

Arbiters of Power: Qabaḍāyāt as Voluntary Security Actors and Intermediaries Between the State, Political Elites, and Local Communities in Lebanon (1943–1976)*

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ABSTRACTS

This article explores a phenomenon of local, voluntary security actors in Lebanon: the Qabaḍāyāt. These strongmen were power brokers and agents of political mobilization within Lebanon's system of patronage and clientelism, connecting local populations with political elites and state representatives. They constituted an important informal institution at the neighborhood level, protecting the neighborhood against external threats, policing crime, settling disputes, and preserving social order, traditions and morality. However, their local authority was based on the use or threat of violence. The article positions the Qabaḍāyāt within the broader field of research on voluntariness and voluntary engagement, focusing on their voluntary nature and their ambivalent role as both protectors of the neighborhood and as violent actors who often bypassed the rule of law. It traces their evolving role within Lebanon's political system from its independence in 1943 until their gradual disappearance during the civil war.

Dieser Artikel untersucht ein Phänomen lokaler, freiwilliger Sicherheitsakteure im Libanon: die Qabaḍāyāt. Diese einflussreichen Intermediäre waren zentrale Akteure der politischen Mobilisierung innerhalb des libanesischen Patronage-Systems und vermittelten zwischen der lokalen

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Bevölkerung, politischen Eliten und Staatsvertretern. Sie bildeten eine wichtige informelle Institution auf Nachbarschaftsebene, schützten die lokale Gemeinschaft vor externen Bedrohungen, patrouillierten gegen Kriminalität, schlichteten Streitigkeiten und bewahrten die soziale Ordnung, Traditionen und Moral. Ihre lokale Autorität beruhte jedoch auf der Anwendung oder Androhung von Gewalt. Der Artikel positioniert die Qabaḍāyāt im Kontext der Freiwilligkeits- und Engagementsforschung und konzentriert sich auf ihren freiwilligen Charakter und ihre ambivalente Rolle als Beschützer der Nachbarschaft und als gewalttätige Akteure, die oft die Rechtsstaatlichkeit umgingen. Er vollzieht zudem ihre sich wandelnde Rolle innerhalb des politischen Systems des Libanon seit seiner Unabhängigkeit im Jahr 1943 bis zu ihrem sukzessiven Verschwinden während des Bürgerkriegs nach.

Introduction

Since its inception, Lebanon has existed in a state of “hybrid sovereignty,”¹ in which a plethora of voluntary, private, non-state, semi-state, and state actors have interacted to provide social services, but also order and security at the local level. In this paper, we focus on a unique phenomenon of voluntary security actors, known as *qabaḍāyāt*. These neighborhood bosses were endowed with a “quasi-chivalric ethic,”² and acted as popular leaders of youth gangs (*ṣayh aš-šabāb*), including some subordinate *qabaḍāyāt*.³ It is important to note that *qabaḍāyāt* were not a religious (Islamic) phenomenon, but rather a cultural peculiarity of the religiously plural societies in the Levant, especially multi-confessional Lebanon.⁴

They originated from medieval brotherhood associations, concerned with self-defense and local security, which had specifically masculine codes of honor. Since the seventeenth century, *qabaḍāyāt* have been an important informal institution at the neighborhood level in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. They acted as intermediaries between the people and the representatives of imperial and local government, settling disputes, providing services, and protecting clientele.⁵ While they have gradually been replaced by new political and ideological actors in other countries since the Mandate period, the *qabaḍāyāt* have remained particularly strong in Lebanon, with its pronounced system of

1 Sara Fregonese, “Beyond the ‘Weak State’: Hybrid Sovereignties in Beirut,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30, no. 4 (2012): 655–674.

2 Edmund Burke, ed., *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East* (University of California Press, 1993), 179.

3 Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East* (Harvard University Center for International Affairs, 1979), 98.

4 Purportedly epitomizing the virtues of all Arabs, regardless of their religion (Michael Johnson, “Political Bosses and Their Gangs: Zu’ama and Qabadayat in the Sunni Muslim Quarters of Beirut,” in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, eds. Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (Duckworth and Center for Mediterranean Studies of the American Universities Field Staff, 1977), 207–224, at 212.

5 Ḥusayn M. Fā’ūr, *Dawābiḥ al-walā’ al-ahli wa-siyāsāt al-madina: Qabaḍāyāt Bayrūt (1926–1975) wa-maṣiruhum fi ‘ahd al-ahzāb* [Control of Civil Loyalty and Urban Politics: Qabadayat Beirut (1926–1975) and their Fate in the Age of Political Parties] (Dār Bilāl li-ṭ-ṭibā’a wa-n-Našr, 2013), 41–57; Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence*, 98; Michael Johnson, *Class and Client in Beirut: The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State 1840–1985* (Ithaca Press, 1986), 21.

patronage and clientelism. There, qabaḏāyāt provided security at the neighborhood level, among other services, until the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990).⁶

The role of qabaḏāyāt as local security actors stems from Lebanon's long history of indirect rule under the Ottoman Empire. Direct rule was established only in the coastal cities; Mount Lebanon, however, was governed by intermediaries, the *zu'amā'* (sing. *zā'im*), a specific Lebanese form of quasi-feudal leaders. They protected their followers and provided for their needs, and in return collected taxes and could enlist men in times of conflict. This reciprocal relationship between a *zā'im* and his clientele formed the foundation of Lebanon's patronage system, evolving over time to encompass not only feudal mountain lords, but also urban notables, populist leaders, and Islamic clerics.⁷ The *zu'amā'*-system still dominates Lebanon's sociopolitical landscape, with patrons now being ministers and members of parliament. This allows them to channel services and resources to their constituents, who then vote for them in elections and rally in their favor during frequent demonstrations, commemorations, or conflicts. The complex clientelist political system previously included qabaḏāyāt, who held significant positions of authority at the neighborhood level and acted as power brokers for the *zu'amā'*.⁸

We focus on the changing role of qabaḏāyāt since Lebanon's independence in 1943, especially the conflict-ridden and ideologically charged period from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. That time was a heyday of non-state actors performing duties typically assigned to the state—at least by Western European standards. Like other Arab countries, Lebanon was enmeshed in the regional implementation of the Cold War and societal conflicts between progressive and conservative forces in the context of the “Global Sixties.” After a brief armed conflict in 1958⁹ between leftist and Arab nationalist political parties on one side and Christian conservative groups on the other, the liberal country with its *laissez-faire* economy entered a period of unusually strong government under the presidency of Fouad Chehab (1958–1964). His political and socioeconomic reform program (“*Chehabism*”) included stronger state control and the integration of Lebanon's vernacular leaders, the *zu'amā'*, who occupied the majority of political positions in the republic. Chehab also sought to reduce the influence of militias of the *zu'amā'*, as well as their local strongmen, the qabaḏāyāt. He identified these groups as a threat to his pro-

6 Michael Johnson, *All Honourable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon* (The Centre for Lebanese Studies and I. B. Tauris, 2001), 25.

