

The JHU Program in Racism, Immigration and Citizenship

STRANGER FRIENDSHIPS: SOLIDARITY AND SUBTERFUGE IN THE PALESTINIAN CAMPS IN LEBANON

Tuesday, April 25th
Mergenthaler 426, 4pm-6pm



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Drawing on ethnographic material from Shatila camp in Beirut and an informal Palestinian gathering in Tyre, this talk explores how political energies and impulses within the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon are redirected into small-scale, seemingly non-ideological “minor politics.” With the collapse of the Palestinian national movement, new forms of political action—many forged through provisional, everyday relations in the informal economy—are emerging in and around camps. How refugees express grievances, tackle immediate material concerns, contest economic exclusion, and demand civic entitlements (even in the absence of citizenship), reveals forms of activism that do not fit prevailing models for Palestinian politics in this context. Unstructured, sporadically collective, and often involving Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, and South Asian migrants working together to challenge the discriminatory policies of the Lebanese state, these alliances and ‘friendships’ among the urban poor often transcend identity, ethnicity and sectarian divides to encompass what seems closer to resurgent class struggle. As conventional nationalist politics falters in the Palestinian camps in exile, these alternative sociopolitical registers seem to hold promise and possibility.

