On June 6, 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. Prompted by the fringe group Fatah-Revolutionary Council’s June 3 attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom, the Israel Defense Forces bombed Palestine Liberation Organization offices in Beirut. In retaliation, the PLO launched missiles from South Lebanon toward civilian settlements in northern Israel. Heavily influenced by Prime Minister Menachim Begin, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, and IDF Chief of Staff Raphael Eitan, the Israeli cabinet launched a long-planned invasion to destroy the PLO’s armed forces (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, chaps. 1–6; Cobban 1985, 120; Y. Sayigh 1997, 505–21). Intensive aerial and artillery attacks began on June 4. The land and sea invasion began on Sunday, two days later.

This chapter highlights core aspects of wartime repertoires of violence from the invasion’s first days to September 16–18, 1982, when the Sabra and Shatila massacre took place. My goal is neither to provide a complete history of the engagements nor to analyze the belligerents’ decision-making, which are available in other works.1 Rather, this chapter has three primary goals. First, I describe five distinct components of the Israeli and Lebanese parties’ repertoires of violence in the summer of 1982 as relayed to me by my interlocutors and as drawn from archival sources and memoirs. This discussion provides a foundation for the following chapters’ analyses of resulting social network adaptation and emergence. While aerial bombardment, street-to-street combat, incarceration, “mopping-up” campaigns, and mass killing could, for example, all fall under the umbrella of “indiscriminate,” each tactic resonated within social networks in specific ways that later played out via hyperlocal processes of organizational evolution.
Second, I use this thick description of violent repertoires during the summer and fall of 1982 to problematize two oft-used conceptual dichotomies in (counter)insurgency research: that between “indiscriminate” and “selective” violence (Kalyvas 1999, 2006; Downes 2007, 2008; Lyall 2009; Kocher et al. 2011; Souleimanov and Siroky 2016) and that between “direct” and “indirect” strategies, the latter of which involves the use of “brutal” or “barbaric” tactics that “seek to destroy an adversary’s will to fight” such as murdering noncombatants and mass internment (Arreguín-Toft 2001, 101–105, and 2005; Hazelton 2021, 18). Despite the causal significance assigned to these categories in (counter)insurgency studies, I suggest three reasons that both the terms themselves and the ways they are employed lack the precision necessary to predict subsequent militant and civilian behavior (e.g., further attacks, new mobilization). First, each label subsumes very different forms of violence. Counterinsurgency campaigns almost always deploy multiple tactics concurrently, rather than à la carte; that is, “indiscriminate” tactics such as aerial bombardment accompany forms of face-to-face, “selective” violence such as assassination and nonlethal techniques such as disinformation. The concurrent usage of tactics from both categories blurs the incentives associated with each, muddying proposed causal pathways to (counter)insurgent success or failure. Second, scholarship focuses on perpetrators’ intentions rather than targeted populations’ experiences. That is, belligerents’ intentions do not translate into militant and civilian perceptions. People targeted by counterinsurgent violence will often experience ostensibly “selective” tactics (such as incarceration) as indiscriminate and will respond according to their interpretations, regardless of perpetrators’ aims. Third, there exist substantial challenges to reliable application of the terms; one reasonable person may code certain tactics, such as blanket incarceration of adult men from a certain village, as indiscriminate whereas another would code them as selective.

While other scholars have argued that extant measures of counterinsurgent success are problematically based on artificially truncated parameters (e.g., a short timeline for follow-up attacks; see Souleimanov and Siroky 2016), my contention is that the very categorization of violent tactics into categories of “selective,” “indiscriminate,” “direct,” and “indirect,” with the goal of predicting political outcomes neglects the fact that variation in choice of tactic does not consistently map onto organizational or social impact. That is, because these oft-used scholarly categories obscure the micro-level, complex network interactions between repertoires of violence and militant organizations, they are insufficiently precise to analyze the unexpected military decisions and surprising social processes that these tactical repertoires produce. I instead argue that organizational networks and the social infrastructures that underlie them mediate both the material effects of and context-specific meaning-making processes that follow
from counterinsurgent violence, affecting outcomes such as militant mobilization, decision-making, and organizational capacity. The implication is that extant scholarly findings mask significant political processes and ignore important modes of organized resistance, thus overstating the chances for and degree of counterinsurgent “success.”

To achieve this goal, this chapter carefully details the tactical components that constituted Israeli and Lebanese repertoires of violence, linking them to network effects (e.g., the meanings associated with a death versus a disappearance) and examining how the meanings associated with them shaped understandings and narratives of violence and repression, which came to infuse social ties. This approach to understanding the contextual and symbolic weight of intrastate war and occupation violence underscores the unexpected ways that tactics interact with each other over time, disrupt social systems, and generate new behaviors and meaning-making among local actors, rather than assuming that these tactics’ deployment plays out as belligerents planned.

