



FIGURE 11. Jars of red pepper paste distributed by an NGO in Nahr el-Bared. Photograph: Perla Issa.

“Factions Are Like Shops”

Aid, Discipline, and the Structural Effect

Now [the factions] are all *dakākīn* [shops]. Meaning now a student gets 43,000LB [30 USD]. He doesn't give the money to his parents anymore; he goes and buys cigarettes. They bring him to the protests, it's not that he goes of his own will; no, they bring him. If he doesn't come to the protest, he doesn't get paid the next day. Payday is always after the protest. And when they started giving him 100 USD he stopped working or trying to get an education. He just goes and guards the offices for a couple hours. He lives by night and sleeps in the day, smoking all the time.

—ABU RASHID, THAWRA GENERATION, SHATILA CAMP, DECEMBER 7, 2010

“Al-faṣā’il zay al-dakākīn” (“factions are like shops”) was a common expression in the camps in Lebanon. While it seemed initially puzzling, with time I came to see the points of similarity. A *dukkāni* was not just an average shop; it alluded to a hole-in-the-wall, small, broken-down, dusty, and old shop—just the image that Palestinians want to associate with factions nowadays. But there was more to the metaphor. Shops carried advertisements marketing their goods; factions carried posters publicizing their martyrs (*shuhadā*). Shops were sometimes deceptive about the quality of their products; factions’ self-proclaimed martyrs were sometimes people dying of old age. Shops engaged in fierce contests with their competitors; factions engaged in heated confrontations with their opponents. Shops had owners; factions had leaders. Shop owners unilaterally directed business; faction leaders unilaterally decided on policy. Shop owners controlled finances; faction leaders controlled funding.

The likeness, however, seemed to have its limits. In particular, I felt there was one glaring contradiction: the type of relations assumed to govern both entities. Shops were impersonal; customers could enter one, not find what they wanted, and then move on to the next. Yet, as we saw in the previous two chapters, those were not the type of relations that seemed to take place “inside” factions. Indeed

we saw how Palestinians had contact with factions based on *personal* relations, which stands in sharp contrast to a customer's relation to a shop. Additionally, the image of shops conferred an edifice with walls and a ceiling that a person "entered" or "left." Again we saw how that imagery did not correspond to people's relations with factions.

Can these two images, of an impersonal building and a personalized network, be reconciled? Looking for an answer, I found my first clue in Abu Rashid's description of factional "shops," quoted above. The clue also helped me answer another pressing question I had: what did factions sell? That was, after all, a shop's defining activity: trade. The answer seemed to be "money." What factions were selling, according to Abu Rashid, was dollar bills. This may seem counterintuitive, as usually a customer pays money to receive a good; in this case, it seemed individuals "paid" with their presence at protests in order to receive financial benefits. While I did not initially give this metaphor much attention, I later realized its sharp insight into how practices of aid distribution served to draw factions as impersonal structures with particular spatial characteristics, those of a perimeter and a ceiling.

This chapter examines how factions transmute from personal networks to disembodied edifices through the provision of care. I elucidate this mutation through an ethnographic examination of how Palestinian refugees obtained aid in the camps of Lebanon. Palestinian political factions, along with local and international NGOs, as well as UNRWA, provided a wide range of services whose central concern was the welfare of the population. These included health, educational, relief, development, economic, and cultural programs. These activities illustrate well how the goal of political power in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon was the administration of life in all its details, or governmentality, as Foucault (2006) termed this modern form of government.

In this chapter I look at practices of aid distribution from the perspective of aid receivers, not aid providers, through my immersion in daily home life as opposed to being embedded in the bureaucratic apparatus of factions or NGOs. In particular I examine the efforts the Talal family exerted in order to cover the tuition fees of their second son, Ahmad. This endeavor exemplifies how Palestinians navigated the web of factions and NGOs in a desire to better their lives. While there are significant differences in the capacity, power, and funding of Palestinian political factions, local and international NGOs, and UNRWA, the ways in which aid is distributed in the camp on a day-to-day basis—the ways Palestinian refugees experience the dissemination of aid—remains largely the same.

Through the many examples outlined in the present chapter I make four inter-related points. First, I show how in the name of distributing aid fairly, a whole series of surveillance and monitoring techniques have been brought to bear on the population. I draw parallels between these methods and what Foucault (1991) calls discipline, and highlight how aid distribution processes worked in a similar way, generating a form of productive power. I also show how these practices served to

embody a hierarchy with an “above” that was in control and a “below” that lacked it. Second, building upon Ferguson and Gupta’s (2002) notion of the “spatialization of the state,” I examine how these disciplinary practices imbued factions with particular topographical dimensions. Factions lost the appearance of networks and took on the cloak of an overarching and encompassing reality, which existed “above” and “surrounded” the people it cared for. Third, I argue that it would be wrong to end our analysis with a description of factions as a hierarchical organization, with a “top” that had power and control over those “below.” Following Mitchell (1988, 1990, 1991), I show how these particular practices served to establish factions as impersonal entities, containers that existed prior to and separately from the very people and practices that brought them into being. Finally, I underline how this very process also created the conditions under which the provision of services increased mistrust in the community, breaking it down and hindering collective political action.

