Languages of Stateness in South Lebanon's Palestinian Gatherings: The PLO's Popular Committees as Twilight Institutions

Nora Stel

ABSTRACT

Public authority beyond the state has often been seen as isolated from the state and/or constituting a threat to the state. Recent scholarship, however, has started to conceptualize 'state' and 'non-state' forms of public authority as closely connected and interdependent. This article contributes to this theoretical shift by means of a qualitative case study of public authority in Palestinian refugee camps in South Lebanon. Lebanon's Palestinian camps are routinely characterized as 'states-within-the-state', undermining the sovereignty of the Lebanese state. Yet, as this article demonstrates, both a generic state idea and the specific Lebanese state system constitute crucial benchmarks for the Popular Committees that govern informal Palestinian settlements. The article therefore conceptualizes the Popular Committees as 'twilight institutions' and explores the 'languages of stateness' that they adopt both communicatively, *vis-à-vis* Palestinian competitors, and coordinatively, *vis-à-vis* Lebanese counterparts. This reveals that the Popular Committees emulate the Lebanese state institutions they come into contact with, to bolster their own authority. They do this partly to be viable interlocutors for Lebanese state institutions; this suggests that the Popular Committees' non-state authority might validate rather than challenge state authority in Lebanon, and that state and non-state authority can be mutually constitutive.

INTRODUCTION

The question of public authorities that are not formally part of the state has long been cast in pathological terms (Hagmann and Péclard, 2010:

540). Under the paradigm of the failed state, with its support of 'good governance' and its struggle against 'neo-patrimonialism' (Khan, 2004a, 2004b), non-state public authorities were widely perceived as 'spoilers' — potential threats to 'state-building' at worst and temporary compromises at best (Meagher, 2012: 1073). Some recent scholarship, however, has started to conceptualize 'state' and 'non-state' forms of public authority as overlapping and interdependent (Boege et al., 2008, 2009; Hoffmann and Kirk, 2013). Following Meagher's (2012: 1083) conclusion that this 'shift in theory' needs to be inflected with 'a consideration of the processes at play in specific cases', this article contributes to this emerging body of knowledge by means of a qualitative case-study of public authority in Palestinian camps in South Lebanon — an endeavour that should help move the discussion beyond its Africa-centrism (Khan, 2004b: 23; Lund, 2006a: 682; Meagher, 2012: 1074).

Lebanon hosts some 400,000 Palestinians, constituting roughly 10 per cent of the country's population. They are the remnants and descendants of the people who sought refuge in Lebanon when they were forcefully expelled from historical Palestine during the 1948 *Nakba* that led to the creation of the state of Israel. After an initial welcome, the refugees were increasingly seen as a threat to Lebanon's precarious sectarian system — even more so after the Palestinians' liberation struggle became entangled with Lebanese internal conflicts during the infamous Lebanese civil war (1975–90) (Czajka, 2012; Haddad, 2004; Sayigh, 1997a, 1997b).[1] In post-war Lebanon, Palestinian refugees have been systematically marginalized: citizenship is withheld, they are legally discriminated against in the labour market, and cannot own real estate (Allan, 2014; Sayigh, 1995).

The majority of Lebanon's Palestinian refugees live in refugee camps where the Lebanese state has ceded much of its sovereignty through the Cairo Agreement.[2] The camps are governed by Popular Committees (PCs), civil bodies installed in the 1960s by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the transnational political representative of the Palestinian people, to provide services, security and political representation (Knudsen and Hanafi, 2011). These PCs, however, face a severe lack of resources. They also have serious legitimacy deficits because members are not elected or selected based on competency, but rather appointed by the PLO's member parties (Allan, 2014; Khalil, 2013; Kortam, 2011). The nature of public authority among Lebanon's Palestinian refugees thus raises the question of how non-state public authorities such as the PCs can maintain their rule, especially in light

---

1. Unless indicated otherwise, all references to 'war' in this article refer to the Lebanese Civil War.
2. The Cairo Agreement was signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Lebanese army in 1968. It sanctioned the PLO's armed presence inside the camps and forbade Lebanese state institutions to enter them (Czajka, 2012: 240; Sayigh, 1997b: 192). The Agreement was abrogated in 1987 but continues to be observed in practice.

of their limited resources, capacities and popular legitimacy. This article shows that part of the answer lies in the PCs' enactment of a generic state idea and their emulation of specific elements of the Lebanese state system.

The alleged weakness of the Lebanese state is notorious (Fregonese, 2012; Migdal, 2001: 136). The country is scarred by a colonial legacy, the brutal civil war and Israeli and Syrian occupation, and its policy making is almost perpetually gridlocked by its consociational political system. Lebanon's Palestinians have often been associated with these predicaments. Palestinian camps are broadly perceived as 'states-within-the-state' (Martin, 2011). Indeed, in post-war Lebanon, the Palestinians are regularly conceived of as the 'anti-state' responsible for the breakdown of the Lebanese state throughout the war (Czajka, 2012). Yet, Palestinian refugees also constituted an important benchmark in Lebanese nation building, providing a convenient 'other' against which the heterogeneous Lebanese could identify (Haddad, 2004; Sfeir, 2010). Similarly, as the camps are controlled through extensive networks of informants and external army check-points, the Palestinian 'issue' featured as a yardstick for state building too, offering an expedient rationale for strengthening surveillance and policing institutions (Czajka, 2012). Manifestations of stateness inside Lebanon's Palestinian camps thus not only offer insights into public authority among Palestinian refugees: they also shed light on the nature of the Lebanese state and its relations with non-state public authorities. Indeed, as outlined below, state institutions can sometimes even be sustained by the authority of non-state governance actors. This article shows that Lebanon's main non-state public authorities emulate the Lebanese state. They do so, in part, to be viable interlocutors for the Lebanese state institutions they have to deal with. As such, they might not undermine or challenge the state as much as validate and corroborate it.

This is particularly true for Lebanon's 39 Palestinian 'gatherings'. Gatherings are informal Palestinian camps. In contrast to the country's 12 formal refugee camps, gatherings are not administered by the United Nations (UN) nor recognized by the Lebanese state (Stel, 2014, 2015; Ugland, 2003).[3] They do not fall under the Cairo Agreement and are built illicitly on Lebanese public and private lands (Martin, 2011: 241). Gatherings, moreover, are relatively dependent on Lebanese actors due to their limited UN entitlements (even if they do fall under the Palestinian PC structure). In short, the gatherings are exposed to the Lebanese state on a regular basis, but, with their residents lacking citizenship, still largely fall outside Lebanese state structures. They thereby offer a unique interface to study how Lebanese and Palestinian, state and non-state, authorities interact and mutually influence each other (Stel, 2014).

The article is based on a qualitative case study that investigates the interactions between Palestinian authorities and local Lebanese state institutions

---

3. I see gatherings as a particular category of camps. In this article, unless further specified, 'camps' thus encompass both official camps and gatherings.

(such as *mukhtars*,[4] municipalities and utility companies) in the gatherings. As such, its main focus is on the relations between different (Lebanese and Palestinian) authorities rather than on those between these authorities and their purported constituencies. Specifically, the article documents how Palestinian authorities shape their rule through a dual enactment of stateness. The PCs utilize generic ideas of stateness, particularly when they address Palestinian competitors or constituents — for instance by structurally referring to themselves as 'municipality-like' and casting themselves as public and national representatives. When engaging with Lebanese counterparts, the PCs also explicitly mirror elements of the Lebanese state system. This is, for example, evident in their duplication of the administrative layers of the Lebanese state.

To explain these dynamics, I draw on the concept of 'twilight institutions' which posits that public authority is generated in the amalgamation of state and non-state institutions. The article thus casts public authority in the gatherings as ontologically beholden to stateness despite the physical absence of a state. It also furthers an understanding of the Lebanese state as an entity that is hybrid and crucially intertwined with non-state providers of public goods rather than simply 'weak'. As Sayigh (1997b: 674) describes, the 'statist approach' of the PLO and the PCs has been historically dominant, but not inevitable.[5] Yet, it is not simply the fact that PCs mimic the state that is of interest, but also the consequences of this mimicry. These are not necessarily detrimental to the 'real' state, but, as I discuss in the article's final sections, can be considered constitutive of it.

