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**Does the political bore? The denial
and camouflage of the “political” in a
Palestinian refugee camp**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology

YEAR

2012

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Declaration for PhD thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation into the significance of the “ordinary” in the process of political self-fashioning in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan called Al-Wihdat. The goal of this thesis is to document how refugees living in Al Wihdat receive and respond to nationalistic messages about Palestinian identity more than 60 years after the establishment of the first refugee camp in Jordan.

When I first moved to Al-Wihdat, I expected Palestinian refugee camps to be highly politicized spaces. Except for occasional political demonstrations and events, however, neither the political turmoil in Gaza and the West Bank, nor the constant footage of the Palestinian struggle in the Arab media, roused refugees out of what they described as the ordinary course of daily life in the camp. In contrast, my engagement with camp-dwellers showed me that refugees’ remaking of their social world was carried out by striving to live what they described as an “ordinary life” (*hayā ‘ādiyye*): by working, praying, relaxing, watching football matches, surfing the internet, or idling in barber shops, for example.

I argue that the performative and reiterative dimensions of ordinary activities have not precluded refugees from feeling an affinity for many of the meanings, ideals, and values of Palestinian nationalism. On the contrary, infusing nationalism with daily interests and needs has allowed people to recapture the meanings, values and promises of Palestinian nationalism from the inflexible interpretations provided by a sclerotic political system in Gaza and the West Bank. At the same time, such process of accommodation has also afforded them the possibility of living what they refer to as being an “ordinary life”.

To my daughter, Mariangela

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GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

<i>'ādī</i>	usual/normal/ordinary
<i>'ā'ile</i>	family
<i>'ayb</i>	shameful
<i>'ashyra</i>	tribe
<i>'iltizām</i>	commitment
<i>'insān</i>	human beings
<i>īrhābiyyn</i>	terrorists
<i>'onsori</i>	racist
<i>'umra</i>	pilgrimage
<i>'urdunīn</i>	Jordanians (sometimes also “native Jordanians”)
<i>'ustāza</i>	educators/Mr
<i>adāb</i>	refined/civilized manners
<i>aghanīyā'</i>	from the wealthy families or the wealthy
<i>ajaneb</i>	foreigners/strangers
<i>al-īkhwān al-muslimīn</i>	muslim brothers
<i>al-'urdun</i>	Jordan
<i>al-laje' al-fīlastīnī</i>	Palestinian refugee
<i>al-quds</i>	Jerusalem
<i>az'ar</i>	good for nothing or thug
<i>banāt</i>	girls
<i>bedū'</i> (pl. <i>badawī</i>)	Bedouin
<i>bilad</i>	country
<i>bilad al-sham</i>	Levant, literary Syrian countries/provinces or the Syrian region
<i>burnāmej al-shabāb</i>	youth programme
<i>dabke</i>	Palestinian traditional dance
<i>dairat al-mukhābarāt al-ammah</i>	the Jordanian intelligent service
<i>dawanji</i> (pl. <i>dawawīn</i>)	trouble-maker/reckless street man, literary someone

	who hangs out in the <i>dīwān</i> all day
<i>dhurūf al-ma'īsha</i>	living conditions
<i>dishdāsha/ jāllabiya</i>	an ankle-length garment with long sleeves, similar to a robe
<i>dīwān</i>	the place where men meet with other men to chat and discuss
<i>farīq</i>	team
<i>fatawy</i>	Fatah's activists
<i>fidā'īyyin</i>	Palestinian guerrillas
<i>gahwe</i>	coffee
<i>ghajarīn/nawari</i>	gypsies
<i>hafle al-shabāb</i>	stag party
<i>hajj</i>	the elder or Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj)
<i>haki fadi</i>	nonsense/empty words
<i>halal</i>	religiously allowed
<i>haq al-'awda</i>	right of return'
<i>harat</i>	sub-neighbourhoods
<i>hatta</i>	scarf/head-gear
<i>hayā 'ādiyye</i>	ordinary life
<i>hijab</i>	veil (Islamic clothing)
<i>hizb (pl. 'āhzāb)</i>	political parties
<i>hub</i>	love
<i>hukūme</i>	government
<i>intikhābāt</i>	elections
<i>jabha al-amal al-islami</i>	Islamic action front (IAF)
<i>jāhilīya</i>	pre-Islamic "time", or time of ignorance
<i>jāsūs</i>	spy
<i>jumhūr</i>	crowd/fans
<i>kāfir (pl. kuffār)</i>	apostate/infidel
<i>karam</i>	hospitality
<i>karāme</i>	dignity
<i>kaslan</i>	lazy

<i>ma'wa/malja'</i>	shelters
<i>malal</i>	boredom
<i>malik</i>	king
<i>masākīn</i>	unfortunate ones/ poor/miserable
<i>mashakel</i>	problems
<i>mitwād'e</i>	humble style of life
<i>muhtaram (pl. muhtaramīn)</i>	trustworthy person/ honourable men
<i>mukhayyamāt</i>	refugee camps
<i>mukhayyamji</i>	camp-dweller
<i>muqawama</i>	resistance
<i>muta'asseb</i>	narrow minded
<i>nakba</i>	the 'catastrophe'
<i>naksa</i>	the 'setback'
<i>nās</i>	people/ folks
<i>numar al-zinco</i>	roofs for the shelters
<i>salāt</i>	ritual prayers
<i>shabāb</i>	young men and adolescents
<i>shahīd (pl. shuhadā')</i>	martyr
<i>shāra'</i>	street
<i>sheikh (pl. shuyukh)</i>	man of faith/man of piety/tribal leader
<i>souk</i>	market/bazaar
<i>sumūd</i>	steadfastness
<i>sūra</i>	verse of the Quran
<i>syāse</i>	politics
<i>tawtīn</i>	resettlement/naturalisation
<i>thawra</i>	revolution
<i>toshe</i>	trouble/fight
<i>wasat al-balad</i>	downtown
<i>wāsta</i>	network of connections, working connections, relationships of patronage, connections and favours
<i>watanī</i>	patriotic
<i>wathīqa</i>	UNRWA id card or laissez passer used for travel
<i>za'lān</i>	sad and angry

zahgān

bored/fed up

zakat

alms-giving, one of the five pillars of Islamic beliefs
and practices

zinekh (pl. zinkhān)

ignorant of the fundamental principles of the Islam

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMA	Amman Metropolitan Area
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIP	Community Infrastructure Program
DPA	Department of Palestinian Affairs
ESPP	Economic and Social Productivity Program'
HPP	Housing Projects for the Poor
IAF	Islamic Action Front
JD	Jordanian Dinars
MB	Muslim Brothers
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PA	Palestinian Authority
PLFP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UN	United Nations
UNCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in the Near East

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

For transliteration of Arabic words, I have followed the guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. However, I have chosen to leave personal and place names in their most common English forms (e.g. Nadi and not Nādī), or how I saw them transliterated in Jordan by refugees. There are also a number of Arabic words (most notably “intifada”) that have passed into common English usage, and are therefore not transliterated in the text. Furthermore I have decided to use colloquial Jordanian (specifically camp dialect) for my translation. This includes for example the substitution of the sound “q” with “g” or “k” and the adoption of words that do not exist in the vocabulary of standard Arabic (e.g. “dawawīn” for “troublemakers”). These purely colloquial terms are transcribed as phonetically as possible. I have also opted to leave the definite article always under the form of “al”, even in the case of “sun letters”. Finally when citing authors or quoting transliteration from other authors, I have simply followed the spelling used in the text to which I am referring.

A general source of inadequacies in all my material,
whether photographic or linguistic or descriptive,
consists in the fact that, like every ethnographer, I was lured
by the dramatic, exceptional and sensational... I have
also neglected much of the everyday, inconspicuous,
drab and small-scale in my study of Trobriand life. The
only comfort which I may derive is that... my mistakes
may be of use to others.

(Malinowski 1935, p. 462)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN: THE “DILEMMA”

When I began my 15 months of fieldwork at the Al-Wihdat Camp in Jordan, I expected refugee camps to be highly politicized settings. Persuaded to document the significance of “the political” in the everyday lives of refugees by my reading of recent anthropological work on the Middle East, I was instead quite puzzled by what seemed to me to be an ostensible absence of politics in the camp spaces. People in Al-Wihdat held quite a diverse attitude toward the political than what I expected. “‘*Ādī*” (usual/normal) was the general response given by virtually everybody questioned on the tenor of the rather rare political demonstrations and rallies held in Al-Wihdat. “Nothing changes... it’s three hours that are speaking! I heard that thousands of times and nothing changed... They are good only to speak”. This comment came from a friend, who was commenting harshly on the oratory skills of the speakers on the occasion of the annual celebration of the Nakba in the Camp¹. Another man, instead, turned his criticism toward the audience: “these words enter in one ear and they get out from the other!” “They are all *fatawy* (Fatah’s activists)”, another stated, having paused for a moment then shrugging his shoulders: “Either *fatawy* or *’ikhwan* (Muslim Brothers), *Kullu nafs ishi* (it’s all the same)!”. For many the whole demonstration was *haki fadi* (nonsense/empty words), and most agreed that these events would never change their situation. Blaming the ineffectiveness of the Peace Process in Palestine or the corruption of politicians and political parties was a regular feature of daily life in the Camp.

Exhibitions of distaste and cynicism toward the political were especially evident during the so-called Arab Spring – the recent political turmoil in North Africa and Middle East that challenged many of the assumptions held by scholars and more popular commentators about the political passivity and inertia of the so-called “Arab masses”. Political anti/governmental demonstrations began to be held every Friday in the *wasat al-balad* (downtown) of Amman, the capital of Jordan, with unexpected regularity. Although generally quite small in terms of the number of participants, these demonstrations accompanied a sit-in held on the 24th of March at the Dākhilliyye

¹ Palestinians remember the year of the establishment of Israel as Al-Nakba (the Catastrophe).

Circle. Dubbed “The March 24 Youth movement”, organizers and participants set a tent encampment (named “Tahrir Square” after the Cairo square that hosted the revolt against President Hosni Mubarak’s regime) in the Circle. Like the demonstrations and protests in other Arab countries, the sit-in was initially organized by various social networks and blogs, and comprised a disparate coalition of people. Originally planned as on-going until their demands were met, it lasted only for a couple of days. On Friday morning, the participants were attacked by a group of counter-demonstrators (the “Loyalty March”), allegedly loyal to King Abdullah II, and eventually they were dispersed by the police in the ensuing chaos.

This fiasco could have led some to predict the beginning of the end or, at least, further and more deadly clashes. The situation did not deteriorate, however, or follow the same developments of other countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria. In Jordan, demonstrators were publically calling for the end of corruption and a change of government, but, at the same time, they publicly pledged loyalty to both the Jordanian nation-state and the Hashemite regime. If the specificity of the Jordanian challenges the idea of an Arab Spring indiscriminately sweeping the region, it also spoils popular expectations about the subversive potential of refugees and refugee camps. Echoing the thoughts of many, a friend in the Camp sustained the popular sentiment beyond the demonstration by confirming the point: “This is not like Egypt and Tunisia. We are against the Prime Minister, the ministers, and Parliament, but not against the King”. Even more surprising was a comment made to me by another friend, who I knew held quite a radical opinion against the King and the government. Referring to the “March 24” sit-in, he commented: “Don’t worry about it... it’s only a group of *dawawīn* [troublemakers] clashing with other *dawawīn* [referring to the counter-demonstrators and police officers]”.

Especially at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was taken aback by refugees’ ambiguous and complex stances vis-à-vis political participation. One of the main questions that has taunted scholars doing research on the “Palestinian issue” in the Middle East is whether camp-dwellers are an integrated community or not (e.g. Hanafi 2008). Should I have interpreted the remarks of my friend as a sign of his clear allegiance to the Hashemite sovereignty expressed in his refusal to criticize the King, or as a form of political protest

tout court, a way of condemning both the authorities and the protesters, depicted indiscriminately by them as troublemakers? Understanding the relevance of this dilemma in contemporary Jordan requires a consideration of the historic centrality of the categories of “refugee” and “refugee camp” to the Palestinian national project and the peculiarity of the socio-political condition of Palestinian refugees in the Kingdom.

Palestinian refugees (*lāji’ūn*) have been popularly depicted by the Western media and many academic accounts as inherently political beings, ready to fight and resist all attempts to annihilate their nationalist struggles. In a similar fashion, refugee camps (*mukhayyamāt*) have also been represented as the locus of a political agency based on the ideal of resistance. Designed as transit centres to host and prepare Palestinian refugees for local integration, refugee camps in the Middle East became what Julie Peteet has recently described as “oppositional spaces appropriated and endowed with alternative meanings” (1986, p. 95). In Jordan, there is a widely held collective opinion that refugees and camp-dwellers have historically nurtured anti-government sentiments. Loyalty to the King, the Hashemite family, and the Government was, by contrast, depicted as being associated most clearly with the tribes and Bedouins who are mostly comprised of east-bank Jordanians. This claim was based on the fact that Jordanians of Palestinian origin were not “sons of the tribes” (*abna’ al-asha’ir*) and hence not truly “Jordanians” (Shryock 1997). These representations were simultaneously sustained by historical studies that have documented the rise of Palestinian nationalism in the camps and its challenge to Jordan’s sovereignty (e.g. Salibi 1993). The result is that camps have been portrayed either as places of political instability or as the crucibles of subversive ideas and behaviour (e.g. Al-Khazendar 1997). In addition, Al-Wihdat has historically enjoyed a reputation of being a bastion of “Palestinianness”, irreducible resistance, and political unrest. In the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, the Palestinian liberation movement – mostly members of Fatah and the “Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine” – established its headquarters especially in Al-Wihdat, and the Camp was renamed “the Republic” in an overt challenge to the Jordanian monarchy. The heroic heydays of the 1960s played, and still retain, a central role in refugees’ self-consciousness and self-understanding: over the years, demonstrations, protests and even allegiance to Al-Wihdat Football Club – which will be discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis – remained, for refugees, important acts of identification with Palestinian national

struggles (e.g. Al-Hamarneh 2002, Jaber 1996, Tuastad 1995). Finally, a Palestinian nationalistic and potentially explosive sentiment has also been constituted negatively by experiences of loss and marginality (see Al-Husseini and Bocco 2010, pp. 262-266). Over the years, Palestinian refugees have faced informal discrimination in Jordan at the legislative level (by having their representation in parliament drastically curtailed to six seats out of 120 members of Parliament) and in the field of employment (especially in the public sector, which largely excludes Palestinians from military and intelligence services) (Abu-Odeh 1999).

On the other hand, while there is truth in depictions of Palestinian refugee camps as hubs of political resistance, it is also important to recognise that the situation of Palestinian refugees in Jordan differs greatly from that of other Palestinians living in other Arab host-countries – Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. First, unlike Lebanon and Syria, where refugees maintained a legal status as “stateless” persons, Jordan has granted full citizenship to Palestinian refugees. The extension of citizenship rights has conferred to them, at least in principle, the same rights and duties as any other Jordanian native. As Jalal Al-Husseini points out, “this unique double citizen/refugee status has placed them within a web of formal and informal balancing mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion meant to guarantee their integration within Jordan’s society while preserving their right of return” (2011, p. 185). Secondly, in Jordan, urban refugee camps such as Al-Wihdat are open spaces and commercial areas that more resemble a low-income residential neighbourhood of Amman than a space of exception designed for control and surveillance (Agamben 2005). The Camp is not a closed space. Historically, refugees have developed intricate social relations and drawn complex and varying life trajectories by moving outside the Camp, returning to it at a later date, or, equally plausibly, never coming back. Finally, since the ‘70s, refugees’ political activism gradually terminated in apathy and indifference (see chapter 4). Once located at the very heart of the Palestinian national movement, refugees and refugee camps were marginalised in the current political process². Relegating the status of refugees to the final stages of the negotiations, the Oslo Peace Agreements was, for refugees in

² It should also be noticed, however, that – although the Oslo Peace Agreements relegated refugees and refugee camps to the margins of Palestinian nationalist discourse – the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada has brought them back to the centre of political stage by dissipating any hope of peace (Khalili 2007, p. 57-58).

Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, clear evidence of how the Palestinian Authority (PA) had sold off the right of return to secure the construction of a Palestinian state (see Tamari 1996). The exclusion by the official national project concurred ultimately in nurturing a growing felling of bitterness and frustrations amongst refugees. Along with the disappointment with the Peace Process and Oslo Agreements in 1993, the restrictions imposed upon political activity in refugee camps by the authorities after Black September, the discontent toward Hamas-Fatah rivalry³, and the ineffectiveness of political parties that advocated the Palestinian cause in Jordan furthered refugees' "disengagement" of formal politics. At the time of my fieldwork in Al-Wihdat, for example, except for the occasional political demonstration or event, neither the recent political turmoil in Gaza and West Bank, nor the constant footage of the Palestinian issue in the Arab media, aroused refugees out of what they described as being the ordinary ('*ādī*) of daily life in the Camp. The last episodes of "uprising" that most of my informants recollected dated back to 2004 when Jordanian flags were burned in Al-Wihdat following the assassination of the historical leader of Hamas, Sheikh Yassin. Interestingly, the issue was eventually solved at an official level by camp leaders (*makhatir*, sing. *mukhtār*) who put the blame on alleged agitators coming from outside the Camp (Al-Dustour 2004).

LIVING AN "ORDINARY LIFE"

In light of the complexities of refugee exilic experience, how should we understand the great discomfort of refugees toward political elites and political parties? What forms does Palestinian nationalism take in the context of protracted displacement and life in a country that has granted refugees full citizenship rights? Most importantly, how do refugees living in Al-Wihdat deal with the pressure of living in spaces endowed with such "thick" political meanings and respond to the expectation of acting as a living embodiment of political resistance?

It would be tempting to answer these questions by stating that refugees have two alternatives: either they comply with these authoritative discourses by resisting the

³ In 2006, the frictions between the two main Palestinian parties – Hamas and Fatah – resulted in the creation of two separate governments: the Hamas Government in Gaza and the Fatah ruled Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank.

attempts of assimilation, or dismiss these by becoming assimilated into the host country. In this thesis, I argue instead that camp-dwellers in Al-Wihdat genuinely did subscribe to Palestinian nationalism, but – contrary to common assumptions – they have done so by accommodating this discursive regime to their determination to live an ordinary life in Jordan.

To understand how camp-dwellers living in Al-Wihdat handle the call to commitment to Palestinian nationalism in the context of their protracted exile in Jordan, we need to go beyond an understanding of refugee agency framed solely in the terms of political resistance. If we take the “will to resist” (or the lack of this) as the ultimate value around which refugee’s everyday life was declined, we risk dehumanizing refugees and missing the complexity of their lives. My engagement with camp-dwellers showed me that refugees’ remaking of their social world was not carried out through spectacular acts in the realm of the political, but rather by striving to be ordinary.

Under the impulse of French Poststructuralism, anthropologists and scholars from various disciplines have documented the importance of the ordinary and its analogues, the everyday and the mundane, in the reproduction of society (e.g. Bourdieu 1979, Butler 1999, Giddens 1984, Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Williams 1958). A compelling body of work on political activity and processes has shed light on the ways through which everyday life and ordinary practices are shaped by the emergence and development of socio-political systems (Elias 2000, Lefebvre 1991); other works, in contrast, have shown how “the ordinary” provides the space and the opportunity to resist and transform hegemonic order (Aretxaga 1997, Certeau 1984, Goffman 1990, Scott 1985).

The ordinary has also circulated in scholarly discourse specialising in the study of nationalism. This body of literature has generally privileged an approach informed by Foucault’s emphasis on the body as a site of inscription of dominant (nationalist) representations and ideologies over de Certeau’s investigation of the transformative social power inherent everyday practices of ordinary actors (Alonso 1994, Bhabha 1990, Billig 1995; see Jean-Klein 2001, pp. 87-89, for a criticism).

In an insightful article (2001), Jean-Klein has criticized this body of work for using the “ordinary” merely as the locus of nationalistic processes forged by political centres imposed upon ordinary people, and showing little concern on how nationalistic practices are fashioned by ordinary people through distinctive narratives and actions woven into everyday practices. My thesis is greatly indebted to Jean-Klein’s investigation of the implication of the “ordinary” in the production and articulation of national subjectivities among Palestinians. However, for Jean-Klein, it is actually the suspension of the everyday, and not its normal reproduction, at stake. It is Palestinians’ will to refrain from engaging in acts of ordinary life such as paying social visits or going to weddings that ultimately fashions Palestinian nationalism. Things were quite different in Al-Wihdat; here, the daily lives of people reflected the conscious attempt to both mitigate the pervasive effects of politics and immerse into an “ordinariness” punctuated by such events as weddings, religious feasts, and other life-cycle events.

Camp-dwellers’ conscious attempt to mitigate or escape political pressures recall to a certain extent Miller and Woodward’s analysis of the significance of wearing blue jeans in a North London neighbourhood. In their book, the authors observe how

“[m]ost migrants, and especially younger migrants, feel that if anything, the pressure is on them to represent some kind of identity (in contrast to the rest of the population), while wearing blue jeans represents some sort of escape from such question. [...] Returning to the default mode of putting on everyday jeans or being content to be an ordinary person is inevitably reported as a means of opting out of all such pressures rather than conforming to them. For all these reason the ordinary stands against the normative” (2011, p. 135).

For camp-dwellers too, the ordinary stands against the normative. While for Miller and Woodward’s migrants, the normative is represented by the pressures to conform with some specific ethnic or national identity, for refugees, this pressure is defined by the urge to act politically: to be a political embodiment of the Palestinian nationalist predicament. My friends perceived the ordinary as substantially non-political and largely encompassed within the prospect of full socio-economic integration in Jordan. In the Camp, people’s daily life was hence articulated around the determination to accomplish an ordinary life and become fully integrated in Jordan, with all this might

entail – owning a flat, getting married, and gaining a decent professional status, but also being able to fulfil other desires, especially such as having fun or being free to choose a specific dress code.

I would go further, however. Whereas in Miller and Woodward’s case, the ordinary is a project animated mostly by escapist desires, “being ordinary” in Al-Wihdat is the very way through which the normative system is reproduced. In other words, the Palestinian political cause and its symbols, the right of return, and the recognition of Palestinian suffering, heroic resistance, and steadfastness (*sumūd*) are genuinely embraced by virtually everybody in Wihdat, and re-enacted in the context of their protracted displacement. Engaging with the stream of ordinary life is crucial to achieving this goal. By infusing Palestinian nationalism with mundane interests and needs, refugees breathe new life into the meanings, values, and promises of Palestinian nationalism. It was the non-political “ordinariness” of watching football, going to the mosque, looking for a job, or loitering around that ultimately mitigated or contained the “saturation” of the political in refugees’ daily lives. But it was also the very engagement with these activities that, as I show throughout the thesis, allowed refugees to reproduce the authoritative messages of Palestinian nationalism in the Camp. By stripping its ideological contents of political militancy and weaving these into acts of daily life, refugees in Al-Wihdat subscribed to a discourse centred on the ideal of resistance and adapted it to their wish to live a “normal” life.

As I will show, however, this process was not always marked by harmony and coherence. At times, it produced considerable anxieties and unsettled problems amongst refugees, which were called upon to confront the inconsistencies of daily life. By failing to grasp this aspect, there is a risk of missing the contradictory, ambiguous and conflicting nature of everyday experience. The ordinary and the political were certainly intertwined, and yet often, being ordinary was infused with hopes and anxieties related to their national predicament – “shall I find a real Palestinian woman from the Camp?” “Is really worth spending money for an iPhone when my fellows in Gaza are broke?”. If we are to understand how refugees have accommodate Palestinian nationalism with the desire of living an “ordinary life” in Jordan, we need also to give significant attention to the inconsistencies that these project might have also generated; for instance, when the

pursuing of “ordinariness” was not seen as desirable but rather perceived as the capitulation of Palestinian political identity and the loss of national values, or when failing to be “ordinary” heightened the lived perception of discrimination amongst refugees.

AIMS AND GOALS

This thesis has three major and interrelated goals.

First, my account of camp dwellers’ daily engagement with ordinary life wants to contribute to a large body of scholarship that has investigated the fragmented experience of Palestinian people and the multiplicity of resources employed by them in the constitution and reproduction of Palestinian nationalism.

Over the past years, a remarkable range of studies has focused on gender and the body as possible sites of political mobilization and empowerment (Allen 2009, Hart 2008, Jean-Klein 2000, Moors 1995, Peteet 1991, 1994, Sa'ar and Yahia-Younis 2008, Sayigh 1981). Comparable enquiries have been carried out on refugees (Bisharat 1997, Farah 2006, Feldman 2008, Khalili 2005, Peteet 2005, Rosenfeld 2002, Sayigh 1979), prisoners (Khalili 2008, Nashif 2008, Rosenfeld 2004), and migrants (Davis 2011, Dorai 2003, Matar 2005). Also, memory has grown into a major research topic (Allen 2006, Collins 2004, Davis 2011, Matar 2005, 2011, Robinson 2006, Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007, Slyomovics 1998, Swedenburg 1991). This body of ethnography addressed a number of themes that stretched from popular culture and poetry (Bishara 2008, Furani 2008, Makdisi and Silverstein 2006, Muhawi and Kanaana 1989, Peteet 1996), to humanitarian aid (Fassin 2008, Feldman 2007, Hart 2002). And especially after the outbreak of the 2nd intifada in the Occupied Territories, the spectacularity of violence and suffering have lured the attention of a growing number of scholars (e.g. Bucaille 2004, Collins 2004, Hage 2003, Kelly 2006, Rabbani 2001). Embedded in a broader political context, violence, memory, gender, popular culture and many other domains of investigations have become privileged sites for understanding the unfolding of Palestinians’ nationalist struggle and their irreducible will to resist Israel’s attempts to silence their predicament.

This thesis draws substantially on this body of studies by documenting the significance of the ordinary and mundane in sustaining a Palestinian political identity and an attachment to the homeland. At the same time, however, it intends to add to it by problematising certain assumptions implicitly and explicitly reproduced in some academic and journalistic writing on Palestinians today. These traditionally convey the idea of Palestinians' life as "locked in a bind between repression and resistance, ubiquitously struggling for national sovereignty" (Furani and Rabinowitz 2011, p. 484). As I will show, camp-dwellers' apparently contradictory desire of pursuing full socio-economic integration in Jordan and upholding their nationalist struggles foregrounds the existence of zones of agency that cannot be accounted by universal schemata of domination/resistance. My aim here is not, therefore, to belittle the substantial achievements of Palestinian studies. Rather, I wish to further the discussion developed by those works forward, pushing towards a better appreciation of refugees' everyday lives, and creating a more nuanced understanding of the place of "the political" in a refugee camp.

Secondly, my account is focused on life in Al-Wihdat, but it raises questions that bear on broader debates in anthropology and the social sciences. Social scientists are now seeking to readdress some limitations inherent post-structuralist accounts of "the political" (e.g. Canda 2011, Spencer 2007). Recent scholarship has produced highly sophisticated theoretical analyses that have sought to go beyond the sharp division between resistance and power (e.g. Laidlaw 2010, Mahmood 2005, Yurchak 2006, 2008). My study of refugees' attempts to live an ordinary life in Jordan moves in this direction. In this thesis, I claim that one of the forms of political agency that enables refugees to continue to uphold their nationalist ideals is located precisely in the context of their progressive integration in Jordan, at the heart of state sovereignty. In other words, within the very power of the state, refugees draw their capacity to escape the state's attempt of total control by fashioning their subjectivity as both Jordanian and Palestinian.

Finally, the material presented here is all the more striking because the research on which this thesis is based was conducted in a refugee camp, a place that in the

Agambanian and Foucauldian tradition is popularly depicted as a space where the state's total control is most effective. This leads me to the final goal of this thesis: challenging the idea that Palestinian refugee camps might somehow fit into the dichotomy that has cast them either as spaces for passive victims (e.g. Agier 2002) or, conversely, as sites of radicalism and irreducible resistance (e.g. Malkki 1995). My focus on the place that the ordinary plays in the constitution of political subjectivity and agency allows a reconsideration of the space of the Camp beyond such overly determinist modes of analysis.

I explore the significance of these three goals, and the relevant literature, in what follows.

Resistance and refugee studies

In the study of Palestinian societies, a heterogeneous body of scholarship has emphasized the significance of resistance to Palestinian identity and life. Scholars working in this vein have tended to document the conceptual and practical resources that refugees have deployed to resist or subvert domination. Rosemary Sayigh's groundbreaking series of studies amongst camp-dwellers in Lebanon shed light on the importance of collective memory and national commemorations in mobilizing both coping and resistance strategies. The transmission and refashioning of specific forms of identity from one generation to the next would lead to acts of resistance against the adversities of living in exile, poverty, and discrimination (Sayigh 1994). In a series of articles, Julie Peteet (1994, 1996) and Iris Jean-Klein (2007) provide insights into some of the ways in which refugees have used gender and their bodies as sites and resources of resistance against Israeli occupation. Peteet, for example, explores the significance of imprisonment and torture at the hands of Israeli soldiers during the first intifada as a ritual of passage to manhood amongst Palestinian young males. She points out how the body of the tortured is not only a locus for the inscription of the dominant power but also the site for the refashioning of a subversive subjectivity (Peteet 1994).

By taking into consideration differences of class, gender, generation, and religious activism, another body of ethnographic work on Palestinian refugees has investigated

the heterogeneity of Palestinian refugee experience in Jordan. According to Elia Zureik, this complexity “is what characterizes the subaltern nature of the [Palestinian nationalist] discourse—a discourse of resistance that is fragmented and lacks unity” (2003, p. 157). In Jordan, Randa Farah documents the role of popular memory and resisting permanent resettlement among refugees living in Baq’ a Refugee Camp in the context of radical shift in nationalist politics. Other authors have also explored the ways in which refugees have challenged the attempt to be silenced and resettled by manipulating the bureaucratic system (Latte Abdallah 2004), through the performance of particular styles of masculinity (Hart 2008), or by re-appropriating the space of the camp (Destremau 1994, Jaber 1996).

In a widely cited article, Sherry Ortner criticises resistance studies for not containing enough politics and being too “thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on the subjectivity-the intentions, desires, fears, projects-of the actors engaged in these dramas” (1995, p. 190; see Jean-Klein, 2001, for a critique). Although much ethnographic research carried out on Palestinian refugees in and outside Jordan emphasizes the fragmentation of refugee community and experience and thereby portray refugees’ lives in a far richer and more complex frame than Ortner’s suggests (e.g. Farah 1999, Hart 2002, Jean-Klein 2000, 2001, Latte-Abdallah 2009, Peteet 1991, Swedenburg 1991), some of these studies do, nevertheless, share a narrow understanding of political agency – understood as the capacity of the subject to assert him/herself against the constraints of larger structures such as cultures or ideologies. This conception produces, as Laidlaw argues (2010), a set of interrelated problems. First, agency is assumed to be the authentic expression of an individual intentionality: a force that would derive from a supposedly a priori self of the individual (p. 144, see also Keane, 2003). A further interrelated problem with this notion of agency is entailed in the unspoken presumption of what a person’s actual or ultimate goal is. By taking for granted the universality of a desire to act and assuming that this may be inspired only by a genuine yearning for freedom and equality, this approach recognises as effective only those actions that are conducive toward this end (Laidlaw 2010, p. 144). This is well exemplified, for example, in the Manichean divide between power and resistance, typical of a certain strand of resistance studies (e.g. Guha 1982; see Spencer, 2007, for a criticism) and feminist studies (Boddy 1989; see

Mahmood, 2005, for a criticism). In the former, the state is an inimical entity that never emerges as a resource but always as an externality and a source of coercion. The dominant and the subordinate appear as two bounded and political homogenous entities, the actions of one of which (the dominant) produce a mechanical re-action from the other (the resisters)⁴. In making this assumption, however, such an approach denies “dimensions of human action whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance” (Mahmood 2005, p. 14).

In the field of Palestinian studies, I agree with those authors who have underlined the capacity of refugees to be active agents in the making of their history (see Sayigh 1998, among others). Giving more emphasis to an agentic capacity of resisting domination was (and still is) a necessary step to challenge an image of Palestinian refugees as passive victims of an international drama. This specific understanding of refugees' political agency also provided an important corrective to popular accounts that had portrayed refugees as submissive in the face of overarching forces (Malkki 1995). But focusing only on that side of agency will preclude us any understanding of forms of political agency that do not fit within the frame of “resistance”. Furthermore, although “resistance” – as an ideal and form of action – is surely paramount in Palestinian nationalism, its centrality has led some scholars to overemphasize the significance of this dimension of refugee political agency (e.g. Al-Khazendar 1997, Rougier 2007). To reduce the complexities of people’s joys, sorrows, dreams, and struggles only in terms of the will to resist⁵ would not be very useful in answering the question posed by this thesis. An analysis of this kind requires an analytical shift away from the classic

⁴ For a more recent account of this approach in the Middle East, see for example Lisa Wedeen’s study of the authoritative rule in President Asad’s Syria (1999). For a criticism, see Gal (1995), Oushakine (2001), and Yurchak (2007) amongst others.

⁵ Here I deliberately choose the broadest possible meaning for resistance as being the capacity to assert the Palestinian national predicament – and not the more politically and historically connoted term of *muqawama* (resistance). In her book “Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine” (2007), Laleh Khalili individuates successive but overlapping transnational discourses appropriated and adapted by various strands of the Palestinian national movement since the 1960s. With great approximation, we can identify four discursive “schisms” in Palestinian nationalism: the nation-statist discourse, liberationist discourse, the Islamist discourse, and the humanitarian discourse. The centrality of “resistance” in Palestinian nationalism is remarkable in the persistence that this motif has in each of these authoritative discourses under the guise of narratives of heroic resistance, *sumūd* [steadfastness], and suffering. As Khalili writes, these narratives “have all been broadly effective in achieving a great many of their goals: keeping the Palestinian conflict and the predicament of Palestinian refugees at the forefront of the international stage (even if in the last instance, remedies to the problems are difficult to find) and ensuring that the voice of the refugees would not be ignored at their leadership’s negotiating tables” (p. 225).

parameters of so-called resistance studies to more complex understanding of “political agency” and the category of the “political”.

One way forward is advocated by a growing number of studies that have expressed dissatisfaction with the limitations of this conception of agency and urged scholars to problematise the idea of agency as the capacity of a free agent to translate his values into actions (Keane 2003, Laidlaw 2002, 2010, Mahmood 2001, Yurchak 2006). These authors have warned against romanticising resistance by misattributing it to forms of agency that cannot be reduced only to conscious or unconscious moments of opposition to domination.

By exploring the way in which resistance is rooted in relations of power, this scholarship has drawn on and furthered Foucault and Butler’s work on “subjectification”. Foucault conceives power as a force that permeates life and produce desire, objects, relations, and discourse. In this context, the subject does not precede power but is produced by the very forces that form the condition of its possibility (Foucault 1980). This is what Butler calls the “paradox of subjectivities” (Mahmood 2005): the process through which the subject is produced as a self-conscious identity by the same forces that lead to his/her subordination. Such an understanding allows us to locate “agency” within structures power; so that, when the subject actively fashions itself, it does that through practices that are imposed upon him/her by the society and social groups in which he/she lives. In doing so, Foucault does not deny the capacity of the subject to act freely, but situates this capacity within historically produced structures of power.

Combining these insights with Derrida’s reading of Austin’s theory of performance, Butler locates the possibility of resistance within the structure itself. According to her, if the subject is constituted within a structure of power and more precisely through the reiterative performance of its norms, it is in the very act of reproducing the structure in which we can find “the possibility of its undoing” (Mahmood 2005, p. 20). In a critical reading of Butler’s theory, Sabah Mahmood (2001, 2005) adds to this approach to “agency” by challenging the former for failing to appreciate how far agency may be entailed not only in resisting but also in inhabiting norms:

“if the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes “change” and the capacity by which it is effected), then its meaning and sense cannot be fixed a priori [...] In this sense, agentive capacity is entailed not only in those acts that result in (progressive) change but also those that aim toward continuity, stasis, and stability” (2001, p. 212).

I find that Mahmood’s work is important to understand camp-dwellers’ political identity and agency. If we recognise that the desire that motivates people to act may be other than the desire for subversion and freedom, it is therefore also important to investigate the conditions under which different forms of desire emerge. In my analysis of political life in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan, I build on this sophisticated body of theoretical work to explore refugees’ complex and apparently contradictory allegiance to the values and ideals of Palestinian nationalism. In doing so, however, I do not intend to suggest that historical yearning for autonomy and freedom in Al-Wihdat needs to be replaced by a new desire for subjection; but Mahmood’s argument is revealing inasmuch it urges us to abandon a “Westernised” notion of agency and begin an inquiry into the meanings that specific forms of agencies take in other contexts. In other words, this would lead us to recognise political agency as existing in a space beyond the mere “will of resisting”, and locating it, rather, in existing structures of power that constitute the subject. After 60 years in a country whose naturalisation policy has *de facto* enabled their gradual absorption into the job market and their partial participation in the national politics (Al-Husseini and Bocco 2010), many refugees have come to terms with the realities of living in Jordan to the extent that a large part of them, if asked, would not leave Jordan for Palestine⁶. A friend – whose words are worth quoting at length – expressed this point clearly during an interview with one of my fellow researchers⁷:

“if you ask anyone if they would return [to Palestine], they would say they go back. But to be honest, I don't think so: we have never been there, we don't know how it is to live there, could I find my house, and maybe someone else lives there now, I would kill him. Would they [Israeli

⁶ A survey carried out in 2003 in Jordan among Palestinian refugees seems to confirm these findings. Despite the fact that virtually all refugees demand the recognition of the “right of return”, only 5 per cent of them would actually be eager to implement it. See Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (<http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2003/refugeesjune03.html>, last visited 20 February 2012).

⁷ Interview carried out by Judith Van Raalten (August 2010).

Jews] leave [the house]? I cannot see this and that is why I would not go back. [In addition] my nationality does not help me [...]. I am Jordanian; this is where I am from. My father and my mother are both Jordanians - does that make me a pure Jordanians? I am Jordanian and am Palestinian of origin!”.

During my time in Al-Wihdat, I met numerous people who made similar remarks. While these observations initially fuelled my growing interest in what at the time I perceived as a further demonstration of refugees’ lack of political involvement, I eventually became aware of the complex shape taken by refugees’ political agency.

This “complexity”, however, introduces a further dimension of refugees’ political life that I want to shed light on. If we are to understand agency in the terms outlined by Mahmood and Butler, then we have to ground it in everyday experience and acknowledge the existence of different and, sometimes, conflicting forces; but doing so leads us also to encounter aspects of people’s desires that are shaped by values and ideas that are not only informed by commitment to Palestinian cause. More than Mahmood, other scholars have given more attention to the ways in which diverse authoritative discourses may coexist, overlap, and clash, sometimes producing profound contradictions within the same subject (Marsden 2005, Osella and Osella 2008, Simon 2009, Soares and Osella 2009). Their studies have highlighted the inherent dangers on focusing exclusively on the inner dynamics of a single discourse to the expense of other values and discourses. For example, Samuli Schielke’s research gives a glimpse of the uneasy coexistence of religious morality and daily life in a northern Egyptian village, taking football matches during Ramadan as an analytical frame. Here, the author documents how for young Egyptian men Ramadan football is an ambivalent exercise that “mix[es] ascetic discipline with fun and entertainment” (2009).

In my study of refugees’ political life, I also account for the various normative and affective registers, ideologies, and everyday practices present in camp-dwellers’ daily lives that do not produce coherent models of political action or belief but often stand in strong juxtaposition to each other. Refugees’ attempts to both pursue full socio-political integration in the Kingdom and express their allegiance to Palestinian nationalistic ideals do not reflect the strategies of a community of “actors” that publicly seek full

recognition while secretly embracing subversive stances (e.g. Wedeen 1999). Nor is it a sign, however, of their passivity and political apathy. It is, I suggest, rather part and parcel of a range of forms of actions provided by living a life as Palestinian refugees and Jordanian citizens. This process of accommodation, however, is neither homogeneously accomplished in the Camp nor devoid of inconsistencies and tensions. The desire to live “normal” lives is fraught with ambivalence and anxieties, and the desired integration bristled sometimes against inescapable invocations of allegiance to Palestinian nationalistic ideals and values.

Spaces of the “non-political”

In light of this ambivalent mixture of profound discomfort and irresistible fascination for “politics” and the “political”, is it still possible to speak of the “political agency”? What language is required to capture the “process of accommodation” that, I argued, is central to refugees’ experience of displacement in Jordan?

A large part of refugee daily life was hence oriented toward more “ordinary” desires and goals such as settling down, getting married, making money, and having fun. The formal domains of politics, instead, for many, were pointless, deadly boring, or, even, a dirty matter. Above I argued that if we are to understand refugees’ agency we need to frame it as the desire of living an ordinary and integrated life in Jordan. I will now show how their capacity to re-enact the Palestinian nationalist predicament is ultimately located within this desire.

One of the specific projects of political anthropology since the ’70s has been to open up the category of the political to include fields that were not traditionally considered political (Vincent 2002). As a result, a wide range of politics was progressively discovered in such sites as: the body (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987), knowledge (Marcus and Fischer 1999), suffering (Das 1997), food (Appadurai 1981), space (Bisharat 1997), language (Desjarlais 1997), and so on. A growing body of scholarship has more recently documented the generative capacity of social life and political behaviour in studies of borders (Pelkmans 2006, Walker 1999) and people’s affective relationships to these (Svašek 2002). Others have explored the political significance of

music (Hansen 2006, Marsden 2007, Qureshi 2000), and football (Armstrong and Giulianotti 1997, Fozooni 2004). This body of work has also contributed to the increasingly complex ways in which the domain of the political is framed in the study of Palestinians. For example, Laleh Khalili (2007) has investigated the role of commemorative practices such as ceremonies, rituals, memorials, and history-telling in forging a sense of nationhood. Lori Allen, instead, documents how memory and the memorialisation of violence during the second intifada respectively constitute “an idiom” and a “set of practices” through which individual pain becomes collective and political (2007). The dramatic proliferation of martyr funerals and posters during the second intifada “created a public sphere in which participants and observers were hailed as national subjects, while simultaneously generating a forum in which public political debated occurred” (p. 107). I build on this body of studies in my thesis to explore the lively work of politics in Al-Wihdat.

We need to note that the aversion to the “political” in the Camp did not necessarily signify a complete disinterest in political life (see also Hansen 1999, Spencer 2007). On the contrary, political rumours and the most daring conspiracy theories circulated quite lavishly; people held quite specific views about the most disparate topics of national and international politics, and refugees frequently spoke about the necessity for Palestinians to be led by “good politicians” (*syāsīn muhtaramīn*). Furthermore, whereas political parties and groups lost their appeal, an observer could not help but remark how the “political” emerged within other domains. In Al-Wihdat, for example, soccer allegiances for local and international football clubs took on particular significance in the daily life of refugees. Football was an important vehicle through which the political was instantiated. On the occasion of the 2001 African Cup of Nations, for instance, a friend asked me: “Tomorrow Egypt and Mozambique play, which do you support?” “Egypt!” I replied. The man commented resoundingly “You are *wati*!” *Wati*, in reference to a human being, is someone contemptible or “low”. The reason beyond this insult had to do with the fact that Egypt at that time was constructing a huge metal wall along its border with the Gaza Strip. My friends were obviously not sympathetic with this attempt to further isolate Palestinians. The national team as an emanation of the nation-state, and hence its policy, was not immune to their contempt. Although *wati* was uttered mainly jokingly, it spoke much about the complex relationship between the

political and different spaces of everyday life in the Camp. With time, hence, I came to ascertain that the political was not underrepresented in Al-Wihdat, but rather that I had been deploying a narrow conception of it both during my pre-fieldwork year, and during the first weeks of my fieldwork. The fact that nothing that I was observing was an overt “political activity” did not mean there was an absence of the political.

Something, however, remains problematic. If political agency of a certain sort is expressed within these domains, how can we make sense of refugees’ eagerness to distance themselves from the corrupted word of the political? And how can we avoid reproducing essentialising depiction of refugees’ daily life as being inherently political? These questions might remain unanswered if this analysis rested on what a recent scholarship has defined as the scantily ethnographic nature of the concept of “the political” in anthropology (Candea 2011, Spencer 2007, Yurchak 2006).

Anthropologists have indeed been particularly dubious about any ethnographic definition that might pin down and curtail the theoretical openness of the category. However, such “reticence” to define the “political” would produce a set of problems in my analysis of refugee political life. First, it assumes an ontological priority of the political over other domains of life. The ubiquity of the concept has *de facto* made impossible or dangerous to seek a definition for it, an attempt that would inevitably lead to also defining the “non-political”, and hence exposing scholars to accusations of de-politicisation (Candea 2011)⁸. Furthermore, leaving the category intentionally open-ended imposes an understanding of it that does not necessarily match the category employed by the very people whose “political life” is the object of our study. In other words, politics might be everywhere, and it is the specific task of the anthropologists to find out where, and whether or not the informants share the same understanding is irrelevant.

Both flaws emerge as the direct consequence of the expansion of the political and have a number of undesired outcomes in approaching Palestinian political life. The risk would be to misunderstand or even ignore local categories of the political that do not

⁸These are dangers felt with particular intensity, especially in the field of Palestinian studies, where the main goal of the last generation of anthropologists was to “question Israel’s effort to repress Palestinian nationalism and to normalise its own colonial and racial character (Furani and Rabinowitz 2011, p. 481).

neatly conform to ours, for most of the people in Al-Wihdat would not normally consider “hanging out” in a games room or watching a football match as political activities. Another problematic weakness of such an analytical endeavour is representing people’s lives as being excessively austere. Politics certainly shapes many aspects of refugees’ everyday life. But to reduce everything their lives are about to this would contribute to reproducing one-sided depictions of Palestinian refugees living in camps – popularly conveyed, for example, in the stereotype of refugees as irreducible dissidents (e.g. Al-Khazendar 1997). Finally, such a reading would prevent us from understanding a crucial dimension of my analysis: the role of the non-political in fashioning new forms of political participation.

In order to understand how “the political” may at times be painstakingly avoided by camp-dwellers, while other times emerging with force in their life (for example, in occasion of a football match), I build on a recent article by Matei Candea (2011) and earlier works by Jonathan Spencer (2007, 1997) . If Spencer warns anthropologists of the necessity to ground empirically a definition of political (ibid.), Candea goes a step farther by recognizing how the performative and reiterative interplay of the political and the non-political within an ethnographic context produce those very categories (2011).

To explain this, Candea draws on Jameson’s “suspension of the political”. The “suspension of the political” has been a useful analytical tool employed by recent anthropological literature to grasp political change in regimes that are experienced as totalitarian and immutable. Alexei Yurchak (Yurchak 2006, 2008), for example, shows how the members of an artistic movement during late Soviet socialism in Russia undermined the power of a seemingly totalitarian state by constituting a space of subjectivity and agency through the suspension of the political. For the members of these groups “anything political was profoundly uninteresting [...] and that neither support of nor opposition to the Soviet system was relevant” (...). Instead of acting in oppositional terms, Yurchak points out, “these groups experimented with a kind of self that was neither pro- nor not-Soviet but beyond Soviet personhood as such” (2009, p. 732).

In this thesis, I draw an analogy between the “ordinary” in Al-Wihdat and Jameson’s “suspension of the political” as the refusal to play the game of politics (Yurchak 2008, p. 213). My case diverges from Yurchak’s insofar as the suspension of the political was not an attempt to subvert the control exerted by the regime over the camps or destabilise Palestinian nationalism with its symbols and values. But it dovetails his argument as refugees’ descent into what they perceived to be a non-political ordinariness was deeply transformative of the political context in which refugees’ lives were enmeshed.

Overwhelmed by the ineffective and pervasive presence of political leaders and parties that have not led to any radical change to their condition of refugees after more than 60 years, people in Wihdat found in ordinary activities an unexpected alternative to politics and the political. By actively pursuing a non-political ordinariness, refugees fulfilled the regime’s requirements of non-politicisation of the camps in exchange for integration. At the same time, the suspension of the political opened up a new “zone of subjectivity and agency” (Boyer in Yurchak 2008) that enabled them to re-enact their nationalist ideals. The ordinary and the mundane were highly attractive aspects of life in Al-Wihdat, appealing especially strongly to “the youth”. But they were also more than merely attractive. Their capacity to infuse Palestinian nationalism with non-political meanings and aspirations was crucial for making these viable to a life in exile. As I will show in greater detail in chapter 6, it was the very non-political nature of football that allowed the political (i.e. Palestinian nationalism) to emerge.

“Spaces of inclusion” or “spaces of exception”?

Finally, I want to go beyond an understanding of Palestinian refugee camps as liminal places of ethno-national radicalism or, conversely, boundless spaces with an on-going process of assimilation in the urban fabric inherently closed or open spaces (see, for example, Hanafi 2008). Instead, in this thesis, I look at the socio-political closeness and openness of camps as aspects ultimately interconnected, and the reflection of refugees’ complex perceptions of the Camp (Marsden 2008, Pelkmans 2006).

The discourse on refugee camps has traditionally cast the camps as spaces of exception where “bare humanity” was settled, controlled, disciplined, and visualised through humanitarian categories (e.g. Daniel and Knudsen 1995, Harrell-Bond 1999, Hyndman

2000, Long 1993, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2002, Malkki 1995, 1997, Soguk 1999). The territorialisation of people inside its homogeneous space is a practical device used both in the governmental and humanitarian action and in the common sense assumptions to preserve the link among culture, identity, nation and territory, and to control this “surplus of humanity” (Malkki 1995). For example, writing with reference to Hutu refugee camps in Tanzania, Malkki explores the disciplinary role of this space in the construction of a “refugee identity” (1995). She conceptualizes the “refugee camp” as a vital device of power that enables the spatial concentration and ordering of the refugees.

The influential genealogy of this scholarly discourse on refugee camps can be traced back to Hannah Arendt’s earlier theorisation of the “refugee” as an anomaly, a liminal being that does not fit into the nation- state/citizen canon. Arendt writes in this regard: “[m]ankind, for so long a time considered under the image of a family of nations, had reached the stage where whoever was thrown out of one of these tightly organised closed communities found himself thrown out of the family of nations altogether [...] the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human was their greatest danger” (in Malkki 2002, p. 32).

Academic work on refugees and refugee camps is also greatly indebted to Foucault’s notion of disciplinary space and practice. Foucault’s attempts to theorise space, and how it relates to governance and control, has been crucial to much academic work on the practices of governance implemented by powerful actors in the spatial regime of refugee camps (see, for example, Latte Abdallah 2004 for a regional variant).

However, it is perhaps the work of Giorgio Agamben, more than that of Foucault, which provides insights into the specific status of the refugee and the extraordinary dimension of the camp as a “space of exception”. While Foucault’s unit of analysis rest in the workplace, school, family, hospital, or spaces of everyday life, refugee camps become the central site of Agamben’s analysis of the working of modern power and sovereignty (1998, 2005). But the greatest difference with Agamben’s analysis lies elsewhere. Drawing extensively on Schmitt, the Italian philosopher reassesses Foucault’s claim that modern state power is primarily based on the disciplining and control of free and

conscious citizens; for Agamben, the power of the state is instead predicated upon the transgressive taking of what he defines as “bare life” – i.e. individuals excluded from the political community, simple biological life stripped of their political status and rights. As the sovereign is the one who can set the limits of the law while going beyond them, “sovereign power” is the capacity to exert power by suspending the rule of law as a consequence of a “necessity”, such as a threat towards the very existence of the political order (1998). The “state of exception” is the condition in which the sovereign power consigns those who are reduced to “bare life” in order to preserve political stability (ibid.). In this framework, the refugee camp appears as the physical manifestation of the state of exception that comes into being when the premises upon which the nation-state rest are threatened: “[t]he camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order” (ibid., pp. 168-169).

Arendt, Foucault, and, more recently, Agamben have been crucial to influencing a large body of scholarship that has sought to grasp the inner and fundamental nature of “the camp” as a critical device in the control and disciplining of refugees. At first glance, the idea of the Camp as an exceptional space where a disenfranchised mass of people is emplaced in order to guarantee the political stability of the nation-state may find its application in Al-Wihdat. Indeed, although refugee camps in Jordan were established to host only who could not find an alternative accommodation, they soon became a useful device in the ordering and controlling of refugees.