“AHMAD BIRAKKID”

My day started with hot, delicious homemade *za'tar*-and-cheese *mana'ish*.¹ It was a ritual: every week or two all the young girls of the family, sisters and cousins, would congregate for an all-girl sleepover at the house of Mariam, Um Muhammad’s unmarried sister. The most eagerly anticipated moment was, however, the morning, when Mariam would sit on the floor with a gas-powered oven to her left, a large green plastic basin brimming with risen dough to her right, and a small wooden table between her legs. Taking a lump of dough between her hands, she would roll it into a compact ball and then flatten it into a perfect circle. She would then top it with either cheese, a mixture of *za'tar* and olive oil, or upon request she would make a “cocktail,” as they called a mixed cheese-and-*za'tar* *man'ushi*. When several had been made she would place them in the oven, piercing the dough from time to time to prevent them from puffing in the heat. The rest of us would anxiously wait, teacup in hands, while the sweet scent of freshly baked bread worked our appetite to unbearable levels. Mariam was always the last one to eat, as she was determined to make enough *mana'ish* for herself and her three married sisters, as well as their entire families; everyone, present or absent, was accounted for.

Congregated around Mariam that morning, her sisters were engaged in a conversation comparing their children’s daily expenses. Who was willing to take a homemade sandwich to school or college with them instead of purchasing one? How many teas did they consume from the cafeteria? How much did they spend on cigarettes and on tobacco for the *narghile*? Fatima, Um Muhammad’s younger sister, was the driver of the conversation, as she seemed to be frustrated the most about her youngest son’s expenses. After accounting for transportation, cafeteria expenses and smoking habits he appeared to be the highest spender by about 2,000 LBP per day (1.33 USD). In contrast, Ahmad, Um Muhammad’s son, seemed to be the

role model. He was not only a careful spender but also, and much more importantly, he had honed a vital skill. Um Muhammad explained: “Ahmad *birakkid*.” “*Birakkid*” literally means “runs around.” In this context it referred to the unending labor involved in applying to different organizations for aid. That labor was time-consuming and took a lot of effort from Ahmad, as well as his family. It involved a lot of physical displacement to different NGOs, factional offices, government bureaus, embassies and UN agencies, which was required at all levels of the process from obtaining information to applying to following up.

I had experienced this “running around” from my first days living with the family, especially as it pertained to securing aid to cover Ahmad’s tuition fees. This aid was obtained from a Palestinian political faction, the Palestinian embassy, and an international NGO. However, at no point in time did the family know how much each party would be paying so that they could know how much would be left over for them to cover.

The uncertainty around how the family was to cover Ahmad’s tuition fees dominated daily conversations. My attention was first drawn to it on my second week with the family. Ahmad had just returned from a workshop on “youth empowerment” with an international NGO.² He and his mother began discussing how much aid the NGO would probably give him as a form of help towards his tuition fees. Ahmad had just heard from the workshop leader that the minimum would be 250 USD, but he was hoping that he would receive at least 350 USD as the college he was attending was more expensive than the public Lebanese university where most of the other workshop participants were studying. Ahmad was majoring in Business Administration in a technical college, and his tuition was two million Lebanese pounds (about 1,334 USD). This was a considerable sum, the equivalent of almost nine months of expenditure for an individual refugee.³

Ahmad was significantly distressed, as his exams were two weeks away and the family needed to pay an upcoming tuition installment without which Ahmad would not be allowed to take the assessments. He explained that on examination day he had to present a receipt to be able to enter the classroom. He had highlighted the urgency of the matter to his workshop leader, a fellow young Palestinian from Beddawi camp who was a recent graduate from the Beirut Arab University, but the man had responded that “the matter was not in his hands” and that usually these things “take time.” Time was a luxury the family did not have. They began weighing their options.

Ahmad had also applied to the Palestinian embassy for financial assistance, but had not received an answer. The embassy had recently started a new fund for students, the President Mahmud Abbas Fund. However, the fund’s mandate was unclear. Ahmad believed it only helped first-year students and it had, indeed, helped fund his education the previous year. He heard from other students in the camp that it wouldn’t fund his second year, but his parents had insisted that he should apply anyway. When Ahmad’s father had handed in the application

several months ago, the embassy's employee did not provide him with a clear answer as to whether the application would be accepted or not. He explained that "the decisions come from Palestine." Um Muhammad added that the prior year the embassy's contribution did not even cover the entire sum and that the family had had to pay an additional 600,000 LB (400 USD), which was raised with the help of Ahmad's brother Mahmud.

Another source of assistance was Islamic Jihad. Ahmad was part of their student group and they usually contributed to his education (see chapter 3). I already knew that Ahmad received a monthly stipend that was slightly higher than the other students, as he also had more responsibilities. He was entrusted with opening and closing the apartment they used as a youth center, distributing salaries to the other members of *al-Rabita*, and sometimes paying the bills. Ahmad had already asked his supervisor if they could provide him with their contribution but he too had replied that "matters were not in his hands" as the decision about how much aid would be given and when "came from Palestine."

Having exhausted all options, Um Muhammad tried to reassure her son that "everything will work out in the end" since "everyone knows our situation." This seemed to calm him for the moment and he brought his books out to study. Ahmad was a serious young man interested in any opportunity to increase his knowledge and skills. He had attended a vast number of workshops in the different NGOs in the camp, ranging from English classes to courses on computers and conflict resolution. His mother once showed me with pride all the different certificates he had accumulated over the years. While he was studying business administration, his real passion was politics and he acted like the official news broadcaster to the family, always entertaining his mother with the latest developments. He spent many hours on the Internet, on Facebook and browsing through different websites and blogs pertaining to Nahr el-Bared camp and other camps in Lebanon, and was also constantly informed of what was happening in Palestine, where the latest Palestinian protests were and where the Israeli bombings, incursions, arrests, demolitions, or assassinations were.