Third, and finally, this chapter provides an empirical outline of the regional and within-region comparisons that undergird this book’s analytical framework. It was one of my interlocutors, Kamal, who made the transformative and entirely practical suggestion that I simply ask my interviewees: “Why is the South different?” Posed at the right moment in an interview about factional history, the question had an almost cinematic flashback effect; people immediately started talking about the 1970s and 1980s. A former Lebanese member of Fatah’s al-Asifa Forces, Kamal immediately started talking about how he used to descend with his unit from South Lebanon into Israeli-controlled territory in the mid-1970s. He directly linked these operations to the 1978 Israeli invasion of South Lebanon and the growing power of Israeli-allied Lebanese militias such as the FLA. Kamal spent approximately twenty minutes of our three-hour interview describing the effects of the IDF’s tactics during the 1982 invasion, including mass incarceration and the deployment of white phosphorous on Lebanese towns. Yet he also spent equal time discussing the War of the Camps in Beirut, which he described as “the hardest time, the hardest politics, the hardest personally” because Palestinian factions were fighting each other and also because Syria was arresting members of pro-Arafat parties. This period, he explained via a direct comparison, “harmed the Palestinians more than the Israelis in 1982… Mazzeh, Tadmor, Qism Falastin, Sadnaya, there were people dying in prison.” Interactions such as this one helped me to understand people’s lived experiences of the invasion and occupation beyond the violence covered in journalistic and most historical accounts. They thus allow for a deep comparison of how Palestinians in (and within) South Lebanon experienced the invasion versus how those in Beirut experienced the Siege of Beirut, the various “mopping-
up” campaigns, and the Sabra and Shatila massacre. This part of the chapter also foregrounds the work of qualitatively comparing network micro-processes (Parkinson 2021) and assembling cases (Soss 2018) of organizational emergence in the following chapters both by noting subtle differences in repertoires of violence across space and by showing how they differentially affected militant networks and broader communities.

The Invasion in South Lebanon

The Israeli government initially anticipated clearing a limited border zone to prevent future PLO missile attacks and guerrilla infiltrations from the border to the Zahran River south of Saida and Lake Qaraoun in the eastern Bekaa Valley. On the morning of the invasion, journalists were still being informed that the IDF’s goal was “to push the PLO and its artillery out of range of the frontier and the northern Galilee area of Israel” (Fisk 2002, 201). Instead, Israeli troops moved into Lebanon via the coastal road, the Arkoub region, and naval landing points just north of Saida. The IDF progressed north up Lebanon’s coastal highway, defeating the PLA units, Lebanese and Palestinian guerrilla forces, and camp-based militias. Once troops were on the ground, high-ranking government officials directed the IDF to continue north to Beirut (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, chaps. 7–11). Many Palestinian guerrillas and militiamen stationed in South Lebanon, including several commanders, fled during the onslaught, which disrupted the chain of command and military discipline. Two of the clearest shared narratives that emerged from my interviews and ethnographic engagements were ones of complete material destruction and the gendered partitioning of social networks as a result of mass incarceration.

Aerial Bombardment and Community Destruction

Intensive Israeli aerial bombardment dislocated Palestinian as well as Lebanese communities and rendered people dispossessed. Entire populations from South Lebanon relocated over the course of the summer of 1982, disrupting community- and kinship-based networks that provided people with emotional, social, and financial support.6 Tens of thousands of Palestinians fled north or into the mountains to villages such as Abra or Wadi Zeini, while others continued on to Beirut.7 The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a US-based Quaker organization that organized humanitarian operations in Lebanon at the time, estimates that the IDF’s destruction of the southern refugee camps left approximately 200,000 Palestinians homeless.8
Many people shared their escape stories from South Lebanon as a means of illustrating their collective confusion, panic, and concurrent search for information related to the invasion. For example, Abu Wissam, who grew up in al-Buss camp in Sur, described a scene from the initial days of the Israeli campaign:

It was the night of my cousin's wedding, but they [the IDF] started shelling. We decided to flee to Ain al-Hilweh, but our car was damaged. So, we took the wedding car! We reached Jal al-Bahr [about 3 km up the road from al-Buss] and we saw cars getting hit. The whole road was getting bombed, everything was destroyed. We saw people dead in the cars, entire families, all burned. We turned off the main road and headed through the orchards; we were driving through the orchards east of Jal al-Bahr with the lights off and drove right up to an Israeli tank! In front of me was an Israeli tank! It was the first time in my life I saw Jews. But they didn't know what was going on—I didn’t either! I didn’t even know it was an invasion! I got scared and pushed the gas pedal harder!

In this particular case, Abu Wissam found dark humor (driving a flower- and tulle-covered wedding car while fleeing an invasion) and self-deprecation (noting that his reaction to the Israeli tank was to slam on the gas pedal), despite an objectively grave, terrifying situation. His experience underscores the oft-surprising coexistence of absurdity and horror in the civilian experience of war; he was obviously scared, but he was not, for example, cowed into immediate submission despite what he saw on the road. Recognizing such tensions in these moments helps to deepen understanding of people's lived experiences of the invasion and occupation, especially by underscoring their emotional complexity.

The destruction of homes, the interruption of lives, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese created clear collective perceptions around Israeli intentionality; people understood aerial bombardment as being disproportionate, expressly targeted at civilians, and aimed at obliterating Palestinian communities rather than the purported goal of stopping rocket attacks. Unlike what would happen in Beirut, the southern camps of Rashidiyeh, Burj al-Shamali, al-Buss, and Ain al-Hilweh were almost entirely physically destroyed during the invasion and its aftermath. Ground-based artillery and aerial bombardment by a modern military had devastating human and infrastructural consequences, magnified by the IDF’s subsequent bulldozing of large portions of the southern camps with the goals of eliminating them as potential staging areas for guerrillas and disincetivizing the return of civilians. An AFSC report cites a June 23, 1982, UNRWA estimate detailing “damage to camp housing as follows: Rashidiyeh 70% destroyed; Bourj el Shemali 35% destroyed; el Buss 50% destroyed; Ein al Hilweh totally destroyed; Mieh slightly damaged”
(Advisory Committee on Human Rights in Lebanon 1983, 18). Drawing on UNRWA figures, the historian Hilana Abdullah (2008, 53) estimates that 70 percent of homes in Burj al-Shamali were destroyed.\textsuperscript{11} Several PRCS facilities—often Palestinians’ only source of healthcare—had to close.

