment, they exerted a considerable influence over their surroundings – and over the UN Agency responsible for their welfare. Moreover, the melding of UNRWA's programmes with Palestinian nationalism is indicative of the Agency's intimate involvement with the camps. This aspect of its set-up is crucial for understanding how UNRWA became increasingly 'Palestinianised' in this period, most notably

through the nationalisation of its curriculum in Lebanon. Significantly, this was a symbiotic process; just as UNRWA became ‘Palestinianised’, so the nationalist movement became ‘internationalised’ in its objectives and strategy. The PLO, as the structure encapsulating the nationalist movement and the organisation responsible for bringing the Palestinian refugees to much of the world’s attention, was central to this process. The dynamics of the PLO’s relationships with both UNRWA and the UN in general accordingly comprise the focus of the next and final chapter.

Chapter Six Palestine at the UN: UNRWA and the PLO

*UNRWA was a crucial hub for the Palestinian refugees.... It became very important for us [in the PLO] to focus on those who constituted its cadres [and] take advantage of the means that UNRWA could offer.*¹

Shafiq Al Hout, PLO representative at the UN from 1974-91

From the late 1960s, the PLO served as the structural representation of the Palestinian nationalist movement, both in the Middle East and on the world stage. After Arafat and the *fidāʿiyyīn* took over the PLO and emancipated it from the Arab League's control, the organisation became increasingly fused with the Palestinian grass roots, most markedly in the refugee camps. The PLO's new prominence and authority in the camps brought it into direct contact with UNRWA. With the PLO serving as what Cheryl Rubenberg calls 'the institutionalised expression of Palestinian nationalism',² its relationship with UNRWA constitutes a core element of the latter's broader interactions with the nationalist movement in the camps during the *thawra*. As such, this chapter complements previous chapters' assessments of UNRWA's relationship with the grass roots, by taking a more institutional approach.

Specifically, this chapter asks how the PLO perceived and dealt with UNRWA in the camps during the *thawra* period. It takes a comprehensive view of the PLO-UNRWA relationship, analysing it in the context of the Palestinian struggle for recognition and legitimacy at the UN. It also probes the extent to which the PLO's views of the Agency were aligned with those of the general camp populations, and asks in particular whether the PLO saw UNRWA's work as beneficial or obstructive to the political goals of the nationalist movement. Particular attention is paid to Lebanon, as the hub of

¹ Shafiq Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), trans. Hader Al Hout and Leila Othman, pp. 44-45.

² Cheryl A. Rubenberg, 'The Civilian Infrastructure of the Palestine Liberation Organisation', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 12:3, Spring 1983, p. 54.

the *thawra* and the site of the PLO para-state at this time. In examining these questions, this chapter expands on numerous points established earlier in the thesis: the camps' centrality to the Palestinian nationalist movement; the politically loaded effects of UNRWA's work; and the intersection between nationalism and internationalism in the camps.

While much has been written about the PLO's leading role in the Palestinian nationalist movement, the existing literature tends to focus on the organisation's internal dynamics and its relationships with the refugee communities. There is comparatively little scholarship on the PLO's strategy vis-à-vis international diplomacy, although Helena Cobban, Kemal Kirisci, Augustus Norton and Michael Greenberg have all examined the organisation's place on the world stage.³ The most comprehensive analysis of the PLO's internationalist angle comes from historian Paul Chamberlin, who argues that global political diplomacy was a core tenet of its strategy. According to Chamberlin, the historiography has wrongly subordinated the importance of Palestinian diplomatic efforts in favour of a preoccupation with the *fidāʿīyyīn*'s militancy.⁴

In making such an argument, Chamberlin builds on the work of Matthew Connelly, who convincingly made a similar case about the international strategy of the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ By taking this approach, Chamberlin illuminates a key part of the PLO's history that hitherto has been insufficiently examined. Yet while he pays considerable attention to the PLO's strategy at the UN, he

³ Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Kemal Kirisci, *The PLO and World Politics: A study of the mobilization of support for the Palestinian cause* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986). Augustus R. Norton and Martin H. Greenberg (ed.s), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organisation* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).

⁴ Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

largely disregards the question of how UNRWA fitted into the picture, as the UN's perceived local address for the Palestinian refugees.

Addressing this omission, this chapter argues that the PLO's relationship with UNRWA comprised an important component of its overtures to the UN. As such, the latter cannot be understood without the former. Moreover, the PLO's relationship with UNRWA is best examined within the context of its internationalist strategy in the 1970s, when it sought global solidarity and formal recognition on the world stage. The records of both the UNRWA Field Offices and the UN Headquarters, combined with the PLO's communications and publications, show that the PLO perceived and approached the Agency as an international organisation of political significance; in this sense it was aligned with the views of the host states, the donor states, and the refugees themselves. For the PLO, UNRWA's political significance was tied to its UN status. Accordingly, the PLO sought to use its local connections with the Agency as a way of furthering the Palestinian nationalist cause in the international arena. This made the Agency an important component of the PLO's internationalist strategy. In showing how this was so, the analysis here will add another layer to this thesis' study of UNRWA's historical connections to Palestinian nationalism.

This chapter's arguments are presented over two sections. The first section looks at the PLO-UNRWA dynamics in the sphere of international high diplomacy. It assesses UNRWA's place in the PLO's international strategy, as the latter sought legitimacy and formal recognition at the UN. The second section then explores the day-to-day interactions between the PLO and UNRWA in the camps during the *thanra* period. It examines both the supportive and the contentious aspects of the PLO's interactions with UNRWA, from its politically-tinged criticisms of the Agency to Arafat's fundraising efforts for its work. In so doing, the second section takes its analysis of the PLO's strategy at the UN to a more quotidian level, assessing

what difference the formal international recognition of the organisation in 1974 made on the ground.

By way of these arguments, this chapter enriches the historiography on UNRWA, the PLO and Palestinian nationalism with several new insights. It expands on UNRWA's historical significance within the Palestinian nationalist movement, showing that it functioned at the institutional level as well as the grass roots, and thus making this thesis a comprehensive account of the subject. Importantly, the evidence of this chapter also augments existing understandings of the PLO's history, which have thus far taken a restricted view of its internationalist approach to the UN. By showing that the PLO's internationalist strategy included UNRWA, it demonstrates the truly multi-faceted nature of its activities and objectives. Finally, by showing that UNRWA's work helped connect the nationalism of the camps to the international arena at the UN, this chapter provides further evidence that the Agency's claims to be apolitical were rendered increasingly untenable by the impact of the *thawra*.

The politics of high diplomacy: Internationalising Palestine

In order to fully understand the PLO's overtures to UNRWA, it is necessary to first consider the internationalist context in which it was operating. Palestinian national politics had been entangled with internationalism ever since the early twentieth century, when the League of Nations provided a mandate for the British governance of Palestine. International intervention in Palestinian politics continued with the 1947 UN Partition Plan,⁶ and the numerous UNGA and UNSC resolutions that followed the Nakba.⁷ The

⁶ UNGA Resolution 181, A/RES/181(II), 29 November 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253>, accessed 31 August 2017.

⁷ See for example: UNSC Resolution 54, S/902, 15 July 1948, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/54\(1948\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/54(1948)); UNGA Resolution 194, A/Res/194(III), 11 December 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A>; UNGA

UN's role in the creation of Israel, which became a Member State in 1949,⁸ led Prime Minister Golda Meir to later describe the country as 'the first born of the United Nations'.⁹ Meanwhile on the Palestinian side, the establishment of UNRWA and the continuation of its work typified the ongoing presence of the UN in national affairs, as Ilana Feldman rightly argues.¹⁰ Indeed, Keith Feldman writes that the UN's continual early intervention in the so-called 'question of Palestine' made the latter 'central to [the UN's] fashioning of a postwar geopolitical order'.¹¹

This background is vital for understanding the positioning of Arafat's PLO, which grasped both the general relevance of internationalism to Palestinian politics, and the particular role of the UN. Observing the extent to which Palestinian affairs had been determined on the world stage, the PLO quickly recognised the importance of attaining international legitimacy for the Palestinian national cause, not least at the UN. As shall be explained over the course of this chapter, the PLO managed its relationship with UNRWA within the wider context of an internationalist strategy. From the late 1960s, the organisation twinned its military campaigns against Israel with a diplomatic offensive on the world stage.

As already explained, the PLO's efforts at international diplomacy have received minimal scholarly attention, with a small number of exceptions. In addition to Chamberlin's aforementioned work,¹² Helena Cobban has characterised internationalism as a major theme of the PLO's discourse and

Resolution 212, A/RES/212(III), 19 November 1948; <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/EDC284B4A5508FD7852560E500670213>, all accessed 21 September 2017.

⁸ UNGA Resolution 273, A/RES/273, 11 May 1949, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/044/44/IMG/NR004444.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed 26 August 2017.

⁹ Golda Meir, *My Life* (London: Futura, 1976), p. 263.

¹⁰ Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 10.

¹¹ Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. 30.

¹² Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, ch.s 1-2. See also: Paul Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47:1, January 2011, pp. 25-41.

activities. According to Cobban, the organisation was keen to reach out to potential allies and raise awareness of its cause among as many parties as possible, because it understood that its success hinged on gaining global recognition and support.¹³ Chamberlin rightly observes that it was strongly influenced in this regard by the precedent of the Algerian FLN, which, as Connelly writes, achieved much of its success by way of international alignments.¹⁴

However, Chamberlin's and Cobban's internationalist interpretations of the PLO's activities are not shared by everyone. Laleh Khalili argues that the 1960s actually saw a Palestinian shift *away* from internationalism, in favour of a focus on anticolonial wars of liberation. By Khalili's reasoning this trend continued until the 1990s, at which point the Palestinian struggle regained its internationalist tilt with a new focus on international legislation and legitimacy.¹⁵ However, Khalili's characterisation of the 1960s as a period of departure from internationalisation is misleading. While this period saw a reformulation of nationalist strategy, the PLO's solidarity with anti-colonial struggles elsewhere – explicitly acknowledged by Khalili – actually constituted a continuation of internationalism, albeit in a different form. Indeed, this solidarity comprised the nucleus of the PLO's strategy in the *thawra* period.

The centrality of international diplomacy to the PLO's strategy at this time is demonstrated clearly in the organisation's communications. It defined itself in the context of an international revolt, writing in one communication that it was 'part of the world liberation movement and the shared struggle' [*juḡ' min ḥarakat al-taḥrir al-ālamī fī al-niḍāl al-mushtarikī*].¹⁶

¹³ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, p. 215.

¹⁴ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, pp. 46-53. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 4-10, 125, 146, 230-231, 279-280.