The following day Ahmad returned from his college even more frustrated. He had gone to the administration to explain his dilemma: that three different parties were offering him help (an international NGO, the Palestinian embassy, and a Palestinian faction) but that he did not know when the assistance would be provided. The administrator just shook his head and said there was nothing that he could do; Ahmad needed to pay the current installment to be able to take the exams. That night a heated discussion occurred between Ahmad and his father. Ahmad was anxious and worried, which at the time translated into anger towards his father who had not been able to find a solution to his problem. When his father told him to concentrate on studying and that he would take care of the situation, it only inflamed Ahmad more. He wondered why should he care about studying when all his efforts would be thrown away if he could not take his exams.

Mahmud, present at the time, looked at his mother and sarcastically asked her if she still wanted him to stop working and continue his education.

The next day Abu Muhammad called his contact in the Palestinian embassy, which was an expensive endeavor, to explain to him the bind that the family found itself in.⁴ Again the employee answered that “matters were not in his hands” as the decision “came from Palestine” and that he did not know how much the aid would be for, nor when it would be disbursed. The situation was getting desperate. After several nightly discussions that went nowhere, Abu Muhammad finally decided that he would go personally to the embassy to have a face-to-face conversation. Travelling to Beirut was not only time-consuming, as it took on average two to three hours to get to Beirut and another two or three hours to get back, but it was also costly. In addition to paying for transportation to reach Beirut and back, Abu Muhammad had to forgo the possibility of earning money that day. He explained that he would use this opportunity to pass by UNRWA’s headquarters to try to convince them to update the file of his daughter-in-law, Latifa, to reflect her marriage to his oldest son. It should have been a routine bureaucratic procedure, but up to that point UNRWA had been unwilling to make the change because the relevant Lebanese government ministries were refusing to legalize his son’s marriage certificate due to the fact that Muhammad was a non-ID (see chapter 2).

Abu Muhammad returned that night with one promising and one bad piece of news. The promising news was that he was one step closer to finding a solution to Ahmad’s conundrum. He had been able to convince his contact in the embassy to provide a verbal guarantee to Ahmad’s school certifying that they would be covering Ahmad’s tuition fees. However, the embassy’s employee refused to call the school himself, insisting that the school needed to call him. The bad news was that UNRWA had again refused to recognize his son’s marriage certificate and to change Latifa’s personal status from “single” to “married.” This was a sore point, as Latifa was six months pregnant. The rejection of this one-word amendment meant that she not only had to face disapproving looks whenever she went to health clinics and had to present her UNRWA card, which then had to be followed by a long explanation of her situation, but that she was also often denied free health services based on the fact that she was legally “single.”

The next morning, Abu Muhammad went to Ahmad’s college in Tripoli and was finally successful in convincing the administration to accept the embassy’s verbal guarantee. He then called the embassy himself, using Ahmad’s cell phone which he had borrowed for the day, and had the school administrator speak directly with the embassy. At this point the college gave Abu Muhammad the most precious receipt. From now on, Ahmad could concentrate on studying and passing his exams—that is, until the next installment would be due.

The above example is just one small glimpse into the never-ending process of qualifying for, applying for, and obtaining aid. I recount this story not only to highlight the anxiety and uncertainty that the process added to refugees’ chronically

insecure lives but to make a point about how individuals experienced aid distribution and how it created a particular imagination of what factions were. The family's lack of knowledge of how much and when the aid would be given altered the way they viewed factions and NGOs, turning them from personal networks to powerful impersonal structures.

HIERARCHICAL OBSERVATION

Um Muhammad's assertion that "everyone knows our situation" was very accurate, and an important part of how the aid distribution process was experienced and practiced. Indeed, aid providers needed to obtain information about the economic situation of camp residents. The impetus for this was the principle that aid needed to be distributed fairly. Camp residents needed to be ranked according to their respective miseries in order to be able to distinguish between them. Therefore Ahmad and his family's financial precariousness needed to be rendered visible for Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian embassy, and the international NGO. However, that transparency into the family's situation was not translated into an equivalent transparency into the aid distribution process. It was unidirectional. This unequal access to information seemed to embody a hierarchy with an "above" that was in control and a "below" that lacked it.

Islamic Jihad's ability to examine Ahmad and his family's lives was rooted in personal and neighborhood ties. As we have already seen in chapter 3, Ahmad's family's former neighbor was Abu Fayeze, the head of Islamic Jihad in Nahr el-Bared camp. At the age of twelve Ahmad started participating in their scouting activities and over the years became part of their student group. Um Muhammad used to emphasize the length of their relationship, which spanned eleven years. However, the closeness of the relationship was revealed to me when I met Fayeze. Fayeze had been living in Beirut for several years, yet he knew the details of the family's life. He had been a schoolmate of Muhammad, Ahmad's oldest brother. He knew that Abu Muhammad was a day laborer; he was familiar with his past political engagement and with the fact that the Talals were non-IDs. While he was not living in Nahr el-Bared any more he was up to date on the more current news that Mahmud was working to help support the family. He further explained to me that "they"—that is, Islamic Jihad—were sensitive to Ahmad's situation, revealing that he knew that Ahmad received a higher salary than other members. It was quite obvious that if Fayeze, who lived in Beirut, knew this much, that his father, the "head of Islamic Jihad" in Nahr el-Bared, would know at least as much.

