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

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Chapter 4:  
“The state doesn’t enter here”: popular understandings of the political community and sovereignty

As announced at the end of the previous chapter, I descend from a bird’s eye view of the neighbourhood’s social and political relations and take us now into the ethnographic mud in order to consider public life in the neighbourhood from the perspective of these ‘citizens’, its residents. One thing that becomes immediately apparent, once one’s boots are firmly planted in that proverbial mud, is that Khandaq is a ‘popular’ neighbourhood. Folks in Lebanon (and the Arab world over) have a word for that, which means exactly the same thing – ‘of the people’: sha`bi. The precise meaning depends a little bit on who’s speaking. When someone who might consider him or herself of a certain standing uses it to refer to an area (it’s usually a geographic qualification, though of course it speaks of the respective area’s inhabitants), it’s usually to say, almost apologetically though not necessarily disparagingly, that the people that live somewhere are merely ‘simple’ people – they have no pretence to high social status or professional occupations, they are not highly educated or wield significant political influence. If by contrast someone speaks who identifies more wholly with the sha`bi character of a neighbourhood, the accent shifts slightly from ‘simple’ to ‘rough’ and ‘unpolished’, like gems: the claim becomes somewhat more proud and (at least when voiced by men) at times boisterous. Both kinds of qualifications, each in its own way, also identifies the sha`b as good or pure, where people stick together and make up a family.
Many have qualified Khandaq to me as sha`bi as well and I would like to stick with that qualification because I believe it is a structuring principle in the way many residents perceive social and political realities in Lebanon. One could opt to go with the descriptor ‘working-class’ instead of ‘popular’, but it would not be quite as apt. For one, it belies the fact that not all of Khandaq is ‘working-class’ (though the majority is). But it would also not capture the feel and aesthetics of social life in the neighbourhood. Walking about its streets, you encounter a type of sociality that may well be tied to socio-economic positions but extends beyond that and persists even when individual residents reach more comfortable socio-economic conditions. Elements of that sociality include the predominance of the street (as site for socializing), the rough and tumble of male competitive sociality (as much about affection as it is about status), and the identification with the ‘ordinary man’ in everyday discussions. An example might illustrate how that sociality remains dominant, irrespective of one’s own socio-economic rank. One of the richest men in the neighbourhood is Ragheb Ammar. He has created, and remains the head of, three companies for the distribution of newspapers and magazines in Lebanon and the Middle-Eastern region. His offices and storage spaces have slowly taken over an entire street, the street where he grew up and where his father used to have a grocery store. His children go to a premier private French-language school. Yet his daily social network is limited to his brothers – who have also been inducted into the enterprise – a few close (former) employees and a number of men he got to know on the seaside boulevard where they go to swim every morning. On the boulevard he’s considered the ‘captain’ of his little Khandaq gang, and there’s a lot of physical jostling, recurrent fart jokes (and some sex jokes, but never performed too ostentatiously, because they are immediately reprimanded as unworthy of a self-respecting Muslim), backgammon games and shouting at high volume. One time, Ragheb had an appointment in town and had clothed himself for the occasion in a two-piece suit that was a kind of a glossy mauve and a little large for him. As I passed him on the street I (somewhat facetiously) complimented him on his fancy appearance. Ragheb, ordinarily loud, rowdy and even intimidating, turned almost shy and managed only to produce a sheepish smile in response. Retrospectively, I felt that he was somewhat ‘out of his element’, a feeling later corroborated by a remark of a daily observer of the goings-on in Ragheb’s street. We were talking about my visit to the theatre the night before. He compared my ‘culture’ with the world of Khandaq. Take Ragheb, bless his heart, he never grew with his income. He would be lost outside Khandaq. He can’t go to fancy business lunches, or out with your friends,
say to the theatre. Imagine if the conversation suddenly turned to English\textsuperscript{83}, he wouldn’t be able to follow! He’s not learned or sophisticated. He simply can’t function at that level.

I’ve dwelt on this ‘popular’ character of the neighbourhood because the self-identification of being ‘sha`bi’, rooted in these daily practices of sociability, is indicative of a broader pattern of how people in Khandaq tend to relate to the Lebanese polity and position themselves in its public debates. I would argue that the ‘ordinary man’ is the character Khandaq residents most frequently assume. Put differently, the ordinary man is a kind of subject position that people inhabit and from which current events and political claims are evaluated. In the first half of this chapter I show such evaluations in relation to the ‘State’ (capital S as in: the idea of the state) and to (confessional) political leadership. These evaluations are entangled with people’s relations to and ideas about the ‘figures’ outlined in the previous chapter. The mukhtar is a face of state, whereas the neighbourhood strongman acts as a stand-in for the political party. They therefore become part of people’s thinking about these grander entities. The ethnographic argument for this first part is that while people in different ways certainly demonstrate support for and alignment with each of these actors and ideas they represent, they also retain a critical distance, a critique rooted in the identification with the ordinary. In the second half of the chapter, I argue that this ambivalence allows us to critically examine recent Deleuze-inspired conceptualizations of state-citizen relations.

The imagination of the “translocal” state: appeal and disengagement

In exploring the discursive stances that people take towards current issues, contentious social entities in Lebanon such as ‘the state’, or known political and communitarian figures I adopt the methodological principle that guides Gupta’s (1995) article on ‘discourses of corruption’ in rural India. Gupta assumes that the way people think about the (national) state will not only be influenced by mediatic discourses in newspapers and television where they could find opinions about such issues as corruption on the highest levels of the nation’s government, but also on their own experience with ‘the state’ on local levels. In fact, Gupta proposes, people interpret and appropriate those more widely circulating opinions and analyses of the national government and top-

\textsuperscript{83} Code-switching between Arabic, English and/or French is frequent among the highly educated. Knowing (any of) these two languages is an important marker of development and status, and is often invoked as a national quality (‘Lebanese know all the languages’). This is also a reason why Ragheb’s children go to the French-language school.
level bureaucrats on the basis of these latter real-life experiences. Given the visceral primacy of interactions with real-life people (local bureaucrats), about personally consequential issues (household budgets, for instance), over the reception of mediatic discourse, and undoubtedly mindful of the symbolic interactionists’ insistence that meaning and social order emerge out of the interactional order, Gupta’s analytic premise seems almost unavoidable – certainly in those cases of remote rural life where people’s only embodied interaction with, and knowledge of, the state is the local state. While in Khandaq, both physical and social distance to higher-level bureaucrats and politicians are far less insuperable, the fact remains that the vast majority of people’s interactions with state and politics occurs through local instantiations and lower-level bureaucrats. As an analytical starting point, we may assume that these interactions inform people’s understanding of social entities otherwise known primarily through (mediatised) discourse – and vice versa.

Before moving on to the actual analysis however, we need to discuss two caveats. One is conceptual, the other methodological. To start with the first, Gupta’s emphasis is on how local interactions enable the “discursive construction” of the translocal state. It is, he asserts, “through the practices of such local institutions [like headmen, the police, or the Block Development Office] that a translocal institution such as the state comes to be imagined” (1995: 384). Therefore, “all constructions of the state have to be situated with respect to the location [and, he emphasizes elsewhere, the experience] of the speaker” (id.: 390). Gupta appears to be making a strong claim about the necessity of situated interaction and experience with local instantiations of the State (capital S) for people to interpret more broadly circulating discourses about what that state is like (in his case, “corrupt”). If this reading is correct, I propose we trade that strong claim for a weak one – a claim that more modestly submits that there is some dialectic between translocal discourses, on the one hand, and local experiences and discourses on the other (without positing causal prerequisites or functional requirements). That is at least the analytical assumption I proceed with. That brings us to the second caveat, the methodological one.

In order to demonstrate there’s a dialectic between translocal and local discourses Gupta needs to show firstly the link between those two discourse (between how political parties and journalists talk about corrup-

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84 Though he (obviously) recognizes the reverse as well, for instance when he draws attention to how (translocal) “linkages [such as austerity policies in response to global restructuring of the economy] may have structuring effects that may overdetermine the [‘local’] contexts in which daily practices are carried out” (id.: 377). His emphasis, especially when it comes to the circulation of discourses, is on the reverse direction, though.
tion at the top and “the subaltern” talk about corrupt bureaucrats at street level) and secondly between local experiences and the local discourse (between trying to get things done through locally accessible bureaucrats and talk of the corruption of the state). Overall he does a reasonably adequate job for the second task but fares quite poorly on the first account. Ironically, in this clearest example of how ordinary people re-interpret translocal discourses (his first task), he precisely omits data of the experiential basis for such re-interpretation (the second task). Towards the end of the article he introduces Ram Singh, a sympathizer of the Congress Party. He favours this party because it has a strong stance on corruption. Singh believes in the party’s stance, because it corresponds to his ‘experience’ or ‘reality’ that one can always seek “redressals for grievances” and “[punishment of] local officials” by going to more highly placed officials, such as MPs, who often happen to belong to the Congress Party. The argument itself would be fine – official, mediatic discourse (the Congress Party line) and local imagination of the state (corruption can be fought) are linked through embodied experience (seeking redress) – except that the experience remains entirely hypothetical to the reader as it is not part of Gupta’s ethnographic record.

My intention is not to bash Gupta, precisely because I am acutely aware of how difficult it is to make the full argument. I will try to – like Gupta tried to – show that people’s ideas about the Lebanese state and political leadership bounce off both mediatic discourse about these notions, and interactions with and talk of local formal, sort of formal and not so formal authorities. Showing that requires one to hold a number of ethnographic balls in the air. Firstly, I would have to – like Gupta had to – show practices on the one hand (interactions with local bureaucrats) and discourse on the other (how they talk about those bureaucrats and about the state in general). In my data, those are mostly the same, because most of the data consist of speech about such practices. For this kind of argument, that’s obviously problematic. Secondly, in terms of showing the links between two ‘levels’ of discourse (mediatised and embodied), I have recorded few moments where both discursive levels were present. Therefore, when I argue people re-interpret mediatic discourse according to lived experiences, the argument will have to be somewhat stipulative. I therefore juxtapose discourse from non-local sources and general complaints about the state on the one hand with references to and about the state’s representatives in Khandaq on the other. While stipulatory, I hope the reader will find the links to be plausible and recognize at very least point the value of understanding imaginaries of the social and the political as coming from a “particular position” (id.).
Mukhtars and the neglectful state Recall from the previous chapter that the figure of the mukhtar is embedded in a strong normative discourse of communal stewardship – a discourse that both mukhtars themselves and residents employ, albeit it with different valuations: mukhtars take up the position of community steward, residents tend to dislodge them from that noble throne. Stewardship can be practiced in a number of ways. One is through financial assistance. Ragheb, the successful businessman who wanted to run for mukhtar, already claimed he wouldn’t have asked for any fees whatsoever – since he didn’t need the office as a business. But the incumbent mukhtars themselves also emphasize this aspect of their work. All claim that they reduce fees or perform services at no cost to those who would not be able to afford it. Of course, there are other mukhtars who do not follow this example, but, as one mukhtar, Kabbani, put it, certainly “there are correct mukhtars”, like himself (interview February 2012).

Another way of serving the community is solving disruptions to public order or ending conflict, often involving (small amounts of) money to smooth things over. The new mukhtar Baydoun, who replaced mukhtar Makki, explains:

If a problem between youngsters happens, we can step in, and [they’re like], ‘yes mukhtar, at your service mukhtar,’ and we can solve [the problem] for them. So if they have a conflict over a motorcycle or 100 dollars, the mukhtar pays it from his pocket. Here’s a dollar, ok folks, forget about it. This happens, yes. These simple problems, we can solve them [...] Sometimes they don’t even accept the money when they see you’re ready to pay and solve the problem. ‘Never mind, it’s fine’ [they’ll say]. And people respect you more for it. As a representative of the state. That’s what I am here in the area. I’m a part of the state. So people respect you, they know if I petitioned the police, they will come down for patrol (dawriya) to me. Firstly, they respect you, secondly, they fear you because they know that if you show them your strength (titza’ran ma’on), you can hurt them with the help of the state, if you complain about them, you can put them in prison. (Interview February 2012)

These are of course discursive constructions of the ‘steward-mukhtar’ and must be taken thus – as much as accounts of actual events that have occurred. In that context it is perhaps interesting that one often mentioned example of conflict resolution is that of marital dispute. While it does happen, its frequency in self-representative discourse is perhaps more due to
the symbolically important link between the family and the (reproduction of the) community, of which the steward-mukhtar figures himself a guardian. As mentioned previously however, people often challenge this representation of the mukhtar. Mukhtars who help out people financially by reducing fees? Residents paint pictures of those same mukhtars as cunning (bandū’) merchants who swindle poor people with fees that are too high. One day I was sitting in one of the offices in Ragheb’s distribution company, where Ragheb’s personal circle often comes to relax. One of his friends and relation by marriage told me:

“The mukhtar – he’s a thief; he gives no respect and gets no respect. There’s a big difference though between the mukhtar here and back in the village. In village you have someone old (kbīr) and he will hit you when you try to pay, here the mukhtar hits you when you don’t! And he’ll ask [LL]15,000 also, even if it only costs 5,000.”

One of Ragheb’s brothers added: “Here”, in the city he means, “it’s simply a maslaḥa”. Maslaḥa is the word for both ‘profession’ (a source of income) and ‘interest’.

While the monetary interests were one problem with the contemporary mukhtar, a different issue that was also brought up, is the independence of the mukhtar – an independence that was discursively tied to his willingness to act in the interest of the community. Ragheb’s friends and family basically argued that it’s difficult to become a mukhtar without having special relations first (with parties or within the state). They recounted Ragheb’s fate when he had intended to run for mukhtar. Because Ragheb did not want to work for any of the parties, as a certain point he was threatened by gangs (‘isabāt). “They didn’t want an independent person. Then they think you’re against them”. Interestingly, they followed up on this claim by pointing out that, if Ragheb would have been elected, he would have given his services for free. The smooth segue suggests that the themes of independence and service lie closely together.

