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

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Citation for published version (APA):

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Chapter 6:
Political subjectivity in the interstices of theory

The discussion in the preceding chapter of the ideological complex of civil society has primarily drawn attention to the differences between ‘civil society’ and the discursive space of the neighbourhood of Khandaq. I’ve also drawn attention to how people from each world perceive the other as different. You will recall form the previous chapter Abu Zalem’s alienation from the cultural and political elite of the country, who value all the wrong things and honour all the wrong people. From the Introduction you will remember how difficult it was for the people from the Zoqaq al-Blat project to engage the population, not in the least because of their ideas of ‘sectarian society’. Yet it is significant that even though people from both sides express a sense of difference and distance, those differences are of a greater concern for civil society folks. The lack they perceive among the people constitutes the very essence of what it means to be ‘in’ civil society: it is one of the prime obstacles to the progress that society needs and which ‘civil society’ struggles for. Interestingly, social scientific theories of citizenship resonate with ‘civil society’ s conception of the order of social things. These theories identify or presume, on one side, a citizenship that Lebanese civil society also works towards and to a certain extent enacts (i.e. a space for individuals, informed, who engage in advocacy and enlist media platforms to further their cause): a citizenship akin to the ideal typical citizen of ideal typical liberal democracies. On the other side, there is a citizenship for people who are actually deprived of the socio-cultural and legal preconditions for that kind of engagement with others and with state and politics, and who find other ways of making do. In this chapter I question and qualify the usefulness of that opposition in understanding the differences between Khandaq and ‘civil society’. At the end of the chapter, I show how an examination of political subjectivity may do more justice to these differences. Let me first review various influential authors who have con-
templated the nature of such distinctive forms of citizenship, in the context of post-colonial states. While these authors are not all explicitly in conversation with each other (though some are), there are genealogical links tying them together. The most ground-breaking work was done in the ‘Subaltern Studies’ group. The South-Asian scholars that made up this group in the early 1980s had taken to explore the position of Gramsci’s “subaltern classes” – the oppressed, the subordinate, the downtrodden – on the Asian subcontinent, in all its relational complexity. In other words, their project was precisely about bringing into empirical and theoretical focus those people marginal to the central order, and thus the people who most likely would qualify as being a different kind of citizen. On the basis of these exploration some of the first outlines of a theory of differential insertions into state-projects were formulated. James Scott’s work is a second influential account, and one tied loosely to the Subaltern school. He brings in a more traditional political scientific account of marginality, whereas much of the focus of the Subaltern Studies was on knowledge production and identity. The union of these two approaches constituted a rough framework in which others followed. The basic premise of all this work is that there are spheres of society, social activities or populations that fall outside of the grasp or purview of the state (we can see the continuities here with Simone here and why he would be attracted to Deleuze-Guattari). From that position of relative invisibility (Holston 1998, Boeck 2014) or marginality (Subaltern Studies, Simone 2010), the question is how they do encounter the state (primarily, and ‘society’ as the body of other citizens, secondarily).

In order to address that question, these scholars tend to work with a dual conception of citizenship. Qualifications of, let’s call it, the marginal kind of citizenship range from ones more in line with more conventional political theory, such as “informal” citizenship (Singerman 1995), to more exciting ones like Holston’s (1998; 2008) “insurgent” citizenship, to different qualifications of a special political logic at play, such as Chatterjee’s (2002) “political society” or Simone’s (2010) “anticipatory politics”. These forms are juxtaposed to a citizenship we think we are familiar with in democratic, constitutional states. The duality can be explicit (as in Singerman, who distances her approach from those who stare blindly on formal definition of citizenship and politics; or in Chatterjee, who

154 Of course, Foucault was central to the Subaltern project (though not to Scott’s), so post-structuralism was always in some way part of this body of work and the step to Deleuze is not entirely out of the ordinary.
opposes political society to the more well-known civil kind of society) or implicit to varying degrees. Still the ‘other side’ is always present as the conceptual and theoretical background against which the author is building her argument. As we will see, one of the crucial points of differentiation tends to be the non-ideological nature of marginalized citizenship. Thus, if we look at the formulation of what Scott called “informal, covert” “everyday resistance” in his influential *Weapons of the Weak*:

To require of lower-class resistance that it somehow be “principled” or “selfless” is not only utopian and a slander on the moral status of fundamental needs; it is, more fundamentally, a misconception of the basis of class struggle, which, first and foremost, is a struggle over the appropriation of work, production, property, and taxes. “Bread-and-butter” issues are the essence of lower-class politics. Consumption, from this perspective, is both the goal and the result of resistance and counterresistance. It is precisely the fusion of self-interest and resistance that is the vital force animating the resistance of peasants and proletarians. When a peasant hides part of his crop to avoid paying taxes, he is both filling his stomach and depriving the state of grain.

(Scott 1985: 296)

Scott is calling here for an extension of our understanding of politics, beyond the “direct, symbolic confrontation with authority” (id.: xiv), like addressing the state ‘as a matter of principle’, within the political field. Instead we should look for the fusion of “self-interest and resistance”, by means of informal networks in everyday settings and actions. ‘Popular politics’ is therefore presented rather straightforwardly as calculation; whatever role political consciousness, ideology or ideals may play in this game, it is downplayed.

Of the aforementioned authors, Chatterjee takes the distinction between the principled kind and the strategic kind of politics and citizenship to its most explicit levels. He takes up the Subaltern and Scottian differentiation in order to make an intervention in a different though related theoretical debate: that on the nature of civil society. The result of that cross-fertilization is also fruitful for us, as it clarifies the stakes and consequences of working with the distinction. Below I therefore discuss his work more extensively.

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155 with the possible exception of Holston’s work, to whom I shall return.

156 Downplayed to the status of what Scott called a ‘moral economy’ in his earlier work.
Civil vs. political society: the logic of rights and the logic of alliance

In Chatterjee’s work on ‘political society’, his principle bone of contention is with theorists of ‘civil society’. His bone concerns an often formulated point of critique brought up against civil society theorists, which is that the intension of the concept often does not seem to correspond to its extension. Let me build up to this point of critique in due steps. Civil society as a concept gained traction through the experiences and theorisations of political activism in former Soviet Bloc societies and authoritarian regimes in Latin America (in the 1980s). Activists as well as academics understood this type of activism as one growing out of ‘society’ against the ‘state’. Later, academics looking at Western societies would understand in similar terms social activism against the negative influences that the ‘(free) market’ has on ‘society’. Civil society is able to sustain such resistance, because it constitutes and cultivates a special space within ‘society’ at large. Thus, Walzer defines civil society as “the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks – formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology – that fill this space” (2003: 306). Such uncoerced human association is characterized by “habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness” (Putnam 2003: 326), informed by De Tocqueville’s “self-interest properly understood”, and contributes both to the “transformation of conflict through the creation of common consciousness and political judgment” (Barber 2003: 244) and “the effectiveness and stability of democratic government” (Putnam 2003: 326).

This very basic overview of some of the principle protagonists of this perspective suffices to indicate two basic dimensions crucial to civil society theory. The first is conceptual: institutions, people and actions are understood to be part of different ‘spheres’ in or of society (in Walzer’s definition, “spaces”); most accounts include a sphere of society, state and economy. Such spheres are relatively autonomous and internally coherent domains of social activity that are at odds with others, because their types of social activity and functional requirements differ. The second dimension is that the theoretical models are grounded in a normative preoccupation: the societal sphere is generally regarded as containing meaningful relations and activities that are under threat of potentially destructive activities in the two other spheres. In a sense, this is a folk sociology of contemporary Western society. It represents normative ideas about how modern society should be organized, and how it should function, with roots in political philosophy of the 18th and 19th centuries, popularized in the 20th century politics of liberal and social-democratic states.

The (at times) rather unreflexive normativity of these theories has attracted concerns from various corners. Critiques range from questions
about the validity of the sectoral or spherical ontology (e.g. Edwards & Foley 1998) to whether civil society really is characterized by equality, ‘trust’ and of the rights and duties of citizens (e.g. Wiktorowicz 2000). Wiktorowicz’ point has also been raised in a different kind of argument that questions whether civil society everywhere is really civil society. In part this has to do with the socio-political constellations (these liberal and social-democratic states) that were presupposed in civil society theory. Thus, Karlström (2003) concludes from his look at NGOs in Uganda that these often do not operate “independently” from the state at all. His and Wiktorowicz’ answer is therefore, well it may look like civil society, but it’s certainly different. (Gellner 1994 took a somewhat more dogmatic stance and concluded that as long as individual and associational ‘autonomy’ didn’t exist, “civil society” couldn’t exist either.) In response, other authors countered that, well, it may look different, but in essence it’s like civil society. Thus, Kamali (2001, for an historical case) and Herbert (2003, for contemporary Egypt) have argued that if you dispense with the “ethnocentric bias” in the conceptual specifics, civil society is a relevant framework for, in their case, the Middle East. This answer in itself raised the question how far we should stretch the empirical extension of the notion of civil society, or put differently, in how far one could ‘dilute’ the received conceptual apparatus of civil society.

As far as Chatterjee’s response (e.g., 2002) to that last question goes, his unease parallels that of most critics of civil society theory, but the way he draws upon his intellectual roots in Subaltern Studies also distinguishes him from these others. He does so notably in two main ways. The Subaltern Studies group had challenged the notion of an even integration of (post) colonial subjects into society and state. As Chatterjee explains (2002: 62), one of the core propositions of the group was that there was a division between an elite and a subaltern political domain. His ideas about civil society can be seen as an update to that original proposition. In addition, the Subaltern group was concerned with developing a positive social theory of (post-colonial) society (rather than merely observing that things are not as they are in the West). Chatterjee’s (and others’) research into colonial modes of governance therefore led him to critically re-examine the political scientific (and philosophical) categories with which one could analyse political and social orders. Again, he makes a similar move in his discussion of the ‘western’ concept of civil society.

His answer to the definitional problem of civil society then is to split off “civil society” from a mirror concept dubbed “political society”. The former concept should be reserved for action through voluntary organizations, typically formed around shared political interests (as it was used
by activists and early theorists). That is, a mode of action that citizenry, as members of a political community endowed with certain rights (the way Hegel envisioned citizens to be). He then introduces political society for all other types of association, to be used to understand those social constellations that do not form part of that citizenry – people who are treated as populations, to be targeted and managed (in the way Foucault thought about governmentality). The state deals with each ‘society’ in different ways, and (correspondingly) people within these groupings defend their interests through different mechanisms. Thus in political society, Chatterjee notes, we see a type of clientelist political leaders emerge that act as mediators between the governmental sphere and society. In such cases, groupings are not recognized as actual citizens, capable or worthy of direct interaction, but through mediation resources and some privileges are still redistributed their way. In civil society, by contrast, citizens who live and operate within the legal framework provided by the constitution, people band together in what we have come to call non-governmental organizations, and tend to subscribe to the modernizing ideal of liberal democracy, as something to realize to ever greater degrees. By describing these two ‘logics’, Chatterjee makes a distinction here, much like Scott, between citizens that are “principled” and perhaps even “selfless” (Scott) and citizens that are strategic, “calculating”.

