POMEPS
STUDIES
49

Urban Politics in the Middle East

October 2023

Project on Middle East Political Science

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The Project on Middle East Political Science

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York. For more information, see http://www.pomeps.org.

The Beirut Urban Lab

The Beirut Urban Lab is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research space. The Lab produces scholarship on urbanization by documenting and analyzing ongoing transformation processes in Lebanon and its region's natural and built environments. It intervenes as an interlocutor and contributor to academic debates about historical and contemporary urbanization from its position in the Global South. They work towards materializing their vision of an ecosystem of change empowered by critical inquiry and engaged research, and driven by committed urban citizens and collectives aspiring to just, inclusive, and viable cities.

The Policy Initiative

The Policy Initiative (TPI) is a homegrown and independent think-tank founded in February 2021 in Lebanon. TPI endeavors to contribute to empowering the public to demand a better alternative. In other words, TPI's mission is to bring policies back to the people. To fulfill this, TPI aims to critically and empirically assess existing policies and generate meaningful alternatives. They also seek to engage with like-minded entities to harness the immense political and intellectual energy that still exists in Lebanon.

We would like to gratefully acknowledge Michelle Woodward's editorial assistance in the production of this volume.

Urban Politics in the Middle East and North Africa

Mona Harb, Marc Lynch, and Jillian Schwedler

Urban politics has received growing attention in the anthropology, sociology, and political science of the MENA region. In line with global trends, questions of scale, territory, flows and connectivities and materialities have come to the fore, with a wide range of creative and novel lines of inquiry connecting the global to the hyper-local and every scale in between. In February 2023, POMEPS partnered with the Beirut Urban Lab at the American University of Beirut and The Policy Initiative think tank for a workshop in Beirut to bring together an interdisciplinary group of young scholars from across the region to explore questions of urban life, politics, and culture. The papers moved beyond more traditional political science topics such as municipal government, decentralization, clientelistic voting, protests, and clientelism. While those themes certainly operated in the background, the authors assembled in Beirut pushed to shift the lens towards multi-scalar ethnographic modes of inquiry, highlighting the materialities and relationalities of the hyper-local, examining sites and places which concentrate power dynamics that Janine Clark, Sarah el-Kazaz, Mona Harb and Lana Salman called "as politically consequential as [global and] national-level practices and institutions, if not more so" (in Lynch, Schwedler and Yom's *The Political Science of the Middle East,* p.258).

Beirut was a particularly opportune location for such discussions, with the disaster of the explosion at the Beirut port of August 2020 and the exigencies imposed by a collapsing economy bringing many of these questions into sharp, indeed urgent, focus. The Beirut Urban Lab and The Policy Initiative had produced an impressive set of policy-relevant original data over the previous years, showing the potential for civil society and academic-policy engagement to fill the serious gaps in governance and knowledge production in those areas. In addition to its work documenting the changes across the neighborhoods affected by the blast, the Beirut Urban Lab and The Policy Initiative have investigated the governance of the post-blast recovery and the range of actors engaged in the provision of goods and services.

Several key themes emerged from the papers and discussions at the workshop. One of those key themes was the importance of spatializing the study of politics in the MENA region through the lens of critical urban studies of/in the Global South (see Mammon and Yiftachel 2023 for a southeast Asian perspective). Without losing sight of the specificities of particular countries, cities, and cases, MENA cities and regions share much in common with similar localities in Africa, Latin America and Asia. All have faced the challenges of post-colonialism, rapid urbanization and the unplanned, largely unregulated, growth of vast exurban spaces over the course of decades, in addition to protracted violence and conflict. There are also more direct connections, with transnational flows of labor migration bringing vast numbers of professional, service and manual laborers into MENA cities – from the sub-Saharan African migrants working on the margins in Tunisia in Shreya Parikh's essay and in Egypt in Gehad Abaza's to the South Asian domestic workers in Lebanon featured in Noura Nasser's contribution. These approaches to the study of urban politics push us towards tracing these transnational and local connections, as well as searching for the appropriate global comparisons.

A second major theme running through the workshop and these papers is the materiality of space and the importance of fully theorizing infrastructure. Studying urban politics pushes us from the abstract to the concrete, toward the lived experience and spatial practice of diverse groups and individuals navigating specific ingredients and elements that structure and produce neighborhoods, cities, localities and regions. The researchers in this collection point towards understudied sites of politics and publics: Carine Assaf's study of buses, shared rides and

other forms of public transportation in Beirut; Katherina Grueneisl's examination of informal markets in Tunis; Noura Nasser's ethnography of Sri Lankan food stalls in Beirut; Abbas Jong's discussion of the quest of spaces of freedom for Iranian youth after hours; Serena Rabia's accounts of women's self-discovery and assertion within Algeria's Hirak. They also point towards the structuring effects of the creation of such infrastructures, such as the checkpoints which reshape life in Baghdad discussed by Omar Sirri; the violent destruction of infrastructure and cities in wartime Syria analyzed by Munqeth Agha; or the selective preservation of heritage sites in Turkey analyzed by Ronay Bakan. Zak Tobias's discussion of Jordan's creation of digital infrastructure and the Saudi mega-city project Neom brings out both the generative and the harmful potentials of such investments.

Third, these papers push us to question notions of the informal economy and how such markets are connected to the "formal" economy and political institutions. Katherina Grueneisl's close study of neighborhoods and informal markets reveals that what looks chaotic and unregulated in fact follows well-developed norms and is governed by invisible but well-understood modes of power. Informal markets play a critical role in sustaining formal economies which consistently fail to generate sufficient jobs for burgeoning youth populations or to provide social safety nets for citizens falling into poverty. But informality as a term appropriate by World Bank-style developmentalism fails to capture the nature of these social and economic relations, the dense and complex forms of internal order, norms and governance which evolve against the state.

Fourth, the contributions bring out different forms of agency and sociability associated to particular places in MENA cities that enable their formation, even if transient. Dalia Ibraheem's exploration of a genre of Egyptian popular music traces the intersections between urban geography and cultural experience. Abbas Jong presents a fascinating portrait of the appropriation of spaces at nightfall by Tehran's youth, and the challenge this poses to a totalizing authoritarian state. Alex Shams finds endless opportunity for new encounters, identities, and public performance in Shia pilgrimages in Iraq.

Taken together, this workshop both marks the maturity of urban politics studies across the MENA region and invites interdisciplinary and cross-regional comparisons to continue advancing these already rich debates. That many of the contributors conducted original field research in recent years also brings valuable new empirical material for those long familiar with the region's major urban spaces.

Wānās, Henna, and the City:
How Sudanese Henna Artists Navigate Greater Cairo

Gehad Abaza, University of California, Santa Barbara

Nawal began drawing henna when she was a child growing up in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan. It was her aunt who first taught her how to carefully swivel and swirl the henna into patterns on the skin. "When I was in school, I would draw henna for the kids everyday…[the teachers] would see the other schoolgirls and ask them who drew that henna for them, and they would say Nawal…so the teachers would take me out of the morning lines and they would punish me," Nawal said. "But then a week would pass and I would do it again, and they punished me again, but I would still do it, again and again, all of the time." Later in her life, when war hit too close to home, Nawal left the Nuba Mountains for Khartoum before eventually making her way to Cairo in 2014. She has since relied on her henna skills as a means of livelihood. Having grown up surrounded by the artform, Nawal's henna comes as second nature to her. When she really wants to treat someone, she sets aside her "catalog," a binder of henna photos to emulate, and she meticulously forms her own patterns on their skin—a canvas for her artwork.

As an experienced *hannana* Nawal has taught other Sudanese women in Cairo how to master the art of drawing henna. Sa'eeda, for example, learned to draw henna after fleeing to Cairo from Sudan. In the time they spent together, Nawal helped Sa'eeda enhance her command of henna as a craft so that she could make a living for herself and her children. When I first met the two women in 2016, they were both houseless and spent most of their days and nights in a garden across from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) building in Giza's 6th of October City. For years, refugees have used the spaces across from and around the UNHCR to meet one another, protest, work, cook, eat, and even sleep when they are houseless. Sudanese refugee women often use the space to sell tea and other goods from Sudan, or to draw henna for interested passersby. In Greater Cairo, whether in 6th of October City or elsewhere, Sudanese women continue to keep each other company (*wānās*) in this way as they go about their daily lives. The word *wānās* is a colloquial form of the verb *anusa*(أَنُسَ) or *anasa(*أَنَسَ). An *anees (masculine)* or *aneesa* (feminine) is one who gives companionship, who dwells, who staves off loneliness, and one whose presence imbues comfort, reassurance, and kindness. In classical Arabic, *anees* is one of the many words synonymous with friend. I rely on this word analytically because of how often the women used it to describe their gatherings—sitting together to drink *jabannah*, light *bukhur*, and talk was called *nitwānis*.

Sudanese refugee women practice a willful defiance (Shange 2019) to the anti-Blackness and layered structural violence of Egyptian policing practices (Puar 2015) by building community, *wānās,* and laboring for their livelihoods through henna art. Additionally, by dwelling in front of the UNHCR people claim space and counter their general invisibility within Cairo. By gathering in the garden, women create space to connect with one another, engage with each other's henna work, critique it, admire it, and teach it. In this paper I argue that Sudanese women, specifically hannanat—or henna artists—traverse and shape the city through their agentic practices of *wānās*, forming bonds of companionship between one another. For many of these women, henna is a creative means of livelihood, of mobility, of creating bonds of solidarity, of expression, and of navigating the city. Whether they are sitting by the UNHCR, or working and drawing henna in Old Cairo, Sudanese women in Egypt's metropolises must constantly avoid arrest and imprisonment under charges of *tāsawul,* or "mendacity." I follow the premise that the spaces that Sudanese refugee women create for themselves in the city are not chaotic and abject, but rather they are sites of cultural production and political refusal (Abusharaf 2009; Shange 2019). The material and quotes I present in this piece are taken from semi-structured interviews that I conducted in Cairo from 2016-2018, and in 2022.

"This Country is Harsh:" Racialization and Securitization in Historical Context

People's everyday experiences of life and insecurity in Cairo are impacted by various factors and configurations of power such as gender, class, race, and religion (Fawaz et. al 2012). The intersections of these categorizations are intertwined with the histories of colonialism, imperialism, nation-state making, neoliberal labor hierarchies, and contemporary humanitarian regimes. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, processes of racialization in the form of socio-political relations and power structures continue to produce hierarchies of human difference and are revelatory of structures of oppression (Weheliye 2014, 3; Aïdi et. al 2021; Kassamali 2021; Ozcelik 2021). Sudanese and South Sudanese women traverse and carry the entanglements of the socio-political histories of racial formations in both Sudan and in Egypt. For example, Nawal explained: "We [people from the Nuba Mountains] were discriminated against in Sudan…they see us as not having a place there, us and the South [South Sudan]…In Khartoum, they were called [slurs] like *khadim* or even *'abeed,"* she said, adding "then we came to Egypt and here we're all seen as the same…we're all Sudanese…we've all been catcalled with *ya Sudanya ya chocalata."* Abusharaf (2021) argues that in Sudan and South Sudan, generations of colonial administrators, historians, and ethnographers laid the groundwork for the racialized violence that the region has endured. In Egypt, processes of racialization include the historical legacies of the African slave trade between Egypt and Sudan and Anglo-Egyptian colonialism of Sudan in the 1800s. As Eve Troutt Powell argues, Egypt historically held the seemingly contradictory position of a colonized colonizer given its imperial campaigns in Sudan (Troutt Powell 2003; Troutt Powell 2012). As such, anti-Blackness in the region is intimately linked to the histories and afterlives of slavery (Elshakry 2020).

In addition to the colonial, representational, and nation-state making histories that contribute to the ways in which anti-Blackness and racializing processes manifest in Egypt, there is also an important global component, which can be seen in the ways that international media, humanitarian organizations, and most host states racialize refugees and migrants. The UNHCR is complicit in this anti-Blackness through its unequal allocation of funding, the blind eye it turns to police brutality against refugees, in its status determination procedures, and in how support programs are extended (or not) to refugees (Edward 2007). As a long-time resident of 6th of October City, I frequently noticed the gatherings of refugees and asylum seekers from Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, among other African countries, in the small, hardly green, garden across from the UNHCR. In the evenings, they write their names on a piece of torn up cardboard, hoping this will hold their places in line before the crowds of people waiting to meet with the UNHCR employees arrive in the morning. The day begins with long lines of people standing outside the building waiting for their chance to speak to employees about their cases, but by nighttime only a handful of people remain. Their temporary, but ongoing, encampments are precipitated by a variety of different causes, including lack of housing, lack of attention from UNHCR, and demands for asylum and protection. People sleep in front of the UNHCR for days, weeks, or months at a time, often leaving and coming back. Officers from the neighborhood police station nearby occasionally pass through the garden, harassing and surveilling the dwellers.

When I began visiting people in the garden more regularly, Ayah, who had camped in the garden for a few weeks at the time, told me that for her this space in front of the UNHCR was the most secure in the city. "We wouldn't really be allowed to stay anywhere else…here, the children can play, they are outdoors, and the place is generally safer." She was there for a short time while she waited for the UNHCR to help her secure housing after she was evicted from an apartment in Nasr City, on the other side of Cairo. The space was also an opportunity for the women to lean on each other for support and care. Sa'eeda, for example, continued to work in the al-Hussein area while camping in the garden. She would go to work in the mornings trusting that she could leave her children in the care of the other women and in the evenings share meals and *titwānis*—be in the company of these women. For many people, their visible presence in that garden was also a reminder to

the UNHCR to fulfill their duties of refugee protection. "Of course, no one wants to sleep in the streets," Sa'eeda reminded me, "but when they [the UNHCR] aren't giving us housing, we have to stay there so that they see us."

Since 2016 police have dispersed the refugees' gatherings and assaulted or arrested them several times. One of the women reckoned that the 2017 police dispersal could have been due to the opening of a nearby supermarket. I did not witness it, but the women told me that police arrested some people, hosed some down, and took belongings from them. These consistent dispersals have a history in the city—one of the most notorious instances was the 2005 massacre in Mostafa Mahmoud square, close to where the UNHCR stood at the time (Fadlalla 2009). The UNHCR's ongoing role in these predicaments calls into question humanitarianism's relationship with white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Dominant racial hierarchies are reflected within the humanitarian regime as international organizations like the UNHCR continue to frame certain refugee communities through different, racialized lenses (Turner 2020; Benton 2016).

