Introduction

‘No doubt, this development [of violence] has a logic of its own, but it is a logic that springs from experience and not from a development of ideas’.¹

This chapter investigates the governance and violence affecting camp-based Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. It focuses on twin governance failures that make them objects of state governance and subjects of interpersonal and factional violence. It contends first that the violence is not the result of an Islamist (or jihadist) militant ideology for a specific political or social cause, but rather of the dismal living conditions that give rise to that cause; and second that the lack of legitimate governance structures in the refugee camps has prevented any improvement in living conditions. This has generated specific forms of violence that jeopardise security for Palestinians and Lebanese alike. Long-term deprivation, exclusion and marginalisation are the result of state policies towards refugees that have generated specific forms of systemic violence inside the refugee camps.
Post-Taif Lebanon is an acutely sectarian country in which the Palestinians constitute a minority ‘sect’, but without a recognised place in the sectarian system. This renders them politically, economically and socially marginalised. However, the main problem for this group of refugees is that they are spatially ‘enclaved’. The right-wing Lebanese political party leaders and Lebanese security and military agencies enclave undesirable groups and confine them in what, following Agamben, can be termed ‘spaces of exception’. This applies not only to refugee camps but also to violence-prone, popular quarters such as Tripoli’s Bab al-Tabanah and Jabal Mohsen, and is considered a necessary measure for ensuring Lebanon’s security. This policy has parallels with the global paradigm of the ‘war on terror’, which enclaves detention centres such as the US Guantanamo base in Cuba and Brazil’s favelas in order to facilitate the ‘free’ circulation of ‘civilised’ people in what Petti has described as ‘fortressed archipelagos’. Building on the insights of Agamben and Petti, this chapter seeks to deconstruct and debunk the myths circulated through the Lebanese media about the forms and magnitude of ‘Islamist violence’ in Palestinian refugee camps and especially in the Ayn al-Hilweh refugee camp in southern Lebanon.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben labelled this kind of condition as living under a ‘state of exception’. The paradox of the camp-based Palestinians in Lebanon today is that they are ‘excluded from rights while being included in law-making’. They enjoy neither the civil rights of Lebanese, upon whose territory they reside, nor those of foreigners living in Lebanon. Excluded from the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, which stipulates that refugees have the right to work without a specific work permit, Palestinians in Lebanon are obliged not only to secure such a permit, but even to pay an exorbitant fee for one. By virtue of their statelessness, as Agamben and Arendt have argued, refugees represent a disquieting element in the ordering of the modern nation-state. For all practical purposes, in that it is only rarely and arbitrarily enforced, Lebanese law has been suspended within the confines of the refugee camps. In this sense, the camps have become Agambian ‘spaces of exception’. The residents live in a ‘zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer make any sense’.

This chapter is based on primary sources that include interviews with five focus groups and community leaders on violence and governance, mainly in the most violence-prone refugee camps: Nahr al-Bared, Beddawi (north-
ern Lebanon) and Ayn al-Hilweh (southern Lebanon). Additionally, the chapter makes use of secondary sources, in particular the findings of the International Information Survey in 2009.

By recording the positions of a wide range of community members on questions of governance, rather than simply restating the refugees’ dire socio-economic conditions as other studies have done, I seek in part to relocate the focus group participants from conventional misery discourse (‘bare life’) on refugees to the ‘political life’ of their actual experiences. To this end, I first discuss briefly the history of Palestinian camp governance in Lebanon and the securitisation of the camps, and then examine three types of violence: the Lebanese authorities’ violence, attacks on individuals and property and finally, violence between political factions.

The Palestinian body politic in the camps

The creation of ‘popular committees’ in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon was based on the Cairo Agreement (1969). Before the agreement, the camps in Lebanon were governed by a state of emergency and under Lebanese security agencies’ control (gendarmes and Deuxième Bureau). Between 1970 and 1982, the Cairo Agreement meant that the police had to negotiate access to the camps through powerful popular committees, which granted or refused entry on a case-by-case basis. Julie Peteet has analysed the different conflict resolution methods during this period. At the time, the traditional authority structures remained in place, as did customary forms of dispute settlement. However, the camps thereafter witnessed the emergence of a new elite, whose legitimacy was based on the Palestinian national struggle. This situation changed after 1982, when participation in the national struggle was no longer sufficient for someone to become a powerbroker.