It is elegant as a solution to civil society’s definitional conundrum. By being strict about the criteria of what counts as civil society, it rescues the concept from referential vacuity. However, that very strictness also entails the risk of hypostasizing it and its counterpart. Perhaps one may phrase the problem thus: it does not rescue civil society from its normativity. The notion of rights-bearing citizens who appeal the state on a rational basis is but an Enlightenment ideal that is only partially realized in liberal democracies. As Flyvbjerg (1998) shows and explains, even in Denmark, the most rational and democratic of all rational democracies, the state’s rationality is often but the rationalization of power relations. Still, Chatterjee does believe civil society to “actually exist” in the post-colony, albeit “demographically limited” (even if he doesn’t specify such a ‘demography’ ethnographically, apart from short circumscriptions like the description of civil society above).

How would the distinction between these two kinds of ‘society’, or ‘(political) logics’, fare in Beirut? To answer that question for the first concept, ‘civil society’, we need to go beyond Lebanese civil society’s self-understanding (i.e., its public culture), in order to look at how its associational activities are organized. I explore the tensions that arise between the public ideals that people in civil society stand and strive for (as detailed in
Chapter 5) and the strategies they (have to) devise to reach their operational goals. I then move on to the ‘other side’ to consider whether we can see Khandaq as a case of political society, and if so, how far that can take us in addressing what citizenship means to its residents and what they make out of it? In this chapter, therefore, I ask what being embedded in either kind of ‘logic’ would look like and what it would do for one’s sense of citizenship.

**Pragmatic programs to protect Beirut’s architectural patrimony** The examples I draw from below all stem from (urban) heritage activism. I have followed these projects with an interest in how people perceive and shape the fate of Beirut as a polis for the new Lebanon, after the end of the civil war, as well as how people find or claim a voice in the capital’s clamour. Yet, the myriad of activities that deal expressly with the city as such have not found their way into this text merely because of a selection bias. They do speak to widely shared concerns in Beirut. During the period of my fieldwork there was a marked resurgence of media attention and projects that thematized urban heritage. The first time a light was cast on the city itself in a widely mediatized and politicized manner in Lebanon was during the 1990s, when Solidere claimed Beirut and its heritage as central to rehabilitation of the nation. What followed were many critical voices that accepted that premise but redefined its corollaries, like what exactly counted as heritage and how it should be preserved. When the critical voices lost the battle for Solidere’s Downtown they strategically retreated to its direct surrounding 19th century belt. Yet, with time, that concern took a back seat to other concerns of the day. It was only with the increasing speed of destruction of much of the heritage in that belt, when the second major real estate boom picked up speed (2005 onwards), that many people, including a young generation that had not participated in the earlier debates and confrontations, engaged with the issue again. Thus, there were regular outpourings of outrage, sadness or nostalgia over a Beirut that was ‘lost’ or getting lost, because of callous developers, complicit or incompetent public representatives and people’s ignorance. Occasionally such statements found their way into newspaper reports, when particularly prominent sites came under duress or simply when media provided (friendly) coverage of the activities of one of the NGOs. Most often however, they were part of a blog or post in social media. In the offline world, there were also numerous conferences or public meetings that were dedicated specifically to this issue, or which for one reason or the other have included sessions that were thus dedicated. The dominant trope that guided such meetings was that of (collective) memory and (national) identity. Thus, when a rally was held to stave off the immi-
nent closure and destruction of ‘Beirut Theater’ – one of the oldest theater buildings in Beirut, known for the heroic (but ultimately ill-fated) attempts during the civil war to have ‘the show go on’, and which had been reopened in 2007 – an Al-Akhbar article headlined the event with a quote from one of the participants: “They are killing our memory” (2011-11-20, Zeinab Merhi). That quote is paradigmatic. The destruction of the identity of Lebanon (or Beirut specifically) is a frame that is frequently invoked, whether because buildings are seen as the deposit of collective memory and therefore identity (as above), or because the specific fabric and architectural forms that defined Beirut (and distinguished it from close cultural others, such as the Gulf countries) are being replaced by an ‘ugly’ and ‘generic’ new (‘Gulf’) aesthetic. Recurrently, though less frequently, people also made reference to what one may call a ‘right to the city’, in that the destruction of heritage also entails the displacement of either “Beirut’s original inhabitants” or “Beirut’s poor inhabitants” out of the city, as the new constructions are often unaffordable to the average Lebanese (cf. Chapter 2). With the speed of urban change, the recurrent occasions to lament a vanishing past and identity built up to an ever greater sense of urgency. It is therefore not surprising that even if most of the meetings and online posts were ‘merely’ plaintive in nature, some were meant to spring a public into action.

‘The Sanayeh Park Sit-In’: public spaces, private deals One such occasion where citizens were called up to stand up for the city occurred in the spring of 2009, a few months before the general elections in Lebanon. I received an email invite in full caps to a “sit-down” at Sanayeh Park to “SAVE & PRESERVE OUR ONLY PUBLIC GARDENS”: the “historical sites” Saneyeh and Sioufi. The forwarded email below explained the situation. It was written by an “urban architect and designer”, Fadi Shayya (who would also go on to set up campaigns to open up to the public the other only park in Beirut, Horsh Beirut).

Dear Colleagues, Friends, and Concerned Citizens,
After the atrocious decision of the Municipality of Beirut to implement parking lots in Beirut under the historical Sanayeh Garden in Ras Beirut and the Sioufi Garden in Ashrafieh, every concerned citizen of Beirut is urged to object the strategies of the municipality and join the sit down in Sanayeh Garden at 10:00 AM this Saturday 30 May 2009. The sit down is a civil action initiated by the Sanayeh neighborhood residents, which we hope it grows to encompass influential individuals, NGOs, and private sector enterprises. Please find attached the sit
down poster and invitation for your reference and to circulate as widely as possible.
I will be helping Mrs. Randa Zaiter (a Sanayeh resident and active mobilizer, copied herein) in coordinating this event; so, please contact me for any inquiries. I hope we can lobby as many stakeholders so we can advocate green areas, open spaces, public spaces, heritage, and most importantly citizenship in Beirut.
Best Regards,
Fadi Shayya
Urban Designer & Architect

It is clear that Chatterjee’s spirit of civil society lives in this email: the “concerned citizens”, who organize a “civil action”, to set up a “lobby” by “stakeholders” who will not only “advocate” for the preservation of public goods but ultimately for “citizenship” itself. An attached poster showed a child-like drawing of the word “memories” (dhikrayāt), with a tree growing out of the letter “ya”, the latter forming its root (see picture on page 216). It cleverly combines three themes important in this protest: heritage, the environment and (public/open) spaces for families and children. These themes also return in the online petition that was circulated around that same time and created by “Humanitarian Lobby”:

Please sign the petition to stop Municipality of Beirut from building parking lots underneath the historical two gardens in Beirut: Sanayeh and Syoufi.
They will be obliged to cut off old trees whose roots are deep down and later they might handle the situation for worse after it’s too late.
These are the only two gardens worth visiting for the habitants of Beirut, they are the only playgrounds for poor children to enjoy their time. Let’s not allow them to commit this crime killing the green and the Oxygen in our lovley [sic] city.
Please sign the petition.157

On the poster, in the meanwhile, underneath the word “memories”, the phrase “will be erased” indicated that the time was now to protect them. Therefore, the poster called on interested parties to support the people and friends of Sanayeh (ahali wa muḥibbi al-ḥadiqa) by attending the

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157 1,475 of the target 2,000 people had done so by the closing date of the petition, a seemingly random date in November, half a year later. http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/save-sanayeh-and-syoufi-gardens-in-beirut/ (2014-08-11)
manifestation, in which they would made their complaint “public”. An attached flyer, headed by the same artwork, explained the history of the park (which goes back to the Ottomans) and the significance of its various parts; it described the plans announced by the president of the municipal council, Abed al-Munim Aris, to construct parking lots under the courts and parks of the city; and finally listed the objections to these plans, as far as they concern the park: will the trees, whose history goes back “hundreds of years”, survive transplant? Where will the children play safely? How much new traffic and pollution will this cause? Moreover, have the residents surrounding the park not paid double the amount to live with a view and in a quiet and peaceful area?

It ends with the final declaration:

We will not accept the establishment of state projects that benefit personal, electoral or promotional interests. As concerns environmental sources, we propose to continue the preservation of the public sparks. [We should] even create more of them, and establish parking lots under those new ones, instead of squandering the old, and rely on other plans and decrees as well, such as projects underneath main roads.

The day of demonstration, though, surprisingly few people had turned up. The reason for the low turnout (some 30 people in all) was, as those present soon found out, that at the last moment, the original organizers –
who appear to be the inhabitants on the “Sanayeh area” – had cancelled the manifestation, because they had received a personal guarantee by PM Saad Hariri that the park would not be razed\textsuperscript{158}. The narrative people cobbled together was the following: there had been no change of plans on the municipal level, no plenary session, no public input or open forum for discussion. Instead, some of the organizers had managed to obtain a personal meeting with Hariri and Aris and the latter two had made a commitment that looked to many people present a lot like an election promise – a PR play or possibly in return for some form of support. (This story line was strengthened by rumours that the original decree still lingered in some drawer waiting for the light of a new day.) Hanane Hajj Ali, the actress who in Chapter 4 had deplored the high-rise construction around the Sanayeh park as well as the state of the Lebanese state (and who, incidentally, had been among those who heroically tried to keep the Beirut Theatre open during the civil war), was also present. She remained suspicious. If there were no official documents, then it was just a verbal promise made to others. The suspicion voiced by Hajj Ali at the manifestation did show a social rift in the people drawn to the cause – a rift between the residents around the park and the (‘hard-core’) civil society activists. The first ones had direct personal stakes in the matter (residential satisfaction, real-estate value), whereas the latter were there primarily for the ‘public’ cause (the value of public green spaces). Whereas the first group was able to ‘solve’ the problem in the end through their connections, the latter had drawn on their connections in the media and NGOs in order to create public pressure. (That the residents would possess high connections is not entirely surprising, given the “super deluxe” residential towers built around the park, one of which also includes a high-profile member of the security establishment who apparently had been able to establish a photography ban in the park [which itself caused something of a melee with the park’s security guards, during the event]. The irony of the “concern” for green spaces and heritage by these people, by the way, was not lost on some of the attendees, who did not fail to point out the fact their residences were built where heritage architecture once graced the area.) Significantly though, the first group of people resorted to “civil society” first, drawing on their connections there. Thus Fadi Shayya enters the picture, who in turn established the “civil society” credentials of one of the residents by introducing her as an “active mobilizer”.

