



FIGURE 9. Woman cooking, Nahr el-Bared camp. Photograph: Ali Alloush.

“We Drank the *Jabha* with Our Mothers’ Milk”

Joining Factions

“Rotten,” “traitors,” “thieves,” “merchants of death” (*tujjār damm*)—those were just some of the names Palestinians used to describe Palestinian political factions in Lebanon. Others went further, saying “they should be burned” or “killed.” However, factions were more often the subjects of jokes and ridicule than murderous fantasies. Khalil, a young man in Shatila camp, explained to me that his father once gave him a list of the factions in the camp and told him to go and give them a try to see if he liked any of them. Khalil explained that he attended several meetings, and upon hearing the different factions call each other “*wlād al kalb*” (sons of dogs), he concluded, with a poignant sarcasm, that “All Palestinians must be ‘sons of dogs’ then.”¹ He stopped going. Another young Palestinian recounted how his grandmother warned him that political work was about the pursuit of personal ambitions rather than the general good: “The Palestinian people are like a bag of garlic, no matter which one you pick out you always end up with a head.” Many young Palestinians recounted how their parents forbade them from approaching factions, often physically pulling them away from factional offices or activities when such associations were discovered. In the Talal household, such condemnations were also common, especially from Abu Muhammad: “They only care about their own interests,” he often repeated.

The popular dissatisfaction of Palestinian refugees with Palestinian political factions has been highlighted in numerous studies (Frisch 2009; Kortam 2011; Peteet 1995; R. Sayigh 2001, 96; 2011; 2012; Suleiman 1999). They have been accused of factionalism (R. Sayigh 2012, 22), of corruption (Brynen 1995b, 25; R. Sayigh 2012, 22), and betrayal (Allan 2014; Khalili 2004; Peteet 1995). In light of such heavy criticisms, a question arises: are Palestinian factions in Lebanon able to attract new members? Nahr el-Bared camp had a popular committee comprised of sixteen

members, one for every faction. It was notorious for its internal divisions and its subsequent inability to take decisions. Few Palestinians in the camp could actually list the different factions represented on the committee, which underscored the fact that many of these factions had little to no existence in the camp.² These factions were called “facades” (*wājhāt*) in the camp, and they were in fact the subjects of even greater mockery. Um Muhammad laughed as she told me that the PPP had two members in the camp, one of whom sat on the Popular Committee and acted as the “head of the PPP” in Nahr el-Bared camp.³ The second member was his son-in-law. These “facades” often infuriated residents who felt that “the only ones who were sillier than those people were those who dealt with them”—referring to UNRWA, NGOs, and the Lebanese government, who sometimes considered the Popular Committee a counterpart and occasionally involved them in decision-making. However, it would be incorrect to assume that all factions were such shells. Of the fifty-one interviews I conducted with “close” Palestinians, forty-three individuals (twenty-two of the younger generation and twenty-one of the *thawra* generation) had contact with factions, while only eight Palestinians (six of the new generation and two of the *thawra* generation) had no relations with factions.⁴

How did the initial contact with a faction occur? How did Palestinians choose which faction to approach, whether for political, social, cultural, or economic reasons? How were factions able to attract young Palestinians in light of such heavy criticisms? Is there a difference in how the *thawra*’s generation was mobilized versus today’s generation? Were Palestinians ideologically motivated? Islamic factions in particular are often studied through their ideologies; their popularity is explained by the rise of Islamism, which is linked to the decline of secular nationalism (Israeli 2008; Rougier 2007). In short, Islamism is seen as “a useful tool that can be wielded to generate support from the Palestinian street” (Schanzer 2008, 10). Other works suggest that Palestinians act strategically in their dealings with factions in order to maximize the financial benefits of such relations. In other words, is economic patronage the main tool of mobilization? Moughrabi (1983) argued that Palestinian politics became “lebanonized” (212): “each Abu has his system of patronage and his own budget” (214).⁵ Or, are there other factors at play? Investigating this line of questioning allowed me to walk down another avenue of inquiry about the actual mechanics involved in “joining factions.” Was “joining a faction” a singular event? Could it be delineated in time and pointed to as the moment when a person crossed the line separating those “outside” a faction from those on the “inside”?

What my research suggests is that Palestinians approached factions based on interpersonal relations imbued with high levels of trust: family, friendship, and neighborhood ties were the main vehicle behind factional affiliation. In fifty-one interviews with close Palestinians of both generations, I found that only two people spoke of party ideology when they discussed their initial contact with a faction (one from the *thawra* generation and one from the younger generation).⁶ While

many spoke of the financial pressures they faced and the lack of stable employment, those economic predicaments rarely determined which factional door they knocked on. Rather, the picture that was drawn was of people coming together because of trust relations built on a local basis. This did not mean that ideology did not matter. It just means that the initial appeal of factions was not to be found in the political platforms which Palestinians were often quick to disavow. As the examples will show, people often criticized the factions' political platforms while maintaining contact with them, and it is impossible to explain this contradiction without looking at the personal relations that form the factions' very core.

My research also suggests that the importance of interpersonal relations in forging factional relationships was present for both the *thawra's* generation and today's. While the factions' appeal has vastly decreased since the *thawra*, the mechanism by which interpersonal relations are transformed into political relations remains the same. In fact scholars of the Palestinian resistance movement in Lebanon (Jalloul 1994, 52–53; Peteet 1991, 119–24; R. Sayigh 1994, 105–8) have noted that refugees in the 1960s and 1970s (the *thawra* generation) were most often mobilized through their kin ties. Rosemary Sayigh (1994, 119–24) mentions that “members of the same household usually joined or supported the same Resistance group, but this was not always the case.” A more recent study conducted in the West Bank points out that a mixture of family and friendship ties can account for political mobilization (Sabella 2001, 44). This finding was corroborated by Jensen (2009, 71–74), whose ethnographic study of Hamas in the Gaza Strip highlights how players were drawn to the Hamas football club for non-ideological reasons such as its geographical proximity to their homes, as well as to satisfy their own sporting ambitions. This argument is also supported by social movement literature. Doug McAdam (1982, 44) affirms that “if there is anything approximating a consistent finding in the empirical literature, it is that movement participants are recruited along established lines of interaction.” Gerlach and Hine (1970, 79) add that “no matter how a typical participant describes his reasons for joining the movement, or what motives may be suggested by a social scientist on the basis of deprivation, disorganization, or deviancy models, it is clear that the original decision to join required some contact with the movement.”

