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Organized Chaos: Informal Institution Building among Palestinian Refugees in the Maashouk Gathering in South Lebanon

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Informal institutions are increasingly recognized as a core concept in our understanding of the organization of socio-political life in refugee communities. This article contributes to this understanding by exploring the ways in which urban refugees in the Palestinian informal community, known as gathering, of Maashouk create, reconfigure and contest informal institutions in their quest to access basic urban services such as electricity, water, waste management and shelter maintenance. In particular, the findings generated through an innovative process mapping methodology suggest that informal institutions do not merely complement and challenge existing formal institutions, but also portend future ones. Formalization of service delivery, however, is complicated by the fact that current informality does not merely stem from residents' coping mechanisms, but also from Lebanese state officials' nascence of how to deal with people who are neither citizens nor residents of UN-administered refugee camps.

Keywords: Informal institutions, refugees, urban, Palestinian, Lebanon

Introduction

The concept of 'institutions' broadly refers to 'a system of established and embedded social rules that structures social interactions' (Hodgson 2006: 18). The godfather of institutionalism, North (1990: 3), defines them as 'game rules of a society' or 'the limitations of human interaction as conceived by

people'. Seen as 'a regularized pattern of interaction that is known, practiced and accepted (if not necessarily approved) by actors', institutions can explain human behaviour on both the individual and societal level (O'Donnell 1994: 34). Institutions can also be defined as 'rules (or sets of rules) that structure social interaction by shaping and constraining actors' behaviour (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 8). The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) takes the definition of institutions a step further, by framing institutions under 'public authority'—in other words,

> institutions (both formal and informal) that can undertake core governance functions: protection from external threats, and managing external relations; peaceful resolution of internal conflicts; and providing or facilitating the provision of a range of collective goods and services (IDS 2010: 9).

In summary, such a definition of institutions focuses on 'functions rather than on form' and considers processes and actors involved both inside and outside what is considered to be the 'formal state' and across the 'public–private' divide (IDS 2010: 10). Indeed, it is safe to say that the notion of 'institutions', by now, has become one of the most salient concepts in social and political science (Bratton 2007).

The informal nature of many of these institutions, however, has only recently been taken up in the scholarly literature (see Bayat 1997; Helmke and Levitsky 2004; IDS 2010). Even if, by now, social scientists agree that 'informal institutions matter', they do not always carefully understand *how* they matter (Lauth 2000: 21; Bratton 2007: 96). Various schools within the proliferating institutionalization theory are concerned with the causes, manifestations and effects of informal institutions on, to name but the most pertinent, economic development (see particularly the groundbreaking work by North (1990)) and democratization (see e.g. Lauth 2000; Bratton 2007). Our ambitions with this case-study article are more modest. We study informal institutions as an effect, rather than as a cause, and explore *what* informal institutions residents of a particular community rely on, *when* they emerge, *who* initiates them and *how* they work.

Informal institutions are 'unruly social practices'—those institutions that do not stem from official public or private regulation systems recognized by a government (Gore 1993, in Cousins 1997: 4). Whereas formal institutions are endorsed and sanctioned by the state, informal institutions are enforced endogenously; they depend on auto-licensing and 'are based solely on the fact of their existence and on their effectiveness' (Cousins 1997: 4–5; Lauth 2000: 24). According to Anderson and Francois (2008: 2), they refer to a system that has not been codified—to rules that are not necessarily laws, but rather binding social agreements. While Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 8–9) define formal institutions as 'rules that are openly codified, in the sense that they are established and communicated through channels that are widely accepted as official', they consider informal institutions as 'socially shared rules,

usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels'. In our working definition, we distinguish between formal and informal institutions based on three core criteria: the extent to which institutions are (i) predictable (based on stable precedents), (ii) public (i.e. not secretive) and (iii) documented (preserved in writing) (Hofmann and Kirk 2013: 11, in Stel 2014: 12). This distinction corresponds to a combination of the many understandings of formal versus informal, and congregates considerations by leading scholars who have assessed such institutions worldwide.

As such, informal institutions are, in essence, about the personalized relationships that evolve between people to structure the way things function by effecting human incentives and, ultimately, behaviour (Hodgson 2006: 18; de Soysa and Jütting 2007; IDS 2010). 'Silent encroachment', 'do-it-yourself mechanisms', 'reform by stealth' and 'autonomy' are key aspects of informal institutions (Bayat 1997: 54; IDS 2010: 62; Sanyal 2014: 567), which Bayat (1997: 57) describes as 'marked by quiet, atomised and prolonged mobilization with episodic collective action'. Shifting analytical attention from formal to informal institutions, then, means to 'focus on the function, not the form of institutions'—from 'rules-based' to 'relationship-based' drivers for behaviour (Moore and Schmitz 2008, in IDS 2010: 22; IDS 2010: 8).

It is widely accepted that the emergence and functioning of informal institutions are related to gaps in performance, 'discrepancies', of formal ones (Lauth 2000: 22; Azari and Smith 2012). In this article, indeed, we are concerned not with what Tsai (2006: 118) calls 'deep-rooted, 'primordial', informal institutions', but rather '*adaptive* informal institutions [which] represent creative responses to formal institutional environments that actors find too constraining'. In Bayat's (1997: 60) words: 'informality is not an essential preference of the urban poor, it serves primarily as an alternative to the constraints of formal structures.'