The article thus addresses several intertwined research questions. It sets out (first) to explore how non-state public authorities such as the PCs rule. Arguing that much of the answer to this initial query lies in the PCs' engagement with 'stateness', it then (second) explores how this engagement takes shape and how the PCs 'mirror' particular state ideas and systems. This leads (third) to a reflection on what such state emulation indicates about non-state as well as state authorities. The article's outline follows these lines of enquiry. First, I introduce my conceptual and methodological approach; I then discuss how public authority is constituted in the Palestinian gatherings and demonstrate that PCs often imitate state institutions. The subsequent section explores why this is the case by analysing the Palestinian and Lebanese polities in which the PCs operate. This is followed by a more elaborate theoretical discussion that links back to the conceptual framework introduced previously. Final reflections are offered in the conclusion.

---

4. State representatives that perform social and administrative services at the neighbourhood or village level.
5. The PCs could have followed other organizational blueprints, inspired by, for instance, civil society and religious movements (as the rival Hamas Family Committees have), or by pan-Arabism and international revolution (as many 'dissident' factions in the PLO have long proposed).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: HOW TO TACKLE 'THE STATE'?

As Abrams (1988) eloquently demonstrated, the state is an elusive construct to study. His distinction between 'state-system' and 'state-idea', however, helps address the paradox, central to this article, that in many non-Western contexts 'the state does not exist and the state is everywhere' (Ismail, 2006: 165). The state system is the collection of practices and institutions produced by state agencies and can be conceived of as a material structure. The state idea is the socio-political construct that gives this amalgamation of practices its perceived coherence and intention and puts forward the state as an ontological structure and a resource for public authorities (Migdal, 2001: 123).

The juxtaposition of idea and system resonates through many of the conceptualizations of the state that succeeded Abrams, ranging from the differentiation between symbolic repertoires and material resources by Hagmann and Péclard (2010) to the distinction between representations and practices put forward by 'anthropologists of the state' (Sharma and Gupta, 2006). These conceptualizations all build on Migdal's seminal 'state-in-society' theory that sees state authority as consisting of a dialectic between the 'image' of a 'clearly bounded, unified organization that can be spoken of in singular terms' and the 'practice' of a 'heap of loosely connected parts or fragments, frequently with ill-defined boundaries between them and other groupings' (Migdal, 2001: 22–3).

This is particularly relevant in situations of 'strong societies and weak states' (Migdal, 1988). In situations where the state system is considered 'fragile' or 'failed', other public authorities might be (more) dominant in regulating security, welfare and representation (Boege et al., 2009; Meagher et al., 2014: 1). The ensuing hybridity begs the question of how to theorize the relatedness of state and non-state authorities.[6] Various scholars have sought to conceptualize interactions and overlap between state and non-state authorities (Hoffmann and Kirk, 2013), for instance through the notions of 'brokered autonomy' (Titeca and de Herdt, 2011: 217), 'negotiated statehood' (Hagmann and Péclard, 2010), 'hybrid political order' (Boege et al., 2009) and 'mediated stateness' (Menkhaus, 2006; Stel, 2015). Here, I will particularly engage with the concept of 'twilight institutions' (Lund, 2006a, 2006b).

Twilight institutions are those 'organizations and institutions that exercise legitimate public authority, but do not enjoy legal recognition as part of the state' (Lund, 2006a: 675).[7] They are outside the state system, but

---

6. 'State' and 'non-state' here refer to the international *de jure* status of a particular authority. Only *de jure* state authorities are part of a formal state system (as an actor), but both state and non-state authorities can draw on the state idea (as a resource).

7. Following Lund (2006a: 676; see also Lund, 2011: 75 and Sayigh, 1997b: ix), public authority is defined as the ability 'to define and enforce collectively binding decisions'

nevertheless draw on the state idea to substantiate their authority, engaging in 'state mimicry' (Scott, 2009: 37) or state 'simulation' (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001: 34). Indeed, according to Hoffmann and Kirk (2013: 34), the aim of the twilight institution is to provide an 'understanding of institutions' abilities to claim public authority through the idea of the state'. Where related concepts emphasize coordination to understand the relations between state and non-state authorities, the twilight institution foregrounds emulation. It thereby takes the political and institutional interconnection between state systems and ideas as an important analytical vantage point. This makes it particularly well suited to my empirical query as it is the PCs' mimicry of state systems and ideas, and not only their pragmatic engagement with state institutions, that stands out. Adopting the twilight institution thus helps avoid teleologically seeing the PCs as either 'wannabe states' or 'states-within-the-state'. Instead, it allows a focus on how their practices and discourses are related to the state ideationally as well as institutionally.

Lund (2006a: 677, 2006b: 688) introduces the 'language of the state', conveyed through behaviour and speech, as a crucial instrument for twilight institutions to shape their authority (see also Boege et al. 2008: 8; Hoffmann and Kirk, 2013: 17; Khan, 2004a: 1–2; Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 18), but does not systematically operationalize this language. Hansen and Stepputat (2001: 17) do. It is, therefore, to their take on 'languages of stateness' that I turn to study the construction of public authority by twilight institutions.

Hansen and Stepputat distinguish between two crucially inter-related languages of stateness. Their 'practical languages of governance' concern the roles that public authorities adopt as providers of security, welfare and representation (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001: 7). Their 'symbolic languages of authority' refer to the linguistic, spatial and material languages centred on legality, public interest and nationalism that authorities use to legitimate their rule (ibid.: 1). I adopt these languages of stateness as an analytical framework to order my findings on the ways in which PCs shape, maintain and render acceptable their authority. My data suggest that the (self-)identification of public authorities in the gatherings and the institutional structures in which they (claim to) operate also testify to the relevance of the state to the functioning of PCs. These elements furthermore help to give due consideration to the political fields, or polities, in which non-state public authorities operate. I therefore add them to Hansen and Stepputat's languages of stateness and discuss them below as 'status and structure'.

My argument is based on twelve months of fieldwork in Shabriha and Qasmiye, two of the largest gatherings in South Lebanon (Stel, 2014). To construe the PCs' languages of stateness, I studied their behaviour and speech

---

and rules. Authority combines coercive elements ('power') with more voluntary aspects ('legitimacy'), understood as the 'normative belief of a community that an institution ought to be obeyed' (Papagianni, 2008 in Stel and Ndayiragije, 2014: 6; see also Sikor and Lund, 2009: 7–8).

by means of 260 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with PC members and related Palestinian politicians and officials and with constituencies (residents, community leaders and women and youth committees), competitors (such as Hamas's Family Committees) and partners (state institutions and non-governmental organizations [NGOs]) of the PCs. In addition, I gathered observational data and collected documentary sources. The most important of these have been the by-law for the PCs produced by the PLO's Department for Refugee Affairs that was signed in July 2010 in Palestine;[8] the guidelines for the PCs in Lebanon as stipulated by the Central Follow-Up Committee for the PCs in Lebanon in 2013;[9] the 2013 annual report of the regional PC in Tyre;[10] and the monthly magazine that the Central Follow-Up Committee has been issuing since April 2014.[11]

TWILIGHT INSTITUTIONS AND LANGUAGES OF STATENESS IN SHABRIHA AND QASMIYE

The Popular Committees, in a nutshell, are the PLO's instrument to organize local governance, including coordination with Lebanese authorities (Knudsen and Hanafi, 2011; Kortam, 2011; Stel, 2014). Ugland (2003: 185) notes that in 70 per cent of the camps and gatherings, PCs are the 'major co-ordinating bodies within the communities'. In Shabriha, the Danish Refugee Council describes the PC as 'active and in charge of . . . organisation of the gathering, solving conflicts, liaison with authorities' (DRC, 2005: 155). PC revenues come from the PLO and from service fees collected among residents. While each PC officially has around 13 members, representing all the PLO's member parties, usually only the head and the secretary are active. They maintain relationships with residents through social interaction based on their close communal proximity rather than through official channels. These relations, moreover, are politicized, because the institutional structures of the PLO, Fatah (the PLO's largest party) and the PCs, while formally separate, de facto extensively overlap (Sayigh, 1997b: 239). This is only exacerbated by the fact that PC members are not elected, but appointed by (and hence accountable to) the respective PLO factions (Sayigh, 1997b: 454).

