The core chapters of this book trace Palestinian militant organizations’ adaptation and evolution across South Lebanon and Beirut during the 1980s by illustrating processes of repurposing, remapping, and emergence. Drawing from approaches pioneered in relational sociology and social network theory (Granovetter 1973, 1985; Padgett and Ansell 1993; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Emirbayer 1997; Padgett and McLean 2006; White 2008; Padgett 2010; Padgett and Powell 2012; McLean 2016), I adopt an ethnohistorical, meaning-centric, and explicitly relational perspective. I examine how the social infrastructure of Palestinian communities interacted with formal militant hierarchies, emphasizing material, practice-based (Bourdieu 1977), and ideational changes to these social structures over time. In doing so, I challenge methodologies grounded by what Philip Howard (2002, 553–54) terms “organizational determinism,” which “occurs when the researcher imputes community culture from the formal structure of its networks and hierarchies.” Networks, in this study, are not independent variables that influence discrete outcomes. Rather, they are systems of dynamic and complex social relations that shape and are shaped by each other to produce often unexpected and unforeseeable outcomes.
Militant Organizations as Dynamic Social Networks

Focusing on unofficial, highly localized emergent organizational networks and how they overlap and interact with formal group structures complements studies that emphasize the form of and change in official hierarchies and institutions (Sinno 2010; Pearlman 2011; Bakke et al. 2012; P. Krause 2017; Gutiérrez-Sanín 2018). At the same time, this approach expressly challenges scholarly approaches that center exclusively on elite, top-down control of militant behavior (Shapiro 2013) to the exclusion of these informal dynamics. This perspective thus provides a comparatively more nuanced and more grounded view of how militant organizations acquire new capabilities, goals, and recruits throughout the duration of armed conflict.

The micro-level processes that drive militant organizational adaptation in contexts of intrastate armed conflict and asymmetrical war have thus far remained ambiguous. However, a burgeoning body of research on militant organizations and civil war emphasizes the importance of prewar or simply preexisting social networks in shaping organizational structure, mobilization, and actors’ behavior (Petersen 2001; E. J. Wood 2003; Staniland 2012, 2014; Metternich et al. 2013; Parkinson 2013; Shesterinina 2016, 2021; Dorff 2017; Lewis 2017, 2020; Larson and Lewis 2018; Hundman and Parkinson 2019; Mazur 2019, 2020). Building on its insights, I argue that ongoing organizational and social change—especially the emergence of new organizations that cope with of-the-moment challenges—must be understood in the context of adaptive network interaction (Lubkemann 2008; E. J. Wood 2008; Fujii 2009; Daly 2016, 2014; Bultmann 2018; Parkinson and Zaks 2018). This approach thus dovetails with perspectives that treat war as an ongoing, iterative, and dialectic process (McGovern 2011; Hermez 2021), rather than as a series of discrete military engagements.

