



Mediterranean in Dis/order

Space, Power, and Identity

Rosita Di Peri and Daniel Meier, Editors

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book began with informal discussions and is the product of a long process of maturation. It comes in response to the editors' frustration with the lack of interest in the variable of space in many analytical works in political science on Middle Eastern and Mediterranean issues. We wanted to go beyond the fascinating perspective offered by border studies, which has previously been explored, and encourage new and young scholars to decipher the spatiality of politics. To this end, we started organizing several panels at international meetings, first during the WOCMES (World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies) in Sevilla 2018, then at SeSaMO (annual conference by the Italian Society of Middle Eastern Studies) and at SISP (annual conference of the Italian Political Science Society) the next year in Turin, and later that year in Paris during the GIS *Moyen-Orient et Mondes Musulmans*. We were fortunate enough to undertake all the works and collaborations with the authors prior to the pandemic, which left us some time to be in touch, write, discuss, and elaborate the book project submitted to the University of Michigan Press in 2020.

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Finally, we would like to thank all the participants who took part in our panels, those who wrote a chapter here, and even those who, for various reasons, did not take part in this project (Are Knudsen, Paola Caridi): everyone’s contributions to the debate were crucial, and we have learned a lot from them. Last but not least, as two companions fond of each other, Daniel would like to thank Rosita for her kindness and thoughtfulness, and Rosita would like to thank Daniel for his thoughtfulness and kindness.

Rosita Di Peri, Turin, December 2021
Daniel Meier, Grenoble, December 2021

INTRODUCTION

Framing the Mediterranean (Dis)order

Epistemologies and Theoretical Perspectives

ROSITA DI PERI AND DANIEL MEIER

1. Introduction

Since the Arab revolts of 2011, the spatial dimension has acquired new relevance in the analysis and study of the broader Mediterranean region. There are several reasons for this “resurgence.” First of all, in many cities in the region, there is the issue of the reappropriation of urban spaces following the protests. Citizens are occupying and appropriating public space after years of authoritarian repression, enabling them to manifest, to speak “louder,” to live the spaces. Second, there has been renewed attention to the spatial dimension with regard to the relationship between the center and periphery and border issues, which has paved the way for new studies especially focused on rural and borderlands contexts. Third, the broader Mediterranean space has become an increasingly important element for those seeking a different future in the migration process. Fourth, it has assumed a renovated and crucial geopolitical role.

The attention to space and its intertwining with politics and power is obviously not a novelty in the study of the contemporary Mediterranean region: the issue of borders, for example, has been at the core of the definition of the Middle East for at least a century. It was also one of the crucial elements in the definition of the politics of mandates and colonial

structures at the beginning of the last century. Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, via the Sykes-Picot agreements in 1916, space—in this case, understood as a border space—has represented the very essence of the exercise of state sovereignty, political power, and its affirmation (Barr 2011). More recently similar space claims have been at the heart of the activities of the Islamic State (ISIS). This is also an issue that takes on relevance when we look at European Mediterranean borders: the reconfiguration of the Euro-Mediterranean space has severely affected migration, border practices, political strategies, and actors' agency (Di Peri and Donelli 2021).

In this book, space and its relationship with politics are at the heart of the analysis. The dynamics within what we have defined as the broader Mediterranean¹ shows trends that highlight a few elements: first of all, the bidirectional intertwining between space and politics creates order and (dis)order not only in those places that are at the center of a state's claims of sovereignty, such as borders, but also in the urban and rural spaces and many places through various types of mobilizations. The reordering process also affects spaces outside the states themselves with emigration communities, as well as those interstitial spaces where sovereignty is lost, limited, or absent (Meier 2020). These dynamics are evident, for example, in the governance of space (and in the policies) of the migration flows, as well as the strategies of redefining political relations within the Mediterranean space (in particular with the European Union) and the governing processes of the cities under regimes and neoliberal rules (Khirfan 2017). Second, the elements of order and (dis)order in the broader Mediterranean space are the result of power relations (also promoted by powerful narratives), which often have a strong impact on national, regional, and international political strategies. This aspect had a strong impact, over the years, on describing the region in realist terms by adopting an essentialist reading of international relations. Even if interesting contributions that aim to deconstruct this approach bring back other dimensions (e.g., the historical dimension), this field still needs to be critically explored (Mason 2017; Kamel 2019). In the field of international relations (IR), an attempt to go beyond this classical assumption came from scholars who highlight the interconnectedness of orders, borders, and identities—thus rethinking territoriality with history—to show the constantly changing, dynamic process that links the three aspects, thereby denaturalizing the order from any essentialist view (Albert et al. 2001). Hence, order and (dis)order affect identity strategies that, in turn, contribute to redefining the region's economic, political, and confessional structures.

The axes mentioned above form the backbone of this volume. By placing itself in a hybrid perspective straddling the disciplines of political science, geography, anthropology, history, and political sociology, the book primarily aims to fill a gap in the literature on space and politics in the Mediterranean region. It does this by adopting an approach relating to different concepts and methods. The interaction between all these factors will clarify how order and (dis)order are not only the result of a geographical modification of borders but the product of specific strategies, practices, and redistribution mechanisms both within and outside the Mediterranean region. This volume, therefore, intends to put space at the center again but as a “dependent variable” as it is affected by its political, historical anthropological, cultural, and geographical dimensions. This aspect makes the book’s approach original, as it contrasts with the argument of numerous publications that have appeared since the 2011 uprisings. Although in such publications the spatial dimension was at the core of the analysis of the Mediterranean region, it was analyzed as an “independent variable.”

2. Space of Politics and the Politics of the Space in the Broader Mediterranean Region: Literature Review

This discussion about space and its role in contemporary societies is combined with renewed attention to the spatial dimension of politics, the idea that politics is something that reflects the governance of not just societies and individuals but also the territories where they live: this has to do with the transformation of the notion of the state, on the one hand, and of sovereignty, on the other hand (Cohen and Kliot 1992). Mechanisms of political control over spaces through processes of bordering and ordering, for instance, have increasingly offered the impression of stability and conservation in an ever more volatile international system (Walters 2006).

The centrality of the spatial dimension, already at the heart of studies like those of Lefebvre (1977), has taken on a renewed centrality during the so-called spatial turn. This was a paradigm shift in the discipline of geography at the end of the 20th century that opened a new perspective for space, understood as a social construction, a process, but also a representation (Debarbieux 1995). Massey pointed out one of the most important reflections in this frame (1992). According to her, a different conceptualization of the space significantly affects the realm of politics: “Spatial form as ‘outcome’ can have effects on subsequent events. The spatial form can alter the future course of the very histories that have

produced it. The spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics, just as the temporal is to geography” (Massey 1992, 84). This aspect is particularly relevant because it opens up new (e.g., private and public) dimensions of space connecting it with power. Hannah Arendt (1963), for example, argues that democracy is the human freedom to act, speak, and create shared spaces by interacting with others.

The flexibility of the concept and its polysemy have undoubtedly made it a powerful analytical tool widely used in different disciplines. The spatial dimension has become a formidable analytical lens considered in its temporality and variability as able to grasp evolving realities: as Lefebvre points out, a plurality of lived practices carry symbolic meanings (1991, 26). Space, as it is “perceived,” “conceived,” and “lived,” is becoming a “social fact,” a strong political instrument, a place where the class struggle arises (Lefebvre 1991, 68). Especially in the last century, the appropriation and configuration of the space reflect class belonging, urban planning, and social hierarchy. Space management becomes a tool for planning inclusion and exclusion, for admitting or not, and for controlling interactions (Mitchell and Van Deusen 2001, 103). As Mitchell has argued, the practice of democracy is often determined in the streets, in squares, sidewalks, and parks (Mitchell 2003, 152). Especially the role of the cities as a space of change has been strongly investigated. In his 1973 book *Social Justice and the City*, Harvey argues that urban development affects income distribution and has an impact on social justice. In their seminal book, Agnew and Corbridge (1995) underscore that a critical perspective has to address issues relating to organization, domination, and development of the territory and stress the need to look beyond the nation-state unit and link the local production of space to a larger spectrum of understanding. Critical geopolitics, promoted by authors like Gearoid O’Tuathail (1996), follows this critical trend by insisting on a definition of geography as a technology of power linked to the production and governmental management of territorial space.

Space definitely has an impact on social sciences and political science in particular, and it has taken on a central role in recent debates. Among others, political scientists raise the idea that spatial representation needs to be deconstructed; in the meantime, however, they are also addressing complex dynamics of societies to define spaces of solidarity and allegiance.

The “use” of the space in politics for the case of the broader Mediterranean has historically been documented. Taking the period of

European colonial penetration as an example, it seems evident that the political use of spaces/places has played a crucial role—for example, in the redefinition of borders and the consequent delimitation of territories on which to exercise sovereignty but also in cities and interstitial spaces, where the imposition of regulatory plans or the colonial toponymy of places has completely altered the perception and fruition of space (Bourdieu 1991; Ferguson 1988; Lefebvre 1991). This resonates with the delimitation (bordering) and the consequent use of public spaces and the public sphere (in Habermas’s meaning) that are continuously being redefined and reshaped across the centuries. This aspect is important to underline because these processes of bordering and reshaping public spaces and public sphere often have the unexpected consequence of generating “narratives” over a place that is difficult to contrast (Culcasi 2008).

For instance, the use of spaces, especially urban spaces, has played a central role in recent political history throughout the broader Mediterranean region: demonstrations, strikes, protests, sit-ins, and even confrontations have been constant elements in many southern Mediterranean cities on both the northern and the southern shores. These places have seen the emergence of various forms of resistance ranging from cultural and intellectual scenes to social and political contention (Rivetti and Di Peri 2015).

In some cases, for example, urban spaces have become places where the authoritarian religious powers linked to control over individuals’ lives have constantly been challenged through practices that were overwhelmingly nonviolent even if they were revolutionary (Lawson 2015). These practices have managed to bring alternative discourses, messages, and practices that impact spaces but also the political practices related to these spaces (Harb 2009; Merone 2015). At the same time, in other cases, urban spaces have become places where open confrontation for the “conquest” of the space erupts, as is the case with downtown Beirut after the assassination of Rafic Hariri (Vloeberghs 2015).

In some other cases, the redefinition of the geographical space is associated with religious and confessional narratives and practices. This is the case of the “sectarianization” of the broader Mediterranean region, a powerful analytical lens that can read and represent the politics of the Middle East as marked by a binary sectarian confrontation between confessions (sects), namely Sunni and Shiites (Hashemi and Postel 2017; Haddad 2020). The division of the region into homogenous enclaves marked by a strong identity character has had an impact on

political strategies, as well as the production of narratives. This argument strongly resonates with a geopolitical interpretation of space in its political dimension.

On the margins of the state or at its core, in the peripheral areas of urban conglomerates or in the center, the spatial dimension of politics conveys two types of investigation this book intends to debate and nourish. The first vector goes from politics to space, meaning that our interest also goes to how the actors of the political system—institutions and citizens—are using, modeling, transforming, elaborating, experiencing, and dealing with spaces/places (Agnew 2011). The second vector goes from space to politics and raises the question of what the effect of space on politics is, or, more precisely, how space generates, creates, produces, induces, shapes, defines, or redefines politics. The latter here is understood in a large spectrum of policies, political behaviors, political actors, and movements: politics as a field of power and, ultimately, the state. While the line between the two processes may seem difficult to draw, this intellectual division has the merit of underlining the dialectic dimension of this relationship: space, intended as a process and not as a static and monolithic locus, does not exist without a political vision. This also implies looking at its related representations and history. In sum, politics appears as a process shaping the power while it is constantly being transformed within/on a defined space.

3. Book Argument

Building on this rich debate by focusing on the relations between power and politics, the present volume examines how space, understood in its multidimensionality, is defined, conceived, appropriated, imagined, and performed within the broader Mediterranean region. Based on original and recent fieldwork conducted in various Arab Mediterranean states, the contributions offer a fresh and innovative perspective on the broader Mediterranean space understood as a place of change and transformation. Beyond the present time and state container a historical perspective on space in politics and its use by the state and at regional levels—its interaction at their borders, especially with the European Union but also other regional actors—suggests the importance of bringing geography back to topics like migration, places, and identity. Moreover, this angle of analysis helps to reveal the ongoing process of re(b)ordering in various contexts and how it links the representation of the Self with the Other.

The book interweaves diachronic and disciplinary perspectives by

examining case studies from different Mediterranean countries and focusing on a few states, like Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, and Turkey, where the lens of space highlights some key ongoing political and identity processes. Lebanon is crucial both for its historical path of mobilization before the civil war outbreak and for being considered a model in the Arab world after the end of the civil war. Libya is a key example of identity processes at work interconnected with the exploitation of space both by internal and by external actors. Along with Tunisia, it also offers key examples of borderland regions whose political events affect not only domestic but also regional and international dimensions. Tunisia is a clear example of how the state's control and appropriation of space have historically contrasted with the evolution of identity claims and domestic political strategies. Finally, Turkey is a major example of the immobility of the borderland region with the EU and the Turkish government's manipulation of the border zone. Although several critical strands have developed over the years and looked at space, especially urban space, as a place of connection with power and identity (often by using Foucauldian lenses), very few analyses have focused on the connection between the state's power structure and its impact on the conception, production, and imagination of space in the broader Mediterranean region (Del Sarto 2017), except for the transnational production of space at the regional scale (Vignal 2017) or the framing of a reflection on bordering processes in the Middle East (Meier 2018). This book intends to fill that gap.

Empirically, the book innovatively addresses one of the main relevant debates of the past 20 years (i.e., the relation between space and power) by focusing on different case studies explored by scholars who have conducted extensive fieldwork. Over the past two decades, and even more recently following the Arab uprisings, scholars have devoted increasing attention to space, politics, and power, especially by focusing on urban centers (Ismail 2006; Bennafla 2013; Stadnicki 2014; Fregonese 2019) and, particularly, industrialized countries (Brighenti 2013). By contrast, the book looks at the multidimensionality of the space in non-Western countries, rural and nonurban contexts, borderlands, marginal spaces, and so on. The focus on these dimensions helps to investigate how power relations reconfigure themselves and how space is affected by (and affects) these relations. This element is the first distinctive feature of the book.

The second relevant characteristic of the book is timing. While it is true that, following the 2011 revolts in the broader Mediterranean region, several studies have used the analytical lens of space to read resis-

tance movements, protests, and repression (Gerges 2015; Huber and Kamel 2015), the new wave of mobilization that started in 2019 seems to give new momentum to the centrality of the space. From Lebanon to Iran and from Iraq to Algeria, contestations and protests erupted and appropriated squares, streets, and other spaces where the state exerts its sovereignty. The increasing interest in the mobilization repertoires has intensified the centrality of the space because of its transformative role: a space that is not just physical but also mental—an “imagined” space.

The third innovation of the volume lies in the level of analysis to read the relationship between space and power. Each chapter addresses the issue through a specific case study that crosses different disciplines: history, political science, geography, political sociology, and anthropology. Thus, it offers original tools to read the relationship between space and power. This methodological approach, grounded in different interactions between actors, groups, and institutions gives the book a stronger argument. Most of the contributors are young scholars (PhD and postdoc students) who are theoretically grounded and live (or lived) in the region for years. Each of the contributions deals with a particular aspect of the relations between space, power, and politics and proposes an innovative conceptualization that considers the space from a nonconventional perspective.

4. Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretically, the book intends to bridge the gap between political science and geography. Therefore, we would like to clarify the key theoretical frameworks at the heart of our project as they define the nexus of this relationship more precisely: space, power and identity.

First of all, what is space and how does it relate to politics? Space is a term that has been repeatedly used in political science as a metaphor following Lefebvre’s (1977) assertion that “space is political.” But to understand its social and historical depth, space requires a more sociological definition. The paradigm shift in the discipline of geography known as the “spatial turn” at the end of the 20th century opened a new perspective for space, understood as a social construction, a process, but also as a representation (Debarbieux 1995). Following this spatial turn, Löw defined space as a “relational (dis)position of livings and social goods” (Löw 2001, 157). She highlights the formation of space—or “spacing” (including the representations of it)—as a by-product of these relations. Foucault underlined the political dimension of space—“Toute histoire

des espaces serait en même temps une histoire des pouvoirs” (Foucault 1994, 192).² Dikeç (2012) sums up the idea as “Space often appears as a means of control and domination,” while Hannah Arendt (1998) elaborates on physical spaces as “inaugurated” by the political action. Massey (2005) reminds us that space is an ongoing product of relationships and exchanges and not at all a “neutral” already given. Reflecting on the relationship between space and power, she sees power as a relation and adds that space is imbued with power, while power has a spatiality (Massey 2009, 19). But this relation is mediated by the process of territoriality that lays claim to a territory through ideology, representations, norms, values, and actions. One of the most interesting developments of this reasoning about the normative vision of spaces is Sennett’s (1992) notion of “dead public spaces”: spaces where social and political interactions are limited.

The second concept that embodies politics is the notion of power, which has a dense history in political science and IR. Morgenthau (1948) defines power as the key concept of IR in his realist perspective and as the dominant goal in international politics and the definition of national interest, as all state actions seek to keep, demonstrate, or increase power. Following Weber (1978 [1922]), power is a form of domination. It is the capacity to impose one’s will within a social relation despite possible resistance and happens within the scope of his definition of the state as a successful act of monopolization through the enforcement of a set of legitimate physical constraints. Foucault (2001), inspired by this definition, acknowledges that power is a relation, “an action over actions”; power is a practice before being something else (a substance, a representation, a capacity). Moreover, Foucault states that power unveils its opposition and resistance; likewise, spaces and places (*topoi*) have their own opposite, *heterotopia*. And as Elden (2017) pinpoints in Foucault’s theory of power, it straddles all domains of life in society. Therefore, politics lies at the heart of the power issues of societal governance.

The notion of identity, which is probably the key element at stake in the relationship between space and politics, is the third term to clarify. While explored by various disciplines related to psychology, identity has become part of reflections on politics thanks to the seminal work of Barth (1969), who explains how groups are formed, self-defined, bounded, maintained, and changed through their interaction with “the Other.” One main way of discussing identity in political science in the Anglo-Saxon world is the debate over identity politics, which is often marked by political stances and culturalist perspectives (Alcoff et

al. 2006). A more promising, nonculturalist perspective lies with the constructivist perspective when it is articulating collective identity as a social construction (Lapierre 1984) that can be linked to a specific territorial space (Bourdieu 1980). This inspiration spread within the poststructuralist perspective, where identity appears as an “effect of a contingent set of relations” that allows rethinking the relationship between violence and the political (Campbell 1998). Such identities can be reshaped through a securitization process that is observable in political discourses as they select and “provide particular subjects with authority and power” (Hansen 2011, 358). From a conflict transformation perspective, the concept of desecuritization has been brought up, alongside the Copenhagen school, to deflate the perception of the Other as an existential threat (Diez and Pia 2007). The poststructuralist perspective offered by the work of Campbell in Bosnia-Herzegovina (2007) indicates a series of links between space, identity, and power (Diez 2002; Hansen 2011). The Derridean term “ontopology,” revamped by Campbell (1999), is one of the most interesting among these links, as it aligns territory with identity, once the latter undergoes a process of transformation, with a “coup de force” in redrawing borders and redefining those who are living on such a territory through a census, thus “giving rise to a geo-body of a nation.”

The intertwining of these three concepts and dimensions usefully bridges the gap between political science and geography and offers a fresh and innovative perspective on the broader Mediterranean space, intended as a place of experimentation and transformation. The combination of space with power and identity appears less deterministic than it may sound once the researcher explores the space-politics relationships by investigating its nature, local mediations, and actors shaping this relationship. From a variable that explains the effects of space on politics, space can also appear as the variable to be explained (i.e., the production of a form of spatiality by the politics). This double dimension is relatively obvious in the field of border studies (Rumford 2012) with, on the one hand, the “border effects” that a walled border creates on local actors living in its vicinity (changing local economic fluxes, bringing new political agendas) and, on the other hand, actors themselves shaping their spatial environment by adapting and redefining the meaning and acting around the new border wall (from smuggling to demonstrations). In both these processes, the actors’ identity plays a key role in the definition of space and the Self, while power relations are evolving—sometimes as a leading force to reshape the environment, sometimes as

a relation transformed by a new spatiality. In this sense, bringing space back to politics is an unusual way of dealing with the Mediterranean area in political science, thus offering a fresh look at current political processes in this region.

5. Book Structure

As explained above, these three concepts link different works of literature and disciplines and are used, framed, and debated by the different contributors in various ways. The book's chapters highlight the need to go beyond the present time and state frames to have a more historical perspective of the space in its political dimension and to look at international relationships between the EU and southern Mediterranean states. The refugee issue, as well as the migration issue, are just some of the topics showing an ongoing process of re(b)ordering in various contexts, linked to the representation of the Self and the Other while at the same time addressing the complex dynamics every society has to face when defining space of solidarity and allegiance (Blasetti 2021). From urban geography to international relations, the various perspectives and levels of analysis provided here offer fruitful reflections based on intensive fieldwork on a wide range of themes linking space and politics in the Mediterranean area. As explained on the previous pages, the countries at the heart of this book (Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, and Turkey) are clear examples of these processes, as they include an internal and external dimension presenting the rearticulation of the Mediterranean dynamics across space, power, and identity.

To delineate some of the overarching trajectories behind these processes, the book is oriented around three main themes that are key to exploring the ongoing (dis)ordering processes in the Mediterranean from an empirical point of view: mobilizations, migrations, and places.

Part I: Mobilizations

In the first part, dedicated to mobilizations, the contributors provide firsthand fieldwork accounts of the connections between political identities and spatial settings in various contexts and at different periods. Thus, this part offers a broad reflection on the spatial perspective of social movements, reminding us of its importance in the power relations and their identity claims. In addition, the different theoretical backgrounds of each chapter included in this part are a fruitful angle from which to

see how scholars deal with the issue of mobilizations from very different disciplinary perspectives and with different methodological tools.

Ester Sigillò delves into the Tunisian case by proposing an original framework to grasp the role of space in tracing the mobilization dynamics of charitable associations in a postauthoritarian setting. Grounded in the literature on Islamic activism, social movements, and urban sociology, Sigillò's chapter highlights the reconfiguration of urban networks related to charities' shifting narratives, which have claimed their "right to the city" at different political stages of the postrevolutionary process by strategically conceiving the urban space as an instrument of urban "hegemony" or "resistance." Based on ethnographic research conducted in the city of Sfax, the chapter scrutinizes the role of space in tracing the dynamics of mobilization of an urban Islamic network that is rooted in the social fabric and has undergone a process of transformation in the past 10 years. The trajectories of those Islamic sociopolitical forces excluded before the Tunisian revolution offer an innovative way to think of space and power: the liberalization of the public sphere after 2011 allowed a reactivation of the material and symbolic resources of grassroots Islamic actors, who emerged after the fall of the regime as a socioeconomic and political "counterpower."

Rossana Tufaro's chapter moves from the present day to the 20th century. In her chapter, she contends that the Btekhay rally at Mount Lebanon in 1965 represented the inaugural act of the transition of rural Lebanon from a locus of preservation to a locus of conflict and contestation in the Lebanese postcolonial order. This historical look at the transformation of the space during a crucial period in Lebanon's history sheds new light on the post-civil war period and the transformation of leftist parties and repertoires of mobilization. In line with Lefebvre's assertion that the history of a space is above all the history of the mutual interactions between the lived and the conceived, Tufaro's chapter offers an effective historical overview of the politics of space that shapes modern Mount Lebanon as a dominated social space. In addition, the chapter assumes the "spatial diversion" exercised by the Btekhay rally as the latest step in, and the broad term of reference for, its journey. The contribution also offers the first reintegration to the history of the post-Ottoman mountain (a long-neglected history of its peasantry), and it also explores the historiographical implications that a Lefebvrian spatial analysis might have.

Debora V. Malito and Muhammad Dan Suleiman's chapter conceptu-

alizes the fragmentation of Libyan sovereignty as belonging to a parallel spatial process producing more atomized and regionalized authorities subject to competing geopolitical interests. The chapter focuses on the role identity plays in the construction of the post-Jamahiriya political space and maps how different forces have mobilized two ideological constructs (i.e., the “17 February Revolution” and the “war on terrorism”) in the production of the post-Jamahiriya political space. In particular, the authors explore how these two ideological constructs have been instrumentalized as ordering principles crystalizing new (but competitive) legitimate claims of authority. The chapter also questions essentialist explanations that have emerged especially after the 2011 uprisings and read the situation on the ground as merely a reemergence of tribal and regional subnational collective identities. The authors contend that these explanations cannot explain the systemic nature of the fragmentation, the overlap between homogenization strategies, and the fragmentation at work in contemporary conflicts over states, institutions, and resources.

The chapter by Rosita Di Peri and Valeria Sartori, which concludes this first part, focuses on Lebanese university spaces as incubators of political subjectivity. They argue that Lebanese universities, which have always been sidelined (even in academic research) when it comes to political processes and mobilization dynamics and called into question just when political parties and communitarian elites seize the opportunity to exploit them (e.g., during elections), are places where new oppositional initiatives emerge. Di Peri and Sartori’s aim is to identify how actors located in spaces that are liminal or marginal in relation to the center of political action can play an important role when significant events occur. If there are independent subjects in the Lebanese political landscape that are ready to challenge the sectarian order of society, university campuses also showcase the remarkable growth of secular and independent subjects capable of “politicizing” students in a way unlike the youth parties’ branches. As a result, Lebanese universities appear to be crucial loci where politics, as well as actors and their behaviors, is reflected and influenced. They are also pivotal spaces for the creation and strengthening of a new youth-oriented political campaign. By examining the Mada youth network, the authors present a case of a daily practice of resistance to the confessional order that characterizes the main public spaces of the country. Such an approach would help to explain why and to what extent Lebanese universities played such a crucial role at the forefront of the 2019 mobilizations.

Part 2: Migrations

The second part sheds light on migration issues with a focus on the key elements of the EU's external border policy toward the Mediterranean states, thus showing how space is produced and shaped by the EU's relationships, which affect every state and refugee community. The development of a vast literature and lively debate around the externalization of EU policy toward the southern Mediterranean borders usually deal with the EU's actorness and marginalizes the role of southern Mediterranean countries in these processes. The chapters in this part "use" the issue of migrations not just to describe the EU's external action but to look at the unexpected (often negative) consequences of this respatialization of EU politics.

In the first chapter in this part, Federica Zardo reflects on the European geopolitical space as a tool capable of redefining the relationships between the EU and the Third Mediterranean countries. Grounded in the instrumentation literature, the main argument of the chapter is that these policy instruments produce specific effects because they structure the process and the results of the policy. The chapter focuses on the space-making impact of migration policy instruments. From this perspective, policy instruments are not only signifiers of policy choices but also a form of knowledge about social space. They also produce specific effects as they structure the process and the results of the policy. Through the analysis of the EU Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa established in 2015, Zardo analyzes the spatial distribution of the funded programs, the interplay between territories and actors from the northern and southern rim of the Mediterranean that these programs generate, as well as their interaction with pre-existing instruments, such as the European Neighborhood Policy or the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. According to the author, this perspective opens up interesting avenues for researching the spatial phenomena in the Mediterranean and can help to redesign the EU-Mediterranean geopolitical space.

In a similar vein, Chiara Maritato illustrates how the EU's border regime in Turkey affects transit (im)mobility toward the EU and what the formation of immobility in the transition area reveals about the art of governing by ordering migrants at the Greek/EU-Turkish border. The chapter relies on the literature on critical border studies and emphasizes how contemporary borders are reformulated and reallocated while becoming dispersed, mobile, and reterritorialized. The chapter stems from the following questions: How has Turkey been included in the

European borderland? And how has this process affected the spaces of (im)mobility at the EU-Turkish border? Three decades of “EU-Turkey migration diplomacy” have redefined the border areas as zones where migrants’ “immobility in transit” is ordered and controlled. The Greek-Turkish border is a peculiar case used to assess the (intended and unintended) effects of the EU’s externalization of border control. The chapter considers the period from 1990 to 2020 to examine continuities and discontinuities between externalization as an instrument complementary with Europeanization and externalization as an attempt to lock, fortify and turn the external border zones in southeastern Europe into a borderland where migrants are forced to stay.

Chiara Loschi systematizes the many attempts by Italian governments to manage the Mediterranean borderlands. By focusing on the evolution of Italian-Libyan relations since 2008, the study supports the idea that cooperation between the two countries is developing a pattern of intended informalization whose aim is to exploit sea borders and their uncertain position in international law as an institutionalized conceptualization of space. Libya and Italy have traditionally nurtured such partnerships according to their interests and profited from the longer-run political consequences of cooperation agreements, such as power vacuums and legal uncertainties. National authorities engaged in the cooperation directly or indirectly support the perpetuation of a state of uncertainty in which a systematic resorting to soft law and legally non-binding instruments to circumvent international law and human rights principles make it possible to provide ad hoc and short-term operational responses to recurring crises. By looking at the sea border produced through Italian-Libyan partnerships since the early 2000s, the chapter investigates which actors and practices have emerged and persisted. It uses these findings to explain how the current sea frontier benefits both parties involved and which distinct trajectories of borderwork at sea still coexist today in the space of the sea.

In the last chapter of this part, Virginia Fanny Faccenda analyzes the transformation of Syria’s borders after 2011 and shows how the refugee issue is stretching the margins of the Syrian state. The aim is to illuminate how the Syrian state uses and manipulates its diaspora to expand their borders and power. The case in point is the Syrian diaspora in Morocco and its daily interactions; cleavages between Syrian migrants can redefine the Syrian political arena in a context of mobility. By studying the Syrian polity in Morocco, Faccenda’s contribution seeks to broaden the boundaries and spaces through which to apprehend Syria’s political pro-

cesses and exercise of power. She suggests using the notion of boundaries and the process of “boundaring” as analytical lenses to observe Syria’s interactions and conflicts in the Moroccan arena as keys to exploring Syrian processes of power. By considering boundaries as relational and sociopolitical constructions, the boundaring process suggests two major levels of analysis: First, it helps to overcome the nation-state as the only natural, inherited place through which to focus the analysis of the process of power. Second, the reboundaring approach makes it possible to overcome the national framework and take into account other areas of sovereignty. Studying the Syrian polity in Morocco enables us to reconsider the limits of the empirical observation of power, as well as the different modalities of its exercise and its effects.

Part 3: Places

The third part deals with places: rural and urban environments. Here spaces are seen in a diachronic perspective through the lens of cultural practices, representations, and political processes. The case studies of Tunisia and Lebanon provide the reader with a deeper look inside the social fabric of collective identities in the context of actions in the urban spaces. They also clearly show how and to what extent places become an incubator of new genealogies of power that affect narrative and representations.

Thomas Richard uses his chapter to analyze how the representation of Lebanese space in fiction and documentaries has affected Lebanese politics and the representation of Lebanon. The chapter explores how images conflict with or support each other and how they contribute to creating a visually contested space in Lebanon and participate in its political culture. This is done through the study of films and documentaries that portray space as contested and appropriated by demonstrations and contention after the end of the civil war. It appears that in most movies shot after 1991, the public space is remarkably absent, as most of these films were shot inside the characters’ homes, in private spaces where, if there is any drama, it develops between the walls of the house. This appears to be understood as a metaphor of Lebanon after the war, meaning that the image of the country as a whole is that of a succession of nonconnecting private spaces, with the very idea of a public space being erased from the film image. The chapter investigates this metaphor by linking it to what remains of image production, where the public space is a contentious space.

Francesco Mazzucotelli's chapter addresses the relation between space and local politics in the case of the Rashid Karami International Fair in Tripoli, as a space that both carries and constructs political meanings and is constructed by local and national politics. In particular, the chapter describes how national and local actors in Tripoli (including institutions and private individuals) conceived the international fair as a spectacle for an idealized vision of the city and a catalyst for economic and cultural development. Designed by Oscar Niemeyer, the site also became contested, as different visions and agendas emerged and sometimes clashed with each other. While some artists and activists have tried to reclaim the site as a space of memory, delving into the Foucauldian notion of heterotopia, the recent project to transform the site into a "Knowledge and Innovation Center" within the Tripoli Special Economic Zone points, instead, to a scheme of neoliberal regeneration in line with the average mechanisms of neoliberal urban transformation. Moreover, the chapter shows how the urban space of this fair can elucidate the political history of Tripoli beyond a superficial understanding of sectarianism and political alignments. At the same time, it contributes to a less Beirut-centric analysis of Lebanon's recent history of the relationship between space and politics.

Urban areas are at the core of Chiara Sebastiani's analysis. The author argues that, in the case of Tunisia, although space is crucial for revolutionary movements, the role of institutions plays a decisive role in democratic action both *in* and *on* space. Relying on a neoinstitutional approach, the chapter analyzes the impact of new local democracy institutions on spatial representations and neighborhood practices. Despite the obsession with elections during the postrevolutionary transition, there were some difficulties when it came to local elections. Sebastiani argues that they stem from two different visions of decentralization: administrative and political. Despite formal agreement on the two major goals of decentralization—spatial justice and democratic representation of territorial communities—as proved by the smooth approval of the decentralization chapter in the new constitution, these visions contrasted with regard not only to how the two claims were to be accommodated but also to the extent to which they were complementary or mutually contrasting. This explains why the two main and truly revolutionary achievements of the decentralization process (i.e., integral municipalization and local elections) produced such a mixture of successes and failures rather than "ardently" invoked local democracy that might have enabled people to experience the fruits of revolution in their everyday

lives and environment. The analysis of the five case studies elucidates these processes by offering what the author calls the “political vision” of decentralization that, of course, is strongly imbued with space.

Finally, in the conclusion, Daniela Huber reflects on the authors’ findings. She indicates how (and to what extent) they will be able to affect the study of the relation between space, identity, and power in the broader Mediterranean region and how their work could contribute to further research in this hybrid and challenging field of study. Considering these relations from a liminal perspective is a very useful analytical lens that can combine various disciplinary approaches and capture the transformative power of some of the processes described in the volume. As a result, the multilevel interaction between space and politics becomes fertile ground for contamination and offers a new and decentered perspective.

Notes

1. Here we adopt a broader definition of the Mediterranean region, including those countries that are also part of the Middle East and not directly on the Mediterranean Sea (Moisseron and Bayoumi 2012).
2. All the history of spaces is, at the same time, history of powers (authors’ translation).

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PART I

Mobilizations

ONE | Filling the Urban Space after Authoritarianism in Tunisia

The Case of Islamic Activism in Sfax

ESTER SIGILLÒ

Power suffers, as in Shakespearian tragedy: the more it consolidates, the more afraid it is. . . . The places where power makes itself accessible and visible—police station, barracks, administrative buildings—ooze with anxiety.

—Lefebvre 1976, 85–86

1. Introduction

Space and power are two interrelated concepts that are essential to interpreting Tunisian politics from the country's independence to the revolution. Space management was one of the instruments that President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's regime used to build its legitimacy by controlling society. Starting in the 1990s, the RCD (Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique), which was the ruling party, was "omnipresent" because of the deployment of thousands of cells distributed across the territory (Hibou 2006a, 101). This capillary control, based on the provision of economic benefits and the creation of clientelist channels, had successfully built a system of allegiance and domination (Hibou 2006a, 101). On 17 December 2010, the street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, who would come to be known as the "martyr of the revolution," set himself on fire in front of the governorate building in Sidi Bouzid, a rural town about 300 kilometers south of Tunis, to protest an unjust political system that

caused regional socioeconomic disparities. This symbolic act in front of a building representing the power system of the authoritarian regime was the catalyst for demonstrations and riots that spread through the country and eventually led Ben Ali to step down on 14 January 2011, after 23 years in power.

After the fall of the authoritarian regime, the transition process unfolded through episodes of riots, urban guerrillaism, unrests, and sits-in, which often originated in the center-west regions, the least developed areas of the country, and spread to the capital. The resurgence of political mobilization and urban revolts has reactivated the attractiveness of Salafi-jihadi subjects, which emerged after the revolution as the political alternative closest to disenfranchised strata of the population of the peripheries, which are unwilling to support a transition process that they perceive as contributing to their marginalization (Marks 2013; Fahmi and Meddeb 2015). Terrorist attacks started in the country after the establishment of the coalition government between the Islamist and the previous regime's forces, which many perceived as a "rotten compromise" (Marzouki and Meddeb 2016) and a betrayal of the principles of the revolution. It is no coincidence that the majority of attacks since 2014 have targeted the places of power or those places symbolically representing an oppressive system of power: for example, police stations, the bus of the Tunisian Presidential Security Guard, the American Embassy, and the resort in Sousse. Therefore, space in Tunisia matters. It represented the core of the exercise of authoritarian power, which dominated, controlled, and marginalized part of the population (Hibou 2006b). Accordingly, the reappropriation of material and symbolic spaces became one of the central demands of the revolution.

The goal of this chapter is to further reflect the notion of space and its relationship with power by analyzing how the city contributes to shaping the organization and development of those sociopolitical forces excluded before the revolution. Indeed, the liberalization of the public sphere after 2011 allowed for the reactivation of the material and symbolic resources of grassroots Islamic actors, who emerged as a socioeconomic and political "counterpower" (Merone and De Facci 2015) after the fall of the regime. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the city of Sfax,¹ this chapter scrutinizes the role of space in tracing the dynamics of mobilization of an urban Islamic network rooted in the social fabric and which has undergone a process of transformation in the past 10 years.

Sfax is a relevant case study for this purpose, as the city plays an important symbolic role in Tunisian politics. Unlike other industrial centers of the country, whose creation was initiated by the national public authori-

ties, the industry in Sfax relies on the work of a local familistic business (Denieuil 1992). The entrepreneurial spirit of the city's residents and the financial resources of market-oriented agriculture put the city in second place in the national GDP rankings, after Tunis. This "endogenous development" (Bennasr 2005) contributed to forging a narrative on Sfax's "specificity" in social, political, and economic competition with the dominant centers of power. Sfax was the first Tunisian city to mobilize for the country's independence in 1956. Then Sfax emerged as a social, political, and economic counterpower to the Sahel region (i.e., the coastal region from Sousse to Monastir, where Bourguiba was from), which has constituted the bulwark of the political strategy of domination since the independence of the country (Donker 2013).

Sfax also played a crucial role in the fight against the regime. On 12 January 2011, the local branch of the UGTT (the Tunisian General Labor Union) organized a general strike, two days before the strike organized in Tunis that would lead to the fall of Ben Ali. Known as the "capital of the South," the city has been framed by its citizens in two ways: a space of "marginalization" and a space of "resistance" drawing its strength from an independent economic development, social conservatism, and the feeling of frustration vis-à-vis the traditional power (Merone and De Facci 2015). People from the Sahel engaged in the country's administration were overrepresented compared with those from Sfax. For instance, in 1970, Tunisian and Sahelian senior officials amounted to 29.2 percent of the country's total, and Sfaxians to 0 percent (Table 1). This inequality in the country's administrative representation forged the abovementioned narrative of "marginalization," which was internalized especially by those political forces excluded by the regime and its allies, such as the Islamist movement.

After the revolution, Sfax saw the reactivation of an Islamic network, which appropriated the two narratives of marginalization and resistance. Two phenomena that emerged after the revolution are worth nothing: First, the commercial neighborhood of the city (i.e., Sfax el Jadida) began to host the headquarters of newly emerged Islamic organizations founded by Islamic activists after decades of political, economic, and spatial marginalization. Second, the peripheries at the margins of the city expanded by hosting massive waves of immigrants from the poorest governorates of the interior of Tunisia. This peripheral area became the area of intervention by Islamic charities that mushroomed after 2011, rapidly filling the void left by the old regime's parastatal charitable and microcredit associations (Sigillò 2020).

This chapter highlights how the urban space played a strategic role

Table 1. Geographical background of the Tunisian administration in 1970 (percentage of country total)

Region	Population	Ministers	Governors	Senior officials
Tunis	17.4%	25%	24.5%	29.2%
Sfax	9.4%	11.8%	5.3%	0.0%
Sahel	11.5%	28%	29.8%	29.2%

Source: Author's elaboration based on Donker 2013.

in the reconfiguration of an Islamic urban network claiming the “right to take back the city” in the postrevolutionary process (Harvey 2008). Accordingly, this contribution develops a way of understanding the role of the urban space in social movements by going beyond the notion of the “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1972), which does not account for the role of space in shaping social movements’ networks and mobilizations (Miller and Nicholls 2013). After the revolution, Islamic activism emerged in the Sfaxian urban space by claiming issues that were not related to the local context—such as inserting sharia into the constitution. Islamic actors rooted in the urban social fabric have recently opted for new logics of mobilization, given the changing political landscape. In recent years, a large number of associations have engaged in local activities *for* the development of the city and participatory local governance. As will be discussed, these logics are not mutually exclusive, and they account for the role of space in the evolution of Islamic activism in Tunisia, taking the case study of Sfax. This chapter provides an analytical grid for interpreting such dynamics of transformation.

2. Social Movements, the Urban Space, and Islamic Activism: A Relational Approach

Since the late 1970s, geographers studying social movements have paid close attention to the concept of urban social movements proposed by Castells (1977, 1983). More recently, starting from the concept of the “right to the city” proposed by Lefebvre (1972), the focus has shifted to the attempt to conceptualize social justice in a critical spatial perspective (Mitchell 2003; Purcell 2006; Harvey 2008; Marcuse 2009). The relevance of the geographical dimension in the analysis and evolution of social movements has been discussed in several contributions (Nicholls 2009; Miller and Nicholls 2013; Routledge 2013) to explain the construction of social groups and collective identities through the spatial

variation of the available resources and their access. Thus, according to this literature, urban social movements arise in response to “neoliberal urbanization” and employ local organizations to launch struggles for a better and more just city. In this light, social movements not only develop *within* the city but also mobilize *for* the city.

As scholars have highlighted, Castells’s and Lefebvre’s theoretical frameworks may draw some criticism. Notably, in the abovementioned literature, demands and grievances are “locked into the city” (Uitermark et al. 2012, 2546). Accordingly, the right-to-the-city concept diverts attention away from understanding the role of space in those social movements that extend beyond the political, geographical, and ideological spaces of cities themselves. On the one hand, this literature emphasizes the city as the cradle of social movements; on the other hand, cities have mostly been seen as a mere backdrop, “as the empty canvas on which social movement activity unfolds” (Uitermark et al. 2012, 2546).

In this chapter, I turn to relational perspectives on cities going beyond the concept of the right to the city (Uitermark et al. 2012). The focus on the relational approach (Diani 2003; Nicholls 2009; Jasper and Duyvendak 2015) makes it possible to focus on the city as a cluster of relational conduits where movements connect and develop. From a relational perspective, cities form the backdrop of networks and are also nodes in relational networks of meaning and collective identity, which may stretch far beyond their territorial boundaries (Nicholls 2009). Diani (2003) views struggle in cities as extensions of broader campaigns, with activists renewing their commitment and ties to the general struggle through the activities and connections made in their everyday lives. Thus, local actors are nodes performing specific functions within broader circuits of contention. Armstrong (2005) has shown how San Francisco was an important site for producing a gay political identity but also for leading local and national political struggles on these issues. Thus, the urban served as a strategic space through which this stigmatized minority was able to assert broad rights claims in the country. The relation between activists and the city enables them to assert their right to the city; however, their demand for rights does not end “at the city gates” (Uitermark et al. 2012). Instead, the city becomes a relational platform for making nationwide claims. Taking a strategic relational approach implicates the analysis of *fields of interactions*, or *arenas*, rather than the investigation of the relationship between structure and agents (Jasper and Duyvendak 2015). Systems are not inherently balanced or static but rather consistently dynamic as they experience the pressures and strains of societal

changes, events, and interactions. According to Jasper, “We must recognize the full panoply of goals, meanings and feelings players have, rather than reducing them to a mathematically tractable minimum” (2004, 4).

This contribution emphasizes the role of Sfax as a relational incubator and a platform for Tunisian Islamic activism. The literature on Islamic activism has focused on the role of horizontal networking in shaping Islamic movements (Bayat 1998; Clark 2004). In particular, Clark focuses on the rise of a new Islamic middle class in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen (2004). She maintains that the creation of social bonds (i.e., ties of trust, solidarity, and teamwork) developed alongside a rising social class of lawyers, doctors, professors, and engineers. These horizontal ties indirectly lead to the development of new social networks and the diffusion of new ideas (Clark 2004). Drawing on Clark’s theoretical framework, Merone and De Facci (2015) interpreted the rise of the Tunisian Islamist movement as the struggle for political hegemony of a rising middle class, which, until the revolution, had been excluded from the public sphere. The abovementioned literature has barely focused on the role of space in shaping Islamic activism. By combining a spatial relational approach to the study of Islamic activism, this chapter aims to fill this gap by showing how the urban space served as a strategy for the organization and development of the Sfaxian Islamic network.

3. Taking the City Back: A Rising Urban Islamic Activism after the Revolution

The toppling of the authoritarian regime in 2011 created new conditions for actors who had previously been excluded from the public sphere (e.g., Islamic activists) to flourish. Besides the legalization of religious, political parties like the Islamist party Ennahda, a large number of activists and preachers decided to engage in the civil society sphere. Most of them represented Ennahda’s electorate in the first free elections in 2011, although they did not always share the party’s objectives (Merone et al. 2018). They are former militants of the Movement of Islamic Tendency (MIT), which was the predecessor of the Ennahda party created at the end of the 1970s, and constitute a new generation of activists who have not experienced militancy within the movement. They also include preachers who are not directly linked to the party or who have distanced themselves from the organization in light of this process of moderation and are considered the most radical in the country. Accordingly, the urban space became the theater and the vec-

tor of the Islamic revival (*sahwa*) rooted in the social fabric. Sfax represented an emblematic space for the reactivation of an urban Islamic network (Merone et al. 2018).

One of the most remarkable forms of Islamic activism relies on the increasing prominence of new charismatic preachers. In the aftermath of the revolution, imams in nearly half of the country's 3,000 mosques were driven out by popular demand, in contrast to the old regime's top-down practices of appointing imams. A wide variety of actors, including some from Islamist and Salafist movements, replaced those imams who had worked under the old regime (Donker 2013). According to this "revolutionary narrative," after the fall of the authoritarian regime, the new imams appointed by the people occupied the "freed *minbar*" (preaching tribunes in the mosques) (Merone et al. 2018). In Sfax, for example, preaching (*da'wa*) activities have evolved thanks to young imams like Mohamed Affès, the preacher of the Great Mosque of Sfax, and Ridha Jaouadi, imam of the Lakhmi Mosque, both appointed by popular demand, after decades of persecution by the previous regime.² In the light of the postrevolutionary momentum, preaching activities went in parallel with a process of reappropriation of the urban space. Immediately after the fall of the regime, most of the sermons were held outside the mosques in informal public spaces such as cafés and public squares, thanks to a renewed democratic spirit. As stated by an imam of a religious association: "Islam is a living religion. It also has to be taught outside the mosques. After the revolution, we're free to reappropriate our spaces, so it's not only the devoted people who must go to the mosque but also the imams who must reach the people in the streets, in the squares—even the cafés, if necessary."³

Aside from the rise of new imams appointed from below, religiously oriented associations emerged as key figures of an "Islamic civil society" that before 2011 had operated underground without national and international legitimacy, and that after 2011 mostly occupied the urban spaces. On 17 January 2011, the day Tunisia's interim government was announced, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi stated that associations whose actions had previously been frozen by the regime would be able to operate freely.⁴ This liberalization was particularly favorable for Islamist activists, who, for the first time since the creation of the Islamist movement in the 1970s, could fully engage in a public sphere after decades of repression.⁵ From this perspective, after the revolution, many former opponents of the authoritarian regime decided to redirect their efforts toward associative action as a form of Islamic activism. As

one former Ennahda activist said: “After the revolution, we could choose whether to keep playing a role in the party or turn to social action by creating an association.”⁶

Thanks to Legislative Decree 88 from September 2011, thousands of associations with religious references have appeared in the new Tunisian public space⁷—notably, Islamic activists mostly engaged in charitable and *da'wa* (preaching associations). Charitable associations (*al-jam 'iyyât al-khayriyya*) have become the most visible forms of the new activism of Islamic inspiration. In the postrevolutionary period, characterized by the population's increasing demands for a more just welfare system, religiously oriented charities legitimized their work by responding directly to the state's inability to meet the needs of the most marginalized sectors of the population. Unlike secular humanitarian associations, religious charities' missions were rooted not in social policies but in religion. Indeed, Islamic activists, having opposed the authoritarian regime for decades, accused the majority of secular associations—more tolerated than religious associations during Ben Ali's regime—of having been supportive of the authoritarian regime's clientelist networks.⁸ In so doing, they have developed their activities by opposing the so-called charity of the state, the old regime's welfare system based on a mechanism of patronage. As stated by the president of a charitable association and former militant of the Tunisian Islamist movement, religion-based charity does not refer to social policies but to religion, in opposition to the state's monopoly on religion and the mechanism of patronage of social assistance during Ben Ali's regime: “We don't do it out of interest. We don't do it for the poor. For us, it is an obligation; it is our religion—we do it for God.”⁹ By following religious prescriptions, their activities are aimed at specific objectives, such as the support of orphans and access to care for families or at particular times of the year: especially the distribution of the bassinet for Ramadan, sheep for *Eid al-Adha* and *Eid al-Fitr*, material for back to school, and duvets for winter. Moreover, their activities draw their resources from the redistribution of locally collected alms (*zakat*) and other forms of donation (*sadaqat*).

In one sense, carrying out charitable activities in postrevolutionary Tunisia has functioned as a kind of redemption for Ennahda activists and the religious opponents of the former regime who wish to dismantle former clientelist networks, which had built up over the years, by building an alternative welfare system. Thus, charitable associations led by Islamic activists emerged in the postrevolutionary landscape as a new social network trying to counter the cultural, economic, and political

strength of the Bourguibian nationalist elite that had led the country since independence until 2011 and continues to exist after the revolution while keeping up some political and bureaucratic control (Soli and Merone 2013).

Islamic charitable activities are not a specific by-product of the revolution but emerged in the postrevolutionary urban space as the institutionalization of recent charitable activities conducted by Islamic activists in secretive conditions before 2011. The president of a charitable association in Sfax, a former militant of the MIT, emblematically explained the link between charitable activities and the activities of the Islamic movement during the regime's strictest repression in the 1990s, when the Islamic movement organized a charitable network to assist prisoners' families and martyrs' widows and orphans: "Charity was one of the main activities of the Islamic movement. During Ben Ali's regime, the charity was always secretly giving to the poorest families of political prisoners and widows and orphans of martyrs."¹⁰ Thus, the charities' original work is rooted in local means, characterized by community-based and self-help activities. According to some elderly militants interviewed, the solidarity network was even more robust during the period of imprisonment: "The time spent in prison was very hard, as I was far from my family, but at the same time, it was an amazing experience, as I reinforced my friendships with my comrades in a challenging environment. We've established a sort of solidarity network, which is still alive."¹¹

These ties of trust and solidarity, coupled with a strong sense of mission, paved the way for the expansion of Islamic activism after 2011. Indeed, these tight-knit personal bonds, which constitute the very identity of these associations, are highly conducive to norms of reciprocity, which in turn reinforce the movement itself (Wiktorowicz 2004). As the literature on social movement demonstrates, people generally associate with other people who are similar to them. Clark retraces this homogeneity in the Islamic associations (Clark 2004). Therefore, charitable associations stemmed from an informal solidarity network based on strong ties of kinship.

This account of the history and activity of Islamic activists is common to a significant number of charitable associations surveyed in the country. However, the particularity of Sfax is tied to the high number of charitable associations, the high level of coordination of urban activities, and the spatial concentration of these associations. One explanation of the more significant expansion of Islamic associations in Sfax might be the city's traditional affiliation with the Islamist movement (MIT) devel-

oped in the early 1980s, the political organization founded by the Tunisian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood that in 1989 changed its name to Ennahda (meaning “renaissance”). Thus, Sfax emerged as an Islam-based counterpower opposing the capital and the Sahel region linked to the regime and its allies. The most conservative leaders of the movement came from this city. Sheikh Habib Ellouze is the most remarkable example. This Sfaxian preacher was the symbol of the Islamists’ struggle against Ben Ali’s regime. After the revolution, he gave an impulse to the reconfiguration of a religious network rooted in the urban space through the creation of the preaching association *Dawa wa al Islam*.¹²

Moreover, the number of charitable associations in Sfax doubled with the start of the Libyan crisis in March 2011, when a massive influx of refugees crossed the Ras Jadir border in the South. As the “capital of the South,” Sfax was particularly hit by the crisis, becoming a crucial operations center to set up refugee camps and organize humanitarian assistance. The latter was organized and structured through the collection of essential products for refugees, caravans of solidarity, and volunteering to help “the Libyan brothers.”¹³ In the context of widespread revolutionary enthusiasm, this initial mobilization of socioeconomic rescue activities had triggered the creation of charitable associations.

Based on established networks of kinship ties between old friends, the Sfaxian charitable associations developed in an urban network claiming its subjective “right to the city” in terms of reappropriating public spaces after years of marginalization. In this regard, after the fall of the regime, Sfaxian charities have organized everyday activities and events in public squares during the holy month of Ramadan. The reason, according to the activists interviewed, was “to make our voices heard, to bring together the Islamic community, in particular the Islamic community of Sfax, the most repressed by Ben Ali’s regime.”¹⁴ The president of a very popular charitable association in Sfax emphasized the link between Islamic redemption after years of repression and the role of space: “Ramadan is a magical month. Thank God we can celebrate it after the fall of Ben Ali. During Ramadan, we address all the pious Sfaxian people to collect food and clothes at the Lakhmi Mosque, the heart of Sfax el Jadida.”¹⁵ Moreover, the *iftar*¹⁶ on the first and the last day of Ramadan is usually organized in the public square hosting the Lakhmi Mosque. As reported by the presidents of charitable associations involved in the organization, these events have been crucial to “strengthening bonds and to create shared solidarity” within the Islamic Sfaxian community.¹⁷

Bonds and ties created by Islamic activists engaged in charitable

associations have facilitated the coordination of charitable activities. However, the political ties cannot explain the careful organization of the charitable work in Sfax. In organizing their activities, charities have established a division of labor aimed at efficiently serving local needs. They have squared the urban space into zones of intervention so that each association is in charge of serving a specific slot. Based on this grid of interventions, associations have created shared databases to rationalize the work and avoid duplicative interventions. This coordination work was undoubtedly the result of a desire to meet a common goal pursued by the leaders of the associations; likewise, charitable activities benefited from the expertise of professionals engaged in the associations, as well as the supervision of a more extensive network of associations and the technical support of experts and management consultants from other kinds of organizations. The network of Islamic associations has drawn its resources from a conservative middle class that emerged after the revolution and is spatially located in the commercial neighborhood of Sfax el Jadida. The latter is the major urban requalification initiative in Sfax, launched in the 1980s and supported by Saudi and Kuwaiti capitals (Carboni et al. 2015a).

Charity headquarters did not pop up in a spatial vacuum but are located in the same area where other Islamic associations established themselves after the revolution. It is no coincidence that the majority of Islamic associations “occupied” the space of Sfax el Jadida. This neighborhood developed as an urban project initiated in the 1980s, strongly supported by Saudi and Kuwaiti capital and by the municipal administration. This project constituted a major urban development initiative aimed at modernizing the city by creating a “hinge zone” intended to concentrate the administrative functions and commercial companies based in the old city, namely in Medina and the colonial area, Bab al Bahr (Bennasr 2003). However, the project ultimately failed due to building speculation (Carboni et al. 2015b).¹⁸ Thus, after the revolution, Sfax el Jadida presented itself as a very dense neighborhood characterized by a large amount of unfinished empty buildings in a developing commercial area. Therefore, a rising Islamic middle class, mostly composed of engineers, doctors, professors, and lawyers who had been socially and economically marginalized by the old regime’s political strategy of exclusion of challengers, after 2011 conceived this area as a new urban space “to conquer” in light of its return to the civic and political scene. In this regard, Sarah Ben Nefissa (1992) notes that a critical reason for the financial success of Islamic associations in Egypt is that they position

themselves in areas where large parts of the population have money to redistribute. Some authors refer to this phenomenon as a sort of “gentrification” of Islamic movements, which are more and more marketing oriented (Haenni 2005).

Thus, immediately after the revolution, the neighborhood of Sfax el Jadida started to host a sort of mutual aid Islamic-oriented service area, where different types of Islamic organizations are locally connected and form a complex Islamic constellation. This ecosystem includes a significant number of Islamic organizations, such as the Zakat association, preaching associations (the most remarkable of which is the Dawa al Islah association, founded by Ennahda’s charismatic preacher Habib Ellouze), the association of Islamic economy, and the Islam-based trade union OTT (Organisation Tunisien du Travail). Each association has its specialty and they complement each other. The association of Islamic economy operates as a think tank, studying the applicability of Islamic values to the market economy; the Zakat association is a pivotal actor for the resource mobilization of the Islamic ecosystem as it can address the so-called businessman wishing to pay zakat to charitable associations or, on the contrary, provide sound contacts to charitable associations for fundraising. Moreover, it works in cooperation with Islamic banks operating in the country: The Tunisian bank Zeitouna and the bank Al Baraka, founded in Bahrein, are both located in the same neighborhood.

4. The City as an Arena: Sfax as the Bulwark of Islamist Mobilization

As most activists engaged in religious associations came from the Tunisian Islamist movement, the boundaries between social and political activism were blurred immediately after 2011: “At the beginning, the association used to do everything. There was not a real distinction between political activity and social activity.”¹⁹ As a result, the involvement of Ennahda activists in the social fabric became an issue, with secular forces accusing the party of indirectly recreating a system of hegemony similar to that of the RCD under Ben Ali. Given the increasing polarization in the country, the city of Sfax, in particular, was home to most of the Islamist resistance against “the ideological attack of secular forces.”²⁰ In Sfax, the desire to create a tighter Islamic mobilization has proved to be more robust than in other governorates. In February 2012, about 30 *da’wa*, charitable, and imams’ associations joined the urban network (*chebka*) Wa Attawanou (from a verse of the Quran inciting the Islamic community to build cooperative networks). The network was active in 2012 and 2013 and facilitated

the associations' activities in Sfax and the organization of mobilizations of national interest, such as the insertion of sharia into the constitution.