However, while this analysis has shown how spatial tactics have contributed to the maintenance and reproduction of power through the surveillance, control, and emplacement of the naked body in the space of the camp, it has been less informative on refugees’ response to this control⁹. The recent scholarly turn to space and spatiality might provide crucial insights to readdress this lacuna (see Casey 1996, Harvey 1989, Keith and Pile 1993, Lefebvre 1991, Massey 1992, Soja 1989, Yaeger 1996, among

⁹ In Foucault’s case, this is true if referred to early works such as *Discipline and Punish* (1980), but not in terms of “late Foucault”, and especially the writings on “bio-power” and the “technologies of the self” (see, for example, Foucault 1980).

others). By exploring how place is constantly in the making, shaped by a dynamic interplay of external forces, structural constraints, and human agency, a compelling body of scholarship has challenged an Euclidean conception of space as an empty and inert container (e.g. Casey 1996), and generated detailed analyses about how space is re-imagined and re-appropriated by the secondary productions of users (Certeau 1984).

Drawing on de Certeau, scholars of Middle East cities have explored the practices of everyday life through which popular action resists spatial domination (e.g. Brown 1989, Lowy 1979). A body of ethnography on Palestinian studies has investigated how refugees have coped with the disciplining power of the state and the humanitarian organisations active in the camps by paying crucial attention to spatial forms of resistance in refugee camps (e.g. Bisharat 1997, Feldman 2008, Knudsen and Hanafi 2011, Peteet 2005, Rosenfeld 2002). These studies have documented how refugee camps, for their inhabitants, constitute the primary reference upon which they reconstruct their identity, their sense of history, social, cultural and political views. In the West-Bank, Bisharat (1997), for example, shows how refugees' strategies in their daily lives have gone beyond bureaucratic and humanitarian labels and they have re-written the camp space, reproducing the Palestinian culture and land inside the symbolic and physical camp boundaries: opening illegal commercial activities in the houses, squatting in governmental buildings for political ends and turning the UN-issued refugee identity documents into symbols of political resistance against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Other studies have also demonstrated how the space of the camp ceases to be associated with negative images – helpless people, passive victims, raw humanity, and so on – to become instead a potent symbol of the national struggle, a visible reminder of their commitment to return to their homes and land in Palestine (see Farah 1999 for Jordan).

What I find most useful about the whole theoretical debate beyond refugee camps is the recognition of how the camp space has played a crucial role in enabling transformations of politics and subjectivity. However, by emphasising the liminality and exceptionality of refugee camps, such research has been less informative about their “normality”¹⁰.

¹⁰Aihwa Ong warns against the tendency of a scholarship in anthropology to adopt a similar dichotomy in which refugees are seen as inherently opposed to citizens and the State. She argues that “this focus on the

This has produced a set of connected problems. To begin with, camps have been often juxtaposed to the city. Whereas the latter has come to represent normality, the camp has been portrayed as the site of hardened national identities and political ideologies (e.g. Malkki 2002) or, conversely, a place of confinement for speechless victims (e.g. Agier 2002). In the field of Palestinian studies, these approaches have at time resulted in missing the shifting and complex nature of Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East. In few cases, the blunt application of Foucault and Agamben's theories to the specificity of Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East have minimised individual participation in the process of self-fashioning and maintained unchanged the biased representation of refugees as an external element. This is particularly evident in Bernard Rougier's analysis of refugee camps in Lebanon as laboratories for the proliferation of radical Islamic movements and conservative religious forces (2007; see Khalili 2007 for a criticism). My reservations about some of these readings are that they continue to hold on to a notion of refugee camps as liminal spaces, often clothed in a negative significance. Most importantly, as Magnus Marsden put it, the emphasis on the liminality of these spaces has led many social scientists to envisage only two alternatives for refugees: "[refugees] must either fashion 'nation-like' identities in order to forge for themselves a space in the 'national order of things', or they must subvert it by emphasizing their 'liminality'" (2008, p. 228). Such an approach does not adequately capture the complex and ambiguous nature of Al-Wihdat: a space that is still temporary almost 60 years after its establishment, but which is almost indistinguishable from the rest of the city, inhabited by people who are still refugees after four generations, but who enjoy full citizenship rights.

I intend to specify further the ongoing debate on refugee camps by building on a recent anthropological work on border and borderlands (Marsden 2008, Pelkmans 2006, Reeves 2011, Walker 1999). Such body of literature will allow me to grasp the ambiguities and contradictions endowed in the process of political-self construction in a space that carries the weight of Palestinian history and struggles. If we want to understand the multidimensionality of the refugee political experience, we should pay more attention to the complex and interweaving process through which camp-dwellers

nation and its others tends to eclipse the actual complex, ambiguous, and interweaving processes that transforms refugees back into citizens" (2003, pp. 78-79).

may display open-ended subjectivities at times, or, instead, imagine the camps as a bounded moral community. The Camp is an open space, fully integrated in the urban fabric of the city. The physical structure of Al-Wihdat, like every other Palestinian refugee camp inside or outside Jordan, recalls more the intricate maze of alleys and paths of an Arab *souk* (market) than the modular structure of a “total institution” where bodies are subject to the normalising effects of a disciplinary regime. During my fieldwork in Jordan, I came to ascertain how refugees living in Al-Wihdat have maintained a sense of connection with the Camp, a distinct sense of cultural, and sometimes class, identity that sets them apart from Palestinians outside, people with whom they share material conditions of ethnic discrimination. At the same time, the process of re-appropriation of the camp space has fostered the socio-economic integration of the Camp in Amman. Historically, camp-dwellers have developed intricate social relations with the “world” outside the camps. The boom of commerce and services and the development of a real estate market in the Camp have drastically changed the impersonal and aseptic space that characterised Al-Wihdat at the time of its establishment in 1955. Through their daily concerns and life trajectories, refugees have radically transformed the physical and socio-economic space of a camp that still remains paramount in their nationalist struggles; so that, at the time of my research, Al-Wihdat was simultaneously home of Palestinianess in exile and a low-income residential area well connected with the expanding neighbourhoods of Amman.

IN THE FIELD

After conducting preliminary research in the Palestinian refugee camps of Jordan from May to December 2004, field research for this dissertation was carried out in the Al-Wihdat refugee camp from July 2009 to September 2010. In Jordan, there are ten official Palestine refugee camps, plus three camps recognised only by the Jordanian authorities. According to the UNRWA¹¹ and the Government, camp populations and refugees residing in their proximity live under similar socio-economic conditions. However, there are visible economic, visual and symbolic differences amongst the

¹¹ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a relief and human development agency established in December 1949. The Agency provides today education, health care, social services and emergency aid to approximately 5 million Palestinian refugees.

camps, depending on factors such as the proximity to urban centres, the place of origins of their inhabitants, and the year of establishment.

This thesis is almost exclusively about Al-Wihdat camp. The other refugee camps appear more as contrastive cases that helped me in the course of my research to either have a better grasp of the specificity of Al-Wihdat or, in contrast, appreciate shared features¹². I decided that fieldwork based mainly on a single camp would best suit my analytical approach. In so doing, I privileged depth at the cost of a broader analysis on refugee camps in Jordan. But while analysis of the latter kind are welcome, the specific focus of my thesis required an “immersion” into the stream of ordinary life that could be achieved only through intensive research within a given context.

Furthermore, the choice of Al-Wihdat was also largely motivated by its relevance with my research interests. For its location and history, Al-Wihdat best exemplifies the ambiguous nature of refugee camps in Jordan between “exception” and “integration”. Now surrounded by residential areas as a result of growth in the Amman population and the subsequent development of the capital, the Camp has developed into an urban-like quarter, though it still conserves a certain “family likeness” with the other camps. In the ‘60s, Al-Wihdat became a symbol of Palestinian nationalist struggles, when it hosted the headquarters of Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Today, the Camp is known for being the birthplace of the homonymous *farīq al-wihdat* (Al-Wihdat Team): a very popular football Club in the region, almost entirely composed of Palestinian players, which has become an important symbol of identification for Palestinian refugees in and outside Jordan.

The choice of the location was also based on more pragmatic considerations. When I arrived in Jordan, I spent the first weeks at Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO), a French research centre that has a hostel in Jabal Amman¹³, located near to the historic centre of the capital. The proximity of the Camp to the neighbourhood in Amman where I first moved at the beginning of my research certainly played a role in this decision.

¹²I conducted some research and paid occasional visits to friends in other camps, most notably in Souf Camp and Hussein Camp.

¹³ One of the seven hills that originally made up the capital of Jordan.

Located within walking distance from Al-Wihdat, living in Jabal Amman was a practical solution until I was able to find a permanent accommodation in the Camp.

I took also into consideration additional factors associated to the existing regime of control in Jordan. Fieldwork in the refugee camps carries some risks for the ethnographer. As the goal of my project involved an ethnographic consideration of political, identity and religious registers, my research was potentially sensitive to local authorities. Although I was granted a permit to carry out research in Al-Wihdat by the government body in charge of the camps in the Hashemite Kingdom (DPA – Department of Palestinian Affairs), the authorities remain generally suspicious toward “professional intruders” into camps such as anthropologists (Geertz 1972). Every time I approached camp branches of the DPA, I was warmly recommended by its employees that it would be best to be escorted by a police officer for security reasons, allegedly related to my safety. Since conducting research with the constant presence of an officer would not have helped me to accomplish the goal of my research for obvious reasons, I have hence soon discarded the possibility of moving into small isolated camps where I was unlikely to pass unnoticed.

Dairat al-Mukhābarāt al-Ammah (the Jordanian Intelligent Service) is well known for its extensive activity in the country and throughout the Middle East. Although the presence of the secret police is less oppressive than in other countries, such as Syria and Lebanon, it is not less pervasive. People whose voices and opinions present in this thesis contrast with the Regime’s rhetoric, appear either anonymously or not with their real names. For the same reasons, during my field research, I considered the possibility of informing people gradually and partially about the exact nature of my research. Inevitably, I did not manage to completely escape the suspicions and stereotypes that inevitably accompany foreigners (*ajaneb*) during their stay in the camps. However, not I never faced any open hostility, but the very large majority of people I encountered in the camp welcomed my presence warmly there and was eager to demonstrate their hospitality. The experience of being a guest was ceaselessly reproduced in diverse settings and occasions: weddings, private visits, funerals, official occasions, and graduation celebration. One of the most pleasing memories of my fieldwork was the lunches consumed in the house of my friends. At times, people also confided a desire to

dispel what they believed were the negative stereotypes circulating in the Western world about the Muslim Arab world and Palestinians more specifically. As a Western researcher, I was called to report refugees' hospitality and generosity to a broader community that I was supposed to embody.

To explore refugees' daily life in Al-Wihdat, I have employed the ethnographic method of participant observation. I began the research by simply going to the Camp, hanging around, and occasionally interviewing the different organisations and actors involved in camp life. Upon the advice of a friend, I decided to visit Nadi Al-Wihdat. The Nadi al Wihdat was established by the UNRWA and the international community in 1956. According to its original mandate, it was founded to help people in the Camp and to give them a place where they can meet together and spend time. At the time of its institution the Nadi operated in two main domains: education and social activities. Although it is now the most important “sphere of action” of the Nadi, “sport” was added only later on, in 1976. Originally called “*markez shabab al-wihdat*” (Wihdat Youth Center), it became the *Nadi al Wihdat*, twenty years after its establishment. The word *Nadi* (club), which is mainly associated with sport, underlines a paradigmatic shift in the agenda of the Club, from social and humanitarian activities to sport.

My visit to the Nadi turned out to be a turning point in my fieldwork. Here I was very fortunate to make the acquaintance of Mohammed and Abu Omar. The two were respectively running a local branch of an international NGO and a cultural program for young men (*burnāmej al-shabāb*) under the auspice of the Nadi. In order to raise the number of the visits to the camp, I first started working as an English teacher in the NGO and then volunteering in various capacities in the program that was held weekly every Friday. I soon made the acquaintance of the young men and adolescents who were collaborating in the “Friday program”. As such, a couple of times I was invited to watch football matches at the TV in a house located at the eastern periphery of the Camp.

Informally called “*al-markez*” (the Centre), the place was a sort of self-run youth club used as an alternative leisure and cultural centre from some of the *shabāb* (young men/adolescents) orbiting in the sphere of the Nadi. The coordinator of the “Friday programme”, Abu Omar, would supervise and cope with the expenses. At that time, I

was still struggling to move into Al-Wihdat. I was often told that there were no places available: camps are overcrowded, and often a whole family lives in the same room. Eventually, Abu Omar found a solution by very generously offering me the possibility of living in the Centre. The first part of my fieldwork was hence split almost evenly between the Nadi and the *markez*. It was here, and with the *shabāb* of the Nadi, that I learned something about living a life in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. With time, I eventually managed to widen my group of interlocutors and include people from outside the sphere of the Club within my network of friends and acquaintances.

I pursued what scholars define “polymorphous engagement” (Viroli 1992), a technique that implies the use of various and different methods. To find my informants, I adopted what in social science is called the “snowball method”. I hence began to meet people who attended or worked in the Nadi to extend afterward my contacts among their acquaintances, friends, and relatives. My research in a youth club has inevitably narrowed down my focus to the young males of the Camp. I attended weddings, cultural events and religious ceremonies, and in general accompanied refugees in the ordinary activities of daily life. Regular visits to households were an important part of my research. Besides providing me with a deeper understanding of how youths manage their livelihood, it furthered my insertion in the camp. In addition, I visited other institutions and organisations in the camp such youth clubs, local NGOs, UN and DPA offices, Zakat committees¹⁴, and the Camp Service Committee as well as markets, shops, small restaurants, cafes, game rooms, and barber shops.

Though participant-observation remained the most important part of my research and field notes my main primary source, I also devoted some time analysing refugee texts, textbooks, documents sources calendars, posters, graffiti, newspapers, internet sites, and blogs texts and other published material, including statistics of the Jordanian government and UNRWA on the condition of camp-dwellers. I have also conducted a number of semi-structured interviews with UNRWA staff, DPA officers, and members of the Camp Service Committee. With the exception of these formal meetings, I soon abandoned the possibility of carrying a tape recorder and learned to avoid taking notes

¹⁴ Voluntary organisations established with the task of collecting and distributing *zakat* funds. *Zakat* is a small percentage annual savings given by Muslim as alms. *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islamic beliefs and practices.

in front of people. It was clear that the employment of a more formal way of enquiry hindered a more spontaneous flow of speech and involved the omission and silence of my informant on many issues. When I present excerpts of conversations held with refugees, it is a reconstruction of a dialogue based on the notes I took afterward.

I was initially engaged in the study of political life, and more specifically the significance of Palestinian nationalism in Al-Wihdat refugee camp. Before engaging my ethnography, I had formulated some initial assumptions about the role of the spectacularity or uniqueness of specific events (e.g. the outbreaks of the two Intifadas) on the political consciousness of Palestinians living in the refugee camps set up in Jordan. However, during my field research, I became aware of the significance that living an ordinary life had among many in the Camp. The discontent and the frustration for the Palestinian political situation (*al-wade'*) were such that many of my friends ignored it or, more likely, deliberately avoid talking about it. Simultaneously, I was increasingly intrigued by the high number of unemployed youths who spent their time idling in the streets of the Camp or in other spaces such as, for example, coffee shops and game rooms. A fascinating aspect of recent work on youth across the world is scholars' tendency to focus on the anxieties that many young men experience in times of social and economic uncertainties. A large part of this literature has ascribed these anxieties to the gap between the fantasies and aspirations of youth and the realities of living in neo-liberal economies (e.g. Hart 2008, Mains 2007, Masquelier 2005, Weiss 2009). The breach between the actual and the desirable also resonated in my findings. Yet, in Al-Wihdat, youth's anxieties were not communicated simply by the impossibility of many young men to translate globally celebrated ideals and values of economic success into their concrete lives; much of the frustrations of young men were communicated by the conflict between the desire to live an idealised ordinary life in Jordan as Jordanian citizens and a binding allegiance to the Palestinian nationalist struggle. The everyday was the site where this tension was consumed and navigated. The fieldwork was gradually shifting my focus from a direct political analysis to the exploration of young men's engagement with spaces of every daily life and their attempts to live ordinary lives.

Immersed in the daily life of my informants, I was eventually seduced by the idea that political subjectivity in the Camp could be encompassed largely by the cycle of everyday life. The symbolic significance of commemorating the Nakba, the memory of the militarisation of the Camp in the '60s, of Black September, and of the two Intifadas, and in general the “political thickness” of being Palestinian refugees, all seemed to be swallowed up within the stream of everyday life. Soon it became clear that “ordinariness”, the dominant theme of my investigations, was the most appropriate organising concept for analysing refugee political agency and subjectivity. “Ordinary” seemed to infuse every aspect of life.

While my stay in a male youth centre and my acquaintance with the people working in the Nadi Al-Wihdat defined the focus of my thesis, it also afforded me with the unique possibility to deepen such an analysis. I was in the privileged position of being able to spend a large part of the day with a multitude of young men and adolescents aging from their late teens to early thirties.

This research, however, has a major limitation. My field trajectory has led me to adopt a privileged focus on young men and adolescents of the camp to the detriment of other categories. Whereas I sought to compensate this by meeting and interviewing members of older generations, I was not as successful in doing this with women. I am aware of the risk of biasing my research by an over-representation of male perspectives. When the occasion arose, I spoke with women in the camps too. However, due to the patterns of gender segregation and standards of modesty, as male researcher I experienced difficulty in carrying out an investigation of this kind. For example, engaging in discussion with women was widely considered shameful (*'ayb*). I was not even able to sit and converse with the female relatives of my friends. During my frequent visits to their houses, I usually had to wait outside before entering, leaving the women of the household time to change room and possibly avoid any contact with a male stranger. As such, this thesis is almost exclusively about men.



Figure 1: Al-Wihdat official map (source: UNRWA)

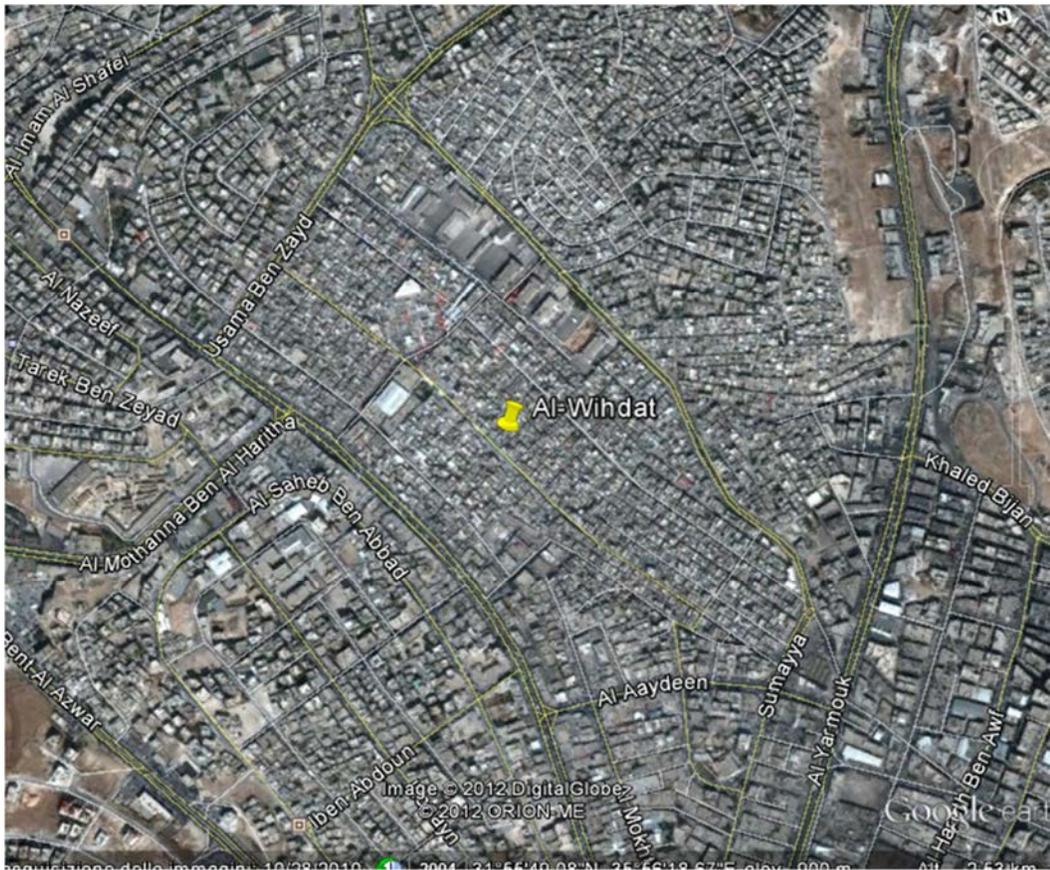


Figure 2: Al-Wihdat today, aerial view (source: Google Earth)



Figure 3: Al-Wihdat (source: Jihad Nijem)

CHAPTER 2: IT FEELS LIKE HOME

INTRODUCTION: SCENES OF ARRIVAL

I asked a taxi driver whether he knew where Al-Wihdat Camp was. The driver nodded, signalling for me to take a seat in his car. The Camp was not far from where I lived in Jabal Amman, approximately a 15 minute drive away. From the *balad* (town centre), there was a road that led uphill towards the Camp; Al-Wihdat, once separated from Amman, is now been completely incorporated into the city through urban expansion. As we travelled from Wihdat to Jabal Amman, the landscape changed visibly. The nice villas and buildings in white stones of this well-off neighbourhood gave way to poorer constructions, dilapidated houses and shabby buildings. The ubiquitous pollution of Amman was thicker here than in the residential area I stayed in, most likely due to the heavier car emissions and traffic jams that engulf one of the main streets that borders the Western side of the Camp, Shāra‘ Madaba.

When we arrived, the taxi stopped at the Camp’s “borders” and did not enter through Shāra‘ Al-Nadi – a large street which departs from the main road of Shāra‘ Madaba and leads up to the economic and physical core of the Camp: the *souk al-wihdat* (Wihdat market)¹⁵. There were no fences, walls, or barbed wire separating Al-Wihdat from the rest of the city, only a large police station located at the crossroads between the town and the entry to the Camp. If the taxi driver had not stopped at its outer limits, I would have never guessed where and what actually constituted “the Camp”. What prevented my driver from entering Al-Wihdat was, rather, a multitude of stands and people who gathered from early morning to late evening, sometimes even very late into the night. My first impression of the Camp only slightly coincided with the image of the refugee camp as a place where a mass of dispossessed, poor people is confined and isolated as threats toward “the national order of things”.

Despite the fact that there were no stark boundaries between the Camp and the rest of Amman and its economic integration into the city¹⁶, refugee camps and their inhabitants

¹⁵ See “figure 3”.

¹⁶ Compare “figure 1” with “figure 2”.

were often perceived as a distinct community by non-camp dwellers in Jordan, including Palestinian refugees living outside the camps. Also camp-dwellers distinguished “us”, living in camps, from those living outside by referring to themselves with the general term “*mukhayyamji*” – a word that can be roughly translated as “being from the camp” (see also Hart 2008). The term, however, means much more than just living in the camp: it entails affinity, emotional attachment, and personal relationship with this space¹⁷. Furthermore, like all other refugee camps, Al-Wihdat was generally said to be afflicted by a number of social plights, especially violence, crime, and poverty. It was also widely believed that the Camp was a big Palestinian enclave, distinct from the rest of the city, and still not fully assimilated in Jordan: a space of Palestinian national belonging and strong social cohesion. But despite my expectations, nobody heralded my arrival with threatening or inquiring glances. The feeling that I would be an intruder in a dangerous and unruly zone of urban life rapidly vanished. Gauging from the flow of people coming back and forth, the space did not strike me as being ghetto-like or, indeed, much different in character from the areas surrounding it and with which I was familiar.

Relieved that I had passed unnoticed in my first day in the Camp, I hence decided to explore it further, following the Shāraʿ Al-Nadi. Here, both women and men were crowding the street. In the small alleys that branched in every direction, many people were standing, sitting and talking. These streets, indeed, appeared to be an extension of the private space (Abu-Lughod 1987) occupied by men who were engaged in activities such as chatting, smoking *shisha* (water-pipe), or sipping coffee.

Al-Wihdat presented itself to me not as an impenetrable community that was hostile to outsiders, but, rather, as an open space and a thriving economic area. Indeed, the first thing that struck me about Wihdat was the centrality of market life to its daily rhythms and dynamics. Almost all of the entire northern section of the Camp appeared to be a big market. There was a lot of bustling and economic activity. The market was expansive and its food sector bigger than the equivalent market in the downtown area of the city. In some part of the market, the asphalt of streets was covered with a thick

¹⁷ Living in Wihdat did not necessarily imply being a *mukhayyamji*. An exploration of what means and entails being “*mukhayyamji*”, especially in relation to the performance of masculinity, is central to the concerns of chapter 5.

stratum of dirt that over the years piled up and took the semblance of soil. There was also a lot of noise, and the smell of rotten food, which filled the nose alongside the perfume of the hot falafel that shopkeepers were frying in thick black oil. A multitude of peddlers, stands, and small shops were selling their merchandise alongside one another. Together, these stores formed a huge market that extended from the centre of the Camp almost until its (administrative) outskirts. Although there was a supermarket and a few other large scale business activities, the *souk* (bazaar) was made up mostly of stands and shops managed by single individuals or, less frequently, a handful of paid employees. As I came to know, almost all of these businesses were family based. But, on my first walk around the Camp, it also became clear to me that Al-Wihdat was the site of many other activities than those associated with refugee conviviality. There were carpenters, butchers, barber shops, tailors, peddlers, coffee sellers, and falafel makers with their stands. The market, moreover, served not only the needs of the Camp's inhabitants but also of a much wider spectrum of people. Men in the Camp took pride in saying how not only *nās min al-mukhayyam* (folks from the Camp) but also people from the surrounding areas and even from the richer zones of Amman frequented their *souk*, attracted by abundant goods and competitive prices. Months after my first visit, in the early spring, when more fruits and vegetables were available, I also noted that the *souk al-khudra* (vegetable market) was frequented by many Filipinos who worked as domestic maids in the city, and were sent to do the shopping by rich Jordanian families living in the richer neighbourhoods of Abdoun, Shmeissani, and Jabal Amman.

As a whole, Al-Wihdat is an integral part of Amman. There are distinguishing features as well. The main road where the taxi driver dropped me – Shāra^c Madaba – is a large one, with two lanes in each directions, divided by a traffic island; this street separates the western border of the Camp from the surrounding neighbourhoods. Another big yet slighter narrower road delimits the northern border of Wihdat. At the entrance of the large street – Shāra^c Al-Nadi – that I had crossed to get to the market, a police station is located. It is notable because it was a three storey fortress with a large poster of the King hanging on its façade. If the two roads encircle a part of the Camp separating it from the rest of the city, the police station draws the attention of a visitor to a slightly different visual pattern – a set of non-distinctive features that, taken together, bestows a specific and peculiar dimension to the Camp. Aside from the main streets, Al-Wihdat is

a maze of narrow passageways and twisting alleys that give the Camp the feeling of a labyrinth¹⁸. The shabbiness of the shelters (*ma'wa/malja'*) – often protected only with zinc roofs anchored by pieces of debris and heavy stones¹⁹ – and their height (rarely exceeding a second floor) are other defining marks of the Camp that help to distinguish it from the rest of the city. Seasoned visitors, then, can also quite easily spot the UN flags that marked out the offices, schools and other facilities of the UNRWA in the Camp. Furthermore, those who know the organisation of space in Amman can better pick out other markers of aesthetic difference that distinguished Al-Wihdat from other comparable areas of the city. According to the words of a Palestinian refugee previously employed in the UN compound in the Camp, Al-Wihdat possesses a familiar air: “for those who never stepped a foot into it, it is difficult to distinguish the Camp from any other poor neighbourhood. But for us who have lived and worked in the Camp, it is simple. You can distinguish the Camp for its vegetable market (*souk al-khudra*), for the women who dress traditionally, for the accent (*lahje*) of the people and the way they shout when they sell their products”²⁰.

¹⁸ See “figure 5”.

¹⁹ See “figure 4”.

²⁰ See “figure 6”.



Figure 4: shelters with zinc roof (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 5: narrow alley (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 6: women in the market (source: Jihad Nijem)

So, in the eyes of the camp-dwellers, Al-Wihdat was neither the bounded space known to outsiders, nor a place like any other neighbourhood in Jordan. In this chapter, I combine two bodies of literature to explore the seemingly paradoxical status of Al-Wihdat: an arena for fashioning nationalist ideals and subjectivity, and as a site for the progressive integration of refugees into the broader Jordanian society. On the one hand, I build on a well established scholarship that has demonstrated how refugee camps have had a profound impact on camp-dwellers' self-perception and Palestinian national consciousness in general (e.g. Bisharat 1997, Farah 1999, Peteet 2005). On the other, I intend to dwell on recent studies that have investigated how (camp) space and borders might be sites that simultaneously connect and separate (Marsden 2008, Pelkmans 2006, Walker 1999).

I will hence begin with a preliminary examination of the relationship between the Jordan state and Palestinian refugees. The material that I present in the first two sections of this chapter will serve to highlight an important theme of this chapter: how state and

UN policies in the Camp have contributed to creating and strengthening the ambiguities and contradictions inherent refugees' political subjectivity. As I will show, refugees' experience of exile was deeply influenced by the policies of the Jordanian state. By first promoting the creation of a hybrid identity encompassing both Transjordanian²¹ and Palestinian elements, and then pursuing an ambiguous policy of integration and discrimination of Palestinian refugees, the Jordanian state contributed to problematising refugees' feeling of national self-identification. The dilemma concerning refugees' dual status as both Palestinian and Jordanian was further aggravated by the evolution of the UNRWA and the Jordanian state's management of camps' physical and housing infrastructure: camps are still administered as temporary spaces, although these are being gradually included into the surrounding municipalities' services.

I will then document how refugees, through their daily spatial practices, seek to navigate the dilemma pertaining to their status in Jordan by making themselves at home in Al-Wihdat. As we will see, especially over the last years, refugees have increasingly sought to pursue social and economic integration in Jordan. Many camps have become thriving urban spaces connected to their surrounding neighbourhoods. Al-Wihdat has constantly reshaped and reorganised its spaces within the urban fabric of Amman. An inside view will dissipate stereotypical depictions of the Camp as an homogenous place and reveal the existence of several sub-neighbourhoods (*harat*), some of which differ from others in terms of the Palestinian origins of their inhabitants, their reputations, and, sometimes, in terms of the forms of wealth and power they are thought to have amassed. I will show that the success of refugees in accommodating the need to live an ordinary life with the burden of "extraordinary existences" is also grounded in their ability to reproduce the Camp's distinctive sense of place as being a Palestinian place, while also seeking to challenge the socio-economic marginality that seems to plague refugee camps. The material presented here will serve to highlight the second dominant theme of this chapter: the historical shift in Palestinian political subjectivity and agency. If camp dwellers once thought to maintain the Camp's spaces as liminal places, today they

²¹The term "Transjordanian" has been used in the relevant literature to indicate the population that became citizens of the State of Transjordan, and successively citizens of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, by virtue of the nationality laws of 1928 of the Emirate of Jordan (see, for example, Abu-Odeh 1999, Massad 2001). There was not an exact equivalent of "Transjordanians" in the Camp. In daily usage, refugees would refer to Transjordanians either with the general term of *'urdunīn* (which literally means "Jordanians") or with the word *badawī* (Bedouins).

welcome the Camp's spatial and economic integration inside the territory as a form of agency and creativity that demonstrates their allegiance to Palestinian nationalism.

PALESTINIANS IN JORDAN

The annexation

When the first Palestinian refugees arrived in 1948²², Jordan had only been recently recognized as a distinct territorial unity. Before Britain and France became the dominant imperialist powers in the area, the country was part of *Wilayat Dimashq* (the Province of Damascus). The end of World War I signalled the victory of the Allied Forces. Ruling what was formerly the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and France introduced two regional systems into the eastern Mediterranean Arab region. The first was the nation-state system; the second was a new international regime that gave the Allies a mandate permitting them to administer the former Ottoman territories until they became full-fledged nation-states (Abu-Odeh 1999). In the Eastern parts of the region, Arab and Kurdish populations were combined into the new Mesopotamian country called Iraq, supposedly independent, but a *de facto* British protectorate. Meanwhile, Syria and a greatly enlarged Lebanon were governed by France. In September 1922, the Council of the League of Nations recognised part of the territories east of the Jordan River as a state under the British Mandate.

The creation of Jordan defined the features of new political and ethnic identities. However, with the introduction of the new nation-state system in the region, traditional loyalties to a tribe, a region, a village, a town, or a district did not disappear but rather merged into a new complex political system (Bocco 1995, Shryock 1995). Territorial integrity and territorial sovereignty provided the basis for grounding the utopian coincidence between ethnic identity and national territory. To legitimise the new order, a number of strategies were implemented, along with the crucial role played by political

²² Besides Palestinian refugees and the native Arab Bedouins and villagers, the population of Jordan includes Circassians, Chechens, Lebanese Shias, as well as a substantial number of traders, migrant-workers from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Some of them arrived in the region even before the establishment of the country in the early twenties. Whereas the large majority of Palestinians living in Jordan were refugees who fled the territory of mandate Palestine following the Arab-Israeli war, a minority of Palestinians in Jordan moved to the country before this date (Massad 2001).

elites and intellectuals in the process of national imagination (Anderson 1983, Chatterjee 1993, Gellner 2006). Recent studies carried out in Jordan have demonstrated how several institutions have had a relevant role in this process: the law and military (Massad 2001), the Emir (Abu-Odeh 1999)²³, the educational system (Anderson 2002), the census (De Bel-Air 2003) and the museum (Maffi 2009) have all served the interests of the ruling powers – the British before and the Hashemite Kingdom after – in the production of a national identity.

The establishment of Israel in 1948 provided an opportunity for the ambitious King Abdullah of Jordan to fulfil his expansionist goals. This project was so systematically pursued that in 1950, the Prime Minister of Jordan announced that “on the occasion of the lifting of barriers between the East and the West Banks of the Hashemite Jordanian Kingdom, there is no longer a reason to consider the country [*al-bilad*] located in the West Bank a foreign country [...] the two countries located in said two Banks are considered one unity [*wihdah wahidah*]” (quoted in Massad 2001, p. 230). In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war, the monarch annexed the territory which, from the West bank of the Jordan River, comprised the cities of Jerusalem (the East part), Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, Hebron, and the surrounding areas. This territory became known as the West Bank of Jordan. The annexation was legitimised by the signing of an addendum to the 1928 Law of Nationality, which stated that “all those who are habitual residents, at the time of the application of this law, of Transjordan or the Western Territory administered by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and who hold Palestinian nationality, are considered as having already acquired Jordanian nationality and to enjoy all the rights and obligations that Jordanians have” (article 2, in Massad 2001, p. 39). Along with a set of laws containing regulations relating nationality, the addendum of 1928 – then amended in 1954 by the Law of Jordanian Nationality – granted citizenship rights to Palestinian refugees and their descendants who were “habitually residents in February 1954 in Jordan” (which included the West Bank). As a result, between 1954 and 1967, Palestinian refugees who fled to territory administered by the Hashemites and Palestinians and who were born in the West Bank achieved legal equality to any other citizen of the Jordanian state.

²³ On April 1921, Abdullah I bin al-Hussein, born in Mecca during the Ottoman Empire, was appointed Governor of the newly formed Emirate of Transjordan by the British Government. In 1949, when the Emirate became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Emir was recognised as King of Transjordan.

If in territorial terms, the annexation of the West Bank signified the addition of a large chunk of land, the seizure of the territory meant also the inclusion of Palestinians to the Jordanian national population. As a matter of fact, the massive demographic amplification played a crucial role in redefining several dimensions of social life in the recently created Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Abu-Odeh 1999). The nature of this change drastically affected the urban environment of the East Bank: before the annexation, Amman was still a village-like town with less than 70,000 residents, in the aftermath, its population doubled, and then further increased to almost 250,000 people in the early '60s. But this was not to be the only transformation in country. The exodus of Palestinian refugees and the inclusion of the West Bank raised the population from 375,000 people to one of 1,270,000 people, transforming *de facto* the Transjordanian population into a minority within their kingdom (Massad 2001).

Refugees accepted the energetic policy of integration pursued by the government. A large number of refugees found employment in the army and governmental services (Sayigh 2007). As Joseph Massad put it, “with the exception of the early opposition to annexation by many Palestinians, most Palestinians came to accept their new status as a *fait accompli* that they did not wish to challenge” (2001, p. 235). However, Palestinians and the native Transjordanians differed noticeably in terms of their social and economic backgrounds. Palestinians in general enjoyed better education, higher standards of health and medical care, and lower rate of child mortality. Many were well-off, and most were better accustomed to an urban style of life and more experienced in terms of political participation than their Jordanian counterparts. If the cultural and economic capital Palestinians brought with them helped the development of the country, it also fuelled tensions with the native population. The Transjordanian upper-class particularly felt slighted by what it perceived as being a Palestinian “nation-class narrative of superiority” (p. 234). Remarkably, these differences have played a critical role in fostering a sense of belonging amongst refugees in the newly formed country. I frequently heard people in Al-Wihdat, for example, claiming with pride to have earned the right to stay in Jordan and being genuinely Jordanian on the basis of the fact that their fathers’ literally built the country and provided the necessary expertise for its development. This claim was also confirmed by Avi Plascov, for whom the

“development of the East Bank was carried out mainly by Palestinians, who, having little option, put their knowledge, skill, and talents at the disposal of the regime. Amman, the kingdom’s backward capital, was to become a flourishing town thus shifting the centre of economic gravity” (1981, p. 37).

In addition to the implementation of the above mentioned legal and political measures, the acquisition of the West Bank required the adoption of a strong rhetoric that would have legitimised replacing the word “Palestine” with that of “the West Bank”. This took form through the idea of creating a national identity that would encompass every citizen of the Kingdom. According to Laurie Brand, “[c]ontrary to the perception of many Palestinians [...], the evidence suggests that the state's goal was less to impose a Transjordanian identity than to create a hybrid Jordanian identity for both communities”. The project – pursued both by King Abdullah and, later, by his grandson, King Hussein – was based upon four fundamental premises: the recognition of the Hashemite monarchy as the symbol of Jordan, commitment to pan-Arab ideals, the recognition of the Palestinian plight and “right of return” (*haq al-‘awda*), and the unity of the two Banks (Brand 1995, pp. 50-52).

Interestingly, the position of the regime toward the Palestinian population did not change after the severe amputation of a large chunk of territory – the West Bank – in the aftermath of the “Six-Day War” in 1967.

In 1967, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan suffered a severe defeat by the state of Israel. Doubtful of his Egyptian adversary and sceptical of the possibility to defeat Israel, the late King Hussein was reluctant to start a new war with Israel. Despite his unwillingness, however, King Hussein of Jordan was drawn into war by a spiral of events and the dominant role played by Egypt in the political scenario (Abu-Odeh 1999). The president of Egypt, Gamal Abdul Nasser, enjoyed immense popularity as a champion of the Palestinian nationalist predicament, simultaneously challenging the legitimacy of King Hussein as the sole representative of the Palestinian issue. After a period of high tension, the war began when Israel launched a surprise air strike against Egyptian air bases on the morning of June 5. The result was a rapid and crucial victory

for Israel that “was destined to change not only the course of the Arab-Israeli conflict but also the history of the Middle East in the twentieth century” (ibid. p. 132).

On a rhetorical level, however, the government reasserted the territorial and demographic unity of the East and West Bank. On July 1968, Prime Minister Juma made this point clearly during a parliamentary meeting:

“Jordan’s policy was, is still and will continue to be predicated on the following: The Palestinian cause is an all-Arab cause. No Arab State has the right to solve that question/ The Jordanian entity of the two banks is sacred. We believe in it as much as we believe in God and in our religion. We will never at any time relinquish this sacred unity/ The West Bankers should realize that their lives, souls and future are all rightly and sacredly bound to this bank. That bond will never be broken under the leadership of King Hussein” (quoted in Abu-Odeh 1999, p. 140).

In keeping with this agenda, a number of policies were adopted – most notably, the “open-bridge” policy that allowed the free movement of people and goods through the bridges that connected the two banks of the Jordan River (Abu-Odeh 1999, p. 139). Furthermore, the government continued to pay the salaries of civil employees in the West Bank in order to maintain its claim on the territory (ibid.).

Black September

The defeat of 1967, however, resulted in the emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); this was a crucial factor that in the following years would lead to a drastic change of policies and attitudes of the regime toward the Palestinian population (Fruchter-Ronen 2008). But even before that would happen, the relationship between Transjordanians and Palestinians was not entirely without problems. The decision to annex the West Bank sparked much animosity, especially within the Palestinian community of the kingdom. The malcontent culminated with the assassination of King Abdallah I in 1951, shot by a Palestinian gunman while attending Friday prayers at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Tensions among Palestinians were also stirred by the unequal development of the two Banks of the Kingdom. The economic and

demographic growth of Amman and the surrounding areas was pursued to the detriment of the Western territory of the Jordan River. Faced with a more advanced West Bank, the government concentrated its efforts in the East Bank by greatly developing the economy of the territory and strengthening its transportation system (Massad 2001). These differences fuelled more tensions. Whereas Palestinians were angered by what they perceived to be a clear favouritism of the Hashemite regime toward the “native” community, Transjordanians felt humiliated by a “discourse of superiority” engaged by the Palestinian upper-class. Moreover, rich landowners were infuriated by expropriation of their land by the government, who then used it to base refugee camps upon (ibid.).

To further exacerbate the political situation in the kingdom, rivalry between the Hashemites and the PLO over the exclusive rights to represent the Palestinian national predicament and rights also grew in significance and volatility. After the disastrous defeat of the Arab forces during the “Six-Day War”, Palestinian *fidā’iyyin* (guerrilla fighters) established their headquarters in the territory of Jordan, now reduced to the East Bank, from where they launched their attack on Israel. The relationship between the PLO and the Jordanian government deteriorated progressively. On the one hand, the regime sought to exploit the internal divisions amongst the ranks of the PLO in order to challenge its ideological and military power (Abu-Odeh 1999). At that time, the unity of the PLO was threatened by the different leadership under which the organisation was becoming fragmented (most notably Fatah and PFLP). In addition, the last years of the ‘60s saw the group alienating the sympathy of a large share of the population in the East Bank as a consequence of the abuses perpetrated by armed bands of *fidā’iyyin* (guerrilla fighters) – often in the form of requests for pecuniary “donations” but sometimes involving the kidnapping, torturing, and even murdering of those suspected of collaborating with Israel.

On the other hand, the Jordanian government failed to pursue a coherent agenda that was in line with its demographic, legal, and rhetoric unity. The cleavage between the Transjordanian population and the Palestinian community was further exacerbated by the regime’s political and economic discrimination against the latter. A clear example of that discrimination was the retaliation implemented by the Jordanian army which shelled two refugee camps after the attack perpetrated on King Hussein’s motorcade on

June 9, 1970. As Adnan Abu Odeh points out, “[t]he choice of two refugee camps as the target of the army’s anger implied that the army looked on all Palestinians as an extension of the fedayeen, and vice versa” (1999, p. 177).

This spiral of tension triggered a series of events that eventually culminated in the tragic civil war of 1970 known as “Black September”. It must be noticed, however, that the bloody confrontation between the Palestinian guerrilla fighters (*fidā ṭyyn*) and the Jordanian army did not see the juxtaposition of two ethnically distinct groups. Not only did most Palestinian-Jordanians partake in the civil strife, but a sizable minority of Transjordanians joined the rebels in their fight against the monarchy (Sayigh 1997).

The conflict started the 17th of September 1970 and lasted until July 1971. Already in the first two-weeks following the outbreak of the conflict, the Jordanian army conquered vast areas of Amman and Zarqa where the guerrilla forces were concentrated. By September 23rd, the army held the whole of the Al-Hussein camp and a large part of Al-Wihdat, and over the next two days it attained total control of the remaining part of the Camp. Large sectors of Amman, the other northern cities of the kingdom, and the refugee camps that served as headquarters for Fatah and PFLP were severely damaged in the early phase of the battle. In the aftermath of the civil war, half of Al-Wihdat was destroyed by army bombardment. The conflict inflicted heavy losses, especially among Palestinians. There is no consensus around the death toll and the nature of the violence. If for the regime, the number of casualties ranged from 1,500/2,000, largely imputed to self-defence needs, for the guerrillas these are between 7,000 and even 20,000 and must be ascribed to the intention of pursuing a systematic cleansing campaign and general slaughter of the Palestinians in the kingdom²⁴. The showdown in Al-Wihdat terminated with the destruction of a large part of the Camp and, as elsewhere in the country, the eviction of the *fidā ṭyyn* from the Kingdom (Massad 2001, Sayigh 1997).

²⁴ For an analysis of the impact of Black September on the formation of a Jordanian national identity and the politics of de-Palestinisation implemented by the regime in government departments and public institutions after the civil war, see among others Fruchter-Ronen (2009).

Black September and the events that followed were gradually precipitating a discourse of unity toward a guest/host relationship, that in Jordan was expressed in the terms of *muhājirīn* (emigrants) – the Palestinians – and *ansār* (supporters) – the Transjordanians. *Muhājirīn* and *ansār* refer respectively to the Prophet Muhammad and his companions – who fled to Medina to escape their persecutors – and the people of Medina – who welcomed the Prophet. In the Islamic tradition, the two terms stand to signify the establishment of the first Islamic state. The reference to these two concepts of the Islamic tradition was made for the first time by King Hussein in the wake of the civil war. If the King’s intention was to invoke this distinction in order to reinforce national unity, Transjordanian nationalists reinterpreted these concepts to suggest the temporary presence of Palestinians in the Kingdom (Abu-Odeh 1999, pp. 211-212).

It should also be noticed that, while the Hashemites never really ceased to rhetorically uphold the discourse of unity between Transjordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin (i.e. refugees and displaced from the 1948 and 1967 wars), the regime pursued an ambiguous policy at times. By generally supporting the manifestation of Transjordanian chauvinism, the government also exploited intercommunal tension in order to achieve specific goals – such as the prevention of horizontal solidarities between Palestinians and Transjordanians or the strengthening of the PLO’s authority over the territory (Brand 1995).

In the years after Black September, however, the Hashemite’s agenda took a clear trend toward privileging the non-Palestinian aspects of the state’s national identity (Abu-Odeh 1999, Massad 2001, Nanes 2008). The civil strife between the Palestinian militias and the Jordanian regime may have been the first major turning point, but further domestic and regional events fostered the weakening of regime’s inclusive policies. One of these events was the “Rabat Summit”. In 1974, the leaders of twenty Arab states met in Rabat to unanimously acknowledge the PLO as “the sole legitimate representative of Palestinian people in any Palestinian territory that is liberated” (quoted in Abu-Odeh 1999, p. 210). However, it was only with the outbreak of the first intifada in the Occupied Territories in 1988 that the regime formally announced their disengagement from the West Bank, and “genuinely abandon[ed] its claim to speak for Palestinians” (Nanes 2008, p. 91).

If the disengagement signified a radical change of orientation, from the '80s onwards, Israeli has claimed that Jordan is the proper homeland for Palestinians (*al-watan al-badil*), which served to further entrench the new tendency to treat Palestinian territory and people as different to the Jordanians.

Jordanian nationalism

Under the pressures of Transjordanian nationalists to distinguish Jordan from Palestine, the construction of a national identity began to be spelled out almost exclusively through those attributes that celebrated its “Transjordanian nature” (Abu-Odeh 1999, Alon 2007, Fruchter-Ronen 2008, Massad 2001, Mishal 1978, Salibi 1993). As a matter of fact, Transjordanian nationalism emerged strengthened by the events of the '70s. Its main concerns revolved around two intertwined issues: the Palestinian issue and the question of national identity in Jordan. It is important to note, however, that not only there were “native” Jordanians opposing anti-Palestinian stances, but that the very Transjordanian nationalism comprised a variety of groups with diverse and sometimes conflicting agendas. The Palestinian-Jordanian statesman and historian Abu-Odeh identifies three main clusters of Transjordanian nationalism – the pragmatic group, the clan/tribe-based group, and the radical group – that stretch from a moderate stance to an extremist position (1999, p. 241). However, notwithstanding the obvious differences that characterise these forms of nationalism, these positions converged into a broad idea: the primacy of a national identity predicated upon the exclusion of the Palestinian “element”.

A widely (but not universally) shared feature of Transjordanian nationalistic discourse was the emphasis on the tribe (*'ashyra*). According to Al-Abbadi, one of the main advocates of this position, “Jordan is our father and the tribes are our mother” (quoted in Abu-Odeh 1999, p. 244). The raising of “tribalism” was also fostered by King Hussein since the '70s in an effort to first integrate the Bedouins within the national body politic and, after Black September, to promote the creation of a national identity (and a shared history) that laid its foundation upon a “genuine” (Trans)Jordanian basis. Although the goal of the monarchy might have not been explicitly linked to this

purpose²⁵, the inclusion of the tribal component in a nationalist discourse of authenticity was deployed to exclude or marginalise the Palestinian community from the national base: the nomadic traditions of “native” Jordanians were to be juxtaposed onto the urban and peasant heritage of Palestinians. And, as Christine Jungen points out, “the terms ‘*ashā’arī* (tribal), *watanī* (patriotic) and ‘*urdunī* (Jordanian) have progressively acquired an equivalence between them” (Jungen 2002, p. 201)²⁶.

The rise of Transjordanian nationalist discourse and the outbreak of the civil war had profound repercussions at different levels of Jordanian society. In the public sector, the increasing discriminatory practices of the regime resulted in blocking Palestinian advancement and a massive purge of Jordanian-Palestinians from the status apparatus. Whereas Jordanians of Palestinian origins used to enjoy a good representation in the government, the proportion of Palestinians was drastically curbed to a quarter of the total seats in the cabinet. Palestinians were also excluded from attaining the highest positions of executive power. Furthermore, a near hegemony of Transjordanian elements came to control the army and, in general, the whole state security apparatus, including the police forces and the intelligence agency (*al-mukhābarāt*)²⁷. But it is perhaps in education that the regime’s discriminatory stance is most evident. Prior to the war, the university was largely dominated by a highly educated quota of Jordanian-Palestinians, but the new forms of exclusion practiced by the regime dramatically inverted these demographics (Abu-Odeh 1999).

The process of depalestinisation of the national identity of the Jordanian state was also evident at a cultural level. The promotion of Transjordanianness was implemented through the institution of a number of cultural clubs (Massad 2001, p. 250). On the societal level, efforts to assert this novel identity led to the adoption of new symbols and identity markers. A case in point was the red-and-white *hatta* (scarf/head-gear). Since the ‘70s, King Hussein started to wear the scarf with increased frequency, especially

²⁵ The emphasis on tribes and tribalism as an index of being genuinely Jordanian was also deployed by a segment of Transjordanian nationalists to question the very legitimacy of the Hashemite elite, whose origins are not to be found in Jordan but in the Hejaz region of Saudi Arabia (see Shryock 1997).

²⁶ For an analysis of how the monarchy encouraged the promotion of tribal components in the process of national construction, see Bocco (1995) and Massad (2001); for the role of the tribes in the Hashemite regimes, see Layne (1994); on the reformulation of tribalism in Transjordanian nationalist settings, see Jungen (2007) and Shryock (1997).

²⁷ On Jordanian national identity and security forces, see Vatikiotis (1998).

when meeting with tribal leaders (ibid.). Following the example of the King, a new generation of urban male youths began to use the scarf in order to mark their ethnic identity as Transjordanians. The *hatta* soon became a marker of the political inclination of Jordanian-Palestinians, allegedly distinguishing those who sought integration – and wore the red-and-white garment – from those who asserted their Palestinianess by donning a black-and-white scarf. But the battle over national identity was not confined only to the *hatta* and involved other dimensions of daily life such the language, football, and even food (see Massad 2001).

Yet, many Transjordanian nationalists have nurtured the feeling that the regime has done little to downsize the economic and political role of Jordanians of Palestinian origin (Abu-Odeh 1999). On February 5th this year, for example, 36 representatives of the main Bedouin tribes – Bani Sakhr, Abadi, Shobaki and Manaseer – issued a petition publicly questioning King Abdullah II's wife, Queen Rania. Among the other things, the petitioners attacked her Palestinian background and accused her of seeking to empower Jordanians of Palestinian origin by supporting the right of women to pass on their citizenship onto their children, which would have inevitably further shifted the demographic balance in favour of Jordanian-Palestinians (Reuters 2011).