Expanding on this argument, I want to unpack the actual process of mobilization. How is factional membership passed down within a family or through a friendship? Is it through a process of indoctrination and the inculcation of a party ideology? How did it operate during the *thawra* and how does it operate today, in the context of increasing dissatisfaction with existing factional structures? And finally, what are the implications of this finding for our understanding of the nature of factions and faction membership?

Bringing to light the process by which factions and families interacted could be seen as reinforcing the view that Arab politics is patrimonial (Bill and Springborg 2000, 112–29) which is seen as the blind following of kin ties. In its crudest

form, patrimonialism is understood as people submitting “themselves as a flock unto a shepherd” (Hudson 1977, cited in Brynen 1995b, 24), where subordinates are not seen as officials with defined powers but rather as pawns who act according to the will of their leaders (Clapham 2004, 48). However, the life stories I collected point to the contrary. In this chapter I show how dynamic and diverse this process is. Far from resembling a sheep following a shepherd, “joining” was an unstable and non-linear process, which featured unexpected elements such as critical analyses of factions and the defiance of parental authority even when the person was inspired by family members to “join a faction.” Additionally, “joining a faction” was not a singular event occurring at a particular moment in time. While some Palestinians could point to a particular moment when they officially became members of a faction, that moment seldom represented the beginning of their involvement with it.

There were two main reasons why Palestinians “joined factions:” family and friendship/neighborhood ties. Out of the forty-three interviews with close Palestinians whose life stories featured relations with factions, twenty had developed their initial contact through family ties, while twenty-two rested on friendship and neighborhood ties. Finally, one young Palestinian joined a faction based on a desire to maximize financial rewards. It is interesting to note that the propensity of family ties was higher for the *thawra* generation (thirteen out of twenty) while the importance of friendship and neighborhood ties was greater for the younger generation (fourteen out of twenty-two). My ethnographic methods revealed the importance of looking at life stories in order to better understand the dynamics that animated refugees’ and factions’ relations and whether we could even separate the two. The examples included below were chosen because they typified how initial contact with factions most often occurred.

FAMILY TIES

My past, my upbringing, the passing of the years, my culture, my home environment, this is what contributed to my belonging to Hamas.

—WISSAM, YOUNG GENERATION, BEIRUT, NOVEMBER 2, 2011

I was born PFLP, I don’t know why. What’s the story? What’s the issue? [Laugh] My siblings and parents were all PFLP, so I ended up PFLP.

—NIDAL, THAWRA GENERATION, NAHR EL-BARED CAMP, DECEMBER 17, 2011

I come from an original Fatah family. . . . My grandfather. . . . was a martyr for Fatah (*shahīd la fatah*) and my aunt was also [stops himself] a martyr for Palestine and for Fatah. We are an old Fatah family. But that’s the issue, what should I believe in? If something was left, I would believe in it, but there is nothing left.

—FARIS, YOUNG GENERATION, BEIRUT, OCTOBER 10, 2011

It was common for Palestinian refugees to associate entire families with a given faction. Similarly to how Faris introduced his family in the above quote, the name of the faction would be added as an adjective to characterize the family. For example, Palestinians would say ‘*ayli fathāwiyyi*, “a Fatah family,” or ‘*ayli jabhawiyi*, “a PFLP family.” Additionally, the duration of the association was sometimes added: ‘*ayli fathāwiyyi aṣīli*, “an original Fatah family.” By adding this extra adjective the family emphasized that one of its ancestors was a founding member of that faction. I illustrate the process through which family and factions intersected through the example of the Hamdan family, whom I had known for over four years prior to this research. Focusing on one family, instead of including many short stories, allows me to explore the interactions of the *thawra* and the younger generations. The relationship of the father, Abu Ali, as well as two of his sons, Ali and Rabieh, with the PFLP typifies how factional affiliation, at times, was transmitted to the next generation. Indeed, Rabieh formed a deep association with the PFLP, becoming an armed guard for the faction, while his older brother Ali disassociated himself. This story gives us insight into several phenomena. First, it allows us to see what it meant to be in a factional family. How were children affected by their parents’ political affiliation, and how was that influence experienced? Secondly, this story illustrates how factional reproduction occurred during the *thawra* as well as today in spite of the vast criticism targeting them. Finally, it permits us to start the conversation, expanded in the next chapter, about the nature of faction membership by examining what appeared to be its “beginnings.”

The Hamdan Family

Abu Ali was a charismatic, kind and well-spoken man in his mid-fifties. He possessed a variety of skills and over the years worked in many trades. He was at times a welder whose job, as he put it, “was to look for a job,” highlighting that he worked one day out of ten. On other occasions he was a fisherman, turning the camp’s location by the Mediterranean Sea to his advantage. He was also an entrepreneur, who over the years operated a thrift shop and, more recently, a fresh-juice and grilled corn-on-the-cob stall next to the metal trailer he called home.⁷ Finally, he was a playwright, a poet, and a chronicler of current affairs, constantly updating his Facebook page with stories, images, and information about the situation in the camp. The common feature throughout all of these experiences was his poise. Abu Ali always impressed me with the calm demeanor he kept in the face of adversity, whether it was the indiscriminate shelling of his community, the destruction of the home he spent thirty-five years to build, his grandchildren’s fits and fights in small and overcrowded spaces, or his inability to pay the “satellite guy” knocking on his door to receive the 10 USD monthly fee.⁸