Sfax el Jadida hosted several sit-ins and demonstrations organized by the Islamic network, which was led by the new Sfaxian preachers, and gathered a large number of pious citizens. The Fadhel Ben Achour square, hosting the Lakhmi, was the leading site for Islamic demonstrations and sit-ins from 2011 to 2013. Traces of these mobilizations are still visible on the buildings surrounding the square, such as the tag of the four-fingered *Rabaa* on the walls of the buildings surrounding the square, which refers to the Muslim Brotherhood's protests in support of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in Egypt.²¹ After July 2013 protests, a large number of Ennahda's activists launched the initiative to rename the square "Rabaa Adaouia" to express their solidarity and support for the sit-inners in Egypt.

The networking experiment of Wa Attawanou in Sfax functioned as a trailblazer of broader Islamic networks. The most emblematic example was the Tunisian Front of Islamic Associations (Jabhat Tunisiyya al-Jami'iat al-Islamiyya), involving all Islamic associations in Tunisia, created "to bring together Islamic forces to fight against secularism in Tunisia and the desecration of Islam and for the insertion of sharia in the constitution."²² Interestingly, Sfaxian associations represented the majority of associations participating in the Front, being the Sfaxian preachers, the leading figure of such organization. The Front made its voice heard by the symbolic centers of power, such as the National Constituent Assembly, and in those places of the country with a symbolic character, such as Avenue Bourguiba in Tunis, which had hosted the significant events organized by the RCD during Ben Ali's time in office. On 25 March 2012, it also organized demonstrations against World Theatre Day, and later that year, it supported protests expressing discontent against the movie *Persepolis*,²³ which was considered insulting to Islamic values, including a sit-in in front of the American Embassy and a march from the Fath Mosque to the embassy building on 14 September. Last but not least, the Front signed a petition condemning a UGTT strike in December of that year, one in a series of escalating protests against the Islamist-led government that culminated in violent clashes in the capital.²⁴ On Facebook, oppositional groups (mainly leftist and secular associations) denounced those that supported the pro-Ennahda petition, publishing a list of signatories and pointing specifically to a bloc composed of Islamic charities, *da'wa* associations, imams' associations, and Salafi parties, such as Jebhat al Islah (Merone et al. 2018).

The watershed for Tunisian politics came in 2013. After the political assassination of left-wing leader Mohamed Brahmi, the country witnessed a severe political crisis characterized by a high level of contention between the two oppositional fronts.²⁵ Immediately after the assassination, a large-scale demonstration of secular forces occurred in front of parliament to demand the government's resignation. Moreover, a group of left-wing activists and secular forces feeling nostalgic about the old regime imitated the Egyptian anti-Morsi mobilization in Tunisia by organizing a national campaign called Tamarod, taking the name of the Egyptian movement, against the Ennahda-led government accused of supporting Salafi groups and ushering in a religious state.

This massive mobilization led to an increasing radicalization of some Islamic fringe groups. In Sfax, Islamic activists organized neighborhood patrols to "protect" the Islamic community against what they saw as an attempted coup d'état (perceived as being similar to the one perpetrated in Egypt against the Muslim Brotherhood's democratically elected government). During this period of uncertainty, the Salafi-jihadist Ansar al-Sharia movement called for the formation of a grassroots Islamic front against the "secular counterrevolution" (Merone et al. 2018). In this crucial period, Sfax became the physical battleground where two political enemies were struggling to control the urban space (Merone et al., 2018).

The increasing polarization led the Islamist Ennahda party to opt for a pragmatic turn by declaring Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist organization and leaving power in favor of a technocratic government in January 2014. Thus, after three years of full liberalization, the state's security apparatus returned to the scene and opposed all religious-political practices, including those of the Front and the local network in Sfax. The two biggest cities of the country (i.e., Tunis and Sfax) became the new space of control of the government's securitization campaign. The government restored state control over mosques and activities accused of causing the "wahabization of the country."²⁶ Islamic associations became the target of police operations, which sought to verify their activities. The primary mechanism of pressure and control was accounting, and many associations received sanctions for allegedly hiding illicit funding linked to terrorist activities. The sanctions provided for the association's suspension from one to three months up to the freezing of the assets or even the definitive suspension of the association. In 2014, 449 associations were closed because they had failed to register foreign funding, 179 because their statute was "unclear," and 236 because of "some link with terrorism reported by citizens."²⁷

Sfaxian charities have been the most affected actors in this securitization campaign. The presidents of the associations interviewed reported their experience with the police: “We received a double punishment, as Sfaxian citizens and as Islamists. Sfaxian people and Islamist activists challenged the authoritarian regime. Unfortunately, after three years of freedom, we’re facing the same dynamics of repression that we experienced during Ben Ali’s regime.”²⁸ This perception of selective punishment has progressively exacerbated a feeling of frustration and anger among those activists engaged in Islamic associations vis-à-vis their secular counterparts, thus further dividing the associative fabric into two oppositional camps. According to the president of a charitable association and an Ennahda sympathizer: “Our association, as with many other charitable associations developed after the revolution, is close to Ennahda. In other words, we’re not against the party, as we share its values, nor are we a part of the party. However, just because we share the same values, we’re now being persecuted.”²⁹ Indeed, several associations stress that there was a definite shift in the mechanisms of state control after 2013, which they see as clearly linked to the political campaign against the Islamist party: “The state’s attack [on religious associations] was an attempt to attack Ennahda. I wonder why the state didn’t exert control over secular charitable associations.”³⁰ In some cases, interviewees articulated a firm stance against the state, claiming that “the state does not allow for the existence of charity in this country because it would like to maintain its prerevolutionary clientelist networks.”³¹

In October 2014, in the aftermath of the parliamentary elections, the neo-Bouguibist party *Nidaa Tunes* and the Islamist party *Ennahda* created a coalition government to start a normalization period following a year of high political conflict. This new era opened up further control over grassroots Islamic activism; the *Ennahda* party made a pragmatic decision by seeking consensus with the secular forces. In 2015, the government launched the “war on terrorism” based on the second wave of the government’s crackdown on “illegal” imams. The exclusion of the young sheikhs and post-revolution imams praised “from below” represented the beginning of a new phase. The most sensitive issue for the government was control of mosques and Islamic public spaces. This restoration of control was particularly evident in Sfax, perceived as the “bastion of the Islamic resistance,” “the Islamic movement’s last challenge” against the “normalization of the post-revolutionary contentious politics” (Merone et al. 2018). During the campaign against unofficial imams, *Ridha Jawadi*, appointed by popular demand after the revolu-

tion, was ousted in September 2015. His replacement was an imam from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This measure showed that the time for spontaneous Islamic politics was over (Merone et al., 2018). Protests erupted against the government, accused of violating freedom of worship. Sheikh Jawadi was a central figure in Tunisian Islamic activism. He was not only the imam of the Lakhmi Mosque but also the president of the Wa Attawanou association network in Sfax. The mobilization of Jawadi's community became the focal point of the "resistance" of grassroots Islamic activism throughout the country.

In recent years, Sfax has continued being the forerunner of Islamic mobilizations. In August 2018, a large number of Sfaxian Islamic associations and ousted imams took to the streets to protest a proposal for a series of constitutional amendments in the areas of gender equality and human rights that were included in an Individual Freedoms and Equality Committee (COLIBE) report, which former president Beji Caid Essebsi had nominated in August 2017. The main controversy related to "heritage law" and in particular to the fact that the committee had not included the opinion of the country's religious figures. Thus, the COLIBE initiative triggered a process of contestation of Islamic activists all over the country. However, the mobilization started in the city of Sfax and then spread to the capital. The local branch of the National Coordination for the Defense of the Quran, a national network of Islamic associations, together with the association *Dawa wa al Islah*, took the lead of the mobilizations, replacing the Wa Attawanou network and the Front of Islamic associations, which had been dismantled by the state's securitization measures in earlier years.³² All Islamic associations organized a march in Sfax el Jadida, which ended at the Lakhmi Mosque. The protesters, with a banner reading "Quran text before any other text," claimed that the presidential initiative was against the teaching of Islam. Interestingly, secular associations organized mobilizations in support of the presidential initiative in the old part of the city, Bab al Bahr, because of a spatial polarization.³³

5. From Islamist to Sfaxian: Serving the City beyond the Umma

When studying Islamic urban networks, we should avoid considering them as isolated and static blocs. Indeed, in the past five years, several Islamic associations have joined multiple arenas of urban mobilization in parallel with and beyond the Islamic cause, thereby contributing to a sort of hybridization of the Islamic network with other local civic cir-

cles. Again, Sfax represents an emblematic example to account for this phenomenon. In particular, local associations with religious orientation started to mobilize for very local and specific claims in recent years by involving the interests of secular associations (e.g., environmental issues or the recovery of urban spaces). Mobilizations recall the narrative of “Sfax as a space of marginalization,” compared with other regions of the country, Sahel and the capital, which has always been affected by discrimination policies implemented by the old regime and also pursued by the postrevolutionary governments after 2011 (Carboni et al. 2015b).

From this perspective, even if demands rely on the issue of “marginalization,” a narrative that is strongly felt by the Tunisian Islamic movement, the relationship with the city acquired a different meaning for Islamic actors if compared with the mobilizations analyzed above. In recent years, the residents of Sfax have mobilized for the sake of the “right to the city,” by advocating the symbolic liberation from the urban development plans imposed by the capital (i.e., by neoliberal policies of the authoritarian regimes since the 1980s) and their right to take back the city by building strategic infrastructure and establishing new places of leisure (Carboni et al. 2015b). The observation of mobilizations (assemblies, demonstrations, sit-ins) and the interviews conducted with the presidents or vice presidents of associations leading the movement gives an account of the demand for the “right to development,” where the “right to the city” is just one of the dimensions, in light of the claim of citizens’ participation in the decision-making process. Setting up power networks and decision-making mechanisms at the local level reveals an elitist recovery of the themes and practices of decentralization and participation.

On 14 January 2016, for the fifth anniversary of the revolution, the Sfaxian Collective for Environment and Development (a citizens’ network of about 40 associations) organized a massive march of commemoration across the city, thus in light of an unedited spirit of cohesiveness despite the city’s ideological participation. More than 5,000 people participated, including leaders of political parties and civil society actors from all the political trends and the ultras of the football team Club Sportif Sfaxien (De Facci 2019). Interestingly, this collective urban mobilization catalyzed all the specific issues relevant to the city, which in 2016 had not yet been processed by the governments’ postrevolutionary political programs. Thus, the demonstration held on the day of the revolution symbolically denounced an uneven democratization process. Among the issues brought forward by the mobilization was, first and

foremost, a demand for the closure of the phosphate processing plant SIAPE, located near the south coast five kilometers from Sfax and considered to be very polluting. The demonstrators took up the slogans of the revolution (“get out,” “the people want”) within the framework of the citizen struggle for the good of the city against a development model centrally imposed by the capital (De Facci 2019).

Some representatives of secular associations who were interviewed explained that the participation of Islamic associations in this kind of event related to Islamic actors’ strategy to occupy new spaces of mobilization to further amplify their constituency. At first glance, the claims do not seem to be consistent with the Islamic mobilizations reported above. This interpretation, however, sounds reductive, as it does not account for the process of transformation affecting the Islamist movements over the past few decades, which fall under the label of “post-Islamism” (Roy 1994). Moreover, these mobilizations coexisted with a moral commitment linked to the Islamic principles: in particular, campaigns for the cleaning of streets and traffic regulation did not contradict Islamic teachings. Since 2014, there has been an intensification of these commitments, with the augmentation of the activities of the abovementioned Collective for Environment and Development and the rise in the number of new associations involving both Islamist and secular activists in joint development projects for the city, such as the recovery of urban zones (e.g., the Taparura area and Casino Beach) (Carboni et al. 2015b). Last but not least, some religiously inspired associations have become involved in partnerships with local authorities.

As observed during the field visits, many Sfaxian charities have increasingly engaged in shared activities with the municipality. The state’s crackdown on Islamic charitable associations has undoubtedly pushed some associations to look for renewed relationships with local officials. Moreover, relationships between local associations and local officials are based on a shared sense of territorial belonging rather than political competition. In fact, in most cases, associations’ executive committees include local notables who have personal contacts among regional officials; the latter present themselves as resource mobilizers. These local ties are indispensable to association heads, who utilize them to create opportunities for collaboration. Collaborations between associations and local administrations take the form of direct cooperation (e.g., through the co-organization of charitable actions) or indirect cooperation, with authorities relying on the work of charitable activities to fill the void of public welfare provisions malfunction, especially in the most

deprived areas of the city. According to an official of the municipality of Sfax, “Charitable associations can be a resource for the state, as they are more enmeshed in the social fabric, and so they know better where the state has to intervene.”³⁴ Islamic charities have not only functioned as subsidiary actors of local authorities. They also keep on collaborating with municipalities to act as facilitators of the participatory budget, with significant numbers of Islamic charities taking part in fundraising or raising awareness campaigns thanks to their proximity with the grassroots (Som-i and De Facci 2017).

Therefore, by mobilizing for the specific claims of the Islamic community (e.g., inserting sharia into the constitution or giving imams the freedom to preach), Sfax’s religiously oriented associations have shifted to serve the interests of the city. The Islamic activists’ sense of belonging to the city of Sfax (i.e., the Sfaxian identity) accounts for this process of transformation to seek a renewed legitimacy in a political context characterized by the increasing delegitimization of religious actors. Thus, while keeping their religious reference, the difficulty of justifying a religious commitment pushes Islamic associations to seek a different “common good” (De Facci 2019), serving the city beyond the Islamic community. This adjustment is achieved through the hybridization of the Islamic network and new urban networks mobilizing *for* the city.

6. Conclusion

Space in Tunisia matters. Spatial inequality was the core of the exercise of authoritarian power and the central claim of the revolution, in which new symbolic and material spaces have been associated with the democratic possibility. This chapter highlighted how space played a strategic role in the reconfiguration and development of an urban Islamic network after decades of repression suffered by the Islamist movement. Sfax represented a symbolic place for the reactivation of Islamic activism. Here, urban mobilizations have been socially constructed upon the shared narratives of marginalization inflicted by the old regime’s selective policies and resistance to the country’s secularization. The chapter retraced how different kinds of Islamic actors rooted in the social fabric have emerged in a liberalized public sphere by taking back their right to the city. In this regard, the neighborhood of Sfax el Jadida functioned as a relational platform to strengthen bonds and structure mobilizations.

Interestingly, the analysis showed the transformation of the Sfaxian Islamic network, shifting from a movement struggling *in* the city to a

movement struggling *for* the city. The Islamic associations' participation in new arenas of mobilization occurred in a period of substantial transformation during which Islamic actors have started to face new constraints amid a national campaign of delegitimization. From this perspective, the mobilization for local claims became a new space of legitimation. The chapter traced all the phases of this transformation while accounting for the strategic shift in the use of the urban space from political battleground to a field of collaboration with local authorities. The analysis also highlighted how the new mobilizations for local governance are based on a narrative of marginalization of the city of Sfax, which is associated with the experience of former Islamist political prisoners during the authoritarian regime and the most recent experience of Islamic associations challenged by the new wave of governmental securitization.

As shown, the hybridization of the Sfaxian Islamic network with other players and arenas of mobilization is not necessarily incompatible with its religious orientation. Yet it contributes to redefining the redeployment of its missionary logic in light of a political context that has posed increasing challenges to Islamic actors. However, one may wonder how, in the long run, the "contamination" of Islamic activists with other urban networks might lead to a process of disengagement from the Islamist goals. The increasing collaboration of religious-based associations with local administrations and their mobilization in urban campaigns alongside non-Islamic associations could eventually expose them to new logics of engagement and a new set of priorities, which might lead to a process of secularization.

Notes

1. Fieldwork took place in Tunis and Sfax from November 2015 to June 2019. Some of the field visits in 2015 and 2016 were conducted with my colleague Damiano De Facci. This chapter is also the outcome of intense exchanges of ideas and fruitful discussions I had with him on the evolution of Sfaxian associations since the revolution.

2. For 20 years, they had been barred from preaching due to the "political" nature of their sermons (Donker 2013).

3. Interview, Tunis, June 2018.

4. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2011/01/17/01003-20110117ARTFIG00590-la-tunisie-se-dote-d-un-gouvernement-d-union.php>. Accessed 23 December 2021.

5. In 1981, during the Bourguiba regime, the MIT submitted a request to form a party, but the application was ignored by national authorities. Following the first attempt of the Islamist movement to enter politics, the regime started

a campaign of repression by arresting 500 of its members, accusing them of inciting violence and “seeking to change the nature of the state” (Ghannouchi 2016). With the rise to power of Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, after an initial window of political liberalization, the regime reverted to the repressive tactics of the Bourguiba era. Thousands of members were arrested, tortured, or blacklisted from employment; many others, including the Ennahda’s leader Ghannouchi, were forced into exile.

6. Interview with a former Ennahda activist and vice president of a preaching association. Sfax, May 2016.

7. Centre d’Information, de Formation, d’Études et de Documentation sur les Associations, http://www.ifeda.org.tn/fr/index.php?lang=fr&id_page=5. Accessed 23 December 2021.

8. After 2011, associations that had been permitted to operate under the old regime acknowledged they now enjoy more freedom of intervention, as they no longer have to respect the list of beneficiaries imposed by the regime’s state officials: “Under the Ben Ali regime, we were all obliged to fulfill the requirements of the regime; associations trying to become autonomous were regularly persecuted.” Extract from an informal talk with the president of a microcredit association that was active before the revolution and has largely renewed its staff since the revolution. Sfax, May 2016.

9. Interview with the president of the charitable association B. Sfax, May 2016.

10. Interview with a former militant in the MIT and president of a charitable association. Sfax, January 2017.

11. Interview with a former militant in the MIT and president of a charitable association. Sfax, May 2017.

12. Habib Ellouze was in exile between 1981 and 1984 and became president of the *majlis choura* (party’s representative assembly) after Ben Ali rose to power. He spent 15 years in prison but was later released on medical grounds. He spent his time before 2011 under tight administrative control. In 2011, he was elected MP in the Sfax electoral district. Interview with Habib Ellouze, Hammamet, May 2016.

13. Interview with the president of the charitable association T. Sfax, January 2016.

14. Interview with the president of the charitable association T. Sfax, January 2016.

15. Interview. Sfax, February 2017.

16. Iftar is the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset.

17. Interview with the secretary general of the charitable association S. Sfax, January 2017.

18. As reported by Carboni et al. (2015), despite a planned building area of 300,000 m² in the 1980s, 450,000 m² were built in 1990; in 2009, almost 1 million m², with significant consequences in terms of urban quality.

19. Interview with the president of the association N. Sfax, January 2017.

20. Interview with the vice president of the association DwI, February 2017.

21. The Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square was the site of a violent confrontation on 14

August 2013 between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian army after the coup d'état, which, one month earlier, had removed President Morsi from office.

22. Data retrieved from an analysis of the Front Facebook page's content <https://www.facebook.com/front.national.des.associations.islamiqes/>. Accessed 23 December 2021.

23. The broadcast of the film *Persepolis* on 7 October 2011, on the Maghreb Nessma TV channel, sparked protests from a Tunisian Islamic public who considered the film blasphemous because Allah is described, which would violate the sacred values of Islam.

24. The strike was organized by the trade union against the so-called troika government. "Troika" was the unofficial name for the alliance between the three parties (Ennahda, Ettakatol and Congrès Pour la République - CPR) that ruled in Tunisia after the 2011 Constituent Assembly election. Ali Laarayedh (Ennahda) stepped down as prime minister on 9 January 2014.

25. The assassination of Chokri Belaid, an opposition leader with the left-secular Democratic Patriots' Movement, in February 2013 sparked the first protests against the Ennahda-led government.

26. Interview with a state official. Tunis, June 2019.

27. Interview with a state official. Tunis, July 2018.

28. Interview with the president of the charitable association N. Sfax, May 2017.

29. Interview with the secretary-general of the charitable association E. Sfax, July 2018.

30. Interview with the president of the charitable association R. Sfax, July 2018.

31. Interview with the president of the charitable association N. Sfax, July 2018.

32. Interview with a member of the network. Tunis, July 2018.

33. Interview with the secular women's rights association M. Sfax, October 2018.

34. Interview with a former official of the Sfax municipality. December 2016.

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TWO | The “Apple of Discord”

*The Btekhmay Rally and the (Ephemeral?)
Subversion of Mount Lebanon’s Politics
of Space (1965)*

ROSSANA TUFARO

1. Introduction

Over the years, the spatiality of the mountain has occupied a central place in the succession of foundational mythmakings accompanying the emergence of modern Lebanon. First, the earliest forms of Lebanese nationalism stemmed from claims on the spoils of the mountain emirate. Second, when the ideal and then the political borders of the “nation” were enlarged to encompass the coastal cities, the Akkar, the South, and the Beqaa, the mountain space, was retained as the custodian of the most authentic Lebaneseness, providing legitimacy for the succession of sectarian political orders ultimately defined by the National Pact (1943). In these makings and unmakings, the attribution of a specific political-symbolic function to the mountain went hand in hand with the functional attribution of a specific social-political essence to the subaltern subjects who inhabited it and over which the nationalists sought to impose their sovereignty. In the “ideologies of the mountain”¹ that dominated Lebanese nationalism until the 1920s, the representation of the mountaineers corresponded to the unredeemed Christians who had protected—and, hence, preserved—the purity of the mountain from alien (most notably, Sunna) attempts of conquests (Beydoun 1984, 161–208). In the colonial

narratives, they had been a cradle of persecuted religious minorities whose freedom and integrity needed to be paternalistically protected from external (Sunna) threats. Finally, in the narratives of the “ideologies of the city,” which ultimately shaped independent Lebanon, they were the genuine, laborious peasants providing a moral compass to the hectic “Phoenician” merchants of the city, so they did not lose themselves in the chaos of the global trading world. In this latest framing, the image of the mountain refuge and Christian bastion was substituted with that of the Switzerland of the Middle East, an image more suitable to performatively represent the new political and economic turn (the so-called Merchant Republic) (Gates 1998) that the country, now standing on its own two feet, undertook (Salibi 1988, 130–50).

The affirmation of the image of Lebanon as the Switzerland of the Middle East mirrored the political and economic victory of the urban trading center over the inherited rural peripheries on which this center earned and built its sovereignty. In this new order, as the socioeconomic fabric of rural Lebanon was inexorably disrupted and reshaped by new forms of aggressive commercial capitalist exploitation, its mainstream representation was crystallized in the romanticized immobility of the Rahbani brothers’ mountain folklore, around which the newborn state built and canonized its popular culture (Stone 2003).

The inherent contradiction between the peasants’ living conditions and their folkloric representation was disruptively foregrounded on 26 September 1965: in the village of Btekhmay, a demonstration of solidarity organized by the Lebanese Left to champion the struggle of the apple growers of Mount Lebanon against agricultural monopolies brought the agrarian question (and, with it, the sociogeographical peripheries that the economic policies of independent Lebanon were producing) straight into the center of the Lebanese political arena.

In 1974, sociologist Henri Lefebvre introduced the groundbreaking concept of space as a social product shaped by complex interactions between human intentions, needs, interests, and, especially in capitalist societies, the global political economy (Lefebvre 1991). According to Lefebvre, space is produced by three types of activities (the so-called spatial triad): *spatial practices*, that is, the social practices pertaining to both production and reproduction by which the space is materially produced (the *perceived*); the *representation of space*, that is, how space is instrumentally *conceived* as a coherent “order” by those who dominate it through the means of abstraction; and the *representational space*, that is, the space of the *lived* experience of those who inhabit it and use it through its

associated images and symbols (Lefebvre 1991, 33–45). In capitalist societies, the dominant form of space is produced by the (urban) “centers of wealth and power,” that is, the space of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. This space is quintessentially epitomized (and institutionalized) in the nation-state. It endeavors to mold the (rural-peripheral) space, which is politically and economically controlled by mobilizing knowledge and technology, symbols, expertise, violence, and norms, with the primary aim of fostering its own interests at the expenses of the other groups—first and foremost, by subjugating differences (Lefebvre 1991, 49–53). It is also the space defined by the triumph of the conceived over the lived or of the dominated over the appropriated space. In other words, it is the space directly shaped and signified by those who make use of it (Lefebvre 1991, 163–69) and whose compresence and inherent conflict represent the terrain where class struggle is inscribed, thus preventing “abstract space from taking over the whole planet and papering over all differences” (Lefebvre 1991, 55).

In the scholarly literature on modern Lebanon, the spatiality of the mountain has been predominantly investigated in relation to the emergence of Lebanon as an independent nation-state and the development of its sectarian institutions and conflicts (Rabah 2020; Khalaf 2013; Fawaz 1994). There has been a particular—though not fully exclusive—focus on the transitional period stretching from the end of the emirate’s era under Bashir II to the institution and demise of the Mutasarrifate (Makdisi 2000; Khater 2001; Akarlı 1993) and the role played by the representation of the mountain in the Christian-driven Lebanese nationalist ideologies (Firro 2003; Kaufman 2004a), including in underpinning the hegemonic aspirations and class interests of the (Christian) organic intellectuals² who produced them (Hartman and Olsaretti 2003). Much less attention has been devoted to studying the mountain as a lived and dominated social space, contributing—here, we argue—to keeping the sociopolitical history of post-Ottoman Mount Lebanon alienated from that of its rural inhabitants.

In line with Lefebvre’s view that the history of a space is, above all, the history of the mutual interactions between the lived and the conceived, as well as “their links with the spatial practice of a particular society or mode of production” (Lefebvre 1991, 42), this contribution seeks to offer a brief (albeit partial and fragmentary) historical overview of the politics of space that have shaped modern Mount Lebanon as a dominated social space. The chapter assumes the “spatial diversion” operated by the Btekhmay rally as the latest step and the broad term of reference of

its examination, with the double aim of reintegrating the long-neglected history of the post-Ottoman mountain's peasantry with the history of Mount Lebanon, and exploring the historiographical implications that a Lefebvrian spatial analysis might have.

2. Lebanon as the Mountain: A Historical Overview of the Representations of Mount Lebanon

When Lebanon achieved full independence in 1946, Lebanese society was mostly rural. Although Beirut was already a cosmopolitan trading city, the core of the country's social life was centered in the plethora of villages that, from the deep North to the South and the Beqaa, were home to at least two-thirds of the Lebanese population. Most people lived off the land, which gave subsistence to about 50 percent of the country's population (Issawi and Dabezies 1951, 395; Gates 1998, 130). Most of these peasants were small landowners working their own plot for subsistence either to commercialize the (scarcely productive) crops or surpluses for the local markets.³ Large forms of land tenure were concentrated in the central Beqaa, the Akkar plain, and the coastal areas of South Lebanon, which were cultivated for the most part by sharecroppers representing about 25 percent of the remaining peasant population (Nasr 1978, 6).

In one of the few scholarly articles of the period dealing with the subject, Aff Tannous (1949) describes Lebanese villages as tiny but dense conglomerates of dwellings developing around the *saha*, the square, which also hosts the main religious buildings. Agricultural land extended in all directions from the central group of dwellings and was divided up into patchwork plots along familial lines. The rhythm of villagers' everyday life was marked by their work in the fields with extended family and the village community. A deep faith shaped the villagers' societal model and value system. Tannous identifies this set of basic elements as the quintessential fundamentals of Lebanese national identity, which has been shaped over the centuries by the villagers' deep attachment to the land and "the community life that has developed on it" (1949, 157).

Although the geographic scope of the article virtually encompassed the entirety of Lebanese territory, the rural archetypical model that Tannous describes coincided, for the most part, with that of the mountain.

The close association of authentic Lebaneseness with the spatiality of Mount Lebanon is as old as Lebanese nationalism. The earliest examples in this regard date back to the mid-1919 century, when Maronite histo-

rians like Archbishop Nicholas Mourad began to identify the foundational cornerstone of a distinct Lebanese nation in the refuge role that the mountain has historically played for Levantine religious minorities (Makdisi 2000, 82–84). Among them, Christians were assumed as the sect entitled to retain power due to their alleged primacy in defense of the mountain against alien (Sunna) assailants. At that time, the territory of Mount Lebanon was experiencing a bloody transition from a rigid feudal sociopolitical order, first embodied in the emirate (1516–1840) and later in the transitional *qaimaqamiyah* (1842–60), to the postfeudal, protonational Mutasarrifate (Makdisi 2000, 2). Amid these rapid transformations, Mourad's work expresses the hegemonic aspirations of the established Maronite dominant groups (the church and the feudal notables) over the spoils of the Bashir II emirate against the Druze feudal notables who had traditionally ruled the area. The terms of their nuclear nationalist discourse were grounded in the new meaning attributed to sectarian identity "as the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims" fostered by what Usama Makdisi defines as the "colonial encounter" between "a self-styled 'Christian' West and what it saw as its perennial adversary," that is, an "'Islamic' Ottoman Empire" (Makdisi 2000, 80–83), first through Western travelers and diplomats and later through missionaries, traders, and armies.

This dominant framing underwent important tropic shifts after the institution of the Mutasarrifate, when the foundational topos of the mountain refuge began to progressively encounter the collocation of the earliest emergence of a distinct Lebanese nation back to Phoenician times. The first systematic elaboration of this new narrative was provided in 1902 by Boulos Nujaym. It quickly gained popularity among the new generation of urban Christian nationalists who, from Beirut, Cairo, and Paris, began to advocate for an independent Lebanese state that might be achieved with France's backing. It would include the crucial coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon, as well as the agricultural outposts of South Lebanon, the Akkar, and the Beqaa—that is, "historical Phoenicia," whose integration was perceived as increasingly urgent to fully liberate the possibilities of development constrained by the geographic boundaries of the Mutasarrifate (Kaufman 2004a, 39–49).⁴ In this case, too, the colonial encounter played a crucial role. In 1860, under the auspices of Napoleon III, an archaeological mission led by Ernest Renan "discovered" the original sites of Phoenician civilization (Kaufman 2004a, 20–26). The findings of the mission were quickly embedded in the orientalist agenda of the Jesuit French missionary schools, where most of the

aforementioned generation of Lebanese nationalists received their education, including the newly established Saint Joseph University of Beirut. Saint Joseph's Jesuit orientalists played a crucial role in providing the arguments to reassess the dominance of the Christian mountain according to increasingly secularized, "objective" ethnohistorical terms and challenge the claims for a united Syrian-Lebanese state championed by the rival Arab nationalists (Kaufman 2004a, 29–36). More importantly, they offered the scholarly basis to underpin the historical justification for the territorial claims advanced by France over Syria and Lebanon after the First World War, in the wake of Sykes-Picot agreements (Kaufman 2001; Firro 2004, 1–27; Salibi 1988, 135). The great architect of this shift was Père Henri Lammens. Most of Lammens's long and prolific scholarly activity at Saint Joseph University was devoted to "discovering" Syria, which was conceived as a "natural country" just waiting to be policed and whose ethnocultural purity was preserved only in the unsubdued Lebanese mountain areas (Salibi 1988, 130–36). The Lebanese nationalist and the French colonial project merged at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, where the Lebanese delegation formally presented the project of Greater Lebanon with its territorial borders, which had previously been the object of internal (and external) debate (Kaufman 2004a, 79–86).

With the League of Nations assigning the mandate over Syria and Lebanon to France, the project of Greater Lebanon was ultimately imposed as a *fait accompli*. Leveraging the well-rooted notion of Lebanon as a multicomunal *asile*, the state was endowed with a Maronite-dominated sectarian system of power-sharing, underpinned by a constitution in 1926, and legitimized through two censuses in 1921 and 1932. Owing to the early association with France, Jesuit-educated Lebanese nationalists were immediately integrated into the Mandate apparatus and occupied most of the administrative positions and political posts. This was a pivotal step in shaping the structure of the new state according to their political, economic, and cultural interests. The most influential group was the one clustering around *La Revue Phénicienne*. Founded in 1919 by the poet and writer Charles Corm, the group had already played a key role in providing arguments to the champions of Greater Lebanon at the Paris Peace Conference (Kaufman 2001). During the Mandate, two major ideological streams emerged, each organically connected to one of the two groups of Christian elites embedded in the Mandate power system: the first, linked to the Maronite (mountain) notables guided by Emile Eddé was the Corm-led protectionist "mountain" stream, with Phoenicianism remaining intimately bound to a Maronite-centered idea of Lebanon as

an Eastern Christian bastion and the cradle of Western civilization that had to be preserved (Kaufman 2004b).

The second stream was "urban," pluralistic, and linked to the city's Christian (not exclusively Maronite) and commercial-financial bourgeoisie, who progressively earned a dominant position in both the economy and the state apparatus. The major and most influential exponent of this current was Michel Chiha. Chiha was a prominent Chaldean banker from Beirut and belonged to one of the most influential merchant families in the capital. Thanks to his socioeconomic background, he was used to boosting ramified relations with both Muslim and non-Maronite Christian elites by starting with the business terrain. In the early years of the Mandate, he actively participated in parliamentary politics and was tasked by French authorities with running the commission to draft the Lebanese constitution (Hartman and Olsaretti 2003). This compelled him to find a nationalist formula that could also appeal to the Muslim citizens and notables of the annexed territories, who were still largely reluctant to accept the solution of Greater Lebanon. Moving from this specific positionality, he reframed Lebanese identity as a distinct "Mediterranean variety" shaped over centuries by the constant interplay between the necessary openness to the world provided by the sea and the protective function of the mountain. While the former has shaped Lebanon's innate vocation to cosmopolitanism, trade, and mobility since Phoenician times, the latter has progressively endowed the country with its specific ethnoreligious peculiarities, including consociationalism as a major source of political stability, of which the Muslim heritage is an integral part (Chiha 1949). In so doing, the mountain as a refuge and a Christian bastion was substituted by Nerval and Lamartine's seductive image of Lebanon as the *Suisse du Moyen-Orient* (i.e., a harmonious consociation of sectarian cantons). Christian dominance was implicitly assessed by leveraging the earlier settlements in the mountain, which necessarily made them more adherent to the "real" national culture. These propositions were summarized in 1942 in the essay *Le Liban aujourd'hui* (Chiha 1949).⁵ At that time, in the context of the Second World War's dissolution of the French Mandate, Beshara al-Khouri was willing to agree with Riad al-Solh on the National Pact, which would lay the political and institutional foundations for an independent Lebanon. As a result, Chiha's nationalism was assumed as *the* nationalist mythmaking of the postcolonial state, providing legitimacy for both the new sectarian order set up by the pact and—as we will see later on—the irresistible transition to the Merchant Republic (Traboulsi 2007, 104–8).

3. The Folkloric Peasant versus Peasant Lived Pasts: Peasant Life during the Mutasarrifate

Within Chiha's framing, the representation of the spatiality of Mount Lebanon was reengineered according to two precise new functions. On the cultural side, the custodian of the most authentic "Lebaneseness" was the harmonious and laborious village life. The latter's function was to provide the "Phoenician" urban trader with a moral compass, so he would not lose himself in the hecticness of the cosmopolitan world. On the productive side, it was rethought as the tourist embodiment of the "Switzerland of the Middle East"—that is, as the privileged destination for Arab and Lebanese summer vacationing where one could find a little idyllic rest from the hecticness of the metropolis (Maasri 2016).

This new double function found its quintessential expression in the Baalbak International Festival. The festival was established in 1956 under the auspices of President Camille Chamoun to make the majestic ruins of the Jupiter Temple the site from which to give continuity and bring about the historical role played by Lebanon "in the development of culture and civilization" since "immemorial time."⁶ In 1957, the festival added "Lebanese Nights" to its program to offer its international audience a taste of the purest and most authentic Lebanese national-popular culture, crystallized in its folkloric tradition. The task of bringing it to the stage was given to the Rahbani brothers, whose music plays with the iconic Fairouz immediately became the most powerful and representative image of Lebanon within and beyond its borders (Stone 2007, 13–31).

As Christopher Stone notes, the type of folklore—and, hence, the metonymic embodiment of *the* national culture—that the Rahbani brothers' music plays helped to canonize was intimately associated with the Christian mountain village. Their plays were usually set in what was commonly considered the halcyon days of Lebanon's "recent" national past: the days of the Fakreddine II emirate and, above all, of the Mutasarrifate. These eras were crystallized in a nostalgic spatial-temporal bubble where the temporary alteration of village harmony because of an external disturbance (e.g., conflict with another village, an alien robber, the Ottoman army, etc.) offered the background plot for the unfolding of Fairouz's (reconciliatory) love story. Life and feelings were portrayed as genuine, simple, and childlike, with rural misery romanticized and polished to serve the entertainment expectations of their bourgeoisie audience (Stone 2003). This constructed representation of rurality, however, had much more to do with Lebanon's political present than the mountain social past.

When the Mutasarrifate was instituted, Mount Lebanon had just emerged from two decades of recurring rural and sectarian strife. The waves of unrest were exacerbated by the sociopolitical backlash of Mount Lebanon's transition to capitalism, driven by the integration of the mountain in the French-dominated global circuits of the silk economy in the middle of the century. At the time of integration, Mount Lebanon was administered according to the *qaimaqamiyah* system, which envisioned a separation between the upper and the lower parts of the region as two distinct administrative units under the jurisdiction of a Maronite and a Druze *muqataaji* (tax farmers) family, respectively. In both administrative units, most of the population were Maronite landless peasants cultivating mulberries on the terrains of the church or the *muqataaji* families themselves, according to different sharecropping arrangements. Political and economic power was exercised through tax farming (the *iqtaa*), paid to the *muqataajis* predominantly in the form of parts of the harvests. Peasants were also subjected to various forms of corvées, embedded in a rigid system of social hierarchies and statutory distinctions (Makdisi 2000, 38–45).

In 1843, at the suggestion of Austrian chancellor Klemens von Metternich, the Porte imposed this sectarian administrative system as a compromise solution to appease the rivalries of Maronite and Druze *muqataajis* for control of the mountain. The two factions were actively backed by France and Great Britain, respectively, in the broader context of an intense imperialist competition to earn economic and political control over the Ottoman Levant. The imposition of the *qaimaqamiyah* solution, however, did nothing but exacerbate sectarian competition, as well as inter-*muqataaji* rivalries for control over the respective communities (Traboulsi 2007, 24–29). A further element of instability was soon added by the coeval erosion of their dominant economic position in favor of an emerging modern bourgeoisie of urban Christian traders and brokers, which succeeded in capturing the marketing of raw silk to France and securing de facto control over several important trading towns. Furthermore, because of the rapid monetization of economic relations, *muqataajis* became increasingly dependent on merchants' moneylending (Saba 1976). This caused a severe backlash on the taxes imposed on peasants and provoked growing discontent.

This set of overlapping tensions ultimately exploded between 1858 and 1860. On Christmas Eve 1858, discontent over taxes and rent sparked a peasant uprising against the al-Khazen *muqataaji* family in the Kesrawan district, Upper Mount Lebanon, led by muleteer Tanyos Chahine. Following the revolt, the al-Khazens' lands were requisitioned

and redistributed among the peasants and commoners. They established a self-governed *Hukumah al-Jumhuriyyah* and organized it according to a subaltern understanding of the *Tanzimat* as the foundation of equal rights among commoners (*ahali*) and feudal notables (*ay'an*) (Makdisi 2000, 96–117). In 1859, fearing that the revolt would spread to Lower Mount Lebanon, the Druze *muqataajis* began launching preemptive attacks against the Maronite *ahali* under their administration, thereby sparking sectarian strife all over the mountain. Fierce Maronite-Druze confrontations also erupted in Damascus, triggering a mutual fueling of fighting (Traboulsi 2007, 33–36; Makdisi 2000, 117–46).

Both Kesrawan's experience of self-government and the intracomunal conflict were definitively sedated by the military intervention of Napoleon III in the summer of 1860. The decision to send troops came in response to the double urgency of quickly restoring the silk trade and exploiting the window of opportunity to finally consolidate imperialist control over the area by ensuring the Maronite *protégés* had control over the mountain. The litmus test for this imperialist end was epitomized by the addition of the Renan archaeological mission to the military expedition. This reflected the tradition consolidated after the Napoleon I expedition to Egypt of underpinning military control with the acquisition of scientific knowledge of areas occupied (Kaufman 2004a, 22). The expedition paved the way for a substitution of the *qaimaqamiyah* system with the postfeudal and protonational Mutasarrifate, established in 1861 with the enactment of the *Règlement Organique* (Traboulsi 2007, 42–44). Along with securing Maronite dominance in a new postfeudal system of sectarian power-sharing, the institution of the Mutasarrifate readjusted the political structure of Mount Lebanon to the new social hierarchies that the transition to capitalism had produced, shifting the site of political power from feudal notables to the modern Maronite commercial and administrative bourgeoisie of *ahali* descent produced by the spread of the French missionaries and economy. Furthermore, the autonomous fiscal system with which Mount Lebanon was endowed readjusted the distortions that had prevented the full capitalist exploitation of silk production.

By the end of the century, about 90 percent of the cultivable land of the Mutasarrifate was devoted to mulberry cultivation, with plantations expanding further to the Beqaa, the Akkar, and the Sidon hinterland. In addition, locally owned spinning and rallying workshops mushroomed across the territory (Firro 1990). Furthermore, new capitalist-oriented sharecropping agreements allowed many peasants to own small land

plots directly. In this new order, prices for harvests were established before the beginning of the harvest season by local brokers linked to French houses, who also advanced peasants the capitals to carry out cultivation at exorbitant interest rates (Khater 1996, 325–48). As a result, coping with chronic indebtedness became the core of peasants' everyday life and triggered a massive wave of emigration to the New World. Between the institution of the Mutasarrifate (1860) and 1913, an estimated 100,000 single male peasants left Mount Lebanon for the Americas, that is, about one-third of the entire population (Tabar 2010, 3). The women who remained provided cheap labor for the rallying and spinning workshops, disrupting established patriarchal structures (Beinin 2001, 64–65; Khater 1996).

4. Rethinking the Nation, Reengineering the Mountain: Rural Lebanon in the French Mandate Order

The highest price for the exploitative booming of the silk economy was paid during the First World War (Farshee 2014). By the end of the 19th century, subsistence agriculture in the Mutasarrifate had virtually disappeared because of the aggressive monoculturalization of the mountain. Consequently, the mountain became structurally dependent on the Syrian hinterland for basic food supplies, including wheat. When the First World War broke out, the Porte blocked the major routes connecting Mount Lebanon with Syria to hinder the advancement of European troops. This act unleashed severe food shortages and triggered the starvation of about half of Mount Lebanon's inhabitants (Thompson 2000, 19–24).

The trauma of the Great Famine played a crucial role in shaping the borders of Greater Lebanon. Nevertheless, the Mandate authorities still refused to implement sustained agricultural policies. As Roger Owen affirms, the French decision to split Lebanon from its natural hinterland flowed from the view that the country played a major economic role as the leading commercial and financial entrepôt between France and the rest of the Levant. This vision was part of a broader project of economic domination aimed at consolidating the French neomercantilist *économie de traite* in the two controlled states. This would be achieved by keeping the hinterland as the main landfill for French finished goods and the extraction of raw materials, on the one hand, and Beirut as the headquarters for the operations of triangular trade and the consolidation of French financial penetration, on the other hand. To that end,

the main bulk of the investments were channeled toward expanding the banking sector and developing Beirut's infrastructure and telecommunication facilities (an expansion of the port, construction of the airport, empowerment of phone and telegraph lines, etc.), implemented via the French-owned Franchise Holding and Common Interest Societies, which controlled the public services and the key strategic economic activities (Gates 1998, 13–34).

As for rural Lebanon, most of the early Mandate efforts rationalized the land tax and tenure system, with the double aim of maximizing wealth extraction and favoring the emergence of a class of mid-farmers to be used as social base (Williams 2015). However, the latter project was quickly abandoned in favor of patronizing the landed rural notables of the annexed territories, who became the main receivers of the (scarce) projects of agricultural development and aid. Likewise, the ambitious cadastral reforms failed to produce a “progressive” privatization of land tenure and greater fiscal equality, thus adding further tax pressure and disrupting collective land tenure systems (the so-called *mushaa*) in favor of big landowners (Hanna 2004). Also, due to the extent of the devastation caused by the First World War and enduring pandemics, agricultural production, and rural living conditions failed to fully recover.

The economic conditions of rural Lebanon were further aggravated by the irreversible crisis in sericulture throughout the 1920s because of the competition between the Chinese and the Japanese and the advent of rayon (Févret 1949). Owing to new political and economic priorities, when the Great Depression gave the last big blow to the silk industry, French authorities made little effort to promote alternative crops or to offer means of sustenance to peasants formerly engaged in the silk industry. Instead, it was a priority to reconvert the mountain as a leading destination for summer vacationing, at the suggestion of the New Phoenicians (Kassir 2010, 304–9; Gates 1998, 34). Agricultural development was left to private initiatives, which were able to drive expansion in the fruit and tobacco sectors. However, while fruit generated profits mostly for the big landowners on the coast, the profits of the expanding tobacco economy were quickly seized by the Mandate authorities throughout the 1930s via the Régie Co-Intéressée Libanaise des Tabacs et des Tombacs. This contributed to making the workers' mobilizations in the tobacco sector one of the main sites of subaltern resistance to the Mandate. In 1924, the village of Bikfayyah, in Mount Lebanon, became home to the first Lebanese working-class labor union, the Union of Tobacco Workers in Bikfayyah, representing the earliest nucleus of the future Lebanese

Communist Party and the starting point for the emergence of a combative, anticolonial labor movement (Couland 1970). Twelve years later, the protests of tobacco farmers in Jabal Amil against the *Régie* monopoly quickly escalated into a broader anticolonial intifada (Abisaab 2009).

Both tourist expansion and the tobacco economy failed to compensate for the silk losses. Furthermore, because of the lack of investments to implement irrigation and mechanization, harvests and crops remained highly susceptible to adverse weather conditions. As a result, between 1921 and 1932 alone, about 80,000 Lebanese citizens—the majority of them from Mount Lebanon (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 60)—emigrated, and those who remained became increasingly dependent on remittances for their everyday survival. Those who returned with a higher status were no longer eager to work the land, preferring instead to use their money to secure a modern education and a middle-class urban life for their children (Khuri 1969).

Owing to the new political importance of demography for the historical justification of a Maronite-dominated, sectarian Lebanon, the French authorities zealously included this second wave of *émigrés* in the emerging state's sectarian politics of citizenship (Maktabi 1999). Rural emigration and misery were embedded in the politics of representation of the hegemonic Lebanese nationalist discourse as essentialized ontological categories expressing Lebanese spirit and moral temper, with their material roots sublimated in a romantic cloud of mysticism, adventurism, and/or ineluctability. As such, as the borders of the nation were ideally and juridically extended to any corner of the world where there was a (Christian) Lebanese, and the nature of deprivation and the meaning of the diaspora were "dematerialized" to serve the political and economic interests of those who were responsible for its enduring unfolding. In particular, by the eve of the Second World War, these interests coincided with the urgency to get rid of the economic burden the French presence had become vis-à-vis the economic aspirations of the commercial-financial bourgeoisie, of which Chiha was an integral part and the organic intellectual. The outbreak of the Second World War offered a favorable window of opportunity for them to reach their goal, as it created the enabling conditions for those elites to take the lead in the independence process and engineer the political structure of the independent state to secure them the lion's share of political power (Traboulsi 2007, 104–8). Consequently, the economic policies of an independent Lebanon were shaped according to their desiderata, finding once again in Chiha's nationalist discourse the legitimizing framework to turn the

implementation of a self-serving *laissez-faire* into a founding pillar of Lebanese identity.

5. The Merchant Republic and the Disaggregation of the Rural World

With the burden of the French presence definitively left behind, the commercial-financial oligarchy that captured the bulk of political and economic power⁷ centered most of its economic policies on creating an economic environment able to fully liberate the economic potential of Beirut's intermediary role. During the presidential mandates of Beshara al-Khourī (1946–52) and Camille Chamoun (1952–58), the remnants of the economic ties with Syria were quickly dismantled, as was the inward-oriented war economic system set up by the Allied troops to face the subsistence needs from the Second World War. In the same spirit, to fully enable the expansion of triangular trade and complex intermediary financial activities, the Lebanese market was heavily deregulated in favor of a *laissez-faire* environment (Gates 1998, 80–135). In so doing, the development of productive activities was definitively subordinated to the dominant commercial-financial sector, in whose favor most of the private and public investments converged (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 93–104).

The economic impact of these policies on the socioeconomic fabric of rural Lebanon was devastating. Owing to the heavy competition of imported basic foodstuffs, which led to lose custom duties being imposed, most of the private investments in agriculture converged toward highly specialized cash-crops for the neighboring Arab states (fruits) or the local transformation industries (tobacco, sugar beets). In the Akkar plain (potatoes), the coastal areas (citrus), and the Beqaa (sugar beets), investments came for the most part from urban or *émigré* traders in search of new businesses, who began to massively acquire large estates from former absentee landlords or declining feudalists to be devoted to intensive capitalist exploitation. This triggered a rapid disappearance of sharecropping, with former sharecroppers turned into hyper-exploited waged laborers or simply evicted from their former domains and replaced with cheaper Palestinian refugees or seasonal immigrants from Syria (Nasr 1978, 6–10). Aggressive capitalistic penetration began to quickly erode the living conditions of small and medium landowners, who became increasingly dependent on traders, brokers, and monopolists who succeeded in capturing the management and distribution of agricultural facilities (Nasr 1978, 6–10). People's living conditions were further burdened by the structural lack of basic infrastructures, utilities,

and public services, which the Beirut-centric economic policies of the Merchant Republic had failed to fulfill. This was particularly the case of the peripheral areas annexed to Greater Lebanon, which, contrary to the mountain, had not even enjoyed the collateral fruits of colonial welfare and proximity with the capital.

The size of the geographical divide was officially on display in 1960 in the findings of the IRFED (Institut de Recherche et de Formation en vue du Développement) mission, which showed that in the formerly annexed territories, most of the rural localities lacked the most basic facilities such as water, electricity, telecommunications, and even rudimentary forms of primary education and health services (République Libanaise 1960, 56–62). The mission was launched in 1959 by the freshly appointed president Fouad Chehab to detect and scientifically address the socioeconomic and developmental needs of the country. The mission was part of a broader project of reform by the state to adjust the socioeconomic and sectarian distortion that had triggered the short civil war of 1958 (Traboulsi 2007, 133–37; Gendzier 1996). Based on the results, the president inaugurated sustained developmental projects in favor of rural Lebanon (electrification, expansion of the telecommunication and road networks, etc.), including an ambitious plan for agricultural development aimed at enhancing irrigation and providing credit to small farmers. Paradoxically enough, however, the projects ultimately ended up further accelerating agro-capitalist penetration, impressing the definitive push to the ongoing process of disaggregation of the rural world (Picard 1988, 145–58).

Owing to the early infrastructural advantage, the first area to experience the effects of aggressive external capitalist penetration was Mount Lebanon. During the post-Second World War reconversion, the cash crop that had earned the lion's share was apples. The earliest commercial orchards had been established throughout the 1930s on the initiative of wealthy urban businessmen of rural origin who started arranging plantations on their own land. The high profits generated by the marketing of their first harvests during the Second World War encouraged both urban merchants and the small and medium peasants who had become orphans of the silk industry to follow suit. Another important input was the boom in Beirut, as well as the temporary absence of foreign competition to satisfy the growing regional demand (Jones 1963, 247). Thanks to this favorable combination, the sector greatly expanded. Between 1953 and 1964, apple production rose from 53,000 to 125,000 tons per year (i.e., +400 percent), and the turnover of exports alone reached a quota

of 18 million LBP, equivalent to about 8 percent of the overall value of national exports (IBRD 1955, Table 6; IBRD 1969, Table 8).

However, as stressed by a report from 1959, "It would be a mistake to regard apple production as a new cottage production that is saving Lebanese village society from disintegration" (Jones 1963, 250). First, because of difficult access to credit, the small and medium farmers who had been able to enter the apple business were only those who could count on family savings, mostly migration remittances. Second, as the boom in apples significantly reduced the price of the apples, these peasants became increasingly exposed to indebtedness and the exploitation of the restricted number of traders and brokers who captured the export marketing and the distribution of the storage and cultivation facilities (e.g., fridges, pesticides, fertilizers) (Jones 1963, 252). Furthermore, the monopolistic nature of the capturing favored the consolidation of highly speculative commercial practices based on the imposition of purchase prices on peasants, which were barely enough to cover the costs of production, against retail prices multiplied by up 400 percent (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 104).⁸ Third, due to the structural underfinancing of the agricultural sector, the little public capital allocated at subsidized rates was captured by the largest firms, with small and medium peasants compelled to go to private banks or usurers, whose interests varied from between 12 percent and 15 percent (banks) to up to 50 percent (usurers) (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 105; Smith 1974, 228–29). As a result, many growers were progressively forced to abandon land or rely on a second activity to survive.⁹

6. The Lived versus the Conceived: The Btekhmay Rally and the Ephemeral Disruption of Mount Lebanon's Politics of Space

The external exploitation of apple production did not unfold unresisted. The first wave of mobilizations began in the second half of 1964. At that time, an estimated 60 percent of Mount Lebanon residents depended on apple growing. The mobilization was sparked by an important decline in exports, which was promptly exploited by traders to decrease the purchase prices further. This pushed the growers to ask for state tutelages against private monopolies, primarily by turning the national Office of Fruit into the main intermediary for the commercialization of crops and the provision of necessary productive facilities, with the purchase price directly bargained with the growers every year according to strictly regulated procedures forbidding speculative infiltrations by external private subjects.¹⁰

Until the second half of 1965, growers' mobilization efforts failed to catch the attention of the authorities, who simply blamed the apple crisis on the inadequacy of peasants' production techniques. The situation changed drastically on 26 September 1965, when an emerging coalition of progressive and leftist forces, later known as the Front of Progressive Forces, Parties and Personalities, organized a solidarity demonstration in the village of Btekhay, in the *caza* of Aley. The coalition had started to form the year before, in the background of the social mobilizations that had just begun to shake the country. The leading force was Kamal Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party, along with the Lebanese Communist Party and a heterogeneous array of Arab nationalist forces that were becoming increasingly influenced by Marxism (Buwari 1986, 221–26 and 239–55; Couland 1981). The demonstration was marked by a succession of speeches where solidarity with peasants and their demands was paralleled by fierce attacks on the agricultural monopolies and, above all, the laissez-faire doctrine that had shaped Lebanese economic policies. The event was a success: according to the newspapers of the time, between 9,000 and 20,000 people attended.¹¹

The massive participation created an incredible buzz in Lebanese economic and conservative political circles: it was the first time since the country's independence that the official rhetoric of the "trading Lebanese" legitimizing the implementation of self-serving laissez-faire was unveiled in such a public, transgressive manner. The transgression sounded even more alarming when several speakers suggested socialism as an alternative to the existing order. Another central source of concern was the political weight that Mount Lebanon retained in the Lebanese electoral system, where Jumblatt, because of his powerful Druze feudal ancestry, already had a solid support in his community.¹²

To restore "the resistant force of *doxa*" against the "propulsive force of heretical criticism" (Bourdieu 1991, 131), a decision was taken to quickly convene a counterdemonstration in memory of those unruly peasants (and, more broadly, whoever might be persuaded that the existing order is renegotiable), what the real Lebanese identity is, and what it is to behave "naturally." The counterdemonstration was to take place in the village of Nabaa Safa, in the *caza* of Chouf, which was Jumblatt's political stronghold. Although opinion against Btekhay was mostly directed by antileftist propaganda of the right-wing, Maronite-based Kataeb party, the grand opening of the counterdemonstration was assigned to Emir Majid Arslan, the latest scion of the Druze dynasty that has historically been Jumblatt's rival. The first part of Arslan's speech leveraged his feu-

dal ancestry for the purported right to legitimately represent the most authentic spirit of the nation:

My dear citizens and brothers, I come here today to Nabaa Safa to tell you that I've taken charge of the Lebanese issue in the name of our ancestors, who irrigated our land with their blood, and under the guiding light of our ancient greats, who have never been greedy with this land.¹³

Once he had clarified that he was not acting on his own behalf but in his capacity as an intermediary of the spirit of the nation, he prepared the terrain to reestablish for the audience how adherence to the authentic spirit of the nation meant having a particular political behavior (or not) for the common good:

Well me, just like them: I refuse to chop cedar wood for heating; I refuse to use others' clothes to protect myself from the cold and to eat from the kneading trough whose bread is not made with the flour of my country; I refuse to import opinions, ideas, and principles as if they were perfumes to adorn my own opinions, ideas, and principles, which I choose according to the culture of my beloved country and its intimate needs and for the sake of its willing sons.

Therefore:

Those who base their discourses and positions on these groundless foundations are the Others. Inevitably, what is right for the Others can never suit us.

The essence of the "beloved country" is unequivocally clarified by the other speakers: It is the free market, which in Lebanon is not a simple economic option among many others but "part of our National Pact and one of our sacred pillars" and, therefore, essential to the spirit of the nation. The real Lebanese are "the self-made Lebanese" who, thanks to their total adherence to the essence of their country, "have earned [their] wealth by crossing the horizons from the equator to the North Pole" and by turning their country, "deprived of any natural fossil wealth," into something great. As a result, socialism (i.e., the "Other" that is constantly mentioned in all the speeches) as a "foreign" ideology is not only inherently alien to the essence of Lebanon but also, inso-

far as it fosters the overcoming of the free market, necessarily unsuited to address the country's needs and inherently dangerously subversive. Embracing socialism, therefore, means embracing the destruction of the nation and committing an unforgivable act of apostasy.