While Palestinians in Beirut would later experience the city’s besiegement and the Sabra and Shatila massacre, they did not witness the same extent of infrastructural destruction and demolition. People from the southern refugee camps often described discrete, galvanizing moments of collective shock, horror, grief, and failure both during and following the 1982 Israeli invasion. These moments formed bases for collective identification among Palestinian civilians as well as reference points for future repurposing, remapping, and mobilization. Yet, in their accounts, my interlocutors emphasized it was not simply a specific tactic—for instance, aerial bombardment—that influenced their interpretations of events. Rather, it was a combination of the tactics used, the perceived manner of targeting (intended or accidental, homes, hospitals, or militant positions), the social consequences, and the subsequent assignment of responsibility that all resonated. For example, Kamal, the former member of Fatah quoted above, shared precise, analytical recollections of military operations—such as leftist guerrillas successfully downing an Israeli helicopter, or a group of eight Israeli soldiers capturing two PFLP-GC guerrillas who were stationed between Arnoun and Nabatiyeh. He explained that the IDF and Mossad took prisoners such as these men to Israel to interrogate them regarding past operations. He understood both of these events as representing normal practices of war. He then relayed vivid, emotion-laden recollections of Israeli jets dropping white phosphorous—a self-igniting compound that both burns through tissue unless it is deprived of oxygen and severely irritates the eyes and lungs—onto both military and civilian targets.\textsuperscript{12} This tactic still shocked and upset him decades later. Abu Riyad, a Fatah officer from al-Buss who fought during the invasion, described each jet-delivered bomb as “clearing the space of a football [soccer] field,” which I interpreted to mean a disproportionate use of force given the significant amount of territory affected (i.e., potentially several dozen homes in his geographically tiny camp).\textsuperscript{13} Yahya and Khalid, both PFLP-GC fighters from Burj al-Shamali, told me that the Israelis encircled the semi-urban camp with twenty-three tanks while conducting air raids, which would have disincentivized escape and contributed to the notion that the IDF was trapping people in the camp as they bombed it. The resulting destruction was so extensive, they recalled: “You wouldn’t know where your house was; a family of 36 all died in the shelling.”\textsuperscript{14} Their emphasis on relaying precise numbers—twenty-three tanks and thirty-six members of a family (which is significant for both the number of dead and the implication that multiple, spatially distinct households were destroyed)—as well as the graphic
visual of being unable to locate one’s own home in the rubble underscore feelings of proximity to the battlefield and their shared experience of devastating loss to the point of social disorientation.

These collective experiences of violence initially spurred strong feelings of linked fate across distinct political affiliations, village backgrounds, religious denominations, and other forms of identification, especially as seemingly overwhelming numbers of people perished or simply vanished from their immediate social networks. Even decades later, multiple people from different political groups in Burj al-Shamali often explicitly anchored their experiences to collective events—for example, by asking if I had visited a memorial in the camp that commemorates ninety-four civilians who died when the IDF dropped a bomb on the Nadi al-Houli, a clubhouse maintained by a Palestinian village association, on June 7, 1982 (the second day of the invasion).15 By asking this question, they sought to highlight a moment that people believed shaped the camp community’s shared trajectory in the following years; for example, several people linked the Nadi al-Houli massacre and its explicitly civilian casualties to the community’s later decision not to engage in direct hostilities with the Syrian-backed Amal militia during the War of the Camps (see chapter 7). In the fall of 1982, narratives of vulnerability, PLO failure and abandonment, and Israeli aggression toward civilians crystallized as months-long delays in UNRWA’s tent construction for homeless Palestinians in Saida and Sur left people sleeping in the open as the winter approached. The situation was so dire that US officials—usually strong Israeli allies—publicly criticized the Israeli government for “doing the minimum for the refugees despite the coming winter.”16

The Role of Camp-Level Militia Forces

Foreshadowing the realities of command-and-control and challenges to formal hierarchies in the following years, Palestinian guerrillas and camp-based militias operated with very little oversight after the first day or so of the invasion. Local camp-based Palestinian militias long outlasted the technically better-trained guerrilla forces and PLA battalions (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, chap. 8), seeding a future bias among many militants toward local coordination and reliance. Several high-ranking officers deserted or were killed; contact with PLO headquarters in Beirut was extremely limited (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, 136; Cobban 1985, 121; Khalidi 1985, 61, 74; Fisk 2002, 219).17 Rashid Khalidi (1985, 61) notes that “regional and large unit commands frequently failed to respond to the emerging situation, particularly in the south in the first three or four days of the war.” Israeli journalists who covered the invasion emphasize that “the real war in South Lebanon was not fought by the Fatah’s semi-regular forces but by
the homeguards in the refugee camps. It was a static, tenacious battle fought in built-up areas cut through by narrow alleyways that barely accommodated a vehicle but afforded the Palestinian irregulars excellent conditions to fight back and defy the Israelis to the end” (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, 137).

Using a combination of small-unit tactics and home-field advantage—that is, a deep knowledge of the labyrinthine alleyways of the refugee camps and the bunker systems that had been built into their foundations—irregular Palestinian forces delayed the IDF’s advance for days. Yet the resilience of specifically local, irregular, defensive forces fighting within the camps marked them as unexpected challenges for the Israeli forces, even in comparison to more traditional targets. Israeli journalists Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari (1984, 138) explain that “the conquest of Nabatiye, for example, where the semiregular forces had six T-34 tanks and were supposed to be prepared for a long holding action, took all of three hours without costing the Israelis a single casualty. But the fighting in the refugee camps around Tyre went on for days, and the defenders of the Ein Hilweh camp adjoining Sidon, held out for an entire week.” Rashidiyeh held out for four days; Burj al-Shamali continued fighting for three and a half (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, 139). Burj al-Shamali’s militia forces managed to destroy a number of IDF tanks and wound several Israeli officers (Abdullah 2008, 50). Palestinian fighters in Ain al-Hilweh held the IDF off for over a week, delaying the overall Israeli advance by two full days (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, 142; Yermiya 1984; Khalidi 1985).