The Hashemite regime, on the other hand, has constantly rejected any attempt to undermine national unity. After Black September and the events that followed, King Hussein I and King Abdullah II have carried out an inclusivist national identity that emphasised, at least rhetorically, the integration of Jordanians of Palestinian origin provided that the latter avoided explicit invocation of a Palestinian identity and refrained from political activity against the regime. Since the 2002, the Jordanian authorities have hence sought to counter these “divisive” stances by developing a unifying agenda, first under the cry of “Jordan first” (*al-'urdun awalan*) and more recently under the slogan “We are all Jordan” (*kulluna al-'urdun*). In this context, camp refugees' status as fully-fledged citizens has been repeatedly confirmed through public statements stressing their status as “part and parcel of the Jordanian people with the same rights and duties as any other Jordanians”; or, also, as “a dear part of Jordan [...] that should be given the same attention and services as other parts of the country such as

the countryside and the semi-desert areas”²⁸. But despite what the government advocated and more or less successfully sought to accomplish, a large part of the refugee population in the country fears that the regime has ultimately surrendered to a Transjordanian exclusivist discourse (Massad 2001, see also Ryan 2008). In Al-Wihdat, for example, many of my friends were extremely sceptical of the rallying crusade of the government. In particular, the slogan “Jordan first” was interpreted in the terms of “(Trans)Jordanian first” and “Palestinian last”: the clear confirmation that the government preferred “native Jordanians” before them.

THE INSTITUTION OF TEMPORARINESS

Refugee camps in Jordan

The first Palestinian refugee camps were set up in the Hashemite Kingdom in the late ‘40s following the establishment of Israel²⁹. When the Jewish Agency in Tel-Aviv announced the institution of the Provisional Government of Israel on May 14, 1948, the war that followed resulted in the destruction and mass evacuation of most Palestinian villages. Palestinians, who left their land and abandoned their houses to flee the mass persecution and atrocities perpetrated by the Haganah and other Jewish forces, were hence prevented by the newly born state of Israel to return to their homes and lands (Morris 1987, pp. 130-131)³⁰. The end of the war saw the territory of the Mandate Palestine divided between the Zionist colonies and the Arab forces that intervened on the behalf of the Palestinian side. Whereas the former took control of a large part of the territory designated by the British Mandate of Palestine, Egypt and Jordan respectively annexed Gaza and the West Bank. Three-quarters of a million people, many injured during the violent Jewish-Arab conflict, were suddenly transformed into a humanitarian problem: the Palestinian issue. Palestinians from southern parts of the Palestine

²⁸ Respectively, Abdel-Karim Abul Heija (Director of the Jordanian Department of Palestinian Affairs in Arab al-Yawm) and Ma’rouf Bakhit (ex-Prime Minister), in Al-Husseini (Al-Husseini 2011, p. 191).

²⁹ I will not refer to Palestinians as a diasporic group, though their exodus presents many characteristics typical of such groups (Clifford 1994). For geographic, temporal, semantic and political reasons specific to the Palestinian case, the employment of the concept of diaspora would mask more than unveil the political issues beyond their flight (see Peteet 2007).

³⁰ Both Israeli (e.g. Kimmerling and Migdal 1993, Morris 1987) and Palestinian (e.g. Khalidi 1997) historians have criticised official Israeli claims that Palestinians left their houses and land following their own decision or the order of Arab leaders. In contrast, these authors have pointed out how the attacks and raids perpetrated by Zionist forces were at the core and origin of this exodus.

Mandate fled to the Gaza Strip; those from the centre dispersed to the West Bank; and those from the north spread out into southern Lebanon and Syria (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003). According to the Red Cross, about 320,000 Palestinian refugees stayed in the West Bank; 210,000 went to the Gaza Strip and 180,000 to other Arab countries. Around 100,000 Palestinian refugees found refuge in Jordan (Zureik 1996).

With some relevant exceptions, the newcomers were all granted with citizenship rights – as part of King Abdullah I's plan to annex the West Bank and legitimise his power. At the beginning of 1949, refugees in Jordan were concentrated around the capital and in the small urban centres around it: 20,000 in Amman and 11,000 in the surrounding villages, 8,000 in Salt, 7,000 in the city of Irbid and 27,000 in its neighbourhoods, 5,000 in Zarqa and in the nearby city of Ruseifa. In the cities and in the villages, Palestinians found shelter in the homes of their relatives, in religious institutions and in tents. Only a small percentage of refugees, 21,000 people, lived in the two camps settled by the international community in the country: Karameh in the Jordan Valley (1949) and Zarqa camp (1949) in the north (Al-Hamarneh 2002). However, the refugees' desperate food, shelter, sanitation, and health care needs convinced the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in charge of the care of the Palestinians, of the need to raise the number of camps in the area: two were built in Amman – the Amman New camp, called “Al-Wihdat” by its inhabitants (1955), and Hussein camp (1952) – and one in Irbid (1951).

The second major exodus of Palestinians occurred in 1967, after the Israeli occupation of West Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The date is commemorated as the “*Naksa*” (the “setback”) and coincides with the catastrophic defeat of Arab armies at the hand of Israel in the conflict known as the “Six-Day War”. A new wave of refugees expelled by the victorious state of Israel crossed the east bank of the Jordan River, raising thus the number of Palestinians living in Jordan to approximately 60% (Massad 2001). Since most refugees received Jordanian nationality after the unification of the East and West Banks in 1951, they were thus naturalised citizens of Jordan. To deal with this mass of displaced people, new refugee camps were set up in the country. They found a place in the areas of Amman and Zarqa and six new camps were organised

under the UNRWA's control: al-Baq'a, Hettin, al-Talbieh, Jarash, Suf and al-Huson (Al-Hamarneh, 2002).

Finally, the number of Palestinian refugees living in Jordan increased considerably following the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990. Approximately 300,000 Palestinians of Jordanian citizenship were forced to leave Kuwait following Saddam Hussein's invasion and occupation of the country. Although the majority of these Palestinians never lived in Jordan before, they acquired Jordanian citizenship through the unification of the East and West Banks in 1951 (Zureik 1996). The first waves of migrants were single men who left in the late '40s and early '50s in search of job opportunities in the expanding market of the Gulf. Palestinians found an employment either as highly qualified labourers or as unskilled ones respectively in the oil and construction sectors. With their remittances, they supported their families still living in Gaza, the kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. A decade later, a second wave of Palestinians followed; but this time as a result of the elimination of visa requirements for Arab citizens, the new migrants brought their families with them (Troquer and al-Oudat 1999). However, in 1990-91, the bulk of Palestinians living in Kuwait left the country as part of the mass exodus of the civilian population at the time of the Iraqi invasion. When the conflict ended, the Palestinian population was prevented from coming back to their houses and jobs in Kuwait. Kuwaiti authorities explained this exclusion as being a result of Arafat's partisanism with the occupier as well as the unfavourable conditions of the Kuwaiti economy (ibid.). The so-called "returnees" – an appellation these people gained for being the descendants of Palestinian refugees who resided for some time in Jordan – settled in the major economic centres of the kingdom: Amman and Zarqa, and to a lesser extent, Irbid (ibid.). Although a minority of them found a place in the overcrowded camps of the country, many built houses near these camps, contributing substantially to the expansion of camps like Al-Wihdat and their amalgamation with the city.

Today, there are approximately 5 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA, of whom almost 2 million are living in Jordan. According to UNRWA, "Palestine refugees are people whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the

1948 Arab-Israeli conflict”³¹. Among them, more than 346,000 registered Palestinian refugees live in the ten Palestinian refugee camps mentioned above, six of which are situated in the AMA (Amman Metropolitan Area) (UNRWA 2012)³².

³¹ See <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=86>. It must be noticed that this was simply an operational definition employed by the UNRWA to establish the parameters for determining who was entitled to receive its services. As Palestinian refugees fell under the general assistance mandate of UNRWA when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established, they were not included into the official definition of refugee. This has had important consequences. First, Palestinian refugees are not entitled to those fundamental rights that enjoy those who meet the criteria set by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees – i.e. repatriation, permanent resettlement in country of residence, or resettlement in a third country. Secondly, unlike the UNHCR, UNRWA does not provide protection of refugees, and its mandate is limited to basic services.

³² See “figure 7”

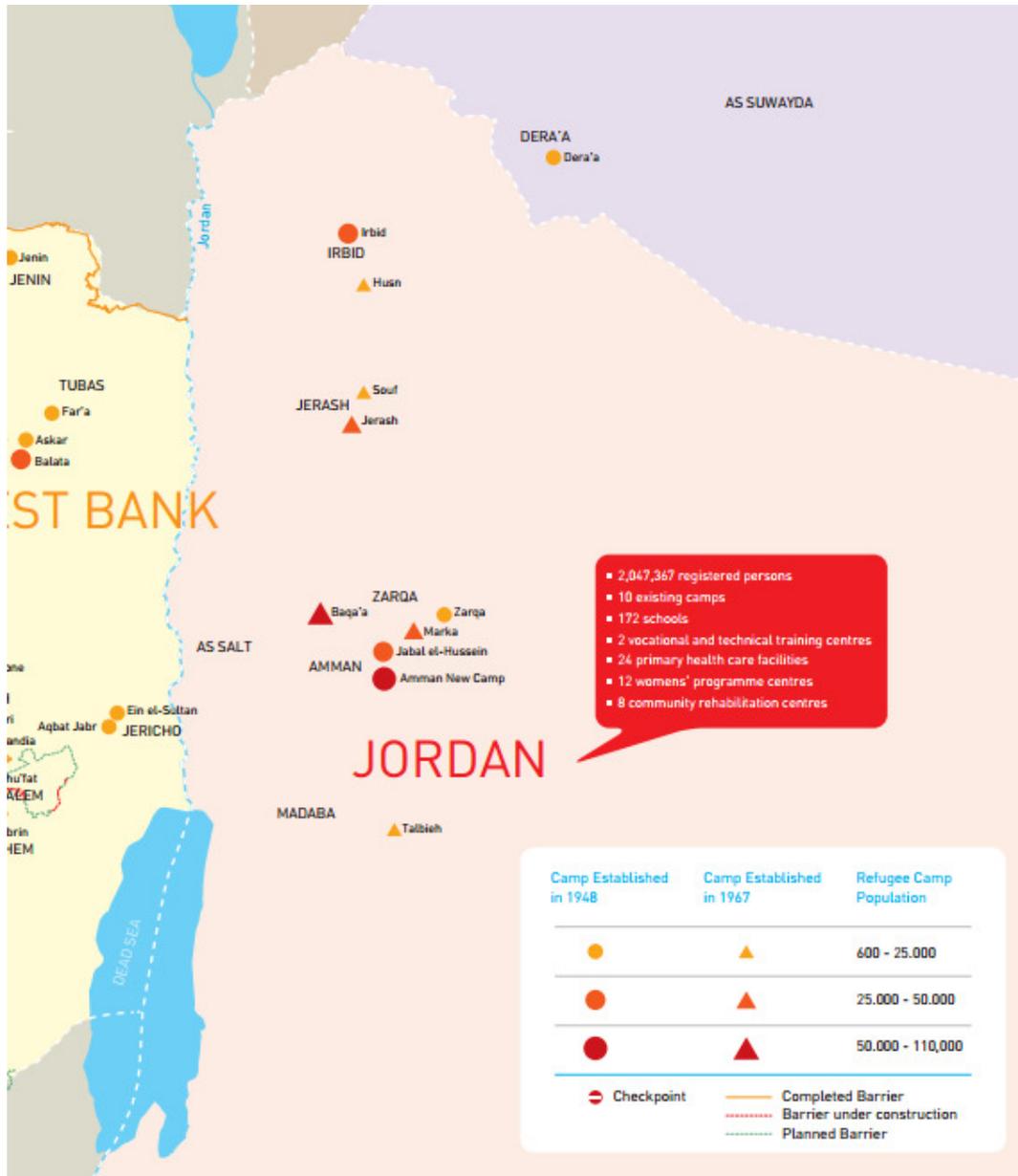


Figure 7: refugee camps in Jordan (source: UNRWA)

UNRWA and the politicisation of camps

The refugees' stay in the camps was meant to be temporary, until the UNRWA's working programs would help them to become economically independent. Even though the host states – Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria – and the large network of humanitarian organisations involved in the care of Palestinian refugees had different and even

contradictory mandates, organisational cultures, and interests, all converged on a similar methodology around the Palestinian issue in Jordan: resettlement (Latte Abdallah 2004). Two major premises under-laid the functioning and determined the objectives of this regime in Jordan (ibid). Palestinian refugees were a transitory phenomena of crisis and disorder, and thus only temporarily relevant; human nature was best served in a sedentary setting. In this context, refugee camps soon became a practical device designed to accommodate Palestinian refugees. Planned as emergency and thus temporary solutions to the “refugee problem”, camps were the most suitable solution for the management of those refugees – mainly dispossessed labourers and farmers³³ – who could not find an alternative accommodation elsewhere. The camps were not intended to separate their inhabitants from the rest of the population, but rather to foster their integration within the local and regional market.

On 8 December 1949, the UN General Assembly established the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for the Near and Middle East (UNRWA) as an operational, non-political agency in order to take care of the humanitarian aspects of this project within Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. According to the December 1949 resolution 302 (IV) of the UN General Assembly, the Agency (UNRWA) had to work “in collaboration with local governments (on) the direct relief and works programmes [...] [and] consult with the interested Near Eastern Governments concerning measures to be taken by them preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and works projects is no longer available” (UNRWA 1949). This project was expected to be carried out first in the refugee camps “through the gradual replacement of relief assistance (food rations, medical care and primary education) by a program of public works involving terracing, afforestation, irrigation schemes and road construction” (Al-Husseini 2011, p. 184)³⁴.

³³ These people made up about three quarters of the refugee population in Jordan (Al-Husseini and Bocco 2010).

³⁴ In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate. This was most recently extended until 30 June 2011. Given the exceptionally high percentage of Palestinian refugees employed in the ranks of the UNRWA, the history of the UNRWA has been strictly intertwined with the vicissitudes of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East (see Schiff 1995, cf. Ashkenasi 1990).

In April 1950, humanitarian assistance passed completely under the control of the UNRWA. In 1951, an agreement between the UNRWA and the Jordanian Government defined the responsibilities of both: camp organisation and assistance-distribution were run by the UNRWA³⁵, while the government's role was limited to enforcing the law and supporting the Agency in carrying out its humanitarian mission. Under the imperative of preserving the temporariness of camps, the Jordanian government and the UNRWA issued specific norms for the regulation of the use of land plots and shelters in the Camp.

Al-Wihdat refugee camp was set up in the south-east of Amman, near the capital city³⁶, on an area of 0.48 square kilometres, owned by private citizens but “temporarily” leased out to the government³⁷. Here, the authorities gave each person 100 square metres of land, called a “unit” or “*wihda*”³⁸ in Arabic, on which they built a concrete room of 12-20 square metres. The unit, designed for refugees and their children, was assigned on nominal basis. As refugees were not entitled to ownership rights over the plot of land, the block was not divisible or transferable. To limit the horizontal growth of the camps, the building of new units was forbidden. The height of the shelters was limited at three meters to avoid the vertical growth of the Camp. The residents were not allowed to rent, buy or sell their habitation units. From the beginning, life in the camps seemed to be disciplined by the absolute prohibition to use the space of the Camp for any activity, except for dwelling (Destremau 1994, Jaber 1996). Furthermore, Al-Wihdat – like the other refugee camps in the territory – was left outside national and municipal's policies of urban development. Again, at the core of this decision was the determination to reproduce camps' temporary character. This choice was not opposed by refugees, who feared that any infrastructural improvement could have led them to being classified as “settled” and jeopardise their return to Palestine. Unlike other refugee camps, however, Al-Wihdat was set up not with tents, but with more durable shelters made of concrete,

³⁵ For the terms of cooperation between the UNRWA and the Jordanian government, see: http://untreaty.un.org/unts/1_60000/3/33/00005646.pdf. Othe political dimension of UNRWA's mandate and its relationships with the PLO, see Al-Husseini (Al-Hamarneh 2002); on the evolution of UNRWA programmatic agenda, see Shiff (1995).

³⁶ This choice was largely motivated by the circulation of goods and services (2001, p. 252-253).

³⁷ The land – rented for a period of 99 years – is expected to be returned to the original owners once a solution to the Palestinian issue is found.

³⁸ Wihdat, which literally means “units”, takes its name from the 100 square meters assigned as housing unit to each familial group with a registration number that certified its refugee status. Wihdat is the colloquial name; the official name is Amman New Camp.

zinc, stone, and asbestos. It was not until the mid-1960s that the expanding municipality of Amman integrated the urban camp areas within its public service system (with water, telephone lines, and electricity)³⁹.

Several factors, including the weak absorption capacities of the host countries and the absence of a political solution for the refugee issue, contributed to endangering the permanent resettlement of refugees into Jordanian territory. But, more than anything else, it was refugees' opposition – also by means of violent demonstrations – to any solution that could threaten the “right of return” that eventually put an end to the UNRWA's plans for a collective reintegration in the late 1950s (UNRWA 1955). While the notion of resettlement/naturalisation (*tawtīn*) was interpreted as a clear sign of the collaboration with Israel, camps become soon political symbols of Palestinian struggles for the right of return. This process is most visible in the politicisation of the UNRWA and its services (see Al-Husseini 2000). Despite its explicitly non-political mandate, the UNRWA has progressively acquired a clear political connotation, often associated with the space of the Camp. A case in point was the UNRWA ID card (*al-wathīqa*). The large majority of Palestinian refugees in Jordan hold a Jordanian passport and an UNRWA registration card. Whereas the former identifies them as citizens of the Hashemite Kingdom, the UNRWA card indicates their temporary status as refugees. These cards provide refugees with access to a number of social and economic benefits such as food or medical supplies, but they also stand as potent symbols of refugees' steadfastness to return to their homes and lands in Palestine. As Al-Husseini writes, “UNRWA's services were instrumental in ensuring the very existence of the camps, which became bastions of Palestinian nationalism as of the late 1960s and simultaneously the focus of the PLO's implantation and its main recruiting ground” (ibid. p. 54). In this respect, the fact that the vast majority of the Agency's staff is recruited within the Palestinian community has surely reinforced the Agency's identification with the refugee cause. This is even more remarkable in the camps, the only place where UNRWA services are available in their totality⁴⁰ – elementary and

³⁹ See Destremau (1994) and Husseini (2011).

⁴⁰ In 2004-2005 for example, only 36% of the children living outside the camps went to the UNRWA's primary schools, while 85% of children living in the camps attended it. The practical implications of the Agency's management inside the camps extend also to tasks that are managed by municipalities outside the camp such as garbage collection and shelter maintenance and rehabilitation (Husseini, 2010).

preparatory schools, health clinics, relief distribution and social centres⁴¹. Over the years, refugees living in the camps have become more dependent from UNRWA services than refugees outside, and the Agency has become identified with the Palestinian plight.



Figure 8: UNRWA field office in Al-Wihdat (source: Jihad Nijem)

⁴¹ See, for example, “figure 8” and “figure 9”.



Figure 9: UNRWA schools (source: jihad Nijem)

The evolution of assistance

During my research in the camp, the UNRWA was a steady but marginal presence in the life of my friends in the Camp.

Since the '70s, UNRWA's influence in the camps began to decline. A diverse range of factors have contributed to the Agency's decrease of control over camp issues. The main reason seems to be a severe lack of financial resources, which has progressively forced the UNRWA to reduce its services and expenditures for all of its facilities – i.e. schools and health centres (Shiff, 1995). UNRWA's loss of authority was accompanied by a greater participation of the Jordanian authorities in the management of the camps. Since 1975, the government has taken over numerous tasks previously endorsed by the UNRWA, such as the enforcement of regulations surrounding spatial constriction, and the maintenance and rehabilitation of shelters and camps' infrastructure (Husseini,

2010). To accomplish these and other duties, immediately after the Jordanian disengagement from the West Bank in 1988, the government established the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA), a national organism in charge of the Palestinian refugee issue in Jordan under the umbrella of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the influence of the government on the camps is not only exerted through direct control, but also by means of the “camp services committees”. These are formed by 7-13 members (not necessarily refugees living in the camps). The committees are quasi-governmental bodies under the economic, operational and membership control of the DPA. These offices are in charge of implementing community projects and representing refugees’ requests and concerns. Refugees have often lamented the lack of autonomy of the committee and called for the independent election of its members; a request that has so far been ignored (ibid.). The DPA has also exerted indirect control through the supervision of the numerous NGOs, the diverse range of “community based organisations” (CBOs) – such as “Women’s Program Centres” and “Community Rehabilitation Centres for the Disabled” – and the *zakāt* committees operating in the camps in the medical, relief and social sectors.

After Black September the Jordanian government and the UNRWA implemented several projects to ameliorate the living conditions of people in the camp. The progressive involvement of the DPA and the government in the camps has certainly led, on the one hand, to major control of the former over these spaces and, on the other hand, to boost the process of the spatial, economic, and, in part, administrative integration of the camps into the municipality of Amman. This process of integration rested on a new strategy of spatial governmentality implemented by the government in the aftermath of Black September, when the status of refugees in exile seemed to be more and more destined to be a permanent resettlement into the host country. In Al-Wihdat, these strategies of governmentality were visible in a number of measures the government undertook in the year following the civil war. In 1986, for example, the Nadi Al-Wihdat passed under the control of the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Originally set up and supervised by the UNRWA, the club grew into a major sports club and a place of political activism in the ‘70s. A decade later, the government widened Shāra’ Sumaiyya, a small alley that crossed the Camp from north-west to south-east, turning it into a large

two-lane road⁴². A few years after, on the occasion of the outbreak of the II intifada, the government also visibly enlarged the police station located on the outskirts of the Camp.



Figure 10: Shāra' Sumaiyya (source: Jihad Nijem)

The different interpretations people from the Camp gave me on these changes are remarkable. For some, for example, while the expansion of Shāra' Sumaiyya was carried out to improve bad circulation within the Camp, the extension and refurbishment of the police station was explained by the unification of the station of Al-Wihdat with that of Ashrafiyya. For others, instead, they were both part of a plan to strengthen state control over the Camp and its population, as symbols of the regime's power and through precautionary measures following unrests pro-Palestine held in the Camp. Either way, these interpretations shed light on the same rationale: if the insertion of Al-Wihdat into the municipality of Amman has become more visible, so was the control of the “state” over these spaces. The increasing presence of the Jordanian authorities in the Camp and the gradual integration of the latter into the municipality of Amman have eventually afforded the Jordanian state with an opportunity to strengthen its control on Al-Wihdat and its inhabitants⁴³.

This process of control and normalisation of the camp-dwellers through the spatial regulation of Al-Wihdat and the other refugee camps has been even more evident in recent years. In 1994, the signing of the Wadi Araba Treaty between Jordan and Israel

⁴² See “figure 10”.

⁴³ I am building here on Ismail's argument that neo-liberal practices and principles of governmentality are also possible in authoritarian states and in contexts where the Western conception of state is absent (2007).

marked further involvement of the Hashemite Kingdom in matters of the camps⁴⁴. Following its signature, the government planned and developed the “Economic and Social productivity Program” (ESPP), a national development program aimed at improving living conditions in impoverished areas, including refugee camps. Two sub-programs, the Community Infrastructure Program (CIP) and the Housing Projects for the Poor (HPP) have specifically tackled the infrastructure situation in refugee camps. The first one is intended to upgrade the physical infrastructure of the camps; the second seeks to rehabilitate the most deteriorated shelters. The novelty of these interventions resides in the fact that, for the first time, Al Wihdat and other refugee camps have been included in a large-scale development scheme that has, at least rhetorically, radically tackled camps’ infrastructure.

It is also important to remark on refugees’ responses to the ESPP. Whereas in the past, any upgrading of the camps’ infrastructure was firmly rejected by the refugee community as an attempt to resettle Palestinians in Jordan, this time, the camp-dwellers displayed a positive reaction toward this upgrade. This has been explained by some authors as the consequence of the widespread feelings of disappointment and bitterness generated by the agreements of Oslo and the signing of the Wadi Araba Treaty (see, for example, Al-Husseini and Bocco 2010). In Al-Wihdat, the signing of these treaties ultimately persuaded many camp-dwellers that Jordan was their permanent place of residence (Al-Hamarneh 2002). Critics of inclusion of refugee camps into the ESPP have indeed pointed out how these kinds of interventions are likely to lead to the “the refugees’ permanent resettlement in Jordan” and to the “gradual disappearance of the camps through their transformation into poor housing neighbourhoods”⁴⁵. Government authorities, however, have been adamant about claiming that the Camp’s status has remained untouched, and that the only actions undertaken by the ESPP programs were the rehabilitation of single rooms of the shelters (Al-Husseini and Bocco 2010).

⁴⁴ On October 26, 1994, one year after the signature of the “Oslo agreements”, Jordan and Israel signed a peace treaty at Wadi Araba that laid the foundation for bilateral cooperation between the two countries and set the basis for the permanent resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Jordan (see Al-Husseini and Bocco 2009).

⁴⁵ Headline of the Islamist weekly newspaper al-Sabil, 24 December 2000 in Jalal al-Husseini (2011)

AL-WIHDAT: BETWEEN INCLUSION AND EXCEPTION

The Camp as a Palestinian space

Although refugee camps were established in Jordan with the very operational and practical objective of gathering in one place those refugees who could not afford alternative accommodations, UNRWA's administrative practices had a profound impact on Palestinian refugees' lives (see among others Latte-Abdallah 2004). In the camps, modern techniques of "bio-power" were implemented for the discipline and control of refugees' bodies. The Agency adopted a number of interventions to inscribe Palestinians with a new status and to fashion their subjectivity. Julie Peteet notes how "rations [were] aimed at the subjective transformation of the displaced from angry, potentially volatile refugees to docile recipients of food aid" (2007, p. 76)⁴⁶. However, the perpetual screening of refugees through their classification and enumeration, the rationing and the medical system had unexpected reverberations on camp-dwellers' subjectivity. If the main purpose of the UNRWA and the government was to generate the image of a social unitary group – the "refugees" – without social, historical and political links with the past or the present, this aim failed: a culture of political resistance came out of the camps.

Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East feature a long political history of national mobilisation and resistance (Peteet 2007). In Jordan, this was most evident during the heyday of Al-Wihdat, when the Camp attained an almost complete political autonomy from state central power. During this decade – from the rise of the PLO in the 1960s until its expulsion by the Jordanian army after Black September in the early 1970 – Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan became a focal point for Palestinian nationalist activity. Even after the disintegration of the armed bands of *fidā'iyyin* (popularly called the "sons of the camps"), camps continued to retain their cultural and political distinctiveness as sites of Palestinian resistance. At the time of my research, along with other elements generally associated with peasant life such as the orange and olive trees, the *tabun* bread, the traditional embroidered dresses, wild thyme (*za'tar*), also symbols

⁴⁶ For a comparative case, see among others Harell-Bond 1999; for an excellent investigation of the UNRWA and its techniques of biopolitics in Jordan, see Latte-Abdallah 2004

associated to refugeeness – such as the zinc-plate roofs, ration cards, and the UN flag – acquired an intensely political meaning in refugees’ nationalist rhetoric. Ration cards, for example, became potent field in which refugees could still remind the international community of the lack of a political solution to their plight and evoke a shared sentiment of national unity. Not merely interpreted by refugees as symbols of their subjection and dependency to the international community, cards constituted one of the few official documentary evidences of their physical link with Palestine (Al-Husseini 2000).

So, “the camp”, a space that once came to represent the attempt of silencing the political predicament of Palestinians under the guise of a humanitarian issue, underwent since the sixties a process of profound politicisation. In Al-Wihdat, the re-appropriation and politicisation of Al-Wihdat was still visible through the reinscription of the memory of the village and the exile into its space (see Farah, 1999). For example, the Camp configuration itself was a great measure of the Palestinian experience of displacement. In this sense, refugee re-appropriation of Al-Wihdat collides with administrative representations. As diverse authors have remarked, the official spatial regulation reflected the international community tends to consider refugees and their descendants as a compact and abstract block, not only in spatial terms, but also in temporal terms (Farah 1999, Jaber 1996, Latte Abdallah 2004). Even though housing units were randomly distributed, spontaneous refugee groupings have sought to reproduce Palestinian villages both for the name and for inhabitants’ provenance: *sabawi* and *ghazawi* refer respectively to inhabitants of Bir al-Saba’a and Gaza. As Peteet points out “organising and naming camp space by village crafted both a memory scape and a practical spatial enactment of the lost homeland” (Peteet 2005, p. 100). Al-Wihdat’s spatial re-organisation through kinship and villages of origin was still relevant in many areas of Wihdat, so that that the moral features generally ascribed to people from specific villages in Palestine were associated to the space of the Camp. For example, I was living in a house at the eastern border of Al-Wihdat, in an area inhabited by *sabawi*⁴⁷. Since *sabawi* were not generally held in high esteem by the rest of the refugee community, the *hara* is also considered to be “disreputable”. Even street names are

⁴⁷ I ignore the origin of this resentment, which is, however, not shared by everybody. Every time I asked explanations, people would shrug their shoulders and say: “they are Bedouins”. *Sabawi* were historically Bedouins from the city of Bir al-Saba’a in the Negev desert, now located in Southern Israel.

symbols of camp dweller's collective memory. Some, for example, recall infrastructure that has helped to characterise the Camp since its institution: "Shāra' al-'Iyada" (chemist), "Shāra' al-Madaris", (schools), "Mu'an Corner" (UNRWA food storage) (Jaber 1996). Others evoke individual stories and more personal refugee life trajectories. "Shāra' al-Liddawi" owes its name to the first wholesale dealer; Shāra' al-Nadi is called after its famous sportive association (ibid.).

A space of assimilation?

Nonetheless, Al-Wihdat would strike many today as being more a space of negotiation with relatively collaborative state officials than a place of overt resistance against an alien state.

Embedded in a tight cluster of dwellings, the densely populated space of the Camp stretched out without any physical interruption toward the urban areas of Jabal Ashrafiyya (hill of Ashrafiyya). The Camp derived much of its energy from the ongoing struggle and adaptation between recent immigrants and its inhabitants, refugees and the "State", peddlers and shop-owners, landlords and tenants, and so on. It was a space of cooperation and struggle between people and the State that Bayat calls "quiet encroachment or ordinary": "a silent, patient, protracted, and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive hardships and better their lives" (Bayat 1997, p. 7). It should also be noticed that the administration of the Camp's infrastructure performed by the DPA has been quite flexible, especially regarding the infringement of spatial norms. Now, for example, is it possible to build two additional floors (of less than 6 meters in height) on commercial buildings, and obtain the authorisation to add one floor to a housing unit (Destremau 1994, p. 97) – though the request has to go through a specific official route before being issued. Likewise, the Jordanian government has also been relatively tolerant of the renting, selling, and buying of housing units in the camps. In the context of the progressive control exerted by the state through the DPA over the camps, this might seem at first sight contradictory. I suggest, in contrast, that this is perfectly in line with the Hashemites' attempt to assimilate Palestinian refugees in Jordan and leave the temporary status of refugee camps unaltered. On the one hand, the DPA's relatively

flexible attitude has sped up the urbanisation of the Camp. On the other hand, the informal and temporary character of state's regulatory practices in the camps was aimed at preserving the temporariness of Al-Wihdat (and the other camps), and has ultimately served the regime's interests in a number of ways: avoiding taking on the responsibility of being an Arab country that has contributed to liquidating Palestinians' "right of return", reminding Israel that Jordan should not be perceived as an alternative homeland for Palestinians, and for an eventual compensation for the resettlement of refugees within its borders (Al-Husseini 2011).

So, faced with a density and rates of overcrowding higher than overpopulated cities like Mumbai and Kolkata in India⁴⁸, inhabitants not only moved outside, but also breached camp rules. They split up the "indivisible" units among family components. Over the years, houses changed owners; they were also sold and bought. Recently, shelters were also rented to Iraqi refugees, Egyptians labourers, and other low-income immigrants who can only afford the relatively cheaper rents of the Camp⁴⁹. After several successions, some units have lost any memory of the original owner, and real estate speculation has become one of the most tangible marks of refugee re-appropriation dynamics. The vertical expansion of buildings also reached unpredictable levels⁵⁰. Fifteen year ago, a second floor on a building was permitted only in special cases. Now almost every unit in the Camp has a second floor, and three- and four-floor buildings are increasing. Nowadays, the roads having been enlarged and electricity has been installed, so refugees clearly inhabit Al-Wihdat not just as a temporary or emergency space but as a place for living.

⁴⁸ In refugee camps like Wihdat, density rates reach to 103 persons/sq. km (Husseini, 2011)

⁴⁹ Generally, the rent for unfurnished accommodation is around 100 JD a month – which is quite expensive, especially considering that the average monthly salary for labour in and from the camp is slightly more than 200 JD. In 1997, a report of the DPA calculated that around 25% of the housing units were rented by their original tenants (DPA 1997).

⁵⁰ See "figure 11".



Figure 11: Al-Wihdat's vertical expansion (source: Jihad Nijem)

If it has boosted the economic integration of Wihdat's camp-dwellers, the physical expansion of Wihdat and the opening of unregulated and unlicensed business have also had a notable repercussion at an administrative and political level. In this context, it is important to note that the state did not monopolise regulatory practices; it was more the case of negotiation between different actors – such as the Camp Service Committee, UNRWA, refugees, and DPA officials. Camp-dwellers' life trajectories have forced the authorities to change the norms that regulate the interdiction of business activity in the camps and reinterpret those that disciplined the physical space of the Camp. Simultaneously, in order to tax these activities and discipline refugees' reappropriation of the space, the government has also had to strengthen its control over this space. This has ultimately favoured the insertion and participation of the refugee community in the wider Jordanian public sphere, since negotiations between the community and state bureaucrats revealed the necessity of the state authorities to discipline these activities and spaces.

Today, the intensive urbanisation and spatial integration of Al-Wihdat into surrounding areas was impressive, especially when compared to other refugee camps. This is reflected in the visual heterogeneity of its space. Despite a common aesthetic pattern that consists of coarse walls without paint, unfinished buildings with iron cables coming

out of the reinforced concrete, many satellite dishes, no windows, iron doors, and narrow alleys, there are tangible differences between different areas of the Camp. While the northern area of Al-Wihdat has developed into a thriving economic centre with three- and even four-floor buildings, the southern quarters resemble slum-like (*sha'bi*) dwelling areas. The staggering price of real estate in certain area stands in sharp contrast with other neighbourhoods of the Camp, whose much lower rents make it affordable to poor refugee families and newer waves of immigrants. This heterogeneity drew my attention, most especially on the occasion of a return visit that I made to Wihdat in the winter of 2011.

When I came back in early March, the Nadi Al-Wihdat was negotiating the rent of a two floors adjoining building with a Palestinian-Jordanian businessman, whose brother was a board member of the Club. The family was rich and had good political connections that stretched far beyond the Camp. The man, I was told, made a fortune working in the Gulf's estate market. At the time of my visit, he was planning to use the space to make a fast-food restaurant. Eventually an agreement between the Club and the man was set for a generous amount of money. The price that the man agreed to secure the tenancy for 15 years was 250,000 JD (around £215,000) and as much had to be paid for refurbishing the entire premise. Half a million dinars seemed a disproportionate price to me, especially in comparison to other areas such as Wihdat Tahtwīr (low Wihdat) – an extension of the camp one hundred meters from Shāra' al-Nadi . With a cost of ten thousand dinars per housing unit (£8,600), the area is widely considered one of the poorest places in the Camp⁵¹. However, as my friends made clear to me, the business should be profitable enough to pay back the investment in a few years.

⁵¹ Compare “figure 12” with “figure 13”.



Figure 12: Al-Wihdat Tahtwīr (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 13: Al-Wihdat, Shāra‘Al-Nadi (source: Jihad Nijem)

Upholding nationalism through integration

What best exemplifies the twofold nature of Al-Wihdat was its *souk* (market). Anybody who steps into the market for the first time would be bewildered by the amount of things and people in the street. Many things draw the attention of passers-by. The intense sociality of the *souk* is striking. In the *souk* a multitude of people stand, walk, sell, buy, play, hang around, shout, argue, and fight. Although all of the camp-dwellers come to the *souk* for shopping, most of the people in the market live outside. Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, Transjordanians (*'urdunīn*), Gypsies (*nawari*), and even Filipinos (*filippiniāt*) came to the market because of its better prices, apparently tastier food, and the wider selection of merchandise, staff, and food.

Cross cut by Shāra' Al-Nadi, the *souk* is split into two main sections: the northern part with the food and articles from the kitchen (*souk al-khudra*, i.e. vegetable market), and the southern part with the clothing and other items (*souk al-malābes*, i.e. cloth market). Shops, fast foods, stands, and street sellers are distributed across the market, selling virtually everything: from potato peelers to bright velvet corduroy pants, from sexy lingerie to the Quran and little pictures that frame the most common hadiths of the Prophet or the word "Allah". Most of the vegetables come from Ghor in the Jordan Valley, clothes are from China, and goods like oil and flour were rumoured to be waste materials shipped from the USA. Men selling a non-descript assortment of objects compete to outcry others over the price of their merchandise, while others sat and gaze passively. Outside the door of their boutiques – propped against the wall or sitting on a plastic chair – shopkeepers would look passively at the stream of people passing by. An important area of the food market is covered. Here, amongst stands, hawkers, and small shops there is also a modern supermarket. In *souk al-malābes*, amidst miserable shops and wrecked stands, there are fancy boutiques which recall high street shops like H & M or Zara. In this noisy and teeming labyrinth, animals such as rabbits, chickens, and even lambs and sheep are exhibited for sale.

This great variety of merchandise is a dimension of camp life particularly appreciated by camp-dwellers, who would often celebrate the advantages of living in a highly

populated area like Wihdat for the reasonable cost of living and the proximity of the *souk* and its services (*khadamāt*). At the time of my research, refugees took evident pride in claiming how the products sold in the *souk* not only competed with but actually outmatched the fanciest and richest zones of Amman. The souk was the symbol both of their integration in Jordan and the capacity of Palestinians to struggle against the adversities of a life in exile. On the occasion of one of my first visits to Wihdat camp, I asked if there were differences between refugee camps and the rest of the city. An employee of the UNRWA, a refugee who lived in the Camp, answered: “no, there is no difference, the Camp is like the *balad*!”. By saying so, the man was drawing a link between the commercial zone of the Camp and the old city of Amman, which is commonly known as *balad*, and wherein an important open market of the capital city is located, a place of business and trade. But in Arabic, the term *balad* might be translated into “village”, “homeland”, and “place of origin”. By stating that Al-Wihdat was only another *balad*, he was also indirectly referring to the fact that the Camp has become an alternative city centre in Amman; the centre of a Palestinian space and a symbol of Palestine itself. The association of Al-Wihdat with the *balad* of Amman is an expression of the ambiguous nature of the Camp: a space of integration and distinction.

In conclusion, while Al-Wihdat was a socio-economic and spatially integrated space, it was also a site endowed with an alternative imagination of belonging to Palestinians. Camp-dwellers’ self-representation as Palestinians and the very “right of return” were grounded in the space of the camp. It comes as no surprise that refugees sought to preserve this space by challenging its socio-economic marginality and fostering its integration into the territory – especially after the Oslo Peace Process. In this context, the recent upgrading of camps’ living conditions was not interpreted as an attempt to dissolve their political rights through resettlement (*tawtīn*) but as socio-economic rehabilitation, waiting for a definitive political solution (*ta’hīl*) (Al-Husseini 2006). But refugees not only welcomed the improvement of living conditions in Al-Wihdat; they saw these as necessary for upholding their nationalist ideals and struggles for the implementation of their “right of return”. Far from interpreting the physical precariousness of Al-Wihdat as a token of their temporary stay in Jordan, many of the people I spoke with in Al-Wihdat perceived the Camp’s deteriorating infrastructure and its low standards of environmental health as an attempt to liquidate the Palestinian issue

and sink refugees into despair and oblivion. As we will see in chapters 3 and 5, poverty and the lack of decent infrastructure were held by camp-dwellers as the main sources of social problems and immorality among the youth, inherently negative situations that ultimately endanger refugees' commitment to Palestinian nationalist struggles. As a friend once told me, pointing to a bunch of children playing amidst a pile of garbage and debris tossed in the middle of a narrow alley:

“I am afraid for the future! If you live in a bad environment, you grow wild; and if you are poor, you don't eat and if you don't eat, you cannot sleep. So what you do? You think, and you get angry, more and more, until... until something bad will happen. It's not still the worse, but we are close to it. Once people will get the bottom, they will start making trouble, maybe kill each other... This is what they [Israel and the USA] want! They want us to kill each other!”

Marginalised by the “Oslo Agreements” for the sake of the national project and faced with the gradual decay of the living conditions, camp-dwellers saw the socio-economic rehabilitation and physical upgrading of Al-Wihdat – a symbol of Palestinian nationalism – as a way forward to preserve their nationalist ideals in the context of a progressive assimilation.



Figure 14: shops in the souk al-wihdat (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 15: stands in the souk al-wihdat (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 16: souk al-wihdat (source: Jihad Nijem)

CONCLUSION

Al-Wihdat is today part of the Al-‘Awda quarter of the Al-Yarmouk district. “Al-‘Awda” means “the return” – a name that might sound surprising for one of Jordan’s most economically integrated camps, but that well reflects the contradictory feelings associated to this space (Al-Hamarneh 2002). Over the years, new comers and the demographic growth have radically altered the Camp’s visual profile, which has increasingly melted with the surrounding neighbourhoods. If the physical reinscription has certainly favoured a process of integration of Al-Wihdat into the urban fabric of Amman, it has also evoked ambivalent feelings of hominess and fears of resettlement among camp residents. In recent years, however, many camp-dwellers seemed to have overcome this dilemma by publicly embracing the inclusion of the Camp into the national development programs as a positive upgrading of its infrastructure that does not endanger refugees’ allegiance to the “right of return”. Most importantly, I have demonstrated that the progressive spatial and socio-economic integration of Al-Wihdat

– which refugees have initially rejected and, then, progressively embraced – has been central to refugees’ efforts to sustain and reproduce the ideals and messages of Palestinian nationalism in the face of their growing feeling of marginalisation at the aftermath of the Peace Process.

In so doing, I have started my analysis by showing how historical events have profoundly affected the way the Jordanian regime imagined the national identity. After Black September and other turning point events such as the loss of the West Bank, the “disengagement”, and the rise of Transjordanian nationalism, the body of the nation has lost a great deal of its original elasticity. The Hashemites’ efforts to develop a hybrid identity encompassing both Palestinian and Transjordanian elements has given away to a project of social engineering aimed at fashioning a national identity that is genuinely Jordanian, essentially meaning “East Banker” (Massad 2001, p. 262). This change has eventually strengthened the determination of the regime to accelerate the process of normalisation of Palestinian refugees in Jordan. In the governmental rhetoric, refugees – Jordanians of Palestinian origin – were included as long as they renounced to any manifestation of “Palestinianness”. “Jordan First” and the other rallying slogans of the regime have sought to reinforce this process of inclusion and integration.

The events following Black September – along with the loss of control of the UNRWA over Camp issues – had similar repercussions at the level of Al-Wihdat’s refugee management. In the decade following its establishment, the politicisation of UNRWA services contributed to transforming Al-Wihdat and Palestinian refugee camps all over the Middle East into “oppositional spaces endowed with alternative meanings” (Peteet 2005, p. 95). However, the civil war, the declining influence of the UNRWA, and the progressive role played by the regime through the DPA in the camps ushered in a new trend on the management of their social and physical infrastructure. In Al-Wihdat, the Jordanian government has deployed an array of practices aimed at strengthening the control of its population: enlarging the police station, supervising historical sites of political activism such as the Nadi, as well as integrating the Camp into nation-wide development policies such as the ESPP. However, as the Jordanian authorities have repeatedly put it, these projects were not formally meant to a permanent inclusion of camps into the municipality’s urban planning. Al-Wihdat’s temporary insertion into

large scale schemes of urban planning must instead be understood as a technique of control and management, through which the regime has sought to maintain unaltered the symbolic status of refugee camps, while reinforcing the Jordanisation of its inhabitants.

Refugees display varying attitudes and response to this process of normalization that has taken place in the camps in the last years. Although their life practices and the long-standing facts of their exile inevitably lead to a profound transformation of the space of the Camp, historically refugees have fiercely opposed any infrastructural change in the Camp aimed to alter the “temporariness” of this space, interpreted as the stronghold to their “right of return”. The Oslo Agreement in 1993 and the Wadi Araba Treaty in 1994, however, introduced a new trend. Undermining the basis upon which lied their hope of return, they triggered among refugees a profound rethinking of their status in Jordan (Abu-Odeh 1999). After that, for the first time, camp-dwellers positively responded to the programs implemented by the government in recent years to upgrading the physical infrastructure of Al-Wihdat. But in this process of integration refugees have also drawn the energy to uphold their nationalist predicament. By pursuing physical upgrading and spatial integration of the Camp within the surrounding urban neighbourhoods, camp-dwellers have sought to challenge the marginality of this space and, ultimately, preserve the political dimension and significance of Al-Wihdat.

In what follows, I will continue my exploration of the ways through which refugees have infused nationalistic values with daily concerns and practices from the specific angle of the refugee political-economy.

CHAPTER 3: IMPERATIVES OF WORK

INTRODUCTION: WEDDINGS

I was once invited by Muhannath to his brother's wedding. The luxury of the location was at odds with every marriage party (*hafle zafaf*) that I attended in the Camp. Unlike Al-Wihdat, the marriage was not held in a tent set in the middle of narrow alleys: it was, rather, celebrated in the splendour of the Landmark Hotel, a five star hotel located between Jabal Amman and Abdoun⁵². There were no signs of the plastic chairs and glasses used at such occasions in Al-Wihdat. In the vast open atrium of the hotel, located around a swimming pool with floating decorations, a magnificent party was hosted and enjoyed: eight people sat at each table, and there were approximately 250 invitees. All sat at tables with embroidered tablecloths, fine glasses, and expensive cutlery.

It was a spectacular break with more “traditional” forms of this celebration, a break that says much about the world inhabited and created by the rich Palestinian bourgeoisie in Amman. We did not eat *mansaf* or other traditional dishes⁵³; the meal was characterised by a fine selection of lighter and more delicate courses, especially designed for international tastes. The unrolling of the dinner in the pleasant coolness of a summer

⁵² Originally the name of the hotel was the “Radisson”. It presumably changed the name after the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the notorious Zarqawi a few years ago discouraged the influx of tourists.

⁵³ *Mansaf* deserves a better investigation. The dish is a Jordanian specialty made of lamb or, alternatively, chicken, and served with a layer of flatbread (*markūk*) and rice. It is, then, topped with almonds and pine nuts, parsley and a sauce made with dried fermented yogurt called *jamīd* (lit. “hardened”). The preparation of the *mansaf* for the wedding meal requires a great sacrifice in economic terms for the host. People in Al-Wihdat often run into debt to cover the costs of a marriage, and the *mansaf* was perhaps the most expensive item. As the price for a single lamb was around 200-250 dinars (around 15/20 of young sheep are necessary), the main course alone could be not less than 3000 dinars, and most likely ran up to 5000 dinars. The rental of the venue (*saleh*) and other arrangements would increase the cost of additional 1000/1500 dinars. At the time of my research, *mansaf* was universally recognised as the national dish, often associated with Bedouin hospitality and tradition. Although Palestinian refugees had their national favourites such as *musakhan* – roast chicken served with local pizza bread and topped with onions and pine nuts – *mansaf* was highly appreciated and even preferred as a main dish at important celebrations and special occasions such as weddings. In his study of the production of national identity and national culture within Jordan, Joseph Massad is very poignant in this respect: “The fact [...] that since 1970, *mansaf*, Jordan's invented national dish, is cooked equally by urban Palestinians (who, unlike southern rural and Bedouin Palestinians, did not know it before), as it is by Transjordanians, and is served on certain occasions (weddings and funerals) as it is in the Transjordanian community [...], all attest to the conclusion that these aspects of state-sponsored Jordanian national identity are not repudiated, but rather adopted and internalised as they are not taken as substitutes for or competitive with Palestinian national identity, but rather as complementary” (2001, p. 263).

evening of the Landmark did not remind me of my time spent in the sultry (or alternatively very cold) and smoky Bedouin tents jammed in the narrow alleys of Wihdat, where wedding parties are normally held. The Camp and the hotel were two different settings which marked as many visual and social differences. In Wihdat, the tents looked like natural outgrowths of the street that reinforced the visual link between the people and the urban environment. The pleasant conversations taking place during the wedding party at the Landmark instead was flowing on the elegant terrace of the hotel. The place was a reminder of people's social status and their insertion into the mainstream Jordanian society.

Nevertheless, this was still a Palestinian wedding; the guests were called to witness the bond of the host family with Palestine. From a legal and cultural point of view, many things were binding the rich Jordanian-Palestinian upper-class with the refugees in the camps. Mainly, they shared the same origins – for they were all also “refugees”. The host, for instance, like most of the refugees in Wihdat, was the grandson of people “whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict”⁵⁴. They all had left “something” in Palestine: houses, lands, jobs, or relatives and memories. At the wedding parties in the Camp, it was quite common to have cousins, uncles, brothers and sisters coming from the West Bank. Likewise, this wedding party was called to strengthen further the relationship between two households – one in Ramallah, and the other in Amman – already linked by kinship.

The bond of the upper-class with Palestine was not cut off by their economic integration into Jordan (or potential links with the ruling class), and was reproduced in the performance of the celebration and in the stagecraft of the *karam* (hospitality)⁵⁵. During the wedding, *zaffa* players escorted the married couple to the centre of the stage with their chants and dancing. They loudly announced the imminent arrival of the wedding party with a musical procession in which the village of origin (in Palestine) of both the

⁵⁴<http://www.unrwa.org/>.

⁵⁵ On the marriage arrangements and wedding celebrations as a site of political activism among Palestinians, see Penny Johnson, Lamis Abu Nahleh, and Annelies Moors (2009).

bride and the groom are mentioned⁵⁶. The players were also chanting about Palestinian dignity (*karāme*) and steadfastness (*sumūd*), and encouraging the resistance in Gaza and the West Bank. In the same way as they do in the Camp, the old women at the party accompanied the song with their traditional shrieks. Nevertheless, an economic, social, and political chasm set the rich Jordanian-Palestinian upper-class apart from camp-dwellers. Whereas in Al-Wihdat, the common pattern of gender segregation was reinforced during these events, on the terrace of the Landmark Hotel women and men were mixed. Unlike the Camp, moreover, here tracksuits and football t-shirts were replaced by expensive suits. Very few women were wearing Islamic clothing such as the *hijab* or the *niqāb*⁵⁷ – and those who did it were also sporting elegant and flowing outer garments, which for many of my friends in Wihdat, would clash with their understanding of “proper” female modesty (*al-ih̄tishām*). Their voices were soft, more accustomed to the educated intonations of the capital (*madanī*), than the self-defined heavier accents of the *mukhayyamji* (camp-dweller), perceived as being closer to “peasant” ways of speaking (*fellāhī*)⁵⁸.

Furthermore, the life trajectories of these people diverged very much from those of the camp-dwellers. Most of the guests were bilingual, switching naturally from Arabic to English, and vice versa, during informal chats. Their fluency in English was the result of their undergraduate and postgraduate studies carried out in the most prestigious universities in America and the United Kingdom. These studies would boost their careers in expanding and richer job markets across the world as high-flying white-collar workers, managers, directors, architects, or lawyers. Not surprisingly, many of the guests were at ease much more with the cosmopolitan class of expatriates (some of them present at the wedding) that crowds the fancy and expensive pubs, restaurants, and clubs of the fancy areas of Amman such as Jabal Amman and Abdoun than with their fellows in the refugee camps – a setting most of the Palestinians gathered at the wedding had never seen.

⁵⁶ *Zaffa* – which in the Camp is played in the street long before the beginning of the wedding – is a musical procession that loudly announces that the wedding party is about to begin.

⁵⁷ Unlike the *hijab*, the *niqab* not only covers a woman’s head, neck, and ears, but also their face.

⁵⁸ See (Spencer 1997).

