Members of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) routinely warn foreign visitors to Ain al-Hilweh that the Palestinian refugee camp is a veritable war zone. Journalistic coverage reinforces these warnings’ undertones; the Lebanese newspaper al-Safir’s archive holds several thick binders of Ain al-Hilweh-specific media clippings under the heading of “ishtibakat” (“clashes”). Many Palestinians share this view of the camp; a local UNRWA employee told me in 2010: “Ain al-Hilweh, it’s like Texas. You anger someone in their car and they might shoot you. What do you call them? Cowboys.”¹ A former United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) official to whom I spoke referred to the most well-known leader in the camp as “a mafioso.”² Palestinians from other communities informed me that they were afraid of visiting Ain al-Hilweh. Palestinians from Ain al-Hilweh called it “the capital of the camps” because its population reflected all political tendencies, ranging from Marxism, secular nationalism, and Salafism to apathy.

Militant leaders in Ain al-Hilweh go out of their way to explain that each faction has its own physical, economic, and social “turf” inside the camp. With practiced precision—they have given versions of the speech to dozens of journalists—officers explain that each of the camp’s dozen-plus mosques is linked formally or informally to a party or Islamic organization (see also Rougier 2007, 2004).³ Militia members staff checkpoints that straddle the camp’s main access points. When asked in 2007 how policing and security was handled within each neighborhood, the leader of Ansar Allah, a Sunni Islamist group that received funding from Hizbullah, explained: “Each faction has its own security ‘square’ and protects the families inside it.”⁴ Ain al-Hilweh’s organizations
field a Security Committee to manage checkpoint allocation, violent disputes between organizations, relations with the LAF, and boundaries between the camp and Taʿamir, a working-class Lebanese neighborhood to the north known for housing Salafi organizations’ offices and members. Belonging to this committee is a reputational goal for armed groups. More recent iterations of the committee, assembled in the mid-2010s, included Salafi groups that it had fought in earlier years.

Leaders cultivate strongman images to match these militarized organizational forms. Interviewing a local Fatah leader in his home in 2007, I was escorted alongside a journalist friend and her fixer through an antechamber with at least a dozen new automatic rifles hanging on the wall, which were protected by a huge, cheerful guard in body armor. We conducted the interview in a trellis-shaded courtyard as the commander’s young grandchildren romped around us. The official sported khaki military fatigues and a pistol; in my now fifteen years of traveling to Lebanon, it was the first and only time that I saw a Fatah officer wearing a sidearm during one of my interviews. A brief glance into an adjoining receiving room revealed what looked like a tripod-mounted rocket-propelled grenade. Looking back, I strongly believe it was all for the foreign journalist’s benefit; the visible weapons conveyed a particular, media-ready image of militancy. The same day, a leader of Usbat al-Ansar, one of the Salafi groups in the camp, locked me and the journalist in a safe house with metal sheeting over the windows. He wanted privacy while he fought with his public affairs officer about whether he should grant an interview to two women, given the group’s fundamentalist ideology. The public affairs officer refused to interact with us on principle, but allowed our male fixer to interview him. Meanwhile, the leader returned to the room, sat down, poured coffee out of a thermos, and offered us dates while chatting animatedly. The leader later insisted on being photographed in full mujahidin regalia—that is, an Afghan salwar kameez, a turban, and a Kalashnikov rifle strapped to his back—with each of us uncomfortably forcing smiles on either side.

These militarized performances have little to do with most people’s everyday lives in Ain al-Hilweh (Khalili 2007b). Indeed, despite the breathless narratives of “a coming war” in the camp, Ain al-Hilweh’s large, central market bustles like any other in Lebanon. Children walk to school in matching uniforms. Youth struggle to find green space where they can play; when I conducted my research, a dirt football field on the camp’s west side served as one of the only large recreational areas. Unemployment figures are often estimated to be as high as 80 percent; the availability of cheap Syrian labor following the beginning of the Syrian Civil War depressed wages for many unskilled workers. Local NGOs—many headed by former militants who have rechanneled their commitment to
the community—find creative ways to fund and run programs that focus on youth, disabled people, the elderly, or gender-based violence. As in other camps, seemingly banal issues, such as the management of the overcrowded local graveyard, morph into wrenching political debates over land, noncitizen rights, and dignity.  

This deliberate public relations entrepreneurship on the part of some factions exploits international audiences’ appetites for media stories that focus on “Salafi jihadis,” and constitutes a form of organizational metadata (see chapter 1). While many media analysts have adopted the narrative that the Salafi organizations were growing in power and set to destabilize the region, scholarship on gang rivalry (Papachristos 2009) suggests that viewing these performances and the violence associated with them is a mode of status competition to which media attention contributes. That is not to say that Ain al-Hilweh isn’t a distinct context; both the militarized performances and the frequency of violence among some of the factions—which has periodically included shootouts, grenade-throwing, and car bombings—set it apart from the eleven other refugee camps in Lebanon. But, as this chapter will demonstrate, the consistent emphasis on security-centric narratives with reference to the camp draws on historical and highly politicized fears surrounding Palestinian populations in Lebanon, crowding out more nuanced, contextualized stories and negatively shaping public impressions of the Palestinian camps and the people who live in them.

The significant question, I suggest, is why this specific structure of relations and system of practices evolved in the way that it did. Palestinian factions in Lebanon today are vastly different from those of the 1970s and 1980, even if they share the same names. For example, one DFLP representative in Sur described the Palestinian factions today as “mainly playing an advocacy role” rather than engaging in armed resistance and related projects.  It’s worth noting, furthermore, that the officers now performing hyperviolent masculinity for journalists in Ain al-Hilweh may or may not have served with the same faction during the war era; Palestinian contacts told me that the Salafi leader who locked me in a safe house had previously belonged to a Marxist organization. Many leaders whom I interviewed had switched allegiances over time, moved between combat and administrative roles, or advanced in status as those above them in the hierarchy quit, immigrated, or died. Some had experienced incarceration or exile; still others had collaborated with Israeli or Syrian forces.

Situating collective organizational performances and individuals such as the khaki- and sidearm-wearing Fatah officer simultaneously within long-term organizational trajectories and the contemporary Lebanese context grounded my ability to generate working relationships with interviewees and to leverage contemporary encounters to inform historical research. Thus, to create a founda-
tion for the analysis that follows, this chapter first highlights critical moments in Palestinian history in Lebanon in order to provide key reference points for the actors, processes, and events that I feature throughout the remainder of the book. The chapter intentionally centers topics that my interlocutors repeatedly mentioned in our interactions both by sketching broad dynamics (such as the suppression of Palestinian freedoms under the Lebanese Deuxième Bureau in the period between 1948 and 1969) as well as by detailing specific events (like the siege of Tel al-Za’tar camp in East Beirut) so as to historically situate core discursive threads as well as modes of identification that served as collective reference points during the 1980s.