The nature of the Talal family's relation to the Palestinian embassy was less personal than their relationship with the Islamic Jihad, as it was based on an official application with supporting documents. However, it was nonetheless not entirely impersonal. It was in fact the embassy that issued Abu Muhammad and his children (and later grandchildren) the only piece of identification they possessed. This

was an A4 sized letter with the PLO letterhead that stated the person's name, as well as the father and mother's names, date of birth, place of birth, sex, and place of origin in Palestine (*al-balad al-aşli*).⁵ The embassy was therefore well aware of the family's situation and Abu Muhammad often joked with them that they could obtain a copy of the ID themselves, since they were the ones who had provided it to him; he should not have to travel to Beirut to hand it in as part of the application process.

Finally, the evaluation and selection of Ahmad as a self-motivated and disadvantaged young student in the "youth empowerment workshop" was also based on personal ties rather than an impersonal selection process. The international NGO had operated through a local Palestinian NGO, using their offices and asking them to select participants for the workshop. The Palestinian NGO, in turn, asked other local NGOs to each select two participants for the workshop, and one of these had selected Ahmad. Ahmad's two brothers, Muhammad and Mahmud, had in fact both worked for this particular NGO, and the person in charge of selecting the candidates was a close friend of the family, often visiting them. She therefore had intimate knowledge of the family's situation and of the level of commitment that Ahmad usually exhibited in group activities.

Information about the lives of aid recipients was gathered in all cases of aid distribution. People's relative levels of misery needed to be calculated and measured. While in Ahmad's case this was accomplished through personal ties, surprise home visits were also common. Through visiting families unannounced social workers, drawn from the local community, could literally see the financial situation of residents by looking at the size of the home compared to the number of people living in it, the family's possessions, and the quality of the furniture. As we saw in chapter 2, UNRWA had two social workers who conducted surprise visits to the Talal family's home, examining every room in the house. One worked for the special hardship cases department while the other was employed by the rent subsidy division. There were many additional examples. Um Muhammad's sister Mariam explained to me that when she applied for an electric heater from an international NGO she received a surprise home visit from one of the organization's employees. The social worker, a camp resident herself, went through all the different rooms in the house to make sure that Mariam did not already own an electric heater. Mariam added that she even knocked on the neighbor's door to confirm the information. She also recounted how another organization, this time a local one, wanted to compensate women who had run businesses prior to the war. Mariam was a seamstress who had owned two sewing machines prior to the destruction of her home. She therefore applied for the aid. Again she received a surprise home visit from an employee making sure that Mariam had indeed lost her sewing machines in the war and had not recovered them.

This capacity to demand the visibility of people's lives and homes was justified in the name of distributing aid fairly. However, the total visibility that was

expected from aid receivers was not matched by a reciprocal transparency of the aid distribution process. Ahmad did not know who decided on how much aid would be dispensed, when the decisions would be made, or on what criteria these would be based. Similarly, Mariam did not know how many electric heaters the international NGO had or how it decided to whom they would go. Nor did she know how much funding the local NGO had to compensate self-employed women or how they would divide it between all those who qualified. It was as if a beam of light was illuminating their lives, uncovering every detail, and simultaneously blinding them and preventing them from looking “up.” This one-way visibility established and demonstrated hierarchy. Um Muhammad highlighted this point when she referred to the UNRWA employee who refused to abide by local custom and remove her shoes prior to walking around the house as a person who liked her job “to be able to control people” (*tatithakkam bilnās*).⁶

Foucault (1991, 171) referred to this ability of seeing without being seen as a “hierarchical observation,” and argued that this surveillance technique was used as a disciplinary tool to gently alter behavior. Its function was not to repress but to train, to reduce gaps. In that sense it was “essentially corrective” (179) and sought to produce a certain type of behavior. Indeed, several months after the workshop on “youth empowerment” had begun the organizers contacted Ahmad and told him that he had applied too late to receive financial aid. Ahmad was upset. He protested that they were incorrect and he was then told by the workshop leaders to be patient. With no alternative, he was. It was not until the end of the school year that Ahmad was finally granted the aid, but only after he was reprimanded yet again for not respecting the deadline. Ahmad was categorical that he had applied on time, pointing out that other participants had submitted their paperwork after him. Both Ahmad and his mother were furious about how the international NGO had treated him, but the lesson learned was that it was better to always apply early. This exemplified what Um Muhammad meant when she told her sisters that “Ahmad *birakkid*.” She didn’t say it with a sense of pride; rather her statement underlined that Ahmad had developed the type of behavior deemed to be appropriate for securing aid. He had the capacity, and willingness, to follow any and all leads to potential sources of aid and to spend the time needed for gathering the required documentation, applying, and following up. He was also willing to live with the uncertainty that came with the process. In contrast, his brother Mahmud did not develop that same capacity. He chose to forgo an education, being unwilling to chase after political factions and NGOs to cover his tuition fees. He preferred living with the uncertainty of a daily wage.