At this point, it’s important to point to some striking similarities between the things people say about ‘the’ state in Lebanon and what they have to say about the mukhtar. One is the tension between ‘service’ and ‘inter-

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85 Incidentally, this is what precisely happened with mukhtar Baydoun. There was a man who came to ask for some affidavit and asked what he needed to pay. Baydoun’s initial reaction was “Oh, whatever you want [to pay]!” which is a polite phrase often used by vendors. “No tell me,” the man repeated his question. Baydoun: “Whatever you want!” So the man pays him 5,000LL, which gets Baydoun into a fit. He shouts at him: “That doesn’t cover it! The price is 15,000! What, am I running a charity here?!"
est’ that came up here, which perhaps serves as umbrella complaint for others. However, let me specify some other convergences. What follows is an almost random selection of the numerous (innumerable) examples of ‘state talk’. Jammal, the proprietor of the excellent but humble ful cafeteria, was preparing me my plate, while the radio was on. The talk show host reviewed a recent dispute between two politicians. Jammal provided running commentary of the show to me, the foreigner, and explained that, contrary to what you might think, given the country’s civil war, religion was never Lebanon’s problem. People lived and live side by side. But politicians were a problem: because they were corrupt, basic provisions or safety nets were never built (i.e. goods for and of the general public), which made the country unstable. This is even more true since the war – the youth who have grown up after it never experienced a real state, since post-war politicians did nothing to rebuild what ‘proper state’ there was before. Later in the show, the radio show moved on to talk about the Minister of Interior, Ziad Baroud, a younger politician, who was widely considered to be untarnished with (i.e., uncorrupted by) a war history. Hopes for his Ministry were therefore all the higher as well. Jammal continued his commentary: they shouldn’t be so hard on him [Baroud]. He wants to, but they won’t let him. This is the thing with politicians here. They’re all talk, but no action. It’s as if I were to say to you: ‘Oh Marten, how fond I am of you’ but then not give you your ful. [Words are nothing, in other words.] You have to feel it through your mouth, in your belly. No, politics doesn’t mean anything here on the ground (‘ala al-ard).

In the same vein, one of the glass workers who work on ‘Ragheb’s street’ wanted to get the record straight for me, as he and others were talking politics over early morning coffee. The Lebanese people aren’t bad, he started out, the problem is thieving politicians. Take this latest little storm over at the Prime Minister’s. The (Sunni) Prime Minister had apparently been trying to place a matter86 under his authority rather than under the then competent Minister. Why? Just so that it would always be under Sunni control from then on (as tradition, and subsequent ratifications, dictates that the PM be Sunni). That sectarian system is a problem. Not because of the sects themselves (though the bigger do tend to eat the smaller, it has to be said), but the sectarian system makes it easy for politicians to get their hands on ‘the state’ in order to steal and fill their pockets. And if they get called on it, they can always hide behind their sect.

The underlying preoccupation with the (cornered) common good also comes out in the following example. One sunny day in mid-April 2010, I was walking to catch a guided tour of the neighbourhood adja-

86 The details escaped me by the time I wrote down my fieldnotes. Mea culpa.
cent to Khandaq, Zoqaq al-Blat. In the following chapters, I speak more of both the tour, the larger project in which it was embedded as well as the neighbourhood; suffice it to say here that it came from an attempt to put the neighbourhood on people’s mental maps of their city and hopefully mobilize greater attention and concern for the fate of its patrimonial architecture. (That fate seemed like a rather dire one, with protections being reduced and circumvented as developers’ pressure to build towers from scratch mounted with the steep rise of real-estate prices.) On my way to the tour, I passed by an ‘Ashura tent’ – a small construction of wooden stilts and black cloth, where people can get complimentary tea during the 10-day holiday of Ashura. Ashura had long past, however, so I inquired with the gentlemen present as to why it was still there. I was promptly offered some tea and we got to talking. The conversation soon touched the state of the old buildings – perhaps because they had seen flyers for the tour, or they figured I’d be interested as a foreigner. They weren’t very happy about their present condition. *The state should do something about that,* one said. *Such a shame, look at this palace* – pointing to a dilapidated but still intact mansion just across the street – *it’s still from the Turkish [Ottoman] time, but it’s empty. There were many like that here, beautiful constructions, with gardens you could play in, but they have already disappeared. This one will disappear too. Shame, the state should preserve and renovate them. Instead, people do what they want.*

In reference to the same topic and concern – the fate of ‘old Beirut’ – I spoke to the director of an NGO that seeks to improve the quality of life and the environment in the ‘traditional’ neighbourhood of Gemmayze, in east-Beirut. He saw the area transform, as three-storey building after three-storey building goes down to make room for residential towers. He also mused over the same quandary: why does the state not impose limits on private interests? Yes, the neighbourhood offers investment opportunities, but “where are the rules? Where is the general plan? Sure, the financial interests of property owners are important, but that’s why the state should establish the norms. […] There are no excuses anymore, that we have to accept irregularities because, ‘well, the situation is still not normal, what with the history of civil war and all’. The state should respond to the demands of the residents.” (Interview July 2009)

While the director still professed hope for the state – they do work together with the municipality, and the latter does have the required competences, so it should just get its act together – many saw little ground for redemption. Like most people, I sometimes struck up a conversation with the drivers of the minivans that operate as private buses, picking up folks on pre-ordained routes. Perhaps it’s the practice of going through the
same conversational motions again and again, but they have a certain talent for the formulaic condensation of popular truths. Thus, one ‘Van no. 4’ driver, after complaining about a fine that he had had to pay for no reason if not corruption, summarized, angrily: In Lebanon, it’s the state violates that the citizen, not the citizen the law! Another driver, a few days later, rattled on about the same, familiar themes of the failed (because corrupt) state, of thievery in the name of sectarianism, but finished off with an eloquent statement of how bad things really are. You know, it’s the crooks on top and the good people on the bottom. And the crooks will not let the people stand! (mā byikhallū yiʿūm) Two weeks later, I was having a longer chat in Van 4, sitting next to a friendly and soft-spoken driver. The traffic flow stopped rather abruptly at a major U-turn. That’s probably because someone tried to cross, jamming the traffic, the driver commented. He then used that as a parable for the situation the whole country was in. He quoted Ziad Baroud, the technocrat Minister with a preceding ‘career’ in civil society (Ziad and I, we’re big buddies, he joked). Apparently, Baroud recently commented that the country was in a ditch (or hole: jūra) and that we need to find a way out. But how to find a way out if there’s no order (like people randomly crossing the street)? Instead, they raised the price of bread, yet again. How can you raise a family, get on in life, develop and ‘find a way out’ in situation like that? This same theme of not having a basis to stand on, a platform to build upon, expressed by these van drivers, also came up in an interview I had with a well-known and politically engaged theatre actress, Hanane Hajj Ali. I spoke with her after she had organized a manifestation against the demolition of one of Beirut’s rare public parks (I will come back to this demonstration in Chapter 6). She had asked me join her on her morning walk through the park. She started off our conversation by pointing to the trajectory of the sun – where the sun would pass at which hour. Then she pointed to the high-rise apartment buildings that were built only a few years previously and were now keeping out the sunlight in the early morning. Where before you could see the sun rise at 6AM, now you would have to wait until 7.30 – the time of our conversation. With all these new constructions we can’t see the sun, we can’t breathe, she lamented. All the while it would be so easy to stop these constructions – all it would take is five simple laws. But politicians are not willing to stop project they themselves profit from, of course. This is the corruption [here], that no law will get voted in. She continued: We can’t engage the state on the basis of rights, they have no political programs [for which we can vote, which we can decide on]. All they do is sit there and make sure their interests are secure. Later she wished they could have a civic state with rights and duties. Instead, everyone is bought – politicians, voters, media. ([Informal] interview February 2009)
Venerable Marxist intellectual Fawwaz Traboulsi also came to talk about this same topic of rights and duties, during a round table in March 2012 about ‘why the revolution did not happen’ in Lebanon, despite the fact some of the energy of the Arab Spring had caught on. The main argument of his contribution was that ‘we’ (the mostly young activists in the room) needed to be clear on what to focus on: try and topple a ‘system’ (the sectarian system) or to work on laws. His preference was the latter – work out a constitution that could correct the ‘illegal’ outgrowths of the political system as it is now. In reply to his talk, a young woman, seemingly completely missing or ignoring Traboulsi’s propos, argued that as long as there is no state, there is nothing we can make appropriate strategic decisions for. Traboulsi retorted that in fact there is a state and that we are in this struggle to change it. However, in saying this, he ran counter a stock phrase in the ‘standard discourse’ about the state in Lebanon – and apparently deeply held conviction by at least some – that ‘there is no state’ (just as ‘there is no order’). If true, then indeed Traboulsi’s proposal would make no sense. Believing it to be true was perhaps the reason why the young woman seemed not to be able to pick up on what he said.

A number of interlinked themes emerge from this wide variety of moments and situations. One is the theme of the absent state tout court (in: the young woman at the round table; the director of the NGO); another is the state that doesn’t respect or recognize formal citizenship (in: one of the Van 4 drivers; Hanane); and a final one we can surmise is the theme of state ‘captured’ by private interests, whether that be for one’s own gain – that of the political clique (in: Jammal’s resigned comments), or for ‘the (sectarian) other’ – (in: the glassmaker’s fiery complaint). Together, these themes make clear that ‘the neglectful or failed state’ is a social reality that is reproduced on a daily basis.

People in Khandaq share in these discursive formulae, at times in their most generic forms (like the ones we’ve just seen), at times in their more socially positioned variation, namely that the state is there for some, but not for them, the residents of Khandaq. Relative deprivation emerges as a noticeable pattern in the way Khandaq residents talk about themselves. However, before describing this perspective more fully, let me tie it back into the way people talk about the mukhtar. Precisely the complaint about the mukhtar is that in fact – despite his informal job description as ‘elder’ – he does not serve the community, i.e. the interests of residents. The complaints about mukhtars we’ve seen run in close parallel to the theme of the lack of ‘state’ respect for citizens and their rights, as well as

87 Thanks to Lamia Moghnieh for the formulation of this idea.
to the idea that politicians (and/or top-level bureaucrats) work for their own interests. Arguably (loosely per Gupta 1995), the lived experiences with mukhtars provide opportunities for people to develop their own perspectives on such more widely circulating notions and ideas. What such perspectives seem to develop in Khandaq is the theme of neglect that is emphasized, within this bigger family of themes of failed statehood. That sense of neglect is not something that is elaborated merely through the imagination of local state representatives as aloof from neighbourhood preoccupations. I also heard the argument of state neglect expressed several times in connection to neighbourhood dilapidation and lack of social order. In fact, as one woman asserted as we were sitting on her balcony, with the Downtown skyline on the horizon, the fact it had some modicum of infrastructural endowment was merely because the area was close to Downtown. The further you get from Downtown, especially into the Shia areas (the suburbs, the South of Lebanon) the fewer the amenities (measured in this case in hours of electricity per day). Because, as a Shia friend from the suburbs also explained, the government always neglects Shia areas. The Khatib building, mentioned in Chapter 2, is often cited as a sore in people’s eyes, particularly by those beholders that like to see themselves as upstanding citizens, with a certain standard and class (and who might be afraid to be dragged down by the reputation of the building and the neighbourhood). These same people often also complain about ‘refugees’, squatters and criminalized youths that deserve state intervention – to “clean up” the area and its streets – but do not get it. While these latter specific points are certainly not shared by everyone, the sense of neglect is definitely shared almost universally. The theme is really a structuring feature of the way folks talk about themselves – and thus of others and their place in the national universe. A ‘discourse’ in that limited sense88. I’ll call it the discourse of neglect. Further below, I will explicate the links between this sense of neglect and the identification with ‘the ordinary man’. For the moment, I want to close this section about the mukhtar and the state with two remarks. Firstly, the discourse of neglect implies that people have certain expectations of what a state should be and do. I’ve not had these expectations clearly explicated to me in Khandaq; instead they were formulated only in their negation. The key undergirding idea though is that it exists to protect the interests of ‘the people’. Secondly, people obviously do not have only one frame to talk about the state and their relation to it. So it is for people in Khandaq as well. There is one alternative discourse I want to highlight now.

88 I pretend no technical deployment of the term, otherwise.
**Strongmen and the defiant community** There is an agentive spin that can be given to the ‘neglect’, when the absence of the state becomes a fact of accomplishment: it’s not the state that doesn’t come in, but it’s we who keep the state out! Let’s call this a discourse of defiance. The discourse of defiance is somewhat at odds with the discourse of neglect, because it doesn’t entirely erase moral claims on the state, it merely constitutes a basic assertion that ‘the neighbourhood’ or ‘the community’ can ward off any interference in its affairs by ‘the state’. Sometimes there is also a more positive formulation of such autarky, in the sense that the community can take care of itself. However, I’ve not heard this affirmation come up very often, which is why I suggest this discourse is not simply the flipside of the discourse of neglect, as in: ‘we don’t need the state to take care of us, we’ll just do it ourselves’. (Implicit) moral appeals on the state area made along rejections of its authority, even if they are ‘logically’ at odds with each other.

The ‘discourse of defiance’ is one that is also elaborated on the basis of (daily and not so daily) experiences of neighbourhood living and particularly experiences with local governance relations and practices. I will discuss a few examples – some incidental, some structural, some grand, some ordinary – of different ways social control is exercised – outside of the direct purview and sometimes in contravention to the (symbolic) authority of Lebanese state institutions. I start off with the examples of neighbourhood strongmen and elders and their regulatory work, move on to a symbolically defining moment of neighbourhood autarky during the 2008 ‘small civil war’, and close off with some institutional sketches of charity and political organization.

Let us first go back to our civil war veteran and now Hizbullah affiliate, Abu Zalem. As I explained in the previous chapter, people come to him for a range of issues. Let me pick a few examples of things he has played some role in. Like with the mukhtars, people come to him with marital disputes (giving him some moral and symbolic communal authority). One afternoon, after having just reconciled – with a few sweet words – two men, one of whom known to be a bit of a drunkard, who had gotten into an emotional fight, he received a phone call. Looking at the call screen, before picking up, he said, *ah, here comes a problem*. Problem number 5, that day. He looked weary. On his way to his car, a few moments later, he expressed his frustration at this man he now had to go to, a *niswanji*, a philanderer, who was wont to spend (too much of) his money on paid sex. His wife had now called him out on it. After having returned, Abu Zalem recounted that by the time he arrived on the scene, quite a few people had already gotten involved. The wife’s demand was that he stay
at home rather than chasing women. Abu Zalem demanded he agree. He agreed. *That was that*, a tired-looking Abu Zalem concluded. He also helps out people materially, whether directly or by hooking up the person to a charity organization. He may land someone a job, such as Hussein, a satellite member of his clique, who squats a decrepit turn-of-the-19th-century house (well, he insists he pays the rent to the owner who lives in Syria and comes to collect it sometimes, but not always) just a stone’s throw away from ‘Abu Zalem’s street’. When a real-estate developer in the neighbourhood thought he needed a security guard from looting youngsters, he contacted Abu Zalem, as the person with the authority to deploy someone and back him up (symbolically). Abu Zalem, knowing that Hussein lived off odd jobs, suggested Hussein who then took on a kind of supervisory and concierge type role on the construction site.

He has also helped people in finding and or securing a residence. When he was still a commander for the Baath party, directly after the first two years of the civil war, he organized entry into the buildings abandoned by the Christian population of the area, providing refuge for a significant number of displaced Shia from East Beirut and the South. A different contemporary case I was partially a witness to was a small crisis when the family of a Khandaq resident that lived in a confessionally mixed area on the far side of East Beirut, were threatened to be kicked out by a landlord who also happened to be employed in the military police. (Abu Zalem’s reading was that he therefore thought he could operate above the law). Abu Zalem referred the resident to an officer he knew who outranked the landlord and was able to mediate the conflict.