7. Epilogue and Conclusion

In the end, both the Btekhmay and Nabaa Safa rallies achieved limited political gains. Nabaa Safa failed to bring peasants back to the fold and was even less successful at containing the rise of the Lebanese Left. As for the apple growers, after one year of further mobilizations and bargaining, they only managed to obtain a temporary solution to the apple crisis by setting a minimum purchase price; all the issues related to the problem of monopolies remained unsolved. Notwithstanding the ephemeral immediate gains, however, the Btekhmay rally marked the inaugural act of a long chain of rural mobilizations that, propelled by the inexorable advancement of monopolistic agribusiness from the far North to the deepest South, soon became an integral part of the long decade of social struggle on the path to civil war (Traboulsi 2007, 164–67; Petran 1987, 133–38). On this journey, the peasants' transgressive reappropriation of the rural space through their mobilizations imposed a new, transgressive meaning on the relation between the center and the peripheries, striking the elite monopoly from the bottom over the social production of space and its representation. As much as most of the history of modern rural Lebanon, however, the history of this liminal time has been mostly untold and unexplored.

Echoing the narrative textures set up by the ideological representations of the mountain, the existing body of scholarship regarding modern Lebanon has tended to approach Mount Lebanon as a predominantly rural and peasant society until the institution of Greater Lebanon. Most of the historical-sociological scholarly attention has recently switched to investigating the role of Maronite mountain emigration and educational advantage in relation to the making of the urban middle class in modern Lebanon (Khater 2001). This contributed to canonizing a mainstream temporalization and spatialization and understanding of the mountain's rural-to-urban transition as primarily driven by the positive forces of upward social mobility. Our brief peasant-focused excursus into the making of modern Mount Lebanon as a dominated social space has offered us a glimpse of how, as late as the early 1960s, a substantial portion of Mount Lebanon's population was still dependent on land.

As much as the rest of rural Lebanon, their gradual abandonment of agriculture—and often of the mountain itself—was primarily triggered by the devastating effect of the rise of monopolistic agribusiness on the peasant social fabric. To get a full understanding of the exact extent of the process, its spatial trajectories, and its sociopolitical implications, however, there is still much more research that needs to be done. This might help to uncover new and as yet unexplored dynamics through which the connection between the multilayered conflicts shaping the historical development of Lebanon in such a delicate time will come into sharper focus.

Notes

1. This section adopts the notions of “ideologies of the mountain” and “ideologies of the city” as defined by Hourani (1976, 33–42).

2. In this chapter, we refer to the notion of organic intellectuals as conceptualized by the Italian Marxist scholar and philosopher Antonio Gramsci: thinking and organizing elements of a particular social class whose major function is to direct the ideas and aspirations of the class they organically belong to (Gramsci 1971, 5–14).

3. According to a study conducted by the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture in the mid-1950s and cited by Claude Dubar and Salim Nasr, 90 percent of the Lebanese population in the governorate of Mount Lebanon owned some land, and so did 81 percent in North Lebanon, 75 percent in the governorate of South Lebanon, and 70 percent in the governorate of the Beqaa Valley (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 101).

4. Other major representatives of this tendency were Shukri Ghanem and Joseph Tabet (Firro 2004).

5. Although composed in 1942, the essay *Le Liban aujourd'hui* was printed in the form of a booklet only seven years later.

6. Quotation from Camille Chamoun's speech at the opening of the first edition of the festival; excerpt from Stone 2003, 15.

7. Known as the “consortium,” this oligarchy consisted of a group of about 30 families strictly linked to each other through close familial and business ties and whose apical point was constituted by President Beshara al-Khouri and his closest circle, including Chiha, who was his brother-in-law. See Traboulsi 2007, 115–18.

8. According to Dubar and Nasr, the marketing of apples was controlled by only 25 traders, of whom the three most important ones controlled about two-thirds of the marketing.

9. In 1961–62, an estimated two-thirds of Mount Lebanon peasants relied on a second activity (Smith 1974, 223).

10. *An-Nahar*, 17 October 1965.

11. *Al-Hayat*, 27 September 1965.

12. For a political biography of Jumblatt, see al-Khazen 1988.

13. All the quotations of from the demonstration of Nabaa al-Safa have been taken from *al-Hayat*, 5 October 1965, and translated from Arabic by the author.

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THREE | The Spatial Production of an “Ungoverned” and Fragmented Libya

DEBORA V. MALITO AND MUHAMMAD DAN SULEIMAN

1. Introduction

Since the collapse of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (LAJ) in 2011, the disintegration of the state’s administrative authority has gradually led to the fragmentation of the Libyan territory around different centers of power. Years of widespread political violence, spanning from civil to international proxy wars, mixed with illegal migration flows and drug trafficking, have contributed to the perception that Libya is now an “ungoverned” space. However, this term is not an innocent construct to be understood in simplistic imaginaries (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010; Kersten 2014; Raleigh and Dowd 2013). For instance, as Keister (2014) notes, ungoverned spaces are not necessarily ungoverned, and no space is ungoverned since there are always localized, even traditional, forms of governance in these spaces. Furthermore, Mallet (2010, 65) notes that “dualistic organizing concepts,” such as order/disorder, governed/ungoverned, liberal/illiberal, “formal/informal, state/non-state, traditional/modern and local/Western, legitimate/illegitimate” (citing Hall 2001), are inextricably linked to and inform political practices. One cannot, therefore, appreciate how “ungoverned” a space might be until one understands the ideological, geopolitical, and strategic preferences that inform the designation. Ungoverned spaces appear to be “ungoverned” only if imagined from the imperialist notion of the West as embodying a neoliberal “order” and the rest as embodying an illiberal “disorder.”

The traditional notion of ungoverned space is, thus, based on geopolitical and geocentric logics of places and spaces, but it also holds political, ideological, and strategic connotations. In its political frame, for example, the construct points to decisions of who has the power to fill these spaces that are left ungoverned. In terms of their geocentric ideology, ungoverned spaces become a problem to be solved by a morally superior liberal peace project emanating from the source of good governance (often “the West”) toward those sites where good governance is lacking but needed (“gap” countries in the South; see Barnett 2004). In a geopolitical/geostrategic sense, subsuming all the above potential renditions and implications of the construct, ungoverned spaces serve as justification for the pursuit of interests, defined and labeled in national, regional, and international terms and often presented as being under the auspices of the “universal.” Therefore, at the core of this chapter is the premise that the deployment of the “ungoverned space” construct is situated in a politics of space, but the construct implies broader spatial-political meanings regarding what precedes its spatial present, what that present entails, and what must follow that present.

We claim that Libyan soil has been strategically forged as an ungoverned space in need of external intervention to expose Libyan political space to simultaneous instances of fragmentation and homogenization. To advance this idea, we anchor our understanding of space to Henri Lefebvre’s theorization of space production. What Lefebvre’s conceptualization helps us to understand is the dialectical nature of this phenomenon, as fragmentation goes hand in hand with pushes for homogenization. In this chapter, we point out how parallel processes of homogenization and fragmentation have produced a “concrete abstraction,”¹ in Lefebvre’s terms (1991b, 69), which is a dialectical process in nature and particularly important in understanding the process of fragmentation in Libya. Pushes oriented toward homogenizing the Libyan political space (from a space that is “ungoverned” to one that is “liberated”) presuppose the erasure of “former meanings” (Lefebvre 1991b, 307), often inscribed in historicized differences, claims, and identities. As claimed by Lefebvre, the creation of a concrete abstraction “serves those forces which make a tabula rasa of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them—in short, of differences” (Lefebvre 1991b, 285). Such abstraction results from historical blindfolding and selective erasures that exclude or include what is worth transferring in the new political formation. At the same time, the creation of a homogenous space remains an illusion (Lefebvre 1991b, 285), as the concrete abstrac-

tion represents a realm of possibilities and innate nonpossibilities, resulting in “manifested dualities” (Lefebvre 1991b, 288) enabled by parallel processes of fragmentation and homogenization. The remaining part of the chapter will explore the production of the post-Jamahiriya political space in the light of such a dialectical relationship.

The chapter proceeds as follows: First, we define fragmentation in Libya and introduce Lefebvre’s understanding of “space as a production” to better navigate violent redefinitions of territorial and political order. Next, we discuss some political and policy interventions across the Libyan territory between 2011 and 2013. In the central part of the chapter, we analyze the production of the post-Jamahiriya political space by focusing on NATO’s regime change and the contestations within the first elected parliament, the General National Congress (GNC). We conclude by defining how the dialectical focus on fragmentation and homogenization helps us to better grasp the spatiality of politics at stake in Libya and disentangle our view of it as a nativist, “localized” conflict.

2. Fragmentation in Libya

What follows the presence of ungoverned space is often a fragmented space. We use the term “fragmentation” to indicate a process of losing unity, where a central authority is not able to effectively exercise total control over the national territory, in parallel with a division of claims of authority at the political, administrative, or military level as multiple and separate forces emerge. Fragmentation entails a subdivision of sovereignty into smaller territories; at the same time, however, there is a functional differentiation in the exercise of power as different authorities, at different scales, may satisfy different governance functions. Fragmentation is visible in the transformation of the Libyan post-Jamahiriya space, where a plethora of actors, cities, municipalities, and local militias play a growing role in the formation of the post-2011 space. Tripoli, Tobruk, and Bayda have become the main centers of political power, while Misrata, Benghazi, Derna, and Sirte have acquired new economic or military relevance. Because of such rampant fragmentation, many contemporary readings of the Libyan political turmoil emphasize the “pronounced localism” of the political and military forces (Lacher 2020, 5). Carboni and Moody point out that the violent fragmentation of (nonstate) armed groups in Libya is “the product of locally situated political opportunities” in the South (Carboni and Moody 2018) and not the instance of broader national revindications. For Lacher, Libya’s fragmentation results from

localized conflicts stemming from competing “strategic choices and social ties” (Lacher 2020, 145). Instability and fragmentation are seen as the result of a process of polarization in part defined by an urban-rural or a hinterland-coastal city divide (Lacher 2013) that has been criticized as highly hypothetical (Cherstich 2014). According to Cherstich, these readings of the Libyan crisis have “schizophrenically” interpreted tribalism as standing in opposition to national identity (Cherstich 2014), nationalism, and nation-building (Lacher 2013; Pack 2013; St John 2013) without grasping the transformative nature of tribalism, its political attitudes, and, most importantly, its compatibility with national aspirations. At the same time, the localized reading also tends to inevitably discount how these localized spaces interact, overlap, and clash with global and regional forces, interests, or actions. In these accounts, external forces remain behind-the-scenes actors in this fragmented landscape: They support, align with, or compete with the strategic choice, but the conflict remains fundamentally localized.

The evolution of the Libyan civil war and the overwhelming internationalized dimension that became manifest in the ongoing regional proxy war have certainly raised questions about the linearity of liberal interventions arguments, as well as the validity of the localized interpretation. Between the 2011 popular uprising and 2014, Libya witnessed a complex process of fragmentation (Lacher 2020). Following popular revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, popular anti-Gaddhafi protests for economic and political reforms also erupted in Benghazi and several other cities in February 2011. LAJ security forces violently suppressed the protests, and clashes between protesters and Libyan security soon turned into armed conflict. The next month, the UN authorized a military intervention to protect civilians, and NATO took military command of the mission. NATO’s intervention culminated in the October 2011 assassination of Gaddhafi and a formal recognition of the insurgent groups that formed the National Transitional Council (NTC) as the legitimate Libyan representative body. NATO’s withdrawal, however, exposed the NTC’s weakness in terms of authority and legitimacy, as its military depended on militias and local military councils (Lacher 2020).

In July 2012, the country’s first parliamentary elections produced a new legislative body, the GNC, although divisions among forces within and outside the legislature transformed the GNC into a political arena for fierce political inclusion and exclusion. Conflict arose over the formation of new security institutions (Lacher 2020, 26–28). Divisions were exacerbated because of certain legislative acts in 2013 aimed at excluding

former Gaddhafi loyalists from public office. In 2014, these tensions led to a new phase of the civil war between military forces supporting Operation Dignity—a coalition of forces opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood and prevalent in the East under the leadership of Khalifa Haftar—and those supporting Libya Dawn, a coalition of Islamist militias aligned with the GNC and opposing those forces considered “regime loyalists.” Thus, military and political competition became deeply intertwined. Despite the low turnout, new parliamentary elections resulted in a new legislative authority, the House of Representatives (HoR), whose formation was boycotted by some forces and which was forced to convene in the eastern city of Tobruk. The HoR, with a stronger representation of Libyan National Army, aligned with Haftar, mandated the formation of a new government, while the GNC refused to dismantle. The crisis led to the coexistence of two rival parliaments and governments.

This instance of fragmentation is not only related to a process of social fragmentation but also composed of and fueled by purely domestic dynamics. Since 2014, the regional competition between Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, on one hand, and Qatar, Sudan, and Turkey, on the other hand, contributed to militarizing political competition between rival authorities and forces. The political competition is now polarized between Haftar’s Libya National Army and Saraji’s Government of National Unity, the internationally recognized government created in 2016 following the UN-led Skhirat Agreement. However, even if we look back at the first stage of the Libyan crisis (2011–13), it is possible to advance a critique of the localized hypothesis. Our concern is not that the attention to localism discounts the existence of a global dimension to analyze but how global and local dynamics mutually shape and inform each other, especially in the making and unmaking of political orders. How can we conceptualize the fragmentation of political and military forces that emerged in Libya in a way that allows us to take into consideration the broader and deeper spatiality of the politics involved?

3. The Production of Space

There has been increasing interest in the politics of space as manifested in recent studies on territorial and political struggles over the access to and use of resources (Niang 2018; Strazzari 2015), as well as practices of territorialization and reterritorialization across processes of state formation (Engel and Olsen 2012) and mobility (Niang 2018). Although space is gaining growing recognition in academic circles concerned with con-

tentious and revolutionary politics, spatial politics is still subject to disciplinary fragmentations (Lefebvre 1991b). This is particularly true for the discipline of international relations (IR). Despite being fundamentally based upon spatial questions, IR tends to externalize wider preoccupation with the category of “space” to geopolitics without necessarily embracing what other disciplines dealing with space—from a sociological or geographical standpoint—can tell us about international politics and IR. The work of French philosopher and geographer Henri Lefebvre, for instance, finds a marginal role in the discipline, which is still very much anchored to problematic spatial assumptions between foreign and domestic affairs, state and society (Rinkart 2019). This chapter attempts to discover how Lefebvre’s understanding of space as a production helps us to navigate contemporary violent redefinitions of territorial and political order.

For Lefebvre, space is a social construct that serves as a tool of “thought and of action” (1991b, 26) and through which control, domination, and power are exerted. The social spaces result from contested relationships between what is perceived (practical space), represented (space of representation), and conceived (representational spaces). This three-part understanding makes visible the multiplicity of meanings a given space occupies. It also helps to conceptualize how different spatial dimensions interact. Lefebvre’s idea of space is based on Engels and Marx’s understanding of the state as the product of society, a vision that opposes the institutionalist understanding of the state as a distinct entity separate from social structures, agencies, class politics, and civil society. This chapter elaborates on Lefebvre’s understanding of the production of space as a way of stabilizing and reproducing capitalist social relations.

By investigating processes of territorial fragmentation across states that have gone through a violent process of transformation, Lefebvre’s work helps us to conceptualize the space as both a function and a result of the continuous attempt to control critical territories and critical resources, as this control constitutes what Mann defines as the “the logistical infrastructure of the state” (1988, quoted from Li 2002, 143). Because spaces are partially “articulated in terms of reciprocal inclusions and exclusions” (Lefebvre 1991b, 131), the sovereign space is constituted through violence: sovereignty is a space against which violence, “whether latent or overt, is directed—a space established and constituted by violence” (Lefebvre 1991b, 280). Lefebvre articulates the centrality of violence in the production of the “politico-economic space” where “the state was constituted as an imaginary and real, abstract-concrete ‘being’

which recognized no restraints upon itself other than those deriving from relations based on force” (Lefebvre 1991b, 279). When applied to conflictual processes of state reconfiguration, the specialization of conflict and postconflict reconstruction is important to understand the production and reproduction of social relations, as well as the coexistence of multiple, overlapping, and contradictory forms of space: social, representational, absolute, abstract, dominated, appropriated, organic spaces.

This chapter focuses on the concept of “abstract space,” where the state space emerges as an idealized concrete abstraction.² In line with a Marxist and neo-Marxist understanding of the state as a formal abstraction, the state is for Lefebvre both an abstraction and a concrete reality, a “realized abstraction” (1991a, 209): it is a primary abstraction, an “abstract-formal object” and not an entity by itself, a medium for class power, in a Marxist sense; but at the same time, it is an organized political force in its own right that can become materialized as “a product of historically specific material, conceptual, and quotidian practices” (Stanek 2008, 62). The abstract space is essentially dialectical. It is intertwined with social relations and practices, but its existence is also subordinated to those relations on which it operates.

This dialectical dimension is even nurtured by rival forces. As pointed out by Soja (1989, 50), what is peculiar about the capitalist mode of production is the (re)production of uneven development “via simultaneous tendencies” producing homogeneity, fragments, and hierarchies specific to the capitalist mode of production. In the third volume of *De l'état*, volume 4, *Le mode de production étatique*, Lefebvre theorizes about the “state mode of production” (Brenner and Elden 2009, 359), a set of overlapping strategies and institutions of political and social control.

The capitalist “trinity” is established in space—that trinity of land-capital-labor which cannot remain abstract and which is assembled only within an equally tri-faceted institutional space: a space that is first of all global, and maintained as such—the space of sovereignty, where constraints are implemented, and hence a fetishized space, reductive of differences; a space, secondly, that is fragmented, separating, disjunctive, a space that locates specificities, places or localities, both in order to control them and in order to make them negotiable; and a space, finally, that is hierarchical, ranging from the lowliest places to the noblest, from the tabooed to the sovereign. (Lefebvre 1991b, 282)

The state’s political predicates are based on processes of spatial homogenization, fragmentation, and hierarchizing. Homogenization implies the

production of spaces of equivalence, where differences are mitigated; fragmentation is marked by the breakdown of spaces and the differentiation among social relations; hierarchizing occurs once previously fractured and interchangeable spaces become subject to hierarchy and specialization. How does this dialectical relationship help us to better understand the fragmentation of the Libyan political and military forces?

We emphasize the necessity to look at the spatiality of politics involved in modern processes of authority formation and fragmentation. We claim that the overlap of strategies of homogenization and fragmentation at work in contemporary conflicts over states, institutions, and resources produces an imagined concrete reality—a concrete abstraction. This social production of abstraction is important to understand the process of fragmentation in Libya.

4. The Post-Jamahiriya Political Space: Ungoverned Spaces, Fragmented Authorities

Now more than ever before, the political struggle over redefining the Libyan political order is inscribed in space. The Libyan territory is witnessing important transformations that need to be accounted for by paying more systemic attention to the relationships among sovereignty, space, and territory. The sovereignty space—the object of strenuous competition in Libya—is not immune to processes of socialization. Since 2011, the Libyan political space has witnessed a ferocious struggle to abolish the old form of state and political order and even more ferocious competition for the mastering of the new order. Interaction among geopolitical competitions and domestic political interests have been crucial in putting in motion the transformation of the Libyan sovereignty we observe today.

4.1. NATO Intervention and the Creation of an Ungoverned Space

International intervention to protect the Libyan population from grave violations of human rights can be interpreted as an attempt to homogenize the Libyan state to an abstract notion of a (neo)liberal state (Wai 2014). The liberal intervention oriented at eradicating the previous form of political organization and radically transforming the Libyan sovereign space veered toward the creation of an (abstract) liberal society, “liberated” from authoritarian rule and illiberal practices.

Modern intervention is part of a geocentric, diffusionist idea “that modern life historically emerged in Western Europe and that this

advanced socioeconomic and political organization would gradually expand outward to the so-called less-developed peripheries” (Göksel 2018, 35). Key to the modernization theory of development put forward by economic historians like Walt Rostow (1990) is the calls today to “help” African places and places, thus leading Western actors to invent a type of “universal”—a “Euroversal”—that fakes “a unified global civilization modelled on the examples of Western Europe and Northern America” (Göksel 2018, 35).

From this vantage point of Western superiority, variations in liberal peace internationalism have approached African spaces as sites of anarchy (Kaplan 1994), of “forever and never-ending wars” (Gettleman 2010), and of vacuous and illiberal misgovernance that requires Western intervention. It is in this sense that Western superiority proclaims neoliberal descriptive fiats like “weak,” “fragile,” and “failed” states or concepts like “good governance” and regard these terms as legitimate descriptors and processes. However, Western superiority masks the violent, self-interested, and imperialist nature of the current liberal world order in altruistic terms (Wai 2014, 490; Kuziemko and Werker 2006) and hides—or seeks to hide—the fact that makers and promoters of liberal ideals like democracy, as opposed to democratization (Amin 2011). It creates a propensity to accept neoliberal ideals as sine qua non for achieving human development to the exclusion of potentially more legitimate and better alternatives. Thus, Samir Amin (2011, 29) calls attention to a neoliberal “democratic fraud” in which real alternatives are denied or faked, resulting in a “relative ‘depoliticization/disacculturalization’ of very large segments of society.”

Like the idea of liberal peace, the concept of ungoverned spaces exudes the arrogance of a Eurocentric certainty of superior morality. The moral architecture of the liberal peace that undergirded the NATO intervention had the idea of “ungoverned space” as its constituent. Both the idea of “liberal peace” and the term “ungoverned space” entail a politics of space and spatial reality that absolves it from complicity in creating the very conditions it purports to solve. These simplistic claims about the extant manifestation of the condition are nothing more than prescriptive fiats serving geopolitical, ideological, and strategic purposes. There is a historical basis for these claims. The idea that Africa lacked history and civilization justified the imposition of European colonial rule (Zachernuk 1998; Mazrui 1986, 1990). Historical and contemporary categorizations of Africa, thus, came through European powers adopting moralistic positions to accuse African societies of failing to civilize or

modernize and forcing colonial presence and culture upon them (Mazrui 1990, 43).

For NATO to succeed in its imperialist prescription of the “liberal peace,” its interventionist logic had to include labeling Libya with a language of abstraction: US officials used the diplomatic and political means available to them to warn against “another Srebrenica” and to prevent an imminent annihilation of Benghazi by Gaddhafi (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014, 13). The space called Libya needed to be presented in a language of chaos, inhumanity, and savagery (Campbell 2013; Forte 2012; Malito 2017, 2019).

The making of an abstract Libya to justify intervention had to have a spatial variant, and the idea of the “ungoverned” lent itself to the Eurocentric project. The arguments informing the decisions of key intervening countries to legitimize NATO’s intervention in Libya attempted to homogenize the 2011 Libyan uprising under a liberal rationale, where the advancement of universal rights (freedom, human rights protection) coincided with the foreign policy interests of those countries advocating for intervention. French, British, and American decision-makers justified the decision to mobilize NATO’s intervention as part of defending the “transition to democracy” in the Arab world (Malito 2019, 6–7). NATO’s intervention in Libya resonates not only with a growing militarization of global politics but also with what Wai (2014, 488) defines as “the routinization of intervention” as an instrument of ethical foreign policy.

For the most assertive interveners in Libya—those countries that mobilized hegemonic discourses and resources for the intervention itself—the promotion of liberal principles was in line with the promotion of national foreign policy interests: sectional interests have been presented as universal ones (Malito 2019; Wai 2014). Such language and discursive-diplomatic gestures allow a hierarchical notion of power and of liberal peace interventionism that displaces, redefines, and reorganizes local spaces into tropes that glorify imperial and hegemonic interpretations of world politics (Wai 2014). The creation of an “abstract” Libya was crucial in this respect: it had to start by placing the past that produced the present in the blind spot of history and rendering African spaces as victims of their failures (Macamo 2018, 9). To be successful, the NATO intervention was orchestrated to survive on a thinking that homogenized whatever existed in the Libyan space before the intervention, the intervention itself, and its consequences, placing them in an abstract frame. On the one hand, this thinking subsumed the whole of Libya to be against Gaddhafi and, on the other hand, blamed North

African spaces, such as the Sahel-Sahara, as geographic entities that must be tackled and problems that needed to be solved. It is clear today that the intervention in Libya has failed in two crucial respects in terms of a pragmatic humanitarian intervention. Robert Pape (2012) identifies a pragmatic humanitarian intervention as one that provides, first, a viable plan that guarantees low casualties from intervening forces and, second, a viable reconstruction strategy that would guarantee lasting peace and human security. Neither condition has been met, and Libya has, instead, by all measures, become a place with fragmented authorities and daily violence and destruction. Libya is far from being able to guarantee peace and security. Yet, despite these failures, at least according to Pape's (2012) yardstick, the intervention's ideological frame and abstract "liberating" meaning still resonate. The NATO intervention was hailed as "the right way to run an intervention," "a model intervention" (Daalder and Stavridis 2012, 2), and a "humanitarian success for averting a bloodbath in Libya's second-largest city, Benghazi, and helping replace the dictatorial Ghaddafi regime with a transitional council pledged to democracy" (Kuperman 2013, 105). Through these ideological frames, the neoimperialist processes, gestures, and strategies ultimately rework—even perfect—the logics that have, across centuries, validated violence and exploitation against non-Western societies (Wai 2014, 492).

We know, however, that the problematic oversimplification of the terms used to represent the Libyan contemporary challenge ignores Western history and places the blame for the existence of such spaces on domestic actors. A totalizing, fundamentalist logic turns major powers' complicity in the creation of these spaces into an international, Western-led responsibility for "solving" governance problems (Dan Suleiman et al. 2021). The aftermath of NATO's intervention must not be free of the politics that sparked the intervention in the first place. That geopolitical event has become almost singular in the security dynamics of the Sahel-Sahara after Ghaddafi. Two ways in which NATO's intervention affected the region were the facilitation of the start of new conflicts or the aggravation of existing ones (Strazzari and Tholens 2014). As noted by Scott Shaw (2013, 199) the conflict in Mali can be explained as "a combination of escalation and diffusion/contagion from Libya." The second impact of Gaddhafi's overthrow is the danger it poses to the Sahel-Sahara because of the release of unregulated small arms and light weapons (SALWs) into the region (Dan Suleiman et al. 2021). Gaddhafi's government was an enormous purchaser of ammunition, perhaps because he was a leader with many powerful enemies and feared possible overthrow from within

and without. It is estimated that at the time of Ghaddafi’s overthrow, the Libyan armed forces had about 250,000 to 700,000 firearms, most of them assault rifles (Chivvis and Martini 2014, 8). Moreover, at the peak of the conflict, France, Qatar, and other NATO allies supplied the rebels with large amounts of weapons. Qatar alone supplied about 20,000 tons of weapons, including rocket-propelled grenades, assault rifles, and small arms (Chivvis and Martini 2014, 8). Libya has become a spot from where clandestine and criminal agents operate across borders into the greater Sahel-Sahara, blurring the lines between refugee and fugitive. These unregulated movements of people have been made more dangerous because of the easy access to arms.

Therefore, what the NATO intervention did achieve was to definitively transform the Sahelian space by unseating the existing regime of control, thereby aggravating the situation. Ghaddafi’s removal led to a geopolitical vacuum proportional to the stabilizing role he played in the region. Thus, while the fall of Ghaddafi could be considered a mission accomplished by NATO and its allies, the vacuum created within Libya would be filled by various splinter groups that shared unsteady alliances and motivations regarding the overthrow of the Libyan leader. With sophisticated weapons in the hands of suspected individuals and organizations, volatility in the region increased as the remaining state control was removed. Insurgent organizations operating in the broader Sahel-Sahara, along with banditry and other illicit activities, had the right conditions to ply their trade. Libya under Ghaddafi had played key stabilizing roles, especially as Ghaddafi was able to control national borders through tribal alliances along the border despite constructing Libya as “ungoverned.”

The longest and most porous part of Libya’s border is along its 2,700-kilometer southern frontier, which links the country to Sudan, Chad, and Niger. Whereas this posed a challenge, at least Gaddafi’s Libya provided some form of control over the porousness of the long border (Bøas and Utas 2013). In addition, Libya had significant economic leverage over its neighbors due to its oil resources. This attracted a lot of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, with the onward effect of creating income for families in the continent through remittances. Under Gaddafi, Libya was a security and economic bulwark, especially for the regions to its south. These roles played by Libya under Gaddafi in terms of security and economy somewhat maintained a level of stability in the region. Pockets of conflicts, militia groups, terror networks, and SALWs movements across the region were under some degree of control and

regulation by state and regional authorities. Subsequently, the spaces across the Sahel-Sahara were relatively peaceful and secure before Gadhafi was overthrown.

4.2. Homogenization and Fragmentation

The politics of space and spatial reality does not end with the homogenization of Libya as an abstract space to be “liberated” from Gadhafi. The erasure of any historical condition or differentiation in the upcoming process of authority or state-building precedes the process of abstraction. The creation of the modern “liberated” state resembles what Lefebvre defines as an abstract space. Such abstraction resonates well with the technocratic and functionalist logic that international organizations and supporters of the liberal peace attribute to the role of international mediators and facilitators, especially in what is often unproblematically conceptualized as the site of “postconflict reconstruction.” The liberal credo inspiring contemporary interventions emphasizes the idea that failures in rebuilding viable states are related to inherent local features, which are manifest in the incapacity or “immaturity” of societies subject to illiberal and authoritarian practices to cope with liberal principles and modes of organizations. Therefore, homogenization works toward creating an abstract space, “where the tendency to homogenization exercises its pressure and its repression with the means at its disposal: a semantic void abolishes former meanings” (Lefebvre 1991b, 307). But in reality, these pulls toward homogenization are contradicted by “destructive forces” and simultaneous pushes toward fragmentation that make the idea of a homogenous space an illusion (Lefebvre 1991b, 285), as demonstrated by the surge in internal conflicts and contradictions within the same space. Multiple interventions have put in motion the transformation of the Libyan sovereign space into sovereignty-contested territories.

As noted by Mundy (2018, 94), at the end of the so-called Arab uprising, Libya was moved by a sense of national unity. Yet, behind a veneer of national consensus, different priorities started to emerge among the constituencies. After Gadhafi was killed in October 2011, the political representative of rebel forces organized inside the NTC formed an interim government that planned national elections and constitutional reforms. The attempt at abstracting and homogenizing the Libyan political space under the umbrella of a unified revolution soon vanished once militia emerged as armed representatives of various communities, and several security actors consolidated power.

Homogenizing pushes coexist with instances of fragmentation. In 2011, a push toward the fragmentation of nonstate armed groups resulted from the NTC’s inherently weak capacity to establish authority over Libyan territory. This was exacerbated by the fact that some influential foreign actors considered the NTC the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people. In addition, the role of the UN Support Mission in Libya during the transition became a “sensitive” issue (Martin 2015, 3). Ian Martin, the first UN special adviser to Libya, stated that “planning required learning the views of Libyans themselves, but which Libyans?” (2015, 3).

Despite the homogenizing rhetoric, when the LAJ collapsed, the NTC turned to militias to secure Libyan territory, and local military councils gained a growing role. Many of these forces have provided security services to the interim authorities, while others have contested their leadership or authority. Thus, local militias gained more military power. For many actors, the country’s insecurity became a way to oppose international negotiations or to conquer empirical legitimacy. At the same time, the interim government appealed to preexisting forces and personnel to smooth the transition. As the government greatly relied on the resources, personnel, and infrastructure of the old political system to navigate the transition, the formation of a national army based on previous members of the military force became an issue of some controversy, fueled by regional influences, as both Qatar and Saudi Arabia were influential actors in 2011 and supported the Muslim Brotherhood and the Madkhaliya, respectively (Mikail 2019).

Meanwhile, since September 2011, the Security Council has mandated that the United Nations Support Mission for Libya support the Libyan authorities in their “postconflict efforts,” while, in reality, they had to rely on former governing structures and resources to navigate the transition. The NTC’s legitimacy soon became contested. Divisions between political, social, and military forces deteriorated as the council intensified efforts to “integrate the ‘Old Guard’ into the new order” (Pelham 2012, 539), a decision supported by international actors’ plan to avoid another Iraq, with a process of purging the former personnel (de-Baathification, in the case of Iraq) that left the country without sustainable resources for reconstruction. Contrary to the idea that, to be liberated, Libya should have been considered an abstract space, to be governed, Libya could not be considered an empty space. However, this decision to integrate former officials into the post-Jamahiriya political space alienated those forces that had championed or contributed to top-

pling Gaddhafi and were now excluded from the formation of the new institutions.

While the attempt at homogenizing the new Libyan political space under the umbrella of the “revolution” soon collapsed, divisions between forces have been framed in different ways: “revolutionaries” (*thuwwar*) versus “old guards” (defined as *azzlam*, that is, those associated with old institutions) (Sharqieh 2013, 1); nationalists versus Islamists; liberals versus Islamists. These divides are also socially and spatially constructed. All these polarizations have important territorial connotations and overlap with each other. With the escalation of the uprising, Islamist forces concentrated in the eastern territories of Cyrenaica: the 2011 uprising escalated first in Benghazi, but in 2012, Misrata became one of the main centers of the *thuwwar* that perceived the NTC’s plan of relying on old guards as a way to minimize the role of those individuals and militias that were not part of the LAJ. The practice of minimizing and excluding inimical forces from plans of reconstruction and institution-building is not by any way static or exclusive to some forces—it is a flexible strategy adopted by different actors.

In this competition, transitional institutions sustained by UN diplomatic efforts fell hostage to forces seeking to exclude their enemies from the new equilibrium. This process of exclusion runs parallel to a homogenizing discourse centered on the “revolutionary” ethics of the post-2011 political order. As Pelham (2012) points out, when Islamists that had previously been marginalized by Gaddhafi acquired political representation, they instrumentalized their participation in interim governments to set up the structures, local councils, legislations, and policies necessary to impose control over the Libyan resources. This was particularly evident in the first legislature of the GNC. Legislative elections took place in Libya on 7 July 2012, and the parliament was formed with 48 percent of the seats going to the National Forces Alliance, 10 percent to the Justice and Construction Party, an Islamist party, and 4 percent to the National Front Party (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018). Although in minority, once the GNC was elected, *thuwwar* and Islamists attempted to exclude the “Old Guard” from power in the same way as the NTC had integrated the “Old Guard” (Pelham 2012) the year before and had attempted not to include militias and revolutionaries in the emerging institutions. The parliament became a battleground of conflict fought on both military and political terms.

The construction of the new Libyan political space was subject to constitutional and legislative reforms to prepare a democratic transition. Yet

the construction of such an abstract space and the substantial changes to the legal and electoral framework did not come without contradictions related to the managing of interests, priorities, and expectations nurtured by competing forces. Elections did not necessarily stabilize Libya but rather deepened those divisions that had not been settled. Rival forces entered the electoral process as an abstract space: an institutional space that is not homogenous but aims for homogenization; a space protected by international observers and supporters, as it “serves those forces which make tabula rasa of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them—in short, of differences” (Lefebvre 1991b, 285). Yet the newly institutionalized electoral platform remains a contradictory arena of political action, where some actors pursue a political settlement solution, while others oppose this possibility. The international community saw elections as a way to stabilize Libya: the external effort focuses on a technocratic mission (how to hold, organize, and observe free and fair elections) that aims to diffuse normative ideals and political preferences about the institutions-to-be but is fundamentally unprepared (precisely because of its abstract content) to deal with the questions of power and representation at the core of the conflict itself.³ While this abstract space is externally guaranteed as a space of equivalence, it is deeply contradictory on the inside.

By looking at the role of the simultaneous strategies of homogenization and fragmentation taking place across the making of the post-Jamahiriya political space, we observed how the so-called localized dimension of the Libyan conflict and fragmentation is intertwined with—not separated by—a renegotiation of the whole Libyan political order taking place at the national and international level. The coexistence of homogeneous and fragmented pushes makes visible the dialectical character of the process of state and order transformation.

Conclusion

The rhetoric of the “ungoverned space” has been used in Libya as a justification for the centralization of power, and the use of violence in such an effort contributes to the formation of the post-2011 revolutionary Libyan space as “a realized abstraction.” The abstract space is, however, what Lefebvre defines as the “product of state spatial strategies—of administration, repression, domination and centralized power; it is both a political and economic condition, made of manifested dualities” (Lefebvre 1991b, 288). Failures and inconsistencies with the “liberating”

enterprise launched by NATO in 2011 in Libya have left doubts about such a liberal illusion. Yet, back in 2011, when human rights considerations were mobilized to permit intervention, the construction of such an abstract space became a concrete arena of political action, and it was politically instrumental in materializing the moral conditions (Malito 2019) for the intervention to take place. Following the collapse of the state, Libya manifested the condition of an ungoverned space, where multiple claims to authority have since emerged.

The chapter also revealed that the transitional road map put in force by the NTC in 2011 entailed the formation of a constitutional democracy with an elected government: the road map attempted to forge an abstract space of a “liberal state” by reforming public subsidies and granting access to government positions and resources. Homogenizing strategies monopolizing the revolutionary commitment and discourse tried to view the preexisting relationships, interests, and identities as a *tabula rasa*. Those differences, however, soon resurfaced and became entrenched in forms of political competition—not only at the local level but at the very regional and national level. This mixture of political and legislative violence served to further institutionalize the divide between former and new political forces and contributed to the production of the post-Jamahiriya political space as a terrain of “realized abstraction.”

Notes

1. Spaces are abstract when considered in isolation, but they become “concrete,” with a real existence, when they are embedded in social relationships.

2. “Euroversality” is a specific and violent manifestation of a “universal” that totalizes and imposes Euro-American-centric ideas, values, and norms on the rest of the world, mainly through overt and covert forces of negative globalization. This type of “universal” is rejected because “there are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the ‘universal’” (Césaire 2010, 152).

3. As reported by Fishman, “Libya’s electoral commission, with support from outside elections specialists, organized a universally praised round of balloting. However, after the parliament was seated, problems emerged at once. Namely, it took months to elect a prime minister and appoint a government. The complicated electoral law, which split seats between party-affiliated and independent members, created confusion and dysfunction” (Fishman 2018).

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FOUR | Turbulence on the Margins

Lebanese Universities' Mada Network against Sectarianism

ROSITA DI PERI AND VALERIA SARTORI

1. Introduction

On 17 October 2019, a series of protests broke out across Lebanon. The following year, the bad economic conditions and the government's inability to manage the crisis were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the country officially defaulting on its debt shortly before Prime Minister Hassan Diab tendered his resignation, and, most viscerally, the explosion at the port on 4 August (Di Peri 2020). The unprecedented demonstrations that resulted were the culmination of a series of protests that had taken place in the country since the end of the civil war (Abi Yaghi and Catusse 2011; Karam 2006). However, the 2019 uprisings presented a few new and original elements. In addition to cutting across all the country's communities, more so than in the past, the protesters collected and assimilated their previous experiences and repertoires of mobilization. As a result, they were able to provide a voice to a whole host of actors who, in previous years, had barely been visible in the Lebanese post-civil war panorama of mobilizations.

In this context, universities have played an important role. Students and professors mobilized in large numbers by organizing public lectures and actively participating in the *thawra* events (Frakes 2019; Dhaybi 2019). However, their role in the mobilization processes is nothing new in the

region. Many scholars have reflected on the universities as spaces for mobilizing and contrasted them with authoritarian or semiauthoritarian regimes more generally as spaces of politicization (Kohstall 2015; Sika 2017; Rivetti 2020). Broadly speaking, however, university spaces have not been comprehensively analyzed. This is also the case with Lebanon, where very few studies have examined the role of universities as spaces of dissent, especially in the postwar period; mostly, they have focused on the connection between students and political parties (Lefort 2013, 2016). These studies are specifically committed to studying the sectarianization processes within universities to show how these spaces reproduce the dynamics of the sectarian system at the national level. To this end, the studies focus mainly on university elections, which political parties and sectarian elites view as crucial moments reaffirming national sectarian politics. The few remaining studies addressing the prewar period have mostly looked at the conflict between conservative nationalists and pro-Palestinian groups on university campuses (Barakat 1977; Rabah 2009).

In this chapter, we will adopt a different perspective. We argue that Lebanese universities, which have always been sidelined (even in academic research) when it comes to political processes and mobilization dynamics and called into question just when political parties and communitarian elites seize the opportunity to exploit them (e.g., during elections), are places where new oppositional initiatives emerge. The chapter's goal is to shed light on how actors located in spaces that are liminal or marginal in relation to the center of political action can play an important role when significant events occur. If there are independent subjects in the Lebanese political landscape that are ready to challenge the sectarian order of society, university campuses also showcase the remarkable growth of secular and independent subjects capable of "politicizing" students in a way unlike the youth parties' branches. Thus, we consider the Lebanese universities to be crucial loci where politics, as well as actors and their behaviors, is reflected and influenced. They are also pivotal spaces for the creation and strengthening of a new youth-oriented political campaign. Such an approach would help to explain why, and to what extent, Lebanese universities played such a crucial role in and were at the forefront of the 2019 mobilizations.

We find the concept of liminality very useful to frame our argument, particularly as it was theorized by Van Gennep (1909) in anthropology and gradually adopted more broadly in the social sciences. If, as Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007) assume, liminal spaces (which they call *borderscapes*) are places where the relationship between space, lived expe-

rience, and power transforms and modifies reality, this concept would seem to be helpful in our case study. According to this view, such liminal spaces, unlike static and fixed spaces, are a “context from which discourses and practices of ‘dissensus’ can originate, thought which it is possible to think of alternatives to the static exclusivity of landscapes of dominant power (counter-hegemonic borderscapes)” (Brambilla 2015, 24). This concept allows us to configure Lebanese universities as spaces where dissent coagulates and new ideas and practices of contestation against the ruling parties and sectarian elites emerge. More specifically, the chapter is rooted in this critical literature on the Lebanese sectarian system. Our starting point is an assumption that Lebanon, while formally considered a consociative democracy (Lijphart 1969; Fakhoury 2009; Di Peri 2010), has deviated from consociativism and veered more and more toward its own kind of authoritarianism (Salloukh 2017, 2019; Fakhoury 2019; Baumann 2019): after the civil war, the political, economic, and religious elites worked together to strengthen sectarian control over their members by exploiting consociativism to their advantage and, thus, maintain positions of privilege and power (Di Peri 2016, 2018, 2020b; Cammett 2014; Kingston 2013). From this frame, a public and a private space emerges that is sectarian-oriented—even in those sectors that are not directly linked to the strictly political actors, such as volunteer activities and the sphere of education. The sectarian system is pervasive and encompasses all segments of Lebanese life.

Empirically the chapter relies on an analysis of the Mada network, which is clearly created as a new way to resist the sectarian political order influencing and shaping the educational environment, especially private and public universities. The Mada youths aim to unite the efforts of the secular clubs and challenge the sectarian way of doing politics to involve the youth in the country’s social and economic affairs. Although considered to be at the “margins of the margins,” the Mada network can be framed as a space where daily practices of resistance to the confessional/sectarian order characterizing the country’s main public spaces have developed. Mada is a transversal network among students from different universities and sectarian affiliations as secular actors capable of reaching consensus and promoting new practices of activism and mobilization.

The data for this study were collected during six months of fieldwork in 2017 at Beirut’s three main universities: the American University of Beirut (AUB), the francophone St. Joseph University (USJ) and the Lebanese University (LU).¹ The first two universities are private and the oldest in Lebanon. They have contributed in a major way to the

country's intellectual and educational development. The LU was chosen because it was the only public university in Lebanon that had played a relevant role in the past, especially during the 1950s and the 1960s because of its strong connections with the Arab nationalist movements and the Left. The research was carried out through a qualitative method by using semistructured interviews and field observation to present an overview of this new student body, as well as an analysis of the network's Facebook page.

The chapter is organized as follows. In the first section, the concept of liminality will be explored to provide a clear framework and better conceptualize our argument. In the second section, the main characteristics of the university campuses involved in the study will connect the analysis with these universities' place in the Lebanese mobilization processes over the years. In the third section, the case study of the Mada network will be investigated. The chapter's conclusion will provide some final reflections on marginal actors and their impact on Lebanon's sectarian system.

2. Exploring the Implications of Liminality

Liminality has become a polysemic concept. It was first introduced into the anthropological debate by Arnold Van Gennep to explore the middle ritual passages. According to Van Gennep, individuals (and, by extension, groups) undergo different transitional stages. To understand individuals' (and groups') transformation, it is necessary to analyze these stages. Relying on Van Gennep's conceptualization, many scholars have reflected on liminality and, particularly, on the idea of stages and process(es). Among them, Victor Turner, in particular, focuses on how people (and groups) react to "liminal experiences"—in other words, how individuals react to liminality and are shaped by it and how liminality influences their life. Liminality is something that can be applied to any "betwixt and between" situation and to space and time (Turner 1967). At the time, it was a novel idea for liminality to be something that affects not only the structure but also the agency of processes, a praxis able to question or change a structure, situation, or object with regard to both space and time (Turner 1982). This broadening of both the meaning and the application of the concept of liminality helped to increase its popularity among different disciplines and spark debates on a different scale: individuals, groups, the whole society, a specific moment, a period, an epoch. Despite the risk of overstressing, the concept

received a warm welcome in academic circles. This was because liminality could capture not just the changes at the interstices—in-between spaces—but also, on a different scale, transformations across time. By capturing the changes affecting imposed hierarchies or stable identifications, for example, liminality can meaningfully explore the experiences of minorities or marginalized groups, as well as individuals or groups in marginalized positions (Stel 2020). Liminality also became a discourse that the state can instrumentalize and use to build a narrative of liminalities and thereby promote specific policies of exclusion (Carpi 2019). In addition, it can grasp important moments of transformation in the transition from one worldview to another. This is evident, for example, in the conceptualization of the “axial age” (Jaspers 1957), where liminality is considered an in-between period between two worldviews when the old order disappears and a new one is configured. This view is particularly relevant because it calls into question the centrality of the margins. The latter are considered the peripheral areas of system(s) of power but can play a key role in specific moments and periods. This renewed centrality of the margins turns liminal spaces or experiences into engines of change capable of challenging views, hierarchies, and dynamics: liminality potentially provides an opportunity to renew society and relations among groups. This aspect appears particularly relevant for our argument: it is precisely from an (apparently) liminal place, such as a university, that changes can be promoted to affect the center of the system (in our case, the sectarian system).

As the concept became more relevant in the social sciences, its importance grew for the discussion about power and space. As Brambilla (2015) points out in her reflection on the liminal concept of borderscapes, “[It] highlight[s] the constitutive role that borders in modernity have played in the production of political subjectivity, thereby showing the potential of the borderscape as a space for liberating political imagination from the burden of the territorialist imperative while opening up spaces within which the organization of new forms of the political and the social become possible” (18). According to this view, liminality is a way to conceive and to see power but, mainly, to explore how political subjects experience living on the border, in the in-between spaces. Del Sarto and Tholens (2020) recently outlined a similar approach, albeit on another level. Analyzing Euro-Mediterranean relations, the two scholars conceptualize the idea of the Mediterranean region’s southern borders as “borderlands” where practices of resistance may arise: “While the periphery is connected to the European core through hub and spoke

systems of connectivity, legal and functional boundaries are eroded in the borderlands” (11). They focus on how political communities react to liminal experiences—in other words, how the agency can have an impact on the structure, for example, by generating counter-hegemonic discourses or practices of contestation and resistance.

In this context, liminality takes on an important role within the framework of IR by questioning the positivist-rationalist theory and giving more room to nonstate actors and informal negotiations. In this meaning, the concept “respect[s] the fundamental polyvocality of the world, resisting, instinctively the attempts to overtly unify political processes and subjects by forging them into a hierarchical order” (Malksoo 2012, 483). Thus, the notion of liminality makes it possible to grasp what happens on the margins of the international system. According to this view, it is the only way to better understand what is happening at the core.

Liminality seems to be a useful concept in analyzing the case study of the Mada network. The first interesting implication is that liminality helps to look at social phenomena as formative experiences: through a learning process, the groups and individuals on the margins can provide new structures and new rules of the game (agency). Another implication is that liminality allows us to look differently at the relationship between the margins and the core, particularly after a specific event that impacts the structure (in our case, the protests, bankruptcy, and the Covid-19 pandemic). Finally, the liminal spaces are loci where thin practices of resistance, contestation, and counternarrative may arise and consolidate. This last aspect appears particularly interesting: even if practices of contestation and mobilization do not have immediate effects on the structures, they are relevant activities that, day by day, softly but persistently, may play a crucial role when a particular unpredictable event occurs.

3. Lebanese Universities as Loci of Mobilization

In this study, the focus is on the spaces of the AUB, USJ, and LU—probably the most well-known and politically active campuses in Lebanon (Favier 2004). To have a higher education campus offering medical training, evangelical missionaries founded the AUB as the Syrian Protestant College in 1866 (Anderson 2011; Dodge 1966). In 1875, Jesuit missionaries established the Saint Joseph University (Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth). It was the first francophone and Catholic educational center in the region and gradually became renowned for its law and literature faculties (Kassir 2003; Herzstein 2007). At the beginning of the 20th

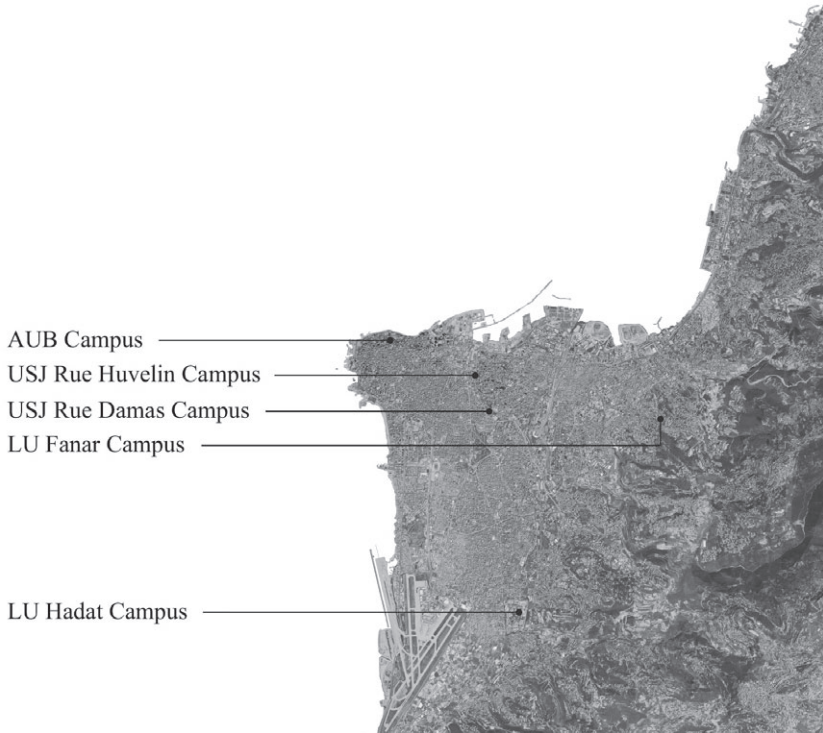


Figure 1. Map of the main university campuses in Beirut

century, the AUB quickly became a theater of political dispute when students of medicine started a protest after a professor had been fired for supporting Darwin's theories. The small group of the faculty received support from other faculty members, and students took the opportunity to tackle other academic issues related to the Ottoman administration of higher education (Barakat 1977). Besides student activism, these two campuses quickly became a point of reference for the Arab elite of Lebanon and the region as a whole: it would be unthinkable for a bank director not to study at the USJ, or an important public official without a degree from the AUB. Especially the then-Syrian Protestant College was a locus at the regional level with a multicultural and transconfessional attendance, while the francophone university became an important reference for the national elite (for Christians, in particular), as its goal was to educate the ruling class of the country (Hajjar 1979). This difference was and still is perceptible in the geographic distribution of the cam-

puses: the AUB is located in Beirut's financial and commercial district, Hamra, while the Jesuit university is spread out across Beirut but always in Christian neighborhoods (Beyhum 1994).

The first decades of the 20th century passed without major problems, although regional events like the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the spread of nationalism, and the creation of the state of Israel certainly had an impact on Lebanese society. During these years of political turmoil, associations sprang up in civil society, political parties proposed different ways for the country to gain independence, and confessional affiliation became an identity marker (Makdisi 2000). Nevertheless, the more progressive and secular sentiments in some parts of the associative sector remained and would never be supported by the ruling class, which seeks to preserve the status quo (Karam 2006). In this context, the student environment is also involved in the current debate, and especially the Syrian Protestant College, which changed its name to the AUB in 1920, became a base for youth mobilization. Despite the dean's attempts to involve students in nonpolitical activities, the various calls for independence arrived on campus by being linked to freedom of expression. The establishment of the Student Council in 1943, the same year as the National Pact, marked an important step, as it was the first discussion body between students and faculty members, and it would be an important point of debate and mobilization in the coming years (Barakat 1977). Nevertheless, the students' demands always focused on allowing the youth to take part in political debate by joining political parties or organizing debates on campus (Anderson 2008b). The regional and local climate at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of 1950s was profoundly influenced by the Palestinian cause, which became a crucial issue on the political agenda of Lebanese parties and inside the AUB since a large part of the student population—around 20 percent—was Palestinian (Barakat 1977). At the same time, many demonstrations were organized against the Baghdad Pact, and the negative consequences (casualties, sometimes fatal) pushed the university administrations to ban political involvement on campus (Anderson 2008b).

Nevertheless, the 1950s represented an important decade in the higher education panorama of Lebanon. In 1951, the country's first and only public university was established and named the Lebanese University. The LU became a point of reference for the country's emerging middle class, Beirut's Muslim citizens, and Christians from the suburbs of the capital (Beyhum 1994), as it was opposed to private and expensive education (such as the USJ and the AUB), especially the law faculty. The

courses were free and took place in the afternoon, which enabled many working young people to attend the public university, which was also clearly different from the private one because of its geographic position outside downtown.²

While the 1950s heralded an important change in the Lebanese educational system with the creation of the LU, this period was also characterized by two opposing tendencies: on the one hand, a general apathy among civil society and the student population, partly due to the tight control by the Chehab government (and the notorious *deuxième bureau*) and, from 1964, the Helou government, and on the other hand, the spread of the nationalist movement across the region and its impact on Lebanon. This movement took on cross-sectarian characteristics and had a significant impact on the local political scene with the rise of leftists and Marxist groups among Lebanese, as well as Palestinians. This was especially relevant at the AUB campus (Anderson 2011).

Within a few years, however, the situation changed because of national and regional events—namely, the Six Day War and the collapse of Intra Bank in 1967—that pushed Lebanon into an economic crisis, which had several knock-on effects for the student environment. In particular, the Israeli attack on Beirut airport in 1968 and Black September in Jordan in 1970 underscored the importance of Palestinian issues for the student movement in its dealings with the university administrations and its approach to the government (Anderson 2008a). At the AUB, students turned more actively against the administration, which they perceived as part of the imperialist and authoritarian control prohibiting political activities to support the Palestinian cause. Following the Jordanian and Lebanese armies' opposition to the activities of the fedayeen from (and in) Lebanon, many youth mobilizations were organized around Beirut and, for the first time, different student organizations from various universities worked together to face the enemy, Israel, and support the Palestinian cause. In this context, the UNEUL (National Union of Lebanese University Students), the first national student union in the country, emerged from the LU's education faculty to defend public education and students' rights (Barakat 1971). As in the rest of the world, the end of the 1960s was a period of social demands and challenges to the status quo. For Lebanon, the UNEUL had the advantage of drawing attention to the negative contract conditions of LU professors and the need to invest more in public education—for example, through scholarships, student residences, and international mobility—based on a secular government.³

Unfortunately, the civil war that erupted in 1975 put an end to student mobilizations and highlighted confessional and political affiliations, which weakened the feeling of unity. At the same time, the student environment as a whole was affected by the conflict since university spaces were also damaged. The security issue became critical, especially in Beirut, and affected students' presence on campus and in residences, which led different administrations to open new branches in the neighborhoods and outside the capital, which had fallen victim to militia fights. Emblematic cases are the USJ, which opened new branches in Zahlé, Sidon, and Tripoli between 1976 and 1978, and the LU, which splits through the western and eastern sides of Beirut (Hadat and Fanar campuses; see Figure 1) following the communitarian logics of the war. It is important to note that this phenomenon had an important role both during and after the war since university campuses became a symbol of the militia's control over the territory (Beyhum 1994). However, the consequences of the war in terms of the division and control of spaces also had an impact on the students' movements, as it undermined campuses by forcing them to spread out. It also affected students by weakening the ties between them—a phenomenon visible after the end of the civil war (Kiwani 2003). The civil war put an end to the first national student movement, which had been able to unite the demands of public and private university students thanks to the support of LU professors.

Regarding Lebanese society as a whole, the civil war had an impact not only on confessionalism, which was further institutionalized in politics by the Ta'if Accords (1990), but also on other spheres of Lebanese society (Di Peri 2018). The social environment became more and more polarized along confessional lines that were exacerbated by the war. There was also a mobilization of some professional categories in the 1990s, particularly in Beirut, which was strongly repressed during the two Hariri governments. As Salloukh et al. (2015, 70–87) point out, these mobilizations, as well as the organizations behind them (particularly the Lebanese trade unions), were silenced because the leaders of the protesters and the unions themselves were handpicked by the powerful elites. During this period, there was a strong apathy among the students (Chaaban 2009), even though, as Yacoub (2014, 93) shows, new political progressive experiences linked to the leftist universe began to emerge in the first decade after the civil war. This is the case, for example, of the activities of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, the No Frontiers Group at the AUB,⁴ and the People's Movement.

While the so-called *intifadat al-istiqlal* for independence in 2005 was a

turning point for Lebanon and social mobilizations and saw the country's youth return to protest on the Martyrs' Square of Beirut (Gabre 2011), this moment also marked a definitive polarization between the sectarian political alliances of 8 and 14 March (Abi Yaghi and Catusse 2011; Knudsen and Kerr 2013). These mobilizations could bring together many citizens (not only party members), but the student movements were weak and divided; the only noticeable mobilization happened on the French campus in rue Huvelin, where students sporadically protested against the Syrian presence in the country, and specific student demands were superseded by the national political agenda (M.T. 2015).

As in many other countries in the Middle East and North African region, the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011 were an important moment for political mobilization. Lebanon also saw popular demonstrations on the streets of Beirut (Geisser 2013; Felsch and Wählisch 2016). In this way, the movement, with the slogan *Al Shâb Yurid Isqat al-Nizam al-Ta'îfi* (the people demand the downfall of the sectarian system), made a stand against the clientelism and corruption of the political elite by demanding an end to the confessional system governing the country (Fakhoury 2011). Despite the expertise of many demonstrators from different associative backgrounds, this movement's components were too heterogeneous, and it was unable to formulate a unique vision for the country. Within a few months, it collapsed (Abi Yaghi and Catusse 2011; Fakhoury 2019). During the same period, on university campuses, especially at the AUB, there was a change in student organizations since a secular club emerged whose goal was to oppose sectarian polarization by promoting the secularization of political affairs.

