Of citizens and ordinary men: Political subjectivity and contestations of sectarianism in reconstruction-era Beirut

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Chapter 3: Figurations of local governance: state authority and political power

In the previous chapter we saw that counter to how Marxist sociologists and geographers have conceived it, the production of space – while subject to popular scrutiny and worry – does not appear form be a dominant frame through which people from Khandaq see themselves as part of the body politic. Nor is sectarian competition for space such a dominant frame. In order to understand where they do situate their politics, we need to turn our attention to other fields – that of the political party and the local state. In this chapter I take up the question posed in Isin’s and others’ scholarship of citizenship, to wit, how people are assigned the status of ‘citizens’, and what such status entails. Two immediate specifications are in order. Firstly, we are of course assigned multiple positions in various ways across our participation in society, so I narrow down this question to what positions are available to people in context of the neighbourhood. Secondly, however, given that positions are always only positions vis-à-vis other positions, this question does require us to look at the broader political field that makes up neighbourhood life. Within this field of governance, we have to look at how the various players address residents as certain kinds of members of the political community, allowing them relate to them as such. This chapter is primarily intended as a mapping exercise, to sketch the outlines of the field without going into how people actually navigate its relations and exploit its scope for action (which will follow in the next chapter). In particular, I trace the outlines of the field by zooming in on two figures of local governance, who, at the neighbourhood level, rep-

58 I’m thus leaving out other contexts of people’s lives, outside of the neighbourhood, like work life. These are limits due to the nature of my fieldwork, however for many people the neighbourhood is a central space in their lives.
resent and mediate in prominent ways the larger-scale formations of the state and the political party. The somewhat elusive, pictorial quality of the word ‘figure’ is intentional here. It suggests a position that has both certain structural qualities and a malleability, which allows different actual individuals across time and space take up the role differently. One of these figures is the so-called mukhtar, who has a formally designated function, that of a local state representative. The other, which ethnographies of politics (e.g., Hansen 2005: 119; Hansen & Stepputat 2006; Rutten 2001) tend to call a “strongman”, lacks such a formal designation, and merits his position on reputation and network. Both act as liaisons and middlemen in a relational triangle of constituent(s), (central) state, and (sectarian) political party. This chapter shows how the constellation of these various parties has evolved over the course of a century and a bit more, though especially over the past decades, up until the time of my fieldwork. The history of these ‘figures’ shows how the same basic tensions – over claims to sovereignty – recur between state and sectarian political leadership, in varying forms and understood in slightly varying vocabularies. These tensions and the way they have been framed also inform how residents perceive them (in terms of questions of sovereignty, that is), though I will only go into that in the next chapter. This chapter sets the scene, as it were.

Let me start by discussing the case of one such mukhtar I met during fieldwork, named Makki. His case encapsulates many of the themes important to this and the following chapter. Now, a mukhtar is an elected, local state representative who deals with all things related to personal status. He (or she) registers birth and death, residence and voting district, issues testimonies of identity (that people need when they interact with official institutions). But his authority extends beyond the domain of personal status. He provides testimonies of good conduct to the court for witnesses that hail from his constituency, registers children for school, authenticates rental contracts as well as other real estate property mutations. He thus serves in some way or fashion as an instance of mediation between citizens and various ‘central’ state institutions (ministries of education, agricultures, the judicial system, etc.). In Lebanon the mukhtar

59 Sometimes confusingly translated as ‘mayor’, which really doesn’t cover it. Literally the term translates as ‘chosen’, or with more licence, ‘elected’.
60 Although in recent years a few female mukhtars have taken office, it was an office completely dominated by men and to a large extent still is.
61 As I explain below, the mukhtar is an Ottoman invention and other countries under previous Ottoman rule have retained the office. Remuneration is organized differently across these countries, though.
obtains his earnings from the fees he collects for each service. In principle, he can perform these services to anyone who requests them (though he would need to know them), he mostly performs them for people in the district within which he is elected. Depending on the district – its wealth, the competition – and the reputation of the mukhtar, the pay can range from modest to quite profitable. Many mukhtars have a second job though.

The mukhtar is elected in ‘the’ local elections. In these elections, people vote in the members of their municipal council as well as their district mukhtars. The mandate is for 6 years. In 1998 (after much pressure from civil society groups), the first local elections since the civil war were held. Come 2010, then, Lebanon held its third local elections (see pictures above). The day after the elections, I stood on the corner from the Khandaq mosque, talking to some of the carpenters who have their premises in this historical carpenters’ sūq (market). The topic of discussion were, of course, the elections. Just then a few men came up, who took in gratulatory words and gestures from different sides, and I got introduced to one of them: the new mukhtar. Festively and confidently he shook hands and continued his small tour of victory up the street. After he’s moved on, one of the carpenters commented: It’s a shame. Mukhtar Makki lost in the elections. His office is just down there. The parties didn’t want him anymore. He’s a poor and simple man (m`atter), but at least he’s honourable. In the few days that followed, I heard similar sentiments from other people. There’s no room for the righteous here, a local businessman reflected. I decided to look up the former mukhtar. I found him on the same street, sitting next to the mosque on some wobbly chairs, talking with residents.
as they walk by and sometimes stop for small talk. We started talking as well and a conversation started that spanned several occasions and several sites – the street, his (now) bare office and his office supplies shop near the Hamra neighbourhood. Makki didn’t live in the neighbourhood anymore but he continued to come to his office frequently or sit outside to chat. Afterwards he would go up the street to this mother’s, 96 years old, and have dinner and make sure she was taken good care of. “It’s important to assume these responsibilities”, though he was the only one among his brothers to do so. He came across as a proud person and he knew how to colour events in a way favourable to his image, a skill typical for men of a certain status.

His story, coloured it may be, illustrates a number of stages in the evolution of local power configurations, and in particular the experimental period of (political) reconstruction that followed the end of the civil war. Makki’s father had been a mukhtar of the district for a number of decades, until his death in 1972. In those days there were few elections (in fact, since independence only 2 elections were held, in 1953 and 1964 [Murad 1997: 104]) and most mukhtars entered or stayed in office by ministerial decree. Makki sr. had been closely tied to the Aamiliye Islamic Society for Charity, which was set up by probably the most important Shia political figure in Beirut at the time, Rachid Beydoun. Makki remembers those days favourably, in which the mukhtar was an important figure and a resource for high level politicians. The mukhtar would have access to ministers, Makki assured me, and once, when his father was received by the Prime Minister, the latter came down the stairs to greet him, which, if you know, is a great sign of respect that you don’t give to just anyone. His father had also been well respected and beloved locally, as he had been a man who cared even for people who might not be able to afford his service fees. Moreover, people came to him when they were in need of other assistance as well, to resolve a marital dispute or to find a job. When local elections were held for the first time after the war in 1998, Sami Makki decided he would run as well, to continue his father’s tradition.