This type of contact with the security establishment (police, internal security, army) is perhaps the one characteristic that distinguishes Abu Zalem most in the eyes of Khandaq residents and his network within that establishment is perhaps what most undergirds his claim to authority. He says he built up this network during the civil war and that those relations allow him to enter into negotiation with members of that establishment. One example is the one just given; here I give one more example because it pertains directly to the themes that I highlight in this chapter through which people identify and position themselves. As previously mentioned, Khandaq youth have some reputation of getting into trouble – while this is a stereotype deployed mostly by outsiders, a kerfuffle does happen. Abu Zalem to the rescue.

AZ: I ask for a favour, they [the army, the police] ask for a favor. It’s an exchange of services. That’s how it is (*ṭabi‘iya*, “natural”) – *normal* [in German].
M: So what can you do of service for them?
AZ: So they would have people, criminals, they can’t take them from here. I help them. If there’s a problem, like incidents with burning tires, or [other] trouble [mashākil], we handle it so that that the situation doesn’t get out of hand.
M: Can you give an example?
AZ: So for example, we had some guys (shabāb) here – they were getting into trouble with the Lebanese army. It would have been close…
M: You mean like fistfights?
AZ: And bullets. I have to go and resolve the situation. I grab (iṣhab) the guys that belong to me and bring them back here, so I solve the problem. The guys that are with us in the party (‘anna bil ḥizb).
M: And then you go to the army…
AZ: and we end the issue.
M: So how can you do that if the guys are clearly in the wrong?
AZ: OK, but how did the problem occur? Between us and [Hariri’s] Future [Movement]. Some of the guys would go up [towards the adjoining neighbourhood], others would come and they’d get into fights with each other. The army intervenes to take them apart. The shabāb then get into trouble with the army. Well, trouble, you know, [they’d exchange] words – so I take them back, the army wraps up things, it’s over, and they tell me, ok, we no longer want anything.
M: Because they know the easiest way to calm things down is through agreement?
AZ: Yes, precisely! Through agreement.

Abu Zalem is doing some mediating and regulating in this very interview – downplaying the severity of conflicts with the security establishment, oscillating between “words”, “firsts” and “bullets” for his depiction of the altercations (and yours truly is happy to assist in supplying ‘agreement’ as the key pacifying concept through which to understand relations with police and military).

Below I’ll highlight and explore Abu Zalem’s claim that security forces wouldn’t be able to come into the neighbourhood. Here, however, I want to elaborate on the performative power of words we see at work in the interview with Abu Zalem, which actually appear to be a staple instrument in the social elder’s toolkit in his⁸⁹ maintenance of social order. Mukhtar Baydoun already spoke of ‘sweet-talking’ as a strategy (“you’re

⁸⁹ Undoubtedly hers as well: surely there are big women in the neighbourhood. That, however, was a world closed to me.
a good guy, let’s take it easy”). One of the Kurdish big men, from just around the bloc, mentioned doing the same. I was introduced to this figure, Abu Ali, through one of the Abu Zalem’s men, who happened to have a close relation to him and was therefore deemed an appropriate link, after I had inquired about whom I should to speak to from the Kurdish contingent in Khandaq. Abu Ali was presented as an equivalent to Abu Zalem for the Kurds (in function, not in significance, of course). He turned out to be a very outgoing and jovial man, heading towards 50, who had a knack for making one feel welcomed. We had a few conversations over a period of two weeks in his small home appliances store. I initiated our talk by asking him if he could tell me something about the history of the Kurds in the neighbourhood, aiming my first questions at the evolution of the housing situation. He quickly came to talk of the omnipresent theme of Sunni-Shia tensions though. That is to say, to clarify that these tension do not really exist. It is merely a problem of trouble-makers, he explained, of youngsters who hang around on the street and take drugs. In their mind, there’s a problem between Sunna and Shia. It is such youngsters to whom he addresses ‘sweet words’ (kilimtayn hilwīn). Whenever a fight arises, such words can quiet the situation: ‘come on now, we’re all neighbours, this is no way to solve a problem, come on, give each other a kiss’. When you have a reputation of treating people right and fair, like Abu Ali does, the boys will listen. However, sweet words are but one way of maintaining peace and order. Another is imposing the right frame (the right definition of the situation, if you will). With the injunction ‘we are all neighbours’, Abu Ali touched on a topic of conversation that proved a recurrent theme in our conversations: that of neighbourliness (jīreh). As our conversations progressed, the concept took on greater meaning and relevance. Originally, he introduced it as a way to describe (inter-communitarian) relations in the building where he lived. Neighbourliness in that context consisted of the little things and services you do for each other, as neighbours. You ask whether they need something, whether all is well, you knock on each other’s door. However, not long after, one of Abu Ali’s close acquaintances passed by and added a dimension, that of living together with people from and

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90 Being known, or “having relations” to the persons involved is the key to such authority, as agree mukhtar Baydoun as well as Abu Zalem. The converse is ruinous. Baydoun’s assistant, a retired officer from internal security, deplored the militias during the civil war. Not only did they cause “chaos”, not being disciplined like the army, but they also meddled in local affairs. It might also happen, say, that you would be fighting with your wife, and that a Palestinian kid would come up to you and tell you to knock it off. On what basis is he doing that? What is his relation [to you]???
on their street. That’s “jīreh” as well. There’s no fundamental difference between the two dimensions of jīreh, but in the latter case it entails you sit, and drink tea with each other, and that you keep an eye out for each other. The visitor gave an example: recently the son of [a young Shia man, who had only just sat with us for a while], had fallen ill, but the man had been stuck at work. Therefore, his wife had gone down with the boy to grab a taxi to the hospital. Someone asked her what was wrong and then took her to the hospital himself and stayed with her all night. That’s jīreh, too.

Slowly, through these examples, the notion evolved to represent a kind of non-sectarian disposition. Being neighbourly means being embarrassed to ask questions pertaining to one’s confessional identity or to talk of Shia-Sunni-Kurdish tensions. Being neighbourly means instead to live together, all of us in this neighbourhood (mant’a). Abu Ali continued:

Much like in the Netherlands, in fact, where, when you sit together in a café [“coffeeshop”], nobody asks whether you’re Roman Catholic or Orthodox. No, you’re Dutch! We’re from the same country. This is also how we have to start anew, without such differences. Neighbourliness means: to stand with each other [nūʿaf maʿ baʿd]. To support and defend each other.

Abu Ali and his interlocutors (including myself) construed a more explicit rendition of a theme that is more commonly (not only in Khandaq but across the Arab world) and more implicitly framed in kinship terms. Several were the occasions that people declared Khandaq to be one “family”, where “everybody loves each other”. The point here is that such declarations do not reveal a hitherto undiscovered and unique tribe of people who for once and for all gave peace a chance, but that they are performative in their intention. When Abu Ali calls on his young troublemakers to be good neighbours, one may question its effectiveness in ending an actual fight, yet I would submit there is a double constitutive effect of the incantation: it does call people to belong and abide by the bonds of neighbourliness, as an encompassing ideal to cultivate in general. Perhaps more significant yet, it also recasts the occurrence of “trouble” [mashkal] as something that is not conflict. That is, it constitutes not merely an appeal to cleave to communal peace but attempts to prevent a reading of actually occurring conflict as a breach of such communal peace, thus symbolically maintaining social order.91

From the power of words I return to the symbolism of practices. In the

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91 Thanks to Gustavo Barbosa for suggesting this line of interpretation to me.
quote from Abu Zalem above you were able to read his claim that security forces “can’t take [someone wanted by the law] from here”. This idea was substantiated by one of the men of his inner circle when he explained the story of a relative newcomer to the tea talks Abu Zalem hold every day. The young man, Anwar, wasn’t a new face as such, in fact he was part of a rather notorious corner group. He was friendly enough, but always quite restless – nervous and jumpy – when he visited the tea group. He stood out, I felt, in part because the men drawn to, and educated and trained by, Abu Zalem tended to be serious (if not in demeanour at least in substance), talked politics and attempted to stick to the straight and narrow. So I asked one of the regular clique about what Anwar’s deal was – why did he seem so nervous? After laughing heartily about the question and sharing it with the others as a joke, he went on to explain that Anwar was wanted by the law, for stealing or using drugs (perhaps both). Abu Zalem had talked to the police and worked out a deal that as long as Anwar stayed within the confines of the neighbourhood, he would not be apprehended. By the fact that he was now also visiting the tea group, I surmised that a part of the deal (whether with the police or between Abu Zalem and Anwar privately) was that Abu Zalem would also try and influence him in a positive way – and perhaps recruit him to Hizbullah’s cause (as he had done with others).

We thus see a claim here to the autarky of social regulation in the neighbourhood, in the form of such everyday negotiations with the security establishment. There is also an exceptional but perhaps far more paradigmatic moment in which such autarky was also (violently) claimed for the area, namely during the events of May 2008, which people in Beirut often called “the small civil war”. It struck me as a highly significant and salient episode in a seemingly widely shared narrative about the neighbourhood’s history and position in Beirut. Though many called it a small civil war, that is mostly because it reminded people of the big one and of the suddenly not so abstract possibility of its ‘recurrence’, not so much because it actually resembled one. It consisted of a sequence of a few days’ fighting: one of intense fighting, others of consolidation of a quickly attained status quo. The principal protagonists in the fighting were Hizbullah troops and a loosely organized ‘militia’ tied to Hariri’s Future Movement. Each side had several allies that were to differing extents practically involved in the conflict. Most of the fighting took place in municipal Beirut, with Hizbullah fighters (perceived as) ‘coming into’ the city (from the southern suburbs), though (sectarian) ‘contact zones’ in the southern suburbs (especially around the airport) also saw serious fighting (cf. Bou Akar 2012). The direct spark in the powder keg was
a decision by the government, led at the time by the Hariri faction\textsuperscript{92}, to shut down a Hizbullah telecommunications receiver located in the Beirut International Airport. It was framed as a threat to national sovereignty, in theoretical terms (a non-sanctioned telecom network within national boundaries) and practical ones (such a network enables Hizbullah to engage in behaviour that risks drawing the ire of third nations). The powder keg itself had been stuffe\textsuperscript{92} d over almost two years though, over two interlinked issues. One was the heightened controversy over Hizbullah’s military power following the July 2006 war, when Israel retaliated against Lebanon after Hizbullah kidnapped a few Israeli soldiers. The second was a year and a half long political stalemate over whom to vote in as the new President of the Republic.

Hizbullah obviously did not take what they saw as an attempt to decapitate the ‘Resistance’ lying down and immediately secured and took over the airport and quite effectively fought off any resistance they found, mostly in the mixed neighbourhoods in Beirut (where Sunni and Shia live together) and along the main infrastructural axes leading to the airport. The army, wary of any internal communitarian rifts and political divisions that could lead to internal schisms, stayed largely aloof from the fighting, restricting its activities to securing areas peripheral to the (most intense) fighting. As mentioned, within a few days it was clear that the victory was Hizbullah’s and that most of their opponents had been disarmed. However the crisis did lend a greater sense of urgency to the political stalemate and precipitated closer foreign involvement. Soon after, an accord was struck in Doha that served as the formal basis for renewed political engagements in the years to follow.

While Khandaq was not an ‘area peripheral to the fighting’, it certainly also was not at the very heart of the conflict. Some fighting took place there, though principally at its outer edges – along those infrastructural axes. Abu Zalem’s men were also called to arms. According to their accounts, they immediately sealed off the ‘external borders’ of the area, that is, the junctions with the main roads encircling Khandaq on the north (Fouad Shehab) and east (Bechara al-Khoury). As to internal borders, the crossing into the Basta Tahta neighbourhood, immediately to the south and next to the mostly Sunni mosque, popularly regarded as a ‘contact’ area, wasn’t sealed off, since that area was all “us” (i.e., Hizbullah), militarily at least. They all presented these operations as emanating from Abu Zalem’s office – just like in the old days of the big war, when that

\textsuperscript{92} By now, the faction was headed by Saad Hariri (or at least, had him as its public face), after his father’s assassination in 2005.
same office had been the local HQ, protected by sandbags – where, as one of the men somewhat fondly and proudly recalled, guns were stacked hip-high. However, they weren’t put to all that much use, because Abu Zalem’s experience dictated that the first days of war are always chaotic and hence dangerous. First you need to see how things settle and get your bearings in the new situation. So they waited. But since the ‘war’ never lasted beyond these first few days, there was relatively little action (they kept the roads closed for about 10 days). The only death Khandaq had to mourn was of a young man who had climbed onto a roof (“on pills” but without having been instructed to do so, as one of Abu Zalem’s men clarified) – and was taken down by a sniper from the Future Movement.

At the time of my research at least (with memories still vivid), the symbolic significance of these events could scantly be underestimated. Its significance was that ‘the neighbourhood’ (at least from the perspective of the Shia residents) came to its own rescue and managed to keep out threats to its integrity. These threats were in part from a political and sectarian other, but in perhaps larger and more practical part, from the army, which was effectively kept out. Perhaps indicative of the importance of the moment and its mark on self-perception is the observation that a young woman made about that time. I had gotten to know her father when I was still on the search for a place to live, and continued to drop by occasionally for tea in the afternoon. We were sitting on the balcony, overlooking the old (and heavily dilapidated) core of Khandaq, with boys roaming the streets looking for some action, passing underneath. The view prompted the following comment. She said those few days in May had turned her opinion about the corner boys 180 degrees: from her earlier annoyance with their antics and poor manners she went to pride about how they risked their lives for the safety of the neighbourhood. She never saw them with the same eyes afterward. The events thus appear to have consolidated both a sense of a moral community (one that is ambiguously or vaguely sectarian and/or neighbourhood-based) – a community for which one is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice – as well as the notion of neighbourhood autarky or sovereignty – manifested in the ability to maintain the integrity of its boundaries.

I come back to his notion of the moral community towards the end of the chapter. For the moment, however, I need to dwell on one aspect

93 Abu Zalem’s men spoke with similar pride of their own feats, but also imputed this same pride to these corner boys themselves, for their participation in this ‘war’ (and, incidentally, that they now thought they were ready for any new war that may be lurking around the corner; this was rather worrying, because as one of the men pointed out, that was no war).

