Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: STRUCTURE, ARGUMENTS, AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Islamic Resistance Movement or Hamas was established at the beginning of the first Palestinian uprising, which began in December 1987. As the representative of political Islam in Palestine, Hamas has had a long and contentious and, in its own way, remarkable trajectory. Typically, Hamas is misportrayed as an insular, one-dimensional entity dedicated solely to violence and to the destruction of the Jewish state. It has largely, if not entirely, been defined in terms of its terrorist attacks against Israel. Despite the existence of differentiated sectors within Hamas—social (including a nascent economic sphere), political, and military—they are all regarded as parts of the same apparatus of terror.

After September 11, 2001, the U.S. government moved to operationalize this perception when it added Hamas to its list of terrorist organizations on November 2, although President Clinton had already designated Hamas a foreign terrorist entity under Executive Order 12947 on January 23, 1995.[1] A key component of this designation was the belief that Islamic social institutions were an integral part of Hamas's terrorist infrastructure in Palestine. Both the U.S. government and U.S. media perceived the role of these institutions to be largely one of indoctrination and recruitment, as typified by this 1995 description in the *New York Times*: "[I]n the Israeli-occupied West Bank and in Palestinian-controlled Gaza, Hamas has another face. Hamas-run schools offer free classes and Hamas-run clinics charge as little as $1 for private visits to a doctor. . . . Hamas . . . uses schools . . . to spread the gospel about their jihad, or holy war, and to recruit young suicide bombers with the lure of martyrdom. . . .[C]ritics contend that the distinction between Hamas terror and Hamas good works is dubious. Charity . . . helps raise the political stature of a group that promotes terror."[2]

In the United States, the view that Islamic social institutions in Palestine are inherently evil has only intensified over time, particularly in the post-9/11 moral and political milieu. This has led the U.S. government to wage a determined campaign against them, freezing the assets of U.S.-based charities that had contributed to Hamas's social organizations. Perhaps the most celebrated case is that of the Holy Land Foundation

for Relief and Development (HLF) based in Richardson, Texas. In 2001, President Bush said, "Money raised by the Holy Land Foundation is used by Hamas to support schools and indoctrinate children to grow up into suicide bombers. Money raised by the Holy Land Foundation is also used by Hamas to recruit suicide bombers and to support their families. . . . Our action today is another step in the war on terrorism."[3]

In his testimony in the case against the HLF, Matthew Levitt, former deputy assistant secretary for intelligence and analysis at the U.S. Treasury, further argued: "the social wing is the foundation for Hamas. It's what supports its grassroots support. It's what enables it to have political support. It carries on its back the military wing by providing day jobs, logistical and operational support and perhaps most importantly, financing."[4] More specifically, "The *zakat* [almsgiving] committees are Hamas's most effective tool, period. They build grassroot[s] support for the organization. They create a sense of indebtedness among people who benefit from their support. Someone who doesn't have very much and is able to get over the hump by the assistance of an Hamas charity welcomes the chance to do something back. So if they are asked to do a favor, they are happy to do so. It provides a logistical support mechanism to the terrorist wing. It provides jobs for militants and terrorist alike. It facilitates Hamas's stature. They are more likely to get your vote if you are getting their financial support."[5]

On August 7, 2007, the U.S. government blacklisted the al-Salah Islamic Association, one of the largest Islamic charities in the Gaza Strip. Designated a "key support node for Hamas,"[6] al-Salah had its bank accounts frozen, which suggested a new U.S. strategy to target individual Islamic institutions in the occupied territories. In fact, al-Salah was the first "Hamas-related charity" to be added to the U.S. government blacklist since August 2003, when the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) froze the association's accounts (and "confirmed that al-Salah was a front for Hamas"[7]). The Department of Treasury accused al-Salah of employing "a number of Hamas military wing members."[8] Since 80 percent of the association's estimated $5 million budget came from external donors who relied on the banking system to transfer the funds, the freeze was devastating. By 2007, the association was running schools and medical centers and supporting more than ten thousand children, many of whose families had become impoverished because of the Israeli and international economic blockade of the Gaza Strip.