SPATIALIZING FACTIONS

Ferguson and Gupta (2002, 982) added to Foucault’s study of discipline by pointing out that practices of surveillance did not just work to discipline individuals

but also created “a taken-for-granted spatial and scalar image of the state that both sits above and contains its localities, regions, and communities.” This is what they referred to as the “spatialization of the state.” The “spatialization of the state” should not be confused with the social construction of space, with the way that states act to structure space and influence the social experiences and relations that unfold within them. Rather it refers to how states themselves are spatialized, how individuals come to perceive that states are imbued with particular topographical characteristics. In particular Ferguson and Gupta examined the everyday workings of a child’s development project in India. They related how social workers experienced the state as an overarching organization through surveillance techniques such as the keeping of registers and surprise visits by project officers who travelled to local centers. The project officers’ mobility across Indian territory, their “sudden swooping ‘down’” (987) into the social workers’ spaces, established their control over the geographical area and enacted a hierarchy. Echoing Foucault, Ferguson and Gupta argued that it “was a demonstration of the inequality of spaces” (987) where officers “higher-up” in the hierarchy could enter “local spaces” at will while social workers could only visit supervising officers at prescribed times.

Indeed we have seen how in Nahr el-Bared local social workers could enter a home at any time and look into any room they wished. On the other hand, aid receivers could not go to the offices of the NGOs, factions, or UNRWA and wander around their workplaces. Whenever they did visit offices, they were confined to specific areas where they were allowed at predetermined times. This unequal access to space exemplified how those “higher up” seemed to encompass the people below them. Social workers’ mobility around the camp and inside people’s homes produced an imagination that they engulfed the geographical area under their control. In other words, this system of surveillance not only created the imagination of an “above” that was in command but also an “above” that enveloped those below it, that surrounded them like the walls of a building.

Ferguson and Gupta further argued that the state’s encompassment was achieved through positioning social workers as “locals” who were then associated with particular communities and interests. They explained that the “localization of the [social] worker is precisely what enabled those overarching institutions [the Indian state and the multilateral aid agencies] to disavow the particular, and to claim to represent the ‘greater’ good for the ‘larger’ dominion of the nation and the world” (988). Similarly, by acting as caregivers, providing tuition aid, electric heaters, and compensation for destroyed property, factions and NGOs positioned themselves as looking out for the well-being of the entire community, surrounding the population within their reach through their care. While the claim to represent the greater good was strongly contested, with camp residents continuously critiquing factions for looking out for “their own” rather than the overall community, the idea of encompassment itself was not. By highlighting how factions just helped “their own” rather than all camp residents, Palestinians were just restricting

the area that a faction appeared to encompass, from that of the entire community to the people it considered its “members.”⁷ This observation brings me to my last point, about how factions now appeared to have a boundary that separated “members” from those on the “outside.”

As we saw in the previous chapter, the question of whether an individual was part of a faction or not did not have a simple answer. Through looking at people’s life stories and the way they spoke of their relation with factions, we realized that factional membership was better understood as a continuously unfolding story of human interactions and self-identification. There was no clear line that separated faction members from non-members. Yet the provision of care was redrawing that very line. Palestinian refugees obtained a personal identification number from factions when they would be receiving monetary contributions. This “financial number” (*raqm māli*) was needed for logistical reasons, as the disbursement of funds needed to be recorded and accounted for. However, this number had an additional effect: it could be pointed to as a marker of factional membership. Adherence to a faction could now be understood as having one’s name on the list of aid recipients. This transformed the relationship between a person and faction from a complex and dynamic relation to one defined by a financial transaction. In short, it helped build the impression that factions did not only have a “top” but also a “perimeter.”

THE STRUCTURAL EFFECT

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to stop our analysis with an image of factions as an organization controlled by those “on top.” Firstly, “those on top” often had other people above them. This was clearly visible when the Palestinian embassy employee told Abu Muhammad that he did not know when Ahmad’s aid would be dispensed as “the decisions came from Palestine.” We can imagine that “the people in Palestine” themselves were not in complete control either, and were dependent upon others, such as their funders. Similarly, heads of factions and of NGOs also had to answer back to their funders.⁸

Secondly, the positions in the hierarchy were interchangeable. As we saw from the previous examples, factions, local and international NGOs, and UNRWA relied on local camp residents for the dissemination of aid as it reflected what was deemed to be a participatory approach. It is easy to understand why that view prevailed: aid workers drawn from among the community were inherently more knowledgeable about its residents since they belonged to multiple community-based networks (see Rempell 2010; Svoboda, Barbelet, and Mosel 2018). In other words Palestinian refugees were both aid recipients and aid providers, since the aid workers assigned to the monitoring tasks were also Palestinian refugees from the same camp. Aid workers were monitoring others while being monitored, visiting each other’s homes and using their knowledge of the local community in making assessments as to who was more deserving of the aid. This meant that an

individual's position would change from sometimes being on "bottom" to being on "top." This point was brought home to me during a visit to the Talal family in the winter of 2014.

The oldest son, Muhammad, had recently started working for an international NGO as an aid worker in their relief program for Syrian refugees. He was in charge of verifying the information given by Syrian women who had been displaced to Lebanon as a result of Syria's descent into civil war following the 2011 popular uprising against the regime and who claimed to be either widows or to have lost touch with their husbands. As I sat chatting with Muhammad he recounted story after story of how he had "caught" women lying and how he would lay traps for them to fall into. One story involved him looking through a woman's hanging laundry and finding what he deemed to be "sexy" underwear—in his mind, a sure sign that her husband was present.

The irony of his newfound position was not lost on his mother, who stated "he has become one of them" as Muhammad continued to brag about his accomplishments. She was clearly referring to the fact that he was now acting like the UNRWA worker who had walked in on him and his wife in the privacy of their own bedroom. Roles had indeed been switched. This lack of a discernible "top" and constantly changing hierarchy transformed a process which depended on personalized and close relations for its day to day operations into a disembodied machine that controlled people's lives. It made the highly personal aid distribution process impersonal. Going back to Foucault's (1991, 177) analysis of disciplinary practices can illuminate this point:

Although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors perpetually supervised. The power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transformed as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery. And, although it is true that its pyramidal organization gives it a 'head,' it is the apparatus as a whole that produces 'power' and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field.