94 Compare Rooden’s conceptualization of the moral community that emphasizes this aspect (Rooden 1996: 78).
of residents’ self-narration that is closely related to the idea of autarky but puts a slightly different accent: self-sufficiency. There are two practical sides to this self-sufficiency: one is the informal and ad-hoc initiatives residents themselves organize, the second are the formalized and regular but non-governmental programs, mostly in the charity business. Abu Zalem’s interventions in the neighbourhood might again provide some examples of the first category. He wields tangible authority over the street his ‘office’ is on. The most direct proof of that authority is that he is able to plaster parts of the street in yellow Hizbullah flags and posters of Hizbullah greats (the “martyred” military leader Imad Mughnieh and General Secretary Hassan Nasrallah, primarily) – in a context where party signs are jealously guarded as markers of political territory. It must mean Abu Zalem is able to impose his will on competitors. (Beyond any individual authority he might exercise, there is also the power of numbers – several plots on and just off that street belong to members of his extended family.) Other interventions in the physical environment point more to the aspect of self-sufficiency: with the support of a donor, Abu Zalem had a clean water tank installed, a small one first, on the corner of the street, a more substantial one later, just opposite his office. In a setting with much irregular housing and poor provisions in the older building stock, access to (relatively) clean water is not self-evident. (The majority of users turn out to be Syrian and Sudanese migrant workers, who generally live in the poorest conditions.) Next to the big water tank, Abu Zalem and his clique slowly built a patio and garden, on the side of the road, technically on land that belongs to the municipality (see chapter 2; see pictures on next page). For a while, this was their favourite place to consume their daily cups of tea and discuss the latest news; some of the youth have also used it as a place to hang out. Finally, people take their own provisions for maintaining ‘public’ infrastructure. Abu Zalem & Co. – reportedly in consultation with the municipality – built speed-bumps on ‘their’ road and hauled cement over to improve an improvised parking lot and walkway to a squatted house. A similar situation existed over at Ragheb’s street, where, for example, a member of Ragheb’s extended family paid the worker from the public-private Sukleen garbage collection company a bit on the side to pass an extra broom on that street as well.

95 My hunch is that in popular Beiruti neighbourhoods like Khandaq they are perceived and guarded as such mostly by – the youthful elements of – local chapters, rather than as official, top-down policy instruments. However, posters and flags along the major thoroughfares (and perhaps other main roads) in the southern suburbs do appear to part of a concerted policy. See for example Harb 2010: 144ff.).
Besides these more ad-hoc attempts to improve or maintain living conditions, there are a number of charity organizations active that support families in a number of domains. Most of these organizations or programs are directly tied to a political party; some are tied to religious institutions and/or leaders. Some of these are ‘need-based’ and other more ‘merit-based’, if you will. That is, while some organizations don’t pay too much attention to political affiliation, others keep closer track of such matters.
Residents subsequently know on which door they need not knock. In so far as I know, none of the charitable organizations doles out cash assistance. Instead they deliver comestibles to the neediest of families, (partially) cover medical fees or tuition (in establishments of their own choice, usually) or provide medical supplies, such as crutches or hospital beds for care at home. The political parties pay special attention to the families of martyrs96; non-affiliated organizations generally look at need only – though (moral) reputation does play a role. The money for the assistance comes from wealthy donors, parties (that receive contributions from a number of sources), as well as the small contributions that residents contribute through collection boxes at various kinds of local stores and mosques. Selection of recipients usually occurs in consultation with locals – elders or people who are well-positioned to know (for example, one mini-market owner, given that he sees the whole street cross his doorstep, had also been asked to form a list of possible recipients) – though organization employees tend to make contact with recipients first as well.

The question now is what such practices mean to residents. Part of their significance derives from how they inform the discourse of defiance so pervasive in the area. I have given two kinds of practices in this paragraph: one of defence and closure and another of self-sufficiency. There are two semiotic levels on which these practices are linked to the discourse. On a fundamental level, both play in slightly different ways into the opposition of an inside and outside to the neighbourhood that undergirds the discourse of defiance – the opposition more precisely of a community on the inside and a state on the outside. While the first kind allows people to emphasize antagonism, the second kind speaks to a more affirmative sense of autonomy. Then, on a second, thematic, level, each practice can be related to the power to influence state policy and practice and the idea of territorial autonomy of the neighbourhood, respectively. Both elements are captured in the quintessential and oft repeated watchword of this discourse: “the state doesn’t enter here!” Most likely, that ‘slogan’ derives originally from the events of May 2008, and the effective closure of the neighbourhood from outside forces. The storyline can subsequently be corroborated with stories such as Anwar’s. In conjunction then with more widely circulating discursive frames (not in the least the territorial frame discussed in Chapter 1), people use these events, practices and relations to elaborate what their place is in the territorial space of that state, and by extension how they belong to community and nation.

96 Which, incidentally, makes it difficult to gather information about their practices, because it makes all information politically sensitive.
As a short interlude, I might point out here that there is a disconnect between what people say happens and what actually happens. The ‘state’ does in fact ‘enter’. To take one of two more prominent examples, one early morning in May 2010 the police raided a 7-storey building that Ammar was sub-letting at a handsome profit to hundreds of Syrian and Sudanese (construction) workers, as well as Ethiopian and some South-Asian domestic workers. The police drove out and presumably deported the African and South-Asian residents. Ammar was called in for questioning and later mumbled something to me about ‘not knowing it was illegal’ and that he’d ‘only be renting out to Syrians’ from now on. Another rather conspicuous entry occurred in the heat of the 2010 football world championship. World cups are a major event in Lebanon and many people support their favourite country fervently. (Also, theories abound about sect-specific allegiances, mostly based on diasporic trajectories.) This particular evening, Brazil had just lost to the Netherlands. Brazil was one of the more popular football countries in Khandaq. When two young men then dared to parade through the streets on their motorbike brandishing the Dutch flag, the man who sat on the backseat was pulled off the vehicle and a fight ensued. According to second-hand sources, someone – an ‘informer’ – then called in the army, probably because tension were high in the country and people feared escalations of violence. By the time the army came in in jeeps the fight had already cleared though. Still, they set up a perimeter on the two streets they entered from, ordering the streets to be cleared and for everyone to enter their houses (they were partially obeyed). An intelligence agent and an acquaintance of Abu Zalem’s conferred with the latter, and they seemed to jointly decide on subsequent action (the soldiers stayed for about an hour or so).

Such discrepancies with the discourse of defiance should underscore that my argument is obviously not that there would be some determinative directionality from experiences with the (local) state and informal regulation to perceptions of state and community. Such perceptions arise at the confluence of these experiences and more widely circulating discourses; or to rephrase the earlier argument inspired by Gupta: there is a dialectical semiotic process in which people accomplish two inextricably linked goals: people appropriate elements from dominant discourses in order to make sense of the experiences, and they make sense of the social entities (such as, ‘the state’) proposed in dominant discourses based on their experiences. Having described some of the experiences as well as having provide some glimpses of how people make sense of them, I still need to complete my analytical task by situating the discourse of defiance partic-
ularly (and of neglect, peripherally) in a (history of a) political discursive field in Lebanon.  

**Ashura and the people’s scepticism** The implication or rather the premise of the pride of being able to stave off outside threats and to keep out the state is that is the latter poses a threat (to community autarky and identity). While such mistrust of state authorities is hardly unique in global comparison, it nevertheless begs the question how it has come to exist in Lebanon. For Shia in particular, it seems the idea has taken shape in part through a trope intimately tied to the history of the mobilization of the Shia community, in which the Shia were depicted as the community of the “deprived”. That key notion can be dated back to just before the civil war, with the nascence of the political precursor to Amal: Musa al-Sadr’s “Movement of the Deprived” (“mahrūmīn”, also translated as ‘dis-inherited’). Musa al-Sadr was a cleric from Iran – though with a lineage that traced back to Lebanon – who was sent to act as the leader for the southern city of Tyre (in 1960) and quite quickly developed into a vocal representative of the Shia community in Lebanon. He appears to have been a clever political tactician in promoting his goal of protecting and developing the (largely Shia) South. From the start, he asserted and promoted his independence (and that of other clerics) from major (Southern) Shia political bosses, maintaining a safe distance while still building some bridges to others. He soon found support with President Chehab, appointed after the 1958 uprising (briefly mentioned in Chapter 2), who thought Lebanon’s peace lay in a more balanced development of the different regions and a reduction of the clout wielded by the (rural) political bosses. Thus, with Chehab’s support, Sadr was able to found (in 1967) the still existing Supreme Islamic Shia Council (SICS), which not only served

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97 Rather than situating it “locally”, one can also veer in the opposite analytical direction. The alternation between the two discourses here resonates with discourses about the state worldwide, in particular these seemingly ubiquitous ambivalences about the state. Kelly & Shah (2006) introduced their special issue of *Critique of Anthropology* on (state) violence by taking up Tilly’s idea of the double-edged nature of state protection – often states have protected subjects from the consequences of its own activities. The combination of fear and protection that ensues is the basis for an ambivalence towards the state that Copeland (2014) and Nelson (2009) also take up. Nelson explains that Mayans have been betrayed by both state and guerrilla and therefore engage in pragmatic resistance and engagement, alternately, with either. Copeland builds on this and argues that as people see that organized resistance is (made) impossible (by the state), they engage in the dishonest clientelist “grubbing” with (state and party) officials, producing an equally profound ambivalence. There may be something about the modern state itself, then, set up to fail its own expectations, which engenders such ambivalences. In any case, as I explain immediately below and at the end of the chapter, it’s not a zero-sum game for Khandaq residents. Their identification of the good and the bad in the state and the party is situational, contextual.
as an officially recognized site of Shia jurisprudence, but also as an important relay point for economic resources. (cf. Gharbieh 2010: 111) He also advocated greater intervention by the Lebanese state to protect the South from Israeli attacks, which had steadily started to increase as the thrust of the Palestinian resistance shifted towards Lebanon. In all his activities he was careful to frame his advocacy in national terms and not exclusively communitarian ones: the SISC served the purpose of greater engagement with and integration into the national state; the army was called to defend the South, not the Shia. (cf. Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 27, 35f.)

Increasingly though, he was unable to maintain this frame. The ‘Movement of the Deprived’ may serve to illustrate this development. The foundation of that ‘Movement’ (which was more a political frame under which Sadr allied a number of political players), in 1973, was most directly precipitated (according to Gharbieh 2010: 137f.) by increased resistance to Chehab’s projects by the Southern Kamil al-As’ad and other allied rural ‘za’ims’. In order to enhance his influence over Southern politics, Sadr therefore needed to shift into a more militant gear. In the foundational speech Sadr held in Baalbeck he called on the state to take greater care of its deprived citizens – while he thus still framed it as a non-sectarian issue and got leaders from various denominations to sign the accompanying declaration, there were a number of reasons why the ‘deprived’ would increasingly be associated with ‘Shia’ in the following years. Already the rally at Baalbeck was attended mostly by Shia, influencing the reception of the message. However, not long after he established a militia – Amal – to fend off Israeli incursion when the Lebanese state proved incapable of doing so, thus siding himself on the Palestinian side of an increasingly controversial and divisive issue (and, I will recall, one of the main sparks of the 15 year war period to follow). Moreover, after 1975, his cross-sectarian relations lost strength and Amal was increasingly redeployed in Lebanese battles. Steadily, the Movement of the Deprived lost funding and impetus and ultimately made way for Amal as its successor after Sadr’s ‘disappearance’ in Libya in 1978. Amal claimed the heritage of the Movement of the Deprived but now – in a context of ‘civil’ (sectarian) war – much more unambiguously as a Shia movement.

How is this political heritage made relevant in the current context? Obviously the idea of a more militant defence of material interest of those neglected by the state, encapsulated in Sadr’s category of the ‘deprived’, seems relevant in the context described above. However, that was then and this is now. How has that particular idea fared over the years? It seems to me its relevance needs to be located in the current competition between Amal and Hizbullah for the hearts and minds of Lebanese Shia.
Amal has ceded its ideological hegemony to Hizbullah, but as I will show remains relevant in the Khandaq context. The master category for Hizbullah’s political discourse is the Resistance Society. The term obviously derives from its fight against Israel, but it actually has come to serve as a node to which many values are connected. Let me single out three. Firstly, as Deeb (2006a) argues, the Resistance is tied to what is perhaps the quintessential Shia ritual, Ashura (see more below). The commemoration of Imam Husayn’s brutal martyrdom at the hand of the ‘Sunni’ Caliph Yazid is explicitly compared with Hizbulah’s (Lebanon’s and Palestine’s) resistance to the occupier and oppressor Israel. Closely tied to this first aspect, a second aspect of the Resistance Society is the value of a broader claim for self-determination – not merely from Israeli occupying forces, but equally from nefarious influences from U.S.-Western powers, whether or not by Lebanese proxies. Finally, the ‘Resistance’ is also used as the container term for a particular kind of piety – a ‘pious modern’ (Deeb 2006a) – in which Shia enter the modern era, with economic development in all its facets, but in which they do not have to lose their soul as they imagine Western modernity has done (probably after reading the conclusion to the Protestant Ethic), but rather modernise their own spirituality, in moving away from mere “tradition” to an “understanding” practice of rite and duty. The running theme here is thus one of (personal, communal) autonomy.

Both Amal’s discourse and Hizbullah’s therefore offer discursive ‘openings’ to formulate a sceptical distance from the state (whether it be plain-tive or agentive). Yet, whereas Hizbullah’s is mostly a proud affirmation of one’s own strength and worth, Amal’s offer is premised on an identification with the ‘small man’ (again, it can be in a plaintive or in a more combative mode). Yet, these discursive heritages are not simply a question of the people vs. the state. The discourse provides openings for people’s sceptical distance and elective rapprochement from and to the state, as much as it does from and to each party. To give one small indication of the first: Hizbullah’s (‘sectarian’ or ‘Shia’) pride is also its bid for Lebanese nationalism: ‘Our Resistance society is the strength and purity we have to offer the nation’ (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 37, 66, passim); Amal’s focus on the little man is linked to a commitment to the state as the locus of collective action, which its ideologues (including Sadr) have tied to a commitment to (political) secularism. In the Lebanese political space, that is form

98 It is important to note here that these values are affirmed as not merely Shia values, but also national(ist) ones. On this – perhaps typically Lebanese version of the – tension between communal and national belonging, see the following paragraph.
of nationalism, in that it advocates transcending particular interests. To get a sense of how these polyvalent discursive traditions allow people to frame their stance towards state, nation party, I need to situate each in one last ethnographic vignette.

I turn therefore to a final example of both social regulation and ritual demarcation of the neighbourhood. This time the event involves not merely local elders who operate officially or informally as representatives of state of party, but more directly formal party apparatuses themselves. The example is the aforementioned, ‘quintessentially Shia’ festival: Ashura. With the Ashura festival Shia commemorate the defeat and death of the last serious claimant to the throne of the Caliphate on behalf of those who believed that that throne should be occupied only by those related to Mohammad by blood. It is a festival that lasts for 10 days where ritually enacted grief is central. Most prominently, two kinds of occasions organize for such grief: the gatherings in the so-called husayniyas, where a preacher tells the story of Hussein, his family and friends, and the sacrifice they made, to different degrees of heart-rending detail. Crying is an expected part of such gatherings, though clerical opinion differs on how open such crying may be. A second occasion of grief is the procession for men in honour of Hussein’s memory, where the participants engage in ritual self-flagellation. The degree to which this may be harmful to the body is also a point of contestation.