According to a senior Israeli official, the decision to target al-Salah was political and had originated with the Fatah government of Palestinian prime minister Fayyad, which sought ways to reduce financial support for the Islamic social welfare system[9] (and thereby to reduce the influence of the Hamas party, which had democratically won the Palestinian

elections in 2006, toppling Fatah from decades of prominence within Palestinian politics). According to Fayyad's information minister, Riyad al-Malki, the aim was not to compete with Hamas but rather to "set up a network of social security where we will be able to respond to the basic needs of families, to connect these families to the official system, and to prevent them from looking for alternatives from the Hamas network," which U.S. officials referred to as "charitable backfill."[10]

In December 2007 President Abbas, who along with the Fayyad government retained power in the West Bank despite the Hamas electoral victory, subsequently dissolved ninety-two Hamas-linked charity committees in the West Bank in retaliation for Hamas's rejection of the Annapolis Middle East peace conference. The Fayyad government claimed that Hamas "transformed the charity committees into financial empires to serve their political ends and activities" and announced that eleven new charity committees would replace those that were closed.[11]

On February 26, 2008, the Israeli government issued closure and confiscation orders against the Islamic Charitable Society (ICS) in Hebron, a charity that had existed for more than forty years and which, at the time of closure, ran a variety of social service programs. According to the Christian Peacemaker Teams, furthermore, "Soldiers have welded shut the gates of the nearly completed $2,000,000 Al-Huda girls' school, raided and looted bakeries that provided bread to the orphanages and on the first of May, raided the sewing workshop in the girls' orphanage, carting away sewing and processing machines, fabric, finished garments and office equipment . . . all of which they brought to the city dump."[12]

Clearly, the attack against Islamic social institutions was preplanned, coordinated, and multipronged. But what concerns about Hamas's social infrastructure prompted the campaign in the first place? Three were paramount:

- *Financing*: Monies raised for the benefit of Hamas's social sector are illicitly transferred to the military wing to finance its infrastructure and activities. As such, the argument goes, charitable and community-based institutions affiliated with Hamas are intimately involved with the military and its terrorist activities, serving as a cover or screen for the military and nothing more.
- *Indoctrination*: Social institutions are used, as President Bush stated, to indoctrinate—that is, incite violence and recruit potential militants from among charity beneficiaries, which is why, the argument contends, Hamas financially supports the families of suicide bombers.
- *Legitimacy*: Even assuming an ideal separation of the social and military wings, "the mere existence of a network of social

welfare organizations affiliated with an organization that deliberately targets civilians is considered unacceptable. It legitimizes an organization that resorts to patently illegal acts . . . ultimately strengthens it and the ideology and practices it promotes."[13]

This last point on legitimacy is the most damaging, because it assumes that the mere provision of needed social services swells the ranks of militant Islamic radicalism.[14] Good works, therefore, are never truly benevolent but merely a means to recruit, whether directly or indirectly, new supporters for Hamas's wholly violent agenda. Seen this way, Islamic social institutions by definition pose both a political and a security dilemma: Like their political counterparts, they seek to dramatically and violently alter the status quo rather than to coexist within it.

These concerns are based on a number of implicit assumptions, three of which I will take on in this book:[15]

1. The recipient community is deeply integrated into the operations and management of Islamic associations (such that its members are able to be indoctrinated and recruited).
2. Islamic social institutions are somehow uniquely Islamic—a viable and attractive Islamic model in action—and this distinguishes them from secular organizations.
3. The mere provision of (often) free social services and financial incentives and interaction with institutional members suffices to mobilize popular support for the Islamist agenda, whether violent or not.

While there can be no doubt that since its inception in 1987, Hamas has engaged in violence, armed struggle, and terrorism as the primary force behind the horrific suicide bombings inside Israel, it is also a broad-based movement that has evolved into an increasingly complex, varied, and sophisticated organization engaged in a variety of societal activities vital to Palestinian life. Hamas's evolution has been most dramatic with regard to its ideology, organizational structure, role in Palestinian society, and perceived goals—its limitations notwithstanding. This study seeks to challenge the conventional frame of reference that defines Hamas only as a terrorist organization. Here, I pursue a more nuanced view of Palestinian Islamism that deliberately seeks to reinterpret its dynamics, challenging the accepted assumption that all Islamic institutions are parts of a larger terrorist infrastructure and that the people who use them are passive victims of religious fanaticism joined in a desire to inflict harm.[16]

Years before the Bush administration targeted Hamas, I had become interested in the role and operations of Islamic social and economic institutions in the Gaza Strip (and to a lesser extent the West Bank), and I had

undertaken field research study on the subject. My research, which grew out of the fieldwork I had been doing since the 1980s on the economy of Gaza,[17] asked whether the dominant and essentialist view of Hamas and the Islamist movement in Palestine—a view that precludes the existence of a nonviolent Islamism and is based on the assumption that Islamist politics (i.e., the failure to separate religion and politics) invariably leads to violence and little else—was justified.