The brief digression above about two diverse wedding settings is poignant because it allows me to remark one more time on the importance of living an ordinary life for camp-dwellers and Palestinian refugees in Jordan. But this ethnographic vignette is also intended to bring to light how distinctions in wealth and status have played a role in the making of camp-dwellers' political subjectivity. Whereas Palestinian refugees (*lāji'ūn*) in Jordan claimed unanimously to belong to the same group, socio economic differences between those living in camps (*min al-mukhayyamāt*) and the rich Jordanian-Palestinians from "outside" (*min barra*) often set them apart, affecting their self-perception of being irremediably different. It was a common opinion that Palestinian refugee camps were places for "the poor" (*faqīr*). Outsiders – mostly Jordanians and Palestinian-Jordanians living outside the camps – never pointed at borders or fences, inexistent barriers in Palestinian refugee camps of Jordan, to comment on the particularistic reputation of Al-Wihdat and other refugee camps. Camp-dwellers were, rather, represented as a close group of miserable and low status people (*masākīn*), often related to each other by common origins and a strict endogamy, aspects of their social identities that also marked them out as being from "rural" backgrounds. This was explained to me as being a feature of the camp population; but it was not the only one. It was also said that an ethno-national form of identity was strengthened by the socio-economic marginalisation faced within the camps. In other words, it was a widespread belief that *lāji'ūn min al-mukhayyamāt* were somehow more genuinely Palestinian, either because they preserved the original "humbleness" of their ancestors, or because the enduring low standards of living had jeopardised their full integration in Jordan⁵⁹.

There was certainly some truth in the popular belief that refugee camps were closed and homogeneous spaces defined by specific forms of socio-economic and political differences. Yet, while a shared sense of poverty is an important aspect of the ways in which camp-dwellers inhabit their collective identities, this should not conceal the important forms of differentiation that define camp life. Economic disparities did not

⁵⁹ This assumption reflected in part a scholarly debate that dates back to the 1960s over the potential of the "poor" of being a destabilizing force to the existing social order (Huntington 1996, Nelson 1970). Such preoccupation informed a theoretical approach to the politics of the poor that frames agency solely in the binary terms of revolutionary/passivity (see Bayat 2010, for a critic). The distinct perspectives ensuing from this debate are all located within the poles of this dichotomy by sharing an essentialist reading of subaltern groups' political agency as inexistent (Lewis 1959), as manifested in collective action and urban movements (e.g. Castells 1983, Friedmann 1992), or as consciously aimed at resisting the ubiquity of power (e.g. Scott 1985).

only contribute to determine the relationships between the rich Jordanian-Palestinian upper-class and Palestinian refugees from the Camp, they also defined the interactions among camp dwellers. Al-Wihdat was not only the homogenous and exclusivist space depicted by outsiders. A perspective from within the Camp also reveals the existence of a socio-economic fragmentation and of areas and sub-neighbourhoods (*hara*) that differed from one another in terms of the wealth and power, collectively and individually, of their inhabitants, as well as of their place of origin in Palestine. This fragmentation was in large part the result of the diverse ways through which refugees cope with the obligations of kinship and the need of securing a living in the settings of the Camp. In addition, diverse working trajectories and interactions with other people and political economies have contributed to this “heterogeneity” by influencing the ways in which camp-dwellers forged shifting and contradictory modes of identification and political allegiances.

The chapter will explore this heterogeneity and the ways camp-dwellers reflect upon it. More specifically, it sheds light on the ambiguous and contested ways in which moral and political selfhood connect to the quandaries of everyday life. By unveiling the implication of the Camp’s political economy for the tenor of refugees’ self-understanding as Palestinians, I document how camp-dwellers negotiate the need of living ordinary lives and pursue a livelihood with the simultaneous emphasis on not giving up a national identity predicated upon a discourse of loss and poverty.

The ethnography here presented will hence be structured around the investigation of the following themes: the corrosive power of wealth and the moral superiority of imagined frugal and rural roots in the context of camp-dwellers search for socio-economic integration; the fracturing and disgregating consequences of camp dwellers’ mobility; and the ambivalent effects of new waves of immigrants on Palestinian refugees’ collective identity.

LIVING IN THE CAMP

Working

Wedding parties were just one among the endless number of *munāṣabāt* (celebrations) – such as births, graduations, funerals, and engagement parties, dispute resolutions and truces, or religious holidays – whose fulfilment allowed the transition to social adulthood of any Jordanian, regardless his or her class and ethnic background. These celebrations were an important part of daily life and required considerable material resources to cover their costs. If coping with their expenses was not an easy task for anyone in the stagnant Jordanian economy, for camp-dwellers it was even more arduous: discrimination and negative attitudes greatly tarnished their livelihood strategies. For this “ordinariness” to be assured in a context marked by declining economic standards, people in the Camp needed to work hard.

Since their exile, Palestinian refugees have pursued diverse income strategies to secure varying forms of employment within and beyond Wihdat and other camps. Historically, Palestinian refugee camps have constituted a pool of labour in Jordan and, via Jordan, to other destinations, most notably the Gulf countries. Studies in Jordan have documented the significance of camp-dwellers’ on regional economies in the Middle East (e.g. Khawaja 2003, Plascov 1981). The first generation of Palestinians arriving in the refugee camps that were set-up by the international community in Gaza, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, were seasonal workers and unskilled labourers from rural areas with little if any formal education. Such folks largely constituted the bulk of people who came to Wihdat after being forcibly expelled from their villages. In Jordan they found work as masons and workers, or, alternatively, in the ranks of the UNRWA.

In the late fifties and early sixties, however, the UNRWA developed a programme for technical training that aimed to integrate these refugees into the expanding economies of the Gulf. First generation refugees quickly realised that better working opportunities for their children depended on them having certificates and educational experience – qualifications that could have been obtained in the UNRWA schools. Consequently, in the following years, diplomas and other degrees were increasingly exhibited in camp-

dwellers' houses as newer generations completed technical training and acquired university degrees (Farah 1999). In the mid-seventies, job opportunities in the expanding markets of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates provided young educated Palestinians with a range of technical and professional occupations (mostly teachers and vocational workers). This focus on educational programs greatly benefited the socio-economic existences of refugees, which saw in the educational programs set by the UNRWA a resource that in part served to compensate for the loss of their land and status (see, among others, Schiff 1995). Most importantly, although the UNRWA's employment schemes were intended to ease the refugees' reliance on its services and favour their integration into the host-countries, they eventually came to serve Palestinian national interests, as remissions to refugee families from relatives working in the Gulf States became a mainstay of the refugee economy (Al-Hamarnah 2002, Al-Husseini 2011). Such opportunities, however, decreased steadily over the years and eventually came to an abrupt termination during the first Gulf War in 1982. In the aftermath of the war, more than 350,000 Palestinian "returnees" were expelled from Kuwait and other countries (see chapter 2).

At the time of the research on which this thesis is based, much of the employment in Al-Wihdat available to camp-dwellers gravitated around the local market. Street vendors, shop-keepers, and *arabanji* (porters) constituted the bulk of these jobs. But the availability of good job opportunities in the *souk* was limited to the owners of the stands/shops and their extended families. Furthermore, not everybody was interested in working within the Camp. Many jobs were quite profitable but demeaning. Working as *arabanji* in the *souk*, for example, could grant an earning of up to 10-15 JD per day (about £9-14), but was held by camp-dwellers as being degrading, and hence was often left to new immigrants.

In addition, the UNRWA was not only a provider of services to refugees, but also a source of employment. Although much less desirable than in the past due to its on-going severe economic situation, many refugees found steady and dependable positions in the ranks of the UNRWA. Especially after the Gulf War, this was a meagre alternative to the drastic reduction of opportunities in the oil-producing countries. The majority of them worked as nurses, cleaning and maintenance staff, teachers, social, and low and

middle cadre administrative staff; very few refugees from Wihdat managed to rise in rank to middle management positions and none of them, including any local staff in or outside the camps, made it to a top position (see Schiff 1995)⁶⁰.

Alternatively, people with business initiative and small capital could invest their money in a games room, pool room, or barber-shop. By far the cheapest option was the games room: I was told that to establish such a business, it would cost around 2000 Jordanian Dinars (about £1,820) – a small amount by local standards for setting up a new business activity: a few Play-Stations, as many screens, and one game – Fifa – were enough to improvise one of these playrooms in a space carved out from the ground floor of a house. Two friends of mine, for example, wanted to open one on the western periphery of the Camp. They were bustling around to scrape together the capital for their venture, around 800 JD (about £730) to start with. The money should cover the initial expenses such as the equipment and the rent.

Furthermore, many households relied on the remittances sent periodically by family members who were pursuing their careers abroad (Khawaja and Tiltnes 2002). Although labour migration among adults remains quite low – accounting for only 6% of adults who ever worked abroad – research indicates that nearly 60% of camp residents have relatives abroad (Khawaja and Tiltnes 2002).

Most of camp dwellers in Jordan have found a job in the service and light industry (Khawaja and Tiltnes 2002). People worked as nurses, cleaners, and clerks; others were employed educational institutions, especially as teachers and social workers. A number of women found a job in hairdressing salons and “beauty parlours”⁶¹. Many men worked in and outside the camps as technicians, electricians, waiters, clerks and mechanics. A very common form of employment amongst *shabāb* from the Camp was to engage in occasional painting and decorating jobs. By any standards, however, the

⁶⁰ Although Palestinian refugees constitute approximately 99% of UNRWA staff, less than three percent of the employed persons in camps work in the Agency (Khawaja and Tiltness 2002).

⁶¹ For a socio-historical analysis of the evolution of the role of Palestinian refugee women living in camps in Jordan, see Latte-Abdallah (2009). For a study of the socio-political aspects of gender and migration in and outside refugee camps in Jordan, see De Bel-Air (2011).

most important source of income came from the private sector, accounting to up to two thirds of the employed people – about 70% of men and 55% of women (ibid.).

At the time of my research, many *shabāb* and young men in Al-Wihdat were not in steady employment⁶²; they alternated between seasonal jobs and periods of economic inactivity. A large number of people left the Camp early in the morning to work as skilled and unskilled workers in the industrial areas of Amman. Many found employment in the “*madine malik abdallah*” – and industrial area located a few kilometres away from Wihdat. Many amongst my friends worked in large companies and factories there. Wages were usually very low and the possibilities for young men without a university education to secure salaries above 250 JD were scarce. Further, working conditions were often exhausting and many jobs had triple shifts, which meant sometimes working over night. As a result many young men looked at migrating as the only viable alternative to boost up their salaries and careers.

Political subjectivity and the ambivalence of poverty

In practice, the social background of the first generations of refugees who settled in the camps, the lack of job opportunities, and the spread of poverty within the camps have all contributed to strengthen the belief amongst camp residents, as well as within Jordanian society more broadly, that refugee camps are places for the ‘poor’ (see also Farah 1999, Pérez 2011)⁶³. What is interesting is the ways in which Palestinian

⁶² Economic precariousness has had important consequences on camp-dwellers’ cross-gender relationships. On the one hand, the first decade of the twenty-first century has assisted to a “feminization of camp families” (Latte-Abdallah 2009): male emigration, high divorce rates, and the rise of female celibacy have *de facto* left many women in charge of the daily running of the household. In refugee camps like Jabal Hussein and Gaza camp, more than half of camp households’ heads are women. Economic insecurity has had an erosive effect on men’s domestic authority. On the other, women’s greater independence does not reflect a clear moment of self-empowerment. As Latte-Abdallah writes, women’s work is now “associated with need in response to family hardship (rather than personal fulfillment) and is therefore less valued (Latte-Abdallah 2009, p. 58). For comparative studies, see Jean-Klein (2002).

⁶³ This is confirmed by recent studies carried out by using national level data from the 1996 census (Arneberg 1997, Hanssen-Bauer 1998, Khawaja 2003, Khawaja and Tiltne 2002). According to these studies, the annual income of a large number of people living in camps is less than 900 JD (around £820) – a very small amount by local standards. A similar socioeconomic differentiation has been noted not only in Palestinian refugee camps set in other host countries (i.e. Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria) but even amongst those established in West Bank and Gaza Strip (Lapeyre and Bensaid 2006)

themselves reflect on the connections between their economic circumstances and the ways these fed into their nationalistic ideals.

To people in Al-Wihdat, much divided the unfortunate ones (*masākīn*), from the wealthy families (*aghanīyā'*) living in West Amman. However, whereas the camps' material poverty was usually associated by the authorities and some authors with social and cultural estrangement and political disloyalty (Al-Khazendar 1997), the negative connotation of poverty encompassed in the word "*masākīn*" acquired a positive dimension within the camps⁶⁴: it indicated ethico-moral qualities such as steadfastness (*sumūd*) and humbleness (*twād'e*). These attributes were employed by many refugees to illustrate their moral and nationalist superiority over non-camp dwellers⁶⁵. Interestingly, the link between status and emotional disposition was also expanded on by my informants to include a further dimension of what it means to be a *mukhayyamji* (camp-dweller). The qualities associated with a humble style of life (being *mitwād'e*), that recalled the modest way of life of the "fathers", was often held up as being an indication of an altogether more pious moral disposition. Thus, a genuine disposition for piety was often said to be best embodied by camp-dwellers. On several occasions, my friends explained the difference between refugees inside camps and rich Palestinians who lived in the affluent areas of Amman in terms of a boundary they drew between refugees from the '48 and those from '67. "Refugees from '48 are different, they are all well-off people who live in places like Jabal Hussein and Shmeissani, or Abdoun", I was once told by Hussein, a friend from Al-Wihdat in his early twenties:

"They don't care about Palestine, they don't live in the camps anymore, they have money. They are like the *'urdunīn* [Transjordanians]; there is no difference even between them and the *yahūdi* [Jew]! Have you seen how their women go out in Jabal Amman?! None of them is veiled!!! [...] Here in Wihdat, most of the people are refugees from '67. We are different, more respectful of Islam and we still care about Palestine!"

⁶⁴ On how loss and poverty is exhibited in the Palestinian nationalistic narratives as a specific form of strength, see among others Lindholm-Schulz (2003).

⁶⁵ This dimension of their identity is the focus of a large body of scholarship that demonstrates how the memory of hardship endured by refugees is a central component of the political identity of Palestinians living in Jordan (Farah 1999), other host countries (e.g. Khalili 2007), and the occupied territories (Allen 2005, Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007). For a discussion over narratives of *sumūd*, see Khalili (2007), Lindholm-Schulz (1999), and Shehadeh (1982)

Hussein's comment is striking in many ways. At one level, it draws a link between piety, steadfastness, and poverty⁶⁶. Of more general importance, however, is that he wanted to point out a correspondence between political economy, moral dispositions, and nationalist identity in order to set an empirical difference between the two "communities" of refugees: the refugees from '48 and those from the '67. The former were those more likely to have found, over the course of almost four generations of life in Jordan, a decent job, been able to move out of the camps, and ultimately adopted what he terms as being an "immoral" life style. To him, those refugees were no longer representative of the Palestinian cause and culture because they lived in comfort and luxury (*rafāhīye*), which made them forget the truthfulness and sobriety of old times, their origins, the hardship of a refugee life, and the teachings of their fathers. Piety and morality was, instead, deemed to be best embodied by poor *fellahīn* (peasants) and their offspring in the camps rather than by rich Palestinians who lived a "corrupted" and immoral life along with Jews in cities like Jerusalem and Jaffa⁶⁷. In Wihdat, camp-dwellers often told me that the immorality of the present-day and the concurrent plight of Palestinians were the result of people no longer remembering their origins (*'āsl*), and also having lost the frugality of the old times. On another occasion, in the context of a visit I made to Souf camp, a young man openly blamed people in Wihdat for having sold out the Palestinian cause: "they are not refugees anymore... at all!! Wihdat is not a refugee camp, it is a commercial centre now, and they even have the biggest *souk* in Jordan! Here it is much worse [...]. We still suffer and we know what it means being refugees".

It remains, however, a crucial ambiguity with regard to poverty in the thinking of many of my informants. So, on the one hand, poverty was certainly perceived as being tightly intertwined with nationalistic values⁶⁸. Yet, at the same time, it was also recognised as being a condition fraught with deeply ambivalent images and feelings. Rather than universally treating poverty as a source of authenticity, many camp-dwellers claimed

⁶⁶ This remark is quite singular also because it seems to overlook the fact that Al-Wihdat Camp was actually set-up in order to accommodate the first exodus of refugees in Jordan in 1948.

⁶⁷ See Ted Swedenburg (2007) for an important study on how the figure of the "fellah" (paesant) has been re-appropriated by the Palestinian national movement for concealing significant differences within Palestinian society and the fashioning of Palestinian national identity.

⁶⁸ For this purpose, see Jean-Klein's analysis of the process of self-nationalisation through self-deprivation (2001).

that the condition of being *masākīn* (poor/miserable) could lead people to a crooked path (*inhirāf*), especially for young men (for a similar argument, see also Pérez 2011, p. 133).

If poverty fostered an immoral disposition rather than humbleness and steadfastness, this depended on a number of factors ranging from individual attitudes to the family and the *hara* (neighbourhood) where one was raised. However, youth were believed to be more negatively affected by poverty because living in a time where the rustic life of their grandfathers – the *jīl al-nakba* (the Nakba generation) – was only a fading memory and the heroic resistance of their fathers (*jīl al-thawra* – the generation of the revolution) was no longer needed. Indeed, the poverty of the older generations was interpreted more in the terms of simplicity, and not as a lack of means. They were believed to have lived a humble and yet rich life with the products that the fertile land of Palestine, I was told, dispensed so lavishly. Similarly, the *jīl al-thawra* was said to be inspired by the heroic ideals of revolution that guided it through life's adversities and economic hardships. But with the backdrop of the declining economic standards in Jordan, active militancy and overt forms of resistance were no longer discussed strategies to pursue nationalist goals; in fact, they generated suspicion, and often disapproval. According to my friends, people no longer had time to waste as they had to cope with other more urgent matters such as working to maintain their families⁶⁹. As a friend put it, “now there are no more *fidā'īyyīn* in Al-Wihdat because they need to find a job to live... now, life is more expensive”. Deprived of guidance and ideals, young men of the Camp were said to gradually sink into the despair and apathy generated by the lack of economic means.

My friends were frequently complaining of the hardship that they had to endure because of the living conditions (*dhurūf al-ma'īsha*) in Al-Wihdat. Refugees who left the Camp were those who made money, I was told; those who stayed were poor (*masākīn*). The unbearable cold in winter and suffocating heat in summer amplified by the corrugated sheets originally used as roofs for the shelters (*numar al-zinco*), the mud that swamped the narrow alleys of the camps in the winter, and the line of people who queued in order

⁶⁹ On changes in understandings of masculinity as people become part of different political economies, also see Kelly (2009), Gilsenan (1996) and Jeffrey (2010).

to have access to rationed goods all played a critical part in plunging many camp-dwellers into a state of frustration and anger. The social unease and immoral behaviour of present time *shabāb* was often explained by poverty and unemployment. As a low rank UNRWA employee once pointed out to me during the course of an informal chat in the UNRWA field offices in Wihdat, “most *shabāb* want to work but they can’t find a job. What can they do? They leave. They go for violence or do wrong things. Amongst youth there are lots of problems like drugs and alcohol. Many youths are fed up of their situation in the camps, so they cause trouble”. So, although the poor and humble life of refugees was romantically seen as being closer to the lifestyle of the ancestors, poverty and unemployment were also recognised as the main causes of many of the frustrations, anxieties, and conflicts that afflicted camp-dwellers; a true Palestinian and a “proper” man was, instead, perceived to be the one that provides for his family rather than searching for political legitimacy in the marginality of his condition.

Wāsta

Perhaps one of the most evident ways refugees struggled to root a nationalist identity into economic integration and the obligations of adulthood (such as providing for their own families and giving children a proper education) – rather than in the reproduction of their own marginality – was their attempt to set up successful working connections (*wāsta*).

When I carried out my research in the Camp, the working careers of many of the refugees I knew lacked stability and their economic situations were far from being vibrant. Individual skills and hard work, indeed, were rarely enough to secure the type of jobs they aspired to. For refugees, things were even worse. The negative stereotypes that accompanied camps and refugees hindered even further the hiring of those from the camps. Many of my friends admitted to having often lied to their employees about their place of residence, claiming to live in the adjoining neighbourhoods of Ashrafiyya or Gwesme. This discrimination was particularly visible in the public sector, where the hiring of “East Bankers”⁷⁰ was usually privileged over that of “Palestinians”. A friend,

⁷⁰ “East Banker”, along with Transjordanian, is the word used to indicate residents of Jordan before the arrival of the first wave of Palestinians in the 1948.

for example, was lamenting the discrimination toward those of Palestinian origins in Jordan:

“After my graduation at the university, I had to wait four years before finding a place as teacher! Do you know how long it takes for Jordanians [*urdunīn*] to find a place? Nothing, it’s straightforward! For us it is like there is a wall [*hit*], beyond which you can’t go. For example, if you work in the police [*shurta*], you can’t have more than three stars [senior commander]. I had to wait four years before getting a place as teacher with a salary barely enough to pay my expenses [250 dinars]. [...]But if we were in Palestine, it would have been different; there we would have had land, a good position, work, *wāsta* [relationships of patronage]!”

Cut off by more lucrative jobs in the Gulf, most refugees could no longer rely on the UN educational system to find a steady job: instead they had to secure network of alliances beyond the Camp. The key to success and the different level of achievements among camp-dwellers depended much on the use of family connections and relationships of patronage (*wāsta*) that were vital to refugees in their search of jobs, credit, and housing. Practices of *wāsta* underline the importance and primacy of personal relationships and their role to meet the needs of everyday life in conditions of shortages and state discrimination⁷¹. Through informal networks, individuals and groups creates more opportunities to find a job, to obtain a visa for migration, to get better working hours, and even to find a groom or a bride. Intermediaries often play a fundamental role in this process. A common figure is the *wassit* (intermediary)⁷². This is a person who, by virtue of his connections and reputation, provides services and connectivity to prospective employees. Friendship and kinship work well in this process. A person might ask his boss to have a better working shift not by virtue of his length of service but because of his long-time friendship with his employee; another might obtain a visa for moving to the Gulf because of a relative who works in the consulate. School teachers, bus drivers, clerks, grocers, workers, and taxi drivers would

⁷¹In this sense, the working of *wasta* might be compared with the practices of *guaxi* and *blat* in China and Russia: systems of informal networks and personal contacts (Ledeneva 1998, Wank 1996, Yang 1994).

⁷²Unlike Hansen’s *dada* (gangsters) in India (2002), however, these people were not suffused with a mythical aura. They are not hustlers or community leaders who derive their power from their superior knowledge of the urban environment and capacity to set and use alliances. *Wassit* does not necessarily influence big constituencies. Since anybody can be *wassit* once in his/her life, this figure is more the manifestation of the daily importance of informal networks in furthering common or individual interests (Singerman 1995).

generally find a job through their social connections – often originating through social and physical proximities or affinities of kinship and village.

So if *wāsta* was judged by many camp-dwellers as a form of corruption (*fasād*) that deeply undermined their career perspectives, they necessarily had to deal with it in their search for a livelihood. In this sense, working in the Camp speeded up the process, as refugees could activate their network of alliances to secure a job. However, job opportunities in Al-Wihdat were still limited (even if they were better than in most other refugee camps). The most viable alternative available was to build connections that might have roots in the Camp, but also extended beyond its borders. But outside the camps, refugees were not masters of *wāsta*; they were rather on its blunt end.

Getting acquainted with the proper intermediary was not an easy task, especially for camp-dwellers, whose marginalisation and discrimination left them very few opportunities to set up the right connections. Their situation was the result of the Vitamin *W*, as my friends sarcastically referred to *wāsta* (see also Hart 2008), a substance refugees in Jordan severely lacked. In this context, setting up the right connections was also a mark of skill and social competence. Establishing social connections (*rawābit*) in the university, for example, was a necessary survival strategy for many young men; these friendships would have, indeed, become useful in the future in terms of securing a job. To my friends, their Transjordanian fellows at university were not inimical others but friends and companions who shared fun, experiences of work, and so on with them. Especially in their relationship with Transjordanians, *shabāb* from the Camp would not stress traits of their identity based on exclusive forms of identification such as “being from the camp” (*mukhayyamji*): they would emphasise, rather, common denominators of belonging based, for example, on Arabness (*urub*) or being from the Levant (*bilad al-sham*). These attempts to set up the “right connections” did not downplay their identity as Palestinian but did play out other forms of identification not necessarily in contrast with their national identity.

In other words, refugees sought to further their economic capacity, and they did that by striving to set up *wāsta* relationships. If refugees’ aspirations to find good jobs, get married, live economically independently, and support their families furthered their

integration, it has not led them to relinquish their allegiance to Palestinian nationalism (cf. Hart 2008). As Kelly put it, “the contrast between self-preserving passivity and nationalist activism is probably overdrawn. Personal aspirations, kinship obligations and national goals are interwoven [...]. In this process *sumūd* (steadfastness) combines both personal and national hopes” (2009, p. 362).

LEAVING THE CAMP

The choice to leave

However, where camp-dwellers’ socio-economic integration served their nationalist ideals, it also introduced disruption to their sense of collectivity and a national identity predicated upon socio-economic marginality (see Sayigh 1998). In this context, it is necessary to move beyond the beneficial consequences of socio-economic integration. By exploring refugees’ mobility and working strategies, I now shed light on the ambivalent feelings and relations refugees entertained with the affective and political space of the camp. In so doing, I will also document how mobility in and outside Al-Wihdat not only reflected refugees’ ambiguous relationship with this space, but it also generated deep fractures within refugees’ self-representation as an “homogeneous community”.

Migration tempted many young ambitious refugees with the prospective of a better working career. People in Wihdat not only left their homes there to go to unfamiliar parts of Amman Metropolitan Area (AMA), but travelled and lived abroad. Economic goals certainly did play a role in explaining the high mobility of refugees. For many households in Wihdat, this was more of a necessity; domestic survival hinged largely on the remittances periodically sent by family members who migrated. Despite the fact that job opportunities in the Gulf had diminished substantially in relation to previous years, migrating to Kuwait and the Emirates was nevertheless one of the few viable means left for camp-dwellers to substantially improve their economic standing and an important source of income for those of their relatives who remained in the Camp. Many of those who left worked in Saudi Arabia or in the Arab Gulf. Others found employment across a range of technical and professional sectors in the United States, Europe, Australia,

Canada, or in the growing economies of some Asian countries such as South Korea and Thailand. Some of them settled down permanently in these countries. Most people, however, worked abroad for a limited period of time, signing up for fixed-time contracts, sending money back to their families, and eventually returning home.

Refugees' choice to leave the Camp cannot be understood without an appropriate recognition of the complex demands of earning a living in a precarious economic context. Most of my companions enjoyed a great deal of mobility, not only for their careers but also for their studies. In Al-Wihdat, stories about people crossing borders were relayed quite frequently during daily conversation: one informant's brother spent a year in the States after winning a scholarship, the cousin of another took a degree in medicine in Ukraine. Mohammed – a young man in his early thirties – travelled to Yemen to study accountancy. People accurately gauged the consequences of their choices, not only before, but also during their stay abroad. Mohammed, for example, once told me: “you know I went to Yemen to study accountancy [...]. There, the cost of university and life are lower than here in Jordan [...] I really enjoyed the time I spent there, I would even settle down in Sana [...] but I came back because I was not learning anything. The quality of studying was very bad”. The destinations were chosen according to different criteria – better job opportunities, prestigious schools and universities, or a cheaper cost of the life, but also for the possibilities opened up to the prospective migrants depending on the documents required, the level of control, and social networks. These factors influenced the production and regulation of people's mobility, providing refugees with new opportunities and different strategies for re-enacting scenes of arrival, departure, and return. Refugees' mobility was not continuous, but fragmented. Again, after spending two years in Yemen, Mohammed came back to Wihdat. He got married to his maternal cousin. A few months after the marriage, his wife went back to Qatar, where she completed her two year course to become a registered nurse. Through his wife, a year after, Mohammed managed to obtain a working visa for Qatar, where he stayed for few months. When the government did not renew the visa, the couple returned back to Wihdat Camp.

However, the desire to move could not simply be reduced to mere self-interest or a cost-benefit analysis. Migrating has to be understood as the outcome of a complex process of

decision-making, in which the choice of leaving amongst camp-dwellers was in large part the reflection of migrant's ambivalence about home (see, among others, Osella and Osella 2008).

As I demonstrated in chapter 2, Al-Wihdat – to many camp-dwellers, Al-Wihdat was both the iconic space of a lost homeland and a place that evoked strong feelings of homeliness. In this context, migrating raised considerable concerns centred on the notions of family and parenting – leaving was rarely, if ever, an easy decision to be taken in “solitude” (Osella and Osella 2008). Squeezed between the need to make money and the uneasiness of bringing up his daughter abroad for an indefinite period of time, Abdullah – a young man in his late twenties – was overwhelmed by a dilemma: “if I stay at home, my wife will leave me, but if I go abroad [with the whole family] for years, who knows how my daughter will grow up in a different place?” A few days before leaving the field, I received a call from him in which he told me how his wife left him and moved in her parent's house. The reason was her unwillingness to live with a man who could not ensure a decent standard of living. It seems that after a couple of months his wife finally decided to come back, though Abdullah never left. The case of Abdullah is all the more poignant because points at forms of intense emotional distress generated not by the incapacity of moving but, on the contrary, by being able to move; a form of agency that Abdullah perceived as imposed upon him. Unlike other refugees, he had both the means and the contacts to work in Europe. His reluctance to leave was justified by the conviction that children should be brought up in a suitable environment, a conviction that the Osellas describe as akin to a folk notion of “habitus”(2009, p. 147). As Abdullah put it: “you know, in Europe is normal that girls go out and have sex with men before marriage... I'm not against that! But I don't want my daughter doing this [...]. If I travel with my daughter, she will end up behaving like the other girls [*banāt*] in Europe!”

However, while camp-dwellers were not simply free-roaming individuals seeking to escape as soon as possible in order to pursue a better economic condition, nor were these people supremely moral and political beings animated exclusively by the irreducible need to live in the Camp. A case in point was the story of Abu Omar. Unlike Abdullah, Abu Omar left the Camp, and he did it for the same reasons that convinced

the former to remain. The man, frequently declared his love for the Camp, where he lived since the age of three. Here he began and completed his studies in the UNRWA schools, worked as a photo-journalist for the local football team and carried out voluntary work in an association for orphans and young men. The Camp was also home to many of his closest friends, and the place where he spent a large part of his free time and eventually got married in. However, after his wedding, he moved out of the Camp to settle permanently in a large villa in the adjoining neighbourhood of Gwesme. It was not an expensive neighbourhood and was populated largely by a mixed population of Palestinians and Jordanians: however, by local standards it was widely said to be a better place than Wihdat. Much to my surprise, when I asked Abu Omar why he decided to leave the Camp and his people, he replied that Wihdat was not a good place to raise his children. This was even more striking to me because, at that time, Omar continued to spend most of his time in the Camp working as photographer, volunteering in the Nadi al-Wihdat, or simply hanging around. While I was at first taken aback by his response, I later came to realise how Camp dwellers held ambiguous ideas of Wihdat as a place to live: both moral and frugal, it was also unsuitable for settling down and raising children for violence and poor infrastructure may have hindered their health and education⁷³. In Abu Omar's story we can see once again how the types of choices that people make about moving and working in heterogeneous social environments were highly nuanced and contradictory, exposing the fractures and deep ambiguities in the relationships refugees had with the affective space of the Camp.

Being Palestinian and the consequences of leaving

The experience of im/mobility documented in these stories well captures refugees' ambivalence about the Camp. Equally important, it is how this experience defines the relationships among camp dwellers.

Feelings of alienation and distance have inevitably taunted the life of those who left and defined the relationship leavers had with their fellows in the camps. Migrants had to deal with some forms of resentment from their family and community members in the

⁷³ I have already explored the infrastructural problems of the Camp such as poor ventilation and overpopulation in the previous chapter. I will further investigate refugees' ambiguous feelings to the space of the Camp in chapter 5.

Camp. Migrating did not always lead to success. If those returning had often to cope with a loss of status and earnings, migrants abroad felt the weight of their duties toward relatives and friends acutely: wives, brothers, and friends nurtured great expectations from their spouses, relatives, and companions abroad under the form of remittances, reliability, connections and favours (*wāsta*). At the same time, people who managed to leave and pursue a career abroad were sometimes accused of exploiting their relatives in the camps as keepers of their mothers, sisters, and fathers. This sometimes was the cause of friction between those who left and those who stayed. If the former complained about the selfishness of those who migrated, the latter feared their envy and back-biting, which was said to poison and weaken the reputation of people in the Camp.

Many factors contributed to fuelling tensions between those who left and those who stayed. Some of these tensions between migrants and their friends and relatives in Wihdat revolved around the alleged “amnesia” the former were accused of suffering after having left the Camp. In addition, disparities of wealth were stamped on what many perceived as being a showy display of newly acquired commodities and demeanours. On a cold afternoon in March, I visited Abdullah, a man in his late twenties who was living with his mother in Wihdat. An expensive and glittering new Mercedes SUV was parked next his parents’ house, a metre to the entrance. It turned out that it belonged to a guest, a friend who was working in the Gulf. It was not the first time I met these guests in Abdullah’s house – young men from Wihdat that managed to leave the Camp and pursue a successful career in the Gulf. He was introduced to me as an old and dear friend. Apparently, the two *shabāb* grew up in the same neighbourhood (*hara*) and attended the same school. He and Abdullah were inseparable friends until the former left for Dubai, where his uncle was making money through successful investments. When I met him in Abdullah’s house, the man, who was wearing designer clothes, was toying with his mobile (the latest BlackBerry) and smoking elegant, slim cigarettes. Although he spoke in the local slang (*‘āmmiyya*) with the others, he refused to address me in Arabic. As a testimonial of his sophistication and courtesy, he spoke in English. He was telling us about how things in the Gulf were not as good as they used to be, though salaries over there were still incomparably better than every other place in Jordan, let alone refugee camps. When, after endless cups of tea, the guest left, Abdullah told me:

“I don’t like him... he was my best friend, but I don’t like him anymore! [...] He found a job in the Gulf as an estate agent [...] after one year I receive a call, and he tells me ‘Abdullah, my friend, you must come here [at that time, Abdullah was not married and wanted to leave]! I’ll think of everything. I have already found a job for you... I will call you in a month, when everything will be ok’ I waited one month... then two months and nothing. The third month I called him and he does not answer. I keep calling him but nothing. When he finally answered he said ‘I’m sorry, but I had problem, now there is no the job...’ [...] It is always like that with them, they forget about their friends!!”

Despite the relatively high levels of mobility in the life of refugees, my informants were rigidly curtailed by visa requirements and other forms of travel documentation⁷⁴. By creating and limiting the possibilities of moving, visa requirements and policies contributed to widening further the fissures and fractures among camp-dwellers. A friend’s desperate struggle to obtain an American visa, for example, came to no good.

Rafid had big hopes: settling down in the United States. He often used to repeat that, and how he did not really care about Palestine. His was a veritable obsession: he always kept with him a map of the USA – he had also an electronic version in which the state of Texas was renamed after himself: “Rafid”. However, Rafid’s powerful desire to travel to the US was rather recent. Ironically, when he was young, he even won a green card applying to an on-line lottery. Either due to his unwillingness to leave his elderly parents alone, as he claimed, or for fear of moving alone to a new country, as his friends more maliciously suggested, Rafid refused the green card. When I met him, the approval letter was treasured as the most precious of relics; it partly signified his indecision and past fortune, and partly nourished his sense of guilt of not having moved. Despite his desperate efforts and several interviews with the visa office in the USA Embassy, Rafid never managed to obtain the yearned document. His countless and unsuccessful attempts to move to the United States were an object of mockery and derision in the Camp. To make things worse, an alleged employer in the States convinced Rafid into advancing him three thousand JD for a fake employment contract,

⁷⁴ For anthropological and historical literature on the emergence and varying significance of border regulation worldwide and more specifically in Asia, see among others Amrith (2011) and McKeown (2004).

which would have eventually led to the issue of the visa. With great effort, Rafid managed to borrow money from his wealthy brother who, to add insult to injury, gained enormous success in the United States working as engineer. Rumours said that Rafid even suspected his brother of secretly conspiring against him because he needed someone in the Camp to care for their elderly mother. However, after having been paid the sum, the man disappeared, leaving Rafid in great despair and in debt to his brother. A couple of months afterwards, a few weeks before the conclusion of my fieldwork, I received a call from Rafid in which he announced to me that he was shortlisted with his family for an interview with the consul – he then added, in a whisper: “don’t tell it to anybody, but I’ve got the visa! I don’t want people in the Camp know because they are all envious”. Yet something went wrong: six months after I came back again to the Camp for a short visit, people burst out laughing when I asked information about Rafid. Apparently, his wife and daughter were granted a visa, yet his own application was rejected due to some obscure irregularities.

In Al-Wihdat, camp-dwellers’ common experience of marginalisation and poverty worked strongly to reproduce a collective identity based on solidarity and reciprocity. However, closer scrutiny of refugees’ life trajectories reveals a sense of mutuality deeply entangled with antagonism. Far from being supportive, kin and social networks could be deceiving and envious. Rafid’s story says a great deal about these dynamics: not only he did fear the envy of those who stayed, but he even suspected his brother – who left – to be complicit in his failure. In other words, camp-dwellers’ experience of mobility endangered a shared national identity by exposing it to interpersonal resentment and bitterness.

As symbols of Palestinianness in exile, people who left the Camp felt the need to reaffirm their bond with it. To do so, sometimes refugees returned on periodical basis, stayed in touch with their friends, sent remittances to their relatives, or found a spouse from the Camp. A man in his thirties when first I met him, Oraib spent his childhood in the Palestinian refugee camps of Baq’a and Wihdat. Status and power had come to him and his brothers from setting up a successful car dealership in South Korea. Apparently, his wealth derived from his capacity to navigate specific norms regulating the trading of cars from Korea to Jordan, and across the borders between Jordan and Syria. Although

Oraib was living in Seoul along with his brothers and their families, he still returned on a regular basis to Jordan, where he still had family, and occasionally visited to Syria, where he had business interests⁷⁵. Migrants often re-asserted their bonds with the Camp by repeating cycles of return and departures and by rhetorically stating the primacy of the Camp in their lives. For his elderly father, and to demonstrate his affluence, Oraib built a villa in Amman right above the Baq'a Camp. It was in Wihdat, during the course of one of his trips back from South Korea, where I met him for the first time. He still went to the Camp to see his friends because, as he told me, he still felt himself to be one of them. Living in the physical space of the "Camp", with people coming from the same city or village, and having shared the same life and similar socio-economic conditions with them, reinforced in Oraib the distinctiveness of being Palestinian and a refugee.

However, Oraib also knew very well that much held them apart too. From his new house, he dominated the landscape beneath over the tight clusters of flat-roofed shelters that stretched out in the valley where the refugee Camp was established. The house's spacious and richly furnished rooms flaunted luxuries inaccessible to the very large majority of people living in Wihdat. This building was a powerful testimony of Oraib's recently acquired economic position. Its superior place marked the social and physical distance between him and "his people". He was quite aware of the significance and influence of living in the Camp in strengthening an imagined Palestinian national identity. One day, he summarised his life trajectory to me in the specific language that characterises many refugee narratives, where football is strictly enmeshed in ethnic and political issues: "I was born in Baq'a, I support Wihdat, and I'll die in Faisaly!"⁷⁶ In that context, it was a funny comment; an irony, however, all the more interesting because conveyed also a great deal of cynicism and self-reflection. This short sentence enclosed a complex set of assumptions where football, status, political allegiances, and sense of belonging are intertwined. By emphasising the trajectory that led him to leave the Camp, support Wihdat, and eventually die in Faisaly, Oraib suggested that moving

⁷⁵ For studies on the regulation of borders that shed light on the collaboration between state power and highly mobile traders, see Andrew Walker (1999). For comparative literature on traders in global words, see among other Mark Anthony Falzon (1986).

⁷⁶ *Fariq al-wihdat* (Wihdat Football Team) and *fariq al-faisaly* (Faisaly Football Team) are the strongest football clubs in Jordan, which every year contend the local championship. Whereas the former was established in Wihdat refugee camp and counts amongst its supporters mostly Jordanians of Palestinian origins, Faisaly is generally associated with the native Bedouins (or Transjordanians/East Bankers). I will explore the significance of football in refugees' daily lives in greater detail in chapter 6.

outside the Camp entails a process of socio-economic and cultural integration in Jordan, alienation from his own origins, and the weakening of his political identity as Palestinian. In other words, money will eventually led Oraib to become someone well-integrated in Jordan, who has forgotten his origins or, worse, who has sold out the Palestinian cause in exchange for integration: in short, someone who even supports a notoriously pro-regime football team.

OUTSIDERS INSIDE THE CAMP

Immigrants

As we have seen, refugees' livelihood strategies and economic trajectories have *de facto* led to the transformation of a humanitarian space into an effervescent space of commerce and business in Jordan. While socio-economic integration was believed to be compatible with camp-dwellers' nationalist ideals, the inevitable differences of wealth and status have at times endangered refugees' self-perception as a homogenous community.

This section focuses on how the Camp has become a destination point for people other than Palestinian refugees. I will document how camp-dwellers have integrated these people into their lives, a process that has led them to reflect on their collective identities in new ways. What is interesting about recent immigration in Al-Wihdat is that it heightened the tensions inherent in the dynamics of integration. The arrival of new immigrants – most notably Egyptian workers and Iraqi refugees – pushed even further the integration of refugees in Jordan and enhanced their affective relationship with the space of the Camp. On the other hand, it also raised anxieties and fears linked to the loss of political meaning and the weakening of local solidarities.

At the time of the Camp's establishment, refugees living in Wihdat were, for the most part, Palestinians from Kufur A'n, Safriyeh, Ramla, Dayr Tariff, Abassiyah and other villages in the district of Ramla (DPA 2009). Scholars have documented in abundance how the memory of the villages of origin has historically played a pivotal role in defining social relations and social life amongst refugees in Jordan (e.g. Farah 1999,

Hart 2002) and outside (e.g. Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007, Slyomovics 1998). This was immediately evident in the widespread opinion that camp dwellers were related to each other and arranged their marriages according to strict forms of village and family endogamy. Other studies have also documented how refugees tended to group by village of origin or by extended family when they first moved into camps. Hana Jaber (1996) notes how village endogamy was still widely practiced in Wihdat when she conducted her fieldwork, explaining this practice as the desire to reproduce a social uniformity and conserve the memory of origins. However, if Wihdat, for many of its inhabitants, stood for security, domestic order, and homeliness, it simultaneously exposed conflicting feelings of insecurity, impurity, and danger. This ambivalence was most immediately evident in refugees' relationships to the new waves of immigrants. Indeed, despite Wihdat's reputation of being a bastion of Palestinianness, the Camp was not an ethnically homogeneous space. Over the years, Wihdat experienced a noticeable diversity in terms of its ethnic composition. Unable to cope with the growing rents in west Amman and the strict requirements for legal residency permits, numerous migrants – including Egyptian labourers and Iraqi refugees – took up residence within the Camp or on its outskirts⁷⁷.

Camp-dwellers referred to these newcomers either by referring to the nationality of the immigrants or with the general term “foreigners/strangers” (*ajaneb*). Despite these generalizations, however, the category of “foreigners” was characterised by considerable complexity. The diverse ways of imagining and categorising such social diversity by refugees reflected the nature of the interactions that took place between camp-dwellers and migrants in Wihdat. During their everyday conversations, camp-dwellers referred schematically to diverse categories of “strangers”. First, there were Arab-speaking refugees and labourers from Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen who settled in Wihdat or in its surrounding areas mainly to work in the *souk* as clerks and cleaners. There were also Sri Lankans and Filipinos – generally employed as maids in well-off households of western Amman – all referred to using the word “*filippiniat*” (Filipinos). These people did not live in Wihdat but came in almost on a daily basis to buy vegetables and meat in the market that was famed for being of especially good value.

⁷⁷ Some authors estimate, for example, that over 10.000 Egyptian workers are today living inside Al-Wihdat camp (Al-Husseini 2011).

Finally, the last category is that of *ghajarīn/nawari* (Gypsies). They were long-term residents who were said to live in the Camp and its proximities almost since its establishment. Their status in Al-Wihdat was highly ambiguous; although they were not called *ajaneb* (many of them were living in the Camp since its institution), they were generally identified as outsiders.

Here I will focus on those groups who lived and settled down inside the camps, namely the *ghajarīn* and the Arab speaking immigrants and refugees. The arrival of these and other communities in the Camp influenced the way refugees lived in and identified with Wihdat, making this space both the arena of an expanding economy and sociality, and the site where an exclusive identity was reproduced⁷⁸.

Relationships between refugees and immigrants

The immigrants were placed by most refugees in a moral hierarchy, and Gypsies occupied the lowest ranks. *Ghajarīn* were widely considered undesired villains; dangerous and immoral strangers who were loosely associated with theft, drug smuggling, and prostitution⁷⁹. The origin of “Gypsies” in Jordan was quite controversial. It was said that they were originally from the East (*shark*) and came to the region long ago, before the establishment of Jordan. They currently spoke the Jordanian and Palestinian variants of Levantine Arabic and, I was told, also “their own language”. Despite people’s reluctance to admit it, however, *nawari* were also said to be originally from Palestine. It is not clear whether they came to Jordan as common migrants or as Palestinian refugees. Although they were not segregated in ghettos, many lived in a neighbourhood nearby Wihdat, others in specific parts of the Camp such as Shāra‘ Liddawi and the alleys that radiated from it. These places were widely thought of as being a poisonous environment. “Gypsies” indeed were generally accused of polluting the moral environment and thriving in those forms of entertainment that were seen by

⁷⁸ In so doing I build on those authors who, warning against the danger of treating cosmopolitanism as the celebration of diversity, have investigated the dialectic between exclusive forms of local identity and openness to “alterity” (e.g. Abu-Lughod 2007, Bayat 2010, Osella and Osella 2007, Tsing 2005).

⁷⁹ Studies have documented the importance of ideas of pollution that Gypsies hold, and the ways in which these form boundaries between themselves and non-Gypsies (see, for example, Okely 1983). Interestingly, the stereotypes associated with pollution and immorality have been also deployed against so-called service nomads in a variety of settings; see Slezkine (1986, chapter 1).

many as immoral or, at least, not pious: encouraging *shabāb* to smoke hashish and drink alcohol, engaging in illicit activities such as thieving and prostitution. *Nawari* also had a longstanding reputation for being loafers; and if males were widely deemed to be *dawawīn* (troublemakers), their women were said to be *sharāmīt* (prostitutes). Some of my friends even avoided playing football with Gypsies because of their supposedly immoral attitudes. And most refugees in the Camp did not count any of their friends amongst them. Gypsies also featured predominantly in many narratives of violence. I heard many stories of quarrels and brawls that involved Gypsies, and also occasionally witnessed to episodes in which they were said to be taking part. In this case, the negative epithets occasionally expressed by refugees toward migrants gave way to the widespread belief that *nawari* in general were “disgusting” (*beghsu*) and ignorant of the fundamental principles of the Islam (*zinkhīn*)⁸⁰.

Compared to Gypsies, Palestinian refugees perceived Arab speaking migrants from Egypt, Iraq, and other Arab countries as much better types of “human beings” (*‘insān*). Refugees interacted with and talked about these newcomers in complex and diverse ways. These people were not simply treated as unwelcome intruders but as, relatives, friends, fellow workers or simply individuals who carried a personal story. The exodus of Iraqis in the Camp and its outskirts has a recent history and reflects a broader trend in the city. Following a mass refugee migration that began in the early 1990s and boosted after the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003, a large number of Iraqis found an abode in Jordan (Chatelard 2010). Egyptians and other labour migrants from other Arab countries began to arrive in the late 70s (ibid.). Working in Jordan was not the favoured choice of most highly mobile Egyptian workers. Given the scant opportunities offered by the stagnant Jordanian economy, the possibility of finding positions appropriate for one’s degree of study was extremely difficult for Jordanian citizens and almost impossible for legal immigrants, let alone those who resided in the country illegally. Unable to secure high wages, poor Iraqi refugees and labour migrants moved in the much cheaper dwellings of *Wihdat* and east Amman. Many of them not only found residences, but also jobs in the Camp. Mahmud, a young Egyptian man in his mid-twenties, was one of them. Since he moved to the Camp, he had been working for a Palestinian family that ran a tiny but profitable business in the *souk al wihdat*. The old

⁸⁰Literally “foul”, sing. *zinekh*

head of the family carved out of his house a small grocery store in Shāraʿ Al-Nadi; he then expanded his business by opening up a stand where cheap goods, mainly imported from China, were sold at low prices. When I saw him last, he was sleeping in a computer shop, whose owner – a decent person (*muhtaram*), or so I was told – only took in rental what the man could afford to pay.

Mahmud’s story highlights camp-dwellers’ cosmopolitanism and everyday practice of coexistence in the Camp. Most Palestinian refugees were on close and friendly terms with these immigrants. Daily life in the Camp provided refugees with complex opportunities to mingle with these “outsiders”, interaction that went beyond a simple working relationship. These were not lowly servants but people who shared the same lifestyle with the rest of the refugee community. The latter participated in camp life, and were welcome guests at the marriages and funerals of other camp dwellers. Marriages between Palestinian refugees and these communities of migrants and refugees were also common. Moreover, these migrants were sometimes called to participate in special events. Because of the beauty of his voice, for example, Mahmood was invited on a few occasions to recite the Quran in the annual recurrence of Palestinian celebrations held in the Nadi.

This was also visible in camp-dwellers’ interactions with *ghajarīn*, though to a much lesser degree. Refugees blamed many of the Camp’s “social problems” on Gypsies, saying they were responsible for introducing their youth to drugs, prostitution, and violence. Ironically, however, it was here where a contact point was established between “Palestinians” and Gypsies. For example in the pool rooms, where even the more pious youth used to go sometimes, Gypsies mixed with the rest of the camp population. Many *ghajarīn* were also particularly appreciated for their sonic performances in nightclubs and in parties held for special occasions in private houses in the Camp. Not only daily interactions, but actual forms of fluidity in personal identity blurred the boundaries around the category “*ghajar*” (gypsy). There were, indeed, cases of Gypsies being “redeemed. The allegedly demeaning gypsy origins of one of my friends were, at least temporary, ignored for his pious commitment – the boy volunteered weekly in the Department of Children in the Nadi Al-Wihdat, and his

family chose to not to associate themselves with the other members of the Gypsy community in the Camp.

Anxieties and cosmopolitanism

If everyday life was informed by cooperative experiences (Bayat 2010) and “convivial cosmopolitanism” (Gilroy 2005), immigration at times reinforced ethnic boundaries. Daily interactions, albeit concealed, problematised the image of a morally and ethnically pure Palestinian community, generating anxieties and tensions. More than a few “strangers” in the Camp harboured rancour against refugees. Over the course of private talks, they lamented how Palestinians (*filastīnīn*) were deceitful in business and could be troublemakers. Likewise, grievances toward new immigrants was equally vocalised by Palestinian refugees. One day in a small and stylish clothes shop beside the Nadi, a clerk was expressing a harsh resentment toward migrants. Visibly annoyed, he shrugged his shoulders and said: “they [migrants] are like cockroaches (*sarāsīr*) who take even the humblest jobs without ever spending a penny in the Camp”. When I asked him whether they were troublemakers, the clerk replied: “not at all, otherwise we would do like that with them”, mimicking the act of putting out a cigarette”. The clerk’s words articulated some of the refugees’ anxieties regarding the perceived take-over of Wihdat by new migrants. According to many in Wihdat, Iraqis, Egyptians, and other immigrants had weakened the sense of solidarity of refugees by mixing with camp dwellers. As another man put it:

“The Camp is good... I like Wihdat, but before it was better! [...] Before there were not all these Egyptians (*masrīn*) around. There were no Egyptians, Gypsies, and Iraqis! We were all Palestinians, the community was much more solid, people were more close to each other. We used to help to each other. If you had a problem, your friends and neighbours would help you. But now, now it’s not anymore like that! With all these immigrants people do not care anymore [...] But this is not all, especially Egyptians come here they take every job but then they do not spend their money. They take everything home, in their countries”.

In fact, many refugees claimed that contemporary disorder was associated with immigrants. A large part of Wihdat's problems – such as the weakening of cooperation

and the loss of meaningful relationships – were rooted in the fact that new migrants do not feel any emotional attachment to the Camp and its inhabitants.

However meaningful refugees' grievances over the lack of a sense of home on the part of recent migrants may be for the assertion of a domesticity in Wihdat, it also conceals the fact that to be *mukhayyamji* and to feel at home in the Camp was not straightforward for Palestinian refugees either. In a recent article on the relationship Karachiites entertain with their city, Oskar Verkaaik reports the grievances of some urban planners who lament the lack of sense of home articulated by new migrants from rural areas. This allows the author to observe that “the manageable Karachi is slipping out of everybody's hands as the dominant notion of what it entails to be a Karachiite is rooted in a mythological time that is difficult to evoke in the present” (2009, p. 68). In the same manner, as the brief excerpt I quoted above underlines, the conception of Wihdat as home was slipping out of refugees' hands as the dominant notion of what it entailed to be a camp-dweller was increasingly rooted in a mythological time. The imagined Wihdat, in which one could feel at home, was represented in the minds of Palestinian refugees as the camp at the time of the first decades of their exile in Jordan. Projecting moral order onto a past is normal. What is interesting, however, is the fact that this representation, that so well evokes the homeliness of Al-Wihdat, seems to neglect that the first generations of refugees fiercely opposed any durable improvement in the camps on the basis that these places were not their home. Ironically, then, the Camp began to evoke the ethos of the home/village when slipped out as exclusively the locus of Palestinianness in exile.