Over the past few years, police have cordoned off the small garden with metal barriers and barbed wire barricades. Still, people refuse to leave completely. They continue to return, and return again, even if it is to stay on the sidewalks by the building rather than in the garden across from it. The most recent incident of dispersal that I heard about from interlocutors was in 2022, when a police truck came to the area, forcibly gathered the women, and left them in the middle of al-Wahat desert road, a highway near 6th of October that leads to Fayoum. In February 2022, Sa'eeda was again camping on the street by the UNHCR after the landlord of the apartment she had most recently rented asked her to leave. Frustrated by UNHCR's inaction, Sa'eeda wore an entirely red *jalabeya,* adorned with a white cloth that read "you have sentenced us to death" in Arabic as she stood by the building. I knew the women had circulated that dress among themselves. I had heard of it months earlier, when I met Sa'eeda and her friend Sayeda in the coastal town of Marsa Matruh where they had both traveled to work as *hannant* on the busy beaches during the summer season. "After I wore it, a man who is a big name in the UN came out and asked me 'what are your demands?' He said, 'I'll do whatever you want but please take this off,' so I told him, look they [the landlord] attacked me at home…I can't deal with this anymore [*mush adra*]. I want you to rent an apartment for me and give me my monthly salary, an actual salary, not something that you give me for a month and then skip for three months, and my kids need to go to school," Sa'eeda explained. "Then a few days passed, and the police came, and they beat us and left us in al-Wahat." Anyone who knows contemporary Egypt, knows how powerful Sa'eeda's confrontation and commanding presence with the red *jalabeya* is in such a difficult post-revolutionary political moment.

Policing Henna Artists

As they continue to draw and re-draw their henna, Cairo's *hannanat* also continuously re-draw their pathways through the city (and between cities) to circumvent constant police encroachments. Old Cairo's Khan El Khalili market is a prime location for the henna artists to find customers among the tourists and the Egyptian men and women spending leisure time in the area. In the alleyways of the old market and by the al-Hussein Mosque, the Sudanese henna artists walk around calling out, "*hēnnā yā bānāt* (Oh girls, henna)." Many of the Sudanese refugee women I spoke with said they prefer this line of work because it grants them a certain degree of mobility and control over their time that other jobs do not. It is not uncommon for police in Old Cairo to arrest and detain the henna artists on charges of "mendacity," especially before big holidays, which are considered busy seasons for the artists, or political events. Mona recounted that the police often made racist comments, such as "this isn't the Sudanese Embassy" or call the women "*abid*," the Arabic word for slaves. Police may also arbitrarily deport the women who do not have valid residency permits. To avoid arrest, the women often must pay the police officers a percentage of whatever money they made through henna that night. As such, their mobility around the city is shaped by the ways they are gendered, racialized, and classed (Rieker and Ali 2008).

Scholars of critical security studies and urban studies have pointed to the ways in which security, and the insecurity that people face daily in police states, acts as a structuring force for cities (Fawaz et. al. 2012; Monroe 2016). Securitization processes impose changes on the mobility of city dwellers, including changes to how people relate to their cityscapes. Cairo's securitization processes coupled with processes of urban development (that have resulted in the displacement of thousands of families through the elimination of entire neighborhoods) have led to rapid changes over the past few years. One of these significant changes for this paper is that of the urban development of the Khan El-Khalili and al-Hussein area, which was also a shift in the space that many of the henna artists labored in. Eventually, Nawal stopped going to Khan El-Khalili, but Sa'eeda continued to go to Old Cairo. She took care to maneuver her way around the alleyways of al-Hussein to avoid encountering policemen, whose moods about the henna artists were arbitrary. Occasionally, security personnel who have good working relationships with one of the artists may warn them if an arrest campaign is imminent, and the henna artists warn one another.

When the security situation in the Khan El-Khalili area is too difficult to navigate, the henna artists may instead roam around the nearby Sayeda Zaynab Mosque or Ramsees Square. More recently, Nawal has felt safer offering henna services in or close to beauty salons, where she is more likely to meet women who need a *hannana* for their bridal showers. During the high seasons for henna—primarily Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and other holidays—*hannanat* sometimes travel together to Alexandria, where they can offer their services to vacationing families. On the road, their presence together provides them with *wānās*. Of course, human relationships are messy and nuanced. For example, Nawal has been bothered by what she felt was sabotage from Sa'eeda's friend. She and her daughter had planned to travel to Marsa Matrouh over the summer to work there with Sa'eeda, but when she called, Sa'eeda's friend answered and told her not to come, that there was no space and no work. "That night Wafaa and I stayed in Ramsees and we did our best work," Nawal said as she recounted her disappointment in the situation. Still, the artists continue to move through and across cities laboring with their henna. "I always carry henna with me just in case," Nawal says. The last time I saw Sa'eeda, in February 2023, she was about to head to Aswan for work.

Conclusion

For years, the women that I kept in touch with moved between jobs, cities, and neighborhoods, and between being housed and housed, while navigating ongoing economic instability and inflation, political repression, and increasing securitization. There is a violent repetition of arrest, detention, demands for bail money, encampment dispersals, and residents' racism that contribute to the racialization and criminalization of Sudanese refugee women in Greater Cairo. Fawzeya told me before: "We are tired of this treatment…we are tired of these conditions… we are tired of them constantly arresting women..." This exhaustion is a byproduct of structural violence. Since 2016, there have been a few more hurdles added to the web of difficulties that Sudanese women in Cairo face. This includes a series of economic crises, inflation, and neoliberal structural policies that have burdened peoples' lives, as well as an urban development plan that is contingent on the elimination of informal settlements in Egypt. The COVID-19 pandemic also added to their difficulties. Yet, amid these conditions, the women refuse to stop laboring through henna, they refuse to stop demanding visibility from the UNHCR, and they continue to provide one another with *wānās* and support. As Simone (2004) reminds us, the creativity and sensibility through which people navigate cities and their informal economies involves reworkings of urban space (and of peoples' connections to that urban space). While Nawal learned from her aunt how to make and draw henna, she taught Sa'eeda, Sara and other women how to hone their henna drawing skills. Here, one can invoke bell hooks' chapter "Work Makes Life Sweet," in which she investigates the difference between a "vocation" or a "calling" that one has passion for and a job that one must do merely to survive (hooks 1993). Can henna perhaps be both for the Sudanese henna artists of Greater Cairo?

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The Politics and Economics of Urbicide:
Why Were Syrian Cities Destroyed?

Munqeth Othman Agha, University of Trento

Dozens of buildings in Deir-ez-Zor were marked for demolition in February 2023 on the pretext of being "unsafe due to the earthquake," even though the city was barely touched by the devastating February 6 earthquake that struck Turkey and northern Syria.[1] The city did, however, suffer well-documented destruction in 2017, including at least 8,200 buildings that were damaged during brutal bombardment by the Syrian regime and Russia.[2] Not so far away in Aleppo, many images of buildings destroyed by the bombardment between 2012 and 2016 were similarly claimed as earthquake destruction in a campaign that called for lifting western sanctions.[3] Blurring this line between earthquake and conflict destruction, and manipulating the narrative of destruction, is not a technical confusion but a strategy that seeks to achieve at least three objectives: political, to break the regime's political isolation; economic, to draw in more humanitarian and financial assistance; and legal, to manipulate criminal evidence of the destruction of Syrian cities by claiming the damage was due to natural disaster rather than a war crime.

Taking advantage of destroyed Syrian sites for political or propaganda objectives had been a systematic regime practice for years prior to the earthquake. Al-Hajar al-Aswad, a ruined neighborhood in Damascus, became a location to shoot a new Chinese action movie.[4] Other war-torn neighborhoods in Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo become hot spots for travel bloggers who were allegedly sponsored by the Syrian regime to help burnish the country's image.[5] While these two events are insignificant from the political and economic point of view, they can be seen as examples of how ruins have been reproduced to generate revenue and promote certain political narratives.

This article advances the concept of urbicide, or the deliberate killing of a city. It argues that the ruination in Syria is not simply collateral damage or driven by military necessity, but also involves economic and political calculations. The article conceptualizes destruction as a continuous process that starts before the conflict and stretches into the post-conflict period. It investigates patterns of destruction in two cities (Hama and Homs) to understand to what extent destruction might have been a result of military necessity, political violence, or revenue maximization. The main focus is on the destruction that was caused by the Syrian regime and Russia, which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the damage in the cities in question and across the country in general.[6] The analysis draws on several datasets: UNOSAT damage density index dataset, the Syrian Memory Institute protest dataset (2011–2013), and the Urban Analysis Network-Syria (UrbAN-S) urban dataset.[7]

Why are Cities Destroyed During Wars?

From besieging and destroying enemies' cities in ancient wars to fighting contemporary urban warfare, cities and wars have been intertwined throughout history. The drivers, repertoire, and intensity of how cities are destroyed during war exhibit a great deal of diversity. To understand the relationship between war and destruction, we need first to scrutinize whether destruction is just a by-product of the war (unavoidable collateral damage), or also a political and economic objective pursued for its own reasons.[8] There are different forms of destruction in addition to physical damage, such as looting, besieging, interrupting functionality, or altering identity. Although destruction of the urban environment is widely believed to be the result of targeting human occupiers, a non-anthropocentric approach also suggests that urbicide is a process that targets the very fabric of the city.[9]

There are multiple approaches to studying spatial violence, which is defined as the form of urban violence and aggression that are primarily directed against the physical

space of the city. Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín and Elisabeth Wood claim that patterns of spatial violence should be analyzed across four dimensions: repertoire (or the form of violence), targeted social group, frequency, and technique of violence.[10] Charles Tilly adds the type of actors engaging in organized violence as an additional component. According to Scott Straus, any form of organized violence can be driven by either strategic or ideological factors.[11] The strategic choice of destruction during wars is mainly associated with territorial control (as argued by Stathis Kalyvas), spoiling peace, or controlling resources.[12] Ideologically-driven violence can be manifested in multiple forms such as ethno-sectarian genocides or cultural intentional destruction (ICD).[13] The drivers often overlap. For example, Luis Felipe Mantilla and Zorana Knezevic find that ISIS destruction of cultural properties in Syria was driven by their ideological motives as well as determined by their degree of territorial control.[14]

Making Sense of the Destruction in Syria

Destruction has been one of the main features of the Syrian conflict. As of 2017, around 54 percent of the total housing stock in Syria was estimated to have various levels of damage, and around half of the basic social infrastructure in the whole country was reported to be non-operational.[15] However, the spatial distribution of the damage is uneven and the motivations and dynamics for the ruination are determined by various political, economic, and strategic factors.[16]

There have been several explanations offered for the scale and scope of the ruination of Syria's cities. Laila Vegnial and Kevin Mazur agree that the destruction has been a vital element of the Syrian regime's repression policy.[17] While Vegnial specifically highlights the relationship between destruction and uprooting rebellious communities as a form of war planning, Mazur demonstrates how destruction was used as an effective, and relatively cheap, tool to disperse urban demonstrators and later to make territorial and military gains. This policy was particularly applied in areas where the regime failed to demobilize social actors and contain crowds due to its lack of financial and technological resources. Kheder Khadour finds that destruction was used as a survival strategy to block any possibility for a political transition.[18] Instead of negotiating with opposition groups, the regime tends to destroy their areas and uproot their social constituencies. Finally, Salwa Ismael claims that destruction is a pedagogical tool that has been utilized as a modality of government, to order and structure regime–citizen relations.[19] She claims that the government marks the built environment with violence (and its memory) to inscribe social memories into the political landscape and, therefore, to unmake dissident political subjectivities.

This article aims to introduce an additional approach to investigating destruction, which is centered around revenue generation. Looting property and appliances, or *ta'feesh*, is probably the clearest example of how destruction itself can generate money. Debris and rubble are also being sold after removal exclusively by contractors linked to the Syrian regime. On the international level, by turning whole towns and neighborhoods into rubble, Russia made Syria a demonstration site for its weaponry to secure large arms deals.

There are three main dynamics that shaped the destruction in Syria, manifesting in various forms and timeframes, and carried out by different actors, but nevertheless, leading to one outcome: ruination.

The first dynamic is shelling and bombardment, which was the main form of destruction during the conflict. The destruction here is a standalone military tactic, not its by-product. The regime forces, due to a lack of manpower and advanced technology, relied on a scorched earth strategy (carpet bombing urban areas where the resisting armed groups hunkered down) to capture territory with minimum urban fighting, a tactic seen in Darayya and Eastern Aleppo. This type of destruction was intentional and group-selective, but was also arbitrary due to the use of cheap and dumb weaponry, such as barrel bombs.

Looting is the second dynamic that shapes destruction in the immediate period following the end of military

confrontations. Looting activities are usually carried out by the very same soldiers or militiamen who captured a town or a neighborhood. They extract whatever they can from captured properties, including electronic appliances, furniture, and even building materials, to the point of making them uninhabitable. Looting is sometimes one of the main motivations of armed groups to fight; towns and neighborhoods are often divided into turfs to be looted by a specific group. As the case of Homs city proves, the level and type of looting vary according to the socio-economic level of targeted areas, which also influences the technique and intensity of destruction to be applied in the first place. For instance, wealthier neighborhoods were identified as potential locations for looting valuable appliances and furniture. These neighborhoods experienced comparatively less destruction on average, unlike poorer neighborhoods where properties were dismantled for raw materials and construction scraping, subsequently repurposed for urban development.

