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**Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded  
Palestinian Leadership in 1950s Lebanon**

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**Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded  
Palestinian Leadership in 1950s Lebanon**

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**To my parents and grandparents**

## **Abstract**

### **Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian Leadership in 1950s Lebanon**

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Ahmad abu Maher al Yamani, born in 1924 in Suhmata, Palestine, was one of the foremost refugee leaders in 1950s and '60s Lebanon. A school principal by occupation, Yamani built and directed the leading civic associations in exile, including the UNRWA Teachers' Association, the popular committees of the camps, the al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement, and the Union of Palestinian Workers. These associations asserted the interests of poor and formerly peasant refugees to UNRWA and Lebanese authorities, and they laid the foundations for the armed struggle. This biography describes the maturation of camp organization with more color. It also traces continuity between the social transformations of the Mandate era and camp society in the diaspora. The processes in Palestine that drew peasants to continuing education, and then to urban areas and to wage labor, and to mass politics and national identification – these refined Yamani into a young leader. Most of all, this biography foregrounds grassroots civic leadership among Palestinians in exile.

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## Introduction

There is a poetry to the youthfulness of the Palestinian armed struggle. It was led by young men, chief among them Yasser Arafat and George Habash, who were both university students in 1948, and others the same age or younger still.<sup>1</sup> It represented rebirth, vitality, and a healthy sense of indignation. These were not the same leaders who lost Palestine, and not their disciples. They carried within them bitterness, but could hardly know guilt. They were a clean break with the past.

The resistance gestated in the harsh deprivation of exile, the base austerity of the UNRWA camps, and the toughening nursery of manual labor. The young leaders waited patiently for the populist movements of the Arab world to emancipate the masses then wage the war of Palestinian liberation; they fought courageously in their armies, too. Then, when defeat struck again in 1967, they erupted. The armed Palestinian Resistance Movement, having captured the popular imagination, now won the people's devotion. In Jordan, the Battle of Karamah reclaimed some dignity for the Palestinians, while guerrilla operations and terrorism showcased their power. With the 1969 Cairo Accords between the PLO and Lebanon, the Palestinians had thrown off the state's shackles and liberated their camps. The Movement, for a few promising years, flourished.

This is an honorable narrative, and largely truthful. But were the Palestinians breaking with their past? And were the 1950s and 60s simply a period of gestation, when the refugees absorbed lessons in despair before erupting? This biography of Ahmad al Yamani, a labor organizer in Palestine turned civic organizer in exile, traces continuity and civic leadership in a historiography dominated by the motifs of rupture, rebirth, and

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<sup>1</sup> The years they were born: Habash (1926); Arafat (1929); Wadi' Haddad (1927); Nayef Hawatmeh (1938); Ghassan Kanafani (1936); Leila Khalid (1944); Salah abu Iyad Khalaf (1933); Khalil abu Jihad al Wazir (1935)

armed struggle. This should be considered an elaboration of Palestinian history, not a criticism of it. It reveals another dimension of agency in the refugee population, apart from its militarism: a vigorous and ongoing assertion of its autonomy in civic life, which manifested from the very beginning of exile.

Ahmad Husayn abu Maher al Yamani was one of the earliest and most important leaders of the Palestine branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement, a pan-Arab political movement that began as a student organization at the American University of Beirut and spawned the militant People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Habash led it. Yamani was not much older than the heralded leaders of the armed struggle – he was born in 1924 – but he possessed considerable maturity. Twenty-five years old when he was exiled, Yamani had already organized laborers in Jaffa and Haifa as a local leader of the Palestinian Arab Workers Society and worked for the Mandate administration in Haifa and Acre. Yamani grew up in a peasant family in the Upper Galilee village of Suhmata and attended college in Jerusalem; he had been old enough to recall al Qassam's Peasant Revolt in 1935 and the Great Revolt of 1936-39. He had attended Arab Nationalist societies in Jaffa, and fought in a Nationalist guerrilla cell in the 1948 War.

Scholarship on British Mandate Palestine traces how the growing muscularity of Zionism accelerated the social transformations that challenged the country's existing political hierarchy. New civic leadership emerged from the peasant, laboring, and petit bourgeois classes to assert new identities, demand concessions, and negotiate new solidarities. Unfortunately, the existing scholarship on Palestinians in exile largely fails to reflect on these changes. While the armed struggle motif accepts that the *Nakba* fractured hierarchies and delegitimized the old elite, it does not identify that the Mandate era produced the leaders, like Yamani, who would rebuild civil society.

Yamani was one of many unheralded civic leaders who in the 1950s asserted the interests of poor and peasant refugees, and who forged constituencies and alliances to negotiate with UNRWA and state authorities from a position of strength. This groundwork has shaped Palestinian civic life until today; it also enabled the armed struggle. This thesis aims to demonstrate two things: the continuity between Mandate-era Palestinian history and their history in exile, and the nature of civic leadership in exile. These are overlapping goals.

## CONTINUITY

As Rashid Khalidi notes of the political currents that emerged among the Palestinians after the *nakba*:

Even a cursory examination of these new groups and their ideology reveals that they represented a continuation of the Palestinian national movement as it developed from the roots we have examined into the Mandate period, until its defeat and collapse in the wake of the 1948 war. ... This is true despite the major differences between the pre-1948 and post-1948 movements, among them the fact that in no case did the new movements include members of the leadership drawn from the old Palestinian elite, which was considered in some measure as being responsible for having 'lost' Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

The examination has indeed been cursory. The narrative, developed through political histories and repeated uncritically in anthropological studies of the camps, is as follows:

When Great Britain inherited Palestine after WWI, it governed the Arab population through a class of local notables, a historically imagined but robust category that denotes the wealthy, educated, landowning Sunni elite who once served as the local agents of the decentralized Ottoman Empire. Though these leaders, the notables, had professed strongly nationalist sentiments, and desired, mostly sincerely, for independence from Britain, the cessation of the Zionist project, and self-rule over all of Palestine, they

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<sup>2</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 180.

were too close to their British overlords to push forcefully for these aims. Nor were they in tune with deteriorating conditions of the Arab peasants and urban laborers; instead of harnessing their resentment, the notables counseled patience and compromise with Zionists and the British authorities. Meanwhile, the peasant, laboring, and petit bourgeois classes were radicalized by despair, and they organized themselves into new forms of association and resistance, “such as boy-scout and other youth organizations with a nationalist or religious political orientation, the Young Men’s Muslim Association, labor unions, and professional associations.” Through these institutions, a broad segment of Palestinian society fashioned for itself an assertive, nationalistic identity that was unafraid to challenge existing structures of political authority and make demands in its self-interest.<sup>3</sup>

Then came the defeat of 1948, and the notables were swept away:

At a stroke, the older members of families like the al-Husaynis, Nashashibis, and al-Khalidis, who had dominated Palestinian politics from the 1920s through the 1940s, were replaced by very young men who were educated in the new schools that had sprung up in Palestine during the Mandate, were often graduates of Universities in Cairo, Beirut, and Damascus, and generally came from poor or middle-class backgrounds.<sup>4</sup>

The narrative in exile continues along the lines of the trope of youth, introduced at the beginning. The new, young leaders surged past the older generation and unlocked the potential of the camps and the vitality of the Palestinians through militarism and patriotic identification. Their political inclinations were naturally rooted in the Palestinian national movement of the Mandate era, but radicalized through the defeat of 1948 and the collective Arab soul-searching that followed.

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<sup>3</sup> See Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*; Khalidi, *Iron Cage*. Quote from Khalidi, 82.

<sup>4</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 180.

In fact, the transition between old and new, though catalyzed by defeat, was less stark than that, and it did not occur just at the instigation of students and bourgeois nationalists. It was mediated instead through the camps, through leaders who survived the *Nakba*, and through perceptions and behaviors imprinted with the legacies of the Mandate era. Peteet (1991) traced continuity between the two periods (before and after the *nakba*) through women's associations and the revision of gender roles:

Regional feminist currents and a general interest in social reforms, in conjunction with the colonial threat and Palestinian nationalism, served as the initial catalyst for women to begin a fifty-year history of participation in the national political arena. The early activists set the precedent for subsequent political organizing. They inaugurated the process of accumulating experience and skills in political work that was transmitted to a younger generation. Moreover, they broke the first crucial boundaries of the normative gender order. ... Peasant and urban middle and lower middle class women conferred legitimacy on the phenomenon of women in the battlefield.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, this biography of Yamani shows that the processes that transformed the position of the peasants and workers in Mandate Palestine produced a generation of leaders who shouldered the task of rebuilding civil society in exile.

### **REBUILDING IN THE 1950s**

Yamani's accomplishments and those of others like him include: restarting the scouting movement, unions, and cultural clubs; creating new schools and invigorating UNRWA ones; establishing teachers' associations, student associations, parent associations, women's associations, popular committees; organizing demonstrations, commemorations, and sports tournaments; and producing mass media.

Their value cannot be overstated. Schools are natural vehicles for the transmission of a shared identity, and though UNRWA's original curriculum was bare, the Palestinian

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<sup>5</sup> Peteet, *Gender in Crisis*, 65.

teachers demanded the instatement of Palestinian history and geography. When UNRWA was slow to comply, they developed the curriculum themselves. Yamani's memoirs reveal that the Palestinian administrators also installed libraries in their schools; they also had their students recite anthems and rehearse nationalist plays; and they organized scouting and sports events, which affirmed the value of communal self-reliance. Countless Palestinians, who ascended to all levels of refugee society, passed through the schools. Naji al 'Ali, a famous cartoonist who drew Handhala, a symbol of Palestinian defiance, attended the UNRWA school in 'Ain al Hilwah. He recalled of it, "For a semester, my teacher was Abu Maher al Yamani. Abu Maher taught us to raise the Palestinian flag and wave it, and he told us who were our friends and who were our enemies. And when he noticed my passion for drawing, he told me, 'Draw, but always for the nation.'"<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1. "Handhala" by Naji al 'Ali<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hamad, "Min Suḥmātā bada'a al-mishwār."

<sup>7</sup> Source: "Handhala."

Other studies have mentioned the publications circulating in the camps, some produced as periodicals and many as pamphlets and fliers, but few have examined the production of these publications or the contexts in which they were read. Walid Kazziha, for example, studied *al Tha'r*, a highly influential, underground periodical circulating among Arab Nationalists and in the camps (its weekly readership peaked at 15,000 copies), for its ideological tracts on Arab Nationalism, Jews and Zionism, imperialism, and so forth.<sup>8</sup> What he doesn't note, however, is the involvement of teachers and students in its production and distribution. Yamani and Salah Salah (a Palestinian labor organizer in Sidon, born c. 1933, whom I interviewed) recall that teachers used to contribute articles regularly, teach the paper to their classes, and have young cadres smuggle copies to other camps. Yamani, his students, and other school administrators also distributed thousands of pamphlets throughout the fifties through the mail to leading refugees, UNRWA administrators, and other teachers. This adds up to a clearer picture of the media's function in exile; it was not just a top-down explication of ideology, but a forum that built a Palestinian community through its participatory distribution and its expositions on civil affairs, in addition to functioning as a means to threaten the authorities and mobilize a mass audience. Yamani has included several articles and pamphlets in his memoirs.<sup>9</sup>

Civic leaders also built community through rallies. These were especially elaborate on days of commemoration, chiefly the anniversaries of the *Nakba*, the Partition, and the Battle of Hittin. Yamani and his associates organized several between 1952-4 in Sidon, and though they seem to have been confined to 'Ain al Hilwah (by order

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<sup>8</sup> Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation*, 30-31, 50-51, 56.

<sup>9</sup> Researchers can also read an archive of *al Tha'r* in America, though it is incomplete and in deteriorating condition. It is available from Princeton University Library.

of the security forces), they drew Palestinians from the surrounding areas and camps, as well. Students and scouts would parade at these events and recite anthems, and community leaders would give speeches and lead marches and chants. On one occasion, Yamani's students put on a play he wrote about the Balfour Declaration and Britain's treachery. By the end of the decade, the rallies had grown to great proportions, occupying the municipal stadiums of Beirut and Tripoli, attended by Palestinians from across the country as well as Lebanese, and hosting even Prime Minister Rashid Karami at the podium. This the civic leaders had accomplished through a decade of patient organizing and through alliances they forged with Lebanese associations, for example the anti-Zionist *Kul Muwatin Khafir*.

Scouts also receive just passing mention in political histories, when they appear from the documents studied here to have been instrumental to forging community in exile. Scouting expeditions brought the camps closer to one another, as young men would hike dozens of kilometers to another settlement and overnight with the Palestinians there. The young Palestinian men would also hike with Lebanese scouts, and in 1956 they attended a retreat in Alexandria with scouts from across the Arab world; these activities broke the isolation of the refugee identity, teaching young men that they belonged in a larger, Arab community. Finally, scouts deserve mention for providing military training to refugees and sending them on to the militias.

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES**

Ethnographic studies of camp life in the 1950s and 60s have shown that Palestinians shaped their settings in diffuse and organic ways. They did this, for example, through the spacialization of their settlement, gathering near their old neighbors and naming camp neighborhoods after Palestinian villages and towns. "Burj al Barajneh camp



was constituted by a spatial array of a number of northern villages in six named areas: Kweikat, Tarshiha, al Kabri, Shaikh Daoud, al Ghabisiyya, and al Chaab.”<sup>10</sup> These reconstituted affiliations not only yielded social and economic support; the agglomerations empowered refugees against UNRWA and the authorities through their sheer numbers, and could resist further displacement and neglect. But the conditions of exile – new geographies, forced relocation, crowded living quarters and the end of privacy, marginalized legal status, poverty, and so forth – naturally engendered adaptations, and refugees forged new affiliations and identifications, altered social practices, and modified reconstituted social institutions. The example of the role of the village *mukhtar* in exile, and the administrative posts that would come to replace him, is illustrative:

Initially, village patterns of social organization and status were viable and relief agencies dealt directly with *al mahkatir* as village heads to help compile lists of residents to be registered as refugees. ... *Al mahkatir* distributed rations, and UNRWA appointed them as Camp Service Officers, a liaison position between camp residents and UNRWA. Corruption and patronage eventually led UNRWA to develop the position of Field Officers, chosen more on the basis of wider influence and merit. Eventually they resembled village notables in the emergent status system of the camps.<sup>11</sup>

Teachers tried privately to add Palestinian themes to their curriculums:

Despite the absence of a specifically Palestinian curriculum, UNRWA schooling was an unprecedented institutional forum, functioning in much the same way that schooling does in the rest of the world, inculcating nationalism and constructing national subjects. Strongly nationalistic, often politically active, and committed to youth and the development of their Palestinian identity, teachers quietly adjusted the curriculum to incorporate Palestinian themes. This was a dangerous strategy, for they could be fired if they were caught.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Peteet, *Landscape*, 111.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

Refugees also manifested their agency through construction in the camps. Tents originally symbolized the expectation of return and solid construction the delay thereof, but after years in exile, practical concerns began to mount.

By 1961, tents, those despised symbols of misery and homelessness, were a relic of the past. The transformation to more solidly built cement houses was gradual. First, a cement block foundation one to two feet in height would be constructed around the perimeter of the tent to keep out rain and prevent drafts. From there it was a matter of building upward, level by level, gradually replacing the tent with a cement structure.<sup>13</sup>

But construction wrought conflict between refugees, UNRWA, and the state that touched at the root of their mutual distrust over whether UNRWA aimed to resettle refugees and whether refugees deserved protracted aid.

## **NEW INTERPRETATIONS**

My research supports the central thrust of these rich studies, that there is a reciprocal relationship between place and agency. “Place is always in a state of becoming; embedded in local contexts, it acts upon them. ... Refugees were the driving force in generating places as meaningful constructs within the constraints imposed by structural features and forms of external power.”<sup>14</sup> We must treat the setting of exile as dynamic, malleable, to an extent, to the will of the refugees. I am elaborating on this and supporting already well-defended conclusions. But I am also adding some new interpretations. The documents in this thesis indicate that there was an element of civic leadership that has so far gone unacknowledged but is integral to any account of adaptation, agency, and resistance. Refugees, according to my research, pushed the boundaries of their constraints in the 1950s and 60s more than the ethnographic studies have suggested.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 130.

The documents presented herein deepen our understanding of the phenomena I've cited from Peteet, above. UNRWA relied on camp intermediaries, and *makhatir* were naturally suited for these roles. The Agency hired Palestinian Field Officers to act as its agents, as well. But refugees also represented themselves through institutions of their own design, namely popular committees and Al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini. Popular Committees were councils of residents that formed in each refugee concentration to manage civic and administrative affairs. Composed of authority figures such as teachers, shaykhs, and leaders of the women and workers' associations, the Committees carved out a space of communal self-rule and conflict resolution. They also represented each camp as a political unit to UNRWA, the state, and al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini. Al Shabab was a network of leaders among the many camps who coordinated political activities – such as rallies, boycotts, and petitions – and managed the scouts, published *al Tha'r* and its successors, managed a militia and linked to other militias, and represented the refugee population as a unit to authorities. (Technically, al Shabab was the Lebanon branch of the Palestine section of the Arab Nationalist Movement, or, the Lebanon branch of the predecessor of the militant PFLP. It operated semi-autonomously of its parent organization, though.)<sup>15</sup> By the late 1950s, al Shabab was able to correspond directly with and receive audiences with the upper echelons of UNRWA and the state.

The documents also indicate that the refugees exerted more control over education and through education than the ethnographic studies have credited to them. Teachers and principals were the predominant camp leaders before al Shabab matured in

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<sup>15</sup> Al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini deserves to be distinguished from its parent organization. The broader Arab Nationalist Movement's doctrinaire leadership launched it into political conflicts from Egypt to Iraq, but refugees – especially camp residents – had more pressing concerns: to manage their own welfare in exile and to return to Palestine promptly. So with consideration to the unique hardships that befell the refugees in Lebanon, al Shabab operated semi-autonomously of the central ANM and focused on local priorities. The Shabab network appears to have penetrated deep into camps and was led by camp residents. I discuss this further in Chapter 3.

1956-57, outside of the village leaders and *makhatir* who derived their power from their cooperation with the UNRWA and their ties to the fading Arab Higher Committee (a representation of the Palestinian former political elite). At UNRWA's training courses in 1951 and '52, local Palestinian teachers' associations from Syria and Lebanon privately formed an umbrella UNRWA Teachers' Association, which represented the refugees to authorities through petitions, negotiations, and strikes when necessary. The local teacher and parent associations were functional precursors of the emerging network of popular committees, and in fact the two affiliations, of teachers and al Shabab, shared between them many community leaders.

Not only did the Teachers' Association manage to get UNRWA to adopt a Palestinian curriculum, it also obliged the Agency to offer more secondary level classes, open secondary schools, and open technical institutes, and to hire more teachers and reduce class sizes. The teachers also roped UNRWA into sponsoring inter-camp sports competitions and securing stadiums for this use, and they taught literacy classes, led the scouts, and raised money to buy books. And when UNRWA fired Yamani from school administration for his political activities, he went on to found two schools in Burj al Barajnah camp and mold them according to his principles. These were the King Saud Charity School, financed by Saudi Arabia and supported by Egypt, and Lebanese Secondary School – Burj al Barajnah, financed and supported by the Arab Nationalist Movement.