Ain al-Hilweh and the Invasion

The battle for Ain al-Hilweh meant that the camp had a unique experience of warfare even when compared to the other southern camps. It was longer, more intimate, and involved a broader array of IDF tactics and weaponry that included incendiary armaments. The camp’s defenders’ refusal to submit prompted Israeli forces to take a particularly aggressive stance toward it during the occupation.18 Throughout this book, I argue that these nuanced differences in counterinsurgent tactical repertoires such as the ones described here influenced variation in Palestinian organizational emergence.

Led by a combination of militiamen, Muslim religious authorities, and scouts, Ain al-Hilweh’s defenders battled Israeli troops starting Thursday, June 10 (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, 144–47; Khalidi 1985, 51; Rougier 2007, 44–45).19 As they retreated, small, isolated groups of fighters wove between the camp’s buildings, targeting the Israeli armored personnel carriers and tanks with light arms as they attempted to penetrate the camp. As a result, the IDF sacrificed any territorial gains made during the day when they pulled troops out of the firestorm for safety each night. After the initial push to clear the camp’s arterial north road failed,
the IDF repeatedly bombed the camp. By Friday, June 11, several days into the invasion, the IDF was attempting to negotiate the remaining militiamen’s exit via camp elders; the militiamen and camp youth refused to leave, saying that they would win or be martyred (Zeidan 2017, 284). Israeli forces resorted to bombing the camp with conventional ordnance and incendiary weapons such as napalm (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, 148; Y. Sayigh 1997, 525; Khalili 2007a, 52). Nevertheless, Ain al-Hilweh held out for several more days.

In both Saida and Sur, these urban battles provided important learning experiences for surviving militia members in terms of tactics, understanding of Israeli forces, and the inadvisability of relying upon higher command for direction. The collective planning, coordination, and toolkits they developed became some of the constitutive elements of emergent guerrilla practices during the ongoing occupation. Neighborhood-based defenses and extensive systems of earthworks, shelters, and arms caches enabled camp residents with small arms to repel the Israeli forces longer than trained forces did. Later, during the War of the Camps, fighters from Burj al-Shamali would transfer a similar, but updated, defensive model to Shatila and Burj al-Barajneh, an example of knowledge transfer that relied on preexisting networks. The PLO’s and factional regulars’ largely weak response to the invasion also seeded narratives of abandonment that were only amplified in local guerrilla networks between 1982 and 1985, creating a cleavage between on-the-ground forces and exiled elites.

**Gendered Incarceration**

In the summer of 1982, thousands of politically and militarily active Palestinian and Lebanese men from South Lebanon—as well as thousands of male civilians and hundreds of women—were arrested and detained in Israeli internment facilities. According to the AFSC, “[i]n November 1982 Israel announced that a total of 9,064 persons had been taken prisoner during its invasion of Lebanon. About two thirds of those arrested were Palestinians and the remainder were Lebanese and foreign nationals.” In her work on the Ansar prison camp outside Nabitiyeh, an open-air military prison where the IDF detained thousands of inmates in tents, Laleh Khalili (2008, 101) estimates the total number of individual inmates imprisoned at Ansar between June 1982 and May 1985 at 12,000 to 15,000 people.

While aerial bombardment is often cited as the quintessential “indiscriminate” tactic, different forms of incarceration have been treated in a more varied manner by counterinsurgency scholars. To understand how mass arrests and internment affected Palestinian organizational and social networks, it is helpful to consider the roles that each interned person may have filled, as well as the effects of their
removal from those roles. Each arrest took a family member—a father, brother, uncle, or son—from their social networks; economically, it separated breadwinners from families while, from a societal perspective, it removed civic leaders, teachers, doctors, and other central social actors from communities. Underscoring the broad, socially disorienting scope of the arrests, rather than reflecting detailed knowledge of actual numbers, former guerrillas from al-Buss and Burj al-Shamali refugee camps separately estimated that approximately 1,500 to 2,000 men from each of their camps were sent to Ansar. To put this number in perspective, the registered population of al-Buss at this time was 5,133 people; in Burj al-Shamali, it was 10,644. In short, people in al-Buss felt that about 40 percent of the camp’s population had been incarcerated. Fatah, the largest Palestinian faction, had 3,000 to 3,500 fighters stationed in South Lebanon before the invasion (al-Natour 2014a).

**Men in Black Masks**

The Israeli forces’ use of mass arrests, interrogations, and internment also revealed the role of secret Palestinian and Lebanese collaborators with the Israelis, shifting how people perceived trust and threat within their own social networks. This is another aspect of the invasion and occupation that distinguished South Lebanon from Beirut, where collaboration was much less central to the repertoire of violence. While collaborators superficially facilitated mass detainment and provided a veneer of selectivity for Israeli forces, few Palestinians saw their role as anything but personally instrumentalist. For example, after the invasion, the IDF evacuated Saida, moving civilians and soldiers en masse to the beachfront. A PRCS doctor, Chris Giannou, who was present on the beach at Saida, paints a vivid picture of the denunciation process that followed:

> The males were paraded one by one in front of three parked jeeps. In each one was a man with a hood over his head and an Israeli soldier. As they walked by, certain people would be singled out and taken away with an X or something in Hebrew written on their backs. Eventually 5,000 to 6,000 people were arrested on simple denunciations by a hooded man.