My research reveals that members of militant groups respond to diverse repertoires of violence by leveraging quotidian social networks—the everyday connections of kinship, marriage, friendship, neighborhood, congregation, and co-membership—to perform explicitly organizational labor. Violence and repression affect militants’ social networks both through “material” changes to structure—for instance, by changing who is physically available to perform certain tasks—and also by shifting the collective meanings embedded within social relations—for example, what is perceived as an existential threat and which tasks are consequently perceived as necessary for community survival. I argue that resilient militant organizations systematically and continuously adapt to wartime environments by altering the membership, content, or structure of their social ties.
To analytically zero in on these processes, I trace the backstage labor that made it possible for Palestinian resistance groups to adapt and survive in Lebanon in the 1980s, despite repeated military campaigns by Lebanese, Israeli, and Syrian forces. While “fighters”—understood as people who engage directly in armed combat—feature prominently in journalistic coverage of civil war and in conflict scholarship (Gates 2002; Weinstein 2005, 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, 2008; Fujii 2009; Daly 2012, 2014, 2016; Beber and Blattman 2013; Eck 2014), research has long noted that only a small minority of those who actively participate in civil war use a weapon (E. J. Wood 2003). A related, developing body of scholarship has addressed the complex organization of militant groups and labor divisions within them (Parkinson and Zaks 2018). An especially relevant area of this literature examines rebels’ relationships with and governance of civilian populations, focusing on issues such as institutional design, service provision, and taxation (Branch and Mampilly 2005; Beardsley and McQuinn 2009; Mampilly 2009, 2011; Arjona 2014, 2016; Arjona et al. 2015; March and Revkin 2015; Huang 2016a, 2016b; Revkin 2016, 2019; Stewart 2018, 2020; Mampilly and Stewart 2020). Related research highlights the sociopolitical and gender dynamics involved with recruitment, mobilization, and participation, all of which affect network dynamics (Straus 2005; Viterna 2006, 2013; Thomas and Bond 2015; Shesterinina 2016, 2021; Gowrinathan 2017). These studies have helped shift analytic focus from the production of violence to the overarching political projects and relationships that sustain militancy as well as insurgency. Moreover, they provide an important foil to top-down examinations of leadership and elite-level management of militant organizations (Shapiro 2013; Foster and Siegel 2019) by complicating notions of hierarchy and agency within militant organizations. Collectively, these perspectives suggest a more holistic approach to understanding the puzzles surrounding asymmetric and intrastate conflict, based on complex interactions among militant organizational structures, civilian communities, and other armed actors.

**Methodological Approach**

Studying Palestinian militant organizations in the aftermath of Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon provides multiple opportunities to develop comparative, micro-level and meso-level studies of network adaptation, emergence, and resilience within the same overarching context; that is, to abductively collect and assemble network data without prior knowledge of existing relations or structures (Parkinson 2021b). A historical and comparative research design, carried out with an ethnographic sensibility (Pader 2006; Schatz 2009; Simmons and
Smith 2017, 2019) through immersive fieldwork, enables me to examine militant organizations’ adaptive processes at both the regional and local levels (including camp and neighborhood), and then to present a deep analysis of the effects of repertoires of violence on militant resilience.

My research process reflects the realities of intrastate conflict by focusing on the diverse forms of day-to-day critical labor that militants perform within non-state armed organizations. Examples include paying salaries, resolving disputes, coordinating engineering and maintenance divisions, and assembling intelligence, among many others. Years of engagement with current and former members of militant organizations ground this work. Over a period of two years, I spoke to hundreds of current and former Palestinian and Lebanese militants who played a variety of roles during both the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and the Israeli and Syrian occupations of Lebanon (1982–2000 and 1976–2005, respectively). My research includes in-depth and often life-history interviews with 114 current and former militants who were active in Beirut and South Lebanon during the 1970s and 1980s. It also comprises interviews with employees of nongovernmental and community organizations as well as individuals who worked for the United Nations, with some overlap between groups. After the initial background work, most of my interviews occurred in the broader context of my immersive engagement with Palestinian communities, including ten months of organizational ethnography with members of Fatah’s Women’s Office. I draw upon deep and extensive analysis of primary-source Palestinian texts, mainstream and clandestine Arabic-language newspapers from the periods under study, original documentary film footage from the Palestine Liberation Organization, and a review of relevant memoirs from Palestinian, Lebanese, and limited Israeli sources. Throughout my research, I volunteered with three camp-based, educationally focused Palestinian civil society organizations for periods lasting between two and nine months. The following section outlines core aspects of the ethnographic methodology I deployed to generate historical evidence and explores the role of memory in this research.