In the summer of 2015, Lebanon saw the biggest antisectarian demonstrations in the country since the end of the war—under the slogan “You Stink” and around the group *tul'it rihetkun* (Di Peri and Meier 2017). The garbage crisis that had erupted when the main landfill closed down and the private company responsible for garbage collection failed to get its contract renewed was considered the result of corruption and clientelism, the immobility of the decision-making process, and the deterioration of democratic rules, all of which were the product of sectarianism inside the political space (Kassir 2016). After this popular demonstration, which had ended without the political elite seriously taking the civil society's demands into consideration, some activists of the “You Stink” and “We Want Accountability” groups joined efforts again in 2016 to found a new political campaign aimed at challenging the political order at the administrative level in Beirut: Beirut Madinati—Beirut My City, for

sustainable development based on garbage recycling (Lebanon Support 2016). This new political actor was also important for the student environment since many activists of the AUB secular club joined the volunteers' team to help the campaign for the 2016 municipal election. This election was important for Lebanese political parties because it followed many years of political turmoil and dead-ends: the last municipal election had taken place in 2010, and the last legislative election in 2009. There were many reasons for this political void, including the unwillingness and political inability to find agreement over the election law (Di Peri 2017). As a result, the 2016 election was a crucial moment for political parties to reaffirm their political legitimacy, as well as their sectarian influence and power.

4. Voices from the Margins: Universities as Liminal Spaces

The electoral fever also had an impact on university elections, which usually take place every year in the autumn, between October and November. Concerning university spaces, which are loci where the sectarian affiliations that characterize the Lebanese political sphere reverberate and continuously shape and influence it, the student elections represent the height of tension during the academic year. Indeed, each political party was present in the 2017 election and actually participated through its respective youth branch that mirrors the same alliances of 8 and 14 March present at the national level.⁵ All of these student organizations ran in the election under the name of "club" because in many universities, as shown in the analysis of the prewar period, politics is not particularly welcomed among students. Moreover, according to Lefort (2016), the strong turnout in the student election was the direct result of parties' investment in student affairs. The political parties were deeply committed to student affairs during the months before the university elections. As many young activists from different parties told us, this involvement had already started at the beginning of the academic year, when the political parties' committee for youth affairs helped the students with their electoral platforms and their campaigns as candidates.⁶ Commitment varies from party to party and for the office in question, but their involvement ranges from choosing the candidates to writing the policy platforms. Moreover, the most important support is the financial aid for the electoral campaign until election day. From gadgets to organizing the election events, the parties also paid for taxis and organized transport for those students who lived far away from the university and had to

come to the campus to vote—obviously, for that party’s youth branch.⁷ Especially during the 2017 and 2018 elections, the local newspapers confirmed the importance of student elections for the party leaders: the country’s leading political men and the party establishment were pleased with the student candidates who won the elections at the universities and saw their success as proof of how important student elections are for the country (Azhari 2017; Husami 2017). Nevertheless, the influence of the political parties persisted even after the election—both inside the university administrations in the composition of the teaching staff and regarding student activities. Especially at the AUB,⁸ the votes for some student projects could be influenced by political affiliations among professors and students. Because of the deep politicization of the university space, it is important to focus on a subject of resistance to the main political trends. Since 2007 at AUB and in the past few years at the USJ, secular clubs have emerged under the umbrella of independent clubs and are not linked (as in the case of other smaller groups) to Lebanon’s traditional political parties. The absence of any kind of ties to the main actors in the political space has consequences for the composition of their members, manifestos, election programs, and actions. Particularly, during the campaign and on election day, when political parties’ presence and influence are at their peak, the independent groups had a worse result than the youth branches. Moreover, many independent activists from different clubs reported in the interviews that they could not outmaneuver the “military” organization of the parties, which allowed their youth branches to organize transport for students to easily let them vote or to have access to university registers to phone every student from their respective confession to convince them to vote for that club.⁹

Universities, especially in the post-civil war era, represent a marginal context (at least when compared with the national political scene) that is activated only around the time of student elections to strengthen sectarian and political parties’ control and influence. By contrast, “sectarianized” university spaces appear to show how critical it is to control these places. These liminal spaces are precisely the places where dissent can coagulate to produce strategies and new subjects that can challenge the structures of power (the sectarian system, in the case of Lebanon).

4.1 Turbulent Margins: The Mada Network against Sectarian Pervasiveness

During the summer of 2017, despite a hostile political environment, some students attending the AUB and the USJ (especially those who

were already active in their respective secular clubs) and other Lebanese youths created the “Mada” network, which basically brings together young people from all around the country into the country’s biggest secular and independent student group.¹⁰ A notable feature of this youth network is the transconfessional nature of its membership, which was mentioned during interviews with the activists. The vast majority of them come from different regions of Lebanon (very few come from Beirut) and belong to many religious confessions. They represent a heterogeneity that is difficult to find in other political groupings in the country. It is formally a network and not a particular kind of civil society organization. This is a clear choice that the founders made to have greater freedom, since in Lebanon the procedure to register an association is rather insidious and greatly depends on sectarian affiliation; otherwise, given the aims and objectives of the network, they would have had to wait a very long time for authorization from the Ministry of the Interior (Joseph 2010).¹¹ It is also possible to consider this choice as a movement’s ability to adapt and to develop in a system where democratic rules are not always respected (Taylor 1989).

Considering previous secular mobilizations (especially the Beirut *Laique* Pride, the groups created during the garbage crisis of 2015, and the emergence of the Beirut Madinati during Beirut’s municipal election) is important when analyzing the Mada network because it is particularly thanks to these moments of engagement that some (former) students of the AUB’s secular club and the USJ’s club *laique* decided to start a new political experiment. While this student group does not have a connection with the other older movements, it has ties to the secular demonstrations of the past decade by drawing from their expertise, and thanks to them, some young activists have learned how to establish the network. With respect to the aims and objectives of this movement, it keeps the classical 8 and 14 March alliances that characterize the political environment of the country at a distance. This stance is sustained by the supporters of Mada since they assume that young people should no longer be influenced by the consequences of the civil war, which are especially noticeable in the political and economic elite, since they were not around at the time. The slogan “secularism, democracy and social justice” makes this intention clear.¹²

It is exactly for this reason that the youth activists who founded the Mada network are working to establish a political alternative for all Lebanese youth, especially inside universities. Despite the disaffection with and antagonism toward the country’s traditional political space (not



Figure 2. Mada logo and slogan

only the political actors in the strict sense but also how they act and what their impact is), the network aims to bring young Lebanese into politics, and this choice makes them different from the other independent clubs of student organizations. In the words of one of the founders of the USJ secular club, “For too long, young people in Lebanon have been excluded from the politicians’ interests, and they have been victims of the traditional, confessional and divisions that still afflict political participation and representation in Lebanon.”¹³ Partly for this reason, the network does not consist exclusively of the secular clubs of the AUB and USJ but also includes students from other universities such as LU and more recently the University of Balamand and the Lebanese American University. One of its goals is to produce a national movement that could be present at and representative of each university in the country, including Lebanese youth who have just finished their studies, are looking for a job or already working, and just want to change their country.¹⁴ In the light of these elements, it is evident why the activists chose the name “Mada,” which means “vision” in Arabic; as many activists told us, Mada seeks a long-term vision for a better society.¹⁵

All these goals are currently being translated into action. We could observe this in our fieldwork during the student elections at the three universities. The electoral platforms of the secular clubs that the network consists of include different points typical of each faculty, as well as more common general points for the whole university. This is how the secular clubs are trying to unite their efforts to have a common electoral platform in each university, going beyond the territorial branches—a step forward for a national student movement. This goal of connecting one

campus to the next is a distinctive feature of these secular clubs because, as the interviews suggest, the youth branches of political parties are not (even trying to be) linked to each other, whether between faculties or among different universities. Regarding the general part of the election programs, in each platform, the clubs demand a secularization of student affairs inside the university while simultaneously working to familiarize students with political topics in a secular way. It is worth noting that many of the network's activities are currently focused on topics generally considered "taboo" among Lebanese students—such as the effects of the civil war, the correlation between religion and secularism, sexuality, and so on—in order to inspire the students and offer a different perspective on certain issues that are still not the subject of public debate.¹⁶ This results in cultural activities and public debates about the most important current events and also in mobilizing the Lebanese youth during certain events—since the 2017 election, in particular, there have been many demonstrations against corruption and the sectarian government.

Given the aims and the main actions of the network, Mada is clearly against the sectarian order that afflicts the university administration and student offices; however, it does not reject the political dimension of youth life. These features also emerged in the first national petition that the network launched in the spring of 2018 to call the attention of the political class to the condition of students. The "Student Contract" was directly addressed to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, appealing to that ministry to establish a student contract in each university that would safeguard students' rights and promote democracy on campuses through student participation in administration offices and decision-making processes. The possibility of backing candidates during the student elections and, thus, making students' voices heard is crucial for the Mada activists because this is how they seek to change the status quo inside universities.¹⁷ This element is very important for them because one of the aims of the network is to find a place for Lebanon's youth on the country's political scene, from which they had previously been excluded for so long. Thus, it is clear why Mada is so involved in national issues and political life as a whole, as it was for the last election in 2018 and, subsequently, when it launched the "Student Contract" and mobilized many students to demand an end to rising corruption and more serious financial measures. The most recent activity in which the network participated was a series of talks entitled "What to Do" tackling the themes of the ongoing crisis in Lebanon to stimulate youth participation in finding solutions and alternatives to those issues.¹⁸ However,

while the other political groups that are organizing these kinds of events are trying to establish a new political party or movements, the Mada network is still in its infancy and has a different idea of what it wants to contribute to such a political experiment. But the 2019 protests gave new impetus to secular clubs: from the emergence of new ones at the Notre Dame University to the (first ever) victory scored by a secular club in the AUB student election, where it gained nine seats out of 19 on the USFC, secular clubs appear to be challenging the sectarian landscape on university campuses (Khoury 2020). To strengthen its internal operations, the network's general meeting in December 2020 sought to gather all of the country's secular clubs to address the most important issues, such as the tuition fee increase of many universities that has already led to several protests (Moukheiber 2020).

5. Conclusion

Although universities are spaces located at the margins of the Lebanese political sectarian scene, especially after the civil war, students and professors played a crucial role in the protests in Lebanon in 2019. By using open-air lectures, sit-ins, debates, discussions, and their assiduous presence in the streets and squares, students (and, by extension, universities) have been at the forefront during the mobilizations. To explain this renewed role of these marginal actors, we argue that the Lebanese universities can be considered liminal spaces where transformative experiences can happen and counterdiscourses and counternarratives may arise. After the civil war, when the confessional divisions were more institutionalized, university activism slightly decreased, but the university campuses remained a political space—one that is currently deeply polarized between the national political alliances of 8 and 14 March, which demonstrate their force and control during the annual student elections that end up being a litmus test for the stability of the system. However, despite this polarization, young people from the universities have managed to apprehend new repertoires and techniques by capitalizing on years of mobilization that have given them the momentum to openly discuss the evident limits of the sectarian system and the need to overcome it.

Although it is perceived to be at “the margins of the margins,” the Mada network, a transconfessional youth network, has spread throughout many universities campuses and represents a locus of discussion for and creation of political awareness among the young Lebanese. By con-

trasting itself to the sectarian vision of the Lebanese political parties, which use universities as a place to reproduce sectarian logics, the Mada network can be considered a secular subject of resistance against the political elite that in Lebanon reflects its way of acting in each sector of the society, including the university space.

Notes

1. The fieldwork was conducted by Valeria Sartori for her master's thesis at the University of Turin within the framework of the Erasmus Plus partner countries. While the chapter is the result of several discussions, Rosita Di Peri wrote sections 1 and 2, as well as the conclusion, and Valeria Sartori wrote sections 3 and 4.

2. Interview, Beirut, Centre culturel Antelias, 30 November 2017.

3. Interview, Beirut, Centre culturel Antelias, 30 November 2017.

4. See the organization's website: <https://nofrontiersaub.wordpress.com/about-us-2/our-bylaws/>. Accessed 20 November 2021.

5. Participant observation and interviews.

6. Participant observation and interviews.

7. Interview with Nicolas, student member of Freedom Club AUB, Paul's Café, 7 December 2017.

8. At the American University of Beirut, the highest office of student representation is the USFC, a committee comprising students and professors that takes decisions about the university as whole. By contrast, at the USJ, each faculty has an *amicale*, a student body with limited power for each faculty.

9. Interview with Zeinab, former member of the USJ *amicale*, Cantina Sociale, 8 November 2017.

10. Interview with Rim, secular club USJ, Campus rue Huvelin, 31 October 2017.

11. Interview with Rim.

12. Interviews carried out on the AUB, USJ, and UL campuses.

13. Interview with Patrick, founder of secular club USJ, Urbanista Café, 14 November 2017.

14. Interview with Patrick.

15. Informal conversation with Mada members, Beirut.

16. Interview with Zeinab, ex-member of the USJ *amicale*, Cantina Sociale, 8 November 2017.

17. Participant observation and discussion with Mada activists.

18. Interview with Farah, activist network Mada, Skype interview, 28 May 2018.

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PART II

Migrations

FIVE | Map Traps

The Spatiality of EU Migration Policy Instruments in the Southern Neighborhood

FEDERICA ZARDO

Introduction

The so-called 2015 migration crisis has brought space and spatiality back to the political discourses of the EU and its member states. Across Europe, metaphors drawing on spatial concepts of governing human flows (e.g., corridors, hotspots, hubs, platforms, and regional routes) have flourished (Scott et al. 2019). Moreover, in the collective imaginary of citizens and policymakers, European and third-country nationals alike, EU and non-EU borders have moved closer or farther depending on the perceptions of threats and opportunities linked to the migration phenomenon.

In this context, the Southern Mediterranean appears to be one of the geopolitical spaces beyond the EU whose perception has probably changed the most. The deterioration of the Syrian and especially the Libyan contexts after 2011 has transformed the North African maritime border into “an open door to Europe” (2015), with EU commissioner for European neighborhood and enlargement negotiations Johannes Hahn changing the definition of the EU neighborhood from a “ring of friends” to a “ring of fire” (2015).

Academic debate on Europe and migration has attempted to capture these spatial phenomena (Garelli and Tazzioli 2016; Bigo 2014; Cuttita

2014; Bialasiewicz 2012). In general, the processes of bordering, rebordering, or region building through EU policies are not new to political scientists, EU scholars, and political geographers, and many scholars acknowledge that the EU's migration policy has always been key to understanding the "spatialities of Europeanization" (Di Peri and Donelli, 2021; Collyer 2016; Bialasiewicz et al. 2009). However, this is particularly true with respect to those countries close to the EU's eastern and southern borders, where the EU's externalization of border management has redesigned border spaces in different ways (Cuttita 2014; Côté-Boucher et al. 2014; Bialasiewicz 2012). Overall, there is common agreement among scholars that the proliferation of governance mechanisms and agreements between the EU and third countries has also multiplied the spatial representations of the Mediterranean region (Collyer 2016). This chapter extends this line of research by focusing on the space-making impact of migration policy instruments.

As den Hertog (2016) argues, one of the major (albeit underanalyzed) EU responses to the "refugee crisis" has been its financial response, which amounts to a partial reconfiguration of the EU funding landscape for migration, asylum, and border policies. Between 2011 and 2016, EU projects and programs for migration management not only impressively increased in number and size but also became more complex, involving more actors and targeting different territories and goals. In this context, several questions emerge, including these: what kind of understanding of the Southern Mediterranean space do EU-funded migration instruments reflect? And how do they contribute to redesigning this space? The perspective offered by the instrumentation literature opens up interesting avenues to address these questions. Policy instruments are not only signifiers of policy choices but also a "condensed form of knowledge about social control and ways of exercising it" (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 4). They also produce specific effects as they structure the process and the results of the policy.

The instrument analyzed in this chapter is the EU Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa, which was established in 2015. This trust fund was launched as an emergency instrument to coordinate and reorganize EU funds to pursue the priorities agreed upon during the La Valletta summit. Without mobilizing new sources of financing on the EU level, this instrument pooled existing amounts from the European Development Fund, the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), and several others. Its geographic scope, which covers three "windows" (i.e., Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa,

and North Africa) that have, thus far, been targeted by other EU funding tools, makes it a particularly suitable case to discuss its impact as a spatial practice. By definition, a spatial practice refers to any practice that challenges and alters existing configurations of space; a key assumption here is that space is a product shaped by conflicting forces that act upon it (Lefebvre 1991). To understand how and to what extent the EUTF is redesigning the Southern Mediterranean space, this chapter analyzes the spatial distribution of the funded programs and the interplay between territories and actors from the northern and southern rim of the Mediterranean that these programs generate, as well as their interaction with preexisting instruments, such as the European Neighborhood Policy and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. First, I illustrate how scholars have discussed the spatial impact of the EU's migration policies, particularly in countries of origin and transit. This is followed by a discussion of how a policy instrument approach contributes to advancing the debate. Third, the analytical part that maps and analyzes the distribution of all 36 projects—its actors, activities, and financial contributions funded through the EU Trust Fund “window C” targeting North African countries from its launch until May 2020—relies on material that has never been published before. Finally, document analysis is triangulated with the elaboration of the EUTF data set of the European Commission and with the data obtained from about 20 ad hoc interviews conducted in Brussels and Vienna in 2019 with EU institutions and some member states that financially contribute to the fund, as well as the EUTF's main implementing partners.

Space, Migration, and the Southern Mediterranean

Migration through the Mediterranean and the politics of making space has been studied as a corollary of broader research on the construction of “extra-European regions.” The Mediterranean region has a long history of colonial engagement from states that are now members of the EU (Giaccaria and Minca 2011). The density of networks around the Mediterranean Sea during precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial times has encouraged a common understanding of this area as a pregiven, “natural” territorial unit where the EU has a self-evident geostrategic interest (Collyer 2016). Accordingly, previous research has investigated the sources and nature of power in its creating and ordering old and new maps of the Mediterranean (Neep 2015; Pursley 2015; Kamel 2016),

as well as the impact of these representations on both regional and local levels (İşleyen 2018; Di Peri and Giordana 2013). For instance, discursive analysis of these policy frameworks has revealed how the term “Mediterranean” was “toned down” and “increasingly replaced” with the term “Southern Neighborhood” and, later on in the Global Strategy, with the term “surrounding regions to the east and south” (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017, 5). The interests in creating a geopolitical space can be diverse, including the importance of certain regions for foreign policy (Svarin 2016), how certain regions are viewed as origins of threats or as a threat themselves or as entities representing certain values and political systems that have to be protected, as is the case with the EU (Lannon 2014). Importantly, in the process of imagining a geopolitical space, certain other geographic spaces can be either included in or excluded from it based on strategic and security criteria, such as the values they are seen to embody rather than their geographical location per se (Nitoiu and Sus 2019). This leads not only to the emergence of new maps and different spatial representations but also to the creation of new geopolitical rivalries and relations. For instance, the broader Mediterranean space¹—as shaped through EU policies—has included countries like Turkey and the Balkan region or even stretched to the Middle East and the Caucasus.

Although not explicitly mentioned in EU strategic documents, at least until the implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), migration has always been a key variable affecting the conceptualization of space and has influenced the development of EU policies toward the Mediterranean region since the launch of the Global Mediterranean Policy in 1972 (Adler et al. 2006). The challenge of governing borders and the human flows associated with migration has contributed to the shift from the EU’s normative region-building approach of the Euro-Mediterranean policy to the “normative bilateralism” (Pace 2007) of the ENP and then to a pragmatic and more flexible approach of the revised ENP of 2015 that sought to manage “uncontrolled migration.” In recent years, in the context of growing concerns about migration to Europe from these regions, the EU has been thinking about “a new ‘arc of crisis and strategic challenges’ from the Sahel to Central Asia,” a “second ring” around the immediate neighbors of the EU, which represent its original “ring of friends” included in the ENP (Lannon 2014, 1). The extension of the EU’s geopolitical sphere of intervention was part of a mission to “counter the scourge of rising organized crime and militant fundamentalism” (O’Sullivan 2014, 23) in Libya, Mali, and the Sahel.

Moreover, as part of the EU's strategy to curtail and discourage migration, cross-regional cooperation between transit and third countries has been encouraged more and more, which, in turn, has produced new political challenges (Wolff 2015). In recent years, a vibrant critical literature has emerged on the processes of Europeanization, regionalization, and "Mediterraneanism" (Bialasiewicz et al. 2009; Haahr and Walters 2004), often with a specific concern about migration as a geostrategic justification for EU interest in areas beyond "Europe" (Carrera et al. 2012; Casas-Cortes et al. 2015). In these studies, which seek to describe the making of new spaces, many scholars have used the concepts of externalization and extraterritorialization when referring to how the borders are managed and migrants are processed (Casas-Cortes et al. 2016; Cuttita 2014; Bialasiewicz 2012). The EU's and individual member states' increasing cooperation with third countries on migration governance through bilateral agreements has backed research on borders and the spatial impact of migration control (Brachet 2016; Wolff 2015; Graee Gammeltoft-Hansen 2006). The spatial consequences of these EU policies include the construction of extraterritorial processing zones, "buffer zones" or "in-between border spaces" (Meier 2020), as well as detention camps in transit and origin countries (Gabrielli 2011; İçduygu 2015; Del Sarto 2016). All of these sites effectively "push the border south," leading to new migration routes and, thus, additional European intervention in countries like Mauritania or Senegal. Furthermore, in the context of African migration to Europe and on a more local level, several scholars have looked at how trans-Saharan transit migrants create new urban and economic spaces or revitalize ancient routes and oases, which change in response to the EU's changing policies and changing migratory routes, leading to new hostilities (Bredeloup and Pliez 2011; Côté-Boucher et al. 2014) and pointing to migrants' space-making abilities. Other scholars have focused on the spatial impact of migration policies (mostly on border regions), showing how different uses of geographical scale can obscure or articulate the violence occurring in these borderlands (Mountz 2015), as well as how counter-mapping projects can show that spaces are "not stable, but open and unstabilized" (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015, 66).

However, despite a burgeoning debate, most previous studies on migration and the Mediterranean space have paid little attention to not only the variety of instruments aimed at implementing the EU's migration policy but also their spatial impact (for a few relevant exceptions, see Wolff 2015; Collyer 2016; Nitoiu and Sus, 2019, and Trauner

and Deimel 2013). In other words, most previous studies have tended to choose a macro level of analysis to consider how policies and bilateral agreements—rather than projects and programs on the ground—have defined some spaces as sources of threats, challenges, and opportunities. For instance, the analysis of changing legal frameworks in EU-third country relations (e.g., mobility partnerships, migration compacts, and readmission agreements) has revealed how different tools drive forward different representations of migration (El Qadim 2018) and different kinds of spatial imagery related to migration (Scott et al. 2019). While improving the conceptualization of the Mediterranean space and acknowledging the relevance of policy instruments in this process, these contributions do not trace the implemented activities and the networks established through them. As pointed out by Smith and Katz (1993, 75), metaphors become problematic “insofar as they presume that space is not,” and they might hide the complex nature of the Southern Mediterranean as the target of EU policies. By contrast, prior studies attempting to capture the processes of making space by locating and placing the EU’s activities have mainly focused on border regions (Collyer and King 2015; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2012) and do not always capture the spatial impact on the national and regional level.

Filling this research gap involves focusing on those EU migration policy instruments that have been underexplored (e.g., the operational cooperation between the EU and third countries) and mapping the dynamics generated by those tools.

Policy Instruments as Spatial Practices

Governments have several tools at their disposal to achieve their goals. Policy instruments—collectively referred to as governing instruments or tools of government (Howlett 1991)—can include taxes, legal agreements, benefits, or political dialogue. Referring to EU migration policy, Trauner and Wolff (2014) adapt the categories used in the public policy literature to suggest a typology of EU migration policy instruments that distinguishes between incentive-based instruments, operational and practical support, and international law and norms development. Previous research on policy instruments has expanded the knowledge of public policies (Trauner and Wolff 2014; Menon and Sedelmeier 2010; Palier 2007), improved our understanding of the link between policy formulation and policy implementation, and helped to assess the policy impact. Specifically, the political sociology approach to policy instru-

ments has demonstrated the extent to which each of these instruments is “a device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries” (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 4). Instruments are institutions that can “eventually privilege certain actors and interests and exclude others, constrain the actors while offering them possibilities, drive forward a certain representation of problems” (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 9). In part, instruments determine which resources can be used and by whom. Like institutions, instruments stabilize forms of collective action, thereby making the actors’ behavior more predictable and probably more visible. Using the concept of a public policy instrument allows us to move beyond functionalist approaches and to explore public policy from the angle of instruments that structure policies. It involves deconstruction through instruments: trying to see how the instrumentation approach allows us to address the dimensions of public policy that would otherwise not be very visible. Moreover, public policy instruments are not equally available tools with perfect axiological neutrality. Rather, they are bearers of values and fueled by one interpretation of the *social* and precise notions of the planned mode of regulation.

As this chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of the overlapping Mediterranean spaces drawn by the EU’s multilayered migration governance system, the instrumentation approach seems to be particularly appropriate and promising. Viewed from this perspective, EU migration policy instruments, inasmuch as they can “alter the existing configurations of space, based on the assumption that space is a product shaped by conflicting forces that act upon it” (Lefebvre 1991, 11), can be considered spatial practices. A scrupulous tracing of the origins and development of specific policy instruments focused on the location of the programs, on actors involved in each of these programs, as well as on norms and criteria underlying actors’ choices and interventions, would allow us to map the transformation trajectories of the Southern Mediterranean space.

3.1. EU Migration Policy Toolbox

An important element in the EU’s efforts to establish a common EU migration policy has been the strengthening of cooperation with third countries. The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility defined by the European Council in 2007 stated the following four key priorities to

be pursued: (1) legal migration and well-managed mobility; (2) irregular migration and trafficking in human beings; (3) development impact of migration and mobility; and (4) international protection and the external dimension of asylum. To achieve these goals, the EU has expanded the range of tools to include flexible arrangements (Cardwell 2018; Wessel 2020; Slominski and Trauner 2020), more operational cooperation and dialogue (Pollak and Slominski 2009; Collyer 2016), and more incentive-based support through aid programs. This incentive-based support has grown significantly after the Arab revolts in 2011 and the so-called migration crisis of 2015. Specifically, the EU has financed an increasing number of projects and programs in the realm of migration, asylum, and border management in Southern Mediterranean countries, redefined some implementation rules to increase flexibility and responsiveness to crises, and launched a new instrument—the EU Trust Fund for Africa—to implement the political priorities agreed during the summit in La Valletta in 2015.

According to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, funding in the realm of migration is entrusted to many programs through which the EU provides both its member states and non-EU countries with financial resources to support their efforts in the areas of regular and legal migration, irregular migration, return, asylum, visa policy, border management, and integration. Emergency funds and development aid are also used for this purpose. These programs are spread across different EU budget lines and managed by several directorates-general of the European Commission, as well as other EU bodies, such as the European External Action Service, depending on their areas of competence. More specifically, most justice and home affairs operations are part of budget heading 3 (“Internal Policies” under the Treaty of Amsterdam, which communitarized this policy area). Under heading 4, “Global Europe,” the EU budget finances the external dimension of asylum, migration, and border policies through geographic and thematic instruments of EU external relation.

To date,² four main programs have dealt more directly with cooperation on migration with Southern Mediterranean countries.³ The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Borders and Visa Instrument Fund (ISF) are managed by the Directorate-General for Home Affairs. Their total budget amounts to €6.9 billion and, although they mainly cover cooperation among EU member states (thus falling under heading 3 of the budget), they increasingly also include cooperation with third countries. Neither the AMIF nor the ISF

has a geographic focus. North African countries are part of the broader landscape of extra-European partners, and selection criteria for involving these countries in the projects follow EU and member states priorities.

In addition, North African countries are targeted by the ENP and receive support through its related funding instrument. The ENP has a broad scope and is implemented through action plans bilaterally agreed between the EU and the third country. While migration has long remained a minor topic in ENP action plans, the Arab upheavals in 2011 and the subsequent increase in migration flows resulted in a proliferation of ENP-funded activities aimed at controlling the phenomenon. In 2013, the European Commission Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement's negotiations included "legal migration and well-managed mobility" among the six main priorities of the 2014–20 ENI financial framework. Although the ENP mostly pursues bilateral relations, the region is vital to the European negotiating strategy. As argued by Collyer (2016, 615), "Regional disparity allows the EU to use the 'more for more' approach as both reward for engagement, but also incentive for those countries which are less cooperative." In the framework of the ENP, the "region" formally includes not only North African countries but also Eastern Mediterranean countries (i.e., Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and Syria). The umbrella term "EU Southern Neighborhood" conceals an enormous diversity among countries only partially tackled by bilateral agreements (Barbé and Herranz-Surrallés 2013). For instance, Syria and Libya have ongoing open conflicts that generate significant emigration, and their lack of stable institutions does not allow the EU to engage in cooperation under the ENP framework.⁴ The new "migration compacts" agreed in 2016 under the revised ENP with Jordan and Lebanon mainly address the countries' struggles with the unprecedented influx of refugees from Syria and the neighboring regions. While Algeria and Egypt are complex countries of origin, transit, and destination, the ENP-funded programs do not mirror this complexity because authoritarian regimes have so far toned down the EU's pressure to cooperate (Zardo and Loschi 2020; Völkel 2020).

In October 2015, the European Commission established the EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) for stability and to address the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa. This instrument, launched at the Valletta Summit one month later, was presented as an innovative and flexible mechanism and a key instrument to implement the Joint Valletta Action Plan adopted by leaders from the EU and African countries. The plan set out the following five priority domains of cooper-

ation: (1) addressing the root causes of irregular migration and developing the benefits of migration; (2) promoting legal migration and mobility; (3) reinforcing protection and asylum policies; (4) fighting human trafficking and migrant smuggling; and (5) strengthening cooperation to facilitate the return and reintegration of irregular migrants. This tool was presented as an emergency instrument to coordinate and reorganize EU funds to pursue these priorities and deal with “situations where experience has shown that the weakness of the local administrations combined with a sudden increase in the number of donors requires strong coordination of the international community” (European Commission 2015, 5). Initially, the EUTF did not mobilize new sources of financing at the EU level, pooling together existing amounts from the European Development Fund, the ENI, the DCI, and other relevant instruments. However, the member states pledged additional amounts that, between 2015 and 2018, resulted in a total allocation for cooperation on migration worth €4 billion. As a targeted instrument for external cooperation on migration with a significant financial allocation, the fund represents an important change in the EU funding landscape. Launched under the pressure of the “migration crisis” and presented as an emergency tool, the fund does not follow the standard EU application and selection procedures. The governance structure consists of representatives from the member states and the EU; however, the European Parliament does not supervise the EUTF’s spending, since the tool falls outside the EU budget, and the selection criteria are underdefined as compared with normal EU funding. As will be discussed in the analytical section, this structure, which leaves the EU member states sufficient room to maneuver, plays a significant role in the Mediterranean space-making process. Under the EUTF, Southern Mediterranean countries become part of the so-called window C (North Africa), next to two other regional windows—namely, window A (the Sahel and Lake Chad) and window B (the Horn of Africa). Although the EUTF’s geographic windows do not entirely match any regional window previously targeted by other tools (e.g., the ENP, AMIF, or ISF), the fund represents a compromise between preexisting definitions, migration routes, and differences among countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Far from representing a single, homogeneously governed space, the Southern Mediterranean, as understood by the EU, is a continually shifting pattern of separately engaged countries, territories, and regional blocks. Each migration policy instrument has a different spatial impact and draws somewhat new geopolitical maps through inclusionary and

exclusionary dynamics on the local, national, and transnational levels. The launch of a new tool in 2015 shows the extent to which the making of the Southern Mediterranean space is an ongoing process. The next section undertakes a critical analysis of the EUTF's contribution to understanding the trajectories of change in the Southern Mediterranean space.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: North African Countries between the Mediterranean Fortress and the Expanding Sahel

The EUTF was originally designed to strengthen the governance of migration in EU-Africa relations at a time of perceived crises. Established following a considerable increase in migration flows after the 2011 Arab upheavals, the Strategic Orientation Document of the EUTF identifies the following four strategic lines of action to achieve the EUTF's overall goal: (1) developing greater economic and employment opportunities; (2) strengthening the resilience of communities and, in particular, the most vulnerable, as well as refugees and displaced people; (3) improving migration management in countries of origin, transit, and destination; and (4) improving the governance, conflict prevention, and reduction of forced displacement and irregular migration. The instrument finances activities in three macroregions on the African continent: the Sahel and Lake Chad region, the Horn of Africa, and the North of Africa.

According to the EUTF's official documents and websites, the North of Africa is "characterized as an area of origin, transit and final destination for mixed migration flows from sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, with some countries of these regions affected by on-going instability and conflict."⁵ Since the launch of the EUTF, the governing board has approved a total of 223 projects amounting to €4.4 billion. These projects are distributed as follows: 101 worth €2.0 billion in the Sahel and Lake Chad; 87 worth €1.6 billion in the Horn of Africa; and 31 worth €807.0 million in the North of Africa. Four of these projects cross over regional boundaries and are referred to as "cross-window projects" whose transregional nature has recently been added to the geographic scope of the fund.

The first spatial impact demonstrated by the EUTF design and the projects' distribution across the three windows, including the thematic dimension and involved actors, is the gradual redefinition of both the Southern Neighborhood as a geopolitically recognized region and its power positioning vis-à-vis the EU and the other African regions. Unlike



Figure 3. EUTF regional windows. *Source:* Author's elaboration from the EU database

previous EU migration strategies that assigned “priority to the immediate southern and eastern Neighborhood,”⁶ the EUTF considers North African countries primarily as part of a “geographic window” on the broader African continent. Neither the EUTF strategic documents, such as the Strategic Orientation Document or the annexes to the La Valletta action plan, nor the project documents (the *fiches d’action*) use the term “Southern Neighborhood” or mention its central position on the list of priorities for the EU and its member states. Interestingly, the EUTF’s Sixth Board Meeting held in June 2019 pointed to the North of Africa window as the only one that, in 2020, will experience a lack of resources,

due to the limited cofunding by the EU member states (European Commission 2019). These dynamics of a Southern Neighborhood fading into the broader African space also becomes explicit when we consider the number of projects approved in window A (the Sahel and Lake Chad; 36 percent, excluding projects under the cross-regional window) and its aggregated budget, which amounts to €1.648 billion. While the strategic relevance of Sahel countries is not new and became more official with the launch of the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel (Mattelaer 2014), the salience of migration management on the EU agenda is redirecting the EU's attention even further toward the region, whose borders are "expanding [n]orth." Within the EUTF, the balance among thematic dimensions (see Figure 4) shows not only that this area is targeted by more projects, which is the result of the number of countries included in window A, but also that the EU is applying the most comprehensive approach to migration there.

During my interview with two officials working on the EUTF for the European Commission, they argued: "Challenges and opportunities in the Sahel are clear, and our networks with actors on the ground are settled; this makes it easier to plan and implement projects."⁷ Unlike the Sahel and Lake Chad, the North of Africa geographic window is covered only by the thematic dimension of "migration management." According to the Strategic Orientation Document, this objective involves activities aimed at promoting rights-based migration governance, advancing mutually beneficial legal migration and mobility, ensuring protection for those in need, and addressing the key drivers of irregular migration while also promoting voluntary return and reintegration and improving information and the protection of vulnerable migrants along migratory routes (European Commission 2015). Yet, the analysis of the projects reveals that controlling migratory routes to contain migration and facilitating return are prioritized to the detriment of supporting legal mobility and addressing the root causes of migration. From this perspective, the EUTF appears to consolidate the representation of this geopolitical space as mainly that of transit and departure rather than destination and origin. According to several of the practitioners I contacted, this narrow conceptualization of the North African space constrains both economic development and South-South cooperation dynamics. According to one UNHCR representative whom I interviewed, this view not only limits "the impact of the EU migration policy within the countries by addressing only part of the problem"⁸ but also delays "much-needed cooperation" on the continental level. The EUTF's cross-window projects were intro-

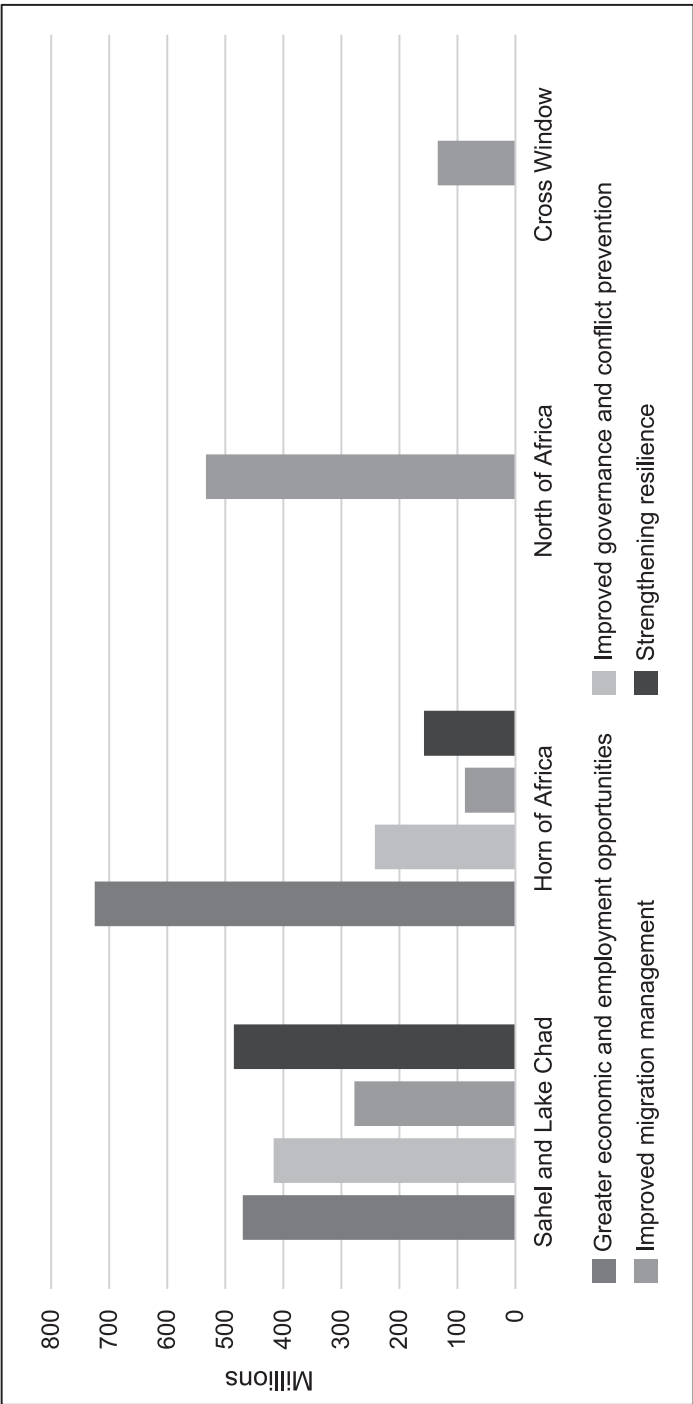


Figure 4. Distribution of EUTF projects across regional windows (A-C, cross-window) and the thematic dimension. Source: Author's elaboration from the EU database

duced in 2017 to address cross-border challenges. However, their potential to foster South-South cross-border activities and, to some extent, push the North African borders toward the “Southernmost Neighborhood” (Mattelaer 2014, 46) remains very limited. Among the four cross-window projects that have received funding to date, two support research and learning activities and do not involve beneficiaries from Southern Mediterranean countries, one aims to improve the management and evaluation of the EUTF itself, and the fourth mainly engages the target countries to cooperate on the protection and return of migrants along the Mediterranean route. From this perspective, despite the ongoing reconfiguration of regional spaces and blurred regional boundaries, the EUTF still upholds existing “cartographic traps” (Garelli and Tazzioli 2016) by fixing the North of Africa as a space of transit in Europe’s collective imaginary.

The second spatial impact of the EUTF on the Southern Mediterranean space concerns intraregional dynamics. The amounts allocated to each North African country, as well as the location and the nature of the funded activities and the countries’ relevance in the EUTF strategic documents, show the extent to which Libya has attracted Europe’s attention and has been altering the spatial representation of the Southern Mediterranean. As can be seen in Figure 5, Libya receives the greatest share of EUTF funds (48 percent), followed by Morocco (12 percent), which also receives additional regional border management programs that boost the country’s allocation. Egypt and Tunisia follow in terms of EUTF funds (10 percent and 2 percent, respectively). Interestingly, while the projects funded in Libya are time-specific and context-specific (i.e., they deal with the increased number of refugees and displaced people in some areas of the country as a result of the wars in Syria and Libya), most of the programs targeting the rest of the countries in North Africa draw on preexisting activities funded through the ENP and other EU sources and involve the development and implementation of long-term national migration strategies. Among other programs, this is the case of the program funded in Tunisia, which is divided into four components and aims at implementing the National Migration Strategy developed within the framework of the EU-Tunisia Mobility Partnership of 2014.

These findings are in stark contrast with the representation of the North of Africa as a “space of crisis” depicted by the EUTF strategic documents. In particular, the decision establishing the fund states that all countries covered by it “are considered to be in a crisis situation” (European Commission 2015, 2), emerging from “armed conflicts, as

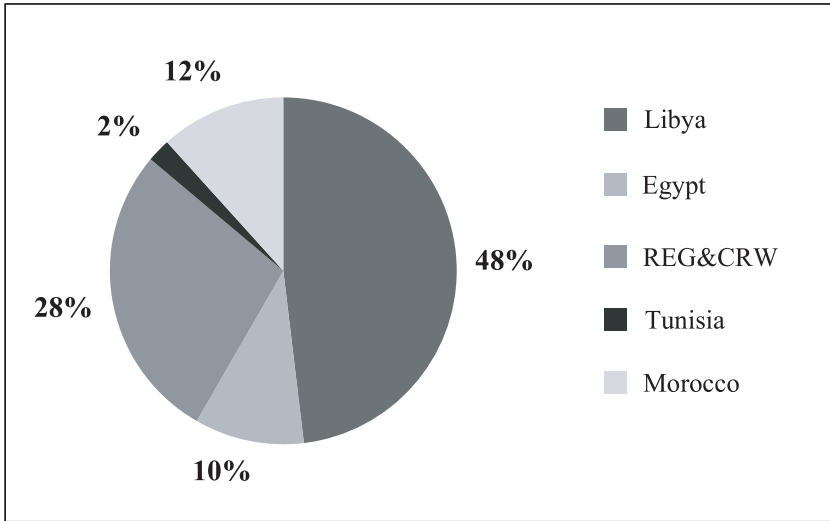


Figure 5. Distribution of EUTF projects by country and budget commitment.
Source: Author's elaboration from the EU database

well as social and political upheavals in the Neighborhood region (and beyond), causing ever-increasing forced displacement of people and humanitarian consequences of enormous proportions” (European Commission 2015, 2). The Libyan situation has been used to drive the process of “crisisification” (Rhinard 2019) of the EU–Southern Mediterranean space. Obviously, this process is not without consequences: While new spatial representations are created, other spaces are included or excluded, leading to new relations and rivalries among actors and territories (Kamel 2016). Several interviews that I conducted with experts and project managers involved in EUTF projects⁹ and recent reports by NGOs highlight the dynamics of spatial inclusion and exclusion among countries and territories within the national borders (Concord 2018; Oxfam 2020). This is the case, for instance, of small Libyan municipalities that are either minor “areas of origin” or peripheral “cities of transit” and have been targeted by EUTF projects to a very limited extent. The position of potential beneficiaries along the migration route and the proximity with border crossing areas are key criteria guiding the location of EUTF activities. Accordingly, this convergence of interventions creates new centers and peripheries that, as argued by an interviewee working for an implementing organization, “sometimes contradict the goal of addressing the root causes of migration.”¹⁰

Finally, a closer look at the actors in charge of the projects' implementation suggests that the EUTF consolidates bilateral geopolitical spaces by strengthening relations between several EU member states and some Southern Mediterranean countries. This polarization of bilateral relations, which follows the bilateralization trend launched with the ENP, is the result of the EUTF's governance structure, which gives significant leeway to the projects' proponents and allows them to focus on those countries and territories that are more in line with their specific agenda (Carrera et al. 2018). As specified in the EUTF's first progress report for the North of Africa window, the most common lead implementing partners after UN agencies, which collectively manage 28 percent of all projects, are EU member states' aid agencies and government ministries (Berman et al. 2019). Together, they are responsible for 36 percent of all projects. In line with the European countries' historical legacies and preferences, the geographic distribution of the actors reveals the leading role of Italy in Libya and of Spain in Morocco (and West Africa). Instead, UN agencies and international organizations lead the majority of regional projects in the Maghreb. While these dynamics are not new, their consolidation in a highly politicized policy area such as migration is more likely to create overlapping spatial representations. Indeed, as suggested by the instrumentation literature, the choice of policy tools is not neutral. Rather, this choice reflects the actors' interpretation of problems, solutions, and their underlying values (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007), all of which contribute to the heterogeneous patchwork of understandings of the Southern Mediterranean that the EU has been channeling through its multilevel and multitrack governance strategies.

Conclusion

As Collyer (2016) argues in his analysis of the EU region-building process in the Mediterranean, the European engagement with Southern Mediterranean countries is deliberately heterogeneous and results in an approximate set of outcomes that are much more difficult to control. The overlapping and, at times, contradicting representations of the Southern Mediterranean space emerging from the analysis of EUTF programs in the North of Africa confirm this finding. In this chapter, I explored the impact of the EU Emergency Trust Fund, which is one of the EU's primary financial responses to the migration crisis in the Southern Mediterranean space. As a half-intergovernmental instrument (cofunded by the EU through existing sources and by some member

states and bypassing the standard governance procedures of EU funding tools), the EUTF for Africa reveals how both the EU and its member states are redesigning the Southern Mediterranean space through migration governance projects.

The results of this study show that, first, the EUTF contributes to the gradual redefinition of the Southern Neighborhood as a geopolitically recognized region and its power positioning vis-à-vis the EU and the other African regions. However, regional borders remain far from settled. While pushing the North African borders toward the “Southernmost Neighborhoods,” the EUTF is strengthening the image of the region mainly as a space of transit, thereby preventing the development of cross-regional development strategies with other African countries. Second, while the design of the EUTF embraces different dimensions of international migration and seeks to deal with all of them, the focus on migration routes and border crossings to control human flows alters the relations among territories and countries, thus creating new inclusionary or exclusionary dynamics. To legitimize the new instrument, the EUTF’s strategic documents depict the entire Southern Mediterranean as a space of crisis. However, the analysis of the EUTF’s implementation demonstrates that Libya dominates the space-making process and, thus, skews the balance of power in the region. Third, by leaving sufficient room for the EU member states to pursue their interests through the fund, the EUTF fragments the map of the Southern Mediterranean even further.

These results support the argument that migration policy instruments are powerful spatial practices that shape the Southern Mediterranean space by either coordinating or scattering the various ways in which the EU and member states understand migration in relation to specific regions, countries, and territories. Their in-depth analysis can help to deconstruct the policy through its tools and “address dimensions of public policy that would otherwise not be very visible” (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 9).

Notes

1. As defined in the introductory chapter of this book, the broader Mediterranean region also includes those countries that form part of the Middle East and are not directly on the Mediterranean Sea.

2. The negotiations for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027 are currently underway, and some important reforms in the area of migration

are being discussed to mainstream this objective further in the EU's external action.

3. Cooperation on migration remains a cross-cutting issue across different policy areas, and the fragmentation of budget lines and responsibilities makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive overview of all the funds available in the area of migration and asylum. The programs mentioned in this chapter are those that allow for a more direct tracing of migration management activities.

4. This does not imply that the EU has no relationship with these two countries. Cooperation is supported through other EU-funded tools, such as humanitarian aid, security and border management, and implemented by EU agencies (Frontex) and UN agencies (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Organization for Migration).

5. EUTF official website, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/north-africa_en. Accessed 4 June 2020.

6. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/international-affairs/global-approach-to-migration_en. Accessed 4 June 2020.

7. Interview with two European Commission officials from the DG DEVCO, Brussels, 26 February 2019.

8. Interview with UNHCR representative, Brussels, 27 February 2019.

9. Interview with a representative of an EU Council member state, Brussels, 26 February 2019; interview with UNHCR representative, Brussels, 27 February 2019.

10. Interview with UNHCR representative, Brussels, 27 February 2019.

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SIX | Migrants' Transit (Im)mobility within the EU Borderland

Three Decades of EU Externalization at the EU-Turkish Border

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1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, the EU's management of migration has been guided by two related goals: the politics of “war against migrants” (Houtum 2008, 34) and the creation of an extended “borderland”¹—a fortified frontier zone acting as a buffer area to contain migrants and refugees en route to the EU. These two aspects are the result of policies aimed at stemming migration, combating irregular immigration, and militarizing the EU border by financing walls, fences, military patrols, and sophisticated technologies to capture migrants entering EU territory (Zaragoza-Cristiani 2017). In EU lingo, these operations are supposed to function as deterrents for the migrants who, upon experiencing the rejection regime at the EU's external borders (Vergnano 2020), might rethink their decision to migrate. On the ground, these policies have transformed the borderland into a buffer zone where the forced immobility of migrants is strongly related to a highly risky circulation. Moreover, as Sabine Hess makes clear, “Settlements and forms of social and economic integration cannot be understood as the opposite of being in transit; rather the meaning of being in transit is extended to pending, suspended forms of transit existence; or, to put it the other way

round, to precarious, provisional forms of settlement” (Hess 2010, 140). This point is crucial as it helps to assess an important collateral effect of the EU border regime: the making of a borderland to serve as a precarious transit zone where people are stranded and where (im)mobility is in transit (Schapendonk 2012; Suter 2013).

Because of its geographical proximity with the Schengen Area and the mixed migratory flows that have crossed its territory since the 1990s (İçduygu 2015), Turkey has been affected by the externalization of the EU’s borders control (Geddes 2008; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009). Long before the 2015 “refugee crisis,” Turkey had already been included in the European borderland (Müftüler-Baç 2016; Zaragoza-Cristiani 2017), a buffer area where migrants and refugees live in precarious situations, whether in “container cities” or in a megalopolis like Istanbul (Danış et al. 2006; Suter 2012). This chapter seeks to address the following questions: How has Turkey been included in the European borderland? And how has this process affected the spaces of (im)mobility at the EU-Turkish border?

Three decades of “EU-Turkey migration diplomacy” (İçduygu and Üstübcü 2014) have redefined the border areas as zones where migrants’ “immobility in transit” is ordered and controlled. The Greek-Turkish border is a peculiar case that can be used to assess the (intended and unintended) effects of the EU’s externalization of border control. The Eastern Mediterranean route and the migration corridor from Turkey to Greece have emerged as two of the major conduits into the EU over the past three decades (Ulusoy et al. 2019, 17). Despite the long-lasting process, the literature on Turkish migration policies and border practices in Greece has mostly been revamped in the aftermath of the migration “crisis” of 2015 and 2017 (Ulusoy et al. 2019, 5–6). This chapter considers the period stretching from 1990 to 2020, and it aims to examine the continuities and discontinuities between externalization as an instrument complementing Europeanization and externalization as an attempt to lock and fortify the external border zones in southeastern Europe, turning them into a borderland where migrants are forced to stay.

It draws on reports released by the EU, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) on policies to contrast irregular migration between 2010 and 2020, NGOs and civil society organizations such as the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), Amnesty International, Migreurop, and independent media outlets like *Sendika.org*. In addition to secondary sources, the data collection includes

interviews conducted in 2010 with an EU officer employed at the EU delegation in Ankara, an officer working at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Ankara, one at the Department for Transit Migration at the IOM's Istanbul office, and a project coordinator at the ASAM office in Ankara. All the names provided for the interviews are pseudonyms used to protect the individual's privacy. Owing to the global Covid-19 pandemic, data on the 2020 events were collected online, mostly through a series of seven online seminars organized by the Association for Migration Research (Göç Araştırmaları Derneği) in which activists and lawyers documented the situation at the Turkish-Greek border.²

The chapter is organized into three sections. The first examines how the making of Turkey as a borderland is a process that originated in the 1990s and has combined the externalization of border control with the Europeanization of Turkey's migration policy as a requirement for EU accession. The second section focuses on how Turkey has been framed as a transit country and a gatekeeper tasked with stemming the flow of migrants to the EU. The strengthening of an externalization of control as a pragmatic strategy to halt the migrants has produced a redefinition of the space: indeed, the creation of a borderland makes it possible to refer to a vast zone rather than a line. The third section elaborates on how the externalization of border control and the making of Turkey as a borderland redefine the border as precarious zones of both immobility and high circulation: the condition of immobility is an expression of the migration itself.

2. EU Border Regime, Europeanization, and the Role of Space in EU-Turkey Relations

The border between Turkey and Greece (i.e., the EU) really consists of two borders: a land border that is delineated mostly by the River Meriç/Evros and a sea border between the western Turkish coastline near Izmir and the Greek Aegean islands facing it. Turkey's mixed flow of migrants mostly consists of asylum seekers, transit migrants, and irregular workers whose visas have expired and whose irregular condition makes it almost impossible to provide exact data on them (Mutluer 2003). However, the transformation of Turkey as a waiting room where migrants are stranded, as well as the militarization of the land and sea borders, has turned the governance of migration into a governance of migrants' forced immobility.

When examining the EU's border regime, scholars distinguish between its internal and external dimensions. The "internal" dimension covers the relationship between members of the Schengen open border zone, states' obligations regarding control over the shared external border and the role of Frontex. The "external" dimension concerns the EU's engagement with third states as it pertains to border control and irregular migration (Ryan 2019, 198). The EU's externalization of migration and border control concerns the management of migration, the fight against irregular migration, and voluntary return (van Munster and Sterx 2006, 237). According to Guiraudon, externalizing control over migration is a political practice to both establish loyal relationships with third countries and export EU policies to transit states and states of origin (Guiraudon 2003, 191–214). Thus, third countries are encouraged to prevent migrants and asylum seekers from entering their territories or to apprehend and return them (Haddad 2008, 199). In the literature, externalization practices are defined as the result of a threefold action: remote control, remote protection, and capacity building. The first, remote control, involves shifting the burden of migration control to third countries (e.g., third-country processing centers or "protected areas" near countries of origin) and dislocating the bureaus for asylum requests with the intent to tackle the issue upstream. European Council Regulation No. 343/2003 of 18 February 2003, also known as the "Dublin Regulation," developed the principle of a "safe third country" (Lavenex 1999, 51) as a basis for determining the country responsible for examining an asylum claim. The externalization of migration controls describes states' extraterritorial actions to prevent migrants and asylum seekers from entering the territories of destination countries or making them inadmissible before considering the merits of individual protection claims (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2011; Crépeau 2013). In line with the heightened politicization and securitization of migration, states' bilateral or multilateral externalization agreements are defined as either security imperatives and a "remote protection" to migrants otherwise deemed to be rejected from the destination countries or a strategy of migration containment and control. The second, remote protection, is the extraterritorial protection of refugees within reception centers and camps built at the EU borders. Since the early 2000s, the militarization of the external borders has entailed the creation of transit zones and detention centers. According to Valluy, camps and detention centers are "waiting zones" that illuminate the persistent banalization of types of exclusion and reclusion of migrants (Valluy 2005a, 2005b). This

“politics of camps” has resulted in one of the more visible effects of the securitization of migration.³ Finally, the third aspect of externalization, capacity building, includes the instruments that the EU uses to manage migration within third countries: the transfer of skills, technologies, and legislation (Frelick et al. 2016, 191–95). In the case of Turkey, the multifaceted aspects of externalization have all been implemented to regulate and govern migratory flows. Moreover, they have accompanied the opening of accession negotiations.

In 1999, the Helsinki European Council declared Turkey a candidate country and launched a series of preaccession reforms aimed at harmonizing justice and domestic affairs with European policies. The process known as Europeanization was particularly enforced through the Turkish government’s adoption of the first National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) in 2001, which scheduled political, administrative, and judicial reforms. Migration control was also framed within the first accession partnership program, which underlines that “to prevent illegal immigration, the EU acquis and practices on migration (admission, readmission, expulsion) will be adopted.”⁴

To fully assess the Europeanization of Turkish migration policy, it is important to take into account Turkey’s geographical position and the changing context of migratory flows that, since the 1980s, have crossed the country. Its location raised concerns within the EU institutions because of the controversial “geographical limitation” Turkey included in the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees. Under this limitation, which originated during the Cold War period, Turkey examines only asylum requests from citizens of European countries and the former Eastern bloc. In the 1990s, the increasing number of refugees from Iran and Iraq led to a securitization of the migration issue (Biehl 2008, 3).