I am telling Yamani's biography chronologically. This reveals the continuities between pre-Nakba Palestine and exile and between the various organizations Yamani directed, which may not have been clear in this introduction. They occur through association, in labor circles in Palestine, and re-association, usually in teaching and nationalist circles in Lebanon. Readers will notice that camp leaders receive crucial

support for their initiatives from outsiders; in this narrative, the Saudi King, a Lebanese political association, and two well-positioned Palestinians in the UNRWA administration all play supporting roles at one point or another.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In Chapter 1, I narrate Yamani's life in Palestine. This section weaves in elements of the social transformation of Mandate Palestine. Palestinian Arab society changed considerably between 1924, when Yamani was born, and 1943, around when he graduated from the Arab College in Jerusalem and joined the workforce, in both the urban and rural spheres. As a result, Yamani entered a political world very different from the one he was born into, one without a national leadership; where the participatory domain had expanded from the educated, urban classes to workers and artisans and peasants; and where villagers migrated, seasonally, in greater numbers between rural and urban areas and acquired jobs in manufacturing and bureaucracy. These changes, though consequential, occurred only in the background of Yamani's early life, though they are reflected in it and in incidents he recounts in his memoirs. So the first part of the first chapter foregrounds the Palestinian Arab social transformation, because its results determined Palestinian society at its 1948 fracture and left young men like Yamani as the civic leaders in exile; this section intersperses accounts from Yamani's childhood and teenage years accordingly. The second part of the chapter relies more heavily on his memoirs, when, as a working adult, he became an actor in the social and political spheres.

Chapter 2 covers Yamani's life from 1949 to 1955. These are the years when Yamani entered exile and when UNRWA expelled him from his employment as a teacher and principal for political activity. Yamani's primary affiliation during this period was with the UNRWA Teachers' Association

Chapter 3 narrates his life from 1955 to 1959. Yamani escalated his involvement with al Shabab during this time, and by the end of it, the group has emerged as the predominant civic leadership association in the camps of Lebanon. This section weaves in a critique on the existing scholarship on the Arab Nationalist Movement, which can be read as a critique of the armed struggle motif in Palestinian history, as well. The reader may notice that Yamani is proudly and fervently Arab Nationalist. This thesis is not a meditation on or an explication of the ideology, though. I bring up Arab Nationalism in the context of civic structures, instead; the ANM's initiatives proved integral to the organization of the camps and to the structure of civic leadership, so I discuss them here.

The primary source for these three chapters is Yamani's memoirs, which include some of his own writing and plenty of his own correspondence and correspondence of the UNRWA Teachers' Association and al Shabab. They include a few reprints of *al Tha'r* and of Arab Nationalist and ANM pamphlets, as well. I also refer sporadically to other Arabic sources and to interviews I conducted with other civic leaders.

The conclusion relates this biography to the political evolution of the camps, culminating in their liberation from Lebanese authority in 1969 and the hegemony of the PLO. I argue that the year's sudden developments depended on Yamani's patient civic leadership over the two decades before, which in turn reflected his maturation in Palestine before that. This study ends on that significant year, because an examination of Yamani's later life would tread worn territory in Palestinian studies and yield few revelations. As befits a leader of Yamani's experience, he was elected to the Palestinian National Council and the Executive Committee of the PLO. He was also a member of the Central Committee of the PFLP, and a member of its Politburo. Yamani died in 2011.

## 1. In Mandatory Palestine

### YAMANI'S EARLY LIFE

Ahmad Husayn abu Maher al Yamani was born to a peasant family in Suhmata, an Upper Galilee village in the Acre district, in 1924. He was one of ten children, and the oldest son. His father's name was Husayn Ahmad Muhammad 'Ali Sulayman, and his mother's was Sa'ida al Hajj 'abd al Rahim Qadura. It was his grandfather who had acquired the nickname "al Yamani," from when he returned from his service in the Ottoman Army in Yemen, which he passed on to his descendants. Ahmad's father used to work for the proprietors of the village and surrounding towns and was treated by his employers with respect.<sup>16</sup>

The family home conveyed the family's modest means: its walls were made of stone and its roof of thick, rugged wood, filled with twigs, and topped with dirt, which they had to replenish each year to keep water from leaking in. The interior was large, though, and the roof supported by four stone arches, and the family slept two or three to a straw mattress, which they laid out on the stone platform that they cleared to use as a living space during the day. ("God bless my mother, she would spend part of the nights awake, to keep us covered in our comforters so that we wouldn't be cold."<sup>17</sup>) They had a stove, storage for grains and flour and oil, and a wooden trunk for clothes. The two windows had no panes. Yamani's mother used to collect wood every morning with the other women in the village to fuel the stove and cooking fire. The property included a chicken coop, a stable for the livestock, and a lavatory. Yamani's secondary school teacher paid the family a visit from 'Akka one year; the teenager was embarrassed that

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<sup>16</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:31.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:33.

his family didn't own any chairs, so he directed his teacher to his uncle's instead. Still, the teacher insisted on visiting the family home, and they sat together on the mattresses without pretention. Yamani called it a lesson in humility.<sup>18</sup>

When Yamani was six, his father took him to Acre to watch an execution. The British authorities had sentenced three Palestinians to death for leading the 1929 Western Wall (Buraq) riots. Yamani witnessed them climb onto their chairs, then fall and hang by their nooses; the crowd in the prison courtyard swelled and protested.

### **THE 1930S: ACCELERATED TRANSFORMATIONS TO PALESTINIAN ARAB SOCIETY**

The multi-city riots manifested an explosion of Arab disaffection with Zionist immigration and land purchases, which Arabs recognized as a threat to their political aspirations and economic future.<sup>19</sup> The trigger came in August 1929, when the right-wing Zionist youth group Betar raised the Jewish flag at the wall and sang an anthem at the Western Wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The next day, a Muslim countermarch to the Wall devolved into violence, and in the ensuing week, rioters killed 133 Jews and British police, deputized civilians, and Jewish gangs killed 110 Arabs. Violence was recorded throughout the country, in Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, Jaffa, and Nablus.<sup>20</sup>

One of the riot's distant consequences was the coalescence of a secular, nationalist movement that challenged Palestinian political institutions that were seen as too compliant with British control. Chief among these was the Supreme Muslim Council. The Council derived its authority from its purse, which the British Commissioner filled

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1:64.

<sup>19</sup> A note about terms: Though the Arabs indigenous to Palestine describe themselves as of Palestine, many refer to themselves as Arabs, for example the Arab Higher Committee. Others refer to themselves as Palestinian Arabs, for example the Palestinian Arab Workers Society. Exile caused the Palestinian identifier to gain importance, though Arab Nationalists still referred to themselves as Arabs or as Palestinian Arabs. As much as possible, I try to respect these self-identifications, which shift between Chapters 1 and 2. I hope that I have clarified when necessary.

<sup>20</sup> Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 64.



with the considerable revenue derived from the various Muslim endowments throughout the country. To this, the Commissioner supplemented income from his Treasury. Never in Ottoman history had a local religious authority commanded such fiscal power throughout Palestine and therefore dominated civic and political institutions. In fact, the Council itself had no precedent – it was fabricated by the British at the start of the Mandate and led by a similarly made up institution, the Grand Mufti of Palestine. The British appointed Hajj Amin al Husayni to the post, a curious choice: despite his title, Hajj Amin was not a particularly pious man, nor was he on good terms with the British. A Mandate court had forced him exiled to Syria in 1920 for inciting crowds at the Nabi Musa riots in Jerusalem that year, which protested the Balfour Declaration. He moreover participated in the 1919 Pan-Syrian Congress that demanded independence from France and Britain, supported King Faysal's short reign in Damascus, and aligned himself with Arab Nationalists. But Husayni belonged to a notable Jerusalem family that was accustomed to holding prestigious posts such as those of the city's Grand Mufti and Mayor, and colonial officials believed that by pardoning his 1920 sentence and elevating him, they could make him beholden to their interests. They were right, and the Supreme Muslim Council, which very much owed its position to British favor, offered just token resistance against the Mandate and Zionist immigration.<sup>21</sup>

The main counterbalance to the Supreme Muslim Council in the 1920s was the Arab Executive, which had formed out of the Palestine Arab Congresses of the many, local Muslim-Christian Associations. Though the Associations had been formed independent of British control, this alternative political structure too came to be co-opted by the Mandate administration, which played the notable families of Jerusalem against

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<sup>21</sup> On the political institutions of the Palestinian notables, their establishment, and their relationship to the British authorities: Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, 55–64; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 30–43.

each other. At the head of the Arab Executive sat Musa Kazim al Husayni, a relative of Hajj Amin and the former mayor of Jerusalem. The British had replaced him in his city post in 1920 with Raghib al Nashashibi, of a rival notable family. Nashashibi led the opposition to Husayni in the Congresses and the Arab Executive. The British manipulated both politicians, their presses, and the largely powerless Arab Executive through favoritism, disbursement, proscription, and censorship.

The 1929 riots, though, vitalized a new vein of opposition to challenge the Mandate, led by the politically engaged contingent of the Young Men's Muslim Associations (YMMA) who came to identify as the Istiqlalists ("Independentists").<sup>22</sup> In truth, there was a great deal of overlap between this emerging cohort of leaders and the political class of the Arab Executive and the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), many of whom were caught up in the heady promise of King Faysal's 1918-20 Damascus government.<sup>23</sup> What distinguished them from the leading politicians of the Supreme

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<sup>22</sup> The YMMA was a young organization and had declared itself apolitical in 1928 to attract civil servants, whose livelihoods depended on the Mandate. A Salafi institution in the tradition of Jamal al Din al Afghani, its mission was to resist the proselytizing mission of the Young Men's Christian Association and European domination more generally. But in the months of political activity and demonstrations following the riots a schism appeared between the civil servants and the YMMA's more ideological leaders, who could not separate Zionist immigration from the terms of the Mandate and thus agitated for independence. The British ordered the Jaffa branch of the YMMA to close and arrested its outspoken, anti-Mandate leader, Hamdi al Husayni (not related to the Jerusalem Husayni family). The Gaza branch closed, as well, unable to resolve its internal fracture. The Association resolved to limit itself to sports and cultural activities at its 1930 Palestine general conference, under threat from Mandate administration. The riots and heightened British repression had fractured and enfeebled the YMMA, but the events also confirmed anti-Mandate convictions and drove the Association's more ideologically inclined leaders to demand independence with less restraint. Their convictions were further confirmed in 1931, when the British House of Commons affirmed through the MacDonald Letter that Britain would not endeavor to restrict land transfers to Jews or immigration, nor would it oppose Labour Zionism's "Hebrew Labor" initiative to secure jobs for Jews and close them off to Arabs. See: Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 64–68 & 84.

<sup>23</sup> Among the men who went to Damascus to work for Faysal's administration or participate in the Syrian Congress or lead the pan-Syrian al Fatat party were: Hajj Amin al Husayni; 'Awni 'Abd al Hadi, who became secretary of the Arab Executive; Subhi al Khadra', who represented Safad in the Arab Executive and served Hajj Amin's administration at the SMC; 'Izzat Darwazah, who directed the influential Salafi Al Najah school in Nablus, wrote an Arab Nationalist history textbook with Sati' al Husari's help, and served on the administration of the SMC; Mu'in al Madi, who represented Haifa in the Arab Executive; 'Ajaj

Muslim Council and the Arab Executive, however, was their urgency and resolve. In the aftermath of the harsh British crackdown, the Istiqlalists took to the press and various Congresses to reject the politics of conciliation, in favor of adopting the more stridently nationalist rhetoric of Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement in India and independence movements in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. They also reached audiences through schools. At 'Izzat Darwazah's influential, Al Najah Salafi school in Nablus, for instance, Akram Zu'aytir taught his students about Gandhi and civil disobedience; teachers politicized curriculums in Haifa, Gaza, and Jaffa, as well. And they organized rallies and filled their newspapers with anti-Notables and anti-Mandate invective. In August 1931, police wounded three nationalist demonstrators and sentenced thirty among 1,500-strong crowd of men and women in Nablus. Zu'aytir wrote in an editorial, "Pro-government notables! Drink tea! But remember, it is tea mixed with blood!"<sup>24</sup>

Weldon C. Matthews identifies the genesis of mass politics in Mandatory Palestine within this era:

By autumn 1931, it was clear that the nationalist message resonated most strongly among educated youth and secondary school students. To speak of shaping public opinion through the press is to refer particularly to these young men, as well as to a small but increasingly politicized group of women. Although the educated youth comprised a narrow segment of the Palestinian population, they read, contributed

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Nuwayhid, who served on the administration of the SMC; and Shaykh 'Izz al Din al Qassam, who tried to organize an armed revolt and whose death in a shoot-out with the British police ultimately inspired one. 'Abd al Hadi, Khadra', Darwazah, Madi, and Nuwayhid all served on the leadership committee of the 1930s Istiqlal Party, the manifestation of the current that emerged from the YMMA. Qassam was not a formal member of the party, but a close associate of it. Many of these men figured prominently in the Palestine YMMA network, along with Hamdi al Husayni, who was mentioned above and who also led the Istiqlal party, and Akram Zu'aytir, another important Istiqlal leader. Zu'aytir was a product of Darwazah's Al Najah institution, and he edited and contributed to several influential Palestinian newspapers in the 1930s. He was too young to serve in Faysal's Damascus administration. Biographical information from Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*. Appendix 2 (pp. 265-73) contains short profiles of the Istiqlal leaders. On the members of the SMC administration: p. 79. On Darwazah consulting al Husari: p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Quote from Ibid., 94. On favoring a non-cooperation movement in Palestine: Ibid., 96 & 174. On Al Najah school: Ibid., 101 & 120.

to newspapers and were aware that the world of their generation was being organized into independent nation-states.<sup>25</sup>

The decade saw the emergence of “a public sphere that was sustained by schools, specialized public spaces, a periodical press, and a telecommunications infrastructure,” and “new associations, including athletic, scouting, and labour and women’s organizations.”<sup>26</sup> The riots had spawned not just a new cohort of leaders to oppose the Mandate, but sparked a transformation in political engagement and association, as well.

The Istiqlal Party lost its luster in 1933, owing in part to an affair reflected in Yamani’s memoirs. News emerged that year that the Jewish Agency had acquired a large tract of land in Wadi al Huwarith that had been put to sale by its absentee owners, the Arab Tayyan family. British police evicted 67 families from the land, exemplifying how transfers like this one eroded peasant welfare and their political power.<sup>27</sup> Yamani’s schoolteachers directed their students in demonstrations and protest, as they did often to mark events of nationalist consequence.<sup>28</sup> The British High Commissioner and the SMC tried very hard to discredit leading Istiqlalists by connecting them to the Wadi al Huwarith, with some success.<sup>29</sup>

Resent towards the Mandate continued to swell, channeled through schools, the press, budding Nationalist societies, a revived YMMA, and unions and other associations. General strikes in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Nablus, and Haifa in October 1933

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<sup>25</sup> Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, pp. 6 and 7, respectively.

<sup>27</sup> Between 1918 and 1936, private landowners, churches, foreign companies, and the government had sold 168 thousand acres of Arab-owned land to Jews. Absentee landlords had sold 53 percent of the acreage; large, resident owners 25 percent; and peasants 9 percent. By 1948, absentee landlords had sold an additional 25 thousand acres. The reasons for the sales are varied, but the result – uncontested, large-scale land transfer to the Yishuv – deepened a cleavage between peasants and powerless national movements. (Essaid, *Zionism and Land Tenure in Mandate Palestine*, 107–119. Figures from p. 116.) Land transfers were concentrated along the fertile coast, moreover, “so gradually the *fellaheen* were pushed back into the less fertile, less watered, more difficult mountainous areas.” (Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 26.)

<sup>28</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:75–78.

<sup>29</sup> Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 188–93.

marked “the intrusion of peasants and wage labourers into the domain of the political classes.”<sup>30</sup> These actors were motivated by a confluence of economic factors and government policies that impoverished them especially, including collapsing agricultural prices due to the global depression, regressive tax collection, ongoing land transfers, rising immigration (the Fifth Aliyah) in the flight from Nazism, and the absence of any adequate social safety net. Unlike the previous Aliyahs, the fifth brought considerable capital, which drew villagers to the cities to work as wage labor, though many would adopt a pattern of urban-rural migration, connecting the centers with the periphery. Between this and the wave of immigration and unresponsive government, the cost of living in cities soared while standards deteriorated, and tenements and shanties proliferated. There was, moreover, antagonism between Jews and Arabs over wages, exacerbated by the Histadrut’s early 1930s “Hebrew Labor” plans; this Jewish union went so far as to organize Arab workers into the Palestine Labor League so they would demand higher wages and look less employable to businesses and bureaucracies, but without much success. Records show that the government implemented an unequal wage scale for its public works projects that paid Jews more than Arabs, by multiples. Palestine’s iconic citrus industry did not benefit peasants much either; quite the opposite, in fact, as growing the capital-intensive crop required considerable investment to become profitable.<sup>31</sup> The strikes of 1933 turned violent in Nablus, Haifa, and especially Jaffa, where police killed 23 demonstrators.<sup>32</sup>

It was in the context of this era that Yamani witnessed at least two instances of injustice perpetrated against his family and village. Once, while Yamani was watching

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 199–206.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 214–18.

him plow, a handful of British officers stopped his father and beat him with the yoke of the animals. They then arrested him without telling Yamani the charges. When his father returned home, unexpectedly, a few days later, he told the family that they were being punished for providing aid to Palestinian revolutionaries. Another time, the police came Suhmata under orders to search the village for weapons and other clues of resistance. They ordered all the households to leave their doors open and to gather at the village center, and they warned they would burn down any home that didn't comply. As officers went through the homes, they singled out a man and threw him in a body of water. He pleaded that he could not swim, but to no avail: they let him drown.<sup>33</sup>

In 1935, Yamani's father sold the family's only cow to purchase a first World War rifle, after the charismatic Haifa Shaykh 'Izz al Din al Qassam died in a firefight with the British police.<sup>34</sup> Qassam's clandestine Black Hand militia numbered 200-800 men. By speaking passionately against the Mandate and leading the armed resistance by example, Qassam had captured the public imagination. Thousands attended his funeral in Haifa, and his martyrdom motivated a formidable, countrywide general strike from April-October 1936.

This one was different from the one of 1933, which the national leaders of the Arab Executive, the SMC, and the fading Istiqlal Party could claim to lead. This strike was organized instead in pockets, by autonomously operating societies, including local YMMAs, the Haifa Palestine Arab Workers' Society, and the Jaffa Arab Workers' Society.<sup>35</sup> Still, the political class tried to co-opt the action by establishing an umbrella

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<sup>33</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:74.