¹⁵ Laleh Khalili, 'Commemorating Battles and Massacres in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon', *American Behavioural Scientist*, 51:11, 2008, p. 1564.

¹⁶ *Mashru' al-burnāmaj al-siyāsī al-ṣādr 'an al-mumntamar al-rābi' liḥaraka, fataḥ*, May 1980, in Raphael Israeli, *PLO in Lebanon: Selected documents* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 23.

This positioning had a particular resonance in the anti-colonial atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, a time when colonies across Africa and Asia were gaining independence and rejecting the old European imperial order.¹⁷ As Steven Salaita notes, the emergence of Third Worldism as a self-consciously internationalist movement had crystallised the notion of progressive solidarity across the Global South.¹⁸ By characterising Israel and Zionism as part of the Western imperialist order, the PLO cast itself in the resistance mould of the global anti-colonial movement.¹⁹

Such positioning was a continuous theme in the PLO's messaging. In 1969, Fatah declared the Palestinian *thawra* 'a model of resistance to neo-imperialist domination', thus asserting both its solidarity and its wider relevance.²⁰ The PLO also regularly highlighted its commonalities with other revolutionary movements, printing posters to celebrate the emergence or victories of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Polisario, among others.²¹ Meanwhile its leftist contingents, the PFLP, DFLP and Arab Liberation Front (ALF), expressed their solidarity with workers and oppressed groups around the world by paying tribute to international leftist commemorations like May Day²² and International Women's Day.²³

As Daniel Meier argues, there was a strategic purpose to the PLO positioning itself in this way. The idea that the Palestinian struggle was part of a broader revolutionary movement was very powerful as a means of mobilising support.²⁴ When Arafat claimed solidarity with popular movements in Zimbabwe, Vietnam and South Africa – as he did when

¹⁷ Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere', p. 27.

¹⁸ Steven Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. xiv.

¹⁹ Article 22, Palestinian National Charter 1969, OP.32072.956.7, CUOPA. See also: Statement by Mr Yasser Arafat, 29th Session UNGA, 13 November 1974, S-0899-0013-03, UNA [UN translation].

²⁰ Daniel Meier, 'The Palestinian *Fiday'i* as an Icon of Transnational Struggle: The Lebanese Experience', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 41:3, 2014, p. 327.

²¹ Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 16.

²² Poster 90, PFLP collection, Palestine political posters, AUB.

²³ Poster 97, PFLP collection; Poster 113, ALF collection, AUB.

²⁴ Meier, 'The Palestinian *Fiday'i* as an Icon of Transnational Struggle', p. 327.

addressing the UN in 1974 – he fortified myths around the *thawra*'s potency.²⁵ The Palestinian nationalist movement carried far more weight as an active component of a global movement than it did as a geographically contained campaign with limited means and little relevance outside its own sphere. This transnational approach to positioning a nationalist cause was not uncommon among stateless peoples; Hamit Borzaslan argues that the Palestinians were analogous to the Kurdish and Armenian nationalist movements in presenting their respective causes as part of a greater movement (and indeed, in the early 1980s the PLO had close ties with the Kurdistan Workers' Party).²⁶ In taking this approach, the PLO added weight and value to its own actions and credentials, and greatly increased its potential for garnering international support, both diplomatically and in terms of resources.

It was with this in mind that the PLO pursued a series of international alliances in the 1960s and 1970s. It paid particular attention to the successful revolutions in Algeria and later Iran, which it celebrated as fellow popular uprisings against Western-backed imperialist regimes in the same region.²⁷ Their solidarity was manifested in the sharing of arms and training facilities.²⁸ Abu Iyad recalls in his memoir how the newly-independent Algerian government of the 1960s became the first state to supply Fatah with arms, and also authorised the opening of a representative office in Algiers.²⁹ After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Arafat was the first foreign

²⁵ Statement by Yasser Arafat, S-0899-0013-03, UNA.

²⁶ Marlies Casier and Olivier Grojean, 'Between integration, autonomization and radicalisation. Hamit Borzaslan on the Kurdish Movement and the Turkish Left', *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 14, 2012, <https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4663>, accessed 29 October 2018.

²⁷ *PLO information bulletin*, 5:2, 1-15 February 1979; 5:3, 16-28 February 1979, IPS. On the PLO's ties with the Iranian revolutionary regime, see: Chris P. Ioannides, 'The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran', in Norton and Greenberg, *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organisation*, pp. 74-108.

²⁸ Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007 edition), p. 140, 156.

²⁹ Abu Iyad with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981), p. 42.

leader to formally visit the new regime in Tehran – an alliance that the PLO celebrated fervently in its communications.³⁰

The PLO did not only align itself with Arab and Islamic countries. Its political opposition to the West, particularly the USA, also facilitated links to the Soviet bloc.³¹ As early as 1956, Arafat and Abu Iyad had travelled to Prague to attend a meeting of the International Students' Congress, with Arafat donning what would become his trademark *kefīya*.³² Over the decades, ties to the Soviet bloc became a mainstay of the PLO's international relations, with Arafat visiting Moscow for talks and continually referring to the USSR as a friend and ally.³³ The PLO also forged close alliances with communist regimes in Romania,³⁴ China,³⁵ and Cuba; the PLO's Havana office openly provided significant diplomatic and material support.³⁶ Yugoslavia was another close ally, and one that would prove highly significant for the PLO's international strategy. It was Yugoslavian President Tito who first suggested that the PLO go to the UN in the 1970s, ushering in a watershed moment for the Palestinian nationalist movement's international standing.³⁷

Palestine at the UN

The PLO's internationalist strategy did not only target foreign states. As noted above, the UN had played a central role in Palestinian politics for

³⁰ Tony Walker, *Arafat: The Biography* (London: Virgin books, 2003), pp. 172-174.

³¹ On PLO-Soviet relations see: Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, pp. 221-228; John C. Reppert, 'The Soviets and the PLO: The Convenience of Politics', in Norton and Greenberg, *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organisation*, pp. 109-137.

³² Said Aburish, *Arafat: From Defender to Dictator* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 31.

³³ See for example: *Mashru' al-burnāmaj al-siyāsī al-šādr 'an al-munntamar al-rābi' liḥaraka, fataḥ*, May 1980, in Israeli, *PLO in Lebanon*, p. 24; Record of Arafat meeting in Moscow in 1979 in Israeli, *PLO in Lebanon*, pp. 34-73.

³⁴ Chief of UN Political Affairs Division, Memo to Secretary-General, 17 December 1976, S-1066-0098-0005, UNA.

³⁵ For more on the PLO's relationship with China, see: Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, pp. 216-221.

³⁶ The Palestinian-Cuban alliance is displayed in: Report of PLO representative in Havana, nd, in Israeli, *PLO in Lebanon*, pp. 147-157 [English and Spanish]. See also: Robert Thomas Baratta, 'The PLO in Latin America', in Norton and Greenberg, *The International Relations of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, pp. 166-195. On the opening of a PLO office in Prague see: *PLO information bulletin*, 3:5, 1 April 1977, IPS.

³⁷ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 127.

decades – and the PLO recognised that it would need to win over the supranational organisation if it were to truly gain legitimacy on the world stage. As discussed in Chapter Four, the UN’s role in partitioning Palestine had led many Palestinians to be suspicious of it.³⁸ Yet gaining recognition and even endorsement from the UN was a central plank of the PLO’s strategy. It stated in a 1976 issue of its publication *PLO Information Bulletin* that ‘exposing the Zionist-imperialist enemy to world opinion through the UN bodies’ was one of three strands of its struggle, the other two being defending the *thawra* in Lebanon, and ‘resisting the Zionist occupation forces in occupied Palestine’.³⁹ The *PLO Information Bulletin* itself contributed to this ‘first strand’; published from 1975-91 in English, French and Spanish, it helped bring the PLO’s cause to a wider international audience.⁴⁰

Fatah, which dominated the PLO from 1968, was the driving force behind its UN-focused approach. Fatah had long been aware of the importance of international diplomacy, having sent its first recorded communication to the UN Secretary-General in June 1965, only a few months after formally launching its armed struggle.⁴¹ After taking over the PLO, it continued to pursue opportunities at the UN. A 1980 Fatah document for political planning, later seized by Israeli occupying forces in south Lebanon, lists the aim of securing more pro-Palestinian UN resolutions among its objectives.⁴² This approach provoked considerable censure from some of the Palestinian diaspora, who continued to see the UN as an enemy force. Shafiq Al Hout, who represented the PLO at the UN from 1974-91, recalls in his memoir how some Palestinians saw the

³⁸ Rashid Khalidi, ‘Observations on the right of return’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 21:2, 1992, p. 33.

³⁹ *PLO Information Bulletin*, 2:10, March 1976, IPS.

⁴⁰ IPS holds issues of *PLO information bulletin* in all these languages from 1975-91.

⁴¹ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, p. 34, 216.

⁴² *Mashru‘ al-burnāmaj al-siyāsī al-ṣādr ‘an al-mumntamar al-rābi‘ liḥaraka, fatah*, May 1980, in Israeli, *PLO in Lebanon*, pp. 23-24.

organisation's overtures to the UN as a betrayal, and demonstrated against the moves.⁴³

Despite their opposition, the PLO – or at least its dominant Fatah contingent – insisted that winning over the UN was vital to the nationalist movement's success. Its rationale was simple; while many in the PLO leadership shared the general Palestinian suspicion towards the UN, they also recognised that it had been crucial to historical Israeli successes and Palestinian defeats. They accordingly concluded that in order to reverse Palestinian fortunes, they would need to persuade the UN of their case.⁴⁴ Many argued that the content of the UN's Charter and Resolutions provided a good basis for their struggle, as they supported ideas of national self-determination and the right to repatriation. The PLO liked to reiterate this by referring regularly to UN norms, for example in its 1968 Charter, and in documentary films like the Palestine Cinema Institution's *Atfal min filistin (Children of Palestine)*.⁴⁵

In the 1970s, the PLO's view on the UN was further influenced by the changes that had occurred in the latter's membership. As several leading Palestinian officials noted, by this time the UN's composition – and particularly that of the UNGA – looked very different from the 1940s. The large-scale decolonisation of Africa and Asia had precipitated the entry of dozens of newly-independent states, which were largely sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Moreover, the PLO had ties with many of these post-colonial governments, often made up of former liberation movements with whom it identified.

⁴³ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 127.