---

8. Provided to me in soft copy on 6 July 2014 by a leader of a Palestinian youth movement; translated from Arabic by my research partner.
9. Provided to me in hard copy by the president of the Central Follow-Up Committee on 29 September 2014. The document consists of various sub-documents and was translated from Arabic by my research partner.
10. Provided to me in hard copy by the former head of the regional PC office in Tyre on 15 August 2014; translated from Arabic by my research partner.
11. Titled 'The Popular Committee – A Monthly Publication'. Various issues were provided to me in hard copy by the head of the PC in Kfar Bedda in September and October 2015; translated from Arabic by my research partner.

Status and Structure

When asked who is responsible for the gatherings, respondents from all categories almost by default referred to the PCs. Two tenets explain why this is so. First, different types of respondents all emphasized the fact that the PCs are part of the institutional structure of the PLO, 'the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people' — a phrase used as 'a shield and a cudgel against internal and external foes and competitors (real and perceived)' (Khalil, 2013: 2). The PLO's consistent 'thinking and organizing in statist terms' rubs off on the PCs (Sayigh, 1997b: 668). An NGO representative explained: 'The PC is the authority. It is with the PLO; it is inside the PLO; it *is* the PLO' (Interview, Qasmiye, 24 September 2014). Second, PC members often described PCs as 'state-like', or, more specifically, 'like a municipality' (see also Kortam, 2011: 203; Martin, 2011: 157). Page 15 of the 2013 annual report of the regional PC office in Tyre states that: 'The PC should be like the municipality and have similar local authority'. When I asked the PC head in Qasmiye how the PCs had realized their position as the main authority in the gatherings, he responded: 'Who works as a municipality here? The PC!' (Interview, Qasmiye, 10 July 2014). Residents used the same municipality terminology, although mostly to point out the PCs' failure. A Palestinian NGO worker posed: 'The PC is like a municipality, right? But it doesn't even have the capacity to develop project proposals' (Interview, Tyre, 20 August 2014).

The PCs in Lebanon fall under the Lebanese office of the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs that oversees a Central Follow-Up Committee on the national level, five regional PC offices and a PC in each camp. This institutional structure influences the languages of stateness the PCs adopt. As Hansen and Stepputat (2001: 6) indicate, 'institutional rites, schemes of classifications [and] hierarchies of competence' are key instruments to order authority. For the PCs in Lebanon, on the one hand, this concerns a general idea of stateness: the PCs cast their institutional structure in terms of professionalism and coherence. On the other hand, the mimicking of stateness apparent in the institutional structure of the PCs is specifically influenced by the institutional set-up of the Lebanese state.

In line with the PLO's regard for 'bureaucratization' (Sayigh, 1997b: 459), the Central Follow-Up Committee's guidelines and its monthly magazine convey the image of a structured organization that meets on a regular basis and whose output is formally documented. The magazine emphasizes that 'in order to serve the public benefit, the communication of the PCs must follow the hierarchy of the PC system and cannot bypass any step in the hierarchy'.[12] Even critics acknowledge the centrality of the PCs' structure in the PCs' quest for legitimacy. A youth leader said:

---

12. PC magazine no. 5, August 2014, p. 1.

As a Palestinian, I can't ignore them, because I'm interested in strengthening the structure and in having a powerful PC. So each time we do a project, we want them to be included. Because we don't want to reinvent the wheel: there is a structure that is good, it's just the people that aren't good. You can't destroy the structure because of the people. (Interview, Tyre, 6 July 2014)

Besides mimicking a state structure in a generic sense, the PC structure parallels the Lebanese state system. This is a consequence of both institutional precedents set during the PLO's 1973–82 heyday in Lebanon — during which it established 'parastatal institutions and a bureaucratic elite, the nucleus of government' — and pragmatic contemporary considerations (Sayigh, 1997b: vii). The PCs' regional tier closely follows the Lebanese provinces. While the PLO's by-law on the PCs claims to provide the exclusive blueprint for the organization of PCs in all countries that host Palestinian refugees, the PC structure in Lebanon has, in the form of the Central Follow-Up Committee's guidelines, set up its own structure rather than followed Ramallah's. This signals the importance of the Lebanese state for the operation of the PCs. When I asked a former analyst of the Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) why the PCs often present themselves as a municipality, he explained that this was partially to make themselves more appealing as partners for the Lebanese state: 'They say they're like a municipality, because they see the municipality as their Lebanese counterpart. They want to show they have a similar structure . . . ; that they also have an organogram and a structure, that they're not random. This might get them more acceptance even if the model doesn't mirror reality' (Interview, Beirut, 9 June 2014).

Languages of Governance

The rule of the PCs is not characterized solely by associations with the 'commanding heights' of the PLO and its stateness, or the organizational mimicking of Lebanese state structures, but also by their more concrete local governance 'in the trenches' (Migdal, 2001: 121). Hansen and Stepputat's languages of governance cover three domains: security, welfare and representation. These domains are overlapping, but the role of PCs is most pronounced with regard to representation. Although PCs have a role in local conflict mediation, security provision is mostly considered a task for the Lebanese police because PCs in the gatherings are not armed and are not assisted by security committees (as in the official camps). Service delivery is considered the responsibility of PCs; however, despite the PLO's history of full-fledged welfare provision in Lebanon (Sayigh, 1997b: 460), the PCs currently do not have the necessary resources and competences for such service provision. In Shabriha and Qasmiye, only water provision is directly managed by the PCs. Thus, PCs in the gatherings have neither real sanctioning power, which compromises their contribution to security, nor resources,

limiting their welfare role. This only serves to put more emphasis on the third language of governance: representation.

Representation here refers to a form of 'brokering': communicating or interacting with an external actor on behalf of a certain constituency. Part IXX of the PLO by-law reiterates that the PC is the 'official representative of the camps *vis-à-vis* foreign, national and all other organizations'. Representation manifests itself primarily in controlling and welcoming. PCs are described as having to 'watch and daily check implementation' of any project.[13] Residents of the gatherings indeed seem to expect PCs to take on this controlling role, sometimes blaming the bad performance of NGOs on lack of oversight from PCs. Representation, in the case of the PCs, also often takes the form of welcoming people or organizations to the gatherings or thanking them on behalf of the gatherings' inhabitants. When a Lebanese politician donated an electricity transformer to Shabriha, for instance, the PC wrote her a public letter in the name of 'the people of Shabriha'. The PC magazine is primarily an overview of occasions on which PCs thank donors, NGOs, municipalities and political parties 'in the name of the PC and the people of the camp'.[14]

PCs represent the gatherings towards three categories of actors: NGOs, the UN's Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Lebanese state. Corroborating Lund's point that 'development projects constitute *par excellence* arenas' for the establishment of public authority (Lund, 2006b: 692), the head of Qasmiye's PC stressed that 'all organizations deal with the PCs', because it is PCs that 'know the needs here' (Interview, Shabriha, 9 April 2013). Hamas's Family Committees indeed complained that most NGOs only coordinated with the PCs and not with them. The PCs also represent the inhabitants of the gatherings towards UNRWA. They send letters to the head of UNRWA's educational committee to request belated exam results, lead protests against failing projects of UNRWA's engineering office and pressure UNRWA to step up its health care services.[15] PCs also strive to represent the Palestinians towards the Lebanese state. Despite a lack of formal recognition, Lebanese municipalities and utility providers routinely address the PCs as representatives of the Palestinian refugees. I will return to this later.

Representing a group of people does not necessarily convey stateness. In this case, however, there are three main reasons why I see the PCs' representative role as an emulation of stateness. First, PCs do not merely try to be *a* representative of the gatherings' inhabitants; they want to be *the* representative and (successfully) claim a degree of exclusiveness that mimics the prerogatives of a state. While there are several other organizations in

---

13. PC magazine no. 6, September 2014, p. 4.
14. PC magazine no. 5, August 2014, p. 3.
15. PC magazine no. 4, July 2014, p. 4; PC magazine no. 3, June 2014, p. 4; and PC magazine no. 2, May 2014, p. 4.