7 Ahmad N. Hamzeh, “Clientelism, Lebanon: Roots and Trends,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 3 (2001): 167–178; Samir Khalaf, “Changing Forms of Political Patronage in Lebanon,” in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, eds. Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (Duckworth and Center for Mediterranean Studies of the American Universities Field Staff, 1977), 185–205.

8 Johnson, *Class and Client*, 2–8; Fā'ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā' al-ahli*, 75–76; Philip S. Khoury, “Abu Ali al-Kilawi: A Damascus Qabaday,” in *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Edmund Burke (University of California Press, 1993), 179–190, at 181.

9 Kamal S. Salibi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958–1976* (Caravan Books, 1977); Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (Pluto Press, 2007), 133–137; for an analysis of the conflict of 1958 in a broader regional context, see Cyrus Schayegh, “Reconsidered: State Formation and the Cold War in the Early 1958 Postcolonial Arab Middle East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 421–443.

ject to strengthen the state's monopoly of violence.¹⁰ Due to resistance from all political camps, Chehab declined a second term,¹¹ and his successor effectively failed to continue his reform program. The late 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by a severe socioeconomic crisis, conflicts between both political camps, student unrest, and strikes. Furthermore, Palestinian revolutionary organizations grew in influence after the Six-Day War in 1967, leading to conflicts with Israel, and the mobilization of militias of Christian *zu'ama'*.¹² These factors all contributed to the beginning of the civil war in 1975. The *qabaḍāyāt* constituted a genuinely voluntary, informal institution that exercised social control and provided local security. As socially embedded actors at the neighborhood level, one could argue that *qabaḍāyāt* were better equipped than state actors to resolve conflicts, because they knew the residents, their family networks, local hierarchies, and social codes. However, they may also have lacked impartiality when dealing with local conflicts and sometimes abused their power. Moreover, a *qabaḍāy*'s authority was based on the use or threat of violence,¹³ which he could employ arbitrarily and often without official accountability. Although Lebanon is a parliamentary democracy based on the principle of the separation of powers, the *qabaḍāy*, in his alliance with a powerful *za'im*, operated outside the rule of law or circumvented it in various ways. This highlights their ambivalent role as voluntary security actors beyond the control of the state or community.

In general, volunteers by definition earn no wages, but are not precluded from receiving any personal benefits for their work. For instance, they often receive an allowance (e.g., per diem) for their time and work. They also obtain social recognition and respect by taking on social responsibilities. They usually feel good about doing something meaningful in their lives and experience individual growth. Often, they enhance their career possibilities because voluntary engagement is widely appreciated as a positive social norm. In the case of the *qabaḍāyāt*, there are clear social and material advantages to achieving this local position of power. Often from humble origins, the young men gained significant social status, particularly in their neighborhoods but also in Lebanese society as a whole. Through their social position, connections, and their alliance with an influential *za'im*, they even obtained political clout themselves. Furthermore, their specific style and habitus made them attractive to women, especially in the historical context of the 1950s to 1970s, when Lebanon became a vacation destination for the international jet set, and Beirut, with its numerous nightclubs, transformed into the liberal party hotspot of the Arab world. Apart from these social perks, the *qabaḍāyāt* also enjoyed financial and material benefits from their position. The *zu'ama'* competed for the attention of successful

10 Chehab also created an intelligence agency, the Deuxième Bureau, to strengthen the state's sovereignty. However, the Deuxième Bureau made use of the *qabaḍāyāt* during their intervention in the parliamentary elections of 1960 (Nicolas Nāṣif, *Ġumhūrīyat Fu'ād Šihāb* [Fouad Chehab's Republic] (Dār an-Nahār, 2008), 426).

11 Johnson, *Class and Client*, 137–58; Traboulsi, *History*, 138–155; Theodor Hanf, *Koexistenz im Krieg: Staatszerfall und Entstehen einer Nation im Libanon* (Nomos, 1990), 116–129.

12 Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence*, 79–82.

13 Johnson, "Political Bosses," 210–212.

qabaḍāyāt, with gifts as well as connections and seed capital to help them build up their own businesses. Their position of power also enabled them to engage in lucrative criminal activities, including extortion, racketeering, and drug trafficking. Thus, the potential risks to life and limb of the voluntary security actors were well compensated.

Volunteering is generally considered a positive social activity. Conversely, voluntary, private forms of policing carry a negative connotation because they run counter to a more predominant norm, particularly from the rather exceptional Western European perspective: the idea of the sovereignty of the nation-state. Security and policing are seen as the purview of the state, in other words, not private actors. Academic studies have also tended to focus on positive connotated forms of volunteering. However, research on voluntary work that is not desired by the state provides a new perspective on voluntariness. It sheds light on the ambiguities of civic engagement by showing that perceptions of volunteer work vary according to historical, legal, cultural, and situational contexts. Sometimes, these perceptions categorize certain types of volunteering as political activism or illegal activity.¹⁴ Moreover, the research provides insights into historical conflicts of interpretation over the role of the state and changing societal norms. These conflicting interpretations are particularly interesting when examining societies in the Global South, where alternative understandings of the state's duties and the rule of law may be prevalent, and where citizen volunteers habitually perform functions that would be relegated to the state in Europe.