\textsuperscript{158} Of course, the story as presented in The Daily Star (2009-06-02, Mahdawi) by Mr. Aris himself the following day was quite different. It ran along the line of “we heard the people and we won’t proceed. We were actually on the people’s side the entire time.”
Most likely, then, the residents had engaged both approaches, both out of strategic considerations and out of a genuine dismay at the idea of razing a historic green space. If we compare that to Chatterjee’s image of civil society in the post-colony, then we see a contrast between, one the one hand, the enfranchised nature of the Beirut’s middle and upper-middle class members, ‘culturally equipped’ (Chatterjee 2002: 63) to have their ‘voice’ heard in the public sphere; their attempts at exerting pressure on policy-makers through a real demonstration and the use of the media, like proper members of Chatterjee’s civil society; and on the other, the ‘dyadic’ (cf. Johnson 1986) agreement some of them were able to obtain, not like proper members of said civil society. Connection or intercession constitute the logic of such agreements, rather than rights and advocacy. I discuss the implication of the tensions between these two approaches at the of this section; let me first ‘thicken’ the ethnography with two further cases.

‘Save Beirut Heritage’: youth activism and establishment networks
The move to short-cut the civil process by reaching out to influential helping hands appears to be a more generally seductive prospect. While in the preceding example one could argue that the core of the “concerned citizens” would have stuck to civil procedures for political impact, in the following example I show that the core is as much part of the ‘political’ world as “self-interested” citizens would be. The example is the “Facebook group” (that’s a self-description) Save Beirut Heritage. The group itself was started in the Spring of 2010 and quickly grew to about 6,000 members (it has grown over the years to some 13,000159). The group however was not merely intended as an on-line community of sympathizers or empathizers, but as an instrument in raising awareness that found its corollary in offline activities. The trajectory of these activities should be illuminating about the power of ‘civil society’ and the lure of ‘political society’. The conversion narrative of one of the three founding members (and at the time of research the only three permanent and active members), Nadine, was quite eloquent about the trajectory of heritage as an issue of civil concern to which I hinted above. Five years ago “there was little consciousness”, she told me, but now young people are getting “interested”, in part still because of “the Solidere thing”. “I mean I don’t want to go political, but most people who know something about anything, they know that Solidere, Solidere was a crime basically” having expropriated land without any recourse to an appeal. And they completely changed the

159 Numbers per July 2015.
area. “Everyone says it was a very lively place, a place of diversity. Now it is not a place of diversity, now it’s like it belongs to only 5% or even 2% of the Lebanese population, most of the owners are actually not Lebanese, so the whole social change is more frightening”. (Interview July 2010)

The emphasis on “social change”, while dominant in the narrative about what has happened to Lebanon since the war, is a relatively minor strand of the heritage discourse more strictly speaking. It gained more currency with the latest real-estate boom, as displacement from Beirut became an inevitable consequence for many a family bought out of an older building slated for demolition. (The compensation sum people receive most often cannot afford a new place within the city.) Thus, she talks about the Mazraa neighbourhood, where her grandmother used to live. Nadine also picks up on this aspect as what defines her own approach, and perhaps, what defines a new generation in how it deals with this “old issue”.

This used to be a very traditional area, [but] when all these building are torn down, people are leaving and being replaced by people from different – let’s be real, the apartments that are being built are not for everyone, they’re luxury apartments. And the real inhabitants, they’re going and sadly, the Christians are going to Christian area and the Muslims are going to Muslim areas and Beirut is losing its diversity. So this is really, we’re building ghetto’s, this is the real problem.

This narration of what has been happening in Mazraa appears to be her personal conversion narrative more strictly speaking – this is when she noticed something wrong was happening and to this experience she stays true: it is not the buildings themselves so much as it is their inhabitants that are at stake. In terms of the heritage discourse we’ve seen of the Zoqaq al-Blat initiative in the previous chapter, then, there is therefore a subtle (generational) shift from issues national or local identity, which buildings express, to social justice (where class is the ground for concern, even if it is still primarily cast in terms of confessional identities).

The subtle shift coincides with her positioning of the group within the heritage (and more broadly, the civil society) scene. She profiled the group emphatically as a youth group – with a different, youthful, ethos. For them it’s about doing something, rather than being complacent. The “war gen-

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160 Not unlike Yazigi and Barakat, for whom touristic routes and buildings expropriated for public utility meant reconstitution of the national fabric, or the Sanayeh protestors, for whom standing up for public spaces meant standing up for citizenship. For Nadine, it’s not about old buildings per se, but about the diversity that gets lost with them.
eration”, they complain about things, but they have no faith in change, in standing up for what they believe in. They’ve been beaten down. Not so for this new generation. Hence, it’s not so much their issue that is new, but the way they want to tackle it is. They are inspired by more “activist” approaches, with activities like setting up a community centre, taking “direct actions” like sit-ins, perhaps even more radical options, like squatting a building or “sabotage”. Other tactics she considered distinctive was their use of social media (they were a “Facebook group”, after all) and focus on making “it” (the cause, the documentation) public.

Initially, about a month after starting the Facebook page, they used their page to call for an open meeting: a brainstorm session to come up with strategies to claim attention. Some of these more radical options also came up during that meeting. However, after a few months and a few more meetings and not a whole lot of action (direct or otherwise), the only strategy seeming worthwhile to them was to hook up to a politician’s ‘platform’ and influence. They had already entered into an alliance with the venerable heritage association APSAD (the ‘old generation’), which they primarily used for its documentation and policy proposals (information to get out in public) – the best of two civil worlds. Mostly likely through that association, and in particular by striking up relations with the notable and still influential Sursock family, whose matriarch heads APSAD, and having gained a certain measure of online notoriety, they were invited to join a special policy club convened by the Ministers of Interior (Baroud) and of Culture (Warde) which included APSAD, another Facebook group called “They are destroying national heritage”, Yazigi’s MAJAL (for initial sessions only) and Phillip Skaff, scion of a notable family and the then president of the Green Party. These relations then also enabled them and convinced them of the necessity to ally themselves officially with the Green Party. Skaff would be able to take them places brainstorm sessions never could. Among other implications, though, that alliance meant other more ‘radical direct actions’ were now off the table. Having failed to mobilize the larger masses, they had instead opted for high-level connections as entry points into the policy-making process. Dyadic connections were reinserted into this “modern” young “Facebook movement”.

‘Zoqaq Reborn’: Revisiting the advocacy for Zoqaq al-Blat’s patrimonial future The last example of the complications in building a

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161 The party had recently made a few moves in the direction of the heritage cause, most likely not unrelated to Skaff’s bid to clean up the Beirut River and redevelop part of it as a waterfront district.
civil society in Lebanon is the Zoqaq al-Blat project. While the amount of activities the project was able to organize was impressive, the results were less so. One of their practical objectives had been for the municipality to expropriate two buildings for the “public benefit”, a legal ground that provided the municipality with that competency. One building was a once splendid, though now somewhat dilapidated, mansion that once belonged to the poet Bechara al-Khoury. The other was a small complex that was once an Ottoman police station, then served as quarters for government employees, among whom the father of the singer Fairouz. The intention was to renovate these premises into a museum dedicated to the life and works of the Lebanese icon. However, as news of these plans leaked, the owner of the building precipitated the destruction of his ‘heritage’ property. In doing so, he undoubtedly hoped to stave off any expropriation plans and retain the possibility of selling the land at booming real-estate rates. (He also caused the organizers quite some headache as he kept interfering with the guided tours in front of the premises, successfully removing the stop from the tour.) Yazigi and others thus needed strong government support to overcome such resistance.

However, not long after the end of the project, a new municipal government was elected and the advances they seemed to have made with the previous incumbents were lost with the new mayor. Before, they had had at least two members of the municipal council that had taken up the issue of heritage and sustainable urban planning and who might have given it some momentum. But after the changing of the guard, it turned out that all the agreements that had been reached, the decisions that had been taken, the cooperation with the Paris municipality that had been initiated, had all been at the status of “compte rendu” – a status that meant the new council was in no way legally bound to observe these decisions. Moreover, it was difficult to get inroads into the new municipal council, which had been thoroughly repopulated. In a meeting, the new mayor made them perfectly clear that his order of business was parking lots and accessibility (I’m quoting Yazigi’s account of their meeting here). Whatever money remained could be used for designated heritage projects. The mayor had scheduled a meeting in which MAJAL, together with the (new) Organisation pour le Patrimoine, would present their vision and explain how one couldn’t disconnect parking lots from heritage, but it was cancelled without a rain check (informal interview July 2010).

Yazigi had hoped earlier that they would at least be able to show what was possible if people from the neighbourhood would get together, that “synergy” is possible, but in terms of impact on the policy process he was a bit despondent, a few weeks after the final event. Fearing the pros-
pect of having to work another two years to get people in the council to recognize the importance of their concerns, he mused they would have to change tactics if they were to have an impact. Of course, it could be possible that the new mayor only needed a little nudge, maybe he was just indifferent (though he might also obstruct their work actively). But a while later during our conversation, it seemed his final interpretation of the turn of events settled on a more political one: that the (new) municipal council is only there to execute a certain political mission, to work on the behest of the various political parties, all for sake of the balance of power – the ‘division of the spoils’ – rather than political parties choosing the competent people who are they to execute on a certain policy. The same went for the mayor – he acted directly under the authority of (Saad) Hariri. However, perhaps that was the single shimmer of hope. Hariri was still a young man, he might (still) be quite benevolent, open to this topic. (Here, Yazigi goes against the common consensus in civil society that tends to equate Rafiq Hariri and his son Saad as the uncultured twin-headed monster from the hell that is establishment politics.) If he were to have influence over the council, he would have to get to Hariri. The problem now was how to get to that higher political level. This was a different kind of lobby than the public, mediatized kind of lobby that Yazigi had advocated. As a mere head of an academic institute, he was not versed in this other kind. We discussed various possibilities, including talking to the Saving Beirut Heritage people who, by that time, had managed to get into a meeting with the Minister for Culture (and, as we’ve seen, fallen in with the graces of the once mighty and still reputable Sursock family). A different route would be to join the board of the Organisation pour le Patrimoine, which included former Beirut council member Ralph Eid and Philip Skaff. While all of them outsiders to the core of the political scene, they were one step closer. In other words, achieving sustainable urban regeneration had become a play of political relations and moves, rather than a project of addressing the state *per se*, as with the lobby ‘from the bottom-up’.