Building on previous notions like 'institutional layering' (the extent to which different types of institutions conflict or coexist) and 'institutional conversion' (the use of existing institutions for new or alternative purposes) (Tsai 2006: 119, 122), Helmke and Levitsky (2004) divide informal institutions into four categories: complementary, accommodating, competing and substitutive. Complementary institutions support formal institutions, for instance by filling gaps in official regulation. Accommodating institutions allow actors to induce change in formal institutions' outcomes through affecting the workings of existing formal institutions. Competing institutions enable actors to violate formal rules by offering a viable, and perhaps a dominant, alternative. Substitutive institutions aim at achieving the same goals of weak formal institutions by in effect replacing such feeble formal institutions.

Informal institutions thus fulfil many roles vis-à-vis formal ones and regulate political behaviour jointly with them. They fill gaps in formal institutions, can bridge or integrate different formal institutions and can underwrite or nuance their outcomes. It is therefore important to stress that the

interaction between informal and formal institutions is dynamic and induces change in both informal and formal rules. Also, informal institutions shape all elements of society. Some groups, however, can be expected to be more dependent on, and hence more extensively affected by, informal institutions. These are often the communities that are (less) included in formal institutions, of which, even in an increasingly transnational world, citizenship is certainly the most important one. As such, refugee populations constitute an important case in point (Sanyal 2014).

Urban refugees by and large face the same challenges as other categories among the urban poor. They have, for instance, difficulty accessing decent basic utility services as well as health care and education. Yet, in comparison with the urban poor, urban refugees have some distinct characteristics that are related to the institutional vulnerabilities that come with their refugee status. Sanyal notes that

> theorizing refuge, be it in camp or settlement or any other spatial configuration, has become a difficult task, both because their stateless condition makes such places an anomaly to the taken-for-granted state sovereignty of the twenty-first century (Malkki 1995) and because their spatio-temporal condition mimics that of slums around the world when perhaps it shouldn't (Sanyal 2014: 559).

In urban refugee settings, where residents are excluded from the formal institution of citizenship and, hence, from many regulations guiding the labour market and social security systems, informal institutions become intrinsic to the everyday manoeuvres and the self-help strategies that allow them to access services.

This article studies the informal institutions that urban refugees establish to access basic urban services. There is an abundance of similar examples of informal institutions that developed in post-conflict societies around the globe, including, but not limited to: Delhi, India; Dhaka, Bangladesh; Cebu, Philippines; and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (Allouche 2014). Such varied examples highlight the significant role of informal institutions worldwide in providing services to the people who need them the most. We look at the case of a Palestinian informal urban refugee setting in South Lebanon named the gathering of Maashouk and study the residents' access to four basic urban services—electricity, water, waste disposal and shelter repair. The article is structured as follows: we present our methodological approach in the next section. The subsequent section offers background information on our case study and on the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon at large. We then present and discuss our case-study findings and proceed with a section dedicated to conclusions and policy reflections.

Based on our findings, we argue that informal structures to access basic urban services such as those found in urban refugee settings should not be viewed as instances of anomaly. Our study confirms Anderson and Francois's (2008) findings that, although informal structures are often perceived as being the antithesis of the formal and organized, they can often become the proponents of more

effective formal institutions. As such, our case study contributes to the nascent argument in the study of socio-political institutions that formal and informal institutions are not only complementary, but mutually constitute each other, with informal institutions forming the bottom-up building blocks of formal ones (Tsai 2006). As Bayat (1997: 54) has noted, 'by their sheer perseverance, millions of slum dwellers force the authorities to extend living amenities to their neighbourhoods by otherwise tapping them illegally'. In a more modest fashion, similar dynamics might eventually arise in the Palestinian gatherings in Lebanon. As such, the study of informal institutions also contributes to the process of 'looking much more carefully at the structures, relationships, institutional spaces, interests and incentives that underpin the creation of formal institutions' (IDS 2010: 3). Informalization and marginalization often go hand in hand, but certainly cannot be equated (Sanyal 2014: 561).

Methodology

To understand the ways in which Palestinian refugees in Maashouk build informal institutions, either as a conscious instrument or an unconscious side effect, in the process of accessing basic services, we employ a method known as 'process mapping'. Process mapping allows a detailed representation and analysis of the series of actions and steps leading up to the provision of any service—offering insights in the components of organization and decision-making that underlie such provision. As such, it facilitates the identification of opportunities for improvement in specific procedures by identifying points of 'inefficiency' (unnecessary steps, delays or costs) (Smart Pros 2002; NHS 2008).

The process mapping approach suits our case study for three main reasons. First, the approach allows for a thorough empirical mapping, which goes well with the explorative nature of our research, which is set in a relatively understudied setting. Second, the literature on informal institutions suggests that they can often eventually amalgamate or improve existing formal institutions. As such, the concrete opportunity process mapping offers for identifying what 'works' and what does not work in informal institutions and where informal and formal institutions connect and where they do not is of great significance. Third, the concrete and descriptive nature of the mapping process help to uncover 'relationships [that are] not highly visible and are often deliberately covert, and therefore difficult to research'— another feature that makes the phenomenon of informal institutions and the approach of process mapping a good methodological fit (IDS 2010: 24).

Process mapping documents what residents *actually do* to access services as opposed to, or in comparison with, what official policy documents would state on how urban refugees *should* access such services. It thereby allows us to juxtapose empirical reality with policy prescription. The approach is particularly suited to avoid the key problem with Western developmentalists who, as put by IDS,

> too often view governance and development challenges in terms of their model of a developed state, and rush to find solutions without stopping to ask what they can actually see (IDS 2010: 1).