Before 1975, the total number of mukhtars for the Bachoura district, of which Khandaq forms the larger part, was five: three Sunni mukhtars, 1 Shia and 1 “Christian”62. However, in 1998, the number was raised and the sectarian balance was recalculated to include 10 mukhtars of which 6 were Shia and 4 Sunni. The update was to be more in sync with the new demographic realities. Or at least, with the realities of electoral voter

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62 None of the informants ever specified which ‘Christian’ sect precisely had been represented, from other sources I gather it was Armenian though.
registration. In Lebanon, due to complications I will go into later, many people are registered as voters in their ancestral villages. This includes the majority of Shia residing in the Beirut metropolitan area – including Khandaq residents. Thus the new balance of Sunni and Shia mukhtars does not reflect the actual residential demographic. In terms of voters registered in the Bachoura district, the voter roll for 2009 showed roughly 23,000 Shia and about 20,000 Sunni voters (Al-Akhbar, 2010-03-23, Rajana Hamyeh). (Both have gone up significantly since 2000, but the Sunna more significantly, the reason for which I discuss below). There are also a few thousand Christians – mostly Armenians – registered there, but because they don’t actually live there, they have not requested the presence of one.

Before I can go back to Makki’s story, I need to explain still one more facet of the electoral process. Lebanon has had the tradition of running on electoral lists for a long time, at least on the national level. As a hopeful politician, you run for a seat that is reserved to the sect you are officially assigned to. District seats are distributed across to the relative size of each sect’s registered voter bloc. However, each voter cast votes for each seat in the district, regardless of sectarian adherence. This favours electoral alliances on the district level. (These alliances are usually made across sectarian boundaries, because most electoral districts are mixed.) They work in the following way. After forming said alliance (the “list”), one then tells one’s constituency to vote for each of its members, an injunction to which most people stick, and the winning list takes all. At least since 199863, this is the running practice in mukhtar elections as well. In local elections they are so-called “unity lists” and they go under such ringing titles as ‘Sons of Bachoura’ (ibnā’ bashūra), literally translated, or more freely translated, ‘Bachoura’s Own’. The “unity list” is an invocation of the best intentions of the politicians involved to prevent ‘trouble’ that might occur if the fate of the opposing parties would actually be decided by unorganized votes on election day64. By agreeing to each other’s candidates, cross-sectarian unity and peace is guaranteed. While this may be some part of the reason, in practice it does not seem that agreeing with each other’s candidates is the purpose of the list. I was unable to hear about any example of one party interfering in the selection process of the other, even if such negotiation is theoretically possible. It seems more important that the parties decide

63 And probably before, though I wasn’t able to find a source to attest to that. It’s likely however, given that the municipal candidates – part of the same local elections – also ran on lists previously (see e.g. Ishtay 2001: 61).

64 It resonates similar invocations on a national scale, where “national unity cabinets” never go out of fashion.
to give each other one’s votes. This is how that works. Most people in fact vote for the proposed unity list in its entirety, on actual pieces of paper provided to them, which they drop into the voting box. (It does also happen frequently that people cross out certain names on the list, and replace them with candidates outside the list. As a consequences, the head of the list in Bachoura walked away with about 90% of the vote whereas the lowest performer on the official list still got some three quarters of the total votes.) In that way, most of the Sunna give the Shia parties their votes and most of the Shia give the Sunni party their votes. The parties can’t lose. Independents stand virtually no chance, though there are independents who are considered to have built up such a large constituency that they are asked to join the list (thus avoiding the danger that the less popular member of their list might be crossed out and replaced by the popular independent candidate).

In 1998, two candidates seem to have taken the initiative to build a list. For the Shia, it was Makki, while on the Sunni side, it was a candidate who had been the mukhtar before the war as well and was part of a second-tier Beiruti notable family (or really, more a clan). That Makki should have been at the joint head of the list was rather logical, because his father had been the only Shia mukhtar in the area, and they stemmed from an numerically important alliance of local families. The list would have been formed in negotiation with the electoral machines of the political parties. In Khandaq, there are basically three parties: for the Sunna Hariri’s party, which was later dubbed the Future Movement; and for the Shia, Amal and Hizbullah.

In 1998 only Hizbullah and Hariri’s Movement joined in a list, Amal stayed out of it – for reasons I will try to elucidate below. So Makki negotiated with Hizbullah’s electoral machine and they established a list. I do not know the details of these negotiations, but Makki had once ensured me that parties weren’t “very strong” in those days (i.e. around the turn of the century), so they didn’t “impose” themselves on the electoral process. There could be some truth in this perspective: Makki would have been a relative asset to the list, running on the reputation and network of his father and family, drawing in many votes. In Makki’s words, it was “thanks to his father’s name” that people voted for him. So this would have given him some stature and therefore room for negotiation, which suited Makki just fine, because he had always been “independent” and just wanted to be “correct”, to give each his own – like his father.

In 2004, at the end of the 6 year mandate, they voted for him again. But in 2010 Makki didn’t make it. In fact, he wasn’t even on the electoral list anymore that was now supported by all the political parties, including
Amal. So why was Makki taken off the electoral list? Makki himself didn’t elaborate on what happened, but a local successful businessman who had also tried to run that same year gave the following explanation. In a sense, it was Makki’s own celebrated “independence” that took him out of the race. The businessman explained that, in exchange for a party’s endorsement, the mukhtar has to bring votes. And Makki refused to do so. “They didn’t take him on the list, ‘cause he didn’t do the work. He didn’t bring people […], to get [them] to the voting booths. He didn’t have an electoral machine. He didn’t bring employees – he didn’t bring anyone.”

**Enacting citizenship in a local field of political mediation** The chapter elucidates why a man who seemed to enjoy local esteem and popularity as well as the endorsement of the political forces still lost his seat. As indicated, it is story of the evolution of the relations between political actors, state institutions and local constituencies. I tell the story by looking at two figures of local politics – the mukhtar and the strongman – and their shifting relations to the state and to centres of political power (whether that be notable politicians or political parties). Historically, strongmen in urban neighbourhoods were called ‘qabadays’ (*qabadayāt* in the Arabic plural) in the Middle Eastern region. People used the term for those who wheel and deal in the margins of the law, yet also act as a communal champion of the neighbourhood, and are often part of the political network of high-level political actors. Nowadays, the qabaday is commonly seen as a phenomenon of the (‘traditional’) past, both by scholars of the Levant as Lebanese themselves, so the choice for this second figure may not seem obvious at first sight. Yet, as a figure of local, ‘informal’ governance, the qabaday remains evocative and interesting to think with in relation to the process of political reconstitution, over the course the past twenty-odd years. The shifts in political positions and functions that make up this process, occur within a pattern of continuities and discontinuities. The mukhtar might give up some power to political parties but his role of mediation is not over. Likewise, you may no longer find qabadays that correspond to the historical ideal type, but other kinds of strongmen are now clearly standing in his shoes.