Discussing the phenomenon of qabaḍāyāt from the perspective of voluntariness allows for a critical reflection on voluntary engagement in relation to the responsibilities of the state and a society's social contract. Because qabaḍāyāt performed important tasks that the state did not or could not adequately fulfil, they emerge as both providers of order at the neighborhood level and competitors of state agents. Thus, research on them contributes to the decentering of the state in historical analysis, shifting the focus to local self-organization and subaltern agency. In this article, we present a historical-critical analysis of the phenomenon of qabaḍāyāt as voluntary security actors and mid-level power brokers. To this end, we employ two perspectives on voluntariness. First, we reflect on voluntariness as a social norm and mode of action to elaborate on the voluntary nature of becoming and acting as a qabaḍāy, and to examine the local functions they voluntarily performed. Second, we explore their complex and evolving relationship with the state and its formal institutions from the understanding that voluntariness is not just a mode of action but also a resource for individuals, societies, and governments. Specifically, we outline how the qabaḍāyāt adapted their functions and actions in response to changing historical conditions, as well as the circumstances under which the state curtailed or co-opted them. Furthermore, we emphasize the significant historical disruption caused by

14 See Regula Ludi's and Matthias Ruoss's remarks on volunteer work in the "alternative milieu" (Regula Ludi and Matthias Ruoss, "Dialektiken der Freiwilligkeit: Editorial," *Historische Anthropologie* 31, no. 2 (2023): 203–207) and especially Ruoss's article on the criminalization of voluntary engagement in abortion assistance (Matthias Ruoss, "Judging Voluntariness: Abortion Assistance around 1900," *Rethinking History* 29, no. 1 [2024]: 71–88). See also the interview "Voluntariness in Global Perspective" in this issue.

the civil war, which resulted in their gradual replacement by other non-state security actors. These two perspectives allow us to discuss different facets of the qabaḍāyāt's varying social position within Lebanon's power hierarchies, their individual agency, *Eigen-Sinn*,¹⁵ and their repertoires of action during a period of societal transformation. Applying a voluntariness approach to our analysis of qabaḍāyāt as ambiguous actors of local policing provides new insights into volunteering in relation to public order and state control in postcolonial societies. Moreover, examining essentially Western-shaped concepts of voluntariness and volunteerism from a Global South perspective allows for a critical reflection on their universality and transferability, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of voluntary modes of action in non-Western contexts.

For such an important and long-standing phenomenon, the state of research on qabaḍāyāt is limited. Michael Johnson's socio-historical and socio-psychological studies¹⁶ provide insight into Lebanon's politics of clientelism, describing it as a complex "political machine" and "agent of social control" that is highly adaptable to social change.¹⁷ Johnson focuses on the qabaḍāyāt's role in the patronage system, but also emphasizes their social functions at the neighborhood level and how they are contingent upon honor and prestige. The role of male honor and violence in Lebanon's system of clientelism is also the focus of Michael Gilson's anthropological analysis,¹⁸ which focuses on rural northern Lebanon in the early 1970s. He highlights how changing relationships between local historical actors and the state caused adjustments in narratives of power and shifting practices of enforcing domination. Gilson's insights from this rural area of Lebanon also pertain to qabaḍāyāt in urban contexts to a certain extent. In his sociological study, Fā'ūr¹⁹ explains qabaḍāyāt as a social phenomenon in Arab societies. He discusses their historical origins and contrasts them with comparable actors such as the Egyptian *futuwwāt* and the Italian mafia. His study, based on interviews conducted over two decades, is an important contribution to the literature.²⁰ Johnson, Gilson and Fā'ūr all contribute important works for understanding the intricacies of clientelism in Lebanon and the role of the qabaḍāyāt within it. However, they do not emphasize the qabaḍāyāt's voluntary nature, a distinctive feature that provides further insight into the functioning

15 "Eigen-Sinn" is an ambiguous term coined by Alf Lüdtke. It means to keep one's own mind, to stubbornly insist on one's own agenda, and to neither comply nor resist (Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* [Results Verlag, 1993], 140–160; Thomas Lindenberger, "Neither Consent nor Opposition: Eigen-Sinn or How to Make Sense of Compliance and Self-Assertion under Communist Domination," in *Making Sense of Dictatorship: Domination and Everyday Life in East Central Europe after 1945*, eds. Celia Donert, Ana Kladnik, and Martin Sabrow [CEU Press, 2022], 19–30).

16 Johnson, *All Honourable Men*; Johnson, *Class and Client*; Michael Johnson, "Popular Movements and Primordial Loyalties in Beirut," in *Sociology of 'Developing Societies': The Middle East*, eds. Talal Asad and Roger Owen (Heinemann, 1983), 178–194; Johnson, "Political Bosses."

17 Johnson, "Political Bosses," 207–208.

18 Michael Gilson, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in Arab Society* (I. B. Tauris, 1996).

19 Fā'ūr, *Dawābiḥ al-walā' al-ahli*.

20 The other more recent Arabic-language monograph of 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Muḥammad as-Sammāk paints a more idealized picture of the qabaḍāy ('Abd ar-Raḥmān M. as-Sammāk, *Qabaḍāyāt Bayrūt: Ahl aš-šahāma wa-l-murū'a wa-n-naḥwa: 1600–1946* [Qabadayat Beirut: People of Generosity, Chivalry, and Brotherhood, 1600–1946] [ad-Dār al-'Arabiya lil-'Ulūm Nāširūn, 2015]).

of state and society in Lebanon. Our research is based on an evaluation of the literature as well as historical and contemporary Lebanese newspaper articles about the qabaḍāyāt, notably an in-depth interview with former qabaḍāy Hassan al-Yatim from 1980. In what follows, we first elaborate on the voluntary nature of the qabaḍāyāt and the functions they performed voluntarily. Second, we trace the changing social and political conditions to which they adapted their modes of voluntary actions and their shifting relationship with the state in independent Lebanon (1943–1958), during the era of *Chehabism* (1958–1970), and during the prewar and early civil war period (1970–1976), when militias challenged and ultimately took over the qabaḍāyāt’s role as local security actors. In the conclusion, we suggest some areas for further research on qabaḍāyāt.

1 The Voluntary Nature of Qabaḍāyāt and Their Role in Lebanese Society

The term qabaḍāy stems from *kabaday*, Turkish for “rough maternal uncle, swashbuckler, swaggerer, thug, bully, tough guy.”²¹ The Arabic roots of the word, qa-ba-ḍa, from which the verb “to catch, hold, grasp” and the noun “fist” are derived, point toward the qabaḍāyāt’s role as enforcers and policemen. According to former qabaḍāy Hassan al-Yatim, a qabaḍāy is an

*honest, upright man who protects people’s honor (ṣaraf) and defends their dignity (karāma) no matter what the cost. He is also the one who protects the honor of women (‘ird) and people’s money. If he is forced to commit a certain crime, his crime must be honorable in order to gain people’s support and sympathies. If he is forced to flee, his flight must be honorable, otherwise people will conspire against him and hand him over to the police. And whoever does otherwise, i.e., whoever steals, plunders and assaults a women’s honor, we call him a thug (az’ar). There is a big difference between the qabaḍāy and the thug.*²²

Al-Yatim provides an idealized description that feeds a present-day nostalgia for qabaḍāyāt, who once adhered to strict moral codes and are still remembered in Lebanon as local heroes.²³ A qabaḍāy was expected to defend the weak, support the poor, safeguard religious minorities, and prevent or punish crime. He protected the community against external threats, and exercised social control internally, especially by ensuring the observance of traditions and moral rules and the defense of the women’s honor.²⁴ Thus

21 A young man usually has a more relaxed relationship with maternal uncles than with paternal uncles, who may become his father-in-law. Johnson, *Class and Client*, 82; Johnson, “Political Bosses,” 211; Fā’ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā’ al-ahli*, 73; as-Sammāk, *Qabaḍāyāt Bayrūt*, 47.