Shabriha and Qasmiye that could, and sometimes do, represent residents, these are careful not to trespass into the PCs' realm of meta-representation. Qasmiye's women's committee, for example, has represented the gathering *vis-à-vis* the municipality and NGOs in multiple instances, but is keen to stress that: 'The PC is the authority. It reaches many different Lebanese authorities' (Interview, Qasmiye, 24 September 2014). In Shabriha, a youth committee that explicitly defined its mandate as 'helping the PC' was nevertheless dissolved by Shabriha's PC soon after, because 'no one could work on these issues other than the PC' (Interview, member of youth committee, Shabriha, 1 May 2013). The clearest challengers of the PCs' representative role, however, are the Hamas Family Committees. The guidelines of the Central Follow-Up Committee label the Family Committees as 'competitors'.[16] Yet, the Family Committees in Shabriha and Qasmiye predominantly present themselves as social associations *inside* the gatherings and not as state-like representatives *of* the gatherings.

The second reason is that PCs seek to achieve the position of exclusive, or at least overarching, representatives by painting their representation as national and public. The state idea assumes an 'almost transcendental association with the "nation" as the fundamental political community' (Mitchell, 1999: 81) — something that is vividly evidenced by the history of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon (Sayigh, 1977, 1995: 52). In line with this, PCs cast their representative role as inherently national: 'The PC is not only a committee concerned with services, but has been established as a national committee' that organizes 'the celebrations of national occasions as well as protests to support the people inside the occupied homeland'.[17] In line with Lund's (2006b, 2011: 74) observation that claims to legitimate authority often hinge on matters of 'autochthony', and Sayigh's (1997b: 671) conclusion that nationalism, for the PLO, is a legitimizing rather than a mobilizing instrument, designating other organizations as 'foreign' is one of the PCs' most effective strategies. The PC head in Qasmiye, for example, stressed that 'The PC and the PLO are Palestinian. [The Family Committees] take their orders from Iran and Qatar' (Interview, Qasmiye, 10 July 2014). In a similar way, critical youth movements were discarded by PC representatives as following a 'foreign agenda'.

Demarcating 'public' from 'private' is also an important part of the 'purposeful fiction constitutive of the will to statehood' (Joseph, 1997: 73). Accordingly, PCs do not merely seek to portray their representation as national, but also as public and non-partisan.[18] Part XIV of the PC by-law explicitly states that PC members 'should prioritize the public good over the private interest', and the Central Follow-Up Committee's guidelines stress that PCs should 'implement all its principles, decisions and advice free from

---

16. Document no. 3, pp. 3–4.
17. PC magazine no. 5, August 2014, p. 1.
18. The 'popular' part of their name stems from the Arabic word for 'the people' (*shaab*).

the interference of the parties'.[19] Qasmiye's PC head explained: 'We're not a just a party, like Hamas is. The PC is the PLO. When I talk in the name of the PC, I talk for the PLO; I talk for Fatah in other occasions. When I write, I have two notebooks to choose from: one with the PC logo, the other with the Fatah logo' (Interview, Qasmiye, 10 July 2014). Despite the politicized behaviour of PC members and the recurrent description of PCs as consisting of party appointees, the fiction of PCs as a public institution was to some extent replicated by the gatherings' residents. Most of them would consider projects implemented by the Family Committees as the work of Hamas whereas activities done by the PCs would be seen as PC (rather than Fatah) work.

The references to exclusiveness, non-partisanship and nationalism give the PCs' representative role some credence in a general sense. Yet, they also contain specifically contextual elements. The politicization of the PCs that hides behind their 'public' veneer, for instance, echoes a particular Lebanese stateness. Much as the Lebanese state is little more than an institutional façade for the 'rule of the parties' with their own militias, welfare institutions, economic enterprises and international alliances, the PC is to a large extent still the administrative fig leaf for Fatah, which uses it as a first stop shop for party members to collect their monthly allowance or sign off medical bills that can then be submitted for reimbursement higher up in the Fatah hierarchy.

The third reason for considering the PCs' representative role as a form of stateness is even more specifically related to the Lebanese state. By portraying themselves as exclusive delegates of the gatherings, PCs do not merely cast themselves as representatives, but — in the spirit of Migdal's (1988: 257) 'strongmen' that 'impose themselves between segments of the population and critical resources' — also as 'gatekeepers' (Lund, 2011: 75; see also Sikor and Lund, 2009: 1). The PCs' appropriation of the position of representative for the Palestinians *vis-à-vis* NGOs, UNRWA and the Lebanese state means that residents of the gatherings will find it hard to access these external actors (and their resources) without the PCs' mediation. Despite the fact that they hardly offer any services themselves and are not particularly liked, PCs have created a modus operandi in which no Palestinian can afford to ignore them.

This gatekeeper position of PCs was illustrated poignantly in a diagram representing the gathering's governance networks drawn during a focus group discussion in Qasmiye. While participants insisted that the PC is 'just talk', it nevertheless formed the hub in the chart they drew. A member of Qasmiye's women's committee was clear that, in the gathering, 'you can't do anything without their [the PC's] permission' (Interview, Qasmiye, 12 September 2014). A representative from an international aid organization

---

19. Document no. 3, p. 5.

seconded this, noting that 'We never enter without passing through them, even though not a lot of people believe in them these days. But they still have the capacity to block things, so we surely must see them' (Interview, Beirut, 27 August 2014).

This gatekeeper position of PCs between residents on the one hand and NGOs, UNRWA and the Lebanese state on the other is, I argue, a duplication of the role the Lebanese state plays *vis-à-vis* PCs. The municipalities with which PCs deal function primarily as gatekeepers to the PCs. PCs have to petition municipalities for permission to build or repair houses, they need municipal agreement before any NGO project can commence, and they require stamps and signatures from municipalities before they can deal with other state institutions such as provincial and district governors. In the words of one PC member: 'The municipality permits. And they're able not to permit and if they don't permit we can't do anything' (Interview, Qasmiye, 24 July 2014). Thus, for the PCs, to be like a municipality is to be a gatekeeper. A senior PLO leader confirmed this link between identifying as a municipality-like organization and insisting on a gatekeeper role when he said: 'The PC should be like a municipality, the by-laws say so. The PCs are the main responsible. They are the entrance gate to the camp, the door that all NGOs, projects, UNRWA, anyone should pass through' (Interview, Beirut, 16 June 2014).

Languages of Authority

An evaluation of the status, structure and languages of governance of the PCs suggests that they project themselves as municipality-like, national and public gatekeepers. They bring together a form of generic stateness (hierarchical and systematic organization and national and non-partisan claims) and more specific features of the Lebanese state (the state as gatekeeper rather than provider and as a civil façade for an inherently politicized system). This impression is further substantiated by looking at Hansen and Stepputat's second set of languages of stateness, the languages of authority that manifest themselves in regalia, space and idiom, which are habitually used by PCs to underline their credibility. Languages of governance and languages of authority are thus tightly interwoven and mutually dependent (Mitchell, 1999: 83).

Administrative 'regalia' can be as diverse as uniforms, 'official documents, stationery and rubber stamps, as well as registers and court books' (Lund, 2006b: 690; see also Ismail, 2006: 133). For the PCs, the role of stately gatekeeper is evidenced by the power to grant 'permission', which they see confirmed in stamps and signatures. The head of Qasmiye's PC was adamant that: 'If they [organizations] want to work here, they'd have to get our stamp' (Interview, Qasmiye, 2 September 2014). Documentation and 'the gathering and control of knowledge of the population' are at the

core of projecting stateness (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001: 7). While mostly not getting beyond an amateur's attempt at such documentation, PCs present themselves as 'making studies, taking pictures, doing measurements and estimating costs' (Interview, PC head, Qasmiye, 13 October 2014). The former head of the regional PC office kept an expanding archive of rudimentary statistics on inhabitants of and developments in the gatherings. He proudly noted: 'for everything there's a paper' (Interview, Bourj el-Shemali camp, 15 August 2014). Considering that 'public authority connotes impersonal administrative operations' (Lund, 2006a: 678), the PCs' take on producing paperwork underlines their proclaimed public nature. This, too, has a gatekeeper dimension. As Martin (2011: 185) observes: 'the possession of this information makes the popular committee the first key interlocutor for everyone'.