Perhaps due to the centrality of the festival in defining Shia Islam (as opposed to Sunni strands of Islam), it has been subject to various kinds of politicization and controversy – over the centuries as much as over the last decades. One change in the meaning of Ashura has been advocated by Musa Sadr as well as clerics and officials from the Iranian Republic, which is to turn some of that grief into revolutionary fervour, to rise up against contemporary forms of oppression, just as the martyred Imam Hussein rose up against the evil caliph Yazid. But here I would like to draw attention to the just mentioned controversies over the degree and public display of emotion and affect during the festival’s central events: the gatherings and the procession. I’ll focus on the latter and in particular on the form of self-flagellation that takes place there.

In Lebanon, especially in the southern town of Nabatiya, considered a centre of Lebanese Shia culture, the form self-flagellation takes what is called darb al-haydar: men recurrently tap or beat a cut (on their head) so the wound does not heal and the blood keeps flowing. As Shaery-
Eisenlohr (2008: 130-136) explains, the practice of haydar appears to have been introduced from Iran by local merchants (around the turn of the 19th century), and then was continued and elaborated locally, despite continuous criticism from an assortment of religious leaders. But the procession grew so big that it tied into to (regional) economic interests, served as a concentrated moment for marriage negotiations, and became entangled in political competition and conflict. It became a beef between ‘traditional’ Shia za`im Kamil As`ad and Musa Sadr (As`ad favoured and sponsored it), between Shia and Israel (who tried to stop it in 80s) and between Hizbullah and Amal, especially after Khamenei issued a fatwa against it in 1994 (he suggested donating blood instead). Hizbullah, in part following Iran here, put a ban on the practice and has been able to restrict its occurrence (they advocate more “symbolic” chest beating instead). For Hizbullah, the importance is the intellectual contemplation of the meaning of Ashura (cf. Deeb’s 2006a account again of the ‘modern spirituality’ that Hizbullah and other religious currents strive for and promote), not the “excessive” visceral experience of it.

However, Amal has never been so outspoken about the practice, in part because of their more strenuous relations with Iran. In fact there is a longer tendency to discredit the claim to authority of the Iranians on Shia matters, and locate Shia ‘authenticity’ rather in the Lebanese South – both for its historical pedigree as a centre for Shia learning, as well as its (more recent) vernacular practices. In fact, rather than outlawing it, Amal to some extent has identified with this popular character of the festival and, conversely, haydar has become associated with Amal. Historically they have tended to associate it with ‘Lebaneseness’, thus putting their best patriotic foot forward, and attempting to distinguish themselves on that score from Hizbullah, whose leadership would be ‘dictated by Iran’. Since 1997 however, after improving relations with Iran, Amal has officially tried to dissuade members from engaging in the practice, but somewhat half-heartedly so, as many (“lower-class and lower-middle-class merchant”) Amal sympathizers are still in favour of it (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 137).

Khandaq also has a march with ḏarb al-haydar. In its current form, it is made possible by Amal’s close involvement. They handle security and logistics. For example, when some corner boys had attempted to set up their own ‘Hussein tent’, Amal security guys came and took it down as it wasn’t an officially commissioned tent. Amal furthermore provided

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100 A small marquee made of black cloth, where men can socialize, at times over a complimentary cup of tea. It’s the kind of ‘Ashura tent’ I entered a few months later in Zoqaq al-Blat.
the flags for the march and a good number of the (young) men walking in the procession wear Amal-provided gear (special ‘skirts’ that catch the blood) [see pictures on next page]. That Khandaq should have such a procession was presented to me as a unique feature. On the eve of the first day of Ashura, there was palpable excitement in the neighbourhood. In a small press distribution company, the employees called me in to the street front office where they were enjoying their daily tea break, and called my attention to the ‘carnival’ that was about to be unleashed onto the streets of al-Khandaq. ‘You won’t find anything like this anywhere else in Beirut. In Dahiyeh, somewhat. And in the South, in Nabatiyeh.’ There was a slightly ironic sensationalism to what he described – to the foreign visitor – but he wasn’t distancing himself from it on the whole – he was part of it. The distinction that the employee of the distribution company had made, more or less explicitly, between Khandaq and other Shia areas, was reiterated post hoc by the corner boys just mentioned, one of whom was wearing a Band-Aid on the hairline of his front, a token of his participation in haydar. Aware of the status of the ritual, apparently, the boys explained with some emphasis: ‘you will only see ḏarb al-haydar here in al-Khandaq and in Nabatiyeh. Nowhere else’.

There are a number of points to be distilled from this. The most significant in the context of this chapter is that this practice of commemorating Imam Hussein’s martyrdom serves to reinforce claims to the popular perspective. Haydar particularly marks people as deviating from proper (bourgeois, urbane) civic qualities. Many in Lebanon associate it with backwardness, with people who are not able to catch up with the times, because of their socio-economic position or their rural (in casu, Southern) background. Residents must be and appear to be clearly aware of such perceptions of the practice and of those who engage in it. Engaging in the practice, and asserting it as one’s own, jibes naturally with the relative marginality that is implied in claims to the position of the ordinary man. Let me provide two examples in which the subject position of the ordinary man is explicitly formulated and inhabited. One took place in Abu Zalem’s little garden, with some of his regular clique and a guest, a former fighter in the civil war (which was also the time to which their acquaintance goes back). That whole evening was filled with tea and war talk – a recurrent topic in itself, but as old friends and colleagues reminisce, it naturally came to the foreground. Reminiscences aside, though, the experience with the war always serves to extrapolate to and comment on the current political climate. Since the connection mounts back to a time when Abu Zalem was still a member of a Arab Nationalist militia, the state of Arab Nationalism (or the lack thereof) is a common frame
for such political commentary. It is also a safe ground from which to talk politics with visitors with different confessional identities. In this case, Abu Zalem jumps from a conversation about a particular battle to an indictment of the current political class, in which a socio-economic frame (rather than a sectarian frame) comes in more explicitly. Abu Zalem starts off with distancing himself radically from a well-known political figure in Lebanon, after claiming to have witnessed him run from a battle scene in downtown “like a dog”. He then rather abruptly switches to a topic that was apparently an on-going conversation in the group, namely who winds up in the national canon of revered martyrs101.

AZ: They’re phoney, all of them. And they are to be honoured? If you want to honour someone, honour Muhsen Ibrahim102. He was on the street till the last minute.
Cousin AZ: He is smart, savvy in politics.
AZ: Honour Najah Wakim103. He wore his gun and he was there on the street. Those are the ones you honour. [silence] Whatever man! Our entire history is a fraud [tazwir].
Visitor: A fraud.
AZ: The hero isn’t a hero. That’s always how it goes.
Visitor: They imprison the hero
AZ: The hero is no hero! [To visitor:] that’s right. Just take Abu Daoud104; he died last week. He was one of the greatest heroes. He died as a concierge. Abu Daoud! He drove the Mossad crazy, drove the world crazy. He passed, Abu Daoud, and no one talked about him [asked after him].
Cousin AZ: Munich was even his doing
AZ: Samir Qassir105, now, for him, that traitor, the dog, that low-life, er, they now made monuments and held commemorations for him
Cousin AZ: They even made his statue sitting with his legs crossed [i.e. he’s sitting comfortably]
AZ: And a statue. Now who’s building a statue for Samir Qassir?
Visitor: [softly] Hariri
AZ: Now what kind of national(ist) hero (batal qawmi) is that? Er, Wadie

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101 Recall that martyrdom is not a religious term in Arabic. It denotes the ultimate sacrifice for all sorts of communities, including the nation.
102 Secretary-General of the Leftist National Movement (see Chapter 1) and head of the Organization for Communist Action.
103 President of the People’s Movement (ḥaraka waṭaniya), still a minor opposition party.
104 Commander in Fatah.
Haddad dies and nobody calls for a memorial, go on and ask them, that riff-raff, they don’t know who Haddad is. They don’t know who Abu Daoud is. They don’t know!

Cousin AZ [explains to visitor] Abu Daoud is Mohammed Aouni

AZ: Nobody knows Wadie Haddad. Nobody even mentioned him He came and went. Normally, if someone dies, they are mourning [hitting their chest], filming day and night, and they talk about his heroic feats, you won’t believe your eyes [gharībat al-shaḵl]. (Conversation July 2010)

The conversation then moves into a discussion of Abu Daoud’s accomplishments. After that, Abu Zalem gives one more example, of Adnan Sultani, the man who (probably under instructions of Abdel-Nasser’s secret service) killed Kamel Mroueh, a Lebanese (newspaper) publisher, in 1966. A respectful, combative and fine man, a man Abu Zalem met and respected. What of his fate? He died “poor, didn’t even own a car!”, despite his heroic achievement and his fighting career that took him all the way to Libya.

By positing an opposition between Samir Qassir on the one hand, and Abu Daoud, Haddad and Sultani on the other – while siding with the
latter ones, Abu Zalem and his tea party position themselves at a distance from the establishment. On the one hand, Samir Qassir, (“French educated”) man of letters, editor of al-Nahar newspaper and revered intellectual in bourgeois circles: a member and representatives of the cultural and political establishment. On the other hand, heroic figures of pan-Arab movements who are considered by that same establishment as controversial actors at best (Sultani assassinated a member of that very milieu). Moreover, Abu Zalem is couching this opposition, and the critique that it implies, in class terms – his heroic figures end up as meagre members of the working classes: as ordinary men. While to Abu Zalem this is obviously an injustice – they were certainly not ordinary men – the fact that he aligns himself with them (as do his interlocutors) implies an identification with the ordinary man.

While the identification may be implicit here – implied merely by the rhetorical technique Goffman dubbed ‘footing’ – it can also be made explicit, as we can see in the second example. One of the men that he has recruited once used the following anecdote to explain why things are more precarious now (2010) than they were at the time of the ‘small civil war’ in May 2008. While those days may have had the appearance of a (sectarian) war, since then a war of a different kind has been unleashed on the Lebanese people: an economic war. Take any member of the (political) elite, he says:

*The man goes from his house – air-conditionné [French in original] – to his car – air-conditionné – to his office – air-conditionné. While the ordinary man has to step outside and wipe the sweat from his brow, work and wipe the sweat from his brow, then comes home – and there’s no electricity! The fan doesn’t work! (Interview March 2012)*

In this interview excerpt as in the conversation above, class is an explicit ground for a sense of alienation from the political and cultural centre of the nation.

Since *haydar* seems to index belonging to the popular classes, engaging in it draws an embodied line under speeches like the ones above. What is important to note here, however, is that distance from cultural centres and scepticism of leadership is played out within the Shia community as well. As indicated, Hizbullah has attempted to move people away from the practice. Its politico-religious leaders and allies have done so for religious convictions (tied to questions of what spirituality is most meaningful), but it is also tied in to Hizbullah’s (not very successful) bid to national recognition and its formulation of patriotism. Each is built in part on the notion that the Resistance Society cultivates values and citizens that
form an asset to the development of Lebanon. In Shaery-Eisenlohr’s words, refraining

from a practice that causes such an outcry among many non-Shi’ites in Lebanon can be viewed as one of the most successful strategies of Hizbullah positioning itself as a respectable, organized, rational, and thus capable of participation in and, in the view of Hizbullah members, of eventually leading the Lebanese nation (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 138).106

Amal by contrast does associate itself to the practice and in fact even attempts to derive some of its social and political authority from its association with such authentic ‘local [Lebanese] Shia culture’. Arguably, the terms of people’s notions of (national and communal) belonging and political allegiance are defined at least in part in these competing terms107. Would one judge by the adherence to and participation in the commemoration and procession, many people in Khandaq would appear to be more on Amal’s side.108 But it’s more complicated than that. There are symbolic footholds to people’s adherence that chafe against each other as people’s weight shifts from one to the other. Amal is in fact widely criticized as a party. While Hizbullah is generally commended for its care of the mahrūmīn (which it tends to call the mustad’afūn, the disempowered [id: 39]), Amal is chastened for failing to do so. Moreover, Amal has traditionally identified itself as the defender of the state. (It had originally done so to make itself more acceptable across sects as the political newcomer, but it also follows directly from Sadr’s focus on making the state “care” for the Shia.) While people in theory certainly also believe in the power of

106 She cites no sources to attest to that ‘success’ and it seems doubtful given that ‘Hizbullah’ and ‘patriotic’ or ‘nationalist’ are not words likely to be co-exist in any sentence uttered by non-Shia. However, Hizbullah has indeed been successful in cultivating a reputation of discipline (source of admiration and fear for many other Lebanese). Amal does not have such a reputation, which in fact reinforces its popular image. Thus altercations between Shia youth and their Sunni or Christian counterparts are usually attributed to Amal file. Amal youth are, in large part of the public eye, zo‘rān: delinquents or thugs (source of disapprobation and fear for many other Lebanese). Class and political identity are quite close here.

107 Such competition is not merely symbolic, but takes place on a material level as well. Ashura is an occasion for Amal to cement its official claim to the neighbourhood as a political territory (official in the sense it has a near monopoly over street markers such as graffiti, flags and banners), as the organizing force behind this defining festival. It does so, however, against Hizbullah’s local presence and influence in the form of its myriad (associated) welfare institutions, as well as its dominance, hitherto, of the local (mukhtar) elections.

108 This whole discussion is of course not meant to imply that participating in Ashura is only a question of political allegiance. People’s participation is polyvalent. I have merely isolated this ‘political’ dimension.
the state and its importance, in practice as we’ve seen, they consider the state to fail continually. Amal’s association with the state project is therefore risky (in fact, Amal is regularly seen as the corrupt party [Leenders 2005: 18; see also Picard’s (1999: 15) rather bleak depiction of the party’s “electoral pragmatism”]). It seems that people from Khandaq draw, more or less strategically, on these elements from either party to articulate a sense of being left out in Lebanon: the identification with the popular and lower-class, tied to Amal; and the discourse of the *mahrūm*, formulated by Sadr, abandoned by Amal (in their opinion), and honoured by Hizbullah. The sense of neglect is therefore not only the basis on which people take distance from ‘the’ state or hegemonic cultural centres, but also from these very same parties. It makes both Amal’s failure to take care of its own and Hizbullah’s honourable bourgeois Resistance Society – and its complements in a more intellectualized spirituality advocated by major spiritual leaders like Fadlallah – less palatable. The ordinary man is a generally sceptical man.

**Sovereignty and the politicization of state, community and citizenship**

It is time to tie a few strands together. In the previous chapter, I suggested that based on the close involvement of political parties in the everyday environment of their constituencies, one would – and it’s worthwhile quoting myself here – “expect people to think and act from within a moral universe in which the political parties are a prominent fixture”. We can at once confirm that suggestion and qualify it in two ways. We can confirm it in the sense that the political parties, their actions, clout and discourse are not merely reference points for the way people talk, but they also align themselves with the parties, their positions and discourses. The defence of the integrity of the neighbourhood, as part of the larger military strategy of Hizbullah and its allies, is one clear example. While the (neighbourhood) community was also at stake, the subsequent claim “the state doesn’t enter here” implies an identification with the parties’ political clout to prevent such entry. The resonance of residents’ frequent invocations of the plight of the ordinary man with Amal’s advocacy for the deprived and Hizbullah’s care for the disempowered is a second example of that. People are part of, and speak from within, a sectarian world – that is, being a member of the Shia community is the starting point, while the parties’ leadership is taken as a given.