Demolition is the third dynamic shaping the destruction that takes place in the months and years following the capture of a city. Entire neighborhoods, such as in Damascus and Hama, have been demolished by explosives and bulldozers (not barrel bombs) under the pretext of urban development and reconstruction.[20] This type of demolition is intertwined with a parallel process of land dispossession through "legal" mechanisms such as law number 10, a process that primarily targets informal areas inhabited by opposition communities.[21] Demolition is undertaken by the local municipalities, which pave the way for regime-linked crony businessmen and foreign companies to construct high-end residential and commercial buildings.[22] These developments serve a political purpose of socially engineering targeted cities and an economic goal of strengthening capital accumulation to benefit the regime's cronies.[23]

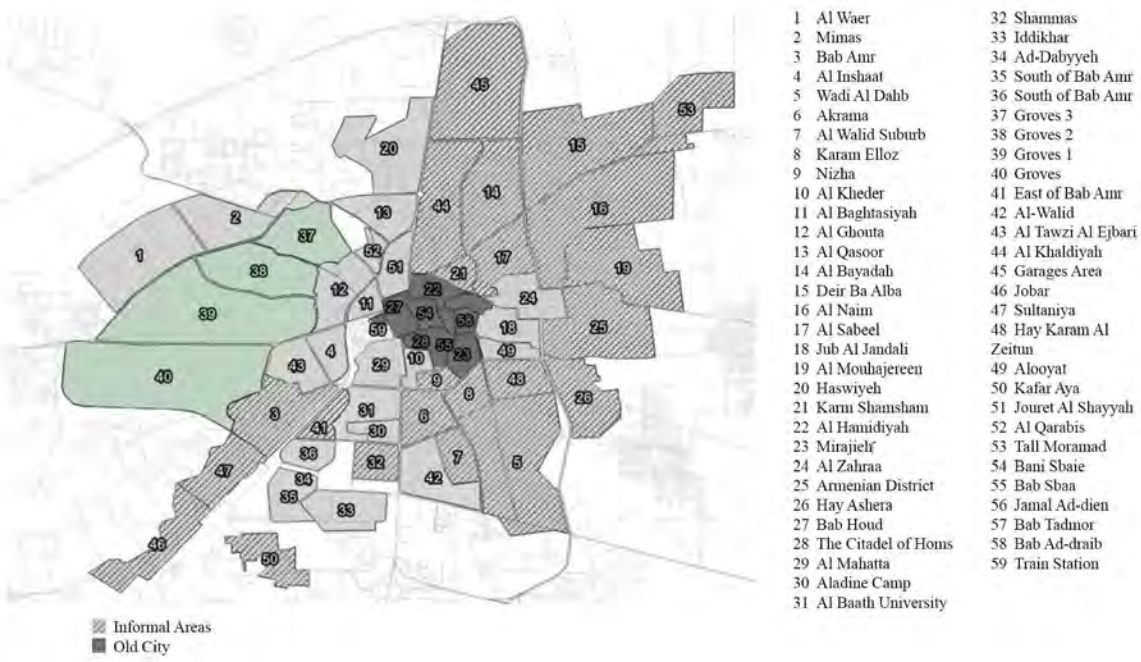
Tools and motivations for destruction can overlap in one place. Darayya is a salient example here. The city was besieged between 2012 and 2016, heavily bombarded, depopulated, looted, and then included in a sectarian-driven urban development plan.[24] A displaced resident from Darayya mentioned that regime forces specifically bombed residential areas surrounding the Sayyida Sukayna Shrine until they were completely reduced to rubble. Bombardment continued even after opposition forces withdrew from the neighborhood.[25] Later, these areas were included in an Iranian-sponsored reconstruction project of the shrine.[26]

In conclusion, destruction should be understood not as a single event but as successive waves of ruination and a continuous process of eradication that internalizes parallel processes of (re)production and circulation. For example, the destruction of the built environment transforms damaged buildings into sites for extraction and looting, then into potential sites for urban development. Looted goods are sold again in special markets (like Souk al-Sunnah) or reused in other construction projects.[27] Demolishing informal settlements and then transforming them into urban development areas increases their economic value and places them at the heart of a process of capital accumulation.

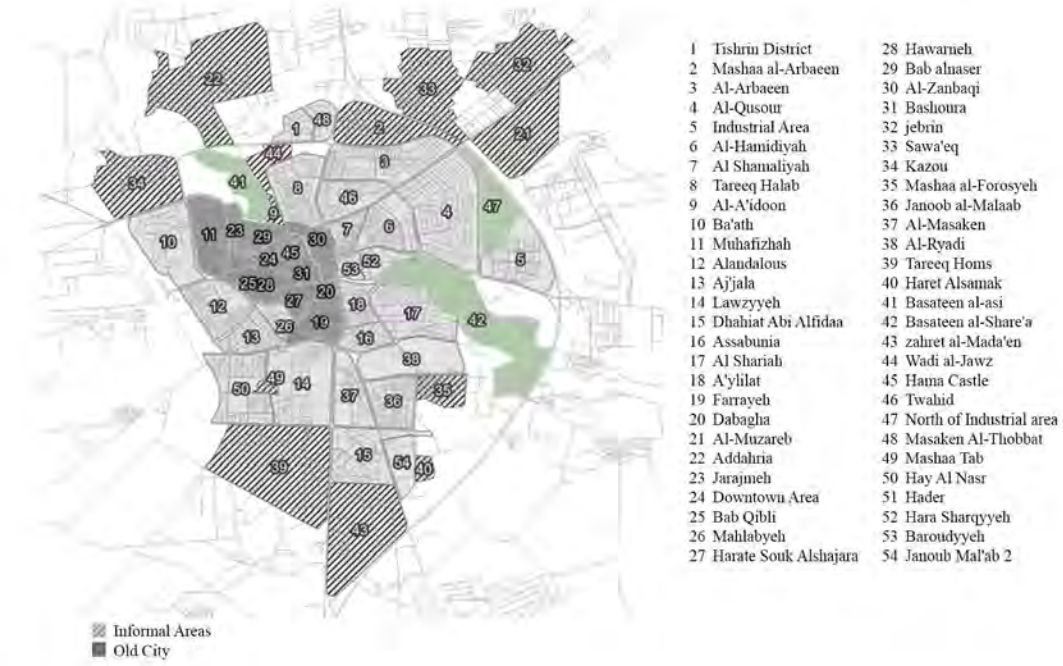
The Destruction of Hama and Homs

Homs and Hama, the third and fourth largest cities in Syria, contain a mixture of urban typologies drawing upon several binaries including old/modern, formal/informal, and urban/rural, as seen in maps 1 and 2. The local society of Hama is predominantly Muslim Sunni, in contrast to Homs which is a mixed society made of different sects and religions including Muslims, Alwaites, and Christians.

Homs and Hama had their own experiences with destruction before the conflict. As will be seen in the next section, the shadow of these experiences may have influenced the way both cities were destroyed during the conflict. Hama suffered massive destruction in February 1982 during the military assault launched by the Syrian regime against the Muslim Brotherhood in the city. Several neighborhoods, such as Keilaniya and Shamaliya, were turned into rubble. Other neighborhoods such as Sakhanneh, Baroudiyeh, and Hamidiya were partially destroyed.[28] Government buildings, hotels, and modern residential buildings were built on top of razed residential quarters. In Homs, multiple neighborhoods were subject to



Map 1 Neighborhoods of Homs. Source: Urban Analysis Network Syria and author.



Map 2 Neighborhoods of Hama city. Source: Urban Analysis Network Syria and author.

demolition and eviction orders as part of the controversial urban development project named Homs Dream.[29] The project targeted informal neighborhoods such as Baba Amro, Al-Sultaniyeh and Jobar and replaced them with high-end residential and retail complexes. The project was widely criticized for allegedly attempting to change the demographic makeup of the city.[30]

Homs and Hama both participated in the uprising in 2011, but their paths diverged during the period of armed conflict. Both cities hosted many protests spreading out across their neighborhoods. According to the Syrian Memory Institute, between 2011 and 2013, at least 3,900 demonstrations took place in Hama and 5,300 in Homs. Alwaer, Al Khaldiyah, Jouret Al Shayyah, and Ghouta have been the main protesting hubs in Homs, while in Hama demonstrations peaked in Bab Qibli, Al-Hamidiyah, and Tareq Halab.

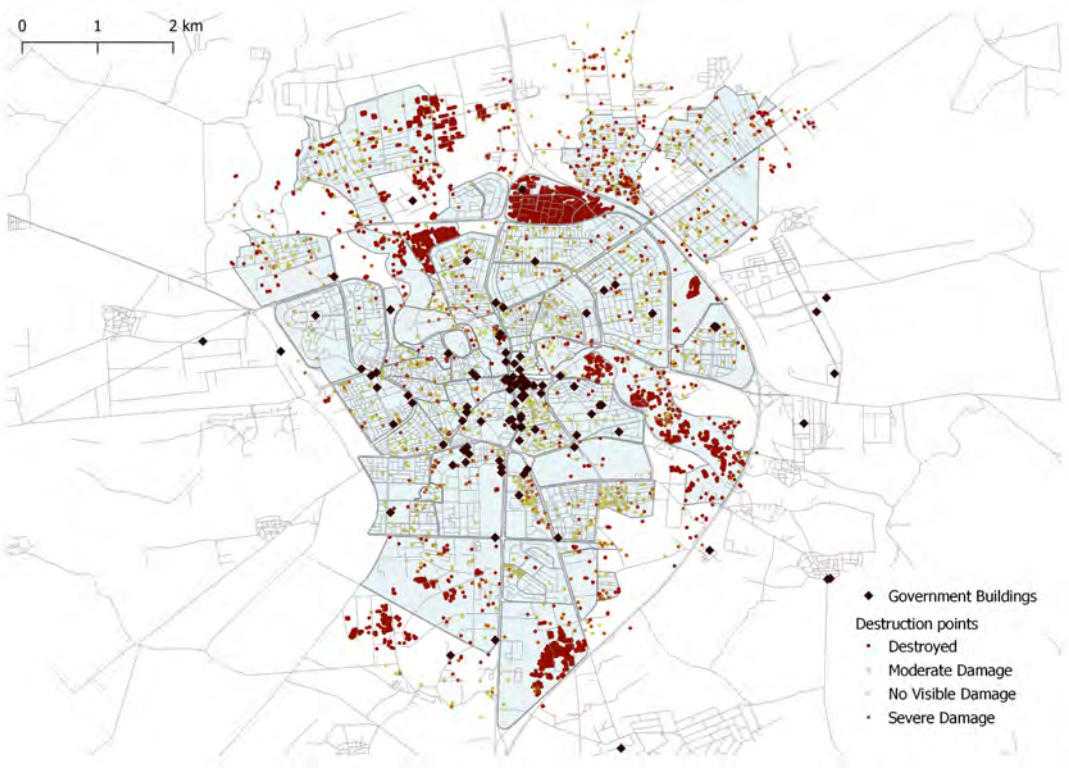
Localized street clashes took place early in Homs but quickly turned into intensified battles as multiple Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups established various forms of territorial control across the city. Heavy fighting took place in multiple neighborhoods such as Bab Amr, Deir Baalba, and Bayadah. Eventually, the FSA was encircled within two enclaves: the old city and Alwaer, both to be recaptured by the regime in 2014 and 2017 respectively after a multi-year siege.[31] Hama, on the contrary, has not experienced any large-scale military operations or actual control by the FSA. The regime has asserted its control over the city since July 2011, after raiding it in response to a series of massive protests in Assi Square.[32] Still, small-scale operations continued to take place here and there, particularly in the northern and southern outskirts of Hama, until 2013 when the FSA completely withdrew from the city.

Despite their military trajectory being very different, Hama and Homs both experienced their share of destruction. According to the UNOSAT dataset, as of 2016 there were more than 10,885 and 14,108 destruction points in Hama and Homs respectively.

Discussion

As shown in maps 3 and 4, the most devastated neighborhoods in Homs are in the old city, including Bab Hod, Jouret Al Shayah, Bani Sbaie, and Karm Shamsham. In Hama, peripheral northern neighborhoods such as Masha Arba'en, Wadi al-Jawz, Addahria, and Sawa'eq are the most destroyed. Despite not witnessing any major military battles, the overall destruction intensity in Hama (0.09) is almost similar to Homs (0.08), as well as the level of destruction in Hama (61 percent of affected properties in Hama are completely or severely destroyed) and in Homs (60 percent).[33]

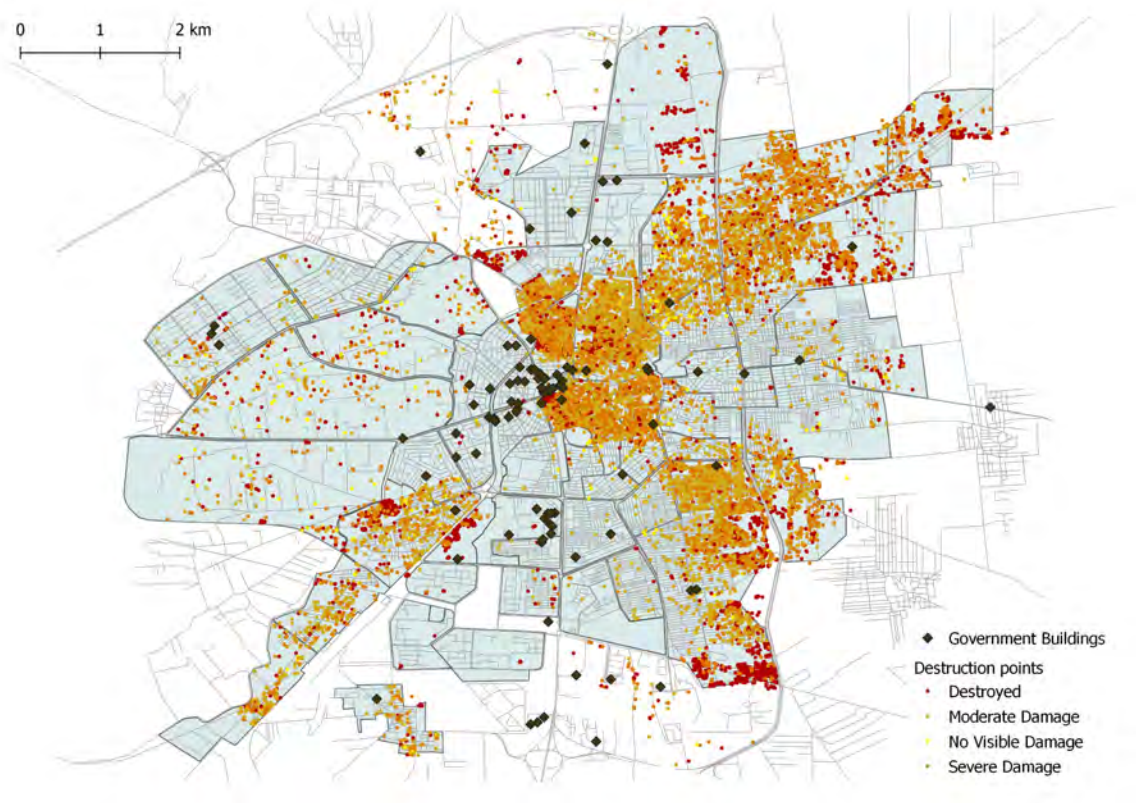
In Hama, the data shows a correlation between the urban typology and the intensity of destruction. Informal areas and city expansion areas (in particular in the north and the south) were damaged more than regulated and old city neighborhoods, both in terms of intensity and density. Notably, much of the destruction in the informal areas was undertaken by bulldozers following the withdrawal of the FSA from the city, such as the demolishing of Mashaa al-Arbaeen and Wadi al-Jawz between 2012 and 2013.[34] Interestingly, both military and economic narratives were provided by the Syrian regime to justify these demolition campaigns. The first narrative proclaimed the need to eradicate the FSA's capacity to carry out operations in the city from the southern and northern fronts where FSA fighters were confined by 2013. The second narrative maintained that certain areas had to be razed due to building violations. However, demolishing plans have continued for years after the end of military operations in the city, targeting primarily informal neighborhoods in the city such as Haret Alsamak, Nqarneh, Kazo, and Marabit. Thus, urban and social engineering rather than military necessity might be the main motive of destruction, especially considering the fact that the Syrian regime has not encountered any serious military threat in the city that necessitates such a high degree of destruction. It can be argued then that the regime capitalized on war conditions to carry out demolition plans for economic purposes.