The second language of authority that the PCs utilize is related to space. Public authorities 'often have territorial markers in space, ranging from national flags, through signs, fences, party banners, masks and marches, to graffiti on walls' (Lund, 2006b: 695; see also Sikor and Lund, 2009: 14). PCs stress the importance of their physical offices for the Central Follow-Up Committee, regional PCs and camp-level PCs. For Sayigh (1997a: 21), 'the rapid proliferation of the offices that [they] vied to set up in every camp, village, and city neighbourhood possible, the closest they could come to the ubiquitousness of government bureaucracy', is 'a mark that the statist model was being emulated' (see also Martin, 2011: 119–20). In Qasmiye, the PC has its own office, adorned with portraits of former president Yaser Arafat, which it shares with the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW). In fact, the venues in Qasmiye that come closest to public spaces — the youth club, clinic and café — are all administered by PLO organizations (such as the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and the GUPW) or have a key kept by a PC member.

The significance of offices ties in with the importance of 'welcoming' and 'thanking'. The PC magazine incessantly emphasizes that PCs act as hosts for anyone who enters a camp or gathering. Such 'receiving' signals the host as both the representative of the community that is visited and the gatekeeper to the territory entered (Ramadan, 2008: 665–6). The importance of meeting space for enacting a hosting role is also related to the importance of staging what residents of Shabriha and Qasmiye called 'occasions', events such as receptions, protests, national festivals and inaugurations (Sayigh, 2001: 104), where the idea of capacity and 'a higher rationality' is transmitted (Lund, 2006b: 689). Following Wedeen (2003: 697), these occasions — which are described in great detail in the PC magazine and, according to Sayigh (1977: 35), are an important source of politicization — offer a stage to 'act like a state' (see also Ismail, 2006: 50).

The third language of authority relevant to understanding how the PCs cast themselves as state-like is that of idiom. In Shabriha and Qasmiye, the theme of taxation provided a particularly useful insight into the way PCs

present themselves as national and non-partisan. For PCs, the collection of fees for water provision is a financial necessity. Perhaps more important, however, is the value of taxation as an assertion of authority (Khan, 2004b: 13; Lund, 2006b: 696). Tellingly, while the PCs do not take issue with the Family Committees providing services, it is clearly understood by the Family Committees that 'if we would want to gather money from the people to address issues, the PC wouldn't agree as they would consider this as us taking over the leadership' (Interview, Family Committee head, Qasmiye, 11 July 2014). In Shabriha, indeed, when the Family Committee started to collect money to improve service provision, the PC objected and eventually sabotaged it.

WHY DO PCS EMULATE THE STATE?

An investigation of the PCs' use of languages of stateness demonstrates *how* PCs seek to shape and legitimize their authority with reference to stateness. In this section, I explore *why* PCs do so. This throws up three interrelated questions. First, to what extent do PCs explicitly cast themselves as state-like and to what extent is this implicit? Are we talking about 'proto-states' aspiring to become 'real', internationally recognized states, as is often said of 'rebel rulers' (Mampilly, 2011)? Or do non-state public authorities more intuitively aspire to the mantle of stateness for the relatively uncontested compliance that the state idea generates (Sikor and Lund, 2009: 3)? Second, do PCs want to appear as a state in a generic sense or do they have a specific — Palestinian or Lebanese — system to mirror? Third, by whom do the PCs want to be perceived as state-like; their constituents, their competitors, their stately counterparts?

   The answers to these questions are linked. In some instances, PCs adopt a generic state idea. This can be explicit, such as when they literally liken themselves to municipalities. It can also be implicit, for instance when they emphasize the significance of administrative hierarchy; assert themselves as the main authority through taxation; present themselves as national representatives through hosting occasions; or stress their public nature through the management of documentation and public space. This projection of a generic state idea is particularly directed at competing Palestinian authorities (and, to a lesser extent, constituents). In other situations, the PCs emulate a specific state system, namely that of the Lebanese state. Again, this is sometimes explicit, as when they copy the Lebanese state's administrative layers. At other times, it is implicit, for instance when the PCs duplicate the state's role as a gatekeeper by issuing stamps and guarding the keys to public spaces, or take over the Lebanese state's politicized functioning. The mimicry of this particularly Lebanese state system is a form of coordinative discourse addressed to the Lebanese state institutions on which PCs depend.

The Resounding Salience of the State Idea

Despite globalization and localization, ours is a 'world of states', where administrative and institutional power is largely concentrated in nation states (Scott, 2009: 337; see also Hansen and Stepputat, 2001: 38; Mitchell, 1999: 81). In this context, public authority by default will to some extent reflect 'stateness', because, regardless of the weakness of some state systems, the state idea has become hegemonic in the imagination of public authority (Lund, 2006a: 677). Recognizing this empirical centrality of stateness is not the same as analytical state centrism (Hoffmann and Kirk, 2013: 13). It does not mean, namely, that stateness is a normative goal or an inevitability; it merely acknowledges that it is exactly the uniqueness of the state as a 'globalized utopia' that makes stateness a resource for any public authority — whether it is part of the state system or not (Von Trotha, 2009: 38).

   As Meagher et al. (2014: 6) surmise, even in 'fragile contexts', the idea of the state continues to 'shape the terms' and 'institutional toolbox' for non-state authorities. In an era governed by the state idea, 'metaphors, analogies and symbols derived from this idea have served to bolster local institutions of humbler pedigree' (Lund, 2006b: 691). This nigh-universal centrality of the illusion of unity and common interest that is intrinsic to the state idea means that any claim to domination framed in its orbit is 'so plausible that it is hardly ever challenged' (Abrams, 1988: 77). The 'veneer of consistency, systematicity, centralized control, and wholeness' that the state idea offers is unsurpassed in obfuscating the 'messiness, contradictions, and tensions' that public authority inevitably entails (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 19). For the PLO, desperately in need of a vehicle to realize 'a reassertion of Palestinian existence and autonomous will [and] determination to pursue an independent course', this veneer is essential to substantiate its claim to power through the PCs (Sayigh, 1997a: 20).

Communication: Stateness as a Resource in Intra-Palestinian Rivalry

The PCs thus adopt a generic state idea for the almost inherent legitimacy this entails. Building on Schmidt's (2008) distinction between coordinative and communicative discourse, I understand this general language of stateness as a predominantly communicative discourse that is directed at the PCs' competitors in the struggle over power in the Palestinian polity in general and in Shabriha and Qasmiye in particular. Languages of stateness have different intentions and manifestations *vis-à-vis* different audiences. What Schmidt calls coordinative discourse are the narratives and practices directed at those actors that authorities perceive as counterparts. Communicative discourse, conversely, addresses a wider public.

   For Schmidt (2008: 310) this public would primarily consist of constituents. However, as also noted by Khan (2004b: 43) for the Palestinian

Territories, in a political context in which power is not distributed democrat-ically — Palestinians in Lebanon do not vote for their 'representatives' — competing Palestinian parties and structures seem more relevant 'publics'. Acknowledging this variety of audiences for the PCs' languages of state-ness serves to contextualize the local dynamics described above in broader (trans)national 'superstructures' of stateness and governance (Khan, 2004a: 2). This, in turn, takes us beyond the protracted localness that Meagher (2012: 1082) identifies as one of the main pitfalls of conceptualizations of public authority beyond the state.

Sayigh (1977: 18) already established that 'while the major determinants of a minority's position are the policies of the dominant group' (the dominant group here being the Lebanese state), 'much of the variation in subordinate group strategies may be accounted for by internal features'. The Palestinian polity is, firstly, dominated by the struggle between Fatah (backed by the PLO) and Hamas (part of the Tahaluf alliance) (Hilal and Khan, 2004: 97), both of which have established local-level entities: PCs in the case of the PLO and Family Committees in the case of Tahaluf. In this struggle, presenting itself as a civil, neutral, public, non-partisan committee, rather than the instrument of one of two contending parties, gives the PLO an edge over Hamas, which it can discard as 'just a party'. The meta-level stateness of the PLO, for which 'the search for state' has decisively shaped 'the articulation of goals, formulation of strategies, choice of organizational structures, and conduct of internal politics', is, then, a core component of the languages of stateness of camp-level PCs (Sayigh, 1997b: x). This confirms Hansen and Stepputat's (2001: 9) argument that 'the attribution of stateness to various forms of authority also emerges from intense and often localized political struggles over resources, recognition, inclusion, and influence' (see also Lund, 2006b: 691).