> We ended up being taken to a convent school close by. There we found ourselves first in a small courtyard and then in a large schoolyard where about 500 to 600 prisoners were being kept. There were new groups of prisoners being brought in and taken out all the time, but the constant population was 500 to 600 . . .

> . . . we knew some of the people were not fighters. Nobody in this schoolyard had been taken with arms in their hands. Now, in the other
Mahmoud Zeidan, who was a child living in Ain al-Hilweh at the time, recounts similar memories, reflecting how Palestinian youth experienced the process:

The Israelis would stamp people’s ID cards, they would tear it from the side of the photo and stamp it with a Hebrew stamp. Everyday new people arrive at the sea, and they would go through the same procedure [of walking in line in front of the informants who would indicate who should be taken in for interrogation]. The Israelis would tell people to go to the sea. Every day, I would go and watch the procedure. In reality, I felt like I was a young man, and that’s why I went to the sea. Maybe my appearance did not suggest that, which is why the Israelis wouldn’t make me walk in front of the collaborators. The Israelis would ask people 15 years old and over to go to the sea, and they arrested many of our friends with whom we used to play, including Suhail Abu al-Kul who was 14 years old at the time, despite his small and short body. He later died in the Ansar prison in one of the uprisings of the prisoners. (Zeidan 2017, 280–81)

Without exception, militants I interviewed who fought during the invasion explicitly highlighted their awareness of Palestinian as well as Lebanese collaborators in black hoods who pointed out their personal rivals on the beaches of Saida and Sur. No one to whom I spoke believed that local collaborators’ “identification” of militants was anything but their personal revenge toward the individual in question.

Palestinians and Lebanese perceived on-the-spot interrogations and arrests as arbitrary—an example being Zeidan’s memory of his small, short-statured, fourteen-year-old friend being sent to Ansar—and designed to generally intimidate the population, rather than to effectively identify individuals engaged in military activity. This particular aspect of the Israeli forces’ tactical repertoire appears to have provided Palestinians a clear, shared narrative frame and a perception of imminent threat that required response. Many people whom I interviewed described, often with an air of residual incredulousness, how Israeli soldiers had simply approached them as they sifted through the rubble of their homes to ask, “Do you work for any organization [implying a political faction]?” as if someone would boldly reply “Why, yes, I’m a colonel in the PFLP! Why does it matter?” Most people assumed they would be detained no matter what they
answered, which lowered any potential deterrent capability and opened new pathways for small, nonviolent acts of resistance that, as scholars such as James Scott would predict, later became routinized, particularly among civilians (Scott 1987; 1990) (see chapter 5). For instance, Abu Haytham, who had never been militarily active, eventually became so fed up with this repeated questioning that he actually answered a young IDF infantryman with a wide-eyed, innocent “Yes!” in order to enjoy the soldier’s shocked look before patronizingly explaining that he was a teacher, and thus a member of an educational organization.26 Arrests, interrogation, and incarceration do not seem to have disincentivized later high-risk activism and militancy. Demonstrating the sheer absurdity of the situation, Mahmud, who was a member of Fatah and a former militia member (though not an active combatant) at the time he was arrested, simply informed his Israeli interrogator in Ansar “no,” when asked if he was a member of a faction; he was unceremoniously released a few weeks later.

Despite the sweeping nature of arrest campaigns, at least some Israeli operations targeted specific Palestinian positions, units, or individuals. Several of my interviewees described this experience firsthand; Abu Riyad, Yahya, and Khalid were all captured as part of their units and immediately sent to prisons in Israel. Their subsequent experiences illustrate two possible trajectories that high-level prisoners took; Abu Riyad (who had little knowledge of clandestine operations) was transferred to Ansar after a few months, whereas Yahya and Khalid remained in Israel until the IDF released them during a prisoner exchange years later. The AFSC emphasizes both that the Red Cross did not have access to these facilities and that the majority of interrogations occurred outside Ansar.27 Yet, given the broader context of mass incarceration and heavy policing of Palestinian and Lebanese men, the fact that someone like Abu Riyad often served similar terms to civilians with no militant history emphasizes a lack of predictability in incentives and also alludes to one source of widespread feelings that the Israeli repertoire of violence was focused predominantly on collective punishment.

At the level of individual families and units, incarceration both removed people—mostly men and boys—from networks and produced overwhelming uncertainty among those who remained outside. The archipelago of Israeli- and Lebanese-militia-run prison camps, military detention facilities, interrogation centers, informal jails, and other internment sites, combined with varying patterns of sweeps and targeted arrests, meant that many Palestinian families simply did not know what had happened to their kin. Some arrests were short-term or involved multiple transfers, increasing the likelihood that neither prisoners nor their families knew where they were, where they would be, or for how long. Besides Ansar, smaller internment facilities in settings such as government buildings and schools held thousands of men and women prisoners across South
Lebanon on a more temporary basis. The IDF frequently held detainees in Saida at secondary internment facilities such as the Safa Orange Factory, the government hospital, St. Joseph’s convent, or government administrative buildings, to determine whether they would be sent to Ansar, Israel, or released. This scenario could last years; at least a hundred families later learned from the Israeli authorities that their relatives had died in prison.