After the forced departure of the PLO leadership from Lebanon in 1982, the PLO’s popular committees and security committees were dismantled (except in the camps in the south), and were replaced by committees that were weaker and significantly pro-Syrian. The new committees lacked legitimacy because they were not made up of elected members (as before), nor were they recognised by the Lebanese authorities. The camp residents instead resorted to traditional power brokers such as imams, local notables [wujaha] and local security leaders to resolve quarrels and disagreements before turning to the police. While such informal conflict resolution meth-
ods were mostly successful in the past, the refugee camps are no longer harmonious, communitarian and headed by local notables. This is due to many factors, but mainly to urbanisation and migration. The continual transformation and transgression of power-sharing within the camps is critical, especially when compared to the situation after the PLO was evicted in 1982.

Recent research in the refugee camps in Lebanon has demonstrated a fundamental crisis of governance in the camps, which suffer from the presence of dozens of competing factions vying for power and influence. In theory, one or two popular committees and their associated security committees govern individual camps and do so under the supervision of the PLO or a coalition of camp-based factions. The committees are comprised of representatives from each faction—who are appointed, not elected—yet are expected to keep the peace, solve internal disputes, provide security, interact with the Lebanese government and aid agencies, and administer the camp in coordination with UNRWA. In some camps, such as Ayn al-Hilweh, an additional education council was established, composed of representatives from all factions as well as local religious authorities. However, despite the thin veneer of cooperation and coordination between the many popular committees, some focus group participants complained that these committees rarely agreed on important issues, failed to coordinate their activities, did not enjoy popular legitimacy, and were not recognised by the Lebanese government. The committees are neither able to protect their constituents from harassment by the Lebanese security forces controlling the camp perimeters, nor hold UNRWA accountable for its shortcomings. In short, the committees promote factional infighting and bolster patron-client politics, causing Palestinian disunity. As Knudsen observed during his 2003 fieldwork in the camps:

Both among the secular and Islamist lobbies we find a plethora of smaller and larger groups, often with conflicting views and sometimes involved in fratricidal battles that weaken the refugee community and ultimately undermine their quest for political hegemony. None of them are able to speak on behalf of the whole refugee community and this serves to ‘compartmentalise’ and therefore weaken the Palestinian nationalist struggle to regain their homeland.

In this regard, little has changed in recent years. Today, Ayn al-Hilweh has two popular committees and two security committees, which purport to represent the camp’s roughly 70,000 actual residents (47,500 officially, according to the UNRWA website). Recently, a new layer of governance was
added: a ‘follow-up committee’ composed of representatives from all the
camp factions, both secular and Islamist. Yet, many interlocutors still
lamented the ‘lack of a political reference, the absence of a unified Palestin-
ian position’.

In 2007 the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp was destroyed in a 15-week
battle between a militant Islamist group (Fatah al-Islam) and the Lebanese
Army. The focus group participants warned that unless Palestinians in Leba-
non are permitted to strengthen their own political and security authorities,
they will not be able to prevent a similar outbreak of violence. In the words
of one Nahr al-Bared resident: ‘There has to be a higher council … to rep-
resent the Palestinian people as a whole, especially in the diaspora camps in
Lebanon such as Nahr al-Bared, Ayn al-Hilweh, and Beddawi, because we
are no longer sure that the events of Nahr al-Bared could not happen else-
where’. A neighbour agreed: ‘If the Lebanese state had permitted politicians
or the PLO leadership to form a [Palestinian] security force, Fatah al-Islam
would never have gained a foothold in the camp’.