Map 3 Destruction intensity in Hama as of 2016. Source: UNOSAT

Row Labels	*Destruction points*	*Destruction intensity*	*Destroyed (%)*	*Severe damage (%)*	*Moderate damage (%)*	*No visible damage (%)*	*Protests points*	*Protesting days (avg)*
City expansion	2,163	0.07	88%	5%	6%	1%	31	118
Groves	1,309	0.15	95%	3%	1%	0%	0	0
Housing area	37	0.005	30%	8%	54%	8%	14	201
Informal areas	4,733	0.40	95%	1%	2%	1%	43	114
Old city	152	0.01	30%	15%	34%	22%	950	517
Old city expansion	136	0.01	20%	8%	35%	37%	874	442
Regulated	512	0.007	16%	15%	40%	28%	2,004	637
Grand Total	9,053	0.09	53%	8%	25%	14%	3,916	304

Table 1 Destruction intensity, protesting, and military control in Hama. Source: UNOSAT and author



Map 4 Destruction intensity in Homs as of 2016. Source: UNOSAT

This argument can be also demonstrated by considering the low correlation of destruction with either protesting or military control. The level of destruction in the main protesting hubs ranges between low to medium, while a number of neighborhoods that witnessed military operations for the FSA such as Bab Qibli and Al-Hamidiyah enjoyed relatively lower levels of destruction.

Finally, not only destruction but also the fear of destruction has been a factor that threatens thousands of Hama residents who still remember the traumatic experience of the 1980s and live in its shadow. Whenever the FSA imposed any sort of territorial control in a neighborhood, the Syrian regime applied intensive and punitive bombardment, quickly turning the general opinion of locals against the presence of the FSA and forcing them to withdraw eventually.

In Homs, destruction is mainly concentrated in two zones: eastern informal areas and the old city—areas that were under FSA control. The data shows a larger correlation between destruction and military control than with protesting or urban typology. The exception here seems to be the FSA-controlled middle-class neighborhoods that are less damaged on average. For example, Alwaer, a modern and middle-class neighborhood, was one of the main protesting hubs in the city and witnessed the longest periods of siege, still, it had a relatively low level of destruction as of 2016. A similar situation can also be seen in other middle-class neighborhoods such as Ghouta and Inshaat.

Row Labels	*Destruction points*	*Destruction intensity*	*Destroyed (%)*	*Severe damage (%)*	*Moderate damage (%)*	*No visible damage (%)*	*Protests points*	*Protesting days (avg)*	*FSA control days*
City expansion	623	0.04	30%	30%	38%	3%	24	28	175
Groves	419	0.01	32%	33%	23%	12%	0	0	0
Housing area	17	0.00	53%	24%	24%	0%	5	15	88
Informal areas	6,780	0.10	18%	42%	39%	2%	2,013	240	133
Informal areas / pro-regime	1,952	0.04	39%	30%	29%	1%	3	26	0
Old City	2,093	0.27	16%	52%	32%	0%	759	319	733
Old city expansion	159	0.03	10%	25%	60%	5%	40	83	184
Regulated areas	1,516	0.16	17%	30%	35%	1%	2,521	578	368
Grand Total	13,567	0.08	27%	33%	35%	3%	5,365	161	210

Table 2 Destruction intensity, protesting, and military control in Homs. Source: UNOSAT and author

However, some of these neighborhoods have been subject to another form of destruction—looting. Considering the Alwaer example again, following the displacement of its population in 2017, a variety of property has been looted, including household furnishings and electric appliances.[35] On the contrary, the looting patterns reported in neighborhoods with a higher rate of destruction but lower economic status (such as Bab Sbaa', Karm Zaiton, Bab Amro, and Deir Balba) included debris and construction materials.[36] Regime-linked businessmen were granted exclusive contracts for debris removal from these areas.[37]

Indeed, the experiences of regulated and informal neighborhoods differ in multiple ways, including in the patterns and intensity of destruction. On average, most affected properties in informal areas (after controlling for the political affiliation variable) are either completely or severely damaged (60 percent) with a total of 6,780 destruction points, while the same kind of damage in regulated neighborhoods is less than 47 percent with 1,516 points. Based on that data, it can be concluded that the intensity of destruction was higher in neighborhoods that were perceived as having lower economic value by the regime. They were turned into potential sites for debris and building material extraction and urban development, while high-class neighborhoods were kept less damaged for the purpose of looting their expensive goods.

It must be noted that the findings above are correct only when controlling for the variable of political affiliation. Neighborhoods known to house pro-regime constituencies (such as Akrama and Nizha) have been far less destroyed.

Furthermore, destruction intensity is noticeably lower in streets that contain government buildings, even in areas that were under the FSA control.

Like Hama, destruction has continued in Homs even after the regime gained control over most of the city in May 2014. New damage is most likely due to demolition campaigns undertaken by the Syrian regime, looting activities, or attacks by opposition groups against neighborhoods affiliated with the regime. Finally, several new regulatory plans were announced for Bab Amr, Sultaniyah, Jober, Joret Shayyah, and Qusur that aimed to alter the urban typology of these neighborhoods.[38] Many voices claim that these plans (and the map of destruction in general) mirror the pre-conflict urban development plan, Homs Dream.[39]

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Homs was a stronghold of opposition forces and Hama witnessed almost no major military confrontations, large parts of both cities were destroyed during the conflict. This paper analyzed the patterns of destruction in both cities between 2011 and 2016, arguing that the destruction of Syrian cities was not solely a military necessity but also served political objectives, such as punishing rebellious neighborhoods, and economic purposes, including house and land dispossession to clear the way for development that benefits the regime and its cronies. Three repertoires of violence against the built environment were observed: bombardment, looting, and demolition. These types of violence were interconnected to constitute a process of ruination, wherein destroyed properties, rubble, and land were made to serve the political and economic interests of the conflict actors. The paper also demonstrated how the location of a neighborhood, the socio-economic status of its residents, and the expected value of its land played decisive roles in determining the type and degree of destruction that was applied.

Table 3 Destruction intensity, protest and military control in Homs's neighborhoods. Source: Author

Neighborhood	Destruction density	Destruction points	Protesting points	Protesting days	FSA control	Neighborhood typology
Bab Houd	0.693	726	199	371	733	Old City
Jouret Al Shayyah	0.411	730	215	1068	762	regulated - mixed
Bani Sbaie	0.363	316	5	127	733	Old City
Karm Shamsham	0.351	389	0	0	342	Informal areas
Bab Tadmor	0.293	200	42	314	733	Old City
Al Qarabis	0.260	222	203	363	733	regulated - mixed
Bab Al Dreib	0.252	136	216	846	733	Old City
Hay Karam Al Zeitun	0.248	705	92	277	0	Informal areas
Al Hamidiyah	0.212	280	11	224	733	Old City
Bab Sbaa	0.207	219	271	341	733	Old City
East of Bab Amr	0.199	202	0	0	0	Informal areas
Wadi Al Dahb	0.165	1709	0	0	0	Informal areas
Al Khaldiyah	0.146	1080	747	947	550	Informal areas
Al Qasoor	0.123	320	344	367	775	regulated - mixed
Bab Amr	0.122	586	382	310	118	Informal areas
Deir Ba Alba	0.119	1138	344	721	271	Informal areas
Al Bayadah	0.114	691	296	451	70	Informal areas
Mirajieh	0.105	135	15	328	733	Old City
Tall Moramad	0.097	403	0	0	0	Informal areas
Hay Ashera	0.092	391	7	171	35	Informal areas
Al Naim	0.085	914	18	372	287	Informal areas
Alooyat	0.055	67	0	0	0	Old city expansion
Sultaniya	0.049	182	0	0	350	city expansion
Al Sabeel	0.045	189	32	184	94	Informal areas
Kafar Aya	0.039	103	19	54	0	city expansion
Jobar	0.037	162	5	58	350	city expansion
Garages Area	0.024	176	0	0	0	city expansion
Jub Al Jandali	0.023	56	39	330	3	Old city expansion
Jamal Ad-dien	0.022	81	0	0	733	Old City
Al Zahraa	0.021	27	0	0	0	Old city expansion
Karam Elloz	0.020	44	1	1	0	Informal areas
Groves 3	0.017	66	0	0	0	Grooves
Al Tawzi Al Ejbari	0.016	46	0	0	0	regulated
Armenian District	0.015	122	0	0	0	Informal areas
Al Mouhajereen	0.014	109	0	0	0	Informal areas
Groves 2	0.014	69	0	0	0	Grooves
Groves 1	0.012	157	0	0	0	Grooves
Shammas	0.011	17	94	408	365	Informal areas
Al Waer	0.010	81	705	1869	1569	regulated
Al Walid Suburb	0.010	23	0	0	0	Informal areas
Haswiyeh	0.009	50	0	0	0	regulated - mixed
The Citadel of Homs	0.009	4	0	0	0	Castle
Groves	0.009	127	0	0	0	Grooves
Al Kheder	0.008	9	1	1	733	Old city expansion
Aladine Camp	0.007	7	3	128	0	Informal areas
Nizha	0.006	8	0	0	0	Informal areas
Mimas	0.006	33	2	7	0	regulated
South of Bab Amr	0.005	8	0	0	0	Housing area
Al Baghtasiyah	0.005	4	147	501	0	regulated - mixed
Al Inshaat	0.004	7	281	609	0	regulated
Al Ghouta	0.004	12	437	1166	130	regulated
Al Mahatta	0.003	11	187	533	0	regulated
Al Baath University	0.002	4	2	1	0	University
Iddikhar	0.002	4	0	0	0	Housing area
Akrama	0.001	5	0	0	0	Informal areas
Al-Walid	0.001	5	5	58	350	Housing area
Southeast of Bab Amr	0.000	0	0	0	0	Housing area
Ad-Dabyyeh	0.000	0	0	0	0	Informal areas
Total	0.065	13567	5367	228	233	

Neighborhood	Destruction density	Destruction points	Protesting points	Protesting days	FSA operations	Neighborhood typology
Mashaa al-Arbaeen	1.541	3251	8	472	yes	Informal areas
Wadi al-Jawz	1.396	897	0	0	No	Informal areas
zahret al-Mada'en	0.284	1203	0	0	No	city expansion
Basateen al-Share'a	0.231	1199	0	0	No	Grooves
North of Industrial area	0.112	186	0	0	No	Informal areas
Addahria	0.080	487	20	209	No	city expansion
Sawa'eq	0.078	270	22	219	No	Informal areas
Basateen al-asi	0.077	110	0	0	No	Grooves
Tareeq Homs	0.048	301	0	0	No	city expansion
Mashaa al-Forosyeh	0.046	90	12	216	No	Informal areas
Haret Alsamak	0.044	16	0	0	yes	Informal areas
Bab Qibli	0.040	41	373	728	Yes	Old City
Al-A'idoon	0.034	15	1	1	No	Informal areas
Mashaa Tab	0.027	8	0	0	No	Informal areas
Al-Zanbaqi	0.026	37	0	0	No	Old City
Hara Sharqyyeh	0.025	22	24	177	yes	Old city expansion
Mahlabyeh	0.025	21	164	592	No	Old city expansion
A'yilat	0.023	43	135	440	No	Old city expansion
Assabunia	0.022	36	146	853	No	regulated - mixed
Al Shamaliyah	0.019	20	153	652	yes	regulated - mixed
Tareeq Halab	0.017	66	480	721	yes	regulated - mixed
jebrin	0.016	70	0	0	No	city expansion
Hawarneh	0.014	10	13	300	No	Old City
Al-Arbaeen	0.013	66	145	483	No	regulated - mixed
Al-Hamidiyah	0.013	45	545	770	yes	Old city expansion
Aj'jala	0.013	28	120	667	No	regulated
Kazou	0.012	58	5	355	No	city expansion
Harate Souk Alshajara	0.012	9	0	0	No	Old City
Bab alnaser	0.011	16	0	0	No	Old City
Dhahiat Abi Alfidaa	0.011	37	14	402	No	Housing area
Industrial Area	0.011	38	1	1	No	regulated - mixed
Alandalous	0.010	30	136	502	No	regulated
Al-Qusour	0.010	78	218	831	No	regulated
Dabagha	0.010	5	154	809	No	Old City
Jarajmeh	0.009	10	66	710	No	Old City
Al-Muzareb	0.009	44	6	145	No	city expansion
Lawzyyeh	0.009	39	79	661	No	regulated
Twahid	0.008	20	118	795	No	regulated
Hay Al Nasr	0.007	33	10	410	No	regulated
Bashoura	0.006	6	5	340	No	Old City
Baroudyyeh	0.005	5	6	231	No	Old city expansion
Hader	0.005	2	134	773	No	Old City
Downtown Area	0.004	6	192	863	No	Old City
Al-Ryadi	0.004	11	0	0	No	Staduim
Al Shariah	0.004	17	23	690	No	regulated
Tishrin District	0.003	3	0	0	No	regulated
Muhafizhah	0.003	10	13	657	No	Old City
Janoob al-Malaab	0.002	30	164	724	No	regulated - mixed
Ba'ath	0.001	8	211	618	No	regulated
Masaken Al-Thobbat	0.000	0	0	0	No	Housing area
Total	0.090	9053	3916	359		

Table 4 Destruction intensity, protest and military control in Hama's neighborhoods. Source: Author

Endnotes

[1] Deir-ez-Zor City Council, February 23, 2023, Facebook post, https://bit.ly/40cvLZ7; "Statistics of Damaged Buildings in Deir-ez-Zor Because of the Earthquake," *SANA*, February 15, 2023. https://sana.sy/?p=1841054.

[2] "Damage density of Deir Ez Zor, Deir Ez Zor Governorate, Syria," *UNITAR & UNOSAT*, November 28, 2017. https://unosat.org/products/1190.

[3] Cathrin Schaer. "Syria Earthquake: Did EU, US Sanctions Stop Aid Deliveries?" *Deutsche Welle*, February 21, 2023, https://bit.ly/3FDd7Sx.

[4] Andrew Pulver. "Jackie Chan-Produced Action Movie Films in Devastated Syrian City," *The Guardian,* July 19, 2022. https://bit.ly/3Y0VnYj.

[5] Sophie Fullerton. "Influencers are Whitewashing Syria's Regime, with Help from Sponsors," *Washington Post*, August 8, 2022. https://wapo.st/3HQ4mGi.