In doing so, this chapter offers a brief chronological view of Palestinian political and military organizations’ entry into and developing roles in Lebanon in relation to the country’s politics, while recognizing that any hard division between discrete “Palestinian politics” and “Lebanese politics” during this period is at least partially artificial. It seeks to situate these organizations in the social, political, and economic realities of Palestinian refugee life, which drove decisions by Lebanese as well as Palestinians to participate in resistance activities. In doing so, this section provides an organizational and social topography of Palestinian communities in Lebanon while underscoring key points of institutional overlap between the PLO, guerrilla parties, and other actors in society. Finally, this chapter highlights key points of intersection between Palestinian organizational and social life, noting where participation in the PLO and in guerrilla parties’ programs, economic efforts, and cultural activities fostered particular types of connections among families, friends, and neighbors and indeed throughout “formal” political life. It pursues each of these goals with the explicit end of providing essential background to readers as it draws upon a large body of exceptional existing work that has been done on Palestinian history and contemporary society in Lebanon.

Palestinian politics in pre-1982 Lebanon can be divided into three broad periods. The first lasted from the Nakba in 1948 to 1969. This period includes the founding of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in 1952 in Beirut; Palestinian political organizations’ illicit operation under the Lebanese Deuxième Bureau (Military Intelligence Directorate); and the growth of Palestinian refugee communities in 16 UNRWA-administered camps as well as in non-camp settlements and in urban neighborhoods. Politically, it represents a time of continued influence of historically village-based governance structures, centered on the figure of the traditional mukhtar. It also saw Palestinian guerrilla groups’ initiation of attacks against Israel from Lebanese territory, the founding of the PLO, and the conclusion of the 1969 Cairo Agreement, which ceded control of Palestinian camps in Lebanon to the PLO.
The second period spans 1969 to the early months of 1975. It includes the formal entry of the resistance parties into the refugee camps, the aftermath of the 1970 Black September events in Jordan, clashes between Palestinian resistance organizations and the Lebanese Army in 1973, and the lead-up to the first phase of the Lebanese Civil War. It was characterized by a massive expansion of the PLO’s apparatus in Lebanon, a presence that many observers likened to the construction of a state within a state. The third period extends from the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in the early months of 1975 to August of 1982, when the PLO and guerrilla organizations evacuated Beirut as part of a negotiated agreement. This last phase of organizational development witnessed several important trends, including the consolidation of internal Palestinian opposition to the PLO and growing tension between the PLO and the Syrian government.

**Palestinian Refugees under the Deuxième Bureau, 1948–1969**

At the time of the Nakba in 1948, between 100,000 and 130,000 Palestinian refugees crossed into Lebanon from what had been Mandate Palestine (Y. Sayigh 1997, 39). During this period, as one scholar notes, “there was no single Palestinian authority, no united Arab leadership, no policy either of mass resistance or mass evacuation. Especially in the countryside, there were no other sources of organization than the villages’ own defense committees” (R. Sayigh 1979, 64–65). Refugees largely settled in or near Lebanese cities where they had friends or family; members of village communities often collectively fled violence in Palestine, traveling to Lebanon together and then reestablishing what had been locally based governing committees.

Initial conditions in the refugee camps that sprung up in Lebanese cities were difficult; both those who had lived in the camps during this time and those who had grown up in more middle- or upper-class Palestinian homes often referenced these conditions when they discussed the importance of the PLO and their own motivations for political activism. The five-year-old Lebanese state, organized under the confessional power-sharing provisions of the 1943 National Pact, dispatched police to pacify large groups of refugees and to corral them into different camps (R. Sayigh 1979, 106–107). Some refugees in Sur and the Bekaa Valley occupied shelters that Armenian refugees had abandoned, while others gathered in old French military barracks. Those in other locations initially stayed in shared tents provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). At the end of 1949, the United Nations established UNRWA as a means to channel international aid to Palestinian refugees across Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Gaza.
UNRWA became active in the spring of 1950, providing education, health services, and in some cases new housing for 726,000 registered refugees (UNRWA n.d.; Salah 2008, 10). Organizations such as the ICRC and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) also played a key role in aid management and service provision (Y. Sayigh 1997, 4; Feldman 2007).

The Lebanese government subjected Palestinian refugees to harsh restrictions on housing, employment, and political organizing. Palestinians could not build permanent homes, work in over seventy professions (particularly in prestigious vocations such as medicine, law, and engineering), or form political parties (R. Sayigh 1979, 1994, 1995; Suleiman 1999; Khalili 2007a). The state justified denying Palestinians civil and social rights on two grounds: to prevent permanent settlement (tawtin) and the ostensible threat it would pose to Lebanon’s confessional demographics, and to maintain the Lebanese government’s political stance that Palestinian refugees should return to their homes in Palestine. However, particularly in the early years, Lebanese administrations also feared the influence of leftist and often cross-national parties associated with Arab Nationalism, communism, and Nasserism. Cold War tensions pitted the pro–Eisenhower Doctrine Chamoun administration against domestic Lebanese currents that leaned toward the United Arab Republic and Arab Nationalist trends, resulting in a civil war and US military intervention in 1958.

Within this context, the Lebanese Deuxième Bureau, one of the state’s many intelligence and security forces, monitored Palestinian activities closely, frequently interrogating individuals suspected of political involvement and their families (R. Sayigh 1979, 151; al-Hout 2004, 24–25). This relationship with state authorities both fomented Palestinian resentment toward Lebanese authorities and forced politically active Palestinians to learn underground organizing skills. The state’s repressive tactics also tended to isolate poorer Palestinians who lived in the camps, who lacked the connections or finances to protect themselves (R. Sayigh 1979, 132–33). Families who had previously owned and farmed their land were left landless and competing for jobs with thousands of other poor Palestinians and Lebanese. While middle- and upper-class Palestinians were, in many cases, able to retain their social status—drawing on both family wealth and socioeconomic ties to the Lebanese elite—they were still subjected to discrimination.