The historical and ethnographic narratives of these evolutions serve to address those issues that were part of the ‘qualities of citizenship’ strand of Paley’s (2002) anthropology of democracy. If you’ll recall from the introduction, the kinds of ideas about and claims to citizenship that people formulate depends on the status positions assigned to them in a given legal system, as well as the actual social and political fields of actions in which such positions may or may not be realized. In this chapter, then,
we start to get a better sense of how Lebanon’s sectarian system works in distributing rights and duties among its citizens: rather than taking the system as a given, I look at how it exists through the particular political relations through which it is distributed and enacted.

The questions of this chapter carry us into a consideration of relations of mediation – the mediation of constituency, state, and (sectarian) political leadership. With this suggestion, I do not mean to invoke such accounts of comparative politics that relegate these political relations to a ‘democracy with an adjective’ (Collier and Levitsky 1997; for other overviews, see Landé 1983; Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007). When political logics do not conform to the model of the all-are-equal-before-the-law, representation-by-individual-vote and bureaucratically rationalized (Western) state, such authors draw on the notion of mediation (brokerage) to characterize such non-conforming states. Access to the political and access to the state is obtained on the basis of ‘connections’ that offer individualized, ‘personalistic’ or ‘privatized’ resources and representation (rather than ‘direct’ access thanks to formalized and impersonal rules that provide resources to duly defined sections of a population). Therefore, clientelism, patronage and negotiations through “informal power” are seen as special cases of a different kind of political paradigm – that of mediated representation.

While this is not incorrect, the point is really moot. All things (political) are mediated – if the reader will allow me to take this inspiration-light from Actor-Network approaches. As Mol (2010: 257) explains for the uninitiated, the ANT approach goes back to Saussure’s structural idea that “words do not point directly to a referent, but form part of a network of words. They acquire meaning relationally, through their similarities with and differences from other words”. In ANT, “this semiotic understanding of relatedness has been shifted on from language to the rest of reality. Thus it is not simply the term, but the very phenomenon of “fish” that is taken to exist thanks to its relations” (id). What a fish ‘is’ (how it behaves, metabolizes food, etc.) depends on whether it’s a fish in a river or in a fish tank. Or, to move on to the human plane, every relation exists by the grace of ‘third parties’ that provide the elements that ultimately link up, say, two actors in an (economic) exchange. The same goes for political logics – the connection that is established between politicians and constituencies, or between state institutions and citizens depend on a myriad of practices of mediation. The proper politically scientific ques-

65 As Gellner observed, political patronage “intrigues” ‘us’ because it “offends our egalitarianism and our universalism” (in Singerman 1995: 135).
tion is thus not whether mediation defines political relations, but in what kind of relational context mediation is accomplished in its particular local form. This chapter therefore sets itself the modest aim of explicating the nature of forms of political mediation, historically and ethnographically, in Khandaq. Doing so will also give us a first insight into what citizen-roles are offered and assigned to people (in the context of the neighbourhood).

Local statehood: a short history of the mukhtar The position of the mukhtar was originally created in order for the Ottoman Empire to exert its authority in the more marginal (rural) areas and into the lowest levels of administrative hierarchies. Successor (mandatory, national) regimes have similarly attempted to use the mukhtar as part of an alternative power structure that could wrest power from local actors, primarily located in the hands of the family, or the ‘clan’. However, as we shall see, a tug of war resulted in which such notable local families attempted to appropriate the office for their own purposes. It is worthwhile retracing that tug of war, as similar battles are fought out today and inform people’s sense of the political.

While interpretations differ in detail as to why the Ottomans introduced the mukhtar’s office, the common thread is that the heads of local families and clans – usually referred to as ‘shaykhs’ (shuyūkh, literally: elders) – thwarted the attempt by the Ottoman High Porte to modernize the empire. Thus, the recalcitrant local chieftains prevented the cultivation of bona fide Ottoman citizens (Reilly 1981); the notable family heads, who often acted as tax collectors, had been a recurrent source of deeply dividing revolts and ethnic conflict, thus disrupting social order (Murad 1997); and traditional power structures were an obstacle to land and tax reforms that were needed to foster capitalist development throughout the empire (Murad 1997; cf. Mundy 2000). The mukhtar was subsequently given several powers and functions: some of the judicial powers (such as powers of arbitration) were taken away from the traditional councils made up of the family elders and vested in an elected council with the mukhtar at its head; also the mukhtar was to function as a source of intelligence to the government and central state organs (e.g., by reporting

66 This was the century of the tanzimāt, launched in 1839, which intended to enhance the viability of the Empire by promoting something of a constitutional patriotism against new nationalist movements, streamlining the bureaucratic apparatus and laying the groundwork for a capitalist economy.

67 At least in Mount Lebanon where several ‘tax revolts’ took place (of which some turned into ‘civil war’) in the 1830s and onward.
crimes, threats and culprits)\textsuperscript{68}, and he was given an important role in the calculation and distribution of the tax burden, which offered significant opportunities to increase one’s influence.

After the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the office followed differing regional trajectories with subsequent regimes. Baer (1980) enumerates the increasing policing duties he was given in Palestine, and in the militarized context of the Jordanian state the mukhtar was given several duties related to military security. A little to the north, meanwhile, the French authorities did also replicate the security related duties of the mukhtar, but their main project appeared to concern setting up a modern Lebanese state powered by capitalist enterprise. The French thus clearly picked up on the mukhtar’s role in reforming financial regimes and the ‘liberation of property’, for which the mukhtar had been a crucial instrument (Murad 1997: 83). The remuneration for their work here “helped to draw them into capitalist relations on the one hand, and their capacity to re-deploy that wealth in the acquisition of real-estate made many of them into big landowners on the other” (ibid.: 84).\textsuperscript{69} According to Murad, therefore, the mukhtar was a linchpin in creating the social reality of capitalist relations throughout Lebanon.

Aside from such judicial and administrative innovations, scholars recurrently point out how the office of the mukhtar remained a battle site between central authorities and local powers. The British in Palestine perceived the mukhtar as being too tightly embedded in a collective social structure. They expected him to be unwilling, say, to give up names of those involved in crimes, instead referring to ‘traditional’ authorities to deal with retribution. So they tried setting up alternative local councils, hopefully more positively inclined towards British policy needs (Miller 1980). The French, on their side, devised ways of increasing the powers of the office in Lebanon, while ensuring those powers would accrue to the state rather than their local competitors, the big families. So on the one hand, they eliminated the (arbitrational powers of the) traditional and pre-existing Council of Elders (shuyūkh), reinforcing the office of the mukhtar. On the other hand, they instituted an oath (of loyalty to state and nation) and introduced an amendment in the electoral law that prohibited the extended family from presenting multiple candidates in one district or from running candidates in multiple districts. (Murad 1997: 84).