Indeed, in the months leading up to the conflict in Nahr al-Bared
(December 2006 to March 2007), the residents of the camp tried repeat-
edly to remove Fatah al-Islam members from their midst. To this end, the
PLO engaged in armed clashes with the militants throughout the month of
March. The outcome of these clashes, however, was inconclusive and was
dismissed by the Lebanese authorities as merely ‘routine’ Palestinian infight-
ing, in spite of the fact that Fatah al-Islam was made up largely of non-
Palestinians. The security committee of Nahr al-Bared and the PLO lacked
both the resources and the mandate to deal with Fatah al-Islam on their
own. The popular committees lacked resources, which prevented them from
fulfilling their municipal functions. Moreover, the committees lacked
skilled technicians with expertise on urban regulations (zoning and con-
struction codes), water, sanitation and electricity.

There is a tapestry of multiple, partial sovereignties, which include ‘real
sovereigns’, such as the Lebanese government, but also ‘phantom sover-
eigns’, such as the PLO and other factions, as well as UNRWA and other
humanitarian agencies, which also contribute to the state of exception and
participate in the suspension of the law through various emergency meas-
ures. These measures are contradictory. Rather than creating order in the
camp, they leave it in a state of chaos and anomie. Each actor—govern-
ment, faction or agency—must compete, not for the allegiance of each
Palestinian resident, but instead for control over each refugee. ‘Contrary to
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our modern habit of representing the political realm in terms of citizens’ rights, free will, and social contracts, from the point of view of sovereignty, only bare life is authentically political’, suggests Agamben.17

There is agreement among refugees interviewed for this chapter, that the popular committees and the factions, in their present form, do not represent the best interests of Palestinians in Lebanon. As will be shown, this situation is made worse by the mobilisation of the political factions, which causes disillusionment among the majority and radicalises a minority of the refugees.

Political disillusionment

Disillusionment can be understood as the disenchantment that follows from the loss of hope and belief in the future. The different focus groups, especially the youth group, testified to a low degree of political activity among the youth in the camps. Out of eighteen people interviewed in this group, only three had engaged in political activities in the year preceding the interview. This differs significantly from the situation in the past, when most people participated in a variety of political activities, including commemorations. Among those in the youth focus group, some were absorbed with securing life’s necessities, while others appeared weary of politics and disinclined to join political factions. The one notable exception is the Hamas supporters, who were quite active both in the Nahr al-Bared and Beddawi camps. One of the indicators of the strength of each faction can be inferred from the results of the election of the UNRWA Staff Union. In the election of April 2009, Hamas won the majority of the seats in the north of the country, while Fatah prevailed in Beirut and in the south.

The consequences of the disillusionment are very important for the long-term relationship between the youth and their community and society, as well as for social cohesion within the community. The tendency to favour migration is another indicator of this political disillusionment. According to the International Information survey, if a Palestinian state were declared without acknowledging the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, 36 per cent of respondents would prefer resettling in a Western country, about 11 per cent moving to an Arab country, whereas about 32 per cent would prefer to remain in Lebanon.

Typically, young people expressed anger, outrage, pessimism and apathy toward the Lebanese and Palestinian polities. Politicians were seen as inef-
ficient, untrustworthy,18 useless and corrupt, ‘looking out for themselves’ and not placing the Palestinian cause first. They considered the popular committee lacking in relevant experience to manage the camp, and felt that the committee members had ‘lost touch’ with their constituency. Many of the interviewees felt that the dwindling Palestinian political authority reflected a crisis of substantive moral purpose. Others asserted that it demonstrated the ways in which the Lebanese authorities undermined the popular committees. Yet others believed that Islamic conceptions of good governance and righteousness were not being followed. Many felt unrepresented by the political factions. One youth in Ayn al-Hilweh reported that ‘my brother was arrested at a check point. My dad went to an old friend from Hamas seeking his help. Effectively, the representative of Hamas in the Ayn al-Hilweh camp intervened and he was released after one week’.