[6] Exceptions are Ar-Raqqa city, which was largely destroyed by the US-led International Coalition during the military campaign against ISIS (2014–2017), and a few parts of the cities of Aleppo and Daraa, which were damaged by shelling from opposition forces.

[7] The UNOSAT damage density index dataset compares satellite images across several years between 2010 and 2016. See "Geodata of Damage Assessment of Homs, Homs Governorate, Syria" and "Geodata of Damage Assessment of Hama, Hama Governorate, Syria," *UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT).* https://bit.ly/3WUSO8T and https://bit.ly/3Rs4hMc. Also see https://shorturl.at/zBJYZ.

[8] Martin Coward. "Against Anthropocentrism: The Destruction of the Built Environment as a Distinct Form of Political Violence," *Review of International Studies 32* (2006): 419–437.

[9] Martin Coward. "Against Anthropocentrism."

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Reinstituting Sectarianism Through Everyday Forms of Resistance:
The Case of the Informal Transportation System in Beirut

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Introduction

I grew up in Beirut in late 90s witnessing chaotic traffic, smoke, and huge *bostas* (big buses) honking for passengers, without ever noticing how Beirut had almost no public transportation. The only exception was the white and blue *Berliet* buses blocking roads, stopping everywhere, and desperately competing with privately-owned buses and vans. I grew up listening to my parents' stories of how they used to move around Beirut using the tramways before dismantling them in 1965, but that remained a distant memory. I got to know Beirut through the window of the car and rarely relied on the so-called *jahech el dawleh* (state's mule or state buses) to commute. When I asked other Lebanese why our travel patterns are shaped by car culture, to understand what happened to Beirut's once glorious public transportation system, which gradually was diminished from the 60s until 90sto allow greater freedom for cars(Assaf, Mady, and Van den Broeck 2022), butno one seemed to have answers. A few shared positive memories about the tram and the train networks, and how such transportation infrastructure connected everyone. Many people seemed to associate the bus system with the bus massacre of Ain El Remmaneh, which ignited the civil war in April 1975.[1] Perhaps the answer is that people came to fear the bus as a symbol of war.

In fact, the 15-year civil war (1975–1990) rendered the state inactive and consolidated it vertically through integrated clientelist relationships, elite politics, institutional diffusion, centralization of social identities, political and territorial stability, and territorial and political isolation that divided the 18 ethnoreligious groups (Mady and Chettiparamb 2017). Fragmentation, embedded in sectarianism, became "an urban condition, affecting the spatial, social and economic, and political evolution" (Graham and Marvin 2011) of Beirut. In other words, the agglomeration of quasi-autonomous territories has evolved independently in alignment with political and sectarian agendas. All these dynamics were reflected in the transportation sector when post-war state members, who fought the war, took advantage of the war to reinforce sectarianism (Assaf et al. 2021). They diminished the potential for a public transportation system because they lacked the political will to re-establish and re-invest in public transportation (Nakkash 2016; Monroe 2017; Assaf, Mady, and Van den Broeck 2022) that unifies the city, promotes conviviality, and raises awareness of common values. As a result, the war shaped Beirut as an unequal city, in which spatial segregation produced uneven patterns of mobility and accessibility. Overall, state decisions to diminish public transportation prior to the war, and de-invest in such social infrastructure pushed many people to rely on private cars. The movement of people became framed by politico-sectarian territorial differences and car culture (Assaf et al. 2021).

As a counter-hegemonic reaction, people found practical solutions for transportation by creating their own system. This system emerged prior to the war as a "paratransit" (Cervero 2000; Klopp 2021) system to supplement fixed-route public transportation by providing individualized rides. Then it became a "gap filler" (Cervero 2000, 5) to compensate for the absence of adequate public transportation after the war (Assaf et al. 2021). This system is usually referred to among inhabitants as informal public transportation, community transportation, or privately-operated transportation and consists of a small fleet of buses, vans, and shared taxi services. I focus in this essay on how the fleet of buses and vans, made by people for people, opened space for contestation and existed beyond the boundaries of the formal state-sponsored system. Such seemingly mundane activity created new mobility arrangements that allowed people to access transportation

infrastructure where state-supported public transportation was minimal. Then, I explore such adaptation as a form of resistance-generating counter-hegemonic narrative vis-à-vis the existing order embedded in transportation. I am not romanticizing informal transportation, which risks denying the impact that certain practices may have on wider social and political debates. Instead, I examine its persistence as an "everyday life form of resistance" (De Certeau 1984; Scott 1989; Toro López and Van den Broeck 2021), with the potential to create an embodiment of sense and self-oriented *in situ* mobilities (Jensen, 2013). Informal transportation practices constitute the "people," who according to Foucault (2007), "are those who refuse to be the population and disrupt the system" (44).

In the next section, I examine whether and how the informal transportation system, which emerged out of need (Moulaert et al. 2013), is a space of power and an everyday form of resistance that contests mobility needs, challenges the hegemonic car system, and re-builds a social infrastructure splintered by sectarianism. I start by analyzing informal transportation as an ambivalent practice of everyday resistance that vacillates between openness and selectivity, equality and hierarchy, and change and statis. I draw upon fieldwork conducted from 2018–2022, based on storytelling or informal and semi-structured interviews with transportation actors: operators, drivers, and transportation union representatives. Through these exchanges I was able to explore how informal transportation institutes, and is being instituted by, politico-sectarian differences. I conclude that informal transportation is a form of resistance since it challenges the car paradigm and provides the right to transportation for some, and the right to work. It is, however, also reinstituting everyday sectarianism by reinternalizing the dominant political powers among its routes, drivers, and riders.

Is Informal Transportation an Everyday Form of Resistance?

Informal transportation emerges through the non-conventional strategies of residents to reduce the risk of being marginalized by providing or increasing access to public goods. Lucas (2012) explains that the combination of poor transportation options and social disadvantages can lead communities to experience transportation poverty, which in turn can exacerbate the problem of their limited access to opportunities, services, and interactions (see for example Martens 2012). Social inequalities and exclusion can occur (Church, Frost, and Sullivan 2000) across seven dimensions: physical, geographic, economic, time-based, fear-based, spatial exclusion, and exclusion from facilities (Murray and Davis 2001; Hine and Mitchell 2003; Lucas 2004; Currie and Delbosc 2010). These dimensions are useful categories to frame conditions that lead to limited access to opportunities in societies. Hine and Mitchell (2003) explain that the mechanisms excluding some residents from access to transportation can be secondary to mechanisms of social inequality that are unrelated to transportation, with the former aggravating the latter.

Access is thus the overarching governing concept that connects transportation, social, and spatial exclusions. In that sense, access informs travel decisions and strategies for reaching essential opportunities (Martens 2012; Hernandez and Titheridge, 2015). By paying attention to people's lack of adequate access to transportation, and thus opportunities, it is possible to differentiate between constraints related to the individual and those related to supply. In this context, informal transportation enters at the intersection between a lack of assets and poor transportation provision for vulnerable groups (Lucas 2012). Specifically, informal transportation is a potential mechanism for overcoming barriers to accessing opportunities, and for creating a situation in which individuals may belong in their societies.

Informal transportation, by contrast to state-provided or formal transport system, creates mobility *in situ* that goes beyond to become a manifestation of an "everyday form of resistance," Scott's (1989) influential concept. This kind of resistance is not limited to organizing collective actions but can also be understood as the persistence of "everyday activity" that potentially disrupts the hegemonic

order. He describes resistance as a "nearly continuous, informal, undeclared, disguised" (Scott 1989, 4) activity that leaves no record and is designed to be beneath notice. In other words, informal transportation can typically be achieved through cooperative social networks, by forming and creating new forms of "associations" (Scott 1989, 36) that exist beyond authorities. Scott's conceptualization of power is, however, limited to the division between the state or capital on one side and the peasantry on the other. According to Foucault (1980), power operates through a net-like structure, is ubiquitous, and works well with the notion of everyday resistance (as another form of power) since "there are no relations of power without resistance" (98). Whitson (2006) explains that the Foucauldian approach discards the standard dichotomy of the powerful and powerless and rather favors a multiform, ubiquitous conceptualization of power. As such, this perspective rejects the vertical (rigid) hierarchies of power among actors and actions and instead views everyone as potential and powerful actors. Cresswell (2000) adds that power is not only to be understood as residing within a single institution or actor, but rather is seen "to be something which is exercised by everyone, […] is potentially productive, and at the heart of social relations" (261). This implies that in theory, drivers, operators, unions, ministries, etc. can all be understood as deploying power. In practice, however, informal transportation cannot be fully conceptualized as a space of power or an everyday form of resistance because it is a space that reinstitutes expressions of power, including exploitation and subjugation that interact simultaneously with resistance (Whitson 2006). Informal transportation in that sense can be seen as a space of power in which strategies are created to cherish and nurture creativity and innovation for collective actions (Moulaert and MacCallum 2019). These actions, whether seen as political (Foucault 2007) or social (Mouffe 2007), constitute the realm of sediment practices for collective actions, which have the potential to challenge the political institutions.

How do these theoretical insights apply to informal transportation? Cervero and Golub (2007), Behrens et al. (2016), and Klopp (2021) explain that informal transportation contains multiple and overlapping spaces of power as different actors enter, interact with, and create meaning for informal work in various ways. The informal transportation system operates between the public and private spheres. Exploitation, subjugation, and resistance are all present in informal transportation since the system has been largely, though not entirely, unregulated and run by various arrangements with either operator associations or unions heavily involved. In other words, it is a self-managed service and supported by providers who decide when and how the system operates, for example, allowing the drivers to divert off the designated routes. This is also partly due to the laissez-faire and informal nature of the socio-political contexts that allow the emergence of these practices (Klopp 2021). Most of the operations are family businesses or cooperatives that engage family members, unskilled laborers, or both. As such, new inter-community relations and institutional structures are being built.

Moreover, the drivers and the operators often belong to a union that determines who may serve a given route and use the route's terminals. Regardless of having a government operating license, the unions charge their members for the use of the terminals and for the right to operate on specific routes. Unions are usually very rigorous in the enforcement of their prerogatives and are a significant political force, as in most developing countries (Kumar 2021) like Lebanon. Their influence is due in part to the number of people involved in the sector and the fact that government officials (such as police, and inspectors) are often directly involved in the industry through license and vehicle ownership. Even when such services are regulated and legalized, they continue to be referred to as informal transportation to distinguish them from bus services operated by large organizations that adhere to fixed routes and schedules. As such, informal transportation can be seen as a form of resistance since it can be developed into an organized, collective type of political activity and since it is a service approved by people (riders) and supported by a popular culture that encodes it with notions of transportation justice (Toro López and Van den Broeck 2021). However, informal transport could remain limited when its space of power contests

subjugation and exploitation, instead of challenging the hegemonic systems. In the next section, the empirical case illustrates this theoretical discussion by examining how the space of power and resistance of informal transportation intertwine to reinstitute sectarianism.

Research Methods

Storytelling or informal conversation is the first method of data collection that I used during the qualitative research interviews. This method was important because Lebanon has limited national transportation archives. The first step was to determine the participants and contexts in which I wished to address the research question by subdividing it into: how, when, and why did the informal transportation system emerge? And by whom and for whom? Overall, the assembled stories resulted from five years of fieldwork (from 2018 to 2022) conducted with the operators and drivers in Beirut of Buses 2, 3, 6, 11, 12, and Vans 4, Tripoli-Cola, Saida-Cola, and Matar (airport). This approach allowed me to interview vulnerable groups (such as workers or operators with limited educational backgrounds) in a manner that obtained authentic and rich data without further disempowering the interviewees. The stories were mostly collected during weekdays to ensure data was captured from individuals moving around the area. In addition, I was able to collect more reflective stories by chatting with random people while circulating in streets, coffee shops, and transportation stops. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Participants' details were anonymized and since they were all men, I refer to them by age or sect. The assembled data was also connected to semi-structured interviews with transportation union representatives.

There were some limitations to this approach. I had to think clearly about my positionality, epistemological approach, and theoretical framework when engaging with this data. Being an insider to the city to which I belong was essential for this method. I was able to collect stories that conveyed a genuine understanding of the informal transportation systems while understanding their true meaning and context. Overall, the choice of using interviews as a research method has allowed me to build a narrative of how the informal transportation sector was driven by innovative behaviors and sectarian politics.

Reinstituting Sectarianism in Informal Transportation as a Form of Resistance

Following the overview on mobility in Beirut and given the numerous challenges that the capital city faces in terms of urbanization, privatization, and weak planning within the consociational state (Assaf, Mady, and Van den Broeck 2022), this section discusses whether and how the emergence of informal transportation, advanced from the people to the people, is a space of power and an everyday form of resistance.

In the beginning, the informal transportation system emerged as a feeder system to existing public transportation, including trams and train networks before the civil war (1975–1990), and municipalities organized this system by providing spaces for bus and vans to park (Chidiac 2008). The transportation system, however, became a self-managed practice in response to a lack of social services, similar to how the system that provides electricity through private generators developed to compensate for cuts in the state's electricity provision, or the insufficient government supply of water is supplemented by actors not mandated by the state, or waste collection is carried out independently by neighborhoods (Farjalla et al. 2017). Informal transportation, in that sense, emerged to answer demands that were unmet due to de-investment in the formal public transportation system. The informal transportation system provided significant access to cities that otherwise would not have been possible—a valuable service to otherwise marginalized poorer and middle-class populations (Klopp 2021). Mobility and accessibility are essential elements of informal transportation, demonstrating its potential to reduce social exclusion and thus achieve the right to transportation. Such practices, however, are framed by a sectarian political system produced by authoritarian and clientelistic state entities (Salamey and Tabbar 2008; Traboulsi 2014). This hegemonic system has been

supporting and feeding processes of informality over the years (Farjalla et al. 2017). Informal transport, whether it is owned by private or cooperative actors (Cervero 2017; Klopp and Mitullah 2016; Klopp 2021; UITP 2021), reflects some of the typical political dynamics of a segregationist sectarian state that fails to enforce urban planning regulations, including transportation infrastructure that caters to people's need to everyday life mobility (Assaf, Mady, and Van den Broeck 2022).