**Civil politics** If we compare these cases to Chatterjee’s schematics, then quite a bit of ‘political society’ seems to go into ‘civil society’. All point to rationalities that are publically disavowed in ‘civil society’: signs of ‘politics’ that are even contradictory to the self-understanding cultivated in public. Negotiations instead of accountability, backroom instead of public deliberations, tailored solutions instead of standard procedures. These should not be too surprising – the disavowal of politics is ‘weird’ in the sense that arguably ‘politics’ is what all social change needs, also in
Lebanon. Also, given that these dyadic arrangements are a social fact in Lebanon, the prospect and the practices are there for people to fall back on. Yet this quick comparison with characteristics of Chatterjee’s political society doesn’t quite hold. This has to do with the kind of analysis of post-colonial society and politics Chatterjee gives. His level of analysis is in fact uniquely on the basis of whole groups and sectors. He does not deal much with individual negotiations with individual bureaucrats, as others (such as Berenschot 2011; Gupta 1995; Hansen 2001; Tarlo 2003) do. Instead his cases are drawn from policy negotiation – through the mediation of local strongmen – on behalf of entire groups (such as slum residents). This kind of mediation – of groups and state through middlemen – is precisely not ‘dyadic’, in Johnson’s (1986) sense, i.e. the ‘personal’ relation between the provider and the supplicant. In civil society, activists seek this kind of connection (even if they do it in the name of larger causes and thus potential beneficiaries; but these are not party to the exchange). This ‘meso’ level of analysis is not problematic as such, but it shouldn’t stand in for the micro, as it tends to do in Chatterjee’s image of things. We’ll see how this tension between the levels of analysis plays out with his understanding of political society, but here we note that descending from an bird’s eye perspective of civil society (the ‘citizens’ who ‘advocate’ for ‘shared interests’) reveals a greater complexity of actions and rationales that characterizations in most scholarship of post-colonial citizenship would imply or allow. Perhaps this oversight is part of larger pattern – scholars like Chatterjee, Singerman, or Holston all focus on the ‘alternative’ form of citizenship and how it can complicate our understanding of citizenship or politics. Empirically and conceptually, they rather neglect its ‘standard’ counterpart. In the process they leave the ‘demographies’ and concepts that are representative for our uncomplicated understanding of proper citizenship or politics unexamined and self-evident. The preceding case-studies indicate that that may be unwarranted. Towards the end of the chapter, I propose a way how we could understand them differently. Before doing so, however, it’s necessary to get a better comparative sense of its counterpart.

Idea and morality in Lebanon’s ‘political society’ Hence, we turn to the other side of Chatterjee’s political divide, to ‘political society’. As we saw in the introduction, one of the key characteristics of political society (or equivalent conceptualizations of marginalized citizenship) was that the logic of practice was one of strategic pursuit of self-interest. Chatterjee situates this kind of action in the following type of relations “between governments and populations” (2002: 51):
[It is] a politics emerging out of the developmental policies of government aimed at specific population groups. Many of these groups, organized into associations, transgress the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work. They may live in illegal squatter settlements, make illegal use of water or electricity facilities, travel without tickets in public transport. In dealing with them, the authorities cannot treat them on the same footing as other civic associations following more legitimate social pursuits. (2002: 65)

Chatterjee qualifies the struggles of people who live on squatted lands to defend their presence and advocate for amenities through collective action (in concert with local big men and political parties or associations) as “political”, because they fall outside the “the terrain of established law or administrative procedure” (id.)162. Their politics is to claim the ‘right’ to live on the land on the basis of the fait accompli principle, acknowledging they have no legal claim to it. As one of the leaders that Chatterjee cites explains: “We have no other place to build our homes. We have collectively occupied this land for so many years. This is the basis for our claim to our own homes” (id.: 64) This is a politics largely devoid of ideology163. People in need of certain material resources – land, electricity, foodstuffs – and in danger of losing them, they enter into negotiation with (usually) the state in order to secure them.

Claims of necessity would also explain the shift in allegiance from one party to another. For instance, Chatterjee describes the case of a neighbourhood consisting of illegally squatted land adjoining the railway. The big men of the neighbourhood struck up alliances with the Communist Party in the 1960s, whose leaders then managed to prevent its eviction in the ‘70s. Since then, however, a neighbourhood association has been able to attract funds to build amenities like a child-care unit and a library, as well as to persuade the municipality to install water and public toilet facilities (even as the neighbourhood itself remains illegal). The clout the association now wields also results in authority in the neighbourhood. Similarly, with a new eviction proposal hanging over their heads, Chatterjee explains that squatters have shifted allegiance from the Left Front to the Trinamul Congress, because the latter’s leader might become railway minister and would therefore offer chance at protection.

In the following, I will complicate the image of strategy and calculation.

162 Much like social theorists as diverse as Dewey and Rancière have located the political there where the procedural runs short.

163 Chatterjee hints at “legitimacy as providers of well-being” (id: 63), instead.
One complicating factor is the ideological sophistication and commitments by individuals tied to the ‘client-based’ structure. I discuss two kinds of examples. One is the belief in proper procedures that is clearly a domain of civil society, as we have seen in chapter 5 (‘civil society’ members weren’t interested in politics per se, merely that it takes place in a clean and orderly manner). Proper procedures are also the basis for Chatterjee’s distinction: the “political” space of where rules may be bent in opposition to the “high modern”, civil space where rules are rules. However, the value of these procedures and norms that undergird them are not exclusive to civil society. The second example concerns the role one assigns oneself in the (moral and political) community. These roles, one’s political calling or sense of morality, are in fact larger and richer than any necessity-based negotiation would ‘require’. All in all then, these examples suggest subaltern society probably looks different from what you would expect it to, based on reading a Chatterjee or a Simone.

Before starting, I need to attend to one qualification. For my ethnographic discussion of ‘political society’ I return to Khandaq. In so far as we were able to situate Khandaq within the domain of Simone’s ‘anticipatory politics’, so its universe does resemble the cases upon which Chatterjee formulated his conceptualization of political society. Still, Khandaq is not some massive slum. Granted, Chatterjee’s demography of political society is wider than slum residents, including “[r]efugees, landless people, day labourers, homesteads, [those] below the poverty line” (id.: 65), but the question is warranted how comparable these cases are with Khandaq. In a sense, they are so only in a limited manner. This is because Chatterjee treats political society essentially as the relations of groups and state. In the block quotation above he defined it at the outset as growing out of government “policies targets at specific population groups”. The only case I have shown that corresponds to that was the eviction of the refugees from the old Christian neighbourhood. They were indeed treated as a group, through the mediation of political powers ‘on the ground’. All other cases present day-to-day interactions of individuals with various government apparatuses – especially the security establishment. However, these cases are still relevant, for a number of reasons. One is that they often concern (small) infractions of the law (petty criminality, drug use, disturbance of the peace) or the uncertain legal ground a minority of the Khandaq population stands on (those in who live in squats). A second is the mediation by various kinds of big men between citizen, state and party, while a third, related element is that people tend to be locked into political and electoral machines. For example, Abu Zalem would certainly qualify for a casting as one of those communal leaders.
that Chatterjee postulates as the nodal point in many of the “associations” in governmentally marginal areas. The issue of comparison, therefore, is not primarily of comparable situations, but one of comparable levels of analysis. I come back to this issue at the end of the section.

Proper procedures and the public good

As we’ve seen, the ‘proper procedures’ cherished by civil society folks may not always be followed in civil society (either), but to a certain extent the ideals are shared with inhabitants of Khandaq, even if the vocabulary to talk about them differs. Such differences are significant in what they say about each world, but they do not negate the convergences. Let me offer you a glimpse of both differences and convergences, by diving into a discussion of one of Abu Zalem’s pet peeves at the time: drugs.

Drugs were an issue that preoccupied people in Khandaq. There had been some cases of youth in the neighbourhood that had fallen prey to more hardcore drugs, and it could well be that the the incidence of petty criminality and youth delinquency were related to drug use. Given that Abu Zalem had abrogated the – mostly accepted – authority to maintain the social order, drugs became a likely area of intervention. His preoccupation was not only of a practical kind though; it also had strong ideological resonances. Those resonances did not derive in the first place from being part of a religiously pious political movement (i.e., Hizbullah), because while he accepted and conformed to it, it wasn’t his naturalized habitus, having come from and been trained within a secular party-militia. More likely it was tied to a more generally shared perspective that associated drugs with social and moral degeneracy (with the collapse of social and moral ties in the community, especially family ties), even though Abu Zalem gave his own spin on the matter. In his formulation, drugs are bad because they weaken youth who would otherwise stand strong to fight. It is therefore unavoidably clear that drugs are part of geopolitical play, or as Abu Zalem phrased it, “there are embassies behind it”. You see,

the man who carries a weapon is 18, 19, 20, 25. When he takes drugs, he can no longer fight. So if in all the region there are 100 who take drugs, that’s 100 who will no longer fight. Who would be behind this project? Israel? It’s like with the English in Egypt and China with opium. A society on drugs is a society asleep. It doesn’t stand up to fight.

(Interview March 2011)

Trying to counter that is a sheer impossible task, he admitted. He had tried to seek help and alliances, but found the proverbial closed door
everywhere he went. He had gone to “the Party” (Hizbullah – the Party of God – though he didn’t specific to whom precisely within the party), but they kindly requested him to deal with it himself. He had gone to the state – to the intelligence service and to the police (both regular and military). It seems he did this largely through his own network, officers he knew from his war days or from more current contacts in the security establishment. However, the officers also couldn’t assist him.