When the International Information survey asked respondents which ‘Palestinian factions live up to their expectations’, 37.4 per cent of surveyed youth named Fatah.19 This figure dropped to 25.5 per cent for Hamas and the more marginal secular and Islamist factions got only 18 per cent. The remaining 19.1 per cent of the respondents stated that none of the factions were performing according to their expectations. Young people are not necessarily ‘depoliticised’, but rather disillusioned with the fragmented and factional political structure (except for Hamas, which is considered an alternative to the traditional Palestinian factions). They feel isolated from the political process, as expressed in both the focus group interviews and in the results from a similar focus group survey carried out more than a decade ago by the Civitas project.20 They express the need to have more channels of communication to connect them with the various governing bodies that serve them.

In the following section I will show that in spite of being a mostly non-violent society, feelings of powerlessness can lead to the eruption of violence. In fact, Palestinian society in the three camps under study (Beddawi, Nahr al-Bared and Ayn al-Hilweh) is on the verge of falling into a deep malaise.

Violence in the camps

Studying social and political violence in the camps is not an easy task, and there are hardly any statistics on the subject. The only statistics found were in a report on violence, monitored by the Palestinian Human Rights
Organisation (PHRO).\textsuperscript{21} In addition, some reports provide indicators of violence, such as the annual reports from PHRO\textsuperscript{22} and the Najdeh Association\textsuperscript{23} which include information on domestic violence. Additional data can be found in my own interviews with community leaders and individuals in the camps and in Lebanese newspaper reports on violence.\textsuperscript{24}

The PHRO report for the first five months of 2010 shows three types of violence: the Lebanese authorities’ violence, attacks on individuals and property and violence between factions (Table 1).\textsuperscript{25} The large majority of the incidents, about 84 per cent (62 out of 74 incidents), were in the Nahr al-Bared camp in the north.

**Militarised violence**

As the table indicates, thirty out of seventy-four incidents of violence (40 per cent of the total violence surveyed in the refugee camps) were perpetrated by the police and army intelligence. This violence is under-reported by the media. Interviewees reported many arbitrary arrests and the obstruction of freedom of movement for the refugee population. This is corroborated by another PHRO report\textsuperscript{27} that shows a systematic pattern of violating Palestinians’ right to unrestricted movement, especially in camps such as Ayn al-Hilweh and Nahr al-Bared. This not only hinders individual mobility but also hurts business. According to a recent Fafo survey,\textsuperscript{28} the checkpoints at the camp perimeters hamper business activity and prevent customers and suppliers from entering and add to the daily suffering of the resident refugees.\textsuperscript{29}

In the absence of a formal mode of law enforcement and camp policing, different Lebanese security agencies are intervening. One UNRWA area officer reported that historically ‘I used to receive calls from one or two agencies of the camp’s security administration in case there was a problem. Now there are at least four such agencies. This shows how far the Lebanese security agencies have infiltrated the camp and appointed collaborators’. One member of the popular committee in the Beddawi camp confirmed this account, stating that ‘a few years ago, we used to denounce and isolate the collaborators—now who is not a collaborator?’ Instead of bringing attention to the asymmetrical power structures and collusion between the popular committees and military intelligence, the media, particularly newspapers, emphasise a mode of cooperation between them.\textsuperscript{30}
There is a near total discrepancy between rhetoric and practice. Former Prime Minister Fuad Siniora has referred to Nahr al-Bared as a model of camp governance, to be implemented in other camps. The Vienna document issued in 2008 by the Lebanese government for the donors’ conference to rebuild the ruined Nahr al-Bared camp uses the term ‘community policing’. In practice, however, the Lebanese authorities have opted for a militarised governmental regime in the form of counter-insurgency policing. Some refugee camps, such as Ayn al-Hilweh, are under siege by the army, which monitors entry and exit points, but the Nahr al-Bared camp and its surrounding area are a military zone and governed by the Internal Security Forces (ISF) through the semblance of a police station. However, the camp dwellers seek to resist such militarised governance and a few resort to violence. This echoes Susan Buck-Morss’ claim concerning the ‘dialectic of power’. In the new governance plan, a division of labour emerges through which the army ensures a regime of separation and control, while the ISF controls the economic and political status of the camp, facilitating economic extraction and exploitation. State governmental control is characterised not by the enforcement of well-defined rules and laws, but by the suspension of these rules through a skewed bureaucratic apparatus that impose different modes of intervention and whose very unpredictability is the key to its effectiveness. The intervention takes the form of real or sus-