22 Interview with Hassan al-Yatim, *Assafir*, June 29, 1980, 11 (own translation).

23 Fā’ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā’ al-ahli*, 73; Johnson, *Class and Client*, 3. The projection of positive qualities onto them is also evident in a political play by internationally acclaimed leftist playwright and theater director Jalal Khoury, titled “Qabaḍāy” (1972). It addresses the concept of tragic heroism in a climate of oppression and juxtaposes it to the “obsolete heroism” of the Western world (*Al-Akhbar*, January 29, 1972, 6 [own translation]).

24 Fā’ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā’ al-ahli*, 74–75; Johnson, *Class and Client*, 82–83; Interview with Hassan al-Yatim, *Assafir*, June 29, 1980, 11.

they also acted as a kind of “moral police.” As al-Yatim highlights, qabaḏāyāt must act in a way that preserves their legitimacy with the local residents.

Lebanese scholar Khalil Ahmad Khalil provides a more pragmatic and less hagiographic description of a qabaḏāy, defining him as someone capable of reaching a position of power that enables the exploitation of others. Using violence or the threat of violence, he leverages his power and the authority of the za‘īm with whom he is allied to serve both of their interests.²⁵ According to Fā‘ūr, a qabaḏāy’s social capital consists of the power to coerce others into doing certain things, including extortion and racketeering.²⁶ Lebanese historian and journalist Samir Kassir characterized qabaḏāyāt as “nothing less than outlaws, bandits posing as protectors of widows and orphans.”²⁷ Incidents of qabaḏāyāt violence have been reported in the press, such as threatening the owner of a bank by placing bombs in front of the bank in Tripoli in 1967, or in illegally collecting customs duties at the port of Sur in the mid-1970s.²⁸

Up until the late 1970s and early 1980s, qabaḏāyāt were an integral part of Lebanon’s patronage system. They forged a special relationship with a za‘īm, sometimes even several zu‘amā’. Through individual agency, they positioned themselves as intermediaries between the people of the quarter and the za‘īm. It is important to emphasize that young men became qabaḏāyāt voluntarily; they did not have a work contract with a za‘īm nor were they elected or officially taken into service by the neighborhood community. Qabaḏāyāt acted autonomously, usually making a living through legal activities such as working as bodyguards, taxi drivers, wholesale traders, or parking lot managers. Many of Beirut’s qabaḏāyāt owned coffee shops in different parts of the capital, each displaying a picture of the za‘īm to whom he was loyal.²⁹ However, some qabaḏāyāt engaged in illegal activities, such as trafficking weapons or drugs, or combined legal and illegal activities.³⁰ In 1974, for example, qabaḏāyāt in Tripoli occupied a farmer’s market that had recently been established by the municipality and turned it into a parking lot, collecting fees from drivers.³¹

Michael Johnson and Philip Khoury point out that qabaḏāyāt typically came from families with little socioeconomic and cultural capital.³² Becoming a qabaḏāy provided a young man from humble origins with agency and responsibility within the community by elevating him to a position of significant local prestige, *wāsta* (influence,

25 Ḥalil A. Ḥalil, *Al-‘arab wa-l-qiyāda: Baḥṭ iḡtimā‘ī fi ma‘anā as-sulṭa wa-dawr al-qā‘id* [Arabs and Leadership: A Social Research on the Meaning of Power and the Role of the Leader] (Dār al-Ḥadāta, 1981), 219.

26 Fā‘ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā’ al-ahli*, 75.

27 Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (University of California Press, 2010), 233.

28 *Assafir*, December 26, 1967, 1; *Assafir*, August 17, 1976, 3.

29 Ṭāriq Kawwā, “ahāwī l-abaḏāyāt bi-Bayrūt ayām zamān: Šūfū išaṣun” [The Coffee Shops of the Qabadayat of Beirut in the Old Days: See Their Stories], Beirut.com, August 24, 2023; Rūzīt Fādīl, “Qabaḏāyāt Bayrūt min al-Astā Bāz ilā Ṭanbar” [The Qabadayat of Beirut from Asta Baz to Tanbar], *Annahar*, February 9, 2019.

30 Fā‘ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā’ al-ahli*, 155–179; Johnson, “Political Bosses,” 213.

31 *Assafir*, June 10, 1974, 2; *Assafir*, September 7, 1974, 2.

32 Johnson, “Political Bosses,” 211; Khoury, “Abu Ali al-Kilawī,” 181–82. The biographies of the qabaḏāyāt interviewed by Fā‘ūr confirm this (Fā‘ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā’ al-ahli*, 293–327).

connections)³³ and honor. Consequently, young men admired qabaḏāyāt and aspired to become one. That the position was voluntary and usually achieved through a form of self-activation made a qabaḏāy not subservient to a za‘īm but rather a coveted ally, who had the clout to act “*eigen-sinnig*,” i.e., on his own accord. Particularly powerful qabaḏāyāt, with their direct influence over the local population, could even bring down a weakened za‘īm.³⁴ However, the position they voluntarily took on was not entirely self-made. Rather, it adhered to historically developed societal norms that favored vertical forms of organization over horizontal ones. The role they proactively took up was created for them within Lebanon’s power hierarchies. Thus, it can be seen as a form of interpellation of the subject in the sense of Louis Althusser.