Yet it’s not that they do not recognize or understand the problem. As he complained to some of his guys and a few visitors, after Najah Wakim’s visit (mentioned in the previous chapter):

Are you telling me that the Drug Enforcement Office doesn’t know who’s selling? We’ve told them 10 times, there’s one in Hayy Sellom, at the bus stop, he’s distributing “Simo” (coughing syrup), pills, and – I mean, seriously [shu ’am tihi]? 100% for sure! Now who is covering him? Who? To top it all, the existing parties, we are asking them to come together. Well, we’ll see. Nowadays, for instance, in Egypt and China, they let the people get addicted to opium. If you let this part of society get addicted to drugs, who will fight? It’s the drug addicts who will fight, when there are no more drugs they stop fighting. This is what they did in China and in Egypt. And look, when you’re the party on the ground, and you say to the state ‘you aren’t doing anything’, well look man, then your job as a party – Here, come and see [I tell them]! There’s 1, 2 3 who are selling. But [they were like] ‘we can’t intervene as replacements for the state’. So: when you want to [as a party], you take the place of the state, when you don’t want to, you just blame the government.

So why, if the parties know what is going on, why are all sides involved trying to deflect blame and shift responsibility? For Abu Zalem the answer was relatively straight-forward when it came to the state, the security establishment and some of the political parties ill-disposed to the Resistance. They were either compromised or actively involved in the geo-political game of weakening Lebanon. “The problem is with the state, it supports drugs. [...] They’re closing their eyes. Someone’s [fi shi] telling them to leave the issue as it is. They want people hooked on [yibli] drugs.”

Take the Lebanese Forces, Abu Zalem’s old enemy in the early days of the war and whose political talking heads were recurrent recipients of ire in Shia Khandaq. Addressing the question in the aforementioned entourage as to why the street can’t be mobilized anymore (like it used to), Abu Zalem asserted it comes down to the youth being ‘worked’ by the wrong forces. “That’s right, that’s right, it’s the Lebanese Forces! It’s the
Lebanese forces towing the American line, who are distributing drugs, 2,000,000 pills. How else are they coming into the country?”

More difficult is the question why Hizbullah would also not tackle the issue head-on, seen as it lives by the strength of its combatant youth. Abu Zalem’s explanation ran as follows:

Those who are selling drugs are Shia – the Party doesn’t want to get make problems with the Shia of the Biqaa. They [Shia in the Biqaa] live off of it. The Party is telling the state – you guys, deal with it. And the state doesn’t deal with it. The Party doesn’t want to get into trouble – it would create a big problem. It’s at war with Israel – they can’t afford an internal problem because of drugs. (Interview March 2011)164

So he was left to his own devices. To his own admission, that’s not much. His work was on the ground, talking to youngsters and weaning them off as well as maintain conversations with local big men (in other neighbourhoods), about trouble makers and encouraging them to keep focused on drug prevention. To this end, he organized walks with his loyal clique through various neighbourhoods for a while – until his clique proved not so loyal and started dragging its feet, literally. (The official reason for stopping given to me by one of the clique was that serious threats to peace, in the form of youth clashes, had been eliminated with the demilitarization of Sunni forces. Whatever differences existed between various parties could be cleared on higher levels.)

When Abu Zalem talked to his superiors and colleagues in “the Party”, his impulse seemed to be to promote institutional decision and policy-making, bringing in ideas and suggestions, attending Party meetings. He thus treated his party as an organ, rather than a tit-for-tat type of network. This is quite similar to the ideal that animates those in civil society, namely to follow proper procedures for the public good. At the same time, it’s not quite the same, because it seems obvious to Abu Zalem that, at least in this case (of geopolitical proportions), there is no role to assign for the state, to follow such procedures or implement policies thus conceived, because it is irrevocably compromised. In such a case, when you come at it from a perspective from within the confessional system, the captured state is not the target of intervention, but something to evade or work around. Still, the dynamic of his efforts to put the issue on the

164 For a better sense of the politics that Abu Zalem is talking about here, consult Harb & Deeb’s 2012 deconstruction of the image of the southern suburbs under Hizbullah’s ‘complete control’: http://www.merip.org/mero/mero103012.
agenda indicates the ideal of a structure through which political positions could be generated and incorporated in the policies it defends towards government and state institutions.

‘Madani’ preconceptions about the “popular sector” might blind one from recognizing that the aspirations of the popular sector may well not be so different from those in civil society. Holston, one of the authors who work with this dual postcolonial differentiation of citizenship, is actually able to capture these aspirational convergences, even if his conceptual work kind of falls out of step with that analysis. His dichotomy, coming out of his Brazil research, is that of ‘entrenched’ vs. ‘insurgent’ citizenship. In principle it is based on the same premise that Chatterjee works from: there are people who, while being recognized members of the political community, are actually quite marginal to the political and social establishment. Yet Holston’s whole point is that ‘the other kind’ of citizenship is not one of a different kind of logic, but one that encroaches on and appropriates the form and substance of privileged citizenship. That makes it interesting to contrast with Chatterjee’s model.

Holston’s fieldwork over the many years has shown him people in (legally or politically) marginal situations progressively adopting the vocabulary (of rights) and the practices (law) of privileged citizenship in order to assert their presence. He recounts the example of a series of confrontations over time between residents of an irregular neighbourhood and the São Paolo courts. In the 1972, he witnessed how a court official was attacked when he announced residents their eviction had been ordered. They fought off the eviction, the only way they knew how – by physically resisting intrusions by officers of the law. As a resident told Holston: “at that time, it was a war, between us and the land-scammers. The law didn’t exist. The only law was might; it was violence. We didn’t know anything about rights. All we knew was to beat up the court official.” Then 30 years later, in a “similar” neighbourhood, a similar court official came to visit a resident. But now an advocacy organization was located in the neighbourhood and had been telling residents to refer any such visitors to them. Thus this particular Treasury lawyer was brought in the office, where the head of the association asked him “to look for the law”. (Holston 2008: 234) The law was thus invoked as the shared vocabulary to evaluate state action. Together they went through all the particularities of the case and the association was able to convince that the order had been based on faulty information or erroneous legal interpretation. The transformation of “belligerent reactions” by “residents of the poor urban periphery” into “the proactions [of] using rights strategically”, to Holston, is the transformations of the marginalized into citizens.
The case is specifically Brazilian, especially with its discrepancy between formally inclusive law that recognizes all as citizens, and an otherwise highly unequal society that divests many people of the capacity of fully exercising their citizenship. This is one reason why the urban poor adopt a ‘rights discourse’. While that may not be so relevant for Lebanon,165 that does not detract from the crux of the matter: Holston recognizes his subalterns’ desire to be full members of their political community (on the same premises as those who consider themselves part of civil society). For that reason, Holston is good to think with. It fits with Abu Zalem’s (and not only Abu Zalem’s) desire for proper procedures of governance, in the way of general accountability and the development of a policy platform, that we saw here. He may be less useful to think about the actual differences in ways that people pursue objectives. His insurgent citizenship does not differ substantively from entrenched citizenship. Insurgent citizens are people who have appropriated the rights and privileges previously reserved to individuals who had already been recognized as substantively full citizens in the extant “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière). It thus allows one to map out, for example, what happens in a process of democratization – the kinds of conflicts and contradictions of people seeking to gain or maintain social positions. However it does not fare so well in capturing the logic and language of citizenship for those who have not made successful insurgent claims (who depend on political mediation rather than rights, for example). In other words, it does not recognize there may be alternative vocabularies of political engagement. In the next section, I’d like to attend to such differences in ideological vocabulary and the imagination that they underpin.

Finding one’s calling In this section I therefore juxtapose stories from two residents of Khandaq – men enlisted in Abu Zalem’s little group – as well as from an employee of one of the NGOs I covered in the previous chapter. I compare the two sides here as a way of putting them on equal analytical footing as well as a way of bringing out more vividly what is distinctive for each. All three stories attempt to capture each individual’s political consciousness, trace it back to decisive moments that shaped it, to map out its defining values. The first two stories are of inhabitants (squatters) of the Khatib building discussed in Chapter 2. The infraction on the legal order this constitutes and the (perceived) cover for it by ‘the political parties’ situate them in this particular half-way integration into the political sphere that

165 Although with the advent of the ‘Arab Spring’, rights as a frame for discourse did make a more explicit appearance on the activist scene. See Coda.
Chatterjee described: an integration based on poor legal standing (citizenship), collective bargaining power and governmental pragmatics.
The first of these men is Subhi. I got to know him through a small group of younger corner boys who hailed me when I was making one of my first strolls through Khandaq, after having moved there. They were sitting in a make-shift patio that I later learned was the prerogative domain of a group of neighbours, friends and ‘followers’ of Abu Zalem. Subhi was one of them. (The corner boys meanwhile were tied to the place mostly through direct vicinage, though some were part of Abu Zalem’s extended family – hence their use of the patio.) I’ve talked about Subhi in Chapter 2 and his long searches for appropriate and affordable quarters, finally – or rather, for the moment – finding a home in a Khatib apartment. After moving in to the Khatib squat, situated down the road from Abu Zalem’s ‘office’, Subhi had become closer and closer to him over the years. As explained in the Chapter 4, the prime reason “the Party” contracted Abu Zalem’s services was to recruit and train young men for the cause of the resistance. This is where Subhi (interviewed March 2012) also comes in.

The story began for him in his teens, when he started “walking”, as the expression goes, with the other Shia party, Amal. Looking back, he didn’t talk about it with much affection. It was just something you did, he explained, all his friends were in the party as well and he didn’t really think about it that much. But even then, he wasn’t quite happy with it. When we spoke, it was clear to him why not. “Amal doesn’t take care of its boys. They won’t ask you whether you’re doing alright, or how things are at school or at work.” This all started to become clear to him when he saw that the converse was possible too, during the “July War” in 2006, when Israel carried out a large-scale retaliation against Hizbullah for abducting a number of soldiers near the Lebanese border. At the time Subhi was living in the southern suburbs, which the Israeli army also bombed. He fled the suburbs to live with his wife’s family, who was from the neighbourhood, along with a number of other refugee families. He got involved in the assistance to these families himself (for instance by delivering food packages) and he witnessed how the Party helped (literally, “served”) the people. As he recalled with unequivocal conviction: “The level of organization shown by the Party then was something unseen in Lebanon – not during the civil war nor after.” It was tightly organized. “When they needed people to move onto the streets, they moved onto the street. When they had to retreat, they retreated”. To him (as, incidentally, to many others, both admirers and detractors), what characterizes the party is “niẓām”: order or organization. And it was clear that it was this characteristic that drew him closer to Amal’s rival.
He also started drawing closer to Abu Zalem (himself one of the organizational nodes of refugee relief in 2006). Of course, he had known him before as well, but the contact didn’t really amount to much more than the respectful but perfunctory ‘hi and bye’. But now they starting talking more. In 2007 – Subhi had by then found a new apartment in the neighbourhood – he asked Abu Zalem to present his candidacy for party membership. The Party gave him a much more serious training than Amal had done. For one, it takes a long time to get your basic qualifications – and thus your military id. (It took Subhi at least a year, because in May 2008, when organized fighting broke out between government supporters and opposition parties, he couldn’t be deployed yet.) Moreover, the basic qualifications are merely the beginning of a life-long learning process – once a year he goes to a dawra – a training session – and he goes to religious classes every week. That points to the second reason he felt his training was more substantial: the training wasn’t merely military. Much more important was the political and religious education – especially the religious education. Through that education, he learned to behave better, develop better relations with others and, in general, to present to others an image of decency. Some of the components of this new comportment are pretty straightforward: like abstaining from alcohol and from fooling around with girls (as well as, one might add, abdicating (popular) music). But such comportment also includes paying respect to one’s elders and to stop cursing and swearing. “It feels good,” says Subhi, “people respect you for it”. And when people respect you, they also come to you when they are troubled by something.

