

CHAPTER 9

Yūsuf's Struggle
*Negotiating Development and Charity
in a Palestinian Refugee Camp*

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Yūsuf has lived almost all his life in al-Naşr Palestinian refugee camp (the Victory camp) in Amman, Jordan. Like most of his friends, he received his education through a boys' school in the camp provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which has been the primary agency responding to the plight of Palestinian refugees since 1949.¹ At the age of twenty-four, Yūsuf and his friends founded a charity and development association, al-Ḥayāh (Life), which targets the children and youth of his camp.² This association, where he spends most of his time and energy, is the culmination of his and his friends' efforts to create a camp-based humanitarian project that prioritizes what they see as the real needs of the refugee children and youth.

Humanitarianism is often imagined from a global North perspective to be intrinsically good, politically neutral, and delivered by international organizations to respond to emergencies.³ With humanitarian workers going to multiple missions around the world, this imaginary elicits the illusion of "a global moral community" based on a common humanity and does so despite deep inequalities among countries as well as among those who help and who receive this help.⁴

My friendship with Yūsuf and fieldwork with al-Ḥayāh volunteers revealed a different humanitarian imaginary. Yūsuf's volunteer work is directed toward his own refugee camp community and its generalized precarity, which he saw as extending into the future, making the streets unsafe, the youth hopeless and

the camp inhabitants preoccupied with their survival. Yūsuf and his volunteer friends are themselves “children of the camps” and interact with the children and youth in the association with a sense of legitimacy and expertise. Their vision of what it means to do humanitarian work does not require the abstract distance of strangers or an apolitical idea of an imminent “emergency” that can be addressed with temporary relief aid.

Yūsuf’s humanitarian imaginary, rooted in his work within his own community, cannot be understood through invocations of shared humanity between aid providers and recipients occupying separate social worlds. Yūsuf is not primarily motivated by religious conviction, though he is Muslim, or religious imaginaries that scholars have identified in other global South contexts.⁵ Ultimately, rather than being bound by humanitarian conventions that came from the global North or the hegemonic approaches of Islamic charitable institutions with whom they often operate in proximity, Yūsuf’s work springs from his individual experiences of growing up in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan and being accultured by a previous generation of Palestinian refugees in these camps. As a refugee-citizen in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan who is serving his own community by constantly navigating relationships, limitations, and future aspirations, the humanitarian imaginary that Yūsuf draws on emerges from practices of care that he learned growing up in the camp.

These practices of care are today known as *‘amal fityanī* (boys’ work) across Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan. Yūsuf and other Palestinian volunteers trace the beginning of *‘amal fityanī* to a summer camp activity for orphan Palestinian children in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Described primarily as a form of developmental care by current volunteers, its origins remain contested and are attributed either to the Palestinian Liberation Organization or to a collaboration between the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the UNRWA. *‘Amal fityanī* can be best understood as a repertoire, or a “whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups” because it provides a framework of engagement toward children in the refugee camps.⁶ Repertoires both enable and constrain people’s actions, providing them with familiar routines to use that can be altered from within.⁷

Yūsuf’s story of how al-Ḥayāh was established demonstrates how “being of the camp” is an important aspect of his work, guiding his aspirations for the future of the camp residents and granting him access to *‘amal fityanī*. He and his friends innovate this repertoire for their own purposes even while they are constrained by the political and social limitations governing their lives as simultaneous refugees of Palestine and citizens of Jordan. At the core of this humanitarian imaginary resides a commitment to remain in what Yūsuf calls “the thick of things,” managing relations with his fellow camp residents. Navigating the precarity of camp life alongside them, Yūsuf aspires for what he perceives

as development even though the reality on the ground pulls him toward providing forms of economic assistance, a dissonance that he tries to overcome by keeping aid discreet.

Entering the Camp, Meeting Yūsuf

I met Yūsuf in the early days of my fieldwork in al-Ḥayāh, an association established in 2015 in al-Naṣr camp. One of thirteen Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, al-Naṣr camp in East Amman is officially named the Prince Hassan Neighborhood. It is administratively located in the Amman governorate and hosts over twenty thousand Palestinian refugees, most of whom were displaced in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Today, in addition to Palestinian refugees, this small camp, which the UNRWA considers unofficial, hosts Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, and Egyptian migrant workers as well as Syrian refugees who took advantage of the affordable accommodation and public transportation facilities the camp provided.