My examination of Hamas focused on its social dimensions and, to the extent possible, on the relationship between its social and political sectors, primarily in the Gaza Strip, where the Islamist movement in Palestine is most concentrated. The underlying thrust of all my research in Gaza and the West Bank has always been toward society—women, children, men, families, neighborhoods, communities—and occupation's destructive impact on them, an area that has never received adequate attention. Given Hamas's increasingly important role as a socioeconomic actor, it was inevitable that I would come into direct contact with it in the course of my earlier fieldwork in Gaza, which I finally did in the early days of the Oslo period. In 1995, for example, I observed the Islamist focus on working with Palestinian youth. Unlike the PNA, which sought to absorb young men into the security apparatus as a source of employment and identity, the Islamist approach stressed creating a religious and cultural framework for community development within which young people could participate and find meaningful identity, belonging, and connection.

The resulting sense of personal identification emerged from civic work and community involvement, not from political power plays or bureaucratic positioning. Perhaps this explains why the Islamic movement generally and Hamas in particular have always been able to inspire high levels of volunteerism, despite the widespread societal impoverishment and economic decline within which it grew. As such, Islamic institutions were not generating employment but creating a space where gradualism was possible and accountability and trust were perceived to be high. Islamic institutions provided islands of normality and stability in a sociopolitical context of chaos, dislocation, and pain. Furthermore, because they worked at the grassroots level, where they were able to build personal and communal ties based on religio-cultural identification, Islamic institutions were creating, in effect, a cultural private sector that felt familiar and safe to Palestinians in an otherwise rapidly evolving, confusing, and oppressive environment.[18] This need among Palestinians for purpose, trust, and solidarity has only grown over the years, and the Islamic response and the way people understand and identify with it should not be underestimated.

Institution building in the face of widespread systemic oppression was a critical function of the Islamic movement in Palestine in general, and Hamas in particular, during the Oslo period. This is little known. That the oppression was both external (Israel) and internal (the Palestinian National Authority) was also crucial to the movement's success (and to its failures, which are also examined). Perhaps most interesting at this time were the ways in which Islamic organizations, particularly those associated with Hamas (the majority), increasingly positioned themselves to play a mediatory role in society, a function historically reserved for the secular political faction, which was then disappearing as a distinct political institution under the pressures imposed by the PNA. Hamas's ability to mediate social disputes evolved during the Oslo period but was restricted largely to the social sphere. Unlike Hizballah in Lebanon, Hamas did not mediate political or military disputes. In fact, it took part in them. It was from the social sphere primarily—not the ideological one—that Hamas derived its legitimacy and constructed a broad popular base. Over a decade later, that base gave Hamas its stunning electoral victory.[19]

Given the dramatic decline in Palestinian economic and social conditions during the Oslo period, I began to ask how vital Islamic social institutions were to community development and economic well-being and, possibly, to internal stability and political order. I probed many questions, few of which have previously been examined in the Palestinian case, although they have in other regional contexts (see "Conceptual Framework," below).[20] In order to explore these questions in some depth, I spent as much time as I could inside Islamic social and economic institutions in Gaza, making multiple field trips over a period spanning 1995 to 2000 although the most intensive period of fieldwork occurred during the spring and summer of 1999.[21]

Time Frame of the Study

While this study takes a broad look at the evolution of Islamism in general and Hamas in particular in Palestine, the findings from the field research focus on what I refer to as the Oslo period—that brief era of hope that began in September 1993 with the signing of the first Oslo Accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and ended abruptly in September 2000 with the outbreak of the al-Aqsa, or second, Palestinian Intifada, or uprising. Many analysts view the first Intifada (1987 to 1993) as a critical period in Hamas's history, because it was during that period that the organization—the political and military embodiment of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine—was born and institutionalized. While this is certainly true, I believe that the first Intifada

was critical for Hamas for another, ultimately more important reason: It localized and consolidated Hamas's control over the Islamic social sector and provided the foundation for the emergence of new social institutions, which the Islamists were better positioned, and in some cases uniquely poised, to support. This strengthened Hamas's presence and legitimacy at the grassroots level (and with certain international organizations and NGOs working in the occupied territories) and subsequently earned (or gained) it entry into new areas of socioeconomic activity during the Oslo period that followed. This access proved crucial to Hamas's political survival at a time of extreme repression and weakness.