This is perhaps in part where Subhi sees his societal role, yet he didn’t avow as much. He framed his engagement as “being ready” – ready if something happens. Such a something may be a small thing, such as an altercation between two hotheads in the neighbourhood (and indeed, Subhi was always alert and quick to intervene whenever, say, sounds of a fight emanated from the next street). Together, with Abu Zalem and others from the group, they also used to do the rounds of the mixed Sunni and Shia neighbourhoods in Beirut, to keep the conversation going with other strongmen, prevent and resolve conflicts between the youngsters. (After the events of May 2008 though, they had been absolved from that responsibility, which had been taken up higher in the party hierarchies, according to his explanation.) Yet, from the way he spoke about it, his primary reference point for his readiness seemed to be for ‘big’ military changes – the next war.

Subhi didn’t specify which war that might be. One may think of a next Israeli intervention, or of civil war (though the only enemies Subhi and
most Shia identify in Lebanon are the Salafis. Popular perceptions of Hizbullah’s – and by extension the Shia’s – role in Lebanon corresponds well with Hizbullah’s official discourse, which proclaims its weapons are only pointed towards Israel.). But (the possibility of) ‘war’ was infused into the everyday – at least as a symbol of the grandness of the dimensions of today’s life in Lebanon. Take a second member of Abu Zalem’s group, Bilal, also someone who slowly found his way into Hizbullah’s fold. I came to talk to him about his trajectory in life right after he and a few other members of Abu Zalem’s little clique had exchanged wartime stories and military credentials with a relatively new visitor to the nightly tea talks that Abu Zalem hosted. The war stories gave us the entry point into our conversation, after the others had left.

We know what war is, he started out saying.

May 2008, for example, was no war. In 2 hours it was over and afterwards [in the ensuing two days] nothing serious happened anymore. The young guys on the street might think that was war and may even be excited for more – they think it is cool to carry a gun. But it wasn’t real fighting.

Still, the event did remind him of the civil war (he is from ‘69) and made him realize that the country is going backwards. It was an important factor in his motivation to join Abu Zalem. He had been relatively close to Abu Zalem since about 2004 and the latter had already extended an invitation to join, but he hadn’t made any decision. He could have withdrawn still. But in 2008, he felt it was either yes or no.

2008 taught him that war was possible, that war is chaos and that in chaos, the “zo`rān” take over166. Zo`rān is a word that can variously denote those who live outside the law, criminals, those who disturb the social peace and have no respect or honour. It can refer to corner boys who are losing their way or it can refer to real thugs. In Bilal’s story, it’s the opposition to zo`rān that structures his self-narration. Thus, before Abu Zalem sought him out, and perhaps because of that, he led a quiet and withdrawn life, “staying away from those who cause trouble [zo`rān]”. Abu Zalem motivated his invitation to come and “sit with him” by the appeal to protect the neighbourhood from zo`rān. And in 2008, it all became bigger and more real. It’s the zo`rān who seek war, because in war they can do what they want. But he must protect and defend his family, and that’s

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166 The opposition of order vs. chaos, and party/state vs. troublemakers is a more broadly shared theme. See also the quote in fn. nr. 90 by mukhtar Baydoun’s assistant, about the nature of militias, in Chapter 4.
why he decided in 2008 that he must do what he can to prevent war. As he explained to me then, those are also the ideals of the Resistance: to protect yourself and your family, and to walk the straight path.

Today, he declared wearily, it’s worse than it was in 2008. Today he sees a different kind of war. It’s a war about money, for the economy. The state in fact is at war with its own people. The people impoverish and at some point it will lose control (and explode into war). “The problem is that all those in government are the same as those who were at war with each other. The very same people. And they are all thieves (haramiya)”. Until these war criminals leave and people replace them with others who work for them, it won’t get any better. “By the way,” Bilal added, “if it weren’t for the Sayyed [Hasan Nasrallah], it would have been war a long time ago”. When I interjected that Hizbullah is a party in government now too, he retorted: “Yes, they are part of the government, but they have stayed the same”.

Before moving on to a discussion of these two portraits, I introduce the third portrait, drawn from ‘civil society’. Nayla works for LADE, which was, as we’ve seen, a crucial player in the association of different “NGOs” that set up the 1998 Baladi, Baldati, Baladiyati campaign (My country, My locality, My municipalities167) for the resumption of municipal elections. Nayla was one of those who considered that campaign as one the first big victories “for civil society”. However at the time she was not involved in the campaign herself. In fact, she hadn’t even heard of LADE, though she had been aware of the Baladiyati campaign. Instead she was in college and getting involved in college politics. During her first year at the (public) Lebanese University, she joined up with the Free Patriotic Movement, the (nominally reformist) party headed by General Aoun, one of the major Christian (Maronite) politicians and a self-declared contender for president. At the time however, Aoun was still in an exile to France imposed by Syria, and the FPM was more a movement than a party. Nayla was in the process of being nominated candidate as an FPM student representative when she had her first clash with the political parties. The clash occurred over a national proposal to re-unite the different campuses of the Lebanese University that had all been created when the war made crossing over into the ‘other’s’ territory nearly impossible. It was a major topic among students at the time. But the FPM and the other major Christian party, the Lebanese Forces, voted against it, in Nayla’s interpretation, because they represented the position many Christians take, namely

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167 Or: ‘My municipal elections’.
that they are superior to others in the region. They were afraid of mixing with the inferior Muslims would degrade the quality of education and perhaps degrade the Christians in general. This was a disappointment for her, as she had not expected the FPM to display such ‘confessionalism’. Already then, secularism was a central value for her and her main hope for the country. So she left the party.

She had two more jabs at politics in the following years. Once, in the final year of college, together with some colleagues she tried to build an alternative, secular political platform as candidate for the student representative body. It didn’t work out. Students voted for their respective ‘confessional’ parties (just as they had also been in favour of maintaining the ‘Christian’ campus). The university is in fact, she maintains, one the most important battlegrounds for a democratic Lebanon. The university is the place where students learn how the confessional and clientelistic voting system works in Lebanon and to find their place in it. Everything that happens outside of the university, happens inside as well: vote buying, pressure and even harassment (into the very voting booth).

Her second involvement with politics and the party system was when she joined one of the oppositional and secular parties on the left, led by a charismatic former member of the once strong Communist Party and someone who voices one of the most biting critiques of political corruption and the woes of confessional politics in the country. The young members of the party were engaged and committed and they talked in extenso about the major political issues of the day. But she also soon realized that the party leader took to his own counsel and that the advice the young members formulated seldom seemed to find their way upward in the party hierarchy. For this lack of internal democracy, she decided to leave the party. She hasn’t tried any other parties since, because she knew what they would require of me to join.

Instead she found her way into civil society when she heard about Greenline, an environmental association set up not long after the end of the civil war (and can thus boast one of more the distinguished pedigrees of civil society advocacy in Lebanon). She had had an interest in environmental issues for some time already – coming from the village, she explained, she felt forest preservation to be especially important – and she had checked out Greenpeace before coming into contact with Greenline. However, Greenpeace didn’t work on the forest issue important to her (their most important project at the time concerned nuclear power) and, perhaps in retrospective, was also put off by the fact they hardly worked on local projects. This is where Greenline distinguished itself. They were organized at the local level, really working with people, for example
on public transportation, but also on Lebanon’s forests. She called in to become a volunteer. However, she soon felt out of place among a crowd made up primarily of (agricultural) engineers. She then heard about LADE on TV. She asked Greenline for a phone number (the two organizations have collaborated on a number of projects and at one point occupied the same building, a hotspot for alternative advocacy in Beirut, called ‘Zico’s House’). At LADE, she started out as a volunteer, then a media monitor (checking for incendiary language during election time) and slowly made her way up to leading positions. At the time, her most important project was the Committee for Electoral Reform, which aims to change the system of national elections (one of the most important components of which is proportional representation). One of the reasons why Nayla feels it is such an important project is that it extends beyond various actors (much like the Baladiyati program). They’ve reached out to the professional syndicates (two of which are part of the committee) and to universities, and they also engaged public intellectuals (like university professors). It’s more difficult to reach consensus, but when they do – mostly on a per-issue basis – they have much more mobilizing power than if they were just a bunch of NGOs. They could yet have a real bearing on the political decision-making process.

**Popular ideology, civil politics and political subjectivity** We can identify at least three themes in these presentations of one’s political engagement: the sect, political parties and the central, organizing value that underlies the framing of these first two. Whereas for Nayla that was democratization, for Subhi and Bilal order structured their ideas (get it?). The themes, in the meanwhile, have come up repeatedly throughout the past chapter and they certainly inform “civil society” discourse in Lebanon. The same holds for Subhi’s and Bilal’s stories: the themes we can identify come back in various constellations in the conversations I’ve had with other Khandaq residents as well. However, given Subhi’s and Bilal’s training in a political party, they may have been able to formulate these ideas, as well as what they mean for who they are, in a more eloquent and coherent fashion.

Let’s start our little exegesis with the discursive framing of the sect. For Nayla and others in “civil society”, secularism is a prime commitment. Secularism here is understood primarily from within a political frame – while she obviously condemns people making value judgements about others on the basis of faith (Christians as superior to Muslims), sectarianism primarily means the need to take religion out of the game of politics, to prevent politicians from vesting their interest in the structure of the
religious community. For Subhi and Bilal, however, the community is a social and cultural reality that needs to be defended against attacks. Such attacks are thought to come from outside Lebanon, primarily, though it can also be an affair between communities. Secularism as political ideology simply doesn’t play a role in their vocabulary.