If it wasn't for a young woman I met serendipitously in downtown Amman, al-Naṣr camp and al-Ḥayāh association might not have appeared on my radar. A young Palestinian woman working in an international NGO as a nutrition specialist in al-Za'atarī with Syrian refugees, Nisreen took immediate interest in my research and arranged for me to visit al-Ḥayāh, where her sister Zaynab was volunteering.⁸ There I met a network of young Palestinian volunteers across the refugee camps of Jordan, including Yūsuf.

When I started visiting al-Ḥayāh in late 2017, the association had about sixty volunteers, young men and women ranging from the ages of fifteen to thirty, working with around three hundred boys and girls from within and around al-Naṣr camp. Despite knowing Yūsuf since the early days of my fieldwork, it took us almost five months to establish rapport. One probable reason for this was the gender-segregated socializing norms of the camp that prevailed in milder forms inside the association: young men and women who otherwise may not even greet one another in the street would converse with one another and collaborate in activities directed toward the children.

In the initial five months, I mostly shadowed Zaynab, a student at the University of Jordan and one of a relatively small number of female volunteers in al-Ḥayāh, while at the same time teaching Turkish to a group of teenagers. If it weren't for one unforgivingly cold Friday in February, I might never have become friends with Yūsuf. That day, volunteers moved the sports sessions, generally undertaken in the garden of the UNRWA boys' school, indoors, and since the association's rooms didn't allow space for team sports, Yūsuf decided to teach table tennis. Zaynab, the guide for a group of fourteen-year-old girls, didn't know how to play table tennis, and Yūsuf was reluctant to guide these

teenage girls the way he had with the boys: by holding their hands and showing them how to throw the ball. Moreover, most of the boys already knew how to play, which made the girls a bit upset. I volunteered and told Yūsuf that I could help teach the girls. During the session, I also played against Yūsuf, and to boost the girls' morale, I made a real effort to score against him.

It was my small spontaneous victory that gave me some street credit in Yūsuf's eyes; he lovingly called me *darwarween*, a term that people usually associate with troublemakers and that, I was later to learn, meant something somewhat different for Yūsuf. He thanked me and told me that he was surprised by my skills since the girls in the camp generally didn't play table tennis.

In the aftermath of this episode, we started to converse more often. In time, the topics we covered extended from political situations in Jordan, Türkiye, the United States, and Palestine to the daily events in the association, the gossip of the camp, our families and friendships, and our aspirations and disappointments in life. In the meantime, our social interactions exceeded the boundaries of the association to my house in Jabal al-Hussein, cafés in downtown Amman where we played cards and smoked *'argile* (hookah), and Yūsuf's old car. This car was at times a free space for our socialization in upscale neighborhoods like al-Webdeih in which we listened to music late at night, and at other times it was Yūsuf's vehicle for a series of consecutive sales jobs that necessitated driving to different parts of Amman to sell different products at different times: chocolates and chips for corner stores in popular neighborhoods, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, masks to various stores in East Amman.

Being of the Camp: The Camp as an Environment That Governs

Yūsuf's grandparents, displaced from a village in Hebron, came to Jordan after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and started living in the al-Naşr refugee camp. His nuclear family is one that chose to stay in the camp despite eventually having the economic means to leave it. In fact, after his grandparents died, his family was the last among his relatives to remain in the camp. For Yūsuf, the refugee camp's meaning was never limited to political significance as a metaphor for Palestinian refugees' right of return: it was a place where his people had lived for generations and established intimacies stemming from their common experience tied to this place. The children's handprints on the walls of al-Ḥayāh and the accompanying writing that reads "I am the camp" should be understood as a reflection of their insistence on keeping their project integrated to their community (see figure 9.1).