Although a qabaḏāy’s position presented numerous opportunities for personal advancement and gain, they were mid-level actors within the zu‘amā’-system and therefore subject to obligations, constraints, and pressures from the za‘īm and the neighborhood community. Thus, their agency was limited. For one thing, they depended upon maintaining good relationships with a za‘īm. Although they could shift their allegiances, they relied on their reputation as powerful yet trustworthy partners. Furthermore, their legitimacy as qabaḏāyāt rested on the support of the local population, whether through approval, or by exerting social control via violence and threats. As a result of those obligations and pressures qabaḏāyāt often held their positions of power for just a few years before it began to wane.³⁵ This illustrates that voluntariness is generally governed by societal conditions, power structures, and normative discourses that direct voluntary engagement towards socially accepted areas. These external conditions and social norms are historically changeable, making particular courses of action seem appropriate, reasonable, or necessary at different times. Thus, they continually shape and re-shape the decision-making processes and modes of action of voluntary actors.

In addition to their responsibilities as mediators in conflicts, protectors of the neighborhood, and policemen, qabaḏāyāt played a pivotal role in mobilizing votes for zu‘amā’ during elections.³⁶ They mainly did so through intimidation or by buying votes with access to influential politicians in Lebanon’s patronage system who could provide jobs, for instance, or offer subsidies for healthcare or education (as the neoliberal Lebanese state provides only a minimum of social services and social security). Qabaḏāyāt also organized demonstrations supporting the political agenda of the za‘īm and broke strikes that

33 *Wāṣṭa* (originally *wāṣiṭa*, i.e., “mediator,” “intermediary”) is a culturally rooted type of social capital in the Arab world that is a kind of favoritism. It constitutes a form of influence based on personal networks, which allows individuals to achieve their aims, particularly in the public sector, by appealing to a high-ranking contact, who in turn uses his status and pull to gain favors for the person.

34 *Fā’ūr*, *Ḍawābiḡ al-walā’ al-ahli*, 91.

35 “He spreads his fame and flies a little bit, probably because of his excess vitality that every qabaḏāy should have. They have the vitality of many years in one year.” Ḥasan Dāwūd, “Madīna bilā Qabaḏāyāt” [A City without Qabaḏāyāt], *Assafir*, August 18, 1984, 10 (own translation).

36 Qabaḏāyāt are commonly called “*miftāḥ*” (Arabic for “key”) because of their central function in elections (Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence*, 98).

threatened his interests.³⁷ In short, the qabaḍāy helped the zaʿīm maintain their grip on power and exert control over their constituents.

In turn, the zaʿīm intervened whenever the qabaḍāy was in trouble with state authorities, protecting him from prosecution or gaining leniency.³⁸ Each time the qabaḍāy walked free instead of going to prison, his prestige and that of the zaʿīm increased because the people understood that they were powerful enough to subvert the law.³⁹ The complementary power of qabaḍāy and zaʿīm, came at the expense of the rule of law and the sovereignty of the state. Of course, there were also critics of the system: A 1974 opinion piece in the leftist newspaper *Assafir* describes the qabaḍāyāt's involvement in corruption and embezzlement schemes and claims that "the ruling state in Lebanon [...] is the state of the qabaḍāyāt."⁴⁰ For all the important functions a qabaḍāy fulfilled within the zuʿamāʾ-system, the zaʿīm had an interest in empowering him. If someone loyal to a zaʿīm wanted to ask for a favor directly, for example, the zaʿīm would refer them to the qabaḍāy.⁴¹ Thus, the zaʿīm upheld the status of his qabaḍāy to keep him from shifting his voluntary alliances to another zaʿīm, as qabaḍāyāt were often known to do.

Qabaḍāyāt also had a distinctive habitus that made them immediately recognizable. They were physically fit, muscular, shared a similar style of elegant dress, and maintained an immaculate appearance.⁴² Especially at night, when they patrolled the streets with stick, dagger, or pistol and a lot of swagger, they displayed masculine attributes that met the requirements of their social position and the community's expectations. Qabaḍāyāt also walked, gestured, and spoke in a particular manner, sometimes to intimidate and other times to resolve conflicts. Hassan al-Yatim explains that

*the gentleman's language is the language of the qabaḍāy, it must be polite. [...] The qabaḍāy is the one who pays from his pocket to resolve the problem between two young men who disagree. And he is the one who seeks to solve the problems of his friends, his family, his sect, and his neighbors. And he is the one who pays the poor families from his own pocket, and by this he will gain the love of the people.*⁴³

Their performances of masculinity, valor, and magnanimity corresponded strongly with archetypes of popular heroes in Arab culture. These were adapted from Ottoman times to contemporary contexts, depicting the qabaḍāyāt as heroes of the fight for independence in the 1930s and early 40s, or as heroes of the 1958 revolution.

37 For instance, qabaḍāyāt in Tripoli broke a strike at a factory after just one hour by threatening the workers (*Assafir*, October 27, 1974, 2).

38 Fā'ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā' al-ahlī*, 76, 91.

39 Fā'ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā' al-ahlī*, 126. Sometimes, the zaʿīm would secure an understanding with the local police to allow the qabaḍāy to roam the streets at night and come back to prison at dawn (Fā'ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā' al-ahlī*, 216).

40 *Assafir*, July 26, 1974, 7 (own translation).

41 Fā'ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā' al-ahlī*, 75–76.

42 Beirut author and journalist Hassan Dawud describes Hassan al-Yatim and his contemporary qabaḍāyāt in the 1970s as "the flower of young men"; "The women love them a lot, their clothes, their cars, their hair, which they cut very nice to show that they are beautiful." (Dāwūd, "Madina bilā Qabaḍāyāt," 10 [own translation]).

43 Interview with Hassan al-Yatim, *Assafir*, June 29, 1980, 11 (own translation).

2 Qabaḍāyāt and Their Interrelation with the State in the Context of Historical Change

2.1 The Independence Era

As local security providers, the qabaḍāyāt were courted by the French authorities during the Mandate period. The French attempted to incorporate them into their sphere of influence to uphold law and order. Thus, if the qabaḍāyāt built good relationships with the security services, the authorities turned a blind eye to some of their practices, such as carrying weapons without a permit, and showed leniency when penalizing them for criminal acts.⁴⁴ The Mandate authorities aimed to neutralize any political threat that might arise from the qabaḍāyāt.