\textsuperscript{68} Leading Murad to conclude that “the mukhtar is the true representative to the authority of the state, its wakeful eye in the village and the neighbourhood” (1997: 84).

\textsuperscript{69} See also Baer for the Palestinian case, who came across many court cases where mukhtars were accused of selling common village land for which they were the trustees if no Village Council existed. (1979: 107f.)
These measures were attempts to curb the de facto appropriation of the office by families. Yet whatever we can say about the balance of power between local mukhtar and central government, the fact is that, as Murad (1997) observes, the mukhtar played a crucial role in the work and establishment of various state offices, instituting the social reality of the state throughout the territory. Certainly this was a change in the Ottoman period, in which territories were mostly governed Empire-style – by (tax collecting) proxies. Yet also in subsequent periods, the mukhtar constituted an everyday face of the state. This leads us to a number of questions: what is the position of the mukhtar today in the political playing field of central state institutions, political parties and local power brokers? What effect does such a position have for the “social reality of the state” on the ground? While the first question guides the remainder of this chapter, the second will take us into the following. Before addressing them, it is necessary to clarify the context of this case study – local governance in Khandaq – which is, in contrast to the majority of the (historical or ethnographic) studies about the mukhtar (for an ethnographic study see e.g., Salem 1965; also consider Peteet 1987), an urban setting. The village constitutes a different political field than the neighbourhood in the city. One of the important differences is the presence of a typically urban, more informal type of power broker, the strongman or, historically, the ‘qabaday’. The addition of this third figure complicates the balance of power between local and central authority.

**Local statehood in the capital: a dense political playing field** As the capital, Beirut has as a distinctive feature that it congregates a good number of its political actors as well its political constituencies (i.e., sects), and is concomitantly the main stage of the country’s political scene. The coincidence of local district and national political scene implies a certain intimacy between political leader and constituency. Johnson (1986) draws a picture of how this ‘political economy’ worked up until the civil war. National political leaders with their seat in Beirut (*zu’aמַע* in the Arabic plural, or *za‘ims* in the standard anglicised plural) maintained their popular support, necessary to elect them into the offices of the state, by ‘servicing’ members (or groups like families or civil organizations) which they

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70 Though they did not succeed in enforcing the rule – candidates of important families continued running in multiple districts, which in fact continued in the Independent period. One last way the French tried to get around this was to fall back on appointment (of people favourable to the governor) rather than depend on election.
accomplished primarily through the resources of the state (such as jobs) they so obtain through their offices (though charity organizations are another important source). The key here is that the za`im accomplished all this through personalistic relations with his constituency. That is to say, he did not represent it as a group, but exchanged services with individuals for their political support.

This poses a few logistical problems: on the one hand, the za`im needed to be accessible for the ordinary citizen. On the other hand, the za`im needed to make calculations about how valuable an individual was as an electoral resource and therefore how much service he (mostly he) was worth. Moreover, at times the leader needed to make a show of force by using the ‘the street’ – such as a demonstration in times of intensified political competition, armed defence when an issue needed to be forced, or simply to ensure electoral turnout. For all these organizational problems, the za`im would have recourse to the qabaday. The qabaday was someone who had built his reputation on violence and was often involved in shady businesses (usually involving one racket or another). He would have been perceived as a regular thug but for his respect for a code of honour which placed him at the defence of the community, sometimes of the poor and as someone who could break up local conflicts. The qabaday had local knowledge of his neighbourhood and its inhabitants, their trustworthiness and voting registration. Moreover, in virtue of his thuggishness, he was also skilled in the mobilization and deployment of men when street politics was called for, whether that be for a demonstration or for fighting with adherents of rival politicians. In other words, such men would be quite useful for solving a za`im’s logistical problem. Would a collaboration be struck, the za`im could also be of service to the strongman. In return for his mediation, the former would make sure his favourite thug would not wind up in jail or court. The qabaday thus served as an intermediary between political boss and constituency, and by extension, served as a passage point between citizens and state services.

So far, I’ve provided a quick summary of Johnson’s description of “dyadic” relations between the political leader and citizen. Interestingly, Johnson does not talk much of the mukhtar. When he does, he considers the mukhtar as a representative of a community – the neighbourhood – and as such someone who would be disqualified from the dyadic service game. The neighbourhood could be seen as an interest group, which disrupts the logic of the personal relation of leader and receiver. Never “was a contract made between the za`im and the mukhtar of a quarter, by which the elected quarter leader pledged the vote of the local inhabitants in return for an increased water supply or cleaner street” (1985: 95).
Yet, this perspective seems to overlook the extent to which the mukhtar enacted his representation of the neighbourhood community through the cultivation of individual relations. This could well have included advocacy of an individual’s concerns with the za‘im. Moreover, the ‘intelligence’ function that Johnson ascribes to the qabaday, could be fulfilled by the mukhtar as well – he too was well positioned to be informed about inhabitants and moreover was supposed to keep the registration of people’s residence and voting district. However, it is unclear to which point the mukhtar was asked to play such a role (and what remuneration would have been considered appropriate for his services, or how a mukhtar’s services related to the qabaday’s position). Johnson’s occlusion of the mukhtar from the story might be taken as an indication that, as far as daily operation of the political machine in the city was concerned, the authority of the mukhtar’s office has been side-lined to large degree by the appeal to another powerful local institution (in so far as the intermediary, and thus to a certain degree structured and rule-bound, position of a local strongman can be called an institution).

Consolidation of urban Shia into a political constituency

There are a few last considerations to take into account before we can start to properly analyse the mediation of state and politics in contemporary Khandaq (and the role of the mukhtar in it). The first is the particular trajectory of political institutionalization of the Shia ‘community’, which differs in a number of important ways from the historical image just painted; the second is the impact of the civil war on the constellation of these – mutually implicating – formal and informal governance arrangements.