⁴⁴ This strategy has not disappeared in the years since the *thamra*. In 2011, the PA applied to become a full UN Member State. The following year, it was accepted as a Non-Member State. See: UNGA Resolution 67/19, A/RES/67/19, 4 December 2012, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/19862D03C564FA2C85257ACB004EE69B>, accessed 18 July 2017. In his accompanying address to the UNGA, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas explicitly referenced UNGA Resolution 181 and the long history of UN involvement in Palestine. See: Statement by President Abbas, 29 November 2012, <http://palestineun.org/692/#more-692>, accessed 18 July 2017 [Arabiq].

⁴⁵ Khalidi, 'Observations on the right of return', p. 35.

The significance of these states' UN membership quickly became evident in how it affected the UNGA. From 1969 the latter passed a slew of resolutions in the Palestinians' favour. These were particularly significant as they focused on the Palestinians' political situation rather than their humanitarian plight, in accordance with how the PLO had long sought to re-frame the issue. For example, in 1969 UNGA Resolution 2535 reaffirmed the Palestinians' right of return and criticised Israeli policies in the OPT.⁴⁶ The following year, two more resolutions upheld the Palestinians' right to self-determination, with one drawing explicitly on the PLO's declaration of solidarity by comparing their situation to that in southern Africa.⁴⁷

In 1970, the PLO gained a new voice on the world stage when its representative participated in a discussion on the question of Palestine, held by the UNGA's Special Political Committee.⁴⁸ Subsequent years saw further affirmations of this kind, with UNGA Resolution 2787 even calling on states to provide the Palestinians with 'political, moral and material assistance' in their struggle for self-determination – the strongest indication yet of the discursive shift from humanitarianism to politics. As the text of this resolution was explicitly grounded in UN values around human rights, liberation, and territorial integrity, it was taken to reaffirm the views of the PLO leadership that the UN could be used to further their cause.⁴⁹

The UNGA's shift towards a pro-Palestinian stance reached its apogee in 1974, a year described by Chamberlin as the 'critical mass' of international

⁴⁶ UNGA Resolution 2535, A/RES/2535(XXIV), 10 December 1969, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/41F2C6DCE4DAA765852560DF004E0AC8>, accessed 20 July 2017.

⁴⁷ UNGA Resolution 2649, A/RES/2649, 30 November 1970, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/UNISPAL.NSF/796f8bd05ec4f30885256cef0073cf3a/14da6cead5f088a8525630a0072450d?OpenDocument>; UNGA Resolution 2762, A/RES/2762, 8 December 1970, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/E7C4B66C913EC0DC852560DE006E8F1B>, both accessed 20 July 2017.

⁴⁸ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, p. 229.

⁴⁹ UNGA Resolution 2787, A/RES/2787, 6 December 1971, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/328/03/IMG/NR032803.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed 20 July 2017. See also: UNGA Resolution 2955 (XXVII), A/RES/2955, 12 December 1972, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/269/85/IMG/NR026985.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed 18 July 2017.

support for the Palestinian cause.⁵⁰ After the Arab League formally recognised the PLO as the sole legitimate Palestinian representative at the Rabat Summit that year, the impetus quickly moved to the UN. In October, the UNGA voted by 105 to 4 to invite the PLO to participate in its plenary discussions on Palestine.⁵¹ Then in November, it formally invited Arafat to address the Assembly in New York. Israel opposed the invitation vehemently, but to no avail.⁵² Arafat's speech, which was broadcast around the world amidst simultaneous fanfare and controversy, won the PLO an unprecedented level of global publicity. Its content articulated the PLO's internationalist strategy, calling on UN Member States to implement the Palestinians' national and political rights.⁵³ The same month, UNGA Resolution 3237 formally recognised the PLO as a UN observer entity, giving it a similar status to the Vatican.⁵⁴

The PLO's victories at this time can be explained to a large degree by the newly post-colonial make-up of the UNGA, which made it much more politically sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. The PLO leadership themselves acknowledged this; Arafat explicitly mentioned the significance of these states' UN membership when he addressed the Assembly, as did AHC representative Issa Nakhleh the following day.⁵⁵ Of particular importance was the Algerian presidency of the UNGA in 1974, which Al Hout cites in his memoir as a key factor behind the PLO's decision to go to the UN that year.⁵⁶ Algeria was a beacon of anti-colonial struggle to liberation movements everywhere and to the Palestinians in particular,

⁵⁰ Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere', pp. 26-27.

⁵¹ UNGA Resolution 3210, A/RES/3210(XXIX), 14 October 1974, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3210\(XXIX\)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3210(XXIX)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION), accessed 17 August 2017. See also: Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, p. 230.

⁵² Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN, letter to UNSC President, 14 November 1975, S/11878, S-0359-0002-0002, UNA.

⁵³ For the recording of Arafat's speech: UN audiovisual library, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/dassics/asset/C792/C792a/>, accessed 18 July 2017. For the transcript: Statement by Yasser Arafat, S-0899-0013-03, UNA.

⁵⁴ UNGA Resolution 3237, A/RES/3237(XXIX), 25 November 1974, S-0899-0013-03, UNA.

⁵⁵ Statement by Issa Nakhleh, Permanent Representative of the Arab Higher Committee for Palestine, submitted to the UNGA, 14 November 1974, S-0907-0012-0006, UNA.

⁵⁶ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 127.

which made its UNGA Presidency both symbolically and practically important.⁵⁷ Moreover and as Connelly argues, the FLN had largely succeeded in its campaign for Algerian independence by forging international alignments, which appeared to validate the PLO's strategy.⁵⁸

The events of 1974, and particularly Arafat's speech in New York, were hugely important in boosting Palestinian morale. Despite their widespread opposition to the UN, the refugees largely reacted with pride to the sight of their *de facto* leader formally addressing the world stage. The UN's particular history in Palestine gave the speech a special resonance; as Fawaz Turki later wrote, 'there was cogent symbolism in the idea of the United Nations, the very international body that had caused the dispersal of the Palestinian people by partitioning the land in 1947, inviting them back to address it on their aspirations.'⁵⁹ On the day of Arafat's speech, UNRWA recorded nationalist demonstrations across the OPT in celebration.⁶⁰

The developments in New York also had firmly practical consequences. Resolution 3237 gave the PLO a higher level of UN recognition than any other non-state actor at the time, and allowed it to participate in the UNGA's work and sessions. As such it made the organisation much harder to ignore. There were limitations; the PLO was not a full UN Member and remained excluded from the Security Council (UNSC), which held the greater power in resolving international disputes. Yet it was now unmistakably part of the UN. To reinforce this, the UNGA used its clout to push for the PLO's recognition in other parts of the UN; in

⁵⁷ On how Algeria inspired the Palestinians, see: Abu Iyad, *My Home My Land*, p. 24; Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, p. 43; Fawaz Turki, *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American* (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 63; Leila Khaled with George Hajjar, *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), p. 88.

⁵⁸ Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 279-280.

⁵⁹ Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), p. 135.

⁶⁰ UNRWA West Bank Director, Memo to Commissioner-General, 31 January 1975, File OR120 2(WB)II, Box OR17, UHA. McElhiney, cable to Rennie, 15 November 1974, S-0169-0009-0009, UNA. See also: John Rennie, 'Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA', A/10013, 30 June 1975, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N75/213/46/PDF/N7521346.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed 27 March 2017, paragraph 4.

the same month that Arafat spoke in New York, UNGA Resolution 3236 requested that the Secretary-General establish contacts with the PLO in order to help further Palestinian rights.⁶¹

The PLO was quick to take advantage of its new opportunities, appointing permanent observers to the UN Headquarters in both New York and Geneva.⁶² Two years after its induction into the UNGA, Soviet pressure led to the PLO's inclusion in UNSC deliberations on the Middle Eastern conflict.⁶³ In a major diplomatic victory for the PLO, its representative was also invited to address the UNSC, and had a private meeting with the Secretary-General in 1976.⁶⁴ The PLO now regularly appealed to the Secretariat and other Member States for support and assistance on issues ranging from the nature of the Israeli occupation to the right of return. In 1978, Arafat wrote to Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, calling for:

[the Palestinian refugees'] right to return to their homes and property in accordance with the rules of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, United Nations resolutions, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁶⁵

Arafat's invocation of the UN Charter and UN Resolutions is highly telling here. By deliberately framing his argument by way of international norms, he implies that is the UN's natural duty to support the Palestinian national cause. The letter is a clear case of the PLO's internationalist strategy in action.

While the Secretariat never formally endorsed the PLO's case, the latter's new status at the UN certainly marked a greater diplomatic discussion of the 'Palestine question'. In 1975, the UNGA established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian

⁶¹ UNGA Resolution 3236, A/RES/3236, 25 November 1974, S-0899-0013-03, UNA.

⁶² 'Question of Palestine', Report of Secretary-General, A/10265, 23 September 1975, S-1066-0098-0005, UNA.

⁶³ Reppert, 'The Soviets and the PLO', p. 116.

⁶⁴ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, p. 230. See also: Notes on Meeting between the Secretary-General and Mr Khaddoumi of the PLO on 15 January 1976, S-1066-0098-0005, UNA.

⁶⁵ Arafat, letter to Waldheim, 22 March 1978, S-0899-0013-07, UNA.

People (informally known as the ‘Palestinian Rights Committee’), charging it with producing a programme for the implementation of the Palestinians’ fundamental rights.⁶⁶ The following year, UNGA Resolution 31/110 called on the Secretary General ‘to prepare and submit... a report on the living conditions of the Palestinian people’, in consultation with the PLO as ‘the representative of the Palestinian people’ – a clear sign of the latter’s growing international legitimacy.⁶⁷

This increasingly official internationalism also came to influence the PLO’s political stance. In 1974 it adopted a political programme that spoke for the first time of establishing a Palestinian state on part of historic Palestine, rather than returning to the pre-Nakba borders.⁶⁸ This paved the way for its later acceptance of a two-state solution. In this way, its increasing integration into the international order triggered changes in the PLO, as well as the other way around. Chamberlin argues that the PLO’s international strategy and status at the UN also led to the Palestinian nationalist movement becoming more cosmopolitan, progressive and global.⁶⁹ The question remains of what this meant for UNRWA, as the UN’s local address for Palestinians in the Middle East.

UNRWA and the PLO’s international strategy

UNRWA’s existence served as a manifestation of the long-running connections between Palestine and the international order as encapsulated in the UN. Specifically, the Agency’s work was an expression of the involvement of the UNGA in particular, which provided its mandate and to which it was answerable. As such, it was directly affected by the UNGA’s

⁶⁶ UNGA Resolution 3376, A/RES/3376, 10 November 1975, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/UNISPAL.NSF/0/B5B4720B8192FDE3852560DE004F3C47>, accessed 19 August 2017.