The analysis, as well as the visual representation highlighting the factors of process, actors, time and cost, displays the 'barriers' but also the 'facilitators' for urban refugees accessing these services.

The case of Maashouk in South Lebanon was chosen for four main reasons. First, renowned for its 'weak' state (Atzili 2010), its protracted refugee communities (Meier 2010), its entrepreneurial acumen (Stel 2013) and its self-sufficient and self-providing sectarian communities (Harik 1994; Cammett and Issar 2010), Lebanon in general offers a distinctive setting to study the linkages between formal and informal institutions. Second, as elaborated on in the next section, our interest in informal institution building led us to focus on unofficial refugee communities: those outside the boundaries of the United Nations (UN)-administered and government-recognized official camps. Third, by exploring a locality in South Lebanon, we sought to go beyond the over-focus on Beirut in both urban studies and refugee studies in the Lebanese context (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012). Fourth, among the different unofficial refugee communities in the Sour (or Tyre) region, Maashouk is one of the few urban settlements characterized by close geographical proximity of Lebanese citizens and Palestinian refugees (UN Development Program (UNDP) and UN Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT) 2014). This uniquely enabled us to study the differences, but explicitly also the overlaps between parallel avenues to access services—ranging from formal to informal and differing from public to private.

Our focus on electricity, water, waste disposal and shelter repair was based on anecdotal evidence and experiences of our previous fieldwork in similar communities that portrayed these four services as generally presenting the most pressing challenges for residents living in Palestinian gatherings in Lebanon (see also Première Urgence (PU) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) 2009; UNDP and UN-Habitat 2014). Consulted Lebanese and Palestinian policy-makers furthermore indicated that it is particularly in these four categories of urban services that they lack the information to develop suitable projects and programmes.

Primary data was collected through structured interviews with Maashouk residents as well as other stakeholders such as local authorities (Lebanese as well as Palestinian), non-governmental organization (NGO) employees and service entrepreneurs in Autumn 2013. As such, the study utilized a purposeful sampling method, soliciting information from specific clients and stakeholder institutions. The study is cross-sectional, with the data collected once and at one point in time. Primary data, however, was complemented by document analysis, literature research and expert interviews data gathered in the context of previous research conducted by the authors.

Case Study Context

Tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon fall outside the geographic mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that is precluded to Lebanon's 12 official refugee camps. Despite the general emphasis on these infamous camps, Palestinians in Lebanon actually live in three different types of localities: as individuals among Lebanese communities, with some refugees holding Lebanese citizenship and others who do not live inside camps but retain their status as registered refugees; as geographically segregated communities in one of the 12 official UNRWA camps (Bourj el-Barajneh, Ain el-Hilweh, Al-Bass, Nahr al-Bared, Shatila, Wavel, Mar Elias, Mieh Mieh, Rashidieh, Dbayeh, Burj Shemali and Beddawi); or in so-called gatherings, which are informal neighbourhoods mostly populated by Palestinians (including, but not limited to, Maashouk, Shabriha, Al Marj, Bar Elias and Qasmieh). Some of these gatherings are so-called 'adjacent areas' located near the borders of official camps that often tap into and benefit from the UNRWA service structures in the neighbouring camp. Other gatherings are autonomous settlements, which are not located in the proximity of a camp.

In Lebanon, people living in informal settlements are not limited to Palestinian refugees or the stateless. Many Lebanese citizens have been living in similar informal settlements around the country, facing similar challenges in securing their basic daily needs. In Beirut, the majority of the informal settlements are situated around the area of the city's port and Bawshriyyeh, in addition to Beirut's southern suburbs of Haret Hareik, Hayy el-Zahraa, Jnah and Hayy el-Selloum (Harb and Fawaz 2010; Fawaz 2013). Most of these informal settlements emerged on the eve of civil war (1975–90) and proliferated during war years to accommodate the internally displaced (Yassin 2012). Although the proportion of Lebanese living in informal settlements continued post civil war, it is combination of Palestinian statelessness and legal marginalization by the Lebanese state that contributes to Palestinian refugees largely living in informal areas (see Fawaz and Deboulet 2011; Fawaz 2013).

For the purpose of this article, our focus will lie on the category involving small, informal urban and peri-urban settlements that are not located in the immediate vicinity of the official camps. As these gatherings are neither administered by UNRWA nor formally recognized by the Lebanese state, they have come to be shaped by a formal institutional vacuum and, consequently, informal institution building by the residents of these areas. A review of the literature shows that, with the exception of the work by Stel (2014, 2015, 2016) in the gatherings of Shabriha and Qasmiye, little research has been conducted on the topic of Palestinian gatherings in Lebanon, when compared to the abundance of studies available on Palestinian refugee camps (see for a recent overview the work of Hanafi 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011).

Because Palestinian gatherings are not officially recognized as camps, they are therefore not protected by the de facto interaction framework established between the Popular Committees (PCs) of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Lebanese state, as part of the Cairo Agreement of 1969 (El-Ali 2005: 82; UN-HABITAT and UNDP 2010: 35; Czajka 2012: 240). The PCs comprise members from the political factions and act as informal quasi-municipal bodies in their respective camps and gatherings. As a result of living in the gatherings, refugees are neglected by UNRWA, the Lebanese state, the NGO community and even the Palestinian Authority. While UNRWA operates schools and mobile clinics in some of the gatherings, it does not provide the free utility services (water, electricity, waste management and infrastructure maintenance) that it does in the camps. Furthermore, as respondents in Stel (2014: 71) explained, because of the gathering's relatively smaller population, NGOs are also less active in the gatherings, where their projects will serve a smaller range of beneficiaries. Finally, Palestinian political parties tend to concentrate their projects and presence in the camps as well as it being there that they have largest constituency, most significant clout (due to their armed status there) and biggest symbolic resonance (as the camps are the symbolic epitome of 'Palestinianness' in Lebanon) (Sayigh 1977; Klaus 2000: 97; Kayali n.d.).