<table>
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<th>Beirut</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Arbitrary arrests, torture and humiliation</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hindering mobility</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violation of the right to decent housing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violation of the right to health^26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: PHRO 2010.
pended violence: some researchers and human rights activists were arrested in 2010 because of their criticism of LAF’s role in governing the Nahr al-Bared camp, and another activist reported staying away from his home in the Nahr al-Bared camp for more than three months because he was afraid of being arrested by the LAF.

Militarised camp governance is based on two principles: nominal inclusion of the camp under Lebanese sovereignty, with simultaneous geographic exclusion. The inclusion is institutionalised by discrimination, especially through the 2010 law on ‘the right to work’ for Palestinian refugees and the 2001 ruling that curtailed their access to ‘property ownership’. The material outcome of separation and its twin pillars of legal persecution and enclaved geography create a deep sense of spatial exclusion and endemic disorientation for Lebanese and Palestinians alike.

The inclusion and the separation of the camps both presuppose the exclusion of their dwellers from the pale of law and the normalisation of a ‘state of exception’ in which the Palestinians collectively as well as individually, are subject to arbitrary violence and coercive regulation of daily life. Hence, Nahr al-Bared becomes in effect an experimental ‘laboratory’ for control and surveillance by the LAF and ISF.

**Attacks on individuals and property**

According to a PHRO report, minor offences against individuals and property represent a miniscule part of the violence in the camps (only nine out of 74 offences during the first five months of 2010). Social constructionist theorists caution us about statistics that do not take into account what some categories of the population would perceive as offences to be reported and others not. This means that violence tends to be both underrated and underreported. In 2007 a local NGO undertook a study of domestic violence based on data from counselling centres that worked with 209 female victims, the majority of them single women (52 per cent). Some 89 per cent of this violence was of a psychological nature. Young girls between 15 and 19 years were the main sufferers of domestic violence (38 per cent of the victims). This illustrates the problem of gender-based violence in Palestinian society inside the camps.

Some of the above-mentioned violent incidents are localised, familial disputes which escalate into problems between political factions. An example from the Ayn al-Hilweh refugee camp began as a quarrel between two
youngsters over the outcome of a game of pinball, which sparked a clash between Fatah and a local Islamic group. In the same vein, vandalism targeting schools reveals communitarian tension and a problematic relationship between this camp and its non-Palestinian neighbours. In mid-July 2010, a Christian school in the Burj al-Shemali camp near Tyre was vandalised by graffiti praising Imam Ali. The culprits were a group of young men from adjoining neighbourhoods.

Some violence is related to drug dealers in the camps. On 14 September 2010, a clash erupted between armed men in a street in the Ayn al-Hilweh camp, wounding one bystander. Reports attributed the scuffle to a crackdown on drug dealing after the head of the PLO’s armed militia had promised that drugs would be eradicated from the camp and drug dealers handed over to the Lebanese judiciary.

Violence between factions

In 2009, about 700 homicides (some of them politically motivated) were reported in Lebanon, but only a few of them took place in refugee camps. Thus refugee camps are not the major sites of violence in the country, nor are refugees the only agents of violence. Still, factional in-fighting remains a major source of violence inside the camps. However, political factions can be either sources of disorder in the camp or conversely guardians of order.

In recent years political violence in the refugee camps has increased, owing in part to heightened tensions between different factions, but there has been no such increase in the Ayn al-Hilweh camp. This is due to a certain political rapprochement between the political factions and the establishment of a ‘follow-up committee’ composed of all political factions, including the Islamists. In the 2009 International Information survey, some 89 per cent of the camp dwellers found that the security situation was ‘bad or very bad’. The deteriorating security situation came as the second most pressing problem (37.4 per cent of the respondents), followed by the lack of jobs and the deteriorating economic situation. The Pursue survey, conducted in 2010 in the Ayn al-Hilweh camp, showed a significant reduction in the camp’s perceived security situation.