Meeting People Where They Are

Cognizant of an increasing trend of “fly-by” and “parachute” research in Palestinian communities in Lebanon, I spent the initial months of my 2009–2010 stay in Lebanon volunteering in a South Beirut refugee camp, engaging in archival research, and slowly building relationships by talking to Palestinian acquaintances both about their everyday lives and about what I was reading in the archives. When they asked what I found, I would tell them about an article that I discovered about a specific battle, or about a youth organization leading a
protest, or perhaps about a foreign humanitarian group arriving with aid. Sometimes my interlocutors asked follow-up questions; often they started entire conversations based on the events that I mentioned, by location and date. At times, the conversation moved away from my research entirely. Adopting this method allowed people to approach me about their possible formal participation in the project later, if and when they chose to do so, often after knowing and vetting me for months, sometimes years. People were paying attention; during later group interviews, interlocutors who knew me would sometimes shush someone who tried to explain that the Lebanese Civil War was between Muslims and Christians, arguing that I had read the history and “knew better.”

The result of this incremental approach to relationship building was that when I was “invited in,” so to speak, it was often with extensive, ongoing access, including times when I left Lebanon and returned a few months or even a year later. My travel schedule in many ways came to mimic that of a family member or friend who had emigrated and who visited for holiday breaks and summer vacation; methodologically, it facilitated ongoing revisits of the sites and organizations that interested me (Burawoy 2003) and provoked constant reflection on my own positionality. The fact that I kept returning over several years, when many researchers do not, also increased people’s willingness to speak to me in depth for my project.

Shadowing people in their everyday jobs and social lives became one of the most productive ways for me to examine the intersection of multiple social networks, as well as to deduce how they interacted with organizational histories and memory. My technique emerged organically from several initial interviews. After I introduced my project, discussed informed consent, and in some cases also conducted an informal or semistructured interview, someone would often remark that I should “just follow them around for a few days.” When I did, they would almost inevitably introduce me and my project to colleagues, friends, and family, many of whom would volunteer to participate in a later interview. Shadowing was also the first step in observing organizational-level phenomena; people invited me to political party events such as rallies and commemorations, encouraged me to attend demonstrations, took me along on recruitment visits, won permission to bring me into closed camp-level meetings, and included me in social events such as group picnics. Speaking to people informally on the way to or from and during such events revealed previously hidden and often unexpected social connections and sites of network overlap. For example, as I walked through the Sabra market with Abu Houli, a member of Fatah and a former member of the ANM, I witnessed him greet several members of ostensibly rival, Syrian-allied factions with a hearty handshake and warm questions about their family, noting afterward that he had played football (soccer) with them in the 1970s or served during the camp sieges with them in the 1980s.
Such practices often revealed historical networks that otherwise would have been invisible to me. For example, chapter 4, which focuses on gendered clandestine logistics and smuggling networks grew out of participant observation alongside a woman named Sawsan, who was involved with curating a Nakba Day (the commemoration of Palestinians’ dispossession and expulsion from the present-day state of Israel) exhibit on women in Fatah. Sawsan was one of my earliest contacts in Fatah; I met her in November of 2009 and told her about my research project. She listened with interest and expressed a desire to help; however, given the newness of our relationship, I did not push the matter. On a few occasions in winter 2009 and the following spring, I tagged along on her visits to young women who, as I later learned, Sawsan hoped to recruit to the faction. In April 2010, in what I interpreted as a signal of her trust in me and acceptance of my presence around her office, Sawsan asked me to proofread her weekly professional activities report. I had accompanied her during most of her work activities that week, and she asked me to check whether she had forgotten anything. Shortly thereafter, Sawsan suggested that I assist with her assignment for Nakba Day.

In the lead-up to Nakba Day, I accompanied Sawsan to poster design sessions, to her visits with both camp-level and regional-level Fatah and PLO officials, and to specially scheduled interviews with women cadres and elderly camp residents. This experience introduced me to new social networks, allowed Sawsan to vouch for me with high-ranking officers in both the Women’s Office and Fatah, and exposed me to several suborganizational memory cultures (in this case, those associated with the 1980s underground). At each stop, she would introduce me to other party members and casually tell them about my research project. Often, after discussing my research interests with them and getting their consent, I would then conduct a brief interview on the spot. I usually stopped after a few questions so as not to distract from my interlocutors’ tasks at hand and so that people did not feel socially obligated to speak to me. In almost every case, I was invited to meet someone again for a more in-depth interview.