However, it would be wrong to deduce from such alignments and resonances a wholesale and wholesome congregation of Khandaq’s (Shia) residents under a sectarian canopy. There are two important qualifications to make. The first derives from the fact that people regularly inhabit
what I’ve been calling the subject position of the ‘ordinary man’. Recall that by subject position I mean a category of personhood or social actor. ‘Inhabiting’ that category (discursively) can be more or less explicit – one talks of the trials of living a simple life, denunciates politicians for turning a blind eye to poverty, and deplores the loss of respect and a place in society for the lower classes. Significantly, this enriches the meaning of people’s qualification of their area as ‘popular’, *sha`bi* as in, “of the people”. More than a simple reference to simple or poor living circumstances, it is a statement of identification. The ordinary man belongs to ‘the people’ – a community of simple, good, but marginalized men and women. My argument is therefore that while the ‘ordinary man’ provides a set of stances people can take, ‘the people’ provides the normative firm ground upon which people can take such stances. Being ‘of’ the people is being part of a moral community. That means two things. On the one hand it is a way of imagining and consolidating cohesion, much in the way Durkheim thought about society (and religion as its moral community), i.e. that ‘moral’ was primarily about recognizing the “kinship” with others, hence accepting one’s responsibility towards them (Durkheim 1995: 421, 429). On the other hand, Durkheim also posits that society, notably through the moral community of religion, endows the individual with the “faculty of idealization” – the ability to imagine an ideal society (id.: 425). In a similar fashion, the moral community of ‘the people’ provides semiotic, normative resources to critically evaluate, in the light of the ideals it embodies, actions and positions by both ‘the state’ and bureaucrats as well of each party and its politicians.

While the preceding point provides a qualification of the kind of moral universe from within which people think and act, based on the material of this chapter we can also qualify the involvement of the political parties in the neighbourhood. As discussed in the first chapter, the literature about Beirut has tended to understand that involvement as (one of the three modalities of) territorialization – of control over and the regulation of a particular space. Both the preceding and the current chapter have shown what such a political logic might look like on the ground: the political machines of which the mukhtars are a part, the partly localized operation of charity organizations109 (some of which are also part of political machines), and local big men like Abu Zalem (who operates in large measure in name of the party he represents – and in smaller measure with its resources). At the same time though, what this chapter has shown

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109 Localized in the sense that financial support is in part local – in the form of collecting boxes – and run by local mediators, like the mini-market operator.
so far, and this lines up with my reading of the production of space in Chapter 2, is that it would be a mistake to take such a logic as too monolithic a process. Firstly because the production of political territory occurs through a relational configuration of actors with different institutional ties, and positioned at varying ‘distances’ to the locality. This fractures any straight connection one might imagine between a ‘party’ (or ‘state’) and a space like a neighbourhood. It doesn’t sever the connection, but much like a prism may fracture and redirect light, the different relations and nodes in the configuration involve situated agency that implicates actions that are superfluous to the reproduction of political power\textsuperscript{110} and in some situations might even run contrary to its purposes.

Having mapped out this political constellation of the neighbourhood, having seen how various actors navigate it and use their experiences to construe a moral political universe, we can return to one of the main research questions of this thesis, as it was rephrased in the second chapter. In that chapter, I concluded that the conflict of interests between capital and residents, between exchange value and use value, did not seem to prompt political consciousness (let alone political action). ‘Resident’ did not appear to be an available category of personhood or actor, nor was residence the foundation of a moral community. In short, they did not situate the political – the fundamental questions that demand attention by the political community – in the (sectarian) territory. In this chapter, it becomes clearer where residents of Khandaq do situate the political. Rather than over conflict over space, they situate it at the contentious intersection of state, community and citizenship. They debate questions of state authority over the lives of Khandaq residents and link these questions to the converse autonomy of the community. They also evaluate the claims to communal representation and form negotiated and unsteady allegiances to those who make those claims. Such debates take place in a complex figuration of manifestations of state presence and power (like the mukhtar, or incursions by the army), local defiance of such presence and power (by squatting or keeping the police out), as well as means of social regulation and the provision of means of subsistence that are ideologically framed as going against or making up for the lack of state prerogatives (Abu Zalem’s network, charity organizations). In other words, contrary to most sociology of Beirut at least since Nasr (1990) and Khalaf & Khoury (1993b), who put space and territory at the very centre of the

\textsuperscript{110} Defined here as electoral loyalty and the felicity of the resultant claim to legitimate representation by a political party on the ‘political scene’ (i.e. the stage on which all representatives of constituencies and partisan interests perform).
imagination of the social fabric and political competition, space and territory are in fact merely instrumental for thinking about these more important preoccupations. The key political question therefore appears to be one about sovereignty. Now, such political questions - of (checks on) authority of the State over its citizens – have also seen their theoretical translations. Of particular note is a (post-structuralist thought) analytical project centred on the question whether, and if so how, states can “capture” their citizens, or whether the latter retain some “autonomy”, and if so, of what nature. This kind of question has been posed and answered with strong Foucauldian overtones in Western contexts, with a focus on how subjects and subjectivities have been encapsulated in the (discursive and ‘structural’) discipline of state (and market) projects. Foucault has certainly also been applied to colonies and their successors (prominently by Ann Stoler and Jon Mitchell), but as Hansen and Stepputat (2006: 3, 19f.) argue, statecraft in the colonies tended to take on forms quite different from those in the ‘mother countries’. They construe the two different tendencies as ‘disciplinary’ and ‘spectral’. The spectral would be characterized not by the routine encapsulation into disciplinary structures, but by incidental spectacular violence, to instil general compliance, and rule by proxy, with significant margin for (more) ‘local’ power-brokers and regulatory practices. Subsequently, the premise is that such colonial rule has also conditioned the kind of post-colonial rule exercised within the independent nation. Contemporary post-colonial states would then be characterized by ‘uneven’ or ‘layered’ sovereignty, in which local powers, whose authority is ‘informal’ (i.e., ‘unofficial’, implicit, sometimes personal) or derives strength precisely from being at the intersection of informal and formal\textsuperscript{111} (i.e. ‘official’, state) positions, have considerable leeway.

Recently, in order to understand such figurations of sovereignty, Deleuze and Guattari turn up more and more often as references for an analytical repertoire that could function as an alternative to Foucault’s. Whereas Foucault arguably focused his attention on, and developed his vocabulary towards, the ‘closure’ of systems of rule, Deleuze and Guattari were animated by a revolutionary desire for change and focused their analyses on the study of fissures and instability in seemingly closed and fixed apparatuses of power. Deleuze and Guattari’s writings have become conceptual sources for those in need of a language to talk about contexts characterized by non-closed apparatuses of power, like those in cases of ‘uneven sovereignty’, as well as to foreground individuals’ agentic scope.

\textsuperscript{111} I come back to uses and abuses of these twin terms.
Deleuzean analyses then pick a different angle from which to relate to the tension between the twin notions of ‘state capture’ and ‘citizen autonomy’, or in other words, to questions of sovereignty. Now, the situation in Khandaq lines up quite closely with such an idea of fractured sovereignty. Can this new literature premised on Deleuze and Guattari’s revolutionary analyses of statecraft help us understand the nature of political relations in Khandaq in a meaningful way? Specifically, can it help us understand the tension and alternation between the two predominant ways in which people understand political relations themselves – that is, either through a discourse of neglect or a discourse of defiance?

**Sovereignty, space and citizenship in the postcolony** An influential account of state-citizen relations in post-colonial, urban contexts is Simone’s (2004; 2011; in particular 2010). He draws clearly (though not explicitly) on ‘Deleuzean’ thought to do so, and – as my indicative Deleuzean frame immediately above would suggest – he emphasizes the instability in these relations. He investigates coping strategies by ordinary people and/or marginalized populations and the means at their disposal to deploy them. Key to such strategies, Simone claims, is the ability to evade positions assigned to them by state policy schemes and the attempts to police such schemes, if such positions would turn out disadvantageous to them (which they often do, as the interest of marginal groups tend not to be the basis of policy formulations). Simone calls the coping strategies by relatively marginal (urban) citizens “anticipatory politics”, a form of action as well as a kind of disposition, in which people attempt to “stay one step ahead of what might come, prepared to make a move” in order to “mitigate their exploitation” (2010: 62), whether that be on the labour market or by political institutions. Their moves could be qualified as slipping through the (institutional) cracks whenever one appears or stepping into a (political or economic) gap whenever one opens up.

His analysis tends to juxtapose two kinds of actors, each associated with a kind of logic of action. On the one hand are economic and state agencies and on the other you have people ‘on the periphery’. This distinction draws on a Deleuzo-Guattarian ontology in that it follows the latter’s juxtaposition of the rhizome and the tree that guides their analysis of

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112 If not a direct influence, then at least mediated through Manual DeLanda’s reading of Deleuze & Guattari: see Charles Lemert’s indication to that extent in the preface (Simone 2010: xi).
pretty much everything in Thousand Plateaus. Very briefly summarized, Deleuze and Guattari propose the concept of the rhizome\textsuperscript{113} as the key to a different worldview, one that takes into account 1) the multiplicity of connections between every thing (whether of mind or of matter) as well as the multiplicity of aspects or components that make (up) that thing; and 2) that these connections and compositions are, always, albeit to different degrees, unstable. All in all then, they warn against too simply or quickly assuming the identity of any thing. A view that too easily or quickly does so is ‘arboreal’ or ‘arborescent’ – tree-like. An arborescent perspective knows where a thing comes from (it can be traced back to its ‘roots’) and what it is (it fits into schemas of categorization, much like a genealogy). Deleuze and Guattari, however, are “tired of trees” (1987: 15). They propose Thousand Plateaus as a rhizomatic reading of reality and apply such a reading to a wide variety of cases, including political relations – or more accurately, state-society relations. Within these relations, arboreal logics are attributed to the State, which seeks to fix subjects and identities, and the rhizome to the ‘noise’ that inevitably accompanies the arboreal institutions of the state, the irreducible multiplicity of relations and actors in society that no institution can quite contain.

Simone transposes this analytical model onto the urban (and in particular the ‘post-colonial’ urban). In this view, the city presents an incredible diversity of actors and actions and offers new opportunities and possible shifts at every corner (the rhizomatic quality of city life); yet capital and state put in place infrastructures that are supposed to regulate and stabilize this diversity, to keep it ‘in line’ (the arborescent quality of governance), which it always fails to do some extent. Especially the anticipatory politics from the ‘periphery’ actively keeps urban denizens out of the line set out by various levels of government. This approach resonates with and has itself influenced recent trends in urban studies. There are two notable strands of scholarship that have drawn on Simone’s framework, in more and less overt and direct ways. On the one hand, you have scholars of the urban in the global south. Some of these scholars frame their work as concerning the postcolonial and cite other prominent names from this eclectic tradition, like Partha Chatterjee, Achille Mbembe, or Edgar Pieterse, whereas others tend to stick with more developmentist frames (like North and South) and include other authors in their referential packages, such as Jennifer Robinson and Arjun Appadurai. The main idea though is that the ‘informality’ found in cities in ‘the South’ should

\textsuperscript{113} The reader will recall that a rhizome is a kind of root that can horizontally shoot off new stems, which are themselves capable of sustaining new plants elsewhere.
be the basis to rethink our urban ontologies (and epistemologies [see e.g. Pieterse 2009, Mbembe & Nuttal 2004]), inspiration for which these scholars find in Simone’s work. On the other hand, you have a body of work that comes out of an approach to the city broadly inspired by the tradition of STS. While some scholars stick to more conventional – let’s say, Latourian – STS approaches, others seek to incorporate a Deleuzean perspective (for which Simone is seen to have made an important contribution), where the latter’s conceptualization of the ‘assemblage’ is put into conversation with that notion as it has been influenced by Latour’s work. While these two strands clearly diverge on essential concerns and conceptual traditions, they converge on an emphasis on creativity over routine, of chaos over order, and rupture over structure114. While certain among them (e.g., Gandy 2005, Ghertner 2011) warn against neglecting ‘structural’ factors, the analytical thrust is to show how informality creates openings (albeit fleeting ones) for people to work around ‘structures’, and generate new possibilities of action (e.g., McFarlane 2012; Bach 2010; Matlon 2013).

**Understanding power: arborescent parties, rhizomatic citizens?** The question is if this analysis of the (inter)play of capture and evasion, informality and indeterminacy helps us understand the nature of political relations in Khandaq. How would it help us to trace the networks of state, religious and party actors that residents navigate, and understand the way they conceive of their citizenship in the nation? The chapter presented various (‘material’) practices of social regulation as well as the provisioning of resources. In terms of the latter aspect, we have seen that housing is a crucial resource and stake in relations between constituencies and political representatives – political blocs confront each other over housing and it constitutes an important favour or resource that people plead for with party representatives and local big men. Yet housing is merely one of the more important (because most scarce) material resources that can be redistributed and exchanged – others include jobs, discounts for services, (alimentary) products, and administrative procedures and interventions. There are a number of people that one can go to – a local or central contact at a charity organization, the neighbourhood strongman, a local party representative or designated party functionary, or the mukhtar. These

114 The core of the idea is of course a much older one. Unpredictability has been taken as defining of city life by, famously, Simmel, and with him (Levine et al. 1976; Lindner 1996) the early Chicago School; in part the Manchester anthropological studies of African urbanism; and Sennett.
people each have their position within the political playing field and the exchanges of services with them subsequently (re-)embed – one might say capture – people in certain kinds of ‘political’ relations. Something similar holds for instances and practices of social regulation. Different players – the army or military police, strongmen, mukhtars – may preserve social order or guard norms of conduct. Through their interventions, each player marks people in relation to certain symbolically identified centres of power and authority (the State, the political party). These ‘marks’ may be subtle, not always verbalized or otherwise explicit, but occasional explications (like in the discourse of defiance or neglect) indicate that such symbolic stakes are in fact at stake. Yet, even when explicated, the understandings people have of the relations they maintain, and meanings of the practices (of exchange) they engage in, are not unequivocal. This chapter has also shown that people’s positions towards (sectarian) community, state, nation and party are ambiguous, or at least, contextual and shifting.

I come back to these discursive positionings below. First though, I want to extend my Deleuzo-Simonean view map of these material practices of regulation and provisioning in Khandaq. Take Subhi and Abu Kassem from Chapter 2, for example, who sought their residential refuge in the grey zone of illicit and illegal housing. The most obvious calque would be to view them as inhabiting or following rhizomatic logics, by sneaking through the cracks and trespassing onto illegal territory. The representative of arborescence would be – like it was for Deleuze and Guattari – the state, delineating where and how people may live. Less obvious are local strongmen like Abu Zalem and the (virtually present) political parties that back up an Abu Zalem’s work and, with some likelihood, also dissuade official authorities from clamping down on illegal squats such as the Khatib building. That presents something of an analytical problem for the dichotomous analytical frame. While both strongman and party aid residents in their ‘rhizomatic’ evasion of state-imposed order, they also articulate these residents within the territorial complex of a party’s electoral machine. A simple rhizome-tree opposition therefore does not quite seem to work.