⁶⁷ UNGA Resolution 31/110, A/RES/31/110, 16 December 1976, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/a06f2943c226015c85256e40005d359c/6cd50f6e6a281da7852560de004a6154?OpenDocument>, accessed 21 August 2017.

⁶⁸ R. Khalidi, ‘Observations on the right of return’, pp. 34-35.

⁶⁹ Chamberlin, ‘The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere’, p. 38.

formal recognition of the PLO in 1974. The Commissioner-General acknowledged this in rather dry terms in his annual report the following year:

the granting to the PLO by the General Assembly of observer status at the UN and the Assembly's request to the Secretary-General to establish contacts with the PLO on all matters relating to the question of Palestine.... were of significance to the Agency.⁷⁰

Moreover, this significance was distinctly political, despite UNRWA's continual insistence that its work was completely detached from politics. The impact of Resolution 3237 would see the Agency drawn into the political discourse about Palestine in increasingly explicit terms.

Officially speaking, 1974 marked the beginning of UNRWA's relationship with the PLO; relations could only be formally established once the UNGA had recognised the organisation.⁷¹ In reality, the Agency had been dealing with the PLO ever since the latter had come to prominence in the camps in the late 1960s. It had loomed particularly large in Lebanon, where the 1969 Cairo Agreement made the PLO the *de facto* governmental authority in parts of the country and meant that the Agency could not avoid working with it (as is discussed in depth in the next section). Yet despite the realities on the ground, UNRWA had to proceed with care, as it could not forge any formal agreements with the PLO without the UNGA's endorsement.⁷²

The Agency thus walked a tightrope in its relations with the PLO for five years after the Cairo Agreement. Its task was complicated further by the fact that even outside Lebanon, the PLO was gaining increasing prominence at this time. As a result, UNRWA faced further challenges and a new directness to its communications with the PLO in the years running up to

⁷⁰ UNRWA annual report 1975, A/10013, paragraph 4.

⁷¹ Riccardo Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees: A History within history', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3, March 2010, p. 240.

⁷² Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 100. Jalal Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29:2, 2000, p. 55.

Resolution 3237. In 1970, the Arab host governments requested that the PLO participate in meetings on UNRWA's education programme.⁷³ The Agency had to negotiate this request in a setting whereby its largest funder continued to consider the PLO a terrorist organisation. In 1973, UNRWA management in Beirut expressed concern to New York over whether the Agency's work in Lebanon, where it was compelled to work with the PLO, was compatible with its status as a UN organ, and with the basis on which it received funding.⁷⁴

The UNGA's formal recognition of the PLO in 1974 thus made things slightly easier for the Agency. It now had an official framework within which it could justify its communications with the PLO. The aftermath of Resolution 3237 saw the UNRWA-PLO relationship formalised, and it was subsequently managed more openly.⁷⁵ Soon afterwards, the UNRWA Commissioner-General called on Arafat in Beirut 'to inform him more fully of the Agency's financial difficulties and their implications for services to the refugees'. The UN formally reported his visit, in an indication of the newly sanctioned state of affairs.⁷⁶ Moreover from 1974, the two organisations held regular official meetings in Lebanon, chaired by Lebanese government representatives, to discuss operational issues regarding the refugees there.⁷⁷

The PLO's formal induction into the UNGA changed things for UNRWA in other ways as well. Although it continued to insist that its work was purely apolitical, the Agency was now inevitably drawn into the UN's increasingly explicit – and increasingly political – engagement with the Palestinian situation. As Kemal Kirisci writes, UNRWA's annual reports had

⁷³ Recommendations of the meeting of representatives of Arab host states, UNRWA and UNESCO on the educational programme for Palestine Arab refugee children, Beirut, 25-28 June 1970, File RE230(3)III, Box RE28, UHA. See also: Laurence Michelmore, Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General, A/8013, 30 June 1970, paragraph 19, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/519871909FA2913885256A5700565639>, accessed 26 August 2017.

⁷⁴ Dale, cable to Stavropoulos, 1 March 1973, S-0169-0009-0009, UNA.

⁷⁵ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 88.

⁷⁶ 'Question of Palestine', Report of the Secretary-General, A/10265, 23 September 1975, S-1066-0098-0005, UNA.

⁷⁷ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 104.

always aided UN discussions on the 'Palestine problem' by providing detailed information about the situation in the camps. In this way they exposed diplomatic delegations at the UN to new aspects of the issue that they had not previously considered, and widened the UNGA debates on the matter.⁷⁸ Yet the events of 1974 elevated UNRWA's role to a new level. The Agency's relationship with the PLO now fell under the umbrella of Resolution 3236, which required the Secretary-General to 'establish contacts' with the organisation.⁷⁹ As part of its fulfilment of this task, the Secretariat requested regular updates from UNRWA on its contacts with the PLO.⁸⁰

There was more to come. In a 1976 report on the Question of Palestine, the UN Secretary-General cited the PLO-UNRWA relationship as a key part of his considerations, in view of the 'direct interest' of the Agency's work to large numbers of Palestinians.⁸¹ The following year, the UNGA called for the Secretary-General to produce another report on the Palestinian situation, this time investigating the socio-economic impact of the Israeli occupation by working with UN organs, 'particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East'.⁸² The meaning of UNRWA's work thus became increasingly politicised.

It was not only the UNGA that incorporated UNRWA's work in this way. The PLO also sought to make use of the Agency for political purposes, sometimes quoting its reports in official speeches at the UN and other international arenas.⁸³ When possible, the PLO cited statements by UNRWA officials as evidence of the justice of their cause. A 1977 issue of

⁷⁸ Kirisci, *The PLO and World Politics*, pp. 132-133.

⁷⁹ UNGA Resolution 2326, A/RES/2326(XXIX), 25 November 1974, S-0899-0013-0003, UNA.

⁸⁰ Urquhart, cable to Rennie, 13 May 1975; Rennie, 'Implementation of General Assembly resolution 3236', 11 September 1975, both S-0359-0002-02, UNA.

⁸¹ 'Question of Palestine', Report of the Secretary-General, A/10265, 23 September 1975, S-1066-0098-0005, UNA.

⁸² UNGA Resolution 32/171, A/RES/32/171, 14 March 1978, S-0359-0021-0011, UNA.

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/8A0357F9B70B635485256A6100516B0D>

See also: UN Environment Programme, 'Living conditions of the Palestinian people', A/C.2/32/L.87, 7 December 1977, S-0359-0021-0011, UNA.

⁸³ Al Husseini, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process', p. 54.

the *PLO information bulletin* proudly proclaimed that the UNRWA Director in Gaza had ‘expressed his strong criticism of the Zionist authorities’ policies in the Gaza Strip’, particularly the forced relocation of refugees.⁸⁴ The PLO was careful to include this in the *PLO information bulletin*, which was printed in European languages and designed to reach a Western audience. Evidently it perceived UNRWA to have sufficient clout and authority that its words were worth disseminating to this audience.

In these ways, UNRWA became increasingly entangled in the complex dynamics of the Palestinian issue at the UN. This was perhaps inevitable; despite its claims to the contrary, UNRWA’s work had never been devoid of politics, and indeed it had initially been intended to facilitate the refugees’ resettlement in the Arab host states, as explained in Chapter One. Moreover, its positioning gave it a particular importance. As the only UN body consistently present in the Palestinian setting for the second half of the twentieth century, it was in a unique place to provide first-hand information from the field.

Yet notwithstanding the UNGA’s endorsements and even requirements for UNRWA to work with the PLO, the subject remained a fraught one for the Agency. Its dependence on voluntary donations meant that it could not afford to alienate its largest donor state, the US, which continued to classify the PLO as a terrorist organisation until 1988.⁸⁵ As a result, UNRWA was careful to underplay its relations with the PLO in its communications with the US and other major donors, which were nearly all Western states. This was especially pressing in view of the fact that, as discussed in Chapter Three, the US had already attached to its funding the condition of total detachment from the PLA and *ḥidaʿiyyīn* groups.⁸⁶ Accordingly, the UNRWA-PLO relationship was conspicuous by its absence

⁸⁴ *PLO information bulletin*, 3:1, January 1977, IPS.

⁸⁵ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, pp. 235-241.

⁸⁶ US Representative UN to U Thant, Note A98USUN, 18 December 1970, File UN 10-4 1/1/71 Subject-Numeric File, RG 59, USNA.

from donor-targeted UNRWA communications such as the regular newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today*.⁸⁷ However, this absence did not reflect the reality in many camps, where this relationship was increasingly important to the Agency's operations.

Daily politics: The PLO and UNRWA in the camps

While UNGA Resolution 3237 was transformative at the high diplomatic level, its impact on the ground was more muted. As already noted, it formalised a relationship that had already long existed, albeit informally. The question remains of how much of a difference this formalisation made in practice. Regardless of its status, the PLO had been on UNRWA's radar since it was first created, ten years before Resolution 3237. For much of the 1960s the relationship between the two organisations was ambiguous. Formally, UNRWA prohibited its employees from publicly identifying with the PLO and protested at the conscription of its staff into the PLA from 1965-67. Yet as Schiff notes, the Agency stopped short of opposing contact with the PLO altogether, knowing this would fuel perceptions that it was anti-Palestinian.⁸⁸

Both Schiff and Al Hussein write that the PLO's rising power in the camps in the late 1960s greatly complicated the situation for UNRWA, whose mandate remained the same despite the changes on the ground.⁸⁹ The Agency first encountered the PLO directly when the latter sought to build a Palestinian para-state in Jordan in the late 1960s.⁹⁰ While this was short-lived, it precipitated new themes in the UNRWA-PLO relationship that would dominate the subsequent decade. After Black September, the PLO

⁸⁷ *Palestine Refugees Today*, back catalogue, IPS.

⁸⁸ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 88, 102-103.

⁸⁹ Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40:1, 2010, p. 15.

⁹⁰ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 69.

established its headquarters close to Sabra and Shatila camps in the Fakhani district of Beirut. The area became known informally as the 'Fakhani Republic', as the PLO established a para-state apparatus in Lebanon that included social, cultural and educational institutions, medical organisations, welfare services, research centres, and economic planning boards.