The informal transportation system tends to be invisible within a car-dependent mobility culture (Assaf et al. 2021), and due to its characteristics—no fixed routes, stops, or schedules, and the formation of political cartels (or "mafia" as many people described it)—it is framed as unreliable and dangerous. One of the reasons for this view is that the politics of everyday mobility have rendered this system quasi-inaccessible, unsafe, and irregular for non-habituated riders, and non-transparent for riders and operators alike (Assaf et al. 2021). At first the informal transportation system may seem chaotic and unorganized. Nevertheless, decoding its operational system reveals how the system is incrementally constructed to defy and re-define different socio-economic variables while reinforcing socio-political hierarchies. It is thus important to understand that the elasticity of formal and informal processes around informal transportation reveals how "informality is not a setting, sector or outcome but rather a site for critical analysis that unveils how informal strategies work for both powerful actors and those with little power" (Klopp 2021, 5; see also, Banks et al., 2020). Informal transportation has the potential to create a situation in which individuals may belong, at the same time, to both the formal and informal sectors due to the actors involved such as municipalities, unions, ministries, drivers, operators, and even riders (Klopp 2021). To illustrate, one can differentiate between the privately-operated vehicles (and networks) and the state-owned buses by looking at the vehicle's license plates. The private buses and vans often operate with a red plate. The red plates are mandatory by law for shared transportation in Lebanon, including taxis, demonstrating that the informal transportation system is considered a semi-legal and flexible operating mode. Why did the government keep pushing for the red plates and why did it not invest in public transportation? The current head of The Federation of Unions of Public Drivers in Lebanon (personal communication, Jan. 25, 2022) explained that the militias who fought the war in 1988 took over the fuel sector, which became monopolized by four companies affiliated with them. In the mid-1990s, the former transportation unions president, Abdel Amir Najdi, attempted to push then-Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri to invest in public transportation infrastructure. However, the latter did not respond. The post-war government was benefiting from the continuous development of a car culture (see El Zein 2020) and from new policies for the red plates that allowed the fleet of shared, private transportation services (including taxis, buses, and vans) to grow. One example mentioned by the union head was when "Farid Makari, the former Deputy Speaker of Parliament of Lebanon and exclusive agent of KIA automobile manufacturer, lobbied in 1994to buy all vans from KIA." The elasticity of informality reframed the system as a hybrid of public and private since it is being operated under an informal-formal governance system, on public roads, and made by people and for the people.

The informal transportation networks operate on a successful economic model as well as being an interesting social phenomenon. The informal transportation networks play an important role in providing the right to transportation, a service that should be delivered by state agencies. They also break the perceived boundaries dividing the city (dangerous, unreliable, etc.) by creating a lived urban experience through a journey that blends social classes and transcends geographic and political boundaries. One of my interviewees explained that "the operating system is a family business or cooperation between different individuals that belong to the same politico-sectarian group, and sometimes between two sects yet with the same political affiliations," a fact expressed by many of the middle-aged drivers during the fieldwork (personal communication, March 8, 2018). For instance, "the operational system of Bus 5 from Hamra (in west Beirut) to Ain Saadeh (a suburb located northeast of Beirut) depends on the sectarian territories in which the

bus is operating," expressed a Bus 5 driver. He added, "from Hamra to the first node of intersection, Beirut River, which separates Beirut from its eastern suburbs, the operator is Shiite. Then, the operator becomes Maronite in the Christian areas" (personal communication, July 2, 2022). In this way the operators distribute political and economic power among themselves according to the agreed power-sharing formula. As for Van 4, for instance, the leader of the Loyalty Union of Transport explained that "legally registered vehicles operate beyond Beirut's southern suburbs (Dahiyeh's borders), but the non-registered vans operate within the limits of 'our area'" (personal communication, June 3, 2021). Immobility is created since the flow of this system depends on the power-sharing arrangement between different sects. A bus driver, who belongs to the Druze community and works on bus route Cola-Chouf District (southeast of Beirut), explained that informal transportation is like board games, "what is your role (driver, operator, union, etc.), what is your political affiliation?" (personal communication, March 8, 2018). The divisions of lines are also reflected in the mobility of riders. Many riders expressed, during the five years of my fieldwork, that they only take the lines that they are familiar with. Familiarity here implies "the lines that serve our communities" (personal communications, March 8, 2018; July 3, 2019; Jan. 25, 2022). As Nucho (2017) explains, "community is translated as sect" (Nucho 2016, 7) in Lebanon. As such, the informal transportation system is reinstituting and being instituted by a sectarian state. Nevertheless, the system is resisting the actions of the state by creating new mobility practices for those in need (such as providing work opportunities or accessibility in the city). The informal transportation system in this case reveals how the situation in Beirut is not determined merely by the state, but by an entire society that reproduces and produces mechanisms of sectarianism.

Conclusions

In this essay, I mobilized the concept of the "everyday life form of resistance" as the lens to examine how the informal transportation system in Beirut is filling the service gap of formal public transportation, and to what extent such practices can be understood as resistance against the hegemonic socio-political order embedded in dominant systems of transportation. From a first reading of the system, it is clear that the practice emerged as a community initiative initiated by and for people to fill market gaps in formal public transportation provision. The practice itself emerged in an unstable political context and kept flourishing in each corner of the city (and even the country) to address the right to transportation. It is challenging the predominance of the car and providing the right to transportation for all, including drivers and operators. It may appear to outsiders as chaotic, disorganized, and unsafe. However, the system has a vertical hierarchy among the drivers and operators, which is connected to unions; the Ministries of Transport and Public Works, Interior, and Labor; the vehicle registration center; Internal Security Forces; and municipalities. The space of power in which the informal transportation system operates is framed and shaped by the hegemonic political order. As a result, the system reinstitutes part of it. Instead of being a vehicle for revolutionary change, the sectarian social structure is maintained. Therefore, this transportation system remains a political tool used by the hegemonic order of power, and its capacity to be an everyday form of resistance remains limited. In other words, the power-sharing formula among different sectarian groups is embedded in the power structure of the transportation system, yet it remains informal in its features. Lastly, sectarian politics also limit the system in meeting people's needs in a bottom-up fashion because of the reproduced injustices they reflect concerning workers and passengers.

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Endnotes

[1] Ain El Remmaneh is a Christian neighborhood, in the Baabda district of Mount Lebanon, a suburb of Beirut and part of Greater Beirut.

Mastering Heritage:
Reconstruction of History and Space in Post-Conflict Diyarbakır

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In summer 2015, the 30-year civil war between the Turkish state and Kurdish guerillas fought in rural Kurdistan became markedly urban. Suriçi, a UNESCO World Heritage site and home to almost 50,000 people, became an epicenter of urban warfare between the Turkish state and the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H), an armed, urban, Kurdish youth organization allied with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The United Nations in 2017 reported that military engagements that included the use of heavy weaponry on populated areas led to killings, torture, violence against women, displacements, disappearances, and destruction of homes and cultural monuments. However, the district's destruction persisted in the aftermath of the conflict.

Following the cessation of hostilities in March 2016, the *Official Gazette*, the official journal of the Republic of Turkey, reported that urgent expropriation decrees were issued across the region. Government demolition crews and security forces subsequently arrived to raze civilian dwellings in Kurdish neighborhoods. Further, instead of providing a path to return for the residents, the government aggressively built up the district's touristic potential as a key part of its ongoing security agenda. These actions prompt the question: How do urban development and heritage tourism serve as integral tools of warfare against populations viewed as unruly and living environments perceived as disorderly? How do inhabitants whose self-identity is shaped, in part, through attachments to urban landscapes conceive, resist, adopt, or repurpose the land-heritage-military nexus in the everyday?

Turkey is not unique in its use of land expropriation and (re)purposing against domestic populations it perceives as threats. The Syrian government has weaponized land and property rights against citizens it perceives as disloyal by

Figure 1: The gradual destruction of six neighborhoods in Suriçi in the wake of the armed conflict. Aerial pictures are from May 10, 2016 (left); August 16, 2016 (middle); and July 11, 2017 (right) (TMMOB 2019, 61, 65, 69).

bulldozing damaged buildings, transferring property rights to supporters, and redistricting to prevent refugee families from returning (Unruh 2016). Both Israel and Guatemala have established ecological conservation spaces to claim and depopulate minoritized communities' land (Braverman 2021; Devine 2014). During the years preceding the Sri Lankan civil war, the government attempted to bolster Sinhalese identity in the face of growing Tamil counter-claims through production of the UNESCO World Heritage sites of the Sacred City of Anuradhapura, the Ancient City of Polonnaruwa, the Ancient City of Sigiriya, the Ancient City of Dambulla, and the Sacred City of Kandy constituting the Cultural Triangle (González-Ruibal and Hall 2015). Nevertheless, the use of legal and developmentalist tactics as a means of counterinsurgency in controlling and containing spaces of contention has received little academic attention (Wood 2008).

This paper examines Suriçi in the wake of the urban war of 2015 to illustrate how heritage tourism serves as an integral tool of warfare against populations viewed as threatening and living environments perceived as disorderly. By treating heritage as data, I elaborate how heritage efforts in the historical city center of Suriçi have become tools to suppress what the state considers future threats by bolstering the Turko-Islamic past and containing non-Turkish and non-Muslim claims to the place and its history. I draw on a multi-sited ethnography of local governance and city planning in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakır, carried out in 2022–2023, encompassing the UNESCO World Heritage site of Suriçi as well as the Kayapınar and Bağlar districts. Specifically, this paper mobilizes in-depth interviews with former and current bureaucrats, activists, and residents; firsthand observations of staged heritage at cultural events in the district, including the week-long Sur Culture Road Festival organized by the government in October 2022; archival research on government documents, officials' public statements, news, and reports regarding the districts; and ordinary maps.

I suggest that the staging and regulation of heritage in the historical city center of Suriçi is key to the state's counterinsurgency strategies in the wake of urban violence in 2015–2016. The state re-imagines and appropriates the history and space of the district in the same way that it blocks any (military and political) counterclaims to its highly centralized understanding of the Turkish nation-state and its foundational pillars. Heritage-making efforts in the post-conflict era do not simply inscribe Turco-Islamic past onto the cityscape, they also promote a novel historicization of Turkification of Anatolia and thereby Turkishness by centering the Kurdish region. Accordingly, heritage-making efforts post-2015 also contain non-Muslim and non-Turkish heritage in the district by singling them out from their social, political, and economic contexts in the urban landscape, while preserving them for heritage tourism.

Heritage as Subterranean Battleground in the Aftermath of the Conflict

The cosmopolitan idea of "world heritage," echoed in the UNESCO constitution, treats heritage spaces as remnants of ancient civilizations that constitute "the ancestors and transmitters of a single human civilization" (Kuppinger 2006, 316). The critical study of heritage, however, emphasizes how the material construction of cultural and natural heritage sites is essentially conflictual and contested due to production and preservation processes that inscribe the landscape with the concrete signs, symbols, and meanings of certain histories at the expense of others (Abu El-Haj 1998, 168; Ferry 2005; Povinelli 2002; Meskell 2018). In this way, states engage with heritage production and preservation not only to translate the past in light of present conditions, but also to selectively reinvent it in the service of their (future-oriented) colonial and national imaginaries (Abu El-Haj 1998; Scholze 2008). Thus, the practice of heritage production and preservation allows states to cast a veil over certain civilizations while also treating current residents in heritage sites as threatening, dangerous, disruptive, and "lacking in culture" (De Cesari and Herzfeld 2015). This situation reinforces racial, ethnic, gender, and class-based power structures in heritage sites through processes of selective reinvention of the past, gentrification, and commodification (De Cesari 2010; Franquesa 2013; Herzfeld 2010; Meskell 2012).

Building on critical heritage studies, this paper proposes that the staging and regulation of heritage sites constitutes a particular type of rescue mission. I suggest that the increasing involvement of Kurdish municipalities, in collaboration with civil society activists, in heritage production and preservation in Northern Kurdistan prior to 2015 emerged as a significant instance of decolonization that counteracted the hegemonic Turkishness and Muslimness inscribed in the cityscape (Biner 2020; Çaylı 2016; Çaylı et al. 2021). However, I here center the intimate relationship between the state's security agenda and its heritage production and destruction to trace the transformation of the old city center of Suriçi from a site of "threat" to a site of "desire" aligned with tourism mobility (Stein 2008).

To illustrate, I first focus on the Conquest Week celebrations of May 2021. These celebrations constituted a significant instance of simultaneous processes of re-imagining the Turkish past in Anatolia and its re-inscription in the old city center to block any counterclaims to the place and its history. The week began with the "conquest march" starting from the Fetih Mosque in Dicle University where it is presumed the Islamic army was based while sieging the city (Keremke 2021). During the march, 100 young people carried torches and Turkish flags while chanting the takbir (the phrase, God is the greatest) and salawats (divine blessings on the Prophet Muhammad) to re-enact the entrance of the Islamic army to the city (Figure 2).

The ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) MPs, the state-appointed trustee of the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, pro-government civil society organizations, and citizens also attended the commemoration of the Islamic conquest of the city. Although the Turkish nation-

Figure 2: 100 young people carrying torches and Turkish flags in commemoration of the entrance of Islamic armies to Diyarbakır, May 27, 2021. (DMM, 27 May 2021)

state narrative takes the Battle of Menzikert (Malazgirt) in 1071 between the Byzantine Empire and Seljuk Empire as the starting date of Turkish rule in Anatolia, during these events the then-trustee of the city, Münir Karaloğlu suggested that the Islamic conquest of Diyarbakır in 639 was "the harbinger of the conquest of Menzikert [in 1071] and the herald of the conquest of Istanbul [in 1453]" (Keremke 2021, 14). This statement reflects how heritage-making efforts in the post-conflict era attributed a central role to the Kurdish region in reconstructing the narrative of the "Turkification of Anatolia." Shared Islamic roots, which pre-date the arrival of Turkish tribes from Central Asia, also became key in defining Turkishness itself.

Simultaneously, the Conquest Week celebrations also included tangible heritage-making efforts to aggressively inscribe the Islamic past onto the cityscape. Accordingly, Münir Karaloğlu also initiated the "re-opening" of the "Conquest Gate" (Keremke 2021). Karaloğlu claimed that this gate had been closed since the 1970s and was now being opened, also as a part of a new tourism route. In this new tourism route, visitors enter the Inner Castle via the Conquest Gate and walk through the Roman Road to go to Saraykapı. Then, they can stop by Hazreti Süleyman Mosque to visit 27 companions of the Prophet Mohammad who are believed to have died during the Islamic conquest and buried in the mosque.

However, these heritage-making efforts led to criticisms among citizens including archeologists, architects, and art historians. According to these experts, there is not any historical evidence or study that demonstrates that the door being restored was the Conquest Gate used by the Islamic army in 639. In fact, they argued that despite the militaristic language that is employed in these celebrations, historically there was a peaceful transition of power from Assyrian to Islamic rule. Secondly, they criticized the misrepresentation of the Hazreti Süleyman Mosque. They argued that 26 of the 27 shrines that are being staged as "the shrines of 27 companions of the Prophet Mohammad" in fact belong to Ottoman governors and their families as it is inscribed on the gravestones. According to these experts, there is only one anonymous grave, which is presumed to belong to Hazreti Süleyman himself. Despite their insistence on further excavations to determine the identity of the occupant of the anonymous grave, it remains unidentified until today due to the active opposition of local state institutions as well as the local Islamic community. They object to an archeological excavation at the site, which is known to be home to both Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations in the city. While these criticisms demonstrate the contested nature of heritage-making efforts, they also reveal the aggressive re-imagination of the past in the district in line with the government's political Islamist ideals to limit any counterclaims to the place. This re-appropriation of the city center happens through militaristic performances, while its continuity is ensured by engineering mobility for tourists.