The analysis of local urban politics by Johnson is in fact based on the Sunni case, and while Johnson does claim some general Lebanese validity (e.g., in stating that “given also the initial dominance of [Beirut] by Sunni notables, the history of Sunni Beirut is in many respects the history of Lebanon” 1985: 2]), we should allow for significant differences at least for the Shia case, especially in Beirut. As described in the first chapter, the period before the war was one of intense migration, in particular for Shia, who had constituted a rural community for a relatively long time. Their urban migration, progressively more towards Beirut, started only in the 1920s (Hillenkamp 2005: 217), accelerating significantly during the 1960s; and even more massively so during the civil war. The initial reason for this was the progressive rationalization of agriculture (Traboulsi 2007: 159ff.) and later, after the foundation of the state of Israel, increasing occurrence of violence (especially in the South), prompting displacement. By the beginning of the civil war therefore, there was already a significant
number of Shia living in Beirut and its suburbs. As with other newly urban populations (such as the Maronites), the governance of the Shia community however had not yet caught up with this new situation. The political representation of the Shia, as (a Lebanese sectarian) community, during the 20th century is in fact much more in flux than in Johnson’s ‘paradigmatic’ Sunni (urban) case, where merchant notable families had already achieved some measure of crystallization of the administration of the community by the time of Independence (1943). Such was not the case for the Shia. One problem for the notable Shia families, based in rural areas, was that they were unable to keep track of (many) people once they migrated to the city (cf. Shanahan 2011: 73; Hillenkamp 2005: 219f.; Hanf 1995: 85), even though they remained registered as voters in their villages. The playing field in the capital therefore lay open to alternative political leadership. By 1975, a number of actors had made inroads into these urban communities. The Communist Party had won some souls; for the Shia living in the east-Beirut, some relations had developed (mostly by intellectuals) with the Phalange party and other parties that mainly serviced other sects; some of the religious organizations (such as Fadlallah’s, already on his way to become Lebanon’s most prominent Shia cleric), as well as the well-off Beydoun family (originally from Damascus, now settled in Beirut), who all had set up charity institutions; and last but not least, the imam Musa Sadr had become a serious player in the city as well (cf. Fawaz 2009: 209; Johnson 1986: 149; cf. Shanahan 2005, esp. Chapter 4). Musa Sadr was a cleric raised and trained in Iraq and Iran, but of Lebanese origins and assigned to Lebanon in 1959, who by the early 1970s had come to form the main challenge to the power of the Shia notable families, capitalizing on the incipient erosion of the latter’s power bases. Besides charity, financed mostly by expatriate money, one way of further side-lining the notable politicians was to set up an alternative institutional structure of access to the state, which could funnel more resources to the Shia community, independent of older patronage relations (the 1970 foundation Higher Council of the South is the prime example of that). The importance of Sadr’s status was proven in the first year of the war, when he was able to negotiate a peaceful departure of the Shia from the Nabaa suburb, after the Phalange militia decided to expulse all Muslims from east Beirut. Yet despite all these developments, no institutional web

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71 Traboulsi (2007: 162) estimates that by the 1970s, over only three decades, the Shia community had become in majority (three quarters) urban. Thus, Beirut’s eastern working-class suburbs alone were home to 250,000 Shia. Salim Nasr estimated the total Beiruti Shia population at 750,000, or at 30% of the total metropolitan population (cited in Hillenkamp 2005: 218).
of actors had crystallized like they had in the Sunni case, nor had a univocal narrative – tied to the agendas of different political (and religious) actors – emerged about the place of Shia in the Lebanese nation. The civil war would be a period in which both these aspects of ‘Shia politicization’ entered a new phase.

**Rise of the militia men as new power-brokers** The situation that Johnson describes stems from the pre-war period. Johnson, himself writing in the early 1980s, sketches the breakdown of this political system among the Sunna leading up to and during the first years of the war. The ‘old’ political leaders failed to prevent war (which ran clearly against their interests as capitalist rentiers and entrepreneurs) and subsequently lost authority among their constituencies as new kinds of power were (perceived to be) required in unpredictable and violent circumstances. One consequence was that the ties between qabaday and za`im were severed. Some qabadays attained autonomy from their former protectors and gathered their own following, rather than acting merely as go-betweens between leader and people. Others allied themselves to the new military forces in the city, the ‘militias’. (This is also tied to a breakdown of state functions. Even if the state never stopped performing its functions completely, notably security was largely wrested from its hands and with that, from of the hands of the za`ims, who previously acted as guardians of the qabadays through their ties to the state, including its disciplinary institutions.)

For the Sunna the system of governance effectively fell apart. In fact, it instigated the decline of Sunni power in Beirut in general. During the civil war, the only Sunni power of some importance had been the Mourabitoun militia, which had grown around one of the leading qabadays in Saeb Salem’s old network (Salem had been one of the most important Sunni notables pre-war, and the instigator of the 1958 Sunni uprising, briefly mentioned in chapter 2). However, even the Mourabitoun were unable to stand up against the much better financed and organized Druze and the Shia armies that wound up taking over Beirut. For the Shia, however, the war heralded a new logic of governance. One of these well-financed Shia armies was Amal, the militia that Musa Sadr had founded, realizing that political negotiations alone would no longer ensure the advancement of the Shia community. It achieved near hegemony over the Shia areas over

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72 While it is commonly phrased as the “military wing” of Sadr’s political movement, the Movement of the Disinherited, Gharbieh 2010) argues that, in fact, these need to be seen as two separate organizations set up for different purposes.
time, until it was challenged towards the end of the war by its splinter movement Hizbullah. Both parties developed relatively elaborate social service programs, but Amal, following Sadr’s original political vision of political and civil integration of the Shia into the state and nation, was always oriented toward direct political representation and increasing services to Shia regions and communities through the state. Hizbullah on the other hand started out with the a strong non-state or anti-state position and correspondingly developed an autonomous service provision program. (Hizbullah also had Iranian money to do so. Amal didn’t.) The logic of both institutional set-ups are different and become apparent in the post-war period. For the moment though, we may note that individuals employed in the military wings of political movements (though these two are not always clearly distinguishable) became the passage points to institutional support in people’s daily lives.

Such ‘militia men’ therefore became the new strongmen in this constellation – considered thugs by some, heroes by others. Their function was in fact not unlike that of the qabaday of old. A good example is Abu Zalem, introduced in the previous chapter, whom some considered as the big man of Khandaq.73 “He controls the entire area here”, as some of the men and boys close to him assured me, a number of times (consequently, should I ever get into a pickle in the neighbourhood, all I would need to say is that I was with Abu Zalem). A native of Khandaq, Abu Zalem applied for a place in the “intellectual” militia of the Iraqi Baath party before the beginning of the 1975–76 war and soon after worked himself up to commander. As commander he came to lead the Beirut division of the Baath army, which until 1982, at least according to his own assessment, was one of the strongest in the city (as there is very little written about that militia, I can provide no independent assessment of that claim). After the 1982 Israeli invasion though, the fortunes of the Iraqi Baath changed as the rival Syrian Baath and its army was able to increase its influence, partly through the enlistment of the Amal militia and the Druze socialists. The Iraqi Baath was basically wiped out and Abu Zalem had to go underground, as he was ‘wanted’ by the Syrians. After the war, perhaps in order to safely resurface and resettle in Beirut with the Syrian army still present in Lebanon, he joined Hizbullah (supported by Syria) – a transition of political home that was all but easy, to his own admission.