As it gained legitimacy from the aforementioned Cairo Agreement, the PLO demanded greater recognition from UNRWA, which had little choice but to engage with it directly in Lebanon. Relations gradually moved from 'uneasy coexistence to active partnership', in the words of Al Hussein. ⁹¹ From the Agency's perspective, the impact was mixed. There were some benefits; Schiff and Yezid Sayigh both argue that at a time when UNRWA was facing severe financial difficulties, the PLO's provision of additional services in the camps helped relieve the level of need among the refugees and thus reduce pressure on the Agency. ⁹² Yet as Al Hussein points out, the legitimacy of the Cairo Agreement did not remove the challenges that UNRWA faced in keeping its Western donors happy while working with the PLO. ⁹³

The PLO took a similarly multi-faceted approach to UNRWA, reflecting the paradoxical views held by many refugees about the Agency (discussed in Chapter Four). Al Hussein argues that from the mid-1970s, the PLO's policy towards the Agency had two main aims: to maintain and increase UNRWA's services; and to ensure that its decisions were consistent with Palestinian political and humanitarian interests. ⁹⁴ Yet while Al Hussein identifies the aims correctly, they did not always result in consistent policy. It is in fact possible to identify three key strands of the PLO's relationship with UNRWA at this time. Firstly, it loudly endorsed the refugees' common

⁹¹ Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-building Process', p. 51.

⁹² Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 447. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 83.

⁹³ Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process', p. 55.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

grievances against the Agency, and was keen to align itself with their criticisms of its work. At the same time, the PLO recognised that UNRWA's services were vital to the welfare and wellbeing of many refugees, and campaigned behind the scenes for its work to continue. Thirdly and most interestingly, it also sought to use UNRWA's camp infrastructure and services for its own political and nationalist purposes. Each of these three strands is now examined in turn.

Criticising UNRWA: The PLO as opponent

The PLO's criticisms of UNRWA were largely grounded in the refugees' general grievances, which the PLO cleverly took up as its own. In the process it gained clout with the refugee population and underlined its claim to represent them. Like the refugees, the PLO always stopped short of calling for UNRWA's abolition or questioning the grounds for its existence. Instead it endorsed the refugees' usual grievances: that the Agency was patronising towards the Palestinians, and that it was politically aligned with their enemies.⁹⁵ It also advocated long-running demands by the refugees for the Agency to improve its health clinics and increase its ration provisions.⁹⁶

Many PLO officials were particularly keen to take up the charge that UNRWA was part of a Western-backed plot to resettle the refugees and thus undermine their political cause. UNRWA's refusal to participate in Palestinian national politics was taken as evidence of this. As early as 1965, the PLO had issued a questionnaire for Palestinian UNRWA staff in Syria, seeking information about their personal backgrounds and their potential to contribute to the nationalist movement, either financially or through activities. The questionnaire also asked recipients to name up to twenty acquaintances who could participate 'in preparing for the battle of

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁹⁶ Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Refugees', p. 15.

liberation'.⁹⁷ The Agency's refusal to distribute the questionnaire, on the grounds of its inappropriate political and military content, was cited as evidence that it was 'conspiring' against the refugee cause – a claim that Al Husseini writes was included in 'countless' PLO pamphlets over the years.⁹⁸ The PLO also used such claims to frame other issues, depicting the relocation of UNRWA's Headquarters to Vienna in 1978 as the result of 'imperialist and Zionist pressures' on the Agency.⁹⁹

Both the PLO and the refugees applied these conspiracy theories to UNRWA's service cuts, seeing them as a precursor to the Agency's dissolution and the international abandonment of the refugees.¹⁰⁰ In a 1977 statement, the PLO accused the Agency and the US of 'playing with the life of Palestinians [sic]' by deliberately providing inadequate welfare services.¹⁰¹ Four years later, a PLO official warned the UNRWA Field Director in Damascus that service cuts would not be accepted, hinting that the PLO would unleash grievous demonstrations against the Agency if it continued with its planned cutbacks.¹⁰² These moves had an impact, as PLO opposition became another factor that UNRWA had to consider when deciding whether to implement certain cuts.¹⁰³ Moreover, it was sometimes a decisive factor; in 1979, the Deputy Commissioner-General argued against education cuts as they 'would cause a serious rupture in our relations with the PLO'.¹⁰⁴ Evidently, these relations were sufficiently important that they needed to be maintained even at a cost.

⁹⁷ PLO information form, nd, S-0169-0002-0010, UNA [UNRWA translation].

⁹⁸ Al Husseini, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process', p. 56.

⁹⁹ PLO Political Department, cable to UN Secretary-General, 26 June 1978, S-1066-0066-0004, UNA. See also: *PLO information bulletin*, 5:1, January 1979; 4:1, 30 June 1978, both IPS.

¹⁰⁰ See for example: *PLO information bulletin*, 5:2, 1-15 February 1979; 4:8, 1-15 May 1978; 4:3, 15 February 1978; 5:1, Jan 1979; 'PLO opposes UNRWA cuts', *PLO information bulletin*, 5:11, 16-30 June 1979; 'PLO warns UNRWA against reducing services', *PLO information bulletin*, 5:9, 16-31 May 1979, all IPS.

¹⁰¹ 'US-UNRWA Plays with the Life of Palestinians', *PLO information bulletin*, 3:17, 30 November 1977, IPS.

¹⁰² Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 129.

¹⁰³ See for example: UNRWA Lebanon Director, confidential memo to Comptroller, 5 March 1970, File RE210/03(I), Box RE7, UHA.

¹⁰⁴ Deputy Commissioner-General, memo to Commissioner-General, 23 November 1979, File RE230/12 II, Box RE94, UHA.

Despite this, Al Hussein argues that the PLO's influence on UNRWA's work was ultimately limited. It failed to prevent many of the decisions it opposed, such as the relocation of UNRWA's headquarters; it also failed to bring in many of the changes it demanded, such as the inclusion of protection activities within UNRWA's general mandate. This is a striking contrast with the frequent success of the refugees' grass roots campaigns, such as their demands for UNRWA to shift from its 'Works' programme to education in the 1950s, and their campaign for a 'Palestinianised' curriculum, which was taken up by the PLO but driven by teachers and students. Explaining this discrepancy, Al Hussein suggests that the PLO's leverage against UNRWA was limited by the fact that it could never establish comprehensive alternatives to the Agency's services, due to its lack of territorial sovereignty and lowly status at the UN. As it could never threaten to replace UNRWA completely, the PLO retained some elements of dependence on its work.¹⁰⁵

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

¹⁰⁵ Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building process', pp. 55-56.

Supporting UNRWA: The PLO as fundraiser

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

UNRWA first formally approached the PLO for help in raising funds in 1974, when it was facing a serious deficit. It asked the PLO leadership to seek emergency funding for its work from the Gulf states, where the Agency had previously had difficulties even getting appointments to see high officials.¹⁰⁹ It also considered asking the PLO to approach Cuba and other communist states on its behalf.¹¹⁰ The Agency's overtures to the PLO on this front provide an example of how their relationship was symbiotic, with each seeking to use the other to its own advantage whenever possible. It is also a clear case of UNGA Resolution 3237 making a difference on the ground; without it, UNRWA would not have been able to appeal to the PLO for fundraising assistance.

The PLO leadership was receptive to the Agency's requests. From 1974-75, it helped secure large emergency contributions to UNRWA from

¹⁰⁶ PLO Political Department, cable to UN Secretary-General, 26 June 1978, S-1066-0066-0004; 'Recanting the Rabat Resolutions', *Monday Morning*, 11 August 1975, S-0359-0002-02, both UNA.

¹⁰⁷ Rennie, cable to Beroudiaux, 4 December 1974, S-0169-0009-0010, UNA.

¹⁰⁸ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹¹⁰ Rennie, cable to McElhiney, 25 November 1974, S-0169-0009-0010, UNA.

various Gulf states. Although these states refused to commit to regular contributions to UNRWA's General Fund, their emergency donations helped keep UNRWA afloat that year.¹¹¹ UNRWA acknowledged the PLO's vital role in raising these funds; in 1975, Commissioner-General Rennie reported to New York that 'reconsideration by Arab Foreign Ministers of increased contributions to UNRWA is result of approach to PLO [sic].'¹¹² Nor was this a one-off; in 1975, Arafat asked to be kept informed of UNRWA's financial situation.¹¹³ Indeed, it was Arafat in particular who was responsible for many fundraising efforts on UNRWA's behalf. Over the 1970s he travelled to numerous Arab and Muslim states to appeal for donations. The PLO made further efforts to fundraise for the Agency at the 1978 Baghdad Summit,¹¹⁴ and Schiff writes that it also directly donated money for use in UNRWA's facilities.¹¹⁵

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

We cannot but express our appreciation for your concern and interest in seeking solutions to the financial crisis faced by UNRWA, in order to muster sufficient support for the maintenance of its activities.... We are in fact exerting efforts through our contacts with the responsible international circles concerned with a view to participating in helping UNRWA financially.¹¹⁷

Their fundraising partnership remained active throughout this period. In 1980 and 1981, Rydbeck met with Arafat repeatedly in Beirut to discuss the UNRWA deficit, and the PLO Chairman promised to again help raise

¹¹¹ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 83, 125.

¹¹² Rennie, cable to Vanwijk, 19 May 1975, S-0169-0010-02, UNA.

¹¹³ Rennie, cable to Urquhart and Vanwijk, 13 May 1975, S-0359-0002-02, UNA.

¹¹⁴ Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 240.

¹¹⁵ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 108-109.

¹¹⁶ Arafat, letter to Rydbeck, 27 November 1979, File OR131 II, Box OR17, UHA [UN translation].

¹¹⁷ Arafat, letter to Rydbeck, 8 November 1979, File OR131 II, Box OR17, UHA [UN translation].

money.¹¹⁸ Arafat subsequently approached Saudi Arabia, Iraq and even Japan on the Agency's behalf. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the PLO's political department, also appealed to France to increase its contribution.¹¹⁹ Again, emergency donations helped stave off total disaster for the Agency.

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

PLO politics: UNRWA and the Fakhani republic

The aforementioned establishment of the Fakhani Republic meant that the PLO in Lebanon came to present UNRWA with many of the problems it

¹¹⁸ UNRWA Commissioner-General, letter to Jordanian Minister of Development & Reconstruction, 14 March 1980, File RE230(J)V, Box RE20, UHA.

¹¹⁹ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 128-133.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹²¹ 'Recanting the Rabat Resolutions', 11 August 1975, *Monday Morning*, 11 August 1975, S-0359-0002-02, UNA.

usually faced from the host governments.¹²² Schiff has written in detail of how questions of access, personnel and the use of facilities all became topics of potential disagreement between UNRWA and the PLO at this time. The huge controversy that surrounded the PLO – not least in the eyes of UNRWA’s major donors – rendered this especially sensitive for the Agency.¹²³ In this sense, UNGA Resolution 3237 made little difference; on the ground in Lebanon at least, the Cairo Agreement and the *thawra* acted as far more meaningful turning points. This alternative periodisation explains why the Fakhani Republic is an important subject of study in this thesis, as its history juxtaposes the high diplomatic shifts of the UNGA with the day-to-day realities of PLO-UNRWA dynamics in the camps.