When Sawsan and her colleagues were formatting posters and pamphlets, I leveraged my previous, short-lived career in magazine publishing along with my Arabic language training to ask questions about their design and texts. This mode of participation opened numerous conversations about noteworthy types of women’s participation in Fatah and the positions women had held over time. For example, a particular poster featured images of women who had served as commandos, pilots, and suicide bombers, in addition to others who had been factional officials and members of the Palestinian National Council. Our searching for certain women’s photos was also instructive; it was easy to locate, for instance, a formal portrait of Dalal al-Mughrabi, a Fatah cadre who led a 1978 attack in northern Israel. However, in one case, Sawsan and I spent an entire day
visiting various offices in Beirut searching for a decent photo of a high-ranking woman in Fatah’s Lebanon branch. We ended up relying on a grainy, undated snapshot; it seemed that no one in the faction had ever taken an official portrait, despite the woman’s status. Sawsan explained that it was likely because she had been an important figure during the War of the Camps, when she had achieved her highest rank. The lack of a portrait might have been for security, or it may have simply been neglected, owing to more-pressing matters at the time. These types of moments sensitized me to the limits of official narratives and records, which in turn encouraged me to continue developing contacts through more-informal channels.

Experiences like these continued to shape my interviewing technique. Shadowing others produced unexpected opportunities for me to ask people questions about their past and to explore how their relationships with each other and with various factions had evolved over time. Whenever I accompanied a factional cadre or a UNRWA official in their daily work, they often situated what they were doing in their own history, given the knowledge I shared with them of my research topic. In particular, I noted patterns of social network overlap (i.e., a cadre might have militant siblings or friends who worked in a social association). I also noted some interviewees’ previous movements among organizational subdivisions (e.g., from a fighting position to a logistics role). For example, as I accompanied Abu Hadi, a UNRWA employee, a former guerrilla fighter, and an ex-officer in one of the General Unions, back and forth between his formal meetings and arguileh cafés, he would explain exactly how he had come to know each party official, NGO worker, or community member and what role he remembered them playing. While his current professional networks only partially overlapped with those associated with his former roles, he revealed that he constantly accessed past organizational networks to get things done around the camps, such as asking someone who had once fought alongside him for a favor. At one point, he “coincidentally” scheduled a visit to a school where he knew that a former officer in the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), who was a veteran of the Magdousheh campaign, would be picking up his sons. Though Abu Hadi only intended to facilitate an introduction, the officer’s enthusiasm on meeting me led me to conduct an interview in a secluded corner of the parking lot as the children happily scampered around us.

As a researcher, I was embedded within present-day relations and organizational structures; I was, of course, unable to witness historical processes firsthand. Instead, I was observing contemporary meetings, demonstrations, and practices. These experiences provided countless opportunities to ask people about their recollection of events in the 1970s and 1980s. Seemingly fleeting moments—a complaint, a joke, an offhand comment, the offer of hot sauce for
one’s lunch—could be leveraged into a question about how things had been in the past. From a network perspective, engaging with the contemporary incarnation of an organization revealed crucial sites of disjuncture with the past, such as discarded practices, gaps in official memory (e.g. when a leader was unaware of how the organization had previously functioned), or marginalized cliques of cadres. For example, many of my interviewees, particularly those with detailed knowledge of the 1980s, had left their previous factions or had withdrawn from leadership roles; current members who maintained friendships with them nevertheless frequently referred them to me. However, these encounters could also lead to tensions and ethical dilemmas. Below, I use an ethnographic interlude to reveal how arguments about historical participation and political authenticity emerged among my interlocutors after I was well into my research on clandestine activism. I use this section to introduce the concept of organizational metadata and to underscore how the acknowledgment of these metadata can inform the historical study of militant groups and other collectivities.