73 As indicated previously, people resisted the idea of categorizing Abu Zalem as a qabaday, though. Abu Zalem himself merely smiled when I suggested the link. The qabaday is seen as something of the past, a figure of tradition. Abu Zalem is a part of Hizbullah, the force of Shia modernity in Lebanon.
Hizbullah asked him the to recruit and train young men from Khandaq and elsewhere for the Resistance. From this position, he created a small yellow Hizbullah island in a sea of green Amal posters and graffiti that dominates the landscape of the neighbourhood. People come to his island for a range of issues; he helps out people financially, whether directly (he receives some funds for this work) or by hooking up the person to a charity organization, landing them jobs, or finding a residence; resolving conflicts with security officials (police, internal security, army) and settling marital disputes; he had a clean-water tank installed, holds a daily audience during after-working hours (though it’s mostly the same group that comes); and he has organized the military defence of the neighbourhood, which he would be best positioned to do, given his experience, his trained men and the infrastructural back-up Hizbullah offers (and which Amal lacks). Abu Zalem is able to perform such functions thanks to a combination of a wide social network (partly built up during the war years, partly through Hizbullah’s extensive organizational network) and his status as representative of one of the most powerful political forces in the country.

Above, I questioned the relation between the function of qabaday and that of the mukhtar in the pre-war constellation of clientelist governance. This question returns all the more urgently in this post-war constellation. In the literature about the mukhtar, he is seen as a key figure in the competition between locally powerful families and the central state. However, none of the authors conceptualize or show quite clearly how locally powerful families could actually be allied to the political actors who had captured strategic positions in the central government and state bureaucracy (or even be the very same actor). Johnson examined precisely such a case, where a political boss like Saeb Salem was both an MP and minister as well as a local leader in his Beirut district. Ironically, in this constellation Johnson does not single out the role of the mukhtar but that of the qabaday. How does this play out in contemporary Khandaq? If one would ask Abu Zalem (which I did), the answer would be clear and rather blunt (it was): “The mukhtar, we [i.e. Hizbullah] put him in place [minjību]. The party puts the mukhtar there. He’s not in the party, but the party brings him and makes him a mukhtar.” How does such a statement reflect relations between constituency, political leadership and the state?

74 One presumes someone like him also plays a role in putting people—people who do not otherwise have the right connections—into contact with other party members at positions in the administration that allow them to allocate funds, employ people and expedite paperwork, but I have never encountered examples of such references during my fieldwork (which does not necessarily mean anything).
Local statehood in Khandaq: the mukhtar between community steward and party bureaucrat

When I related Abu Zalem’s viewpoint to mukhtar Makki, he thought (of course) it was nonsense. Yet, Abu Zalem no more than reiterated Makki’s own narrative about what has happened to the mukhtar’s office. Both his references to his father’s days of being a mukhtar as his explanation of how the electoral process had changed since 1998 are permeated with a nostalgic sense of decline – a decline from a period when the mukhtar still amounted to something to one in which he has become near irrelevant. In his father’s days, ministers paid due respect to the mukhtars, who were important for their votes; state resources had not been completely monopolized by ‘political parties’, so the mukhtar was able to pull strings to get members of their constituencies a job or other state-based resources; and people would come to them to address their (financial and social) issues, putting faith in the authority of the mukhtar to solve problems. As regards the local elections, he explained his power relative the party’s was still strong in 1998, whereas he intimated that parties in 2010 were much more autonomous in their decision-making and scope for action (having built up strong election machines).

Such a narrative of the decline of the mukhtar resonates in fact with much older ones. In the writings on the topic between the 1960s and 1980s, authors consistently signal that while the mukhtar, as traditional community elder (note how an instrument of modernization now becomes a vestige of tradition), ‘still’ had some influence and prestige, his authority had succumbed to erosion by various kinds of processes of modernization. Among the forces of modernization are the changing nature of the state, the democratization of education (especially relevant for mukhtars in the village), and the emergence of new centres of political power, such as social movement and political parties. Thus, Peteet, in her study of conflict resolution in Palestinian camps in Lebanon, draws attention to the “serious challenge” to “the traditional bases of authority – landownership, age, prestige, arbitration skills” coming from “the cadres of the

75 It is unlikely though that such resources, especially precious ones like jobs, would have been mediated on the mukhtar’s authority alone. Undoubtedly the mukhtar would have been the middleman, advocating the case of one of the residents with a political boss, in Makki’s father’s case most likely Rachid Beydoun.

76 We can find the same type of argument for another (“traditional”) figure of power of the locality, the qabaday (the strongman, see below for discussion), who did not manage to ‘survive’ the onslaught of modernity between the 1920s and ’50s (Khoury 1984). By working with such broad categories like tradition and modernity, they appear not to see the innovations the office of the mukhtar or the position of the qabaday can undergo, from within ‘modern’ configurations.
national movement, often educated young people who came to occupy politically influential positions” (1987: 7f.). Migdal (1980) cites a host of reasons for the declining influence of the (village) mukhtar in Palestine, including his marginality from Israeli state bureaucracy, or the fact that youngsters were making more than him with low-skilled labour in Israel (though Migdal admits arbitration skills still counted for something). Baer (1980) adds that the new administrative context (incorporation into Israeli bureaucratic structures) also deprived him of sources of personal profit, in managing money streams from state to community or citizen.77 Abu Zalem (unsurprisingly) also reiterates the decline of the mukhtar. Asking the rhetorical question of who, besides the party, is important in the neighbourhood, he proceeded to answer: “Not the mukhtars. The mukhtar is a nobody. I solve the mukhtar’s problems. He comes to me and I solve his problem for him”. After the party puts him in place, “he can’t do anything. He doesn’t have any power (ṣalāḥiyya).” The power he referred to are the kinds of connections one has to have in order to intervene in various social, legal and state affairs and thus “solve problems”. The businessman who had explained why Makki had been excluded, sketched a similar balance of power between the party and the mukhtar.

He had in fact wanted to run himself, not because he needed the job, but as an extension of the services he already provided as a wealthy man (and, as he boasted at one point, to “break” the Shia parties). However, when he announced his candidacy, Hizbullah and Amal came to him, “and I didn’t want to make an alliance with them. To join their joint list. It was better for them if I was with them instead of against them – because I would make an impact on [the election results] [li’anno bi’assir `aleyhun]” (interview Ammar, October 2011). He intimated that perhaps they would have turned to aggression if he did decide to run by himself, but ultimately he settled on the following explanation for what he decided to do, that is, to retract his candidacy:

Ammar: I have work, I have interests. I can’t be a mukhtar. I have customers from Hizbullah and Amal, and the [Lebanese] Forces, the Socialists and Nationalists, Wahabis – they all distribute through me, all the parties. Sadr, Fadlallah’s, the institutions of the Patriarch,

77 At the same time, though, he notes that with the tighter integration into state and national economy comes the increasing need for “all kinds of documents”, for which the mukhtar serves as the source (1980: 123). Whether this would add to his individual power (as Baer hypothesizes) or not, this point is worth keeping in mind because it alerts us to the structural mediating function the mukhtar continues to fulfil, even with the loss of personal charisma.
Maronites – I can’t stand with one group against another [ṣuff ma’ fi’a ḍudd ukhra]. I distribute newspapers for the opposition and [the government]. Take [the newspapers] Mustaqbal – which is Hariri’s – and Akhbar [left-leaning ‘opposition’ newspaper] – they’re against each other, so I can’t be with either. It’s just “business”, that’s how I walk.