Many Palestinians who were politically active during the 1970s and 1980s grew up during this period and relayed being deeply affected by the conditions in which they lived and the repression they experienced. They vividly recalled the zinc roofing and shared toilets of the pre-1969 camps. Middle-class Palestinian refugees often looked on the camp populations with pity. For example, in her autobiography, Leila Khaled (1973), a long-term leftist militant whose family fled Palestine and took refuge in Sur, recalls that children from the nearby camps
lived in deep poverty, lacking shoes or proper clothing (her family had a stable income and could afford a small apartment outside the camp). Several of my interlocutors whose older siblings had been politically active vividly recalled their parents’ concern for the family’s safety because of the Deuxième Bureau’s constant surveillance. While they resented the political repression, people also noted that being raised by constantly worried parents both affected their social freedom and sometimes made them hesitant to tell their parents when they did mobilize.

Despite varying restrictions on Palestinian refugees in host Arab states, key Palestinian political organizations appeared in the predominantly middle-to-upper-class arenas of Arab university campuses during this period. Three core strands developed: A leftist, secular, pan-Arab vein in Beirut; a more socially conservative, explicitly Palestinian nationalist strand among affiliates of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) and Palestinian members of the Muslim Brotherhood; and, a bit later, a third line cultivated by Palestinian officers in the Syrian army that blended leftist, Ba’thist ideology with social conservatism. At the American University of Beirut (AUB), a group of radical students led by George Habash (a Greek Orthodox Palestinian), Wadi Haddad (also a Greek Orthodox Palestinian), and Hani al-Hindi (a Syrian), founded the socialist, pan-Arab secular Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in 1951. The organization’s clandestine membership gradually grew among Lebanese and within the Palestinian refugee community; it was frequently the first of many political affiliations that my older interlocutors mentioned. Habash, Haddad, and their followers later split from the ANM, forming the revolutionary Leninist-Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1967.

This initial split foreshadowed several more within the leftist elements of militant Palestinian politics. For example, the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) split from the PFLP in 1967, the Arab Liberation Front (ALF) in 1968, and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, later known simply as the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (P)DFLP, led by former ANM and PFLP leading member Nayef Hawatmeh, in 1969. In the late 1950s, then Kuwait-based activists Yasir Arafat (Abu Ammar), Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), and Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad) founded Fatah, a broad-based nationalist organization dedicated to using armed struggle to liberate Palestine. Other Palestinian organizations also emerged in the late 1950s, including the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)—the forerunner of the PFLP-General Command (founded in 1968)—which Palestinian Syrian army officers Ahmad Jibril, Ali al-Bushnaq, and Abd al-Latif Shururu created. During its 1964 meeting in Cairo, the Arab League established the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), an umbrella organization dedicated, in its words, to freeing the territory of Man-
date Palestine and establishing right of return for all refugees; Ahmad al-Shuqayri became the PLO’s first chairman.

While support for the growing number of Palestinian resistance organizations varied across communities in the region, the ANM and the Palestine Liberation Front-Path of Return, the latter of which was a leftist-Nasserist group founded in Beirut, gained the two largest followings among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon during the late 1960s (Y. Sayigh 1997, chap. 6). At the international level, Fatah emerged as the leading Palestinian militant organization by 1967; its main rival within the PLO for years to come would be the PFLP (R. Sayigh 1979, 144–45).19 However, the March 1968 Battle of Karameh between Fatah and the Israel Defense Forces in Jordan monumentally improved Fatah’s reputation among Palestinians and augmented the group’s ability to recruit in Lebanon. At this juncture, Fatah began moving significant military resources into the Arkoub region of South Lebanon, opening training sites and launching attacks into the Galilee.20 This series of actions foregrounded the tense relationship between the Palestinian refugee community and the Lebanese state.

At this time, the PLO was organized around the Palestinian National Council (PNC), its legislature, and an eighteen-member Executive Committee. It also included a conventional military arm, called the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), which eventually established battalions in Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. While highly competitive, the various emergent militant organizations cooperated extensively on military matters, funneling weapons to each other and sharing training camp space in the late 1960s (Y. Sayigh 1997, chap. 6). As they progressively joined the PLO, members of guerrilla parties quickly assumed control of the initially independent organizational apparatus.

Lebanese support varied for the growing Palestinian political project in Lebanon. Large portions of the population of South Lebanon, along with urban leftists and a majority of Lebanese Muslims, supported the Palestinian *fida’iyyin* (guerrillas/resistance fighters)21 in the region (R. Sayigh 1979, 156; Traboulsi 2007, 152-153). Particularly because many communities in South Lebanon were socially marginalized and lacked state services, “supporting the Palestinian Revolution became a means of protesting against a corrupt and negligent regime” (R. Sayigh 1979, 157). However, tension between the fida’iyyin and the Lebanese army increased, not least because repeated Palestinian cross-border military operations into Israel elicited that state’s reprisals on Lebanese territory. Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza during the 1967 war elevated the importance of South Lebanon, a location from which to stage these assaults. In April 1969, the Lebanese military sealed the village of Bint Jbeil to capture fida’iyyin returning from an operation in Israel. The guerrillas’ subsequent surrender and imprisonment in Sur set off a wave of urban protests that
mobilized the Palestinian camp community as well as thousands of Lebanese sympathizers. Throughout the summer, attacks on the Deuxième Bureau, the Lebanese police, and the Lebanese military increased, even though camp populations were unarmed. By the end of the year, Palestinians had forced the Lebanese to abandon control of the refugee camps and had replaced Deuxième Bureau offices with party and PLO headquarters. In November 1969, representatives from the PLO and the Lebanese army finalized the Cairo Agreement, which gave the PLO and its constituent parties permission to base their armed struggle on Lebanese territory and formally transferred refugee camp governance into Palestinian hands.