Apart from the conflict between Fatah and Hamas, the Palestinian polity is also characterized by a less tangible tension between the PLO and the Palestinian Authority (PA). The PLO claims to represent all Palestinians worldwide and thereby institutionally supersedes and encompasses the PA that functions as the governing body of the Palestinian Territories only (Sayigh, 1997a). With the nascent international recognition of the PA as a state, however, the relation between the PLO and the PA has started to shift (Khalil, 2013; Sayigh, 1995). This is particularly the case in Lebanon, where the gap left by the PLO when its state-in-exile there was shattered in 1982 is gradually being filled by the PA-affiliated Palestinian embassy that absorbed the existing PLO office (Knudsen, 2011). For most PC and PLO representatives, then, the embassy represents a threat to their position as the default interlocutor to the Lebanese state.

Much to the chagrin of the local Palestinian PLO leaders in Lebanon, more and more issues are resolved between the PA headquarters in Ra-mallah and the Lebanese government rather than 'within Beirut' (between the government and Lebanese PLO elites) (Sayigh, 1997b: 661). This is

particularly vexing for Palestinian authorities in the South, traditionally a PLO stronghold in Lebanon (Allan, 2014: 115; Martin, 2011: 176; Sayigh, 1995: 41). In Qasmiye, many PLO leaders accumulated power 'due to their direct relations with Abu Riad who used to be the head of the PLO in Lebanon before the embassy' (Interview, former LPDC analyst, Beirut, 9 June 2014). The relations between the PLO and the PA, which are symbiotic in many situations, should not be painted as too antagonistic (Sayigh, 1997b: 662). Nevertheless, there is significant discontent amongst 'many members of the Palestinian leadership and senior officials' who 'lost their power bases in Lebanon' (Sayigh, 1997a: 29; see also Sayigh, 1995: 41). In this dynamic, casting the PCs, which are still under the sway of the PLO rather than the PA, as state-like might give credence to a message that the PLO is more than the increasingly redundant political umbrella for a Palestinian state headed by the PA (Khalil, 2013). Presenting the PCs as municipalities, in this light, might be an attempt to ensure their enduring relevance as 'the counterpart to Lebanese municipalities' (Interview, LPDC facilitator, Beirut, 26 June 2014).

Coordination: Stateness as a Resource in Palestinian–Lebanese Relations

The communicative discourse of the PCs, directed at their Hamas and PA competitors, is thus crafted around a generic state idea. In this intra-Palestinian strife, however, one of the things at stake is the position of counterpart to the Lebanese state on which the Palestinians in the gatherings to a large extent depend. For the PCs that try to govern the Palestinians in Lebanon until their envisioned return to Palestine, it is the Lebanese — rather than the Palestinian — state that functions as 'the gravitational force' (Scott, 2009: 328). It is Lebanese municipalities to which the PCs refer when they bestow upon themselves the status of a municipality; it is the behaviour of Lebanese state officials that they copy when they interpret their role of public authority as that of gatekeeper; it is the organizational levels of the Lebanese state that the PCs follow (to the extent that they sideline institutional structures imposed from Ramallah); and although the regalia, spaces and idioms that the PCs employ to establish public authority follow general languages of stateness, some of their exemplars are clearly taken from the Lebanese system. This emulation of the more specific Lebanese state system can be seen as part of the PCs' coordinative discourse directed at the Lebanese state institutions with which they are confronted. The PCs' mimicry of the Lebanese state system ultimately conveys a 'wish for state recognition of [its] position (thus indicating the state's importance which [it] tries to emulate)' (Lund, 2006b: 687; see also Sayigh, 1997b: xi). For PCs, it appears, the recognition of state authorities is prioritized over that of constituents (Lund, 2011; Sikor and Lund, 2009).

The above contextualization of the PCs in the Palestinian and Lebanese polities helps to illuminate how PCs utilize the state idea and state system to organize and legitimize their public authority, the core issue raised in the introductory sections. The case study contributes to our understanding of public authorities for whom 'slogans' and 'rhetoric' seem to outweigh capacity; they have no sanctioning power and fail to satisfy the needs of their constituencies, but nevertheless maintain their power positions (Sayigh, 1997b: 665). This seems to go against the general assumption as summarized by, among others, Hoffmann and Kirk (2013) and Sikor and Lund (2009: 10), that there can be no sustained public authority without the provision of public goods. In the cases central to this article, languages of governance, and thereby the generation of public authority, may be less about provision of security or welfare than about the representative position that facilitates control over such provision. The PCs in Shabriha and Qasmiye may not produce many public goods, but they are deployed between those institutions that do and their constituencies. This fabricates authority in its own way, as Ismail (2006: 48–9, 52) has documented for Cairo's informal quarters where, for twilight institutions, 'undoubtedly the most important element is their mediating role between local communities and state agents and agencies'.

While the question of popular legitimacy has not been the main focus of this article, my findings nevertheless confirm Meagher's (2012: 1077) concerns about the almost default equation between hybrid authority structures, localism and popular legitimacy. The languages of stateness adopted by the PCs do not render them legitimate in the eyes of the inhabitants of Shabriha and Qasmiye; nor are they necessarily geared towards obtaining such popular legitimacy, as Sayigh (1997b: 670) rightfully notes. Rather, the PCs' twilight nature serves to maintain their position *vis-à-vis* competitors and partners, in the process often 'reproducing rather than challenging predatory and unaccountable modes of governance' (Meagher, 2012: 1097). As observed by Ramadan (2008: 673), there is a broadly shared sentiment among Lebanon's Palestinians that their leaders care more about 'political relations' with Lebanese than about the 'lives of ordinary Palestinian refugees' (see also Sayigh, 2001: 96).

CONCEPTUAL IMPLICATIONS OF EMULATION AND COORDINATION

Analysing the PCs in light of the Palestinian and Lebanese polities allows for a better understanding of the nature of non-state public authority. It also provides insights into the Lebanese state. In my case study, non-state authorities do not only refer to and thereby empower a general state *idea*, they also mirror and as such give credibility to Lebanon's specific state *system*. As twilight institutions, the PCs are not formally part of the Lebanese state and often agitate against its policies (Lund, 2006b: 687–9). Yet, in their behaviour and speech the PCs address the Lebanese state institutions they

see as their counterparts and whose recognition they seek at least as much as that of their Palestinian constituencies. Shabriha's PC head summed up the function of the PCs by stating that: 'The PC is the representative of the Palestinians to the Lebanese state and the Lebanese authorities deal with the PC' (Interview, Shabriha, 9 April 2013). According to the regional PC head, the PCs were even '*created* to officially work with the government' (Interview, Bourj el-Shemali camp, 7 May 2013; emphasis added).

PCs, then, do not seek to overthrow or replace the Lebanese state, but covet its recognition. They not only mirror the Lebanese state, but also validate it by confirming the state's hegemony and shaping themselves in the state's likeness to obtain its de facto acknowledgment. As DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 154) demonstrate, the more an organization depends on another organization or perceives it to be successful, 'the more similar it will become to that organization in structure, climate and behavioural focus'. My study of public authority in Palestinian gatherings illustrates that the Lebanese state, despite its proclaimed weakness and absence, still has potency as 'the big enframer' of political life in Lebanon (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001: 37). This is true even, or perhaps especially, at the margins of its sovereignty that the gatherings are often seen to represent.

Whereas the PLO's state-in-exile was a threat to the sovereignty of the Lebanese state — a 'cuckoo' that saw Lebanon as a useful 'hostage' (Sayigh, 1997b: 551) — the current PCs are a very different matter and, if anything, at times help cement the rule of the Lebanese state. The empirical trajectory of PLO institutions from meta-level threat to local-level partner, then, appears to go hand-in-hand with the conceptual shift from a zero-sum perspective on state/non-state relations to one that acknowledges interdependence. This means that the usual narrative of sovereignty-undermining 'states-within-the-state' that Lebanese politicians and officials still use to discuss Lebanon's Palestinian camps is redundant (Czajka, 2012). In this regard, the situation of the Palestinians is significantly different from that of, for instance, Hezbollah — to take the example of Lebanon's most significant 'state-within-the-state' (ibid.). Hezbollah is more formally institutionally entrenched in the Lebanese state and more broadly seen as a competitor to it (Davis, 2007; Early, 2006: 121). While Hezbollah's path is widely understood to 'have grown beyond the ability of the Lebanese state to determine', this is far from true for the PCs (Early, 2006: 125).