I initially met the Hamdan family in Beddawi camp, where they were sheltering during the Nahr el-Bared conflict in 2007. Throughout the years I kept a relationship with the family, visiting them whenever I was in the camp. Following their return to

Nahr el-Bared camp the family settled in UNRWA-provided metal trailers, locally known as the “Baracksat.” These were made of corrugated steel panels. Apart from the windows on their long sides, the trailers resembled shipping containers. They were about three meters wide and seven meters long. A family of five people was allowed one container, while larger families could claim two. They were placed in stacks of two, six in line for about twenty-four rows. Initially about 240 families lived in the “Baracksat.” These were meant to be temporary quarters, but up to the time of writing, six years later, the Hamdan family was still living in them. Inside the trailer there was, on one end, an aluminium counter equipped with a sink; above it was one wooden shelf and a water heater. The family later added a two-burner stove for cooking. This was supposed to be the “kitchen.” Next to it stood the bathroom: a small one-meter-square stall with a sink, a squat toilet, and a shower. The rest of the trailer was an open space that the family filled with mattresses that were used as beds at night and as a sitting area in the day, as was common in the camps. I was never quite able to figure out how many trailers the Hamdan family as a whole had, because the family was quite large: many of Abu Ali’s children were married and had offspring of their own. However, it seemed that one trailer was used as the common area for the extended family, and it was to this that I always directed myself. It was always packed with infants, toddlers, teenagers, and adults. In fact, I seldom knew the family relations between the different people present at any time.

At the time of my research UNRWA provided rent subsidies and strongly encouraged people to leave the “Baracksat,” and I witnessed several visits from an UNRWA employee trying to convince the family to move out. However, the Hamdan family found that the rent subsidy was not enough to be able to find housing in Nahr el-Bared, which was in short supply and therefore more expensive. Additionally, water and electricity were available for free in the “Baracksat,” while they would have to pay for them if they were to rent a home. But more importantly, the family’s daily survival was predicated on living close to each other, with collective cooking, shared care of young children, and many other forms of joint work and solidarity. This form of communal living was unlikely to be replicated if they were to rent apartments, which would certainly not be neighboring each other even if they were lucky enough to find them in the first place. It was precisely in such environments that familial bonds were solidified, stories were shared, and new connections were made, as I learned from Abu Ali, Rabieh, and Ali.

The Thawra Generation: Abu Ali

“I drank the *Jabha* with my mother’s milk,” was Abu Ali’s answer to my question of how his involvement with the PFLP began.⁹ We were sitting in a metal trailer further away from the family commotion. He continued by explaining that his father, Ali,¹⁰ had been an early member of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), and later became part of the Revolutionary Youth Organization and then the PFLP (see Hasso 2005, 7–10). Abu Ali remembered how, as a young child, he used to

stand guard outside his family's home during meetings there. It was the era of the Deuxième Bureau, when gatherings at homes were forbidden.¹¹ It was common to have children watch out, signalling to their parents when a patrol was passing by. Abu Ali emphasized that his association with the *Jabha* started from an early age and was something he was nurtured with. He remembered how as a teenager he used to go to the bakeries to collect donations for the fighters and women would sometimes give him their entire batch, stressing that, at the time, people trusted in each other and in the *thawra*.¹²

Abu Ali's father talked to him about Palestine, and taught him "to love it" and to fight for it. He insisted that he "drank the *nidal* (struggle)" from his father. He continued by explaining that "our household was all *Jabha*, we were raised in the *Jabha*." Abu Ali was replacing "family"—where a person is usually raised—with the "*Jabha*." This stressed that no clear line could be drawn between them: his family was the *Jabha* and the *Jabha* was his family. The *Jabha* was something very personal, and it was not just encountered in offices or in political events, but also and more importantly at home. For Abu Ali, the *Jabha* was first and foremost people, not a party ideology.

At school he became part of the PFLP student movement, and then in his first year of high school, he heard that the PFLP was organizing training sessions for future guerrilla fighters. He dropped out of school and registered. His mother and uncle were against his decision to stop his education. He said that at the time he understood their motives and that he was aware that, as a Palestinian, getting an education was paramount. He added that he actually enjoyed school, especially Arabic literature, of which he was still fond. He boasted of being one of the best students in his school in that particular subject. However, at that time, his love for Arabic literature and his belief in the importance of an education could not compete with the excitement of fighting for his country. Political protests were common in the camps and Abu Ali explained how he could never stay away from them. "Resistance was in my blood" (*al-nidāl bi dammī*), he explained.

In 1972 he went to the training camp, but within a few days Israeli warplanes bombed the camp early one morning, killing eleven people, including his friend, Ibrahim Rabieh, who was also from Nahr el-Bared camp, and injuring twenty seven others.¹³ Abu Ali explained that the training camp had few defences; he remembered that they only had one heavy Soviet machine gun, which was useless against warplanes. He hid behind rocks. Following the destruction of the training camp the survivors returned to their homes. Abu Ali became a full-time member of the PFLP (*mutfarrigh*). Although Abu Ali's father had been placed in charge of armaments (*mas'ul al-tisliḥ*) in Nahr el-Bared, he explained that he did not receive special treatment due to his father's position. He stressed that he started like anyone else as a member of a cell, and that due to his own merit he was elected and became a cadre. He was then put in charge of political guidance (*mas'ul al-tawjih al siyāsi*) for the PFLP in the north of Lebanon.

Abu Ali considered his participation in PFLP training to be the moment he officially joined the PFLP. He explained that it was at that time that he “filled out a form.” However, if we recall how Abu Ali first spoke of the PFLP, as something he drank with his mother’s milk, it seemed that Abu Ali’s relationship with the PFLP did not really have a start date. The official moment when Abu Ali “filled out a form” did not correspond to the time when he moved from being “outside” the faction to being “inside” it; he appeared to have been “inside” all along. This is the first reason why I always put quotation marks around the phrase “joining factions,” as that expression seems to imply an action delineated in time. (The second reason will be explored in the next chapter, where I recount the subsequent evolution of Abu Ali’s relationship with the PFLP and examine the concept of political membership and the possibility of defining its end).