Randa Farah characterises the UNRWA-PLO relationship at this time in largely positive terms, contending that hostilities between the two were rare even though the PLO briefly ‘overshadowed or competed with UNRWA’.¹²⁴ However, much of the evidence suggests that this depiction, while not inaccurate *per se*, may be overly simplistic. The difficulties were in fact plentiful. As Farah herself identifies, an increasing competitiveness between the PLO and UNRWA took hold as the former gained power in the camps.¹²⁵ The PLO’s new authority meant that its patronage became as important and desirable to the refugees as connections with UNRWA, if not more so. This in turn undermined UNRWA’s authority, disrupting its previously exclusive status as the camps’ *de facto* government.

In practical terms, the PLO increasingly came to use the same sites and installations as UNRWA, albeit for different purposes. For example, the PLO’s Higher Political Committee sought the use of UNRWA schools to

¹²² See Chapter Three on UNRWA’s relations with the host governments.

¹²³ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 83, 100, 104-105.

¹²⁴ Randa Farah, ‘UNRWA: Through the Eyes of Its Refugee Employees in Jordan’, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3, March 2010, p. 396.

¹²⁵ Randa Farah, ‘Uneasy but Necessary: The UNRWA-Palestinian relationship’, Al Shabaka policy brief, 30 November 2010, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/uneasy-necessary-unrwa-palestinian-relationship/>, accessed 21 August 2017.

hold nationalistic classes for Palestinian children.¹²⁶ Farah writes that this was sometimes due to a lack of alternatives,¹²⁷ and it is true that in the case of the schools, there were not many other buildings in the camps of suitable size and design. Yet the reasons were not merely practical. As this chapter's opening quotation from Shafiq Al Hout shows, the PLO was well aware of the strategic potential that the Agency's work provided. Schiff, Al Hussein and Bocco all note that from the late 1960s, the PLO accordingly sought to use UNRWA's infrastructure to extend its own authority, legitimacy, and support in the camps.¹²⁸

The PLO's efforts on this front took different forms. Al Hout recalls in his memoir that it particularly targeted UNRWA employees in its recruitment drives, aiming to use them to take advantage of the Agency's network and accordingly reach as many Palestinians as possible.¹²⁹ For this reason, the PLO was keen to align itself with UNRWA's Palestinian staff in their tensions with the Agency, as a way of winning their trust and loyalty. Al Hussein argues that it was here where the PLO actually enjoyed its greatest influence over the Agency, albeit informally. By loudly endorsing the demands of organisations like the General Union of Palestinian Teachers, it could turn small-scale grievances into national issues, and win itself a place at the negotiating table in the process.¹³⁰ It accordingly endorsed the teachers' demands for higher salaries, and supported their complaints about the prohibition of political discussion in schools.¹³¹ The latter issue was of particular interest to the PLO, as UNRWA's regulations

¹²⁶ Director General of PLO Higher Political Committee, note to UNRWA Lebanon Director, 21 November 1979, File RE230/12 II, Box RE94, UHA [UNRWA translation]. See also: Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, p. 96.

¹²⁷ Farah, 'UNRWA: Through the Eyes of Its Refugee Employees in Jordan', p. 406.

¹²⁸ Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 239, 245.

¹²⁹ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, pp. 44-45.

¹³⁰ Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process', p. 56.

¹³¹ 'GUPT: Palestinian Teachers Intensify Social and Political Struggle', *PLO information bulletin*, 5:1, January 1979, IPS.

on staff neutrality, and specifically its ban on employees joining the PLO, severely limited its scope for recruitment.¹³²

The PLO also took up the refugees' aforementioned desire for a 'Palestinianised' curriculum as a key issue.¹³³ A 1974 issue of the PLO organ *Falastin al-thawra* wrote of the Agency's 'suspicious attempts to keep the people ignorant'.¹³⁴ More formally, at the UNESCO General Conference two years later, PLO observer Ibrahim Souss spoke of the need to 're-evaluate' UNRWA's education system, as part of the burgeoning relationship between the two organisations.¹³⁵ This is a key example of how, in league with the refugees, the PLO sought to influence the Agency's educational policies and professional training programmes along its favoured nationalistic lines.¹³⁶ Souss' intervention is also demonstrative of how the UN's formal recognition of the PLO could intersect with the refugees' demands on the ground, in this case by giving them a voice on the world stage and boosting their leverage.

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

¹³² Farah, 'UNRWA: Through the Eyes of Its Refugee Employees in Jordan', p. 396. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 88, 101.

¹³³ Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', p. 239, 245. R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, pp. 184-185. See for example: 'GUPT: Palestinian Teachers intensify social and political struggle', *PLO information bulletin*, 5:1, January 1979, IPS.

¹³⁴ UNRWA Note: *Falastin Ath-Thawra*, 17 July 1974, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UHA.

¹³⁵ UNESCO General Conference: Verbatim Record 18.Prov, 4 November 1976, File OR230(1-3)VI, Box OR71, UHA.

¹³⁶ R. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, pp. 184-185.

¹³⁷ McElhiney, cable to Rennie, 15 November 1974, S-0169-0009-0009, UNA.

the Agency reported agitation in Jabalia and Shati camps on the day of Arafat's speech.¹³⁸

From UNRWA's perspective, the PLO's encroachment on its facilities and services caused both political and practical problems. Hasna Rida, who worked as a Research Assistant for UNRWA in Lebanon at this time, recalls that the Agency's relationship with the PLO was an anxious one. Agency management were nervous about the PLO's power in the camps, and the accompanying desire of many refugees to be actively involved in the *thawra*.¹³⁹ This, of course, caused concern for the Agency, which was keen to keep its services detached from any political affairs – an increasingly unfeasible objective in the camps at this time. The PLO's use of UNRWA's installations for its own purposes also caused serious practical problems, as these buildings were increasingly targeted in Israeli air raids.¹⁴⁰

The Agency's inability to prevent the PLO's infringement on its spaces is perhaps the clearest sign of the *thawra*'s impact on the balance of power in the camps. It contrasts starkly with UNRWA's previously straightforward refusal in 1965 to distribute a PLO questionnaire that was deemed inappropriately political. By the 1970s, the impact of the *thawra* had greatly increased the PLO's leverage, and the situation was much more difficult for UNRWA, particularly in Lebanon. Its problems worsened as the Lebanese Civil War escalated and UNRWA's field office in Beirut found itself frequently cut off from both headquarters and area offices. As a result, it became increasingly dependent on the PLO, the only security force to which it could appeal. Thomas McElhiney, who was UNRWA's Deputy Commissioner-General from 1974 to 1977 and Commissioner-General from 1977 to 1979, spoke positively of the PLO's role in helping the Agency function in Lebanon at a time when the country was ruled by chaos and

¹³⁸ UNRWA Gaza Director, cable to Acting Commissioner-General, UR245/4, 28 November 1974, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, UHA.

¹³⁹ Interview with Hasna Rida, former UNRWA Research Assistant, Beirut, 7 December 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 70, 104.

terror.¹⁴¹ Yet the actions of the PLO in Lebanon at this time also caused untold problems and serious reputational damage for UNRWA.

The disorder of the Lebanese Civil War saw the PLO take its use of UNRWA installations to new heights. It infamously used the Agency's VTC in Sibliin to store and re-tool weapons, and hold military training for *fiḍāʿiyyīn*.¹⁴² When the Agency discovered this obvious breach of UN regulations, it protested to the PLO, temporarily closed the VTC, and disciplined the staff members responsible.¹⁴³ Yet the damage was done. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Israeli discovery of Sibliin in 1982 caused a furore in Israel and the US, and created serious problems for UNRWA's relationships with both states.¹⁴⁴ Occurring in the final year of the Fakhani Republic, the controversy marked the culmination of UNRWA's long-running, complex and contradictory relationship with the PLO in the camps.

Conclusion

The historical relationship between UNRWA and the PLO provides an important perspective on the Agency's interactions with and influence on the Palestinian nationalist movement in the camps. This perspective is even more valuable because it has been largely neglected in much of the existing scholarship. The evidence presented here has shown that the realities of the situation in the camps during the *thawra* compelled UNRWA to engage with Palestinian nationalism in various forms, both among the general refugee population and with their institutional representatives in the PLO. As such, this chapter's institutional analysis complements the grass roots-focussed

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁴² For UNRWA's internal discussions about the PLO's use of UNRWA facilities, see: UNRWA Lebanon Director, letter to Commissioner-General, 29 October 1979; Commissioner-General, letter to Lebanon Director, 13 November 1979; Note for the Record OR210(1-2)L SC, 16 November 1979, all File RE230/12 II, Box RE94, UHA.

¹⁴³ *Palestine Refugees Today*, 101, January 1983, IPS.

¹⁴⁴ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 104-109.

discussions of Chapters Two and Four, showing how UNRWA's political significance was felt at multiple levels of the nationalist movement.

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

Furthermore, analysis of the PLO-UNRWA relationship is vital for enriching existing understandings of the PLO. This chapter has shown how the PLO pursued its goals both at the level of high diplomatic politics, and by way of more everyday administrative politics in the camps. Moreover, it has provided a deeper perspective on the PLO's objectives and strategy, showing that it promoted a version of nationalism that was self-consciously global, forward-looking and interconnected to contemporary movements around the world. This point is particularly important because it challenges conventional assumptions that nationalism is inherently insular, directed inwards rather than outwards. As such, it demonstrates how the historical study of Palestinian nationalism can inform wider understandings of nationalism in the modern era.

Finally, the PLO's use of UNRWA as part of its internationalist strategy at the UN shows decisively how the Palestinian refugee situation was inextricably tied to the international arena, and particularly the UN. The fact that so much of this relationship played out in the refugee camps

comprises another element of these spaces' historical importance to the Palestinian nationalist movement – in this case, as the site of its intersection with internationalism. The relationship between UNRWA and the PLO served as a microcosm of how these apparently contrasting notions were juxtaposed in Palestinian history, at both the institutional and the grass roots level. This explicates the depth of Palestinian refugee history, and also explains its wider relevance to the history of the UN, globalism, and modern constructions of nationalism.