The Oslo period also was a critical time in the evolution of Islamic social institutions because it was then that a formal political institution was established—the Palestinian National Authority—that transformed the political environment and Hamas's position within it and consequently expanded the role and purpose of Islamic associations in Gaza and the West Bank, altering the relationship between the Islamist political and social sectors. It was during this period especially that Hamas demonstrated its capacity for change and moderation. It was also a time when the Islamist social sector played an important role not only within society but within the Islamist movement as well. As such, the Oslo period was arguably far more defining for Hamas as a political and social organization than any other historical period except 2006, when it won the Palestinian legislative elections and assumed control of the government, and 2007, when it violently assumed control of Gaza.

The Oslo period is pivotal for understanding the Palestinian Islamist movement in its social and political dimensions because it was, without question, a discrete and unique period of time in which critical and dramatic changes were occurring within the movement overall and within Hamas specifically. It was also a time, albeit limited, of relative openness that I was extremely fortunate to access and study. The changes I describe remain largely unseen and underresearched. Moreover, they contradict conventional wisdom, which has consistently viewed the Palestinian Islamic movement and Palestinian Islamism as singularly destructive and immutable forces. Fundamentally, these changes illustrate Hamas's capacity for moderation, accommodation, and transformation, as well as the limitations and constraints that have consistently plagued it.

Scope of the Study

Over the course of my fieldwork, I researched a broad range of Islamic social organizations in Palestine—primarily in Gaza but also in the West Bank. I also surveyed some economic and political institutions. Some

institutions made themselves more open and accessible to me than others, while others remained completely closed. My research included those institutions with some form of affiliation to Hamas—the presumed majority—and those that claimed none at all—the presumed minority—(a claim that was difficult, in the final analysis, to substantiate). I include both categories and refer to them collectively (perhaps unfairly) as Hamas social institutions because I aim to convey some sense of the breadth and depth of the social institutional universe and the nature of Hamas's role therein.

Social institutions that I surveyed included charitable societies, schools, community outreach programs, libraries, research centers, orphanage programs, day care centers, women's centers, youth centers, homes for the elderly, specialized care centers, health clinics, summer camps, Islamic committees in the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip, and *zakat* committees. I spoke with a diverse range of people involved in these institutions, including officials, staff, and clients, and observed some of their internal operations firsthand.

Economic institutions I visited included investment companies, banks, retail businesses, factories, and private entrepreneurs. (The Islamic economic sector was never as clearly delineated or defined as the social sector, which created many difficulties that are discussed in chapter 5.)

I also spent time in Islamic political organizations. For this, I spoke with officials, members, and supporters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, many of whom were very willing to meet with me while others were not. Some of the officials and residents with whom I spent time have been killed. Of those still living, not all remain within the Islamic movement. Over the course of my inquiry, I encountered various problems. Many, with time, were surmounted; others never were. They are described throughout this work, for they clearly informed my analysis.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this study I use a variety of terms: Islamic movement, Islamist movement, Hamas social institutions, and Islamic social (and economic) institutions. These terms can be confusing and therefore require definition.

Technically, there is an analytical difference between the "Islamic movement" and the "Islamist movement" in Palestine. The *Islamic movement* refers not only to its political sector in which Hamas predominates (but which also includes other Islamic political factions such as the Islamic Jihad) but also to the social, economic, cultural, and religious sectors of the movement, which may or may not have direct links to the

political. Hence, the use of the adjective "Islamic" does not automatically imply or assume any political affiliation. The *Islamist movement* refers only to the Islamic political and military sectors in Palestine and is meant as a form of political identification and affiliation. However, since Hamas has long defined and shaped the Islamic movement in Palestine, I use the term "Islamist" to refer to all its sectoral parts, not just the political or military.

Hence, in my examination of the Islamic social sector, I refer to "Islamic social institutions" and "Hamas (or Islamist) social institutions" interchangeably. Conceptually, I use the terms interchangeably for two reasons: because from what I could determine, the majority of Islamic social institutions in Gaza fall within Hamas's domain in some form; and because the work of the Islamic social sector as a whole has directly and indirectly benefited Hamas politically. But I acknowledge a problem with this usage: It assumes—as many observers have argued—that all who establish, direct, work, participate, support, and benefit from Islamic institutions, be they aligned or unaligned, are politically motivated Islamic activists. However, my research shows that most arguably are not.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study goes beyond standard approaches to the study of Islamist movements (including Hamas), which often employ social movement theory or democracy and Islam as their conceptual paradigms. While this study certainly draws from these critical frameworks, it extends them by reframing the approach to include the notion of civism (and civil sentiment) in Islamic and Islamist thought and practice. Civism is here defined as support for, commitment to, and strengthening of an organized society, economy, and polity with attention to the following features: *ahli* institutions, community life, order and stability, law, accepted social usages, individual and collective rights, the public good, productive relations with the "state," and so forth. As such, the conceptual framework examines the concept of social agency in Islamic/ist thought and how Islamists conceive of civil society (including the central role of the Islamic faith in generating civil sentiment) in an attempt to try to understand Palestinian Islamism *from within its own framework*—to understand Islamists as they understand themselves.