In addition, the restoration of three churches—the Armenian Catholic Church, Surp Giragos Armenian Church, and Mar Petyun Chaldean Church—in the aftermath of the conflict is an example of containing heritage to render the local social, political, and economic legacies of non-Muslim and non-Turkish communities in the district invisible. In February 2022, the government finally lifted the curfews in the six neighborhoods of Suriçi where the conflict was at its peak. Following the end of the curfew, the government organized a weeklong Sur Culture Road Festival in October 2022 as the grand opening of the conflict-affected district. The festival was depicted as a new beginning in the city, which was unimaginable ten years ago due to the security threats. Throughout the festival, tourists, locals, and officials filled the streets of Suriçi where post-conflict restoration and reconstruction activities made a debut for the first time. Although the festival aimed to stage the heritage site as a site of "desire" that marked a rupture from its "dangerous past," the events and movements of people were surveilled and controlled by riot police, special operation forces of the army, armored vehicles, checkpoints, and drones.

Along with various concerts, exhibitions, and workshops, the festival also included "Heritage Talks" consisting of talks, interviews, and panels on heritage-making efforts in the aftermath of the conflict. High-ranking bureaucrats

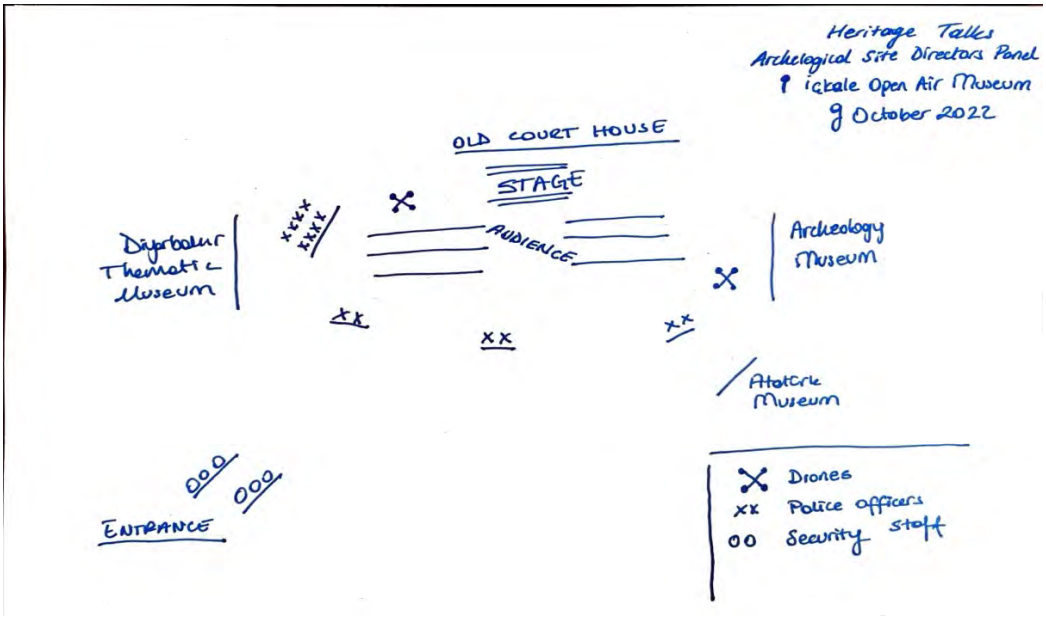

Figure 3: A security map of the Sur Culture Road events drawn by the author, 2022.

and academics from archeology to art history took the stage to present accounts of ongoing archeological excavations as well as restoration projects to mark this new era. For example, they presented the restoration of the Surp Giragos Armenian Church, Mar Petyun Chaldean Church, and Armenian Catholic Church as a sign of indiscriminate heritage-making efforts. However, I suggest that "indiscriminate restoration" allowed certain non-Muslim monuments to be preserved for the sake of tourism mobility while the social, political, and economic dynamics that brought them into existence in the first place have simultaneously been erased from the heritage-scape.

This became particularly evident during the panel called "Geçmişten Günümüze Diyarbakır [Diyarbakır from Past to Present]" by the Turkish Historical Society (THS) as part of the festival. The event took place in the restored Armenian Catholic Church, which had been damaged by the state during the clashes to enter Hasırlı neighborhood. According to experts in the community, aerial photos of State Hydraulic Works vehicles in the backyard of the church led to public outrage against the destruction of cultural monuments as part of military tactics. This public pressure prevented the church from total destruction. Instead, the church was restored to its original form in the wake of the military conflict. However, the church's property was expropriated due to the absence of the church community, and it was transferred to Dicle University, which now uses the church as the Dicle University Culture and Art Center. For this panel, the audience was welcomed with an Islamic calligraphy exhibition at the entrance marking the new beginning for the Armenian Catholic Church.

In this new era, the old church itself became a venue for the erasure of the 1915 Armenian Genocide and the panel instead celebrated the Islamic conquest of the city in 639. Moreover, a member of the THS emphasized that after the 1540s the Muslim population constituted the majority in the city. He stressed that Armenians were only one segment of the 20 percent of the population that was non-Muslim, along with Assyrians, Chaldeans, Latins, and so on. Referring to the Armenian Genocide as "Armenian incidents," he argued that they occurred due to the provocation of foreign countries such as France, England, and the United States in the region. He concluded that

Figure 4: Armenian Catholic Church during the Sur Culture Road Festival. Photo taken by the author on October 10, 2022.

Kurdish tribes were responsible for the incidents, claiming that the Ottoman Empire could not have possibly intervened due to its weak state presence during its decline.

The restoration of Surp Giragos Armenian Church and Mar Petyun Chaldean Church were also presented during the festival as evidence of the government's "indiscriminate" approach. However, activists described these heritage-making efforts as examples of incomplete restoration that isolated the churches from their social, political, and economic environments. As a member of the activist community succinctly put it, a church exists when there is a church community. But in this case, all three restored churches—celebrated as signs of indiscriminate heritage preservation—are in the six neighborhoods that were completely bulldozed following the urgent expropriation decrees in the wake of military conflict in 2015. Although the non-Muslim communities of Diyarbakır have been long gone due to the history of violence against them, the recent destruction erased the last traces of these communities who lived, loved, and died in these neighborhoods. Similarly, the restoration projects for the Surp Giragos Armenian Church and Mar Petyun Chaldean Church also removed the historical shops that belonged to these churches while widening Yenikapı Street from three to twelve meters to accommodate (armored) vehicles. In addition, the doors of both Surp Giragos and the Chaldean Church were reoriented to open onto Yenikapı Street, as opposed to their original direction, to revive the street that was designed as an open-air shopping center for tourists.

Figure 5: A view of Yenikapı Street. On the left-hand side, there are restored churches that now open to the street. On the right-hand side, there are newly built "Diyarbakır Houses" which host London and Ankara-based coffee houses as well as shops that sell high-end luxury brands. The photo shows two special operations army officers waiting in front of the church, where the historic shops of the church community used to be located. Photo taken by the author in November 2022.

These churches were singled out and restored as monuments isolated from the social, political, and economic conditions in which they historically came into being. Hence, I contend that these restorations constitute instances of containing heritage, which renders the (violent) past invisible and thus future claims to the place as "unfounded," rather than providing examples of indiscriminate restoration to bolster multicultural heritage.

Conclusion

In this essay, I argue that security strategies of developmentalist states such as Turkey exceed military means in targeting populations who are viewed as unruly, and their living environment perceived as disorderly. By focusing on heritage-making efforts in the historical city center of Suriçi, this paper particularly demonstrates the intertwinement of heritage-making and pacification in urban Kurdistan. By treating "heritage as data," it proposes that heritage-making efforts constitute a particular mode of counterinsurgency in preventing spectral insurgencies by mastering the past and space in the aftermath of the urban war of 2015. In doing so, the state bolsters the Turco-Islamic past while rendering non-Islamic and non-Turkish heritage as fixed categories that are deprived of social, political, and economic legacies.

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Countering "*Fripisation*:"
Competing Forms of Order-Making in Tunis' Second-Hand Markets

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In July 2017, the Tunis governorate launched a campaign of unprecedented scale against informal markets.[1] Massive police deployments—timed to coincide with the Eid festivities when many vendors had left Tunisia's capital city to visit their families—rapidly dismantled the dense street markets that had come to characterize the central city. The demolition of informally built market infrastructures, the confiscation of merchandise, and the arrest of vendors was branded a "clean-up campaign" by the then-governor of Tunis Omar Mansour.[2] In prominent media appearances, he blamed the sprawling trading landscapes for propagating "anarchy" and "chaos" and portrayed the markets' removal and subsequent relocation as a precondition for a return to law and order.

The trade in imported second-hand clothes, shoes, and diverse used objects—referred to in Tunisia with the umbrella term *fripe* (French term for "used clothing")—played a prominent role in the appropriation of public space and thus became one of the central targets of the governorate's clearance campaign. Especially since the 2011 revolution, when a reconfiguration of local governing relations enabled a surge in informal building activities, *fripe* markets had expanded rapidly across the capital city.[3] A vernacular Tunisian word creation, *fripisation,* thus gained traction, capturing the *fripe* trade's capacity to take over and transform urban space. Rue du Liban, a formerly residential street in central Tunis, turned into one of the most spectacular sites of *fripisation* over the past decade. As one of its long-standing inhabitants put it, "we step out and no longer know our street because the *fripe* trade has taken over everything, even our windowsills, entrance, and staircase."[4] The governorate's 2017 campaign thus sought to reverse this process, first through the clearance of Rue du Liban's *fripe* market and then through the relocation of displaced vendors to an adjacent parking lot.

In examining this top-down attempt at market relocation, this paper posits Tunis *fripe* marketplaces as sites that crystallize multiple and at times competing agencies in the production of urban order. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Rue du Liban market between October 2017 and February 2018, as well as on interviews with local police agents, the municipal market authority, and the Tunis governorate, this research is part of a more extensive, ethnographic research project on the Tunisian *fripe* economy undertaken from 2017 to 2020. As places of circulation and exchange in which space is scarce and access to it becomes a condition for livelihood-making, markets demonstrate how everyday urban politics emanate from, and become articulated through, divergent mechanisms of spatial organization.

The first and second sections of the paper situate contemporary policies of countering *fripisation* in genealogies of governing urban marketplaces in Tunis. It shows first how spatial enclosure and fixity have dominated representations of "orderly markets" since colonial times, producing a fictitious dichotomy between "souk" and "marché." Second, it explores how the *fripe* trade eschewed static market forms, turning its evolving market landscape into a site of periodic contention. The third and fourth section then turn to Rue du Liban, examining the governorate's clearance campaign as a spectacular performance of state power that disrupted multiple other routinized forms of order-making. To comprehend the resistance to and eventual failure of market relocation, the paper investigates the intricate temporal and spatial ordering mechanisms that enabled the functioning of Rue du Liban as a *fripe* market before government intervention. By zooming in on market processes at the micro-scale, this analysis exposes the incompatibility of a politics of permanent settlement with the *fripe* trade's dependency on keeping space open to multiple kinds of movement and

circulation and deliberates what wider implications this has for urban politics.

1. Souk and Marché: Genealogies of Distinction Between Orderly and Disorderly Market Forms

Urban marketplaces—as dense intersections of human and material circulations—juxtapose diverse agencies and interests in the organization and distribution of space as a scarce, and thus highly contested, resource. To assert fiscal and political control over marketplaces, both the colonial authorities and post-independence governments in Tunisia sought to impose fixed spatial parameters on markets, thus framing non-enclosed or sprawling trading spaces as transgressive. This translated into differentiations between souk and marché—or disorderly and orderly market forms—that reverberate in the contemporary governance of urban marketplaces in Tunis.

The Arabic term souk is derived from the verb "to go towards" or "drive," testifying to the emblematic role of markets as radiating centers of movement.[5] Consequently, the souk was often framed as an ungovernable site, representing a rural-urban interface that centralizes flows of merchandise, people, and information.[6] Attempts to establish fixed spatial delimitations for marketplaces were thus at the heart of the Ottoman *tanzimat* modernization reforms in the late nineteenth century.[7] Policies of market enclosure and regulation were subsequently systematized by the French colonial authorities.[8] In the capital city, the colonial authorities incorporated the construction of urban marketplaces—modelled after French covered market infrastructures and thus called marchés—into their project of European city building. Mirroring a "colonial urban order that was segregationist and dualist," the Tunis medina and its suburbs, or *faubourgs* in French, with sprawling, open-air souks were now juxtaposed to the newly planned European districts that featured enclosed marchés.[9] The new central market of Tunis, completed in 1891, became the epitome of the modern market, complete with an office for sanitary control and tax inspection.[10] The model of the covered marché was subsequently replicated across the European districts while new decrees formalizing health and safety regulations for fresh food markets in 1904 legitimized the forced enclosure of the remaining open-air souks in the city center. Simultaneously, legal provisions first formalized in 1884 banned *colportage* (hawking) from all public spaces and streets were now regulated as mono-functional spaces for mobility.[11]

Such colonial-era policies produced juxtaposed urban market forms, captured in a new lexical differentiation between souk and marché. This dichotomy first mirrored a broader system of "differential regulations" for European and native districts under French colonial rule and then came to describe separate categories of governing that outlasted independence.[12] Consequently, modernization efforts in the capital during the 1960s initiated a process of *dé-soukalisation* that aimed to eradicate sprawling, open-air markets.[13] Weekly souks were now framed as "archaic forms of trade lacking spatial order and unable to contribute to economic progress."[14] This led to attempts to first completely prohibit and then severely restrict the parameters of weekly souks on the capital's peripheries (ibid). Meanwhile, the colonial-era model of the covered municipal marché was replicated, both in new urban areas of Tunis and through the forced enclosure of remaining open-air marketplaces.

In reality, post-independence policies of *dé-soukalisation* had limited success: while weekly souks retained their importance in supplying a majority of urban dwellers with fresh produce, covered marchés often remained underutilized because traders refused to pay occupancy taxes or relocated back to the open street to capture passenger traffic. Nevertheless, the normative distinction between backward and modern—or sprawling and enclosed—market forms produced separate categories of governing that cast some market landscapes as inherently transgressive to urban order.