Yūsuf appreciated his father for choosing to stay in the camp despite having a generally conflictual relationship with him. He often criticized those who



Figure 9.1. • A wall on the rooftop of al-Ḥayāh association (translation: I am the camp), Amman, 2018. © Gözde Burcu Ege.

left the camp as soon as they improved their economic situation, calling their escape an act of selfishness. Although his two uncles and their families no longer lived in the camp, they were still closely connected to its socioeconomic life. One of his uncles, a man described by Yūsuf and others as a charitable, religious, and respectable person, still has a small grocery store in the building adjoining al-Ḥayāh. The other used to be a volunteer in the management of the camp's long-standing Youth Club.⁹

Coming from an extended family where men were socially and economically invested in the camp, one may think that it was no wonder that Yūsuf became a volunteer in the Youth Club and, later, founded an association with his friends. However, Yūsuf's trajectory is more complicated than continuing a family legacy of social work. In fact, both he and others told me repeatedly that growing up, his reputation in the camp was that of a troublemaker who constantly stirred things up, was routinely involved in physical fights, and often ended up in the police station. Yūsuf would sometimes narrate these fights in a humorous fashion, not refraining from sharing the details of occasions when he emerged victorious and others when he got beaten up. It was clear from his description that he saw these confrontations not as a testament to youthful machismo but rather as minor components of a broader struggle for the moral and physical well-being of the camp.

As our friendship developed, Yūsuf started to tell me about the difficult circumstances that led him to become the kind of person people called a troublemaker. When he was in eighth grade, his father went bankrupt after his clothing store was robbed, and he went to South Africa to work with a tradesman from the same village in Palestine as his grandfather for four years. Yūsuf told me that this was the first turning point in his life, since he felt the responsibility for providing for his family as the oldest son among two sisters and a younger brother:

That period probably was the period of my life that affected me the most. We didn't have money. In the seventh grade, I used to steal my father's car. As a small child, and I was very short, I would put a pillow on the seat and drive the car. Then, suddenly, we lost everything. And there was also a lot of debt. And because I was the oldest in the house, it was very difficult for me. I was very fat in the seventh grade, now look at the pictures from the eighth grade, I became like a skeleton. I worked a lot. Also, we weren't sure about my dad's situation, South Africa was very dangerous. Every day, we would receive a phone call: your dad is dead.

According to Yūsuf, it was primarily this necessity of providing for his family that put him in environments where he had to learn how to act tough. Starting with seventh grade, he worked a variety of jobs: in the camp's bazaar, in the small coffee shops in and around the camp, and in construction work. His behavior must have troubled his family; one of his uncles allegedly called Firas,

a Youth Club volunteer six years Yūsuf's senior, and asked him to lure Yūsuf into becoming a volunteer there with the hopes that he would calm down and "stay out of fights a little bit."

Yūsuf told me that he immediately liked volunteering since he felt like he could change the things he didn't like about life in the camp by working on the upcoming generation. From the time he started working in the streets, he told me, he kept diaries of camp life: which family was from where in Palestine, who married whom, who organized large iftars during Ramadan, which youth initiative did what, who joined protests, and who worked in whose parliamentary election campaigns, among other things:

Even when I was a child, Burcu. . . You know the drug dealers would use the *bastaat* [street vendor stands] in the bazaar of the camp to sell drugs at night. Someone would stick the money on a stand, and the other would come and put the drugs. I used to scream from the top of my lungs: police, police. Of course, there were no police around, I used to do it to frighten them. I was just a child, and I was trying to stop the drug trade in my own way.

His volunteering did keep him out of fights "a little bit," because he found a new place where he could invest his energy.

As a young man with a lot of male relatives and who didn't refrain from trouble, he still believed in the necessity of being involved in fights. Whenever he talked about a fight in the camp, he would add, "The environment governs your life, you can only escape but so much." Now, however, as a twenty-seven-year-old man who has founded an association with his friends, he told me that he only fought "smart and strategically."

Establishing al-Hayāh

If Yūsuf's father's four years of absence was one turning point, his meeting Faruq in the university was another. He and Faruq met through Firas when Yūsuf called Firas to borrow money to buy a required textbook for class. Firas directed him to Faruq, and the two soon became inseparable. Despite never having lived in a Palestinian refugee camp, Faruq also came from a refugee household where the Palestinian cause was important, and he was also a volunteer of *'amal fityanī* in another refugee camp, Muḥaṭṭah. In the third year of college, when Yūsuf dropped out because of financial difficulties, he took Faruq to the Youth Club to work with him.