The Younger Generation: Rabieh and Ali

Rabieh was a sensitive young man, six years younger than Ali. During the 2007 Nahr el-Bared conflict he worked with an international NGO in Beddawi camp delivering relief aid. The NGO’s emergency relief operations ended once the Lebanese military allowed the residents of Nahr el-Bared to return to the camp, and Rabieh was subsequently unable to find stable employment. Occasionally, he helped journalists and filmmakers make contacts in the camp, and in the process heard several Palestinians from the camp recount their stories of torture in Lebanese jails. He was profoundly affected by these accounts. His work with journalists later caused him trouble with Lebanese military intelligence, who began to question him. At the time of my research he was unemployed and had lost all hope of finding work. In his mid-twenties, he was significantly depressed and felt he had few prospects for his future. He explained:

Rabieh: When I go to cafés and I hear the guys, of course it is going to bother me, because they are living what I am living. There is no work, there isn’t anything. There is no future; everything is lost. My ambitions are broken. We don’t know how to dream; even dreaming we don’t know how to do it anymore.

[He lights up a new cigarette]

...

[Prior to the war] there wasn’t an hour of boredom. Now the whole day is like that. There isn’t anything. A person like me should be doing something.

Perla: What was different?

Rabieh: Everything was different. I was studying. I would leave school and go home. Our home’s atmosphere was nice. Our family is big. We were six apartments but we all shared one door. Our homes formed a circle; we were all next to each other. If you were bored you would go sit in the courtyard and you would forget the world. My time was full, I had a lot of work, I worked in the *shabibe* [the youth organization of the PFLP], I had workshops, scouting trips, and my

guard duties. The *shabibe* was my second home (*al bayt al tāni*). I never felt any emptiness.

The interior courtyard that Rabieh described and the form of collective living that the Hamdan family worked hard to replicate in the “Baracksat” was central to how the different generations of the family interacted. Rabieh highlighted this point, and as we will see later on, so did Ali. In particular, Rabieh had strong memories of his grandfather, to whom he was very close. In fact, it was his grandfather’s stories that affected Rabieh and made him want to “join the PFLP” and later become a fighter. Rabieh recalled:

Rabieh: We always used to sit and talk. I used to ask him, where did you go in the past? Where did you fight? Where did you serve? He would tell me: I would take them to the mountains, to Tyre, Saida. He would tell me which battles in Lebanon he’d taken part in. I was trying to figure out how nice the *Jabha* is, how much did it engage in resistance? I was still discovering, until today [I am discovering]. . . . I was liking it, I wanted to be in the *Jabha*, I was loving it, I wanted to be a fighter, that impacted me a lot, a whole lot, I wanted to go to Palestine to fight. And I told you I had a group of friends and we had a room in the [PFLP] office and we asked to have military training.

Perla: And did your father tell you stories too?

Rabieh: No just my grandfather. My dad and me, our relationship was of a father and son, not that of a friend. With my grandfather I would tell him everything, even if I liked a girl I used to tell him. I would tell him I like this girl, what do you think about her? And he would tell me, well, she’s from a good family. [Laugh]. He was considerate of my age.

We can see how Rabieh’s conversations about the PFLP with his grandfather were mixed with other casual discussions, such as Rabieh’s affection for girls. The discussions were informal, non-ideological and interwoven with everyday life. They did not aim to indoctrinate or politicize Rabieh, but were tied up with everyday social and familial practices. Later in our conversation, Rabieh labelled his affinity to the PFLP as “hereditary.” He highlighted that as a child it was very “natural” to him (*ṭabīʿī*) to say that he was part of the PFLP. However, when I asked Rabieh what the PFLP meant to him, this is what he had to say:

What makes me love the *Jabha* are the people, it is not because it is the *Jabha* and that my parents are *Jabha*. Of course if I had joined and didn’t like what I saw, it would be different, I wouldn’t be convinced. But what I liked was the people in the *Jabha*. The cadres. There is no hierarchy; it is not a leader and member’s relationship, but a friendship. It is like a family.

It is revealing that when talking of the PFLP, Rabieh spoke of the people of the PFLP. In particular, Rabieh discussed the role of Faris, his mentor, who left a strong impression on him:

I would be in the youth center, [my supervisor] Faris would come and we would talk of things. I liked him a lot. I felt that he was the *Jabha*. I felt that he should be a leader. I often talk to him on Facebook and on email; I call him ‘Sir.’ I love him a lot. He is the one who pushed me to open up, to discover how much energy I had, what I am capable of. He wanted to make something out of me.

While family ties often drew young Palestinians to factions, it was personal relations developed with other members that kept Palestinians “inside” the factions. Rabieh equates Faris to the *Jabha*—“he was the *Jabha*”—to stress how the factions were first and foremost people and not an ideology. Rabieh went on to explain that his chance to become a fighter for the PFLP came in 2006 when, following the July war with Israel, the PFLP decided to organize training sessions for young fighters. Like his father, Rabieh halted his education and signed up. To be a “fighter” in the early 2000s, however, was a very different experience compared to the 1970s. Palestinian military operations from Lebanon against Israel had halted and following the end of the Lebanese civil war Palestinians could no longer carry arms outside of the camps. Being a “fighter” in Lebanon basically meant being an armed guard for the factions’ offices. By the 2000s, arms within the camps had become controversial even amongst Palestinians themselves. While Palestinians continued to feel threatened and in need of armed defence, they also often saw guns in the camps as a source of insecurity (Abou-Zaki 2013). Rabieh highlighted to me that his family was opposed to his decision to carry arms for two reasons: they opposed his decision to forego an education and they worried about him getting involved in an armed confrontation in the camp. Abu Ali explained that he wanted Rabieh to continue his education, especially since he himself had been unable to go to university. He explained that he used to beg Rabieh to continue his education and after a long pause he continued:

Abu Ali: I used to dream when I was in school that I would go to university and study Arabic literature because I liked it, I was in love with it. This is why I write short stories or poems from time to time. I may not be good at it, but I like it and this used to be my ambition. If I could go back in time, I would study. At times I think of studying at home, even if I am fifty-six years old. I think of getting the baccalaureate books and studying on my own, but there is no time. . . . You feel that your youth was wasted, fifteen, twenty years went like that, you didn’t do anything.