These three aspects of the larger repertoire of invasion and occupation violence—aerial bombardment, close quarters battles in Ain al-Hilweh and the Israeli forces’ subsequent repression of the camp’s population, and mass incarceration—shaped both militant and civilian trajectories in the following years. While each of these tactics might reasonably be classified “indiscriminate,” analyzing them independently and in concert demonstrates their distinct network effects and narrative influence. They spurred network remapping that relationally distanced active guerrillas from formal chains of command, produced gendered roles within underground guerrilla cells, motivated civilian women’s collective as well as community-based advocacy, and spurred the development of cross-generational counterintelligence networks. These processes are the focus of chapters 3, 4, and 6.

The Siege of Beirut and Its Aftermath

By June 8, 1982, West Beirut was crowded with refugees from South Lebanon, many of whom flooded into neighborhoods that were subsequently bombed (Fisk 2002, 216). After moving up the coastal highway in an initial push, the IDF encircled Beirut over the next five days, isolating Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian forces, decimating Syrian anti-aircraft facilities in the Bekaa and cutting transit routes between Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, and Damascus. Between June 14 and June 26, the IDF fought to control the mountainous heights that encircle the city (Khalidi 1985, 48). Between June 26 and August 12, the IDF besieged the capital, cutting off roads, water, and electricity while shelling West Beirut.

The political dynamics and effects of siege and blockade often receive comparatively little scholarly attention, in comparison to those associated with conventional or insurgent warfare. With notable exceptions, such as Sarajevo in the early 1990s, sieges may receive minimal on-the-ground journalistic coverage, given the sheer difficulty and risk associated with reporting from them (Borri 2013). While millions of people might be affected, they can be harmed or killed in less visible or enumerable ways than in battle (whether through starvation, dehydration, or building collapse). However, from Changchun to Grozny to Aleppo, sieges have featured in dozens of twentieth- and twenty-first-century
wars and have killed or wounded hundreds of thousands of combatants and civilians while affecting millions more. Siege is generally treated as an indiscriminate or indirect tactic. Yet, as the limited number of scholars who seriously examine sieges, blockades, and similar tactics almost universally note, there is a particular set of organizational, psychological, economic, and social dynamics that accompanies them (Andreas 2008; Finkel 2017).

The experience of siege shaped later organizational and social evolution among Palestinians in Beirut. Rashid Khalidi describes the Siege of Beirut as “intensive air, naval, and artillery bombardments and aggressive [sic] psychological warfare directed both against the defenders of the city and its civilian population, and included calculated pressure on the morale of the besieged via the cutting off of food, water, and electricity” (Khalidi 1985, 49). In contrast, the Israeli Kahan Commission report notes in its background section that the capital was “occasionally shelled and bombed by the I.D.F.’s Air Force and artillery” (Kahan Commission 1983). Intense resentment of the Israeli military grew as the IDF bombed residential areas and deployed anti-personnel weapons such as cluster bombs and white phosphorous in civilian neighborhoods (Fisk 2002, 278). The siege also created feelings of solidarity among civilians across national lines—an unsurprising finding, given classic sociological theories of conflict dynamics (Simmel 1964).

The PLO had unevenly prepared for an onslaught of this magnitude. Its military organization was deeply flawed and inconsistent, incapable of matching the Israeli onslaught (Khalidi 1985, 60–61). However, the PLO had shifted reserve forces to Beirut; stocked supplies such as arms, ammunition, medicines, and fuel; and provided military training for Palestinian civilians (Khalidi 1985, 59), including in and near the camps. Sabra, Shatila, and Burj al-Barajneh withstood constant shelling, though not of the destructive magnitude seen in the south. The IDF targeted the PLO’s massive weapons dump in the Camille Chamoun sports stadium next to Sabra and Shatila as well as Palestinian anti-aircraft guns that had been placed in West Beirut, which were concentrated more heavily in Fakhani, Sabra, Shatila, and Burj al-Barajneh (Fisk 2002, 205, 210).

Beirut-based militants did not have the discipline, training, manpower, or firepower to indefinitely hold off the Israelis, to interact professionally with civilians, or to manage public opinion in West Beirut. Of the night of June 21, for instance, journalist Robert Fisk (2002, 259) writes: “Fatah guerrillas could be seen parking their truck-mounted recoilless rifles beside hotels and apartment blocks, inviting destruction on the civilian population. Several Palestinian officers did their best to organise relief services, guiding ambulances through the streets from the American University Hospital. Others behaved less heroically, threatening civilians with their rifles and harassing the few Western correspondents who
ventured onto the streets.” Despite these realities, it also became evident that the Israeli forces would have to accept massive casualties if they faced Beirut’s full defenses—the Joint Forces of the PLO and the LNM, local Lebanese militias, and camp-based defense committees—in open battle in order to take the city (Cobban 1985, 122).

Ensuing negotiations lasted for most of the summer and were punctuated by failed ceasefires that took a further toll on Beirut’s population. The Israeli government would not speak directly to Palestinian representatives, and Lebanese President Elias Sarkis would not meet with PLO Chairman Arafat; instead, Lebanese Prime Minister Shafiq al-Wazzan served as the communication channel between Arafat and Sarkis. Sarkis, in turn, dealt with US Ambassador Philip Habib, who held consultations with the Israeli government. When they reached a ceasefire agreement two months later, the Multi-National Forces (MNF), a peacekeeping force composed of soldiers from France, the United States, Italy, and the United Kingdom, moved in to monitor the ceasefire, the Palestinian and Syrian forces’ evacuation of Beirut, and an IDF withdrawal from the city. The PLO’s international bureaucracy and guerrilla fighters from multiple parties (14,398 personnel and soldiers total, including at least 11,000 fighters and 1,500 political staff) evacuated Lebanon at the end of August. The MNF deployed in Beirut and its southern suburbs. The PLO relocated its headquarters to Tunis while fighters dispersed to Tunisia, Yemen, Syria, and other Arab countries.