So, on the one hand, the arrival of new-comers in Al-Wihdat unveiled dynamics of everyday cooperation and sharing between them and the camp-dwellers (Bayat 2010). On the other, the exclusive forms of identity that aroused from refugees' mingling with these “strangers” exposed clearly the anxieties and fears for the allegedly decreasing moral standards and weakening of forms of solidarities. In turn, these feelings served to foster forms of ethno-national identity by encouraging antagonism and a sense of superiority to other minorities and migrant populations, reinforcing the affective relationships that refugees nourished toward the space of the Camp.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has documented and explored refugees' agency through their working lives and the practices that inform political economy in Al-Wihdat. The goal was not to simply give a better understanding of the refugees' material lives. Here, I have also shown how socio-economic integration provides the ground for sustaining a nationalist identity in exile – although at times this process of integration might have disaggregating effects on camp dwellers' social relationships and self-depiction as a homogeneous community.

In so doing, I have shown how discrimination, material poverty, and other negative dimensions linked to the working and economic conditions of refugees have reproduced forms of self-understanding based on the conception of “the refugee” as embodying an ideal of resistance. The simplicity and authenticity associated with a modest life and humble origins were thought by camp-dwellers to confer upon them more intense forms of political commitment. On the other hand, however, minute displacements were introduced to this form of political subjectivity in consequence of the need to fulfil the obligations people in the Camp believed to be integral parts of adulthood and moral maturity. In this sense, refugees were not driven by a yearning for marginality but reproduced their political identity in relations to more practical responsibilities, notably the need to secure an income (see also Kelly 2008). Rather than simply being the *raison d'être* of narratives of *sumūd* and resistance, for example, poverty was talked about in terms of youthful uneasiness, violence and immoral behaviour. Overt exhibitions of independence or cunning without rational reflection were seen by many camp-dwellers as contributing to current hardships. Living an ordinary life entailed active processes of thinking about the consequences of one's actions. In this context, camp-dwellers' attempts to set up the “right connections” in order to overcome poverty were not perceived as threatening their nationalistic commitment. It was, rather, one way in which the ideological tenets of Palestinian nationalism could be produced and made more visible and also adaptive to exilic life.

However, refugees' goal of upward mobility was fraught with ambivalence. By challenging the notion that refugee camps are merely disciplinary spaces of

confinement, I then investigated how camp residents' working trajectories “feed into local framework of self and subjectivity” (Osella and Osella 2000, p. 117, see also Reeves, 2011). I documented the negative implications and displacing effects that camp-dwellers’ mobility has had on their self-perception as a national community. The experiences of Abdullah, Rafid, and Oraib shed light on the variety of ways in which refugees negotiate the demands of mobility at the time of great economic uncertainty. As these cases show, the political and affective dimensions of Wihdat have played a role in influencing camp-dwellers’ attitudes about migration. This was well reflected in how this bond was recreated, for example, through refugees' regular visits to the Camp, the remittances sent to improve their homes, the unwillingness to leave, and even the desire to build magnificent villas nearby. But if this bond was continuously re-enacted through these acts, these patterns of im/mobility were also transformative of the very relationships between camp-dwellers. If in some of these journeys, people attained success by becoming business people or professionals, others were left behind: tensions revolved around the ways in which people perceived migrants’ newly acquired wealth and position, which was often understood to be over-exhibited through the brash display of high-priced items such as expensive cars, mobiles, brand name clothing and accessories.

Finally, I demonstrated how recent immigration in Wihdat has further exposed the complexities and ambiguities inherent refugees’ socio-economic integration. I argued that the daily encounters of Palestinian refugees and new immigrants have not wiped away but reinforced exclusivist forms of identity. Daily relationships with Iraqi refugees, Egyptian migrants, Filipino workers, and *ghajarīn* (Gypsies) contributed to reproducing a specific discourse in which an exclusive national identity as Palestinians was objectified and valorised, distinguishing Palestinian refugees from other communities in the Camp and beyond. On the other hand, the opening of Wihdat to new migrants led to de-territorialising and displacing the authoritative discourse inherent Palestinian nationalism, which sees refugees and refugee camps respectively as the embodiment and the site of Palestinian nationalism in exile. If Palestinian refugees proclaimed themselves as being the ultimate symbol of Palestinian nationalism and the real inhabitants of the camp (*mukhayyamji*), the anxieties associated to the seemingly selfishness and immorality of new immigrants unveiled a deviation from the idealised

image of the “refugee camp” as a Palestinian place. As camp-dwellers’ fears well highlight, the heterogeneity and everyday cosmopolitanism of camp life did not reflect the territorialisation of this ideal of Palestinianness, but rather the integration of refugees inside the territory.

Refugees’ pursuit of an ordinary life served nationalistic ideals by challenging a marginality that was held to contribute to cultural decay and an immoral demeanour, characteristics that were widely said of being among the main causes behind Palestinian refugees’ incapacity to return to Palestine. In the next chapter, I will carry further this analysis by tracing the link between political and moral agency in the context of the growing importance of Islam in the daily lives of refugees in Al-Wihdat.

CHAPTER 4: “ORDINARY ISLAM”

INTRODUCTION: AVOIDING, BLOCKING, AND CONCEALING THE POLITICAL

One day, after a brief demonstration held in Wihdat and organised by the Islamic Action Front (IAF), Abu Omar once again expressed his criticism of politics. Like many others, he was deeply disenchanted. His criticism was also directed at political demonstrations and protests in the streets: “I don’t like political demonstrations!”. For him, political gatherings and events were merely moments of leisure or, at best, displays for political parties that pursue only their own selfish interests:

“ Hamas takes to the streets and hails Sheikh Yassin; Fatah takes to the streets and hails Arafat; the communists [Jordanian Popular Democratic Unity Party] take to the streets and hail George Habash... but there is only one Palestine!! [...] If you go [to these demonstrations], you will see communist flags, Hamas flags, or Fatah flags, but not Palestinian flags!”.

A few days later, a further episode caught my attention. I was lying on the sofa of the *markez* with a friend and watching TV. My companion was flicking through the channels and Nasrallah’s face – Hezbollah’s charismatic political leader – appeared on the screen: “*beghsi* (filthy)!!”, my friend exclaimed. “You don’t like him?”, I asked, “Why? He fights for Palestinians!”. He replied, “I’m happy if he fights against *al-yahūd* (the Jews), but I don’t like him! Do you know that he is *shia*, not *muslim*? *Shia* are worse than *yahūdi*!”⁸¹.

At first sight, the behaviour of my companions might seem puzzling: Palestinian refugees who expressed harsh criticism against all Palestinian political leaders and parties indiscriminately, and who lashed out against a political leader who was sympathetic to Palestinians only on the grounds that he was Shi’a. However, the distaste manifested by my companions for Palestinian politics and symbols was part of a general disaffection that many in Al-Wihdat had for politics and political elites, especially in and about Palestine. In general, people in Wihdat spoke of politics (*syāse*) as something dirty, unprincipled, and unsavoury (compare Ruud 2001). This was true as much for

⁸¹ Historically the Muslim communities living in Al-Wihdat are almost entirely Sunni.

Islamist parties and movements as for their secular counterparts. Muslim Brothers, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Fatah were perceived as being exclusively interested in chasing political seats, and not caring about the common good of Palestinians.

However, if talk of politics was said to be *haki fadi* (ineffective/empty words), and political parties, movements and leaders were almost unanimously depicted as being amoral and corrupt, then, for most if not all of the people I met in Wihdat, attention to Islamic doctrine was a very important dimension of their everyday life. More than this, they considered Islam to be the only solution to their political problems. Abu Omar often stressed that the solution to Palestinian political issues must come through the formation of a moral personhood: “you see, Luigi, as long as we [Palestinians] drink, curse, and behave like animals [*haīwānāt*], we will never be able to get back to Palestine!”. Like him, many other people I met in Al-Wihdat believed that their political plight was an issue of faith. During my fieldwork, most of my friends were scrupulous in showing their appreciation for Islamic teachings and practices. The need to go back to the Islam of their pious ancestors living in Palestine was stated by both the older and younger generations in the Camp.

Amidst raising levels of apathy and cynicism towards politics in and about Palestine, and the parallel growth in significance of “global” forms of Islamic discourse and symbolism, this chapter seeks to address the relationship between attempts to lead a pious life and Palestinian nationalism. In previous chapters, I have demonstrated that what characterised the daily life of camp dwellers in Al-Wihdat was neither political militancy nor active resistance against attempts to resettle them within the territory. On the contrary, Palestinian refugees have upheld the ideals of Palestinian nationalism by pursuing integration in Jordan through ordinary daily activities such as spatial (chapter 2) and socio economic (chapter 3) practices. I argue here that the performance of a pious self in Wihdat has to be understood in the same light: as an attempt to ground the authoritative discourse of Palestinian nationalism within the need to live an ordinary life in Jordan.

In order to explore the complex imbrications and separations of piety and politics, however, we first need to address anthropological attempts to theorise the study of the political more broadly.

The interaction between Islam and politics in and beyond the Middle East has been fiercely debated by scholars who see the progressive importance of Islam in public life as a throwback to an ancient time (e.g. Barber 1996, Lewis 2002), and social scientists who posit the call for political Islam in the vacuum of values generated by globalisation and the crisis of the nation-state (see Devji 2005, Keddie 1998, Kepel 2002, Roy 1994). More recently, the failure of Islamic groups to seize state power and their declining popularity in many countries, have led some authors to postulate the existence of a period of “post-Islamism” (see Soares and Osella 2009, for a critique, Soares and Otaek 2007). This is held to have led to the rise in new forms of Islamic fundamentalism that are concerned with the Islamisation of the self (1986, Roy 1994), the departure of Islamists from Islamic radicalism to more moderate and “Westernised” positions (Kepel 2002), or a greater engagement of Muslims worldwide with issues of civil rights and democracy (Bayat 2007). Up to a point, the declining popularity of Islamic groups in Al-Wihdat might lead an observer to claim that a period of post-Islamism is underway in the Camp too.

Nevertheless, I would caution against overdrawing the contrast between the process of individual self-fashioning and more “traditional” forms of political Islamism (see also Soares and Osella 2009). Despite the willingness of many to separate their ways of being Muslim from the treacherous world of the political, the seemingly “post-Islamic” way of behaving and displaying piety in Al-Wihdat consistently recalled the Salafi discourses openly connected with Saudi Arabia’s political and foreign policy objectives⁸². At the time of my research, audio-recorded sermons and publications of popular Salafi scholars and preachers from all over the world were widely consumed by my friends. Tapes and books were generally sold in the various stands on the streets of the Camp and in the book shops outside the King Hussein Mosque in the centre of

⁸² According to Wiktorowicz, Salafis “are considered “tied to Saudi” because they receive Saudi financial support through contributions for proselytizing and publishing and are unwilling to articulate a challenging discourse that would threaten the Saudi regime” (2007, p. 232).

Amman⁸³. The impact of this discourse in Al-Wihdat was visible, for example, in the strengthening of a sectarian distinction between Shia and Sunni Muslims⁸⁴ and in the popularity of figures generally associated by Western media with Salafi Jihadism, such as Osama bin Laden, al-Maqdisi, and Zarqawi.

Yet, describing camp-dwellers' religiosity as being defined in terms of a singular trend – Salafism – would be misleading when attempting to understand the complexity and plurality of Muslim self-understanding and experience in the refugee camps. Regardless of the obvious differences in their approaches, it is surprising how little attention is paid by the above-mentioned authors to individual Muslims' participation in shaping their religiosity and political subjectivities, and how this process varies according to different historical junctures. Other scholars have warned against adopting these generalisations too quickly (Marsden 2005, Osella and Osella 2008, Rosander and Westerlund 1997, Simpson 2006, Soares 2005), as they obscure the various and changing forms of religious identification, and maintain a biased representation of Muslim cultural identity as homogeneous and global. Indeed, in Al-Wihdat, Salafists or other radical Islamic groups were no more popular than so-called moderate Islamic groups such as *al-ikhwān*. Many camp dwellers were particularly sceptical of the Salafi movement, which they perceived as being merely interested in pursuing the short-sighted interests and political agenda of the Saudi regime.

To understand Islam in Al-Wihdat and its relevance for Palestinian nationalism, I suggest that we should move beyond a debate on whether people's piety in Al-Wihdat is best defined as Salafism or post-Islamism, and instead ask what it means to refugees and how it is performed. In so doing, I draw on two bodies of literature.

The rejection of the political and the stress on the moral dimension of Islam recall compelling scholarly work that has preferred a fine-grained ethnography and a focus on Muslims' individual experience, rather than the macro analysis of political scientists (Brenner 1996, Deeb 2006, Henkel 2007, Hirschkind 2006, Ismail 2006, Mahmood 2005). This body of work in anthropology has called for a recognition of the moral and

⁸³ For the growing importance of the Salafi discourse in Jordan, see Wiktorowitz (2007). For the role of cassette sermons in the fashioning of a pious self, see Hirschkind (2007).

⁸⁴ This polarisation has never taken the shape of sectarian violence.

ethical aspects of Islam as motivations that cannot be reducible to power and politics (see especially Lambek 2000). In her ethnography on revivalist movements in Cairo, Mahmood shows how the process through which pious women craft a docile self is neither an instance of passivity nor a moment of self-empowerment, but simply part of the subject's desire to embark on a project of ethical self-fashioning (1986). However, framing piety as project of moral self-fashioning has important consequences at a political level, though this might not be the primary goal of pious-minded people; in Mahmood's case, for example, this happens by naturalising an Islamic lifestyle that would ultimately subvert the secular and liberal project of the state (2005, see also Tugal 2009). Such an account is important because it allows us to understand the relationship between piety and Palestinian nationalism without becoming trapped in the rigid categories of political Islam. The importance of Islam in the life of many people in the Camp did not mean that refugees actively sought to challenge the state authorities and becoming engaged in armed violence. Rather, piety was understood by many as a genuine attempt to develop an ethical self. But the cultivation of a pious self was not completely divorced from their nationalist ideals: many in Al-Wihdat believed that consolidating an Islamic lifestyle was also the solution needed to fight Zionism and Western imperialism.

However, while these ethnographies might be excellent in unveiling the ways in which piety ideally satisfies the conflicting demands of living life in Jordan whilst upholding nationalist struggles, their commentaries seem less capable of capturing the ambiguities and contradictions involved in this process of accommodation. In other words, the exceptional piety documented by this body of scholarship tells us very little about how refugees behave in situations in which the pressures of everyday life make it difficult to fulfil a moral ideal. As a corrective to this approach, in a recent study of Islam in Africa Soares and Otayek have advanced the concept of "Islam *mondain*" (2007); a term that points to the diverse types of sociality and ways of being Muslim in contexts of political and economic uncertainty. Scholars working in this vein have hence sought to document the ambiguities and inconsistencies of living a Muslim life (2007, Gregg 2007, Marsden 2005, Schielke 2009, Soares and Otayek 2007). Adeline Masquelier (1986), for example, demonstrates that for young Muslims in Dogondoutchi, Nigeria, Islam provides the moral framework to connect with society. However, the tension between

the desire for success in life and the state's failure to provide a valid educational system and job opportunities may lead Nigerian youths to selectively shift between different and sometimes conflicting forms of self-representations in order to capitalise on new possibilities. Likewise, Magnus Marsden explores how Muslims in Chitral do not conform to a set of ideal-types (such as Islamist, fundamentalist, liberal, traditionalist, etc.), but that they respond to the pressure of Islamisation in dynamic ways that "reflect a complex interaction of decision-making, intellectual energy, debate and critical discussion, and ideally balanced levels of affect and emotion" (1986). By drawing on these scholars, the goal of this chapter is to capture the complexity of Muslim social experience beyond a totalising focus on self-discipline. The time I spent in the Camp gave me the opportunity to observe the uneasy coexistence of religious morality and more mundane aspects of life, where ethical self-fashioning, the quest for romantic love, and consumerist binges were all features of refugees' everyday lives in the camps. For camp dwellers, piety was a source of great comfort as well as deep anxiety.

This chapter starts with an examination of how the political was perceived in the Camp as inherently treacherous. In so doing, I will first situate my discussion of Islam's significance in the everyday lives of Wihdat dwellers within the context of the increasing popularity of Islamic parties such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood among refugees, and their decline in political importance in recent times. Like their secular counterparts before them, in the last few years Islamic parties and groups have come to be depicted by many people in the Camp as being selfish and ineffective. For camp dwellers, these attributes were inevitable outcomes of the intrinsically treacherous and dangerous nature of the political.

The second part of this chapter will explore the moral (and political) significance of living a pious life for camp-dwellers. In the Camp, Islam was understood by many as a moral project that may eventually also reward the refugees politically – as long as it is not corrupted by political activism. The following section of this chapter will hence be dedicated to exploring modes of ethical self-fashioning in relation to Palestinian nationalism. To be a pious Muslim and a good Palestinian in the Camp, one had to strive in both material and spiritual terms towards a process of subject formation that was perceived as self-improvement. By documenting refugees' involvement in the

burnāmej al-shabāb (the youth programme) of the Nadi Al-Wihdat, I suggest that one of the specific forms in which the co-dependence of piety and nationalism has emerged has been through people's commitment to welfare activities and organisations (see Deeb 2006).

Finally, this chapter will shed light on the importance that an open-minded and dynamic interpretation of Islam plays in the life of many Palestinian refugees in Al-Wihdat. Among camp dwellers, the capacity to accommodate the cultivation of a pious self with the complex demands of daily life is paramount in their attempt to carry out an ordinary life in Jordan.

POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL

Al-'ikhwān in Jordan

At the time of my research, a general contempt towards Fatah was shared equally by Palestinians living in camps and those outside. Despite its critical role in resisting the Israeli occupation and colonisation of the West Bank and Gaza strip, Fatah was widely regarded as ineffective and corrupt. The PLO's loss of influence was also a reflection of another trend: the growing popularity of Hamas in the occupied territories (e.g. Chehab 2007, Hroub 2000, Lybarger 2007, Milton-Edwards and Farrell 2010, Mishal and Sela 2000) and the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan (e.g. Cohen 1972, Schwedler 2001, Taraki 1995, Wiktorowicz 1999)⁸⁵.

Scholarly inquiry into Jordan's so-called Islamists – popularly referred to in the Camp using the term *shuyukh* – has generally focused on the Muslim Brothers (*al-'ikhwān al-Muslimīn*). Indeed, the Brotherhood has been a fundamental factor in Jordanian politics. Despite a recent drop in its popularity, attested to especially in the electoral defeat at the November 2007 national parliamentary elections, *Al-'ikhwān* was still playing an influential role when I conducted my research. Although its political wing – the Islamic Action Front (IAF) or *Jabha al-Amal al-Islami* – was legalised only in the early 1990s,

⁸⁵In Al-Wihdat, the two were seen by refugees as inherently similar – albeit there were obvious differences in their ideological and functional structure. For the link between Hamas and the Brotherhood, see Khaled Hroub (2007).

the Muslim Brotherhood has been present in Jordan since its constitution. It was founded in 1945; however, it was from the late 1980s and 1990s that *Al-'ikhwān* came to play a pivotal role in the Jordanian political panorama. From 1984 onwards, the movement expressed a strong criticism of the Jordanian government's non-democratic practices, and support for the Palestinian cause. Its campaigns against corruption, for political inclusion, for democratisation, and against the normalisation of the relationship with Israel, gained much consensus throughout the territory of Jordan. Although the decline of pan-Arabist and leftist groups in the region certainly played a role, much of its success was also linked to its capacity to exert influence through an extensive network of Islamic Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other charitable organisations. From the 1970s to the 1990s, the Brotherhood's activities were boosted by a massive influx of money through oil-related financial support and revenues from the Gulf countries. This ultimately enabled the movement to establish a system of schools, clinics, and other organisations across the country (Wiktorowicz 1999). These grassroots activities implemented and managed by NGOs have created "vehicles for developing a clientele and support for the Brotherhood cause" (ibid, p. 7). *Al-'ikhwān*'s civil activism, however, is manifested not only through the movement's involvement in and commitment to charitable activities: it is also expressed through professional associations such as the Engineering Association Council – the principal forum for political activism in Jordan (Larzillière 2012)

Al-'ikhwān's political success could be measured by the results of the parliamentary election of 1989, in which the movement gained 22 of the 80 seats. Behind the political influence of the Brotherhood and IAF there is also its longstanding relationship with the regime. Until the lifting of the martial law in 1991, indeed, the Brotherhood was the only political movement allowed to operate in civil society. The bond between the government and *Al-'ikhwān* was also reinforced because they shared a common enemy: the left-leaning opposition. The regime saw in the Brotherhood a useful ally, and a counter against the leftist threats of Nasser's pan-Arabism, Communism, and Ba'thism (Wiktorowicz 1999). Most importantly, the "Islamists" never sought to seize political power in Jordan. They always remained predominantly a realist pro-democratisation movement that never really opposed the regime. On the contrary, the Brotherhood even had a positive influence on placating the riots that broke out in the kingdom after the

rise in the cost of living in 1989, and during the increase in tuition fees that led to student revolts in 1984 and 1986 at Yarmouk University; a cooperative attitude that resulted in them being bestowed with the title of “loyal opposition” (ibid.).

Among many Palestinian refugees in Al-Wihdat, the Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front – its political arm – filled the political and social gaps left by the PLO’s incapacity to sponsor its supporters and allies. This officially registered Jordanian political party and moderate reform movement became the main representative body in Al-Wihdat. Here, *Al-’ikhwān* came to run a variety of organisations such as sewing centres, orphanage programmes, and associations providing financial and material aid to the poor, especially during the holy month of Ramadan⁸⁶. The influence of the Islamist movement on youths in the refugee camps is particularly significant. This reflected in part the Islamists’ focus on grassroots education and youth initiatives (Hart 2008), especially after the vacuum left by the diminishing influence of the PLO’s various factions, which was mostly filled by organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The camp youth clubs are a notable example: once firmly in the hands of various factions of PLO, they recently fell under the influence of *Al-’ikhwān*.

Kullu nafs ishi’ (it’s all the same thing)

In Jordan, despite the initial popularity enjoyed by the Brotherhood, Islamic groups and movements have not thrived in recent years. A clear sign of this trend is given by the results of the recent national parliamentary elections. Having gained 17 seats in the previous election, the movement had to deal with an unexpected and disappointing result in 2007 elections: it secured only 6 seats in the 110-member parliament and lost important cities that it had previously held, such as Irbid and Zarqa⁸⁷.

The waning popularity of such parties has multiple causes. The mild opposition of the Brotherhood towards the government, and its alleged association with members of the regime, certainly played a role. According to a report by the International Crisis Group

⁸⁶For comparative literature on Islamic grassroots politics, see Jenny White’s study of Islamist mobilisation in Turkey (2007).

⁸⁷According to the Brotherhood, the defeat was instead caused by the involvement of the state in large-scale election rigging (Ryan 2008).

in 1993, “Youths were angered by steps to normalize the relations with Israel and felt abandoned by Jordan’s mainstream MB which refuses to clash openly with the government over this issue” (in Larzillière 2008, p. 9). *Al-’ikhwān* were also widely accused of nepotism for backsliding into tribal dynamics and logic in their policy making. This denunciation, as Larzillière points out, “is all the more problematic for them as part of the support for Islamists [...] indeed relies on their challenging of community management. They notably strengthen the position of youth with regard to that of the elders by claiming a higher religious legitimacy” (ibid). In addition, the discrimination systematically exerted by the government on its members eventually contributed to the delegitimisation of the movement. Indeed, since the decline of the left, *Al-’ikhwān* has “become the main target of the strategies of co-optation and exclusion from the government” (Krämer 1994, p. 278). In 2006, for example, the government curtailed a large part of the Brotherhood’s grassroots activities by closing the Islamic Centre Charity – the main means through which the movement operated in civil society.

Although they were still quite popular, political sympathy for the IAF and Muslim Brothers was also rapidly decreasing in Al-Wihdat. Many in Al-Wihdat were overtly critical of the bland opposition of the Brotherhood to the government. When a well-known *sheikh* (man of faith)⁸⁸, affiliated with the Brotherhood, came to the Camp to give a speech on the holy places in Islam, the main atrium of the Nadi Al-Wihdat – where this kind of event was usually held – was crammed with people. The speech was an occasion for denouncing the alleged attempt by Israel to demolish Al-Aqsa Mosque. It was a widespread belief in the Camp that the true goal of the archaeological excavations implemented by the municipality of Jerusalem in the proximity of the famous mosque was not to find the temple of David, but, rather, to erode the foundations of Al-Aqsa, causing it to collapse. The *sheikh* was encouraging a mixed audience to act. Adopting a seemingly proven rhetoric, he reproached Arabs for their inactivity, stating that it was not the duty of Western countries to intervene in Arabs’

⁸⁸ In Arabic, “sheikh” is an honorific appellation that can be literally translated with “elder”. It is commonly used to refer to a tribal leader or a spiritual guide such as an Islamic scholar. In Jordan, the term was popularly associated with people who were deemed to be well versed in Islamic practice and knowledge. I decided to loosely translate the term with “man of piety”. The term and its significance in the camp will be analysed in greater detail in chapter 5.

own affairs. Arabs, he claimed, had two goals: a long term goal that consisted in a united war, like that at the time of Saladin, to take back Jerusalem; and a more immediate goal that involved the need to foster worldwide public awareness for what was happening in Palestine. Despite the inflammatory vocal style of the performer and the “righteousness” of his arguments, the majority of my friends were not enthusiastic about the speech. As one friend put it, “he’s like the other Muslim Brothers, he says that we have to fight but then he adds ‘not now’ and ‘maybe later’, and they don’t do anything to change *al-wade*’ [the political situation]”.

Furthermore, I often heard people lamenting the nepotism and despotism of *Al-’ikhwān*, who were said not to tolerate any organisations and groups in the Camp other than their own. Many in Al-Wihdat criticised in particular their attempts to monopolise humanitarian action (especially through *zakat* and youth-based programs) as a political tool to serve their own interests. Rumours were circulating, for example, about some of the charitable activities implemented by *Al-’ikhwān*, most notably the “orphan program”. The Brotherhood gave 10 dinars to children in the Camp on a monthly basis. According to my friends, behind the unselfishness of this noble gesture lay a deeper intention to create a constant dependence (“so they can tell to everybody, and everybody knows that they have given money to them”). Providing support to children in need was just, they said, a self-interested way of strengthening and improving the visibility of the organisation, and, even more perniciously, to ultimately provide themselves with a more resilient electoral base.

As a consequence of such disaffection with the Brotherhood’s political strategies and social activities more generally, many refugees had also ceased their involvement in the various social institutions under the control of *Al-’ikhwān*, such as the youth and orphan centres. One such person was Omar, a friend who I first met as volunteer in the orphan and youth programme (*burnāmej al-shabāb*) run by the Nadi Al-Wihdat. Confronted by one of the managers of a youth club affiliated with the Brotherhood – where he was spending some of his free time – and asked to make a choice between them and the Nadi, Omar opted for the latter, commenting on his decision as follows: “I did not like the fact that the *’ikhwān* tell you what to do and how to do it!!”

Echoing the general disaffection with political parties and the ruling class in Palestine (see also Allen 2009, Kelly 2008), the distrust towards the Brotherhood was also extended to other Islamic groups. Hamas, germane of the Brotherhood in Palestine, had lost much of its appeal amongst camp dwellers. Disguised behind the empty words (*haki fadi*) and boastful statements of its leaders, the weakening of Hamas resistance in Palestine was often explained to me as a result of their hidden intention of coming to terms with Israel. In addition, Hamas was also widely blamed for having lost a clear agenda by engaging in what most saw as a sterile conflict with Fatah.

So, rather than being said to be made up of pure and pious people, many people in the Camp claimed that, like any other political party, those who stood on an Islamic platform were no less dirty or corrupt. In the mind of people, rather than being a sign of purity and morality, the alleged strict observance of Islamic standards allowed the supporters of these groups to conceal the immorality of their own real goals.

The despicable nature of the political

The allegations of corruption and dishonesty that increasingly characterised people's perceptions of parties that were once represented as the solution to the Palestinian political issue, fostered a sense of despair among Palestinian refugees in Al-Wihdat. This sense of despair led many to depict politics as a treacherous domain of life, dangerous at best. However, not only politics and political parties, but everything that refugees perceived as being "political" was represented as intrinsically treacherous and dangerous⁸⁹.

"Treason" (*khyāne*) was spoken of as being endemic to the political. There was a veritable concern in the Camp for rumours, for secrecy, and for secret services. It was part of this obsession with treason. This is hardly surprisingly. In a situation where the boundaries between loyalty and betrayal were blurred by the fundamental ambiguity between Palestinian-hood and Jordanian-hood, the fear of treason erupted violently as a consequence of the anxieties of not being able to clearly define who is who (Thiranagama and Kelly 2010, see also Appadurai 1998). As politics was the arena in

⁸⁹ In chapter 6, I will also explore how "the political" is thought of as being fundamentally boring.

which the tension between competing acts of loyalty was most frequently re-enacted, it was hence perceived as especially corrupt and deceptive. On the occasion of the parliamentary election held on 9 November 2010, for example, rumours circulated about people who gave their vote to pro-government runners from the Camp in exchange for favours and money: traitors who make deals with traitors, I was told. Not surprisingly, many of my friends were extremely cynical about the outcomes and the benefits of the forthcoming elections (*intikhābāt*):

“I’m not going to vote for anybody... It’s the same thing, nothing will change” claimed one. Similarly, another, pointing at the banner close to the Nadi Al-Wihdat, said: “*izbaleh* [trash]... they are for the government [pro-governmental candidate], it’s a well-known family in the *mukhayyam*, they are the ‘Cauz’, they are disgusting [*beghsu*]! Once, one of them, the head of the family, said on television that Palestinians who criticise the government should leave the country”.

Also, the rise and fall of groups and people was often accompanied by allegations of being corrupt, of collaborating with the “enemy”, or even of being a spy (*jāsūs*). As we have seen, this mechanism was well exemplified by the descending parabola of Fatah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood. These political groups – considered by refugees one of the main champions of their rights – fell into disfavour amongst many as a consequence of the allegedly corruption of its members and their seemingly collusion with the Jordanian or Israeli government⁹⁰. The label of being a spy or a traitor was indiscriminately attached to everybody, and refugees from the Camp were even more liable to fall into the category than “outsiders” such as myself. But, again, accusations of treachery were extended to everything that was perceived as potentially political, and not simply to politics and politicians. For example, in Al-Wihdat, rumours circulated about people who sold their refugee cards. Many believed that beyond this was a scheme planned by the Americans and the Israelis: purchasing refugee cards in exchange for money and, ultimately, forcing people to sell themselves out, become traitors (*khawana*) and renounce their “right of return” or compensation.

⁹⁰ This belief was widespread to the extent that even Arafat was not immune to similar allegations. There were even people who told me that the leader of Palestinian resistance was a “*mustarab*”: literally “fake Arab”, the term was used to indicate a Zionist spy trained since the childhood to speak and behave as Palestinian.

Because of its treacherous character, however, the political was also perceived as being dangerous. As a matter of fact, outside the domestic sphere, Palestinian refugees from Al-Wihdat did not speak about politics: real or imaginary threats made such conversations hazardous to say the least. Political conversations would have exposed someone too overtly to the “spectre of treason” (see Thiranagama and Kelly 2010). Tales about political collaboration and complicity with the Jordanian secret services circulated frequently in the Camp. Evoked by the tension between resistance and integration, the seeming ubiquity of *mukhābarāt* (the secret service) filled the anxieties and fears of refugees. As such, refugees sought to avoid engaging with dimensions of the political discourse in Jordan that were liable to bring to the surface the underlying tensions between Jordanian-Palestinians and Transjordanians. “Ethnicity”, for example, was one of these dimensions. I still remember the general uneasiness I provoked when, on the occasion of a trip to Aqaba⁹¹ organised by the *burnāmej al-shabāb* (youth programme) in the Nadi Al-Wihdat, I asked a man whether he was a Bedouin. That day, the children and the adults of the Nadi were frantically working to prepare for their imminent departure. Some were gathering luggage outside the Nadi. Others, instead, were putting the luggage on top of the two vans that would take us to Aqaba. Everybody was doing something. Close to the vans were the two drivers. One of them was “pure” Jordanian – a friend whispered in my ear the word “*bedū*” (Bedouin) to indicate with a subtle sarcasm his allegedly Jordanian “authenticity”. Awkwardly, I exclaimed “ah, you are *bedū*!” My friends stopped talking and the man suddenly stiffened, replying to my curiosity with a sharp “yes”. Something seemed to have annoyed him. Later on, my friend reproached me, warning me that this was not a proper topic of conversation, especially in the presence of Palestinians, and even more so in a refugee camp. As the tribal discourse in Jordan was deployed by a specific branch of Transjordanian nationalism to support claims of authenticity, asking someone in a setting such Al-Wihdat, where the construction of ethnicity is intertwined with social and political differences, about their origins was a way to invoke the antagonism between Transjordanians and Jordanian-Palestinians, and expose the latter to accusations of treachery (see also chapter 2).

⁹¹ Aqaba is a coastal city located in the south of Jordan.

To conclude, as Kelly writes, “[i]t is not just the unknown that produces apprehension [about treason] but the all too knowable” (2010, p. 171). As people were all too aware of the dilemma that had to face as refugees of “a state to be” and citizens of Jordan, they were also conscious of the fact that virtually everybody and anything could have been guilty of treachery against the nationalist struggles and collaboration with the Jordanian government (*el-hukūme*). In this context, accusations of treason should be seen not as the marking of difference, but as the exposing of similarities between Jordanians and Palestinian refugees. The political – because of its agonistic nature (Spencer 2007) – was what best exposed the ambiguities and contradictions that emerged when the aim to live an “ordinary” and integrated life in Jordan clashed with their urges to fulfil nationalist ideals. Not surprisingly, the large majority of my informants in the Camp sought to distance themselves from the corrupt world of the political (see also Hansen 2002, Lerche 1995, Ruud 2001, Spencer 2007).

ISLAM AND RESISTANCE

Islam, not politics!

While politics and the political were largely perceived as ineffective and corrupt, attention to Islamic morality and discipline instead played an important role in the daily lives of refugees in Wihdat.

When Hussein came into the main atrium of the Nadi Al-Wihdat, he signalled to me to follow him into one of small rooms of the Club. Here, on Fridays, the Department for Children (*lejne al-atfāl*) in the Nadi held a programme for young men and orphans (mainly) from the Camp, run weekly by voluntary workers. Sitting behind a small desk at the right-hand corner in front of the entrance, Hussein was teaching a class of children of various ages the difference between Islamic and “pre-Islamic time” (*jāhilīya*). Nearly twenty children aged between six and twelve were sitting around him, arranged in five rows of plastic chairs. “Islam” was part of the curriculum of the programme, which also included educational and leisure activities. As far as my limited understanding of Arabic at the time allowed me to grasp – the event took place at the beginning of my fieldwork – Hussein seemed to be a good teacher: the children in his

class looked particularly enthusiastic, spoke only when he questioned them, and when he did this they were always eager to answer. Over the course of the class, I was struck by the recurrence of the name “Abbas”; it was reiterated several times by Hussein. I hence asked him in English at the end of the lesson whether the “Abbas” he was referring to was the Mahmood Abbas, who at the time of my research was the president of Palestine and a prominent member of Fatah. He promptly answered: “no, not at all! Mahmood Abbas is *wati* [a bad person/a miserable person]! I was talking about Abbas, the relative of the Prophet. Not Mahmood Abbas!” The clarity with which Hussein dismissed a Palestinian political leader from a party that had established its headquarters in Wihdat in the late 1960s, reflected the attitudes of many camp people: their growing disappointment with and contempt toward Fatah and its leadership were also coupled with a growing appreciation of distinctively Islamic symbols and rituals. Hussein then continued: “Political leaders are bad, and Palestinian politicians are even worse. [...] A decent person [*muhtaram*] does not get mixed up with politics today [...]. Did you notice the difference between my father and Adnan’s father? My father has never mentioned Palestine, he just talks about Islam!” He was referring to an evening we had spent at the house of a companion few weeks earlier when Adnan’s father – a *fidā’ī* during Black September – spent a great deal of time exposing his views on the current political situation in Palestine and its causes. In contrast, in Hussein’s house the Palestinian question was never raised in the course of the whole dinner. Hussein’s father – whose pious commitment gained him the appellation of *sheikh* – was not the only one to think in this way. By refusing to engage in what they perceived as the muddy and treacherous world of the political, many refugees found a life project in the cultivation of a pious self.

Likewise, the general disaffection toward politics and politicians did not lead refugees to unthinkingly embrace radical forms of political commitment. The role of the so-called Islamic movement in the political sphere has generated anxiety amongst a Western audience worried about the politicisation of Islam and the rise of movements fundamentally opposed to democracy (Huntington 1996). Writing on the issues seems to assume, however, that the delegitimisation of the Muslim Brothers and other moderate Islamist groups in Jordan is likely to contribute to the radicalisation of their ex-supporters and sympathisers (Larzillière, Ryan 2008), especially amongst the most

destitute subjects such as the Palestinian refugees living in camps (Al-Khazendar 1997, see Rougier, 2007, for a similar argument in Lebanon). A friend's answer to my interrogation as to whether he was a Salafist abruptly brought to my attention the foolishness of certain questions and how little esteem was given to political groups in general. "No, I'm Muslim", he answered, cutting my questioning short. He then paused for a moment reflectively before continuing: "I don't care about the Muslim Brothers, Hamas, Salafists or anybody else, I just take what I like from them, and I leave the rest". Like him, the vast majority of people I met did not think of themselves in terms of being "Salafi", "Islamist", or "reformist". Although Islam was important in the daily life of refugees, the majority of people I met did not identify themselves with a particular political group or movement. Untying Islam from the political was, for many, a necessary step in preserving the righteousness and purity of their faith.

The "turn" towards piety involved a moral regulation of everyday life (Hirschkind 2006, Lambek 2000, Mahmood 2005). Going to the mosque, performing *salāt* (ritual prayers), and abstaining from practices deemed to be immoral, such as stealing, drinking, flirting, lying, and watching pornography, were said by my informants to strengthen Islamic values and pious forms of morality (Allen 2006). This was perhaps best reflected in prayer. The very large majority of people I met during my research in the Camp extolled the virtues of praying five times a day, preferably in a mosque. The benefits that – I was told – people could obtain from praying were great. The five prayers were considered a boundary between morality and immorality. Many people told me that they became real Muslims only when they started to pray every day. For my friends, the realisation of the moral self had to pass through submission to God, and the performance of daily prayers was a fundamental way to reach this accomplishment (Mahmood 2005, cf. Simon 2009). But this style of religiosity also involved careful conduct with regard to dress and language. Many people strived to adopt a distinctive jargon⁹². This was most immediately evident in common patterns of greetings, now replaced by Islamic locutions. An Islamic style of dress for men and women was highly valued. Actions were often considered according to an Islamic moral code, and the appropriate moral stance to some questions of personal behaviour was sometimes the object of passionate discussions.

⁹² See chapter 5.

In what follows (and in the next chapter), I will explore in greater detail how refugees sought to construct an ethical self by means of daily practices. What is important here is that they had taken active steps to distinguish piety from what they refer to as the corrupted and dangerous domain of the political. Obviously, it would be arduous to track a commonality of intention in relation to Islam: while for some, Islam was not be mixed up with politics, for others the religious and the political were inextricably linked, despite many believing that the former comprised the latter. However, what virtually everybody agreed on was that Islam had nothing to do with contemporary politics and, most importantly, that the cultivation of a pious self was a moral project and not a political endeavour in itself. So, if properly followed and performed, Islam was perceived as a stronghold against the anxieties and troubles of life, a source of happiness that would provide the believer with internal peace for the whole of his life, and even afterwards. As a friend once told me, “people should not waste time with politics [...] Islam is the best thing [*’āhassan ishi*] [...] when my father died, he looked happy; you could see the serenity on his face. When he died it was as if he was flying towards God [...]. He was a good Muslim [*muslim mlīh*]. This is the way people should live”.

Piety and nationalism

The cultivation of a pious self brought Palestinian nationalist ideals into the ordinary. As we have seen in chapter 2, since Black September, the Jordanian state had shown little tolerance for any form of political militancy in the Camp. If the depoliticisation of refugees was a requirement for their integration in Jordan, refugees did not generally oppose this project, preferring the prospect of living an ordinary life to the idea of becoming engaged in politics. In this context, the cultivation of a pious self was a project that favoured this process of integration. Along with a good knowledge of Islamic doctrine, being pious was defined in terms of a set of qualities and obligations – such as diligence, studiousness, and commitment to fulfil the practical obligations of kinship – that were often perceived as more desirable than engaging in overt forms of political militancy and resistance. At the same time, although Islam was not perceived as a strategy for achieving political goals, the cultivation of a moral self allowed camp

dwellers to hold on to the ideological imperative of Palestinian nationalism. Feeling betrayed by political organisations in Palestine and Jordan, for refugees, steadfastness in faith was what they fell back on, but also what they needed to make sense of their lives and exile in Jordan.

Most of the people I met shared a concern for what they described as the increasing erosion of a pious disposition at the present time. According to them, the consequences were tangible: the corruption of values was the root of their moral, practical, and physical problems. Floods, earthquakes, and other natural disasters were God's punishments for the immorality of Muslims all over the world. For many, the plight of Palestinians was the consequence of God's wrath. Governments and political parties were equally, if not more, guilty for being careless of Islamic precepts and moral conduct. As Abu Omar once pointed out: "the problem is not only people [...] there are many good Muslims [...] the problem are the governments! The governments do not care about Islam; they just want seats [...]. When they start to follow Islam properly, we will finally be able to get Palestine back!" Only a return to the proper way of being Muslim, the Islam of the Prophet, would finally achieve lost unity. Indeed, Islam was the key to overcoming division and uniting every Arab Muslim under the flag of Islam, as it had been during the time of the Prophet or Saladin. Islam was widely said to eventually leading to the eviction of the evil (*shitānī*) forces – Zionism and Western imperialism – from Palestine. As another friend put it, "you see, Luigi, at the time of the Prophet the Muslims managed to take control of Palestine against overwhelming forces... they were hundreds, the enemies were thousands, but Mohammed – may Allah honour him and grant him peace – won against them [...]". If Islamic prescriptions and norms acted as prevention against various threats – especially political menaces – the task of every Muslim was to organise everyday life according to Islamic doctrinal principles and moral precepts.

In line with his belief, Abu Omar aimed to strengthen pious disposition and promote education amongst the youths of the Camp through the *burnāmej al-shabāb* (children's programme).

The burnāmej al-shabāb

As on almost every other Friday morning, *shabāb* gathered in a semicircle along the lines of the penalty area of the big football pitch on the first floor of the Nadi Al-Wihdat. In the middle, a young man was conducting the voices of the others as the director of an orchestra would. The youths first sang a song about Palestine, they then recited the first *sūra* of the Koran, and they concluded with a song on the Islamic holy places of Jerusalem (*al-quds*). This was the beginning of the programme, the goal of which, according to what Abu Omar said, was to “keep the children (*atfāl*) off the street ... by teaching them about Islam and Palestine”. The programme was relatively popular in the Camp – running every Friday morning from 7:30 am until the call of the muezzin for the noon prayer (*zuhr*), and attracting around one hundred children and adolescents. After the prayer, the rest of the morning was taken up with educational and sporting activities. Arranged in three groups, each headed by a tutor, children were educated on different themes, mainly revolving around “Islam”, “sport activities” (*nashāt riādī*), and “Palestine” (*nashāt watanī*, literally “national activities”).

A fundamental part of the programme was to tutor the youth on the basic tenets of Islam and Palestine seen as two connected topics. This was not only carried out by means of educational activities – such as classes on Islamic and Palestinian history – but through songs, trips, and leisure activities such as quizzes and sketches. Occasionally, for example, trips were organised to take the children to Aqaba (the only coastal city in Jordan) or even to Mecca for a pilgrimage (*‘umra*). The children also had a vast repertoire of songs about Palestine to perform. Most of them recounted the heroic deeds and suffering of their counterparts in Palestine. Other songs were instead about the beauty of their homeland. Much time was also given to listening to CDs of sermons by preachers from Saudi Arabia – such as Sheikh ibn Baz– discussing issues and problems affecting daily life. I have also attended a number of sketches and dramas staged by the children under the supervision of the educators. Both songs and sketches suit the task of teaching children about Islam and Palestine. One of these sketches, for example, re-enacted the eviction of Palestinians by Zionist forces: a person was sitting alone until a stranger decided to sit in the same chair. The first person moved over slightly and let the

second share the same place. But the newcomer was not satisfied, and kept pushing the first person out until he was alone on the chair.

The memory of exile and the suffering experienced from the establishment of Israel to the siege of Gaza were continuously re-enacted and re-narrated through these activities. Also, the questions asked by Abu Omar and the other tutors took this direction: “when was the Balfour declaration signed?” or “when did the intifadas start?”. Children were not only given classes on the history of the Palestinian issue, but the programme also lent them DVDs that they could keep in their home and watch for a period of three days. The goal was to raise awareness about what was happening in Palestine. These DVDs showed images of violence and the suffering of Palestinians, depicting events such as the atrocities committed during the II intifada and the siege of Gaza by the Israeli army since 2007. But they also showed acts of resistance and guerrilla warfare: Palestinian fighters, women, men, and children facing tanks, armed with stones, and sometimes carrying weapons.

To Abu Omar and the other *'ustāza* (educators), the *burnāmej* had to truly serve as a barrier against immoral dispositions and attitudes, educating children towards good conduct. Those, who did not comply with this model – who cursed, drank, took drugs, stole, and in general whose behaviour was deemed not pious – were made to feel unwelcome and ultimately thrown out of the programme. A case in point was the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca (*'umra*) periodically organised by the *lejne al-atfāl*. The journey was supposed to last ten days and was, for the children of the programme as well as the educators, an irresistible opportunity to improve their faith and have fun in the company of their friends. However, a few weeks before leaving, the educators met to debate the case of two youths who were said to be cultivating immoral dispositions such as watching pornographic films, swearing, and smoking cigarettes. After a long discussion, they all agreed to let one of them join the group on the trip and to leave the other at home. What led to this resolution was the fact that, while the boy who would be allowed to join them on the trip was “new” to this immoral behaviour, the other had been accused of such behaviour in the past and showed no sign of reforming.

FLAWS OF PIETY

Striving to be ordinary

In Al-Wihdat, many refugees had certainly sought to ground Islamic principles within the concrete context of life. Islamic doctrine and belief were instruments of moral self-improvement. As we have seen, they helped refugees to make sense of their exile and to uphold the Palestinian struggle for national sovereignty in the context of a growing dissatisfaction with the political. However, if refugees' interpretation of and adherence to Islam were not defined by the rigid dogmas of militant groups, neither were they a perfectionist project of self-discipline. In order to understand the complexities and nuances of refugees' political consciousness and agency, we need an appreciation of the ways in which refugees dealt with this project of ethical self-fashioning amidst other conflicting demands and desires. In their everyday life, camp dwellers more or less successfully balanced Islamic moral regulations with, for example, the ideal of romantic love or the desire to have fun. This ambiguity was not necessarily problematic. As Samuli Schielke writes, "often it can be rather comfortable, allowing people considerable leeway of action as long as one practices due consideration to avoid open conflicts and scandals" (2007, p. 22). In Al-Wihdat, if the performance of a virtuous life was a goal in line with the ideal of resistance and, ultimately, Palestinian nationalism, refugees adapted this project to the need of living an ordinary life.

The very large majority of Muslims I met in and outside the Camp were neither unreflectively conditioned by any *sūra* of the Quran nor by a sermon by any particular preacher. For example, very few people in Al-Wihdat were said to be Jihadi Salafists or members of similar groups, whose followers my friends generally referred to as *takfīrīn*. In keeping with a rigid interpretation of Islamic sources, these people were said to lash out not only at those who worshiped or followed religions other than Islam, but they also openly attacked those Muslim regimes who allegedly fail to uphold Islamic law. For the *takfīrīn*, for example, the Jordanian regime is *kāfir* (apostate, pl. *kuffār*) and, hence, subject to violence (Wicktorowitz 2000). For Wicktorowitz, there is a split in the Salafi movement in Jordan between reformist and jihadist factions. On one side, there are those who believe that armed struggles against other Muslims require absolute proof

of their apostasy. As this certainty is rarely available, jihad against other Muslims is not permitted. On the other side, there is the jihadi group, “which argues that even if a regime practises Muslim rituals, any failure to uphold Islamic law marks it as unbelieving and therefore subject to violence” (Wiktorowicz 2000, pp. 223-224). These people, however, did not constitute the bulk of “Muslims” in the Camp, but represented an exception. According to my friends, one of the direct consequences of their lack of understanding was their strict and unreflective reading of the Quran, which prevented them from understanding that the *jihad* involves diverse forms and must be not taken literally. According to one friend, *takfīrīn* are a bunch of “narrow-minded people” (*muta’assebīn*) who “read that a good Muslim should do jihad, and they would take a machine gun and go straight (*ala tul*) to the closest police station to kill people”⁹³.

Being a “good Muslim” (“*sheikh kwayes*” or “*muslim mlīh*”) was hence something that was open and subject to interpretation. In the Camp, people had their own specific ways of being pious, adapting it to the context and to their circumstances, facing failure and inconsistencies. I met people who were notorious for settling disputes through the use of butterfly-knives, who explained to me that they were good Muslims because they abstained from drinking alcohol and smoking hashish. People carried on their lives without caring too much if there were contradictions in their way of being a “good Muslim”. For example, I heard Mohammed and his brothers stating many times that the problem with Arabs is the fact that they have lost their way. Mohammed, for example, told me that “people pretend to be Muslims but then everybody drinks and just goes to pray on Fridays. See my brother Fadi” turning to him, “he only prays on Fridays!” Fadi did not say anything; he acquiesced to his brother’s rebuke, and, shrugging his shoulders, added:

“there are people who go to the mosque every day but they steal and do not care about others [...]. And there are people who think that to be a good Muslim you need to have a long beard and dress like the Prophet used to. But the Prophet dressed like that because that was the way people dressed at that time. If Prophet Mohammed came now, he would dress like people do now”.

⁹³ According to Wiktorowicz (2007), the jihadi tendency within the Jordanian Salafi movement claims that the Hashemite state is *kāfir* (apostate) for its failure to uphold Islamic law, and therefore subject to violence.

On another occasion, I was catechised for a couple of hours by a friend of Mohammed on the advantages of becoming a Muslim. He did not understand why I would not convert to Islam. In his eyes, my refusal to convert was incomprehensible: “yes I know, you are not Muslim! *Bas leshenta ma tislam* [why don’t you convert]?!”. He was determined to make me change my mind. He began to list the benefits of being a Muslim and the joy he derived from it. Eventually, we ended up talking about the significance of Ramadan to good Muslims and the blessings that came from it: “Ramadan is an important time for Muslims that helps people to relax, get stronger, and become better people [...] You see, Luigi, I really think you should convert”. Given his self-confidence, I was quite surprised to find out that he was not fasting during Ramadan: “I mean [*i’ani*] ... I smoke, I curse... there’s no point in doing Ramadan”. Likewise, I was also constantly reminded by friends that Ramadan was intended to teach Muslims about patience, humility, and spirituality. At times, however, the modesty and frugality of Ramadan was replaced by a consumerist binge. A veritable trade flourished behind the spirituality of the month. Small stands, street sellers, and peddlers mushroomed before and during Ramadan, shops remained open until very late, and the consumption of food and soft drinks skyrocketed.

Camp dwellers’ lives were fraught with these inconsistencies and ambiguities. However, the seeming duplicity in refugees’ behaviour was not an example of refugees’ hypocrisy; it was rather the demonstration of their capacity to navigate the complex and contradictory demands of everyday life.

Inconsistencies and conspiracy

At times, however, inconsistencies between a pious ideal and other conflicting demands triggered profound fractures within the self and became a source of great frustration.