In the same era, migration and in particular irregular migration has also been framed differently by EU institutions. The Seville Summit in 2002 triggered a securitization of migration policies centered on the fight against irregular migration and the increase in readmission agreements with third countries defining the stem of migration as conditional to the development aids. As it concerns the right of asylum, the second Dublin Regulation adopted in 2003 introduced the notion of a “safe third country” and included the mandatory clause that the asylum seekers submit the requests in the first EU country they set foot in following the asylum single-procedure “one-stop shop.” In 2003, the second NPAA included investment in the construction of the premises for specialized

institutions (Board of Asylum and Migration), construction of the refugee guesthouses and refugee shelter centers, and construction of the reception centers for asylum seekers. Moreover, in the context of the fight against “illegal” immigration, Turkey will initiate, in the medium term, practices on readmission and expulsion in addition to alignment with the EU legislation required during the preaccession process. The Turkish government will continue signing readmission agreements with neighboring countries and countries of origin covering Turkish citizens, persons illegally transiting through Turkey, and foreign nationals caught residing illegally in Turkey.⁵

In 2005, within the framework of the accession process, Turkey elaborated, with the EU Commission an Action Plan for Cooperation with EU on Migration and Asylum, a seven-year plan to implement reforms on the topics of visas, the asylum process, “illegal” border immigration, procedures for administrative detention and expulsion of migrants, creation of reception centers for asylum seekers, and new rules for residence permits for foreigners. The 2005 Global Approach to Migration sought to provide a solution to “irregular” migration to the EU, and a partnership was launched with states of origin and transit, especially in Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Moreover, since the turn of the century, externalization as “remote protection” has been expanded. In 2003, the UNHCR agreed on the creation of detention centers in third countries located on transit routes toward the EU.⁶ Migrants and asylum seekers increasingly became stuck in Turkey without legal channels for resettlement to a third country or integration in the country; they were in legal and social limbo as they waited to (irregularly) enter the EU (Danış et al. 2006; Suter 2012; Biehl 2015). In 2006, a directive of the Turkish Ministry of the Interior directed that while asylum seekers are waiting for the UNHCR to render a decision concerning their refugee status, they are assigned to reside and to register in certain cities (so-called satellite cities) and be subject to regular police control.⁷ The attempt to manage migration was confronted with a lack of detailed legislation and by migrants’ movements inside the country toward big cities like Istanbul, where there are broader networks of assistance and more opportunities to find informal jobs. The 2008 NPAA urged the passage of an asylum law to harmonize Turkey’s legislation on asylum, immigration, and foreigners with EU legislation while maintaining the existing geographical restrictions. For the 2009–11 period, it also encouraged the creation of an “Asylum and Immigration Unit” within the Turkish National Police “to [follow] and [evaluate] the mass

population movements (mass influx) . . . for *giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons* and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between member states in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.”⁸ The last part sounds rather foreboding if one considers the influx of refugees and the humanitarian crisis sparked by the Syrian civil war.

Retracing how the EU has influenced Turkey on the issue of migration and asylum migration between 1990 and 2010, it is important to emphasize that the process of harmonizing national legislation was fostered by the country's candidate status for accession to the EU and combined with the EU's externalization of the management of migratory flows. The fight against irregular migration was not only framed as a fight against drugs, weapons, and human trafficking but also associated with the fight against the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), which is active on Turkey's border with Syrian and Iraq in the southeast. According to Baklacioğlu, the term “Fortress Turkey emphasizes how the narrative on migration and border control in Turkey has been a matter of security and harmonization” (2009, 110–11). In assessing the Europeanization and the EU's externalization of migration control, it is important to consider that although the fight against irregular migration is among Turkey's objectives (Kaya 2008, 7), the country was not just passively receiving these directives: on the contrary, ruling elites wanted to curb the number of irregular migrants and control the possible infiltration of PKK members or radical Islamists; therefore, it reframed migration control as a matter of national security (Içduygu and Kirişci 2009, 22).

3. From “Transit” Country to “Gatekeeper”: The Making of Turkey as an EU Borderland

Part of the EU's attempt to tackle irregular migration has been to delegate border control, migration and asylum management to Turkey. Against this backdrop, scholars have examined the EU's attempts to create a buffer zone, or “borderland,” by transferring migration control measures to its southeastern neighbors (Del Sarto 2014; Zaragoza-Cristiani 2017; Müftüler-Baç 2016; Deleixhe et al. 2019). The notion of a “borderland” (Del Sarto 2014) is crucial to assess how migrants' movements are strategically ordered rather than arrested (Walters 2004a, 248). While investigating how politics affects the space of the border, Walters refers to multiple geostrategies that allow power to be exerted at

the border⁹ and define the Mediterranean frontier as a *limes* dividing the North and the South as two highly separated zones (Walters 2004b, 677).

This process accompanied the securitization of migration and was determined by the active role played by IOM experts and EU officers in defining Turkey as a “transit country” (Düvell 2014). This controversial concept has been crafted and spread to denote a security threat as it concerns trafficking and irregular migration mostly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and the Caucasus (İçduygu 2005). Since the 1990s, the EU and the IOM have contributed to redesigning Turkey’s agenda on the subject of migration, including the management of transit migration as a major priority (İçduygu 2005; İçduygu and Kirişci 2009). “Transit migration” is an example of a concept that migration experts and officers have crafted in EU lingo. Turkey as a “(third) transit country” is a notion that has been spread by the IOM, which defines transit as a period of transfer when traveling from one country to another. Reports on the topic turned the issue of transit migration and its place on the Turkish agenda into a security issue: In 2001, the Council of Europe’s recommendations on transit migration in Central and Eastern Europe defined transit migrations as illicit and linked to criminal organizations. As scholars have analyzed, transit migrations are a process resulting from unintended effects rather than a predetermined status (Papadopoulou 2004, 168; Düvell 2006, 11). Over the years, the notion of transit migration has been politicized and used as a synonym for irregular migration. In the early 2000s, as Turkey’s preaccession negotiations with the EU were making headway, the “problem” of irregular transit migrants started to be coded as a security issue (Hess 2010, 136). Turkey’s position has been peculiar as both a candidate for EU accession and a third “transit” country (İçduygu 2005; Kirişci 2007; Düvell 2014) located on the EU periphery where migrants transit as they make their way toward Europe.

However, it was the exporting to Turkey of the EU’s norms on migration and asylum that entailed a transformation of Turkey as a borderland (Müftüler-Baç 2016, 3). Within the framework of Turkey’s Europeanization process, both the 2005 National Action Plan for Asylum and Immigration and the 2008 National Program for the Adoption of the EU Acquis institutionalized border control mechanisms while intensifying repatriation, deportation centers, the employment of sophisticated technologies and equipment, and the training of border guards (İçduygu 2007; Özçürümez and Şenses 2011; İçduygu and Aksel, 2012). In 2006, Frontex conducted its first joint operation to control the European-Mediterranean border and combat “irregular flows” (Ulusoy et al. 2019,

6). In 2008, measures to hinder irregular migration and facilitate asylum procedures included the construction of reception centers.¹⁰

After the outbreak of the war in Syria in 2011, the arrival of Syrian refugees occurred in a context where the systems of control were already in place and fully enforced. The massive flows led to a redefinition of Turkey-EU strategic cooperation on matters of common interest such as asylum, migration, and border control. Conferences, summits, and meetings have proliferated, opening a season where the management of the borders has been placed squarely on the political agenda.

The first aspect concerned the status of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Because of Turkey's geographical limitation inside the 1951 Refugee Convention, it only has to consider refugees originating from European countries. However, after the first year of Turkey's "open door politics" toward Syrian refugees, Turkey's legislation concerning asylum and migration was carved into the European framework. In 2013, the country adopted Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection, which granted temporary protection to Syrian refugees in Turkey and revitalized migration diplomacy between Turkey and the EU (İçduygu and Üstübcü 2014). The definition of a "temporary protection regime" for Syrian refugees inaugurated a new legal framework for asylum in Turkey that affirms the country's obligations toward all persons in need of international protection, regardless of their country of origin. The law also establishes a Directorate General of Migration Management as the agency responsible for migration and asylum.¹¹

In 2013, the EU and Turkey signed the Readmission Agreement, for "the rapid and orderly readmission, by each side, of the persons who do not or no longer fulfil the conditions for entry to, presence in or residence on the territory of the other side."¹² The agreement was implemented in 2016 in the aftermath of the massive flow of refugees from Syria to Turkey in 2015. To tackle this humanitarian emergency and the political impact of the refugee crisis, the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan of 15 October 2015 and the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 (also known as the EU-Turkish Deal) are in line with the EU's border externalization project aimed at enhancing cooperation to stem irregular migration. With their 2016 statement,¹³ the EU and its member states sought Turkey's assistance in preventing Syrian refugees from crossing into EU territory and promised visa-free travel for Turkish nationals in the future, 6 billion euros in aid to assist Syrian refugees, and a renewed path toward EU membership.¹⁴ It is important to consider that while negotiations on migration were very intense, Turkey experienced a rapid

democratic decline and a de facto “exit from democracy” (Öktem and Akkoyunlu 2016), which resulted in the formal suspension of accession negotiations in 2019.¹⁵ With this suspension, the EU’s bargaining strategies to order and govern migrants’ (im)mobility outside its territory have been reframed. In addition, between 2012 and 2015, in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings and with the recrudescence of conflict in Syria, the urgency to cope with the massive flows of migrants as a humanitarian “crisis” required drastic measures to contain migration toward Europe. The “long summer of migration” in 2015, when 880,000 people reached Greece from Turkey, and the subsequent rise of right-wing nationalist and xenophobic parties in EU countries reshaped the nature of externalization as a sort of Europeanization by other means. The 2016–19 EU “Global Strategy”¹⁶ was indeed characterized by robust border control in which the Europeanization narrative has been secondary to the two main security challenges: migration and terrorism. This process affected both the legal and the operational instruments used to manage and control immigration and redefined the EU’s position vis-à-vis third states.

The formal agreement in 2016 also concerned the return of irregular migrants who had crossed from Turkey into Greece back to Turkey and was presented as an overwhelming success and a step change for its role in curbing the number of refugees arriving in Greece.¹⁷ However, “practices of non-entrée, such as visas, carrier sanctions, international zones, and bilateral readmission agreements work to prevent refugees from accessing territory, in this case of the EU, which is necessary to make asylum claims” (Baban et al. 2017, 83). Third countries like Turkey negotiate their role as gatekeepers while being aware that the externalization of migration control might transform their territory into buffer zones. Although the EU-Turkey Statement drastically reduced the number of crossings, Frontex reported 42,319 unauthorized border crossings on the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2017 and 56,561 in 2018.¹⁸ Governing migration by rejecting migrants reshaped the borders into borderlands where people are caught in mobility and transformed border regions into zones of heightened circulation (Hess 2010, 142). The EU borderland is a region made up of both EU member states and EU candidates and has been “sacrificed” in the name of stopping migration (Zaragoza-Cristiani 2017, 70–71). Since the 1990s, states’ border regimes have resulted in an assemblage of practices whereby the logic of control consists of policing, filtering, and risk management. As Bigo affirms: “What EU texts call ‘border management’ is translated into more integrated zones, permitting not only the holding of people in retention at

the borders and their immediate repatriation (e.g., in airport waiting zones, or entry refusal at land borders), but also the initiation of surveillance after people have crossed borders and their repatriation even after they have entered the EU" (2014, 214). In this vein, transit movements have become more irrational, costly, and risky for migrants (Üstübcici and İçduygu 2019, 183). In 2010, presenting the outputs of the "Transit Migration" research project on the Europeanization of migration policies and the formation of the European border regime in southeastern Europe, Sabine Hess stated that the border should be considered a catalyst of a new "zoning" of territories, economies, rights, and subjectivities rather than a solely exclusionist political mechanism. She also suggests reconsidering the border not as a line but as fragmented, spread-out, stretched, and highly stratified "border zones" (Hess 2010, 140).

4. Conceptualizing Transit Immobility at the Greek/EU-Turkish Border

On 27 February 2020, after 33 Turkish soldiers had been killed in Syria's Idlib province, the Turkish authorities announced that they were opening the "gates" at the Greek border.¹⁹ All of a sudden, 12,500 migrants reached Turkey's Edirne region and the coastal area close to Izmir in an attempt to enter Greece via land or sea. What happened in the hours and days immediately following the announcement has been reported by civil society organizations, independent media, and international broadcasts: migrants stranded at the buffer zone near the Pazarkule border crossing were attacked by Greek police with tear gas, and those who were apprehended reported violence.²⁰ While the EU institutions supported Greece in its efforts to "defend" the zone's external borders, the "border spectacle" also marked the umpteenth ritual of border regime as an instrument of governing migration (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015). Turkey's unilateral decision was in contrast to the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, which had sought to halt irregular migration by returning to Turkey one migrant for every Syrian refugee settled in the EU and transferring 6 billion euros to Turkey to manage the Syrian refugees.²¹ Despite the EU's influence over its neighbors via the externalization of migration and border engineering, it is necessary to "decolonize" borders' externalization and consider the counterstrategies that peripheral actors activate in everyday life (İşleyen 2018). Turkey is not merely a passive recipient of the border policies being implemented but also interprets them and uses the issue of migration as leverage to acquire visa liberalization

and revive its accession negotiation talks (Dursun-Özkanca 2019, 83–97; Okyay and Zaragoza-Cristiani 2016).²² The creation of a multistate buffer area has established a complex nexus between the core of the EU and each buffer state. As Zaragoza-Cristiani notes: “The refusal to cooperate by any of the buffer states making up part of this borderland, but above all by Turkey, would inevitably provoke a domino effect, with yet more arrivals of refugees at the EU core” (Zaragoza-Cristiani 2017, 72).

However, according to Karadağ, it is significant that not all of these strategies employed by border practitioners and Turkish politicians entail the empowerment of migrants. On the contrary, the strategic engineering of mobility has a lot of influence over migrants with respect to more hazardous and precarious circumstances (Karadağ 2019, 13) associated with the creation of zones of (im)mobility at the borders. These transit zones are indeed the effect of the tacit collaboration between the EU and Turkey in policing mobility (İşleyen 2018). The creation of a fenced-off buffer zone as a borderland has completely transformed the border and produced zones of transit (im)mobility.

An increasing number of studies have critically investigated the effects of externalization on transit migration and examined migrants who become stuck in transit—immobilized before they even reach their aspired destination (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008; Collyer et al. 2012; Collyer et al. 2014; Kaytaz 2016, 294). New concepts like “stranded migrants” and “precarious transit zone” (Hess 2010) have been coined to grasp the complexity, unsteadiness, and multidirectionality of migratory transit biographies. In this regard, migration appears “fragmented,” broken into several separate stages, and involves varied motivations, legal statuses, and living and employment conditions (Collyer 2010, 275).

Three decades of militarization and the increasing surveillance of internal and external borders of the Schengen Area have not only failed to stop the movements but also kept people caught in mobility and transformed border regions into precarious transit zones. Against this backdrop, the Greek/EU-Turkish border emerges as a precarious transit zone where migrants’ movements are interrupted, their plans and trajectories are redirected, and migrants’ uncertainties are coupled with the state’s insecurities (İçduygu and Sert 2014, 47).

This was vividly shown between 27 February and 27 March 2020 at the Edirne Pazarkule border crossing: Turkey used the 4 million refugees on its territory to blackmail the EU over a matter that goes beyond the management of migration and relates to the country’s security issues on the opposite (southeastern) border. Since the first military operations

started in 2016, the war against the Kurdish forces in Syria and Iraq has seen the Turkish government seeking EU support for the creation of a so-called safe zone at the Turkish border. Once established, this plan would provide for a safe zone at the border that would be populated by Sunni Syrians returning from Turkey.²³ Therefore, it is important to emphasize that Turkey's western and eastern borders are strongly interconnected but also mutually shaped by geopolitical strategies and national security interests.

This aspect is crucial to assessing the current (and future) spatial reconfigurations of refugees and migrants within the Turkish territory. As a result of the tremendous difficulty of moving, transit migrants are now highly vulnerable minorities in Turkey and other states on the border of Europe. This bordering process, as an attempt to delocalize, externalize, and expand the EU's external borders in order to contain the flows of migrants and refugees, has institutionalized a buffer zone. However, as Bigo affirms, the idea of a completely fortified Fortress Europe is an impossible dream, as none of the militarization systems implemented since the 1990s have managed to overcome the porosity of the border (Bigo 1998, 160).

The literature on critical border studies emphasizes how contemporary borders are reformulated and reallocated while becoming dispersed, mobile and deterritorialized (Rumford 2006; Coleman 2007; Walters 2016). In the context of the Europeanization of Europe's neighborhood, borders' mobility implies an exportation of migration policies regarding citizenship and entry regulations, new techniques of mobility control, and new surveillance mechanisms to third countries (Zaiotti 2007; Lavenex 2008; Bialasiewicz et al. 2009; Bialasiewicz 2012; Casas-Cortes et al. 2013). In its multifarious forms, the externalization of migration control is not only meant to govern the freedom of movement; it also helps to imagine and order European space by constructing migration as illegitimate movement menacing Europe.

Owing to the EU border regime, more and more migrants are caught at the fringes of the EU, stranded and forced to adjust their plans and migration trajectories. Recently, scholars working at the EU-funded Advancing Alternative Migration Governance project have stressed the importance of migrants' and refugees' aspirations, concluding that not all the people aspire to be on the move but might also decide to "stay" on in buffer states like Turkey.²⁴ The focus on migrants' agency as determinative for the decision whether or not to remain in Turkey might entail a hyperindividualization focused on migrants' personal will,

which tends to underestimate how the systemic conditions determining the EU's migration policies might act as a driving force for migrants' plans. However, aspirations do not tell the whole story, and we need to consider how they have been forged by a regime that defines migrants as "unwanted" and "illegal." Moreover, it is relevant to go beyond the conceptualization of the border as a line to cross or transit through and of transit migration as merely an indication of the movements of people from a supposed country of origin through various countries en route to their final destination.

5. Conclusion

This chapter retraced how the making of Turkey as an EU borderland has been profoundly entangled with the Europeanization of the country's migration and asylum policies. Similarly, the EU's externalization of border control was examined within the context of the harmonization of Turkey's legislation with the European *acquis*. Between the late 1990s and 2010, EU-Turkey migration diplomacy was characterized by a securitization of the migration issue, the fight against irregular migrants, and the creation of a buffer state on the EU borderland.

However, the second section sketched out how the EU and the IOM have actively contributed to framing migration as a security problem and supported reforms to the regulations on asylum by emphasizing the challenges of Turkey's being a "transit country." With the outbreak of the war in Syria in 2011, a new phase of the EU's externalization of border control and management of migration started. In the past decade, Turkey has adopted two important pieces of legislation on migration and asylum: The Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2013 and the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016. The 2016 statement exemplifies how the EU's decision to externalize migration control and asylum procedures to Turkey has modified the notion of transit by adding the (temporary) settlement country status. This has gone hand in hand with a complete halt to negotiations for accession to the EU and the democratic backsliding of Turkish institutions.

In the aftermath of the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, the image of Turkey as a "gatekeeper" has increased the country's bargaining power vis-à-vis EU institutions. The securitization of irregular migration and the militarization of the border have contributed to institutionalizing a system aimed at ordering and returning the migrants who are stuck in Turkey. However, while keeping the migrants on its doorstep, the EU created

zones of immobility, precarity, and irregular transit. Which are the unintended consequences of this lack of mobility on border management on the ground? How do the immobility zones affect the construction of migrants' subjectivities and their strategies to move further? Additional research should investigate how this "transit immobility" is institutionalized, narrated, and performed by migrants. This approach would support a mobility perspective that would relate transit migration "to migrants' experienced and physical im/mobility," according to Schapendonk, "instead of defining [it] in terms of migrants' intentions and demarcating it with a clear-cut time limit" (2012, 581). In this vein, the third section showed how the idea of a militarized borderland that keeps people caught in mobility—like the notion of the Fortress Europe—was little more than an illusion. To govern migration by ordering migrants into borderland buffer areas has not only given prominence to the border as a zone of heightened and risky circulation but also reconfigured the agency of third states.

Notes

1. The concept of a borderland is used to identify those "areas in closest geographic proximity to a border that are directly affected by the latter" (Del Sarto 2014, 202).

2. In detail: the Association for Migration Research organized a series of five webinars titled "Türkiye-Yunanistan Sınırında Neler Oldu?" (What happened at the Turkish-Greek border?). The recorded videos are available at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBFnCVOjpaadUIGupB97tXQ>. Accessed 3 December 2021.

3. Since the early 2000s, civil society organizations and associations both from member states and at the European level have increased awareness and condemned the human rights violations at the reception centers and camps at Europe's external borders. At the same time, the militarization of the EU border has paved the way for the definition of Europe as a "fortress" constantly under threat by an imaginary enemy personified by the allegedly "economic migrants" attempting to access the EU territory illegally.

4. Here is the content of the National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA): www.ab.gov.tr/_195_en.html. Accessed 3 December 2021. Two NPAAs followed in 2003 and 2008.

5. Italics are mine. 2003 National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) Title 24. www.ab.gov.tr/_196_en.html. Accessed 3 December 2021.

6. The decision to open detention centers for migrants and asylum seekers in third countries like Libya marked a step toward alignment with the UNHCR to the EU securitization of migration and was opposed by civil society organiza-

tions that condemned the human rights violations and terrible conditions at these centers. The “Migreurope, Observatoire des frontières” network includes 50 associations of the civil society denouncing the politics of detention camps in third countries at the EU borders. For more information: www.migreurope.org/?lang=fr. Accessed 28 May 2020.

7. Ministry of Interior General Directorate of Security Circular no. 5, “Implementation Directive,” 22 June 2006.

8. Italics are mine. National Programme of Turkey for the Adoption of the EU Acquis (December 2008), Chapter 24, p. 269. The document is available online: www.ab.gov.tr/_42260_en.html. Accessed 2 December 2021.

9. These geostrategies are the networked (non)border, the march, the colonial frontier, and the *limes* (Walters 2004b).

10. In an interview conducted at the EU delegation in Ankara in 2010, EU officer Volkan affirmed that seven new reception centers for asylum seekers and irregular migrants would be opened in Ankara, Erzurum, Gaziantep, Izmir, Kayseri, Kirklareli, and Van. In 2021, one reception center and 25 prerulement detention centers were operating in Turkey under the control of the Directorate General of Migration Management: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/removal-centres>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

11. Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management website: Migration Statistics: Irregular Migration, <http://www.goc.gov.tr>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

12. EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement, [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0507\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0507(01)&from=EN). Accessed 20 October 2021.

13. About the effective interinstitutional collaboration and informal institutional governance which characterized the EU-Turkey deal see Smeets and Beach 2020.

14. EU-Turkey Statement, 18 March 2016: www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/

15. On 13 March 2019, the EU Parliament called on the commission to formally suspend the accession negotiations with Turkey. www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0200_EN.html?redirect. Accessed 20 October 2021.

16. The European External Action Service, the EU diplomatic service, identified its “Global Strategy” for 2016–19.

17. See ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20190306_managing-migration-factsheet-step-change-migration-management-border-security-timeline_en.pdf. The number of refugees who arrived in Greece from Turkey in 2015 was 861,63 and 74,613 in 2019. Data available on the UNHCR website: data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179. Accessed 15 June 2020.

18. Frontex website: Migratory Routes: Eastern Mediterranean Route, <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/eastern-mediterranean-route>; Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management website: Migration Statistics: Irregular Migration, http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/irregular-migration_915_1024_4746_icerik. Accessed 25 September 2019.

19. See www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/turkish-soldiers-killed-air-raid-syria-idlib-200227211119672.html and www.dw.com/en/eu-strongly-rejects-turkeys-use-of-migrants-at-border/a-52640976. Accessed 22 May 2020.

20. See www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/world/europe/greece-migrants-secret-site.html. Accessed 22 May 2020.

21. Furthermore, in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic, migrants were stuck at the border, then sent from one camp to the next in Turkish cities, where they completed their quarantine before being allowed to resettle in Turkey. On 27 March 2020, all migrants left the border zone and Turkey's minister of the interior, Suleyman Soylu, affirmed that after the pandemic Turkey will not apprehend any migrants.

22. In this respect, it is interesting to consider that in March 2020, to ease the desperate conditions in reception camps on the Greek island, the EU offered 2,000 euros to refugees who decided to return voluntarily: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51859007>. Accessed 25 May 2020. The campaign is a further step in EU migration governance and shows how to stem irregular transit migration mostly by ordering and governing immobility.

23. See www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/18/syrian-refugees-return-to-home-towns-in-safe-zone-despite-dangers; foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/09/turkey-resettling-refugees-northeastern-syria/. Accessed 8 June 2020.

24. The Horizon 2020 project's deliverables are available online: <http://admigov.eu/>. See also Kirişçiöğlü and Aysen 2020 and Welfens et al. 2020.

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SEVEN | Sea Borders between Domestic and International Definitions of Spaces

Italian-Libyan Cooperation on Border Management

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1. Introduction

This chapter examines the evolution of Italian-Libyan cooperation in border management and challenges the understanding of these practices exclusively in terms of externalization or crisis-led interventions. By looking at the partnerships between Italy and Libya since the early 2000s, the chapter argues that the two countries are engaged in multiple kinds of cooperation to produce a sea border that entails more than the externalization of border and migration control. Both countries have actively nurtured this cooperation and profit from the longer-term political consequences of such processes, including gaps in jurisdiction and power vacuums. An investigation based on the space of the sea between the two countries makes it possible to unravel the complex processes behind such relationships and borderwork. For the past two decades, Italian authorities have sought cooperation with Libyan authorities and engaged with the European Union's sponsored programs of border management with little (if any) compliance with international legal regimes, especially in terms of human rights principles, while leaving Italian authorities enough room to negotiate flexible and more fruitful economic cooperation with Libyan authorities. In turn, Gaddhafi's

regime profited from the cooperation to reinforce both legitimacy and authoritarian governance on the domestic front. After the regime's downfall in 2011, it has been common practice for EU institutions and Italian authorities to resort to soft law and legally nonbinding instruments with Libya, which the postrevolutionary Libyan authorities have not explicitly opposed. How does one account for the construction of this border system and lack of a political and legal framework for sea borders between Italy and Libya? Which processes, features, and techniques formed such a specific border space? This chapter claims that an exclusive focus on the externalization of migration and border control in Italian-Libyan relations is misleading because it fails to grasp the implications and complexity of the long-term history of relations between the two countries. The chapter is based on the idea that the specific forms of governance and practices over border management occurring in the "space of the sea" (Cuttitta 2017) between Italy and Libya after 2011 are not invented but build on preexisting practices that enable their consolidation under the international cooperation agreements signed after 2011. The focus on their evolution and historical dimension sheds some light on the borderwork and the rationales behind the current cooperation (Bialasiewicz 2012), stressing that migration control is not the only issue at stake. While legal accounts agree on the idea that bordering practices between Italy and Libya can be defined as "shifting the burden of border and migration control" (Palm 2017), this perspective does not take into account the implications of the interaction between the actors. By looking at the interaction of the two countries in a historical perspective, the chapter highlights that the juridical-political indistinction is the cornerstone of the borderwork being performed and establishes a sea border that ultimately allows both parties to escape legal constraints while strengthening their partnership in the long run.

Europe's borders have become places of suffering and death (Pallister-Wilkins 2017): in 2016 alone, almost 4,000 people are known to have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea (IOM 2016). Scholars agree on the shift from a humanitarian mission of search-and-rescue operations to a more securitized response to boat migration and an increase in militarization, legal gray zones (Meier 2020), and a lack of transparency (Pallister-Wilkins 2017; Ghezlbash et al. 2018). Agreeing with Sassen that while the "nation-state remains the prevalent organizational source of authority and to variable extents the dominant one. But . . . critical components of authority deployed in the making of the territorial state are shifting toward becoming strong capabilities for detaching that authority from its exclusive territory and onto multiple bordering

systems” (Sassen 2006, 419), the chapter will show how the bordering system that emerged between the two countries before 2011 and was reinforced during the so-called 2015 migration crisis aims to rescale border control and identify sea borders as “spatial.” Between the expectations of European member states hoping for operational solutions to security problems and the crisis of European solidarity among member states in managing migration and external borders (Cusumano 2019), the result is a “complex, networked border” (Rumford 2006) in which legal safeguards for humanitarian principles and international law cannot be adequately applied nor reinforced. To this end, the chapter will deal with the specific kind of border system that developed between Italy and Libya by focusing on which actors are participating in the countries’ sea border space, how they are doing this, and how this has affected the context in which breaches of fundamental rights can emerge. In so doing, the chapter adds to this collection’s theoretical contribution regarding the interconnection between space and power. In particular, this investigation wishes to stress that sea borders can be considered one of the incomplete spaces that are always under construction, but not because of a neutral character (Massey 2005). Sea borders indeed represent a space in which to understand the complex convergence of international legal norms, sovereignty concerns, and cooperation practices. Moreover, it offers a generative site for political science and geography to reflect on and analyze the complex relationships between democratic and non-democratic regimes that co-produce the sea borders, as well as the consequent redefinition of politics and conceptualization of spaces.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses the scholarship scrutinizing the space of the sea between Italy and Libya and connects it with the literature focused on migration and border studies beyond legal scholarship. Section 3 focuses on the signature of the 2008 Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya, as well as the formalization of previous agreements. Section 4 presents the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding, along with some practical examples of cooperation and how international human rights principles are circumvented. The conclusion summarizes the chapter’s main findings.

2. Studying the Space between Italy and Libya

In the context of political science, geography, and critical border studies, cooperation between Italy and Libya has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention. As discussed below, a growing body of work has

engaged with different aspects of the two countries' relations. Above all, the scholarship on migration policies and practices has focused on the EU's and Italy's relationships with Libya, mostly to unravel and highlight processes of externalizing and outsourcing migration control to third countries with the aim of preventing third-country nationals from reaching the shores of European member states (Paoletti 2010; Gammeltoft-Hansen 2011; McNamara 2013; Baldwin-Edwards Lutterbeck 2019). While this chapter does not contradict these works' arguments, it shows that they fail to explain the diachronic processes of space construction and the specific border spaces produced between the two countries. By looking at the sea border produced through Italian-Libyan partnerships since the early 2000s, the chapter showcases the "use of the space" in politics and supports the other theoretical contributions included in the present volume. In particular, it provides input to the discussion of the vector from politics to space by discussing how stakeholders from political systems and institutions can use, exploit, and transform the space when dealing with political issues and, in this case, border management cooperation (see the introduction to this volume).

In the redefinition of analytical tools to analyze borders in an international studies perspective, Balibar emphasizes the need to rethink borders in a more creative fashion in order to make sense of what is happening in global politics: "Borders . . . are no longer at the border, an institutionalized site that could be materialized on the ground and inscribed on the map, where one sovereignty ends, and another begins" (Balibar 1998, 217–18). More recently, while relying on this elaboration, international relations scholars like Vaughan-Williams and Rumford have refocused attention on the "borderwork" (Rumford 2008) and the "generalized biopolitical border" (Vaughan-Williams 2009) to scrutinize the "global archipelago of zones of juridical-political indistinction" that makes it possible to untie the analysis of sovereign powers from the nations' territorial confines and relocate it in the context of a global biopolitical terrain that spans "domestic" and "international" space (Vaughan-Williams 2011, 195). In particular, there is an acknowledgment of the mismatch between the political territory of "Europe" and the political space defined by the borders of the EU. According to Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, 3), reconfiguring borders is a strategic tool in the network of global flows, and the lines of geographical mapping do not overlap with the component of the bordering practices and separation between nation-states, regardless of whether they are "legal, cultural, social [or] economic."

On top of these accounts of the international reconfiguring of borders, scholars have reflected on practical outcomes of EU law and of “European infrastructures,” since “‘Europe’ as an important geographical and conceptual marker [is also] unclear, respectively, about either physical extent or meaning” (Schipper and Schot 2011, 246). While the 1985 Schengen Agreement provided for the lifting of internal border controls, it also introduced an infrastructure of data gathering for the Schengen Information System, along with new security rationales. The latter created a form of networked and dispersed borders across the internal European space that, by registering practices, reflected external borders within the European space in the form of hotel registers or social security data far beyond airports and ports (Vaughan-Williams 2016). Borders are political technologies reflecting a particular politics in a specific context (Bigo 1998). Elspeth Guild’s work on the shifting relationship between domestic and international law in the EU outlines that, within this small “globalized world,” it is not borders and law but the economic resources available to migrants, especially third-country nationals, that shape the outcome of their mobility projects (Guild 2005). The redefinition of borders’ reality and the blurring of the “inside/outside” is reflected in Bigo’s analysis of the interweaving of the internal and external realms of European security (Bigo 2006), albeit with a privileged focus on the internal projection of EU border control.

To sustain the investigation of borderwork between Italy and Libya, especially after 2015, and show how this is not invented and does not appear on a blank canvas but builds on and consolidates preexisting practices, this chapter starts from the insights of Bialasiewicz, who takes into consideration that the border must be separated from its territorial trap (2012, 843). Bialasiewicz highlights that, already back in 2009, Italy-Libya relations brought about “off-shore blackholes where European norms, standards, and regulations simply do not apply, legitimized through bi-lateral agreements” (2012, 861).

What is largely scrutinized is the implication of this blurring between the “internal” and the “external” and of these new border systems when it comes to maritime border space. One of the main problems in dealing with maritime governance—and, to a larger extent, maritime borders—is understanding who is doing what (Arstsad 2017). Nowadays, international law applied to the governance of the sea includes a number of nonpublic actors that shape practices and current systems of operations. Therefore, it is no longer possible to account for what happens at sea borders by relying on the instruments of hard law and

legal accounts. Against this background, existing scholarship on maritime governance has acknowledged that, in the maritime domain, some soft-law instruments introduce uncertainties that affect the rights and obligations of states and individuals, creating opportunities for different responses (Ghezelbash et al. 2018). From the perspective of the literature on governance, “who governs” makes it possible to move beyond hard-law accounts and to grasp which actors have the power to play a role in maritime governance (Arstsad 2017).

The work of Cuttitta (2017) is particularly relevant for the theoretical conceptualization of the creation of the particular sea border between Italy and Libya and the territorial organization of borders far beyond the capitals. Cuttitta investigated the production of “space of the sea” through the categories of “inclusion” and “exclusion,” and the work outlines the role of both states and nonstate actors at sea. By adopting the point of view of human beings moving inside the space, the work advances the idea that the space of the sea between Italy and Libya is enacted by a plethora of actors, all engaging in practices of inclusion and exclusion, which results in a fragmented, unpredictable, jagged space. Another relevant study is that of Cusumano (2019), who introduces the concept of “organized hypocrisy” in the EU-sponsored operations off the coast of Libya to highlight mismatches between official discourse based on humanitarianism, the practical operation of border control, and, ultimately, the securitization of migration. By looking at the specific actors involved in the activities, the author asserts that official commitments do not align with actions because “rhetoric is used as a surrogate for the lack of consistent action” (Cusumano 2019, 16). These accounts prove that policy-oriented frameworks and legal accounts alone cannot tackle the transformations in the space of the sea between Italy and Libya. As the present chapter also proposes, it is of the utmost importance to critically reassess the links between policy formulation, legal aspects, and actual practices on the ground and at sea. As a matter of fact, from a legal perspective, the situation of governing the sea borders between Italy and Libya has been labeled a picture “of dispersed authority and a grossly imperfect regime complex,” with a lack of a political will to unite all divergent actors operating at sea (Ollick 2018, 289). A remarkable exception is the work by Müller and Slominski (2021), who rather than speak of a mere “externalization” utilize different theoretical tools to problematize the cooperation between Italy and Libya. The authors claim that the EU is advancing not only by externalization but mostly by “orchestration strategies” in which the political actors involved resort to enroll-

ing third parties and engaging in indirect orchestration via the Libyan authorities: the orchestrators enlist intermediaries on a voluntary basis to achieve the goal of border management and migration control while evading legal constraints (Müller and Slominski 2021). Yet this scholarly work does not problematize the diachronic trajectory of the relationship between the two countries. This process of redefining sea borders in the present case reveals the nature of such spatial dimensions when all the actors involved (and their correlated practices) modify the sea border, shape it according to their interests and political strategies, and generate new political scenarios, including power vacuums—jurisdictional gaps from which all actors may profit. Indeed, the sea border between Libya and Italy embodies and gives expression to Massey’s conception of space as “the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity” (2005, 9).

3. Geopolitics of Monitoring the Sea Border between Italy and Libya: Laws and Actors

By using a historical perspective, this section will focus on the most important aspects of cooperation on border management that have emerged between Italy and Libya. The specific context and the content of the Treaty on Friendship signed in 2008, as well as earlier cooperation agreements, shed some light on the Italian authorities and their Libyan counterparts’ particular stylings of governance of the space of the sea since 2011. Ambiguity regarding international legal regimes and more operational cooperation on migration is at the core of the treaty, which is officially portrayed as reparations for Italian colonial occupation, while it formalizes and ensures mutually beneficial cooperation with the Libyan authorities.

On 30 August 2008, the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation signed between Berlusconi and Gadhafi laid out a broad framework of cooperation, including cultural, economic, and defense affairs, the core contents of which can be found in the 1998 joint communiqué signed by Italian minister of foreign affairs Lamberto Dini and Umar Mustafa al-Muntasir, secretary of the General People’s Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation (Libyan foreign minister) (Lombardi 2011, 37). In particular, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi pledged \$5 billion in compensation for abuses committed during the

period of Italian rule in Libya between 1911 and 1943. Italian authorities had never before admitted to colonial crimes, including using illegal weapons (i.e., mustard gas), deporting and putting civilians in concentration camps, or engaging in mass executions (Morone 2018, 118). However, once back in Rome after signing the treaty in Benghazi, Berlusconi declared that the treaty meant “fewer illegal immigrants as well as more gas and oil” (Di Caro 2008). Indeed, after ratification by parliament in January 2009, Italy obtained full collaboration from the Libyan Coast Guard to jointly patrol the Central Mediterranean Sea and push illegal migrants back to the shores of Libya (Morone 2017). Under the terms of the agreement, the Italian government committed to an investment of \$200 million per annum over a 25-year period to help fund the development of critical infrastructure in Libya. In return, besides winning contracts for Italian companies, the deal provided for the offshoring and outsourcing of Italy’s borders to Libya. Berlusconi’s initial apology was not followed by any “precise and specific historical reference” to colonial crimes that could inform the public opinion about the Italians’ earlier rule in Africa (Borgogni 2015, 26). Italy’s contribution to Libya as reparations for colonial acts was transformed into new opportunities for ENI and other private Italian companies working in the infrastructure sector, such as Finmeccanica, to expand their activities in Libya and establish joint ventures with the Libya Africa Investment Portfolio. In parallel, the treaty appropriated funds to fight illegal immigration in the form of sea and land border management in Article 19. The treaty states that Italy’s provision of mixed crews on boats to patrol approximately 2,000 kilometers of Libya’s coastline and a satellite detection system for southern land borders will be jointly financed by Italy and the EU and provided by Finmeccanica (Ronzitti 2009).

From a historical point of view, it becomes evident that the official discourse on colonial reparations was more the result of Italian authorities’ efforts to engage with Libyan authorities in successful and mutually beneficial cooperation, including migration control and economic partnerships, with little room for compliance with international legal regimes. The treaty did not draw on a blank canvas but on a long history of signed agreements and informal cooperation, and it set a precedent that reemerged in the years of the so-called 2015 migration crisis. It confirmed and expanded the number of bilateral agreements, paving the way for the normalization of Italian-Libyan relations regarding migration, in which the way toward the indefinite regulation of human mobility was more than evident, and it outlined various Italian governments’

ambiguous attitudes toward international human rights standards. Previous agreements had been signed in December 2000 to deal with the fight against terrorism, organized crime, and illegal immigration and came into force in December 2002. In 2003 and 2004, additional bilateral agreements were signed, and significant measures of cooperation were introduced during the presidency of Silvio Berlusconi. Italian and Libyan authorities oversaw a program of charter flights financed by Italy to remove undocumented migrants to their home countries. The Italian government provided equipment and training programs to control Libya's borders, including patrol boats and fingerprinting kits (European Commission 2004). In 2003, Italy also financed the first construction of a camp for undocumented migrants in Gharyan, close to Tripoli. Additional camps were financed in later years, for example, in Kufra and Sebah (Andrijasevic 2006, 9).

Since the early 2000s, Italy has primarily conducted joint operations by placing Italian officers on Libyan patrol vessels. In this context, informality and secrecy surrounding the agreements have characterized the cooperation between Italy and Libya. As documented by researchers, no detailed contents of the July 2003 agreement, which regulates the practical cooperation between the security forces of the two countries, or of several informal agreements, are publicly available (Cuttitta 2006; Klepp 2010).

Italian administrative bodies responsible for the implementation of these agreements and of the 2008 treaty were situated within the Ministry of the Interior. Italian law explicitly conceives of control over irregular migration by sea as a multiagency task whose leadership is assigned to the Ministry of the Interior. The latter has the duty to promote coordination between the relevant Italian authorities and EU agencies and, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to promote agreements with countries of origin and/or transit aimed at fostering "cooperation in the fight against illegal immigration."¹ In 2002, a new Central Direction for Immigration and Border Police was established under the Department of Public Security at the Ministry of the Interior, which was entrusted with the overall coordination of border control policies. The Ministry of the Interior coordinates the operational activity of various law enforcement and security agencies, in particular the State Police, Guardia di Finanza (Italian Custom Border Guards), and the Italian Navy, in addition to the Italian Coast Guard, which is a specialized branch of the Italian Navy acting under the authority of the Ministry of Transport and responsible for the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (Campesi 2020).

The mutual benefit of the Italy-Libya partnerships is detectable not only in the details of border patrols and private companies' engagement. The Treaty on Friendship was of the utmost importance to Gadhafi, who obtained Italy's decisive sponsorship to lift the international embargo against Libya and provide support for the resumption of US diplomatic relations with the country (Morone 2018, 119). Moreover, as Bialasiewicz outlines, the ambiguity that characterized Italy-Libya relations is reflected in Libya's relations with international organizations such as the UNHCR, as well as the EU itself. The EU lifted its embargo against Libya in 2004 on the condition that, among others, it would ratify the 1951 Geneva Convention. But this never happened. On the contrary, 15 years later, the same Libyan authorities have stuck to the line that all migrants in Libya are economic migrants and that the question of asylum policy is a "European obsession" (Bialasiewicz 2012, 858) and a European problem. What differs is that at that time, Libya preferred to interact with the UNHCR mission on an ad hoc basis (Bialasiewicz 2012).

After Italy donated patrol vessels to Libya, its officers were allowed to accompany Libyan patrols, where they fulfilled a liaison function. In 2009, Italy began intercepting migrants on the high seas on barges and returning them to Libya. Libya and Italy announced the launch of joint naval patrols in Libyan territorial waters, although it was unclear whether and how they worked (HRW 2009).

This situation had a negative impact on compliance with international human rights standards. A case in point is the well-known 2012 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy*,² which concerns the maritime interception and pushback to Libya of 11 Somalians and 13 Eritreans by the Italian Financial Police and the coast guard. On 6 May 2009, for the first time since the 2008 treaty had been finalized, Italy ordered its coast guard and naval vessels to push back forcibly and return a migrant boat on the high seas to its country of origin without screening it to determine whether it contained passengers who could apply for asylum or required special protection. Boats with 200 people onboard departed from Libya with the aim of reaching the Italian coast; when they were 35 miles south of Lampedusa, they were approached by navy forces from the Italian Guardia di Finanza. Immediately, people were transferred onto the Italian boats and sent back to Tripoli. Once they reached Libyan territory, the migrants were handed over to the Libyan authorities. The court stated that the nonrefoulement principle must be applied extraterritorially and constrain interdictions that can obstruct access to protection or expose migrants to any risk of

harm or torture (Biondi 2012). Although Italian border control authorities are legally bound to respect the international laws concerned, not least because their activities have a functional territorial reference and, thus, relate to sovereign territory (Biondi 2012), this was not they did, and their actions translated into pushbacks.

In this context, the fragmented EU law has contributed to a deregulated situation in the governance of sea borders. A standard set of rules to coordinate the EU member states' search-and-rescue (SAR) and disembarkation activities is lacking, except for those activities carried out in the context of Frontex-led joint operations at sea (Carrera and den Hertog 2015), which are covered by Regulation 656/2014 (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union 2014) and Regulation (EU) 2016/399, also called the Schengen Borders Code. Regulation 656/2014 applies to all Frontex-coordinated maritime border surveillance operations and includes a set of SAR and disembarkation obligations for "participating units" (i.e., law enforcement vessels of participating member states). In the case of disembarkation following an SAR operation, Article 10 Regulation 656/2014 establishes that the member state hosting the operation and other participating member states must cooperate with the responsible Rescue Coordinating Centre to identify a place of safety and ensure that the disembarkation of rescued persons is carried out. If it is not possible to arrange for a unit participating in the SAR operation to be relieved of its obligation to render assistance to persons in distress at sea as soon as reasonably practicable, that unit must be authorized to disembark the rescued persons in the member state hosting the operation (Art. 10(1)) (Carrera and Cortinovis 2020). In addition, Article 4 (Regulation 656/2014) also introduces provisions on the protection of fundamental rights and nonrefoulement, which apply to all cases of disembarkation in the context of sea operations conducted by the Frontex agency. In line with the verdict of the ECtHR *Hirsi* case, the regulation lays out a set of procedural steps to be followed when considering the disembarkation of rescued migrants in a third country.

4. Consolidation of Italy-Libya Cooperation after Gaddhafi's Downfall: The February 2017 Memorandum of Understanding

This section will examine the current migration control arrangements that emerged from the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). It will discuss how the memorandum relates to the previous cooperation agreements and the 2008 treaty and how it circumvents Italy's responsi-

bilities toward international human rights regimes. By focusing on examples of such cooperation, the section will discuss the implications of soft and deregulated instruments of cooperation and how they allow for a situation of uncertainty that encourages flexible and ad hoc negotiation with Libyan authorities.

After the 2011 Arab upheavals, many actors operated in the Mediterranean Sea. With reference to institutional actors, states, and institutions, these include the coast guards and navies of the countries on the coast, Operation Themis of the EU border agency Frontex, the EU Common Security and Defence Policy mission EUNAVFOR Med Sophia since June 2015, and commercial vessels that are accidentally involved (Heller and Pezzani 2018). In addition, humanitarian NGOs voluntarily participating in SAR operations are also part of the governance of sea borders. The Italian Navy carries out autonomous patrolling activities only within the small operation called “Mare Sicuro.” Previously, it managed the large-scale military-humanitarian operation Mare Nostrum, launched in October 2013, which ended in December 2014 (Cuttitta 2017, 79). Frontex has coordinated joint operations in the Strait of Sicily for over a decade, and the current Operation Themis has replaced Triton. The EU CSDP missions engaged with Libyan authorities in training and cooperation and sometimes instrumentally neglected vetting procedures in the case of alleged smugglers among the targets of EU programs (as happened with the CSPD mission EUNAVFOR Med Sophia training) (Loschi et al. 2018).

In the shaping of border practices between Italy and Libya, the smuggling economy falls within the cracks of these cooperations. Migrant smuggling is a practice that partially evades state control and requires multilayered and complex interventions. The governance of smuggling, in this regard, outsteps migration management by states and international institutions and instead aligns with the broader issue of governing unruly conduct and populations (Garelli and Tazzioli 2018).

After 2011 and the downfall of the Gadhafi regime, the Tripoli-based government was the Libyan counterpart in international cooperation partnerships, recognized by the international community (UN and EU member states). Under UN-led mediation in December 2015, the Government of National Accord (GNA) was established in Tripoli in early 2016, thereby cutting the eastern authorities in Tobruk and Benghazi off from international support (Toaldo and Fitzgerald 2017). Post-2011 Libyan authorities under the Ministries of Interior and Defense, along with the Libyan Coast Guard, became the focus of Italian and EU support for border management and security sector reform (Loschi and Russo

2021). The EU's emphasis on migration management and collaboration with detention centers eventually empowered the Ministry of the Interior to deal with migrants and collaborate with the international organizations that visit detention centers without changing the way the sector is governed (Loschi and Russo 2021, 17). As post-2011 authorities have not reformed asylum or *non refoulement* rights under Libyan law, this resulted in a complex, uncontrolled scenario over human rights principles.

As the so-called 2015 refugee crisis highlighted and exacerbated longer-term shortcomings in the Common European Asylum System and lack of solidarity among member states, the relationship between Italy and Libya regarding the (control of the) flows of migrants became a pivotal instrument in the multilateral bordering practices. On 2 February 2017, Italy signed the MoU with the GNA led by Fayed al Serraj to establish cooperation in the field of development, fight against illegal immigration, trafficking in human beings and smuggling, and enhance border security.³ The key commitment of the partnership was to “resume the cooperation between Italy and Libya on security and irregular migration according to past bilateral agreements” (i.e., the 2008 Treaty on Friendship). In addition, in the summer of 2017, the Italian parliament authorized the “Mare Sicuro” naval mission to provide technical support to the Libyan Coast Guard.

The 2017 MoU was the outcome of, among others, the Libyan regime's dismissal of the 2012 *Hirsi* judgment, which had forcefully recognized the correlation between the humanitarian dimension of SAR activities and human rights obligations (Ghezelbash et al. 2018, 323). In particular, the *Hirsi* case confirmed that the assessments of a state's human rights obligations could not be circumvented by other legal regimes, and the international obligations arising from other international regimes (e.g., the law of the sea, especially regarding SAR operations) do not relieve them of their obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which Italy had ratified (Pijnenburg 2018, 400).

The 2008 treaty is regarded as having been suspended following the downfall of the Gadhafi regime. Nevertheless, the 2017 MoU is a soft-law instrument that stands in an ambiguous position vis-à-vis the previous treaty: the MoU includes cooperation as also foreseen in Article 19 of the 2008 treaty (Pijnenburg 2018, 402). It is not ratified by the Italian parliament and is closely related to the informal Italian diplomacy and informal cooperation with Libyan Government of National Agreement under the interior minister of the time. Against the backdrop of migrants' flow from Libya and the migration crisis in 2015, it added much confusion to

a multilayering of legal and semilegal instruments that created opportunities for black holes in bordering practices.

The cooperation around the MoU empowered the Libyan authorities to pull migrants back to Libya. In this scenario, Italy provided technical support to “circumvent the prohibition unequivocally affirmed by the ECtHR Hirsi Judgement” (Liguori 2019, 12) and implemented what scholars define as a “refoulement by proxy” (D’Argent and Kuritzky 2017; Heller and Pezzani 2018). In this sense, what was launched with the 2017 MoU is an engagement by both Italian and Libyan authorities regarding bordering practices that “legally are situated outside of the EU, but which functionally lie inside its strategic zone of interest” (Germont and Smith 2009, 579).

To circumvent the prohibition on refoulement, a Libyan SAR area had to be declared and put into effect. This has also been presented at the EU level as a solution to the migration crisis—at least, to end the uncontrolled flows of migrants to the EU’s external borders. At the informal summit held at La Valletta the day after signature of the Italian-Libyan MoU, the Council of the European Union used the Malta Declaration to further endorse cooperation with and assistance to Libyan authorities and prioritized training, equipment, and giving support to the Libyan Coast Guard and agencies (EU Council 2017). Subsequently, in its action plan of 4 July, the EU Commission pledged €46 million for a project to be developed with Italy as part of the EU Trust Fund for Africa and to support the establishment of a fully operational Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre in Libya (European Commission 2017).

The most relevant outcome of the process launched with the 2017 MoU is Libya’s notification of an SAR zone to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a specialized United Nations agency.⁴ The declaratory procedure for establishing an SAR area acknowledged by the IMO allows states to claim such a zone unless other state parties object. On 13 September 2017, Libyan authorities declared their first SAR zone, but the announcement was signed by two lieutenants from the Italian Coast Guard. Based on its own investigation, the IMO did not accept the declaration. A new declaration was proposed on 14 December 2017, as also confirmed in the last SAR report of the Italian Coast Guard, which the IMO again refused (Facchini 2018). At the end of June 2018, Libyan authorities submitted a declaration a third time, which was then accepted and ratified by the IMO (Spaggiari 2018).

This was the result of long-standing support from Italian authorities. Since May 2017, the Italian Coast Guard has coordinated the Libyan

Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (LMRCC) project managed by Italy and financed by the European Commission at a cost of €1.8 million. In August 2017, within the Italian “Mare Sicuro” mission, the Italian Navy provided a boat, the *Mare Capri*, moored in Abu Sitta in the port of Tripoli. The mission includes the establishment of the LMRCC for the management of the SAR area through the Italian Port Authority (Senato della Repubblica 2019, 126). In December 2017, Italy and Libya created a Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC).

At the time of this writing,⁵ the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) was not yet fully operational, although a MRCC is mandatory for a formal SAR zone, as it is charged with the coordination of SAR operations, so that the Italian MRCC is often involved and the JRCC functions as a provisional coordination facility. Moreover, even before the start of the third civil war in April 2019, authorities from the Libyan Coast Guard were not adequately equipped or trained to carry out and coordinate the SAR area effectively. In March 2019, the coordination of disembarkations from the *Mare Jonio* in Lampedusa was managed by the Italian MRCC, along with the Tripoli-based JRCC Tripoli, where officers hardly spoke any English, despite international conventions to the contrary, and the coast guard officer resorted to an Arab-speaking translator to communicate with Tripoli (Scavo 2019).

In this scenario, when a sea rescue by both the (few) NGOs and Libyan Coast Guard boats is underway, the Italian Maritime Coordination Center gives explicit “on-scene command” to the Libyan Coast Guard (Liguori 2019, 45). Nevertheless, the Libyan declaration of a SAR zone is just a reenactment of the preexistent collaboration between the two countries, which legally hands oversight to Libyan authorities when the rescue has to take place in Libyan international and territorial waters with the justification of ensuring Libyan sovereignty. This most recent form of cooperation, however, had an unregulated character that adds a great deal of confusion and leaves much room for interpretation by the stakeholders and the actors involved. Another nonlegal instrument that adds fuel to the fire is the Code of Conduct drafted by the Italian government in July 2017 (Statewatch 2017), which applies to NGOs present at sea. Under the code, NGOs are banned from entering Libyan waters to rescue migrants and obligated to accept the deployment of Italian vessels with armed police onboard to investigate, in cooperation with the Libyan authorities, trafficking of people in Libyan waters. NGO vessels are thus not permitted to transfer people who have been rescued to other vessels at sea, and rescue crews are required to return to port

for disembarkation. In parallel with the support provided to the Libyan SAR team and its activities, as well as the growing general criticism of the activities carried out by the NGOs, which are accused of being an “incentive for human smugglers to arrange departures” (Senato della Repubblica 2017, 9), Italy’s interior minister imposed limitations on NGOs’ rescue activities involving migrants, epitomized by the Code of Conduct that has to be signed by maritime NGOs. The main aspects advanced by the code are, first, NGO vessels are prohibited from entering Libyan territorial waters except in exceptional circumstances and in compliance with the previous authorization; second, NGOs should not interfere with vessel satellite tracking devices, which is problematic as the presence of an NGO vessel activates the obligation to an SAR operation; third, NGOs should also commit “not to make communications or send light signals to facilitate the departure and embarkation of vessels carrying migrants.”⁶ As migrant boats have no navigation lights, dinghies departing from Libya at night can only be spotted in the darkness by means of spotlights aboard rescue vessels (Cusumano 2019).

The first example of cooperation in such an unregulated legal framework dates to 10 May 2017, before the declaration of the Libyan SAR area. The Libyan Coast Guard interrupted a rescue operation by Sea-Watch and returned nearly 500 people from international waters to Libya (Elumami 2017). The Libyan intervention was coordinated by the Italian MRCC, which instructed the NGO vessel to let the Libyan boat take the lead in the SAR operation. This incident marked a turning point, with the Italian MRCC turning from an actor of inclusion to one of exclusion by giving explicit indications to the Libyan Coast Guard. Importantly, this happened at a time when the Italian judiciary had also taken the first steps in the same direction by opening up investigations against SAR NGOs regarding the facilitation of illegal immigration (Cuttitta 2017).

The second event took place in parallel with the first failed attempt for Libya to declare an SAR zone in December 2017. In March 2018, the Proactiva Open Arms boat rescued two vessels in distress despite threats from the Libyan Coast Guard, which, as reported by a Spanish journalist on the boat, approached the vessel and threatened to shoot the NGOs boat’s crew if they did not release the migrants. This happened in Libyan international waters, and the Libyan Coast Guard, which was the first to reach the NGO’s boat, claimed authority over them. In this case, the NGO claimed that the Italian maritime rescue center did not grant enough time to Libyan authorities.

The unregulated framework for border activities privileges SAR activ-

ities and operations led solely by either the Italian or the Libyan Coast Guard. This does not mean that SAR operations are not carried out by private or NGOs vessels, but it rules out almost entirely the legal commitment related to the detection of a vessel in distress or greatly limits external eyes on such operations. At the same time, involvement is more than evident at the informal level of Italian authorities, which would confirm the jurisdiction and obligations of Italy under international human rights. The sea border is not only the creation of a new territorial fix but a space of deregulation in which the rationales of institutions and agencies representing the two countries coexist and deflect accountability vis-à-vis international norms by means of informal and practical cooperation.

5. Conclusion

This chapter investigated the borderwork emerging in the space of the sea between Italy and Libya. By adopting a diachronic perspective, it focused on cooperation agreements and practices between Italy and Libya since the early 2000s and claims that an exclusive focus on the externalization of migration and border control in Libya-Italy relations can be misleading. The cooperation strategies that have emerged between the two countries since 2011 are not invented but build on preexisting practices and enable their consolidation. The focus on their evolution and historical dimension sheds some light on the borderwork and the rationales behind the current cooperation, stressing that migration control is not the only issue at stake and that the juridical-political indistinction arising from such a scenario allows both parties to escape legal constraints and reinforce cooperation in the long run.

Since the early 2000s, Italian authorities have sought cooperation with Libyan authorities and engaged with EU-sponsored programs of border management with little if any compliance with international legal regimes. The cooperation between Italy and Libya before 2011 was reinforced through soft law and an unregulated framework after 2015 by ruling out judicial obligations. Cooperation at sea created not only a case of shifting borders but a real scenario in which the borders do not overlap with the physical borders and sovereignty concerns but allow for the creation of buffer zones (Meier 2020)—areas that are doomed by juridical-political indistinction in which legal accountability for maritime operations is limited.

As the analysis outlines, the agreements signed between Italy and Libya since the turn of the century follow a coherent pattern of coopera-

tion to counter illegal migration and patrol the sea borders. The analysis outlines that, despite the downfall of the Gaddhafi regime in 2011, the same rationales continue to apply. The 2008 Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation ensured the legalization of cooperation on migration control with little room for international legal regime obligations, which was challenged by the *Hirsi* judgment in 2012. Nevertheless, the kind of cooperation and borderwork sketched out in that treaty persisted even after 2011 because of the soft-law instruments that allowed for the circumvention of legal obligations.