When clashes erupt in the Ayn al-Hilweh refugee camp employees stay away from work and checkpoints, schools and shops are closed and medical services are disrupted. The following examples illustrate the nature of violent encounters, particularly concerning ‘strategic’ areas inside the
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camps, such as mosques. In September 2010, three people were wounded in the al-Buss refugee camp near Tyre, after a dispute between clerics loyal to either Fatah or Hamas resulted in armed clashes. The clerics disagreed on who would lead prayers at the camp’s mosque.\(^4\) Another clash over the control of a mosque happened in 2008 in the Burj al-Barajneh camp between Islamic Jihad and Fatah and resulted in the death of one person.

Some incidents involve violence by Palestinian political factions directed against the camp residents. The murder of Reem, a 17 year old female living in the Shatila refugee camp (Beirut), is revealing.\(^4\) As a Palestinian from Syria residing in Lebanon, she was reportedly afflicted by psychological problems and drug addiction. At around 4:15 am on 1 July 2008, at the western entrance of the Shatila camp, Reem was stopped at the gate and asked by the head of the security committee in the camp why she was entering at night with her boyfriend. When she replied that it was none of his business, she was shot by the personal bodyguard of the head of the local security committee. The security committee came to the scene to review the incident but left her bleeding for 45 minutes before an ambulance arrived and took her to the hospital. A coroner came to the hospital to investigate the murder, but quickly closed the file. Soon afterwards, her family was authorised to pick up her body and she was buried later the same day. The PHRO fieldworker asked the security committee whether the murderer would be handed over to the Lebanese security forces. They replied that they were waiting for a response from Reem’s family whether they would file a formal complaint or accept financial compensation [\(\text{fidyya}\)]. What is particularly significant in this story is the complicity between the Palestinian security committee and the Lebanese police, both treating Reem as a \textit{homo sacer},\(^4\) a person who can be ‘eliminated’ by anyone without punishment.

Still, political factions can and occasionally do play a positive role by mediating between parties in conflict and in enforcing certain community norms and customs. A psychologist working for a Palestinian NGO acknowledged this role, praising the work of the factions in resolving all types of health-related problems and coordinating efforts to help and assist patients inside the camps. Indeed, some focus group participants, the members of security committees in particular, insisted that the security situation in the camps would be worse without the political factions: ‘The factions have their advantages. They serve the people in the camps and act as a buffer. Without them, the camps would a mess. The factions stand in the way of those who want to create havoc’.
Ayn al-Hilweh: The myth of global jihadi violence

Over the past decade, the refugee camps have been the scene of a religious revival, influenced by the growth of a conservative Sunni Islam in urban areas such as Tripoli and Sidon, where Lebanese Islamist groups such as al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya, the Muslim Brotherhood and various Salafist preachers have been competing for new bases of support. This conservative Islamic ideology has also been aided by the growth of satellite television, especially Saudi media (Iqra, al-Majd, Annaas, etc.). This religious transformation has at times also featured elements of sectarian rhetoric, which take aim at Hizbollah (Shia) in order to foster a sense of unity within the Sunni community. Additionally, the Lebanese authorities’ discrimination against refugees and the lack of a coherent refugee policy have left the camp dwellers in a state of impoverishment and legal purgatory. Finally, there is a growing bitterness at the retreat from, for some even the defeat of, the Palestinian national project because of the infighting between Hamas and Fatah in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as the American occupation in Iraq and their military and political intervention in the region.

The work of Laleh Khalili concerning Palestinian commemorative practices vividly illustrates these changes. According to her work, in the 1970s these practices were related to transnational ideologies and world events. At that time, the PLO was a liberation movement connected to other liberation organisations around the world. However, from the 1990s onwards, the collapse of the communist bloc and the concomitant rise of Islamism interacted with the fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement to modify commemorative themes. The guerrilla hero melted into the image of the martyr, and heroic battles were replaced by massacres, which demonstrated a lack of hope and a prevailing retreat from the development of the national project.