Much recent scholarship has demonstrated that people do not inhabit moral states unproblematically, but that they might experience contradictions and inconsistencies in living a moral life (e.g. Ewing 1997, Marsden 2005, Masquelier 2001, 2005, Schielke 2012, Soares 2005, Soares and Otayek 2007). Living an ordinary Muslim life in Al-

Wihdat did not necessarily result in feelings of calm and harmony. Conversely, being “ordinary” – or not being able to live a fully moral and thoughtful Muslim life – was often a source of deep stress and anxiety, fraught with situations that overtly contradicted the ideals of piety.

In Al-Wihdat, contradictory and conflicting aims were entailed in the performance of an ordinary life – such as the desires both to live by the Quran and to pursue “illicit” fun by drinking, getting high, or having premarital sex. When ordinary aims contradicted refugees’ moral convictions, people were confronted with considerable anxiety (Schielke 2012). The experience of the failure to inhabit a moral space has ultimately affected the way in which refugees accommodate the impetus to carry out extraordinary existences within their need to live an ordinary life. In other words, the anxieties and frustrations associated with the impossibility of accomplishing a full moral self increased refugees’ sense of marginalisation and discrimination, as well as their despair vis-à-vis the political situation in Palestine.

While my friends despised Salafi activists for being tied to political organisations and groups, they drew heavily on the conception of Muslim personhood and a “literalist” understanding of the Quran advanced by those who are often labelled as Salafi. Islam was perceived as an irrefutable and perfect set of directives and preventions that left little room for interpretation and compromise. Many of my friends believed that people should strive to return to earlier forms of Islam, most notably from the time of the Prophet and his companions. They therefore sought to embody those virtues, forms of thinking, and ethical capacities that they perceived as having been forgotten by present-day Muslims⁹⁴. However, people in the Camp were often torn by their incapacity to comply with a rigid, but fascinating, interpretation of Islam. *Salāt* was a case in point.

As I mentioned in the previous section, many people celebrated the five daily prayers as truly distinctive of a pious self. In the Camp, the apathy and laziness of those Muslims who did not perform the daily prayers were widely condemned. I often heard people claiming that they experienced a sense of tranquillity and peace through their

⁹⁴For recent work on Salafi Islam in Jordan, see Wiktorowicz (2007) and Caillet (2011); for comparative literature in the area, see Wiktorowicz (2001) among others.

submission to God during *salāt*. There was much in this that recall Gregory Simon's observation in Minangkabau, Indonesia, about the importance of Islam in the life of the people (2009). According to Simon, "[a]lthough the practice of prayer may thus serve as a vehicle through which such contradictions can be challenged, and sometimes even transcended, it may also be a vehicle through which the intransigence of these contradictions is more directly experienced" (ibid. p. 259). Also in Al-Wihdat, despite the importance of *salāt*, many people neglected to pray. Hussein, for example admitted that he, like many others, frequently failed to accomplish the whole set of prayers. And when questioned about the reason, he confessed that although it was a source of comfort, waking up very early in the morning to pray or going to the mosque every day was exhausting. His inability to fulfil the perfection inherent in this ideal, especially when it was exposed by my direct questioning, fuelled at times a great sense of discomfort and failure among my friends.

Likewise, a strong sense prevailed in Al-Wihdat that people had become more attentive to Islamic precepts and doctrine, and that this was a very good thing for their struggles for national sovereignty. Still, the inhabitants neither felt that they were any closer to achieving their political goals, nor thought of the Camp as a better place to live. My friends used to repeatedly say that it was not a good time for Islam. According to many, the immorality of the present time was the emanation of internal and external threats: the Arab immorality and the corruption exerted by the Western world. The moral weakness of Arabs – who might curse, drink, take drugs, engage in prostitution, cheat, fight, and exploit each other – and the attempts by Western governments and pro-Western Arab regimes to corrupt the souls of Muslims, were the root of their moral and political problems. If the biggest world powers could not breach the defences of a group of Muslim fighters in Afghanistan, this was because God rewards true believers. A pious life was also rewarded by political success "because God helps good Muslims". The examples were countless, stretching from the past to the present time, from the example of the Prophet to the Afghan wars and the resistance of Zarqawi in Iraq. But, apparently, Palestinians were still very far from the right path, and their immorality was most evidently expressed in the ongoing occupation of Palestine by Israel. As a friend once told me, venting his bitterness after having seen the news of an Israeli air strike in the occupied territories, "*Muslimīn beghsu assa* [Muslims suck nowadays], Luigi! We

lost Palestine because we were not good Muslims; we cannot get back Palestine because we are still bad Muslims”.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to contribute to the wider goal of the thesis by addressing the role played by religion in fashioning the identities and political thinking of my informants. In so doing, I have demonstrated how an “ordinary way of being Muslim” has come to provide refugees with a new life project and an alternative and more viable way than politics to fulfil nationalistic goals and aspirations.

In so doing, I have first shown how the growing importance of Islam in the Camp cannot be described as part of a broader trend of Islamic politics sweeping through the Middle East. Support for Islamic groups and parties was about more complex issues than refugees unthinkingly adhering to allegedly global forms of Islamic radicalism. This complexity was partly the reflection of the ways refugees sought to inflect Islam with nationalist meanings, and vice-versa. The continuities between Islamist and national-secularist discourses in the Middle East have been thoroughly explored by scholars in the last two decades throughout the world (e.g. Keddie 1998, Roy 2004, Zubaida 2004) and amongst Palestinian refugees (see Khalili 2007). I have demonstrated how Islamic and nationalist discourses were clearly entangled in Al-Wihdat at the time of my fieldwork.

This, however, has not resulted in a straightforward militancy of camp dwellers in Islamic parties and movements. Refugees were particularly critical of these groups, for which adherence to Islam and proper conduct among politicians and political parties were said to have given way to a cruder, more direct, and often embarrassingly shameless desire for power, office, money, and recognition. As I have shown, people in Wihdat camp were much more concerned with the attempt to cultivate a moral self than join a militant Islamic group. Islam was interpreted by many as a project of ethical self-fashioning. But it also provided refugees with the material for the reinterpretation of the cultural parameters of their world. Camp dwellers’ efforts to keep Islam separate from the dangerous and dirty world of the political was not meant to suggest a complete

withdrawal from Palestinian nationalism into an isolated and bounded space of piety: the sacredness of national sentiment found its expression through militancy in Islamic political parties, movements, and organisations. Nationalist ideals were made possible by seeking to carry out an ordinary life in Jordan. By linking their faith to a broader political and social context, many in the Camp extolled the virtues of living an Islamic life as a stronghold against the political menaces of international neo-colonialism.

At the same time, however, I have avoided framing refugees' piety as a perfectionist project of self-discipline. Specific forms of ethical self-fashioning cannot be always and easily separated from the complexity of social life. In this sense, refugees' religiosity reflected their attempt to carry out an ordinary life. For many in the Camp being ordinary was as important as the impetus towards self-perfection or adherence to a strict, reform-minded Quranic form of Islam or Islamic purification. In other words, if the performance of a virtuous life was a goal in line with the ideal of resistance and ultimately Palestinian nationalism, refugees have adapted this project, more or less consciously, to the need to live an ordinary life. The cultivation of a pious self in the Camp was captured more adequately in ordinary ways of being Muslim – “Islam *mondain*” (Soares and Otayek 2007) – where the multiple demands and desires of living life were not always consistent with this ideal. Camp dwellers' critical capacity to interpret Islam enabled the uneasy accommodation of ideals of resistance and desires of integration.

The next chapter follows the nexus between piety, ordinary life, and political agency focusing on the performance of masculinity among the young men of Al-Wihdat.

CHAPTER 5: ORDINARY MASCULINITIES

INTRODUCTION: THE CAMP AS A “WILD PLACE”

Either as the expression of immoral behaviour or unthinking radicalism, youth masculinity in the Camp was widely perceived inside and outside camps as threatening. Taking as its starting-point scholarly discussions on gender and nationalism, this chapter seeks to document the role that the performance of masculinity plays in relation to the political subjectivity and agency of youths living in Al-Wihdat.

At first sight, the articulation of the seemingly paradigmatic forms of masculinity I encountered in Al Wihdat seems to fit academic accounts that emphasise the inherent hegemonic dimension of certain styles of manhood (Connell 1987). Masculine virtues such as male assertiveness, steadfastness and bravery were doubtless central to the ways in which Palestinian nationalism was imaginatively enacted and constituted in the Camp⁹⁵. Palestinian nationalism was hence re-enacted in Al-Wihdat through the performance of seemingly dominant models of masculinity. This is not a new theme in anthropology: the contribution of the discipline to the study of gender has been conspicuous, to say the least. The discursive construction of masculinity has been a central theme of investigation in a well-established body of scholarship that has explored the role of gender in the imaginative and material production of the nation (e.g. Kandiyoti 1991, Kimmel 2006, McClintock et al. 1997, Mosse 1996, Mostov 1999, Parker 1992, Povinelli 1999, Yuval-Davis 1997, Yuval-Davis et al. 1989). Studies have also acknowledged the dynamism and plurality of masculinity and challenged rigid and static conceptions of manhood, shedding light on the production of masculinity in relation to diverse forms of nationalism and to a variety of factors such as ethnicity, age, and class.

Having emphasised the fictitious character of traditional forms of masculinity, a growing scholarship has looked at the different factors that have contributed to the reconfiguration of masculinity amongst Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (e.g.

⁹⁵ It should also be noted, however, that in Palestinian nationalist discourse, the military and heroic masculinity of the Palestinian fighter has been partly replaced in recent years by the celebration of “pity” and “suffering”, whose main locus is the body of women and children (Khalili 2007).

Jean-Klein 2000, Massad 1995, Peteet 1994) and, more specifically, in Jordan (Hart 2008). In doing so, these studies have also consistently drawn on the notion of “hegemonic masculinity” proposed by Connell in his book, *Gender and Power* (1987). They have thus investigated the process of national construction especially in relation to the production of a specific style of masculinity that takes shape against allegedly subordinate forms of masculinity, most notably those associated with “homosexuality” and “womanliness”. In a recent article on the construction of masculinity in Hussein Camp⁹⁶, for example, Jason Hart shows how the instantiation of a dominant model of masculinity – typically associated with male assertiveness, over-toughness, and independence – was interwoven with the performance of Palestinian nationalism (2009). The author notes also that while this worked well to assert refugees’ enduring national identity, a hyper-emphasised Palestinian masculinity in Jordan was unlikely to be the most obvious goal to pursue for the transition to manhood in Jordan. Expressions of male potency identifiable with a distinct national identity would have irremediably signified marginalisation outside the camps (ibid.).

My findings dovetail with these studies but only up to a point. As I will show, the display and performance of specific manly values was central to the reproduction of Palestinian nationalism in Al-Wihdat. However, to understand the intertwining of nationalism and gender in the Camp, the notion of “hegemonic masculinity” remains inadequate. When I conducted my fieldwork in Jordan, I noticed that there was not a simple division between ideal or hegemonic forms of masculinity and those that were subordinate. Rather, young men were engaged in performing a life that was not consistently in line with any broad category⁹⁷; they were aware of the complexities of their daily lives and adapted their understandings of being a Palestinian man in exile to those realities. In this sense, we have to recognise the flexibility of Middle Eastern conceptions of masculinity, rather than simply thinking of camp-dwellers as frustrated males who strive to achieve an ideal form of masculinity in the context of a camp life in which their masculinity is constantly violated. Most importantly, I argue that categorising the multiple expressions of masculinity that I have encountered in the Camp as either “hegemonic” or “subordinate” would implicitly reproduce the

⁹⁶ A Palestinian refugee camp in Amman, a few kilometres away from Al-Wihdat.

⁹⁷ Other scholars have shown more criticism toward this conception of masculinity; see for example Magnus Marsden (2007) and the Osellas (2007).

underlying assumption in much scholarly work on Palestinian refugees' political agency, framed in the terms of "irreducible resistance" versus "passive domination". Although some authors have acknowledged the coexistence of different masculinities within the same individual (e.g. Hart 2008), their accounts continue to suggest a binary understanding that points to some form of duplicity in refugees' agency: while certain male virtues such as male assertiveness and independence are ideally associated with resistance and political agency, others like diligence and compliance would point to integration and normalisation in the host country. What can be lost in similar accounts is that refugees in Al-Wihdat have continued to reproduce their allegiance to Palestinian nationalism despite or because of the performance of those traits of masculinity that are reconcilable with a process of assimilation, such as being diligent, responsible and reliable (*muhtaram*).

In Jordan, exploring the ambiguities and complexities inherent camp dwellers' performances of masculinities is all the more important because young men from the camps were widely held to be unruly and violent. I argue that the stigmatisation or stereotyping of men from the refugee camp (*mukhayyamji*) was part of a process of "othering", in which the *mukhayyamji*'s masculinity was represented as a symbol of cultural and political difference, and the failure of camp-dwellers to embrace assimilation. Similarly to Ewing's argument in relation to Muslim immigrants from Turkey in Germany in Berlin, Palestinian refugees from Al-Wihdat were imagined "through the lens of a socially shared fantasy that forms the context through which their visible attributes are noticed and interpreted" (2009, p. 3). This fantasy locates the camp-dweller as a stigmatised or, at best, stereotyped "other". Notably, as Ewing points out, "even when a minority is granted full legal rights, these collective fantasies can be a source of basic challenges to the possibility for full cultural citizenship" (p. 6). An exploration of how the stigmatisation of camp-dweller masculinity has been used as a strategy to manage refugees and consolidate Jordanian national identity goes beyond the scope of my thesis. In this chapter, I will instead focus on how refugees have sought to challenge these stereotypes and pursued integration through the performance of masculinity, and how this performance was also orientated through the reproduction of Palestinian national values and ideals.

To understand these dynamics, the first two parts of this chapter will be an investigation into the main stereotypes associated with camp residents' masculinity through an analysis of two paradigmatic models of masculinity, which I term here "*dawanji*" (trouble-maker) and "*sheikh*" (man of piety). *Dawanji* and *sheikh*'s masculinities have at times been ideal ways through which Palestinian nationalism has been re-enacted through the display of specific manly values. As we will see, these ideals of masculinity shared common features, being both models of resistance and steadfastness. Whereas adherence to Palestinian nationalistic ideals of resistance and steadfastness were exhibited through aggressiveness and over-toughness in one case, it was sobriety and austerity at stake in the other. It would be tempting to interpret the manly virtues that both types of masculinity have respectively embodied in the Camp as the primary and genuine way through which young males re-enact the ideal and values of Palestinian nationalism. Careful scrutiny, however, will collapse common stereotypes about adolescents and young men in the camp. Refugee masculinity was articulated towards a more mundane and ordinary project rather than being inspired by subversive ideals and performances. I intend to explore the ability of refugees to accommodate nationalist models of masculinity within their desire to live an ordinary life as citizens of Jordan.

The third part of the chapter will hence document how apparently diverse and irreconcilable types of masculinity converge in the performance of what I call "ordinary masculinity" (Marsden 2007). With the term "ordinary masculinity", I refer to the capacity to manage, but not fully comply with, a wide range of different yet intertwining masculine registers, which are also adapted to the mundaneness of daily life. I argue that the performance of an ordinary masculinity is the key in which refugees infused Palestinian nationalism with daily interests and needs, and what ultimately made possible the performance of a "Palestinian national masculinity" (Massad 1995) that is fully adapted to the facts of their exile. Finally, I will conclude this analysis by documenting fractures in the performance of masculinity. This does not refer to camp dwellers' inability to conform to a specific model of dominant masculinity, but rather to their incapacity to reconcile the diverse masculine registers that constitute what I have defined as "ordinary masculinity". This can be caused by a number of interlocking factors that range from refugees' failure to come to terms with the facts of their exile to

the very impossibility of performing an ordinary masculinity because of the marginality and discrimination that many of them have faced in Jordan.

IDEALS OF MASCULINITIES IN THE CAMP

Lasting representations

“*Dīr balak fil wiḥdat* [be careful in Al-Wiḥdat], it’s a dangerous place”, I was in few occasions reminded by friends who were genuinely concerned about my safety – mostly Jordanians and Jordanian-Palestinians who never lived in the camps. This was the type of image that people “from outside” (*min barra*) commonly held on camps (*mukḥayyamāt*) and camp dwellers (*mukḥayyamjiyye*).

I have a clear memory of the first time I met the head of the police station of Wiḥdat, during a meeting in which I was seeking approval for doing research in the Camp. The man was sitting in his armchair, and his short legs barely touched the floor of his office. Swinging them up and down, he complained about the problems and troubles of his work, while a sizeable plasma screen television in front of him was showing a local soap opera:

“My job is very difficult. Here there are any sorts of crimes! ... *Kullu, kullu* [everything]! Drugs, stabbings, homicides, prostitution, fights ... *kullu, kullu*! Especially in the summer because people get out of their houses and they give vent to their frustrations. [...] Unemployment and the poor condition of infrastructure aggravate the situation. [...] Yes, you can say so, the Camp is much worse than the surrounding areas. It is a dangerous place!”

Such stereotypical depiction of the Camp and those who lived in it were especially powerfully and consistently articulated by the authorities and wealthy people of both “Jordanian” and “Palestinian” backgrounds. However, it was not uncommon to hear such ideas in poorer areas of Amman as well⁹⁸. These images played an important role in constituting a Jordanian national identity. As Ewing writes, “the identity of the

⁹⁸ Not to mention Transjordanian nationalists who see camp dwellers and Palestinian refugees in general as an internal threat.

national subject, that is, of one who fully belongs to the nation as one of “us”, rests on a discursive process in which others are defined as “not us” (2009, p. 3).

In Jordan, however, things were more complex. As we have seen, not only did refugees enjoy full citizenship rights, but the large majority of them lived outside camps. Regardless of generational, economic, and social differences, refugees from camps (*min al-mukhayyamāt*) and those living outside all identified themselves as belonging to the same category: that of the Palestinian refugee (*al-laje' al-filastīnī*). But this bond of communality was fraught with ambiguities and complexities. Because of the symbolic significance of the “camp” (*mukhayyam*) in the Palestinian national discourse, as well as the economic and socio-economic differences between camp and non-camp refugee communities, Palestinian refugees living outside camps tended to be both critical and appreciative of the camps’ inhabitants – imagined as unruly individuals and romantically perceived as genuinely embodying Palestinianess in exile (Farah 1999, Pérez 2011). Either way, however, the “camp dweller” continued to be popularly depicted as being incapable of fully belonging to the Jordanian nation. For example, one of the people who was most zealous in his attempts to persuade me not to carry out research in Al Wihdat was Abdel Rahman, a Jordanian-Palestinian who worked as a driver and whose father spent some time in Al-Wihdat after leaving Palestine in 1967. So strong was Abdel Rahman’s contempt for Wihdat that not only did he warn me of the risks of being stabbed by the violent youths who crowded the Camp – he even feared that, if I stayed in the camp for too long, I too could end up behaving like a *mukhayyamji* (camp dweller):

“I promise, Luigi, if you keep going to Al Wihdat, you will become a *dawawīn* (troublemaker). [...] When I was working as a taxi driver, I used to go there. But every time either people were already drunk or wanted to go somewhere, to a night club (*nadi leili*) for example, to get drunk or even worse. I remember last time I was there [in Wihdat] I almost had a fight with a man. He was drunk and he asked me to drive him somewhere where he could buy alcohol. When I refused he became aggressive. I told him to ‘please get out of the taxi’ and he started shouting. I had to tell him several times to go away and only after [I insisted] he finally went away. But after that I said to myself, ‘*khalas*’ [that’s it], this is the last time”.

Al-Wihdat and Palestinian refugee camps in general were often portrayed by “outsiders” and the authorities as hubs for unruly and violent individuals (*mushkalgie*). This belief was accompanied by the idea that camps were epicentres of an apparently renewed fascination with strict Islam: gender segregation, a visibly higher number of veiled women (*muhajjabāt*), and the past popularity of Islamic political groups (see chapter 4) – especially Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood – were used as proof of the camps’ inherent support for political Islam. Along with the allegedly conservative attitudes of its residents, poor infrastructure and poverty were widely held as being the causes of Al-Wihdat’s reputation as a wild place. It was argued, for example, that the camp residents’ radicalism was ultimately connected with the poverty and economic destitution that was believed to be rampant in these spaces. New generations were thought of as being affected in particularly acute ways by the camp’s “poverty”: seen as idlers and loafers (*dawawīn*), and a constant source of social anxiety, the youth were said to be responsible for a large share of the problems (*mashakel*) that afflict the Camp – from petty crimes such as fighting, theft, drug dealing, and feuds amongst families, occasional political demonstrations that burst out of the rhythm of political turmoil in Palestine, and political militancy, to their decision to embrace “wrong” and overly radical ways of being Muslim. Quite contradictorily, Al-Wihdat was widely thought of as being problematic because it was seen as both a place of immoral sinners and of Islamic terrorists (*‘irhābiyyin*). Youth from the camps were widely believed to contribute to the strength of any opposition in Jordan. So, if Al-Wihdat was known for being a place brimming with unruly individuals, this stigma was also associated with the widespread belief that young men and adolescents in the Camp were unthinking and ignorant conformists in the grip of Muslim fanatics. These stereotypes have eventually led some authors to question the very idea that camp dwellers might nurture a genuine feeling of identification with the Jordanian state (Al-Khazendar 1997, p. 35-36, see also Brand, 1995, pp. 149-150).

Significantly, this process of stigmatisation has had powerful lingering effects on the camp dwellers themselves. Some people in the Camp spoke of these spaces in a manner that suggested they had internalised the images of the Camp as a space of immorality, violence and fanaticism that were so often articulated by “the outsiders”. Sara was one such person. At the time of my research, he was a *mukhtār* in Al Wihdat. He was born

in Palestine in the late '40s. Like many other old men in the Camp, he was critical of the tenor of life in the camp during the period in which I conducted fieldwork: "I remember, I was there [in the Camp] when they set up the first shelters [Al Wihdat had been built with shelters since the very beginning]. Life was very difficult but simple... in the mid-fifties we had electricity, the first generators [...]" Sari continued by highlighting some of the ways in which life in the camp was easier now, yet that such ease was also connected with many more problems of living there. In particular, the man depicted the Camp's youths as one of its most intractable "problems":

"They are the *shabāb* of the Camp that cause many troubles here. They are 17-18 years old, fed up with their problems, with no jobs or money. They say: 'you [the Government] are responsible for my problems and you must do something! [...] Many of them drink alcohol, smoke hashish, and take drugs [which in the Camp are often sold by coffee sellers and stallholders]. They are troublemakers [*mushkalgie*]!"

The manner in which Sari represented the youth as a one-dimensional source of immorality for other camp dwellers was not too far from the depiction given by the head of the police station of Wihdat or by Abdel Rahman just above. But are these faithful representations or rather caricatural images of camp youth? To answer this question, I will first proceed with an analysis of how these representations were narrated and, to some extent, performed by the young men and adolescents (*shabāb*) of the Camp. In Al-Wihdat, these representations of youth found manifestation in the figure of the reckless street man (*dawanji*) and in that of the fanatical man of piety (*sheikh*) respectively.

Dawawīn, violence and the street

Scholars have documented in considerable detail the importance of violence – endured, narrated, or performed – to the creation and reproduction of masculinity in the Arab Middle East (see, most notably, Gilsenan 1996). More specifically, these themes have also been addressed in literature dealing with Palestinian experiences of the I Intifada (see, programmatically, Peteet 1994). Al Wihdat was notorious in Jordan for being a space of violence. Indeed, mainly in its urban and domestic forms, "violence" was quite widespread in the Camp. On walking into Al-Wihdat, it was quite common to see or

hear about a *toshe* (quarrel/fight). The narration of violence – perhaps more than its performance – was an important part of camp life. In any case, violence – narrated, exerted, or endured – was strictly intertwined with people’s understanding and enactment of masculinity.

Feuds and clashes arose and died in the *hara* (neighbourhood). The street (*al-shāra*‘) was also the ideal place where people could either weaken or enhance their own reputation for being manly. Walking through the Camp, it was not uncommon to come across groups of adolescents and young men arguing or fighting over issues concerning respect and authority in the *hara*. There was much at stake, and the street was the best context in which to exhibit superiority over others, or to challenge local authority figures in a manner that also displayed one’s masculine bravery. Violent confrontations were quite limited during wintertime, a period of year during which people tended to stay in their homes. In contrast, the sultry heat of the summer pushed “refugees” outside of their houses and was also said to stir up their tempers. Often, quarrels were prompted by ordinary issues such as car crashes, economic competition, or neighbourhood jealousy. At other times, brawls arose over homing pigeons, family matters, women, or daily “misunderstandings”. In some cases, the dispute generated a feud that ended up involving also the extended families, leading to an escalation of tensions that often culminated in bloody confrontations.



Figure 17: children playing in the street (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 18: children and *shabāb* in the street (source: Jihad Nijem)

While camp dwellers often spoke of Al-Wihdat as being a homogenously violent space, at other times they recognised that certain areas had a worse reputation than others in terms of the behaviour of their inhabitants. *Shāra‘ liddawi* and the alleys that radiate from it were one such case: these alleys were widely thought of as being an especially poisonous environment. Many of the camp dwellers I spoke to explained this in terms of the high concentration of troublemakers (*dawawīn*) and gypsies (*nawari/ghajarīn*) who lived in this area of the Camp: they were deemed to corrupt the morality of its people, especially the youth.

The street and the *hara* were a laboratory and a testing ground for young men who want to fully embody a specific model of masculinity. The display of violence was frequently said to be a prominent feature of a model of masculinity best embodied by the figure of the *dawanji* (sing. of *dawawīn*). The word “*dawanji*” may be roughly translated as “thug”. It was generally used to refer to trouble-makers inside as well as outside camps. Although there were *dawawīn* everywhere in Jordan when I conducted my research, the traits associated with this figure referred to a “hostile” attitude toward the authorities that was believed to be distinctive of refugees from the camps (*mukhayyamji*). Because of the irreducible hostility that the term evoked, being *dawawīn* in Jordan was fraught with ambivalence. The word had doubtless taken on in recent time a clearly negative

connotation, and those who complied with this ideal-type commanded little support in or outside the Camp. The very origin of the name is synonymous with idleness. In Arabic, the word shares the same root as *dīwān*. If the *dīwān* is the place where men meet with other men to chat and discuss, the *dawawīn* are those who do not work and pass their time idling in the company of their fellows. With the same commitment the pious people in the Camp would show to their devotion, these men exhibited a similarly strong appetite for women, independence, male assertiveness, and transgressive behaviour. They would organise their time around forms of sociability such as drinking and drug consumption that “mainstream” attitudes in the camp would hold as being “immoral”. They would hang around the streets of the Camp, play *shadda* (cards) or videogames in the games rooms, “talk dirty” (*biseb*), or simply lazily stare at the homing pigeons performing their aerial tricks from the tops of the houses. Generally speaking *dawawīn* were said to be idlers who wasted their time doing nothing. However, at the time of my fieldwork, being *dawawīn* could still be a source of pride. People who conformed to this model – who used the very term “*dawawīn*” to refer to themselves – were not ashamed of this label and displayed, with a certain degree of pride, the features associated with being able to act in such a way. As the word signified being tough, canny, and streetwise, some skills and dispositions related to this ideal type were still appreciated as a mark of being genuinely from the camp.

Dawawīn were also recognisable by their outward appearance, notably the ways in which they combined distinctive dress patterns and particular aesthetic features. The *dawawīn* sometimes had long hair, and displayed their tattoos and a specially-grown long nail on their little finger with pride; they often dressed in a shabby way, wearing worn jeans, dirty t-shirts, and tattered tracksuits, but occasionally combined these with garish garments like studded shoes or belts with brash metal buckles. Haircuts and styles of dress were not the only way to perform, display, and enact this identity. Tattoos were also quite common, especially amongst *dawawīn*. There were certain recurring patterns, ranging from the evergreen flaming heart on the bicep to nationalist slogans. Many *dawawīn*, for example, sported three stars/points that sketched out the shape of a triangle on the back of their hands between the thumb and the forefinger. Each point or star implied a word: three points for a three word sentence that means

“*kuss ‘ukhtāk el-hukūme!*”⁹⁹. Furthermore, *dawawīn* were also identifiable by being referred to by specific nicknames (*algāb*). Giving nicknames was a fairly common practice in the Camp. People were often named after objects, animals, or famous people that had or may have had some connection with aspects of their character, physical appearance, or “deeds” performed in the past. For example, tall people might be called *shajara* or *silam*, which respectively mean “tree” and “stairs”; a man could be named “*hit*” (wall) for his stoutness and strength. *Dawawīn* would often earn nicknames such as “*bonduqiyye*” (shotgun) for their violent behaviour¹⁰⁰.

However, the best way to recognise a *dawawīn*, I was told, was by the scar left on his cheek by the knife of someone like him. In many cases, violence was etched on their faces in the shape of diagonal scars as memories of past vengeance. Sometimes violence was also self-inflicted. One day, for example, my friend reported to me, shaking his head in visible disapproval, that a man who was questioned by a police officer in the Camp began screaming and cutting himself with a razor blade, carving deep cuts into his flesh from his shoulders to the bottom of his chest. Although he eventually managed to escape, his behaviour was more a symbolic display of strength for public consumption than a practical way to escape control.

As scholars less drawn to the Cartesian dualism between body and mind have demonstrated (see for example Das 1997, Mahmood 2005, Wacquant 2004), the body is not only a blank canvas for the inscription of culture but also a site where the individual is defined and social relations are negotiated. Self-harming and tattooing the body must be located within the same sphere of meaning that makes these acts not only plausible but also sensible (Desjarlais 1997, p. 233 - 234). With regard to self-harming, for example, the anthropology of violence and medical anthropology have shown that violence and suffering are never simply acts of speechlessness, nor are they simply relegated to the individual sphere, but they belong to the domain of intersubjectivity (e.g. Daniel 1996, Feldman 1991, Makdisi and Silverstein 2006, Peteet 1994, Schepers-Hughes 1992, Taussig 1986). Michael Gilson traces how narratives of violence

⁹⁹ Loosely translated as “fuck the government”.

¹⁰⁰ The study of nicknames has attracted the attention of diverse scholars (see Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006). For a notable study of nicknames in Jordan as a device of social control, see Antoun (1968); on the use of nicknames among criminals, see Gambetta (2009, chapter 7).

emerge out of social negotiations amongst actors with different access to symbolic and material resources (Gilsenan 1996, cf. Briggs 2007). In this sense, the strength of a story depends on the character of the storyteller and the historical context in which it is narrated. In a recent publication on communication codes amongst inmates in the USA and elsewhere, Gambetta argues that apparently senseless and violent behaviour follows a rational logic. In this sense, the *dawawji*'s act of deliberately harming himself should be regarded as an effective signal through which a weaker actor seeks to avoid control and submission from a powerful one (the police officer) by communicating his dangerousness and fearlessness (Gambetta 2009, chapter 5)¹⁰¹.

Shuyukh, piety and the mosque

Shabāb in the Camp did not only establish their masculinity in the street and through the performance of violence, but their assertion of manly virtues also developed around religious practices and discourse (Ismail 2006). Having explored the *dawawīn* model of masculinity, I now turn my attention to another, apparently incompatible, style of masculinity: the “*sheikh* masculinity”.

The exhibition of independence and transgressive behaviour did not find a sympathetic public among Sheikh Abu Omar and the other supervisors of the “Youth Programme” (*burnāmej al-shabāb*) at the Nadi Al Wihdat. In the course of our daily chats, Abu Omar often stressed the role that the peer group, and ultimately the environment play in the transition to social adulthood for many children:

“Some boys become *dawawīn*, [while] others [become] good guys (*muhtaramīn*)... Family (*‘ā’ile*) and friends (*‘āsāeb*) are decisive in pointing kids on the ‘right path’ (*al-sirāt al-mustaqīm*) [...] Ashraf, Ismail, and other *shabāb* are *muhtaramīn*, but they grew up in a very bad *hara* with friends that are no good [...] Ashraf last year was also a very good student. He finished the year with a ‘7’ [his school mark]. But now his mother is complaining about him, she told me that he sits in front of the computer all day– perhaps even watching pornography– and he doesn’t want to do anything [...] She cannot do anything because she is a woman on her own, and his [Ashraf’s] father is always absent because he works from morning until night”.

¹⁰¹ For a criticism of Gambetta's rational actor approach, see Pettenkofer (2011); for a different reading of self-harming as a vehicle of communication, see Desjarlais (1997).

Notwithstanding studies that have problematised the categorisation of forms of masculinity as “dominant” and “subordinate” (most notably Marsden 2007, cf. Connell, 1987), it would be tempting to define the *dawawīn* as being in opposition to the forms of masculinity adopted by the *sheikh* (pl. *shuyukh*). The division between these two models of masculinity recalls a pattern highlighted by other anthropological work conducted in the Arab Muslim world (see for example Ismail 2006, Martinez 2000) that points to some of the ways in which the path from youth to adulthood involves young men being confronted with the choice to join either “the party of drugs” (*hizb al-zalta*) or the “party of the mosque” (*hizb al-jami‘*). In Al-Wihdat this choice led to young men either becoming a *dawanji* or a *sheikh*. *Sheikh* in Arabic has a wide range of meanings. At the time of my fieldwork, those people who strived to adopt a style of life consistent with Islamic piety and had a broad knowledge of Islamic doctrine were popularly called *shuyukh*, regardless of any affiliation with a particular political group. As a matter of fact, in Al-Wihdat, almost anyone who exhibited a groomed long beard, a sombre haircut, and a *dishdāsha*¹⁰² was generally referred to as being a *sheikh*. Whereas the *dawawīn* were synonymous with intemperance, ignorance of Islamic precepts, and immorality, the word *sheikh* was often associated with moral dispositions, especially piety, humbleness, and sobriety. The term was also related to wisdom and knowledge. Most notably, a *sheikh* would strive to develop a style of living that reflected the example provided by the Prophet Mohammed in his life¹⁰³.

A nexus of spatial context and moral characteristics were also included in this style of masculinity. Games rooms, pool rooms, and the street were primarily the domain of the *dawawīn*, where young men would gather to chat, be idle, and watch women passing. In contrast, *shuyukh* would spend their time working, praying, spending time with their family, and studying the Quran, preferring the mosque to the street. What is striking here is the spatial dimension of moral personhood: the perceived deficiencies in people’s morality and immoral forms of masculinities were widely accounted for by others in the camp in terms of the time spent on the street. In other words, more than the failure to conform to Islamic values, it was *al-shāra* ‘(the street) that played the key role

¹⁰² An ankle-length garment with long sleeves, similar to a robe.

¹⁰³ For an analysis of the importance of figures of the Islamic tradition in the process of self-fashioning, see among others Deeb (2009) and Tugal (2009).

in a man's moral degradation. Along with family and friends, for Abu Omar, the mosque and the Nadi could also be helpful in keeping adolescents away from the street and, ultimately, from immoral behaviour more generally. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Abu Omar and the other educators (*'ustāza*) in the *burnāmej al-shabāb* sought to educate young people to be studious and to adhere to Islamic teachings and practices by recurring to a number of teaching methods, most notably lecturing and peer-teaching.

A further domain, in addition to those of space and the body, in which the expression and performance of pious forms of masculinity were especially visible is that of language. The recurrence of certain verbal locutions marked someone as *dawawīn* – like “*ard 'ummi*”, which literally means the “honour of my mother” – and others were frequently adopted by *shuyukh* and pious Muslims – such as the spasmodic reiteration of “*al-hamdulillāh*” (praise to Allah). Because of its rudeness and the large amount of cursing and abuse shouted aloud such as “*kuss 'ukhtak*” or “*kuss 'ummak*”¹⁰⁴, the distinctive linguistic style adopted by *dawawīn* would not be appropriate for a “true” *sheikh*. In this sense, the importance of Islam was also reflected at the level of daily language. Many words that were pointed out to me as the proper traditional manner for greeting someone or give one's condolences, I later found out, had only been adopted a few years earlier. Great appreciation was put on a man's linguistic refinement, and a complex etiquette regulated a wide system of salutation. The specific way to address, honour, and greet people was highly valued amongst refugees as a sign of cultivation and politeness, and a standard of civility indispensable to being a good Muslim. *Shuyukh* and pious people put a great deal of importance on the polite style of Islamic speech to adopt depending on the circumstances. This display of politeness played a significant role in shaping a pious masculinity in contrast to the unruly and ignorant *dawawīn*. For example, I was told that *salāmtak* (health be with you) was not the best way to address someone who sneezes. The term, which had commonly been adopted as an act of courtesy toward someone who was ill until recently, was replaced by the Islamic locution “*yarhamuk allāh*” (may Allah have mercy on you). If a non-Muslim were to sneeze, the best choice of words would be “*yadī kum allāhu wa yaslih ba*

¹⁰⁴ Literally, the “pussy of your sister/mother”.

lākum” (may Allah give you guidance and make your children pious). The pattern of courtesy, however, demanded that this formula followed the ever-present “*al-hamdulillāh*” (praise to Allah), a phrase pronounced by the one who sneezes immediately after sneezing. The courtesy exchange would then conclude with “*yarhamuna allāhu wa iyyakum wa yaghfiru lana wa lākum*” (may Allah have mercy on us and you, and may He forgive us and you), which is the proper answer to “*yarhamuk allāh*”. A few years earlier, I was told, people would have simply said “*sahha*” (health) and answered “*shukrān*” (thanks). Similarly, formulas and locutions to celebrate or congratulate someone – for example a bride and groom – or to offer condolences for the loss of a relative have been replaced by alternative Islamic expressions.

This way of speaking was connected by many to piety and refined manners (*ādāb*). As such, speaking was not only an index of the moral qualities of single individuals: for many people, the social dimension of language made it a general index of the moral fabric of society. To them, the lack of *ādāb* (civilised manners), most clearly expressed in the street jargon of the *dawawīn* but also in the more austere language of secular everyday life, was symptomatic of the moral and political decline of Jordanian society as a whole, described as corrupted and not genuinely Islamic (see chapter 4). Conversely, by striving to adopt a distinctive jargon and a proper etiquette, my friends sought to pin down an Islamic moral code into the fabric of everyday life: at once an ethical and political endeavour¹⁰⁵.

FROM DAWAWĪN TO SHUYUKH

From resistance to idleness

“A *toshe!* [quarrel/fight]”, Fadi warned me, pointing at a police van in the middle of the road that was drawing the attention of a growing crowd of people. The van was parked in front of a small alley that led from the main road into the maze of alleys in the camp. It was clear that something was happening there, because people were darting out from the small alley onto the main road like steam escaping from a pressure cooker. “It is

¹⁰⁵ For a similar and more in-depth analysis of the moral (and political) bearing of language on Muslims in Pakistan, see Rollier (2010); for comparative work on *ādāb* in the Middle East and in South Asia, see respectively Schielke (2009) and Metcalf (1987).

always like this”, Najjar commented, “when [the weather] gets hotter in the summer, there are always more problems”. In the Camp, it was a commonly-held opinion that this seasonal shift in the performance of violence was coupled with another temporal change: the gradual decrease of the number of *dawawīn*, whose behaviour was said to be the source of many problems.

The unfolding of masculinities in the camp can be narrated historically. “There was a time in which the *dawawīn* were *muhtaramīn* [honourable men]!” people sometimes told me. There was, indeed, a time in which Jihad – who had spent some time in an Israeli prison in the 1960s – did not mind displaying the huge “Palestine” tattooed on his right forearm. When I conducted my fieldwork, the situation had significantly changed and the man felt awkward with his allegiance engraved on his body: “I’m not young anymore and Wihdat is different now... before there were a lot of *dawawīn* in Al Wihdat, and I was one of them... life *fil mukhayyam* [in Al-Wihdat] was more intense in the past. But now I don’t want people to think I’m a *dawawīn*¹⁰⁶”. If in the past the demonstration of independence and hostility towards authority had served to reinforce a distinctive identity as Palestinians, it later became a potential source of embarrassment for many camp dwellers. In the years preceding Black September, and in its aftermath, *dawawīn* instead fitted the ideal of active resistance. Many *fidā’īyyin* (guerrilla fighters) were also *dawawīn*, and in refugees’ narratives, the two terms were often used to indicate the same kind of person. As long as the figure of the armed fighter embodied the ideal of resistance, *dawawīn* were highly praised and esteemed for their “quarrelsome” spirit. I heard many using the word *muhtaram* (honourable) to refer to former *dawawīn*. But the very same people would not have described them in the same positive way when I conducted my fieldwork.

Since the late 1990s, with the political and symbolic significance of refugee camps progressively vanishing in the nationalist rhetoric of the PLO, and the “dream of return” gradually becoming a myth, the overemphasis on those traits that served to reinforce the distinctiveness of camps as separate and oppositional political spaces was unlikely to be the most obvious goal to pursue for the transition to manhood in Jordan (Hart 2008). Notably, the time in which there were most *dawawīn* in the Camp was before and

¹⁰⁶ The word “*dawawīn*” (pl. of *dawanji*) is often used for both singular and plural cases.

during Black September. Also, Nader – the owner of a game room equipped with a few PlayStations, which was informally called *Al-Mahal* (The Place) by its customers – confirmed the gradual diminution of *dawawīn* as a result of the control exerted by the government over the territory: “Before, there were famous *dawawīn* living here [*shāra’ liddawi*], I knew at least five *dawawīn* that were living here and there [pointing in different directions]. But they all ended up badly: hanged by *el hukūme* [the government]!”.

Such overt expressions of toughness and hostility were not only discouraged by the authorities, they were also no longer widely admired symbols of male assertiveness among camp dwellers themselves. Since the seventies, so-called revivalist religious discourses have played an increasing role in Jordan (e.g. Wiktorowicz 1999). For Hart, the progressive influence of Islamist groups in camps, such as the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-’ikhwān*), had a significant bearing on rearticulating camp ideals of masculinity around Islamic values and principles. The over-toughness of previous generations inspired less sympathy amongst young men, for whom instead “adherence to Islamic teaching and practice, studiousness, modesty and obedience seemed particularly admired qualities” (ibid. p. 11).

As shown in chapter 3, local explanations also assumed that the rising cost of living was the primary cause beyond the disappearance of *dawawīn* and the “cooling down” of active resistance. The increasing cost of living in Jordan, the intensifying control of the government over the camp space, and the descending trajectory of secular nationalist discourse in Palestine stripped *dawawīn* of much of their political agency. Deprived of this capacity, those who remained *dawawīn* gained a reputation for being loafers, or even criminals.

Conflicting masculinities, common features

Heroic resistance aimed at subverting tyranny and overcoming imperialism are persistent themes both in Islamist ideologies and nationalist/liberationist discourse (see for example Khalili 2007, Roy 2004). As Laleh Khalili points out, “[i]n their national homes, Islamist movements were clearly entangled with the nationalist movements,

alongside or in opposition to which they often declared their being. [...] Post-1967 Islamists in the Arab states saw themselves as an alternative to the “failed” Arab nationalist project even as they borrowed its discourses, goals, and strategies” (2007, p. 29). Building on the work of Khalili and others, in what follows, I want to show how interactions between Islam and nationalism were visible also at a social level in terms of the local ideas about and practices of masculinity. In this sense, it would be a mistake to see the two ideals of masculinity – *dawawīn/ fidā ṭyyn* and *shuyukh* – as the embodiment of contrasting and antithetical discourses. However, the differences between *dawawīn* and *sheikh* were not as marked as people claimed.

First of all, many refugees who had been known in the past as “notorious” *dawawīn* had suddenly changed their beliefs and attitudes, becoming *shuyukh*: giving up drinking alcohol and taking drugs, changing their style of dress, and adopting a distinctive jargon. If the performance of “*dawanji* masculinity” was devoid of any political content, becoming *de facto* pointless and immoral if not dangerous, *shuyukh* gained prominence and acquired a popular following. According to my friends, Islam fulfilled the hope to pursuing a meaningful life, which had been left unfulfilled by the broken promises of secular nationalism. Religion replaced the latter as a way through which people could escape the idleness and boredom of *dawawīn* by giving sense to their life. If, for many of my friends, *dawawīn* were afflicted by boredom, pious believers were relieved of that by their faith: Islam gave people the possibility, I was told, of choosing between deviance and commitment, between boredom and fulfilment.

Secondly, while *dawawīn* came to embody a less desirable and appealing style of masculinity amongst the refugee community, some of the features associated with *dawawīn* did not cease to exist but were inherited by the figure of the *sheikh*. In the camp, *shuyukh* came to embody a style of masculinity that was not only appreciated for its pious-based qualities – such as studiousness, modesty, and obedience: male assertiveness and virility were also part of *shuyukh* ways of being. Looking at a robust, bearded man, for example, a friend one day called my attention to the man’s imposing figure. With a self-satisfied tone, the man – whose father was a *sheikh* – pointed out that physical strength is as important a quality for these “men of faith” as their pious disposition.

The masculine self in the Camp came thus to be associated with the figure of the *dawawīn*, who exhibited his manliness through acts of courage and self-sacrifice. Despite obvious differences, *shuyukh* took the role of the fighter from the *dawawīn/fidā ṭyyin* and borrowed some of their manly qualities such as steadfastness, male assertiveness, and resistance. The display of this “new” type of masculinity often revealed antagonism either in relation to the Jordanian government, which was perceived as immoral and tied to Western imperialism. For example, when reflecting on how political change would come about, many people in the Camp mentioned the example of leaders such as Salah al-Din, who freed the Holy Land from the occupying forces with the power of his faith. Not surprisingly, many *shabāb* in Al-Wihdat were fascinated by the protagonists of the “Islamic Jihad”. Bin Laden, Zarqawi and others were highly acclaimed by some as pious fighters who were willing to give up their lives and wealth to fight for the freedom of Islam in a country far from their homeland. *Shuyukh* were the protagonists of the Islamic jihad, people who followed the example of the Prophet and also fought wars far from their homes. From this perspective, Americans, Israelis and their allies in the Middle East and North Africa persecuted good Muslims, those who sought to bring to an end the political, social and cultural subjection of Arabs to the yoke of the West. Islam and pious Muslims were considered by many in the Camp as a bastion against Western despotism. The act of self-sacrifice, which may have been involved in fighting a battle under the sign of “freedom” (*hurīe*), was held in high regard by some of the adolescents and young men in the Camp. The example was also given of Afghans’ pious life being rewarded even with political success, “because God helps good Muslims”. As a friend once said: “have you seen what happened in Afghanistan with the Russians, and now in Iraq and again in Afghanistan with the Americans? They have not still managed to conquer them! And why can the Americans not catch Bin Laden [at that time, Bin Laden was still on the run]? And why did they only kill Zarqawi after many years?!”.

Often, it was more the fascination for the martyrs and the heroes of the so-called Islamic jihad than the adherence to the agenda of these groups that held appeal for people. When I asked Najjar whether he liked Al-Qaida, he replied: “I don’t know... I can tell you that I like Osama Bin Laden a lot”. In fact, many in the Camp actively made

comparisons between Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Osama Bin Laden. One such a person was *Sheikh* Najjar, who told me on one occasion of his fascination for figures like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro¹⁰⁷; others in the Camp displayed a similar appreciation of iconic figures who had stood against American despotism and Western imperialism. Najjar, however, sported a long beard and placed much emphasis on Islamic teachings and practices, and in doing so gained the title of *sheikh*. His fascination for secular heroes such as Che Guevara might at first sight seem at odds with his piety. This is less surprising if we consider that nationalist and liberationist discourse still have some influence on Islamist movements in the Middle East. The extent to which my friends borrowed the valorisation and militarisation of masculinity from nationalist and liberationist discourses is significant. According to Najjar, indeed, “there is no difference between people like Osama and others like Che Guevara. They are both strong and fight for freedom against America [...]. Osama in Afghanistan and Zarqawi in Iraq have fought for the freedom of Islam!” *Dawawīn* and *shuyukh* thus shared many more similarities than my friends were inclined to admit; the story of *Bunduqiyye* exemplifies this particularly clearly.

Bonduqiyye

During the time I spent in the Camp, my friends frequently pointed out to me people who were thought of being *dawawīn* yet who had radically changed their demeanour and appearance to become respected *shuyukh*. I asked many people what ultimately motivated this spiritual change and physical transformation for so many *dawawīn*. I was told that these people were referred to as living in darkness and ignorance (*jāhilīya*), disregarding Islamic precepts and doctrine until their gradual awareness of having wasted their time and energy doing nothing worthwhile finally roused them from their torpor. This change was said, sometimes, to motivate these newly reborn pious Muslim to engage in “noble and pious” undertakings, such as, for example, fighting for the freedom of Islam from the Western yoke in Afghanistan or Iraq. However, the figure of the avenger – a *sheikh* or someone who acts on God’s behalf, whose virtues lie especially in being capable of overcoming evil and unjust blasphemers in violent

¹⁰⁷ For comparative literature on the political significance of the commodification and transnational circulation of the images of Che Guevara, see Raman Parvathi (2009)

contest – recurred also in many other accounts. If taken singularly, the plot of such stories itself is not remarkable as it follows a quite standardized pattern: offence, fair punishment, overwhelming forces, and rightful victory. What is interesting in these stories, however, is that they introduce us to a specific ideal of masculinity, declined around the values of piety, power, and force. Notwithstanding the considerable appeal that similar stories might have held for some *shabāb*, very few people in Al-Wihdat were said to have left and ultimately fought in Iraq or in Afghanistan. The distance, the cost, the time, and the risk involved in such an enterprise apparently persuaded the large majority of these prospective fighters to abandon their warlike ambitions. Bonduqiyye was an exception.

Bonduqiyye was aged, when I first saw him, in his late fifties. He was known for his outbursts of irrational violence in the Camp and for having been a thief and murderer in his youth: a reputation that gained him the nickname “*bonduqiyye*” (shotgun). As a matter of fact, I was never introduced to the man. Because of his wild behaviour and insanity, my friends dissuaded me from meeting him personally. Nonetheless, I came across him several times. He used to spend much of his time wondering the streets of his neighbourhood or sitting on the kerb and gazing at people in a rather bewildered manner. He was living in the area of the camp called *wihdat al-taht* (Lower Wihdat) – a southern *hara* relatively distant from the souk – next to the house of one of my friends, Hussein. It was here, outside his house, that I met him for the first time. After a quick exchange of greetings with him, my friend whispered to me that the man had the reputation for being something worse than a loafer: “you see this man, this is Bonduqiyye, and he was the king of the *dawawīn* [*malik al-dawawīn*]!” Hussein continued: “he was a *dawawīn*, the biggest *dawawīn* in Wihdat. He used to steal, drink, curse, and even kill. Then, he changed; he embraced Islam, and became a much better person. He started praying and respecting people, he stopped stealing and behaving as a *dawawīn*. Eventually, he decided to go to Afghanistan and fight with Osama Bin Laden... but he didn’t meet him [...] He met Zarqawi in prison, though”

People in the camp disagreed on whether Bonduqiyye had been changed after having met Zarqawi in prison, or before. They all agreed, however, that, at some point in his life, the man dismissed “Western” trousers and a clean face to appear bearded and

dressed in *jāllabiya*. Apparently, Bonduqiyye adopted a style of life consistent with a Salafi revivalist understanding of Islam. This led to an abrupt break with his sinful past as he became a new committed person (*multazim*). The unexpected change was said to have had an all-encompassing effect in Bonduqiyye's life. Pious discipline was hence not only applied to his style of dress, but also to the other dimensions of his everyday life. The perfectionist nature of this project led him to fulfil religious obligations, socialise only with people who were religious in the same way that he was, and give up his "career" as a thief and criminal. Bonduqiyye was also said to have pushed his commitment (*'iltizām*) even further by deciding to travel to Afghanistan in order to fight against the American military occupation of the country in the wake of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. However, people less fascinated by Bonduqiyye's pious change maliciously suggested that he never really changed and that what had pushed him to travel to Afghanistan was not a pious goal but rather his notorious violent disposition.

Bonduqiyye was an established feature in the Camp's landscape. Anecdotes and stories about him abounded in the Camp: a violent *dawawīn*, a brave *sheikh*, and an unpredictable *majnūn* (fool/insane person). "Now, he is old but before he was very strong [...]. Once, a gypsy passing nearby cursed God while Bonduqiyye was praying. Bonduqiyye finished his prayer, caught up with the gypsy, and beat him badly". In retaliation, apparently, some hours later a large group of gypsies gathered in the streets of the camp looking for the offender. In a short time, a huge crowd of *dawawīn* gathered on the roof of the houses and began throwing stones and other blunt objects at the gypsies. Some of my friends, who participated in the clash, still laughed recalling Bonduqiyye pretending to be a *sheikh* and throwing a huge rock at his adversaries to the cry of "*Allah Akbar*" (Allah is great). In another story with him as the protagonist, a man from a Jordanian family from Al-Tafila¹⁰⁸ cursed God. Bonduqiyye gave him a sound beating. The other members of the family tried to avenge the "disrespect" but the feud ended with the annihilation of the entire family.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Tafila is a town located 183 kilometres southwest of Amman, known to be inhabited predominantly by Transjordanian families.