The relation between PCs and the Lebanese state is clearly an asymmetrical one: Palestinians 'play little part' in post-war Lebanon (Sayigh, 1995: 42) and PCs need the Lebanese state for both practical and legitimizing purposes. However, bearing in mind the logics of indirect rule (Boege et al., 2008: 8–9) and the concept of the contained client state (Hilal and Khan, 2004), the Lebanese state also needs the PCs. If we substitute 'tribal' with 'stateless' in Scott's famous 'anarchist history of stateness', the interest of states in state-like authorities that are not rivalling state systems becomes apparent — particularly considering that 'reestablishment of state control over

the refugee community' has been a main objective of Lebanon's post-war governments (Sayigh, 1995: 42; see also Sayigh, 2001: 101):

> Rulers and state institutions require a stable, reliable, hierarchical, 'graspable' social structure through which to negotiate or rule. They need an interlocutor, a partner, with whom to parlay, whose allegiance can be solicited, through whom instructions can be conveyed, who can be held responsible for political order, and who can deliver grain and tribute. Since tribal peoples are per definition outside the direct administration of the state, they must, if they are to be governed at all, be governed through leaders who can speak for them and, if necessary, be held hostage. (Scott, 2009: 209)

The PCs, in this light, are a crucial element of the Lebanese state's attempts to control or contain 'extrastate spaces' (ibid.: 31). As such, the relation between the Lebanese state and PCs exhibits much of the trappings of what Hilal and Khan (2004) call 'fragmented clientelism': factional competition and weak central control on the Palestinian side nurtured by the Lebanese state's interest in maintaining a client authority. In such a constellation, the PCs constitute the controllable 'strongmen' that can enact some of the social stability the Lebanese state so desperately needs (Migdal, 1988: 141).

Martin (2011: 160) cites an employee of the British Embassy in Beirut who concludes that 'it was very much easier for the government to exercise control of the camps through the PLO in this way'. In her work on the everyday state in Cairo, Ismail (2006: 39) shows that the dependence of state authorities on intermediary public authorities in marginal areas has led state representatives to incorporate such authorities 'into their strategy of control'. This 'local power compact that serves as an auxiliary to formal government', then, cuts both ways (ibid.: 55). Many respondents, Lebanese as well as Palestinian, indicated that in Palestinian gatherings 'the reality on the ground, the current situation, is a consequence of mutual interests' (Interview, former LPDC analyst, Beirut, 9 June 2014). This resonates with other accounts of 'the tacit complicity between institutional stakeholders on the Palestinian political scene and the Lebanese government in maintaining the status quo' (Allan, 2014: 203). Indeed, a local PLO official went so far as to claim that 'we help the Lebanese government to control' (Interview, Rashidiye camp, 14 May 2013).

Most state institutions, too, seem to work on this premise even if it is not formally acknowledged or officially organized. Above and elsewhere (Stel, 2014), I have documented in detail how municipalities, *mukhtars* and utility companies routinely work with PCs to the extent that they would not be able to deal with the contentious presence of the Palestinians in their domain without the PCs as a representative and buffer. The regional director of Électricité du Liban, for instance, explained:

> There is a PC present in all gatherings … There is coordination between us … It's true the Lebanese state doesn't consider it as official, but if there are problems in the gathering as a whole, the PC is responsible. We cooperate with them as a reality on the ground, but not official … And for us it's better if the PC comes to apply than if twenty people all come by themselves. (Interview, Marake, 15 October 2014)

Shabriha's *mukhtar* said it was 'natural' for him to work with Shabriha's PC since, exactly because of the weakness of many state institutions, 'it's just me and the PC who do the local governance here' (Interview, Shabriha, 3 April 2013). Even the former president of the LPDC, whose policy vision does not so much as mention the PCs (see LPDC, 2013), matter-of-factly explained that on 'construction, infrastructure, electricity, water, sewage . . . we call them directly' (Interview, Beirut, 22 July 2013).

In this light, the authority of the Lebanese state and that of the PCs are intertwined rather than contending, as Lebanese nationalist narratives would have it. While the PCs mimic the Lebanese state to legitimate their authority, 'the question of who invests whom with authority' cannot be singularly answered (Lund, 2006b: 693). The state is not a given (Migdal, 1988: 180). If we see it 'not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, apparently metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist', the PCs' emulation of the state might indeed be a relevant 'state effect'. Taken as such, the PCs' mimicry of the Lebanese state contributes to the Lebanese state's 'appearing to exist' (Mitchell, 1999: 85). Rather than forming each other's antithesis, in many ways the Lebanese state and the PCs constitute and require one another and are 'doing the state' together (Hoffmann and Kirk, 2013: 12).

CONCLUSIONS

Not everything that the PCs do or say — maybe not even most of it — evokes stateness. There are certainly crucial differences between the creation of public authority by states (Lebanese or any other) and by non-state public authorities such as PCs. Yet it is the similarities between them, the languages of stateness appropriated by twilight institutions, that prop up the public authority of PCs in many instances. Accordingly, this article has made a twofold empirical argument. On the one hand, it has demonstrated that public authority in Lebanon's Palestinian gatherings can be better understood by investigating it through the lens of stateness, regardless of the often proclaimed absence of the Lebanese state in these localities. On the other hand, the article has shown that studying the production and legitimation of public authority in localities popularly understood to be characterized predominantly by the absence of the state can, in fact, tell a lot about both state ideas and state systems. The article thereby underwrites Scott's (2009: 31) contention that state evasion and forms of authority that are 'derivative' and 'imitative' of stateness are not at all mutually exclusive.

As a policy goal, the 'fiction of statehood' has been proven misleading in many fragile settings (Von Trotha, 2009: 39). As an instrument for non-state authorities in these same settings, however, this fiction is significant indeed. Stateness, partly accrued through emulation, is an important constituent of the glue that binds together the 'great variety of interpenetrative

relationships' that make up public authority (ibid.: 42). Even if languages of stateness merely feature as 'the emperor's clothes' — to buy into Von Trotha's metaphor (ibid.: 43) — these clothes serve a purpose. Especially when non-state public authorities have few carrots (welfare and security provision) or sticks (repressive and sanctioning power) at their disposal, 'dressing as the emperor' helps them to benefit from the inherent compliance generated by the state idea and to gain relevance as interlocutors for representatives of the state system.

Exploring the languages of stateness used by the twilight institutions that govern Lebanon's Palestinian gatherings thus makes a conceptual contribution to the nascent theorization of interaction and overlap between state and non-state authorities under 'hybrid', 'mediated' or 'negotiated' arrangements. The case study presented here helps conceptualize state and non-state public authority as mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive — in contrast to the claims of the dominant discourses of both the failed state policy model (Hoffmann and Kirk, 2013) and state authorities themselves (Czajka, 2012). In particular, my cases have demonstrated that it is not merely an abstract state *idea* that is relevant in understanding public authority produced by actors not formally part of the state system, as originally assumed by the concept of the twilight institution. Rather, by differentiating between public authorities' coordinative and communicative discourses, I have demonstrated that the emulation of a concrete state *system* is equally significant in analysing public authority beyond the state. State and non-state forms of public authority, then, are not merely drawing on similar legitimacy sources but are also practically, institutionally, interdependent.

This explains why it is perhaps exactly in alleged 'states-within-the-state', the pockets of informality seemingly outside the reach of the state system, that the significance of stateness is apparent. The assumption that the Lebanese state does not actually exist 'imbues the daily perceptions and attitudes of Lebanese of all backgrounds in the wake of failing public services, institutional deadlock, civil strife, and political stalemate' (Mouawad and Baumann, 2014). The case of Lebanon's Palestinian gatherings, however, suggests that the Lebanese state exists rather compellingly for those who live within its shadow as non-citizens — if only as the hegemonic exemplar for the twilight institutions governing these gatherings.

REFERENCES

Abrams, P. (1988) 'Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1(1): 58–89.
Allan, D. (2014) *Refugees of the Revolution. Experiences of Palestinian Exile.* Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
Boege, V., A. Brown, K. Clements and A. Nolan (2008) 'On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: State Formation in the Context of "Fragility"', *Bergh of Handbook Dialogue* 8: 1–21.

Boege, V., A. Brown and K. Clements (2009) 'Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 21: 13–21.