In 2015, Yūsuf and Faruq decided to leave the Youth Club and open their own association in al-Naṣr camp with five other friends. In doing that, they relied on the repertoire of *'amal fityanī*. They replicated *'amal fityanī*'s designation of volunteers as guides, supervisors, and helpers as well as the titles

of the children as boys and flowers (girls) instead of referring to them with a title that would denote beneficiaries. They also took the ritualistic aspects of the Friday programs and started and ended their programs with children and volunteers establishing a circle and chanting words about Palestine, the camp, and the right of return. Moreover, just as I had seen in visits to the Ḥusayn, Muḥaṭṭah, Baqā', and Weḥdāt camps, supervisors shared the knowledge and social, cultural, and artistic skills they had acquired from their volunteer leaders, and guides were advised to pay attention to children's problems at school, home, and in the street and come up with solutions.

While relying on this repertoire, Yūsuf and his friends also wanted to innovate by putting additional emphasis on sociocultural education while inculcating values of community service and refraining from charity as much as possible. Yūsuf and Faruq told me that it was because of their desire for innovation and the opposition they faced in the Youth Club that they ended up leaving the Youth Club and opening their own association. When Faruq started volunteering in the boys' committee of the Youth Club with Yūsuf, the committee was very weak, and there were only four other volunteers. Yūsuf was particularly upset about the way the new management approached the children:

They were just petting the heads of the children, expressing pity because the child is an orphan or poor, and feeding him a sandwich and making him play some football. Then, go home! Nothing else. How does this benefit the child? Nobody is dying of hunger! It only makes him feel bad! We wanted to do additional programs with the children, not only on Friday. We wanted to innovate the program, we wanted children to learn things, to develop themselves. We became forty volunteers and started to push for these things, and the problems started.

Identifying as a son of the camp himself, Yūsuf often voiced his desire that children not be tied to the institution through economic aid. He didn't want them to feel like they were objects of pity. He wanted the Youth Club to become a place where children and volunteers spent time whenever they wanted. Through his volunteer work, Yūsuf wanted to contribute to the creation of a specific kind of Palestinian refugee generation: a generation that knows their historical and cultural Palestinian roots as well as their rights as refugees; that is equipped to overcome their socioeconomic marginalization in Jordan but does so without severing their ties and disinvesting their energies from the camp community.

After much conflict, Yūsuf and his friends understood that they were going to be booted from the Youth Club and decided to open their own association. Upon receiving approval from the Ministry of Social Development, they transformed Yūsuf's family building into the space for their association and, according to them, established the first association run solely by youth in any Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. The youthfulness of al-Ḥayāh must

have been so unusual for the networks of Palestinian camp volunteers that some compared it to the youth's role in the Egyptian revolution, as other youth groups allegedly started to open their associations in different refugee camps after al-Ḥayāh.

In addition to this renewed emphasis on sociocultural development, they also tried to create their own institutional ethos in which the youth in management would remain active volunteers on the ground instead of only fulfilling administrative roles or fundraising. Yūsuf told me that they hope to prevent both a stark generational difference between volunteers and children and a management that is unaware of the needs of both. This commitment is reflected in their critiques of the INGOs that worked in the kingdom as well. In fact, many of them considered INGOs' ethics as being insufficiently humanitarian. For them, INGOs implemented short-term projects when funding was available, depended on salaried labor and the knowledge of so-called experts who generally had no idea of the realities of their recipients' lives, and undertook projects aiming to inculcate individualist notions of development rather than a community spirit.

Incessant critique of the INGOs, however, didn't mean that they refrained from consulting their friends who were working in the thriving INGO sector of Jordan. Yūsuf told me:

We noticed that we gave the child something cultural, but there is something bad psychologically or socially. He starts to understand culture, music, Palestine, plays chess, his schoolwork becomes better. . . . But the psychosocial problems remain, like he or she keeps beating other children, or remains scared and silent. We decided to stop and ask people. If you want to make a revolution, you should look at other revolutions in the world, but also you can't just imitate them, right? We talked to our professors in the university. Also, Waseem was working at CARE International with Syrian refugees, we talked to him. But we didn't work in the same way; we understood the idea and adapted it to our own program. For example, they had an activity for the little boys and girls, something like "healing through singing," we immediately understood that this won't work in the camp because the boys already see themselves as men. However, you can use theater for social development here, too. It makes sense. Or you can't treat a volunteer like a paid employee; a volunteer is here because he or she wants to give from his heart, not because he will be compensated, so you can't just give orders to him or her and say: This is your job, but you should let them be creative. You should create an attractive atmosphere so that volunteers and children want to keep coming.