The most consistent and widespread rumour was that upon his return from Afghanistan, Bonduqiyye was caught by the Jordanian *mukhābarāt*. Apparently, the secret service brutally tortured him with electric shocks to the degree that his mind was irremediably injured. Bonduqiyye never recovered from this encounter. After that, he ceased to be considered a pious man and was said to have returned to being a *dawawīn*. He was said to have become insane and irrational (*majnūn*). In fact, Bonduqiyye was unpredictable at best. On one occasion, for example, I saw him snatching a tray of *mansaf* by force out of the hands of one of the Egyptian employees of the catering agency in charge of providing daily distributions of food to the orphans of the Nadi during Ramadan.

Bonduqiyye was also rumoured to be a *takfīr*¹⁰⁹. For these reasons, I was told, he would have never tolerated the presence of an infidel (*kāfir*) like me. However, he was considered a serious threat for everybody in the Camp. Embracing what was described to me as an inflexible position, the man not only lashed out at “infidels” like me (*kāfir*), but also against other Muslims. What is interesting, however, is the low reputation that Bonduqiyye enjoyed in the Camp, also motivated by his radicalism. I indeed expected somehow that the fascination for models of masculinity predicated upon Islamic values and male potency would have inevitably led my friends to approve the extreme positions of the *takfiris*. However, rather than admiring his uncompromising approach, most of my friends called him *muta’asseb* (narrow minded) and *’onsori* (racist). For most of my friends, Bonduqiyye’ extremism was the reflection of his wild nature and, now, insanity. Conversely, open-mindedness and critical thinking were instead qualities held in high regard among my friends (cf. Marsden 2007).

Having documented the changes in and similarities between models of manliness in Al-Wihdat, I now turn my focus to how camp-dwellers strived to adapt this new ideal of masculinity to their wish of living an ordinary life.

LIVING THE IDEAL

Unbearable models

¹⁰⁹ See chapter 4 for a discussion of this movement in Jordan.

Piety and religiosity in the Camp did not generate any predisposition to Jihadi Salafism, nor did it lead people to fashion a perfect and coherent pious self. As Samuli Schielke put it,

“the rigor of Salafi piety of the piety movement produces much starker contrasts between commitment and deviance [...]. This can become a problematic and troublesome experience, however, when one or some of the ideologies of the self a person holds to are based on a demand for strict and exclusive perfection – as the Salafi revivalist notion of subjectivity based on ‘commitment’ (*iltizâm*) is” (2009, p. 23, cf. Mahmood, 2005).

The constant suspicion about the “true” nature of *shuyukh* was, indeed, evidence of the impracticality of fully complying with the “perfectionism” inherent in this model of masculinity. The sobriety and rigour that “*sheikh* masculinity” made refugees extremely sceptical and critical about those who claimed to embody such inner qualities. During the time I spent in the Camp, people frequently warned me about the fraudulent austerity of many *shuyukh*. Far from being examples to follow and model to imitate *per se*, the term “*sheikh*” could easily be devalued. Aesthetic features were deceptive and could be actively manipulated by someone for personal interest. It was a commonly-held opinion within the Camp that a beard and *dishdāsha* did not necessarily point to a true *sheikh*, though they certainly earned him the appellative. There were people who posed as *sheikh* but were believed to really be *dawawīn*. Since over time being a *sheikh* had progressively come to embody an ideal style of masculinity, some people simply pretended to be a *sheikh* solely to gain respect and popularity in the Camp. Therefore, if it had been interpreted genuinely, the role could have been a source of great respect and esteem in the Camp. Conversely, being a *sheikh* did not spare anyone from social condemnation and disapproval. I have also heard people debating whether it was better to sit with a *dawawīn* or a *sheikh*. They were complaining about the hypocrisy and dishonesty of some *shuyukh* who were believed to be mere drunkards (*sukharjin*) and professed a strong allegiance to Islamic doctrine only to behave immorally when out of sight. For one of them, *dawawīn* were somehow more “genuine” and honest. I was taken aback by one of them, who I had come to respect on religious issues because of his principled conduct, when he said: “*kullu shuyukh bekhsu!* [all *shuyukh* suck]”.

Although his statement was largely playful, it pointed to the alleged untrustworthy and dishonest nature of some self-professed *shuyukh*¹¹⁰.

However, the exceptional piety of a “sheikh” model of masculinity was not only difficult to maintain in the face of the ambivalent pressures of everyday life; in some cases, it was not even desirable. As we have seen, while young men expressed admiration for the display of pious qualities, at the same time they often ridiculed the inability of *takfīrīn* to think rationally. According to my friends, I should not pay much attention to the *takfīrīn* because they did not reflect the way people in Wihdat thought: “there are not many in the Camp... only people like Bonduqiyye, Sheikh Issam, and few others... not more than ten!”, a friend once told me. This is not to say that the figure of the *sheikh* and the “holy warrior” (*mujhāhid*) ceased to hold appeal for the *shabāb* and young men of the Camp. In Al Wihdat, the names of those who managed to fight Western imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq were often uttered with respect, and those who came back were treated with certain deference. However, for my friends, the display of pious qualities did not necessarily involve engagement in armed jihad. And, as the story of Bonduqiyye highlights, the gains to be made by unthinkingly embracing a weapon in order to fight a holy war against internal and external threats were far from self-evident. I heard many in Al-Wihdat expressing criticism toward the narrow-mindedness of those who could not reconcile Islam with the need to live an ordinary life. As such, rather than admiring their radical approach, most of my friends saw these people as *muta’assebīn* (narrow minded).

The irresistible call of the ordinary

Notwithstanding the ideal of manliness that the two types of masculinity so far discussed have respectively embodied throughout the years in Al-Wihdat, most of the people in the Camp were thus engaged in a quite different type of project: performing a kind of ordinary and middle ground masculinity far from the manly rigour of the *shuyukh* and even further from the hyper-masculinity of the *takfīrīn* and *dawawīn*. In other words, by infusing these forms of “nationalist masculinities” (Massad 1995) with

¹¹⁰ It should be noted that the Muslim Brothers – who at the time of my research were deemed to be corrupt and despotic by a large part of the camp population – were referred to by the appellation of “*shuyukh*”.

daily interests, passions, and needs, adolescents and young men have inhabited and created what I define here an “ordinary masculinity”.

First, as I came to understand it, being a true *mukhayyamji* required young men in the Camp to have a careful balance of toughness, independence, and smartness as well as those attributes that make one a good and trustworthy person (*muhtaram*), such as conscientiousness and hard work. Over the course of my stay in Al-Wihdat, I heard camp dwellers boast relatively frequently about the Palestinian ability to successfully carry out business, especially through smart or savvy behaviour and self-assertion. This, I was told by my friends, was a distinguishing mark of Palestinians and especially of refugees from the camps. One day, for example, a friend who I came to know for his studiousness and piety puzzled me by admitting that he and one of his friends from the Camp had managed to round up their monthly salaries significantly by taking money from the counter of the KFC in Shāra‘ Gardens, where they were both employed as seasonal workers. Working outside the Camp was for many *shabāb* a part-time activity that decreased during winter time with the reduction of tourism in Amman. For my friends, it was hence quite acceptable to scrape together extra money in a job that they would probably have lost anyway when winter came. It was easy for one of them, which was working as a cashier, to pocket money without ringing up the receipt. With evident self-satisfaction, my friend recalled the story, pointing then to how “*shabāb* from the Camp are not like Jordanians of Jabel Amman, Shmeissani, or Abdun!”. This difference was also displayed through demonstrations of potency and toughness. It seems, indeed, that on another occasion he and his friend gave a sound beating to a couple of Jordanians employed in the same fast food restaurant for having allegedly ordered the two “*mukhayyamji*” around at work.

Ordinary jobs, however, were also widely said to require a great amount of patience and dedication, and other skills and attitudes that were very different from being smart and streetwise. These skills were perceived to be essential to successfully pursue a career. In another occasion, the same friend, in fact, blamed his co-worker for not being able to secure a long term job, because he was too lazy (*kaslan*) and too short-sighted to see that being reliable and trustworthy was in most cases more profitable than displaying hyper-toughness and independent behaviour: “He is a *dawawīn*. He cannot do the same

job for more than a couple of weeks [...]. He spends all his time in the games room, watching girls (*banāt*) and drinking... when he manages to find someone who pays for his booze”. Like this man, many of my friends argued that the incapacity to find a steady job was incompatible with being pious and respectable (*muhtaramīn*).

At the same time, the highly valued adherence to Islamic teaching and practice was also reinterpreted in an often very flexible way by the majority of the youths in Al Wihdat. Many in the Camp professed a strong allegiance to the tenets and precepts of Islam. As I showed in the previous chapter, Islam was widely perceived to be the solution to their national quest. “*Sheikh* religiosity”, however, with its insistence on perfection and purity, made it extremely difficult for most *shabāb* in the Camp to follow their example. If the inflexibility and austerity of this model was unlikely to be steadily maintained in the confusion of everyday life, many *shabāb* opted for the instantiation of more complex and ambiguous forms of masculinity (Marsden 2007, Masquelier 2009). An awkward coexistence of religious morality with more worldly distractions marked the daily life of many young men in Al-Wihdat. The time people spent glorifying the significance and importance of Islam was equivalent only to the time employed in violating and breaking its norms. Drinking, illicit romantic affairs, smoking hashish, and cursing were part of the not-so-marginal mundaneness of transgressing: activities denounced in public and performed in private circles. Real life blurred differences; being *shuyukh* or *dawawīn* in the Camp was more a matter of degree than a sharp-edged dichotomy.

A case in point was “love” (*hub*). Love was almost ubiquitous in the life of *shabāb* in Al-Wihdat, finding expression in a variety of domains that ranged from internet, to poems, to everyday discussions. An investigation into this dimension and the anxieties it generates has been the central issue of a large numbers of studies (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1986, Bayat 1997, Hart 2007, Marsden 2007, Masquelier 2009, Schielke 2012)¹¹¹. For the sake of brevity, I will refer here solely to pre-marital prohibitions. In Al Wihdat, premarital sexual intercourse was publicly condemned. The perception that women from the Camp (*banāt min al mukhayyam*) were generally more modest and pious than

¹¹¹ For an investigation into how Palestinian nationalism has historically entered the domain of women’s sexuality, see among other Massad (1995), Peteet (1991), and Sayigh (1998).

girls from outside (*banāt min barra*) was also important amongst my friends. As a matter of fact, the constant surveillance over pre-marital inter-gender relations made it difficult for illicit intercourse to occur. The greater enforcement of gender segregation in Al-Wihdat were a source of pride among people in the camp, who often compared the superior modesty of “their” women with the immorality of Jordanian and Palestinian-Jordanian women outside Al-Wihdat. When men wished to get married, they generally asked their mother or sister to look for a prospective wife. The search was first carried out, ideally, within the extended family and, if unsuccessful, extended to a broader group of people such as their circle of friends and acquaintances. But while waiting for the marriage to happen, many did not trouble themselves with the Islamic obligations of sexual abstinence before marital life. In this case, if the Camp was the moral space where Islamic obligations were reinforced, outside Al-Wihdat unmarried men abandoned their austerity. In such cases, *shabāb* turned their attention to other areas and parts of the city where the environment was more “suitable”. The university was one of these spaces where men and women flirted and where illicit meetings could take place. But even in the Camp, behind the stairs in buildings, in the maze of narrow alleys, and in its physical interstices in general, quick chats and insistent glances took place.

In order to reveal these complexities and inconsistencies that young men in Al-Wihdat face in their attempt to live a virtuous life, the story of Ashraf is paradigmatic. Ashraf, like many other young men in the Camp, emphasised the importance of Islamic morality to his everyday life. As such, he performed his ritual prayers five times a day, refrained from drinking alcohol, fasted during Ramadan, and, in general, strove to comply with Islamic teaching and doctrine. However, the *leitmotiv* of the entire trip to Lebanon I made in his company was inspired by a less pious goal.

During the first half of my fieldwork, Ashraf asked me to go with him to Beirut, a city that he never saw before and he planned to visit since a long time. Beirut had quite a reputation in Jordan of being a sin city, and the young man was thrilled by idea of spending a weekend there. The higher visibility of “vice” and “immorality” – such as alcohol and immoral dress patterns and habits – in the city centre and in other areas was what made Beirut so attractive in the eyes of my companions. Although Jordan does not lack these forms of immoral entertainment, these “bad habits” were limited and

consigned only to determined pockets of the city. Not surprisingly, when his father called on his mobile, Ashraf lied about the real destination of his trip, Ashraf told him that he was in Syria: “my father thinks I am in Syria now!! He does not want me to go to Lebanon; he thinks it is a bad place”. Ashraf also thought of Beirut as an “immoral place”, and he juxtaposed it with Amman and Al-Wihdat: “Amman is the best place and Al-Wihdat is the best place in Amman. In the Camp they are all *muhtaramīn!*”.

Rather inconsistently, however, Ashraf’s few days spent in Beirut were characterised by what in my eyes seemed an ambiguous coexistence of religious morality and discipline, and “carnal desires”. Prayers and partial abstinence, as well as the belief that Al-Wihdat was a better place because of the greater morality of its inhabitants, were counterbalanced by Ashraf’s quest for sex. Indeed, Ashraf left with a very clear target in mind: to stare at, flirt with, and eventually spend some time with women. Everything was subordinate to this mission in Ashraf’s priorities. I had already been warned by Hussein of Ashraf’s burning desire, but I expected that his desire to misbehave would embrace a wider range of “sins” than sex alone, such as alcohol and hashish. Instead, Ashraf neither drank alcohol nor smoked hashish, and his transgressive quest for impermissible fun revolved only around women. Unfortunately, his expectations were eventually frustrated by the much higher cost of Lebanese daily life that made entering a pub or a disco prohibitively costly for the vast majority of *shabāb* from a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. Although Ashraf’s “goal” was primarily voyeuristic, he ultimately intended to have something more substantial than simple glimpses of Beirut’s renowned women. However, his two attempts – first asking a taxi driver to take him to a night club, and then trying to touch a woman directly in a “massage parlour” – were doomed to fail because of Ashraf’s severe lack of money and my refusal to lend him extra funds. Ashraf thus had to content himself with a simple walk on the streets of the fancier areas of Beirut.

Ashraf’s story reveals how camp dwellers’ modes of being masculine were contextually enacted and performed as they moved in different contexts and embraced and inhabited alternative modalities of thought, agency, behaviour and subjectivity. In Al-Wihdat, as elsewhere, this was a widely recognised part of being a person. Neither Ashraf nor most of his friends regarded his trip to Beirut as ultimately incompatible with being a good

Muslim, and he negotiated the moral dilemma of accommodating his pious ideals within his seemingly “immoral” urges quite well – although at times this might have generated inner tension and social tensions (see chapter 4). However, far from being an indication of unpredictable and hypocritical behaviour, his conduct was just part of how camp dwellers deal contextually with the quandaries of social existence.

FRACTURED MASCULINITIES: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF BEING ORDINARY

Discriminated masculinities

Still, the coexistence of diverse registers of masculinity that the pursuit of the “ordinary” seemed to promise was a deeply fragile project. I will here give an account of the failures, setbacks, frustrations and disappointments in men's attempts to carry out what I have termed “ordinary masculinity”, or the capacity to reconcile different models of masculinity.

Within this framework, it is important to shed light on the relationship between youths in the Camp and the authorities. From the viewpoint of camp authorities, *shabāb* in Al-Wihdat embodied opposition to the state. Refugees continued to be popularly depicted as a community that was inherently hostile to the authorities. As a matter of fact, young men's encounters with “the state” usually involved forms of police discipline, repression and monitoring. Police control of people living in Al-Wihdat and in its proximity was quite pervasive. As a middle-ranking cadre of UNRWA put it in the course of an interview:

“Amongst youth there are lots of problems like drugs, alcohol, and unemployment. Many youths are fed up of their situation in the camps, so they cause trouble [...]. Most of the people there don't have a job. So they run small stands in the main street, where the camp market is held. This is their main source of income, but they don't have a licence to do it. So, when the municipality comes, they are forced to leave. They generally wait until they go away, and then they put their stands on the street again, but sometimes the police confiscate their stuff. This is what upsets the youths most. They get angry.”

Nonetheless, refugees did not seek confrontation (cf. Peteet 1994). Rather, agency more often took the form of cooperation or, in many cases, evasion (see also Ismail 2006). The encounters with state authorities were often narrated in terms of humiliation and injury; being harassed by over-zealous police officers, I was told, was a very common experience. My friends carefully avoided approaching the area where the massive police station (*makhfar*) of Al-Wihdat was located without their IDs or other identification papers. If they were stopped without proper documents, this would mean their being detained in the station until a relative or a friend could come to vouch for them.

If the objective behind the control, beating, and restriction exerted upon the bodies of males was to render the potentially resistant body of refugees into a docile and integrated subject, the result was quite different: the actual effect of such policies was to exacerbate the marginalisation of their masculinity, relegating it to a condition of liminality or negation.

This “crisis of masculinity” was further aggravated by the negative stereotypes applied to camp dwellers that ultimately contributed to fostering further social marginalisation and economic discrimination. If refugees were prevented from emphasising the traits of their masculinity that were associated with an enduring and virulent national identity, discrimination and blocked upward mobility, especially in the public sectors, also endangered the transition to social adulthood, which was largely focused around the capacity to provide for a family and live an independent marital life. My friends in the camp frequently complained of their incapacity to forge a productive masculinity by stepping into the more practical responsibilities of kinship and marital life: in the stagnant Jordanian economy, getting married was a costly affair that overt discrimination in the public sector postponed even further¹¹². In addition, the combination of the problems of living in an area that was economically marginal and deprived, aggravated by a severe shortage of connections and contacts to get things done (*wāsta*), strengthened the idea amongst camp dwellers of being second-class citizens. One friend, a young man who worked as a taxi driver, put it to me as follows:

¹¹² For comparative literature, see Masquelier (2005).

“We are not strangers (*‘ajaneb*) in Jordan, but we are not like the *‘urdunīn* [Transjordanians]; we are second-class citizens (*muātab min al daraje al thanye*)! Even class four!! If a Palestinian, a *nawarī* (gypsy), and a *masrī* (Egyptian) go to the *makhfar* (police station), the Palestinian will be the first to be arrested! [...]. I have a friend who works as taxi driver. He was going to Aqaba with a friend of his, a Jordanian, who was driving another car. The police stopped the two cars. One asked for their passports and said to the other [police officer] ‘this one is fine, he is a *sabawi*. They let him go and gave my friend instead a ticket for high speed (...). You see, Amza?”, my friend continued, pointing at his brother, who was younger by two years, “he passed the *tawjīhī* [diploma] with a 70. That is very good, but he did not find a job. Jordanians who get 50 in the *tawjīhī* find a job! And they can work in the army or in the police. I can tell you, we are under the Jordanians!”

For many of my friends, the discrimination that they had to face as Palestinian refugees living in camps not only prevented them from fulfilling the fundamental requirements of masculinity, such as those relating to marriage and parenthood. In addition, such discrimination impacted on their performance of everyday masculinity, influencing the very domain of personal style. The authorities in the Camp were also often worried about the progressive “Islamisation” of the youths. The figure of the Islamic activist as the lawless and violent terrorist and an enemy of the state was ideally represented in the figure of the young man from the refugee camp (see also Ismail 2006). For Abu Omar, who was complaining that it was not possible to adopt a style of dress consistent with his ideal of piety because “if you wear traditional clothes, they [the authorities] think you are a terrorist. I tell you, ‘Islam’ and ‘Palestine’ is a dangerous mix for them. I would like to wear *dishdash* or *jallabia*, but with my job it is impossible [he works as photo-journalist for Al Wihdat football team] ... I would be stopped by the police everywhere! Then, if you add that you are from a refugee camp, they will arrest you as soon as they see you”, he ironically concluded.

Discriminations and negative stereotypes have ultimately jeopardised refugees’ attempts to carry out a life as “ordinary” citizens of the kingdom. At the level of camp-dweller masculinity, this endangered the performance of an “ordinary masculinity” – i.e. the capacity to conjugate different styles of masculinity – and ultimately the possibility to progress into full adulthood as either Palestinian or Jordanian males. In other words, if discrimination fuels the feeling among refugees of not being ordinary subjects of the

kingdom, it also sanctions the celebration of male potency, political independence, and toughness identifiable with specific models of Palestinian nationalist masculinity. This is brought to light, for example in the documentary movie “Full Bloom”, in which the Jordanian filmmaker Sandra Madi explores these dynamics in Al-Baq’a Palestinian refugee camp. The film draws the real portrait of Faraj Darwish, a young boxing champion whose promising career came to an abrupt end upon his refusal to fight in a match against an Israeli boxer. Faraj was born and lived his life in Al-Baq’a, a big urban camp established in the environs of Amman. As for many other *shabāb* in the camps, his life was slow, intrinsically boring, and lacked excitement and surprise. Unemployment and unfulfilled aspirations filled him with frustration and offered little change to the unchanging and predictable rhythm of life. He passed his time monotonously by chatting with friends, idling at home, playing with homing pigeons, and occasionally training. Unlike other *shabāb* in the camps, however, there was a time when Faraj was well-known and popular in the country. In 2004, when he was 21 years of age, he gained the title of Arab boxing champion in Algeria. The victory also earned him the chance to meet the King of Jordan. Afterwards, the newly decorated champion trained to pursue his dream to compete for the Olympic title. But in the year 2006, Darwish was barred for life by the Jordanian Federation from competing officially because of his refusal to fight an Israeli boxer at an international championship competition in Turkey. The ban irremediably damaged Faraj’s blooming career, leaving the boxer powerless and embittered, capable neither of reaching full socio-economic integration within the kingdom nor of becoming a virile symbol of Palestinian nationalist struggles as a boxing champion from Baq’a.

The failure to move through conflicting registers of masculinity reinforced refugees’ experiences of marginality, frustrated their search for an “ordinary life”, and ultimately broadened the chasm between being “refugees” and “citizens”. Some of my friends remained trapped in this condition. Exasperated by the situation, a friend once bitterly expressed this feeling of marginality by drawing an analogy: “You know, Luigi, what we [refugees] say about our situation here in Jordan? We say that Palestinians are ‘*zei kuss el bakara: la ehna barrā wa la ehna jua*’ [like the vagina of the cow: neither outside nor inside]!”

The example of the fathers

Discrimination jeopardised young men's prospects of securing a livelihood, prevented the performance of an “ordinary masculinity”, and reinforced divisions between the different aspects of their selves that, in ordinary circumstances, they were quite capable of managing. However, this experience of failure was also generated by unsettled tensions between the desires of fulfilling the idealised style of nationalist masculinity and the demands for conformity from the local economy and polity (Hart 2008). Camp dwellers’ capacity to manage and combine different and sometimes conflicting styles of masculinity coexisted uneasily with the greater clarity of the more idealised nationalist conceptions of masculinity: most notably the masculinity of the “fathers”.

Many camp dwellers pointed to the sober and pious masculinity of their peasant ancestors as an ideal to strive for (compare Swedenburg 1990). In this sense, the nexus between humbleness and being Palestinian – that I have explored in chapter 3 – had a significant bearing also on the way young men in the Camp imagined their own masculinity. In Wihdat, the elder (*khitiār* or, more respectfully, *hajj*) was the depository of the peasant tradition and the living demonstration of the Palestinian national struggle and suffering over the years (see also Khalili 2004)¹¹³. His role was fundamental in passing on the memory of Palestine and Palestinian-ness, the specific way of being Palestinian re-enacted through food, dialect, songs, embroidery, and so on. Since most of the first generation of refugees was illiterate, people in the Camp relied heavily on the narratives of their grandparents – *jīl al-nakba* or *jīl al-thamānīe w’ārba’in* (the generation of ‘48) – to imagine life in the villages in Palestine before the Nakba. In the narratives of the first generation, references to the rural life in the villages before the arrival of the Zionists abounded. The impact of these memories on the new generation was strong. My friends referred with pride to themselves as the children of the countryside (*awlād al balad*) to denote the cultural authenticity of the Camp, a space where peasant tradition and culture were still preserved (see also Farah 1999). Most of

¹¹³ Laleh Khalili has written about Palestinians who live in refugee camps in Lebanon that “as the generation that remembers living in Palestine passes away, commemoration of quotidian life in Palestine becomes for subsequent generations not merely a narrative or practice of remembering and reconstructing, but the basis of their political identity and the motivation for their political mobilisation” (1986).

them confessed that their most joyful wish was to own a piece of land to be cultivated and farmed. The first generation of refugees – the pre-Nakba generation – was seen as representing the pre-colonial time, a golden age in which Palestinians were living in harmony with their tradition and respecting Islamic tenets and doctrine. Many of the young men in the Camp, however, talked about the pressures of living up to the standards set by their elders. Past generations were often held up as examples of ideal masculinity and celebrated as models for living a moral lifestyle. Their moral qualities and physical skills were often reported to me as a standard of masculinity that new generations were no longer able to fully re-enact.

If the “generation of ‘48” set the example of the sober and pious masculinity of the grandfathers, the heroism of the fathers throughout the late ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s defined another model of masculinity which took shape around the manly values of steadfastness, heroism under fire, military courage, and self-sacrifice (Massad 1995). Some recalled the time when their fathers fought against Israelis in Jordan or in Lebanon; many praised the past heroism of the *fidā’ī* (guerrilla fighter) and *shahīd* (martyr) who died in their attempt to pursue the national goal. People were proud to have an uncle or a father martyr who died in the Battle of Karama during the civil war in Jordan and Lebanon¹¹⁴. Such a person was Abu Hussein. “Abu Hussein always thinks about his father when he prays”, a friend once told me. His father became a *shahīd* (martyr) when Abu Hussein was three years old. He was killed in Lebanon by Israeli soldiers and buried in a cemetery for *shuhadā* (martyrs) in Syria, which the son periodically visited. The man, at the time of my fieldwork in his early thirties, was proud of his father and his glorious death. He often showed me the picture of the tomb – a long epitaph engraved on the stone quoted part of the *sūra baqara* on *shahāda* (martyrdom) – that he treasured on his laptop and smartphone. He made no secret that it was his wish to re-enact the example of his father. On a few occasions, in fact, he also confessed his wish to fight in the Occupied Territory for Palestine and Islam: “I want to

¹¹⁴ On 21 March 1968, in reprisal for a series of raids by the PLO against Israel, around 15,000 Israeli troops, armored vehicles, and helicopters attacked the small town of Karama. As the village was located on the east bank of Jordan River, the Jordanian Army decided to fight alongside the Palestinian *fidā’īyyin*. On a military level the battle ended in favour of Israel. Karama Battle resulted in massive losses for Fatah’ forces, which lost 120-200 fighters and saw a large part of the city destroyed. However, also the Israeli army suffered heavy losses: 28 Israeli soldiers were killed and 12 tanks were captured. Because of these losses, the battle became an epic victory of Palestinians against Israel celebrated throughout the Arab world (see Khalili 2007, pp. 156-157).

go to Palestine to fight. I don't know when, I only know that I will go. Not necessarily to kill, I can also help in other ways". The urge to follow in his father's footsteps was particularly evident on the occasion of a two-day journey that I made to Aqaba in his company. During the last part of the journey, the road to Aqaba ran parallel and with great proximity to the border between Israel/Palestine and Jordan, and my companion glanced with mixed feelings of excitement and sorrow at the nearby city of Eilat in Palestine. Turning his gaze away from the hills and to the other side of the border, Abu Hussein said: "I can't see these mountains and do nothing. My father died for them, and I don't do anything..."

The recognised generation gap between camp youths (*shabāb*) and elders (*khitiārīn*) came about not only because of the ideal of perfection set by older generations, but was also interpreted as the consequence of declining standards of masculinity that afflicted the younger generations (see also Masquelier 2005). For them, the *shabāb* of Al-Wihdat had become loafers and troublemakers, and their weak (*da'īf*) parents were seen as incapable of controlling and educating their children. In their eyes, it was the corruption of the simple and pure way of life that led to the weakening of religious feeling and eventually the loss of their country. In one case, the UNRWA's teachers' strike was the trigger that led a couple of men in the Nadi to start a long tirade about UNRWA, youths, and moral decay:

First man: [...] "schools are very bad. There is alcohol, drugs, and young guys come to hang around the girls. Yesterday, I went to the school and I saw a glass of wine on the floor. My son told me a week ago that a man tried to sell him a drug tablet for 10 piasters [psychotropic drugs]"

Second man: "Yes, of course! That's why *shabāb* raided the UNRWA Clinique a few days ago. Alcohol and drugs helps them to forget their problems [...]"

First man: "The problem is that they don't know the way of Allah. We are very far from Islam [...]. I'll tell you what the problems are: TV, satellite, internet, and sexy [pop] singers! They fill the mind of *shabāb* with stupid things. Youths' minds are empty! They can do everything! And where are their families? Their fathers are bad, and their mothers are even worse [it was not

clear whether this was because they were too busy to care for their children or because they were inherently bad!] But in the past, when we were young, Islam was everything!!”

The image of idle youths whose lack of means condemn them to social marginality was hence seen as a consequence of their inability to forge a mature masculinity through the cultivation of a pious disposition. But *shabāb* were held accountable only in part for their hardships: unemployment, poverty, and juvenile criminality were seen as both the outcomes and the causes of the deviant and immoral masculinity of youths.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explored the complex relationship between masculinity and political agency. Terms like “refugee camp” or “camp-dweller community” might induce towards lingering assumptions on the homogeneity of models of masculinity within a space like Al-Wihdat. In Jordan, these ideal forms of masculinity were abstracted and reified, with some being romanticised and others “abjected” (Ewing 2008), but all pointing to the camp dwellers’ lack of integration. However, camp dwellers’ masculinities did not rest upon uniformity. The ability to move through and master diverse and sometimes contrasting registers of manhood was an important dimension of daily life in Al-Wihdat at the time of my research.

During the course of their adolescence and early adulthood, young men in the camp have reproduced “Palestinian nationalism” as a system of human values and as an everyday reality of “normal life” through the negotiation of diverse forms of manhood, most notably embodied by the figure of the *dawawīn* and the *sheikh*. Despite their obvious differences “*dawawīn*” and “*sheikh*” masculinities share common attributes traditionally ascribed to what authors have called hegemonic forms of masculinity such as male assertiveness, moral or physical strength, and independence. By exploring the production of masculinities in diverse settings, I have come to recognise a shift in the significance of the political in people's lives. The time in which there were the most *dawawīn* in the camp was before and during Black September. Afterwards, disillusioned by the broken promises of Palestinian nationalism on one hand, and deprived of their political agency by poverty and governmental control on the other, many withdrew from

political activism. Remarkably, many famous *dawawīn* in the camp “embraced” Islam and became *muhtaramīn* (respectable) or even *shuyukh* (pious men). What was once an ideal of political masculinity eventually became the embodiment of the immoral apolitical idler, and the *dawanji* came to be gradually replaced in the Camp as the dominant model of masculinity by the *sheikh*. Those who remained *dawawīn* gained a reputation for being loafers or even criminals. Allegiance to Palestinian nationalist ideals and occasional hostility to the Jordanian regime, which in the past was expressed mainly through the performance of overt expressions of toughness and political independency, have gradually been replaced by other forms of manliness. Reflecting political and social trends in the region towards the employment of symbols and texts associated with Islam, humility, temperance, modesty, obedience and a great knowledge of Islamic teaching and practice gradually become important qualities in the camp.

However, the similarities between these two ideals of masculinities were striking. Bonduqiyye’s story draws attention to this aspect. A reckless *dawanji* and a pious *sheikh*, Bonduqiyye affords us a glance into the historical interplay and relationship between apparently hegemonic models of masculinity. He became a *sheikh* having previously been a feared *dawawīn*, and eventually gained a reputation of “insane”. At the same time, his story also sheds light on the critical reflectiveness that distinguishes people’s understanding of Islam and political agency. Bonduqiyye’s spiritual epiphany did not result in him acquiring any uncritical forms of respect. Although widely admired and respected for his decision to fight for Afghanistan, he was still thought to be wild and narrow-minded, and not a good Muslim. The almost uniqueness of Bonduqiyye’s story highlights how, despite the fascination that certain ideals of masculinity may have at times exerted on youths, the majority of people in Al-Wihdat were neither actually performing nor wishing to embody either of these two models. At first sight, the dominant types of masculinity centred on the hyper-masculinity of *dawawīn*, or on *sheikh*, may be thought of as the primary medium through which refugees could assert their distinctiveness as Palestinians in Jordan. But the exclusive performance of these masculinities was also quite costly. If the valorisation of the over-toughness and independence of the *dawawīn* was discouraged by the authorities and eventually disparaged by later generations of refugees, the rigour of *sheikh* was difficult to maintain in the face of ambivalent feelings and more mundane urges.

Ultimately, these allegedly hegemonic masculinities privileged an unbearable “extraordinariness” at the expenses of more manageable and ordinary ways of being a Palestinian in Jordan. The vast majority of people in the Camp were instead engaged in the performance of “ordinary masculinity”. Ordinary masculinity, in contrast to the other two models, brings to light the reproduction of nationalist masculinities in times of protracted exceptionality. Its performance, if successful, displays refugees’ day-to-day engagement with the facts of their exile in Jordan alongside their need to uphold the values and ideals of Palestinian nationalism. It opens a space in the national discourse for the ordinary way of being male, which is generally overshadowed by sometimes cumbersome ideals of masculinity. This capacity, I have argued, is what has ensured the ongoing distinctiveness of a Palestinian political identity.

In the next chapter, I will conclude my analysis of the significance of the ordinary into refugees’ political identity and agency by exploring in greater detail young men’s time-off activities and strategies to deal with boredom.

CHAPTER 6: TIME OFF! “LOITERING” IN THE CAMP

INTRODUCTION: THURSDAY NIGHT

Wandering with Hussein around Shāra‘ Liddawi, we heard a voice calling us over. Turning our heads we saw Ghazi, one of the regulars at the *Al-Mahal*. He was lying on the sofa in the barber’s shop located next to the game room. Ghazi was not alone in the *sālūn* (barber’s shop); other *shabāb* were sitting listlessly and watching the TV. “*T’al t’al!* (come here!)”, he called, and invited us to sit with him. He arranged a couple of plastic chairs for us and asked what we wanted to drink: “*shāī* or *gahwe?* (tea or coffee?)” Returning with the hot drinks, Ghazi confessed to being extremely bored: he had spent the last five or six hours doing nothing other than hanging around in the barber’s shop and playing the PlayStation in the *Mahal*. He wanted to do something: “what about buying a bottle of vodka? What do you think? (*shu raīkum?*)”. He wanted to drink, but Hussein was not at all keen to spend the rest of the night watching Abu Sharif and me drinking alcohol. He had recently returned from the *‘umra* and this had strengthened his determination to behave piously and avoid keeping “bad company”. We left Abu Sharif with the promise that we would call him after the prayer, and walked on towards Rami’s house. On the way, after meeting the *kashashīn* (pigeon trainers) wandering in the Camp with a friend, we met Rami’s brother. Along with a man in his forties, he was sitting on the kerb rather lethargically, and staring passively at the asphalt. He returned our greeting in a listless fashion. We moved on and finally spotted Rami sitting on the footpath in front of his house: Rami, a friend, and a group of young people were talking to another friend who was passing by. Apparently, this man was also bored. He did not have a job and, even worse, the right season to find one was passing by: “you are complaining now... but in the winter it is much worse, you know that!”, Rami pointed out. He nodded and then shrugged his shoulders: “*shu bidna nsawi* (what can we do about that?)”. All of a sudden, he invited us to join him for the prayer. Rami and Hussein accepted willingly. I declined the offer and waited for them outside the mosque.

Friday night (*jum‘a bil leil*) in the Camp was not generally a thrilling experience for the *shabāb* who lived there. Everybody stayed up until late into the night, but the activities

did not really differ from any other day. People had two options: they could either stay in the Camp or leave it. In the second case, young men would often go to the more upmarket areas of Amman, Abdoun, Jabal Amman, and Shmeissani. Alternatively, younger boys in their teens would spend their time in Shāra^c Madaba, a main arterial road that borders Wihdat, or in the small square in front of the *masjid al-darwish*, a beautiful mosque located in the proximity of the Camp. In this pedestrian area, benches and several shops made the place an attractive solution to their boredom: men and accompanying women would gather to spend some time together, drink juice, eat sunflowers seeds, and chat. Those who stayed in the Camp did not have many options: *shabāb* and young men would often play football. For my friends, playing football in the Nadi al Wihdat was an engagement that could not be deferred. They would meet in the Nadi late in the evening, usually at around 11 pm. Although only a relatively small number of people were able to enter the Nadi late at night, playing football until late on Friday evenings was quite common amongst the youth in the Camp. However, since there were no open spaces to play in the Camp, *shabāb* would usually go to Gwesme – this wide clearing around the Malik Abdullah II Stadium provided them with a suitable spot in which to play football. Games rooms, pool rooms, and coffee stalls were also quite popular. A favoured alternative to football, especially with the hot season approaching, were the frequent wedding parties that also punctuated life in the Camp: these parties would usually begin in the late evening and go on until well after midnight. However, the street was by and large the most likely option that young men would choose: sitting on kerb, standing on street corners, or strolling around was what young men would generally do with their free time.

A widespread feeling of ennui and apathy were the order of the day. The discussion is articulated around a key issue: the relationship between boredom and the political in Al-Wihdat. This chapter is focused on time-off activities in Al-Wihdat. In order to understand how refugees have made Palestinian nationalism a viable project in the context of their displacement in refugee camps, an examination of the different spaces of male life and strategies for dealing with boredom is fundamental. My argument in this chapter is that leisure and entertainment – like socio-economic integration and ordinary ways of being a Muslim and a man – are part of those acts of daily life through which young men from the Camp have sought to navigate the extraordinariness of their

condition without renouncing to their allegiance to Palestinian nationalism. If the time people spent together sipping hot drinks and chatting in the street, playing football, or training their homing pigeons on the roofs of their houses were the expression of refugees' attempts to live an ordinary life, these activities contributed to strengthening a sense of closeness and national identity among camp dwellers.

BOREDOM AND LOITERING AROUND

The origins of boredom

A widespread feeling of boredom seemed to infuse the life of many in Al-Wihdat. People would express their boredom by shrugging their shoulders and saying 'ādī' (normal, ordinary), a word that conveys a general feeling of apathy. In daily speech, this expression of boredom (*malal*) was often used as an adjective, so that people would often be describing themselves as being *zahgān* (bored/fed up). This state was said to be generated by a number of factors.

First of all, echoing existing anthropological work on boredom, refugees often explained this emotional state by drawing a connection between being bored and socio-economic deprivation. This condition was often explained to me with reference to the lack of job opportunities, social equality, and proper infrastructures. This situation was strikingly similar to others cases reported by ethnographies elsewhere. There is an emerging body of scholarship in social sciences that has investigated the connections between boredom and the frustrated aspirations of youths in the neoliberal economies in Africa and South Asia (Hansen 2005, Jeffrey 2010, Mains 2007, Schielke 2008, Verkaaik 2004). For most of these authors, boredom is a distinctively modern condition that is attributed to the existential emptiness experienced particularly by young men in the face of unemployment, socio-economic marginalisation, and their feeling of being left out of great economic and social transformations¹¹⁵. Their work resonates with my findings in Wihdat, where boredom and ennui were generated within the gap between the aspirations of young men in Al-Wihdat and the economic reality of contemporary Jordan. Among camp dwellers, boredom was caused in large measure by the lack of job

¹¹⁵ For a relevant exception see Musharbash (2009).

opportunities and career prospects. Adolescents and young men often lamented how their frustrated trajectories of upward mobility and their day-to-day experiences of discrimination condemned them to a forced a state of social immobility. Many in the camps neither worked nor studied. As a friend once told me: “if you don’t get a good mark in the diploma and if you are poor you don’t go to the university... and you don’t work because in Jordan there are no jobs. So, what can we do? We can just wait and get bored!”.

In Al-Wihdat, however, boredom was not merely the product of particular configurations of the neo-liberal economy, but also the effect of the excess of the political into the lives of Palestinian camp dwellers. In this sense, I intend to also draw on another body of scholarship that has shed light on the link between boredom and the political, and how boredom (*malal*) has come to dominate Palestinian political ethos over the past few years (Allen 2009, Kelly 2008). As Allen notes, “in the midst of traumatic, deadly daily events, and beyond the bravado and ‘*sumūd*’ that made up the normative sentiments of Palestinian nationalism, it was boredom and *zahaq* (a state of being fed up and frustrated) that came to be a dominant ‘political ethos’” (2009, p. 473). Similarly, Kelly writes that “[a]longside the spectacular acts of violence that have dominated the newspaper headlines, for most Palestinians the second *intifada* has been marked by boredom and frustration” (2009, p. 353). Boredom is also a central theme in the work of Palestinian intellectuals and artists – such as Mahmood Darwish’s poetry, “State of Siege”, or Elia Suleiman’s films, “Chronicle of a Disappearance” and “Divine Intervention” – that evokes the feelings and actions set forth by bored and frustrated generations of Palestinians. In the Occupied Territories it was the overwhelming presence of death and political violence that placed boredom at the centre of people’s everyday worlds and confined people to their homes, making them restless and tired, unable to carry out a “normal” life. In Jordan, it was the ineffectiveness of politics (*syāsīn*) and the ineptness of political parties (*‘āhzāb*) that infused refugees’ everyday lives with a pervasive sense of boredom (*malal*) and led many to claim to be “fed up” (*zahgān*) of the useless political refrain around Palestinian rights and suffering that were periodically invoked by political leaders.

By combining these two bodies of literature, I argue that boredom was in large part the consequence of not being able to carry out a normal life (*hayā ‘ādiyye*) or, rather, what refugees expected a “normal” life to be. On the one hand, being bored was caused in large measure by the lack of job opportunities and career prospects against the backdrop of the stagnant Jordanian economy. In keeping with such an explanation, boredom was said to affect mostly young men and adolescents, who were often unemployed, and was more intense in winter when the muddy alleys of the Camp and the cold curbed *shabāb*’s willingness to look for a job. On the other hand, boredom was also expressed in terms of their deep frustration for the continuous failure to find a solution to the “Palestinian issue”: rather than making life more meaningful, politics and politicians increased their feeling of being bored and fed up (*zahgānīn min el syāsīn*). It is worth drawing attention here, however, to how these two factors were perceived by camp dwellers as being intertwined and ultimately conducive to the pervasive influence of the political. The already meagre chance of gaining decent employment, for example, was drastically reduced by the negative stereotypes associated with being “Palestinian refugees from the camps” (*lāji’ūn min el mukhayyamāt*); the discrimination they faced in Jordan was often imputed to the incapacity of the political elites to effectively advocate the rights of Palestinian refugees. Likewise, in the eyes of many, it was a political conspiracy that aggravated the condition of deprivation that seemed to affect the Camp. As a friend who was exasperated by the latest cuts in UNRWA services once told me, “the UNRWA cuts, the drugs, the alcohol, and the unemployment are parts of a plot to sink Palestinians and refugee camps. They are killing us, always! You see, Luigi, Western people can only die once, but not Palestinians... We can die a thousand times. This is what they are doing to us; they have been killing us since 1948!”.

Palestinian nationalism and fun

One of the most obvious consequences of boredom in the Camp was the proliferation of spaces and activities of recreation. In Al-Wihdat, the attempts to escape boredom constituted an important part of refugees’ daily lives – especially for adolescents and young men. However, as boredom was ultimately perceived as being the result of the

saturation of the political in their lives, it would be wholly inaccurate to see loitering as completely divorced from the political. By mitigating the excess of the political in refugees' lives, infusing it with mundanity, and crafting a sense of collectivity among camp dwellers, these activities made a Palestinian national subjectivity viable in the context of their progressive integration into Jordan.

Yet, the nexus between emotions, politics and morality is not something new in anthropology. Much anthropological work focuses on the ways in which leisure activities do not simply communicate a desire for escapism. As scholars have suggested, and recent events in the Middle East and North Africa have abundantly demonstrated, new technologies and social networks have played a pivotal role in sparking debate and fostering political change in the Arab world (e.g. Eickelman and Anderson 1999). Studies have also investigated how a specific "sub-political consciousness" is at times re-enacted inside spaces of leisure such as taverns and saloons (Thompson 1963, pp. 55-59) or through sport (MacClancy 1996) and other particular forms of leisure (Kumar 1988). Another body of work has shown how gender and kinship politics are reproduced within coffee shops (Cowan 1991, Herzfeld 1985). Other studies on young men and free time underline the importance of "hanging around" in the production of distinctive forms of masculinity (e.g. Chakrabarty 1999, Weiss 2009). In his book "Timepass", Craig Jeffrey hints at the possibility that idleness is not only an expression of social suffering, but also something else – perhaps a cultural and political practice, a mode of self-fashioning and self-expression (2010). Magnus Marsden, for example, in his research amongst Chitrali Muslims in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, sheds lights on the political significance of *istok*, all-male musical gatherings that are very popular in the region. The fun of these musical events, he claims, is often "framed and invested with political and affective significance by participants in a way that creatively builds on the theories of emotion advanced by their Islamist detractors" (2007, p. 474). The interplay of specific forms of masculinity and emotion during the *istok* challenges the parameters of morality advanced by the region's "men of piety". In a similar fashion, Oskar Verkaaik shows how militants of the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) perceive their participation in the nationalist movement as a good opportunity to have fun. Fun is the channel through which MQM produces its own nationalistic discourse, promoting a Muslim identity that is "a paradoxical reconciliation

of complementary but contradictory discourses on Muslim nationalism and ethnic solidarity, Islamic modernism and Sufism” (1986, p. 185).

My argument moves along similar lines insofar as I am interested in documenting how fun and entertainment were central to the re-fashioning of the political.

First of all, time off-activities were a way through which young men in Al-Wihdat sought to negotiate their social suffering and mitigate the “excess” of the political by becoming engaged in the trivial and mundane¹¹⁶. A great deal of time for many people in the Camp was spent meeting people, chatting and occasionally playing football, or attending wedding parties (*zaffāt*) in summer. “Now the summer is coming... you will see, Luigi, *al-mukhayyam* [the Camp] is going to be much more fun [...]. Every Friday there is a *hafle al-shabāb* (stag party)”, a friend once commented to me. There was, however, a broader range of other activities available in Al-Wihdat. Football was definitely one of these. It was extremely popular in Al-Wihdat among boys and young men – watched in TV and played in the UNRWA school yard or, alternatively, in the football field located on the first floor of the Nadi Al-Wihdat¹¹⁷. But young men would also smoke *shisha*¹¹⁸ in small cafes near the Camp, mostly run by Egyptians. In addition, activities such as training homing pigeons took on an important role in the Camp. Sitting on the roofs of their houses, the *kashashīn* (pigeon trainers) dedicated a great amount of time to their hobby: feeding and grooming their birds, separating those that were sick, or just observing them flying in circle. Places like games rooms – generally small rooms equipped with a few screens and PlayStations – and barber’s shops were often crowded with youths of all ages.

Barbershops and game rooms were also a warmer alternative to the street. Especially in winter, people would spend much of their time listening to Western and Arabic pop music, watching music videos, Hollywood or Egyptian soap operas, or listening to religious sermons on the radio. But the popularity of these spaces was explained

¹¹⁶ Other research carried out in different geographical areas has investigated how fun and time-off activities are the means through which youths navigate their social malaise (e.g. Corrigan 1976, Cowan 1991, Jeffrey 2010, Whyte 1969).

¹¹⁷ See “figure 19”.

¹¹⁸ A type of smoking pipe used in eastern countries in which the smoke is filtered through a water pipe before reaching the inhaler pipe.

especially by their social significance. These places were meeting points that were open until late at night: youths gathered and spent time chatting, joking, grooming or drinking coffee¹¹⁹. They were forums of public life where *shabāb* spent their time sitting, talking, being informed of job opportunities, talking about politics, gossiping, playing cards, and listening to the news on the TV. The tradition of young men gathering in such spaces and engaging in social practices of conviviality is definitely no singular to Al-Wihdat. What is peculiar about the popularity of these activities and places, if anything, is that they were all iconic of a desire to live a normal life (*hayā ‘ādīe*) beyond the imperative of political resistance; a desire even more striking if compared to the emphasis placed on personal and collective austerity that has been documented by other scholars of Palestinian communities during the first intifada (see for example Jean-Klein 2001).

However, as I stated previously, loitering was also central to how the political was re-enacted, conveyed, and narrated. In this sense, it is important to recognise the importance of spaces of everyday and apparently idle sociality to the fashioning of political views and subjectivities, and to show how the political merges with other discussions and feeds into them. In urban West Bengal, Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999) brings to the forefront the importance of male social exchange in culturally defined spaces (*addas*) for the fashioning of masculine conviviality and political consciousness. Beauty salons, games rooms, street corners, coffee stalls, or the roofs of the *kashashīn* were comparable contexts in Al-Wihdat. Here, the boundary that separates the most disparate topics of conversation was not clearly defined and, as often happens, people started to combine them. Sex and morality provided the background for political analysis, climate change blended into the most extreme conspiracy theories, and ethnic discrimination often served as a complement to business talk. As talking about the “illicit” was permissible and quite common within the relatively secure circle of friends, these discussions operated in the sense of Herzfeld’s notion of “cultural intimacy” – “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (1985, p. 3). These moments of sociality were hence very important in Al-Wihdat. In such spaces, *shabāb* crafted a sense of intimate solidarity, strengthened also by common experiences of discrimination in Jordan. The frequent use of humour,

¹¹⁹ See “figure 20”.

horseplay, and biting jokes was instrumental in reinforcing interpersonal association among young men from the Camp (compare Jeffrey 2010, Verkaaik 2004). One friend, for example, generated bitter laughter when, sitting in a friend's newly refurbished barber's shop, he made a sarcastic comment to another friend who was lamenting his condition of unemployment: "there is no job here [in Jordan] for us [camp dwellers]", the man grumbled, "the only thing that we can do is just wait, wait until we die! Yes, perhaps only when we are dead, we can find a better situation". "Don't bother about that", my friend responded, "I am sure that God has built refugee camps in paradise for Palestinians"

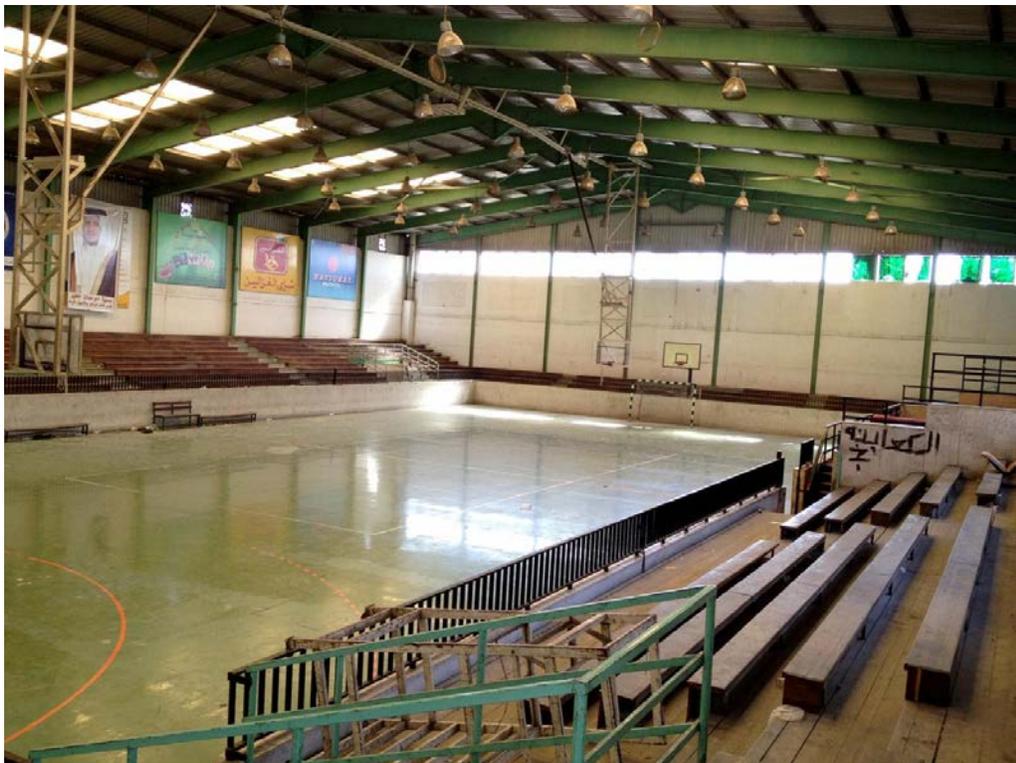


Figure 19: football field in the Nadi Al-Wihdat (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 20: coffee shops (source: Jihad Nijem)

Excessive “fun”

In the next section, I will document in greater detail how refugees have infused Palestinian nationalism with mundanity by focusing on two apparently different types of time-off events: political commemorations and football matches. However, before doing so I want to shed light on how entertainment was also a source of moral debate and discussion: in some contexts, it was the particular mode of entertainment that provoked debate; in others, it was the type of contexts in which these activities took place.