In an attempt to understand to what degree Islamic movements are supported by young Palestinians in the camps, the International Information survey asked them ‘which of the main Islamic movements’ projects performed up to their expectations’. The majority of the youth (74.7 per cent) responded that no one group lived up to their expectations, while a tiny percentage opted for the smaller, ‘fringe’ Islamist groups.

In contrast to the picture transmitted by the media, the vast majority of the youth do not endorse violence against civilians as being ‘always justified’. However, about 70 per cent maintain that what is referred to as Pal-
estinian suicide bombings they consider to be martyrdom operations against their Israeli enemy, and thus always justified. A smaller number (about 20 per cent) find martyrdom operations to be ‘sometimes justified’. Based on the latter two findings, it is obvious that the youth distinguish between resistance and terrorism. While the majority rejects indiscriminate violence, they consider martyrdom operations legitimate.47

The focus group interviews with members of two of the ‘fringe’ Islamist movements, Usbat al-Ansar48 and the Islamic Jihadist Movement,49 demonstrated that these groups are playing a major role in curtailing camp-based violence and not, as the Lebanese media would have it, simply in generating it. Moreover, there is no evidence that camp-based Islamist groups are connected to al-Qaida, as stated by many Lebanese politicians and the media. Some of the Islamist groups inside the camps, while unaffiliated with al-Qaida, may nevertheless espouse a rhetoric of ‘global jihad’ similar to that of al-Qaida, and some groups have even sent men to Iraq to fight against the coalition forces. My fieldwork in July 2009 showed a tremendous change in the organisation and outlook of these fringe Islamist groups: the dissolution of Jund al-Sham,50 the near-elimination of Fatah al-Islam and the political transformation of Usbat al-Ansar into a more mainstream Islamist group with a local social agenda rather than a global jihadist one.51 Thus, my fieldwork data debunks the sweeping image of Ayn al-Hilweh as a stronghold of al-Qaida,52 and the claim that there is a significant shift in the identity of camp dwellers from national identity towards a broader Islamic identity.53 Even if there is an unresolved problem of ‘fugitive’ Palestinians inside the camp, their purported contribution to a ‘global jihad’ is no different from that of any Sunni locality in the region. Recently, the PLO, Hamas and other political groups sought to consolidate the camp’s many factions and organised a follow-up security committee composed of all the secular and Islamist parties. In December 2011 the PLO established a new police force in the camp that included most, but not all factions, yet the internal divisions within Fatah remain the main impediment to this effort. The case of Ayn al-Hilweh is therefore different from that of Nahr al-Bared, where the presence of Fatah al-Islam was primarily a phenomenon in the camp and not of the camp, that is, the militants used the camps for ‘strategic localisation’54 in order to wage guerrilla warfare. Thus, Fatah al-Islam’s presence in Nahr al-Bared was an exceptional rather than a typical case. There is thus no al-Qaida phenomenon among the Palestinians in Lebanon.
ENCLAVES AND FORTRESSED ARCHIPELAGO

The Islamists in Ayn al-Hilweh do not have a military agenda in Lebanon. Instead, interviews conducted in mid-2009 found that they were staying operational, waiting for the day to fight for Palestine. A leader of Usbat al-Ansar argued that the Ayn al-Hilweh camp was being targeted by the media and Lebanese politicians in order to destabilise Lebanon and create sectarian tensions (Sunni versus Shia). A leader of the Islamic Jihadist Movement seconded this analysis, claiming: ‘The objective of some Lebanese authorities is to make Ayn al-Hilweh become like Nahr al-Bared in order to destroy it’. However, Islamist actors recognise the specificity of Ayn al-Hilweh, arguing that unlike the other camps, ‘the presence of Islamists in Ayn al-Hilweh is an integral part of camp life. We have been here since the 1970s. We are not foreigners. Our main objective is to help people to abide by Islamic values. Historically, our social environment is plagued by alcoholism, delinquency and drugs’.