Yūsuf describes a desire to learn new approaches while pointing out the new atmosphere in which some of the *'amal fityani* volunteers, like his friend Waseem, found a space for themselves in the newly boosted INGO sector in Jordan following the Syrian refugee crisis. Yūsuf and his friends selectively adopted these new approaches to their program and still relied on their sense of expertise coming from "being of the camp."

Being in the Thick of Things

For Yūsuf, being a good volunteer in the camp means being a *dawāween*; an endearment he called me when I beat him at table tennis, said something witty in a conversation, or did something he thought was clever while teaching Turkish to children. According to him, *dawāween* doesn't simply mean a troublemaker: it comes from the word *dirwan* in Arabic, the place where people with influence host their guests. Thus, he argued, being a *dawāween* means being experienced in different *dirwans*, learning their rules, making these rules work for your own goals, and even changing the rules once you get the opportunity. To be able to do this means to be and remain in “the thick of things.”

Yūsuf is indeed in the thick of things. He is a refugee from Palestine, a citizen of Jordan, and a resident of the camp. He is a young man making his way through life with sporadic jobs, helping his family economically while at the same time investing most of his energy in an association for the upcoming generation of camp refugees. Moreover, he is a person who would pay attention to the gossip in the camp, pick the brains of the other volunteers, join every wedding and funeral in the camp, make sure to keep good relations with the UNRWA school where most of the children were getting their education, and coordinate children's participation in intercamp events. One day, he could be sweeping the floors of the association or fixing the bathroom, the next day he could be wearing a suit and talking with a member of parliament who joined an iftar event the association organized. He is also a curious person who closely follows the activities of other associations, the Youth Club of the camp, the Muslim Brotherhood charities, international and royal NGOs to learn from them or simply to know who their competitors were.¹⁰ Inside the association, he usually teaches sports-related subjects, but his main role is to create and perpetuate relationships inside and outside the camp.

Being in the thick of things also requires him to tailor the way he interacts with different people. For example, Yūsuf told me that there is a need to prevent people who are known to be drug dealers from approaching the boys, and that the only language these people understand is fear. To show that he isn't afraid to flex his muscles, he would instigate at least one big fight every year with some of these men in the middle of the camp. When I was still in Jordan, someone stole the market stand that always stood in front of the association. Volunteer boys used to populate this stand to sell various products whenever they needed to raise money for their families. The next day, the stand was in its place, and Yūsuf told us he recovered it by dragging down the person who stole it and taking it by force. The fight wasn't so much to recover the stand, he told me, but to show others that they shouldn't mess with the association. *Tamtheel* (performance) was his answer to why these fights were needed: “If someone is a thug you can't reason with them.”

In dealing with other people, Yūsuf used to tell me, there is a need to engage in other tactics. One day, after almost a year of my fieldwork, a volunteer told us in a meeting that he had invited a certain sheikh, Hussein, to volunteer as a Quran teacher in the association, an informal announcement that made some volunteers present giggle. Since I knew that the association didn't have such a program, I asked Yūsuf whether they wanted to develop a religion program, a question he ridiculed. "No," he said with a huge laugh, "Even if we wanted, we wouldn't do it with this guy! He just pretends to know Islam, but the only thing he does is to spread slander about the association because there are girls and boys in the same space." Apparently, Yūsuf was behind the idea of inviting him to stop him from slandering the association, and they did it with the full knowledge that this man would never give "a day of his life" to benefit others.