“We Could Finally Breathe”: 1969–1975

The Cairo Agreement prompted a restructuring of political life in the refugee camps and allowed Palestinians to openly organize. It afforded the PLO the opportunity to establish camp Popular Committees, which included representatives from each guerrilla party as well as the general unions. My interlocutors who had lived in the camps during this time frequently used language such as “we could finally breathe” to describe the freeing nature of the transition. Palestinian militant groups used this autonomy to launch repeated armed incursions into northern Israel. These operations targeted both IDF installations and civilian communities; multiple operations resulted in Israeli civilians’ being taken hostage or killed. Palestinian guerrilla incursions and Katyusha rocket attacks on settlements in the Galilee led the IDF to target South Lebanese villages to eliminate militant bases and to force the local Lebanese population to halt its support of the Palestinians. These attacks displaced tens of thousands of predominantly Christian and Shi’a Lebanese, many of whom settled in the slum districts surrounding Beirut where several of the Palestinian camps were also located.22

During the Black September events of 1970 in Jordan, deep disagreements between the PLO (particularly its leftist elements such as the PLFP) and the Hashemite Kingdom sparked open warfare between Palestinians and the Jordanian government. Jordan outlawed Palestinian parties and guerrilla groups from operating within its borders; in summer 1971, the PLO relocated its command structure and its fighters to Lebanon.23 The PLO and the guerrilla organizations transferred both their massive military apparatus and a significant social and economic sector that became the largest employer in Lebanon; Jaber Suleiman (1997) estimates that approximately 65 percent of Palestinians in Lebanon were employed by the PLO’s social and economic apparatus. Funded by Arab states,
the Soviet Union, and a 5 percent income tax on Palestinians working in Gulf countries such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, the PLO acted in many ways like a deterritorialized state apparatus. Areas of West Beirut and South Lebanon became near-autonomous regions within the Lebanese state. Reflecting the organizations’ broad influence, people referred to the Arkoub region as “Fatahland” (Traboulsi 2007, 152) and the West Beirut neighborhood that housed the PLO’s administrative buildings as the “Fakhani Republic.” The PLO became Lebanon’s largest employer, running industrial operations through organizations such as Samed, medical institutions through the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), and popular organizations such as the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) (Suleiman 1997). The GUPW alone counted 21,000 members (Rubenberg 1983b, 73).

People like Yunis, a middle-class, left-leaning, half-Lebanese/half-Palestinian who grew up in Beirut’s eastern suburbs during this period, frequently emphasized that mobilization at this time was not simply about military aims. When he described to me his pathway into the GUPS, he started by stressing conditions in the camp and then connected his activism to efforts to instill a sense of shared history and collective dignity among Palestinians and between Lebanese and Palestinians, given the new atmosphere:

**Yunis:** People were deprived [mahrumin] in Tel al-Za’tar, the toilets were all shared, they were living in a very bad situation. There was darkness [zalam], they lived under zinc [zinc] roofs, people were poor. In 1970, 1971, I was working with the Students’ Union in East Beirut, I was in the union with Lebanese and Palestinians who wanted freedom.

**Me:** What was the union’s role?

**Yunis:** Teach ideas about Palestine, share with the Lebanese. We were cultured [muthaqafin], we had the brève, the BAC, the BAC II [high school certifications], we wanted to teach people about Palestine, about freedom, about their roots. The idea was to pass information from generation to generation. The military stuff happened later.25

Here, Yunis emphasizes building ties among Palestinians, between Palestinians and Lebanese, and across strong class divides. Often, Palestinian militants later called upon these ties during the Israeli occupation and the 1985–1988 War of the Camps.

The PLO and guerrilla parties also quickly became deeply entwined in domestic Lebanese politics. Interviewees from multiple parties referred to this involvement as a mistake, referring to Lebanese politics as “a sickness” or an “infection,” both terms conveying that Palestinians felt their own sociopolitical
projects had been infected or sullied by Lebanese politics (Parkinson 2016, 978). Palestinian groups dealt extensively with Lebanese political parties, particularly members of the leftist, secular, pan-Arab Lebanese National Movement (LNM) led by Kamal Jumblatt, which included the predominantly Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP), the Independent Nasserite Movement (Murabitoun), the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), and smaller leftist parties such as Saida’s Popular Nasserite Organization (PNO). Coordination among the PFLP, DFLP, and Lebanese leftists was particularly strong; Fatah tended to operate more toward the political center, even maintaining relationships with many of the right-wing Christian parties such as the Kata’ib (also known as the Phalange) and Camille Chamoun’s National Liberal Party (NLP) (Abu Iyad and Rouleau 1981).

Yet the Lebanese army’s repeated skirmishing with Palestinian guerrilla forces, its relative weakness in South Lebanon, and the government’s refusal to allow a military response to Israeli attacks, including the April 1973 assassination of three PLO leaders in Beirut, put it at odds with Palestinian forces (Khalidi 1985, 24). In May 1973, with the support of the Kata’ib and the NLP, the Lebanese military attacked Shatila and Burj al-Barajneh camps using tank-supported ground and air assaults. Palestinians and leftist Lebanese staged multicity protests, roadblocks, and attacks on police barracks that prompted the declaration of a state of emergency in Lebanon. Subsequent negotiations culminated in the Melkart Protocol on May 17, 1973, which further outlined guidelines that governed Palestinian military activity in Lebanon, including the cessation of attacks on Israel (Y. Sayigh 1997, 316–17; Picard 2002, 87).

In 1974, the PLO had to contend with a strong wave of internal dissent following its adoption of the 10 Point Program at the 12th session of the Palestinian National Congress. Seen as a possible harbinger of the PLO’s willingness to accept a two-state solution with Israel, the PFLP, DFLP, ALF, PPSF, al-Sa’iqa, Fatah-Revolutionary Council, and the PFLP-GC formed the Rejectionist Front. Several factions left the PLO. The PFLP—the first organization to formally protest—resigned from the PLO’s Executive Committee but remained in the organization (Cobban 1985, 62). Others also remained as opposition groups but refused to attend Central Council meetings (Cobban 1985, 151). The Rejectionist Front remained as the primary collective opposition body until it dissolved in 1978. By then, the Palestinian experience of the Lebanese Civil War moderated many of the dissenting organizations’ unfavorable stances on establishing a “Palestinian National Authority” (Cobban 1985, 150).
Individual factions continued to use Lebanese territory to launch attacks on Israel. For instance, the DFLP was responsible for the May 1974 killing of twenty-four people, the majority of them schoolchildren who had been taken hostage, during an attack in the northern Israeli town of Ma’alot. The PFLP-GC had carried out a similar attack on the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona, in April 1974. Operations such as these were frequently aimed at coercing the Israeli government to release Palestinian prisoners, or, in the late 1970s, to sabotage Egyptian–Israeli peace talks. In response, Israel retaliated against Palestinian forces and against civilian communities in South Lebanon more generally, seeking to engender resentment toward the Palestinians; between “June 1968 and June 1974, the Lebanese army counted more than 30,000 violations of their national territory, including Israeli ‘policing’ operations, control measures taken with impunity using patrols and fixed observation points, blows at the civilian population in the camps or at resistance leaders in the cities, and attacks aimed at Lebanon itself” (Picard 2002, 83).