The positions that parties take up in their perspectives varies accordingly. Nayla sees political parties primarily as an obstacle to reform, an obstacle to realizing her dreams for a better Lebanon. This is simply because most of them exist by virtue of the sectarian political system and thus are inclined to continue depending on it. In so far as political parties are outside of the confessional system – the ‘secular’ parties – they are dysfunctional. She recognizes their necessity however, as the organs through which, not merely in spite of which, change must be achieved. Dissatisfied with the existing parties, she has in fact contemplated starting a party of her own at several moments (but decided it wasn’t feasible). That idea is directly tied to her commitment to democratization though: it would be a different party for a different Lebanon, an (internally) democratic party for a democratically organized Lebanon. Leadership here is never top-down but always vetted bottom-up.

Subhi and Bilal take up a more ambivalent position that is akin to many a party member or supporter – one’s own party is good, but the other man’s party causes trouble. Bilal is specific in his accusation of certain parties – they are led by war criminals who have no interest in serving the country. This is what marks out Hizbullah for both men – it is led by an honest and prudent man who is there to serve the people. (And incidentally, it is in this aspect where Amal falls short, for Subhi.) It is clear in any case that being part of a party is central to their imagination of being helpful to their community and society and in potential at least, the political party is a guarantor of safety. This brings us to the last point. For Subhi and Bilal the party is a central tenet in their more encompassing belief in order. What Lebanon lacks is efficacious organization and rules that effectively keep (powerful) people in line. Incidentally, (strong) leadership is an important element of this, although again, they recognize that it is a double-edged sword with many leaders deceiving and dividing their people.

There are two points I want to raise. One is about similarities: clearly Khandaq is a place where people entertain and develop real political ideologies, just as people do through ‘civil society’. The second is about differences: clearly these ideologies are not the same. How should we understand the similarities and the differences, respectively? I address the first point now; the second point follows after a few pages. To rephrase the
first point: not only are these ideas underdetermined by any calculation of needs and interests between subject and ruler, but they are real ideals and personal values they are trying to live up to. These ideals represent what it means for them to be a member of Lebanese society today. Now, as mentioned previously, Subhi and Bilal are exceptions in Khandaq to a certain extent. Yet that does not detract from the argument itself because, firstly and fundamentally, beyond their specific discourse, the values proclaimed by ‘the people’ (throughout this thesis) do also pertain to a moral vision of society and politics (whether that concerns the proper way of deciding all things public or fulfilling one’s personal role). They should be treated accordingly. Secondly and more operationally, cases like Subhi’s and Bilal’s show the problem of assuming something like ‘political society’ in the first place. Parties like Hizbullah that educate their members are to be found everywhere, including, as we’ve seen, along the railroad in southern Calcutta. In other words, Khandaq might not seem your ideal typical case of political society (i.e., a socio-political space where politics revolves around the strategic mediation of group resources), but then you’d have to wonder if there is such a thing at all.

In part the problem is logical in nature. Chatterjee defines political society as politics for “most of the world” who are not, in practical fact, full citizens, and so they don’t invoke the high-minded principles on which full citizenship is based – they do something else to get by or ahead. They engage the polity around them through need-based, mediation-enabled negotiations. While that is not incorrect, the definition of the problem precludes a second look. It is also a methodological issue, however. As I indicated earlier in this chapter, one thing that distinguishes Chatterjee’s analysis and theorizing is that he discusses the political encounter in “political society” uniquely on the level of groups. If he would have descended further down to the level of individuals and the conversations and daily projects that make up their lifeworlds, perhaps he would have noticed his account of political society is somewhat poor. Again, not that I dispute the nature of the basic dynamic he outlines. There are however two dangers: one, if one lets the group level stand in for the micro, you probably won’t do justice to ‘political society’ as a society where people live. Second, you might actually misunderstand fundamental modes of operations – for example when it comes to alliances people make with mediatory forces: they help them make a stand in exchange for loyalty. To take Subhi’s example, he did not shift from Amal to Hizbullah because the latter was better at addressing his needs, but because it lived up its his ideals. Subhi will not be alone in this (nor are railway squatters). In short, Chatterjee is unable to do justice to these lived ideals.
Chatterjee is merely exemplary in this and henceforth I shall refrain from picking on him. In this broader literature more widely, quite often the subalterns and their brethren and sistren across the world do not appear as people with a full political subjectivity. A unsympathetic reading of Scott’s work on the “weak” would subsume him under this kind of literature, given that the lack of political consciousness (ideology) is the premise of his entire argument. However, the work of a different scholar strongly influenced by Scott might make the limits of this kind of analysis more apparent: Singerman’s (1995) meticulously researched and painstakingly argued study of the kind of political participation open to the “popular sector” in 1980s Cairo. Her work is actually more instructive than Scott’s because while the argument adheres in part to Scott’s logic, it is not as bound up with the specific argument Scott himself wanted to make. Furthermore, her research field stays within a moral universe – that of the popular neighbourhood – quite akin to Khandaq’s, even if the political context is quite different. This political context – authoritarian rule, under a younger Mubarak – is precisely Singerman’s starting point. She points out that standard political science (she cites Myron Wiener as its representative) tends to focus on the formal political sphere as its object of study. In doing so, it fails to understand much of anything in these authoritarian situations, because most people are excluded from that formal sphere. But that doesn’t mean that they have no impact on the political process. Or at least, that is her meticulous and painstaking argument. They do have an impact and they have one through “informal avenues of [political] participation”. These avenues of participation are built upon the “alternative, informal political institutions” they form “to further their interests” in the shadows of state governance (1995: 3), out in the rather messy inner-city neighbourhoods or outside of the city in the “auto-constructed”, irregular satellite cities. Such ‘institutions’ are constituted by networks that are deployed to make financial ends meet (like short term savings schemes), to get a position or favour through a local politician or bureaucrat, or services from a social charity. The norms that people take as points of orientation, and have to take as points of orientation in order to be judged favourably in the interactions and exchanges within these networks, derive from a ‘family ethos’ – a set of norms based on analogies to kinship – and from orthodox Islam (though she doesn’t emphasize this aspect). In her discussion of these exchanges however, Singerman, much like Scott, emphasizes the dimension of “self-interest” over norms – these exchanges are resources people need to make those ends meet.

The crux in Singerman’s analysis – a Scottian type of move – is that these institutions, networks and practices cumulatively change the order of
things in the polity, constituting a challenge to politicians and state-builders who need to respond to these faits accomplis. Scott analyzed goings-on in the Vietnamese rice patties in a similar fashion: one peasant stealing rice from the master doesn’t do much to impact the operation of the system, but when a lot of peasants start doing it, it becomes a weapon of the weak, necessitating change in the system. Such cumulative impact is in the final analysis what it means for the people from the “popular sector” (the sha’b) to be “political”, in Singerman’s eyes. This does not leave a lot of scope for political consciousness or ideology, for thinking about what kind of citizen one is. Singerman talks about something like ideology in two respects. Firstly, in respect to the official (‘formal’) political sphere, in so far as people have some opportunity to interact with it, and participate in it directly. Such interaction consists mostly direct appeals to politicians and bureaucrats (for services). In this sphere, ideology really doesn’t matter so much. Ideology is not what can distinguish politicians in an authoritarian setting, where there is only one official version of things. What does matter is generosity: the services they are able to provide. Formal politics, then, is “reduced to distribution”. (id.: 260) But as we’ve seen, it doesn’t look much different in regards to the second respect, informal politics. People are making ends meet, not engaging in “political” struggle. So she asks the question, “Where do informal political and economic activities fall in this typology [of politics as intentional and public] if people who design informal networks never would suggest that they are intentionally influencing the choice of political leaders at any level of government?” (Singerman 1995: 6f.) In other words, political activity is not a matter of consciousness (nor contention), but rather just that: an activity that affects the status quo. It’s in the effects of the things people do that the political lies.

Yet, she does review quite extensively the values that people embrace in judging action in the neighbourhood social sphere – ‘the community’ – which are made up of the family ethos previously mentioned: values “of cooperation, arbitration, and association with trusted individuals”. Moreover, she recognizes the potential ‘political’ nature of such values. For, as she argues, the values that sustain the family and the community

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168 To drive the point home, Singerman echoes Scott: “The important variable in this discussion is not whether a man or woman "intends" to act politically but whether his or her actions, individually and cumulatively, actually influence the political order, the distribution and redistribution of public goods and services” (1995: 7). For example, the short-term saving schemes that people operate keep private resources within the community and outside the purview and grasp of the banking system and therefore the state (in the form of taxes), thus weakening the latter’s resources base and reducing its clout an viability.
are “not solely expressed within the walls of their home” but “resonate upwards” into media and government when the latter are discussing issues that impact the family and people’s ability to sustain it. (id.: 71)\textsuperscript{169}

That is, the “community’s understanding of “the good,” of justice, and of fairness, based on widely shared consensus of values and norms” is also the basis on which “the sha’b judge national events and politics and envision a better Egypt” (id.: 43). In other words, she does recognize something like an ideology, but it never becomes quite clear in the book what role this plays in the practices of citizens and ideas of citizenship.

This is what we are ultimately interested in though. A more faithful anthropological account of (democratic) politics would take account of the multiple dimensions of people’s (embodied) membership of a political community. This starts by recognizing people’s political imagination as a vocabulary for their engagement with the state and the nation. As Singerman recognizes for repressive regimes, people have “subtle and creative ways” to express political beliefs (1995: 7). I would submit that people everywhere play subtly and creatively into the political culture of their country. In Beirut, I have shown two vocabularies, or styles of imagination. One is ruled by the master category of “civil society”, and another is characterized by the frame of “the people”. In the first, notions like democratization, transparency, and rights are important; in the second, order, community, and stewardship organize reflexive speaking about state and society.

We subsequently need to understand how such imagination feeds into how people are disposed to their political community. This is where we come back to the subject positions I identified: the citizen and the ordinary man. People self-identity as a “citizen” or as an “ordinary man” and they ascribe it to others whom they deem members of the same moral community, or call on them to take up that identity (especially in civil society, where being a citizen is a more like a project, always in need of renewal, in search for a more complete realization). Identifying with it, one speaks and acts from that position. Hirschkind’s (2001) analysis of circulating cassette sermons is attuned (get it?) to how morally laden subject positions relate to people’s sense of citizenhood. Hirschkind did research in social contexts very similar to Singerman’s, but in contrast to her study, he zooms in on the moral universe of religious orthodoxy. In particular he examines the widely circulating cassette sermons that people listen to

\textsuperscript{169} This is also where her painstaking argument recurrently falls apart – the links between the local political institutions like kinship and translocal institutions remain suggestive, putative, not so much demonstrated.
and discuss amongst each other in order to identify and cultivate correct Muslim behaviour. A key aspect of such ‘audition’ is thus engaging others with its contents and appealing to them “to abide by Islamic moral standards” (Hirschkind 2001: 10) as well. Thus, Singerman’s “popular sector” developed a kind of public. These cassette sermons “became the conceptual sites wherein the concerns, public duties, character, and virtues of an activist Muslim citizen were elaborated and practiced” (id: 11), especially in a context in which the Egyptian state could not offer such (conceptual, social, political) sites.