In its early years, Hamas had a clear frame of reference: Palestine is Arab, Islamic land that fell to colonial control with the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Hamas viewed the establishment of the state of Israel as a way to perpetuate colonial authority over the Muslim homeland and therefore as illegitimate. As victims of colonialism, according to Hamas,

Palestinians had the right to struggle to regain their homeland and freedom. The Hamas Charter, which is undeniably racist and anti-Jewish, articulates Hamas's reference point. A clear set of objectives was also set forth, but the accompanying discourse was sometimes confused, in part because it derived from the need to fight the occupation and compete with secular political trends within Palestinian society.

More than two decades after its establishment, Hamas has matured and grown in size and popularity. While its frame of reference and objectives remain unchanged, its political discourse has become refined and streamlined particularly with regard to (1) relations with local groups, political factions, and other religious communities and nations; (2) resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and political compromise with the state of Israel; and (3) the nature of the political system it envisages for a Palestine free of occupation.[22] Since Hamas's victory in the January 2006 legislative elections, there has been a further evolution in its political thinking—as evidenced in some of its key political documents—characterized by a strong emphasis on state building and programmatic work, greater refinement with regard to its position on a two-state solution and the role of resistance, and a progressive de-emphasis on religion.[23] In a May 2009 interview with the Hamas chief, Khaled Meshal, the *New York Times* described Hamas's willingness to accept a two-state solution with Israel along the 1967 borders.[24] Commenting on the Hamas Charter and a Palestinian state, Meshal stated: "The most important thing is what Hamas is doing and the policies it is adopting today. . . . Hamas has accepted the national reconciliation document. It has accepted a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders including East Jerusalem, dismantling settlements, and the right of return based on a long term truce. Hamas has represented a clear political program through a unity government. This is Hamas's program regardless of the historic documents. Hamas has offered a vision. Therefore, it's not logical for the international community to get stuck on sentences written 20 years ago."[25]

A good deal has been written about Hamas and the Islamist movement in the last few years.[26] Although these studies (among others) collectively and individually provide important analyses of Hamas and Islamist politics in Palestine and the moderating dynamics within them, they do not systematically explore the more pragmatic and constructive role of Hamas as seen in its social institutional work.

Furthermore, while the disciplines of Middle East studies and political science, for example, have considered such issues as the positive and negative roles of Islamist movements worldwide, the field of Islamic economics, and the nature of Islamic social and economic work in some Arab countries (e.g., Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Yemen), there has been little

if any substantive attention paid to the socioeconomic role of Islamists in the Palestinian context. In this regard, Khaled Hroub, one of the finest analysts of Hamas, writes, "Hamas's concern with social issues found expression in the extensive infrastructure of charitable social services the movement established for the poor. . . . Subsequently, these social services became one of the most important sources of influence that Hamas had with broad strata of the public. Nevertheless, the literature on this subject, either by Hamas or others, remains meager."[27]

My research, which forms the core of this book, attempts to fill this void by examining four broad lines of inquiry, each briefly described below.

The Islamic Social (and Economic) Sector

The Palestinian Islamist movement especially in Gaza is defined not only by political/military organizations such as Hamas but also by a range of social service institutions, many with a long history in the area. In the Gaza Strip, for example, Islamic institutional social activism is over six decades old and is varied and complex, with a tradition of community development work that long predates the emergence of political and radical Islam. As such, the Islamist movement is not homogeneous but rather quite diverse, both in its constituency and in its institutional leadership. Institutions also differ in their missions, objectives, philosophies, approaches, and achievements.