The functioning of disciplinary practices in the camp did not rely on a specific person for its functioning; it was the whole apparatus that was responsible for its effect. Every person was interchangeable and this made the entire process very impersonal. Additionally, it was impossible for the family to identify the person responsible for the decisions about how much or when aid was dispensed. The family could only say that it was Islamic Jihad, or the Palestinian embassy, or the international NGO dispensing the money. It was impossible to say it in any other way. The lack of visibility back into the aid arbitration process meant that it could not be attributed to a specific person; it could only be associated to a structure that was called by its own name. I was bound by the same logic while

writing this chapter: I could not write in any other way. I had to say, for example, that “Islamic Jihad contributed to Ahmad’s education.” By virtue of dispensing money, decided in unknown places by unknown people, using unknown criteria, at unknown times the faction gained a sense of separation and remoteness compared to the family and it became an entity that had to be called by its name.

This disconnection between the social relations that underpinned the factions and the opaque and secretive dissemination of aid served to create the appearance that factions existed as containers, as buildings independent from the personal relations that formed its core. This is what Mitchell (1991) refers to as the structural effect. Building upon Foucault, Mitchell contends that modern disciplinary practices served to create the appearance of a framework, of a container that appeared to exist separately from its content. He explains:

The precise specification of space and function that characterize modern institutions, the coordination of these functions into hierarchical arrangements, the organization of supervision and surveillance, and the marking out of time into schedules and programs all contribute to constructing a world that appears to consist not of a complex of social practices but of a binary order: on the one hand individuals and their activities, on the other an inert structure that somehow stands apart from individuals, precedes them, and contains and gives a framework to their lives (94).

As we have seen, knowledge about the lives of aid recipients was achieved through either personal relations or through surprise visits carried out by local camp residents. In both cases a high degree of visibility was expected and achieved. However, the distribution of aid was anything but transparent; it seemed to operate by a different set of rules. It was opaque, inaccessible, and evaded scrutiny. In that sense the logic of the aid distribution seemed disconnected from the social relations that underpinned its everyday workings. For example, the international NGO had delegated the selection process for its “youth empowerment” workshop to a local NGO, and Ahmad was selected due to a long-term relationship with a social worker who knew the family and their situation well. However, this local knowledge was deemed irrelevant once Ahmad was accused of applying too late. In order to get the aid, Ahmad had to be judged based on an impersonal application process, with its own rules and deadlines.

The same process was also at work with Islamic Jihad. Ahmad had initiated his relation with the Islamic Jihad through neighborhood ties and it was clear that his own understanding of his relation with the faction was based on personal fidelity, which was seen to increase as the number of years went by. However, when requesting tuition aid Ahmad was again treated like an anonymous applicant whose fate would be decided upon in Palestine by people to whom he had no relations. The disembodiment of the distribution aid from the personal relations that determined its very eligibility created the impression of a container that was separate from its content. The “faction” seen as an entity was now the one

responsible for the distribution of the aid, not the personal relations that had joined its people together.

The strangeness of these taken-for-granted methods and the effects to which they give rise can be brought to light through an examination of an alternative, and much more widespread, model of aid distribution that was present in the camp: the way that family members helped each other. The crucial role that family played in sustaining everyday life in the camps has been highlighted in many studies (Rosenfeld 2004; R. Sayigh 1994, 2007; Taraki 2006). I illustrate this process through the most common and by far the largest enterprise that any family in the camp ever undertook: the construction of a home. It required a concerted effort from everyone: time, labor, and financial resources. I will examine this process through the example of Nesreen, a young woman in her late twenties who was a social worker for a local NGO in Nahr el-Bared camp. One day, while I was visiting her in her half-demolished home, she explained to me how she, along with her family, had initially built it.

When she was growing up, Nesreen's family shared a two-floor house with her uncle's family. The ground floor consisted of a kitchen, a bathroom, and a single room, which her parents along with her younger siblings occupied at night. The second floor had two rooms. Her uncle, along with his wife and younger children, slept in one of the rooms, while the grandmother and the older children of both families used the second one. This meant that Nesreen shared one room with her siblings as well as her cousins. As she grew up this arrangement began to trouble her, as she slept in the same room as her male cousins and she felt that she was not therefore a "real *muḥajjaba*." Employing the term for "veiled," she indicated that she was not abiding by her own understanding of what Islam required of her.

Nesreen went on to study nursing and, unable to find employment upon graduation, she worked in her uncle's clothing store in the camp making 100,000 LBP (about 67 USD) a month. She told her parents then that she wanted to use her salary to start renting a home of their own. They thought she was crazy but she insisted. Her younger brother, who was still in school, also began working, and he contributed an additional 50,000 LBP. Their joint efforts allowed the family for the first time to rent a two-room apartment. Over the next four years she changed employment over four times, each time earning a slightly higher salary, which culminated at 300,000 LBP (200 USD). Her brother had also completed his schooling and began working on different construction jobs in the camp. While his earnings were a lot more irregular, Nesreen explained that he too saved money, and after four years of renting they were able to buy a small parcel of land in the new camp. Her brother then began the physical labor of constructing the house, often offering his services for free to different workers in the camp, such as masons, painters, and tile layers, who would then reciprocate and help him build the family home.