A core obstacle to the access of Palestinian gathering inhabitants to basic urban services, moreover, is the legal status of the gatherings themselves. Under Lebanese national law, people living in 'informal settlements' are not entitled to access to public services. According to Law 7279 issued in 1961, 'it is forbidden to connect property owners or residents of a lot with a phone, service or electricity if s/he does not provide a residency permit'. Suspended momentarily in 1967, this provision was reinstated by the 1971 Lebanese Building Code and reconfirmed in 1983. It applies to all public agencies providing services, including water, managed by Lebanon's Ministry of Energy and Water, and electricity, controlled by *Electricité Du Liban* (EDL). So as to respond to the informal provision of services to these settlements, the Lebanese Ministry of Energy and Water and EDL lobbied for a ministerial decision which entitled them to collect fees for water and electricity that are informally provided in the gatherings (UNDP and UN-Habitat 2010: 30). Yet, these fees are quite high and thus most Palestinians are not capable of paying such exorbitant amounts of money.

The implementation of a new property law in 2001 marginalized Palestinians residing in the gatherings even further. Presidential Decree No. 11614 of 1969, amended by Law No. 296 of 2001, states that

> no real right of any kind may be acquired by a person who does not carry citizenship issued by a recognized state or by a person, if such acquisition contradicts the provisions of the Constitution relating to the prohibition of permanent settlement (*tawteen*).

The 2001 law has therefore impacted all Palestinians outside the recognized refugee camps, who generally do not hold official titles for the land they are living on—even though many have contracts with the former Lebanese owners (El-Natour 2012; NRC 2013). As such, the unofficial territorial status of the gatherings also affects the possibilities of improving their housing conditions. For example, in order to do basic reparations on electrical lines, specific permits from Lebanese authorities are required. Depending upon the location of the gathering, obtaining these permits is quite difficult—sometimes proving to be impossible. NRC notes:

> Permits are required to carry out construction, rehabilitation or expansion work which is externally visible and these can only be requested by a person holding legal title to the land (NRC 2013: 21).

The general lack of a comprehensive national strategy towards the Palestinian refugee camps—the 'no-policy-policy' (Stel 2014: 69)—and the limited capacities of Lebanese institutions such as the EDL (Stel 2013) have led to further pressures on the quality of basic urban services provided to this marginalized population. Indeed, these legal and structural barriers can all be linked back to the sensitive political context in Lebanon, in which improvements of the living situations of Palestinians are often interpreted as a step towards the ever-feared 'permanent settlement' (Meier 2010). Consequently, dwellers in the gatherings have found themselves in a legal and political vacuum, suffering from an absence of institutional protection and lack of access to basic urban services (Knudsen 2009). Today, these gatherings embody one of the most vulnerable refugee communities in the Arab region (Ugland 2003; Danish Refugee Council (DRC) 2005; PU and NRC 2009). Left in a grey area within the general structural discrimination of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, mounting uncertainty and isolation have come to characterize these gatherings.

In order to cope with their exclusion from both the Lebanese state's and UNRWA's formal institutions for service delivery, Palestinian gathering dwellers have resorted to alternate self-help mechanisms and strategies so as to secure and maintain their basic urban services—in the process creating informal institutions that govern access to electricity, water, solid waste disposal and shelter repair. Focusing on the experiences of Palestinian refugees living in the Maashouk gathering in Tyre, this article provides insights in exactly how these Palestinian refugees go about establishing such informal institutions. By looking at the ways in which such services are accessed, this article explores how Palestinian gathering dwellers have resiliently surpassed the culture of exceptionalism (El-Ali 2005: 83; Long and Hanafi 2010; Sanyal 2014: 559) characterizing their existence in Lebanon since the *Nakba* that forcefully expelled them from Palestine in 1948.

Created in the early 1950s by refugees who, in the direct aftermath of the *Nakba*, had first stayed in temporary camps and Lebanese villages closer to

the Palestinian border, Maashouk gathering is located (illegally) on public land within the southern Lebanese town of Maashouk (Popular Aid for Relief and Development (PARD) n.d.). While relatively peripheral at the time of its creation, Maashouk has now become part of the sprawling suburban areas around Tyre. The gathering lies on the main road leading to Borj Al Shemali camp, three kilometres east of the city of Tyre and approximately three kilometres from the Al-Bass camp to the West and Rashidiyye camp to the South. Its centrality in the larger Tyre area has led Doraï (2006: 11) to consider Maashouk as '*une espace urbain . . . partie de l'agglomération de Tyr*'. Maashouk has approximately 1,600 inhabitants and comprises some 500 m^2 that are divided into two main neighbourhoods (UNDP and UN-Habitat 2014: 105). The gathering's residents—mostly Palestinian but also Lebanese and Syrian—predominantly work in agriculture and private companies (DRC 2005: viii, 151; PARD 2011: 13). Unlike most gatherings, Maashouk has both an UNRWA primary school and a pre-school education centre, thereby functioning as a modest regional hub among the chain of gatherings along Lebanon's southern coastline. Maashouk is mostly governed by PCs, who collect a monthly service fee. Coordination with the Tyre municipality is relatively minimal: the municipality neither provides services nor collects taxes (UNDP and UN-Habitat 2014: 105).