It is in fact questionable whether the picture painted by Simone in his programmatic 2010 introduction (‘On Cityness’) – while mixing Deleuzean colours onto his analytical palette – is able to do justice to his own more detailed analyses he presents later in the book. There also, there are different kinds of capture, through different modes and levels of governance. For instance, in the first chapter, which develops the theme of anticipatory politics and zooms in on Jakarta’s northern periphery, he
discusses relations not wholly unlike those we’ve seen in Beirut. There is also a big man figure, the preman, who acts as an intermediary between largely irregular residents and more powerful actors. He does so in part thanks to his intimate knowledge of a formally excluded group of people. The mediation, however, does not ‘free’ people from the designs that the economic and political elites have for the land they live on – it binds them instead to certain compromises – compromises that yield relative advantages, but binding ones nonetheless. The preman himself also often becomes part of the local state (a sort of mukhtar) to mediate official and informal citizenship in ways that fit his own (financial) designs (such as selling much needed state-ID cards). The focus on the creative over the fixed in Simone’s conceptual outlines\textsuperscript{115} therefore seems at least partially misplaced, relative to his own case. In the following, I trace the misfit back to problems with the Deleuzean (more properly speaking, Deleuzo-Guattarian) perspective that inspired his conceptual work.

A first problem is the (rhetorical) operationalization of the arboreal by the focus on the state. Despite Guattari’s experiences with anti-institutional (one could have said, anti-arboreal) struggles in psychiatry, Deleuze and Guattari’s writing itself seems to select the state as the prime target for their analysis of the nefarious effects of arborescent thought and practice. This follows up from their joint work for the first volume of the Capitalism and Schizophrenia project, \textit{Anti-Oedipus}, (1983) which presents a similar kind of analysis (\textit{Thousand Plateaus} is its second volume). The key stake in \textit{Anti-Oedipus} is subjectivation in its relation to desire – that is, how the psychic apparatus is constituted. That has significant consequences for how they construe the state. Playing off major Lacanian psychoanalytical insights of the time, they combine the Freudian idea that becoming a person (subjectivation) depends on where desire can be invested (see \textit{Civilization and its Discontents}) and the semiological-structuralist notion that the assignment of meaning is crucial to operations of culture (cf. Levi-Strauss et al.), a mix to which they add a more materialist consideration of power and institutions (the Foucauldian moment). They thus posit that what may be desired depends on how a thing is named and whether it is subsequently proscribed or allowed: ‘what is what’ and ‘how should one relate to it’. Consequently, the state is treated primarily in terms of its ability to ‘code’, i.e. to fix meaning for its subjects\textsuperscript{116} (and only secondarily


\textsuperscript{116} The focus or emphasis in \textit{Anti-Oedipus} and \textit{Thousand Plateaus} on categories of identity, that is, on the ascription of ‘names’ or subject positions to ‘things’ and ‘people’ in their understanding of power fits squarely in the realm of identity politics that emerged in the 1960s and
in terms of a disciplinary apparatus built up around such coding).

This dimension of state power is less interesting to our purposes here, and we won’t take it into account, but it’s important to note that their reflections on the role of the state come out of their interrogation of the historical specificity of statehood, which they locate in its ability to over-code identities (human, nonhuman) and their reciprocal relations (i.e., to name and proscribe) that had been assigned by ‘communities’ (non-state social groupings, like tribes). This superior coding power later seems to motivate their near exclusive identification and critique of arborescent structures in the state in Thousand Plateaus (as the prime organism to make use of or to be constituted by such power117). In Thousand Plateaus that coding power translates into the concept of centralization. They use that concept both to extrapolate their semiological thought from Anti-Oedipus (the State as the central Signifier) and to explore different modes of social organization. Concerning that last aspect, the state’s arborescence manifests in its tendency to centralize, to structure and orient societal institutions and subjects in relation to itself, the centre. As a corollary it rigidifies social boundaries, as these boundaries become redefined in relation to the more powerful centre.118

I revisit the nature of these boundaries below. For now, the contours of the first problem become apparent. From the Khandaq examples above, it is clear that it’s not only the state that tries to stabilize relations and fix people – a powerful civil society institution such as the political party in Lebanon tries to do the same thing. People turn for help directly to someone who is allied to a political party – in the most prominent case here, Abu Zalem, who is a part of Hizbullah’s organizational complex – or they are aware that their breach of the law is premised in part on the ability of political parties to provide cover and negotiate state policing of the law, as with the Khatib building. Such awareness falls in line with people’s perception of the territorial, and thus political, integrity of party

1970s (Anti-Oedipus was written as an explicit reaction to Paris, May ‘68; Thousand Plateaus as a more cautious follow-up after the ‘70s). (See also Buchanan’s [2008: 13f.] characterization of the consensus among [French] theorists about the nature of power.)

117 Of course, the logic can be found in any place, and they see it for example in the postulates of (Chomskyan) linguistics, but in terms of their socio-political analyses, they relate it primarily to the state ‘and its derivatives’ (cf. 1983: 252).

118 Such an idea does not deviate far from Marxist thought of the time, if the importance that Lefebvre (e.g. 1991: 331) accorded to centralizing powers is any indication. It is plausible that the French state’s myth of its own centrality (manifesting itself in far-reaching concentration of decision-making and regulatory practices in Paris) has fed into the sociological imagination of thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari. (At least, we will see that their idea of the [symbolically or materially] all-powerful State looks curious in other contexts, where centralization is neither myth nor praxis.)
power. It obliges people – to a certain extent – to reciprocate in the form of electoral loyalty or other signs of partisan commitment. From the party’s standpoint, this is precisely the function of such support (if not its sole purpose): it strengthens its bonds with its constituency. From a simple rhizome-tree opposition, the paradox here is that people’s enlistment in a political identity or camp entails – or creates the conditions of – the possibility for people to evade attempts at stabilizations by the state. That paradox should entail a reconsideration of the specifics of Deleuze and Guattari’s sociological sketches in terms of the presence of – and relations between – arboreal institutions, as well as a reappraisal of the epistemological value of the notion of the rhizome: problem number two.

Of states and war machines: challenges to sovereignty Let’s first pause for a moment longer over the multiplicity of arborescent institutions (or ‘organisms’), their reciprocal relations, and the consequences for our understanding of the state (especially as related to the idea of sovereign governance). In order to judge these elements at their proper value, let’s revisit Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of the State, which they identify with sovereignty (and vice versa, on the whole). In extrapolation of their sketch of statehood in *Anti-Oedipus*, sovereignty lies in the state’s capacity to re-orient all social relations and values to itself as their primary reference point.119 In *Thousand Plateaus*, they refer to this as the interiority of the state and the process of interiorisation takes places through the twin dynamics of “capture” and “appropriation” (a capacity which they also denote by “domination”). In ambition, interiority – sovereignty – is total: any territory the state has captured and claimed as its own, it overcodes or appropriates to its purposes. Contrary to what one might have expected based on their characterization of the state as the great centralizer, they do recognize the state never quite fulfils this ambition. In other words they do recognize the fragility of the state (a staple insight from the anthropological study of the state). What is striking though, and this is the point I’d like to draw attention to here, is that in their analytics, the state’s sovereignty is only ever questioned by its radical other. The logic of interiority is defied by the logic of exteriority, which in the immediate co-text they call the war machine (thus, interiority :: exteriority :: arborescent :: rhizomatic :: capture :: war machine). By definition this precludes the possibility that other arbores-

119 In *Anti-Oedipus* they work with the term, but in a rather taken-for-granted manner – its deployment is more suggestive then analytical. The authors make more of it in *Thousand Plateaus*. 
cent institutions or organizations can challenge the sovereign operation of the state’s law. For Deleuze & Guattari, such organizations have in fact been captured and overcoded (and thus work to strengthen state-derived order – “political parties, literary movements, psychoanalytic associations, families, conjugal units, etc.” [1987: 116]). Interestingly, when they do acknowledge the fragility of the state by pointing to its unwieldy nature, as an organism with its various institutional and bureaucratic manifestations that, one would readily assume, are bound to enter into conflict with each other, they insist these organizations can only challenge state sovereignty when they turn their modus operandi from arborescent to war machinic, if only for a while (as examples they mention lobbyists and labour [union] conflicts).

What challenges sovereignty therefore is what evades it – was remains ‘outside’ of it. The exterior might be constituted by a network of relations that extend beyond the territory of the state (the multinational corporation, international religious orders) or “local” mechanisms such as those of “bands, margins, and minorities” that assert their rights in spite of or against the state’s imposed order (1987: 358ff.). The war machine that challenges the state are the relations that cannot be appropriated by, and for the good use of, the state, relations that defy the codes (identities, classification) and interpellations by the state. It is a refusal or incapacity of staying fixed, identical to the norm. The real challenge to sovereignty lies not primarily in the defiance of those codes, but in the automatic implication that the right itself of the state to capture and overcode the band or minority is in question (the judicial aspect of state dominion Deleuze and Guatarri are attentive to).

So the analytical problem becomes immediately clear: it is curious that Deleuze & Guattari posit that the state’s claim to territorial sovereignty could only fail in its inability to domesticate what is formally different from itself. At the very least, the ethnographic case from Khandaq shows that organizations formally akin to the state, like a political party, could effectively disable state mechanisms of capture or even dispute its territorial claims. Yet, one might counter, does Abu Zalem, as a local strongman, not significantly resemble the “chiefs” that ran the bands that Deleuze and Guattari imagine as the principle war machines? Recall that (on the

120 “The law of the State is […] that of interior and exterior. The State is sovereignty. But sovereignty only reigns over what it is capable of internalizing, of appropriating locally.” (1987: 360)

121 See also Toscano (2005: 40): “State capture defines a domain of legitimate violence, in as much as it always accompanies capture with the affirmation of a right to capture” (my emphasis).
basis of their reading of Pierre Clastres’ analyses of pre-state politics), Deleuze and Guattari identified the band or the tribe as that form of social organization that is (was) bound to remain rhizomatic: not only because, as autonomously functioning, nomadic groups, they were hard to domesticate by an external state power (such as a colonial state), but also because the power of the tribe’s military heads was always kept in check internally by the tribe, so that these heads always had to play “move by move” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 35) and hence were unable to transcend the tribe to become a ‘central’ (centralizing) power.

Is Abu Zalem not the same? He is the big man who leaves no bureaucracy of his own. Moreover, he keeps the state at bay, when necessary. Not only does the ethnographic examples show he functions a point of passage in citizens’ rhizomatic evasions (take, for example, Abu Hussein’s squat on state ground), he can also be shown to effectively dispute the state’s claim to sovereignty, understood as “a domain of legitimate violence”. If one takes Anwar’s case, the young man reportedly wanted by police, but whose freedom within the neighbourhood had been guaranteed by Abu Zalem, it effectively presents a negotiation of the legitimacy of state intervention in the neighbourhood territory. It’s not an absolute negation, as some boisterous (and mostly young) claims would want it, but still relative and locally significant. To equate on this basis Abu Zalem with a Clastrean chief, however, is problematic because Abu Zalem is in fact tied to, and his authority is in part dependent on, the ‘arborescent’ structure of a political party.

I believe this points to more fundamental problems with the dichotomy, ones that also showed in Simone’s trouble in conceptually capturing the complex relations of mediation in the north of Jakarta. In the following section, I propose an alternative to the dichotomy, but before getting to that, I would like to close this section with two related points. The first concerns the notion of territorialized politics in Beirut. Towards the end of the first part of this chapter, I suggested we qualify how such ‘territorialized’ politics might actually work, because it depends on relations between actors that have different ties to the locality (i.e., the ‘territory’). The subsequent discussion of Deleuze and Guattari’s work allows us to frame that configuration of relations as a question of how to understand the relation between space (‘territory’), sovereignty and its logic of ‘capture’.

We can see Abu Zalem as an ethnographic example of how state sovereignty may be limited by locally, i.e. geographically limited, rooted centres of power. While Abu Zalem does not operate like the leader of a band, the fact that he is ‘local’ is essential to his position. Thus, there is some-
thing more fundamental in Deleuze & Guattari’s analytical intuitions that rings true – even if their logical extrapolations take them to a somewhat alien social ontology. Their analytical intuition was that state power operates through a kind of de-territorialization of more locally bound forms of sociality and power. ‘Primitive’ society (the bands and tribes) operate on the basis of a closer vital connection to its material environment, which is an inherent part of the social process. The state breaks such a link by institutionalizing a form of social regulation that derives from a legislative and bureaucratic centre, removed (physically and logically) from the immediate environment. The state, in other words, has a (fundamentally) different relation to the territory it governs than the bands. Now, where their analysis starts to break down is when they assert that such a primitive territoriality (let’s not fuss over words here122) may only be maintained in the war machine, categorically separating the rhizome and the tree. By empirical contrast, we see that people’s induction into something of a political constituency (arborescence) depends precisely on a closer link to the material environment (which should have been rhizomatic).

Both the Lebanese state and a political party like Hizbullah are large-scale complex organizations, whose decision-making or legislative ‘centres’ are relatively far-removed, though certainly to different degrees, from the spaces of everyday living of its citizens or constituency. The power of someone like Abu Zalem – and hence his use for an organization like Hizbullah – is that he is precisely tightly linked to a space – a territory – and hence has more of a grip on unstable everyday living.

So while in principle Deleuze & Guattari’s perspective fits well with an attention to the networked nature of the workings of power, their conceptual understanding of the state and its sovereignty is patchy. This becomes readily apparent if one mirrors it to Hansen & Stepputat’s (2006) distinction between spectral and disciplinary power, mentioned earlier. The former modality is geared at exploitation and general compliance of the population, the other at regulation and constitution of the population. The latter implies close involvement of state apparatuses in everyday life, the first implies rule by proxy. While these are merely ideal typifications123, in 1960s and ‘70s France it was perhaps easier to see disciplinary encapsulation as the inherent tendency of state operations and the

122 Though I may point out here that it comes close to what many contemporary authors would designate with ‘informality’. Because of the close affinity between these two terms – primitive territoriality and informality – one can also say that contemporary Deleuzean analyses start to break down at a very similar point as well. Cf. infra.
123 It doesn’t mean there’s no discipline in the spectral post-colony, and no spectrality and fracture in the metropolitan centre.
progressive realization of state power. It was easier to assume the state penetrating (‘disciplining’) all aspects of society, and to consider civil society organizations (“political parties, literary movements, psychoanalytic associations, families, conjugal units, etc.” [1987: 116]) “captured” and “overcoded”, as mere continuations and consolidations of the state-derived order. However, if Deleuze & Guattari had ventured out of the metropolitan regions they probably would have noticed that such a tendency is not inherent at all, and that such organizations may in fact form counterpoints to state pretentions of authority and claims to power (they did avidly read the anthropology of the time – notably Clastres – but the discipline hadn’t yet moved on to questions of contemporary statehood).