Perla: But you tried to do something.

Abu Ali: Yes, but if you see what it is being used for today, how it is being marketed and sold, in a very different way from what you believed in or wanted. You feel that your dream became smaller. Your dream used to be big, now it is just 8 percent of Palestine. If we knew that then, maybe all those martyrs wouldn’t have had to die, and there would have been no need for all the injured and all the widows. Believe me, maybe no one would have sacrificed anything. What am I going to sacrifice anything for? If it is not for Nahf or Acre, which is where I am from, am I going to sacrifice myself for 8 percent of the West Bank? It is depressing.

Abu Ali's objection to Rabieh's military training was directly linked to his own experience as a fighter and his anger at the leadership's subsequent betrayal of the principles he fought for. He was highly critical of the current Palestinian political leaders and did not want his son to forego the possibility of forging a future for himself as self-sacrifice would lead nowhere. Additionally, his family also worried that he would get entangled in armed confrontations in the camp or that the PFLP might call on him in case of fighting. Abu Ali expressed his concern:

There is a total loss of trust, in all these people, the sixteen factions.¹⁴ I am not telling you that one is better than another. All of them are problematic. All of their lies have become apparent after forty years of the beginning of the *thawra*. When I used to see each day in Nahr el-Bared factions go on military alert against each other—for what? (*istinfār min tanzīm 'ala tanzīm, 'ala shū?*) This is what made us lose trust. I remember we used to run after the *fidā'i* just to see his boots.¹⁵ He was something amazing, a symbol, like an angel. We imagined him as an angel when we were children. Just say *fidā'i*: a camouflage uniform and a pair of boots. We would follow him just to look at him. He represented something important to us. Unfortunately they erased this image from our mind with their politics and their actions.

Rabieh's father was highly critical of the Palestinian factions, not only in terms of their positions during negotiations with Israel and their abandonment of the ideals he fought for, but also in terms of their local behavior in the camp. In particular, he insisted that his criticism was directed at all factions, which therefore included the PFLP. He lamented how the higher cause of fighting Israel had given way to internal fighting in the camps. In 2007, when Rabieh became a guard for the PFLP, there were two armed incidents in the camp involving Fatah al-Islam. On those two occasions, his parents sent Rabieh's oldest brother, Ali, to bring him home from the PFLP center. Rabieh explained that he had refused to leave and that Ali had had to drag him home on both occasions. Rabieh explained that when there was a situation of heightened military alert in the camp he would wonder if this was what his father and grandfather used to experience. He explained:

I wanted to live something of what I was hearing. You know when there were military maneuvers I would wonder, is this what used to happen with my grandfather or with my dad? I was longing for this experience.

After a pause he continued:

Rabieh: I like my tea strong because of that, because the revolutionaries (*thuwwār*) liked it strong.

Perla: Really?

Rabieh: In the training camps, you can't go to the kitchen all the time to get tea. The kitchen has a guard, so you can't keep going asking for tea. You can go once a day to get tea, and they put it in the pot and boil it all day long, so it turns black. [He laughed and then sipped his tea.]

Rabieh's desire to be a fighter was directly linked to what he perceived to be the experiences of his father and grandfather in particular and of the revolutionary generation in general. His detailed knowledge of their mundane practices, such as how they prepared and drank tea, reiterates that the process of the transmission of factional affiliation is not an overtly political or ideological process intended to indoctrinate or inculcate. Rather, it was the natural product of daily interactions with family members and was mixed with discussion of girls and tea-drinking habits.

Rabieh was not the only one influenced by the tight-knit family environment in which he grew up. Ali also remembered his grandfather's accounts, but explained that he was a lot more interested in the tales his great-grandmother used to tell. He reminisced how he, as a child, would gather with his siblings, cousins, and sometimes even the neighbors' children, and sit on the ground in their interior courtyard, while the adults formed a semicircle around them. He explained that the tales would last three days, "like a television series." Similar to the tactics used by modern-day television editors, his great-grandmother would interrupt her stories just before the climax and tell the children that it was time to go to bed. Screams, and sometimes even tears, would follow and his great-grandmother's response was always the same: "it's for tomorrow (*labukra*)."¹⁵ This left Ali with a strong sense of anticipation for the next evening. He added that he could barely sleep those nights, waiting for the next day to pass in order to hear the remainder of the story. Ali emphasized that she was the one who taught him the meaning of *turāth* (cultural heritage), as she often accompanied her chronicles with real artefacts, such as old keys and pictures from Palestine. It was in that same spirit that he later formed a *dabka* group.

Ali's interest in cultural productions did not mean that he was not interested in experiencing the *thawra*, like his younger brother had been. However, Ali's friends had a greater influence on him. At the age of fifteen he joined his friends in attending political meetings with Jabhat al Nidal, another faction in Nahr el-Bared camp. His involvement did not last long once his father became aware of his association: he physically pulled him out of a meeting and forbade him to return. Ali then began going to the PFLP youth center but he soon lost interest, explaining that he did not feel a strong sense of belonging (*mish zyādi*). He highlighted that by the time he was an adult the situation of Palestinian factions was different from that during the *thawra*; he had lost trust in them. He also explained that most of his friends were "outside" the PFLP and that he preferred to form a *dabka* group with them. He added that one of his friends was in a leadership position in a local NGO, and the organization ended up adopting the troupe and provided them with costumes and musical instruments, as well as the opportunity to travel around Lebanon performing at different events. His friend soon left the NGO over a dispute with the new director and the entire troupe left the organization in solidarity with their friend.¹⁶ This example highlighted the power of friendships and how Palestinians valued personal solidarity over institutional fidelity.