Following independence in 1943, the political situation changed, allowing Lebanon's vernacular leaders to once again rely entirely on the qabaḍāyāt as local enforcers and vote collectors. The voluntary alliances between the qabaḍāyāt and the zu'amā', particularly in electoral mobilization, caused the zu'amā' to compete for their attention. The zu'amā' also intervened on their behalf whenever they were in trouble with the authorities, thereby subverting the rule of law in the new parliamentary republic. This contributed to a new normative discourse on state sovereignty that aligned with the political and socio-economic conditions of the 1950s. During this time, Lebanon's laissez-faire economy boomed, but democratic institutions were undermined by President Camille Chamoun's (1952–1958) autocratic policies.⁴⁵

For example, in the late 1950s, Metri al-Ekdih, a famous Christian qabaḍāy, stabbed Taufik Shmaisani, a Muslim qabaḍāy, in the heart. Al-Ekdih was sentenced to 15 years in prison but was released after two years due to the intervention of Henri Far'aoun, a za'im and influential Christian politician. Al-Ekdih was even honored with a prestigious membership to the Beirut Horse Racing Club, which Far'aoun owned.⁴⁶ In 2010, former qabaḍāy Khalil Khaled al-Feghali recounted how, in 1951, when he was 19 years old, he shot another young man but received only a suspended prison sentence of one and a half months, due to Far'aoun's and his associates' interference. Al-Feghali reflects critically: "This is how the Lebanese state institutions and their security, administrative and judicial apparatuses were 60 years ago, and they are still the same today."⁴⁷

The increased interest of the zu'amā' in the qabaḍāyāt during this period caused the qabaḍāyāt to adapt their modes of voluntary action. Most notably, it emboldened them to diversify and switch their loyalties. For instance, Rashad Qulaylat, a Sunni qabaḍāy from the Basta neighborhood, was allied with Abdallah al-Yafi, an on-and-off prime minister from the late 1930s to the late 1960s. In 1957, al-Yafi formed a pro-Nasserist

44 Fā'ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā' al-ahli*, 90.

45 Traboulsi, *History*, 129–138.

46 Muḥammad Abī Samrā, *Maqātil qabaḍāyāt az-zu'amā' bi-malāhi Bhamdūn wa-Bayrūt al-layliya fi l-ḥamsināt* [Qabadayat of Leaders Fighting in the Nightclubs of Bhamdoun and Beirut in the Fifties], al-Modon, July 5, 2020.

47 *Annahar*, November 8, 2010 (own translation).

people's revolution movement with Saeb Salam, another influential Beirut Sunni politician, who also held the post of prime minister several times. When they planned demonstrations against the pro-Western president Chamoun in Basta, Qulaylat sided with Chamoun by blocking the demonstrations. His reason for switching his allegiance was to protect his own business interests, which depended upon his good relations with a family allied to Chamoun. Subsequently, however, the Sunni leaders of the 1958 revolution did rely on another qabaḍāy when launching their "popular resistance" in Basta. This qabaḍāy rose to power in the neighborhood, replacing Rashad Qulaylat.⁴⁸ This example illustrates the qabaḍāyāt's individual agency and freedom of choice in forming and altering their alliances. It also underscores the consequences of disloyalty and the constraints on their agency and power within Lebanon's system of clientelism.

During the independence era, the main characteristic of the qabaḍāyāt was that they were a highly sought-after resource for the zu'amā', yet not co-opted by the state. Even when President Chamoun collaborated with some qabaḍāyāt, it was solely for electoral purposes. The only time some qabaḍāyāt were actively integrated into Lebanon's state institutions was during Fouad Chehab's presidential term (1958–1964). His aim was twofold: to use the qabaḍāyāt as a tool to combat the zu'amā''s popularity and to utilize their connections in the criminal world to apprehend wanted criminals. This was the golden era of the qabaḍāyāt because the competition for them—from the zu'amā' on one side and now the state on the other—was at its peak.

2.2 The Golden Era

During the politically charged period from the late 1950s through the 1960s, political ideologies in Lebanon began influencing the qabaḍāyāt as well as their relationships with each other and the zu'amā'. Several qabaḍāyāt emerged as popular leaders from the political crisis and armed conflict of 1958. Many Muslim qabaḍāyāt, such as Hassan al-Yatim, advocated for Arab nationalism (particularly in the form of Nasserism that also integrated elements of Arab socialism), while many Christian qabaḍāyāt, particularly Maronites, supported Lebanese nationalism. Their usual rivalries over territory, influence, and access to resources were now imbued with a political dimension tied to the conflicts between the zu'amā' over the future of Lebanon.

Furthermore, the state's interest in the qabaḍāyāt's affairs reached its peak during the presidential term of Fouad Chehab. The Deuxième Bureau, the intelligence agency created by Chehab during his presidency, competed with zu'amā' like Saeb Salam and Camille Chamoun to garner the qabaḍāyāt's support.⁴⁹ Hence, a new type of patron-client network emerged in which the state played a role like that of a za'im⁵⁰ by distributing benefits through qabaḍāyāt to win over the local population. This constituted another turning point in the political, economic, and social conditions governing the qabaḍāyāt's

48 Fā'ūr, *Ḍawābiḥ al-walā' al-ahlī*, 99.

49 Johnson, "Popular Movements," 184.

50 Johnson, "Popular Movements," 183.

decision-making processes and modes of action. Most notably, the qabaḍāyāt could now voluntarily choose whether to cooperate with the state's security services or ally with one or several of the zu'amā'. Seeking to align the qabaḍāyāt with the *Chehabist* political agenda, state authorities put pressure on qabaḍāyāt who chose loyalty to a za'im. Thus, Chehab attempted to weaken the zu'amā's patron-client networks and increase the state's sovereignty.

State-coopted qabaḍāyāt and those loyal to a za'im co-existed during this era. The former implemented the aims of the Deuxième Bureau, and the state occasionally turned a blind eye to their illegal activities. Among state-coopted qabaḍāyāt, one of the most popular and notorious was Ibrahim Qulaylat from the Tariq el-Jdideh neighborhood. He emerged as a local hero from the 1958 conflict in Lebanon, like many qabaḍāyāt of that era. Considered a troublemaker, Qulaylat was imprisoned several times for various violent acts. Furthermore, he had connections with the Egyptian intelligence service, and in 1960, he was questioned in Riyadh regarding an alleged assassination attempt on King Faisal of Saudi Arabia.⁵¹ In the late 1960s, likely because of his status as a qabaḍāy allied with the state, Qulaylat was not convicted for his alleged involvement in the assassination of Kamel Mroueh, founder and editor of the pro-Saudi Lebanese daily *al-Hayat* and an outspoken critic of Nasserism.