<sup>34</sup> When the national leadership called off the General Strike of 1936, the mayor of Suhmata urged his villagers to surrender their weapons to the British. Yamani's father hid his rifle, instead; that he would use it again in 1948 magnified the symbolism of this act. Ibid., 1:42.

<sup>35</sup> Its decentralized character betrayed the failure of national politics and demonstrated the willingness of the population to organize and act on its own terms. In a telling example of how out of touch the national

Arab Higher Committee that comprised all the leading parties.<sup>36</sup> But if there was any hope that the Committee could represent a lasting, unified national leadership it was dashed in the strike's aftermath. The general stoppage, while enduring and inspiring, nevertheless inflicted a lot of self-harm to the Arab economy. Nor could the Palestinians muster much leverage to negotiate with their Mandate authority; Hitler's ascent in Europe drove an unremitting wave of Jewish emigrants to Palestine in the Fifth Aliya, and the populist governments of Egypt and Syria, negotiating their own autonomy from Britain and France, respectively, decided, rightly or wrongly, to offer just lip service for the Palestinian strike so as not to upset their own negotiations. So, as Yamani recalls hearing from his father, the Higher Committee and the Arab governments urged the population to call off the stoppage in October and secured promises from the British to renegotiate the Mandate. But the more radical strike leaders and the militants in the population suspected the Higher Committee's integrity, and their fears were confirmed in July 1937, when the British Government published the unilateral recommendations of Lord Peel Commission: partition. By October, armed revolt had erupted across the whole country. It had no centralized leadership and the bulk of the militants were peasants and laborers and other economically marginalized members of Palestinian Arab society.<sup>37</sup> "British forces lost control of much of the countryside to armed bands and were briefly forced to withdraw

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leaders were from their constituents, the limp Istiqlal party had tried to initiate a general strike in February, at the height of the citrus harvest season. Naturally, workers did not heed its call, and they instead struck in April with their corporatist interest groups, after the harvest season had ended.

<sup>36</sup> "The Higher Arab Committee (HAC), which represented a kind of alliance between traditional notables and emergent middle-class urban radicals, took over the leadership of the strike and articulated its demands." (Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, xix.) Twenty-eight out of thirty-two of the AHC delegates belonged to landowning aristocracy or to the wealthy merchant class, or were bourgeois professionals. No peasants or workers were on the Committee. Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> "At this point, the rebellion's peasant and lower-class character crystallized, as the rebel command imposed subaltern dress codes on urban residents, declared a moratorium on debts, banned the use of electricity, canceled rents on apartments, and extracted large 'contributions' from the wealthy classes, many of whom fled the country." Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, xx.

from several of the major cities, including the Old City of Jerusalem, Jaffa, Acre, Jericho, and [Beersheva]. The less accessible and more rugged areas of the countryside escaped British control for a longer time.”<sup>38</sup>

The consequences of the Great Revolt, as it was known, cannot be understated. It took two years for Britain to quell it, through a strategy of battle, repression, and negotiation. After signing the Munich Agreement with Nazi Germany in September 1938, the Mandatory power committed ten thousand troops to an intensive military campaign in Palestine that laid waste to crops, cattle, property, and lives. It imposed harsh, martial law in the territory it reconquered, and imprisoned, expelled, and executed militants and anyone Britain believed supported them. The events upended the Arab leadership and left the population without any sort of national direction. Five thousand Palestinians died, and another 10,000 were wounded; more than one in ten men were killed, wounded, imprisoned, or exiled. Those who remained endured severe repression. From this point on, the population sorted into narrow, shared interest associations instead of into a broader, political movement. Meanwhile, the Yishuv economy expanded thanks to the Arab boycott, and its members acquired valuable military experience. The coming 1947-8 War would predictably end in disaster for the Palestinian Arabs.<sup>39</sup>

#### **EDUCATION AND ADULTHOOD**

Yamani turned fifteen in 1939 and was still a student. His parents were illiterate, and committed to educating their oldest son. Yamani’s first lessons were with a shaykh, who taught him how to read from the Qur’an, but Suhmata’s school principal, who was from Safad, advised Yamani’s father to broaden the child’s studies, and the family enrolled Yamani in the town. Suhmata’s school was founded in 1886. It offered primary

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<sup>38</sup> Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, 107.

<sup>39</sup> On the Great Revolt, see: Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*; Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, 105–24.



education and had a garden, where students learned to grow crops, raise poultry and rabbits, keep bees, care for a farm. The principal met regularly with the parents, and Yamani remembers that national school administrators esteemed him for his resourcefulness and commitment. I wonder about the veracity Yamani's account, considering it dates from his early youth, but in any case he adopted a similar pedagogical approach as a principal in exile, adding practical lessons to the UNRWA school curriculum and involving parents in school administration. The only other school in Suhmata was an agricultural one, established during the Mandate period, so when Yamani finished his courses in the village, he attended the primary school in Tarshiha. He also took English lessons in the summer. Yamani attended school in Safad for his secondary education, then Acre, then the Arab College in Jerusalem. The many transfers tested Yamani's family's resources, but at least in this way he was introduced to students from other parts of Palestine, and one of his close friends in the Arab College was from distant Majdal, the site of present-day Ashkelon.<sup>40</sup>

This peregrination was necessitated by the scarce supply of schools for Arabs in Palestine, and though new ones opened in the villages during the mandate, they were still too few and underfunded, and the curriculum was of a very low quality. Only 277 of the country's 780 villages had schools in 1932; this proportion grew to 432 out of 800 in 1945. But the cost of construction had fallen overwhelming on the villagers themselves, as the Mandate government had only funded five new Arab schools in the whole of the country between 1918 and 1945. Moreover, many of the schools, like Yamani's in Suhmata, did not even offer a full complement of the elementary grades.<sup>41</sup> Yamani's scholastic experience was very much the archetype of village education in Mandate

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<sup>40</sup> His education: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:45–72. Date of Suhmata school's establishment, *Ibid.*, 1:84.

<sup>41</sup> Statistics from Miller, *Government and Society in Rural Palestine*, 98, 102, 152.

Palestine. British policy aimed to keep villagers in the countryside and reinforce rural norms (effectively reducing them to stereotypes), so curriculums focused narrowly on practical, agricultural education at the exclusion of other technical training and the liberal arts, and some schools like Yamani's school kept gardens and livestock to serve this priority. Qualified teachers were put off by low salaries and the prospect of impoverished, village living – a concern not at all allayed by deep, British neglect. By the late 1930s, the Colonial Office recognized that the system produced substandard bureaucrats, and the 1937 Peel Commission warned that the policy was alienating the Arabs. Khalil Totah, the headmaster of the Ramallah Friends' Boys' School, told the commission, "It would seem that Arab education is either designed to reconcile Arab people to this policy [of the Jewish National Home] or to make the education so colourless as to make it harmless, and not endanger the carrying out of this policy of the Government," comparing it to the provision of Jewish education. Already in 1932 the High Commissioner knew that the Arabs were referring to it jeeringly as *siyasat al tajhil* – the policy of making ignorant. Villagers recognized education as a ladder for social mobility, and like Yamani many students migrated to the cities in its pursuit. Villages did what they could to open new schools and attract qualified teachers, and leaders applied unwavering pressure on the government for improvements.<sup>42</sup>

There were many times when poverty threatened or complicated Yamani's studies. He received word of his acceptance to the Arab College with joy, then distress, knowing he could not afford the books or attire that the College required. But his teacher in Akka sent him off with a parting gift: the books his courses would require, a suitcase of clothes, and five pounds. In Jerusalem, a friend gave him a college jacket, and another

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<sup>42</sup> On education in the villages, see *Ibid.*, 90–118 & 151–55. Quote from p. 96.

taught him to tie a necktie. These experiences, too, would inform Yamani's priorities as a principal in exile, and he demanded insistently that UNRWA provide more financial support to Palestinian students.

Yamani's first jobs were in the service of the Mandate administration. He worked for a year as a bureaucrat at the Bureau of Agriculture in Acre and then was lured away to the Bureau of Public Works in Haifa for a higher position and better salary. Yamani's coworkers were Arab and Jewish, and he noticed that Jews commanded better salaries and held most of the higher positions. He also suspected that they were stealing resources for the Jewish civil engineering firm Solel Boneh and was tasked by the German deputy administrator of the Haifa Bureau, Julian Viblotch, to investigate. Yamani collected evidence and Viblotch submitted a report with the accusations, but the central administration refused to act on it, and Viblotch was assassinated shortly after.<sup>43</sup>

The events led Yamani to seek out the Palestinian Arab Workers' Society (PAWS), and he offered to organize the Arabs at the Public Works Bureau. After he organized one hundred of his coworkers, the Society sanctioned the establishment of a union. The workers learned quickly, though, that they could multiply their influence at the Jerusalem headquarters by organizing all of the Public Works Arab workers in Palestine, so they established new branches and elected Yamani to serve as the syndicate's leader, its secretary. Before long, Yamani had quit his job and worked full-time, for less pay, for PAWS Haifa. He supervised four unions of workers of the Public Works Bureau, the Survey Department, the Municipality, and the port.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:104–8. I believe the events took place in 1943–4, if I assume that Yamani graduated from the Arab College at age 18 (1942) and worked for a year in the Bureau of Agriculture in Acre.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:116–9 & 122.

The PAWS operated as an umbrella organization for a variety of professional syndicates and company labor unions. Some of its initiatives were for the general benefit of its membership, such as purchasing or contracting housing in bulk and renting or reselling it at reasonable prices, operating an employment bureau, extending credit and financing savings, and operating a consolidated depot to rent and sell tools. The Society also sponsored cooperatives for artisans and contractors to control prices, regulate market entry, and bargain collectively on behalf of their independently operating members: these included the cooperatives of the lamb butchers, port container operators, welders, and tailors of Haifa.<sup>45</sup> Its general roles in strikes and negotiations were to liaise between workers and employers and to lock out scabs and strikebreakers, in order to protect workers from retaliation and to secure the maximum possible concessions.

For example, when the Haifa port workers – who were contracted as day laborers – decided to demand steady employment, they quietly requested the PAWS to negotiate with the port authority on their behalf, so that the lead organizers would not have to reveal themselves and jeopardize their employment. Yamani, now working full-time for the Society, presented their demands to the port administration but was rebuffed, so he invited the leaders to the Society headquarters to organize a strike in secret. They planned to have workers walk out after the day shift, while the Society would refuse entry to the night shift and to any scabs, and they would maintain the stoppage until the port relented. Unfortunately, the port authority found out the plan and on the appointed day locked some of the day workers into a warehouse. Yamani, though, still had his ID card from his Public Works Bureau employment, and he gained access to the warehouse under false pretenses. He confronted the shift foreman, also an Arab Palestinian, and loudly berated

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1:111–6.

him for betraying the workers, which provoked them to push through the doors and leave. This won him an audience with the port's Arab Palestinian deputy administrator and British chief administrator, Arthur Kirby, and he negotiated as an interim solution to have the port immediately pay higher wages, provide new uniforms, reduce shift lengths from twelve hours to eight, recognize the workers' union, and promise to address the remaining demands promptly. The workers accepted the offer and resumed work, though they took revenge on the foreman who had kept them in. They beat him so badly, he spent three weeks in recovery, and the new union's administration donated twenty-five pounds to offset some of his hospital expenses.<sup>46</sup>

#### **THE PALESTINIAN ARAB WORKERS' SOCIETY**

Yamani had entered the workforce around 1943, and conditions were ripe for labor activism in the wartime economy. Demand for labor was high, but rocketing inflation was driving down real wages – by one calculation, the cost of living index nearly tripled between 1939 and 1945.<sup>47</sup> The PAWS was the most powerful Arab workers' society of Palestine, but it was by no means the only one; its chief rivals to represent the Arabs came from the left, in the form of the Federation of Arab Trade Unions and Labor Societies and the Arab Workers' Congress. Both were the intellectual associates and heirs of the Palestine Communist Party and, unlike the PAWS, showed a willingness to coordinate strikes with the Zionist Histadrut union to strengthen their bargaining positions. (The distinction between the FATULS and the AWC blurred after the war).<sup>48</sup> The gulf between the Leftists and the PAWS was at times pronounced. In its

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1:142–6. This incident must have occurred between 1944 and 1945, before Yamani transferred to the PAWS Jaffa office. Kirby also managed the Palestine Railways until the partition.

<sup>47</sup> Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, 268.

<sup>48</sup> FATULS and the AWC were not Zionist sympathizers, though – they called for the establishment of a unified, Arab, democratic state across all of Palestine, which would recognize Jews as a minority but treat them as equals. To paraphrase David Ben-Gurion: The Palestinian Arab Left (Marxists, ex-Marxists, and

efforts to marginalize the Histadrut, which for nearly two decades had been trying to organize Arab workers within its own framework, the PAWS would sometimes ask Arabs to refrain from striking with Jewish coworkers, or would settle for quick negotiations in the hopes of winning the favor of the Mandate administration. Whatever the political merits of this strategy, it opened the PAWS to criticism that it sold out the Arab laborer for the national cause. Critics complained its leadership was high-handed and doctrinaire, and that its leader, Sami Taha, was conservative and in thrall to the discredited and largely exiled Arab Higher Committee political elite.<sup>49</sup>

This rift over anti-Zionist strategy has riven Palestinian politics from the Mandate era to the present, and Yamani's memoirs should be read in this light. Should Palestinians (and Arabs, in a larger sense) seek salvation through class struggle or unity and the pan-Arab nation? How exclusive are the associations by class and nation? Can Palestinians disassociate Judaism from Zionism in the context of their anti-imperial and class struggles? Who are the allies of Palestinians masses and who is figuring to subjugate and exploit them? The Nakba appeared to Yamani to have vindicated the PAWS and Arab Nationalist strategy to subordinate class struggle to the national cause. That the Palestinian and Lebanese Communists endorsed the 1947 UN Partition resolution, in line with the Soviet Union's vote, further confirmed it. But the Palestinian political leadership, to which Yamani belonged practically his entire adult life, continued to wrestle with these questions. Were Arab Nationalists Nasser's lackeys, were they too doctrinaire, and were they wrong to entrust Palestine to the pan-Arab cause?<sup>50</sup> Was the

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Socialists) fought labor exploitation as if there were no Zionism and Zionism as if there were no labor exploitation.

<sup>49</sup> Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, chap. 7–8.

<sup>50</sup> I discuss this criticism of Arab Nationalism in Chapter 3. See also Turki, *The Disinherited*. Turki grew up in the Lebanese refugee camps and was a partisan of the pan-Syrian movement.

armed struggle too unprincipled, and did it neglect governance and welfare and the class struggle? Did the PLO sacrifice the refugees outside of Palestine for those inside it, and self-determination for empty statehood?<sup>51</sup>

In Yamani's admiring profile of Taha, the PAWS leader, he evokes the reverence of a young man for his mentor. That is, in defending Taha's leadership, Yamani defends his own; in defending Taha's political philosophy, he defends the foundations of his own; in defending the compromises and sacrifices Taha made for his cause (remaining in Palestine), he defends those he made for his own (returning home). Taha was born in 1915, in Jenin, but his father moved the family to Haifa to find work while he was still a child. When he died, Taha dropped out of school to support his mother. He spent his whole career in the employ of the PAWS, joining as a messenger and ascending to the position of General Secretary in 1946. When the port administration of the strike described above refused to negotiate with Yamani on account of his apparent youth, Taha obliged them with a visit, but only to say that Yamani enjoyed the full confidence of the workers, and then walked out. In the few years he worked for Taha, Yamani observed him meld civic organization with national defense and subordinate labor activism to patriotic duty.<sup>52</sup>

Yamani used to notice a regular stream of figures gathering in Taha's office, behind closed doors. His curiosity got the best of him and he asked Taha about the goings on – the financial statements made it clear that these were not anonymous financiers. Taha confessed that they were trying to form a nationalist association to defend Palestine.

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<sup>51</sup> These criticisms have been developed by any number of authors. For example: Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, chap. 5–6; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, vii–xvii, 663–92.

<sup>52</sup> Yamani profiles Taha's life: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:126–41.

Yamani would later collaborate with many of these men to rebuild civil society in exile. They included Ahmad al Shukayri, ‘Amir al Khalil, and Ziab al Fahum.<sup>53</sup>

Taha reached the height of his renown in 1947 when, as a member of the Arab delegation to the London roundtables on the resolution of Palestine, he faced down the British Foreign Minister, Aneurau Bevan, and delivered a stirring speech that denounced Britain for colonizing Palestine and facilitating Zionism. Jamal al Husayni, the head of the Arab Higher Committee at the time, had led the delegation. When Taha returned to Palestine, he organized an 11<sup>th</sup> hour political effort to resist partition, announcing at the PAWS third general conference in August that the Society would reject the cleavage and support instead a democratic, Arab Palestinian state. Taha affirmed that some Jews in Palestine did in fact have their roots in the land and said that the future Arab Palestinian state should offer citizenship to those who had resided there since 1918. He also called for the Arab League and other Arab states to purchase lands in Palestine to prevent further transfers to the Yishuv.

In hindsight, such an initiative seems pitiable, but someone took it seriously, and Taha was assassinated in September that year. Yamani originally suspected that it was the British or the Zionists who ordered the hit to weaken the Arab leadership, but he came to believe the Arab Higher Committee did it, to warn others from bypassing the institution. This was a reasonable suspicion; Taha wasn’t the first of the Husaynis’ political opponents to suffer so.<sup>54</sup> The assassination sparked large demonstrations in Haifa and Jaffa, and the Society struggled to appoint a new general secretary.<sup>55</sup> It did not really

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<sup>53</sup> On the secretive nationalist meetings, *Ibid.*, 1:152–3.

<sup>54</sup> Khalidi writes that al Husayni convinced the 1939 Arab delegation to London to reject the White Paper, partly by threat of assassination. (*Iron Cage*, 117.)

<sup>55</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:136–41. The Arab Higher Committee nominated Ya’qub al Husayni to the post, but the Society declined and offered it to Ahmad al Shukayri, who later led the PLO, instead. Shukayri declined, though, and the Society settled on ‘Amir al Khalil, a Nationalist leader who had been part of the



matter much, though, because the United Nations resolved to partition Palestine six weeks later, and the Society fragmented in the ensuing violence.