Ali soon married and started to concentrate on income-generating activities. At the time of my research, Ali had two young sons and an infant daughter. He was working as a driver for a vegetable wholesaler, transporting fresh produce from the fields of Akkar to Tripoli. His pay was minimal but he rejoiced over the fact that he was often given fresh fruit for his family, which, as I explained in the previous chapter, was a luxury many families could not afford. Ali's younger son soon joined us in the trailer; he had just showered and was ready to be put to bed. Ali took the opportunity to explain that he used to send his children to the Ghassan Kanafani kindergarten. The kindergarten was run by Annie Kanafani, the wife of the late Ghassan Kanafani, a famous Palestinian writer, artist and one of the founders of the PFLP.¹⁷ He explained that he liked their style of teaching, as it was closer to his "home environment" (*jaw al bayt*). However the nursery was too far away from the "Baracksat" and Ali could not afford the 10 USD monthly bus fees, so he sent his two sons to the closest nursery, an Islamic facility run by a local mosque.

Recounting Ali and Rabieh's stories in conjunction is valuable both for contrast and similarity. Ali and Rabieh were raised in the same environment, yet their political trajectory was different: Rabieh felt a deep association with the PFLP while Ali did not. Both stories, nonetheless, show that personal relations based on trust—and not a set of political ideas and beliefs—determined how Palestinian refugees interacted with factions. This was true for Rabieh, who was inspired by his grandfather, as well as Ali, who was influenced by his friends. This, however, did not mean that Ali and Rabieh blindly followed their friends or family members. On the contrary, Ali attempted to disassociate himself from the PFLP and Rabieh defied his father's desires. Indeed Rabieh's desire to become a fighter with the PFLP was challenged by his father, and Rabieh believed that his grandfather—who had initially inspired him—would have probably opposed him too if he had still been alive. These stories showed that trust relations, developed on a local basis, exemplified by Rabieh's relations with his mentor and Ali's relations with his *dabka* friends, determined the strength of their relations with organizations, whether factions or NGOs. Finally, Rabieh helps us understand how "illegitimate" and "unpopular" factions continue to exist and reproduce regardless of the condemnations directed at them, while Ali's choice of daycare gave us a glimpse of how geographical proximity helps establish new ties and connections, a theme I turn to next.

FRIENDSHIPS, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND SPACE

I joined because of a girl, I was ten years old and I used to pass by the [DFLP] hall on my way back from school and I was looking at the girls singing with kids. I saw a beautiful girl and I thought I should join. I didn't want to go to Fatah [where my father was], the girls were not pretty in

Fatah [laughter]. . . I used to always go and watch them. At the end I was convinced of the idea, I needed to enter. So I entered this organization and I liked it so I continued with them.

—SAMI, YOUNG GENERATION, SAIDA, DECEMBER 6, 2011

[The PFLP youth center] was a very nice center [prior to its destruction in the 2007 conflict]. There were a lot of activities; there was football, music, the scouts, and theatrical plays. The center was always full; it would never be empty, not like now. Now the center is sometimes closed, there isn't anyone. The center in the past wouldn't close; it was open twenty-four hours a day. If we were inside preparing something we would lock it so no one would come in, if we were preparing for a summer camp or an activity. People loved us.

—RABIEH, YOUNG GENERATION, NAHR EL-BARED CAMP, OCTOBER 13, 2011

Just as particular families came to be associated with political factions, so too did particular quarters of the camp. During the *thawra* it was common to refer to neighbourhoods as *Iqlim Fatah* (Fatah quarter) or *Iqlim al-dimuqrāṭiyyi* (DFLP quarter) (R. Sayigh 1994, 92). However, this was not always the case. When Palestinians first settled in the refugee camps in Lebanon they organized themselves according to their village ties, with camp quarters taking on the names of villages in Palestine (Petee 2005, 110–24; R. Sayigh 1994, 59). These village bonds were a system of support and survival in difficult and daunting circumstances (R. Sayigh 2007, 109). It has been pointed out that these village ties gave way during the *thawra* to an organization based on factional affiliation, with each faction “controlling” a part of the camp (Khalili 2004, 13–14; R. Sayigh 1994, 92).

In this section I reveal how neighborhoods came to be associated with a specific faction by outlining how neighborhood ties helped develop friendships, which in turn led to factional associations. This phenomenon was clear for both the *thawra* generation as well as the younger generation. However, before I begin my exposition, it is important to note that my choice of Nahr el-Bared camp as the site of my fieldwork affected how I conducted my research into the importance of space in understanding factional affiliation. The destruction of the camp in 2007 meant that I could not witness those dynamics first hand. The majority of its residents were no longer living in their original homes and factional offices and centers had been destroyed. While some factions were able to rent new spaces to act as offices and youth centers, not all were able to. The interplay between neighborhoods, friendships, and factions was to be found in the stories that Palestinians told about themselves and about their involvement with factions.

The physical location of factional offices, centers, or NGOs mattered for the simple reason that Palestinians often developed friendship ties with their neighbors and the physical closeness of these centers made them more convenient for parents to send their children. Ahmad, the youngest son of the Talal family with whom I lived, began his association with the Islamic Jihad in a similar fashion. His

mother explained to me that when Ahmad was young they lived next door to Abu Fayez. Abu Fayez was a member of Fatah in his youth who left the party during the internal fighting of 1983 because he refused to participate in the battle.¹⁸ He stayed away from politics until he met Dr. Fathi Shaqaqi, the founder of Islamic Jihad, who was visiting Nahr el-Bared after he was exiled from Gaza. After their meeting, Abu Fayez decided to start a scouting group for children in Nahr el-Bared camp. Um Muhammad explained that she sent her three boys to the scouting group, which basically consisted of religious classes and occasional outings to a nearby river. However, Ahmad was the only one who enjoyed the group and made several friends there. Ahmad continued to participate in their activities over the years and once he began his studies he became a member of the student group al-Rabita al-Islamiyya, which was referred to as just al-Rabita. Ahmad went to al-Rabita's center every day. He had the key and was responsible for opening and closing the center, which had a computer and a television set. This was Ahmad's only social outlet outside the family home, except for visiting other relatives in the camp.