So while that public is primarily about being certain kinds of Muslims, it can also become about being a certain kind of Egyptian citizen. The public is “emergently” political in two ways. The first is tied to the form of discourse it promotes and makes possible, and thus a certain kind of subject. The preacher is the model here that listeners seek to emulate: “an active and concerned citizen, one who, having honed the skills of public concern and careful listening, is able, through example and persuasion, to move fellow Muslims toward correct forms of comportment and social responsibility” (2006: 131). The second lies in the content of the deliberations. While primarily about life in the neighbourhood, government policies can impact that life and as such draw reflections about their value and impact. Oftentimes these reflections were quite critical because the discourse diverged from key reigning moral notions about the nature of the Egyptian nation. Thus, “[w]hile participants of this movement clearly considered themselves to be Egyptian citizens, they also cultivated sentiments, loyalties, and styles of public conduct that stood in tension with the moral and political exigencies and modes of self-identification of national citizenship (id.: 116f.).

Hirschkind therefore seems to draw attention to what Singerman also identified but tended to gloss over. His account does not reveal subaltern citizens who are merely concerned with “self-interest and resistance”, but instead shows their active reflection in an alternative vocabulary from the standard “modern” (secular) Egyptian ‘national citizen’.

Things looks quite similar in Khandaq, actually. Subhi and Bilal looked at the world around them and decided to become different persons. While ‘order’ was an important trope to talk about society, it significant that their turn to Abu Zalem and Hizbullah was primarily about getting their own lives in order. To take care of themselves and their family and be prepared for the worst. To be righteous persons. It got them self-respect, in part through the respect they earned from others. They are, in the full sense of the world, moral subjects: in the light of “higher-order” values (Taylor) they undertake to discern right from wrong and enact that dis-
tinction as their responsibility towards a community of mutually recognized equals (cf. Durkheim’s moral members of society). Moreover, the respectability, and the recognisability it implies, point to the fact that, not unlike Hirschkind’s “activist Muslim” Egyptian citizens, this disposition forms a behavioural template for other members of the public as well (even if its emulation isn’t so proactively encouraged as in the cassette sermon public). “Order” bolsters a language of citizenship.

Speaking such a language – taking up the subject position (both discursively and bodily) – establishes and consolidates other dimensions of that subjective disposition: affects like aspirations or anxiety; as well as forms of engagements with others, the kinds of claims one makes from institutions (cf. Tilly 2008), or models for action in certain situations. To take this back to Khandaq, these dimensions are mostly tied into the community and life in the neighbourhood. Fear for war, worries about making ends meet, indignation at the plight of the good but poor people, placing one’s hope in – or gaining some sense of control over the future by joining – the Resistance. People have to wage other options to make ends meet (like changing houses), and try to ‘be ready’ (to run towards commotion) and be a steward to the community and to neighbours (exercise neighbourliness). They work to have things ‘in order’ and expect others to do so as well.

To understand this complex of language, affect and practice it remains crucial to take into account the (material) context in which people speak and act. In Chapter 4 it became clear that Khandaq residents’ identification with ‘the people’, and the critical moral horizon it offered, in part grew out of the space between state and communal (party) claims to sovereignty and authority. In veering between (allegiance to) these claims by political parties and various institutions of the state170, (marginal) residents in Khandaq formulate their political imagination and learn to address political institutions. This governmental situation constitutes the “arena” or “space” for such political subjectivity. What does this look like for ‘civil society’? Firstly, ‘civil society’ provides two kinds of arena that structure people’s subjectivity: one arena consists of public gatherings; the other of private meetings. The public arena is ideologically primary. A large part of being part of ‘civil society’ consists of becoming a different type of moral subject: by cultivating a special public persona, able to debate issues in the appropriate manner, being “open” to (and curious about) others (from other ‘walks of life’). These are the (discursive) prac-

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170 Contextually varying, depending on what issue was at stake, whether that was planning, justice, public order, etc.
tices of a subject that desires to be proud of Lebanon, but experiences (and voices) exasperation and indignation about corruption and irresponsible sectarian leaders. Claims are made in public and are public claims, ideally. In addition to these discursive practices, being a civil subject is also about the knowledge one develops about knowing how to lobby, as well the network it requires one to nurture (with other NGOs, activists, and, especially, media). However, we have also seen that claims in the name of the public are at times made in private (backroom) settings. Doing so is a familiar template for strategic action, but depending on people’s networks as well as how rooted one is in a civil subjectivity, it is not an easy one to execute. Yazigi and Hajj Ali are two examples of people who have neither network, disposition nor ideology for politicking (the razing of Sanayeh would have been the straw that broke the camel’s back for Hajj Ali – in that moment of anger and frustration, she said would leave the country, after and in spite of all the years of activism and struggle. That would essentially be an admission that the political game is stronger than activism, and that she’s unwilling or unable to play that game).

Conclusion

This chapter identified two analytical problems: the current understanding of what subaltern (political) life looks like does not do justice to people’s reflexivity; and the strategic (‘political’) action by members of civil society seemed to defy their own self-definitions and by extension our understanding of what civil society ‘is’. The chapter subsequently proposed political subjectivity as an analytical lens that would be able to do justice to the complexities of each (political) universe. Let me review these three points.

As to the first point, it is in fact a dual argument. The first part argues that the political calculus that Chatterjee theorizes and describes is a rather poor conception of the stakes of “politics for most of the world” or the “governed”, as he identifies them. We can see now that claiming to be “from the people” doesn’t preclude a sense of (full-bodied) citizenship. Folks who speak from the position of ‘the people’ do in fact also claim citizenship, i.e. full membership of the nation (even if people in their civil counterpart don’t always recognize that). It’s ‘simply’ that their ‘citizenship’ is not so intimately tied to the word and concept of “citizen” itself, like it is in “civil society”. In “civil society” it was tied to a complex or network of ideas and imagination that does trace its lineage directly to Hegel’s idea of the citizen of the State. In Khandaq, however, people drew upon different discursive genealogies in order to articulate how they perceive and conceive their membership of society, and the norms they expect politicians and fellow citizens to abide by. The second part is that
even if one wants to understand but the calculus, you probably still need this thicker, ethnographic understanding of ‘political society’. People’s ‘strategic’ alliances probably aren’t purely a game of chess. If you want to understand the logic of people’s strategies, you will therefore also have to pay attention to more micro-level, everyday interactions between people, in which they cultivate their understanding of the world and its political players and forces.

What emerges out these interactions is a picture of people’s ethical commitments to such players and forces, as shown also in Chapter 4. If we combine the picture from that and this chapter, it turns out that the related notions like ‘political society’ or ‘popular politics’, or ‘informality’, are somewhat misguided in two ways: in the assumption that there is a space outside the purview and clout of formal(izing) institutions and powers; and because subjects in these spheres or domains are conceived a little like marginal hustlers. As to the first point, in Chapter 4, I already noted that the presence of state and political parties (and their associated religious and charity institutions) in people’s lives meant that the notion of a marginal or “peripheral” (Simone 2010) space of indeterminacy wasn’t very helpful. This chapter fleshed out this proposition somewhat. Abu Zalem’s personal war on drugs provides an indication that popular politics is usually not about maintaining or attaining autonomy from the political field. Instead, it is about navigating it, and entering into negotiation with it. An account of politics in the popular sector should thus start with the acknowledgment that these larger political entities are vitally present in people’s everyday. While someone like Chatterjee surely does recognize they are there, interestingly, he doesn’t follow up on that and investigate how they are part of people’s lives.

In terms of the second problem – the paradigm of ‘informality as the space of the hustler’—, in Chapter 4 I also drew attention to people’s ideological commitments to the institutions of power. Again, this chapter fleshes out this proposition. The prototype of the hustler clearly doesn’t make much sense in this case – you can understand very little of Subhi’s or Bilal’s lives through that lens. This has consequences for our understanding of informality and political society. Such notions become problematic, because one of the definitional boundaries they are (implicitly) founded on is in fact quite blurry. The moral work that people like Subhi and Bilal perform, in order to become self-respecting and respected members of the moral and political community, challenges the dividing line that for instance Singerman based her argument on. For one of the grounds for maintaining a distinction between a realm of formal and informal politics is the kind of political subjects that inhabit these realms, and these
turn out not to be so different. They challenge the more or less implicit notion that some people are tied more immediately to their concerns and, as a consequence, practice, perform or inhabit their citizenship differently from people who have some (juridical) platform to stand on that allows them to think about things and form an underdetermined political imagination. Marginalization from the state or the (‘formal’) political sphere does not mean that people are reduced to the barest of political action. I do not mean to imply that the whole notion of ‘informality’ is vacuous, merely to say that it’s probably not what we think, based on how it has been used thus far. To take up Chatterjee once again, the dynamics he describes do exist; clout based on state authority and clout based on reputation and militia back-up are different, but we need to contextualize them more properly. A different analytical language may help to rethink such a notion. When you examine the world from the perspective of people’s subjectivities, for example, one fares better with these complexities and contradictions. The crux is to not take the logics as the defining characteristics, because people’s lives aren’t defined by just the one logic. Instead analysis of subjectivity pushes one to attend to the material context of people’s actions and to see how affect, knowledge, and practice follow from the interplay. Dichotomies are not the likely result of such an enterprise. Instead, it generates questions like how are people’s actions situated in each given context? What grounds for evaluation and justification do people put forward (for example, do they invoke rights or the survival of the community?); what is the nature of the political relationality (are people collectively represented, or do they connect to leaders and key officials on an individual basis? Is their relation to the political field mediated by institutions or by individuals?); what organizational commitments do they have or what modality of mobilization do they engage in (do they engage in street politics, organize manifestations or network through social media?). By stripping down the political society and civil society dichotomy to their constituent dimensions, you take first steps to figuring out how people incarnate the political field of their world and create a different basis for comparison.

In the Conclusion, I sum up what that kind of analysis results in, in terms of our understanding of Lebanese citizenship: how people understand their position in society, what they expect from the state, and which forms of everyday reflexive living sustain these notions.