Shabāb's free time should not be romanticised as a moment of camp dwellers' boundless conviviality. If these activities generated a sense of intimacy among peers, they also contributed to dividing the camp community along moral fractures. This discourse of male idleness bears similarity to the distinction Craig Jeffrey made between Indian students who “imagined themselves as intelligent, unflustered observers of urban life and spoke of illiterates as slack-jawed, easily riled buffoons—the lowest

common denominators of urban street culture” (2010, p. 475). In Al-Wihdat, camp dwellers made a distinction between different forms of pastimes by opposing the figure of the “good (moral) person” (*muhtaram*) having fun against the image of the “useless loafer” (*dawawīn*) engaged in excessive and immoral loitering. Such debates had important repercussions on the way refugees conceptualised their own political subjectivity. Whereas the former behaviour was the epitome of the good Palestinian, the latter was the embodiment of immorality and the enduring political plight of Palestinians. The result of the indolence and immoral behaviour of lazy people was clear and plain for everybody to see in the decadence of present times: entire families lacking a fatherly example and stable financial support; children and adolescents devoid of proper guidance, who wasted their time running across the streets of the Camp; *shabāb*, lying on the sofa of barber’s shops or idling on footpaths, engaging in immoral activities such as cursing, smoking, watching pornography and drinking alcohol. And, as we have seen in the previous chapters, immorality was widely deemed in the Camp, to be one of the main causes behind the Palestinian catastrophe (Al-Nakba).

My friends, for example, saw a clear difference between their “moral” ways of having fun and those of the *dawawīn* of Shāra’ Liddawi. This distinction, however, did not prevent them from engaging in a number of time-off activities. According to them, loitering was not antithetical to Islamic piety. Despite the significance of Islam in people’s lives, many in Al-Wihdat reinterpreted the call to soberness and austerity promoted by more “orthodox” readings of Islamic and Muslim tradition, making it more flexible.

In so doing, I draw on recent scholarship that has documented ways of having fun that transcend a sharp divide between pious forms of pleasure and apparently more authentic expressions of joy (Marsden 2005, Rollier 2010, Verkaaik 2004). These authors have challenged the idea advanced by those who see the playful spontaneity of “authentic fun” as necessarily incompatible with the moral ideal advanced by Islamist and pious-minded people (Bayat 2010, chapter 7).

In Al-Wihdat, many – including those who gained the appellation of *sheikh* – had an unabashed fondness for watching and playing football, alternated listening to the

Islamic sermons of well-known preachers with listening to popular Lebanese and Egyptian pop stars, and, most importantly, did not find any contradiction in doing so. One day, for example, Sheikh Abu Omar recounted to me a conversation he had had shortly earlier with a clerk employed in a fish shop located in the northern outskirts of the Camp. The man, an Egyptian in his early thirties, wanted to become a *sheikh*. Abu Omar was often approached by people on issues of piety because of his principled conduct, and so advised the Egyptian to simply follow the Quran. The clerk, however, was concerned that such a change would turn him into someone like his uncle, a sheikh, but also a sad and angry (*za'lān*) person who condemned any form of fun. Abu Omar sardonically commented that he did not see the point in being like that: “if you are *sheikh*, you can still watch a film (*tishuf film*) and play football (*tla'eb kura al-qadam*)!”.

On the other hand, other forms of entertainment that were popular amongst young men in Al-Wihdat, such as the consumption of hashish and alcohol, were publicly condemned. However, generally, it was less the activity than the setting where this was performed that was under attack. Non-gambling card games (*shadda*), for example, were an almost ever-present feature of life in the Camp. Although – I was assured – there were no specific indications in the Quran that forbade these activities, some people believed that such games distracted men from more godly activities such as praying or listening to audio sermons. In spite of such anti-card game arguments, most camp dwellers found playing *shadda* very amusing and not at all in contradiction with Islamic moral standards. The game was *halal* (religiously allowed) insofar as it did not preclude the fulfilment of Muslim duties such as the *salāt*. As a friend very simply put it, “there is no problem [*mush mushkile*], you pray, and afterwards you can play!” Conversely, if *shadda* was permissible, the settings where these games were played commanded little approbation amongst pious-minded people in Wihdat. Pool rooms and games rooms were such type of places: especially popular amongst youths and young men, the clientele that they attracted was said to be made up mostly of *dawawīn*, gypsies (*nawari*), and drunkards (*sukharjin*).

Yet, although many of my friends believed that these places were sites of immorality, in fact there was no clear division between those who criticised and those who engaged in

such forms of sociality. As a matter of fact, games like *biliardo* and *shadda* were very popular in the Camp, and people like my friends found themselves torn between the desire to play these games and the importance of maintaining a good reputation. This moral impasse, however, was often settled by simply choosing a place outside the Camp and reducing the number of visits. In other words, loitering required a careful balance (see also Schielke 2008); if not judiciously managed, excess loitering (*daiyya' el-waget*, lit. “wasting time”) might have turned a person into being an *āz'ar* (good for nothing/thug): someone who idled away his time doing nothing (*yatasak'a*), a feature of being *dawawīn*.

“APOLITICAL” NATIONALIST CELEBRATIONS

Commemorative ceremonies (ihtifālāt) at the Nadi

I now turn my attention to an aspect of camp life that has been widely considered as being central to the reproduction of Palestinian identity and resistance: commemorative events. Celebrations such as weddings and funerals, exhibitions, stories, songs, pictures, and also religious symbols such as the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa, contribute to transmitting the memory of Palestine and keeping it alive. The iconic role of these objects of memory has been crucial even in the fiction and poetry of Palestinian artists such as Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmood Darwish. Most importantly, as many scholars have pointed out, pro-Palestinian celebrations and events are not merely acts of nostalgia but are paramount to forging a sense of nationhood among Palestinians. A heterogeneous and large body of scholarship has abundantly investigated how strategies of cohesion and resistance are articulated through commemorative narratives (see Farmer 1999, Sayigh 1994, and Tilly 1994 amongst others). The significance of the Nakba (the catastrophe of 1948) and its associated objects of memory in the political life of Palestinians (see Khalili 2007) – olive trees, house keys, embroidered dresses, and village life in general – has been explored extensively (Abu-Lughod 2007, Khalili 2004, Slyomovics 1998, Swedenburg 1990). Recent studies have also focused on

commemorative practices that celebrate Palestinian heroes and martyrs from the start of the nationalist movement in 1960 and its tragic development during the II intifada (Allen 2005, Khalili 2007).

My approach is located in these studies. Situating narratives at the core of commemorative practices, Laleh Khalili argues “that every commemoration, whether it is a ceremony, a monument, a mural, or commemorative naming, explicitly or implicitly contains a story” (2007, p. 5, see also Verkaaik 2010). In Wihdat too, these ceremonies were vehicles for the transmission of nationalistic narratives. This does not mean, however, that participants unthinkingly endorsed the ideological and political rhetoric channelled through these events. A great deal of criticism was often expressed not only after or before but even during the various kinds of celebrations held annually in the Camp, such as those commemorating the Nakba Day (*yom al-nakba*) or the Naksa Day (*yom al-naksa*). My friends often ridiculed the speeches, as well as the poses assumed by the speakers at these events. They were not sympathetic to the reasons and motives behind the participation of people in such events creating a distance between themselves and the *jumhūr* (crowd) whose involvement they believed was not motivated by a true interest for political issues, but, rather, to immoral reasons, such as flirting with girls or just “hanging out”.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that refugees, who were extremely critical of the efficacy of these celebrations, were completely indifferent to the ideological values that these ceremonies commanded. I have never met anybody who did not praise these ceremonies as an occasion for celebrating a common story and cause. As Yurchak shows (2007), the routinisation of such rituals leads to acceptance of the form but not necessarily of its contents. In our case, despite the harsh criticism expressed by many of the participants in these types of celebrations and their ideological messages, the repetitiveness of these commemorative ceremonies in the Camp has contributed to strengthening a sense of community. Similarly, the re-enactment of certain stories and histories, the performance of semiotically rich ritual elements, such as the playing of *dabke* (a Palestinian traditional dance) or performances by Palestinian folk musicians and the incessant displays of Palestinian symbols (flags, scarves, maps) reinforced allegiance to an imagined Palestinian community. Most of all, these ceremonies, held in

the Nadi, located at the centre of the Camp, reinforced among my friends the belief that camp dwellers more than anybody else embodied Palestinian steadfastness (*sumūd*) and commitment to return.

The Nakba celebration

A case in point was the annual celebration of Al-Nakba I attended during my fieldwork in the Nadi Al-Wihdat.

Despite at the beginning of the event rumours seemed to confirm the government's refusal to grant permission to commemorate the Nakba in Wihdat, a celebration was eventually held in the Nadi under the aegis of its *lejne al-thaqāfe* (Department of Culture). These kinds of celebrations were usually quite standardised and contained many ritual elements: the recital of a *sūra* (verse) of the Quran, the hail to the King, the speeches of the invited speakers, and, occasionally, performances by Palestinian folk musicians. The visual realm was always characterised by the abundant display of Palestinian and Jordanian flags and drapes, and the ever-present face of the King.

That day – the 15th of May – had been planned long before. The meeting room of the Nadi was packed with men and women of different ages. They were all accommodated in a large atrium – the room that had reminded me of an abandoned department store the first time I saw it. A conspicuous group of police officers were patrolling both the entrance to the Nadi and its main hall. In the left corner of the hall, *mukhābarāt* (secret service) officers were jotting down notes and taking photographs. Journalists, photographers and cameramen added to the crowd in the room. People were sitting in a semi-circle around the podium that was set up for the vocal performances of the speakers. There was a mixed group in the Wihdat club for the anniversary of the Nakba. Although separate seating for women and men was not strictly enforced, the former tended to sit to the left of the platform. Men occupied the remaining two-thirds of the room, some sitting, and most standing. On the back of the stage, two big flags – one Palestinian and one Jordanian – represented the solidarity of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with the suffering of the people of Palestine. However, a giant poster of the King in the middle of the two flags suggested who the ultimate patron of the celebration was.

A few posters and flyers of the event were scattered on the wall and the floor of the Nadi; some banners waved by the spectators completed the scene.

The opening started with the salute to the King and the reading from the Quran. After that, it continued with speeches given by seven speakers. The men – two Jordanians and five Palestinian-Jordanians – loudly evinced their support for the Palestinian cause and the suffering of its people. As often happens in these kinds of discourse, victims and martyrs were invoked by the speakers to make their speeches more effective. One speaker in particular made an explicit reference to other contexts, such as Algeria, where a much smaller number of martyrs led people to a revolution (*thawra*). The orator was wondering how many victims Palestinians would need to do the same. Saddam was also mentioned as a victim and symbol of resistance against imperialism. At the end, medals were distributed to the speakers.

I cannot say whether it was vanity – as my friends maliciously suggested – or a veritable sense of duty to inspire the vocal performances of the old guards of the Palestinian resistance, but what certainly did push many *shabāb* to attend the event was boredom: the conference was a pleasant distraction from the daily routine in the Camp. A generalised feeling of boredom saturated the room. Many yawned, other looked around listlessly. A friend whispered in my ear that he had better things to do than wasting his time listening the raving of the speakers.

Like other events for Palestine that I attended, the celebration of the Nakba was also an occasion for distraction. And despite the great efforts of the speakers, once again the singers were met with greater approval by those gathered. Indeed, things began to change when the speakers brought to a close what in the eyes of my friends looked like “empty words” (*haki fadi*). Shortly afterwards, a documentary was screened. As with many others I watched, in this film images of devastation, grief, and misery were followed unfailingly by actions of urban guerrilla warfare, steadfastness, and rebellion. The *shabāb* seemed satisfied with this event. Hisham, a young man from Gaza, explained it to me by saying that the references to the martyrs and heroes in the speeches were more emphasised this time than during the commemoration that was held

the previous year in the Nadi. The conference then turned into a sort of live concert as a well-known Palestinian singer and his band, wearing traditional dress, began playing nationalistic songs. No longer bored, the crowd was jubilant at listening to the music. Bursts of applause and joy accompanied the screening of the documentary and the musical performance by the singer. Many other people, mostly *shabāb* now also entered the gathering attracted by the music and noise. Photographers and cameramen were bustling around with the intention of recording and framing any instant of the event. The public now participated with visible enthusiasm. The event was a great opportunity to flirt, dance, and have fun.

The celebration prompted different responses. While Hisham and the other *shabāb* of the Nadi described the day to me as “*helū ktir*” (really nice), others were instead very critical of the nature of this commemoration. According to the latter group, it should have been more a moment of remembering and mourning rather than a mere party for amusing youths. Their scepticism addressed not only the nature of the day’s event, but also the real intention of the speakers: “they speak, so they feel important!!”. The motivations that inspired most of the *shabāb* and young men to attend also came under question: “*al-shabāb* here do not care about the celebration, they just come to flirt with the girls (*yimshi warā’ al-banāt*)”. As a friend put it, “I am here just because there is nothing better to do today [*fish ishi tani al-yom*]”.

The celebration at the Nakba draws hence attention to the kinds of emotional involvement that participating in this and other similar events involved. Fascination for patriotism was one reason why such ceremonies continued to enjoy considerable success in Al-Wihdat. Yet there was more to peoples’ decisions to attend such events than formal commitment to Palestinian nationalism alone. The celebration provided camp dwellers with opportunities for flirting with girls, listening to music, and also the possibility of maliciously backbiting about the speakers. As such, a diverse mixture of motivations linked to a range of emotional states, from fun to boredom, ultimately led people to attend these ceremonies. People participated in this event and other similar gatherings that I attended in different ways: many were happy, others were cynical, and some were critical of the rhetoric of such commemorations. Stating that fun, boredom, enthusiasm and aversion were the most common emotions participants displayed

towards these events, however, also has unexpected implications. It means that indifference was not as common a feeling as might have been expected based on what refugees said about their discomfort toward politics and political elites: despite their indifference towards or mocking of the speakers' political rhetoric and staid opinions, spectators, were not indifferent to participating in the celebration as a whole.

Seeing people's participation in ceremonies solely through the lens of their passive acceptance of or resistance of an event's political contents would not explain the contradictory fact that many people in Wihdat were able to both criticise these gatherings, and to be pleased from participating in it. In other words, the political was boring but these gatherings were, for many, an irresistible occasion to have fun or, at least, escape boredom. By enjoying the company of friends, the presence of girls, and good music, refugees infused the political contents of the celebrations with apolitical transgression and fun. But, however profane the reasons for attending the celebrations may be, refugees did not cease to reproduce Palestinian nationalism; quite the contrary: participating to these rituals produced among them a feeling of togetherness and shared intimacy that would have been otherwise impossible without turning a boring and highly standardised political ritual into an opportunity for transgressive forms of behaviour (Verkaaik 2004, Yurchak 2006).

POLITICAL FUN

Fun and football

An enduring memory of my fieldwork is the several evenings I spent watching football in the *Markez*. “*Shu bitshaja'e* [which team do you support]?” was one of the most recurrent question I was asked during my fieldwork. “Football” was a central part of refugees' daily life. It was played in the UNRWA school yards or in any other clearings that served the purpose, watched on television, and evoked by the logos and official colours of popular teams – such as Barcelona or Real Madrid – printed on the t-shirts and tracksuits that refugees wore daily.

Moreover, whereas political demonstrations and events were often attended because they were amusing diversions from the tedium of daily life, leisure activities – such as football – at times took on distinct forms of political significance. People often drew a link between politics and football. The Algeria vs. England match played in the preliminary heat of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in July 2010, was a case in point. As I expected, the large majority of refugees supported Algeria. For many, the World Cup was the time for payback against colonisers and imperialist countries (*musta'mirīn*). As a friend once told me, “I used to support Brazil and Argentina [...] now I support whoever is against the colonisers”. However, “political” sympathies for football teams extended beyond the simple colonised/coloniser dichotomy. Abu Omar, for example, once explained to me why he supported the Italian football team despite its disastrous performance during the previous edition of the World Cup: “you asked me why? Here is the reason”, he said, pointing at a picture on his laptop that displayed a crowd of Italian fans in a stadium who were waving Palestinian flags and placards with slogans supporting the resistance in Gaza. “You see the posters? When Italians won the World Cup in 1982, they dedicated it to us!”. But football was connected to the Palestinian national struggle not only through the imputed political sentiments of international teams, however: the camps also had their own teams and these occupied an important place in Jordan’s national culture. This was most evident when the Wihdat team (*farīq al-wihdat*) – a sports club founded in 1956 in the Camp – played against its historical rival, the Faisaly team (*farīq al-faisaly*) – a club associated with ethnic Jordanians. When this happened, there was little room for ambiguity in the minds of the people in the Camp: football was politics. I often heard people repeating in occasion of these matches that “‘*ādī syāse mish mubārā ‘ādīe!* [This is politics, not a normal football match!]”.

Apparently, people in the Camp were much more likely to incur the wrath of the authorities for football matches that turned into collective protests against the regime, than for political demonstrations. However, how can we explain the fact that people who manifested and expressed their profound distaste for the political were still keen to use football as a political arena? This is the question around football and politics in Al-Wihdat, and it is the complex imbrications of the two that I now explore.

There is, of course, nothing special about the political significance of football. The relationship between politics and football has been abundantly documented in the Middle East as well as elsewhere (Armstrong and Giulianotti 1997, Ben-Porat 2001, Fozooni 2004, Sorek 2007` amongst others). In Jordan, the political significance of the matches between Al-Wihdat and Al-Faisaly has been the subject of a research study (Tuastad 1997) and a plethora of newspaper articles (e.g. Abu Toameh 2009, Omari 2010), and even a leak from WikiLeaks (Keinon 2010). The problem with these accounts is that while they have the merit of exploring how football channels political tensions, they look at football primarily for “its expressive and instrumental role in the reproduction of nationalism” (Tuastad 1997, p. 118). I do not intend to downplay here the obvious political dimension of Al-Wihdat football club, which became one of the symbols of Palestinian nationalism in Jordan after the crushing of guerrilla fighters during Black September (Massad 2001, Tuastad 1997). However, I believe that if we are to understand the significance of Wihdat football club in the daily lives of refugees, we should look at football for its ludic dimension rather than for its capacity to act merely as a political medium. Focusing on this dimension can ultimately enhance our understanding of how fun and football enabled camp dwellers to navigate the ambiguities of their lives – ambiguities that the political would otherwise crystallise.

To understand the political importance of football in a context dominated by a general discomfort surrounding politics and the political, I will turn to Oskar Verkaaik’s ethnography of the Muhajir Qumi Movement (MQM). The author explains the extraordinary popularity of this religious nationalist group in Pakistan by the irresistible opportunity for fun that the movement offered to urban youths. Verkaaik notes that members of this group often drew a contrast between their activities and the seriousness and pretentiousness of state-promoted forms of nationalism in the country. To describe the specific nature of MQM’s activities, he draws on a distinction made by Obeyesekere between “dromena” and “chatartic” rituals. Obeyesekere describes the former as “solemn, stately rituals [...] which [...] embody cultural, religious, and philosophical values and are characterized by controlled behaviour and seriousness, camouflaging conflict and anxiety. Catharses, in contrast, are ‘vulgar’ rituals that move in an opposite, regressive direction. They are characterized by acting out behavior and often levity and obscenity” (Verkaaik 2004, p. 119). According to Verkaaik, the activities of MQM

recall cathartic rituals insofar as they share the same “self conscious parody of high cultural forms and values, and a collective enjoyment of the ludic, of comedy and satire” (ibid.).

Likewise, I here draw an analogy between political celebrations and “dromena” rituals, on one side, and football matches and “cathartic” rituals, on the other. While, as we have just seen, many refugees in the Camp despised the solemn and serious nature of formal celebration, football matches were widely appreciated for their ludic and joyful nature. Yet, at the same time these events provided an important form of empathy with Palestinian nationalism that could not be attained otherwise within the corrupt and boring world of the political.

I will explain what this involved and how it was experienced by refugees by giving a brief account of the celebration of an important victory of the Al-Wihdat football team in the Camp.

Riots in the Camp

It was a sunny evening in early April. Along with a few friends from the Camp, I went to the football stadium in Amman where the Al-Wihdat football team played the majority of its home matches. *Malab Malik Abdullah II* (King Abdulla II Stadium) was located within walking distance of Wihdat Camp in the nearby neighbourhood of Gwesme¹²⁰. The proximity of the stadium and the wide clearing that encircled it provided the *shabāb* of Wihdat and the surrounding areas with a suitable place for playing football. That day, however, the riot police were patrolling: Wihdat Football Club (*nadi al-wihdat*) was playing and, as ever, unrest was expected by the authorities. The deployment of security forces was noticeable and a thick cordon of officers stood along the entire perimeter of the football field. However, this exceptional display of force was not the norm. At ordinary games most of the fans were Palestinians from Al-Wihdat, and only a few police officers would patrol the stadium; on this day, however,

¹²⁰ For security reasons, however, the matches between Faisaly and Wihdat were generally played in Zarqa, a nearby city, and not in the Malik Abdullah II Stadium, close to Wihdat refugee camp.

there was much more at stake than usual: Al-Wihdat was just one step away from winning the Cup of Jordan (*casse al-'urdun*).

Al-Wihdat eventually won and celebrations were no less vibrant than I would have expected: in small groups, people flooded into the streets of the Camp chanting songs while waving Palestinian flags and football scarves. Having watched the match at home in the Camp, we decided to join the crowd in the street. Important Al-Wihdat victories were always moments of shared joy and collective participation in the Camp¹²¹. In terms of the number of people involved, other celebrations such as political demonstrations or the annual commemoration of the Nakba were insignificant. The enthusiasm and joy that accompanied this spontaneous gathering were greater than anything I had seen since I had been living in the Camp. The streets were full of people jumping and dancing, and traffic flow – in itself always problematic in the narrow alleys of Al-Wihdat – was completely blocked. In the important arterial roads of Shāra‘ Sumaiyya and Shāra‘ Madaba, the sound of the drums accompanied the explosion of crackers and fireworks, while the Wihdat football anthem was played loudly from stands and small shops.

The spontaneity of these celebrations was also indicated by the complete lack of organisation. Separate groups of people – which, in the dim lighting of the outer areas of the Camp, looked like just darker spots in the street – met in the street and started the celebration. *Shabāb* spasmodically waved flags and Wihdat football scarves, occasionally using aerosol sprays as flamethrowers. As a mark of the strong bond that united Wihdat Football Club with camp-dwellers, soon after the prize-giving in the stadium, the cup was brought into the Camp and excitedly displayed by a group of people who were presumably standing in a car. The vehicle – not visible because of the number of people on and around it – was parading around Shāra‘ al-Nadi. In the space of a few minutes, thousands of people overflowed Shāra‘ Madaba and the streets around it. Blocking traffic flow, many hailed the victory by singing slogans such as “God, Jerusalem, and the Arabs” or “we are from Wihdat, we are the children of Palestine”. These clusters of people eventually joined to merge into a bigger one. Moving back and

¹²¹ Although women and old people were watching, only men and *shabāb* (youths) participated in the celebration.

forth in Shāra‘ al-Nadi between the Souk and Shāra‘ Madaba (where a main police station was located), the multitude attracted more people, growing rapidly in size. Nobody led the crowd; occasionally leaders, appeared, stirred up the crowd, and disappeared.

However, the “mood” of the crowd changed quickly. The joy about the success of the Wihdat team was replaced by songs and chants against Al-Faisaly and the royal family, and the jubilation turned to turmoil. New slogans were replacing the old ones – such as “*kuss ukhtak el-hukūme*” (fuck the government) and “*feisalawy maniak*” (Faisali supporters are asses). Insults were lunched also at the police officers who were zealously observing the celebration, perched on the observation balconies that were located on top of the towering police station. Some also began to set off fireworks close to or even in the direction of the police station. The size of the crowd alone would have probably been a sufficient reason for the police to scatter the crowd; in fact, immediately after the first fireworks were set off police officers arrived at the scene dressed in full riot gear.

It did not take long for the police to intervene with batons and tear gas; they were, according to my friends, only waiting for a pretext of one kind or another to scatter the crowd. Moving back from the epicentre of the clash/celebration, we came across groups of *shabāb* running away. Poor street lighting in Al-Wihdat raised fears and tensions further. Indeed, a few hours earlier a friend of mine had commented that a temporary blackout in the Camp was the direct result of regime machination: “it’s the *hukūme* (government)! They are doing it because of the match”. The main road that provides access to Al-Wihdat from Shāra‘ Madaba was blocked by temporary check points. A friend commented, his voice shaking with excitement, that: “it seems like we’re in Afghanistan!”.

Fun and Palestinian nationalism

The whole episode may have induced some observers to conclude that political life amongst refugees was framed in terms of a radical antagonism between Jordanian-Palestinians (*filastīnīn min urdun*) and Transjordanians (*‘urdunīn*), and that young men

in the Camp made instrumental use of football to channel their political struggles. I instead highlight once again the need to look at the ludic dimension of football in order to grasp the complexities of camp dwellers' political identity.

Al-Wihdat's football matches generated a generalised enthusiasm in the Camp, and my friends listed important victories by the local team among the most cherished moments of their lives. However, as Verkaaik writes, "[i]t often takes only a tiny step to go from fun to violence, and it is frequently taken without much consideration" (1986, p. 118). The fierce rivalry between Al-Wihdat and Al-Faisaly often turned into political criticism and unrest. It was hence not uncommon that the aftermath of a football match between the two clubs turned into a sort of urban guerrilla fighting. Fun provided Palestinian refugees in Al-Wihdat with the capacity to act under a common feeling of identification as Palestinians. During these matches, national and ethnic nuances were wiped out and boundaries sharpened: Palestinians supported Wihdat, Transjordanians supported Al-Faisaly. This identification reached such an extent that when Wihdat lost an important match and consequently the championship, many were embittered and remarked to me: "They took Palestine, then al-Aqsa, and now Wihdat".

For camp dwellers, however, allegiance to Palestinian nationalistic ideals during football matches was more than the discourse on Palestinian national identity and struggles promoted by party leaders. They experienced this ideal as a form of leisure, humour, and irreverence, which gave them a sense of power, amplified by the self-awareness that being together inspired. It was not only solidarity, though, but also internal competition within the group that defined the relationships between its members. Again, it is worth quoting Verkaaik when he states that "[a]lready standing somewhat outside mainstream society and often lacking formal leadership, such groups may put pressure on members to show their wit and courage by going beyond the limits of what is generally deemed morally acceptable" (1986, p. 186). The transgressive crossing of the boundary between the legit and illicit was a common feature of important at Al-Wihdat matches. Aroused by the noisy sound of drums at the stadium, audible even from the South-Eastern outskirts of the Camp, Al-Wihdat's fans (*jumhūr al-wihdat*) often accompanied the performance of their team with mocking and sarcastic songs. On these occasions, for example, a common slogan that the crowd shouted to

encourage Al-Wihdat sees the substitution of *Malik* (King) with “Wihdat” as a term of reference in what originally was a nationalistic pro-Hashemite slogan – “*bir-roh bid-dam nafdika ya malik*” (by soul and by blood we support the King/Wihdat)!”. In Al-Wihdat, this was even more evident when the euphoria and joy about the victory of Al-Wihdat took a dangerous and yet thrilling turn – i.e. when the *shabāb* started criticising the King and his entourage, including the authorities. Such deeds would often be recalled with pride within the peer group, and were narrated again and again to loud laughs and clapping.

However, the irreverent and ludic nature of these events points to yet another dimension of fun: its creative capacity (Verkaaik 2004). Against the backdrop of the disastrous political situation in the Occupied Territories and the discrimination faced in host countries, fun did not simply make it possible for camp dwellers to infuse new life into Palestinian nationalism and to use it to counterbalance their shared experience of loss and marginalisation in Jordan. More than that, the creative power of fun enabled camp youths to give new meaning to the notion of “Palestinianness”, and a new form to their allegiance to Palestinian nationalism, one more suited to their desire to live life in Jordan. Of course, the dynamics of friend/enemy identification that defined the agonistic world of the political (Spencer 2007) were also played out during football matches: this was most evident when Al-Wihdat played against Al-Faisaly. But because of its ludic and non-serious dimension, however, fun enabled a flexibility that the sclerotic world of the political did not permit. The self-contradictory ambiguity of being both Palestinian refugees and Jordanian citizens was of little importance to my friends when Al-Wihdat played. If supporting Al-Wihdat meant anything at all, it was the desire for transgression, the feeling of togetherness, and the euphoric atmosphere that its supporters experienced when the team played. This made it possible to support Al-Wihdat as a symbol of Palestinian identification, despise Al-Faisaly as the antagonist team that represented the “Transjordanian community”, and yet feel themselves genuinely Jordanian citizens afterwards. For example, one day a friend told me that a man, disguised as a Wihdat fan but suspected of being a Faisaly supporter, managed to get access to the online forum of the Al-Wihdat football team – informally called *al-mouq‘e* (the site). Apparently, the man posted insults, threats, and other obscenities on the forum based on the alleged ethnic origin of the team and its supporters. The event

left my friend quite puzzled, and he commented on the foolishness of the episode: “I do not see what Palestine and Palestinians have to do with the Wihdat team. Why would you insult Palestinians if you don’t like the team?! Insult the team, if you really have to!”

Not surprisingly, the fun experience during football matches did not only set apart camp dwellers from the so-called Transjordanians; at times it served to unify the population of Jordan. The support for the Jordanian football team was a case in point. Most of my friends had an ambivalent attitude toward this team. Some were genuine supporters because Jordan was their country as well as the country of their fathers. Others instead denounced the abuse and the discrimination that they underwent as “second class citizens”, and complained about the normalisation of relationships with Israel, as reasons why they would never support Jordan. However, as a large number of the players of the Jordanian team were Palestinian-Jordanians who played in the beloved Al-Wihdat Team, the victory of the national team seldom left my friends in Al-Wihdat unconcerned. For example, when Jordan’s victory against Singapore qualified the team for the Asian Cup play-off, the success of the local team eventually triggered a wave of enthusiasm on the streets of the capital as well as in Al-Wihdat. Again, Joseph Massad notes that, in the Arab football championship of 1997, the defeat of the Syrian national team by Jordan generated a similar response:

“At the end of the game, which most of the people of Jordan watched on satellite television at home or in cafes, thousands of people and cars crowded the streets of Jordan’s cities and towns, especially Amman, where cars stopped in the middle of the streets and young men and women danced, bringing traffic to a complete halt for hours. King Husayn chartered a plane to bring the players home from Beirut. Upon arrival, the team toured Amman’s streets in a massive convoy with supporters (men and women) lining all of Amman’s major thoroughfares. Many Jordanian news columnists saw this as a sign of Palestinian-Jordanian unity under one Jordanian identity” (2001, pp. 257).



Figure 21: farīq al-wihdat (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 22: Al-Wihdat fans (source: Jihad Nijem)



Figure 23: Al-Faisaly fans waving Jordanian *hatta* (source: Jihad Nijem)

CONCLUSION

In Al-Wihdat, camp dwellers have actively sought to relieve themselves from boredom and the overwhelming presence of the political by becoming engaged in a range of activities.

During my fieldwork, I have observed celebrations becoming occasions of fun, and apolitical events such as football matches turning into movement of political unrest. Camp dwellers did this for fun, as a playful alternative to the boredom experienced daily in the Camp, and as a reaction to the condition of being “fed up” of politics and political parties. The momentary suspension of the political created new spaces of agency that allowed refugees to accommodate their need to live an ordinary life as Jordanian citizens with the stresses towards an extraordinary existence as living symbols of Palestinian nationalism. We have already seen how refugees have sought to accomplish this goal through the pursuit of social and economic integration (chapter 2 and 3) as well as through the performance of a moral and masculine self (chapter 4 and 5). Likewise, to relieve their existence from boredom, and hence the overexposure to the

political, refugees turned to the non-political grammar of loitering. Engagement in these activities, however, was not a way for refugees to neglect their nationalistic ideals (cf. Jean-Klein 2001), but rather a mode through which they readapted these to the concurrent and powerfully felt need to live an ordinary life. By making a nationalist celebration an irresistible opportunity to meet girls and listen to live music or simply escape boredom, and turning a fun event such as a football match into a political demonstration, refugees infused Palestinian nationalism with ordinariness: doing so injected it with vitality and adapted it to the protracted temporariness or fragile ordinariness of being both refugees and citizens in Jordan.

We might be tempted to describe refugees' engagement with these activities as entirely political. However, I would urge to refrain from doing so, as this would run the risk of removing the very thing that enabled the political: the non-political (Candea 2011). It was the very dialectic between these two dimensions that allowed the adaptation of Palestinian nationalist discourse and the imperative of resistance to the exigencies of living a normal life. For example, the ritualism of watching football together, hanging around on the streets of the Camp, or attending nationalist commemorations, contributed to effectively strengthening a sense of intimacy and, in so doing, the ideal values of political unity. Allegiance to national symbols and identity was often re-enacted in the course of these activities. But "loitering" cannot be framed in functionalist terms as a social ritual that served to re-inscribe the subject with nationalist values. Neither were these activities, in line with the tradition of resistance studies, a space where the hegemony of Palestinian nationalism was challenged and resisted. While the centrality of Palestine was never called into question, the politics of "loitering" never fully subscribed to nationalist ideals. These activities were an expression of the redundant and fundamentally boring nature of the political in the Camp, and the fun generated by them was the reflection of camp dwellers' wish to carry out a normal life.

To reiterate, the fun and ludic dimensions of time-off activities allowed refugees to reproduce the ideal and ethical values of Palestinian nationalism by mitigating the excess of the political and fashioning a shared feeling of belonging to the same community. At the same time, however, these activities enabled camp-dwellers to

reinterpret these ideals and meanings in a new way that was more suited to their need to live a normal life – i.e. outside the imperative of active militancy.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have sought to show how refugees have received and responded the political messages behind their struggle for national sovereignty in the context of their progressive integration in Jordan. To illustrate the complexities and ambiguities of camp-dwellers' experience of the political in ordinary times, I will begin this conclusion with two short anecdotes from my 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork amongst refugees in Al-Wihdat camp.

Political talks were a veritable source of anxiety in the Camp because exposed people to the danger of being overheard. The government took any sort of criticism towards it seriously. As it was confirmed by my friends, many people collaborated with the *mukhābarāt* – the Arab secret service, and a vast network of secret agencies was thought to liaise with the local group, most notably the CIA and Mossad¹²². In the Camp, many stories circulated about people being stopped, questioned, and occasionally detained for expressing their disapproval against the royal family. Not surprisingly, almost everybody avoided publicly expressing opinions about the King and his entourage. One day, for example, a friend started a long diatribe in his house whose main target was the government (*hukūme*) and the King (*el-malik*). There was nothing seriously about it – or so it seemed to me – nothing that could have vaguely recalled seditious dispositions; there were “merely” a number of insults and injuries addressed to the political leaders. So, while one friend was expressing a point of view, another friend was anxiously looking at him, gesturing to him to stop. I suspected that I probably was the problem. Although I had a sincere friendship with them, I knew that my role as researcher did not reassure them completely of a potential security leak. Determined to put an end to this, I decided – as a joke – to show them my passport. But in the act of putting my hands in the inside pocket of my jacket to take the document, my friends froze with fear. Only the sight of my passport relieved them from the deep anxieties that what I was showing was neither a tape recorder nor same sort of badge.

¹²² The Jordanian *mukhābarāt* and the Israeli secret service are both widely known for being the most effective intelligent agencies in the Middle East – rumours, poetry, and lately cinematographic transpositions have contributed to strengthen this idea.

Ironically, just few months earlier I had to receive the latest rumours with a hint of bitterness and anger. Apparently, the father of one of my friends was firmly convinced I was a secret agent, a spy (*jāsūs*), from the *mukhābarāt*. The brief visit I paid to his house upon his invitation did only seem to confirm his suspicions. According to the old *fidā ṭyyn*, my shaky Arabic was only an attempt to dissimulate my true intentions and secret plans. But not only the old man did not hesitate to express his suspicions, he even urged my friends to chase me out of the Camp. Luckily, they reassured me that I should have not paid too much attention to the ravings of old men as they did not reflect what they thought about me – “in truth, old people are always suspicious [*fil agiga khitiārīn dā’iman mashkūlīn*]”. Yet, that day, when I took my passport, I could still clearly perceive their unease. Only after spending months together did my friends indulge in open speculation in front of me. Yet, the spectre of being a spy taunted me for the whole period of my stay in Al-Wihdat. And toward the very end of my fieldwork, just few weeks before leaving, a man – an Egyptian who worked as a peddler in the market of the Camp and to whom I was introduced months earlier – approached me in the street. With extreme consideration, he warned me that I could have been killed because there were people who suspected me of being a Jewish spy: “people here think that any stranger works for the *mukhābarāt*, Mossad, or CIA. When I came here they thought the same about me, and there is someone that still believe that I am a spy!”. Luckily, nothing happened to me and, as I suspected, the man overestimated the risk of my opinionated friend. Yet these episodes remain relevant of the extent of this paranoia in Al-Wihdat.

However, as I will show in the second vignette, it was not only fear but also boredom that the political inspired in the lives of my informants¹²³.

After few months of fieldwork in Wihdat, I finally managed to leave to Lebanon on a trip that I had for long been planning with a friend from the Camp. My travelling companion, Ashraf, picked me up with a friend in my house in Wihdat. We took a *service* (public taxis) from Abdali – once Amman’s main bus station¹²⁴ – to Beirut, via

¹²³ On the relationship between boredom and fear, see also Kelly 2008 and Taussig 2004.

¹²⁴ Although no busses departed from Abdali any longer, – the station was closed down because of the types of property speculation that were affecting many areas of the city at time of my research – services

Damascus. We approached the city five hours later, where we planned to stay for a short, two-day trip. Our goal was to do some sightseeing and enjoy the nightlife that made Beirut so popular among many youth in the Middle East. On my side, however, I also hoped that our short joint travel to Beirut could turn into a good occasion to observe my friend's attitude and relationship to a city that was of central importance to Palestinian political memory. Engraved in the streets and corners of Beirut there are still memories and physical reminders of the Palestinian history of suffering and nationalist struggles decipherable for interested eyes, such as the ruins of Tal Al-Za'tar and the still existing refugee camp of Sabra and Shatila (Khalili 2007)¹²⁵. It did not, hence, take me long to observe my friends' attitudes toward the political side of Beirut. Hanging around on the streets of Beirut downtown, we ended up in front of the historical headquarters of the Lebanese Phalange. A sturdy Phalangist¹²⁶ approached us, questioning in a somewhat intimidating way about what we were doing there. Reassured on our intentions, he left. I asked Ashraf whether he knew the man. "No, I don't know him", he replied. "He's one of those who killed so many Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila". I said. "Ah!", he replied rather listlessly.

Ashraf, like everybody else in the Camp, knew about the stories of violence and sorrow that took place in the city of Beirut – narratives that have so dramatically saturated the political imaginations of Palestinians (Allen 2005). Yet, he did not seem to care greatly about it. On my part, I was rather disappointed by his answer: after all, Ashraf's patriotism and loyalty to the Palestinian cause was one of my main reasons for travelling with him to Beirut. I was puzzled by the fact that Ashraf did not seem to care about a man who was obviously a member of a militia that had played a central role in one of the worst massacres to have taken place in Palestinian history. Even more puzzling was what was about to follow. After the incident, I proposed him that we visit the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. Ashraf seemed a little surprised by my proposition and asked me why I thought we should do something like that. I told him

continued to connect the capital with other important locations such as Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo.

¹²⁵In 1976, over four thousand people died following the destruction of Tal Al-Za'tar refugee camp at the hands of Maronite militias during the Lebanese Civil War. Six years after, in the refugee camp of Sabra and Shatila, the Lebanese Forces and South Lebanese Army, with the logistic support of Israeli army, perpetrated another massacre, killing more than a thousand Palestinian refugees (Sayigh 1997).

¹²⁶A member of the Lebanese Phalange Party – a right-wing paramilitary and political organisation, mainly supported by Maronite Christians.

that these were places important to the history of the Palestinian national struggle. No longer surprised but visibly annoyed by my admittedly rather over continuous insistence on talking about Palestinian issues, he cut me short: “Luigi, *ehna zahgānīn min al mukhayyamāt* [we are fed up of refugee camps]!” I was taken aback by his response, for I expected Ashraf expressing feelings of pride, sorrow, or even anger in relationship to the many symbols that stand prominently in the Palestinian nationalistic discourse in Beirut; but at that time of my field, I was still not prepared to encounter “boredom” among the normative feelings of Palestinian nationalism (Allen 2009). During the rest of our time in Beirut, we went on sightseeing. Ashraf never approached the topic of politics again and neither did I.

What these two vignettes ultimately tell us is the complexities for camp-dwellers of living an “ordinary life” (*hayā ‘ādiyye*). The real obsession for secrecy and treachery in the Camp was indicative of the intrinsic fragility of this project. Mistaking the act of taking my passport as a potential threat exposed the exceptionality of their condition. The extraordinariness of refugees’ political status was always there, ready to emerge, and apt to jeopardise the prospects of an ordinary life. Likewise, when Ashraf reproached me for my continuous insistence to uncover the political (“*ehnā zahgānīn min el mukhayyamāt*”), his was an invitation to cut short the exceptionality of their lives and let them relax within the comfort of a life carried out in an apparently banal ordinariness – something my friend conceived of in terms of flirting with girls or simply walking around for Beirut’s nightlife district.

The indication in my fieldwork suggested that being ordinary was not only a state, but also a condition that most people in Al-Wihdat aspired to (see also Kelly 2008). It was a project that the large majority strived, more or less successfully, to achieve. It was the struggle to fill the gap between what Kelly identifies as the normative sense of what ordinary “should be” and the empirical sense of what actually “is” that constituted the goal of many refugees in Al-Wihdat and often also the cause of much frustration and boredom. For refugees, “being ordinary” was not something that could have been easily taken for granted, for the search of the ordinary took place in a situation of protracted extraordinariness and great ambiguity: Palestinian refugees and Jordanian citizens who after 60 years still live in a “temporary” space that is also spatially and economically

integrated into the municipality of Amman. And this condition was further aggravated, for, as we have seen throughout the thesis, a sense of communality among camp-dwellers was often threatened by discrimination and stigma. The determination of many people to accomplish an ordinary life with all this might entail – owning a flat, getting married, and gaining a decent professional status but also being able to fulfil other desires such as having fun or being free to choose a specific dress code¹²⁷ – was sometimes in strident contrast with the extraordinariness of refugee political status and their wish to re-enact their allegiance to Palestinian nationalism.

So, boredom and fear were in large part the consequence of not being able to carry out an “ordinary life”. But the two anecdotes above tell us something more: boredom and fear were brought to light with even more intensity during refugees’ encounter with what they perceived to be the corrupted world of the political. If, in many anthropological accounts, the political could have worked as a vehicle through which such contradictions were co-opted or challenged (e.g.Scott 1985), for the majority of camp-dwellers, it was instead an arena where these contradictions were more intensely experienced. In this sense, the findings of my research confirm Carl Schmitt’s specific understanding of the political. According to the German political philosopher, “at the very heart of the political lay the distinction between *friend* and *enemy* [italics is mine]” (Spencer 2007, p.10). In Jordan the distinction between “enemy/friend” was played out in the tension between assimilation and resistance, between refugeeeness and citizenship, between Jordanianness and Palestinianness, between the efforts of living an ordinary life in the context of their integration in Jordan and the nationalistic struggles of an exilic community. The tension inherent in camp-dwellers status in Jordan was cankered by the politics of the “friend and enemy” dichotomy – the politics of “us” (Palestinian refugees) versus “them” (Jordanian citizen) that left little space for the kind of flexibility that refugees needed to accommodate their need to live an ordinary life with their wish to uphold their nationalist ideals. Asking Ashraf his opinion on refugee camps and political leaders strictly tied with the Palestinian history surely uncovered painful memories. But my insistence also operated in the sense of continuously reminding him to take a clear stance on his national identity. It sounded like: “are you

¹²⁷ On one occasion, for example, a friend lamented the impossibility of dressing like a real pious man (*zei sheikh hagigi*) because especially in refugee camps, this would have given the authorities hints of the man being aligned with terrorists.

Palestinian, or not?! If so, behave as such and show more commitment”. Ashraf’s answer was symptomatic of the fact that, at least at that moment, he did not want to take any categorical and exclusivist political position. These dynamics were even more evident during the first vignette. Indeed, if the political exacerbated the ambiguities of being Palestinian refugees in Jordan, these contradictions were then most intensely experienced by camp-dwellers in Al-Wihdat – a space endowed with “thick” political meanings. For its history and reputation, the Camp was intrinsically political. It was as though refugees were constantly asked to whom they pleaded allegiance – the Jordanian state or Palestinian nationalism? The anxiety and uneasiness generated by this question took the form of a ubiquitous and chronic fear of treachery. The label of being a spy or a traitor was indiscriminately stuck to everybody, and refugees from the Camp were even more liable to fall into these categories than “outsiders” such as myself.

But if the political required taking a firm stand either as Palestinian refugees or Jordanian citizens that camp dwellers were unwilling to take, a descent into the ordinary gave them hopes of transcending the incommensurability of the rhetoric of “us” versus “them”. Working as a kind of counter-politics, the ordinary mitigated the excess of political in the lives of refugees and infused their nationalist predicament with mundanity. For these reasons, I argued throughout the thesis that if we want to explore refugees’ agency, it is hence on the apparently “ordinary” that we should focus – which is both what refugees did for a large part of the day and what they aspired to achieve. The whole dissertation has been an attempt to do that. Here, I have documented the practice, concerns, and experience of everyday life among Palestinian refugees living in Jordan, and demonstrated how through daily acts of ordinary life refugees have sought to overcome, more or less successfully, the undergoing tensions of their lives as Palestinian refugees in Jordan. While exploring the interplay of the political and non-political may strike some observers as trivialising the struggles of the refugees, an investigation of this kind is important if we want to produce humanising accounts of the everyday lives of Palestinian refugees (and others living in similar circumstances).

ON PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN

The central concern of this thesis has been to explore the political aspects of the everyday lives of the refugees living in Al-Wihdat refugee camp in a manner that does not fall into the trap of so much work on Palestinians in Jordan and elsewhere that treats them as one-dimensional political beings. This is important on different levels.

First, this thesis contributes to Palestinian refugee studies. My account of political life in Al-Wihdat differs in substantial ways from other treatments of the nature of political agency amongst Palestinian refugees. It remains too often assumed in popular accounts, and to a lesser extent also in scholarly work, that Palestinians are either irreducible, oppositional others, or passive victims emplaced in disciplinary spaces. By building on nuanced studies of life in Palestine by other anthropologists (see, among others, Jean-Klein 2001, Kelly 2008), I have shown the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that for a great number of Palestinian refugees in Al-Wihdat, the fundamental values of Palestinian nationalism were of genuine importance, despite the fact that many of their everyday practices did not recoil from a progressive integration within the Kingdom of Jordan.

Obviously, whilst Palestinian refugees have enjoyed full citizenship rights since they first came to Jordan, there remains the potential for friction. In the eyes of many camp-dwellers, the causes of these unsettled tensions are often seen as the consequences of ethnic and social discrimination exerted by the authorities and the Government. Refugees often lamented a not-so-subtle favouritism for East Bankers exerted by the regime in the economic and social spheres, forms of harassment when dealing with the authorities, blocked upward political and economic mobility, and so on. These tensions were also fuelled by those scholars who have excluded the possibility of full integration in Jordan (e.g. Al-Khazendar 1997) and by that branch of Jordanian nationalism that considers Jordanian-Palestinians as unwelcomed guests.

What I found, however, is all the more interesting because contradicts popular expectations. Despite effective discrimination and lasting representations, most camp-dwellers were actually seeing themselves as pure Jordanians, and devoted a great deal of their energies seeking to overcome discrimination and reaching full integration into

Jordan, and actively sought to build social and economic relationships that extended far beyond the administrative borders of the Camp.

Secondly, my findings are important also because contribute to shed light on the political and cultural complexity of Jordan as a multi-dimensional society. My exploration problematises approaches to the study of Palestinian-Transjordanian relationships that have emphasised the separate and rigid nature of categories such as “Transjordanian”, “Jordanian”, “Palestinian of Jordanian origin”, and “camp-dwellers” (see, for example, Brand 1995). The findings of the present thesis shed light on the diverse spheres where this process of “blending” has taken place: from the physical reappropriation of the Camp (chapter II) to the strategies for securing better economic prospects (chapter III), and so on. With this I do not mean to suggest that economic disparities and ethnic discrimination do not play a role in structuring the relationship between camp dwellers and the so-called “Transjordanians” – as we have seen throughout the chapters, they clearly do. Indeed, documenting the multidimensionality of being refugees does not mean hailing its unbounded fluidity. My account has sought to shed light on the unevenness of camp dwellers’ power to live, manage and manipulate the interconnected nature of camp space. As I have demonstrated, camp-dwellers attempt to navigate the complexities of everyday life was not always a story of success: paranoia, frustration, and boredom document well the complexity of such an endeavour. Yet many refugees have negotiated these differences on a daily basis. This confirms the findings of those few studies that have suggested how important dimensions of “state sponsored Jordanian national identity are not repudiated, but rather adopted and internalised as they are not taken as substitutes for or competitive with Palestinian national identity, but rather as complementary” (Massad, 2001, p. 257, see also Abu-Odeh, 1999).

ON THE POLITICAL

Finally, by shedding light on how Palestinian refugees handle nationalist pressures and accommodate them with the facts of their displacement in Wihdat, this thesis has added to a scholarly debate that has recently urged anthropologists to rethink the categories of “the political” and “political agency”.

Al-Wihdat is radically different not only from other settings densely populated by Palestinians in the region, but also from the other refugee camps established in Jordan. This difference has doubtless had a great impact on fashioning specific forms of political agency in the Camp. However, investigating the ways in which refugees have sought to accommodate their wish to live as Jordanian citizens with their genuine allegiance with Palestinian national symbols and ideals has signified a critical reassessment of “the Foucault-Agamben canon” and has important repercussions also on political anthropology in general.

By building on Foucault's and Agamben's analysis of the mechanisms through which the state creates the subject-citizen, I have argued that refugees in Jordan have progressively identified themselves as citizens of the Kingdom. Their lives were oriented toward a progressive integration rather than resisting assimilation. At the same time, however, I moved forward by drawing on a growing scholarship that has expressed criticism toward some of the limitations inherent this approach (Candea 2011, see also Yurchak, 2008 and comments by Dominic Boyer). In their daily lives, refugees have displayed forms of agency that cannot be fully explained by “universal schemata of force/power relations such as *“pouvoir-savoir”* (Foucault 1980) and “sovereignty” (Agamben 1998). If the increasing inscription of refugees’ lives within the Jordan state order has certainly enabled the production of refugees as (relatively) integrated citizens, it has also supported the creation of a zone of subjectivity (as Palestinian refugees) that the state itself was not able to account. Indeed, refugees’ pursuit of social and economic integration, their legal and political assimilation within the territory of Jordan, and their desire to be ordinary are what have ultimately allowed the reproduction of the ideals and messages of Palestinian nationalism. To put it simply, the more refugees have been assimilated, the more they have breathed new life into a political ethos that was otherwise dominated by frustration and despair. The opening up of this new zone of agency and subjectivity within the very context of their integration has signified refugees’ capacity to escape the state’s power to fully determine individuals’ subjectivity. In this sense, refugees managed to subvert the Jordanian state's attempts at total control by constituting themselves as both Jordanians and Palestinians. And they did that by actively pursuing integration. In so doing, Camp-dwellers not only exposed

the state's control and its power of subjectification, but also demonstrated that this very power can be deployed in multiple ways.



Figure 24: Jordanian flag painted on a shelter in Al-Wihdat (source: Jihad Nijem)

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