The Lebanese Civil War, 1975–1982

In the late winter and early spring of 1975, simmering tensions escalated into violence between the leftist LNM/Palestinian alliance and the right-wing Lebanese Front—an alliance including the Kata’ib (affiliated with the political party of the same name and the Gemayel family), Tigers (affiliated with Chamoun’s National Liberal Party), Marada (also known as the Zgharta Liberation Army, affiliated with the Frangieh family), Guardians of the Cedars, and al-Tanzim. A dispute between predominantly Sunni fisherman and the government-supported, Christian-dominated Proteine Company, a seafood consortium that was encroaching on Saida’s traditional fishing trade, resulted in the fatal wounding of Maarouf Saad, then the city’s mayor and founder of the PNO, during a February protest. Following Saad’s funeral in March, leftist Lebanese and Palestinian demonstrators clashed with the LAF (el-Khazen 2000, 268–73). Many of my interlocutors thought of this event as the start of the Lebanese Civil War, particularly given the way that the clashes mobilized intersecting modes of identification that ranged from economic and class-based (elite-run corporate entity versus traditional fisherman), political (rightist versus leftist), and sectarian (predominantly Maronite and Greek Orthodox versus Sunni and anti-sectarian). To my interlocutors, this event embodied the diverse underpinnings of what became innumerable ongoing conflicts in a context of a broader state breakdown.

These events served as precursors to the April 13, 1975, bus attack in the East Beirut neighborhood of Ain al-Rummaneh, which is more broadly understood
and memorialized as the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War (Haugbolle 2012). During this episode, Kata’ib militiamen attacked a bus full of Palestinian members of the ALF who were returning to Tel al-Za’tar after a rally in Shatila, killing twenty-six. While buses carrying members of Palestinian and Lebanese militant groups regularly traversed the city, Kata’ib members were on high alert following a shooting only hours earlier, when Palestinian gunmen from another faction fired into a church where a member of the Gemayel family, which founded Kata’ib, was attending services, killing several bodyguards (el-Khazen 2000, 285–88). The event prompted LNM organizations and Palestinian militants to mobilize both diplomatically and militarily against the LF and its allies. This chain of events eventually triggered the Lebanese government’s collapse in May as well as militia fighting and sectarian massacres throughout the remainder of 1975.30

Right-wing Lebanese militia attacks on Palestinian civilians and camp communities during this period served as later reference points for Palestinian activists and militants during the 1980s. In January 1976, Maronite militias renewed their attacks on the East Beirut refugee camps Tel al-Za’tar31 and Jisr al-Pasha as well as on proximate Shi’a neighborhoods such as Nab’a. These areas were centers of leftist labor and political organizing as well as being strategically located near major industrial zones on the main highway between Beirut and the Christian heartland in the Metn.32 Right-wing Lebanese militias, in some case led by elites with economic interests in local industries, laid siege to the Tel al-Za’tar and Jisr al-Basha with heavy artillery. In the same month, right-wing militias overran Dbayeh Palestinian refugee camp north of Beirut before expelling its residents. On January 18, the right-wing militias expelled and massacred hundreds of Palestinians, Syrians, Shi’as, and Kurds from the left-leaning Maslakh-Karantina slum district in East Beirut, another geographic hub for cross-national organizing.

In response, Palestinian fighters attacked the seaside Christian town of Damour on January 20, 1976. At Damour, Palestinian fighters affiliated with the PLA, Fatah, and al-Sa’iqa committed numerous atrocities to avenge these East Beirut killings, including the rape, expulsion, and murder of hundreds of Lebanese Christian civilians (Hanf 1994, 211–12; Y. Sayigh 1997, 374–76). When ordered to retake Damour, the Lebanese army in the southern city of Marjayoun split down sectarian and ideological lines, producing the Muslim-led Lebanese Arab Army (LAA) commanded by Colonel Ahmad al-Khatib and the Christian-led Free Lebanon Army (FLA) led by Major Saad Haddad.33 The PLO and LNM Joint Forces moved into the Christian heartland of the Metn, further straining the capacities of right-wing Maronite militia forces.
Tel al-Za‘tar as a Historical Touchstone

For many of my interlocutors, the 1976 Tel al-Za‘tar siege became emblematic of the Palestinian struggle in Lebanon as well as a harbinger of future attacks on the refugee camps. As Hala, a former PFLP militant and former member of the Tel al-Za‘tar branch of the GUPW told me, “Before, Tel al-Za‘tar didn’t know war . . . before the 70s, there was security, we never thought war would happen.”

The siege came to represent how she, and many others, understood war. Individuals’ experiences of malnutrition, snipers, constant shelling, and medical shortages—which left the camp without antibiotics, anesthesia, or plasma supplies and led to widespread gangrene—were coupled with the reality of being unable to leave the camp for fear of torture, rape, or murder upon exit. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized memories of severe dehydration, asking me to pinch my arm to watch how my well-hydrated skin bounced back into place, imploring me to imagine how during the siege people became so dehydrated that their skin would stick in place. These visceral, embodied memories of the physical hardships of siege, survivors of Tel al-Za‘tar explained, informed their future mobilization as well as the risks they were willing to take during the 1980s. The shared experience of siege had important downstream effects on people’s notions of political and social affiliations, including a willingness to override factional affiliation in order to protect communities. Zahra, for example, told me: “[The siege of] Tel al-Za‘tar canceled all affiliations. I am not from the village, I’m from Tel al-Za‘tar. If there is happiness, if there is pain, if there is a problem, all of us from Tel al-Za‘tar, we are coming.”

I asked her if this was perhaps due to people’s shared political affiliations in the camp: did everyone who “stuck together” belong to the same militant party before the siege? She immediately responded: “no, no, because of the siege.”

In January 1976, right-wing, predominantly Christian militias established a military cordon around Tel al-Za‘tar and Jisr al-Basha. At this time, civilians living in the camp received what would be the last deliveries of fresh food, including produce and meat. In the camps, local militiamen, guerrillas, and PLA soldiers battled the Lebanese Front and elements of the Lebanese military. Throughout the following months, the Lebanese Front increasingly sought to use the camp as a bargaining chip against the PLO and LNM. The Joint Forces’ (PLO and LNM’s) military successes in the spring of 1976 resulted in direct reprisals against Tel al-Za‘tar. On April 9, the Syrian government, fearing that further fighting would result in an untenable regional security situation, moved armor and infantry into Lebanon (Y. Sayigh 1997, 385; Traboulsi 2007, 197). Tel al-Za‘tar received its last supply shipment of preserved food, hygienic supplies, and medicines on April 24 (Y. Sayigh 1997, 396). On June 20, the Tigers—led by Dany
Chamoun, son of Lebanese Interior Minister Camille Chamoun—escalated the confrontation; according to Sayigh, during the assault, “up to 5,000 shells landed on the camps, damaging up to 70 per cent of their housing” (Y. Sayigh 1997, 396). Jisr al-Basha fell on June 24.