On the one hand, the argument of ensuring Libyan sovereignty and developing sea patrols to protect the migrants' lives and secure borders by military actors has given rise to a series of jurisdictional voids around bordering practices. The overlapping of sovereignties through national institutions and agencies' ambiguous practices foster this gray area of competence and responsibility, including patrols and rescues that put sea borders under the microscope without establishing a legal and political definition. On the other hand, this body of soft-law agreements and MoU has proliferated and allowed the two states to delay and, to date, avoid any commitments to protect human rights and adopt a stronger convention that would require time and political will from the actors involved.

In this context, the involvement of Italian authorities at the informal level is more than evident, which appears to confirm the obligations of Italy under international human rights norms. The sea border is not only the creation of a new territorial fix with its own complexities but a space of deregulation and reformulation where the main stakeholders rely on informal and practical cooperation. As a result, the worrisome gray legal zones increase in which accountability and control mechanisms are highly dispersed and difficult to establish.

Notes

1. Article 11-bis, Legislative Decree No. 286/1998.
2. *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy* [GC] App no. 27765/09 (ECtHR, 23 February 2012).
3. For an unofficial translation of the memorandum, see the Odysseus Network blog, https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/MEMORANDUM_translation_finalversion.doc.pdf. Accessed 24 September 2021.
4. The IMO is the UN's global standard-setting authority for the safety, security, and environmental performance of international shipping. See <https://www.imo.org/en/About/Pages/Default.aspx>. Accessed 24 September 2021.

5. The chapter was last revised on 4 November 2021.

6. Code of conduct for NGOs undertaking activities in migrants' rescue operations at sea. <https://www.avvenire.it/c/attualita/Documents/Codice%20ONG%20migranti%2028%20luglio%202017%20EN.pdf>. Accessed 4 November 2021.

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EIGHT | Boundaries and Spaces of Syrian Power

Syrian Migration to Morocco

VIRGINIA FANNY FACCENDA

1. Introduction

In 2015, it was common to walk around the city of Rabat, Morocco, and see refugees in the street holding up a sign that read, “We are Syrian refugees” or displaying a copy of their passport. They sat in front of some crossings or in strategic parts of the city, like supermarkets, mosques, and train stations. “How did they manage to reach Morocco?” people wondered. “Why are there Syrian refugees in Morocco?” These questions prompted an interest to explore a context that appeared to be not only far from Syria but also far from the center of international interest at the time, namely the Syrian civil war and the Middle East (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; Carpi 2019). Because this phenomenon cannot be condensed to a purely Gulf, Mashreq, or Europe issue, it allows a perspective on how Syria’s national borders have expanded, and in this regard, the transformation of Syrian spaces of power needs to be highlighted.

The presence of Syrian refugees outside their country of origin is an interesting access point to shift scientific interest and explore Syrian political processes beyond Syria. On the one hand, the presence of Syrians outside their country’s national borders makes it possible to rethink Syrian polity in terms of spaces beyond a single territory. On the other hand, it compels the researcher to reconsider the various ways in which to study Syrian power beyond a national framework.

The North African region is one example. Little studied and seldom seen in the literature on Syrian political migration, the infraregional mobility between Syria and Morocco opens a new analytical perspective from which to consider as yet unexplored *spaces*.

Syrians started migrating to Morocco in the late 1960s, and this migration is the result of decades of experiences involving different trajectories. After the first wave of intellectuals and professionals who had migrated to enter the Moroccan educational system, some entrepreneurs came to invest in particular fields and exploit their major economic and social capital. The most recent flow of migration consists of a heterogeneous population fleeing war; after a long journey through Turkey, Egypt, and Algeria, they reached Morocco.

By studying the Syrian polity in Morocco, this contribution aims to broaden the *boundaries* and the *spaces* through which to apprehend Syrian political processes and the exercise of power. It suggests using the notion of boundaries and the process of bounding (Paasi 1998) as analytical lenses to observe Syrian interactions and conflicts in Morocco in order to explore Syrian processes of power. By considering boundaries as relational and sociopolitical constructions, the bounding process suggests two major levels of analysis: first, it helps to overcome the nation-state as the only natural, inherited place through which to focus the analysis of the process of power. In this sense, it helps to study space as a production (Lefebvre 1991) and an ongoing process of construction and negotiation (Massey 2005). The dominant narratives concerning Syrian borders and its exercise of power are mostly analyzed from a nation-state angle and fail to examine what boundaries are or which borders need to be considered. Such a perspective makes it possible to explore the relationship between space and power by, on the one hand, considering the non-state-centric or territorial dimension of Syrian polity and, on the other hand, going beyond the monolithic way of considering Syria's domestic center of power in its leadership and political institutions.

Second, the rebounding approach not only makes it possible to overcome the national framework but also to take other areas of sovereignty into account. Studying the Syrian polity in Morocco allows us to reconsider the limits of empirically observing power and the different modalities of its exercise (Weber 1978) and effects (Foucault 2001). In particular, it lets us expand the *margins* of Syrian power and examine the relationship between the center and the periphery, which tends to be reduced to a dichotomist view in support of or against its leadership (i.e., for or against Assad). By contrast, looking through the cleavages and

interactions among Syrians in Morocco helps provide a better picture of what happens at the *margins*, how the structure of power may change, and how liminal spaces and in between borders between communities (Di Peri 2020) can be used to explore the power dynamics.

This contribution consists of three main parts. In the first part, the emphasis is on building an analytical framework to analyze Syrian power beyond the national context. In this regard, the notion of borders and boundaries as sociopolitical process (Newman 2003) will be taken into account.

The second part retraces the domestic spaces in which Syrian power is often analyzed. This part will demonstrate how Syrians' migration broadens Syrian spaces and will help us to explore power. The third and final part goes into detail on the fieldwork. By linking the *boundaring* process (Paasi 1998) with a theoretical approach on cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini 2005), we develop a lens on Syrian social interactions in Morocco through which to analyze modes of government and the exercise of power in the context of migration.

Because of the absence of archives or specific literature, reconstructing Syrians' trajectories in Morocco has not been a simple task. Through deep fieldwork based on grounded method theory and by reconstructing life trajectories and combining them with observations of people's participation in everyday life in Morocco, I met several Syrian families. Syrian interactions will be analyzed by using data from the fieldwork conducted in the cities of Rabat, Tangier, Oujda, and Nador in 2014 and 2015. The in-depth interviews were done in the Syrians' homes, restaurants, and private schools or through daily interactions in the street. In addition, data were collected through observations of the social and political environment, as well as the Syrians' daily organization in Moroccan cities or districts.

2. Beyond National Frameworks: Using Borders and Boundaries as Political Processes to Question Power

Since 2011, the Syrian conflict and forced migration of its 6 million citizens¹ have compelled researchers to consider how Syrian national borders are shifting. The interest in studying space and power regarding Syrian migration responds to two main needs. The ongoing conflict not only calls into question the modalities of access to the Syrian territory but also invites researchers to redefine the spaces through which to investigate Syrian power beyond the national framework.

This perspective beyond national borders has been deeply analyzed in transnational studies (Portes et al. 1999; Basch et al. 1994; Appadurai 1991). In transnationalism, the role of migrants and their practices relies heavily on acts of resistance that challenge the borders of the nation-state (Kearney 1991). In this case, migrants' transnational lives are directly linked to the formation of the nation-state (Basch et al. 1994; Guarnizo and Smith 1998), and their practices are mostly presented through the level of integration and the dream to return to the homeland (Anwar 1979) or through traditional forms of investment that can shape the political and economic fields of the two countries. The example of Palestinians as long-term displaced communities is illuminating in this respect. The Palestinian diaspora has made significant attempts to overcome methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and deal with the portrait of their homeland beyond national frames (Richter-Devroe and Salih 2018). In analyzing this imaginary place (Johnson and Shehadeh 2013), scholars present homeland-oriented politics through emotional participation (Gabiam and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2017), where mobilization (Sayigh 1997), resistance (Clifford 1994), or national identity (Nassar 2001) is an aspect of diasporic Palestinian life. By contrast, transnationalism challenges national borders and seeks to overcome the only idea of the state project through the relationship between identity and territory (Peteet 2007). It seems that its conceptualization of migration tends to essentialize the *center* as the motherland and takes the *margins* for granted by failing to examine what is *inside* and *outside*. Following this perspective, this contribution aims to rethink borders not as a given, stable concept but rather as an ever-changing political construct, as well as a category from which to begin the observation.

In this sense, the study of borders has conquered the scientific agenda; in other words, there is a shift in how borders are viewed: not as simple territorial lines but as analytical categories that can be used to apprehend power. The term *border* refers to a linear, territorial, and rather institutional limit. By contrast, *boundary* represents a conception of the symbolic and social border between political communities. In scientific literature, the *border* has been given more prominent political value by being used to express territorial power balances. Moreover, border studies have already proposed the *bordering* approach (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002; Meier 2015), which is not limited to a geographical conception of the division of territories but has been used repeatedly to analyze each process of demarcation between the "self" and the "other" from a political, symbolic, and cultural point of view (Newman 2003).

Thus, Syria is an interesting case as it deals with borders and the process of bordering and debordering.

With the outbreak of the conflict, Syria's borders have come up for discussion. Syrian territory has been fragmented into different spaces of authority divided between the Assad regime, which continues to run the central administration, ISIS in some areas, and the PYD,² with its independent administration since 2013. Internal borders have fluctuated and become porous, and so have the country's external borders, which, because of the conflict dynamics, are under different authorities. Matthieu Cimino's book (2020) dealing with the study of Syrian borders and conflict is a rich source of information in this regard as it examines Syrian borders and boundaries as geographical, symbolic, and political processes. However, the dimension of the mobility of the country's citizens is missing. By contrast, Elizabeth Picard (2006b) proposed the study of Syrian entrepreneurs migrating to Lebanon in the 1950s as a point of access to apprehend the transformations of political processes in modern Syria. Following this reasoning and fitting into the discussion of Syrian borders and boundaries, this contribution focuses on a less explored process, which Anssi Paasi (1998) presents as *boundaring*.

As he mentions in his research on Finnish borders, Paasi (1998) states that *boundaries* are sociocultural processes that people use to try to make sense of the world at all spatial scales. Boundaries may be able to define, regulate, and explain social and political behaviors, as well as relational spaces, in order to apprehend the functioning of power. This perspective raises questions about the process of *reboundaring*, which involves the reconfiguration of Syrian boundaries in a migration context. To connect this process with the analysis of power, it was heuristically interesting to focus on an analysis of the political, economic, and social cleavages in Syria. The theoretical approach to cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini 2005; Delfosse 2008) makes it possible to explore some types of conflicts by analyzing social belonging, the construction of collective identity, and the shaping of political behavior (Bartolini 2005). Following this perspective on the reboundaring process and this connection between boundaries and cleavages has two goals: to reflect on the political demarcations in Syria (e.g., social structure, power relations, organization of space between isolated regions and cities, and the result of political reforms with the Baath government) and to observe current behaviors, those political processes that contribute to organize social space (Massey and Jess 1995) and regulate Syrians' polity in the social arena in Morocco.

Therefore, the process of rebounding seems to be an appropriate analytical framework through which to observe the updated modalities of the exercise of power beyond the national framework. Power is conceived not through vertical sovereignty but rather in its relational dimension (Foucault 1975; Weber 1965) through those techniques of domination that show who governs (and how) in a situation of mobility. This approach allows us to look at the Syrian polity as a new space of politics (Brambilla 2015) and as an arena of authority, where the heterogeneity of the economic, political, ideological, religious, and social cleavages that run through Syrian society move, regroup, and emerge in a situation of mobility. In this sense, rebounding means considering boundaries not as limits to sovereignty, but as analytical categories at the center of the study of societies (Rumford 2006).

3. Syrian Domestic Political Spaces and the Apprehension of Power

Taking the spaces and borders of Syrian power as categories to be probed not only responds to a methodological choice to gain access to Syria but also makes it possible to investigate the most established knowledge we have about Syrian power. Therefore, before revisiting national borders and exploring the field in Morocco, we should retrace the domestic spaces in which Syrian power is most studied.

The study of contemporary Syria (i.e., since 1960) often focuses on the Assad dynasty through the cult of Hafiz al-Assad (Seale 1995), his image and symbols (Wedeen 1999), and the legacy of his son Bashar and his modernization of Syria (Donati 2009), all of which contribute to building the center of Syrian power around the personal qualities of the country's leadership. The study of Syria's authoritarian regime has often been limited to the omnipresence of the leader and the "presidential monarchy" of the Assad family (Hinnebusch 2008), the Baath Party (Abu Jaber 1966; Torrey 1969; Trombetta 2013, 2014), and the support from military groups and rulers (Batatu 1981) that reduce the activities of the press or the opposition (Bozarslan 2013). Repression inside the country and violence as a mode of governing (Ismail 2018) seem to be key to analyzing how power is wielded within the regime.

The analysis of the Syrian space in political science literature before the current conflict mostly focused on its central structure of power (Trombetta 2014)—the patron, its hierarchy, and the bureaucratic system (Perthes 1995; Hinnebusch 1982, 3)—and translated into the party-army-bureaucracy triptych supported by the Alawite political elites.

Therefore, those institutions that exercise power over people, property, and land have been recognized as the structure of power (i.e., the state apparatuses that have forged a cohesive and stable center of authority).

In the Baathist regime, centralization was extreme, since everything was supposed to be referred to the central government and determined according to the final decision to the president (Kienle 1991). In particular, the Baath Party was created by a strong state capable of integrating Syria's internal conflicts and different social segments by introducing municipalities as a key element to frame the Syrian population without producing any local or opposed power (Balanche 2008).

While some scholars have focused on the Baath ideology and the single party that reinforced and concentrated power in a party-state center (Hinnebusch 2008), or Pan-Arabism (Klaz Belhadj and Abdennabi 2020), others have emphasized Alawite relations to frame the Syrian regime (Balanche 2006; Van Dam 1996). The neopatrimonial framework as neobureaucratic domination in political and social life (Haddad 2012; Kessler 2002), along with the clientelist networks (Balanche 2009; Heydemann 1999, 2004), tightened the links between the regime, the population, and the territory and contributed to centralizing power through inner dynamics. Thus, the centralization of power was also possible thanks to a great system of *jama'a*, or a "regrouping of power," and the dominant *asabiyya*,³ where religious, familial, or tribal relationships and the role of absolute fidelity link people in restricted circles.

Finally, the outbreak of the civil war in 2011 and the multitude of actors involved show how the Syrian territory is fragmented into different spaces of power (Hamdan 2020) with a mix of religious and political communities. Syrian territory has been divided into subspaces: Alawite spaces with *asabiyya* in power and the territory divided into regions under the control of the regime, the opposition, the Kurds, or ISIS (Yazigi 2016). As noted, these arguments do not dwell on how this structure of power may change or which other *spaces* this structure may govern. While some studies have challenged this central perspective—for example, by analyzing the role and agency of charitable associations (Ruiz de Elvira 2019)—the perspective of questioning and deconstructing essential *borders*, *boundaries*, and political cleavages of the Syrian regime and its power still needs further exploration.

In Syria, more fundamental cleavages are often boiled down to religious differences through a sectarian-ethnic mosaic (Hinnebusch 1982), or by contrasting the cities and the rural areas or considering some social groups and the elites in power (Van Dusen 1972, 1975). In addition, the

link between migration and Syrian cleavages creates logics in support of or in opposition to the *center* of power (i.e., the Assad leadership). Baeza and Pinto (2016) report on the growing support for the Assad regime in the diaspora in South America, whereas al Haj Saleh (2015) presents the opponents of and political activists against the Baath regime. By contrast, in Morocco, the interactions between the heterogeneous flows, along with their experiences and different temporalities, offer a wider scenario: building a political polity outside the Syrian nation-state passes through the construction of symbolic boundaries in a distinction between “one-self” and the “others,” a hierarchy between “old” and “new,” a continuous redefinition of a single cultural, linguistic unit of a homogeneous population. These interactions not only overcome those domestic spaces of Syrian power but also indicate the need to broaden the prism through which power is studied and to focus on the processes related to the *boundaries’* and *cleavages’* formation of a Syrian polity beyond national frameworks rather than the institutions or those opposed to the regime.

4. Syrian Reboundaring in Morocco: A Process to Exercise Power

The encounter between the Mashreq and the Maghreb—between East and West—becomes evident when the flows of Syrian refugees appear in major Moroccan cities: entire families who came to Morocco and intended to settle in an Arab and Muslim country far away from Syria or cross the border to Europe. This mobility shows long trips and the consequent politics of closure of national borders in the Arab countries (Ababsa 2015; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; Kelsey 2017). One example is the trips from Syria to Turkey or Lebanon with a medium-long stay in the refugee camps (Carpi 2019), followed by a flight to Egypt and an attempt to enter its economic system. With al-Sisi’s presidency in 2014, Syrians found it difficult to stay in the country,⁴ and the fear of being deported to Syria brought the majority of them to Algeria. There the economic and political allegiance with the Syrian regime did not help the Syrians who were looking for basic living conditions. So through clandestine contacts and the aid of *passeurs*, Syrian refugees crossed the closed-border points on Algeria’s border and entered Morocco.⁵

From a quantitative perspective, Morocco does not have a large number of Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This small number might be explained by the reluctance of Syrian refugees to register since Morocco does not have a proper asylum law. Even though Morocco signed the 1951 Con-

vention Relating to the Status Refugees and its Protocol in 1967, it does not have a legal domestic framework to implement it.⁶ In particular, the government of Morocco has instituted formal measures to deal with refugee affairs, such as collaboration with the Bureau des Réfugiés et Apatrides and the UNHCR to recognize and distribute identity papers that prevent individuals from deportation and enable them to legally reside and work on Moroccan territory.⁷ In another way, it might also be explained by the fact that, with the arrival of new flows of migrants in 2015, Morocco chose to legalize Syrian refugees for a year as foreigners or economic migrants, thereby depoliticizing their status and letting them enter society as ordinary workers.⁸ Nonetheless, it is essential to note that Syrian mobility in Morocco cannot be reduced to a single flow of contemporary refugees. It started long before and has contributed to overcoming the division between the Mashreq and the Maghreb that is often presented by area studies. In the 1960s in Syria, the authoritarian government of the political leader General Hafiz al-Assad caused a solid nationalism that also conquered the economic sphere. In particular, the Syrian policy of nationalization involved strong state-planning programs and the expropriation of private enterprises. In addition, the massive bureaucratization, the state's penetration into the villages, compulsory conscription, and control over academia (Balanche 2006) are examples of authoritarianism that led certain segments of the population opposed to the Baathist policies (Maoz and Yaniv 2014)—especially small and medium entrepreneurs—to migrate to Morocco. This first phase of Syrian settlement involved the birth of profitable specialized activities in the textile and construction industries, helping to build the image of the rich Syrian investor in the Moroccan social context. Two further flows of Syrian settlement can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, when the policy of Arabization of the Moroccan education system led to several Syrian students and Arabic-speaking teachers migrating to Morocco to establish private schools. In the 1980s, numerous workers and specialists in the wells-digging industry started businesses that continue to be recognized as typically Syrian.⁹

Morocco was also a strategic choice to overcome Syrian political borders and economic limitations. These experiences remind us that Syria and Morocco in the 1960s and 1980s openly adopted opposing political and ideological positions: socialist Syria was ruled exclusively by the Baath Party, was allied with the Soviet Union and strongly supported the Pan-Arab movement against the Arab national monarchies. By contrast, Morocco, as an absolute and capitalist monarchy ruled by King Hassan

II, had pro-American positions, supported Saudi Arabia, and was in clear opposition to the pro-USSR Baath Party ruling Syria. Crossing Moroccan borders means entering another political regime, the enemy of the motherland, albeit open to receiving foreign investment. In Morocco, the reception of Syrian *outsiders*, opponents of the regime, as well as Syrian investments by small entrepreneurs fleeing authoritarian Baathist policies, allowed the country to support and continue to nourish ideological political dissidence against the Syrian state.

In Morocco, given how difficult it is to give an accurate estimate of the number of Syrian residents, it is not possible to talk about “a little Syria.”¹⁰ However, in the city of Tangier in the north of the country, a Syrian mosque built by the Tatari, a major family of entrepreneurs from Syria, reminds us that we can find concrete signals of the delayed delocalization that contributes to the local, the particular, and, to some degree, the Syrian territory. This Syrian district may be recognized by the signals in the street or by asking some locals or taxis “how to reach Hayy Suryyi.”¹¹ Around the mosque, there are still some shops with Syrian signs: “Syrian blacksmith,” “Syrian shoemaker,” “Syrian school,” and the like. While these signs may be directly linked to the Syrian diaspora, the shops tell a story that deals with the past. On walks in the district to collect some information by talking with the locals, it was clear to see that most stores have been sold to Moroccans, and the school has been turned into a Quranic one open to everybody, not just Syrians. In the same way, just a few Syrian families may be found living there. Therefore, Hayy Suryyi as a Syrian district is not a sufficient access point through which to analyze the Syrian political space in Morocco. Syrian space in Morocco should not be pursued just in open spaces or specific places recognized as “Syrian.” On the contrary, the exploration of space should be expanded, and the fieldwork was not focused on one district or one city. Examining Syrian spaces in Morocco took me to different cities, Syrian restaurants, Moroccan hotels, private houses, schools, and borders. And from a theoretical point of view, space needed to be explored in the encounter between *borders* and *boundaries* (Meier 2013)—between Syrians’ interactions and daily lives in Morocco.

To analyze the construction of this Syrian polity, it has been heuristically useful to dwell on local everyday life. The space of everyday life seemed to be a microcosm (de Certeau 1980) in which one may understand different ways of governing beyond national borders. The everyday is an interesting framework through which to analyze the power relations among Syrians and between them and the state, which cannot be summarized as a single

binary relationship (Carpi and Glioti 2018). Thus, ordinary practices help to analyze space and relational processes of power.

The following paragraphs are an attempt to observe a bond of causality between the cleavages built in Syria and their reconfiguration in the Moroccan context by combining past experiences with the strategies of the present. In this regard, social cleavages, geographical origin, and ideological polarization are key to analyzing the boundaries of Syrian power in their *reboundaring* process.

4.1. *Social Cleavages*

Syrian agrarian reforms and the nationalization of banks and enterprises in the late 1960s formed part of the socialist tradition of the Baath regime, as well as a project to destroy opponents like the urban bourgeoisie (Balanche 2009; Hinnebusch 1982). They were also an example of the territorialization of Syrian power, whose goal was to boost national integration. In addition, the agrarian reforms seemed to be a way to embed the small landowners in state organizations and reduce the power of the urban strata (Balanche 2009). However, these policies caused the migration of a large number of small and medium entrepreneurs from Syria ready to invest their capital in a land “where everything needed to be imagined”:¹² Morocco. These first flows consisted of a specific social class from the cities of Damascus and Aleppo, who could shape a social image of the rich and educated Syrian businessman. Large enterprises dealing with the textile and construction sectors controlled the market in the city of Tangier and Casablanca in Morocco. This kind of migration seemed to offer a way to escape the socialist restrictions of the Baathist reforms and shape a kind of dissidence with Syrian power. In the same way, it also showed how Syrian investments and economic projects found a place in the Morocco of the 1960s by letting Syrian *savoir faire* conquer the Moroccan imaginary and Syrian subjectivities. In Tangier, K. and her family explained to me that they had come to Morocco in 1967; since her father was against Assad and a member of the Sunni party. In Tangier, her father started working in the textile industry: “We had lost everything with the nationalization policy in Syria. But here, Morocco had just gained independence; everything needed to be built.”¹³ Syrians invested in a new field: “We, Syrians became the image of the colonizer; we gave jobs to Moroccans and created an empire. They depended on us.”¹⁴ In this way, the image of the rich Syrian started to be built in the Moroccan imaginary.

T. and his family are from Damascus and settled in the Syrian district in Tangier. They explained to me how “everybody knows us thanks to our textile business. We’re Syrians. We came here with our money, and we even built a mosque following the Shams style.”¹⁵ The first flows came mostly from Damascus and Aleppo and were businessmen and students: “I came to Morocco in ’74 since my husband couldn’t complete his studies in medicine without doing military service. We escaped, and here we became doctors.”¹⁶

Nowadays, several companies, restaurants, and cafés are run by Syrian entrepreneurs who have become visible in the business sector and built their own economic space.

By contrast, the nature of the current conflict has led to a disintegration of cities, family groups, and interpersonal relationships. Sectarianism in Syria (Balanche 2018), rural-urban migration, and internal divisions in the cities have led to the migration of an entire population from distant regions, from different social statuses among which there was no longer a division between those who are *for* and those who are *against* the regime. In Morocco, the success of a class of Syrian entrepreneurs and intellectuals enhanced not only the creation of a cultural division but also the construction of a system of behaviors capable of influencing collective action (Bartolini 2005). Consequently, the arrival of the new influx of Syrian refugees fits within a context already built by their predecessors. Many refugees, most of them peasants, have been completely rejected, considered *gitans*¹⁷ and begging in the streets. They are considered invisible and viewed as “Syrians that we don’t know and we’ve never seen before.”¹⁸ The owner of a Syrian restaurant in Rabat explained to me that he did not want Gypsies to work for him—he wants real “Syrians.”¹⁹ With a lack of social structure to welcome refugees in Morocco, these bonds between Syrian citizens became essential. In a simple schematization, the Syrian entrepreneurs and intellectuals of the late 1960s were well integrated into the economic network and created their space of domination in the Moroccan market and the relationship with the Syrian refugees.

These social cleavages suggest not only the need to explore Syrian relational power but also to create different ways of conceiving space. Begging in the streets with a Syrian passport or running the best-known restaurants in the city center became different ways of conquering Moroccan local space.

4.2. *Geographical Cleavages*

It is worth remembering that the Syrian civil war marked a strong sectarianism of the conflict and a consequent reconfiguration of the cities and affiliations in the country. Such an identification of Syrian refugees through geographical association has not only created new identities and a sense of belonging in their homeland but also contributed to producing dynamics of marginalization within the Moroccan context. Syrian refugees live on the outskirts of large cities like Rabat, Tangier, Oujda, and Nador. Different families share the same apartment, but all of them grew up in the same neighborhood in Syria.

The “Homs refugees” stayed with the other “Homs refugees,” and so did those from Hama, Aleppo, and so on. In Tangier, a residence has been taken up by a whole village coming from Hama: inside three apartments, there were two or four families from the same neighborhood in Syria. The residence was not far from the sea, though not close to the city center or the Syrian district. “In this residence, there are just us; to find other Syrian refugees, you need to change districts. We don’t know them.”²⁰ It is interesting to see that most refugees have been living outside the Syrian district, opting for a more economical solution in the suburbs, where other migrants (mostly from sub-Saharan Africa) were living, such as the district of Boukhalef. Hence, the Syrian space widens, is reconfigured, and changes according to the economic and social cleavages that lead refugees to look for more economical solutions of living. The construction of Syrian space has acquired geometries that change according to geographical cleavages.

The same happened in Nador, where Syrians explained to me how they had been displaced: “In this building, we all come from Homs; in each apartment in the building, there are people from my village or not far from it. We can’t live with Syrians we don’t know.”²¹ Thus, belonging to a city turns out to be the bond within which relationships are built and families are reconfigured, which has allowed a circuit of solidarity, cooperation, and protection confined within the community or tribe—but only in that one.

In this regard, language also becomes an important dividing line: the most vulnerable, illiterate classes or those who showed dialectal nuances different from the Damascene Syrian of urban centers became a further source of isolation: “They are Syrians just because they show a Syrian passport, but they don’t speak our dialect. They’re Kurds, Gypsies, or Moroccans pretending to be Syrians.”²² This geographical fragmentation

shows a segmented Syria but also indicates how these spaces have found their place and are reconfigured in new schemas in the social scheme of Morocco. Therefore, the relationship between space and politics also passes through the bonds of cooperation or forms of opposition (Duez and Simonneau 2018) as a new territorialization of the political authority.

In addition, in the north of the country, most Syrian refugees were spending time in the hotels or cafés close to the border with Melilla, the Spanish enclave, biding their time to cross it and enter into Europe. Thus, the new cartography of Syrian spaces is gaining visibility in Morocco and conquering its marginal spaces, peripheries, and borders.

4.3. Ideological Cleavages

Although different flows of Syrian migration found their place in Morocco following the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, ideological polarization has led to a lack of participation in associative activities and increased the constant fear of “opening one’s mouth.” In this regard, the difficulty of conceiving oneself as part of a united community—through associations or by creating relations of interdependence—reintroduces the dynamics of isolation, reticence, and control that operated in Syria during the current conflict. Since in Syria the secret services dominated and operated in broad daylight (Bozarslan 2013), dynamics of isolation were also transplanted to the hosting context. In Morocco, you can find Syrians either for or against Assad: “Syrians have always been afraid of talking. Even here, there is always somebody who can write reports on you.”²³

In particular, in a regime where the secret services were considered a political institution capable of governing, controlling, and shaping the space of Syrian sociability, it is interesting to note how these dynamics are located in Morocco. In addition, the different waves of Syrian migration have not built a community, if by community we mean a social unity and a territorial organized group, nor a common sense of belonging (Weber 1978).

The lack of unity among the Syrian population in Morocco has also produced a lack of participation in associationism in Morocco and the public space. One example is a Syrian association created by teachers and intellectuals who had migrated to Morocco to share activities and trips to Syria; it was closed after the spread of the civil war. “We’re less afraid in Morocco, but we don’t need to share our ideas or spend time with those that are pro-regime. We can’t discuss freely with people who are against doing so.”²⁴

The absence of places of leisure and of shared activities suggests how

political conflicts are still perpetuated—not only in continuity with the Syrian experiences but also in dialogue with the Syrian configuration in Morocco: “Here we can live in peace. Thanks to Mohamed VI, we can talk. We can share with Moroccans but not with Syrians. What if they denounce me to the embassy?”²⁵ A Moroccan expert on migration explained how Syrians could stay safely in Morocco but needed to follow Moroccan rules in terms of religious and political behaviors.²⁶ In addition, they needed to be controlled by Moroccan institutions: “They could be terrorists. Syrians may bring political, religious, and cultural problems. The Shams has always brought troubles.”²⁷

If the image of a community derives from the creation of a nation-state and assumes that the space becomes the main place in which to regulate one’s actions, Syrian migration to Morocco has recreated a dynamic of sectarianism, marginalization, and conflict that was already present in the motherland. The previous flows of Syrians’ weak and rather absent response to the new Syrian refugees indicates the fear of the Moroccan order: “We don’t know them. We don’t want to have problems with the Moroccan government. What if they’re jihadists? Or Shiites?”²⁸

The positioning for or against the regime, the regional belonging, the social class, and, in some cases, the location within the city itself have prevented the recognition of belonging to the same community. “At the beginning [1970–80], we used to have a Syrian network here. Then, social classes split us up.”²⁹ Or “Political belonging influences Syrian relationships. If you want to be neutral, it’s better to stay away from any relationship.”³⁰ Syrians’ socialization in Morocco was limited to marriages or funerals or distant economic bonds since they had little in common.³¹

So when the relationship of obedience to Syrian power collapses with the act of leaving the country—whether through force or because of a deliberate act—it is interesting to see what becomes of the *center* of control and domination and how the Syrian *space* of socialization becomes a mode to govern Syrian relationships. The act of “leaving” means more than staying tied to a sentimental dimension, rituals, or a sense of belonging to the national community (Adelkhah 2012). “Leaving the state” also means reproducing in a more or less conscious way those conflicts or boundaries that conjure a story that is already known and allows us to reflect on the dynamics and processes of the exercise of power in a dimension of mobility. Syrians in Morocco also build their subjectivities through their experiences and relations with the Moroccan context. This is another way to grasp and analyze the spaces in which being Syrian can be constructed.

5. Conclusion

By observing Syrian socialization in Morocco, this contribution engaged in some reflections about the relation between Syrian space and power. Syrians' mobility to Morocco appeared to be a concrete situation through which to examine the frontiers of power, its reconfiguration, and, above all, the concrete practices of its exercise. The aim was to overcome a personified and substantial approach of the Syrian regime and observe what the other *boundaries* and spaces are in which Syrian domination and logics of power may govern a specific political situation in other spaces beyond the national framework, such as the Syrian polity and the arena of socialization in Morocco. This approach made it possible to place the dimensions of *boundaries* and *spaces* at the center of the analysis of Syrian power. In this way, Syrian migration to Morocco helped us to examine the sociopolitical frontiers of power, allowing not just an investigation of what is the *center* and what is the *margin* of the state but also a reconsideration of how boundaries may inform Syrian political processes.

The Syrian polity in the informal arena in Morocco makes it possible to draw conclusions about at least two matters. First, starting with Syrian migration to Morocco, it is possible to rethink the cartography of Syrian statehood, including new geographical borders and new political spaces, where spaces mean not only crossing national borders but also connecting *borders* and *boundaries* in the local hosting context. Second, as an access point, through the perspective of *reboundaring*, Syrian behaviors and interactions helped us to rethink how Syrian cleavages can be translated into observable practices (Bevir and Rhodes 2010) and how they become terms to question a new spatiality of politics, such as the decentralization and the territorialization of everyday life practices in the arena of socialization in Morocco. Finally, Syrians' mobility to Morocco not only redefines the spatiality of power by incorporating and reproducing the boundaries of authority, but becomes an interesting field for rethinking Syrian political processes and analyzing its exercise of power *through* the boundaries. After all, Syrians' mobility confirms what Fariba Adelhah (2012) presented in her researches about Iranians, revealing how it is possible to "leave" the state without leaving it completely.

Notes

1. For update information see the UNHCR section dedicated to Syrian emergency: <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>. Accessed 4 December 2021.

2. PYD (Democratic Union Party) is the Syrian side of the Kurdistan Worker's Party, PKK.

3. The *asabiyya* is a type of solidarity among members of this social network where the links are boundaries: largely determined by family, clan, or community membership and aimed at suppressing any kind of opposition. For more details about this kind of relationships in the Arab and Muslim countries, see Picard 2006a.

4. See the articles published in local and international newspapers (Smith 2016).

5. Some information is found in Moroccan newspapers (Telquel, Jeune Afrique, Yabiladi). All the information mentioned in this chapter was collected from interviews. See in particular Dimitrakis 2017; Siouane 2019.

6. See the decree dealing with the application of the Geneva Convention published in the Official Bulletin no. 2341, 6 September 1957, modified by the Decree 2-84-846, 28 December 1984. <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=5d6d1bbc4>. Accessed 4 December 2021.

7. For further information, see Law no. 02-03 relating to the entry and stay of foreigners in the Kingdom of Morocco, to emigration and irregular immigration as well as the report of the Gadem NGO: <https://gadem-guide-judiquie.info/category/asile/situation-refugies/>. Accessed 4 December 2021.

8. By 31 December 2014, 27,332 requests for legalization had been submitted; 17,916 of these applications were successful. This process of legalization affected 116 nationalities, including 6,600 Senegalese, 5,250 Syrians, 2,380 Nigerians, and 2,281 Ivoirians. For more information, see the report of the Gadem NGO.

9. This information was collected in the field through in-depth interviews with Syrian entrepreneurs and Moroccan members of civil society.

10. For example, there is a "Little Syria" in Turkey (Kotan 2019; Agence France-Presse 2015).

11. In Arabic, it means "Syrian district."

12. This idea was shared by many Syrian entrepreneurs I met during my fieldwork.

13. Interview with K. and family from Damascus. Tangier, November 2014.

14. Interview with K. and family.

15. Interview with T. and family from Damascus. Tangier, December 2014.

16. Interview with T., Syrian doctor from Aleppo. Rabat, October 2014.

17. Expression used by most of my Syrian interviewees, meaning "Gypsies."

18. Interview with T. Most interviewees shared the feeling of not knowing and not recognizing new refugees as Syrian citizens. They share the feeling of being "teased" and denigrated because of the attitudes and image of the new refugees.

19. Interview with R., owner of a Syrian restaurant in Rabat. Rabat, November 2015. My interviewee recognized the identity of "Syrians" through their savoir-faire, their level of culture, and their determination to find a job.

20. Interview with M., a Syrian refugee and dentist living with his family in a residence in Tangier. Tangier, February 2015.

21. Interview with O., Syrian refugee, father of three children living with his family in Nador. Nador, February 2015.

22. Interview with R., Syrian teacher from Damascus. Rabat, October 2015.
23. Interview with G. A., Syrian teacher from Daraa. Rabat, November 2014.
24. Interview with G.A.
25. Interview with H., Syrian from Daraa. Rabat, November 2014.
26. In Syria, most of the population is Sunni, but the elites in power are Alawite. In Morocco, they follow Maliki rite in Islam. Other faiths are accepted as long as they do not bother the political and religious order.
27. Interview with M., Moroccan researcher in migration studies. Tangier, December 2014.
28. Interview with M. T., Syrian businessman in Tangier. Tangier, January 2015. The same feeling was shared by many of my interviewees.
29. Interview with H., Syrian woman from Aleppo. Tangier, December 2015.
30. Interview with Q., Syrian intellectual from Damascus. Rabat, February 2015.
31. Information collected through several interviews. Rabat, Tangier, Oujda and Nador, January–March 2015.

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PART III

Places

NINE | Contestation and Appropriation of Space in Lebanese Post-Civil War Cinema

THOMAS RICHARD

1. Introduction

Between 1975 and 1991, the Lebanese civil war resulted in, among other effects, the destruction of ancient common spaces where individuals and communities had previously been able to meet, share, and argue. These spaces, particularly those in Beirut, had developed between the end of Ottoman rule and the first decades of the independent state of Lebanon (Eddé 2009). During the war, urban space was segmented along sectarian lines, with each subspace creating its own particular urban public space. Since these spaces were defined by their appropriation by militias and political parties (Meier 2013), they can hardly be considered spaces available for contention, that is, a space in which political, social, and religious factions would compete against each other, as this spatial appropriation can also be considered the start of an enduring political privatization of space that silenced any dissident voices (Delage 2004; Jreijiry 2018). For personal or commercial reasons, private actors supplemented this political privatization with a more classical appropriation of what remained of the public space as they considered the space to be theirs. In the same way as the militias, they did not allow any kind of trespassing in what they considered “private” property (Khayat 2002). At the same time, the front lines were spaces where contention took place at the cost of destroying the urban public space: no-man’s-lands ran between the barricades, which means that these spaces intellectually ceased to exist beyond this representation of emptiness (Coates 2014).

This is particularly clear in the film *Beirut the Encounter* (Alaouié 1981), which was filmed during the war. In the film, lovers on either side of the front lines cannot find a common space to meet, so they have to resort to using the telephone to exchange a few words (Rugo 2018). The urban space shown in the film has been destroyed, especially in downtown Beirut, where the refugee families live—near the no-man’s-land, which is filmed as a nonexisting space (Salhab 2012). The only space where the two protagonists can almost meet is the airport, which, apart from being appropriated by warring factions, is itself another type of nonexisting place—it is by nature a transitional space where people stay only a few hours, in a generic environment that elicits little appropriation by the films’ characters. The airport, as presented in the movie, is more a gateway to leaving Lebanon than a public space.

My goal with this study is to examine how urban space in Lebanon has been represented on film since the civil war. In this regard, I follow in the steps of Lina Khatib, who developed an understanding of how images make an impact on Middle Eastern politics and how an analysis of these images makes it possible to understand the underlying aspect of political struggles (2012, 15, 168). This chapter is rooted in an interpretation of the cinematic image as a way to make tangible the ghosts of Lebanon’s memories (Ayoub 2017; Khatib 2011). It is also based on research about the use of art as a memorial tool, particularly when it comes to the representation of space within an artistic framework (Nikro 2017, 2019). The connection between politics, space, and film is explored by Ghada Rahal (2013), and I link this dimension with Robert Eid’s work on memory and identity within postwar Lebanese cinema (2010). At first glance, it appears that in most movies shot in Lebanon after 1991, public space is remarkably absent, as most of these films were shot inside the characters’ homes: a private space, where, if there is any drama, it develops between the walls of the house. This appears to be understood as a metaphor for Lebanon after the war, meaning that the image of the country as a whole is that of a interstitial pseudonational space. I intend to study this metaphor and to link it with what remains of image production where public space is contentious. In other words, I will study under which conditions, and by which means, Lebanese directors consider and portray public space as a potentially contentious space in their films.

Urban spaces mostly concern Beirut, its main squares and streets and their reinterpretation in light of the memory of the civil war, as no other city in Lebanon has enjoyed such representation in films, which, apart from the capital, mainly focus on villages (Stone 2007, 152). In films that

are set in the countryside, directors often use roads as a dual symbol of connection and separation, which again has to be understood through the visual imagery of the civil war. Therefore, our corpus comprises Lebanese films (both documentaries and fiction films) shot after 1991 that focus in particular on the production of images about public spaces in Lebanon's post-civil war context. The choices made by film directors lead us to focus especially on two spaces represented as extremely symbolic regarding the issue of contention, and which are given contrasting cinematographic and political status. Directors have cultivated an image of Lebanon as a series of intertwined privatized spaces, either for political reasons or for personal appropriation, thus leaving no gap for a possible space for public political competition and debate. Based on spatial memories of the civil war, the very image of space is defined in military terms of occupation and control. Thus, the country's image is that of a series of gated communities (in both political and economic terms) separated by former no-man's-lands, with a mapping of the country that is developed as a metaphor for its social and political realities. I will first study the production of images about Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut, a symbol of the Lebanese nation since the 1930s (Volk 2010, 65). In documentary films, it is presented as a space used competitively by political actors seeking to appropriate it. Then I will focus on the streets and roads of the urban space through works of fiction that aim to interrogate the status of these roads along the civil war's front lines, which face contemporary political and personal privatization.

2. Filming Martyrs' Square as a Space of Competitive Political Appropriation

Situated in downtown Beirut, Martyrs' Square has been one of the main public spaces in the city since the late Ottoman period and was enhanced during the Mandate when the city was rebuilt following its proclamation as capital of Lebanon (Eddé 2009, 50). The square received its current name in 1931 after the country gained independence. Its iconic statue, representing Lebanese resistance against Ottoman rule, was installed in 1960. At the time, particularly in Lebanese-European coproductions of popular cinema, Martyrs' Square was presented as the center of a well-off capital—a public space where communities mingled in the city center. Things changed during the civil war, when it was situated on the front lines and became a symbol of the no-man's-land that divided the city, as can be seen in Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri's *War Generation*

Beirut (Brittain 2020; Salhab 2012). The restoration of this space and the surrounding area was at the core of the postwar Solidere program of urban restoration, which sought to simultaneously reconstruct the city, carry out archaeological surveys that could help to recreate a common memory among Lebanese, and rebuild a common space in which communities could meet (Stewart 1996). Unlike the Place de l’Etoile area, which was rebuilt rather quickly, the square still bears the marks of the civil war, and its restoration has only been partial, while the project as a whole, and particularly the reconstruction of Martyrs’ Square, has come under heavy criticism for creating an elite enclave within Beirut (Hourani 2012), destroying the ruins it claimed to protect (Fricke 2005), and, above all, recreating a false sense of memory that people could not relate to (Larkin 2009; Nagel 2002; Dados 2009, 169). As such, it still appears as an interstitial space between the former sectarian divisions of the war, with each side controlling part of the area around the square (Beauchard 2012). The statue in the middle of the square was restored and put back in its original place in the 2000s, but bullet holes dating back to the civil war were preserved, giving the statue a new meaning of remembrance and, theoretically, representing how the Lebanese will not go to war against each other again (Khalaf 2013, 169).

The statue remains guarded by soldiers (although it has no honor guard), and some graffiti were visible around it and on its pedestal the last time I visited.¹ The official commitment to making Martyrs’ Square a symbol of memory and peace appears not to have been appropriated by the Lebanese population (Ababsa 2002)—especially by political factions, which tend to consider the square as a space up for grabs since the 2005 demonstrations and the “Cedar Revolution” that put an end to Syria’s military presence in Lebanon (Abu Fadil 2005; Knio 2005). The contrast between the post-civil war symbol of the square and its appropriation by political parties has drawn the attention of film directors, who have focused on this particular space to document the political rifts within Lebanese society while simultaneously imbuing it with a new cinematographic meaning. This was particularly clear in two documentaries from opposite sides of the Lebanese political spectrum. The first is Katia Jarjoura’s *Terminator the Last Battle* (2006), shot during the 2005 demonstrations. The director follows a former militiaman, nicknamed the Terminator (“because he wants to terminate everything,” in his own words), a supporter of Michel Aoun, who was at the forefront of the demonstrations. The film documents the 14 March (at that time, comprising the Aounists) side of the demonstrations, which protested

against Syria's influence in Lebanon, and gives only very limited space to the 8 March demonstrations, led by Syria's allies. This way of directing the documentary mimics the demonstrations and turns it into a visual effect: demonstrators from opposing factions barely met each other on the square, and the Terminator, who claims to be protecting his comrades, has little chance to show his determination, as there is no opposition. Once one side flooded the square with its supporters, the other retreated, and there is very limited contestation over the appropriation of this public space. In contrast to the Egyptian revolution in 2011, clashes are scarce on the square, which means the number of images showing scenes of confrontation are limited, and film directors appear not to be interested in documenting such scenes (Riboni 2016; Richard 2019). Rather than clashes, the film develops the image of a contention in which side avoids its opposing faction in a sort of ballet that claims the land and occupies the square but avoids risking bloodshed—a metaphor for the lack of social and political public encounters in Lebanon in the post-civil war era. Civil war actors are still at the forefront of the demonstrations, personified by the Terminator, as militiamen play an important part in Lebanon's political culture and cultural representations (Hourani 2008), with the rest of the demonstrators behind them reproducing the situation of the civil war.

The Terminator himself, who eagerly awaits the return of his leader from exile to avenge his civil war defeat, embodies this iconic militiaman deeply scarred by the civil war. Seemingly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, with bursts of anger and melancholia, he is presented by the director as someone carrying the burden of the civil war but at the same time imposing it on Lebanese society (Haugbolle 2012): he tends to force other demonstrators to act according to the rules he chooses, including when it comes to national symbols such as the anthem and the flag, which he has appropriated, thereby symbolizing the contradictions of Lebanese politics. As a veteran militia member, he is presented as a type of outcast, living alone with few friends and no real occupation (Rivoal 2009). At the same time, however, it is this outcast, filmed as being trapped in his memory, who decides and defines how others have to demonstrate and develop their movement, deeply linking their occupation of the square with his own war experience of space, understood from a sectarian and military rather than a political point of view. Martyrs' Square is treated as public spaces were during the war by political parties, and by the Terminator himself, who, when not at home, literally lives in the square and makes his home in it, as a militiaman would, by

occupying the ground in case an enemy appears. The Terminator is a survivor who finds in the revolution a way to reenact the civil war (Sadek 2015) in the same place where he fought and to make history repeat itself to the point of being tragicomical, as the director suggests. The title of the film symbolizes this vision, as the revolution and the contestation of the Syrian presence in Lebanon are envisioned as a reenactment of the civil war by its veterans, who, in this case, define the way contestation can take place, people whom Katia Jarjoura (2007) calls “children of chaos” trying to define Lebanese identity after the civil war (Tabet 2013).

This production of images while filming Martyrs’ Square is also noticeable in another documentary from the opposite side of the political spectrum. Shot according to more militant guidelines than Jarjoura’s work, *Amaliyyet Radwan* (2006) was produced by Al-Manar (Hezbollah’s news channel) and scripted by one of the channel’s unnamed directors. It documents the celebrations that followed the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah and the exchange of prisoners that took place in July 2008. During the conflict in 2006, Hezbollah’s media strategy played a key part in its victorious narrative (Kalb and Saivetz 2007). The documentary starts with the appearance of Lebanese fighters’ coffins returned by Israel and then paraded through Lebanon, particularly in the Shia areas, where many of them had come from and where they are honored as martyrs, following the Hezbollah militant narrative in the spaces under its direct control (Harb 2004; Chaib 2007). In this regard, public mourning for the fallen fighters is part of the political privatization of public space by militias that dates back to the civil war. This appropriation is further justified in a way that answers the Terminator’s appropriation of national symbols, as the celebration is presented as a national victory by Hezbollah, meaning the Lebanese army also appears in the film, as it welcomes and honors the coffins of these fighters. In both cases, the militiamen define the visual use of national imagery and institutions, which have been appropriated by political factions.

This prelude leads to the main event on Martyrs’ Square, where a stage has been prepared for the victory celebration. The way the anonymous director uses and depicts space is virtually identical to what can be seen in Jarjoura’s documentary and suggest a similar apprehension of space. Despite the proclaimed national dimension of the event, the celebration is entirely one-sided, and national political institutions are remarkably absent. Only the supporters of Hezbollah and its allies are present, as shown by the flag waved during the ceremony (Amal, the SNSP—Syrian National Socialist Party). Hezbollah leaders come to

deliver speeches, and the highlight of the ceremony is the speech by Hassan Nasrallah, who had left the secret place where he usually lives for this special event. Bordering on devotion and insisting on the charismatic dimension of this spatialization of militia power on Martyrs' Square, the way in which Nasrallah's connection to the Hezbollah militants is filmed mirrors Jarjoura's approach to the link between the Terminator and Michel Aoun (Mermier and Mervin 2012, 35–137; Matar 2008). Such devotion is engrained in the militia's charismatic leadership during the civil war. The appropriation of the square is the scene where a military and political organization stages its power under the eyes of its invisible opponents by demonstrating the strength of the bond linking its leader to his followers. Polemics and contention do not appear in such a space. Potential adversaries are out of the picture, both in reality and on film, and they do not oppose this appropriation of the space. For one night, the square belongs to Hezbollah as it stages its victory, just as its opponents had done a few months earlier. As a "national" space, Martyrs' Square is envisioned and filmed only as a space where one side, when it is powerful enough, can impose its own version of celebrating the nation. The nation is understood following this side's peculiar interpretation (Mermier 2010) and filmed with a strong military undertone (El Hourri and Saber 2010). Here, as the party stages its victory, there is a long sequence devoted to the appearance of fighters liberated by Israel, including Samir Kantar, who had been the longest-serving Lebanese fighter in Israeli prisons and a national symbol appropriated by Hezbollah (Erlich and Kahati 2007). They appear on stage in military fatigues, symbolically breaking plastic prison bars. An assistant releases doves as they take the stage, the birds bearing the double meaning of freedom and martyrdom, as they frequently appear in Shia celebrations for the fallen (Marzolph 2013).

On screen, Martyrs' Square appears as a possible extension of political private spaces, highly symbolic, as its provisional appropriation signifies that one feels strong enough to go beyond these private spaces and try to impose its apprehension of the national narrative. As an interstitial pseudonational space, this cinematographic image calls to mind a political no-man's-land, symbolic of the country's enduring divisions. One has to appropriate it to pretend to be a national power, but this is done in ways that are reminiscent of civil war practices.

This explains why these images also develop an aesthetic of the provisional, as all the filmed installations are made to be nonpermanent, and in both documentaries, the camera focuses more on these installations—

with the buildings ruined by the Civil War in the background—than on the renovated areas around the square. Katia Jarjoura focuses on the Terminator’s camp, while the Hezbollah director keeps his attention on the provisional stage. When a structure remains, as is the case with Rafic Hariri’s grave, the opposing faction simply ignores it when filming the square, which is what *Amaliyyet Radwan* does. If it is temporary, it is also less menacing to the opposing faction; a formal monument would be a much stronger and potentially harmful way of appropriating the space in the long run. Another interpretation of this aesthetic of the provisional would be to link to the civil war: since the occupation of the square is understood in military terms, it also makes sense to occupy it with provisional structures, like all the structures built by militiamen during the civil war. These may be quite impressive, as in the case of Beit Beirut (Polledri 2016; Reder 2020),² which was reinforced by concrete but at the same time meant to be temporary. And the square is filmed through this war-related aesthetic that deeply scars post-1991 Lebanese directors (Khatib 2011; Ayoub 2017), which makes it appear as an outpost in an ongoing political offensive from either side until the tide of political strife recedes.

3. Roads and Streets: Private Appropriation along Former Sectarian Borders

When it comes to the production of spatial images in postwar Lebanese cinema, beyond the national symbol of Martyrs’ Square, streets and roads are particularly important—once again against the backdrop of the civil war, as these streets run along the lines that used to separate warring factions. As former parts of no-man’s-land, streets and roads are spaces that the directors link with the issue of national unity: they use them as symbolic spaces that need to be reappropriated to face and even heal the wounds of the civil war by reuniting the various parts of the country that have been politically appropriated. This process is made more complicated by the private appropriation of the streets that lead to the film image of Lebanon as a labyrinth of intertwined privatized spaces with no room for public debate and contention.

Political appropriation of the street appears foremost in *I Want to See* by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige (2008), inspired by Alain Resnais’s use of space and gaze in *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) (Mercken-Spaas 1980). The film focuses on the issue of seeing traces of the civil war and the 2006 war (Silverman 2014), one of the directors’ major

themes, as they intend to use their work to produce “missing images” of the war, particularly concerning its psychological and spatial aspects (Noirot 2016). The film is a road movie set on the highway from Beirut to the South all the way to the Israeli border, with Rabih Mroué and Catherine Deneuve chatting in the car along the way. One of their first stops is in Dahye, the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut (Harb 2010, 139–251). The directors deploy a faux-documentary style to stage a scene in which Mroué and Deneuve are interrupted by Hezbollah sympathizers who do not want anyone to film in the neighborhood. The scene takes place out on the street, that is, in public space that has been appropriated by the party, whose monopoly and control over the production of this part of the city’s images is presented as being under threat by the film crew and the actors. The filming style gives the scene the semblance of truth and makes this political appropriation all the more palpable, which reinterprets what would be contention in the public space in terms of an intrusion into a privatized space. In this regard, public space in the city is filmed to be as disposable as the ruins of its buildings (Naeff 2018) and belonging to whoever is politically stronger in a given area.

This scene is echoed at the end of the trip, filmed in the same style, when the actors meet the UN peacekeeping forces on the border with Israel. The link between roads, war, appropriation and the memory of no-man’s-land is deepened as the area of potential contention is the heavily militarized border zone, with officers explaining that they more or less control the main roads but not the surrounding areas under the rule of Hezbollah, and that they have to take care not to breach the fragile understanding they have reached with the party.

As movies use political street control to symbolize the fragmentation of the country between competing powers asserting their legitimacy through the appropriation of public space, images of cooperation and encounters on these streets are presented as a new and fragile experience for the characters. *Where Do We Go Now?* (Labaki 2011) features one main road, as does *Every Day Is a Holiday* (El-Horr 2009), in which the director develops her academic reflection about the memory of war (El-Horr 2016).³ These roads are precisely where people coming from opposing political spaces meet—an encounter that occurs only within the neutral land stripe defined by the road itself, as no-man’s-land did during the war (Sinno 2017; Turan 2019). This is symbolically interesting, as in such cases, roads replace squares as coexisting spaces. This situation also echoes and contrasts with the images of squares depicted in military

terms and where people are no longer meeting each other. On the contrary, it is on the streets, using here another aspect of the polyphonic war memory narrative, that people can meet. On the streets, there were a few crossing points that allowed people to meet during the civil war, and this image is reused as a subtext in post-civil war films. By contrast, these counterintuitive images of the use of space hint at an understanding of space that the war has turned upside down (Ayoub 2017).

Since roads are used as symbols of encounters, the mere fact of traveling the country appears as a symbol of crossing bridges between communities. This image is most notably present in Philippe Aractingi's films, especially in *Bosta* and *Under the Bombs* (2005 and 2007). *Under the Bombs* follows a mother searching for her son during the 2006 war. She is accompanied by a taxi driver who belongs to a different community (one is Christian, one is Shia), and who may have collaborated with Israel during its occupation of southern Lebanon. As they try to find the missing boy, the neutral road becomes a space open for contention and for a confrontation between each other's memories of the war (Bonnet 2013; Hout 2016). At the same time, their search takes them across the country, along streets that used to be separating lines (Salhab 2012), and they map together what could become a way to recreate national unity. Aractingi's visuals are heavily laden with symbols, particularly when it comes to space (Aquino 2012) and how it can be used to confront the civil war wounds while trying to heal them through debate. Through the layers of memories and symbols associated with them, the roads in his films are the best place to stage this confrontation and examine the audience's relation to space (Kotecki 2010).

Bosta is made along the same lines, using the same type of symbols, but with a slightly different perspective. Here, a multiconfessional dance group decides to go on a tour through Lebanon. They use their old school bus to present their modern interpretation of the Lebanese national dance, the *dabkeh*. The bus is a powerful symbol, as it is reminiscent of the 13 April 1975 massacre that started the civil war, as is the *dabkeh*, considered a key element of the Lebanese national identity and, as such, densely appropriated by artists, particularly when it comes to giving a political statement through a techno rendition (Karkabi 2018). In this film, roads are presented as a symbol of national reunion, as they lead the dancers to different parts of the country previously separated by internal wartime borders (Salhab 2012). Constructed as a road movie, the film develops a relation to space that goes from private to public: the dancers first go from the private houses of each member to private

(but open space) parties where they perform, and the climax of the film takes place at the national public monument of Aanjar, which serves as a symbol of national reunification to the sound of the techno *dabkeh*. The film examines the absence of public space in postwar Lebanon and its representation on film, while claiming its faith in the possibility of reconstructing by using of national symbols. The choice of Aanjar is telling in this regard: an Armenian city famous for its Ummayyad ruins, the city was relatively spared by the civil war, and the choice of a dance and music festival hints at the national symbol of the prewar Baalbek festival, which had played a key part in the construction of Lebanese identity and pride (Stone 2014). Roads, as filmed here, are the links that bring much-needed contention to the private spaces isolated by memories and practices of the civil war, which in turn allows Lebanon to free itself from these practices strengthened by space privatization. Locally produced (Jarjoura 2007), the film was very successful in Lebanon, despite some initial difficulties, precisely, at least according to the director, because it called into question the usual postwar representation of space in Lebanon (Khatib 2011, 134).