**Credit Claiming and Authenticity Debates**

*Nafisa is sitting on the couch, calm and smiling yet clearly livid; I realize she has been waiting for me to arrive. I am barely across the threshold when she asks, in what feels like a dangerously cheerful tone: “So, what did that liar tell you? Did she tell you that she was in Beirut for the siege? Did she tell you she smuggled food? She didn’t, she couldn’t, she’s afraid of everything! She was in the Gulf the whole time with her husband!”*

In order to reconstruct historical militant hierarchies and quotidian social networks, I deliberately interviewed key figures from different strata within the factions, often repeatedly. Long-term engagement with Palestinian organizations and communities allowed me to recognize three relevant dynamics that affected my ongoing research. First, as one might expect, people spoke in increasing detail and depth about their experiences over a series of interviews and conversations, frequently over months or years. Informal, ethnohistorical group interviews, especially when they involved members of different generations and followed an initial, one-on-one semistructured interview, often elicited particularly poignant material, in part because my interlocutors would focus on connecting multiple individuals’ experiences or on teaching younger cadres who were present, rather than speaking as they would to a foreign researcher like me. For example, during my second interview with Nafisa at her house in Burj al-Barajneh camp, Sawsan asked her where the community had buried the people who died during the War.
of the Camps. Nafisa and her elderly mother gently explained to her that many were buried under the camp alleyways through which we had just walked. This fact pained Sawsan immensely, yet she also expressed that, as a party member, she needed to know this history. Without my long-standing commitment to doing immersive fieldwork, information of this nature would have been largely unavailable to me.

Second, also unsurprisingly, many interlocutors omitted certain types of information in our early interactions. An obvious category for omission related to negative feelings about officers or factions, though numerous people spoke quite candidly about their critiques of the factions (Parkinson 2016). Yet many of my interlocutors, specifically those who had been involved in clandestine work, also didn’t want to risk overemphasizing their personal contributions in what they strongly felt had been collective efforts, a practice that several associated with opportunistic politicians. Others worried about the tension between their experiences and factional narratives, especially when it came to present-day reconciliation with Lebanese parties such as Amal. As people shared different memories over time, I attributed their increasing openness to confidence in my growing ability to appropriately contextualize their experiences as well as to their own exercise of agency in how they wanted to tell their stories, rather than how they imagined their contemporary chains of command wanted them to be told. Third, delicately discerning who had experienced certain historical events or participated in them first-hand, who knew about these occurrences secondhand (but might speak as though they had participated), and who hadn’t been aware of them in the first place all became essential to my understanding the structure of past organizational and social ties (e.g., the degree of compartmentalization in underground networks) and how they had evolved.

In the lead-up to Nafisa confronting me, the leadership of her faction had delegated Umm Amir, a high-ranked local officer, to assemble a group of women for me to interview about the sieges during the War of the Camps. Umm Amir, a sweet but somewhat naive woman, was clearly pleased with the responsibility and had gathered several women together for coffee and a chat. But, outside the office, women who were long-term members of the faction seethed; they felt insulted that a senior male officer had appointed Umm Amir as their representative, given that she was in fact a new member who had never engaged in wartime activism or militancy.

The resulting group interview revealed that, despite general familiarity with the workings of the camp’s defensive efforts, the women whom Umm Amir assembled had certainly not been core activists. Neither she nor the contemporary leadership knew exactly who had been part of the woman-dominated underground in the 1980s. Nevertheless, one of the interviewees Umm Amir selected,
Rana, subsequently bragged to Nafisa that she had been chosen to take part in an interview with a foreign researcher; now, Nafisa was asking me what had been said. I had to negotiate the situation before she confronted Umm Amir.