Concerned by the prospect of the PLO and LNM seizing control of Lebanon, and foreshadowing its later operations against the PLO in the 1980s, the Syrian regime switched its support away from the left-wing, Palestinian–Lebanese Joint Forces and allied with the right-wing Lebanese Front. The Syrian military, including PLA units, consequently began providing artillery fire against Tel al-Za’tar while militarily sustaining the Front against the Joint Forces in battles across central and northern Lebanon. Intensifying attacks severed Palestinian forces’ supply chain via the Beirut River, meaning that goods and replacement fighters ceased reaching the camp; near-starvation conditions followed. A July ceasefire negotiated between Syrian president Hafiz al-Assad and PLO chairman Yasir Arafat collapsed in early August; the Kata’ib occupied Nab’a, expelling approximately 200,000 Shi’a Lebanese from Beirut’s eastern neighborhoods (Traboulsi 2007, 201). Tel al-Za’tar eventually succumbed on August 12, 1976; between 9,000 and 12,000 civilians fled. The Lebanese Front’s militias executed between 1,000 and 2,000 people as they evacuated the camp; my female interviewees who had endured the siege emphasized that the militiamen also sexually assaulted women as they attempted to escape.37 Approximately 4,000 people died over the course of the siege (Berggren et al. 1996; Y. Sayigh 1997, 401; Fisk 2002, 85–86; Picard 2002, 110; Faris 2007; Khalili 2007a, 51).38 Members of the Lebanese Front immediately bulldozed the entire community.39

Cross-Border Operations and the Israeli Invasion of 1978

Cross-border armed operations into Israel, planned by different guerrilla factions, began in the 1960s and continued during the late 1970s into the 1980s. A March 1978 civilian bus hijacking near Tel Aviv, led by Sabra-born Fatah cadre Dalal al-Mughrabi and carried out with thirteen members of her unit, killed 37 people. My female interlocutors frequently referenced al-Mughrabi’s skill as a commando, specifically, as an inspiration in their own careers. They considered the operation a success, though it also prompted an immediate, massive Israeli reprisal (Cobban 1985, 96).40 Three days after the hijacking, on March 14, the IDF launched Operation Litani, which, according to Israeli journalists Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari (1984, 24), “[aimed to] destroy the PLO bases that were the continuing source of harassment to settlements in the Galilee and of terrorist raids farther inland; and to extend the territory under the control of Leba-
nese Major Saad Haddad [one of the founders of the Army of Free Lebanon in 1976] and the local militia he had recruited among the Christian population of the area—Israel’s surrogate and client force in South Lebanon.”

A 25,000-strong IDF force occupied South Lebanon, with the exception of Sur (Cobban 1985, 94); the Lebanese government protested to the UN Security Council. Approximately half of the region’s population—around 285,000 people—fled the area and some 2,000 died. As a Syrian officer told the journalist Robert Fisk, the Syrian military prevented many people from fleeing because the Israelis would otherwise “claim that they had found another land without people” (Fisk 2002, 130). The Security Council responded by passing Resolutions 425 and 426, which established the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and called for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces. Haddad’s militia, supported by the IDF, greatly restricted UNIFIL’s access to the area; the decision to base the peacekeeping force at the coastal town of Naqoura restricted its capacities and gave the FLA a chokehold over the mission’s attempts to patrol the interior. The FLA also continuously abused Shi’a civilians in its zone of control (Fisk 2002, 137–55).

Skirmishes between the Israel–FLA alliance on one hand and Palestinians and Lebanese leftists on the other took an increasing toll on South Lebanon; they also helped Palestinian militants to build guerrilla skill sets and to learn the terrain. Yet, these clashes also had a devastating effect on the region, given that “in one period of under six months in 1979, there were 175 Israeli land, sea, and air attacks on the area. Villages were hit repeatedly, their residents made refugees time and again, and it became difficult to see what they or the P.L.O. were achieving from this war of attrition in which civilians paid the main price” (Khalidi 1985, 28). Palestinian militant organizations continued to cross into northern Israel to conduct operations and to shell the northern settlements from their base at Beaufort Castle, undeterred even by the IDF’s July 1980 bombing of the PLO headquarters in Beirut. These attacks created considerable Lebanese resentment against Palestinian forces operating in the region, even if many communities simultaneously sympathized with the Palestinians’ larger aims.

In the early 1980s, Lebanese support declined with continued Israeli attacks and Palestinian militants’ abusive treatment of Lebanese civilians. Rashid Khalidi muses: “If the relationship between a successful guerrilla army and the society it operates within is accurately described by Mao Zedong’s metaphor of ‘fish swimming in the water,’ the P.L.O. was flopping helplessly on dry land in Lebanon on the eve of the 1982 war” (Khalidi 1985, 17). He further emphasizes: “It was of particular importance that immediately before the war, this alienation had begun to affect communities and groups traditionally well disposed to the Palestinians and which benefited politically from the P.L.O.’s presence” (Khalidi 1985, 17–18).
The Social Infrastructure of a State in Waiting

The PLO and various guerrilla organizations spent the 1970s constructing a massive military, social, civic, and economic footprint in Lebanon. In the following sections I provide a brief description of some of these capacities, thus sketching, in part, the social infrastructure that undergirded militant organizations in the lead-up to 1982. Specifically, given the frequency with which my interlocutors mentioned them, I describe military training, healthcare, and scouting and recreation programs. Some data on healthcare and scouting and recreational institutions are available in a 1981 report by Team International Engineering and Management Consultants (TIEMC) that was submitted to the Economic Commission for Western Asia. However, they are primarily self-reported and only represent projects that fell under the factions’ social wings. For example, Fatah’s scouting programs did not fall under its social wing; in fact, the PLO’s supervision of scouting activities was located in the Department of Mass Organizations rather than under Social Affairs (Rubenberg 1983a). Likewise, in the section regarding the PFLP’s Medical Committee, the report says only: “The Committee supervises health and medical care provided to martyrs’ children and families and the Palestinian people in the camps” (TIEMC 1981, 31). Although the PFLP had a well-known and respected history as a medical provider in many camps (notably Tel al-Za’tar, where it opened the first clinic in the camp in the 1970s), no further geographic, financial, or workforce details are provided. It must also be noted that brick-and-mortar facilities are only a rough starting point from which to analyze the nature and degree of the PLO and the guerrilla organizations’ social embeddedness. Only by examining the content of social network ties generated by these establishments and the ways in which people perceived the influence can we understand a fuller picture of militant social presence.