Conclusion

1982 saw the PLO's heyday come to an abrupt and drastic end. In June that year, the Israeli army began an 88-day siege of Beirut that devastated much of the city and destroyed the infrastructure established by the PLO over the previous decade.¹ On 30 August, Arafat and an estimated 12,000 PLO cadres departed Lebanon by boat.² Their new headquarters were located in Tunis, more than a thousand miles from historic Palestine and the refugee camps. These same camps, having acted as the bases of the nationalist movement since the late 1960s, now found themselves exposed and highly vulnerable, without the protection and leverage that the PLO's power had brought them. The zenith of the Palestinian nationalist movement in exile was decisively over.

The PLO's departure from Beirut also marked the end of an era for UNRWA – not only in Lebanon, but to varying extents across its five fields of operation. Since the late 1960s, the Agency had functioned in spaces dominated by the ascendance of the Palestinian nationalist movement. Its work had become entwined with the latter, as it navigated the complexities and sensitivities of the movement's authority. As Palestinian refugees across the Levant drew inspiration and encouragement from the PLO's power in the region, UNRWA had been unable to escape the ramifications of the *thawra*. In such a setting, the Agency increasingly struggled to maintain its international and ostensibly apolitical status.

The lessons that the Agency took from this period would have a lasting impact. Just five years after the PLO was routed from its base in Lebanon, the first Palestinian *intifada* began in Gaza and quickly engulfed the entire OPT. Contemporary studies of UNRWA tend to identify the first *intifada* as

¹ For more on the PLO's history during the 1982 War see: Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege: PLO Decisionmaking during the 1982 War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

² Ihsan A. Hijzai, 'Palestinians Exit Lebanon in droves', *New York Times*, 3 January 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/03/world/palestinians-exit-lebanon-in-droves.html>, accessed 28 December 2017.

a turning point in the Agency's politicisation;³ it certainly engendered a new role for the organisation in the OPT. Yet the impact of the first *intifada* followed a long period of intense politicisation, in which UNRWA's *raison d'être* had already been fiercely challenged and reimagined. The Agency's history during the *thawra* era thus comprised an important phase in its historical development, which saw it become increasingly fused with the nationalistic politics of its environment.

The nature of UNRWA's development, and the contradictions of its situation, reflected the uniqueness of its set-up. At the time of its creation in December 1949, UNRWA constituted the UN's first institutional response to a major humanitarian crisis. The fact that it predated UNHCR – and was never merged with the latter – ensured that UNRWA remained distinctive and in some ways idiosyncratic, as the only UN Agency mandated to serve one particular group of people exclusively. The challenges that it faced while doing so were indicative of the tensions inherent to its set-up as an international organisation fully absorbed in potent regional dynamics. In keeping with its intimate involvement with the Palestinian refugee situation, UNRWA's uniqueness ultimately embodied the latter's exceptionalism.

UNRWA's internationalism also made it emblematic of a much broader theme in modern Palestinian history. From the early twentieth century, global powers had perceived Palestine's fate to be an 'international' issue, due to the country's deep religious significance and its increasing entanglement in questions of inter-continental migration. Governmental structures in Palestine appeared to verify this; the legitimacy of British rule in the interwar period was grounded in a mandate granted by the League of

³ See: Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), ch. 9; Benjamin Schiff, 'Between Occupier and Occupied: UNRWA in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18:3, 1989, pp. 60–75; Randa Farah, 'The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees', in Niklaus Steiner, Gil Loescher, and Mark Gibney (ed.s), *Problems of Protection. The UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 162.

Nations in 1922.⁴ Twenty-five years later, the British government further affirmed Palestine's continuing internationalist status when it formally handed over responsibility for resolving the country's problems to the League of Nations' successor, the UN. These internationalist perceptions only continued with the UN's direct involvement in first the partition of Palestine,⁵ and then the continuing conflicts between Israel and the Arab states.⁶

As a UN body ultimately dependent on international support, UNRWA constituted the main manifestation of this internationalism among the exiled Palestinians. In many ways the UN's involvement in a regional refugee crisis typified the norms of the post-war era, whereby such problems were seen to be the responsibility of the entire global community.⁷ Yet more particularly, both the creation of UNRWA and its continuance over the decades signified the multi-faceted connections between the Palestinian people, the international community in general, and the UN in particular. The fact that UNRWA has continued to function in the same exceptional set-up has arguably made the global powers' perceptions of Palestine as uniquely international into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Nor were such perceptions one-sided; Palestinian nationalists themselves, most notably the PLO, sought to take advantage of UNRWA's international status by using it to further the international legitimacy of their cause.

The nature of UNRWA's relationship with the PLO was not alone in reflecting its internationalism. The Agency's diplomatic relations in general

⁴ Council of the League of Nations. The Palestine Mandate, 24 July 1922, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp, accessed 29 December 2017.

⁵ UNGA Resolution 181, A/RES/181(II), 29 November 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253>, accessed 31 August 2017.

⁶ See for example: UNGA Resolution 194, A/Res/194(III), 11 December 1948, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A>, accessed 28 February 2015; UNGA Resolution 212, A/RES/212(III), 19 November 1948, <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adb322aff38525617b006d88d7/edc284b4a5508fd7852560e500670213?OpenDocument>, accessed 25 February 2015.

⁷ Susan Akram, 'Palestinian Refugees and Their Legal Status: Rights, Politics, and Implications for a Just Solution', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 31:3, 2002, p. 36.

were grounded in its status as an international organisation, and a semi-autonomous one at that. It depended overwhelmingly on Western governments for funding, and relied on the goodwill of Israel, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon to be able to function in its five fields. UNRWA's dependency on numerous different governments meant that its close entwinement with the refugees' daily lives was juxtaposed with an inherent internationalism in its operations. It also added a further layer of complexity to the politics of the Agency's set-up, as it had to navigate the opposing political stances of Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the US, and the UK, among others.

The nature of UNRWA's international relations is further intriguing as it reveals that the conflict between these states did not always result in straightforward political positioning. For all their differences, Israel, the Arab host states, the Western donor states and even the PLO were all informally aligned in their shared view that UNRWA was an essentially political organisation. Their support for its work was in fact often grounded in this supposition, as they variously saw UNRWA's operations as a way to promote regional stability, to keep the Palestinian issue on the global agenda, or to remove the economic burden that would otherwise fall on the host states.

Moreover, with the exception of the PLO, these parties all opposed the ascendance of the Palestinian nationalist movement during the *thawra*, and were suspicious of the role UNRWA might play in enabling its progression in the camps. This in turn reflected their shared view that UNRWA functioned as a quasi-state in the refugee camps. Both the host states and the donor states tended to treat UNRWA as the refugees' *de facto* diplomatic representative, regularly calling on it to manage, quell, or account for goings-on in the camps. As this shows, UNRWA was inextricably tied to the camps in the international imagination, with these spaces defining how it was perceived by much of the world. This was underlined further by the fact that

much of the Agency's relationship with the PLO played out in the camps, despite the fact that the majority of the PLO's leadership were not camp residents themselves.

Interestingly, this idea of UNRWA as a politicised quasi-state was one shared by the majority of refugees themselves. Like the states discussed above, the refugees grounded their views of UNRWA's political significance in its UN status. Yet their understandings of it also took a particular form. In the refugees' eyes, the UN had erred in 1947 when it sanctioned the partition of Palestine and thus enabled the creation of the state of Israel and the Nakba. According to this view, UNRWA served as a form of 'compensation' from the international community in general and the UN in particular – of which they continued to be suspicious. As such, the Agency's services comprised not aid but entitlements, and were in fact evidence of the refugees' international political rights.

With this in mind, the refugees supported the continuation of UNRWA's work. They feared that its suspension would mean the international abandonment of their cause, and thus clung to its continuance as a sign that their plight – and particularly the right of return – had not been forgotten. Yet at the same time, they were far from subservient or meek in their dealings with the Agency. On the contrary, this thesis has shown that the refugees demonstrated considerable agency in shaping the nature of UNRWA's work, be it by opposing resettlement, calling for education, demanding the 'Palestinianisation' of the curriculum, or pushing for the Agency to play a greater advocacy role. Despite their structural powerlessness, the refugees were remarkably successful at organising themselves in order to exploit the little leverage they held over UNRWA. Ultimately, the Agency needed the refugees' cooperation in order to function, and they were highly effective at taking advantage of this.

As this shows, the history of UNRWA's work is relevant not only to studies of internationalism and high politics, but also to more general histories of the Palestinian refugees' experiences. Indeed, much of the Agency's historiographical value stems from the fact that it directly connected the global arena of the UN to the quotidian affairs of the Palestinian refugee camps. Intimately involved with these spaces, UNRWA played a vital role in defining and demarcating the camps; along with checkpoints and socio-economic conditions, it was the presence of Agency institutions that helped distinguish the camps from surrounding areas and even from the rest of the *shatā*t. In turn, the camps' spatial peculiarities facilitated their key role in driving the *thanra*, with the refugees once again demonstrating their agency by using the possibilities of their surroundings to further the national cause. Studying UNRWA's history thus illuminates not only the place of Palestine in high politics and global diplomacy, but also the development and significance of the Palestinian refugee camps as spaces.

The camps' histories both complement and challenge conventional understandings of modern Middle Eastern history. On the one hand, the significance of chronological watersheds like 1967 is underlined by examining the changes precipitated in the camps by the events of that year. At the same time, this thesis has shown that the refugee camps' distinctiveness precludes the possibility of understanding them simply as subordinates to the wider history of the region. The camps' own histories are marked not only by large-scale regional turning points like the Naksa, but also by the impact of the *thanra*, the cuts in UNRWA services, and the dynamics of the Agency's relationship with the PLO.

The intimacies and intricacies of UNRWA's involvement with the camps meant that the latter's political development in this period inevitably had an impact on the Agency's work – and vice versa. Once again, the refugees' agency came into play, as they used the momentum of the *thanra*

to push through their long-held demands for a Palestinian national curriculum in UNRWA schools. At the same time, UNRWA's quasi-state role in the camps shaped the development and expression of the nationalist movement therein. Its transnational nature provided a common frame of reference for the Palestinians across the Levant and thus reinforced their shared national consciousness, while its registration policies and education programme helped inculcate a sense of Palestinian national identity in the refugees. As a case study, the Palestinian refugee camps thus counter modernist theories that posit the presence of a state as a necessary condition for the emergence of nationalism. UNRWA's role shows how a 'shadow sovereign' can emerge in this setting to fulfil some of the usual state functions, not only in terms of service provision but also in facilitating a shared national consciousness and identity.