After the PLO’s 1982 evacuation of Beirut, Palestinians lacked direct communication with the PLO and the various guerrilla groups’ exiled command apparatuses. Instead they focused on reestablishing relationships with each other on the ground. Remembering the massive air and ground assaults of June and July of 1982, Zahra, the now-retired military trainer, simply said: “We couldn’t do anything.” In the space of a few months, my interviewees recalled initial feelings of communal strength and optimism giving way to helplessness and vulnerability.

From “Mopping Up” to Massacre

Even before the PLO’s departure from West Beirut, the IDF and right-wing, predominantly Christian Lebanese militias had begun arrest and disarmament campaigns in the camps. Schiff and Ya’ari note: “The first attempt to ‘straighten out’ the situation in Beirut took place on August 23, 1982 in the Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp, which was surrounded on three sides by IDF units. On [the leader of the right-wing Kata’ib militia Bashir Gemayel’s] orders a battalion of the regular Lebanese army entered the camp, began making mass arrests, and searched for arms caches” (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, 251–52). Following the withdrawal of the PLO leadership, guerrilla fighters, and their families at the end of August,
Lebanese government forces led by Kata’ib asserted control over West Beirut. Underscoring a broader, complementary narrative centered on the fighters’ defeat, the micro-level disarmament of the camps, and the resultant vulnerability of Palestinians left behind, the author of one history of Shatila camp writes that they departed “wearing civilian clothes and holding their individual weapons” (Kallam 2008, 43).

In the eyes of Palestinian residents of West Beirut, the immediate aftermath of the evacuation began a period of acute community insecurity. In September 1982, the Lebanese army initiated a “security plan” throughout West Beirut and Dahiyeh, a demographically mixed area of the southern suburbs adjacent to Burj al-Barajneh camp. Palestinians who were living in these communities remembered feeling helpless and overwhelmed during the invasion and its immediate aftermath, especially in light of the symbolism of the LAF entering neighborhoods it previously refrained from entering due to the 1969 Cairo Agreement, which ceded control, security, and management of the camps to the PLO (al-Hajali 2007, 66–67).

Photographs in historical collections depict Lebanese soldiers removing arms caches from basements and bunkers in Palestinian-populated neighborhoods in Fakhani, Tariq al-Jdideh, and Burj al-Barajneh (al-Din 1985, 100–103). The PLO and guerrilla factions had transferred many of their weapons stores out of the camps and to their Lebanese allies before the evacuation. Small numbers of fighters, including a group who had survived the Tel al-Za’tar siege, kept their personal weapons for self-defense, arguing that they had no way of knowing what would come to pass. However, there was also considerable community-level pressure to hide or dispose of individual small arms, since they could be used by Israeli and Lebanese forces as a pretext for violence against districts inhabited predominantly by civilians (al-Hout 2004, 40–42). With fighters gone and the Cairo Agreement abrogated, Palestinians who remained in the camps felt exposed and under constant threat.

The Sabra and Shatila Massacre

On September 14, less than a month after the PLO’s formal withdrawal and the MNF’s stationing in West and South Beirut, a bomb planted by a Maronite Syrian Socialist National Party member ripped through Kata’ib headquarters in Ashrafieh, killing Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel (Hanf 1994, 268). Operating on the Israeli government’s preexisting claim that Palestinian fighters remained in the city, the IDF immediately occupied West Beirut. It established positions on major access routes to the Shatila district, the area comprising the Palestinian camp itself as well as the adjacent, demographically mixed neighborhoods of West Shatila, al-Daouk, Sabra, Hay Farhat, Hay al-Miqdad, Hay
Arsal, and Horsh Tabet (al-Hout 2004, 43–44). On September 15, militiamen affiliated with the Lebanese Kata’ib, the South Lebanon Army, and other right-wing Christian militias surrounded and scouted the neighborhoods surrounding Shatila. Swee Chai Ang (1989, 55), a PRCS volunteer from England who worked as a surgeon in Gaza Hospital in Sabra and was present for the subsequent massacre, notes: “People who tried to leave the camp returned and said that all roads leading out of the camps were blocked by Israeli tanks. . . . At 5 p.m. we were told that Israeli commandos were on the main roads of the camps.” Maps published by witnesses indicate Israeli military positions on the Kuwaiti Embassy corner and along major streets on the camp’s periphery (Kallam 2008, 48). Two groups from Shatila, one of male community elders and the other made up of women and children, attempted to reach and peacefully negotiate with IDF commanders in the area, yet Lebanese militiamen abducted, raped, or killed members of both parties (al-Hout 2004, chap. 2). On September 16 and continuing through the morning of September 18, Lebanese militiamen entered the district and killed or disappeared between 2,000 and 3,500 predominantly Palestinian civilians, many of whom were also subjected to beatings, torture, and sexual violence. Significant numbers of Lebanese and other nationalities were also victimized (Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, chap. 13; Ang 1989, chap. 6; Y. Sayigh 1997, 539; Fisk 2002, chap. 11; al-Hout 2004, 296). Throughout the massacre, IDF troops prevented people from leaving, illuminated the area with flares (Traboulsi 2007, 218), and, especially in the early stages, shelled the district. This last act forced residents into underground shelters whose locations Lebanese militias had deliberately surveyed; they became one of the first places where the militias found and subsequently killed civilians (al-Hout 2004, chaps. 2–3).