Still, Aractingi's work remains an exception (Bonnet 2013), and most postwar Lebanese films focus instead on public spaces' private appropriation by people who do not accept the type of border-crossing illustrated by *Bosta*, which, among Aractingi's various works, remains his most fictional film in a career heavily influenced by documentary work (Kotecki 2010). *The Valley* (Salhab 2014) and *A Lost Man* (Arbid 2007), which follow people lost in a country where any space—including streets and roads—has been aggressively privatized, exemplify this tendency, such as in the encounters made by the main character of *The Valley*, who appears (symbolically) not to have much memory of his past and is constantly confronted with defiance from other characters when he enters what they consider to be their property. This film, set in the same criminal milieu of Lebanon as *Al Hayba* (Barqawi 2017), uses the mafia and its appropriation of space and state functions as a metaphor for militias, deconstructing their sociopolitical legitimacy. It follows the director's previous work on the ghosts of the civil war in Beirut (*Phantom Beirut* 1999) and the landscape's loss of sense (*Terra Incognita* 2002) as its appropriation erases its meaning of identity (Daudelin 2013; Hurst 2010; Sgard 1997), something that cinema, like the visual arts, is particularly capable of presenting through the emptiness on screen underlined by camera work.

With the mafia metaphor, the film also points to more intimate priva-

tization of space and the contention that arises from it, interpreted as being rooted in the civil war. In this case, postwar cinema, with its focus on intimacy and destructured family and social relations, develops to a larger degree the dimension of “otherness” that was already present in *The Valley* (Toukan 2010), the “Other” being primarily the one who trespasses on a space that has been appropriated and will be considered an intruder. This can be seen in *Around the Pink House* (Hadjithomas and Joreige 1999), which focuses on competitive appropriations of space. At the core of the movie is the fight between two families who have settled in the Pink House, an old palace located near the ancient Green Line in Beirut. They are on the verge of being expelled by the new owner who wants to transform the building into a shopping mall. Because of its location in the former no-man’s-land, the Pink House belongs to the former “nonspace” of the civil war, where many poor refugees, expelled from their homes elsewhere in the country, took shelter—a theme developed by *In the Shadows of the City* (Chamoun 2000; Khatib 2011, 71–86). This is a key issue regarding the memories of war and the city’s reconstruction (Schmid 2006); it also represents the prosperity and the culturally open society of prewar Lebanon. By putting its characters in opposition to each other, the film develops the idea that the politically driven appropriation of space during the war opened the way to the business-oriented appropriation of the reconstruction period while investigating the destruction of the city as a common space shared by all communities and sociopolitical backgrounds. As a key theme in the directors’ work is about “missing images” and “posthumous images” (Noirot 2016; Seigneurie 2020) of the destroyed city, this film focuses on the “missing image of space.” The space where political, sectarian, and military contention took place is now devoted to a brutal economic contention, whose practices are rooted in civil war habits of appropriation that are now accepted even at an individual level and leave no place for a common culture. Metaphorically, this is also a narrative of memory (or amnesia) contention and the appropriation of the civil war heritage, as the private winner of this argument will, through its mastery of space, impose its vision (or its absence of vision) of the past.

Falafel (Kammoun 2006) also points to an intimate apprehension of space in Lebanon, but what was an exceptional event in *Around the Pink House* is presented here as day-to-day appropriation, filmed as the norm in Lebanon: the privatization of the streets (Delage 2004; Khayat 2002). Beirut has been called a “city turned upside down” (Davie 2007), and so are its spatial norms. The hero goes from one private party, where

there is some sort of public debate and exchange, to the street, where he finds himself despised and assaulted by car drivers who consider the public space their property (Khatib 2011, 165). As was the case with *Around the Pink House*, this understanding of space is visually linked to the civil war: the only person to offer him help is a former militiaman who has become a mechanic. And the so-called solution he offers is to reconquer the space at stake—with a gun. This attitude, in symbolic terms, can be interpreted as a reenactment of civil war practices but without the political legitimization they had between 1975 and 1991. Moreover, this would mean that the hero would contest the appropriation of space by appropriating it in the same way for his own benefit. Throughout these films, from *The Valley to Falafel*, the underlying theme is that economic private benefit has replaced the political justification for appropriating space and treating the “Other” as an intruder on what has come to be considered private property. The general image produced about the apprehension of space in Lebanon is that of a country at war with itself that cannot overcome the practices and mental mapping of the civil war or its spatial understanding.

4. Conclusion

To say that space has a symbolic meaning in Lebanese post-civil war cinema is an understatement. Film studies and directors in interviews have constantly raised the issue, with a particular focus on the link between places and war memory. As ruins and bullet-ridden buildings gradually disappear from the Lebanese urban landscape, they have heavily been used to signify the problematics of war amnesia in the country and play a key part in the directors’ search for the “missing images” of the war. Still, it appears that the mental mapping of the country—as much as places, space, its status, the images produced about it, and its various dimensions—is heavily laden with symbolism and references. It is still understood in terms of civil war categories, as spatial images are produced in terms of conquest, privatization, appropriation, and no-man’s-land, contrasting with the striking absence of a space open for civil contention. This filmic image is shared by both fiction films and documentaries, whether they develop images of political appropriation or economic appropriation, which appear to be done in the same violent and potentially criminal way by questioning the very legitimacy of any political public space. As such, postwar Lebanese films, with their drive toward intimacy and despite attempts to use the spatial dimension of

memory to face the civil war (e.g., Philippe Aractingi's films), develop an image of the country as a series of gated communities (in both the economic and sectarian senses) (Kohn 2004; Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002), where the neighbor remains the "Other."

Notes

1. Field research and observation, April 2014 and September 2019.
2. Designed in 1924 in the Ottoman revivalist style by Youssef Aftimus, Beit Beirut is a landmark of the Lebanese civil war. Originally divided up into apartments, the house was occupied by militiamen at the start of the war and became a vantage point for snipers on the front line as it overlooked the SODECO crossroad. It has since been redesigned as a memorial to the war and a museum for the city of Beirut; its bullet-ridden facade and the barricades that militiamen erected within the building have been retained to contribute to the formation of a collective memory of the civil war.
3. Dima El-Horr wrote her dissertation (2014) about post-civil war cinema in Lebanon.

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TEN | A Lebanese Heterotopia?

Oscar Niemeyer and the Rashid Karami International Fair in Tripoli, Lebanon

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1. Introduction

In 1962, the Lebanese government asked the famous Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer to draw up a master plan for a new international fair complex in the northern city of Tripoli. The site chosen for the fair-ground was strategically located at the entrance of the city, near the port, in the coastal settlement of al-Mina, amid the orchards and olive groves that stretched toward the al-Bahsas area. Among the benefits of this location was its closeness to the historical old city, with its Mamluk and Ottoman architectural heritage and easy access to the highways leading southward to Beirut and northward to the Syrian border.

Oscar Niemeyer (1907–2012) had achieved worldwide fame for his leading role in the design of many public buildings in Brazil's new capital city, Brasília, between 1957 and 1960. In his projects, Niemeyer explored the aesthetic possibilities of reinforced concrete forms and expressed a modernist style that favored function over form, rejected redundant ornament, and embraced minimalism. In Tripoli, Niemeyer redeployed many of the elements that had been included in the Palácio do Planalto and the Palácio da Alvorada in Brasília, with neat lines of columns and ramps that created vanishing lines, clean shapes such as cylinders and domes, as well as reflecting pools that emphasized symmetries. The proj-

ect devised by Niemeyer included 15 buildings over an elliptically shaped expanse of one square kilometer. Niemeyer rejected the predominant concept that favored isolated pavilions for each exhibitor and opted instead for a boomerang-shaped canopy composed of a 300-meter arc with two straight edges on both sides and supported by two rows of columns. This main exhibition space was flanked by the Lebanese pavilion, a square colonnaded building with pointed arches that was Niemeyer's take on Lebanese vernacular architecture and Tripoli's monumental heritage. Niemeyer also included more daring elements, such as an indoor "experimental theater" housed inside a concrete reversed dome and an open-air theater that could be accessed through a ramp leaping over a pool and crowned by a monumental gateway arch. Other buildings included a lotus-shaped helipad, a cylindrical water tower with a rooftop restaurant, and a one-floored housing section (Aridi and Singh-Bartlett 2018).

The construction of the fair was marred by land expropriation issues, technical problems, and even construction mistakes related to the use of reinforced concrete in curved elements, as well as soaring costs (Shehadi 2019). This resulted in long delays before work came to a complete halt as the country plunged into civil war in 1975 and the city of Tripoli became a battlefield among different Palestinian, Arab nationalist, and Islamist groups. After Syria took over the city in 1983, the grounds were requisitioned and partly converted into a Syrian army base, which effectively cordoned off the area from the rest of the city. The eventual evacuation of Syrian troops was not followed by a coherent program of restoration of the area, and the grounds were open to the public only for brief, sporadic events. In the meantime, policymakers in Tripoli and Beirut inconsistently discussed vague promises of refurbishment and even more generic plans to transform the venue into a theme park. The fair became a place for adventurous teenagers, parkour practitioners, and enthusiasts of modernist architecture, who inevitably lamented widespread structural damage and the increasing risks of collapse caused by the carbonation of concrete and the rusting of steel rods. These remarks were included in the statement of integrity that was submitted by the Lebanese delegation to UNESCO on 31 July 2018 as part of the files needed to put the site on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The application provided several arguments that could justify the "outstanding universal value" of the venue and its consistency with the criteria defined by UNESCO. In particular, the document emphasized the originality of Niemeyer's project and the authenticity of the site, which was

paradoxically preserved thanks to decades of neglect (UNESCO 2018). This chapter describes how national and local actors in Tripoli (including institutions and private individuals) imagined the international fair as a spectacle of an idealized vision of the city and a catalyst for economic and cultural development. However, the site conceived by Oscar Niemeyer also became a contested site where different visions and agendas emerged and sometimes clashed with each other.

Since its inception, the Rashid Karami International Fair was conceived as a huge project aimed at putting Tripoli back on the economic and cultural map of the modern Middle East. The project was supposed to increase trade and provide workplaces for the urban population. Perhaps more importantly, it was presented as an alternative to the narratives and perceptions of marginalization and decline that had been predominant in the local public discourse after the end of Ottoman rule and the controversial incorporation of the city into the Lebanese nation-state.

In a 1967 lecture entitled “Des espaces autres” (Of Other Spaces), Michel Foucault introduced the concept of heterotopia, which could be defined both as an alteration of the ordinary dynamics between space and time, a space with a distinct regime of mobility and access, a space of illusion, and a space of compensation.

While some elements of this definition may apply to the fairground in Tripoli, in particular as a space where different visions of the future are projected (space of illusion) and as an outlet from the grim reality of postwar marginality, I argue in this chapter that the fairground is also a central site for contentious politics and, therefore, at best a heterotopia that is very much *sui generis*. Until the time of writing, local actors had been trying (mostly unsuccessfully) to transform or to gain control of this place in order to bolster their political aspirations. In short, the fairground still remains a mirror of the tensions, conflicts, and fault lines that affect Lebanon’s second-largest city.

This chapter shares most of the conceptual premises of the most recent analyses of the spatial (and specifically urban) dimensions of Lebanon’s political conflicts. In his evaluation of the 1949 incident in Beirut’s Gemmayzeh neighborhood, Baun (2017) offers a bottom-up analysis of the clash among local actors and the state over both physical and symbolic space, arguing that the dynamics of the conflict and its “eventfulness” cannot be disconnected from the materiality of the urban space where it unfolds. According to Baun, political actors are involved in the use of space and the production of its meanings, and a history of

the relationship between urban space and political subjects adds more nuance and complexity to the existing narratives on political conflicts.

Nalbantian (2013) reassesses the clashes among competing Armenian factions during the turmoil of the summer of 1958 through the lens of the actual control of Armenian-majority areas in Burj Hammoud and eastern Beirut. In her analysis, space is refashioned along ethnic, confessional, and ideological markers to assert hegemony and distinguish between friends and enemies.

The importance of demarcation and border-making is also central to the research carried out by Mazaëff (2012) through her fieldwork in the neighborhood of 'Ayn el-Remmaneh. The physical space of this urban periphery becomes the stage where competing identities of the Self and the Other are continuously projected. The political mobilization of identities leads to the appropriation of space for sectarian and ideological reasons, thereby depriving it of its public and pluralistic nature. Sawalha (2010) shows how neighborhood spaces are sites of struggle, even at its pettiest level, and a redefinition of "us" and "them." Focusing on the reconstruction of the 'Ayn al-Mreisseh area, on the edge of Beirut's central district, Sawalha connects space, memory, identity, and aspirations.

This chapter considers the international fair in Tripoli in terms of human geography and sociology of space and sees it as a socially constructed and operating place, as well as a physical landscape imbued with competing meanings and social practices (Lefebvre 1991, 16–18, 26–27, 31–33, 53). Therefore, the Rashid Karami International Fair in Tripoli is seen as a space that is at the same time *influential* (because it has, at least, a potential impact on the local economy and power balances), *affected* (by the creation and change of historical landscapes), and *conceived* (because it is connected to the mental cartographies and the making of meanings) (Agnew 1987; Soja 1996).

The aim of this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, in line with the works mentioned above, I want to show how the urban space of the Rashid Karami International Fair can elucidate the political history of Tripoli beyond a superficial understanding of sectarianism and political alignments. On the other hand, I hope to contribute to a less Beirut-centric analysis of Lebanon's recent history by focusing on an urban space that is not located in the capital city.

I first locate the construction of the fair in the urban and political history of Tripoli under the French Mandate and immediately after Lebanon's independence, emphasizing the realities and perceptions of

marginalization that shaped the mainstream discourses in the city. I then move to show how the fair embodied an ambitious project of modernization that was in line with the political and cultural debates of the early 1960s. In this section, I argue that the fair was conceived as a signifier of a bold, modern city that was at once part of Lebanon and connected to the rest of the Middle East. Next, I describe the long decay of the place during the civil war and in the extensive postwar period, marred by inconclusiveness and a lack of vision for the city. The dilapidation of the buildings and external areas of the fair is assumed here as a metaphor of the city as a space of crisis in this century. In the end, I consider the ambitions and ambiguities of the different projects that envision competing visions of urban regeneration and redevelopment.

In addition to printed and online sources, this chapter is based on visits and interviews conducted on-site in January 2017.

2. Modern and Lebanese: An Alternative to Decline

To understand the peculiar nature of the fairground and its spatial and symbolical relation to the city, it is important to place the site within its urban context. In his description of early-1960s Tripoli, Gulick (1967) emphasized the consistency in the ecological and architectural patterns of the city. Ginzarly and Teller (2016) argue that the connections between the Mamluk historical core and the Abu Ali river basin were disrupted by the canalization of the river after the 1955 floods. The topographical characteristics of the city were also traumatically altered by the 1971 master plan and the heterogeneous urban sprawl that was caused by massive migration from the countryside. Conservation practices also tended to focus on the restoration of specific monuments rather than the preservation of a lively urban fabric, and they eventually severed the historical center of the city from its periphery.

As late as 1916, authors like Rafiq Tamimi and Muhammad Bahjat offered a rather positive assessment of Ottoman rule and praised the cultured and modernist character of urban elites in Tripoli, but later historical narratives and historiographies almost invariably painted a bleak picture. In scholarly works and the prevailing public discourse, the city was usually framed in the tropes of backwardness (*jumūd*), cultural isolation, and parochialism (Reilly 2016, 114–21).

Historians and intellectuals debated whether the main cause of decline was the Ottoman oppressive rule, French colonial penetration or self-destructive competition among local actors and centers of power. In

many respects, the narrative about Tripoli was part of the historiographical debate on the port cities of the eastern Mediterranean and the role of the local bourgeoisie, variously interpreted as either the facilitator of European colonialism or the harbinger of Arab nationalism in the 19th century. In fact, late-Ottoman port cities were the arena of conflicting interests and emerging subjectivities that defy rigid classifications and romanticized nostalgia (Fuhrmann and Kechriotis 2009); for this chapter, however, it is safe to assess that Tripoli lost ground to Beirut, in part as a result of the reconfiguration of regional trade networks during the 19th century and in part as the creation of the new vilayet (province) of Beirut in 1888. The rise of the merchant middle class in Beirut consolidated that city's role as the principal entrepôt between the Mediterranean and the Syrian interior (Hanssen 2005, 55–112, 138–62) to the detriment of Tripoli.

Despite the complexity of their thought and their evolution through the decades, it is interesting to note how prominent scholars and public intellectuals like Khaled Ziadeh and Masud Dahir lamented the burden imposed on the urban fabric of Tripoli through neglect and loss of relevance since the onset of the 19th century, when Tripoli ceded its regional standing to Beirut and Damascus (Reilly 2016, 129–39).

The marginalization of the city became more pronounced after the establishment of the French Mandate in 1920, when Tripoli was cut off from its Syrian hinterland, and historical connections with cities such as Homs and Hama were severely affected (Traboulsi 2012, 81). Even though proposals and petitions for a reunion with Syria emerged as late as 1928, the city lost its competition with Beirut, which had been conceived in the political geography of the Mandate as the major trade hub between the Syrian interior and the Mediterranean routes (Saliba 2016).

Mirroring the emerging political landscape in Beirut, the Sunni elites in Tripoli were divided between those who believed that the interests of their constituency would be best defended through negotiation with the Maronite moderate wing and those who continued to reject any division of the geographical region of Syria into separate states and, thus, challenged the legitimacy of the Mandate's institutions (Firro 2003, 134–35). The first trend was represented in Tripoli by Khayr al-Din al-Ahdab, who sided with Francophile president Émile Eddé and became prime minister of Lebanon in 1937. A more nuanced position was expressed by Muhammad al-Jisr, who decided pragmatically to run for election but maintained a critical stance regarding the role of Christian hegemony in the new Mandatory system. The other trend was represented by 'Abd al-

Hamid Karami, the scion of a family of notables who had been stripped of his status of mufti by the French Mandatory authorities and became one of the most vocal opponents of the incorporation of Tripoli, Beirut, Saida, and the regions of 'Akkar, Biqa', and Jabal 'Amil into the former autonomous Mutasarrifate of Mount Lebanon. After the 1936 Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence, which confirmed the Mandatory borders, and despite several arrests for his previous opposition to French authorities, 'Abd al-Hamid Karami decided to enter the arena of Lebanese politics, which had become less defined by the territorial reunification with Syria and more defined by identity politics and shifts in the international balance of power (Traboulsi 2012, 99–109).

After his death in 1950, his eldest son, Rashid, was catapulted into national politics by being elected to the National Assembly in 1951 and quickly rising through the posts of minister of justice and minister of economy and social affairs before becoming prime minister in 1955. Such a spectacular rise in power related to the climate of extreme volatility fostered by the assassination of former prime minister Riyadh al-Sulh, who together with President Bishara al-Khury had mastered the consociational consensus at the root of the political system in independent Lebanon (Zisser 2000, 220–40). In this context, Rashid Karami emerged as one of the main leaders of the Pan-Arab nationalist camp who stood in opposition to the pro-Western line espoused by President Camille Chamoun during the 1956 Suez Crisis.

In the meantime, the Syrian government led by Khalid al-'Azm had decided in 1950 to sever the customs union with Lebanon, disrupting the circulation of agricultural goods and having a significant impact on trade in Tripoli. By contrast, the impossibility of using the terminal of Haifa after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war had prompted Iraq to reroute most of Mosul's crude oil production to Tripoli, leading to a growing relationship between the city and the economy of oil-producing countries (Kassir 2011, 353–58). These economic and social tensions simmered for years and finally erupted in May 1958, after the formation of the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria under the aegis of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq.

The old city of Tripoli became one of the focal points of a country-wide uprising against President Chamoun, who requested military intervention by the United States. To quell the insurrection and restore order, a political consensus was reached with the election of General Fouad Chehab, then-chief of staff of the Lebanese Armed Forces, as the new president, while Rashid Karami was asked to form a cabinet of political reconciliation (Traboulsi 2012, 134–38).

One of the first decisions of the new Chehab administration was to commission a study by IRFED, the research institute on sustainable development that was founded in 1958 by the French Dominican economist Louis-Joseph Lebret. The institute was asked to assess the overall situation of the country. The research demonstrated with numbers what empirical observation might already have suggested: abysmal inequality in the distribution of wealth, which overlapped with regional and sectarian fault lines, was leading to unsustainable tensions. Without adopting a full-scale policy of dirigisme, the Chehab administration welcomed the suggestion of decentralized growth, created a ministry of economic planning, introduced some minimal forms of social security, and launched a project of state-driven development of peripheral regions through the modernization of infrastructures (Kassir 2011, 359–62).

In this context, the fairground in Tripoli appears as both an embodiment of the projects of the Chehab period and a testament to the national ambitions of Rashid Karami, at the intersection of national and local politics. Through the choice of a modernist international architect, the fair was designed to cast a positive image of Tripoli as a city conversant with modernity and confidently oriented toward the future. Despite the combination of modernism and minimalism, which is quintessentially Niemeyer, the concept of the fairground intended to allude to a continuity between the heritage of the city and its future. It is important to keep in mind here that, in the context of the early 1960s, modernism in the visual arts, literature, and design was saturated with political layers and was often constructed as a transnational language and aesthetic that could counter both communism and the politically committed Pan-Arab nationalist imagery in art and literature (Maasri 2020, 63–64).

The grandiose scale of the project attempted to reclaim the status of Tripoli as a major city, retrieve its former outward projection, and provide some sort of moral compensation for a city that was still suffering from a steady loss of rank and prestige, felt at odds with Beirut, and cultivated the perception of being punished by the Lebanese state for its support of Arabism and political Islam (Reilly 2016, 140–43). In a city that overwhelmingly perceived itself as Arab (and Islamic) more than Lebanese and whose affective attachment to Lebanon had been tenuous at best, if not outright rejectionist in the Mandate years, the fairground sought to inscribe Tripoli into a new “Lebanese modern” national narrative. While earlier images, identities, and historical descriptions of Lebanon were firmly rooted in the Maronite hegemony and its Mount Lebanon stronghold, the early 1960s saw the drive of previously marginalized regions and communities to claim their place as constituent parts

of the country on a fairly equal basis. The areas that had been annexed in 1920 not only demanded more political rights and economic benefits but, more broadly, asserted their role in Lebanese history and geography well beyond their characterization as peripheral additions to the core of the country (Beydoun 1984, 117–27, 550–58).

3. An Unachieved Project

The choice of Niemeyer as the mastermind of the project in Tripoli resonated fairly well with Lebret's recommendations and Chehab's projects. Both tried to decentralize productive activities, incentivize economic exchanges, and diminish concentration in the urban area of Beirut to redistribute resources and wealth across the country and mitigate sectarian grudges. However, this project suffered the same fate as Michel Écochard's first and second urban master plans for Beirut, which were only implemented in a fragmentary way, emptying them of their original scope and purpose. Ultimately, Chehab's vision of regional development in Lebanon could not stop the country from becoming a vast suburban sprawl around a hypertrophic capital (Kassir 2011, 419–30).

While enormous scholarly attention has been devoted to Beirut's urban transformation in the 1960s, with the consolidation of a greater metropolitan area and the reconfiguration of the concept of periphery (Arnaud 1996), and whereas there is a rich history of Beirut's city planning and its main protagonists (Verdeil 2010), much work remains to be done on the transformations and (scarce) planning in other Lebanese cities in the 1960s.

The presidency of Charles Hélou, who succeeded Chehab in 1964, marked a gradual return to the patterns of *laissez-faire*, clientelism, and nepotism in the public sector, while the rise of Palestinian militancy quickly became the most polarizing and divisive issue in Lebanese politics. At the same time, oil revenues and drug smuggling kept ports busy and fueled an opaque and uninhibited banking sector linked to the most important families of urban notables and, increasingly, to political factions (Marshall 2012, 49–74). Adding further stress to the original aspirations of the fairground project, Rashid Karami's influential position at the national level never translated into hegemonic control of local politics in Tripoli because he constantly had to negotiate with lesser notables on the municipal councils of Tripoli and al-Mina, while government policies at the national level opened spaces of contestation at the local level for leftist, Palestinian, and Islamist factions. In fact,

Karami had to maneuver between his class-based inclination, which favored the dominance of the merchant class and the financial oligarchy over the state, and the loosely defined political program of the Chehab presidency, which tried to dismantle the ubiquity of the *zu'amā'* system (Dewailly 2012).

The ambiguity of Karami's politics exploded in the wake of the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, the subsequent shock in oil markets, and the broader upheavals in the region that disrupted the idea that Tripoli could function as a major trading post between the Mediterranean and the Gulf. The *raison d'être* of the international fair was rapidly lost, while the project was marred by serious setbacks in its construction. By the time Lebanon and Tripoli slid into civil war in 1975, the compound remained a vision of the potential of the city that had not materialized: a spatial testimony of what could have been and never was—an isolated icon of modernism, an image of the untapped potential of the city, and, later on, a physical metaphor of its decay (Simon 2017).

During the war years, the fairgrounds escaped the process of transformation of public spaces into militarized space under the control of armed factions, which created the grid of militia-controlled areas (*quadrillage milicien*) of varying radii around a heavily armed core that has been analyzed in the geography of the Lebanese civil war (Davie 1993).

However, the Syrian army, which had entered the conflict under the banner of the Arab Deterrent Forces, seized the site as early as 1976. Despite an attempt made in 1978 by the fair's administrative council to request an evacuation from the premises, Syrian troops resided permanently on the ground throughout the conflict. The second request for evacuation, this time submitted by the minister of economy to the Syrian military command in North Lebanon, was rejected in 1980. The stalemate, which resulted in the termination of nearly all ongoing works, prompted the resignation of the councillors in 1983. In the next three years, the fair remained cordoned off while Palestinian, leftist, and Islamist groups fought each other and the Syrian army to assert control over the old city and the port area (Kattar 2018).

By 1986, all factions had been either rooted out or subdued by the Syrian army, which imposed its rule over the entire city. This did not translate into an outright stabilization of the political landscape in Tripoli, which was scarred by the assassination of Rashid Karami in 1987. Backed by the Syrian government, his younger brother Omar was prompted to fill the void and enter national politics. His quick rise under Syrian patronage allowed him to become prime minister in December 1990,

when Lebanon's postwar political landscape was terraformed around the provisions of the Ta'if Agreement and the heavy-handed interference of Syrian governmental, military, and security apparatuses. Karami stepped down a few months later, shortly before the 1992 parliamentary election. His departure paved the way for the long season of Rafic Hariri, whose agenda of neoliberal development, technocratic rhetoric, and soft sectarianism soon became hegemonic (Baumann 2019).

Although sometimes branded as a sort of Syrian-backed nemesis of Hariri, Omar Karami had to live the paradox of a pro-Syrian leader at the national level who was not capable of ruling his native city under Syrian military control. Municipal elections, often contested by "consensus" lists realized through Saudi-sponsored efforts, showed the intricacy of local politics, the decline of many families of traditional notables, the opacity of patronage networks, and the rise of self-made men with an entrepreneurial background. The case of Najib Mikati,¹ a businessman who made his fortune in the telecommunications sector with complex ramifications in several countries, is the most prominent example of a local member of the bourgeoisie who glided between Beirut, Monte Carlo, Dubai, and West Africa (Dewailly 2012). It is particularly telling that Mikati tried to bolster his potential as a national and local leader in two ways: on the one hand, by offering scholarships and first aid; on the other hand, by trying to seize the reception hall at the entrance to the fair. According to Dewailly, by having some of his henchmen installed at the gates, Mikati tried to claim a sort of protection over the site, viewed as a status symbol (*objet de répertoire*) in his rise to power.

Syrian troops evacuated the premises of the fair in two phases: first in 1994 and later in 1998. Part of the boomerang-shaped building was rehabilitated in 1996 for small-scale conferences and local festivals. However, during the 2000s, the decay and neglect in the rest of the site got worse, and a sector that had originally been conceived for social housing was sold to build the new business-oriented Quality Inn Hotel. Skimpy anecdotal evidence suggests that a plan of partial rehabilitation led to the temporary reopening of the open-air theater, which received the addition of somewhat incongruous white plastic chairs but did not translate into a full restoration of the venue or a public discussion on its use.²

Unsurprisingly, due to the similarities between Tripoli and Beirut in the domain of speculative real estate development, there was significant attention in the 2010s to the lack of proper public spaces in the city, poor maintenance, and the trend to privatize underdeveloped lots under the build-operate-transfer scheme, which leases public spaces to private

investors based on long-term concession contracts (Nazzal and Chinder 2018). In this perspective, the Rashid Karami International Fair appears as a “semipublic” space (in fact, second in importance only to the Mina waterfront) that could, in theory, provide a much-needed open place for the inhabitants of Tripoli but, in practice, is hampered by its segregation from the rest of the city, its increasing de facto privatization, and the lack of transparency in the decisions concerning its management and future.

4. Postwar Spaces of Crisis

Tropes of neglect and decay have been used to describe the condition of Tripoli in the late 1990s and the 2000s. The city suffered dire social and economic conditions long before the Syrian civil war, which prompted shockwaves in terms of factional mobilization, inflow of refugees, and a generalized sense of precariousness and persecution. The situation of the city has been defined as a combination of capital flight, massive supply and use of weapons, and the impact of unproductive patronage (often from foreign benefactors), which has resulted in the formation of a “militia industry” and a “cottage industry of shaykhs,” leading Simon (2017) to define the malaise of Tripoli as that of a city that has lost any sense of development and priorities, ending up in a microcosm “built to repel its own human capital.”

This sense of hopelessness, factional competition, and social gridlock appears clearly from many recent ethnographies of sectarian conflict and Islamist radicalization, especially those that deal with areas of crisis, such as vulnerable neighborhoods and Palestinian refugee camps or the physical distribution of Syrian refugees. In her essay on the processes of involvement with jihadi radicalism and deradicalization, for example, Carpi (2015) explains how these phenomena are triggered by factors of contingency and intentionality that are often related to neighborhood spaces and networks.

In the *Syria Street* project by Brandon Tauszik, GIF-based portraits and soundbites offer insight into daily life and intraurban borderization processes between the predominantly Sunni neighborhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh and the predominantly Alawi neighborhood of Jabal Mohsen. These two areas, which can be defined as underprivileged conglomerations of the urban poor and relatively recent rural migrants, share a material condition of poverty, unemployment, and a lack of social services (RouPELL 2017). Tauszik investigates how the liminal space between the two neighborhoods is lived on a daily basis, navigated, or challenged

by its residents, who craft their coping strategies amid repeated flare-ups of violence and growing sectarian animosity prompted by political tensions in Lebanon and the violent spillover of the Syrian civil war.

Kortam (2015) considers the overlapping of sectarian identities, mental space, and built-up space in the mechanisms of identity-based introversion (*repli identitaire*) and exclusion in Jabal Mohsen. Her analysis of the processes of urban self-enclavization is in line with the paradigms of the sectarianization of space that are discussed in sectarianism studies, as well as the patterns of spatial segregation and reaggregation studied by Alaily-Mattar (2010) in Beirut, where mobility based on income and social ascendancy is supplanted by sectarian reconcentration in times of conflict. What emerges is a complex urban geography of spatialized relations based on core spaces conceived as safe havens, in addition to areas devoted to the fruition of specific functions, contested zones, and transit corridors. These maps are encapsulated by urban borders and regimes of mobility that reflect power shifts through space and time.

Most political analyses of the situation in Tripoli agree on the roots of the structural crisis that has engulfed the city in chronic violence and underdevelopment. A recurrent theme is the imbrication of economic stagnation, political fragmentation, perceptions of marginalization and fear across the sectarian divide, despair, and Islamist radicalization, which in turn have prompted a governmental response based on a shortsighted securitization approach. Younes (2016), among others, sheds light on the history of neglect by the institutions of a Beirut-focused state and the ineffectiveness of the urban political elites, who preferred to fill the lack of a credible political platform with a clientelist system that ultimately led to the “hard politics of street militias.” Devoid of the loose Pan-Arab discourse of the 1950s and 1960s and the leftist-Palestinian discourse of the early 1970s, Tripoli’s notables repositioned themselves in the post-1990 political landscape through a patronage system that was predicated on the ephemeral provision of basic services in exchange for short-term electoral support. This relation is grounded in the actual control of space and creates a complex relationship pattern between the *zu‘amā’* (notables who mostly inherited their status within their families) and the *shabāb* (street/neighborhood youth) at the local level, often within the confines of a street or a block (Zaccak 2007).

In his 1981 fieldwork ethnography in Bab al-Tabbaneh, Seurat used Ibn Khaldun’s concept of *‘aṣabiyya* (group solidarity) and Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of *popolino* (premodern urban poor) to describe forms of political mobilization and loyalty that were constructed at the intersection of mul-

multiple social cleavages, including the class-based and sectarian, and were strongly connected to the physical and symbolic control of space. This tapestry of relationships between the commercial and financial bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the neighborhood strongmen who embody an idealized image of virility and supposedly chivalrous values, on the other hand, was also the focus of the research conducted by Johnson (1986) in the Sunni-majority neighborhoods of Beirut. His analysis showed how a considerable degree of social order, coupled with an opportunistic usage of state institutions and resources, was dynamically preserved through a patronage system that, in turn, was deeply engrained in notions of masculine honor and respect. These hierarchies of values and expectations continued to be socially reproduced despite significant transformations during the 20th century (Johnson 2001). These connections between social hierarchies, notions of masculinity and honorability, clientelism, and control of physical landscape were also explored in the ethnography realized by Gilsenan (1996) in the rural region of 'Akkar, close to Tripoli, which highlighted the complex tapestry of relations between the urban and the rural to this day.

All these dynamics of social hierarchies, urban politics, and gendered expectations are at the core of the analysis of Lefèvre (2018) and its notion of “qabaday Salafism.” This concept encapsulates the rise of Salafi militancy in marginalized Sunni-majority areas and frames it more as a form of rough masculinity expressed by the vernacular term *qabaḍāy* (street/neighborhood boss) than with a clear ideological or spiritual commitment to Salafi doctrines. In Lefèvre’s analysis, street Salafism emerges as a struggle for urban power and control of resources, in line with local traditions of social unrest, yet deploying a religious language for legitimization. The rise of Salafi militancy is, therefore, seen as the by-product of a degrading social and political environment fueled by the failure of the Sunni political and official religious institutions such as Dar al-Fatwa. The sectarianization of political conflicts during and after the civil war in Lebanon—and recently concerning the civil war in Syria—overlaps with the inflow of money and weapons toward militias that national and regional sponsors use as proxies. The inability of political leaders and official religious bodies to provide sound leadership creates a climate of disaffection with the state and its local institutions, fostering antistatist views. Central and local authorities, in turn, adopt a securitization approach (in relation to the rise of Salafism and the presence of Syrian refugees) that does not address the roots of urban segregation and structural inequality.

Lefèvre's analysis is consistent with the conclusions of Gade (2013), who has analyzed the impact of the Syrian civil war on the city as a space of confrontation among local, national, and transnational actors. The resulting urban conflict appears as a testament to the weakness of Sunni institutional players, who seem unable to control the "Sunni street" in the city. Processes of engagement, truce, and co-optation are fluctuating and contingent: The leadership through "street proximity" of the 1950s and 1960s has been superseded by extremely volatile loyalties due to the ambiguity of a fragmented political elite (Gade 2018) and the absence of strong ideological discourses, except for the narratives of transnational jihadi radicalism, which were implanted in some mosques, Palestinian refugee camps, and mountain villages in the city's hinterland (Rougier 2007, 228–46, 253–59, 264).

What was left of the "Rashid Karami International Fair" in this urban context? During most of the 2000s and the early 2010s, the combination of political uncertainty at the national and local levels, lack of transparency, and abstruse administrative procedures maintained the place in a liminal and suspended status, with isolated voices of concern that could not overcome the leadership crisis and ineffectiveness of urban elites (Younes 2016). Dissatisfaction with the existing political leaders led to the sweeping victory of the list led by former general Ashraf Rifi in the 2016 municipal election, prompted by a mixture of sectarian mobilization, exhaustion, from the decay of the city, and strong disillusionment with central government and Beirut politicians, in particular within the Sunni constituency (Basim 2016).

5. Competing Visions for the Future

In the autumn of 2018, a group of Lebanese and Mexican artists were finally able to produce a collective exhibition under the title *Cycles of Collapsing Progress* on the fairgrounds. The curatorial statement defined the installations as a conversation about the notion of cyclical time, in contrast with a linear understanding of progress and modernity (Beirut Museum of Art 2018). The understanding of history and philosophy of history in the curatorial statement seems excessively simplistic in some passages, but the importance of the exhibition lies in its ambition to bring contemporary art into (supposedly) public spaces and let it enter into dialogue with architecture and history (Aridi and Singh-Bartlett 2018).

The 18 works of art, including eight (or 12, depending on the source)

site-specific and newly commissioned pieces, reflected the sensitivity of the authors and their take on the theme of the exhibition, including musings on environmental apocalypse, obsolescence, and displacement (El Hérou 2019). The artistic merits of the installations might be debatable, but, according to Quilty (2018), the point of the exhibition was the attempt to have a dialogue between the contemporary (ephemeral, fragmented, and utterly incomprehensible for the noninitiated) and “Lebanon’s most conspicuous embodiment of derelict modernism,” with its aura of naively utopian confidence in progress. In so doing, the exhibition questioned the role of the fair as a container, its relation with content, and its position in the memory and history of the city.

Although the word as such was never mentioned in the curatorial statement, some of the artists eventually worked on the site of the fair as a heterotopia that enclosed the possibility of a different notion of the city, its past, and its future, outside of the incumbent narratives and perceptions of factional infighting and misery. After all, the definition of heterotopia has evolved and called into question earlier understandings of a place as confinement, crisis, or deviation, which inevitably carries connotations of exclusion and stigma. The “other places” (*espaces autres*) that are off-center or interrupt the apparent continuity of ordinary spaces carry multiple meanings (Dehaene and De Cauter 2008) and do not need to be physically or symbolically peripheral, marginalized, or deviant (Agier 2012). As networked spaces that realize or simulate a common experience of place and as sites that are open to negotiation and contestation, heterotopias run opposite to the notion of nonplaces, defined as spaces that do not produce a conversation on identities and the nature of social relations (Augé 1992).

In fact, heterotopias have a political nature, in particular as spaces where people can enact strategies to reclaim places of otherness or question the fabric of normality (Dehaene and De Cauter 2008), but also as securitized spaces for privileged elites (Yardımcı 2014). The ambiguity of heterotopias is mirrored in the possibility of both having radical, subversive enclaves (Tramontani Ramos 2010) and reinforcing the status quo, as well as a combination of flow and stasis (Shane 2005). Heterotopia, in the current understanding, remains a slippery but thought-provoking concept that questions the experience and interpretation of space, its political meaning, and how all these processes are affected by the fact that embodied subjectivities are diversely positioned in social constellations of power: The heterotopia of someone could be the normative, constrictive space of someone else (Heynen 2008).

The ambiguity of the concept is mirrored in the ambiguity of the attempts at reappropriating the fairground in Tripoli as an “other space” for the production and consumption of contemporary art.

While the curator and the artists seem engaged in a conversation on memory and meaning, the project is entangled with financial and political interests—one of the main sponsors is a private and corporate banking institution (Banque BEMO 2018). Furthermore, behind the 2018 exhibition, one might detect the Mikati Foundation and its intention to “break the ice between Tripoli, the second-largest city in Lebanon, and the rest of the country,” according to its director, Ziad Mikati (El Hélou 2019). In short, very real interests, structurally intertwined with the business domain and politics at the national and local levels, overshadow the aspiration for a radically subversive reinvention.

This process of requalification through contemporary art and carefully controlled cultural initiatives was overcome in 2019 by the project that was launched by the Tripoli Port Authority. The latter plans to establish a “special economic zone” and transform the port of Tripoli into a logistic hub for postwar reconstruction schemes in Syria, with the possible involvement of Chinese investment (Cornish and Zhang 2019). In February 2019, the Tripoli Special Economic Zone (TSEZ) Authority unveiled an architectural design project competition to transform the international fair into a “Knowledge and Innovation Center” (KIC), a sort of tech park and incubator of start-up enterprises, with an eye on the language of neoliberal governmentality, the rhetoric of the “smart city,” and the global challenge that urban areas face in attracting investors and researchers (Tripoli Special Economic Zone 2019).

The KIC competition has been marred since the beginning by several critical points. Only an extremely short period was slated between the competition announcement, the deadline for the final submission of the projects, and the final deliberation of the jury. Many prospective competitors raised substantial questions and highlighted discrepancies and inconsistent technical information in the competition brief, putting the organizing committee in a rather embarrassing position. The latter had to clarify that the master plan called for the edification of leasable offices, support facilities, utility buildings, housing, and underground parking lots for a total of 60,000 square meters. Despite the value that, in theory, was attached to Oscar Niemeyer’s building and the pending UNESCO World Heritage application, the committee candidly admitted that there was no maximum permissible height limit for new buildings, nor a floor area ratio. The site was defined as “not subject to Tripoli

building regulations” in terms of open space between buildings (KIC 2019). With equal candor, the committee also admitted the absence of existing infrastructure on site for water supply, sewage disposal, and power supply, clarifying that all services and connectivity were “to be left to the next step of design development.” The committee also described the western part of the boomerang-shaped main building as “totally abandoned and never [having] been used since constructed in 1965–1966.” Finally, the committee’s answers made it clear that the KIC was conceived as a restricted-access site rather than a fully open public space and not meant for “touristic usage” (KIC 2019).

It is not surprising, then, that the technical jury released a final report where the requirements of the competition were criticized because they “would impose an excessive densification of the proposed area.” It unanimously recommended that the second phase of the project be reexamined “in terms of its built-up area as well as its location.” It is also not surprising that the committee decided to mention some nonwinning projects that emphasized minimal impact or even questioned the building strategy on the site (KIC Jury Report 2019). The jury eventually chose a project of underground development that was viewed as “safe” and not interfering with Niemeyer’s original architecture but was also criticized by other architects as drab and of uncertain sustainability (Pratty and Popoviciu 2019).

Further complicating the situation, in addition to the two previous different concepts about the fairground, UNESCO also launched its own Conservation Management Plan, supported by the Getty Foundation. In carefully crafted diplomatic language, the UNESCO Beirut office reminded all the stakeholders of the necessity of reaching “a consensus on a general conservation policy” before taking any “informed decisions.” The announcement emphasized the cultural significance of the site and “the different values it mediates,” which requires a careful assessment of the current damages to its physical fabric and an appropriate scheme for future plans of restoration and redevelopment that do not jeopardize “either its integrity or authenticity.” In stark difference with the KIC competition, the CMP announcement stressed the connection between the site and its local context, including the needs of the urban entity around the fairground. The project also emphasized the need for “a participatory approach” to understand the diverse “values” of the site, address its constraints and opportunities, and identify “possible adaptive reuse strategies” within the framework of international conservation standards. The first phase of the project should involve

archival research, field investigation, and the collection of oral histories to retrieve all the necessary information about the site and its significance for those related to it.

6. An Open Conclusion

Much of the steam behind the projects of the TSEZ came from its chairperson and general manager, Raya Haffar El-Hassan, a close ally of Saadeddine Hariri, who was minister of finance in the first Saad Hariri cabinet (10 December 2009–11 January 2011) and minister of interior and municipalities at the end of the second Hariri cabinet (31 January 2019–21 January 2020). An economist turned political heavyweight with possible national aspirations despite her own intentions (Haddad 2015), Hassan was unable to calm the unrest that erupted in Tripoli at the end of 2019. Once again, the dynamics of power and politics in Beirut did not automatically reflect on the scene of Tripoli.

The demonstrations in October 2019 demanded the downfall of the entire postwar political class and held it responsible for sectarian strife, corruption, economic poverty, and unemployment in Tripoli and the north of Lebanon (Azhari 2019). Galvanized by the spectacle of effervescence offered by massive crowds, many Tripolitans mobilized en masse to defy the image of the city as a hotbed of conservatism and a nest for terrorists, and they had little reason to return to a life of deprivation (Bajec 2019). Poverty, as captured by the data sets released by the United Nations in 2018, and neglect from the central government were perceived by the demonstrators as even more scandalous since Tripoli is home to some of Lebanon's wealthiest people and most influential politicians, with their patronage networks that connect money from the Gulf countries and local neighborhood militias. The social anger, exacerbated by the influx of Syrian refugees, explains how Tripoli styled itself "the bride of the revolution" and remained Lebanon's protest capital when tension resurfaced in April 2020 (Facon 2020; Iskandarani 2020) in the wake of the country's financial and political collapse after its default (Mazzucotelli 2020).

Lebanon's meltdown, worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic and the ominous consequences of the Beirut port blast on 4 August 2020, casts serious doubt on the feasibility of urban projects that might very well remain on hold while the country struggles to get its act together. In such a precarious and unpredictable situation, urban infrastructure remains a visible site of contention, where all the major fault lines of Lebanese politics appear more vividly, and a wide consensus on the significance

and value or urban heritage is yet to emerge. For now, the Rashid Karami International Fair remains the space of possibility of an ideal Tripoli, conversant with modernity, confidently projected into the future, yet connected to its past and territory, that is still far from being turned into reality as long as no actor in the city or even the country has the audacity, vision, legitimacy, or resources to bring the project to completion.

Notes

1. At the time of finalizing this chapter, Najib Mikati was the prime minister of Lebanon. Mikati is at the helm of a supposedly technocratic cabinet that was inaugurated on 10 September 2021, more than one year after the August 2020 Beirut explosion and the subsequent resignation of his predecessor, Hassan Diab.

2. Conversation with local activists during field visit, Tripoli, January 2017.

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ELEVEN | Implementing Local Democracy

From Borders to Powers in Postrevolution Tunisia

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1. Revolutionary Decentralization

Although local democracy is now recognized as a global issue (GOLD 2008; Wilson 2000), there is still a partition in decentralization studies between the long tradition of research into decentralization in the West (Tarrow 1977; Bennett 1993; Page and Goldsmith 2010) and the more reduced literature available for the rest of the world, including the Middle East and North Africa (Bergh 2010; Bras and Signoles 2017). Moreover, while academic studies on decentralization in Europe and the West have focused on power issues (Le Galès 1995, 2002; Sebastiani 2007), the focus in so-called developing countries is on service delivery (Harb and Atallah 2015), good governance (Schmitter 2019), and development (Salman 2017) in compliance with the requirements of international funding organizations. Thus, unsurprisingly, we may find decentralization on the agenda of authoritarian regimes, which was the case in Tunisia (Marcou 1998).

If so, how did the issue of decentralization in postrevolutionary Tunisia differ from the previous regime's agenda? It is generally agreed that the people wanted two things: freely elected representatives close enough to them to respond to their daily life problems and be accountable in their dealings with them (Gobe 2017); and spatial justice granting all portions of Tunisian land, as well as the people living on it, equal

access to resources, services, and opportunities (Ayeb 2011). These claims impact two of the four cleavages Rokkan identifies in the process of state-building: the cleavage between the center and the periphery and between urban and rural (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), which constitute the two spatially grounded cleavages of Rokkan's model. Whether or not "Arab springs have all been a matter of center/periphery—a rebellion of the margins," as asserted by a young anthropologist backstage at an EU-sponsored event on decentralization in Tunis,¹ this view certainly applies to the Tunisian case. It means that, to be satisfied, these claims call for a new design of subnational territorial units combined with a new structure of subnational political authorities. They were to transform subnational territorial units from portions of land, subjects of (and responsive to) top-down administrative action, into space-grounded actors capable of choosing their political representatives via bottom-up processes and linking rights and entitlements to the spatial *Lebenswelt* rather than social status or corporatist belonging.

To convey this strong meaning of "local democracy," I draw on Saskia Sassen's concept of alternative "assemblages" of "territory, authority, rights" (TAR), which she uses to explain how "the national" was assembled in the modern era and how it is disassembled in the postmodern era of globalization (Sassen 2006). This is exactly what decentralization in Tunisia was about: the creation and bordering of new territories and the establishment of new authorities and rights on this basis—thus, a disassembling of the previous territorial cleavages and a reassembling of a new structure of powers and rights. To analyze decentralization in terms of TAR has the advantage of escaping old political and academic regional partitions and taking globalization seriously. It also proves a valid heuristic concept to answer the question: what did the Tunisians mean when they called for decentralization, and what did they get? The crucial question arose after the remapping of territorial authorities known as "integral municipalization" in 2016 and the 2018 municipal elections, after which conflicts arose almost immediately, thereby calling into question the efficacy of the new assemblage.

The reconstruction of political legitimacy through democratic elections has been one of the obsessions of Tunisian leaders during the country's postrevolutionary transition, which has received substantial support from the international community. But while there was a wide consensus on the roadmap that eventually led to the first national elections in October 2011, the latter were followed by an increasing disinterest in local elections (Turki and Loschi 2017). Nevertheless, the process

of local democracy institution-building made slow but steady progress. A whole chapter (Title 7) in the 2014 constitution was devoted to local government. Municipalities were established across the national territory in 2016, and eventually, the Code of Local Authorities was promulgated in 2018, barely 10 days before the first municipal elections. Difficulties for newly elected councils and mayors quickly emerged, proving that formal bordering and democratic elections were just not enough to govern.

Where did these difficulties come from? I argue that they stemmed from two different visions of decentralization (i.e., administrative and political) that had been present since the earliest days of the revolution. Despite formal agreement on the two major goals of decentralization (i.e., spatial justice and democratic representation of territorial communities) as proved by the smooth approval of the decentralization chapter in the new constitution, these visions contrasted not only concerning how the two claims would be accommodated but also as regarding the degree to which they were complementary or mutually contrasting (Ben Jelloul and Turki 2018). This explains why the two main and truly revolutionary achievements of the decentralization process—integral municipalization and local elections—produced a mixture of successes and failures rather than a triumphant advent of the “ardently” invoked (Bras and Signoles 2017) local democracy that would enable people to experience the fruits of the revolution in their everyday lives and environment. To make the new assemblage work, the actors had to draw on what Sassen calls “capabilities,” that is, a variety of institutions, techniques, and social forms that have proved more useful than legal resources and electoral legitimacy. Thus, the Tunisian revolution can be understood as one of those “tipping points” in which already existing trends and practices involving both actors included in and those excluded from the old dominant system “tip” into a new organizing logic (Sassen 2006, 9–10).

To illustrate this and shed some light on what the Tunisians wanted, got, and are still lacking almost 10 years after decentralization was put on the agenda because it was constantly postponed during the protracted democratic transition and eventually returned to the political agenda just before national issues would swallow it up again,² this chapter proceeds as follows. I begin with a brief account of territorial politics in modern Tunisia to argue that centralization, far from being an older legacy, was imported into Tunisia by the French Protectorate and further strengthened by the two authoritarian regimes after the country had gained independence (section 2). I then show, by using evidence collected through participant observation, as well as interviews with key

actors, how contrasting visions of decentralization existed since the very first months of the revolution and how the “administrative vision” prevailed in the boundary issues connected to integral municipalization (section 3). I contrast this vision with what I call the “political vision” of decentralization, which is supported by both national actors, who pressured to get municipal elections implemented, and the mayors who were subsequently elected. Five case studies containing in-depth interviews with five mayors in the Tunisian metropolitan area provide evidence of the clash between the two visions and the impact on the aftermath of the 2018 municipal elections (section 4).³ My conclusion is that even if Tunisians got “decentralization,” they still have to fight for local empowerment (section 5).

2. The Politics of Space and Territory in Modern Tunisia: From the Beys to Revolution

To understand decentralization in Tunisia, it would be wrong to assume that centralization before the revolution had been firmly established since the time of the beys (Marcou 1998). Under the Ottomans (1574–1881), territory was divided into *wilayats* (“governorates,” a division corresponding more or less to a province) ruled by caids—some 60 dignitaries named by the bey who were both tax collectors and in charge of public order—under whom there were khalifs and around 2,000 sheikhs. These functions correspond neatly enough to the centralized structure of governors, delegates, and district chiefs in modern Tunisia. However, their names have been modernized: The caid is now a *wali* (governor), having under him *muatameds* (delegates) and *omdas* (village chiefs). But the systematic negotiations between the center and the periphery, the legitimacy of local institutions and practices, the survival of tribal solidarities and allegiances, and the fierce attachment to collective lands in southern regions have been overlooked by political science state-building theory as archaic remnants, leaving it mainly to anthropology to investigate them (Pardo 2017).

The beylical system delivered the basic functions of a modern state: order, justice, defense, and tax collection. In urban centers, sheikhs were the heads of local administration and responsible for policing the souks, controlling corporations, weights and measures, and public morality. But welfare services were largely delivered by typical Islamic institutions like the *habous* or waqf (i.e., real estate goods donated to produce revenues for charitable purposes such as schools, public kitchens, librar-

ies, and mosques), which played an important role in poorer neighborhoods, tribal regions, and rural environments. Moreover, in rural areas, caids and sheikhs were sometimes chosen from among the notables of nomadic tribes. Although the beylical authority was centralized, religious and communitarian institutions at the local level had a system of solidarities based on both family and proximity ties, which the French Protectorate (Pardo 2017) and then the Tunisian Republic (Hibou 2006) strived to break in the name of modernization.

The French Protectorate, which was established in 1881, formally maintained the beylical system of *wilayat*, caids, and sheikhs but made institutional changes that emptied it of territorial representation and tribal self-government (Turki and Verdeil 2015). There used to be 80 *wilayat*, which corresponded to the territory of a tribe or an urban region; they were reduced in number (on the eve of independence, only 36 were left), and their remapping intentionally dissociated them from ethnic criteria. In rural areas, caids and khalifs, as well as sheikhs, were now chosen by Protectorate authorities from among the notables of Tunis and major cities, and these authorities preferred members of “great families” loyal to the Protectorate (Marcou 1998, 16; Pardo 2017). The new system consolidated the marginalization and exploitation of rural peripheries. Tunis and cities where French and other European communities were stronger (e.g., Bizerte, La Goulette, Sousse, and Sfax) started to benefit from a gradual albeit very limited introduction of communes, and in 1952, a protectoral decree introduced elections for municipal councils. This apparent democratization consolidated an apartheid system as in each commune, elections were based on two separate constituencies—one Tunisian and one French, with an overrepresentation of the latter. *Wilaya* councils became elective with the same decree and were based on similar discriminations. Urban policies developed a “European city” side by side with the ancient medina (now called the “Arab city”). The string of coastal medinas, doubled by a “European city,” became typical of Tunisian urbanism (Chabbi 2012), and the urbanized coast became richer while the rural inland remained poor.

After national independence (1956), the territorial cleavages between inner and coastal, rural and urban regions persisted, and so did centralization, cast in the mold of new institutions. The 1959 constitution mentions municipal and regional councils in just one article (art. 71), recognizing their existence but devolving their functioning to ordinary laws. Lack of power, resources, and democratic legitimacy made them a “pure fiction” (Baccouche 2016, 185). While colonial authorities had designed

the communes to dissolve the traditional solidarities based on family and tribe, after independence, the national authorities had no interest in promoting new solidarities based on proximity and on “the strength to claim their rights in face of central power” (Marcou 1998, 23). Under Bourguiba, who wanted to strengthen the state, national agencies and state corporations took over both infrastructures and social services. As for Ben Ali’s reforms (regional councils in 1989 and municipalities in 1995), their main goal was to make “the citizen feel that administrative structures did not spare any effort to be at his service” (Marcou 1998, 25).

On the eve of the revolution in 2011, the only institutions formally corresponding to decentralization were the 264 communes that covered less than 50% of the national territory in the densely urbanized regions of the east coast and the capital. All other territorial institutions belonged to the structure of deconcentration:⁴ They were not elected and had scarce autonomy and only consultancy powers. The deconcentration structure comprised 24 governorates (*wilayat*), 264 delegations (*muatmadiyah*), and 2,073 sectors (*imadat*), thus corresponding to the ancient caid, khalif, and sheikh structures. More than half of the territory was nonmunicipalized, and more than one-third of the population lived outside a municipal district (Labiadh 2016). In all the governorates on the coast from Bizerte to Medenine (except Mahdia), the majority of the population, reaching 100% in the governorate of Tunis, was living in the communes, whereas in all the governorates of the interior, except for Gafsa and Tozeur, only a minority of the population lived in a commune. Thus, more than one-third of the population had no chance to elect its own representatives, was directly under the authority of the governor, and had to apply to governorate offices—often far from their residence—for basic services, including personal documents and certificates. This power structure both mirrored and strengthened the center-periphery, urban-rural, coast-interior cleavages.

3. “Integral Municipalization” and the Boundary Issue

Without political representation, the inland regions did not receive many resources: “In the Ben Ali regime’s final budget before it fell, 82 percent of state funds were dedicated to coastal areas, compared with only 18 percent going to the interior” (Yerkes and Muasher 2018). Giving voice to the latter, the very areas in which revolution had started, and “overcoming the exclusion of people and regions”⁵ was at the top of the revolutionary agenda. The 2014 constitution introduced the principle of

decentralization “through local authorities comprising municipalities, regions, and districts” (art. 131). The same article further established (par. 2) that “each of these categories covers the whole territory of the Republic in accordance with a découpage established by the law.” This principle is referred to, in Tunisian political and media discourse, as “integral municipalization.”⁶ Its implementation was the outcome of a long process.

Between the end of June and the beginning of July 2011, with a dissolved parliament, a provisional high authority ruling the country, and occasional outbursts of violence, an international conference titled “Decentralization and Local Democracy in Tunisia: Issues and Perspectives” was organized in the well-known tourist resort of Yasmina Hammamet (Belhedi 2011; Sebastiani 2014). In an eerie landscape of deserted hotels and empty vacation apartments, when the summer season should have been in full swing, politicians, experts, civil society actors and academics, party delegates, and public administration officials had discussions that lasted four full days. There were two visions of decentralization: administrative and political.