“Nafisa, you know I have to get the ‘official’ story. It doesn’t matter what she said to me, it matters how and why she said what she said.” I assure her that I understand that some people are going to misrepresent history and that I can often tell if they are.

Nafisa storms into the kitchen, where the target of her rage changes to the faction’s leadership. She begins furiously scrubbing the stove. I’m welcome to get the official story from the leaders, she says, but they didn’t experience the siege like everyone else. People in the camp had been starving and yet “you could find fresh banana peels and candy wrappers outside the political leaders’ offices.” She yanks back her clothing and, for the first time, shows me several deep scars; she explains that a shell fell directly into her home. I know that she would have had limited access to emergency care during the siege. The camp’s field hospital had minimal supplies and would have necessarily prioritized life-threatening injuries before treating wounds like hers, despite their apparent seriousness. Nafisa asks me come to the window by the stove and shows me where exactly fighters had positioned themselves [next to her house, emphasizing her proximity to the battles].

Nafisa was adding nuance to what I already knew of her own story. When she had previously spoken to me about the siege, she, like others, always drove home the point that “everyone” in the camp participated in some way. At this point, Nafisa and I had spoken multiple times over two years about her political activity, and specifically about her life during the War of the Camps. Because she had served on the defensive front, her neighbors from multiple factions viewed her with deep respect, especially in comparison to her newer colleagues. However, when asked whether older members like Nafisa were recognized or promoted for their actions, another woman who had been active in the underground remarked that “now everything is like there was nothing.”

Practices of memory sharing and claiming organizational histories offer researchers important insights into long-term organizational structures, expose dynamic processes of organizational change, and reveal politicized divisions in collective memory frameworks. Nafisa and I originally met when I was shadowing Sawsan and another woman, Sabah, during the Nakba Day project. When I described my research, Nafisa sat back thoughtfully and asked me whether I
smoked. I produced a pack of Marlboro Golds and offered her one. She laughed and took out her Kents, making sure to tease me for smoking “light” cigarettes. We then spoke briefly about clandestine operations during the 1980s, which is the first time that she told me how important it was to understand that everyone—across factions—had participated in camp defense together. She invited me to her house, where I later conducted a life history interview with her; I returned afterward to conduct a follow-up interview about the camp siege and her role in the underground. Our conversations continued over the course of a decade as I returned repeatedly to Lebanon.

As I conducted more interviews, I was increasingly present at demonstrations and party events alongside members of the Women’s Office such as Nafisa. I came to know her and several of her family members as part of an organizational subgroup constituted by past co-membership in the clandestine apparatus and the interfactional defense front during the War of the Camps. As we interacted more at party events and as her children came to know me better, I began visiting them socially, got to know her extended family and friends well, and frequently slept at her house.

By contrast, in 2012, when the party leadership introduced me to Umm Amir, I had decided to try a more formal route to conducting interviews by approaching factional leadership. On paper, the women leaders were all party colleagues and neighbors. Umm Amir herself was a member of the camp community and a current officer. However, as I learned, she had been excluded from the two elite subgroups of which Nafisa was a member.