The Islamist Party of Liberation [Hizb al-Tahrir] is also active in the Ayn al-Hilweh camp. A local party member employed by UNRWA stated: ‘Since its establishment, Hizb al-Tahrir has denounced any participation in the political system, such as joining committees or other elected councils. Hamas has given up the Palestinian land. We cannot; it is an Islamic endowment [waqf]. Waiting for the Caliph, we don’t need to impose anything on any one. We should keep our faith until this moment. We have some obligations, but the importance is later on. Hizb al-Tahrir thus does not have any political agenda here in Lebanon. We are a party that preaches the good of Islam and is interested in a social agenda. We do not have even light arms’.

On behalf of Islamic Jihad, which is a nationalist Islamist group, the group’s leader in Ayn al-Hilweh declared: ‘Yes, we are supported by Iran but we have an independent position. Our agenda is exclusively Palestine. We don’t even wish to operate from Lebanon. We are here to support our brothers in Palestine. We only have light individual arms’.

In spite of the fragmentation of the Islamic scene in Ayn al-Hilweh, there is one figure who is very influential and respected by the majority of the camp dwellers and political factions: Sheikh Jamal Khattab, the leader of the Islamic Jihadist Movement and imam of the camp’s al-Noor Mosque. For the past twenty years he has intervened in all sorts of family, neighbourhood and social problems.

Although a calm person, during the interview Sheikh Khattab suddenly changed his tone, becoming bolder as he talked about the security of the
camp: ‘We cannot afford to threaten the security of the camp or its residents in order to protect one or more people. Safety of the camp is the most important consideration’. He was aware that some Lebanese authorities wanted to use Ayn al-Hilweh as a stronghold against Hizbollah and emphasised the good relationship with this party: ‘We have held several meetings with Hizbollah and we supported them [in the 2006 war] by welcoming those displaced [from the south] to Ayn al-Hilweh. People here gave them blankets and food. We even sent blankets to Sidon. We did not participate with Hizbollah in the war because it was fought with rockets and not fighters. We only have light arms which would have been useless anyway. We have a very good relationship with some Lebanese Islamist groups’.

Ayn al-Hilweh cannot be considered a hideout for al-Qaida fighters, nor does al-Qaida’s ‘global jihad’ find support among the camp population. Its influence among the population is also insignificant, as the findings from the International Information survey demonstrate. They asked respondents (youth from the four camps) whether murdering civilians was justified in order to solve grievances with their government. The large majority, about 73 per cent, answered that such actions were ‘never justified’ and only about 5 per cent answered that they were ‘always justified’.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to challenge the misperception, common among the Lebanese, that the Palestinian refugee camps are ‘islands of insecurity’. The everyday violence prevalent in the camps is not the result of a militant ideology, but rather of discrimination, urban segregation and state violence. Both political and everyday violence are found in the camps, yet neither is particularly prevalent.

This chapter has demonstrated that internal camp governance is in a state of crisis. The popular committees have been delegitimised by both the Lebanese authorities and the camp dwellers. This governance crisis may be aggravated in the near future. The recent uprising in Syria has resulted in refugees flowing across the border into Lebanon, and these new regional developments threaten the uneasy truce between the PLO and the many pro-regime factions in the camps. Weakened Syrian influence in Lebanon (a likely result of the Arab uprisings) could provoke conflict over power and authority within the camps, as opposing factions, including the PLO, seek greater influence at Syria’s expense.
Islamism has emerged during the past decade and, for better or for worse, has become a new and powerful force in the refugee camps. For some, it has brought out the best in people, compelling them to behave in ‘sound’ and ‘Islamic’ ways, abating violence, delinquency and moral degeneration while simultaneously encouraging increased cooperation among neighbours, improved health and social services. On the other hand, the Islamist factions have brought with them new problems, especially the inability to engage with existing or historical modes of governance, both Lebanese and Palestinian. These developments have divided the Palestinian community, exacerbating political discontent among the majority (especially the youth), while radicalising a tiny minority.