Throughout her narration of the story Nesreen was careful to specify how her situation and her brother's were changing with time and how that affected their

respective contributions. This clarity and transparency was a feature of many narratives I heard in the camp. When people would tell me how other family members had helped them attain a certain goal, whether securing an education, obtaining medical help, immigrating, or building a home, there was always a description of the “giver” too. The helper’s personal situation was always described and it served to qualify how much his or her contributions could be. A sister could help raise her nieces and nephews until she started a family of her own, an uncle working in the Gulf helped pay tuition fees until he lost his job, brothers working in Germany helped pay for the pouring of a concrete roof in an amount according with their respective jobs. Information was a two-way street: aid receivers knew as much about the economic situation of aid givers as the other way around. Certainly, all family members did not help each other: there were numerous examples of “rich uncles” who did not care about a sick young niece. However, my point is to highlight that regardless of whether a family member helped or not, information was flowing in both directions—allowing the “uncles” themselves to be blamed in this case. There was nothing that stood outside of those relations. This was in stark contrast with aid from factions, which appeared as immaterial entities, as stores that people entered to shop for aid.

OPEN POCKETS

During the [2007] war, some people got richer and some got poorer. The factions and NGOs made money off of our misery. They get funding because of our situation. They give twenty-five percent and they take seventy-five percent.

—UM NABIL, *THAWRA* GENERATION, NAHR EL-BARED, NOVEMBER 29, 2011

It is impossible to end this discussion of aid distribution practices without also pointing out what should be obvious at this point, which is that the lack of control and transparency into the decision-making process created unequal relations of power and built mistrust between what now appeared as the refugees on one hand and factions and NGOs on the other. With so little visibility into the aid distribution process, recipients could never be certain whether providers were distributing aid fairly, or worse, whether the aid at their disposal was even distributed in its entirety. It was therefore possible to distrust factions and NGOs, seen as entities that existed separately from the local trust relations that kept them together. The same way that personal relations became impersonal, so did trust relations become distrustful. This did not dissuade Palestinians from attempting to obtain the aid that they saw as their right, but it did make them reticent about joining any type of mobilization organized by those “entities.”

Palestinians were well aware that factions and NGOs were receiving funding from third/outside parties and knew that they were merely intermediaries between

the donors and themselves. However, being kept in the dark about how much aid was available and how it was disseminated, they could only wonder if indeed the aid was being distributed fairly. Lina, whom I introduced in the previous chapter, told me about an NGO project she worked on. It was called “Money for Work” and was implemented in partnership between a local NGO and an international NGO and funded by a European agency.⁹ Lina described the project she worked on for three months as a surveyor, registering project participants. She recounted her story in the presence of Abu Ziad, who worked as an office clerk for UNRWA and who lived in the metal barracks, and of Rania, her friend and colleague.

Lina: There was funding coming. Honestly, I don’t know what its goal was. Was this funding destined for a project, or was it intended for direct distribution [as cash] to the people, which they turned into a project? I really don’t know. What I know is that there was an idea. I am not sure if this was their idea or the funder’s, but the idea was that instead of giving a person cash and getting them used to receiving money and being lazy, we would give them the money in exchange for work, so that they feel that they are received cash in exchange for work, that it isn’t just charity—so they would get used to working to get the money.

Abu Ziad interjects: I’ll tell you what is going on! These are funds that are meant for the people. We make the people work a little, and we put some in our pockets a little.

Lina: Now the issue of pockets! Pockets are open everywhere.

Rania: Well, I didn’t dare say that, but turns out it’s true.

Abu Ziad: No, I will say it! What kind of work is this? What did I gain from this work? What do I gain from trees? Am I going to sit under a tree? They got pickles to give to people.

...

Lina: Now how the money came, how it got distributed, I don’t know. But the idea was to start making up projects for the people to work on. They took into consideration that there were women and men, some with a formal education and others without. So they created different projects for the different categories of people: for the women without formal education they created cooking projects. They would get them to prepare different types of pickled vegetables. . . . They made projects just to make the people work, not to provide real work opportunities.

Rania: I wish they made real projects so that people could work for the long term.

Lina continued to explain that the pickled vegetables produced in the project were not sold, but distributed free to camp residents. I remembered at that point that I had seen one of these jars at the Talals’ home. It was a plastic jar with a label featuring

the local and international NGOs' logos as well as the funder's. Lina continued to list the different projects. They had made the men without formal education plant trees to create small "parks" in the camp, but as Abu Ziad pointed out this was considered of little value to locals. I often passed one such "park" with a broken bench; it was right on the edge of the camp, facing barbed wire and a military post. They asked the men and women with formal education to tutor young children, when their involvement in the program was limited to a single month. The tutoring program was therefore of limited use to students, who "didn't have time to start learning before their tutor changed." Lina finished the story by saying that "of course connections were active. Those who 'knew people' worked for more than a month, and those who didn't did not get to work."

The mistrust induced by the lack of visibility into the aid distribution process explained why camp residents, whether or not they worked for NGOs or were part of factions, often declared that these organizations "profited from their misery." Such statements reflected the frustration they felt, which was well expressed by Abu Ziad. The funding was meant to reach the people; however, they could never be certain if they had indeed received it, even if they themselves were working on a given project. Nevertheless, they pursued their attempts to obtain aid from organizations they distrusted, in part because they understood this as a way to fight corruption.