This study addresses the social components of the Islamist movement, the nature of Islamic socioeconomic work, and the impact of this work particularly on community development and stability. It also looks at certain institutions' agendas and work methods, administration, clientele, and operational spheres. Some representative questions explored are

- What types of organizations in Gaza and the West Bank were considered "Islamic" and in what ways were they Islamic? To what extent and in what ways were these institutions "Hamas"? Were these labels synonymous?
- What work did Islamic social organizations actually perform, and what impact did it have on the community or on a collective (Islamic) identity? What were their key objectives, goals, and priorities?
- How "extremist" were these social institutions, and were they directly linked to the instigation of violence?

The study examines the nature of Islamic social (and to a lesser extent, economic) work during the Oslo period, particularly with regard to its strengths and weaknesses, the possibilities created by the institutions

themselves, and the external constraints imposed. The actual, presumed, or desired social role of Islamist institutions is discussed against assumptions about the parallel role of the state or similar authority, and in the continued absence of such an authority as well.

As part of its examination of the social and economic sectors, this study takes a particular interest in the notion of change from below and working from the bottom up—the inclusion of women, minorities, and non-Muslims (nonbelievers); the role of (political and religious) ideology versus practice, and religion versus professionalism; the interrelationship between Islamist social institutions; and the nature of Islamic civism particularly as it regards the role of Islamist associations in strengthening or weakening state-society relations and in promoting or delimiting an ethos of civic engagement.

Interrelationships between the Social and Political Sectors

Very little of a systematic nature has been written on the Islamic social sector. Similarly, there have been few serious attempts to clarify the relationship between the social and political spheres of the Islamic movement, especially with regard to the work they do, the clientele they serve, or the beliefs they hold.

Toward this end, the book explores the ways in which Islamic political institutions interact with and/or influence social institutions and vice versa; the nature of Islamic social and political mobilization in Palestine and the links, if any, between them; the changing nature of Islamically legitimized action in the public and political spheres; and the slowly emerging secularization of religious discourse as a way of adapting to existing social and political realities. Attention also is directed to the nature of the ties that do exist between the social and political spheres, and an attempt is made to understand what those ties are and how they are operationalized. The military wing, which is highly decentralized, secretive, and autonomous, and largely West Bank–based, is not included in this analysis.

The political meaning of Islamic social institutions in Palestine has long been a hotly debated topic. To reiterate, the commonly accepted belief is that Hamas has used its extensive social service network—mosques, schools, kindergartens, orphanages, hospitals, clinics, and sports and youth clubs—to further its primary political agenda, which is assumed to be the mobilization of beneficiaries into political action aimed at destroying Israel; it has also been assumed that Hamas has been successful in doing so.[28] As such—and to paraphrase the former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright—Islamic social institutions have long been perceived as a part of the "Islamist terrorist infrastructure." The political intensity

with which this belief is held is matched only by the lack of research devoted to it. This study examines questions such as

- Was the Islamic social sector in fact a social wing of an Islamic political movement (i.e., Islamic activists trying to reform society according to Islamic law and create an Islamic model for a state), or were these activists merely Muslims wishing to realize and live by Islamic social values?
- What, if any, formal institutional links existed between Islamic social institutions and their political counterparts?
- What was the basis for bringing institutions and clientele together? Was it enough to encourage sustained action in support of political or radical Islam (i.e., what was the relationship between Islamic social and political activism)? Were institutions and clients joined by their mutual support for Hamas or by shared interests that were expressed symbolically in a common Islamic idiom?
- How important were ideological versus nonideological factors in influencing client communities? To what extent were Islamic social and economic institutions ideologized (i.e., what was the relationship between ideology and praxis)?

Critical Internal Processes of Change within the
Hamas Movement over the Past Fifteen Years

Hamas's ability to reinterpret itself is a pronounced and common theme in this book. Different forms of accommodation, adaptation, and transformation are examined within the political and social sectors of the Islamic movement during the Oslo period especially and the second Intifada. During the Oslo period, for example, the long-dominant political (and military) sector receded in favor of its social counterpart, representing a shift, albeit gradual, from an Islamic political movement to collective action in a Muslim society. This shift was in part characterized by a return to the gradual reform tradition and to the ethical-moral aspects of Islam, and by an approach that sought to "prepare the mind" through social activism. In this regard, this book examines the connections between competing (Islamic versus secular) visions of a Palestinian social and political order and competing definitions of legitimacy. The synergy between these competing forces has characterized the history and growth of Palestinian Islamism.

The book addresses the radicalization and de-radicalization (and demilitarization) and reradicalization of the Islamists, the ways in which

these processes compare, contrast, and coexist, and the relationship between the Islamic social and political sectors. It also looks at why Hamas failed to persuade Palestinians to adopt political Islam as a national goal, its electoral victory notwithstanding.