On 16 March 1968, center-right, pro-Chehab newspaper *Annahar*, published an extensive report on the Qulaylat trial, printing the verdicts, some witness statements, and describing the reactions of the defendants.⁵² Insinuating his guilt, it particularly quoted witness Captain Abu Shaqra, who described Qulaylat as

*the sheikh of the youth, generous and enthusiastic about his Arab nationalism, and known for that. And since Ibrahim Qulaylat understood the Egyptians and Syrians better than most other people, I told the investigator that I expressed an opinion in focusing the investigation on Ibrahim Qulaylat, that he was the instigator, and this was my personal opinion.*⁵³

When Qulaylat was brought into the court room in handcuffs to hear the verdict, he was "distributing greetings and smiles" and was "dressed well with a very good appearance." The judicial council declared him innocent of the assassination of Mroueh but imposed a one-year prison sentence for possession of an unlicensed weapon, a sentence he had already served during pretrial detention. After the verdict and sentencing, Qulaylat "smiled and some lawyers came to congratulate him and the people outside the hall started to applaud."⁵⁴ Naturally, the article does not mention any intervention on Qulaylat's behalf by the Deuxième Bureau.

51 Johnson, *Class and Client*, 84.

52 *Annahar*, March 16, 1968, 4–5.

53 *Annahar*, March 16, 1968, 4 (own translation).

54 *Annahar*, March 16, 1968 (own translation).

The second group of the qabaḏāyāt were those loyal to a za‘īm. Among them was Hassan al-Yatim, who was also one of the local heroes of the 1958 revolution. He explains,

*We rose up in ‘58 against the corrupt state, and Chamoun was the president of the republic [...]. We rose up against him, the entire people rose up against him. We supported the political figures, headed by Saeb Salam, and we took action when they attacked Saeb Salam Bey [...]. I was responsible for Zoqaq al-Blat, Karakol al-Druze [...], and I was one of twelve people responsible for all of Beirut. We divided Beirut into governorates (wilāyāt), each quarter its own governorate, bearing the name of the person responsible for it, like the Al Yatim, Abu Shaker, Shatila [...]. By God, sir, I had 125 men at that time, and [...] they were made up of all sects [...].*⁵⁵

Al-Yatim was a Nasserist loyal to Saeb Salam, a Sunni za‘īm from Beirut, and an opponent of the pro-Western president Chamoun. His leadership role during the armed conflict highlights why his service as a qabaḏāy was highly coveted by zu‘amā’ like Saeb Salam.

The *Chehabist* government was intent on disrupting such strong alliances between zu‘amā’ and the qabaḏāyāt. It used the government-aligned qabaḏāyāt to channel support to their candidates in Beirut, thereby undermining the power of vernacular leaders such as Saeb Salam, Abdallah al-Yafi, and Camille Chamoun.⁵⁶ Through their strong interest in the qabaḏāyāt, the *Chehabist* government increased their popularity and created new opportunities for them. This altered their voluntary modes of action, essentially allowing the qabaḏāyāt to engage in illegal activities to a limited extent, while simultaneously trying to keep them under tight control. Even though the qabaḏāyāt shared information with state representatives, the latter still planted secret agents in their coffee shops to ensure they were not deceiving or manipulating the Deuxième Bureau.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the competition over the qabaḏāyāt was at its height in the period under Chehab and his successor, Charles Helou. Their decline then began in the lead-up to the civil war, as they could not compete with the growing influence of militias.

2.3 The Era of Militias

The qabaḏāyāt were powerful as long as they were the predominant non-formal institution providing security and channelling services to the local population. However, their prominence began to dwindle with the rise of militias. By the end of the war in 1991, none of the hundreds of qabaḏāyāt present at the beginning of the civil war in 1975 had any role in local affairs. In predominantly Christian Eastern Beirut, blue-collar workers were influenced by the discipline of the Phalange Party and its militia rather than

55 Interview with Hassan al-Yatim, *Assafir*, June 29, 1980, 11 (own translation).

56 Muḥammad Abī Samrā, *Qabaḏāyāt aṭ-tawā’if bi-Bayrūt... yuḡanniduhum aṣ-sirā’ aṣ-ṣihābī aṣ-ṣam’ūnī ba’dā 1958* [The Sectarian Qabadayat in Beirut... Enlisted by the Chehab-Chamoun conflict after 1958], *al-Modon*, May 27, 2020.

57 Fā’ūr, *Ḍawābiṭ al-walā’ al-ahli*, 107.

qabaḍāyāt such as Costa Paoli.⁵⁸ In Muslim-majority West Beirut, the working class began joining left-wing and Arab nationalist parties, such as the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). This weakened the qabaḍāyāt's base. However, one qabaḍāy in West Beirut was smart enough to transform his local power base into a political and militant organization. Ibrahim Qulaylat founded the Mourabitoun, a Nasserist political movement and militia in Tariq el-Jdideh. This gave him a wider range of possible modes of action and allowed him to surpass other qabaḍāyāt who lacked a political and paramilitary power base. Qulaylat used pan-Arab ideology to undermine the power of some of the zu'amā', but he also challenged the state politically and militarily.⁵⁹ Despite his revolutionary spirit and participation in the Lebanese National Movement (LNM),⁶⁰ which provided him with access to Fatah training and military support, the PSP eliminated the Mourabitoun in 1984–85, forcing Qulaylat into exile.

The war fundamentally altered the external set of conditions that governed the qabaḍāyāt's decision-making processes and range of activities. Due to changing social norms and political alliances during wartime, the qabaḍāyāt were forced to either adapt, as Qulaylat did, or perish into oblivion. Moreover, as an informal institution, the qabaḍāyāt depended on a functioning state and the zu'amā', who could extract public resources and specific concessions, then distribute them to their constituents through the qabaḍāyāt. However, when the state ceased to function properly during the war, people turned to the militias that ruled their neighborhoods for services. The political parties and their militias attracted followers with their diverse ideological viewpoints, and these followers no longer needed the protection of the qabaḍāyāt. The most influential militias, such as those of the Phalange and the PSP, even established quasi-state structures in their areas of control. They assumed state functions, such as providing water and electricity, and also raised taxes, established courts, and took over policing.⁶¹ The qabaḍāyāt found it extremely difficult to compete with the militias, which gained valuable resources through their participation in the war economy. Thus, the qabaḍāyāt's importance declined because they could not sustain the patron-client system on which they relied. Even the role of the zu'amā' was diminishing if they could not adapt and transform into warlords. This also allowed new militia leaders, such as Samir Geagea, to gain political power.