Finally, as a Palestinian refugee-citizen who had a project, he had to interact with the Jordanian state in particular ways. For example, he told me that when the Jordanian intelligence agents called him in the first year of the association and asked him why so many young people had joined, he reverently replied that they were implementing the kingdom's vision: empowering the youth of Jordan. He would even begrudgingly accept the fancy dinner invitations of parliamentary candidates who would only talk about Palestine and Palestinian refugee camps right before the elections because he had to sustain these relationships to keep the association open.

The Father of Salt: Aspiring for Development

Before the Ramadan of 2018, Yūsuf confided his frustration about donor interest in organizing iftars for the children, and I asked him the reasons behind his frustration. In his famously mischievous manner, he recounted his oft-repeated phrase, "Nobody is dying of hunger in the camp." Then, he told me the story of the nickname he received when he was still a volunteer in the Youth Club. Yūsuf and his friends wanted Ramadan to be an opportunity for camp children to engage in activities they couldn't find in the camp and socially develop themselves, such as playing in an amusement park, spending time in nature, or watching a theater play. But the Youth Club used to accept any iftar invitation, regardless of what kind of meals it entailed or the activities before or after the breaking of fast. Yūsuf was young and didn't have decision-making power, but he would still carry salt and pepper in his pockets to give the donors the message that "feeding people" is not enough, and that's why they called him "the father of salt" (*Abū al-milḥ*). It turns out, in this Ramadan too, most donor interest focused on providing meals without any planned activities for children to attend before or after breaking their fasts.

Yūsuf's insistence on engaging in what he perceives as development provides a powerful critique to the political necessity that surrounds humanitarian projects whose main goal often centers around saving lives.¹¹ This prioritization of development took its place in other conversations and practices of the association as well. For example, every Friday, the association provides a simple breakfast for the children and volunteers. Taking pictures during this time is forbidden for all, and others warn new volunteers beforehand. In one of the training sessions, Yūsuf's friend Mahmoud warned the new volunteers in the following way:

Some of the children may not have food at home, your job is to understand this and come to the management. We deal with it without making the child feel it. Don't talk about this among one another. Also, never take pictures while children are eating. Even in Ramadan iftars. The child shouldn't feel like the association is feeding him, he should come if he is happy here, if he feels that the association benefits him with its programs.

This warning revealed that the precarious realities of camp life cannot always easily be contained. Conversations that implied precarity became particularly prominent in the context of Ramadan, since the heightened activities of giving created expectations for different stakeholders: children wanted to go to as many iftar events as possible, and families, who were normally only in contact with the association to talk about their children, kept inquiring about donation boxes. Apart from the Islamic holidays, Yūsuf and his friends mainly focused on the sociocultural activities they prepared for children.

Despite his insistence on development and refraining from charity, Yūsuf and his colleagues did engage in discrete practices of economic aid. If I hadn't been friends with some of my young interlocutors like Yūsuf and families in the camp, I would have remained unaware of the economic aid and emotional support the association silently provided to the families of Palestinian and Syrian children. For example, when one of the boys was shocked by an exposed electrical wire in 2016, it was Yūsuf and his friends who brought him to the hospital and covered the hospital bills. On other occasions, while accompanying Yūsuf as he sold chips to small stores around Amman, I witnessed him bringing along some of the younger volunteers whose parents were struggling economically so that they could make some money that day.

In November 2019, when the association posted on Facebook about the passing of a ten-year-old boy in Dara'a, Syria, for instance, I understood how intimately connected this child's life had been to that of Yūsuf. That day, Yūsuf came to my house in a horrible mood. He told me how much he and his friends had insisted that the family not return to Syria. He mourned for the fact that this small child had lost his father to the war, temporarily ended up in a place like al-Naṣr camp, and lost his life upon returning to Syria by

stepping on a landmine while playing with his friends. Yūsuf had named him Baibars, because like the historical Baibars, one of his eyes had a cataract, and he didn't want the boy to see this as a defect but as something he shared with a great historical figure. The boy also had problems with his heart, and the association had funded a heart operation for him. The day before the family returned to Syria, Yūsuf prepared a birthday party for his sister, whom some of the youth in the association had rescued when their first house in the camp caught fire.