Findings: Securing Access to Basic Urban Services in Maashouk

Accessing Electricity in Maashouk

There are multiple ways to access electricity in the community of Maashouk. Although the official provider, EDL, maintains some presence, there are various alternative channels to access electricity in Maashouk ranging from 'informally' connecting to the grid, which is maintained by the local PC, to 'buying' electricity from the privately owned generator that distributes to the neighbourhood and owning a private generator.

Documents required for official access to electricity include an ID (or UNRWA card), a title deed or rent contract and a receipt from another resident of the building showing connectedness to the grid. However, securing and submitting these documents are problematic especially considering that title deeds or rent contracts are seldom available in the gatherings that are, in a legal sense, squatter communities. Moreover, on the rare occasion that such documents are provided, they do not automatically secure fast access to electricity from EDL, as it may take several months to become 'formally' hooked to the electric grid. The cost of EDL electricity installation is, furthermore, exceptionally high (448,000 LBP, equivalent to almost 300 USD, which is almost the average monthly income of a labourer). In addition, EDL generally faces difficulty in collecting payments in the informal Palestinian gatherings. As a result, EDL has less of an incentive to provide relatively good services in these areas. 'Official' access to electricity through EDL, in other

words, is not the norm in Maashouk. Palestinians of Maashouk seek alternate, informal methods to obtain electricity, because they find the outlook for long-term, guaranteed electricity provision bleak at best.

Some residents 'buy' electricity from a private provider, usually a local businessman who installs a large generator and sells electricity for a fee that can hike to USD 100 a month per 10 Amperes. Most of the residents in Maashouk cannot afford such services—although some, especially shop-owners, cannot avoid this alternative. Individual hooking, the illegal practice of connecting one's house to the grid, has also been reported extensively. Most of the residents, however, rely on the PC to 'informally' connect them to EDL's official power grid. This 'service' is offered by the PC at a nominal fee of 10,000 LBP (equivalent to USD 7) per month. Houses inside the gathering are connected to neighbourhood switch-breakers, which in turn are connected—hooked—to the official EDL grid (Figure 1).

The PC has thus created an informal grid inside the gathering that illegally taps electricity from the EDL network. In many ways, the PC is 'governing' the local grid at a discounted price and thereby looks as the most efficient and affordable way to get access to electricity. Yet, such 'regulated' hooking often results in inconsistent service provision, since breakers regularly burn and must be fixed. Many consumers reported that neighbourhood transformers in Maashouk are becoming overloaded as a result of this 'regulated' hooking. The PC, in such situations, would use its political network to secure funding to purchase a new transformer—which could cost up to USD 4,000. This informal organization, while accessible and relatively inexpensive, thus also generates a waste of time and resources. As a result, residents have repeatedly called for more organization and accountability for those who provide them with electricity.

Accessing Water in Maashouk

In Lebanon, the official body responsible for overseeing water provision on a national level is Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW). The MEW is in charge of securing water for Lebanese residents through the use of an underground tank, at no installation cost. The closer a consumer is to an official Lebanese water grid, the better the quality of the water and the less likely it is to be cut off. Maashouk, however, is relatively far removed from an official Lebanese water network. Therefore, in Maashouk, residents rely on community wells for their daily water needs. These wells are managed by the PC and are usually dug with the help of international NGOs. Connecting to the local water network is straightforward and merely demands approval from the PC and the payment of a monthly fee of 10,000 LBP (USD 7). The quality of water provided by the PC, however, is very poor and not suitable for drinking, not even after cooking. This pushes residents to buy drinking water in 5 or 10-liter containers at an approximately 3,000 LBP (USD 2) per day—sums that accumulate to very high costs for the average family.

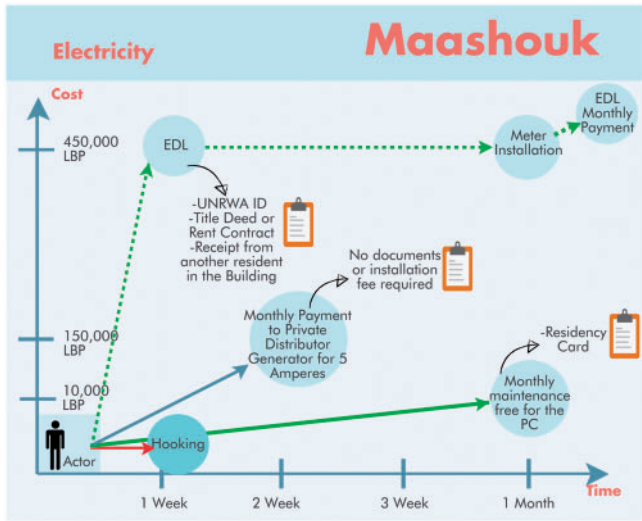

Figure 1
Accessing Electricity in Maashouk

Similarly to accessing electricity, the PC is 'regulating' the local water network that is built without the approval of the MEW or the local water authority. The PC relies on international NGOs to raise capital for funding the establishment or maintenance of local wells in the gathering (Figure 2).