The group interview that I conducted with Umm Amir and the women she gathered clearly included the inventions, evasions, and silences that Lee Ann Fujii theorizes alongside rumors and denials as metadata, that is, the “spoken and unspoken thoughts and feelings which [interlocutors] do not always articulate in their stories or interview responses, but which emerge in other ways” (Fujii 2010, 231). As Fujii underscores: “Meta-data are as valuable as the testimonies themselves because they indicate how the current social and political landscape is shaping what people might say to a researcher” (Fujii 2010, 232). In the group interview, the outright inventions stood out to me, first because they came in the form of appropriations and exaggerations, and second because they were shared in an official manner on behalf of a political faction. For instance, Umm Amir told me, twice, that she gave birth to her son during the siege, with bombs dropping around her. In reality, the son was born overseas and after, not during, the time of the siege, meaning that her statement was an invention. Other women in the camp, whom Umm Amir certainly knew, had in fact given birth during the siege; she had appropriated their experiences and represented them as her own.12 In another instance, Rana, whom Umm Amir recruited to speak
with me, told me that she been one of the women who picked up the faction’s money at the bank. Yet, her description of how her bank runs worked did not jibe with my previous interviews. In addition to naming the wrong bank, the way she described carrying the money—strapped to her stomach, to mimic a pregnancy—was known by veteran smugglers as an easy way to get caught by Lebanese militia members. Rana may in fact have smuggled food or money into the camp as a civilian or a supporter of the faction (as another interviewee’s husband did), but I doubted her claim that she was one of the trusted lynchpins of the clandestine financial apparatus. The two other women in the room stayed silent during these periods in conversation, neither affirming nor contradicting what Umm Amir and Rana said. This unusual lack of interaction (particularly during a lively conversation), which was characterized by deliberate silences, signaled that something was “off” about Rana’s and Umm Amir’s stories. I also noted that women who had served as underground activists always requested that I conceal their identities; the implication was that they might have something to fear (particularly as the Syrian Civil War escalated). By contrast, each woman in the “official” interview requested that I use their real names in my writing, and also mentioned to friends and neighbors that they had spoken to me about the siege.

Rather than examining my interlocutors’ verbal strategies in a vacuum, I came to recognize the collective and explicitly organizational meanings that they embodied, ultimately revealing what I label “organizational metadata.” In other words, the variety of metadata linked to the multiple encounters surrounding a specific interview revealed important aspects of organizational networks, collective experiences, and participants’ histories. These include several events preceding and following the interview, such as: (1) my asking Farouq, an officer whom I knew well, and who had been part of the underground, if he knew women activists I might interview; (2) Farouq’s deferral to his commanding officer (who had not served in the underground); (3) the commanding officer’s referral to Umm Amir, a high-ranking officer in the Women’s Office; (4) Umm Amir’s selection of individuals for my interview; (5) interview-specific metadata, in particular Umm Amir’s and Rana’s embellishments and appropriations alongside the others’ silence; and finally (6) Rana’s choice to then brag to Nafisa about being chosen for the interview.

Organizational metadata amplified the importance of factions’ contemporary cultures and structures in shaping the material I gained through interviews and participant observation. They also augmented my understanding of the geographic segmentation of contemporary social networks associated with the 1980s Palestinian underground. For instance, as an officer, Farouq interacted with cadres from the Women’s Office. However, he was not from one of the camps
that had been besieged; he had not had direct contact with women from Shatila, Burj al-Barajneh, or Rashidiyeh during the 1980s. Given a lack of personal connections in this specific realm, he defaulted to contemporary party protocol and referred me to a ranking (male) political officer in the Beirut chain of command. That officer referred me laterally to Umm Amir at the Women’s Office. Referring me to her meant one of two things: it could have reflected the officer’s lack of knowledge of how the underground had actually operated, or it may have implied that my inquiry had been classified as a “woman question” rather than a “military question” or a “camp question,” which would have elicited a different referral.

This starkly gendered divide in contemporary party structures was not representative of the 1980s, when women served in both military and clandestine roles alongside or in cooperation with men. In other words, the gendered referral process reflected present structures, not the historical ones I was studying. Alternately, if Farouq knew that many former underground activists had quit or reduced their roles in Fatah owing to disenchantment, he may have wanted to avoid referring an outsider to critical members of the party. Either way, if I had relied solely on the party hierarchy or on my male contacts, I never would have encountered the underground network.