The conference was organized by the Center for Training and Support for Decentralization (Centre de Formation et d’Appui à la Décentralisation, or CFAD) of the Ministry of the Interior. Created in 1994, the CFAD had smoothly and efficiently pursued its activities before and after the revolution. It was benefiting from a partnership between the *École nationale d’administration* and the Tunisian ministry (it dates back to before the revolution and was meant to be pursued with minor adjustments after the revolution), an agreement protocol signed in May 2011 with the Assembly of Regions of Europe, and a range of EU/Sigma projects running from 2009 to June 2011 (*République tunisienne n.d.*). The document confirms that the Ben Ali regime did have decentralization on its agenda: a gradual process that was planned to overlap with the process of urbanization and would maintain central control through the governorates and party organization. As for the CFAD, it was concerned with improving the performance of civil servants and appreciated the contribution that participatory techniques could give to the administration’s efficiency. A demonstration of his expertise in such techniques was given by Mokhtar Hammami, then-chief of the Department of Local Communities at the Ministry of the Interior, during a workshop with members of “special delegations.” Hammami became head of the CFAD the following year and then minister of local affairs, a position he would occupy from November 2018 until February 2020. During that period,

following the municipal elections of May 2018, new political actors (i.e., elected councils and mayors) were confronting the administrative establishment of the centralized state and its previous assemblage of territory, authority, and rights.

Almost 10 years after the Hammamet event, Hammami disputes any notion that there have been delays in administrative action for decentralization. He describes the situation in 2011 as “catastrophic”:⁷ “Nobody was paying anything,” he says, referring to taxes. The media reported that local income taxes “had dropped 70% as compared with the first two months of 2010” (“Dissolution des Conseils municipaux” 2011).

So we met to discuss what happened in the world. Those new concepts: accountability, transparency . . . and how to transpose them to the social and cultural structure of Tunisia. We made diagnostics and pilot processes, we tested rules on compensatory funds and local finance, as well as practices—social economy, women’s participation in rural areas. We tried to understand how other countries’ principles would work in Tunisia’s historic society. (MH)

This does not mean, according to Hammami, that there was any desire to delay integral municipalization, which “requires a long time [but] was on our agenda even before the 2014 constitution.” When Hammami speaks of “our agenda,” he means the Ministry of the Interior with its Department for Local Communities, as well as the CFAD, but adds that “we worked well with the ANC [the National Constituent Assembly]” and implicitly denies any conflict between politics and the administration. Quite on the contrary, as a result of this lengthy preparatory work (“We visited about 10 countries, from Poland to Portugal, for field research”) and despite the presentations of as many as 62 different projects, finally, “Chapter 7 of the constitution passed smoothly: it’s the one that required the least discussion” (MH). But after the constitution was approved, “a second period opened, in 2015” (MH). Since Tunisia’s new constitution was approved in January 2014, one might ask what happened for a whole year, especially since “now we needed a Code of Local Authorities, a law on territorial planning, a law on deconcentration” (MH). Hammami responds that “people were not interested; they thought the administration would be the same as usual,” which might explain the view that there was no need to rush things.

Nevertheless, his predecessor, Youssef Chahed, in an interview released in 2016 (Hajbi 2016a) during his brief tenure at the Ministry of

Local Affairs before becoming prime minister, mentions “more than 550 requests concerning the creation of new municipalities” that had been received by the ministry, adding, “Of course, this can only confirm citizens’ interest in their commune and communal activities.” People were now keenly interested in the découpage or boundary issue. To cover the whole national territory, the boundaries of existing municipalities had to be redefined (through extension or partition), and borders had to be established for new municipalities in areas, mainly rural and southern, where there had previously been none. This was a technical issue, according to Chahed, for which “we’ve adopted several scientific and technical criteria and indicators such as development, health, and transportation indicators [after] a study that has lasted over two years [involving] five ministries, the National Institutes for Statistics and Topography, and several experts.” People had never shown much interest in the remapping of governorates and the creation of new ones, which had always been a thoroughly top-down policy (Chabbi 2012). But the moment the government started creating municipalities through decrees, requests concerning new municipalities poured on the ministry. They came especially from the South, that is, the rural nonmunicipalized regions, where 25 new municipalities were created in 2015 (Hajbi 2016b).

Hammami confirms this account but stresses that integral municipalization was a “third stage,” and “like every action subject to juridical, social and political rules,” it could not be done en bloc, “like they did in France between 1984 and 2004.” In the meantime, the Ministry of Local Affairs had been established to withdraw authority over local collectivities from the Ministry of the Interior and to enhance territorial autonomy.⁸ According to the new ministry, the process would have required “three periods of nine years each, thus, 27 years [in total]” (MH). Political actors, including newly elected mayors, note this figure to prove that administrative actors opposed decentralization as much as they could, although Hammami explains that, “to proceed faster,” they “established eight groups who collected data for eight months.” Subsequently, he explains, “We studied how to transfer data to maps, with the involvement of the Statistics Center, the Topographic Center, the Télé-détection Center. Parameters for rural areas had to be established—for instance, concerning the surface and the number of inhabitants” (MH).

Despite these lengthy procedures, some scholars observe that integral municipalization has been tackled and achieved in one year, that is, very (and probably far too) speedily. “Whereas, since the creation of the municipality of Tunis in 1858, the edges of communalized terri-

tory more or less overlapped with those of urbanized territory (no more than 10% of the whole surface of the country up to 2015), the whole country was communalized in 2016 through the creation of 86 new communes and the extension of borders of 187 other communes to incorporate their rural hinterland, sometimes extending their original surface up to 20 times” (Ben Jelloul and Turki 2018, 75; my translation). This rebordering, they predict, “will produce upheaval in the functioning of communes established for a century and a half. They will find it difficult to generalize proximity services . . . to rural areas with low population density and great distances from the center, to say nothing of insufficient human and financial resources” (Ben Jelloul and Turki 2018, 75; my translation).

Thus, through different viewpoints and data, the same notion is conveyed, namely that efficient administration and political representation are two quite different matters, and forcing them into the same borders would have poor outcomes in both domains, especially for the rural areas that municipalization was meant to benefit. It would produce “two territories whose boundaries are scarcely fit for overlapping: one of political legitimization . . . and one of practical administrative action” (Ben Jelloul and Turki 2018, 75; my translation). This vision, which focuses on “borders” rather than “(bordering) capabilities” (Sassen 2009) is based on the notion—strongly embedded in Tunisian institutional culture—that top-down state policies, whose business is to deliver, prioritize bottom-up political representation whose function is to give voice.

This position is unanimously expressed by different voices within the central administration. Mourad Eddhif, an official of the Ministry for Local Affairs in charge of the implementation of new communal boundaries, explains in detail the technical aspects of the bordering process concerning municipalities:

Boundaries must be approved by decree after technicians have done a field-check of coordinates and ministerial offices have checked the formal correctness of the acts. Before approval, they must undergo technical establishment and formal control. Then, the Ministry of Equipment and the Ministry of Finances must be consulted. Conflicts are settled by administrative courts. Any changes must be decided by law.⁹

However, he laments that “the pressure for elections has postponed all this technical work, which may go on until 2020–221” (ME). Ham-

mami expresses the same idea: “Elections were held in a context of territorial uncertainty. There were pressures and interests demands made by tribes and clans, of families for land. Some municipalities became aware of their boundaries only afterward” (MH). And so does Basma Jebali, secretary of state for local authorities: “Now, we are checking boundaries on the field. And not everybody is happy with them: We’ve received 40 to 50 complaints.”¹⁰ This dissatisfaction is confirmed by Mourad Eddhif, especially among the tribes. “They wanted to keep the old *imada* boundaries. Those were the historical boundaries. They didn’t want them to be divided” (ME).

Yet these last remarks imply that the municipality issue was not just a matter of efficient administration and service delivery but also a matter of identity and autonomy, that is, a matter of politics and not just policies. When Hammami recalls that “we’ve received 1,810 requests concerning communes,” confirming somewhat contradictorily that “people *wanted* communes,” we have to return to our first question: “What did the Tunisians want when they called for ‘decentralization’”? The administrative vision (i.e., “much supported by department directors and by *walis*”) as somewhat ironically asserted by Ennahda MP Maherzia Labidi,¹¹ in charge of the Commission for Local Affairs in Parliament (the ARP, Assembly of Representatives of the People) responded: “Better services, more equipment,” which somehow amounts to making citizens feel the presence of the state, as in the past (Hajbi 2016b). But the debate on integral municipalization shows that people wanted autonomy and felt strongly about local identities. Is this what the Tunisians got? And if so, how did the postelection difficulties start?

4. Democratic Representation and Power Struggle

At the Yasmina Hammamet Conference, a different, political vision of decentralization was embodied by “special delegations.” An early product of revolution, though referring to the existing legislation on municipalities, special delegations had been established—after the dissolution of old regime communes, which had resulted from manipulated elections and where mayors had been chosen according to their loyalty to the regime—based on political consensus, which regulated most activities during the transition period (Bras and Gobe 2017). Readers’ reactions to a call for voluntary participation in special delegations in the business magazine *Leaders* demonstrate the interest in bottom-up participation and the implementation of “revolution values” and “local democracy,”

as well as some preference for the early organization of local elections (“Dissolution des Conseils municipaux” 2011).

Members of special delegations—who insisted on having their own workshop during the conference—were mainly qualified members of civil society, wellknown in their communes, politically active during the uprisings, and very enthusiastic. And yet, their lack of administrative experience, coupled with a lack of elective legitimacy, would soon lead to a wave of resignations. At the national level, the pressure to hold elections came mainly from the Ennahda party (the majoritarian Islamist party), some sectors of civil society, a variety of NGOs (Carnegie Endowment, Hanns Seidel Stiftung, Al Bawsala), and international institutions ranging from the EU to the World Bank (Salman 2017). Integral municipalization and the remapping of Tunisia’s political geography to overcome the old cleavages between urban and rural, coastal, and inland regions formed the necessary basis for giving territories political representation. The real goal was to “empower territories and people,” says Tasnim Chirchi of the Jasmine Foundation.¹² Moreover, “Local power was also meant to protect against the return of dictatorship,” as clearly stated by Maherzia Labidi, who added that “the decoupage process and electoral legislation had been secured two years earlier” and, thus, could not account for the delay in decentralization. The truth, Labidi argued, is that “if chapter 7 of the constitution was the one on which there was the least discussion, it simply proves how little interest the issue received from political parties. Only Ennahda firmly pursued it” (ML).¹³

Besides these two major motivations, the urge for elections was justified by the increasing erosion of local political authority due to “the absence of formal, electoral legitimacy underpinning the actions of the city councils” (Volpi et al. 2016, 379). Elections were meant to mark the transition from the revolutionary legitimacy of committees, leagues, and special delegations (Allal 2011; Auffray 2013) to the institutional legitimacy of democratic representation. One year later, this outcome was far from achieved. There had been low voter turnout (34%) for the May 2018 municipal elections (Boileau and Elleuch 2018). Moreover, these elections were soon followed by a wave of council dissolutions and mayor resignations, which were related to the party strategies for the upcoming national elections (Vidano 2019). As for new communes, they were lacking basic means and resources. In this context, mayors emerged as potential leaders of counterpowers not in accordance with an institutional design but, to some extent, in spite of it.

Currently, mayors have several handicaps. They do not enjoy the

legitimacy of direct elections. Their official title is *rais baladiya* (president of the commune): they chair municipal councils and are elected by council members from among the heads of winning lists, which unavoidably entails party-sponsored negotiations, except in the case of very strong majorities. Such negotiations are the rule, due to an electoral system based on purely proportional “blocked list” vote that has produced highly fragmented assemblies. Mayors have a salary but must guarantee full-time engagement—a problem for all those holding independent jobs and professional activities. They chair volunteer councils whose members are not even allocated some form of expense reimbursement but have the power to dissolve the council if the majority of its members resign (Chaabane 2019). At the same time, because they are also the heads of local administration, they are responsible for managing a staff of municipal employees and workers who—unlike council members—enjoy a permanent position and a regular salary, have a better knowledge of bureaucratic norms and practices, are highly critical of new power arrangements, and claim autonomy in the name of administrative neutrality (Dridi 2019).

Such an institutional design is bound to produce weak councils and mayors. According to Tasnim Chirchi, this is because “the Code of Local Authorities was written by the Ministry of the Interior—that is, by those people who wanted less decentralization” (TCI). By contrast, State Secretary for Local Affairs Bisma Jebali complains that “mayors, at the beginning, believed they could do everything. They had not understood gradually” (BJ). No sooner had the mayors been elected than they “came into conflict with governors and the ministry” (BJ).

The stories of five mayors¹⁴ from the Tunis metropolitan area (“Grand Tunis”),¹⁵ chosen as a sample of very different yet very typical actors in the new kind of local democracy,¹⁶ help us understand why this happened. Despite their very different political backgrounds, biographies, and expertise, all five agree on two issues: that resistance to decentralization within the state persists even after elections and that, in the power struggle between state and municipalities, the former has mobilized two key actors—governors and local police.

Governors’ resistance to the new authority of mayors “takes advantage of a lack of implementation regarding the decrees,” according to Slim Meherzi,¹⁷ a well-known and popular pediatrician very successfully elected in the upper-class La Marsa municipality (92,000 inhabitants), an old neighborhood beloved by francophone elites, as head of the independent list entitled “Marsa Changes” (Kapitalis 2018). Although

Meherzi resigned as mayor some 18 months later, in October 2019 (Nemlaghi 2019), he chose to remain on the council.

The lack of “essential decrees implementing a transfer of power from deconcentrated to decentralized entities” is confirmed by Fethi Zagrouba,¹⁸ who is an engineer and professor. From 1995 to 2005, he was a member of the municipal council and later vice-mayor of Hammam Chatt—a pleasant seaside resort of 32,000 inhabitants some 20 kilometers south of Tunis center—and then again in 2010, “just in time to ensure that administration continued after the revolution when I became the interim mayor.”¹⁹ He was elected in 2018 as head of the independent list “Medinatna.”

Delays in issuing the decrees are seen as part of a strategy: “Central power is clinging to its prerogatives,” says Meherzi (SM). In modern Tunisia, this power lies with the governors, who are appointed by the executive chief. The governors have political, economic, and security functions: Unsurprisingly, they are hostile to decentralization as opposed to deconcentration. Without decrees “telling us what to do,” as one of them puts it,²⁰ they refuse to relinquish their responsibilities to the mayors. This has a paralyzing impact on municipal action—first and foremost, on its struggle against illegal and informal developments afflicting a large part of Tunisian territory and involving huge real estate interests. “Because the governor still controls Steg (National Agency for Electricity and Gas), Sonede (National Agency for Water Distribution Supply), and Onas (National Water Sanitation Office), illegal construction sites manage to get authorization for water and electricity connections,” explains Adnan Bouassida (AB2),²¹ the mayor of Raouad municipality, which has 94,000 (mostly working-class) inhabitants, borders on La Marsa, and consists primarily of industrial areas. There is an old border issue between the two communes due to the huge tax incomes generated by the hotel business (TN24 2019). Bouassida has managerial and marketing expertise and was elected as an independent heading the Ennahda list. He knows what he talks about: Raouad has “140 informal settlements amounting to about 43% of informal buildings in the whole country” (AB2). And lack of control over the local police only makes things worse, so much so that this is the second issue all five interviewees mentioned.

The local police force, formerly under the municipal authority, was put under the authority of the minister of the interior in 2012: a paradox that can be connected to security difficulties in the early transition period. “Ennahda’s minister of the interior, Ali Laarayedh, yielded to corporatist pressures of local police trade unions” coveting the privi-

leged status of state police, explains Hatem Ben Kdim,²² who is head of the cabinet supporting the mayor of Tunis. In 2015, “when the Ministry for Local Collectivities was separated from the Ministry of the Interior, local police should have been transferred to the new ministry. As this was not done, the only solution was to create a new local police body, the Environment Police, which does not work, does not have enough resources, and has no clear mandate,” admits Besma Jebali (BJ), another voice from inside the ministry. And the drafting of the Code of Local Authorities, on the eve of municipal elections, has been another lost opportunity to give municipalities coercive power and, thus, enable them to tackle two of their main problems: informal trade and informal buildings, both directly related to patronage and corruption.

Since coercive power (Max Weber’s “legitimate violence”) is the central resource of political authority, mayors feel that you cannot really speak of political decentralization “if security is in the hands of a central power, depending on its goodwill, and the local police only do what they please,” explains Slim Meherzi (SM). Fethi Zagrouba conveys the same idea in soberer terms: “Real decentralization involves the availability of local police to fight informal development and occupation of the state- and commune-owned land” (FZ2). In a press interview, Adnan Bouasida, who is far less diplomatic, bluntly declared that “local police in Raouad has not lived up to its obligations to fight trespassing on public domain and state property, as well as informal buildings: This makes it a useless and crippled organ” (A.M. 2019).

Regarding the impossibility of dealing with illegal land use because of the lack of control over local police, each of the mayors has a story to tell. “I’ve had documents stolen and received death threats because I opened many files that had been left behind and concern buildings that have gone up illegally,” says Zeyneb Ben Hassine,²³ a former MP and a member of the Bardo municipal council during the presidency of Ben Ali. She describes herself as coming “from a cultivated Destourian²⁴ family with a habit of volunteering and a passion for politics” (ZBH). After the revolution, she joined the Islamist Ennahda party and was elected to the Bardo municipality (72,000 inhabitants), a historical neighborhood in the heart of Tunis and the base of the ARP. She was forced to resign one year later when the Bardo council was dissolved, following the mass resignation of council members (Y.N. 2019).

“In my commune, the head of the municipal police was transferred after refusing to engage in patronage practices,” reports Slim Meherzi (SM). Because mayors do not control the local police, corruption per-

sists as much as in the past, when “only good patronage connections could deliver a building permit” (Volpi et al. 2016, 379). And yet, seven years after the fall of Ben Ali, “You still do not get a building permit without bribery” (SM). The main difference is that now corruption, as Meherzi puts it, has been “democratized”: anyone can get in it—not just the president’s friends.

According to Meherzi, mayors should “develop a project for the city: This is what proximity politics means” (SM), which requires control of land use. The situation may vary within the Tunis metropolitan area. “Raouad is the only sector in the Tunis metropolitan area that still has undeveloped land,” emphasizes Bouassida.²⁵ By contrast, Meherzi describes gentrified La Marsa as “a locality of huge real estate interests and speculation” (SM). But both need municipal councils “to have a plan for the future”; instead, complains Meherzi, “They have done everything to make local authorities a matter of service delivery” (SM). And Bouassida maintains that “those who’ve written the laws do not believe in them and are against them” (AB2).

Although it is a recurrent argument in criticisms of decentralization, nobody mentions the lack of financial resources as the main issue: only 4% of the national budget is allocated to local authorities. This confirms that decentralization, in its political version, is first and foremost a matter of power transfer rather than service delivery. All mayors feel that they could do something to help develop their commune if only they had the authority they are formally entitled to: “Resources? No, that’s not the problem. It’s power,” says Hatem Ben Kdim (HBK).

As a result, explains Bouassida, “Today, a mayor must wrest his powers off from the state” (AB2). “Municipalities currently wrest their powers off from central authorities,” confirms Hatem Ben Kdim (HBK), who in his capacity as head of the cabinet around the mayor of Tunis metaphorically plays the role of institutional bodyguard to the *sheikh al medina*,²⁶ Souad Abderrahim: the similarity of positions is all the more interesting since the mayor of Tunis is president of the National Federation of Tunisian Cities, an institution that has existed since 1975 and critics dub (together with the CFAD) “part of the facade,”²⁷ whereas the mayor of Raouad is president of its newborn rival, the Confederation of Tunisian Mayors (Cotumaires). The creation of the latter as an instrument for “wresting off powers” provides a good example of what Sassen construes as gearing preexisting capabilities into new organizing logics (Sassen 2006). In the process, the mayors’ backgrounds, expertise, and personalities are relevant when it comes to their ability to adapt to a

context where the law is not the only resource: more successful mayors are either managers from the private sector or cadres from the previous administration. Both use institutions and techniques they are familiar with to generate those counterpowers that can make new TAR assemblage a political and not merely a legal construct.

By comparing how Zeyneb Ben Hassine and her successor, Mounir Tlili, dealt with the same problem (i.e., the governor's delay in implementing the council's decisions), we get another example of gearing preexisting capabilities into new organizing logics. The Bardo municipal council had been dissolved when a majority of 18 council members resigned after accusing Zeyneb Ben Hassine of "authoritarianism"—one of the standard reasons councils give for mass resignations (Vidano 2019). The story is different according to Tlili, a theologian, Zaytouna professor, minister for religious affairs under the Jomaa government, and a member of the small Al-Badil party founded by Mehdi Jomaa. Tlili became the new Bardo mayor after elections with 11% voter turnout (TAP 2019). Although elected by a coalition that joined forces against the majoritarian Ennahda party, he cooperates very well with Ennahda vicepresident, Jihène Ben Aissa. "The mayor had bad relationships with the governor and the delegate," is Tlili's explanation. "So people with open files were kept waiting. When I became mayor, I suggested a mixed commission to study the issue. And now the governor has given the order to take up the files again."²⁸

We also find differences between the strategies adopted by Zeyneb Ben Hassine and Mounir Tlili for a project involving high-speed trains (RFR) in the middle of urban Bardo, an idea the residents strongly opposed. Ben Hassine staunchly defended the project and was accused of corruption by her council members. Tlili explains that, while formally legal, the RFR was one of Ben Ali's "presidential projects" to enhance his personal prestige. In the old regime, one did not even discuss these projects, but today, "It is possible to say no" (MT). When the new council and mayor were elected, "We had negotiations between the municipality, ministry, and top state authorities, and we obtained a decree to stop the project. Then we had competent citizens, who've worked abroad, meet with technicians from the municipality and the RFR, and we submitted another plan" (MT). Low "electoral legitimacy" did not prove to be a problem.

The tools Slim Meherzi and Adnan Bouassida deployed to fight corruption provide a third example of how preexisting resources have been

adapted to new TAR assemblages. Meherzi eventually resigned after a year because he failed to keep his main promise, namely, “law enforcement for all.” To deal with “cronyism and preferential treatment,” he explains, “We’ve filed complaints against the governor, the minister of interior. We’ve won in administrative court, but they’ve filed complaints against us in return” (SM). Facing the same problem, Adnan Bouassida organized a public conference to discuss a revision of the urban plan of Raouad. So, he explains, “At least for the moment, solicitors can’t sign land sale documents anymore without regular parceling” (AB2), which had previously been widespread malpractice.

By drawing on different capabilities, mayors follow their own style. Mounir Tlili, who has an institutional background, maintains that a mayor must both “listen to inhabitants” and “have good relationships with top directors and managers” within the state and police force, as well as within public companies such as Steg, including “the commission that issues permits [for residents] to connect to the water and power networks”; he adds that a mayor must also be “a diplomat with skills in conflict management and teambuilding.” By contrast, Adnan Bouassida, who has a corporate background and positions himself as the leader of the new mayors’ movement, stresses that “a mayor must be strong and raise his voice” (AB2). Communication is one of his favorite instruments: his ability in this domain comes from his marketing expertise. “I communicate with all possible means. With two or three appearances on TV or radio and some 20 web magazines, you make your case. Public opinion is important, and mayors can exert pressure through the press” (AB2).

For Fethi Zagrouba, who draws on his university career, project management, and local administration, networks are one of the main resources. On the eve of the 2018 municipal elections, he confidently declared: “Next time you visit, you’ll find us in the municipality.”²⁹ Sure enough, 18 months later, he was successfully running the Hammam Chatt municipality. When our interview was drawing to an end, people started entering his study for the next meeting. One by one, local officials—including the governor, ministry members, and other municipalities’ representatives—made an appearance while Zagrouba explained, beaming: “Yes, we try to have these meetings regularly. . . . Coordination is important—as a way of governing together. And you can bring this about through voluntary practices” (FZ2).

There is a word all mayors use: *rassembleur* (someone who can unify). Zagrouba explains the meaning as follows:

After the elections, we organized a big *mechoui* on the beach. Everybody was invited. We spoke about “responsibility,” not about “victory.” And then we started governing as though we all belonged to one single list—no discrimination. We only take into account expertise, inclinations, complementarities. All our decisions are taken unanimously. (FZ2)

5. Postrevolution Empowerment

The ability to be a *rassembleur*—to bring together representatives of different interests—is crucial to the empowerment of territories in the face of state power. This power struggle between the state and the territories is generating a new informal system of action and coordination that overlaps with the formal assemblage of “territory, authority, and rights” because of a fluid context in which informal capabilities often prove more relevant than formal authority. Three different authorities are now supposed to share powers on the same municipal territory: the municipality itself, the governorate, and the state. While this may sound like the French *millefeuilles administratif*, which generates uncertainty and hampers efficient decision-making, there is an important difference because, in a transition situation like Tunisia’s, the new assemblage of territory, authority, and rights still needs to gain acceptance and legitimacy.

Until now, actors struggling to obtain the authority in the field that they have been allocated on paper have tackled this issue by using two complementary strategies. The first one implies a shift from a “government” to a “governance” perspective,³⁰ with actors adopting approaches “that make it possible to go beyond a purely institutional perspective” and focus “not only on government, its powers, and its instruments” but also on exploring “alternative mechanisms of negotiation between different groups, networks, and sub-systems that enable governmental action” (Le Galès 1995, 59; my translation). This shift was heavily emphasized by European scholars during the EU integration process toward the end of the 1990s: The “governance” approach was deemed better suited to the implementation of the subsidiarity principle, though later it was also criticized as a tool for promoting privatization. In the period following municipal elections in Tunisia, it explains the success of mayors like Bouassida or Zagrouba—who have an entrepreneurial or organizational background and a habit of doing not only what the law prescribes

but also anything the law does not explicitly forbid—where others with a more strictly institutional perspective have failed.

The second strategy aims to institutionalize the emerging state-territories dualism. Cotumaires, for instance, is not “the mayors’ trade union,” as it is sometimes called,³¹ but an alliance (not unlike the medieval Hansa league of cities) for mayors to wrest power from the state and the governors. This process is analogous to the prince-estate dualism in the municipal era of postfeudal, prenational Europe, when cities “increasingly constituted themselves as politically and legally identifiable entities” (Sassen 2006, 68). These political innovations created openings for new political actors to emerge in a highly dynamic context “where older forms of authority might struggle and succeed in re-imposing themselves” (Sassen 2006, 71). They produced “a larger net-worked territorial formation, one arising from the ground up” (Sassen 2006, 73).

However, Sassen argues that this particular assemblage of territory, authority, and rights did not represent “a rival regime to that of the territorial state” (Sassen 2006, 73). Likewise, today, the fact that “the national” in Tunisia is being disassembled and reassembled does not mean the state is going to disappear. On the contrary, current trends appear to exclude two outcomes: a “withering away of the state,” as a very minoritarian Marxist Left in Tunisia would have it, or a “weakening of the state,” as feared by the secular bourgeoisie and middle-class state employees. The cases presented here suggest that the state remains but faces emerging capabilities of new actors. On a global scale, states face alternative “bordering capabilities” of new international actors that produce diverse emergent regimes “cut[ting] into the foundational proposition of the exclusive authority of the State over its territory” (Sassen 2009, 568), but in Tunisia’s decentralization process, the same “foundational proposition” of the postcolonial nation-state is being challenged from the inside. Even though the new subnational boundaries of communes were established under the authority of the state, subsequent municipal elections have transformed them into political borders of communities claiming autonomy in decisions concerning their territories and their share of power and rights.

It required a revolutionary process to bring about this change, and it currently requires the mobilization of preexisting capabilities in the new TAR assemblage to make it effective. This mobilization is pressing to reshape national territory in a territorially polycentric structure. New authorities are increasingly seeking support in voluntary networks

instead of just relying on formal competencies. A whole new set of territorially based and diversified rights and entitlements is emerging, ranging from participatory proceedings to positive discrimination in favor of poorer communes.

This raises some new questions. From an inner transition perspective, will the newly born institutions of local democracy be able to protect the very fragile Tunisian democratic regime? From a broader regional perspective, will the new TAR assemblage benefit the globalization logic, as Sassen maintains for newest assemblages, or might it enhance some new locally centered processes in economics, politics, and culture? In the long run, the state-territories, center-periphery conflict, which decentralization has reshaped, might well yield an original product: a dualistic system that is similar to that of the communal era in postfeudal Europe and develops out of a fruitful hybridization between European and Arabic-Islamic institutional and cultural heritage.

Notes

1. W. B. O., informal interview. Tunis, January 2020. All interviews quoted in this chapter were conducted before the events of 25 July 2021. When it proved unfeasible to anonymize interviewees because of the institutional role they played, the appropriate process was followed to ensure that the fieldwork complied with the University of Bologna's Code of Ethics and Conduct (Annex to Rectoral Decree, File no. 1408/14 of 1 October 2014) with specific regard to chapter II ("Academic Integrity and Ethical Conduct in Research and Teaching"), art. 6, and article 26 ("Responsibilities in research"), item 1. All the author's scientific work, including this research, conforms to these standards, specifically with regard to nonanonymous interviews.

2. Local elections took place in May 2018, a few days before the beginning of Ramadan, which was followed by the parliament's summer period of closure. In the autumn of 2019, national elections were already on the agenda, and the local issue would once again have been postponed *sine die*.

3. In all three sections, I use press excerpts based on a systematic press review during regular periods of fieldwork in Tunisia between 2011 and 2020, as well as digital resources. I only used francophone media and was perfectly aware of the circumspection required.

4. Both academic literature (Turner 2002) and policy papers (Yuliani 2004) distinguish between *political decentralization* (or simply "decentralization") and *administrative decentralization* (also called "deconcentration"). For the World Bank, "Political decentralization aims to give citizens or their elected representatives more power in public decision-making," whereas "administrative decentralization seeks to redistribute authority, responsibility and financial resources for providing public services among different levels of government" (CIESIN

2002). In political science, the feature distinguishing (political) decentralization from (administrative) deconcentration is the presence of an elected body (Dente 1988).

5. Tasnim Chirchi (Jasmine Foundation), interview. Tunis, May 2018.
6. My translation of the Arabic *al-muwatna al-mutakamela*.
7. Mokhtar Hammami, interview, Ministry for Local Affairs. Tunis, November 2019. Henceforth: MH.
8. The post of minister of local affairs was occupied by five different people between 2016 and 2020.
 9. Mourad Eddhif, interview. Tunis, January 2020. Henceforth: ME.
 10. Basma Jebali, interview. Tunis, November 2019. Henceforth: BJ.
 11. Maherzia Labidi, interview. Tunis, May 2018. Henceforth: ML.
 12. Tasnim Chirchi, interview. Tunis, May 2018.
 13. Maherzia Labidi, interview. Tunis, May 2018.
 14. Zeyneb Ben Hassine (ZBH), former mayor of Bardo, Mounir Tlili (MT), mayor of Bardo, Slim Meherzi (SM), former mayor of La Marsa, Adnan Bouassida (AB), mayor of Raouad, and Fethi Zagrouba (FZ), mayor of Hammam Chatt.
 15. The Greater Tunis area (“Grand Tunis”) stretches across four governorates: Tunis, Ariana, Ben Arous, and La Manouba. In our cases, the municipalities of Bardo and La Marsa belong to the governorate of Tunis, Raouad to Ariana, and Hammam Chatt to Ben Arous.
 16. Main facts concerning the municipalities can be found on the municipalities’ official websites. The descriptions are based on my personal knowledge. All other information was provided by the interviewees and cross-checked with media coverage.
 17. Slim Meherzi, interview. La Marsa, November 2019. Henceforth SM.
 18. Fethi Zagrouba, interview. Hammam Chatt, November 2019. Henceforth FZ2.
 19. Fethi Zagrouba, interview. Hammam Chatt, May 2018.
 20. Reported by Adnan Bouassida, interview, Raouad, November 2019.
 21. Adnan Bouassida, interview. Raouad, November 2019. Henceforth AB2.
 22. Hatem Ben Kdim, interview. Tunis, January 2020. Henceforth: HBK.
 23. Zeyneb Ben Hassine, interview. Bardo, April 2019. Henceforth: ZBH.
 24. The Neo-Destour was Bourguiba’s party and later became Ben Ali’s RCD.
 25. Adnan Bouassida, interview. Tunis, April 2019. Henceforth: AB1.
 26. In the municipality of Tunis, created in 1858, the head of a 15-member council of notables named by the bey bore the title of *sheikh al medina*, which is still in use today: Some political circles contested that Souad Abderrahim could bear that title because she is a woman.
 27. Tasnim Chirchi, interview. Tunis, January 2020.
 28. Mounir Tlili, interview. Bardo, November 2019. Henceforth: MT.
 29. Fethi Zagrouba, interview. Hammam Chatt, May 2018.
 30. For a long time, “the word ‘governance’ simply meant ‘governing,’” but today, “the term governance refers to basically a non-hierarchical mode of governing, where non-state actors participate in the formulation and the implementation of public policy” (Mayntz 2003).
 31. B. M., Al Bawsala NGO, interview. Tunis, January 2020.

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CONCLUSION

The Politics of a Transforming Mediterranean Space

A Liminality Perspective

DANIELA HUBER

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility . . . we are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world.

—bell hooks 1989

1. Introduction

The study of the Mediterranean—while being rooted in a long tradition (Braudel 1996 [1949])—began to accelerate in the early 1990s with the onset of an intensive interest of the European Union in the Mediterranean space as the Cold War ended and the US hegemonic moment set in. As the United States sought to seek to establish a “new world order” (Lazar and Lazar 2004), the EU was thriving on that moment, seeking to leverage its own experience in areas adjacent to its enlarging space. Thus, 25 years ago, the EU set up the Barcelona Process / Euro-Mediterranean partnership in an attempt to forge a “security community” in the Mediterranean space, somewhat imitating its own European model. A related literature evolved that explored the (im)possibilities of this endeavor (Adler et al. 2006; Attinà 2004; Volpi 2004). As the

EU's borders expanded considerably with the eastern enlargement, it again began to copy its model of liberal market democracy to what it now referred as "circles of friends" in the eastern and southern "neighborhoods," an evolution that was accompanied by the rise of the "Normative Power Europe" (Manners 2002; Pace 2007) and the externalization literature (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2013; Üstübcici and İçduygu 2018). In 2011, however, a historic rupture happened with the Arab uprisings and a subsequent geopolitical earthquake in the Middle East and North Africa, which has made these space-making initiatives history at a time in which the EU itself struggles with internal politics of contestation.

This new period is often described with Antonio Gramsci's words: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (2005, 276). It is a period in which multiple powers are active in the Mediterranean space (United States, Russia, Turkey, France), while people are continuing to mobilize for conceptions of justice that go far beyond the liberal human rights focus of the European Union.¹ The literature on the Mediterranean is struggling with this period of interregnum; as is, indeed, the larger IR literature on global politics, which is similarly transforming (Acharya and Buzan 2019; Acharya 2010). The calls for a non-Eurocentric literature are therefore accumulating (Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013; Keukeleire and Lecocq 2018), but studies from decentering perspectives on the Mediterranean are only just emerging (Di Peri 2014; Huber and Kamel 2016; Huber 2020; Sarto and Tholens 2020; Huber 2022). In this respect, studies emerging from a bordering perspective are of particular interest, as they help to center the debate on borders within the region outside the usual perspective, which links the Middle East with the EU (Meier 2018). Coming from this perspective and further linking it with the issue of space more broadly, this book helps us to better grasp this period of interregnum and transformation in the Mediterranean from a decentering perspective. As Di Peri and Meier outline in the introduction, this volume puts space and its relationship with politics at the center of analysis again—it is this move that also opens the possibility to investigate change from a multidimensional (political, historical, anthropological, cultural, and geographical) perspective. It does so alongside two vectors: "from politics to space, meaning that our interest also goes to how the actors of the political system—institutions and citizens—are using, modeling, transforming, elaborating, experiencing, and dealing with spaces/places"; and, vice versa, "from space to politics," raising "the question of what the effect

of space on politics is, or, more precisely, how space generates, creates, produces, induces, shapes, defines, or redefines politics” (Di Peri and Meier, this volume). This framework helps us to look beyond established categories, to deconstruct or denaturalize what we perceive as normal, and to tap into both those politics that produce marginality and also the agency at the margins that resists this and actually produces something new or different (see the epigraph from bell hooks). Furthermore, this period of interregnum is also captured in this book because research has been pursued by young scholars of various disciplines who have all done original fieldwork in four Mediterranean states: Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey. Giving voice directly to the agency “at the margins,” all chapters provide a *contrapuntal reading* (Said 1993; Bilgin 2016) to much of the existing literature, adding a variety of new perspectives and findings that will be outlined in this conclusion.

Rather than just summarizing each of the chapters, it focuses on the substantial *transformatory* aspects of the Mediterranean space and politics that become so evident in each contribution. To capture these transformatory aspects, it brings the chapters into a conversation with the *liminality* literature that is growing in IR in response to a world in change. The liminality literature is helpful as it captures transformation in a comprehensive way, while the present book adds new empirical insights to this literature in turn. As Maria Mälksoo has pointed out, “The engagement with liminality has yet to be substantiated with empirical studies from different fields and theoretical traditions of IR. The ‘Arab Spring’ . . . would be interesting examples to explore here” (2012, 488). Indeed, as the next section will highlight, the chapters of this book bring various dimensions of liminality to the fore.

2. Forms of Liminality in/of the Mediterranean Space

Liminality is a concept that comes originally from anthropological studies, the work of Van Gennep (2004) and Turner (1970) in particular. It refers to a situation of “betwixt and between” (Turner 1970), of neither here nor there, of being in a moment of transformation that irritates and is ambiguous, but also possibly creates something new. Departing from normalized categories and concepts, the liminality literature is interested in boundaries, borders, and borderlands and in actors that are marginalized or ignored in the traditional literature. As Mälksoo points out, liminality “offers a fundamental critique of the conventional onto-spatial imagination of IR with its traditional focus on policing the

‘sensible boundaries’ of statehood, sovereignty, international system, identity, and security. Instead, it reveals their contested history, recognizing the inevitable intertwining of logical classifications and hierarchies to social and political ones” (Mälksoo 2012, 484). Research on the Mediterranean from liminality and “in-between” perspectives are evolving, Rosita Di Peri’s (2020) work on “in-between border spaces” within the Lebanese Maronite community helps to understand new discourses of dissent. Daniel Meier (2020) has provided a conceptual framework on in-between border spaces focused on space, power, and identity that is further developed in this book. All contributions in this book abandon the typical state-centric approach of IR, irritating assumptions of what constitutes “inside” and what “outside” of the state and who counts as an actor or not when analyzing politics and space. With their context-sensitive approaches, the chapters provide important insights to the liminality literature, particularly in terms of the three sets of themes: mobilizations, migration, and places.

2.1. Mobilizations and the Politics of Becoming

In terms of mobilizations, these chapters show the multiple agency in countries in transformation, delving into the *politics of becoming* after the extraordinary moment of uprising and revolution (but also the devastating port explosion in Beirut and the Covid-19 pandemic). While the revolutionary moment has brought down the old order, cleavages between center and periphery, urban and rural, old and new political forces, and sects remain. How these are mediated or transformed depends on the agency and dynamics that are formative of and producing new orders.

Ester Sigillò opens the collection by zooming into the space of the city in Tunisia and the mobilization happening there, seeing cities as nodes “in relational networks of meaning and collective identity.” Cities also evidence the spatial inequality that “was the core of the exercise of authoritarian power and the central claim of the revolution, in which new symbolic and material spaces have been associated with the democratic possibility.” In particular, what becomes evident in her chapter is the potential of polarization and conflict and how this is solved through a transformation of space through agency. After the revolution, the Islamic network in Sfax was reactivated, appropriating the narratives of marginalization and resistance of the revolution. She traces several phases of the movement. First, she shows how in the postrevolutionary period, responding to demands for a more just welfare system as well as

to waves of refugees coming to Sfax from Libya after 2011, a particularly high number of Islamic charitable associations were concentrated in Sfax. Islamic actors used the city as a departure point for larger national claims in this period. While the initial years were characterized by a rather full liberalization, this changed in 2014 with a governmental securitization campaign in which grassroots Islamic activism became further controlled by the state. Islamic organization then adopted “new logics of mobilization,” engaging “in local activities *for* the development of the city and participatory local governance.” Sigillò describes this phenomenon as “post-Islamism”—a phenomenon that points to a transformation not only of the actor, but also of the city, and indeed the larger national framework, as it can act as a bridge to polarization. Thus, she shows how the Sfaxian Islamic network shifted “from a movement struggling *in* the city to a movement struggling *for* the city.” While this was a strategic shift as “the mobilization for local claims became a new space of legitimation” and tapped into new constituencies, it shows how in this process the movement was itself transformed, as “social movements not only develop *within* the city but also mobilize *for* the city” and the city transforms “from political battleground to a field of collaboration with local authorities.”

Rossana Tufaro looks into the transition of rural Lebanon from a locus of preservation to a locus of conflict and contestation of Lebanese postcolonial order. She does so through a historical analysis that sets both the political economy and subaltern agency at the core of her analysis, through which she fills a lacuna in the literature, as “the history of this liminal time has been mostly untold and unexplored.” What she finds points much more to liminality as a space for a new beginning than the perpetual liminality as the two other chapters on today’s Lebanon indicate. She first examines how colonial rule has shaped the borders of Lebanon. The French decision to “split Lebanon from its natural hinterland” did not answer to local economic needs, but rather to a “view that the country played a major economic role as the leading commercial and financial entrepôt between France and the rest of the Levant” and could ensure French economic domination and financial penetration. At the same time, she also shows the transgressive reappropriation of the rural space exercised by peasants: “Through their mobilizations [they] imposed a new, transgressive meaning to the relation between center and peripheries, seizing from below the elite monopoly over the social production of space and its representation.” Much of their repertoire might actually reverberate in the social mobilizations in Lebanon today and how they are unfolding spaces for a new beginning.

Deborah V. Malito and Muhammad Dan Suleiman investigate the opposing dynamics of homogenization and fragmentation in the “production of the post-Jamahiriya political space,” observing how “the so-called localized dimension of the Libyan conflict and fragmentation is intertwined with—not separated by—a renegotiation of the whole Libyan political order taking place at the national and international level.” Through this approach, they make visible “the dialectical character of the process of state and order transformation.” In other words, they show how Libya has been produced as a liminal actor by the West, which the authors contrast with the local practices that are producing the post-2011 political space (in other words with how Libyans practice the actual liminality into which they have been driven by the NATO intervention). Libya is just one of many cases that the West has produced as liminal in the sense of “not being there yet”; of being in the need to be uplifted through Western intervention. Libya, as Malito and Suleiman point out, has been represented by NATO powers first as being in need of transformation “toward the creation of an (abstract) liberal society,” liberated “from authoritarian rule and illiberal practices.” After the NATO intervention, as Libya disintegrated and fragmented with an enormous impact on the larger Sahel-Sahara space, it was represented as an “ungoverned space” that, again, needed and justified Western intervention. As the authors point out, the Western concept of “ungoverned space” does not actually exist: “There are always localized, even traditional, forms of governance in these spaces,” and spaces are “‘ungoverned’ only if imagined from the imperialist notion of the West as embodying a neoliberal ‘order’ and the rest as embodying an illiberal ‘disorder.’” Furthermore, the authors contrast this Western representation by exploring “the Libyan post-Jamahiriya space, where a plethora of actors, cities, municipalities, and local militias play a growing role in the formation of the post-2011 space.” Particularly, they focus on fragmentation “marked by the breakdown of spaces and the differentiation among social relations.” The building of the new Libya has become hostage to exclusionary dynamics as those political forces previously marginalized repeated the same exclusionary logic once they received political representation. In this, the case of Libya contrasts to the chapters on Tunisia, which show how political actors actually evaded such fragmentation through their practices.

Another chapter that shows how societal fragmentation can be overcome is by Rosita Di Peri and Valeria Sartori, who look into the case of cross-sectarian mobilization in three Lebanese universities and how it resists the postwar sectarian order. They frame universities not only

as “crucial loci where politics, as well as actors and their behaviors, is reflected and influenced” but also as “pivotal spaces” for the creation of alternatives: of “new ideas and practices of contestation against the ruling parties and sectarian elites.” In this way, universities can be liminal spaces “where transformative experiences can happen and counterdiscourses and counternarratives may arise.”

2.2 Migration and Perpetual Liminality

EU and European practices in defining spaces and migrants are problematized in four contributions on North Africa, Italy/Libya, Turkey, and Syria/Morocco respectively. What becomes evident is that the EU and its member states are producing the Mediterranean as a space of exception and permanent liminality for migrants. The migrants, instead, are disturbing the borders the EU produces, as well as other distinctions (inside/outside, center/margin).

Federica Zardo shows how the EU is redefining the Mediterranean space in terms of spatial concepts such as “corridors, hotspots, hubs, platforms, and regional routes,” while also moving EU borders “closer or farther” in the “collective imaginary of citizens and policymakers.” Particularly, she inquires into the EU Trust Fund (ETUF) which—as she points out—“considers North African countries primarily as part of a ‘geographic window’ on the broader African continent,” “fixing the North of Africa as a space of transit in Europe’s collective imaginary.” Furthermore, “The EUTF’s strategic documents depict the entire Southern Mediterranean as a space of crisis.” The EU in this way produces the region as a transitory space that needs EU intervention. This justifies particular policies with which the EU places migrants in a situation of permanent liminality where they are neither emigrants (leaving a place) nor immigrants (arriving in the EU) but are suspended in a permanent limbo. This stands in stark contrast to the migrants’ own space-making abilities. As Zardo highlights, “Trans-Saharan transit migrants create new urban and economic spaces or revitalize ancient routes and oases, which change in response to the EU’s changing policies.” Thus, migrants actually continuously subvert the EU’s production of space in the Mediterranean.

Chiara Maritato shows a similar process for the case of Turkey. The latter—instead of becoming an EU member—is increasingly transformed by the EU into an extended borderland, a “fortified frontier zone acting as a buffer area to contain migrants and refugees en route to the EU.”

This process originated in the 1990s when the EU externalized border control coupled with the Europeanization of Turkey's migration policy. However, it intensified after 2014, as Turkey has been framed "as a transit country and a gatekeeper tasked with stemming the flow of migrants to the EU." In this process, the agency of Turkey has been reconfigured and, as in other parts of the Mediterranean, a frontier has been cemented—a "*limes* dividing the North and the South as two highly separated zones." Migrants, instead, are forced into a "pending, suspended forms of transit existence" in transit zones, camps, and detention centers that are "waiting zones." With the "politics of camps," migrants are turned into a permanent state of liminality, instead of actually being in transit. Transit, indeed, is made "illicit and linked to criminal organizations."

Chiara Loschi challenges the accounting of European border management practices in the frame of "externalization," highlighting the "little (if any) compliance with international legal regimes, especially in terms of human rights principles" in the case of the Italian-Libyan border system. Similar to the case of Turkey, this system builds on "preexisting practices that enable their consolidation." Particularly, she shows that this system has its roots in the 2009 Italian-Libyan agreement on cooperation that Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi represented as a "colonial reparation," while it actually provided Italy with an opportunity to push back migration while securing contracts for Italian companies. The Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding of 2017 followed up on this. Like the EU-Turkey statement, it is not an agreement, and thus not ratified by the Italian parliament. Loschi's contribution highlights not only how migrants are put into a limbo, but how they are moving in a space that has been turned into a legal black hole, as the sea border has become "a space of deregulation and reformulation where the main stakeholders rely on informal and practical cooperation." As a result, "gray legal zones increase in which accountability and control mechanisms are highly dispersed." Thus, she highlights how Europe's borders have become not only "places of suffering and death," but also spaces in which humanitarian principles and international law are suspended.

Virginia Fanny Faccenda explores Syrian mobility to Morocco, but from the perspective of the most marginalized (rather than the state), giving them and their agency a voice. She is "interested in considering how Syrian mobility confuses the borders of the nation, redefining those spaces in which Syrian power may be analyzed." In particular, she pursues three moves: she adopts an off-borders perspective that studies the Syrian regime outside the national territory; an off-boundaries approach

that analyzes communities that appear outside the reach of the power of the Syrian regime; and an rebounding dimension that observes how refugees take their “homeland” as an imaginary place with them, reproducing the Syrian political arena beyond its national borders. With these moves, Faccenda disturbs not only our concepts of the borders of the state (in her case Syria), but also our distinction between the inside and the outside, between the center and the margins, and ultimately also the distinction academia has set up between geographical entities such as the Middle East (Mashreq), North Africa (Maghreb), and, implicitly also, Europe. Faccenda indeed highlights the enormous fragmentation of Syrian territory and community this has brought about, but also how we can see this fragmentation (territorial, sect, rural-urban) among the Syrian community in Morocco. Faccenda calls this the “new cartography of Syrian spaces,” visible also in Morocco, with all its dynamics of “isolation, reticence, and control that operated in Syria during the current conflict.” While the Syrian migrants have moved on quite literally, they do remain in a state of being in-between: “After all, Syrians’ mobility confirms . . . how it is possible to ‘leave’ the state without leaving it completely.”

2.3. *Places and Spaces of Transition*

Places have a concrete locality with which people may identify; through the interaction between human beings and the connectivities/borders, power relations, and meanings they create/manifest, places (and the interconnections between them) become or are inserted in spaces. Spaces inhabit the possibility of exclusion and inclusion, of fragmentation and community, of separation and connection, of isolation and outwardness, of past and present, of stasis and flow. As various contributions to this volume show, it matters *how* a place is (re)appropriated as a *space of transition*, ranging from perpetual liminality to possibilities for a new beginning.

Thomas Richard analyzes the representation of Lebanese spaces through fiction and documentaries. A perpetual liminality—of being in-between—is evident in the places that the movies engage, such as Beirut airport, a “transitional space” and also a “gateway to leaving Lebanon,” as Richard points out. He shows that public space is portrayed as being largely absent, since most films are actually shot within the private, not the public, space. It is almost as if the private-public distinctions have turned inside out, with the public being discussed in the private space.

The cinematographic image of Lebanon appears as “a labyrinth of intertwined privatized spaces,” a “succession of nonconnecting private spaces, with the very idea of a public space being erased from representation on film.” Thus, the community is portrayed as “gated” with no space for open contestation. Martyrs’ Square, as an “interstitial pseudo-national space,” appears as a “political no-man’s-land, symbolic of the country’s enduring divisions.” However, this is not “fixed” since there are also roads, key cinematographic features that film directors use “as a dual symbol of connection and separation.” Roads are places that can be enacted as a space of transition in terms of liminality, as well as a way out of this liminality. Roads are ambiguous, as both connection and separation are present. Streets “run along the lines that used to separate warring factions” and are “former parts of no-man’s-land.” At the same time, roads “are used as symbols of encounters” and the “mere fact of traveling the country appears as a symbol of crossing bridges between communities.” It is on the streets rather than in private homes or public places “that people can meet,” and there are also a few crossing points along the streets. Film directors use them as “symbolic spaces that need to be reappropriated to face and even heal the wounds of the civil war by reuniting the various parts of the country.”

Francesco Mazzucotelli focuses on a particular place: the international fairground in Tripoli. The latter appears as a symbol of perpetual liminality between the past and the future, between backwardness/neglect and modernity, between outwardness and isolation, between Asia and Europe, between arts and the economy. The fairground had originally been imagined as “a spectacle of an idealized vision of the city and a catalyst for economic and cultural development,” but with the onset of the civil war, it rather came to embody a state of perpetual liminality: a “vision of the potential of the city that had not materialized: a spatial testimony of what could have been and never was.” Indeed, the author bears witness to its perpetual liminality, as he states that during “most of the 2000s and the early 2010s, the combination of political uncertainty at the national and local levels, lack of transparency, and abstruse administrative procedures maintained the place in a liminal and suspended status, with isolated voices of concern that could not overcome the leadership crisis and ineffectiveness of urban elites.” At the same time, however, Mazzucotelli catches dynamics that are pushing perpetual liminality into transformation, a dynamic he describes with the concept of heterotopia. He sees heterotopias as sites that are open to negotiation and contestation, spaces “where people can enact strategies to reclaim

places of otherness or question the fabric of normality.” Heterotopias are ambiguous spaces, as they can both have “radical, subversive enclaves” but also reinforce the “status quo”—a “combination of flow and stasis.” The international fair has become reappropriated as an “other space” for the production and consumption of contemporary art,” a space that “enclosed the possibility of a different notion of the city, its past, and its future, outside of the incumbent narratives and perceptions of factional infighting and misery.” However, he also qualifies this, as at the same time, “Very real interests, structurally intertwined with the business domain and politics at the national and local levels, overshadow the aspiration for a radically subversive reinvention.”

While the case studies of Syria and Libya display an enormous fragmentation both of territory and of their “communitas,” and while Lebanon appears as somewhat caught in perpetual liminality (even though with transformatory potential), Chiara Sebastiani’s contribution encounters Tunisia as a place in which the margins are enacted as a space for a new beginning. Sebastiani points out that the Arab uprising in Tunisia has been “a rebellion of the margins.” She traces centralization in Tunisia back to French colonial rule and the autocratic regimes that followed. This is a good example of how the Arab uprisings and the fight for local democracy actually undo remnants of colonial heritage. Sebastiani argues that local capabilities have always been and remained present; the “systematic negotiations between the center and the periphery, the legitimacy of local institutions and practices, the survival of tribal solidarities and allegiances, and the fierce attachment to collective lands in southern regions have been overlooked by political science state-building theory as archaic remnants, leaving it mainly to anthropology to investigate them.” In her in-depth research she finds that capabilities such as “a variety of institutions, techniques, and social forms” old and new are existing trends and that the “Tunisian revolution can thus be understood as one of those ‘tipping points’ in which already existing trends and practices involving both actors included in and those excluded from the old dominant system ‘tip’ into a new organizing logic.” As the whole country has been communalized in 2016, she finds contrasting visions of decentralization and local democracy: efficient administration and political representation. Sebastiani argues that resistance to decentralization within the state persists. In response, municipalities are organizing themselves, for example in alliances of cities for mayors to “wrest off” the powers of the local authorities they chair and the local communities they represent in face of the state and its peripheral structures, the governorates. Thus,

she concludes that while Tunisians have achieved decentralization, the struggle for local democracy continues, which—as is clear in the case of city networks—is actually already an expression of democracy and of forming a new structure in the country.

3. The Mediterranean: A Space of Exception or a Heterotopia?

What do all these particular findings mean for the larger Mediterranean space? What is the transformation that reverberates through the chapters? This book shows two opposing trends in this respect. The first is a transformation in which the Mediterranean space is increasingly fragmented, separated, and securitized—it is being transformed into a space of exception (see Huber 2020; Goulordava 2019; Roman 2019). The other trend is an opposite transformation in which new nodes, crossing points, and logics of engagement are forged by a variety of actors in multiple sites, so making the Mediterranean at large appear as a “heterotopia.”

Regarding the first trend, the EU and its member states are directly involved in creating liminality in the Mediterranean space in particular ways that are producing (1) other states as liminals, (2) the Mediterranean at large as a space of exception, and (3) refugees as liminals. Bahar Rumelili has pointed to the EU’s ability to produce others as liminal, as not being there yet, or as in need of transformation. The “liminal” can even be seen as a threat, because it undermines “categorical distinctions that social structures rely on” (Rumelili 2012, 496–501). At the same time, she also highlights how the actors produced as liminal “may act toward their liminality in different ways.” While some might reinforce and reproduce it, others might “adopt a more subversive strategy that seeks to convert the ambiguity of their position into an asset” (Rumelili 2012, 503). She has shown this in the case of Turkey—now produced as a “transit country” rather than a member state—and this pattern also clearly comes across in the case of Libya, which is produced first as a country in need of liberal uplifting and then as a dangerous “ungoverned” space in need of security intervention. Second, the Mediterranean at large is produced as a space of exception in which an inverted logic of criminality operates: while international law is suspended, transit itself is turned into an illicit activity. Migrants are produced as illicit, as neither here nor there, being placed in a perpetual state of limbo.

This pattern takes place at a time when we indeed witness an intensified liminality of the EU itself. As Pace and Pallister-Wilkins point out, the “EU is an evolving project, its identity undetermined and under

continual renegotiation by its member states and citizens” (2018, 231). This liminality has intensified as a result of the so-called migration crisis when an increasing Eurocentrism hit the Union. In this process the EU has begun to define itself through its migration policies, negotiating who is inside and who must remain outside of the Union. In this process, the European project—which originally evolved as a departure from Europe’s nationalist (Waeber 1996) and, less so, colonial past (Pace and Roccu 2020)—seems to lose its core and tendentially adopts some practices that can be seen as neocolonial. This becomes, for example, evident in the contribution on Libya and Italy in which a discourse of colonial reparation contrasts with practices that create and secure economic space in Libya for Italy, which at the same time helps to construct camps in Libya and contributes to the production of the Mediterranean as an area where law is suspended. This example is indicative of a larger trend in the Mediterranean space, which becomes a hard and deadly border to separate the North from the South. As Arundhati Roy has argued, this might be indicative of colonialism being back in a new disguise or with new practices. As she points out, in the past, colonialism “needed to move large populations of people—slaves and indentured labor—to work in mines and on plantations. Now the new dispensation needs to keep people in place and move the money—so the new formula is free capital, caged labor” (Roy 2019).

On the other hand, the unfolding of multiple agency for a new future at various levels and in different sites resists such a trend, as becomes evident in the contributions on Tunisia, on Lebanon, and on Syrian mobility in Morocco. This transformation is driven by actors such as cities and networks between them, transforming social movements; migrants who change routes; migrants who build new political spaces; artists who claim new spaces; or moviemakers who introduce crossing points and roads to a new future. This new cartography is very complex and may best be captured in the concept of heterotopia that Francesco Mazzucotelli applies in his contribution on the international fair in Tripoli. As Neumann points out, Michel Foucault came up with the concept of heterotopia “for utopian (non-)spaces where social hierarchies were suspended” (Neumann 2012, 474). The Mediterranean at large also appears as such a heterotopia—a site of contestation, of negotiations, of strategies by a variety of actors who claim spaces in diverse ways and with different ideas. This transforms these actors as well as the space in which they act. Heterotopias, however, are ambiguous: they can be radical and revisionary; they can be flow and stasis. While the outcome is, therefore, unknown,

this book has shown us that it is necessary to look both into marginalization and into the agency in the margins to grasp the full picture of a changing Mediterranean space.

Note

1. As Arundhati Roy has pointed out for human rights, these are fundamental rights, but they are the “minimum, the very least we demand. . . . What should be the minimum becomes the maximum—all we are supposed to expect—but human rights aren’t enough. The goal is, and must always be, justice” (in Roy and Cusack 2015).

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