Process of Disposing of Waste in Maashouk

In official refugee camps, waste management and disposal services are consistently provided by UNRWA. In gatherings such as Maashouk, however, the Lebanese municipality is theoretically responsible for solid-waste management. Residents in Maashouk typically dispose of their solid waste by placing it in designated bins outside their homes from which the municipality collects it almost six days a week—which, in terms of service provision in Lebanon, is considerably regular. Generally speaking, the majority of respondents in Maashouk consider themselves satisfied with the quality of the waste disposal service being provided. This is, they stress, entirely due to the geographical proximity to the Lebanese town where the municipality is responsible. Although a yearly municipality fee is typically required for this service (ranging from 50,000 to 150,000 LBP), this fee is sometimes waived in poor areas, where fee collection is inconsistent anyway, as is also the case in Maashouk. The efforts of the municipality to collect solid waste are typically maintained through positive relationship between the PC and the municipal authority through the mayor and his deputy. The PC, in some instances, can contribute to sweeping the streets by paying for labourers (Figure 3).

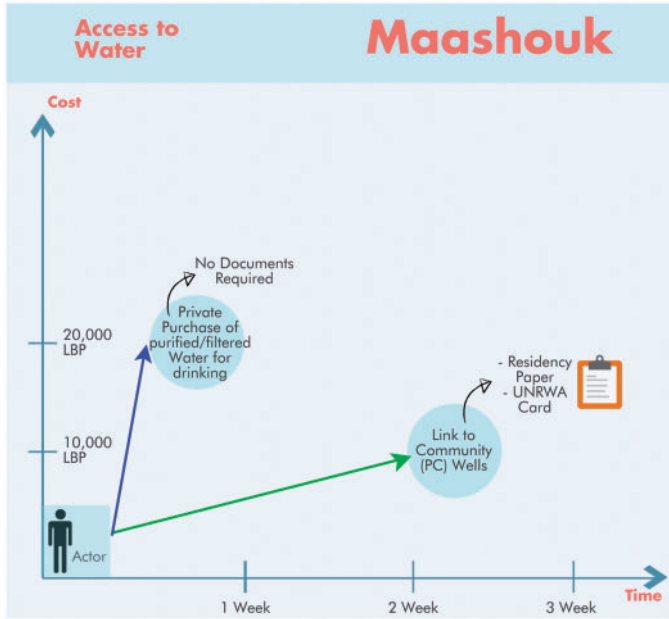

Figure 2
Accessing Water in Maashouk

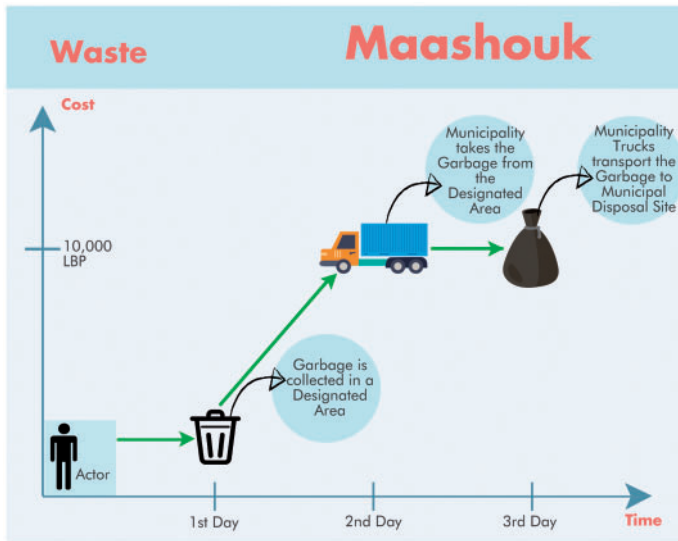

Figure 3
Process of Disposing Waste in Maashouk

Process of Shelter Repair in Maashouk

For major shelter repair in Lebanese areas, citizens are required to go to their local municipality to secure a permit for building. Such a permit is provided on the condition of legal ownership or rental of the property at hand. Given the general difficulty of proving ownership—especially with respect to inherited lands or lost deeds and other complications partly stemming from the administrative absence of the state during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90)—municipalities often overrule this legal process based on what they call 'knowledge of ownership'. Instead, a municipality would assess the circumstances at hand and grant the building/repair permit accordingly. All costs related to labour and materials then fall on the consumer.

In the gatherings, an entirely different set of rules governs shelter repair. Formally speaking, municipalities under which the gatherings cadastrally fall do not provide construction permits to the residents without residency documents. This poses a significant problem for many residents of Maashouk, who do not have any residency documentation—since they technically reside in informal settlements (if they do have a residency paper it usually states their (fictitious or previous) residence in one of the official camps). As a result, the majority of construction repairs are done without formal permission or do not abide by any sort of regulation and residents of Maashouk resort to informal avenues to realize shelter repair and construction.

Lebanese municipalities claim that the Palestinian gatherings are treated in the same way as Lebanese neighbourhoods where Palestinian residents are only allowed to build in accordance with the regular law. They would claim that Lebanese citizens without the necessary documentation would be refused papers just as Palestinian refugees would. Residents interviewed, conversely, said that they cannot receive building permits required for construction simply because they are Palestinian. Since the 2001 law that forbids Palestinians to own land or real estate, the link between Palestinian nationality, lack of residency papers and absence of building permissions has indeed become a direct and institutionalized one.

Many residents in Maashouk thus rely on NGOs or private initiatives for repair and reconstruction. During a governmental vacuum in 2011, for a short period of time, the Lebanese government failed to penalize people making repairs on their residences without permits. For an undeclared reason, the residents of Maashouk were denied this temporary impunity. They collectively demanded the right to build through protests and since then it has been relatively easier for Maashouk residents to obtain building permits. Nevertheless, there remains a tremendous and widespread need to perform shelter repair inside the Maashouk gathering. Lack of space and poor infrastructure further exacerbate the dire structural living conditions inside Maashouk (Figure 4).