By appropriating siege stories, both Umm Amir and Rana engaged in multiple types of political and memory work. First, they acknowledged the lasting social prestige associated with being a veteran of the 1980s underground. Second, they established ownership of that collective memory for an organization rather than for the camps as communities—in marked contrast to the narrative shared by members of the underground network (see, e.g., chapters 4, 5, and 6). It was, in effect, an act of what sociologist Eviatar Zarubavel (1996, 286) calls “mnemonic socialization,” in that it deliberately encouraged me to see the clandestine apparatus as an exclusively factional project. Moreover, by claiming first-hand experience of these events, Umm Amir was appropriating the roles, sacrifices, and suffering of survivors such as Nafisa. As a political officer, she was smoothing over an intra-organizational cleavage by equating herself and her friends with long-term members who were veterans of the underground. By claiming female smugglers’ stories for all women in the faction, and by making women’s smuggling efforts banal rather than recognizing certain individuals’ unique contributions, Umm Amir challenged Nafisa’s and similar women’s elite status, both discursive and structural, in the faction. Tellingly, Nafisa was not the only individual who sought to correct Umm Amir’s narrative. After learning that Umm Amir had been delegated to run the interview, Farouq pointedly and privately told me that while Umm Amir was “with” them and a fundamentally good woman, she nevertheless did not know anything; he made it very clear
that even *he* knew she was never part of the underground. He said this in a way to indicate that she was excluded from the clique of old-school activists, but also in a way that preserved the faction’s reputation.

This situation reveals how memory cultures (Zerubavel 1996; Auyero 1999; Haugbolle 2012) that are associated with the militant organizations I studied emerge from and help to maintain intra-organizational networks. Overlapping network membership in the party and in the underground meant that unlike the male-dominated leadership of Fatah, women like Nafisa had direct access to the camps’ populations. The contemporary brokerage role that women like Nafisa play, in part owing to their prior roles as clandestine actors, also highlights their potentially substantial “informal” power as well as their capacity for social innovation (Burt 2005; Papachristos 2006, 105–11); indeed, Nafisa frequently walked a strategic line between organizational stalwart and peripheral critic, depending on whether she needed, for example, financial support from the faction or a job with a nonpartisan NGO. As Nafisa’s mention of the banana peels and candy wrappers outside party offices during the siege implied, it also meant that members of her clique had a more contentious relationship with the leadership than the new “9 a.m.–2 p.m.” members (referring to the limited office hours they kept). Nafisa’s subgroup represented more than a few people with unique local connections; it also represented a clique with a shared understanding of organizational history (which the new leadership had downplayed), common critiques of both the old and the new leaderships, and a membership base that granted mutual respect and authority based on members’ past deeds. In many ways, this clique thereby challenged the formal organizational hierarchy.

My interlocutors’ past organizational roles often translated into divergent behaviors during our interviews. Former members of the underground, including Nafisa herself, often downplayed the uniqueness of their roles, avoided drawing distinctions between women activists, acknowledged cross-factional cooperation, and eschewed articulating hierarchies of sacrifice between themselves and others. Instead, like many others whom I interviewed, Nafisa insisted they had all sacrificed and that everyone did something. Only when women who had not been part of the underground claimed membership did Nafisa condemn them on the grounds of appropriating others’ experiences and informal status. In response to Rana’s bragging, and in stark contrast to her previous behavior, Nafisa subsequently learned who had been at the interview and broke down exactly how much of a right each woman had to speak. One had lost a son in front of her eyes during the siege and was a “good woman” (but not an activist herself). Another’s husband had smuggled money for the PLO and was also a “good woman.” One was a “gossip and an airhead who knew nothing.” And Umm Amir was simply “a liar.”
This approach underscores that researchers of political organizations must study not only the formal, “consciously designed entities” (Tsoukas 2001, 8) but also the informal, everyday aspects of organizations’ political power. Experiences such as those I relate in this chapter have allowed me to think seriously about how to pursue an ethnographic methodology in ways that would enable me to systematically understand relationships among the factions, broader communities, and historical memory, as well as ultimately to reflexively evaluate my role in them as a researcher.