Not all forms of social engagement were equally prioritized across the factions. This may be due to the variant nature of ties; medical institutions, for example, can be used to employ many people and to provide services; they also are not age-specific. By contrast, nurseries and kindergartens employ fewer people, and the nature of service provision is to a family (centering on mothers and young children); interactions at childcare institutions have, however, been demonstrated to generate new social network ties for parents via interactions during drop-off/pickup and class activities (Small 2010). Ideology may well have influenced this variation; reports from the era indicate that leftist organizations tended to run more social, cultural, and recreational facilities than, for example, Ba’thist and Syrian-supported groups. The leftist organizations’ general ten-
tendency to combine recreational facilities and activities may indicate a broader commitment to grassroots social change and political education.

**Military Capacity and Training**

Engagements such as those in East Beirut and Damour involved a diverse array of Palestinian armed forces. The Palestinian military apparatus in the 1970s and in the early 1980s comprised three main levels, all of which played varying roles in the conflicts of the time. Local, camp-based militias were formed to manage community-based defense; members were not necessarily party cadres. They received less training and were not as well armed as guerrilla cadres or the PLO’s official military force, the PLA. Militia members did not commonly attend specialized training programs in other camps. The PLA and the guerrilla organizations, by contrast, fielded uniformed fighters and support staff who received varying levels of formal indoctrination, training, and supplies.

The PLA and guerrilla factions were deeply embedded in Palestinian communities. Recruiters often worked close to home, enrolled people they knew, and sent them for basic drilling nearby before transferring promising new cadres for specialized instruction elsewhere. PLA soldiers frequently trained alongside the Egyptian, Syrian, or Jordanian national armed services. They were, as a result, familiar with conventional military organization, discipline, and tactics. The PLA initially comprised three brigades—the Ain Jalut Brigade (originally stationed in Egypt), the Qadisiyya Brigade (originally located in Iraq and moved to Jordan and Syria in 1967), and the Hittin Brigade (originally based in Syria) (Hamid 1975, 105; Rubenberg 1983a, 12). Elements of all three forces participated extensively in the Lebanese Civil War, some under Syrian command. In early 1982, a fourth brigade, the Badr Forces, deployed in Beirut and in the hills above Damour. When Israel invaded in June 1982, between six and ten thousand PLA soldiers were stationed in Lebanon, some of whom had combat experience from the events of Black September, from the 1973 war (during which Palestinian contingents fought in Egypt and Syria), or from the Lebanese Civil War (Rubenberg 1983a, 12).

The guerrilla organizations’ armed elements varied widely in size, training, and capacity. In 1968, Fatah had some 2,000 guerrillas; in 1970, the PFLP, PLF/PLA, and al-Sa’iqa each comprised approximately 1,000–1,500 guerrillas (Y. Sayigh 1997, chap. 12). These numbers rose notably in the decade leading up to the 1982 invasion, in part due to heavy recruitment and conscription within the refugee camps in Lebanon. Of the seven guerrilla organizations that filled seats on the 1981 PLO Executive Committee, Fatah had approximately 14,000 guerrillas
organized into five brigades—Yarmouk, Karameh, Qastal, Ajnadayn, and Force 17, the latter of which was Arafat’s personal bodyguard—and 26 battalions (Rubenberg 1983a, 11; Schiff and Ya’ari 1984, 130; Y. Sayigh 1997, chaps. 19–21). Fatah historian Mahmoud al-Natour (2014a, 1:600) claims the faction could field 3,000–5,000 fighters in South Lebanon alone, in addition to 50–60 Soviet T-34 tanks and 50–60 cannon. Many fighters had previous battle experience; the approximately 4,000-man-strong Yarmouk Brigade included a large number of former Jordanian Army soldiers and had been active since 1971. Based in Syria but deployed in South Lebanon in 1982, the Yarmouk Forces consisted of “three infantry battalions, an artillery battalion and other combat support units, and a full complement of support units (medical, communications, engineering, supply, transport, and workshop)” (Y. Sayigh 1997, 295–96). These preexisting ties came into play during the 1983 Fatah rebellion, when many soldiers in the Yarmouk Forces sided with dissidents led by the former battalion commander Colonel Saied al-Muragha (Abu Musa).

Other guerrilla organizations fielded smaller combat forces in comparison. Al-Sa’iqa only had the ability to put 3,000 guerrillas into combat. The 6,000-soldier-strong DFLP organized thirteen battalions, “eight infantry, two gun artillery, one rocket artillery, one air defense, [and] one security” into regional brigade commands, which would have theoretically allowed military commanders tactical independence (Rubenberg 1983a, 11; Y. Sayigh 1997, 451). The PFLP’s 6,000-strong guerrilla combat forces comprised ten battalions, while the 500-person-strong PFLP-GC fielded six; in both cases, the faction’s central leadership had direct control of combat forces rather than creating independent brigade commands (Rubenberg 1983a, 11; Y. Sayigh 1997, 451). However, manpower varied widely across battalions, which could consist of anywhere from 60 to 150 men. Sayigh (1997, 451) emphasizes that “on this basis, even the miniscule ALF could claim three battalions, as well as artillery, mortar, and anti-tank sections.”

Several interviewees cited their participation in military training and operations as a deep source of pride. They also noted how it affected their relationships with their families, friends, and communities. Others saw mass participation in armed resistance as a harbinger of social change, especially when it came to gender. When I asked Zahra, whose story is detailed in the introduction to this book, about gender relations during initial recruitment, she told me: “there were equal numbers of men and women in Fatah.” Her statement, however, does not pan out in official records or research, which indicate higher male participation in fighting roles (Peteet 1991). Rather, it likely indicates her personal sentiment that the resistance elevated women and placed them on a more equal footing with men. Mahmud, a guerrilla from South Lebanon, also referenced shifts in gender roles that military training facilitated, recalling both his shock
the first time a woman shared the barracks with him in Shatila and his ability to view her as “one of the guys” after she told a raunchy joke (which would have been highly taboo and to some extent still was at the time of the interview).