By the end of 2019, Yūsuf came to me with what he perceived as a very tragic realization: that many families were having difficulties putting food on their table. Moved and frustrated by the severity of the situation, he told me they may need to accept any iftar offer for the upcoming Ramadan. "Every year the situation gets worse," he said sadly. The COVID-19 pandemic made life even more severe in the camp, and many young people who used to find sporadic employment became indefinitely unemployed, including Yūsuf, who, at the beginning of the pandemic, worked to distribute hygienic masks to small shops. When Ramadan arrived, the volunteers organized a large iftar event via Zoom, with volunteers carrying food from the association to the houses of the families.

Reconciling the Need for Aid with Aspirations for Long-Term Development

Yūsuf's work critiques humanitarian imaginaries governed by the logic of emergency and centered around saving lives. Instead, he engages in the daily, intimate, and long-term forms of care that refugees provide to their communities at the margins of the international humanitarian regime, revealing the shortcomings of imaginaries that create apolitical, short-term, and top-down responses to refugee needs and aspirations. Moreover, he reminds us of the importance of knowledge grounded in experience. He remains in the thick of things and continues to navigate relationships, limitations, and future aspirations instead of holding onto fixed moral principles that prioritize outside expertise, humanitarian conventions, or religious convictions.

As a long-term refugee from Palestine, a citizen of Jordan, a resident of a camp, and a young man, Yūsuf cares for refugees by drawing on a repertoire of caregiving practices that were created by previous generations of refugees and working within a humanitarian imaginary that is intimately connected to his own life in the camp. His approach demands more than temporary relief. Yūsuf makes it possible to envision a generation who knows their historical and cultural Palestinian roots as well as their rights as refugees, a generation empowered and equipped to overcome socioeconomic marginalization in Jordan,

a generation that can do so without severing their ties and disinvesting their energies from their fellow camp residents.

For a young man like Yūsuf who tries to prioritize these long-term goals for his community, the precarity of camp life too often hinders these aspirations. Despite these frustrations, Yūsuf's daily efforts to reconcile the realities on the ground with his aspirations are ongoing, and he remains committed to caring for his fellow camp residents. When the association's face-to-face activities were suspended in accordance with COVID measures, Yūsuf opened a small store in the camp where he sold snacks that children enjoy. Today, some of the younger male volunteers still work there from time to time to support their families. During the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, the store became a place where he could stay in touch with the children of the camp. In this way, Yūsuf perseveres in modeling the possibility of preserving the ties he has shown to be so valuable and investing his energy in the camp community.

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Notes

1. It had two mandates: first, in collaboration with host governments, to provide direct relief and works programs, and, second, "to consult with interested Near Eastern governments concerning measures to be taken in preparation for the cessation of international assistance for relief and works project." See Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 231.
2. The names of the people and al-Ḥayāh association have been changed for confidentiality reasons.
3. For a critique of humanitarianism's equation with moral goodness, see Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*, 244; for a case study on Doctors without Borders and the power dynamics among its international and local volunteers, see Redfield, "Unbearable Lightness of Ex-pats," 366; for an analysis on the relationship between emergency imaginary and humanitarian intervention, see Calhoun, "World of Emergencies," 373.
4. Malkki, "Zealous Humanism and Its Limits," 189; Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*, 252.
5. In the context of Egypt, see Atia, *Building a House in Heaven*, 80; Mittermeier, "Revolutions Don't Stop Charity," 25.
6. Tilly, *Contentious French*, 4.
7. Tilly, *Contentious French*, 6.
8. For more information on al-Za'ateri camp, see <https://www.unhcr.org/jo/refugee-camps>.
9. Established by the UNRWA in the 1950s, by 1970s voluntary community members with UNRWA supervision were running these Youth Clubs. In Jordan, by 1986, the Jor-

- danian state took over the supervision of the Youth Clubs. See al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Refugees," 11.
10. During the martial law that started with a staged coup attempt against King Hussein in 1956 and lasted until the regime-led liberalization in 1989, Islamic social providers, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood under the Islamic Center Charity Society, organized most extensive services. See Brumfield, "Governing Charitably." Starting in the 1970s, funds and foundations established by the members of the royal family became the main institutions to facilitate the entrance of foreign aid to Jordan. See Sato, "Islamic Charity and Royal NGOs in Jordan," 6.
 11. Trapp, "You-Will-Kill-Me Beans," 413.

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