This thesis has shown decisively that the exclusion of UNRWA from much of the existing literature has been not only unfortunate, but erroneous. It has resulted in a partial understanding of the history of the PLO, the Palestinian refugee camps, and the nationalist movement in exile. The centrality of Palestinian politics to the modern Middle East makes this oversight all the more regrettable. Over the second half of the twentieth century, UNRWA functioned as an integral part of the Palestinian refugee experience, in not only socio-economic but also political terms. As such, its exclusion from much of the relevant historiography – explained in part by the inaccessibility of the Agency's archive in Amman – needs to be addressed and reversed. This research has opened the door for future studies to examine other overlooked aspects of UNRWA's history, such as the dynamics of its relationships with UNCCP, UNHCR and UNESCO; the trajectory of its political positioning following the end of the *thawra* era; and the history of its standing with Arab governments in the Gulf and Maghreb.

The findings presented in this thesis do not only illuminate the history of UNRWA, as important as that is. They also show that the nature of the Palestinian nationalist movement was more complex than is often understood. While grounded in the social memory of pre-1948 Palestine, and the collective trauma of national dispossession, Palestinian nationalism was not simply an invocation of a lost mythical golden age. It was instead self-consciously international, contemporary, and outward-looking, with tenets grounded in global norms and institutions. The increasing fusion of UNRWA's work with the Palestinian nationalist movement over the years 1967-82 demonstrates the latter's forward-thinking nature, and the former's entwinement with the politics of its surroundings. As this thesis has shown, examining this intersection between the national and the international is vital not only for illuminating Palestinian history, but also for informing wider studies of nationalism, migration, camps, collective memory, and the dynamics between people and state in the modern era.

**Appendix A:
List of official UNRWA camps in Gaza**

	Camp	Date established	Area (sq km approx)	Original population	Population in 2018
1	Bureij	1950s	0.5	13,000	41,088
2	Deir el-Balah	1948	0.17	9,000	24,525
3	Jabalia	1948	1.4	35,000	119,486
4	Khan Younis	1948	1.27	35,000	84,325
5	Maghazi	1949	0.6	<i>Data unavailable</i>	30,101
6	Nuseirat	c.1948	0.68	16,000	77,761
7	Rafah	1949	1.23	41,000	120,526
8	Shati (‘Beach’)	c.1948	0.52	23,000	84,077

Source: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>, accessed 29 May 2018. Additional information kindly provided by Matthias Schmale, UNRWA Director in Gaza, and Rafiq Abed, Chief of UNRWA Infrastructure & Camp Improvement Programme in Gaza, via email, 29 May 2018.

**Appendix B:
List of official UNRWA camps in Jordan**

	Camp	Date established	Area (sq km)	Original population	Population in 2018
1	Amman New ('Wihdat')	1955	0.48	<i>Data unavailable</i>	57,000
2	Baq'a	1968	1.4	26,000	119,000
3	Husn	1968	0.77	12,500	25,000
4	Irbid	1951	0.24	4,000	28,000
5	Jabal el-Hussein	1952	0.42	8,000	32,000
6	Jerash ('Gaza')	1968	0.75	11,5000	29,000
7	Marka ('Hitten')	1968	0.92	<i>Data unavailable</i>	53,000
8	Souf	1967	0.5	<i>Data unavailable</i>	19,000
9	Talbieh	1968	0.13	5,000	8,000
10	Zarqa	1949	0.18	8,000	20,000

Source: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan>, accessed 23 March 2018.

Appendix C:
List of official UNRWA camps in Lebanon

	Camp	Date established	Population in 2018*
1	Beddawi	1955	16,500
2	Burj al-Barajneh	1948	17,945
3	Burj Shemali	1948	22,789
4	Dbayeh	1956	4,351
5	Ein el-Helweh	1948	54,116
6	El Buss	1950s [†]	11,254
7	Jisr el-Basha	<i>Data unavailable</i> (destroyed 1976)	n/a
8	Gouraud	<i>Data unavaialble</i> (evacuated c.1963)	n/a
9	Mar Elias	1952	662
10	Mieh Mieh	1954	5,250
11	Nabatieh	<i>Data unavailable</i> (destroyed 1974)	n/a
12	Nahr el-Bared	1949	n/a (27,000 in 2007) [‡]
13	Rashidieh	1936/1963 [§]	31,478
14	Shatila**	1949	9,842
15	Tel al-Zaatar	c.1949 (destroyed 1976)	n/a (60,000 in 1976)
16	Wavel (‘al-Jalil’)	1949	8,806

* The original population sizes of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were not recorded. UNRWA does not publish data about the sizes of the camps in Lebanon due to contention over where it provides services.

† El Buss was originally built in 1939 to house Armenian refugees. In the 1950s the Lebanese government rehoused Palestinian refugees there. See: El Buss Camp, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/el-buss-camp>, accessed 23 March 2018.

‡ Nahr el-Bared camp was destroyed in 2007 in fighting between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian Islamist group Fatah al-Islam. It is currently being reconstructed. See: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/nahr-el-bared-camp>, accessed 29 May 2018.

§ The French government originally constructed Rashidieh camp in 1936 for Armenian refugees. In 1963, UNRWA expanded and developed the camp to accommodate Palestinian refugees from Gouraud. See: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/rashidieh-camp>, accessed 23 March 2018.

** Sabra neighbourhood is connected to Shatila and is sometimes counted separately, although it is not an official UNRWA camp.

Source: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>, accessed 17 May 2018.

**Appendix D:
List of official UNRWA camps in Syria**

	Camp	Date established	Area (sq km)	Population in 2011 (prior to Syrian war)
1	Dera'a	1950-51	1.3	10,500
2	Ein el Tal* ('Hindrat')	1962	0.16	6,000
3	Hama	1950	0.06	8,000
4	Homs	1949	0.15	22,000
5	Jaramana	1948	0.04	18,658
6	Khan Dunon	1950-51	0.03	10,000
7	Khan Eshieh	1949	0.69	20,000
8	Latakia**	1955-56	0.22	10,000
9	Neirab	1948-50	0.15	20,500
10	Qabr Essit	1948	0.02	23,700
11	Sbeineh	1948	0.03	22,600
12	Yarmouk**	1957	2.1	148,500

Source: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/syria>, accessed 23 March 2018.

The sizes of the original populations of the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria were not recorded.

* Ein el Tal, Latakia and Yarmouk are 'unofficial' refugee camps that were established by the host governments but still receive most UNRWA services.

Appendix E: List of official UNRWA camps in the West Bank

	Camp	Date established	Area (sq km)	Original population *	Population in 2018
1	Aida	1950	0.71		3,150
2	Am'ari	1949	0.096		6,100
3	Aqbat Jabr	1948	1.67	30,000	8,600 [†]
4	Arroub	1949	0.24		9,850
5	Askar	1950	0.119		18,500
6	Balata	1950	0.25	5,000	27,000
7	Beit Jibrin ('Azza')	1950	0.027		1,337
8	Camp Number 1 ('Ein Beit el-Ma')	1950	0.045		4,600
9	Deir 'Ammar	1949	0.162		2,200
10	Dheisheh	1949	0.33	3,000	15,000
11	Ein el-Sultan	1948	0.87	20,000	3,800 [‡]
12	Far'a	1950	0.26		7,100
13	Fawwar	1949	0.27	3,000	9,500
14	Jalzone	1949	0.253		9,450
15	Jenin	1953	0.42		14,000
16	Kalandia	1949	0.42		9,950
17	Nur Shams	1952	0.21		7,350
18	Shu'fat	1965			12,500-24,000 [§]
19	Tulkarm	1950	0.18		21,000

* Original populations were not recorded for the majority of camps in the West Bank. Aqbat Jabr, Balata, Dheisheh, Ein el-Sultan and Fawwar are the exceptions.

[†] The population of Aqbat Jabr fell drastically in 1967, when around 25,000 residents fled. See: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank/aqbat-jabr-camp>, accessed 24 March 2018.

[‡] An estimated 18,000 Palestine refugees fled Ein El-Sultan in 1967. See: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank/ein-el-sultan-camp>, accessed 24 March 2018.

[§] There are 12,500 Palestine refugees registered as living in Shu'fat, but UNRWA estimates the actual number of residents is closer to 24,000. See: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank/shufat-camp>, accessed 24 March 2018.

Source: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank>, accessed 23 March 2018.

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- File RE230/1(11)
- File RE400 II: 'Camps & Buildings – General'
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Box LEG22:

- File LEG 480(IS) I: 'Legal Status of the Agency & Relations with the Government: Agreement with Israel for Continuation of Services in Occupied Areas'

Box LEG23: Legal Status of Agency Etc; Attempts by Local Governments to Control Appointments:

- File LEG 480/4(S) IV: 'Movements & Status of Agency Staff – Syria, 1 July 1972 – December 1985'
- File LEG 480/4(L) I: 'Movements & Status of Agency Staff – Lebanon, 1957-69'
- File LEG 480/4(L) II: 'Movements & Status of Agency Staff – Lebanon, 1970-75'
- File LEG 480/4(J) II: 'Movements & Status of Agency Staff – Jordan, 1970-75'
- File LEG 480/4(J) III: 'Movements & Status of Agency Staff – Jordan, 1976-80'

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- File OR 100 II: 'Organization & Policy 1959'
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Box OR17:

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- File OR 131 II: 'Organizational Matters: Field and Inter-Field Visits, 1 January 1979 – December 1979'
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Box OR29:

- File OR150/2-EDU: 'Commissioner-General's Annual Report: Education 1980-81'

Box OR59: Israeli Government Policy:

- File OR214(IS): 'Education 1967-80'
- File OR215(IS)II: 'Resettlement & Rehousing 1972-80'

Box OR71: UN Agencies:

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- File RE 120 Part I: 'Repatriation or Compensation'
- File RE 140(6)I: 'Social Surveys in Occupied Territories, October 1967 – 31 December 1970'
- File RE140/1(3)I: 'Government of Israeli Census – West Bank & Gaza, 1 July 1967 – 29 February 1968'
- File RE150 I: 'Political Matters & Relations with Refugee Organisations, 1956-63'
- File RE150 II: 'Political Matters & Relations with Refugee Organisations, 1956-63'

Box RE7: Eligibility & Registration

- File RE210/03(WB) I: 'West Bank 1967-70'
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- File RE210/03 III: 'General Education (General)'
- File RE210/03(L): 'General Education: Admission of non-Eligible Palestinian students into UNRWA/UNESCO Schools in Lebanon 1969-75'
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Box RE19: Education

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- File RE230(L-4): 'Lebanon Institute of Education Courses 1970-75'
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- File RE 230(WB) I: 'West Bank: Elementary, Preparatory & Secondary, July 1967- 1975'
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- File RE230(1) J I: 'Jordan & West Bank, 1969-70'
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