The deployment of siege tactics and the use of “mopping-up” campaigns that culminated in mass killing and atrocity during the Sabra and Shatila massacre created constitutive bonds of shared vulnerability that motivated later cross-city organizing in Beirut. The PLO’s original video footage of the massacre’s aftermath reveals aspects of the tableau visible to any resident of Mar Elias, Tariq al-Jdideh, or Burj al-Barajneh who ventured down the road to see what had happened: Red Crescent workers wearing branded vests and face masks while spraying lye over bodies lying in the streets; volunteers digging mass graves and laying dozens of bodies in them; screaming women searching for children and elderly parents. The camera gives some idea of what it might have been like to wander through the area’s tight alleyways as a Palestinian or Lebanese from elsewhere in South Beirut; it selectively zooms in on the corpses of women and children, often half-buried under haphazardly bulldozed rubble. It repeatedly focuses in on everyday household objects such as children’s toys in a clear effort to further dramatize the militias’ targeting of children. In terms of the per-
spective taken, the PLO cameraperson is insistent on conveying the idea that civilians—specifically, women, children, and the elderly—were killed brutally and intimately in their own homes and businesses. In October 1982, Palestinians’ fears were further compounded when government forces loyal to newly elected President Amin Gemayel (Bashir Gemayel’s brother) arrested and imprisoned hundreds of Palestinian men at the Lebanese Ministry of Defense in Yarze. These arrests involved broad round-ups; a photo chosen to represent this period in a well-known history of the Lebanese Civil War shows at least 15 Palestinian men sitting or being loaded on an open-bed truck by two armed men in fatigues and helmets while a driver stands in the cab (al-Din 1985, 102–104).

While siege, mass killing, and “clean-up” campaigns each easily fit into the category of “indiscriminate tactics,” the close examination of their micro-level network effects and narrative influence in the following chapters demonstrates how they shaped Palestinians’ experiences and perceptions in distinct ways, in comparison to South Lebanon. The confinement of numerous men at home initially cut communication channels, but Palestinians soon reestablished them via a woman-led courier-system similar to that in the south. However, rather than being cross-regional, these processes occurred at the city level. Moreover, the specific targeting of civilians by Lebanese militia forces during the Sabra and Shatila massacre created bonds across political persuasions as well as the militant-civilian divide. The narratives it seeded became key relations that undergirded the development of camp defensive fronts later in the decade. These processes are the focus of chapter 6.

By all accounts, the PLO and the guerrilla factions had been defeated by September 1982. Few Palestinian fighters remained in Lebanon; among the limited number who did, an even lower number retained their personal weapons for self-defense. Many extant studies of counterinsurgency would predict that in this context, indiscriminate targeting of civilian communities (Lyall 2009) and brutal, indirect tactics (Arreguín-Toft 2001, 2005; Hazelton 2021) would successfully suppress Palestinian militancy and “drain the sea” of civilian support. The following chapters demonstrate that they did neither. In fact, the repertoires of violence and repression that both Israeli and Lebanese actors deployed created new collective grievances among Palestinians and Lebanese while laying the network foundations for new, adaptive modes of organized resistance.

Approximately 19,085 Lebanese and Palestinians were killed and 30,302 were wounded between June 4 and August 31, 1982, a period inclusive of the Israeli invasion, the Siege of Beirut, and the PLO’s withdrawal (Rubenberg 1986, 281). However, these numbers do not capture how the lived experience of the invasion and
occupation immediately affected and continued to shape social networks. Regional differences arose between Beirut and South Lebanon based on the repertoires of violence people faced and their agentive decisions regarding how to manage it. The massacre at Sabra and Shatila instilled in many people that civilian communities had to be robustly defended. Claims that the IDF and Lebanese militias wanted to selectively root out “terrorists” in Shatila had little believability in the wake of mass civilian death. Likewise, arguments that collaboration and mass incarceration in South Lebanon only targeted fighters held no credibility when the IDF, its Lebanese allies, and Palestinian collaborators continuously harassed, exploited, and violently targeted people who had no involvement with armed activities.

Repertoires of violence that felt indiscriminate and brutal conclusively taught Palestinians that they would be targeted independently of their individual or collective decisions. However, it would be wrong to argue that a distinction between selective versus indiscriminate violence or direct versus indirect violence determined Palestinian organizational outcomes. Rather, distinct, regionalized repertoires of violence shaped both the material content of and collective meanings embedded in Palestinian social networks, thereby affecting processes of organizational and social change at the local level.

The rest of this book closely examines those experiences of violence and repression and their effects, revealing how intersecting social networks mediate both organizational and social responses to violence. It suggests that current understandings of counterinsurgent success often erase the human cost of military tactics by relying heavily on body counts as a measure of their effects. Building a deep understanding of how communities experience and collectively process violence allows scholars, policymakers, journalists, and other observers to better comprehend the spectrum of violent and nonviolent organizing that emerges to challenge states’ and other belligerents’ power during intrastate wars. This is especially true when considering how repertoires of violence affect people differentially in terms of gender, age, social class, and geography—dynamics that the more general language of “indiscriminate” and “indirect” obscure.

The following chapters build from the ontological and empirical foundation this chapter has provided by pursuing the regional and within-region comparisons of violence, network adaptation, and emergence. Each chapter cases instances of organizational emergence both by tracing subtle differences in repertoires of violence across space and by showing how they differentially affected militant networks and broader communities. In doing so, each chapter continues to problematize the concepts of indiscriminate and indirect violence and to insist on a more complex understanding of the human experiences of violence and participation in intrastate war, all while looking at the unexpected consequences for both armed organizations and civilians.