One of the reasons why young Palestinians joined their friends in going to factional spaces was to partake in the activities that were offered to, and created by, them in those spaces. I often heard about the old PFLP center by the sea from Palestinians in the camp. Muhammad, the son of the head of Islamic Jihad in Nahr el-Bared, told me that he used to go to the PFLP center to use their library, as it was one of the few quiet places in the camp where he could study. Herein lies the importance of these spaces in the camp: their rarity. Young Palestinians had a limited number of locations in the camp where they could gather and take part in activities such as *dabka* practice or singing, or just hang out. The available places usually belonged to either factions or NGOs. They provided a breathing space for many young Palestinians, a place to go to during the day or in the evening.

These spaces were not always to be found in faction offices, but were sometimes located in people's homes, especially during the time of the *thawra*. Um Nabil, who was a young child when the revolution started, remembered how her affiliation with Fatah started when she and her friends started going to their neighbors' home. Her neighbor, Jamileh, was affiliated with Fatah and had turned her house into a youth center. There were political meetings, sports activities, English classes and, sometimes, trips. "I really miss those times, it was great," she said. They were about twenty to twenty-five girls, all from the neighborhood, and she "started to get attached to Fatah." She explained that she felt that she was discovering herself through Jamileh. Factions often had student centers close to universities with computers where students could meet to talk, play games, or surf the Internet. For many Palestinians who lived in the camps, going to university was the first time that they had actually left the camp and lived in a Lebanese neighborhood. This moment was often scary and stressful to them. A student center offered them a space where they could meet fellow Palestinians, discuss their problems, find solutions, and feel more at home. Some factions even had

dormitories for students, where they rented out beds for the semester for a fraction of the market price.

The factions also organized outings several times a year. It was rare for many Palestinians who lived in the camp to leave. While no legal restrictions limited their exit from the camp, financial pressures kept them inside. It was common to meet young girls in their twenties who had left the camp only a few times in their lives, generally on outings to the sea or the river. The situation was different for the camps in Beirut, but for the camps further away from the Lebanese capital this situation was rather common. Therefore outings organized by factions or their associated NGOs were welcomed by the youth. They often spoke about them for several days before and for a long time after. Factions also often organized summer camps where youth gathered for several days and attended speeches by the leadership of the factions. But what these summer camps were more known for was the long nights where the youth gathered, smoked narghile, chatted, danced, and had fun together, far away from the suffocating confines of the camps.

It is important to point out that what often determined the strength of the relationship with a faction was the strength of the friendships developed in these spaces. Fouad, the PFLP football coach, was a good example of this. Fouad's father, a falafel salesman, was a prominent Fatah military figure. In fact I had heard about his father from several different people in the camp. He was well-respected as he had remained in Lebanon following the departure of the Fatah forces from the north of Lebanon in 1983. He therefore lived under the constant threat of being arrested and detained by the Syrian authorities. He had passed away a year prior to the 2007 conflict and Fouad highlighted that his only comfort was that his father did not live to see the camp bombed into annihilation. He showed me a short video on his cell phone of his father in military fatigues walking along with other colleagues. He was very proud and grateful that he still had this video, as all of his other possessions had been destroyed in the war.

When I asked Fouad how his relation with the PFLP began, considering that his father was such an important Fatah figure in Nahr el-Bared, he answered that he had liked the PFLP since he was twelve years old. They had a big center close to his home in Hay al-Madāris where he and his friends used to go.¹⁹ He explained that most of his friends were from his neighborhood and that they all used to go to the PLFP center to play games, work on the computer or just enjoy each other's company. His friends would talk about George Habash, the founder and Secretary-General of the PFLP from 1967–2000, who sometimes visited the homes of his neighbors. He explained that they would later show him where Habash sat.

As Fouad was talking to me about his links to the PFLP, he immediately and without prompting started to talk to me about Shadi, his best friend for over ten years. Fouad recounted how, in the war that destroyed Nahr el-Bared, he had left the camp on day fifteen, leaving behind Shadi, who remained until day twenty-five. He told me that those ten days apart were the only time they had ever been separated from each other. He blamed himself for what he saw as the abandonment

of his best friend and remembered how he had cried when he saw Shadi again, even though his friend was alive and well. For Fouad, his friendship with Shadi was integral to his sense of belonging to the PFLP, and once Shadi faced problems with the PFLP leadership, Fouad's own links with the PFLP were strained.²⁰

For Ahmad, Um Nabil, and Fouad, friendship ties, neighborhood ties and factional ties were all linked together. The physical location of these centers played an important role in determining which factional space a young Palestinian went to. However, I am not arguing that if a Palestinian lived next to a faction's office then he or she would necessarily become affiliated with that particular faction. Instead, I aim to show how factional ties always begin with personal ties involving family members, friends or neighbours. Indeed, when looking at how Palestinians "join factions" we see that the factions no longer appear as structures defined by their respective ideologies, but as a group of people coming together on the basis of personal relations.