The Characteristics of a Future Islamic Society and Body Politic in Palestine

The features of a future Islamic society and polity are vital to explore in light of several key factors both internal and external to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. To name just a few: the inclusion of Hamas in the Bush administration's global war on terrorism; Israel's 2005 disengagement from Gaza and continued settlement expansion and building of the Separation Wall in the West Bank; the growing embrace of religion and use of Islamic idiom by Palestinian society generally and secular social and political organizations specifically, and the emerging Islamization of Palestinian society and politics, a trend with some precedent;[29] Hamas's electoral victory and control of the PNA followed by the imposition of international sanctions, which has crippled the economy with damaging social effects; the summer 2006 Lebanese-Israeli war in which Hizballah emerged the unofficial victor; and the June 2007 factional war between Fatah and Hamas that resulted in Hamas's seizure of Gaza, the disbanding of the unity government, the establishment of a new emergency and subsequently institutionalized government in the West Bank that formalized and concretized factional divisions into political practice; the June 2007 intensification of the sanction regime imposed on the Hamas-led government one year before; and Israel's three-week assault on Gaza that began on December 27, 2008.

Some Findings

Despite some negative experiences, the more time I spent inside Islamic institutions, the more I came to understand the contradiction between my firsthand experience of them and the impressions I was receiving from secular Palestinian friends and colleagues, let alone those of foreign analysts.

By the end of the 1990s I had observed that Islamic social service institutions and economic enterprises in the Gaza Strip and West Bank avoided radical change. Their behavior was less dogmatically "Islamic" than was often assumed. Rather, they seemed to advocate a more piecemeal, moderate, and systematic approach toward change that valued order and stability, not disorder and instability. This approach was marked within Islamic social organizations whose clientele consisted of people belonging

to very different social classes with a range of political outlooks who had no history of acting collectively in support of radical Islam. The mass base of the Islamic movement, as opposed to its political and military leadership, appeared neither ideological nor radical.

During the Oslo period especially, the strength of Hamas increasingly lay in the work of Islamic social institutions whose services, directly and indirectly, reached tens if not hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, helping them to survive. They provided services that the Palestinian Authority was unable to provide adequately, if at all. This base supported Islamic institutions largely because they met basic needs for economic sustenance and community well-being with a focus on health and education, community support, and service delivery. Islamic institutions were increasingly viewed as community actors in a context where few such actors existed. They sometimes went beyond their traditional social roles, engaging in more creative and innovative forms of community action. Hence, Islamic institutions did not emphasize political violence or substate terrorism but rather community well-being and civic restoration, a role that was (and remains) vital in a context of steady deterioration.

Indeed, given the steady socioeconomic deterioration that followed the implementation of the peace process, the balance of power between social and political Islam shifted even further in favor of the former, particularly at the grassroots level, where the majority of people interacted with the movement. This was a defining—and largely unrecognized—feature of the Oslo period. Islamic social institutions had, by the admission of the Hamas leadership itself (and despite clear structural limitations of their own), a greater capacity to mobilize people during the Oslo period than did their political counterparts.

Perhaps most importantly, it was not religious congregations that Islamic social institutions were attempting to create but civic communities, despite the larger religious framework that inspired institutional programs. Indeed, during the Oslo period there was a clear and deeply committed attempt by the Hamas political leadership to stimulate a social, cultural, and moral renewal of the Muslim community in Palestine. This was not an ad hoc measure but a real, if unofficial, strategy of incremental reform. The Islamist goal of social reform through community development was couched not only—or even primarily—in religious terms but in terms that were cultural and, at times, universal.

Organization of the Book

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first three provide the necessary context and conceptual frameworks for understanding the data.

Chapter 1, "Introduction: Structure, Arguments, and Conceptual Framework," explains the origin of the study and introduces key research questions, arguments, and areas of analysis. Chapter 2, "A Brief History of Hamas and the Islamic Movement in Palestine," provides background and a general context for examining Hamas's specific role as social actor. Chapter 3, "Islamist Conceptions of Civil Society," articulates a conceptual framework for ideas about Islamic civil society and explores the meaning of civil society to Islamists themselves.