MB: So you can’t be mukhtar without being on the list and you can’t be on the list?

Ammar: Right, the situation doesn’t allow it.

In other words, parties take precedence over local eminence and stewardship to the community – the role of the ‘traditional’ mukhtar. To give one last example, when I conducted an interview at the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) about the local elections, my interviewee exclaimed at one point, only half facetiously, ‘who cares about the mukhtar anymore? Only you care about the mukhtar!’ But in fact, as mukhtar Makki acutely experienced (and as my LADE interviewee also acknowledged), political parties care a good deal about the mukhtar. There are therefore both scholarly and popular discourses that would disqualify the mukhtar as not very interesting. That presents something of a puzzle. Were mukhtar a nobody, whence the meddling by political parties in their election? The businessman and once mukhtar- hopeful had already given the first hint of the answer at the beginning of the chapter: the mukhtar has to play a role in the electoral machine of the political party. The issue is not so much that the mukhtar has to bring his own votes to the local election – as explained, the parties depend on the list as a whole, not so much on the individuals on it. Mukhtars are however useful for a number of other reasons – most of which have to do with the national elections instead – which explains why Amal finally joined the ‘unity list’ of 2010. It was previously agreed that Amal, instead of Hizbullah, would get the one Beiruti Shia seat for the opposition in Parliament. In order to provide support for that candidate, Amal was in need of a mukhtar, so Makki himself explained. (Support he seemingly wasn’t willing to provide.)

What is the role of mukhtar in the national electoral process? First of all, mukhtars, as persons with a certain social standing, hold events during which the constituency can meet a candidate MP. Secondly and more importantly, however, is knowledge about that constituency. Already

78 In an exchange for a seat in a district south of Beirut, Baabda, for the Christian ally in the ‘opposition block’, the Free Patriotic Movement. (An-Nahr, 2009-04-08)
back in Ottoman days, when the office of the mukhtar was first introduced, providing information about local affairs was one of the primary expectations of the mukhtar – as the LADE interviewee put it, the Empire needed a “spy” – and he added, that hasn’t necessarily changed much. The mukhtar is still one of those best placed in producing knowledge about the neighbourhood – both in terms of relatively prominent social position and the records that he is professionally bound to keep. Still more importantly, the mukhtar also has the competence of registering residents – and by implication – voters in the district. Not unsurprisingly, mukhtars have been accused of abusing this competence more than once – the most egregious case happening in 2009 when it became clear that almost 2,000 new residents had been registered – 99.99% of which on the same address (Al-Akhbar, 2010-03-23, Rajana Hamyeh). Thus, not only does the mukhtar in some ways mediate the relation between party and constituency, he can at times constitute that very constituency. In other words, the mukthar’s hands in state operations are quite precious.

So we wind up with a somewhat complicated picture: on the one hand there’s no public recognition of the strategic value of the mukhtar, even though in point of fact, there certainly seems to be one. On a popular level, meanwhile, the strategic value of the mukhtar does not really appear to be an issue, whereas his role as community steward actually is. For while I have been implying that people in Lebanon and in Khandaq specifically relegate the mukhtar to a traditional past, this is in fact not entirely accurate. A case could be made that ordinary people do see his office – in part at least – as ‘traditional’, but that doesn’t mean it also counts as the past for them. He is still seen as someone who should have a certain standing in the community, a standing that comes with certain responsibilities. Makki emphasized this aspect of mukhtarship, in the way he talked about his own office as of that of his father, which he sought to emulate. To Makki, his father the mukhtar was an ‘elder’, to whom people would turn with all sorts of problems. That is what any mukhtar should also aspire to be. Now, one might say that perhaps he emphasized this aspect because his standing was all that was left, not having lived up to other expectations attached to the position. Yet such a normative discourse of

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79 These new ‘members’ of the neighborhood were of good help in slowly closing the gap between the number of registered Shia and Sunni voters, alluded to above. According to Makki, the new ‘residents’ were part of an attempt to redraw the balance of mukhtars between Sunna and Shia from 4-6 to an equal split.

80 The fact that most of the mukhtars (that I spoke to) in fact had had careers in state institutions before (in security, or personal status administration) suggests the candidates were also selected for their capacity to put those mukhtar hands in the state to good use.
service is actually quite strong and pervasive – all mukhtars as well as residents make use of it. Thus, in spite of the wide-spread narrative of the decline of the mukhtar, he is still held up to the old ‘traditional’ standards of community service\(^{81}\). However, and this complicates matters, mukhtars are also constantly berated and derided for not living up to the standard of the community steward. Why that would be and what that means for residents takes us into next chapter’s territory. To conclude this one, we can at least sum up what we’ve learned about the position of the mukhtar, in relation to political leadership, its constituency and the state.

**State authority, the mukhtar and local political powers** I have attempted to capture a part of a complex and shifting set of actors and mediating relations. We have the state, understood as the different institutions that can make things possible for citizens, which regulate transactions between them, and provide important resources like jobs. We have the political actors, which often actually serve as a ‘gateway’ to the state. These political actors have changed over time, from the ‘shaykh’ and the za`im, as heads of important families, to the political parties and movements who at times replaced the notable families, at times incorporated them (in the case of Amal and Hizbullah they have replaced earlier notable Shia families). Then there are citizens who are the third party in this constellation. The three ‘parties’ are tied to each through an array of intermediary ‘institutions’, such as the mukhtar and the ‘qabaday’ or big man\(^{82}\), who have separate identities and roles, yet similar functions that sometimes overlap, sometimes alternate.

At its origin, the office of the mukhtar was supposed to mediate the authority of the central (imperial) state at the local level. Accounts differ as to the details of what authority and how to mediate, as well as in competition with which non-state authority. For Baer, and others following him, the mukhtar was an instrument of maintaining social order, an order that was often against the wishes and control mechanisms of the ‘chiefs’ of dominant families or clans. As Mundy (2000) notes, it is not entirely clear who these chiefs were and why they would be considered a problem (though the sweeping reform of the taxation regime might be one indication, as the ‘shaykhs’ were often tax collectors), but the amount of legislation, both by the Ottomans and later the British and Jordanians (as well

\(^{81}\) In contrast to the qabaday, whose ‘traditional’ role people seem to consider not of this time anymore. Cf. note supra.