By this time, Yamani had moved to Jaffa to serve as the secretary of the PAWS branch there after the Society's leftists split to form its own Conference of Arab Workers in 1945. They had taken with them the Jaffa, Gaza, Jerusalem, and Nazareth offices.<sup>56</sup> Coinciding with the final period before Partition, Yamani's activities in Jaffa revolved increasingly around national defense. In one instance, Yamani arranged a steel theft to benefit an Arab militia, the Ajnadayn Brigade, that would join the Arab Liberation Army in the coming war. Public Works Bureau drivers had informed Yamani that they had been transporting the material to a Zionist settlement, under orders, where it was being used to make armored vehicles. Yamani relayed the information to the military wing of Jaffa's Nationalist Committee, but it asked Yamani to have the drivers transport the steel directly to their offices. So Yamani contacted Michele Issa of the Ajnadayn Brigade, instead, and they worked out a plan to "ambush" the convoy – with the foreknowledge of the drivers. The theater allowed the drivers to feign ignorance to their employer.<sup>57</sup> Then, after the ratification of the partition resolution, Yamani joined the city's Nationalist Committee as the representative of the Arab laborers to coordinate supplies, armament, and resistance.<sup>58</sup>

Yamani's final year in Palestine resembled that of the hundreds of thousands of Arabs who lived in the territory that would become Israel, marked by displacement and

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Arab delegation to London in 1947. He was also a doctor and had managed the Society's health services and insurance. The general suspicion for the murder was cast on the Arab Higher Committee, according to Lockman (*Comrades and Enemies*, 342). On Taha's speech in London, see: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:134–5.

<sup>56</sup> On the split: Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 187. The leftists were unhappy with the Society's nationalist (as opposed to class) orientation and its willingness to compromise on labor issues. See also: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:148–9. Yamani says the PAWS was composed of three currents: the Arab Nationalists, who constituted the majority; the Pan-Syrians; and the Communists.

<sup>57</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:151. This was of course not the first time Arab Palestinians had discovered that the Mandate administration was supplying Zionists for war; such revelations had bred distrust towards the British throughout the '30s. Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 1:156–7.

terror. The PAWS summoned Yamani back to Haifa as Jaffa descended into chaos. There he secured the organization's documents and delivered them for safekeeping to a delegation of the Lebanese Red Cross in Acre. Then he returned to Suhmata, where he joined the village's coordinating committee and the regional committee for the Galilee. They attempted to maintain basic civil services, and they strengthened connections to Lebanon after the Zionists took Acre. Yamani's father urged him to flee with the family to safety in Lebanon, promising to return when hostilities would subside. Yamani refused, stayed with a guerrilla cell of three, and waited for the Israeli army to arrive. They were arrested and kept in prison until early 1949.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 1:157–209. See also: Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 86. Yamani is quoted under the initials “R.M.”

## 2. Reconnecting in Exile

### INTRODUCTION – THE NAKBA – CONDITIONS OF EXILE

Though *nakba* (translated as “the disaster” or “the catastrophe”) connotes a moment resolving instantaneously in time, Palestinian refugees experienced the process of displacement as a years-long ordeal. Many fled from the advancing Zionist front in 1948, propelled by terror, bombardment, and reliable reports of rapes and massacres. Their first priority was to move out of harm’s way; some left immediately across the borders to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, or Egypt, while others relocated to relative safety nearby, only to be forced to move again not long after. Those who remained in their locations in spite of the approaching Zionists – and many families fractured apart in decisions to flee or remain – were liable to be forcibly expelled across the border. Thus, even before reaching a neighboring country, many Palestinians had moved multiple times, displaced from one vulnerable location to another or searching for family members now scattered apart. There are accounts of parents searching among the displaced for their children, who were separated from them in the chaos.<sup>60</sup> By 1949, 131,155 Palestinians had been displaced to Lebanon, according to UNRWA. Most had come from Haifa, Akka, and the Upper Galilee, though a few had come from as far south as Jaffa.<sup>61</sup>

Displacement did not end at the border, either. The Lebanese state had not prepared for this refugee crisis; as a result, diaspora through the country unfolded in an assortment of ways, and for many Palestinians families it would be years if not a decade until their circumstances stabilized. The country’s initial response was coordinated by the League of Red Cross Societies and supplemented by government support and the UN

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<sup>60</sup> Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 81–92.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Alī, *al-‘Ummāl al-Filaṣṭīnīyūn wa-masār al-ḥarakah al-niqabīyah*, 15.

Relief for Palestinian Refugees. But the refugees had fled their homes with minimal provisions, and the scale of need overwhelmed the uncoordinated response. Relying on their own, limited resources and on the charity of individual Lebanese and local and national charities, most refugees headed for the coastal cities looking for work. Many settled in tents, warehouses, or other shelters, or they rented cramped quarters to share with other families.<sup>62</sup>

The state's laissez-faire market orientation and Maronite-controlled executive facilitated some Palestinians in their recovery. At first, there were very few restrictions on employment, and foreign capital was always welcome so long as businesses employed three Lebanese for every foreigner. The middle-class found gainful employment, and professionals resumed their practices. The state granted Christians among them citizenship at first; Muslims of moderate means could also obtain the privilege by paying lawyers and proving Lebanese ancestry.<sup>63</sup>

The privilege turned out to be a very valuable one, because the 1950s saw the government institute a system of regulations restricting Palestinian behavior. In 1951, Interior Minister Emile Lahoud stipulated that the government should treat Palestinians as it does all other foreigners, that is, according to the principle of reciprocity. This meant that the government would grant privileges to foreigners as foreign governments granted them to Lebanese expatriates. Of course, the idea was fraudulent, as there was no Palestinian state to grant privileges to Lebanese, but that was the point. Subsequent rulings deprived Palestinians of access to social security and disability insurance (though they were required to pay into it), limited the number of licenses available to them and

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<sup>62</sup> Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 103–7.

<sup>63</sup> On Lebanese policy favoring Christian and professional and wealthy refugees: Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, 22–26.

made them prohibitively expensive, and curtailed their rights to participate in unions or unionize.<sup>64</sup> Property ownership and travel permissions were restricted, too. Casual labor jobs remained available to Palestinians, but they earned exceedingly little for their toil: 17 times less than Palestinians in “regular employment” and 33 times less than those who operated a private business.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, UNRWA subsidies never exceeded 20 cents per person per day.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, bureaucrats exploited the vulnerable Palestinians, as Rosemary Sayigh describes:

The absence of a clear code regulating Palestinian rights and duties allowed the state to operate a ‘politics of convenience’, using the Palestinians’ need for vital documents (mainly work permits and travel documents) as a means of exercising political pressure, or individual extortion. The supply of work permits also responded to fluctuations in the Lebanese economy’s labour needs. Departments of the state that dealt with refugees – mainly the ministries of the interior, labor and foreign affairs – could issue their own decrees, enabling officials to exploit refugee needs for their own ends. Rules, procedures and fees were constantly changed, producing a situation of confusion and dependence on *wasta* (connections, bribes).<sup>67</sup>

The mass of the underserved refugees – those coming from rural Palestine and from poor, urban origins in particular – saw their conditions deteriorate from dire to impossible. For them, the “UNRWA-managed camps played a basic role in the economic survival of the refugees, especially in the first decade of low wages and limited employment.”<sup>68</sup> Camps provided rent-free shelter, basic rations, water and waste facilities, clinics, and schools, and UNRWA employed Palestinians to provide the various

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<sup>64</sup> Mundus (in Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 140, fn. 47 & 49) calculated that it usually cost 32-37 LL – one to three weeks of a laborer’s income – plus at least one missed day at work for a Palestinian to obtain a work permit. Only one office in the country issued them, in Beirut. Officials would also extort Palestinians for bribes. In 1969, only 2,362 out of approximately 100,000 Palestinian workers held a valid permit. On work restrictions and the onerous permit system, see: ‘Alī, *al-‘Ummāl al-Filaṣṭīnīyūn wa-masār al-ḥarakah al-niqabīyah*, 34–40. On exclusion from social security and union membership, see: Ibid., 13–15.

<sup>65</sup> Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 115.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>67</sup> Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, 24.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 23.

services – Yamani moved to Ghoro, near Ba'albeck, to take a position as a teacher. Some families that could afford to rent their own accommodations at first soon found themselves forced to move to the camps. The camps also afforded the vulnerable refugees security in numbers, and their proximities to the coastal cities promised relative opportunity and income, as compared to the impoverished south and the Beka'. Many Palestinians migrated from one to the other in search of schooling and work. By 1952, one-third of refugees were living in a UNRWA shelter.<sup>69</sup>

<b>UNRWA Camps: Establishment, Surface and Population (1993)</b>				
<b>District</b>	<b>Camp</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Surface (sq. m)</b>	<b>Population</b>
<b>South Lebanon</b>	Rashidiyeh	1936	367,200	22,683
	Al Buss	1936	80,000	8,227
	Borj El Shemali	1949	134,600	16,456
	Ein El Helweh	1949	301,039	38,753
	Mieh Mieh	1956	54,040	3,986
	Nabatiyeh	1956	103,455	Destroyed
<b>Beirut</b>	Mar Elias	1952	5,400	635
<b>Mount Lebanon</b>	Shatila	1949	39,567	7,242
	Borj El Barajneh	1949	104,000	13,877
	Dbayeh	1955	83,576	3,959
	Tel el Zaatar	1949	56,646	Destroyed
	Jisr El Basha	1952	22,000	Destroyed
<b>North Lebanon</b>	Nahr el Bared	1949	198,129	25,148
	Baddawi	1955	200,000	13,545
<b>Beqaa</b>	Wavell-Galilee	1948	43,435	6,618
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,793,087</b>	<b>161,129</b>

Table 1. UNRWA Camps: Establishment, Surface and Population (1993)<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 114–9. Statistic from Peteet, *Landscape*, 108.

<sup>70</sup> Source: Abbas et al., "The Socio-Economic Conditions of Palestinians in Lebanon," 379.

The authorities preferred to consolidate the refugees into camps, too<sup>71</sup>. Relief agencies recommended it as a best practice measure to efficiently distribute aid, and they incorporated one refugee camp in 1948 and six more in 1949 (see Table 1). The government, prefiguring its policy towards displaced Syrians today, wanted especially to move the impoverished refugees away from cities, as a way to undermine their potential political influence. This proved to be a prescient move; Palestinians increasingly engaged in strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations in the 50s and 60s, to assert their identities and existence, and to demand better treatment from employers, the government, and UNRWA. Moreover, consolidated populations are easier to police, as the president's Deuxieme Bureau would prove through its backbreaking vigilance of the camps in the 1960s; Yamani's memoirs speak to the Bureau's unforgiving surveillance. Camp settlement effectively amounted to marginalization, away from public sight and political participation. In this way, the state undermined, or at least erected barriers to, cooperation between Palestinians and marginalized Lebanese, whose interests overlapped. Politicians played on popular perceptions of peasants and the poor as miscreants; the Beirut mercantile elite, in particular, did not want glamorous image of their capital tarnished. Out of sight, out of mind.<sup>72</sup>

Yet, the refugee population amounted to an abundant labor force desperate for income. While the state tried to push refugees out of the cities, especially Beirut, the productivity of the urban economies pulled them back. Employers, especially in manufacturing, construction, and agriculture, too, preferred to have refugees nearby. The Mkalles industrial zone, east of Beirut, drew thousands of refugees to settle in Dbayah,

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<sup>71</sup> On the location of the camps, see Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, 22–26 & 34–45.

<sup>72</sup> On state repression, see Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 130–36. On Beirut politics, see Kassir, *Beirut*, 349–58, 427–36.

Qarantina, Burj Hammud, Tal al Za'tar, and Jisr al Basha. Similarly, refugee settlements in Shatila and Burj al Barajnah, both south of Beirut, grew at exponential rates; not only did Palestinians hope to find work in an agglomerating market, they recognized the value of security in numbers, and once settled near Beirut, they'd send for their families and fellow villagers to join.<sup>73</sup>

The camp locations reflected these various tensions: Relief agencies wanted to concentrate the refugees, the state wanted to isolate them and push them out of the cities, the refugees wanted to work, and employers wanted cheap labor nearby. So, the camps concentrated around the zones between urban and rural. All of the Beirut area camps except for Mar Elias formed in the city's suburbs, accessible to both factories and farms; the capital's growth has swallowed their sites into what is its metropolitan area today, though. Burj al Shimali and 'Ain al Hilwah lie not far outside of Tyre and Sidon, respectively, and serve those two cities' agricultural regions. Nahr al Barid was placed 20 kilometers from Tripoli, in the North. Security forces also directed Palestinians to Rashidiyah and al Bass camps, both near Tyre and both already homes to existing Armenian refugee populations, and to Camp Wavell, a military barracks outside of Ba'albek vacated by the French at the end of the Mandate.

For years, security forces and refugees tangled over where the latter could live. In Tripoli, refugees living in warehouses in the port resisted a police eviction order to Nahr al Barid camp outside the city. A fight ensued, and the police had to call reinforcements to finally execute the order.<sup>74</sup> In Beirut, the government denied water and electricity in a

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<sup>73</sup> Mundus, *Al-'Amal Wa-Al-'ummāl Fī Al-Mukhayyam Al-Filastīnī* is a meticulous account of the conditions of Tel al Za'tar camp and the work behaviors of its inhabitants. Kassir (*Beirut*, 347–436) documents the capital's post-war boom, swelled by the outcome of the Nakba, which closed the border to Palestine and removed the port of Haifa from the Arab market.

<sup>74</sup> Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 107.



protracted but ultimately failed bid to discourage refugees from settling the periphery. Authorities were especially keen to move refugees out of the South, away from the border with Israel.<sup>75</sup> In Tyre, they put families, including Yamani's, on trains and dispersed them throughout the country. Some were sent to the Bekaa, but winter was so bitter there and food so scarce, that they went on strike, and the government transferred them again, this time to Nahr al Barid. Later, in 1956, authorities transferred a contingent of remaining Bekaa Palestinians back to the south, to Burj al Shimali, because conflict had erupted between them and the Armenian refugees who had settled 'Anjar, a town in the east, decades prior.<sup>76</sup> Neglect fueled further migration. While the state had allowed fifteen camps to incorporate by 1956, it permitted no further after that, nor did it allow any to grow in area. Shantytowns (Beirut's "belt of misery," especially)<sup>77</sup> absorbed who the formal camps could not support. Families moved especially to Beirut to enroll their children in secondary or higher education. Authorities tried to force migrants to return by requiring refugees to pick up monthly rations and relief from their places of registration.

This chapter and the next are an account of how Yamani, on an individual level and on behalf of Palestinians in general, weathered the manifestations of powerlessness, chief among them endless insecurity and relocation. His first response was to work for sorely needed income, but he soon left his job and returned, hopeful, to Palestine. After it became clear that he would not be able help the PAWS rebuild, he returned to Lebanon. He found some stability in teaching and school administration, and he worked with

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<sup>75</sup> A Nabatiyah camp resident told Peteet: "In 1955, the government decided that there were too many smugglers between Palestine and Lebanon and that it could affect the security situation – military operations could be undertaken. ... They coordinated with UNRWA to build this camp for these stray groups of people near the border area. They attracted them in a number of ways. ... They said [to my father], 'You are not obliged to pay rent and there will be a school.'" (*Landscape*, 108.)

<sup>76</sup> 'Alī, *al-Ummāl al-Filastīnīyūn wa-masār al-ḥarakah al-niqabīyah*, 15–16.

<sup>77</sup> Kassir, *Beirut*, 488–93; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 109–55.

similarly positioned Palestinians to strengthen the institutions that nourished refugee society and gradually captured political power.

#### **YAMANI – SETTLING IN LEBANON – ORGANIZING IN THE WEST BANK**

Abu Maher al Yamani entered Lebanon on foot in early 1949. After a period of captivity in Israeli jail, Yamani was driven to the border with a few other prisoners and released with a warning. “The soldiers will shoot whoever turns back. Don’t try to return, or you will be killed,” his captors said. The men walked to the border village of Rmeish, south of Bint Jbeil, in the Nabatieh province. They were received kindly by the residents, who comforted them and gave them food and a place to rest.<sup>78</sup>

Yamani planned to travel to Tyre the next day to search for his family, but was astonished to see his maternal uncle in Rmeish in the morning, who was passing by the village to sell his horse to support his family, which had settled in exile in Nabatieh. In Nabatieh, Yamani learned from his relatives that his family had settled near the docks of Tripoli, and he set off for the northern city in a shared van with the few liras his uncle gave him. He found his family in what had become the refugee quarter; their joy of reuniting can hardly be described.

Yamani’s family had settled in a certain Ahmad Mir’ai’s warehouse in the port. Ten families shared the space, each separated from the other by a curtain of bed sheets. Yamani’s family had also crossed into Lebanon through Rmeish, but then turned to Tyre as authorities had directed thousands of entering refugees. They settled temporarily in a camp and received rations and blankets from the Red Cross and clothes donated by the city’s residents, before boarding a train at the orders of the camp authorities to relocate north, to Syria. But the Syrian government had closed its borders to further refugees from

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<sup>78</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:5–15.

Lebanon, and they disembarked at Tripoli instead.<sup>79</sup> Yamani's father went to the Red Cross there and obtained from them a letter acknowledging Abu Maher's prisoner of war status in Palestine, stating he had been arrested on January 8, 1948. Not a few days before Yamani caught up with the family in Tripoli, his father had departed for Palestine to find his son. He traversed the country by night and hid from Israeli police during the day and met secretly with some former associates, but after failing to find out anything about Abu Maher, he returned to Tripoli two weeks later. Of course, he was overcome with emotion to see his son again.

Yamani found work to support the family as an accountant in a chemical factory, but he did not stay in Tripoli for long. A friend of his in the port had just been in Kuwait looking for work, where he met Hosni Salah al Khafash, a companion of Yamani's in the PAWS and the former director of its Nazareth and Nablus branches. Al Khafash asked the friend to deliver a message to Yamani, inviting Yamani to join him in Nablus to revive the PAWS branches in the West Bank. Yamani didn't indicate much hesitation about accepting the proposition; he wrote in his memoirs, "Our friendship was bound by our service to the working class."<sup>80</sup> On October 8, 1949, Yamani left his job and his salary of 20 Lebanese Liras (LL)<sup>81</sup> per week and returned to Palestine.

Yamani would spend about a year organizing workers in the West Bank. There, he learned from the example of the Jordanian state, which had assumed control over the territory, that the Arab regimes could be just as intransigent towards the demands of the working class as the Mandate governments, if not more so. Yamani also discovered the

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<sup>79</sup> The family probably experienced further displacement. It is likely that soldiers forced them to move again in 1957, to Baddawi camp. Peteet writes that a property owner had ordered the eviction of 19 families from the port, including ones from Suhmata. By this year, however, Abu Maher was long gone to work in other parts of the country. (Peteet, *Landscape*, 107.)

<sup>80</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:17.