Most qabaḍāyāt did not realize the radical societal transformations taking place in the late 1960s and 1970s or were not able to adapt to them. Instead, they began fighting one another, taking advantage of the weakening state power and thinking that they could expand their influence over other neighborhoods. For instance, Kamal Salih Sulayman, a

58 Johnson, "Popular Movements," 183.

59 Johnson, *Class and Client*, 199.

60 The LNM was an Arab nationalist, left-wing political umbrella organization under the leadership of Kamal Jumblatt, the president of the PSP, until his assassination in 1977. The LNM was allied to the Palestinian military organizations operating from Lebanon.

61 Jürgen Endres, "Das Milizsystem des Libanon," in *Gewaltordnungen bewaffneter Gruppen. Ökonomie und Herrschaft nichtstaatlicher Akteure in den Kriegen der Gegenwart*, eds. Jutta Bakonyi, Stephan Hensell, and Jens Siegelberg (Nomos, 2006), 203–214; Judith Harik, *The Public and Social Services of the Lebanese Militias* (Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1994).

qabaḍāy from West Beirut, began to home in on the Christian-dominated eastern part of the capital, particularly in a neighborhood under the dominion of Assad 'Awad. In July 1973, the two qabaḍāyāt happened to meet at a nightclub and got into an altercation, ostensibly over a woman. A shootout ensued, and they killed each other.⁶² Additionally, in March 1970, Palestinian militias from the Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp in East Beirut competed with Muslim and Christian qabaḍāyāt in smuggling, leading to clashes between them.⁶³ Even with the intervention of a za'īm demanding that the qabaḍāy stop any vendetta or attack against the Palestinians, such incidents could not be averted.⁶⁴ Therefore, with the rise of Palestinian militant activities, ideological militias, and regional powers that openly sponsored political parties in Lebanon, the qabaḍāyāt lost their local power bases and could not fulfil their main functions anymore. Though a few remained active until the mid-1980s,⁶⁵ the qabaḍāyāt gradually became part of Beirut's history.

Conclusion

The qabaḍāyāt were key actors in Lebanon's informal political economy, bridging gaps between the state, local populations, and political elites. Within Lebanon's system of clientelism, they operated as strongmen aligned with Lebanon's vernacular leaders, providing security and social services on the neighborhood level. Initially courted by the Mandate authorities to prevent any threat from them to French rule, the qabaḍāyāt became an important resource for the zu'amā' during the early years of Lebanese independence. The ability of the qabaḍāyāt to mobilize votes for politicians in the young Lebanese republic put them in high demand, expanding their voluntary modes of action and emboldening them to switch their loyalties. Through their position of power, the qabaḍāyāt gained agency, honor and prestige within their local communities. Their influence peaked during the presidency of Fouad Chehab, who co-opted them to reduce the power of the zu'amā' and to strengthen the sovereignty of the state.

The role of the qabaḍāyāt during the *Chehabist* period offers a fascinating glimpse into the ways in which clientelism and patronage operated in Lebanon's shifting political landscape. Competition between the state and the zu'amā' for the loyalty of these intermediaries and local security actors further empowered them, expanding their voluntary modes of action at the neighborhood level. This provided them with a higher degree of freedom in choosing their alliances, better access to resources and services to channel to their neighborhoods, and a greater position of power within Lebanon's patronage system. It was the golden era of the qabaḍāyāt.

62 *L'Orient-Le Jour*, July 5, 1973.

63 Johnson, "Popular Movements," 185.

64 Johnson, "Popular Movements," 183–187.

65 During the intracommunal conflict between the Christian Phalange party and its former militia organization, the Lebanese Forces, both groups are reported to try to win over the remaining neighborhood qabaḍāyāt to their side (*Assafir*, September 13, 1986).

In retrospect, that period provides important insights into how informal networks of power, such as the qabaḍāyāt, intersect with formal state structures, particularly in contexts of hybrid state sovereignty as in Lebanon.⁶⁶ The qabaḍāyāt, which played a significant role in Lebanon's security landscape, emerged as a result of the state's inability to provide local security. However, their relationship with the state was complex and ambiguous. During Chehab's rule, the government actively encouraged the qabaḍāyāt to engage in providing local security, which paradoxically weakened state sovereignty but simultaneously undermined the zu'amā's influence. Their relationship with state institutions was shaped by tension, co-optation, and occasional cooperation. Nevertheless, their status as non-state actors meant they always operated in a legal and political grey area.

Ultimately, the *Chehabist* state's experiment with informal power structures to maintain control gave way to a more militarized and sectarian system. The qabaḍāyāt's voluntary role as local strongmen and power brokers deteriorated during the Lebanese Civil War as militias and political parties increasingly took over the responsibility of providing security and services. Their autonomy in choosing their alliances now was limited, as was their individual agency. By the time the war formally ended in 1990, the qabaḍāyāt had lost their significance in Lebanese public affairs. Militias had established quasi-states in the areas under their control and provided security and services at the neighborhood level. The qabaḍāyāt had become increasingly irrelevant as they were incapable of adapting to the changing militarized and ideologically driven environment. As a result, they lost their influence and faded into oblivion. Their decline symbolizes the shift from informal to formalized forms of power, with militias becoming the new arbiters of political influence in Lebanon.

Existing research provides valuable information about the qabaḍāyāt's role in Lebanon's patronage system and social order. However, much remains to be explored regarding the voluntary nature of their position and its impact on the broader dynamics of state-society relations in Lebanon and beyond. An in-depth study of their motivations for voluntarily becoming qabaḍāyāt, their integration into local social structures, how those structures influenced their decision-making and actions, and how those factors were subject to historical change will provide further insight into their voluntary nature and their role as arbiters of power in pre-civil war Lebanon. Such research will reveal the social constraints governing their voluntary modes of action and highlight the limitations of voluntariness.

66 Though the informal institution of the qabaḍāyāt is a phenomenon of the past and most militias have disbanded since the end of the civil war, hybrid state sovereignty remains prevalent in Lebanon. For instance, state security forces, such as the Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces as well as non-state actors, including Hezbollah, Amal, and some Bekaa clans, have interacted in Dahiyeh, the southern suburbs of Beirut, since the 1990s to provide security. See Jeroen Gunning and Dima Smaira, "Who You Gonna Call? Theorising Everyday Security Practices in Urban Spaces with Multiple Security Actors – The Case of Beirut's Southern Suburbs," *Political Geography* 98 (2022).