"REVOLUTION UNTIL THE END OF THE MONTH"

A very common joke in the Palestinian camps was that Fatah's new motto was *thawra ḥatta ākhir al-shahr* (revolution until the end of the month). This referred to the payroll that came at the end of the month, insinuating that people "joined Fatah" for the money, and played on Fatah's actual motto, *thawra ḥatta al-nasr* (revolution until victory).²¹ This joke was employed as a criticism addressed not only against Fatah but against all factions. Another common condemnation was to point out that in the past *individuals* used to pay membership fees to the factions—people, in other words, used to contribute to the factions—while, at the time of my research, the *factions* had to pay people for them to "join." While being part of a faction could have financial benefits, my research suggests that financial incentives alone were not enough to explain how Palestinians chose which faction to "join." If money was the major reason behind factional affiliation then we should expect Palestinians to "join" the richest factions, which was not the case for the vast majority of the Palestinians I interviewed (forty-two out of forty-three).

Being part of a faction could have several benefits. It increased the person's network in the camp, it could lead to a job opportunity in one of the faction's NGOs, youth or women's organizations,²² and it meant that they were eligible for aid in case the faction was distributing any.²³ While this could explain why people "joined factions," it did not explain how they chose which one to "join." Fatah often appeared to be the richest faction. For example, at the time of my research a university student who was part of Fatah received 40 USD a month, while a DFLP student received 200 USD a year (which breaks down to a little less than 17 USD a month) and a PFLP student didn't receive any compensation. A socio-economic survey conducted by a team of AUB researchers found that 66.4 percent of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were defined as "poor" in 2010 and 6.6 percent as "extremely poor" (Chaaban et al. 2010, 27).²⁴ Consumption expenditure was found to be on average about 170 USD per refugee per month (28). By this measure, the

Fatah contribution of 40 USD a month for a university student was substantial, representing about 23 percent of the average monthly expenditure. Yet, as shown in this chapter, many Palestinians created links with other factions. In some of these cases Palestinians did reap benefits from their association with a faction, but their choice of which faction to approach was not based on a calculation that sought to maximize it.

This point can be further illustrated through the example of Ahmad's relationship with the Islamic Jihad. Ahmad was the youngest son of the Talal family with whom I lived. As I elaborated in the previous chapter, the family faced severe financial hardships, which made them vulnerable to food insecurity. There was no doubt that Ahmad benefited financially from his relationship with the Islamic Jihad and that this assistance was vital to the family. They provided him with a monthly stipend and contributed to his tuition fees. Um Muhammad often said that if it were not for the Islamic Jihad, Ahmad would not have been able to go to college. However, it would be wrong to assume that Ahmad initiated a relationship with the Islamic Jihad in order to obtain such assistance. In actuality, the financial benefits that Ahmad received were the reflection of his longstanding relation with them. As we saw in the previous section, Ahmad's relation with the Islamic Jihad was based on neighborhood ties. At the age of twelve his mother sent him to their scouting group, which was led by their neighbor. This relationship continued over the years and was entering its eleventh year at the time of my research. When Ahmad was young there were few monetary incentives to this relationship. The stipend and tuition help that the Islamic Jihad provided only began once Ahmad attended college. This financial assistance can only be seen in context; it could not explain why the relationship was initiated. Other members of the Islamic Jihad received different stipends. Um Muhammad always reiterated the fact that Ahmad had been with the Islamic Jihad for eleven years and that the relationship was therefore superior to other members. I further examine the process by which Ahmad obtained the aid in chapter 5 when I inquire into the aid distribution process in the camp. What is important to realize for now is that while Ahmad no doubt benefited from his association with a faction, these benefits could not explain his choice of faction.

Furthermore, the role that Islamic Jihad played in Ahmad's life exceeded just a financial transaction. As highlighted in the previous section, Ahmad's participation in the Islamic Jihad's student group provided him with a crucial social outlet. Ahmad went to the youth center every day. He often returned in the evening with many stories of the latest news in the camp, which his mother always listened to attentively. I would therefore be wrong to qualify Ahmad's relation with the Islamic Jihad as being purely financially motivated.

. . .

Rabieh described to me the official method of joining a faction. He explained that once he had decided that he wanted to be part of the faction, he had to fill out a

form, which he believed was sent to Palestine, where it had to be approved. It was only after that process that he was considered a full-fledged member, was allowed to participate in factional meetings, and became a member of a cell. It was this process that was characterized as *dakhalit tanzīm* by Palestinians, loosely translated to “I entered an organization.” Three points can be inferred from this two-word expression. First, it evokes the image of crossing a line as the person moved from the “outside” to the “inside” of the faction, signalled by Rabieh’s ability to now attend party meetings. Second, it implies that this crossing of borders occurs in a moment delimited in time, in this case the moment when Rabieh’s application was approved in Palestine. Third, it confers order; it classifies people by giving them an organizational rank: Rabieh was now a member of a particular cell in Nahr el-Bared camp. These three points all work to build the appearance that factions are structures that organize people.

However, by examining the stories of how and why Palestinians “joined factions” we realize that Palestinians encountered factions in the form of people and not in the form of a party ideology; those individuals could be parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, friends, or neighbors. It was no accident that kin and neighborhood ties formed the backbone of factions, as those two networks formed the basis of Palestinian endurance and survival since the *Nakba* (Rosenfeld 2004; R. Sayigh 1994, 2007; Taraki 2006). This is not to say that a person’s kin ties and geographical location in the camp would solely determine his or her political affiliation; this was generally not the case. Rather, that process was non-linear, non-ideological, and interwoven in everyday practices, such as hearing grandparents’ stories or joining friends to play games on the computer. This process also featured instances of opposition to parental authority, as illustrated by the case of Rabieh, as well as volatility, as shown by the different trajectories followed by Rabieh and Ali, two brothers raised in the same environment.

Further, “joining a faction” is not an action that can be delineated in time. It is not a matter of entering a structure defined by its ideology; it is about connecting with family and friends. Indeed, if we stop looking at factions as structures that a person enters or leaves, as a bounded entity with lines separating those on the “inside” from those on the “outside,” but instead as a group of people coming together because of trust relations, we realize that a person’s affiliation with a faction cannot be understood as “affiliated” or “independent.” Instead we notice that such a relationship is much more complex, as it is a continuously unfolding story of human relations. It is to the examination of such relationships that I now turn.