A further example illustrates this idea. In March, news went around the camp that Hamas was paying the application fee for the baccalaureate exam for all high school students in Nahr el-Bared. However, Um Muhammad and her sister Fatima feared that it was going to Hamas "members" only, as both had children taking the matriculation exam and they were not contacted. One day Um Muhammad came back home from her afternoon visit to her sisters and proudly told me that she and Fatima saw a "Hamas guy" in the street and reprimanded him for only helping their own rather than caring about all Palestinians. The next day Ahmad received a call from the same individual to arrange for paying the examination fees. Um Muhammad and her sister were very proud of themselves, recounting this story to their friends. They explained that they were proud not because they were able to get 50,000 LB (33 US dollars) each from Hamas to pay for the exam fee, although that certainly helped. Rather, they had openly challenged Hamas and had gotten what they perceived was their right and in the process minimized the corruption of Hamas. They added that if they had not claimed the aid, then it would have gone to the "official's pockets."

Looking at aid distribution from the perspective of a recipient, it was better to get aid from a corrupt entity, because doing so prevented the organization from being even more corrupt. This explained why refugees would still deal with NGOs and factions while continuing to criticize them. It was made clear to me again and again that refugees saw the aid distributed as their right and it was their duty to make sure they received it even if it meant dealing with what they perceived to be

corrupt entities. However, these undemocratic aid distribution processes greatly diminished the NGOs' and political factions' ability to mobilize refugees in times of crisis. This created a situation in which refugees continued to solicit aid and social services from NGOs and the relief arms of the factions in order to get what they perceived to be their fair share while ignoring their calls for action. That is why certain individuals referred to the people of Nahr el-Bared as *sha'ab al-karateen*, the people of the cartons. Viewed from the perspective of that denigrating description, residents appeared to be solely interested in getting "free" aid and not in working towards the betterment of their situation or that of the camp. In reality, theirs was a rational response to a system of power that stripped them of autonomy, dehumanized them, and deprived them of their right to have a say over aid distribution processes undertaken in their name. By insisting on obtaining the aid available, camp residents believed they were getting what was rightfully theirs and preventing factions and NGOs from profiting even more from their misery.

Lastly, it is important to note that this effect of mistrust did not necessarily happen in every instance. It depended on the level of knowledge or transparency into the aid distribution mechanism. Many camp residents knew certain heads of factions or NGOs personally and could see for themselves how they lived and infer their income level. While this did not always mean that they were familiar with the details of the aid distribution process, they could at least evaluate whether these people were profiting at their expense or not. Through personal relations, then, individuals could get some visibility back into the fairness of the aid decision-making process, infusing trust back into the relationship and breaking down the appearance of structure.

. . .

My daughter needed an operation and we needed 1,000 USD. I asked an NGO for help and the social worker told me 'Is it worth it to ask for 1,000 USD?' [Implying that I should be able to cover the cost.] I told him, 'those who make 300,000 LBP [200 USD] a month and have young children, can they save 1,000 USD?' Anyways I wished that God may preserve his health and left while carrying my daughter in a cast. I did not enter another organization. I had expected something different. I thought that once I told them [about my daughter's condition] they would say, come on in.

—UM FATHI, THAWRA GENERATION, BUSS CAMP, DECEMBER 9, 2011

Two main topics dominated the Talal family's everyday discussions: their lack of legal documentation in Lebanon and Ahmad's tuition fees. While the former was particular to non-ID families, the latter was generalized across camp residents. The process for obtaining aid from factions and NGOs was pervasive in nature, not only in its penetrating gaze into the lives and homes of people but also in the amount of time it took camp residents to acquire it. While factions and NGOs had numerous aid programs, they were always minimal in impact, barely making

a dent in people's lives, but constantly keeping them busy with the qualification, application and following up processes. The lack of NGO coordination only worsened the problem and turned a process that was supposed to be of assistance into an aggravating one that was particularly painful and humiliating for families searching for medical assistance.

My aim in this chapter was not only to highlight the frustration and insecurity of the aid distribution process but to also show how it turned networks built upon close, personal ties into impersonal and suspicious bureaucracies, how the provision of services which depended on highly personalized and intimate relations for its day-to-day operations suddenly metamorphosed into a disembodied machine that controlled people's lives and sowed mistrust in the community. In the name of distributing aid fairly a pervasive system of surveillance was put in place to monitor, evaluate, and compare refugees' different levels of misery. This system of surveillance served to establish and demonstrate a hierarchy with a "top" that could see below it and a "bottom" that was blind. This sense of hierarchy, the impersonal and secretive nature of the decision-making process and the redrawing of the line between "faction members" and "independents" through the dispensing of aid, led to the creation of an imagination where factions appeared as structures that are not to be trusted. They appeared as a container that stood outside and separately from the people contained inside of them. And although there was a head, like the head of the faction, of the NGO, or of the PLO, the structure and the functioning of the aid distribution process did not depend solely on them. The factions resembled a building that existed separately from the very people that they contained, demarcating them from those outside, and while trust sometimes thrived through personal relations on a local and individual basis, there was a great level of mistrust about these "entities."

In the next chapter I look at two other sets of practices, of factionalism and of the physical representation of factions through emblems, flags, and anniversary celebrations. I show how these practices served to give life to factions through the creation of a novel position, the position of an observer. This serves to highlight that practices that produce the effect of structure do not only work from what appears to be the "inside" of factions, through aid receivers and givers, but also from what appears to be the "outside."