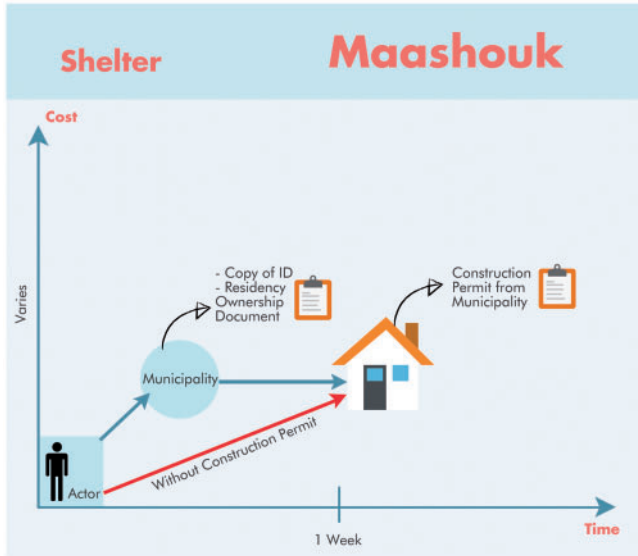

Figure 4
Process of Shelter Repair in Maashouk

Discussion

Palestinians living outside the official UN camps in informal areas such as the 'gatherings' have long lived in limbo. They do not receive the basic services provided by UNRWA in the camps and are denied most services provided by the official public bodies in Lebanese villages and towns. Consequently, in order to secure electricity, water, solid-waste disposal and shelter repair, Palestinians have had to resort to multiple complex and diverse processes of service provision, involving formal, semi-formal and informal methods. It is not unheard of that one resident may resort to tapping into several different routes in order to access only a single service. Although the Lebanese government and its institutions have clearly outlined the formal and official methods for service provision on its territory, such methods are seldom the routes in practice for Palestinians in the legal grey areas presented by the gatherings.

Our case study of Maashouk shows how closely formal and informal institutions are intertwined and how diverse the roles are that informal institutions play vis-à-vis formal ones. In the case of solid-waste management in Maashouk, municipal services are available for Palestinian refugees based on the formal institution of residency. The informal institutions which residents and their representatives rely on with regard to this service—such as investing in personal relations with municipal council members—predominantly serve to maintain the status quo. Regarding drinking water, conversely, municipal and governmental services are unavailable and informal institutions are thus

geared towards providing alternatives for formal services. Considering electricity and shelter repair, the problem is not that services are not available to the Palestinian refugees in Maashouk, but that they do not have access to them. With regard to electricity, access is impeded by high costs. Residents and the local PC turn to informal institutions to engineer illegal access to formal services. In the case of shelter repair, access depends on permits, which are withheld from Palestinians based on the conjunction of the formal institutions of citizenship and residency. Here, residents invest in either illegal access to permits through fabricated papers or in bypassing formal regulations altogether through public collective action.

The informal institutions residents of Maashouk resort to are pertinently political, ranging from clientelism and corruption in the case of electricity services to civil disobedience and (the threat of) use of force with regard to shelter repair (Lauth 2000). Among services we studied, we also see the variety of functions informal institutions can fulfil in relation to formal ones. With regard to waste management in Maashouk, informal institutions complement (i.e. seek to maintain and bolster) formal ones provided by the municipality. Considering drinking water, Maashouk's informal coping mechanisms substitute formal services by offering an alternative in the form of community wells. Regarding electricity, informal institutions can be regarded as accommodating ones as they change the outcomes of formal institutions: PC-managed hooking depends on EDL's formal electricity services, but fundamentally alters EDL's underlying allocation logic. Concerning shelter repair, finally, informal institutions have both substitutive and competing features: substitutive because Maashouk's residents simply bypass existing formal channels to access building permits, and competing because they openly defied formal institutions in favour of their informal ones.

Apart from these reactive relations that informal institutions have vis-à-vis formal ones, moreover, our study shows that informal institutions also have a more proactive, even portending, role towards formal institutions. Informal institutions do not merely respond to existing formal institutions; they also have the ability to herald future formal institutions. This is first and foremost the case because, and this is significant, residents in Maashouk explicitly ask for formalization of their services. This was most evident with regard to electricity services, where residents longed for more transparency and accountability. As such, echoing Anderson and Francois (2008), while bypassing official EDL electricity provision, residents of Maashouk simultaneously indicated a desire to formalize the existing informal arrangements so as to improve their living conditions. Similar dynamics characterize the other services. Residents' emphasis on the importance of the proximity and goodwill of the municipality in the case of waste management as well as their general willingness to pay for services signal a desire to perpetuate formal relations with the municipality and make them more durable. With regard to shelter repair services, residents' aspiration to formalization is even more poignant. Tellingly, and bringing to mind Bayat's (1997) 'episodic collective action'

among communities of urban poor, they protested to get the relevant permits rather than to realize construction without such permits.