<sup>81</sup> Exchange rate to US Dollars: see Appendix A.

firmness of his ties from his union days. At every step along his journey to Palestine and across the West Bank, he was met by the hospitality and encouragement of his former associates. He rested in Damascus with Burhan Sarih, a coworker from PAWS – Haifa, and met with ‘Abd al Hamid abu Faris Hamir, one of the earliest leaders of the Society.<sup>82</sup> Yamani stayed with another PAWS associate, from Tarshiha, in Irbid, and in Amman, he met with ‘Amir ‘al Khalil, who served as the interim president of PAWS after Sami Taha was assassinated. As he had managed with Yamani, Khafash enticed PAWS leaders from across the Diaspora to return to Nablus to reconstitute the Society’s Administrative Committee and coordinate the activities of the remaining branches in the West Bank, especially Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jenin, and Tulkarm.<sup>83</sup>

It wasn’t long before the Administrative Committee attracted the attention of the Jordanian security services. In Nablus, the PAWS tried to organize a sit-in at the Khalifa al Mikanikiyah factory after management terminated a worker who had tried to organize his colleagues into a union. Jordanian security forces forced the workers out, however, and arrested the Khalifa organizer, and exiled Khafash to the isolated East Bank town of Shobak. Demonstrators took to the streets. Yamani thought he could appeal with the provincial governor, whom he knew when he was a judge in Haifa, but the governor stonewalled him. When Yamani reminded him of the compassion he’d shown to workers as a judge, the governor replied coolly that they were no longer in Haifa. The labor action had failed, and now the intelligence services started to follow PAWS activities with interest: an agent was attending all of their public meetings, and it appeared that the

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<sup>82</sup> ‘Abd al Hamid abu Faris Hamir, whom Yamani met in Damascus, deserves mention, not for his role in this story, which is insignificant, but because his biography is also a transnational history. Abu Faris led PAWS when it was just a railroad workers union in Haifa, though he wasn’t Palestinian himself; he was a Damascene who had moved to Haifa to work. He returned to his hometown after the Nakba. What ambitions and expertise did he take back with him to Damascus? And how did he engage with the nationalist politics that coursed through the newly independent state?

<sup>83</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:16–27.

services had a mole in the Administrative Committee. Not long after, an officer summoned Yamani to the intelligence bureau and informed him that he would be placed under a strict curfew and forbidden to leave Nablus. The PAWS leadership decided that the restrictions on Yamani were too severe and urged him to return to Lebanon, where he could do more good. Dejected, Yamani obliged.<sup>84</sup>

Yamani would return to Palestine 14 years later to attend a conference of the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, held in Gaza. By this time, Khafash had transformed PAWS into the General Union for Palestinian Workers, and the Confederation declared that Arab workers would be the vanguard to secure Palestine's return. Khafash would ask Yamani to establish a branch of the General Union in Lebanon, marking his reentry into the organization he had revived in Nablus years earlier.<sup>85</sup> But when Yamani returned to Lebanon in 1950, he had no foreknowledge of this future. His chapter in Palestine had come to an end.

#### **UNRWA SCHOOLS PRINCIPAL – GHORO (BA'ALBEK) AND 'AIN AL HILWAH (SIDON)**

Returning to Tripoli, Yamani found work as a primary school Arabic and arithmetic teacher at the College of Education. Again, he had found support from his former associates from Palestine: it was Muhammad Khayr Bahlul, who directed a cultural club in Jaffa and who sat with Yamani on the National Committee in Jaffa, who connected Yamani with the position. Bahlul was also exiled in Tripoli and teaching at the College. But Yamani only stayed for a semester. He applied to teach in the UNRWA school system and, in January 1951, he moved to the Biqa' Valley to begin his

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<sup>84</sup> On this attempt to revive the PAWS in the West Bank and Jordan: Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 188–9. The Society was outlawed a couple years later, but the Federation of Trade Unions in Jordan succeeded it in function.

<sup>85</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 3:115–9.

appointment as the Principal of the Ghoro Barracks school, near Ba'albeck. His salary was 150 liras per month.<sup>86</sup>

Yamani took to elevate the roles of the school and principal beyond their official capacities. Recognizing that the school was a nexus of camp society, Yamani arranged a Parents Association that would concern itself with general camp issues as well as school matters. In coordination with the Association, Yamani would postpone classes to allow students to join their parents in demonstrations, some ideological, proclaiming a national character, and some practical, demanding better services from UNRWA. Yamani would also transcribe residents' petitions and present them to administrators. Inside the school, Yamani had his teachers give supplementary lessons on Palestinian history and geography and lead sports and scouting activities. He also arranged classes for illiterate adults and an overnight summer camp for 80 students. No doubt, Yamani's ambitious agenda was facilitated by his familiarity with the refugees: many of the residents of Ghoro, he happily discovered, had hailed from his own Sahmata, and he knew several teachers from home. Moreover, he was already acquainted with the UNRWA Education Administrator for the Biqa' Valley, who used to lead the Tiberias branch of PAWS. Visiting, foreign UNRWA administrators did not seem too happy with Yamani's initiative, however, and sent the head of the UNRWA Education Department, Ernestine al Ghor, to investigate. But Ghor herself was Palestinian, and Yamani spoke his case plainly to her. She returned to Beirut and promoted him to Principal of the much larger 'Ain al Hilwah school, near Sidon, the following year. She noted the commendable test scores coming out of Ghoro.

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<sup>86</sup> On his tenure at the College of Education: *Ibid.*, 2:46. On his tenure at Ghoro school: *Ibid.*, 2:47–57.

But at ‘Ain al Hilwah, as at Ghoro, Yamani’s initiatives extended beyond improving scores. An examination of Yamani’s leadership as ‘Ain al Hilwah school principal reveals how Palestinians in camps endeavored to improve their circumstances and assert a vitalized sense of patriotism.<sup>87</sup>

In the summer of 1952, before his first year at ‘Ain al Hilwah, Yamani attended a teacher training course organized by UNRWA and UNESCO for their staff in Syria and Lebanon. The attendees could use the guidance – like Yamani, many of UNRWA’s Palestinian teachers came from a different professional background. Yet, the official purpose of the course seems ancillary to its function of bringing scattered leaders together. One hundred and fifty teachers attended this course, and one hundred had attended a similar course the year prior. “These two courses strengthened the ties between the teachers in Syria and Lebanon. The teachers would exchange notes on methods, circumstances, and management.”<sup>88</sup> These relationships had consequence. Privately, the teachers organized an informal network to collaborate among themselves in Lebanon and selected Yamani to maintain correspondence with Subhi abu al N’aj, who represented an analogous association in Syria. Three years later, the two groups of teachers coordinated strikes against the UNRWA administrations of both countries.

When Yamani arrived at ‘Ain al Hilwah, there was only one school for nearly 1,000 students, and it offered no secondary-level classes and no classes on Palestinian history and geography. He set about to overcome both deficiencies in his first year. Drawing on the connections he had made through the training courses, Yamani coordinated with the principals of the Ghoro, Ta’albaya, Beirut, Tyre and Nahr al Barid

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<sup>87</sup> On his tenure at ‘Ain al Hilwah School: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:57–69. On educational access for Palestinians in Lebanon and the role of schools in building a national consciousness, see Peteet, *Landscape*, 50–91.

<sup>88</sup> On the UNRWA teacher training courses: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:74–7. Quote from p. 77.

schools to write and distribute texts on Palestinian history and geography. This would motivate UNRWA to finally incorporate a similar text into the official curriculum. The principals also coordinated to distribute a uniform Palestinian oath for students and scouts to recite across Lebanon at the beginning of each day.<sup>89</sup> For his students who passed the primary-level baccalaureate exam, Yamani arranged the school's first secondary-level classes, and he invited graduates of the nearby Mieh Mieh camp school to attend, as well. For books, Yamani sent a delegation to Beirut with 1,000 LL to purchase them secondhand; the money had been collected by camp residents in three days, and presented to him as a surprise. UNRWA gave sanction the new classes and, two years later, opened secondary school in 'Ain al Hilwah. Yamani also established the camp's first library and concentrated its collection on Palestine.

As at Ghoro, Yamani believed that physical conditioning was an integral part of growth and education. He organized gym classes, sports teams, and tournaments, and he arranged to play matches at the Sidon Municipal stadium and to have UNRWA award official certificates. Teams would also travel to other camps to compete with students there. These arrangements, along with public rallies and commemorations, were important rejections of the state's attempts to isolate the peasant and poor refugees.

The commemorations elevated 'Ain al Hilwah's position as a hub of Palestinian activity in the Sidon area. Refugees from Mieh Mieh and Sidon and towns all around would descend on 'Ain al Hilwah for important anniversaries – the Nakba, the partition of Palestine, and the Battle of Hittin. Yamani drew on scouts to invigorate the memorials through rallies and chants, and though public demonstrations could not leave the gates of the camp (the Lebanese security forces forbade it), refugees came to attend. Yamani's

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<sup>89</sup> Yamani claims to have written the oath; I cannot be sure, but, in any case, a search on Google indicates it has fallen out of use. Only a couple of obscure social network pages list the lyrics. Yamani transcribes them in *Ibid.*, 2:61.



commemoration of the Battle of Hittin, in particular resonated with the refugees, most of who had come from the Galilee and some even from the village of Hittin itself, which was depopulated in 1948. The Battle has been mythologized by Arab Nationalists as a symbol of Arab unity that dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In it, Salah al Din led a force from Damascus that included a brigade of men from Mosul – who had come to aid their Arab brethren – to reconquer Hittin from the Crusaders and expel them from Palestine. In school, students recited commemorations of the Battle. On another occasion, they performed a play to a mixed, Lebanese and Palestinian audience about the treachery of the Balfour Agreement and Britain's deceit. These memorials instilled pride and hope in the traumatized, bitter, and disinherited refugees.

Yamani was one of many likeminded men who undertook such initiatives. Farj Mu'ad, the principal of the Nahr al Barid camp school, might have been his closest associate. Mu'ad had organized the first Palestinian teachers associations in Tripoli, the Bika', Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre. He and Yamani both believed that unions, schools, and scouts could be vehicles for nation building and return. During this period, while Yamani was principal of the 'Ain al Hilwah school, he and Mu'ad approached Ziad al Fahum, the Inspector General for the UNRWA Education Department, with the idea to expand the scouting movement beyond the schools and open it up to all young men. Fahum was a Palestinian, older than Yamani. He had fought the British mandate tenaciously in the 1936 revolt and was consequently exiled to Iraq. There, he took up arms as a partisan of Prime Minister Rashid 'Ali al Gaylani against the monarchy propped up by Britain. He returned to Palestine to fight partition and the Zionist militias, and he was ultimately exiled to Lebanon, where, like Yamani, he decided to pursue resistance through civic leadership. Yamani seemed to trust Fahum absolutely for support in the Agency administration. Fahum appointed one of his aides to assist Mu'ad and Yamani, and he

connected them with ‘Atif Nurallah, the former head of the Scouts of Haifa. Nurallah, in turn, connected them with the Lebanese scouts al Kashaf al Muslim and al Kashaf al Jarah, which supplied the growing ranks of Palestinian scouts with equipment and books.<sup>90</sup>

The scouts became the nuclei of mass mobilization in the camps and the vanguards of the armed struggle under the direction of the UNRWA principals; they symbolized the nation. Pictures show them, young men and women and boys and girls, marching in formation through stadiums and singing anthems to assembled audiences. Some of the lyrics were, “We are the Force of Revenge (*Fawj al Tha’r*) and the Heroes of Sacrifice (*Abtal al ‘Awda*) / We ask for revenge, we don’t seek riches/ Our concern is recovering glory and the nation.”<sup>91</sup> They also represented Palestine at Arab scouting retreats. In 1956, they drilled in Alexandria, and Nasser gave them a rousing speech, having nationalized the Suez Canal shortly before. They hoisted slogans on flags and tucked under their arms thick sticks that mimicked rifles; they wore matching uniforms and kept tight poses. They trained in military exercises, too. Yamani and other principals collected dues through the Military Organization for the Liberation of Palestine, a clandestine association,<sup>92</sup> to purchase pistols, machine guns, and ammunition, and men who used to be police officers in Palestine led the scouts on hikes into the mountains and taught them the fundamentals of combat and wilderness survival skills.

The principals organized a scouting confederation, al Kashaf al ‘Arabi al Filastini, to coordinate activities across Lebanon. On important anniversaries, teachers would hike with contingents of young men to the border and lead commemorations there. These

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<sup>90</sup> On the scouts: Ibid., 3:238–42. Scout activities also described in the ‘Ain al Hilwah pages: Ibid., 2:57–69. Profile of Fahum: Ibid., 2:70.

<sup>91</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:259.

<sup>92</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3

small brigades took the name *Tala'i' al 'awda* (“The Vanguard of Return”). Al Kashaf al Muslim and al Kashaf al Jarah joined them, as well, fixing bonds between the Lebanese Muslim left and the Palestinians that would endure especially in times of civil warfare. Principals also sent scouting delegations to other camps, where the young men would overnight and meet families from parts of Palestine strange to them. Palestinians had settled in Lebanon largely in clusters with their former neighbors – cohabitants of their villages from Palestine, or their hometowns, or their former city neighborhoods. The exchanges broke this insularity, and scouts and students maintained these new, if distant, relationships through correspondence.



Figure 2. Top: al Kashaf al ‘Arabi al Filastini (scouts) drilling in Alexandria. Bottom: Yamani standing with scout leaders.<sup>93</sup>

Scouting activities were not just constructive, though; they diminished the position of the hometown as a place of identification and chipped away at pre-Nakba social hierarchies. In their places, scouting instilled patriotism and contributed to an

<sup>93</sup> Source: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:258. No date, but presumed from the text to be from 1956.

ongoing social transformation of the peasant, laboring, and petit bourgeois classes that had begun in Palestine. What was happening, in essence, was the entrenchment of the state paradigm, whereby Palestinians learned to look to national unity for strength, and to administrators for leadership. In Mandatory Palestine, a form of proto-state had emerged from schools, factories, unions and the government bureaucracy; these were the institutions that had proven most adept at responding to the period's pressures. Exile further favored the state paradigm, partly because the UNRWA administration mimicked a Palestinian government bureaucracy and because the Lebanese state operated as just that, and partly because the leaders of the proto-state institutions in Mandatory Palestine, who had emerged from the Nakba with their reputations intact, were naturally inclined to resurrect these institutions in exile. Scouting, in the eyes of the civic leaders, was a response to the difficult conditions of exile – exclusion, exploitation, powerlessness, indignity, and isolation – that was viable within the framework of the existing institutions – camps, UNRWA administration, the Lebanese state, Lebanese civil society, and the growing sense of patriotism. Simultaneously, scouting continued the social transformation that entrenched the proto-state, Palestinian nationalism, and the authority of the administrators turned civic leaders, such as Yamani, Mu'ad, and Fahum.

In May 1953, Hajj Amin al Husayni scheduled a surprise visit to 'Ain al Hilwah school, which Yamani arranged with just a day's notice. By Yamani's account, the Hajj had desired to meet with camp representatives in Sidon to avoid any possible disturbances that would smear his tour's publicity, but Yamani assured him that a camp audience would be on good behavior. He gathered teachers, parents, and camp representatives to the school's courtyard and announced the identity of their visitor just

before his arrival. The audience was elated: “They jumped up and cheered.”<sup>94</sup> Al Husayni’s visit was brief, but the hosts managed to deliver a few short speeches to him on their activities, their resolve, and the condition of the camps; the Hajj made some remarks in return and promised that the Arab Higher Committee would represent the camp to the Lebanese authorities. A short while later, a delegation of the Higher Committee returned to praise Yamani for the arrangements and offered perpetual financial support to the Kashaf al ‘Arabi al Filastini in exchange for folding the scouting movement into the Committee’s aegis. Yamani declined, and no support was given. Afterwards, according to Yamani, the Higher Committee tried to obstruct the activities of the Palestinian scouting movement and the Shabaab al ‘Arabi al Filastini in Lebanon, and al Shabaab waged a media campaign alleging that the Committee neglected the concerns of Palestinians and hoarded donations meant for refugees.

The British had forced Husayni out of Palestine during the Great Revolt, and he watched the Nakba from exile. But his ego and opportunism did not diminish one bit, and he reprised his role as the self-interested intermediary. After 1948, Husayni bounced between Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and Amman, concerned with keeping the Arab Higher Committee in the good graces of the new, post-independence political elite, and through favoritism he jealously guarded what nominal recognition and authority UNRWA and the Arab governments had granted him. In Lebanon, into the 1960s, the Higher Committee served patronage through permits, funds, and UNRWA job appointments, and it shielded its clients from the Lebanese security forces. Chief among them were the former notables and village leaders, who owed their continuing influence in the camps in part to the Committee. But the variables of exile were too great for the Higher Committee to control

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 2:294.

and, as the above example shows, a new model of civic leadership resisted its influence. At the state level, Arab governments – Nasser’s especially – played off the rival leaders of the All Palestine Government and the PLO against Husayni. With the submission of the PLO to Fatah and the popular, armed struggle, the marginalization of Husayni and the Committee was complete.<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, the residents of Nahr al Barid were innovating an umbrella institution to manage the camp: the popular committee. Popular committees were mechanisms of self-rule that represented each camp as a unit, coordinated services, mediated conflicts, interfaced with UNRWA, and organized rallies in coordination with the scouts, Teachers Associations, and workers associations. The popular committees of the Sahrawi camps in Algeria, for example, afford refugees some autonomy from the state. “Sahrawi refugees take charge of their lives, camp organization, and the distribution of aid... This enables the Polisario [the dominant political representation of the Sahrawis] to act as a buffer against direct intervention and the hegemony of international aid institutions.”<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the committees in Lebanon enabled the Palestinian leadership to mediate between the directives of the authorities and the realities among the refugees.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, we can think of the committees as a mechanism by which the civic leaders extended and entrenched its authority among the refugees. Careful not to rouse the vexation of UNRWA, a clandestine network of civic leaders quietly implemented the administrative design among other camps and Palestinian concentrations. From Nahr al Barid, for example, they had popular committee member Shaykh ‘Ali Sa’id al Qadri, a marriage official who could visit other Palestinian agglomerations without drawing the

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<sup>95</sup> Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, 35–67. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 35–100.

<sup>96</sup> Farah, “UNRWA: Through the Eyes of Its Refugee Employees in Jordan,” 409.

<sup>97</sup> Discussed later, under Arab Nationalist Movement in Chapter 3.

suspicion of the authorities, travel to Baddawi and help organize a Committee there. In this way, they replicated the civic structure and formalized their leadership across Lebanon. Under Yamani's direction a decade later, the committees would lose their autonomy to the PLO and the national cause, and would lose some of their sensitivity to camp-specific issues. Still, they have survived as mediating institutions within the camps until today and constitute one of the popular foundations of the PLO.<sup>98</sup>

Yamani requested to transfer from 'Ain al Hilwah to Burj al Barajneh for the 1954-5 school year. The reason he gives in his memoir is dubious.<sup>99</sup> At the close of the previous school year, UNRWA announced it would open a second school in 'Ain al Hilwah. Yamani would remain the principal of the primary school, and one of his teachers would lead the new, secondary school. Parents and students were not happy with what they perceived was an attempt to marginalize Yamani, and they boycotted the schools and demanded that he remain the principal for all students. But Yamani thought that the UNRWA plan was sound and counseled the demonstrators so. When he couldn't convince them to end the boycott, he abruptly asked for and received a transfer to Burj al Barajneh, rendering the plan *fait accompli*. I suspect, though, there were ulterior motives for Yamani's request. Why was he so ready to leave 'Ain al Hilwah, where he had enjoyed such success? Perhaps he recognized the advantages of operating in Beirut, where he could enjoy closer contact with other civic leaders and expand the initiatives he had championed: the scouts, of course, and the student associations, the parents associations, the Palestinian history and geography courses, the illiteracy classes, the physical education classes, and so forth. Most of all, though, from Burj al Barajneh,

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<sup>98</sup> On the creating the popular committees, and their functions: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 3:225–34. The clandestine network of civic leaders I refer to in this paragraph is *al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini*, discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>99</sup> On the drama around his departure from 'Ain al Hilwah: *Ibid.*, 2:68–9.