The implication – and this is the second point – is a different reading of state power. It doesn’t have to be sovereign (having ‘captured’ social and political relations) to be powerful. In the ideal-typical post-colony, as well as to a certain extent in neighbourhoods like Khandaq, we must conclude that sovereignty is fractured and ‘incomplete’; yet that doesn’t mean that power is ineffective. The above example suggests that it may very well be preserved, through the chain of somewhat autonomously operating passage points. But far from wanting to provide a neat functionalist account, it could also be otherwise. The breakdown of relations between za’ims and qabadays in old Sunni Beirut during the war (see Chapter 3) is an example of the fact that functional benefit is no guarantee for reproduction. Local powers can get away from under the grip of larger power blocs (such as parties). Residents’ ambiguity about state rule and political leadership point to something similar: there are largely successful and functional claims to authority, but everyday life is still ‘unruly’ and may wind up constituting a challenge to these claims, when the winds of change pick up. At the end of the chapter I come back to the link between the unruliness of residents’ ambiguity and what it shows about sovereignty in Khandaq, but before that I develop this conception of a fractured but functional sovereignty in more conceptual detail, addressing the shortcomings of Deleuze & Guattari’s dichotomy in capturing such a conception.

Lines of code, articulations of power: molar, molecular, and flight

To recap: we have to preserve some of the truthiness of Deleuze & Guattari’s intuitions, but avoid the alien in their social ontology. For now, we can at least conclude that the arborescent cannot only be attributed to the state, or state-captured and state-derived institutions. The arboreal is multiple and different organizations are in competition with each other for control. While I have not challenged the notion of the arboreal per se –
it is a heuristically useful concept with which to think about what power actually might be – I have complicated the picture relative to Thousand Plateaus in terms of where one might find arborescent logics in operation. The rhizome, by contrast, turns out to be a more fundamentally problematic notion. Rhizomatic citizens, or at least their strategies, are – in some cases – rhizomatic only relative to one arborescent structure or attempt at control: it’s not that citizens evade fixation per se, that they are always on the move (the implication Simone and others have drawn from Thousand Plateaus), but that they may evade one kind of fixation – only to assume another one. Granted, Deleuze and Guattari recognize this – “no de-territorialization without […] re-territorialization” (1987: 303) – but their insistence on the ontological (not relative but absolute) status of the rhizome does invite further reflection on the value of the concept as such. Therefore I want to explore a triplet set of notions Deleuze and Guattari also employ, perhaps less well-known than the rhizome-tree dichotomy, that one can employ to address the problematic aspects of the dichotomy. These triplet concepts are the molar, the molecular and the flight. Deleuze and Guattari speak of ‘lines’ here (for what I have been calling ‘logics’) such that there is the molar line, the molecular line and, most famously, the line of flight. The line of flight is actually often (rhetorically more than axiomatically) equated with the rhizome, but Deleuze and Guattari are not unequivocal about that relation and one could argue equally well that both the molecular and the flight cover what they call rhizome elsewhere. In fact, that’s what I’ll argue, because I believe it will help our understanding of the rhizome’s relative quality. The molar for all intents and purposes is the arborescent. Deleuze & Guattari define the molar – taking inspiration from its use in biology for that which qualifies the perspective of wholes or aggregates – as that which identifies and imposes, codes and structures. What these lines articulate (“conjugate”) are so-called segments, such as social classes or genders. Molecular operations also conjugate. What sets apart them apart from the molar line is the measure of rigidity of their codings and structuration. The segmentation of molecular lines is “supple”: connections are variable, and importantly, cross-cut the (often binary) segmentation of the molar aggregate of which molecular segments are a (diverging) part. The molar and molecular are perfectly able to co-exist leaving each other intact. To take the human body as the appropriate example, it is whole from a molar perspective, but criss-crossed by all sorts of activities and shot through with interstitial spaces on a ‘molecular’ level. Molecular divergences of molar segmentarity do not in themselves hurt the molar whole. They might cause “blockages” to the molar system, but usually there is a sort of a compromise that keeps
the molar line operative as a whole. However the molecular is also one step towards the line of flight. The suppleness of molecular line creates openings that might give cause to a “run-off” – a line of flight. A new pathway, a new connection or relation that defies all segment relationality. Most likely it will be reterritorialized into a segmentation at some point, but by then it may have effected a change to the extant set of categories and their relations. Deleuze & Guattari sum up the different logics as follows: “The line of rigid segmentarity with molar breaks; the line of supple segmentation with molecular cracks; the line of flight or rupture, abstract, deadly and alive, nonsegmentary” (1987: 200).

It seems as if this intermediary and mediating category, which divides the rhizome into two different manifestations, is what we need to map out the set of relations we see in Khandaq. While people’s attempts to live in the margins and the gaps of state sovereignty undermines the ‘molar’ grip of the state, it’s not quite a rhizome in the sense of the war machine type, i.e. in the sense of a line of flight. The rhizomatic evasion by citizens is more accurately molecular, in that it represents the flexibility of shifting allegiances, never real escapes, always within the boundaries of the known. (And of course this map includes the important addition of more than one molar system, a systemic complexity that precisely creates the conditions of possibility for molecular shifts, jumps and infidelities).

It is not rhizomatic in the sense of Deleuze & Guattari’s famous introduction to Thousand Plateaus (1987: 21) of the rhizome as ‘anti-memory’, i.e. that which isn’t reproduced. Most lives are quite routine, lived within the contours of arboreal identities, roughly along the ‘rigid’ lines of molarity.

This brings me to the last point. Deleuze & Guattari, and Simone in their footsteps, seem to idealize somewhat the diversity and instability of rhizomatic living. For both, the paradigmatic expression of the rhizome appears to be the line of flight (not the molecular). For Deleuze and Guattari the idealization presumably follows their larger political engagements, hoping as they are to stimulate molecular lines to free themselves as much as possible from molar lines (that is, to encourage May ‘68 energies to liberate themselves from all kinds of fascism). As for Simone, the emphasis in his programmatic conceptualization of the (postcolonial) city is analytical in nature and hence more curious. For if the line of flight is the paradigmatic expression of the rhizome, then it doesn’t seem very determinative of city life (despite the fact Simone situates it at the very heart of “cityness”): changes to how cities ‘work’ are rare. The confusion may be due to different levels of analysis: from an individual’s point of view one may well see little lines of flight people seize on to make ends meet – to an individual a city may indeed present itself, at least in part,
as diverse and unpredictable. But the disruptive quality of that line of flight – the ultimate stake in *Thousand Plateaus* – is limited to say the least. It doesn’t lead to unpredictability on a ‘systemic’ level – usually, mostly – even though it has that potential. The progressive autonomy of the qabada-days during the civil war is one example where the latter actually ‘ran off’ from the established exchanges.

Two lessons emerge. If rhizomatic noise defines city life, then one should understand the rhizome initially as the “ambiguity” of the molecular level. The concept allows one to take inspiration from Deleuze & Guattari and heed their call to not take habitual (molar) categories for granted and stay attentive to the possible (which logically is as much a part of social reality as that which is ‘already manifest’), while steering clear from the pitfall of fanciful theorization of indeterminacy (that Gandy 2005 and Ghertner 2011 also warned against). In practice that means Deleuze-inspired approaches should steer clear from a fixation with the opposition between rhizome and the tree. The second lesson is the converse of the first – while staying attentive to the possible, we also have to ask how we should think the regularity and stability of most social structure, including ‘informality’. You can’t talk about interstices without also talking about the structures they interstitial to, to play off Simone. We already have the outlines of a more coherent theory of territoriality to address that question from within an urban sociological perspective. From that perspective, we can see territoriality as a modality of power through which the molar order is made to stick, even as supple subversions of that order are given some room for play.

**Conclusion** In this conclusion, I look back and synthesize the main themes and propositions of this chapter, and I look forward to what the remaining section should bring. To start with a look back, in the first part I presented the discursive shifts and ambivalences in the way ‘the people’ in Khandaq talks about relations of state, community and party (leadership). Having concluded the second part of the chapter, we can now see their full analytical significance. They are actually an important key to understanding how sovereignty ‘works’ in Lebanon, and arguably in

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124 Even if individual ‘revolutions’ are also still rare. Certain individuals may be more predisposed to these kinds of experiences, people in practical or existential transience, like migrants or students.

125 One could see another example in the Arab Spring: the line of flight was virtually present for a longer period in the political economy and social contract of each country (see e.g. al-Ghobashy 2011). (The ‘reterritorializations’ within the old order – only partially affected – are also illustrative of most lines of flight.)
post-colonial societies more generally (as per Hansen & Stepputat). The alternation between the two discursive frames I dubbed ‘defiance’ and ‘neglect’ through which people talk about their relation to the Lebanese state occurs in the ‘room for play’ they have to (“strategically”, pace Simone) draw upon the resources of the state and civil society institutions that are ideologically understood to be in competition with the state (Hizbullah or religious charity as compensations for the shortcomings of the state). Exchanges with such institutions also imply, to different extents, practical and ideological alignments. Similarly, the scepticism they formulate towards party and religious (i.e., sectarian) leadership gives some symbolic form to the “anticipation” that defines their everyday disposition – watching out for changes in the political constellation that may have consequences for them, much like the ordinary people that populate Simone’s book. Ultimately then, these discursive frames, and the scepticism that undergirds them, point to the nature of sovereignty. It’s not that ‘(so and so) people do not recognize the authority of the state’ and that ‘party so and so form a state within a state’, as one can recurrently hear in Lebanon, on the streets as much as in the press and public interventions by intellectuals. That would miss the point. (Competing) ‘molar’ forms of organizations constitute a layered and uneven figuration of effective power and provisioning, which forms an experiential basis upon which people (continually) give shape to their – equally layered – position on (state or party) authority (drawing on historically formed discourses of nationhood and communal identity, of course).

In terms of Deleuzo-Guattarian (inspired) frameworks and vocabularies, in so far as terms like “evasion” and “capture” flag a dynamic in how citizen-subjects and state institutions relate to each other (their heuristic value), we need to emphasize their relative nature. Evasion – by economically and legally marginal people – in fact is most likely to be navigation between multiple (‘arborescent’) logics of capture and, concomitantly, capture remains in fact partial or tentative. The ambivalence people show towards both the state (denouncing its shameful neglect as much as boasting defiance against it) and towards political leadership of the confessional community (aligning with certain principles it stands for but distancing from others) reveal the problematic nature both of a romance of rhizome as well as the premise of centralizing (state) power.

This brings me to two related points about the nature of ‘informality’ (the space of anticipatory politics, or rhizomatic, primitive territorialities, if you want to stay closer to Deleuze & Guattari). First, the emphasis on unpredictability or indeterminacy in this understanding of informality is too strong. Deleuze & Guattari themselves are ambiguous in this respect
– they claim one thing (the rhizome gets subsumed back into the arboreal) but largely do another (they’re more interested in the rhizome than in the arboreal) – so one might be forgiven for reading them in a way that emphasizes indeterminacy, and constructing one’s analytical framework on that premise. Still, to read them that way probably requires other ontological commitments, within which such an emphasis feels natural. Some of those commitments may derive from the urban sociological tradition. The emphasis on the unpredictability that runs from Simmel to Sennett reverberates here with radicalized Deleuzean overtones, in which the rhizomatic relative nature becomes something more absolute, as a property that gets incarnated in certain people or spaces, hyposatized into something we call informality. However, as we’ve seen, that perspective doesn’t really do justice to what we’ve seen here (and even in Simone). We have to understand this ‘space’ of informality instead as structured, organizing and ordering people’s lives. In this case, we see that both state and political party are pervasively present in people’s everyday lives, structuring (over-determining if you want to play with words) what is possible and what is not. However, one might counter, isn’t this precisely Simone et. al’s point? ‘Certainly, these structuring institutions and relations exist, but they don’t cover all aspects of people’s lives and this is precisely the space of manoeuvre and indeterminacy’. Again, this case indicates that that would be a misrepresentation of things. People themselves are also bound to these structuring forces and relations, ideologically, emotionally, or in other words, ethically. They are not the proverbial hustlers working the system, or even merely ‘rational’ actors who weigh calculable benefits and costs. Even though these are certainly aspects of parts of their lives, the choices, strategies are limited by ideological alignments with and ethical commitments to the ‘State’ or the leadership of the political party, as the case may be. In the final chapter I come back to this point, that is, the need to see people as moral agents (rather than smooth operators in the marketplace, a paradigm that is the logical culmination, if not the actual intention, of this kind of thinking about informality, foregrounding individuals and their desires).

For the moment, let me extend the review further back, to the introduction. The questions with which I started out this thesis followed from a more basic interest in how people imagine themselves part of the Lebanese political community. In particular I was curious how the sectarian system would figure into their imagination of who they are. How do people relate to the sectarian grid, as a way of classifying residents of Lebanon? Based on the preceding chapters, we can summarize an initial
answer as follows. Firstly, people in Khandaq considers themselves “of” the people. Secondly, at the same time, people consider themselves as part of the sectarian community. Thirdly, people also consider themselves part of the neighbourhood. The first and second are the two predominant ways people conceive of their ‘citizenship’, and they are at a tension, even if they are not mutually exclusive. Each frame becomes more or less relevant depending on the discursive context and the speaker’s objective. The third is a polyvalent (technically, ‘ambivalent’) membership. At times, the neighbourhood can stand for the “the people”; at others, it can stand for the confessional community (at least for the Shia majority of the neighbourhood). When the second and third are coupled, they emphasize their sectarian identity and frame themselves as defiant and agentive members of the political community, combative even (“the state doesn’t enter here!”). When the first and the third are coupled, they emphasize their relation to the state and frame themselves as marginalized members of the political community (“they don’t let us stand”). While they stress state neglect, such stress derives strength from a normative discourse about the good state, even if those norms tend to remain implicit.

This brings me to the second part of this conclusion, a look forward. What remains to be done in the final two chapters? Firstly, we move on to a contrasting case, to those people who consider themselves part of ‘civil society’. The value of the case is double. Ethnographically, we get a sense of the range of ways people can relate to ‘the sectarian system’. As will become clear, civil society activists and employees take quite different positions, enriching our understanding of (imaginaries of) ‘citizenship’ in Beirut. Theoretically, furthermore, the comparison of the cases invites reflection on conceptualizations of postcolonial citizenship by a variety of authors (Holston, Singerman, Chatterjee), who argue for or assume a duality of kinds of citizens (or logics of citizenship), which is divided along lines not entirely dissimilar to the differences between Khandaq and ‘civil society’. While in the following chapter I will show how ‘civil society’ is a moral and discursive universe indeed different from what we have seen so far, in the final chapter I show convergences and similarities that any neat dichotomy fails to capture. That chapter will also develop our sense of how the subject positions outlined in this chapter and the next may relate to people’s (broader, political) subjectivity.