\(^{82}\) As well as others that I haven’t talked about like the so-called ‘election keys’: “key” individuals (very punny) in the party’s local election machine.
as to a lesser extent the French), targeted at these functions does suggest a strong desire to gain sovereignty over the territory. For Murad and, at least implicitly, for Mundy, the mukhtar played a crucial role in mediating expanding access of capital to real estate especially, by freeing up land. (In so doing he progressively took up the role of an entrepreneur.) In a different way, the mukhtar mediated ‘state and society’ by serving as the channel through which demands of the state linked up with needs of the citizens. Whether the state wanted something from the citizen (taxes, testimony in court) or citizens needed something from the state a (job, a permit), the mukhtar stood (and stands) in between. With that position also came opportunities for ‘tailored’ mediations, i.e. brokering individuals’ connection to state resources, especially when some governments increased the mediating duties of the mukhtar. For instance, in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the mukhtar was charged with the distribution of government aid, which, according to complaints lodged against mukhtars, were distributed according to, let’s say, ‘supplementary criteria’ (Baer 1980). It remains unclear to me to which extent the mukhtar ever had ‘connections’, what people in Lebanon tend to refer to as “wāṣṭa” (in a usually disparaging manner), that would also enable them to tailor services. According to Makki, his father had ‘real’ connections, with high-level politicians, which would have left him some scope of action for him to, say, get people placed in state-bureaucratic positions. Makki’s depiction of the past may well have been coloured by the fact he wasn’t able to stand up against the political parties. At least we may observe that the ṣalāḥiyya of the mukhtar has transformed along with the shifts in the ideological and infrastructural make-up of state governance on the one hand, and non-state political figurations on the other. Fairly quickly after its establishment, the mukhtar was recruited out of (or into) the local political elites – the ‘notables’, whether that be by virtue of the powers of his office, by virtue of his ‘employment’ by an important family, or whether because his incumbency in the office itself was the reflection of already being notable. All authors agree that mukhtars played an important social role, albeit in different ways and in varying degrees. The mukhtar was one of the go-to-guys, especially for problems that required conflict mediation (i.e. dispute settlement) as well as social capital. Again, it is not entirely clear to which extent the mukhtars in Khandaq may have played such a role. We have two situations to compare with ‘the’ village and pre-war ‘Sunni Beirut’. In the village there would have been a greater overlap between the ‘notables’ and the mukhtar offices and therefore the mukhtar’s position would have been invested with social influence. In Sunni Beirut, the big notables were differentiated
from the local notables, but they were nearby. People would go and petition the notable’s office, through his contact person (the secretary or more often, the qabaday who could actually vet for the person in question), according to Johnson. However, in Shia Beirut, there were no traditional notable families before 1975 (with the possible exception of the Beydoun family). A family like Makki, which was relatively large and well-to-do within the Khandaq context, might well have played a bigger role than it would have in a different playing field. Arbitration between constituents, for example, would consequently have been part of his social role.

As noted, the 1975–’90 wars changed the playing field dramatically. It left the power of the old Sunni elite in Beirut and its system of control and support in ruins and the militias-cum-parties claimed the still open field of Shia sectarian governance. This catapulted a new kind of qabaday onto the scene, who had proven his valorous worth in battle during the war and was given the job of preserving social order on behalf of the party. Not all go-to-guys are of this kind, nor do they have to be: having the party behind one is already a powerful magnet (independent of individual reputation), whether for its state resources (especially though not exclusively Amal) or ‘civil’ resources (especially though not exclusively Hizbullah). These persons therefore took over many functions that might have been exercised by mukhtars in a previous era. They have become a social authority – as someone who ‘solves your problem’, for instance through arbitration – and have taken up the duty of tailored mediation, what the political scientific literature calls brokerage, between state and society.

The shift towards the party-big man nexus doesn’t imply that the role of the mukhtar is played out, as the general discourse in Lebanon seems to suggest (the notion that ‘being a mukhtar is merely a matter of status’). The office still mediates in particular ways state and society; it regulates many of citizens’ everyday dealings with the state. In addition to this, to all appearances, they contribute also to the mediation of party and electorate. Firstly, by participating in the ‘electoral machines’, mobilizing people to the voting booths, and secondly, through their hand in the very constitution of who the electorate is (by changing the voter rolls, legally or illegally, licitly or illicitly). One might suggest that in this last sense, they also mediate the relation between party and state, as key actors that can preserve or enhance access of parties to the state, by creating more advantageous conditions for electoral success.

**Conclusion** In this chapter, I promised we would start to get a better sense of how Lebanon’s sectarian system addresses its citizens as par-
ticular kinds of citizens, through the particular political relations ‘on the
ground’. Let me now reiterate how more precisely. The ‘sectarian system’
works in part through (electoral) districts. The districts are ground for
leading sectarian political powers to intervene closely in local politics,
by participating in elections or controlling mechanisms of (in)formal
governance. Elections are organized according to an old sectarian – or
‘consociational’– principle of having members from different sectarian
communities vote for each other’s representatives, forcing representa-
tives from different sects to work in tandem. One outgrowth of that is
the cooperation in lists. These lists, for which people are asked to vote
in their entirety, fit well within a representative logic in which the gift is
a central mechanism and metaphor. It helps sustain a particular kind of
citizen-voter, the loyal voter, who enters into a social contract with his
leadership. The connections that strongmen and mukhtars provide also
play into such a political relation.

What does ‘situating’ the resident in such a web mean for the latter’s
political imagination, and more specifically, for the kinds of ideas about
and claims to citizenship that they formulate? There are three elements in
this configuration of local power that seem relevant to this question. One
more general element is that because of district politics, political parties
are present in everyday spaces. One may therefore expect people to think
and act from within a moral universe in which the political parties are
a prominent fixture. A second, more specific element of the first, is that
local party men assure some entry into the state as well as access to other
kinds of resources (social and material capital), which puts “problem-
solving power” on the agenda. At base, this is a question about sover-
eignty. Thirdly, then, the mukhtar has a dual position, both as a local state
representative and, still, as an elder to the community. The imbrication of
the two means that the office serves as a subject through which to explore
and develop both notions of the (sectarian) community – that is, what
moral ties exist between community and state – as well as of the authority
and service of the state.

The following chapter explores how these general themes are worked out
by the residents of the neighbourhood. That means that whereas so far
I’ve contented myself to describe the features and occupants of the local
political landscape, in the next chapter I blow these ‘figures’ to life and
explore how the logic of these overlapping different formal and infor-
mal authorities works from day to day and how that is co-constitutive
of a moral community, embedded in particular imaginations of what
Lebanon has become.