Yamani could consolidate the energy of the large but fragmented network of camp teachers associations and direct its efforts towards mobilizing the general public and articulating clear and direct demands to UNRWA and the Lebanese authorities.

#### **BURJ AL BARAJNAH (BEIRUT)**

Encouraged by what the UNRWA teachers had accomplished after gathering through the training courses, Farj Mu'ad organized to have fifteen of them meet privately in Beirut and establish a more formal structure to their network, in 1954. At this point, the Association of UNRWA Teachers in Lebanon was formally established, and the teachers elected six men to comprise its administrative committee. Their names are worth mentioning here, because the Association would remain a forceful advocate for peasant and poor Palestinians in Lebanon, organizing civil society in camps, holding UNRWA accountable to its promises, arranging rallies, and lending leaders to the various factions of the ascendant Palestinian Resistance Movement. They were: Elias Jarayasi, 'Uthman Fa'ur, Ibrahim al Sakhnini, Nathmi al Kan'an, Farj Mu'ad, and Ahmad al Yamani, with Yamani elected Secretary and Mu'ad Vice-Secretary. Thereafter, the Association met on a roughly semi-monthly basis in Beirut, usually at Café Qasqas in Hamra, and collected membership dues of 25 piasters per month. Yamani coordinated their activities from his position as Principal in Burj al Barajneh.<sup>100</sup>

Official correspondence that Yamani preserved indicates that the Association behaved as a union in its dealings with UNRWA.<sup>101</sup> In 1955, they engaged with the Agency to secure raises and school and camp improvements. An account of this episode casts light on the Association's motivations and tactics, which include careful

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<sup>100</sup> On the formal organization of the association: Ibid., 3:27–8. On his tenure at Burj al Barajnah School: Ibid., 2:69–74.

<sup>101</sup> Copies of correspondence in Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 3:29–61.

preparation, strikes, publicity, and negotiations. As a consideration of Yamani's tenure in 'Ain al Hilwah illustrates, camp circumstances did not improve because of some natural progression of time, nor out of concessions granted out of the goodness of administrators' hearts; here, too, civic leaders manipulated UNRWA into action, with the primary difference between 1955 and the years before it being that the teachers were more assertive in their affiliation and demands. This was a natural continuation of the work that camp leaders had initiated prior.

In January 1955, the Association agreed that UNRWA had not made good on earlier promises to increase wages and wrote to the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States to have them present the matter to the agency. In the letter, the Association complained that inadequate wages threatened the quality of education and pointed out that UNRWA drivers were paid 250 LL per month plus allowances whereas teachers were paid just 200 (this was for the breadwinner of a family of four). We learn that UNRWA operated roughly 40 schools and employed 320 teachers at the time, and, if the claim is to be believed, that students in UNRWA schools performed, on the whole, better on standardized tests than students in state and private schools. The Association also agreed to stage a hunger strike in front of UNRWA headquarters.

At the UNRWA headquarters on the appointed February day of the strike, an Agency director received the gathered teachers and principals and passed along their demands to officials who were presently gathered to discuss the camps. The Association suspended its strike as a gesture of good will. It does not appear that they were satisfied with the outcome however, because they escalated their actions and their demands over the next few months.

In March, the Association implied a threat to join with the striking UNRWA teachers in Syria, who had received some coverage in the newspapers for their demands

for better pay. In April, they confronted a UNRWA director at his home and made clear that their patience was running out. They demanded better pay, investment in the schools, and formal recognition of their Association. Two weeks later, the Association in Lebanon announced its cooperation with its counterpart in Syria and protested the news that demonstrating teachers in Damascus were winding up in hospitals. The teachers planned to meet privately in early May to plan their next steps, but UNRWA caught wind of it and asked the Lebanese government to prohibit the gathering. Perhaps the Agency impressed upon the government that the teachers were Arab Nationalists, which the Presidency considered a threat to the state. In any case, George Himri, the head of the state's Central Committee for Palestinian Refugee Affairs, summoned Yamani to the Presidential Palace, listened to his grievances, promised the state's cooperation, and requested that he call off the Association's meeting. Yamani refused, and security forces broke up their meeting the next day. Himri arranged to mediate a discussion between a handful of Association representatives and Mr. Courvoisier, the Director of UNRWA-Lebanon, though, and Yamani presented Courvoisier 17 demands.

The Association's demands give us a picture of the conditions of UNRWA schools and administration in 1955: Class sizes exceeded 40 students; instructors taught over 30 class periods per week; breaks did not coincide with those of the state school system; teachers faced arbitrary dismissal; teachers were not compensated for moving expenses when assigned to another camp; and some of the districts had no UNRWA secondary schools. The teachers also demanded that the Agency offer higher salaries, ranging from 150 to 320LL (\$46-\$98) per month plus a family size allowance and family health insurance, and they demanded supplies and new books, texts on Palestinian history and geography, free education through secondary school for the children of teachers continuing education grants for the top teachers, and labs for secondary schools.

Within the Association though, members were starting to burnout, and they asked Yamani why they should agitate if they've been promised raises in July. Yamani reminded them that the struggle was a matter of patriotic duty and workers' pride. "The teachers' cause is not just a material demand; it is a public one that has been present since the day the schools opened, and it has no end. For this reason, I again ask all teachers to put the interests of their students in front and to work cooperatively to promote the most consummate levels of social and educational attainment."<sup>102</sup> It's unclear how this situation was resolved, though, because in June, Yamani was arrested for distributing an incendiary pamphlet that accused the UNRWA administration of serving Zionism.

The document in question, pseudonymously signed by "Al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini," was called "Agent and Agent" (*Wikala wa Wikala*), and it accused the UN Relief and Works Agency of conspiring with the Jewish Agency to complete the partition of Palestine. "Just as the Jewish Agency... expelled the Palestinians from their homes, we see that the international Agency (Zionist Agency #2) also exiles the Arab Palestinians and keeps them out of Palestine," it said.<sup>103</sup> It called Courvoisier a Zionist and said his directorship was poisonous and aimed to annihilate any hope of Return. Courvoisier complained to Himri – the same state official who would mediate between the Teachers Association and UNRWA in May – and the agency and the Interior Ministry recruited camp informants to trace the source of the document. They arrested Yamani, three students, and a Sidon publisher, and a court sentenced Yamani to a few months in prison for publishing illegally. (Palestinians were proscribed from engaging in political activity at the time). UNRWA – Courvoisier, specifically – fired him in August.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 3:43.

<sup>103</sup> The memoirs contain documents pertaining to the trial, Ibid., 2:181–91. The incriminating pamphlet is photocopied to p. 182.

The episode revealed a sliver of Yamani's clandestine activities. It came out at the trial that Yamani had started publishing similar materials when he was assigned to 'Ain al Hilwah. He had distributed over 9,000 copies by mail to other teachers, influential figures, leading refugees, and UNRWA's foreign administrators and its local staff. He testified that only he and the three students were involved, but this was at least a half-lie. Yamani had been engaged in clandestine publishing activities since he had lived in Tripoli. He had penned and distributed numerous pieces to rally workers and refugees, in coordination with other similarly ascendant civic leaders, who more often than not shared a faith in Arab Nationalism.

### 3. Expanding Organizations

#### ASSOCIATING WITH THE ARAB NATIONALIST MOVEMENT – *AL THA’R* NEWSPAPER

When Yamani returned to Lebanon after helping Hosni al Khafash to revive the PAWS in the West Bank, in 1950, he brought with him a document that he had received in Jerusalem from a former notary from Jaffa, ‘Abd al Halim al Yassin. It was a manifesto titled “Arab Nationalism: Facts, Clarifications, and Methods.” Yamani appreciated it not just for its contents but also because men he had admired had it read before him, including Taha, ‘Amir al Khalil, and “other intellectuals.” It is photocopied into his memoirs with the note, “I kept this valuable gift of theory with me. It furnished the basis of my national consciousness. I thought it beneficial to record the document in its entirety as an article of Nationalism that predated the establishment of the Arab Nationalist Movement. In my opinion, it remains suitable as a unifying, modern, *nahdawi* project.”<sup>104</sup>

The opening lines immediately give us a sense of why Yamani subscribed to Arab Nationalist thought:

Arabism, or the Arab Cause, is what we call the movement the Arabs have undertaken to liberate themselves from colonialism and slavery, poverty and ignorance, and the other weaknesses. They comprise the powerful, civilized Arab Nation and through it they preserve their physical and moral existence, carry their cause, and deliver their message to the people and the civilizations of the world.<sup>105</sup>

Arab Nationalism offered Palestinians deliverance and salvation. Several scholars have traced its genealogy of the idea from the late Ottoman period, through the Mandate and into exile. In fact, its content is less consequential to this story than the fact that the idea

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 2:29.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 2:136.

was widely shared. Yamani's memoirs reveal that camp leaders relied heavily on the organizational framework and material support offered by Arab Nationalist associations in order to rebuild civil society. By the late 1950s, the Palestinian section of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in Lebanon, which calling itself *al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini*, was directing considerable attention and resources to the camps, from coordinating between the various Popular Committees to representing refugees to the authorities to arranging to have Nasser's government supply teachers to a camp school. Because of overlapping associations, the leading camp institutions were nearly interchangeable – al Shabab, the Teachers Association, the Popular Committees, and the scouts – and Arab Nationalism came to undergird important refugee social institutions.

Back in Tripoli, Yamani turned to some of his old Nationalist acquaintances for practical and moral support. Muhammad Khayr Bahlul, who used to direct the Arab Nationalist cultural society in Jaffa, set Yamani up with his first teaching job, at the Teaching College. Yamani again depended on the man, who had access to the College's printing press, to print pamphlets for his Nationalist organization, the Military Organization for the Liberation of Palestine (MOLP).

The MOLP began as a group of five Tripoli refugees, Yamani among them, who met intermittently to share readings, commiserate, and support each other.<sup>106</sup> Yamani and Fadah had been friends in Palestine and companions in the PAWS in Jaffa. In their first meeting, Yamani shared an essay that he'd found while passing his time in a local college library. Written in 1935 by the great Syrian Arab Nationalist orator 'Abd al Rahman al Shahbandar, the essay had called for Palestinians to remain steadfast against Zionist immigration and refuse to migrate away from the coast and leave the cities and the

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<sup>106</sup> The other men were Fayiz Fadah, Salih Qasim, Muhammad 'Atawi, Khalid 'Abd al Wahab. (Ibid., 3:14.)

cultural legacy to the immigrants. “What will you say to the future generations?” it asked. “What good will the religion of the Arabs have amounted to, their distinction, their knowledge, their glory, and their modernity – what good would all of these amount to if you surrendered this eternal and valuable heritage for a dilapidated, provisional, and cheap one?”<sup>107</sup> The discussions inspired the young men to form the formal association to mobilize other Palestinians, reject their circumstances, and return to Palestine.

Contrary to its name, though, the MOLP didn’t practice violence – they had no weapons. The young men thought it would be a good idea for it to sport a menacing label, and they sent threatening pamphlets to the League of Arab States and other authorities denouncing “reactionary” Arab regimes and the international community’s treachery. At the top of the pamphlets sat the logo, a map of Palestine with the slogan “For an Arab Palestine, Death Does Not Scare Us,” crossing through the middle. They delighted upon finding a picture in a newspaper in 1950 with the caption, “Azam Basha [head of the League of Arab States] shows Ahmad Hilmi Basha [Ahmad Hilmi ‘abd al Baqi, the Prime Minister of the All-Palestine Government] a threatening letter he received from the Military Organization for the Liberation of Palestine.”<sup>108</sup> They read another report that the Jordanian government had sent a delegation of intelligence officers to help Lebanon track down the MOLP, after the organization had sent Jordanian authorities a letter demanding they stop disrupting Palestinian political activity and release all Palestinian prisoners. In these early stages of organization, distributing pamphlets and exchanging ideas was the sole method of mobilization, and the young men shared their materials at their workplaces and expanded their network. Yamani recruited members from the Teachers Association in ‘Ain al Hilwah and collected from them small dues to buy

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 3:11.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 3:19.



weapons, which they provided to the scouts to train them. Occasionally, the MOLP members would drill, too. In sum, the Organization didn't amount to much, except that it inspired Palestinian Arab Nationalists in Lebanon to restore their affiliations with one another and preserve their Palestinian identity within the Arab Nationalist Movement, a broader, more powerful current that would eventually incorporate the members.

The Arab Nationalist Movement started as al Shabab al Qawmi al 'Arab, a clandestine association of American University of Beirut students who drew inspiration from their professor Qustantin Zurayk. Zurayk, like the whole of the Arab world at the time, was engaged in a reflection on the state of the region in the wake of the calamitous 1948 defeat. In the place of the bankrupt regimes that had lost Palestine, and in the place of the neglect and imperialism and political fragmentation that retarded Arab society, Zurayk hailed the promise of an educated, invigorated youth to realize the total Arab potential, cast off empire and Zionism, and build a democratic, popular, progressive, and unified Arab nation. "In this process a 'select elite' of Arab youth, 'organized and united through political parties and cohesive organizations, committed to a common and pure doctrine, and bound by a concrete and true loyalty...' would play the major role."<sup>109</sup>

Two Palestinians— George Habash and Wadi' Haddad – and three others formed the ANM's core. Habash and Haddad came from the middle-class families that were expelled in the Nakba from Lydda and Safad, respectively. They both studied medicine and would graduate in 1951 and 1952.<sup>110</sup> The students used to collect donations for refugees and deliver them to the camps; it was in this way that Yamani first became acquainted with them in 1950, when he was the principal of Ghoro. They invited Yamani to speak at their cultural association in Beirut, *al 'Urwa al 'Wuthqa* (The Firmest Bond),

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<sup>109</sup> Zurayk, quoted in Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation*, 11.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 17; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 73.

and he continued to receive delegations in Ghoro and then in ‘Ain al Hilwah. By the start of the 1952 school year, Yamani had become one of the ANM’s principal contacts in the refugee camps, and the movement began to finance camp associations and support them through its publications and its expanding network of contacts. It was at this time that Yamani began to decline donations on behalf of the refugees, concerned that they would engender a culture of dependency among the younger generations and inure them to exile from Palestine; the ANM responded by donating 500 LL to the ‘Ain al Hilwah scouting movement, instead. Shortly after, ‘Adnan Faraj, a junior member, approached Yamani to ask for his help to produce and distribute the ANM’s first publication, *al Tha’r* (Revenge). They published the first issue on October 20. Teachers regularly contributed expositions on camp conditions and criticisms of UNRWA administration.<sup>111</sup>

*Al Tha’r* found a ready audience among Palestinians. To avoid attracting the authorities’ attention to the ANM, they listed a pseudonymous publisher, The Committee of Resistance Against Reconciliation with Israel. The content reflected just that. *Al Tha’r* was speaking to the frustrations of camp refugees when it accused authorities of abetting the Zionist agenda, and it spit vitriol not just at Israel and Western imperial powers but at what it called “reactionary” Arab regimes as well, such as the Hashemite Monarchies of Jordan and Iraq and the Saudi Kingdom of Arabia. It was equally caustic towards UNRWA, which it accused of acting as an agent of Zionism and pointed to its insensitive administration, its appalling services, and its persistent attempts to settle Palestinians in exile and normalize relations with Israel as proof. Its message was direct and clear: Palestinians would never recognize the legitimacy of the Zionist state, and they would accept no outcome but the dissolution of Israel and return. “To reconcile with Israel

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<sup>111</sup> Yamani’s first meetings with the ANM students, and the initiative to launch *al Tha’r*: *Tajribatī*, 4:5–16.

means to concede that the Jews have a right to our land,” said an article by the title “The Dangers of Reconciliation with the Jews.” Another article, titled “The Direct Negotiations,” said, “The UN agency’s resolution calling for direct negotiations between Arabs and Jews is the logical and inevitable result of its weak engagement with the Arab-Palestinian issue after the Nakba... Fundamentally, this is about a nation raped and an Arab peoples expelled from their homes... but disputes over borders and compensation have abandoned the core matter.”<sup>112</sup>

*Al Tha’r* expressed a resentment towards the international community that traced back to 1947 United Nations Resolution 181, to partition Palestine. Palestinians were deeply skeptical of the international community’s intentions in light of its betrayal, and they were further disappointed by its apparent unwillingness to pursue a just resolution. “UNRWA itself was born... because of the failure of the United Nations Palestine Conciliation Commission to – in the terms of its mandate – ‘facilitate the repatriation and rehabilitation of refugees and the payment of compensation.’”<sup>113</sup> *Al Tha’r* articulated the implication: the United Nations was pursuing an emollient approach and setting the status quo. In this light, all UN initiatives seemed suspect. *Al Tha’r* vigorously protested resettlement and naturalization, reflecting the general consensus among Palestinian leaders that such programs aimed to subvert their claims to refugee status and annul their right to return. UNRWA’s own mandate – to “rehabilitate” Palestinians and get them to a point of self-reliance – did it no favors. Palestinians were acutely aware of the agency’s aim to delete them from its rolls, and they rejected its large-scale works projects (the ‘W’ in UNRWA), which they recognized as underhanded attempts to integrate the refugees into the host countries through binding employment. There’s a story retold so often that

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<sup>112</sup> *Al Tha’r* articles copied in Ibid., 4:141–50.

<sup>113</sup> Weighill, “Palestinians in Lebanon,” 304.

its origins have been lost, that refugees used to cut down trees that UNRWA had planted in the camps. These were not acts of ingratitude, though, or of cultural backwardness, but ones of protest. “If it is something that can be brought home when the refugees repatriate (such as literacy, education or training) then it is acceptable. Anything else is resettlement by stealth.”<sup>114</sup>

UNRWA’s top-down directives and inattentive camp administration further alienated the Palestinians. Camp conditions were truly abhorrent. Sewage ran on the streets and access to water, gas, and electricity was severely limited. Floods washed away possessions, storms blew away tents and tin roofs, and harsh winters killed residents. But when UNRWA undertook to make improvements, it did so unilaterally, confirming fears of resettlement and abandonment. “The decision was taken in 1953 to replace tents with semi-permanent shelters. ... Thus the latest of a series of non-decisions resulting in refugees remaining in areas where they had initially been accepted as a strictly temporary measure, and assistance being provided on an extended relief model with all the marginalization and impoverishment that implied.”<sup>115</sup> UNRWA moreover stopped registering refugees in 1953, despite that new families fell into poverty and despair with each year, squeezed out of the Lebanese economy by an ever-tightening system of work permits and regulations. The state’s restrictions condemned Palestinians to unprotected wage labor, while others enjoyed the dividends of a blossoming Lebanese economy. The Palestinians who had registered with UNRWA couldn’t change their residencies, and they risked losing their subsidies and registration if they moved – for education, work, family, or whatever other reason – whether to another part of the country or to another country altogether. State security forces periodically swept the camps to evict those not

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 297.

registered there, and the state and UNRWA coordinated to consolidate refugees and displace them from the cities and the southern Border. Camp leaders loudly protested the inflexible ration and subsidy distribution regimes, which served as another layer of movement restrictions. UNRWA refused to open distribution centers in unofficial settlements, and it required refugees to pick up their rations, in person, at their location of registration, and at appointed times, saddling them with the additional costs of missing work and paying for transportation.<sup>116</sup>

*Al Tha'r* sought to make sense of these many indignities and seeming betrayals. It was as though the international community wanted to set the Zionist project, not undo it. Every offer of assistance was one-half of a Faustian bargain, requiring Palestinians to agree to forfeit their identity in exchange. The paper confirmed to readers the lesson: it was up to Palestinians to represent their own interests to the world, and even to UNRWA; they could expect no favors from the international community except through struggle.