Informality is certainly not, by definition, marginalization. In fact, it is often a remedy for marginalization. Yet, in Maashouk, residents themselves appear to associate formality with certainty and guarantees—in essence confirming our conceptualization of informal institutions as less predictable, more secretive and not documented in writing. In light of this demand of Palestinian refugees for formalization of their services, it is important to note that informality does not merely stem from the coping mechanisms of marginalized communities, but from the side of the Lebanese state as well. This was particularly evident in the shelter case. The government's decision to forego adherence to official documentation in favour of a personal judgement described as 'knowledge of ownership' deliberately blurs institutions determining permit allocation and instead makes such allocation dependent on individual civil servants. Similarly, as described above, the 2001 law can be said to have institutionalized the informal residency status of the Palestinians living outside the official camps.

The conscious as well as unconscious creation of informal institutions is thus not merely a coping mechanism of Palestinian refugees in Maashouk gathering to deal with their institutional marginalization, but also a coping mechanism of the Lebanese authorities to deal with this category of refugees that falls outside two of the country's most determining formal institutions: citizenship and refugeeness. This echoes observations by Tsai (2006: 123), who noted that 'local state agents may collaborate with ordinary people by intentionally misinterpreting the formal institutions that they are supposed to uphold' in cases of conflicting mandates, decentralized policy implementation and more pragmatic convergent interests (Tsai 2006: 123).

In fact, our findings above demonstrate that Palestinian residents of the gatherings are forced towards informality by these two different, but mutually reinforcing and equally exclusionary, institutions: citizenship and refugeeness. These institutions manifest themselves in terms of space, subject and representative. Because Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are not citizens—neither of the Lebanese nor of the Palestinian state—and do not hold civil rights, they legally do not have the same rights to services as Lebanese citizens do. As subjects they are thereby, at least partially, inherently informalized. Their exclusion from the formal institution of citizenship, however, should be partly alleviated by their inclusion in the formal status of refugee. As we have explained above, however, in Lebanon, the 'merits' of refugeeness are heavily dependent on camp residence. It is in the camps that UNRWA is obliged to provide urban services, that NGOs and Palestinian parties are most active, and that the PC operates with a certain degree of authority and autonomy. In terms of space, then, in the Lebanese context, Palestinians living outside the camps relinquish some of their formal refugee entitlements. This makes them more dependent still on informal institutions. Both elements, moreover, lack of citizenship and a tarnished refugee status,

combine to informalize the core representative of the Palestinians in the gatherings. While the legitimacy and capacity of the PCs should certainly not be over-estimated (Long and Hanafi 2010), they played a crucial role in most of the services we studied in Maashouk as well as in other gatherings (Knudsen and Hanafi 2011; Allan 2014; Stel 2014). Nevertheless, they lack the de jure legitimacy of representatives elected by citizens as well as the de facto authority of representatives operating under the Cairo Agreement in the camps.

Future Research and Policy Reflections

For future research in the field of refugee studies, our article suggests that the marginalization of refugees should not be conceptualized as merely following from their legal status (and lack of citizenship), but also from their place of residence. The infamous protection gap that Palestinian refugees are exposed to (Knudsen 2009; Allan 2014) is determined not merely by the statutes of different UN and government agencies, but also by more mundane considerations like place of residence. This, then, would demand more systematic comparisons between the informal coping mechanisms of refugees and other categories of the urban poor. In the Lebanese arena, specifically, juxtaposing Palestinian gathering dwellers, Palestinian camp dwellers and Lebanese squatters and urban poor can be expected to yield important insights in how vulnerable communities relate with both formal and informal institutions and how refugeeness operates as a driver in these dynamics.

In terms of policy relevance, one consideration stands out. The Lebanese context—characterized by a fear of *tawteen* (Haddad 2004; Meier 2010)—makes a reversion of Palestinians' refugee status into one of citizenship extremely unlike (and for many undesirable). This need not mean, however, as our findings suggest, that there is no room for formalizing refugees access to services if and where this is desired. By formalizing space—remedying the disparities between formal camps and informal gatherings—and representation—granting the PCs a more representative status in the civil if not the political realm—much headway can be made in improving the situation of a significant part of Lebanon's Palestinian refugees. Such a development, however, is only possible when policy-makers acknowledge that informality stems not merely from residents coping mechanisms, but also from the coping mechanisms of Lebanese government and policy-makers confronted by a category of people excluded from citizenship as well as many aspects of refugeeness.

As such, our findings also help to further conceptualize institutional change in two main ways. First, we have shown that informal institutions can, and according to many of Maashouk's residents should, foreshadow new and improved formal ones. The relation between formal and informal institutions, in other words, is not dialectic, but a continuum. This underwrites Tsai's thesis that 'the etiology of formal institutional change lies in the informal

coping strategies devised by local actors to evade the restrictions of formal institutions' (Tsai 2006: 117). For Tsai (2006: 127), 'the formal-informal-formal sequence represents the core of the argument'. Second, both formalization and informalization are inherently relational, as illustrated by the fact that informality in Maashouk is a response from residents to exclusionary formal institutions, but equally a response from state officials faced with formal institutions giving them insufficient guidance on how to deal with the Palestinian non-camp residents. This again confirms Tsai's (2006: 122) conceptualization of institutional change as deriving 'from interactions among various grassroots actors'. Just as informal institutions 'emerge out of the collaborative coping strategies of state and non-state actors when they find formal institutions too constraining', institutional change 'depends on interactions between various state and non-state actors' (Tsai 2006: 140). Embracing institutions as inherently relational ultimately means that analysts and policy-makers have to recognize that it is 'the accumulation of informal interactions between local state and non-state actors' that can provide 'both the impetus and legitimizing basis' for eventual reform or formalization (Tsai 2006: 118).

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