Czajka, A. (2012) 'Discursive Constructions of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32(1): 238–54.

Davis, P. (2007) 'Filling the Void: Hizbullah's State-Building in Lebanon'. PhD Thesis, University of Sydney.

DiMaggio, P. and W. Powell (1983) 'The Iron Case Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields', *American Sociological Review* 8(2): 147–60.

DRC (2005) 'Needs Assessment of Palestinian Refugees in Gatherings in Lebanon'. Beirut: Danish Refugee Council.

Early, B. (2006) '"Larger than a Party, Yet Smaller than a State": Locating Hezbollah's Place within Lebanon's State and Society', *World Affairs* 168(3): 115–28.

Fregonese, S. (2012) 'Beyond the "Weak State": Hybrid Sovereignties in Beirut', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30: 655–74.

Haddad, S. (2004) 'The Origins of Popular Opposition against Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon', *International Migration Review* 38(2): 470–92.

Hagmann, T. and D. Péclard (2010) 'Negotiating Statehood: Dynamics of Power and Domination in Africa', *Development and Change* 41(4): 539–62.

Hansen, T. and F. Stepputat (eds) (2001) *States of Imagination. Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hilal, J. and M. Khan (2004) 'State Formation under the PNA: Potential Outcomes and their Viability', in M. Khan, G. Giacaman and I. Amundsen (eds) *State Formation in Palestine. Viability and Governance during a Social Transformation*, pp. 64–119. London: Routledge-Curzon.

Hoffmann, C. and T. Kirk (2013) 'Public Authority and the Provision of Public Goods in Conflict-Affected and Transitioning Regions'. Justice and Security Research Programme Paper No. 7. London: London School of Economics.

Ismail, S. (2006) *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters. Encountering the Everyday State*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Joseph, S. (1997) 'The Public/Private: The Imagined Boundary in the Imagined Nation/State/ Community: The Lebanese Case', *Feminist Review* 57: 73–92.

Khalil, O. (2013) '"Who Are You?": The PLO and the Limits of Representation'. Al Shabaka Policy Brief, March. Washington, DC: Al Shabaka.

Khan, M. (2004a) 'Introduction: State Formation in Palestine', in M. Khan, G. Giacaman and I. Amundsen (eds) *State Formation in Palestine. Viability and Governance during a Social Transformation*, pp. 1–12. London: Routledge-Curzon.

Khan, M. (2004b) 'Evaluating the Emerging Palestinian State: "Good Governance" versus "Transformation Potential"', in M. Khan, G. Giacaman and I. Amundsen (eds) *State Formation in Palestine. Viability and Governance during a Social Transformation*, pp. 13–63. London: Routledge-Curzon.

Knudsen, A. (2011) 'Nahr al-Bared. The Political Fallout of a Refugee Disaster', in A. Knudsen and S. Hanafi (eds) *Palestinian Refugees. Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*, pp. 97–110. New York: Routledge.

Knudsen, A. and S. Hanafi (eds) (2011) *Palestinian Refugees. Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*. New York: Routledge.

Kortam, M. (2011) 'Politics, Patronage and Popular Committees in the Shatila Refugee Camp, Lebanon', in A. Knudsen and S. Hanafi (eds) *Palestinian Refugees. Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*, pp. 193–204. New York: Routledge.

LPDC (2013) 'From Dialogue to Vision . . . Towards a Unified National Policy for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and a Future Vision for LPDC'. Beirut: Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee.

Lund, C. (2006a) 'Twilight Institutions: An Introduction', *Development and Change* 37(4): 673–84.

Lund, C. (2006b) 'Twilight Institutions: Public Authority and Local Politics in Africa', *Development and Change* 37(4): 685–705.

Lund, C. (2011) 'Property and Citizenship: Conceptually Connecting Land Rights and Belonging in Africa', *Africa Spectrum* 46(3): 71–5.

Mampilly, Z. (2011) *Rebel Rulers. Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Martin, D. (2011) 'The "Where" of Sovereign Power and Exception. Palestinian Life and Refugee Camps in Lebanon'. PhD Thesis, Durham University.

Meagher, K. (2012) 'The Strength of Weak States? Non-State Security Forces and Hybrid Governance in Africa', *Development and Change* 43(5): 1073–1101.

Meagher, K., T. de Herdt and K. Titeca (2014) 'Unraveling Public Authority. Paths of Hybrid Governance in Africa'. IS Academy Research Brief No. 10. Wageningen: Wageningen University.

Menkhaus, K. (2006) 'Governance in the Hinterland of Africa's Weak States: Toward a Theory of the Mediated State'. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia (30 August – 2 September).

Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States. State–Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Migdal, J. (2001) *State in Society: Studying how States and Societies Form and Constitute One Another.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, T. (1999) 'Society, Economy, and the State Effect', in G. Steinmetz (ed.) *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, pp. 76–97. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Mouawad, J. and H. Baumann (2014) 'Wayn al-Dawleh?', *Arab Studies Journal* website. http://www.arabstudiesjournal.org/pages/call_for_papers_full (accessed 14 May 2015).

Papagianni, K. (2008) 'Participation and State Legitimation', in C. Call and V. Wyeth (eds) *Building States to Build Peace*, pp. 49–72. Boulder, CO: Lyenne Rienner.

Ramadan, A. (2008) 'The Guests' Guests: Palestinian Refugees, Lebanese Civilians, and the War of 2006', *Antipode* 40(4): 658–77.

Sayigh, R. (1977) 'Sources of Palestinian Nationalism: A Study of a Palestinian Camp in Lebanon', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6(4): 17–40.

Sayigh, R. (1995) 'Palestinians in Lebanon: Harsh Present, Uncertain Future', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25(1): 37–53.

Sayigh, R. (2001) 'Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Implantation, Transfer or Return?', *Middle East Policy* 8(1): 94–105.

Sayigh, Y. (1997a) 'Armed Struggle and State Formation', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26(4): 17–32.

Sayigh, Y. (1997b) *Armed Struggle and the Search for State. The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schmidt, V. (2008) 'Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse', *Annual Review of Political Science* 11: 303–26.

Scott, J. (2009) *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland South Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Sfeir, J. (2010) 'Palestinians in Lebanon: The Birth of the "Enemy Within"', in M. Khalidi (ed.) *Manifestations of Identity. The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, pp. 13–34. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies.

Sharma, A. and A. Gupta (2006) *The Anthropology of the State. A Reader*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing.

Sikor, T. and C. Lund (2009) 'Access and Property: A Question of Power and Authority', *Development and Change* 40(1): 1–22.

Stel, N. (2014) 'Governance between Isolation and Integration. A Study on the Interaction between Lebanese State Institutions and Palestinian Authorities in Shabriha Gathering, South Lebanon'. Issam Fares Institute Working Paper No. 22. Beirut: American University in Beirut.

Stel, N. (2015) 'Lebanese–Palestinian Governance Interaction in the Palestinian Gathering of Shabriha, South Lebanon: A Tentative Extension of the "Mediated State" from Africa to the Mediterranean', *Mediterranean Politics* 20(1): 76–96.

Stel, N. and R. Ndayiragije (2014) 'The Eye of the Beholder: Service Provision and State Legitimacy in Burundi', *Africa Spectrum* 49(3): 3–28.

Titeca, K. and T. de Herdt (2011) 'Real Governance beyond the Failed State: Negotiating Education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *African Affairs* 110(439): 213–31.

Ugland, O. (ed.) (2003) *Difficult Past, Uncertain Future. Living Conditions among Palestinian Refugees in Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon*. Norway: Norwegian People's Aid.

Von Trotha, T. (2009) 'The "Andersen Principle": On the Difficulty of Truly Moving Beyond State-Centrism', *Berghof Handbook Dialogue* 8: 37–47.

Wedeen, L. (2003) 'Seeing like a Citizen, Acting like a State: Exemplary Events in Unified Yemen', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45(4): 680–713.

Nora Stel (e-mail: Stel@msm.nl) is Assistant Professor in Governance and Human Rights at Maastricht School of Management, Maastricht, The Netherlands, and PhD Candidate at Utrecht University's Centre for Conflict Studies. She is an affiliated scholar at the American University of Beirut's Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and Foreign Affairs. Nora's research interests revolve around the construction and perception of state and non-state authority in conflict-affected contexts, with a geographical focus on the Levant.