Equally importantly, though, *Al Tha'r* connected the camps. Young cadres were compensated with falafel sandwiches for smuggling issues across Lebanon, and weekly readership grew from 5,000 to 15,000. Salah Salah, a young Nationalist organizer in 'Ain al Hilwah said of the paper, "It was the most influential and most widely distributed voice, and refugees seized copies of it with excitement."<sup>117</sup>

## THE ANM AS A CIVIC INSTITUTION

Existing scholarship on the Arab Nationalist Movement focuses on its political leadership, privileging analysis of the movement's trans-national, pan-Arab activities at

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<sup>116</sup> Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 98–143; Peteet, *Landscape*, 68–130.

<sup>117</sup> Salah, "Unpublished Memoirs" shared with the author. Statistic from Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation*, 31. *Al Tha'r* ceased publication in 1957. The ANM began publishing a new paper, *al 'Awda*, immediately, but it didn't find as much success.

the expense of a probe of its leadership among Palestinian civic life in exile.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the ANM's leaders, foremost among them Habash, ensnared the group in the thick of the Arab Cold War, field mice in a lion's den of battle, and after Nasser refused to sign the Baghdad Pact in 1955 and nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, the Movement had found its Arab Nationalist hero. In 1957, the group agitated against King Husayn in Jordan and sabotaged government targets in the capital, with the help of Syrian and Egyptian intelligence services. In 1958, it fought along the opposition in Lebanon during that country's brief civil war, dispatching members to fight from Tripoli and Tyre, smuggling arms in from Syria, and training with the Syrian-Palestinian 68 Battalion. In 1959, it fomented unrest in Iraq against 'Abd al Karim al Qasim in the lead up to and aftermath of the failed rebellion in Mosul; smuggled Egyptian arms to insurrectionists in Oman; and resumed sabotage operations in Jordan. Meanwhile, it entangled itself in Syria. Enthusiastically supportive of the Nasser-led United Arab Republic, the group could count itself among the losers when the Syrian political establishment dissolved the union in 1961. In 1962 then a year later, it supported a failed coup then a successful one that brought Baathists and Nasserists to power in Damascus but again found itself on the wrong side of history shortly after when the Baathists began to consolidate their power: the ANM had not endeared itself to the Baath by supporting an abortive military rebellion to reunite the UAR.

Wadi' Haddad used to tell new ANM recruits that the road to Tel Aviv ran through Damascus, Baghdad, Amman, and Cairo,<sup>119</sup> but there was an obvious tension between its pan-Arab orientation and the leading concern of its predominantly Palestinian

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<sup>118</sup> This characterizes the standard accounts of ANM histories. I refer over the next three pages to Kazziha's narrow but informative book (*Revolutionary Transformation*) and to Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 35–142 & 231–42.

<sup>119</sup> Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 73.

rank-and-file, to return to Palestine. “The ANM leadership increasingly faced a difficult question: how to reconcile the emphasis on Arab unity with the need for a special focus on Palestine, and to what extent should commitment to Nasser prevent independent armed struggle against Israel?”<sup>120</sup> The weight of this contradiction led Habash and the ANM leadership to authorize a Palestine Committee within the movement in 1959. Habash and Haddad sat at its head, but the committee included lower-ranking Palestinian leaders as well, such as Yamani. They would sometimes operate in Lebanon under the name al Shabab al ‘Arabi al Filastini, presumably adopting it from the pseudonym Yamani had used to sign his pamphlets. In 1963-4, while Habash was embroiled in Syrian affairs, the Palestinians organized themselves into an autonomous branch. It’s not clear whether Habash sanctioned this development, but he had no choice on the matter: the rank-and-file wanted to prioritize Palestine. Habash preferred a centralized, trans-national structure to the ANM, but at least the Palestinian branch developed into his own command.

The division over Palestine overlapped with another fissure in the movement, over whether the Arab Nationalist agenda could afford to overlook the social and economic struggles that divided the pan-Arab polity. On this matter, Habash and Haddad preferred the affirmative: they gave the pan-Arab agenda higher priority, in large part because it spoke more directly to liberating Palestine. The two men, and Haddad in particular, and the bulk of Palestinians in general, simply were not as concerned about class struggle as the Movement’s leftists, led by Nayif Hawatmah, himself a Palestinian, and Muhsin Ibrahim and Muhammad Kishli, both Lebanese. There were three currents running through the ANM, then: the Leftists, led by Ibrahim, Hawatmah, and Kishli; the

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 78.

Nationalists, led by Habash and Haddad; and the Palestine-firsters, led by Haddad and the Palestinian leadership in Lebanon, which included Yamani and others.

But the 1967 defeat exposed the Arab Nationalist slogans as hollow. The Leftists were already convinced that they needed to wage a social and economic struggle, and Ibrahim and Kishli organized the ANM-Lebanon branch into the Organization of Lebanese Socialists and withdrew it from the movement. The Organization would evolve once more and become part of the nucleus of the Lebanese National Movement, the Leftist coalition of the coming Lebanese civil war. At the same time, Fatah's easy ability to recruit from the refugee camps highlighted the popular appeal of liberating Palestine. Habash presided over a merger with the Syrian-supported Palestine Liberation Front to form the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), symbolizing the final triumph of Palestine-first over the Arab Nationalist agenda. As for Hawatmah, he had remained attached to the ANM-Palestine branch and then the PFLP, but in 1968 he led a contingent of Leftists to form an offshoot that would become the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

In fact, the Arab Nationalist Movement was far more enmeshed in Palestinian civic life than this political history suggests. Though the Palestine Committee was not formed until 1959, the Movement had become the fabric for camp society before that. By 1957, it could count forty UNRWA teachers among its members.<sup>121</sup> Documents dated in 1958 and signed al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini, a cover name for the Palestine Committee's network in Lebanon, reveal that Palestinian Arab Nationalists had begun operating with a degree of autonomy in the country before the Committee had even formalized its existence with the central ANM leadership. The makeup of Al Shabab's

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 74.



leadership moreover indicated the overlap between the Movement and camp civil society. Al Shabab's six regional directors were Nathmi Kan'an (Tyre), Ibrahim Husayn 'Ali (Sidon), 'Abd al Karim Hamid (Beirut), Farj Mu'ad (Tripoli), and 'Uthman Fa'ur (Biqā'), and Yamani served as their deputy director and Haddad their director; Kan'an, Mu'ad, Fa'ur, and Yamani used to direct the UNRWA Teachers Association as members of its six-person administrative council.<sup>122</sup> Rallies boasted nationalist pride, and *Al Tha'r* and other publications and pamphlets connected the disparate communities in exile and unified their message.

Reflecting on political engagement among Palestinians in Lebanon in the 1950s and 60s, Salah Salah said it was mediated through the Arab Nationalist Movement. "The political parties were minor to the Palestinians, minor in terms of what they could accomplish within for the camps. You'd find some individuals who were Communists, or Syrian Nationalists, or Baathists, but they didn't have the confidence of the camps. The ones who were truly trusted were the Arab Nationalists. The Arab Nationalist Movement was the primary arena [*al maydan al asasi*], and it provided the distinguishing structures of the camps. It formed the Union of Palestinian Women, the workers associations, the student associations, and the Popular Committees in the camps."<sup>123</sup> Popular Committees institutionalized a network of refugee administration and asserted autonomy vis-à-vis UNRWA and the state.<sup>124</sup> And the scouts became a pipeline to the militias, whether to Al

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<sup>122</sup> *Al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini* documents located in Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 3:62–111 (dated from the 1950s) and *Ibid.*, 4:35–70 (from the 1960s). For the identities of the regional directors: *Ibid.*, 4:20–24. Yamani's own 1966 report on the ANM, presented to the movement's leadership: *Ibid.*, 4:155–70. History of ANM, as told by Yamani, and reflections on its activities: *Ibid.*, 189–212.

<sup>123</sup> Salah, Interview with the author.

<sup>124</sup> Yamani's memoirs indicate that Popular Committees, discussed in Chapter 2, may have emerged independently of the Arab Nationalist Movement. But preserved correspondence indicates that by the late 50s, the Popular Committees were functioning as local administrations within the federalized al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini camp network. (*Tajribatī*, 3:87–97.)

Shabab's *Shabab al Tha'r* (Youth of Revenge) and '*Abtal al 'Awdah*,<sup>125</sup> or later to Fatah or any of the many other clandestine groups. More than just a political-militant movement, the ANM's less heralded, yet equally integral, role was to undergird civil society.

#### **AFTER PRISON – KING SAUD CHARITY SCHOOL – SECOND ARREST**

When Courvoisier terminated Yamani's UNRWA employment in 1955, he had deprived the civic leader of a prominent post. But Yamani had already managed to lay the foundations of the many networks that would support his initiatives in his five years as a school administrator. And while he never stayed in the same job for long, his multiple reassignments allowed him to expand his initiatives and strengthen the social institutions he was assembling across the camps. (This was a pattern that would continue in the years following his termination, when he continued to change jobs as a private schools administrator). "This got me to encounter many teaching colleagues (Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians, and Egyptians), and to connect positively with parents, especially in the Palestinian camps," Yamani wrote. "And it made it easier for me to build organizational rings and cells within the framework of the ANM."<sup>126</sup> Yamani's iron bond with the Movement, as well as with other teachers, students, scouts, and camp residents meant he would waste little time to return to building community after leaving prison.

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<sup>125</sup> Yamani was one of the founding members of Shabab al Tha'r, in the 1950s. 'Abtal al 'Awdah succeeded it as the ANM's primary militia. Neither was particularly consequential until the eruption of the armed struggle in 1968, but they did infiltrate Israel in 1964, two months before Fatah's acclaimed first raid. One man was 'martyred' in the operation, possibly killed by the Jordanian border patrol. It was conducted in such great secrecy, though, that the ANM received no publicity, making it ultimately a waste. (Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation*, 84; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 111.) The militias received training in Syria in 1959-60 and arms from Egypt in Lebanon in 1961 as an outcome of a meeting between Yamani and Nasser in 1959. (Ibid., 79; Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 4:76-80.) More info on Shabab al Tha'r, Abtal al Awdah in Ibid., 4:72-122.

<sup>126</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:104.

Released from prison in August 1955 and terminated from his former employment, Yamani found new work as an assistant to the supervisor to the Beirut Community College, which had had a branch in Ba'albeck. Yamani travelled many times there, and reconnected with his students and former associates in Ghoro. But he was repeatedly harassed and arrested by General Security over the same accusations as before (publishing illegally, organizing clandestine meetings, inciting unrest, threatening authorities with bodily harm, etc.), and he left at the end of the school year in 1956, even though he still had his supervisor's favor.<sup>127</sup>

That was all right, because for the 1956 school year, Yamani was appointed as the principal of the King Saud Charity School for Palestinian Refugees in Burj al Barajnah. The school was founded, as its name would suggest, through a generous donation from the Saudi king, of 10,000 pounds sterling. Saudi Arabia supported Palestinians in exile for decades, and though donations by their nature constrained the autonomy of the refugees, they furnished important social institutions and met a modicum of the refugees' material needs. They also afforded the refugees some independence from UNRWA, and to a large degree Yamani was able to mold this school to his own ideal. This was made doubly possible by the facts that he was school's first principal and that he played an integral role in its establishment.<sup>128</sup>

King Saud School came about as a consequence of a network of cooperation between Palestinian civic leaders and sympathetic, well-connected Lebanese. Among them was Palestinian Ziab al Fahum, still the Inspector General of UNRWA's Education Agency, who had earlier helped Yamani and Mu'ad grow the Scouting movement, and now again worked (presumably clandestinely) with Yamani, who had been expelled from

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<sup>127</sup> On his tenure at Beirut Community College: Ibid., 2:77–9.

<sup>128</sup> On the establishment and administration of King Saud School: Ibid., 2:80–5.

Agency employment. Fahum continued to demonstrate how Palestinians were manipulating UNRWA to meet their needs.

The story begins with an act of tribute to the Saudi king. Muhamad Fistuq was a well-known Palestinian refugee who bred Arabian racehorses. One of them won at the Beirut Hippodrome on a day when King Saud was in attendance, and Fistuq gifted the animal to him. He thanked Fistuq generously and gave him a Cadillac and invited him to Saudi Arabia. Yamani, who was friends with Fistuq, and knowing of the King's charity towards Palestinians, suggested they ask him for the money to open a secondary school for refugees. The two men presented their request to a Royal Advisor, who lobbied the King, who agreed. But Yamani and Fistuq were both Palestinians, and the state's permitting system favored Lebanese. Yamani approached Fahum for help, and the Inspector General connected him with Muhamad Khalid, an eminent Beirut doctor known for his sympathy towards the refugees. Khalid obtained the necessary licenses, and they opened the school. On its four-member board of supervisors sat Khalid (President), Fistuq (Vice President), Fahum (Educational Supervisor), and Khalid al Farj (Member), a member of the Palestinian Arab Higher Committee in Lebanon. Yamani was paid 350 LL per month (\$109).

Three hundred students attended the school. Most of them were Palestinians, whom Yamani had invited from the camps across Lebanon; a few were Lebanese. In both of these traits, the student body bucked the UNRWA mode, which, through its rigid registration system, made it difficult for refugees to attend schools outside their camps, and moreover did not enroll Lebanese students in its schools, deepening the Palestinian isolation from the host country. The school had a science lab and a library, and, in the 1957-8 school year, it opened a Girls' Section with its own female principal, Jamila Khuri, and 60 students.

The school was aided, curiously, by Egypt, despite – or perhaps because of – the animosity between Nasser’s republic and the Saudi Kingdom. The country provided twelve teachers and paid for their salaries after Fahum approached the Culture Attaché. Unfortunately, Yamani doesn’t provide a record of their curriculum, but a speech he gave in December 1958 gives us an idea of his scholastic agenda. He delivered it to an audience of UNRWA teachers at the al Shabab clubhouse in ‘Ayn al Hilwah. It was a lament of their deteriorating efforts as compared to the conviction of the teachers of the early 1950s, especially in their lessons on Palestinian geography and history and Arabic language. Yamani’s comments are fervently patriotic; he stressed the value of a modern, particularly Arab education, and he impressed upon the teachers that their work is in the service in the nation. And he warns again against UNRWA:

We cannot raise our children today as they used to raise them in the Ottoman era, or the Abbasid or Fatimid eras, for if we did that we would produce men ill-prepared to live in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. ... We must teach our students to love in their hearts the greater Arab nation as well as the smaller, local home. This can only happen through service to the society, which transforms abstract patriotism into action... [and by] underscoring the geographic and historical bonds of the whole of the Arab nation. ... Ask yourselves: ... Have you accustomed them to faithful expression, to insight and freedom? ... Have you accustomed them to exert themselves in the service of all, and to distinguish the general from the personal interest? ... Have you engraved on their hearts and minds: Remember Palestine, and prepare to shed your blood for its retrieval? ... Have you taught your students that what is called the Relief Agency [UNRWA] does nothing but squander our masses and exterminate our hopes of return?<sup>129</sup>

As he had done at the UNRWA schools, Yamani instituted Nationalist slogans, rallies, and sports and scouting exercises. He organized to send scouts to a retreat in Alexandria in the school’s first year, and they attended at a moment of heightened Nationalist feeling, when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal; the charismatic leader

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 3:104–11. Yamani emphasized personal development, as well: “The aim of education is to cast strong bodies, cultured minds, and good morals.”

addressed the young men that were gathered from several Arab states. In all, the school represented what Yamani believed belonged to a Palestinian education: a breadth of books, experimental science, Palestinian history and geography, secondary-level classes for boys and girls, physical activity, a geographic cross-section of Palestinian students, association with other Arabs, and mass mobilization and the imbuelement of Nationalist pride. On this last purpose, it appears that Yamani was especially successful. When Ahmad Shukayri, the former Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League (1950-56), the Saudi Ambassador to the United Nations (1957-62), and the first Chairman of the PLO (1964), visited the school in 1957, he said, “This isn’t an ordinary school. It’s a military college.”<sup>130</sup>

It took only two years for Yamani’s scholastic program to land him in jail.<sup>131</sup> In March 1958, he was arrested for provoking his students into tearing down a poster of King Saud during a pro-Nasser strike. He was undone by the symbolic irony. Strikes across Lebanon had ignited in response to news that the Saudi king was behind a failed plot to assassinate Nasser, who not a month before had declared the union of Syria and Egypt, a triumph of Arab Nationalism and a grave, political threat to Lebanese President Camille Chamoun. The mood in the country was terribly tense. Chamoun was despised by a large swath of the population – the Phalangists, the Muslim elite, and the Sunni street – for his ambivalence towards Nasser and his closeness with the West. News of the union drove a resurgence of support to federalize Lebanon within a greater Syrian or Arab state, especially among the country’s sizable and politically marginalized Sunni population. Practically every leading opposition politician had travelled to Damascus to

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<sup>130</sup> Khashān, “Dhikrayāt ‘an ‘abi Māhir al-Yamānī.”

<sup>131</sup> On his arrest, and trial documents: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:84–6, 2:195–202. On the 1958 Civil War: Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 134–7.

congratulate Nasser, while Chamoun hadn't; the 1958 Civil War would begin just four months later. General Security was already interrogating Yamani's students about his clandestine, Nationalist activities, to find cause to arrest him.<sup>132</sup> This was easy: students were demonstrating for pan-Arabism ("What was taken by force can only be retaken by force, and the strength of the Arabs is contained in their unity," they chanted), and they defiled an image of an ally of the independent Lebanese state. The King complained, and Yamani was imprisoned. His conviction was overturned on a technicality on July 15. Shortly after, Yamani was fired from his post.