The next three chapters present the main findings from my fieldwork. Chapter 4, "The Evolution of Islamist Social Institutions in the Gaza Strip: Before and during Oslo (a Sociopolitical History)," explores the evolution and role of Islamist social institutions in Gaza (and the West Bank), beginning with the reformist work and philosophy of the Muslim Brotherhood and continuing through the first Intifada and the Oslo period. Emphasis is given to the primary role of the social sector (e.g., the Islamist institutions' contribution to community development, order, stability, and civic engagement—what I define as civism); the political role and meaning, if any, of Islamist social work; and the impact of institutional work on grassroots development, community cohesion, and civism.

Chapter 5, "Islamist Social Institutions: Creating a Descriptive Context," introduces the reader to some of the major social and economic institutions that existed in the territories during the Oslo period—types, roles, services, target audiences served (clientele), organizational structure, legal status, and funding sources. Most importantly, it explores the social agenda that the Islamists had during the Oslo period and attempts to examine what constituted "Islamic authenticity" during that time and whether that aligns with the various widely held assumptions about Hamas and the Islamists.

Chapter 6, "Islamist Social Institutions: Key Analytical Findings," explores the main outcomes of my research with regard to the work and impact of the Islamist social sector, the nature of the Islamist social project, and the successes and failures of Islamist mobilization at the social level.

The last chapter considers the evolution of Hamas, its social institutions, and the Israel-Palestine conflict generally in the post-Oslo period. Chapter 7, "A Changing Islamist Order? From Civic Empowerment to Civic Regression—the Second Intifada and Beyond," assesses the political impact on the Islamist movement and its social institutions of the following: the second Intifada, Israel's 2005 "disengagement" from Gaza, Hamas's 2006 electoral victory, the subsequent international boycott of the Hamas-led government, and Hamas's June 2007 military takeover of Gaza. Particular consideration is given to how the role of social institutions changed after the second Intifada and after the 2006 elections.

Finally, the postscript offers a brief commentary on the implications and repercussions from Israel's 2008–2009 attack on Gaza, which occurred while this book was being written, and on Gaza's current situation.

A Note on Method

Having spent twenty-five years engaged in some form of research on the Gaza Strip and West Bank, I have always made it a priority to live among Palestinians and "walk in their shoes" to the extent that I was able and for as long as I could. My observations and interpretations over these two and a half decades provide the foundation for this book.

Hence, a central feature of this study is ethnographic. This book attempts to render visible—often through visual description—the social institutions of Hamas, their interrelationships, and their role in creating a collective existence among Palestinians. Having spent time among Islamic institutions and the people who run and use them, I want this book to give them voice. It is important for Palestinians to speak in their own words, not only through mine. As Augustus Richard Norton wrote in his two-volume study of civil society in the Middle East, "[s]cholarship on the Islamists . . . has been overly textual, too inclined to report the words of the ideologue and the spokesman, and insufficiently sociological, in terms of failing to look at the motives of those who lend their support to the Islamist movements."[30]

Despite all that has been written about them, Palestinians remain little known to the world; Hamas and those people identified with it, arguably more so. To the extent possible, I try to provide a sociological profile of both those who run Islamist social institutions and those whom they serve—that is, the people who live and work outside and well below Hamas's well-known circle of political and military leaders. My aim is to present a more dynamic depiction of Palestinian society, challenging the static and distorted one we typically get, allowing Palestinians to speak about Hamas, and from within it, about their everyday lives and what it means to be occupied and deprived. In presenting this more dynamic depiction, I tried to resist resorting to categories or dichotomies (although some are delineated for analytical purposes), since reality is always far more complex, differentiated, and irreducible than the stereotypes that are typically constructed for us. The imperative, as I see it, is to make *more* distinctions, not fewer.

In this book, therefore, I have tried not to speak *for* Palestinians but *from* them by incorporating into my analysis personal stories and accounts in the voices of individual Palestinian men, women, and children who are part of the Islamist social sector. In so doing, I have attempted

"to apply," as Loren Lybarger has written, "a disciplined scholarly per-spective that resists ideology in the interest of truth—truth always condi-tioned by the observer's historical and social location, his [or her] relation to power, the accidents of his life course, and the choices for alignment that flow from prior political commitments, experiences, and values. This truth is a reflexive one—seeking understanding of the other and of the self."[31] While I might substitute "accuracy" for "truth," the meaning is undeniably the same: rendering visible the complexities of Palestinian life and, in so doing, providing a more differentiated understanding of the forces that shape it. I do this while acknowledging that all interpreta-tions can—and should—be challenged, recalling what Paul Ricoeur once wrote, "[n]either in literary criticism, nor in the social sciences, is there . . . a last word."[32]