**Healthcare**

In 1982, Palestinian healthcare infrastructure in Lebanon was geographically widespread, financially accessible, and well-regarded by both Palestinians and Lebanese. These organizations created overlap between people’s everyday relationships, their professional ties, and military organizations, though they also often reified factional divisions. Concentrated in Beirut, Saida, and Sur, the PRCS hospitals were among the PLO’s social anchors in Lebanon; they provided patient services, educational campaigns, and employment to the Palestinian community. In 1980, for example, the PRCS managed nine hospitals and twelve clinics, treating 425,682 Palestinian and Lebanese patients (Rubenberg 1983a; Khalidi 1985, 32). The PRCS funded programs to train nurses, technicians, and paramedics and ran preventive health and mother-child health programs (Rubenberg 1983a; TIEMC 1981, 9–10). Guerrilla factions administered over thirty additional medical and dental clinics (Rubenberg 1983a; TIEMC 1981).

Healthcare organizations provided key spaces and institutions through which the PLO established ties to Palestinian and Lebanese communities through employment and service provision. Julie Peteet (1991, 104) notes, for example, that leftist institutions’ preventive medicine projects drew their employees from the camps. PLO-subsidized healthcare services were both financially and geographically accessible. Employees of the PLO and their families received medical care for free, highlighting the strong exchange of employment and services that membership incurred. However, all Palestinians and Lebanese could access PRCS services; patients paid approximately US$1 for a clinic visit, US$5 for inpatient hospital care per day, and, on average, US$60 for surgery (US$2.94, US$14.69, and US$176.27 in 2021, respectively) (Rubenberg 1983a, 21).

During and following the invasion, protecting and maintaining medical establishments—which were often targeted by the IDF and right-wing Lebanese militias—were military and social priorities (Ang 1989; Cutting 1989; Giannou 1990). After the invasion, hospitals’ and clinics’ needs drove logistics and smuggling considerations while continuing to provide employment for skilled Palestinian workers. Building or rebuilding a hospital or clinic became a way to combine old organizational logics with new civil society-derived practices. Starting in the mid-1980s, institutionally independent medical facilities paid for by foundations but managed by militant parties began operating.
Scouting and Sports

Scouting organizations paved the way for many young Palestinians to later enter military divisions of the guerrilla organizations. While all the scouting organizations included at least elementary military training, my interviewees distinguished the scouts (sing.: *kashaf*, plur.: *kashafa*) from the male Lion Cubs (sing.: *shibil*, plur.: *ashbal*) and the female Flowers (sing.: *zahra*, plur.: *zaharat*); the Lion Cubs and the Flowers were expressly militarily oriented (TIEMC 1981; author interviews). Yet few people explicitly mentioned ideology or indoctrination when they spoke of their experiences of the scouts; those who grew up in the 1960s tended instead to contextualize scouting organizations as places where young Palestinians could be proud of their heritage and feel as if they were part of a broad social and political project. For example, when I interviewed Amjad, a member of the PFLP who had grown up in Tel al-Za‘tar in the 1960s, he emphasized the historical role of the scouts, especially during the *Deuxième Bureau* era. He noted that unlike the *ashbal*—whom he remembered as boys marching off to the forests with sticks (not guns, at that point) for military training—the *kashafa* were “just in schools.” Yet Amjad still underscored the *kashafa* organization’s particular influence on its members, explaining that “to the outside, they were scouts,” but on the “inside” they were “something for Palestine.” Sports clubs, he explained, encapsulated the same inside–outside dichotomy: on the “inside”—under the table, so to speak—they were “something for Palestine.” Especially in the context of the 1960s, Amjad’s memory of the scouts and sports teams emphasizes how people carved out small spaces of collective resistance, even in contexts of surveillance and state repression, and also how people’s pathways into later high-risk activism incorporated many different, and differently risky, starting points.

Scouting and sporting organizations did more than simply build physical skills; as in other settings, recreational facilities generated lasting social and political ties among their members. Sporting clubs have long been a source of political and military organization building, licit and otherwise. Scholars have noted the importance of fun in political activity (Royko 1988; A. Cohen and Taylor 2001; Volkov 2002; Verkaaik 2004), suggesting that participation in party-sponsored recreational activities may have been an important aspect of continued membership and cohesion, rather than simply a path to recruitment. In Soviet Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, participation in sporting clubs has for decades also been linked to involvement in riots and violent enterprises (Royko 1988; Buford 1993; Volkov 2002). In Lebanon, politically affiliated football clubs have a long history of facilitating friendships and reinforcing political boundaries among Palestinians; several of my interlocutors had played in the leagues since shortly after the ANM’s founding and were still friends with football buddies who
had changed factions. For example, Abu Husayn informed me on several occasions that he had met members of other Fatah battalions and other guerrilla organizations because he played on the football team. Abu Riyad, who played in the same football league, noted, almost offhandedly, that these programs had obviously broadened his contacts within the sprawling institutions of the Palestinian resistance. Even the ALF and the PLF—both leftist factions that showed comparatively little comparative interest in social efforts such as childhood education—were deeply involved in the world of cultural and sporting clubs (TIEMC 1981).

Understanding the relational environment in Palestinian refugee communities at the beginning of the 1980s is a critical foundation from which to understand processes of organizational adaptation and emergence over the following decade. By 1982, Palestinian guerrilla organizations and the PLO itself had deeply embedded in refugee communities and developed complex ties with Lebanese political parties. They benefited from the backing of regional and global state patrons. Military, social, cultural, and economic projects mobilized hundreds of thousands of ordinary people. These projects also provided a scaffolding upon which a complex social infrastructure developed. Palestinian organizations also became deeply entwined in domestic Lebanese politics, causing broad resentment and attracting incendiary political rhetoric. The early stages of the Lebanese Civil War, shaped by Syrian and Israeli interventions, introduced new generations of Palestinian refugee populations to the lived realities of armed conflict and created new frames for collective identification and mobilization. Of particular import for the processes described in this book are the various ways in which people who were engaged with militancy interacted across subdivisions, factions, and the Lebanese–Palestinian divide.

As the vignette regarding Ain al-Hilweh at the beginning of the chapter suggests, the actors at the center of this study—militant organizations—demonstrate dynamism and malleability in their organizational structures over time, a theme that the remainder of this book deepens. In other words, while the factions being studied retain their names over time, their organizational structures and behaviors change as they experience and respond to violence and repression. Attention to organizational metadata—for example, in Ain al-Hilweh, to distinct performances of militarized hypermasculinity in one camp—can help to reveal historical ruptures and provide evidence of comparative differences in adaptive processes. The following chapter lays out initial distinctions in regionalized repertoires of violence that shaped these adaptive trajectories; those chapters that follow trace the processes of adaptation and emergence that produced new organizational forms.