#### **KUL MUWATIN KHAFIR AND AL SHABAB AL 'ARABI AL FILASTINI ACTIVITIES**

1956, the year Yamani and his associates founded King Saud School, also marked the start of Yamani's association with *Kul Muwatin Khafir* (Every Citizen is a Sentry), an anti-Zionist group that amplified the Palestinian and Arab Nationalist messages. It was led by Bashara al Dahhan, whom Yamani had met once before, in the 1948 War. Dahhan was a doctor, treating Palestinians in a Red Cross field hospital in Acre; it was to him Yamani had handed the PAWS documents that he had sneaked out for safekeeping. Kul Muwatin provided important political cover for Palestinians and al Shabab by virtue of being Lebanese. It may have had connections within security forces and the government, too; Yamani noted that al Shabab suffered less harassment at the hands of security forces as the two organizations got closer, and Yamani depended its leaders to win his release from prison in 1958. Kul Muwatin allowed al Shabab to publish in its name, which gave the articles some added weight and reduced the proscribed group's exposure to

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<sup>132</sup> Khashān, "Dhikrayāt 'an 'abi Māhir al-Yamānī."

prosecution by the state. A 1959 Shabab internal memorandum thanked Kul Muwatin for supporting their campaign of strikes and negotiations with UNRWA.<sup>133</sup>

Kul Muwatin organized lectures and commemorations at a range of cultural clubs through the country and had a Shaykh speak at mosques about the encroaching Zionist threat. On other instances, Kul Muwatin's president, Bashara al Dahhan, called on Lebanon to deploy a National Guard to its south border and fortify its border villages, which he described as its front line with Israel. He also urged expatriates to support Lebanon as Jews did Israel, and called on Arab states to use oil as a weapon against Zionism and imperialism. Kul Muwatin's newspaper *al Yom al Masa'iyah*, edited by Wafiq al Tabibi, regularly carried features on refugee affairs, UNRWA, and Zionism and published some of Yamani's writings.

The group was also able to organize large, public rallies that almost certainly would have been prohibited had al Shabab fronted them. Their rally at Beirut's Municipal Stadium on the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nakba, May 15, 1959, drew a crowd in the thousands; they were energized, patriotic, politically conscious, and eager to take back Palestine, according to a private letter sent to Yamani.<sup>134</sup> Even more impressive might have been their rally in Tripoli on the same day. Tripoli's population had always been favorable towards Palestinians, and it wouldn't have been a surprise that the Prime Minister, Rashid Karami, himself a Sunni from Tripoli, spoke at the commemoration. What was notable, though, was that Yamani spoke on the same stage, too – Yamani, who had already been twice arrested for illegal political activity and whose affiliation with al Shabab and the ANM was well known. His role in the commemorations could not have

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<sup>133</sup> On Kul Muwatin Khafir: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 3:248–58; Taqī al-Dīn, “Kul Muwāṭin Khafīr.” Al Shabab internal memorandum: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 3:98.

<sup>134</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 3:285.



left any doubt about al Shabab's involvement.<sup>135</sup> The rallies in Beirut and Tripoli make clear the extent that the Palestinian civic leadership had managed to mobilize the refugees, engage the Lebanese, and forge productive alliances deep within Lebanese society, eleven years after being dispersed into exile and ignored.



Figure 3. *Nakba* commemoration, organized by Kul Muwatin Khafir. Palestinians and Lebanese in attendance. Beirut Municipal Stadium<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Transcription of the speeches, and a photocopy of a four-page al Shabab pamphlet marking the anniversary: Ibid., 3:259–81.

<sup>136</sup> Source: Ibid., 2:246 (n.d.).

A trove of correspondence from this period indicates that al Shabab and the Popular Committees were applying pressure to UNRWA and the state beyond rallies, too. Al Shabab organized short boycotts of UNRWA services in December 1958 and January to oppose what appeared to be continuing efforts to resettle the refugees and, simultaneously, exclude them from services and society. In a letter to Nour al-Din al-Rifa'i, the director of the state's Central Committee of Palestinian Refugee Affairs, al Shabab demanded that UNRWA cancel its "self-reliance" program to remove refugees from the benefits rolls, as it had already done to 8,939 of them. Perhaps al Shabab hoped to appeal to the Lebanese official's sense of pride, and they pointed out that in no other country did UNRWA cut off income earners from living assistance. They also requested Rifa'i put pressure on the Agency to fire the director of the "self-reliance" program. In January, al Shabab secured a meeting with the Leslie Carver, the international UNRWA director, where they repeated their demands, and they met at least twice in the spring with the Lebanon Agency director, Marcel E. Beroudiaux. In June, Beroudiaux wrote to Yamani with a concession: he acknowledged the hardship caused by the Biqā' Valley aid distribution regime, which required refugees to pick up provisions in person in Ba'albeck, and promised to have Agency officials visit dense concentrations of Palestinians on a fixed schedule, instead. He also confirmed that he had installed additional water taps in Baddawi, though the residents were still complaining of a water shortage. Still, he wrote to Yamani, "You confirmed to me that the present system provided for a distribution of the available water to them is much more equitable than before."<sup>137</sup>

The letter to Rifa'i lodged other complaints, as well. Among them, it protested that when UNRWA opened new health clinics in the cities, it removed others from the

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 3:62–87, 3:98–104. Quote from p. 83.

camps. It asked for the authorities to expand access to vocational education and noted that UNRWA had thus far only opened two technical institutes (one in Hazmiyyah and one in Tripoli) and mismanaged both. It demanded that authorities stop expelling refugees from the Beirut suburbs. It complained that students couldn't afford to enroll outside of UNRWA schools, which were insufficient in number and quality. It protested that scholarships were too meager and too scarce and were anyways too often granted by connection. And so forth.

The Popular Committees also wrote to the UNRWA Administration, directly. A letter from Nabatieh dated June 1958, for example, noted the improvements made to settlements in Dabieh, Jisr al Basha, and Baddawi demanded equal treatment. Among other things, it required that the UNRWA school offer secondary-level classes and that the Agency hire more teachers, install clinics and a pharmacy, improve nutrition services, and register new camp residents. The letter threatened, "If you don't execute our requests quickly, we are prepared to resist UNRWA and take the appropriate measures."<sup>138</sup>

The 1958 and 1959 letters reveal the crushing deprivations of camp life, after a decade in exile. The Popular Committee of 'Ain al Hilwah wrote that the local hospital, Labib abu Thahir, was not accepting patients from the camp and demanded that UNRWA provide rations for all newborns and make first aid available day and night. The Committee also called on UNRWA to eliminate the benefits ceiling and to give residents zinc metal roofs, and it condemned the state police for obstructing construction efforts. A letter from Burj al Barajnah conveys astonishing squalor. It complains of swamps and spoiling rations and a shortage of latrines – it counts just one per five hundred people. It requests a camp clinic, doctors, and zinc. Burj al Shimali also requested a clinic, a doctor,

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 3:77.

and midwives. It complained that the shortage of schoolrooms meant students could only attend for half-days, as a way to ease the overcrowding. Nabatieh also asked for better educational facilities and classes through fourth grade secondary. Nearly all the popular committees complained about malnutrition, the state's onerous permit system, and UNRWA's refusal to register any new refugees or update their places of residence. And the popular committee of an informal agglomeration of 6,000 refugees in Al Barghaliyah and Al Qasamiyah, near Tyre, petitioned the Central Committee of Palestinian Refugee Affairs to incorporate them as a camp, so that they could receive proper services such as clean water, a clinic with a doctor, a milk dispensary, and a benefits center.<sup>139</sup>

An undated letter from al Shabab to President Fuad Chehab (1958-64) attempted to smooth over relations between refugees and the state and to relieve pressure from the state security apparatuses. On the proliferation of organizations, activities, and demonstrations, which UNRWA and state security forces treated as subversive and criminal, the letter explained that the refugees were blameless, and acting within their rights to secure their livelihoods and liberate Palestine. "The Palestinians understand that as guests in Lebanon they must not interfere in local issues. We have confidence that the relevant authorities in your administration will treat Palestinians on a sound basis and will treat them as a peoples with potential who live in Lebanon, the civilized, developed society whose sons enjoy freedom and civic life," it stated.<sup>140</sup> It continued to say that the refugees did not have faith in UNRWA's intentions and required the Agency to improve its services and provisions. It also complained about the state's glacial and discriminatory bureaucracy, which made it difficult for refugees to acquire the necessary permits to travel, work, and conduct other everyday affairs. Al Shabab asked the President to

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 3:87-97.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 3:51.

resolve their complaints with the state and its security forces, and offered to cooperate with his office through an advisory council of refugees.

## Conclusion

Though Yamani's conviction for inciting the student strike in 1958 was overturned, the King Saud School nevertheless unceremoniously fired him from his post as principal, and he was forced to find a new job. He was hired to be the headmaster of the Maqasid Institute's Khalid bin al Walid Secondary School in Beirut in 1959, where he also taught Arabic and arithmetic. His salary was 340LL per month. And as al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini and the Arab Nationalist Movement continued to escalate their civic and political activities in this period, so too did the Lebanese Security Forces of the Deuxieme Bureau chase after its leadership and Yamani with increased vigor. In early 1962, Yamani was forbidden from being in Beirut between 7pm and 6am, and he had to present a letter every month to the police attesting to his employment. Later that year, he was imprisoned for a year for directing the activities of an "illegal party" – presumably, the ANM.<sup>141</sup> Guards would beat him and inflict bastinado and shave his head.<sup>142</sup> Yamani left his job with Maqasid in 1965, and in 1967 he opened a new, Arab Nationalist secondary school in Burj al Barajnah that was sponsored by the Movement. Its initial enrollment was 117 students, and it remained open until 1976.<sup>143</sup> Yamani also founded a network of cultural centers in the camps in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>144</sup>

The history of Palestinians in exile is better recorded for the 1960s. In 1964, Ahmad Shukayri, the League of Arab States-appointed representative of the Palestinians to the same institution, established the Palestinian Liberation Organization to function as

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 2:88–93.

<sup>142</sup> Oh his prison treatment: Ibid., 2:106. Sayigh colorfully describes Deuxieme Bureau oppression (*Palestinians*, 150–52).

<sup>143</sup> Yamañī, *Tajribatī*, 2:102. They named it the Lebanese Secondary School. The Movement paid 25,000 LL to another school owner to obtain his unused secondary school license.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 3:143.

the state-in-exile for the Palestinian people. The PLO consolidated existing civic institutions under its umbrella, such as student groups, teachers' associations, women's unions and workers' unions. Hence, a number of general Palestinian unions – federalized networks of sectorial associations that stretched across borders – sprouted in this era, such as the General Unions of Palestinian Women, Teachers, and Writers and Journalists. The General Union of Palestinian Students and the General Union of Palestinian workers predated the PLO, but they too were incorporated into its framework.

Yamani attended the first conference of the General Union of Palestinian Workers (GUPW) in Gaza in 1964. He was elected the union's Deputy General Secretary. In Lebanon, Yamani helped to found the union's regional branch, the Union of Palestinian Workers – Lebanon, and served as its secretary. Salah Salah described its *modus operandi* to me:

[The UPW]'s methods were direct pressure on the employer. For example, at a construction project, the manager isn't treating them fairly. The UPW agrees with the workers, that if they want to go on strike, the UPW will make sure no scab labor goes in to take your jobs.<sup>145</sup>

The UPW also established a social security fund for its members. It maintained its offices within the PLO headquarters in Corniche al Mazra'a, Beirut.

Still, the PLO in its initial iteration was politically weak and hardly representative of the Palestinian masses. The organization's deference to the League (seen at the time as an instrument of Nasser), its constitution of Palestinians professionals and former notables and its detachment from camp residents, and Shukayri's self-serving image challenged its legitimacy in the eyes of many refugees. But the rapid defeat in the 1967 War discredited the League of Arab States and the governing Arab regimes and swept

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<sup>145</sup> Salah, Interview with the author. On the establishment of the GUPW/UPW-Lebanon and its activities in Lebanon, see 'Alī, *al-ʿUmmā al-Filāṣṭīnīyūn wa-masār al-ḥarakah al-niqābīyah*, 41–56. Approximately 2,500 members belonged to the UPW-Lebanon by the end of 1967.

Shukayri out of power. At the same time, Fatah, boosted by the tactical victory at the Battle of Karamah in 1968, became the new standard bearer of the Palestinian cause, and in 1969 Yassir Arafat became the chairman of the PLO. The marriage of the armed struggle to the PLO injected the organization with the legitimacy it once lacked, and it quickly transformed into a muscular, para-statal institution. That same year, the camps in Lebanon erupted against the Lebanese security forces, and the commander of the Lebanese Army, Emile Bustani, signed the Cairo Accord with Arafat. It was a major concession of sovereignty to the Palestinians and put the camps under the total authority of the PLO. The state also eased movement restrictions on the refugees, removed the work permit regime, permitted Palestinian militants to openly recruit, fundraise, and train, and allowed them to infiltrate Israel along prescribed routes in the south. These events in Lebanon have been remembered collectively as a revolution. As a camp resident said to Rosemary Sayigh in the 1970s:

Before the Revolution I and all Palestinians wondered how we could return to Palestine. As a Palestinian I felt that I must have a role in the struggle... The Revolution was the most important event, not just in my life, but in the life of the Palestinian people. Our understanding, our talk, our thinking all changed. Before there was reactionary thinking, now there is revolutionary thinking.<sup>146</sup>

Fawaz Turki wrote this in his memoir of the new consciousness, “In a short time the term Palestinian became identified not with the downtrodden refugee living in abject poverty, but with the young dedicated freedom fighter.”<sup>147</sup>

The prevailing mood sent flocks of young Palestinians to the guerillas, and Habash’s contingent in the fractured ANM, which included the ‘*Abtal al ‘Awda*’ militia that Yamani helped to found, morphed into the PFLP. Yamani was named a member of the group’s Central Committee and its Politburo. As for civic institutions, the PLO’s new

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<sup>146</sup> Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 166.

<sup>147</sup> Turki, *The Disinherited*, 108.



clout meant that its general unions, once operating semi-autonomously of it, were now politicized, and their nominal functions were subordinated to the national cause.<sup>148</sup> Yamani's own role in this process is reflected in his memoirs. By the late 1960s, it appeared that Yamani had bought in fully to the PLO paradigm of a Palestinian institution independent of the Arab states and abandoned Arab Nationalism in praxis. He was elected to the PLO's Palestinian National Council and from there to the Executive Committee. His portfolio on the Executive included the Bureau of Popular Organization, and in this position he consolidated the network of popular committees that he had helped to found under the aegis of the PLO.<sup>149</sup>

## REFLECTIONS

Though it took until 1969 for the camps in Lebanon to install the PLO and adopt its civic and political frameworks, these developments were preceded by two decades of Palestinian organization. Camp residents built or reconstructed from Mandatory Palestine many of the institutions that the PLO would incorporate, and the armed struggle relied on the schools and the scouts to imbue a young generation with strength, judgment, knowledge, and a national consciousness. Unheralded leaders forced UNRWA and the state to recognize grassroots organizations – such as the Teachers' Association, the popular committees, al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini, and the Union of Palestinian Workers – as the representations of refugee interests. Palestinians improved their own welfare through sacrifice, backbreaking work, and emigration, and they protected themselves by carving out space for an autonomous, civic society. They broke the state's efforts to isolate them in camps, and they succeeded in securing certain concessions – not

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<sup>148</sup> 'Ali argues that the GUPW from the beginning was only loosely oriented towards class struggle and much more concerned with the national cause. He points out that the first conference declaration laid out scarcely any class goals. 'Alī, *al-'Ummāl al-Filaṣṭīnīyūn wa-masār al-ḥarakah al-niqabīyah*, 53–6.

<sup>149</sup> Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 3:232–7.

tremendous ones, but important ones, such as new schools, a Palestinian curriculum, and improved health services and access to sanitation. And through their publications and their inspired rallies, the refugees drew the attention of Lebanese society and politicians, and they formed solidarities with powerful actors and marginalized citizens. These bonds would prove to be especially consequential in the months leading to the Revolution.<sup>150</sup>

As Brand has written, “The 1950s was a critical formative period for the later development of the quasi-governmental institutions that emerged throughout the Palestinian diaspora.”<sup>151</sup> Sayigh highlights the groundwork of the ANM: “Nor, probably, would [the 1969 Revolution] have mobilized the masses on such a large scale without the vanguard work of activists like those of the Arab Nationalist Movement during the refugee period.”<sup>152</sup> One of Sayigh’s subjects even identifies Yamani as a leader in the events: “A large number of the Revolution’s leaders are from the camps, some in the first rank, such as Abu Maher, or Abu Ahmad Yunis – we needn’t mention names but they are a large number.”<sup>153</sup> Though this groundwork has not gone unacknowledged by other scholars, it has gone unexamined. This biography has described the organizational activities within the 1950s Lebanon camps with more color. It has also traced the continuity of the social transformations of the Mandate era to camp society in the diaspora. The processes that drew peasants to continuing education, and then to urban areas and to wage labor, and to mass politics and national identification – these refined

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<sup>150</sup> I have not covered the solidarities between the Palestinians and the Lebanese in the lead up to the 1969 confrontations between security services, Palestinians, and Lebanese civilians. The tales of these heady events are usually told either from the perspective of Palestinian refugees (for example, Sayigh, *Palestinians*; Peteet, *Landscape*) or Lebanese society writ large (for example, Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*; Kassir, *Beirut*). The latter histories render the refugees rather voiceless. For greater context to the 1969 events, see Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 188–94.

<sup>151</sup> Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 4.

<sup>152</sup> Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 147.

<sup>153</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 164. Sayigh does not explicitly identify Yamani, but I believe from the context that it is he.

Yamani into a young leader. He reconnected with his PAWS and nationalist associates in exile, and, through UNRWA as well, the scattered refugees exerted their will to construct camp society. Yamani also exerted his will on the Arab Nationalist Movement's evolution, by carving out autonomy for the Palestinian branch, *al Shabab al 'Arabi al Filastini*. Most of all, this biography has foregrounded assertive, grassroots Palestinian leadership in exile.

## Appendix A. Exchange Rate, Lebanese Liras to US Dollars

Year	Exchange rate, Lebanese Liras (LL) per US Dollar, nominal, period average
1948	3.600
1949	3.250
1950	3.740
1951	3.800
1952	3.570
1953	3.190
1954	3.240
1955	3.250
1956	3.200
1957	3.184
1958	3.183
1959	3.155
1960	3.169
1961	3.079
1962	3.009
1963	3.097
1964	3.074
1965	3.072
1966	3.131
1967	3.205
1968	3.157
1969	3.255
1970	3.269
1971	3.228
1972	3.051
1973	2.610
1974	2.328
1975	2.302

Table A1. The nominal exchange rate<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Source: IMF eLibrary.

## Appendix B. Scouts, Rallies, and Athletics (photographs)



Figure A1. Palestinian girl scouts in Lebanon<sup>155</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Source: Yamānī, *Tajribatī*, 2:260 (n.d.).



Figure A2. Palestinian scouts – *Fawj al Tha'r* battalion<sup>156</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Source: Ibid., 2:259 (n.d.).





Figure A3. Palestinian student athletes competing in a meet

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