2. The *Fripisation* of the City as a Problem of Urban Governance

As trading in second-hand clothes was long considered a socially marginal activity, it remained confined to the outskirts or interstices of urban markets in Tunis. Excluded from planned urban marketplaces, *fripe* traders were thus

forced to make space for themselves in the city through processes of appropriation, unauthorized construction and the gradual adaptation of infrastructures designed for other purposes. This resulted in the emergence of an evolving *fripe* market landscape that consistently transgressed the ideal type dichotomy between souk and marché and posed a challenge to urban governance by eschewing fixity.

The *fripe* trade's origins as itinerant barter trade and, thereafter, its reputation as an income-earning niche for poor rural migrants explains why it was never considered worthy of being accommodated in planned urban marketplaces. In colonial-era Tunis, *ruba fikia* (second-hand clothes) were collected and resold by door-to-door traders, who were described as a nuisance by the colonial authorities from the early twentieth century.[15] With the onset of *fripe* imports to Tunisia—first war-time surplus materials from the Second World War and then civilian used garments from the United States during the 1960s—rural migrants with little other opportunities on the urban labor market began to establish themselves in the trade. In the absence of permanent trading spaces, these migrants built on existing clan-based solidarities to collectively appropriate land to construct the first *fripe* marketplaces. Most prominently, the *fripe* traders succeeded in establishing marketplaces at the heart of the urban renewal project in the Hafsia district of the Tunis medina (Fig. 1) and at the center of the newly built housing estate Cité Ibn Khaldoun.

Fig. 1 Fripe *traders permanently occupied a large open terrain in the Hafsia in 1970. (Abdelkafi 2017: 79[16])*

In addition to the construction of such specialized trading places, *fripe* traders soon occupied the fringes of most inner-city marchés and came to appropriate ever-larger trading areas in the weekly souks of Tunis.[17] By the early 1970s, *fripe* traders already accounted for over 30 percent of the overall number of traders in certain weekly souks on the capital's peripheries.[18] In conjunction with the six-fold growth of global second-hand clothing exports between 1980 and 1995, *fripe* imports increased exponentially in Tunisia and resulted in a further expansion of trading landscapes in the capital.[19] In addition, a new legal framework adopted in 1995 exempted the *fripe* from import taxes, on the condition of recycling at least 20 percent and re-exporting at least 30 percent of total imports. This law transformed Tunisia from a simple end destination of *fripe* imports to a sorting and re-distribution hub on the global second-hand market, with 50 sorting factories operating by the end of the 1990s. The professionalization of *fripe* sorting also transformed the local market, as the availability of differentiated product types and price categories resulted in a rapid specialization of marketplaces. High-end *fripe* markets offering exclusively *fripe de luxe* (luxury *fripe*) now emerged in wealthy residential areas, attracting a middle- and upper-middle-class clientele that would not have bought from the *fripe* beforehand. In Menzah VIII, an expensive residential area in the north of the capital city, *fripe* traders took over the covered municipal marché—originally built as a fresh food market—and transformed it into a popular shopping destination for second-hand designer brands.

By the late 2000s, the *fripe* trade had thus morphed into a ubiquitous and differentiated commercial landscape, spanning weekly souks on the urban outskirts, numerous permanent marketplaces in the inner city, as well as clusters of boutiques and street markets. While some *fripe* trading places had been consolidated over decades, others remained in flux. The capacity of the *fripe* trade to continuously occupy new urban spaces and infrastructures, as well as its defiance of spatial containment, periodically constituted it as a "problem" of urban governance. Particularly in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, when an unchecked increase in *fripe* imports further

spurred on the proliferation of *fripe* trading, *fripisation* thus came to be framed as a challenge to urban order, by local government and residents alike. A citizens' initiative called *Winouetrottoir* (meaning "where is the sidewalk") for example launched a vociferous campaign against the spread of informal vending, identifying *fripe* traders as key culprits for what they considered to be "a descent into anarchy" and "a process of rapid urban degradation."[20] Such negative representations must be understood in continuity with post-independence urban policies destined to contain processes of *soukalisation* in the inner city and complaints about the *boumendalisation* of the Tunis medina from the 1990s onwards, alluding to the rapid spread of trade in cheap made-in-China commodities.[21] As one of the most spectacular sites of *fripisation* over the past decade, Rue du Liban was thus a prominent site for government intervention in 2017, allowing the governor to stage a symbolic return to order through market clearance and subsequent containment in an enclosed site.

3. Enacting State Power in Rue du Liban, or the Failed Attempt to Contain *Fripisation*

By autumn 2017, Rue du Liban had turned into a densely occupied market street that had acquired a city-wide reputation for its exquisite and rapidly changing offer of diverse *fripe* products—from second-hand sneakers to accessories and kitchen utensils, baby clothes, toys, work uniforms, and women's underwear. The market street consisted of permanent *fripe* shops (located in former garages, workshops, or food stores), metal vending stalls with stable positions, and diverse handcarts and ephemeral stall structures that formed temporary market extensions, particularly during weekends. (Fig. 2). The governorate's clearance campaign, which targeted the stalls occupying Rue du Liban's roadsides and sidewalks, was intended primarily to reclaim the symbolic monopoly over the production of spatial order. However, the subsequent relocation attempt of the displaced *fripe* traders to an adjacent parking lot (Fig. 2) rapidly exposed competing agendas in reordering the marketplace, including amongst local government entities.

Fig. 2. The fripe *market in Rue du Liban before the clearance and the adjacent market relocation site. (Grüneisl 2023)*

The violent clearance of *fripe* market stalls in Rue du Liban occurred without prior warning on a sunny Saturday morning in October 2017 when the *fripe* market was in full swing. It took not only the *fripe* traders by surprise, but also the local police agents and employees of the municipality who were responsible for the market's day-to-day governance but had received no prior notification. Instead, the Tunis governorate relied on external police units for the execution of the "clean-up." In line with previous clearance operations, it ordered the destruction and confiscation of all merchandise and materials belonging to *nassaba* (street vendors), while leaving the adjacent *fripe* shops in Rue du Liban undisturbed. In the aftermath of the campaign, police vans were permanently stationed at the street's intersections to prevent the displaced *fripe* traders' return.

The governorate subsequently tasked members of the Municipal Market Authority with overseeing the

relocation of the displaced traders to an adjacent parking lot that was to be transformed into an orderly marketplace. While the governor of Tunis had publicly advertised his "comprehensive relocation scheme," the employees of the market authority found that no precise plans had been elaborated, let alone discussed with the *fripe* traders. Following the example of previous relocation projects, municipal employees thus began to draw up standardized plans for a new *fripe* market within the concrete walls of the parking lot. Homogenous vending plots were to be allotted to the displaced traders through a number system and a grid-like arrangement of identical stall spaces was to guarantee the market's internal order. However, due to a lack of any extra budget for the relocation, the municipal authority only commissioned one model stall space that was then to be reconstructed independently by each relocated trader. In addition, the governorate ordered the municipal employees to levy fees for a *batenda* (license) from every relocated *fripe* trader.

While the governorate had thus successfully captured media attention with its clean-up campaign—producing symbolic images of a return to "order"—the municipal employees openly expressed their frustration at being confronted with an impossible relocation task. The *fripe* traders felt betrayed by the authorities' violent attack and lack of negotiation, and therefore they categorically refused to move to the relocation site. While none of the *fripe* traders openly admitted responsibility, they likely hired or cooperated with the *bandiya* (thugs) who broke into the relocation site to vandalize the model stall space and infrastructure set up by the market authority. When the external police units were deployed elsewhere in December 2017, previously existing agreements between local police and *fripe* traders fell back into place, allowing for a gradual return of the market stalls to Rue du Liban. Meanwhile, the new marketplace soon turned into a waste disposal site for the *fripe* traders (Fig. 3) and the governorate lost interest in the relocation scheme, allowing the municipal market authority to quietly shelve the project.

Fig. 3. After several break-ins, the relocation site became a disposal ground for unsold fripe *merchandise. (Grüneisl 2017)*

The governorate's clearance campaign and plans for top-down market reordering relied on a depiction of Rue du Liban as *fawdhawi* (chaotic) and thus on the complete negation of the *fripe* market's existing internal structure and ordering mechanisms. However, both municipal employees and local police agents had in fact routinely participated in co-producing a form of order in the Rue du Liban *fripe* market over the preceding decade and were thus familiar with the complex processes and negotiations that underpinned the marketplaces' evolving forms. They hence recognized the relocation project's incompatibility with the market's day-to-day functioning from the outset and only ever engaged half-heartedly in its implementation. In addition, these local state actors had earned regular rent from the booming *fripe* market through informal taxation and the patrolling of the market's shifting boundaries. This further disincentivized participating in what they recognized to be a disruption of the market's functioning mechanisms, for the sole purpose of delivering on the governorate's abstract promises of "order."

4. The Spatio-Temporal Order of the *Fripe* Market: Enabling Movement and Circulation

The relocation plan for the Rue du Liban *fripe* market followed the standard recipe for creating an orderly market: first, the enclosure of trading activities in a confined site away from the open street and second, the establishment of a standardized, internal partitioning with identical vending positions for each trader. This section examines how the specific market processes that constitute Rue du Liban as a functioning *fripe* market in fact depend on an intricate—albeit largely illegible—spatial and temporal order that was upset through the clearance and permanently threatened by the relocation project. It does so in three parts: first, it examines the strict temporal and spatial order upon which day-to-day coordination between different *fripe* traders in the street is premised; second, it shows how particular patterns of spatial occupation in the street help stabilize market hierarchies; and, finally, it demonstrates how the market's boundaries function not as fixed and impermeable spatial barriers, but as relational constructs that evolve and adapt to movement over time.

First, the clearance campaign targeted exclusively the stalls of traders occupying the street space, or what the authorities pejoratively referred to as "*intissab al-fawdhawi*" (chaotic standing), thus failing to recognize the intricate connections between permanent *fripe* shops and vending stalls in Rue du Liban (Fig. 4). In fact, stable working agreements between shop owners and *nassaba* or street vendors (at times verging on non-formalized employment relations) enable the resale of the permanent shops' unsold *fripe* merchandise in the street stalls for a share of profits. This accelerates the turnover of *fripe* merchandise in the market and allows traders to multiply "bale openings," the moments when new merchandise from the sorting factories is first disclosed to customers. As the temporalities of valuation of the *fripe* are short-lived, with peak value attained only in the moment of bale opening and a rapid, subsequent devaluation through repeated sorting and exposure to sun and humidity, such temporal coordination is crucial. The traders of Rue du Liban thus attribute the market's success to the synchronization of new *fripe* deliveries, bale openings, and the handover of leftovers for resale. These temporal arrangements in turn hinge on particular patterns of spatial occupation. The plan to permanently separate the *nassaba* from the *fripe* shops through market relocation therefore threatened to upend the mechanism of synchronized, two-fold circulation that accounts for the exceptional success and popularity of the Rue du Liban *fripe* market.

Fig. 4. Fripe *shops and nassaba stalls occupy opposite sides of the road in Rue du Liban's middle section. (Grüneisl 2018)*

Second, the internal reordering of the market through the attribution of numbered vending plots on the basis of a lottery system disregarded the subtle hierarchies and coordination mechanisms that had created specific spatial occupations in Rue du Liban. While the authorities perceived the *fripe* market as *fawdhawi* (chaotic), most *nassaba* had in fact long consolidated their vending positions, with their initials inscribed on the concrete walls behind them. Resale agreements between shop owners and stall vendors not only determine the positioning of stalls during the day, but also define in which *fripe* shop the stalls and merchandise are stored overnight (Fig. 5), transforming the *fripe* boutiques temporarily into what has been referred to as "*magasin-entrepôts*" (shop-warehouses).[22] Moreover, tacit hierarchies among different *nassaba* determine where they operate in

Fig. 5. The nassaba *pack up their merchandise to store it in the* fripe *shops overnight. (Grüneisl 2018)*

Third, the relocation to an enclosed parking lot contradicted the *fripe* traders' reliance on the open street to ensure the uninterrupted circulation of goods and people. As one of the *fripe* vendors explains, "our customers in Rue du Liban are mainly commuters, they look and buy while walking, so we need to catch them on the way."[23] The *fripe* traders thus insist that the market's relocation to a walled enclosure—not visible from the street—would translate into a loss of vital commuter traffic. In addition, the *nassaba* consider any physical and visual barrier between them and the street as a key impediment to their sales practices, as it deprives them of their capacity to flexibly adapt to shifting densities and movement. Most *fripe* traders with permanent stalls in fact collaborate with vendors who resell *fripe* on so-called *berwitas* (handcarts) and are able to rapidly adjust their positioning. Especially when the market gets so congested that commuters bypass Rue du Liban, these mobile vendors position themselves at the intersections, expanding the *fripe* market boundaries outwards. The plan to confine the market and to separate it from the main commuter route thus signaled the loss of one of the market's key competitive advantages that had spurred the process of *fripisation* in the first place.

A close-up analysis of the day-to-day processes that constitute Rue du Liban as a successful *fripe* market highlight their incompatibility with the static and abstract market form the governorate's relocation plan sought to impose. On the one hand, the top-down intervention upended intricate mechanisms of temporal coordination amongst *fripe* traders, which depend on strict market hierarchies and a stable partition of space that reflects these. On the other hand, the market's permanent enclosure clashed with the *fripe* market's reliance on market boundaries that remain negotiable as intangible relational constructs that are thus able to adapt to and accommodate diverse forms of movement and circulation.

5. Conclusion

In Tunis, as in other cities in the Middle East and North Africa, urban marketplaces represent privileged sites for both the contestation and the symbolic enactment of state power. This became particularly apparent in the aftermath of the 2011 revolutions, when sprawling street markets turned into an emblem for the erosion of governmental control, but also triggered repressive state intervention in cities across the region.[24] In Tunis, the *fripe*'s evolving trading landscapes eschewed the policies of containment and fixity that were associated with "orderly" market forms, presenting the rapid *fripisation* of urban space as a central problem of urban governance.

Contemporary attempts to contain *fripisation* must be situated in genealogies of governing urban marketplaces through the imposition of static spatial forms and enclosures in Tunis. Marketplaces, as dense intersections of flows of people, goods, and money within which access to space is contested, repeatedly frustrated such efforts of top-down order-making. This is so because, first, markets bring to the fore multiple agencies in the production of "spatial order." Specific market processes depend on intricate forms of temporal and spatial order that typically remain illegible to outsiders and are thus portrayed as chaotic or anarchic. By exposing how particular economic processes depend on, and in turn constitute, distinct spatial forms, analysis of market processes foregrounds how everyday social and economic practices co-produce a plurality of urban orders. Second, as this exploration of *fripe* markets has emphasized, the functioning of any

given urban space as a 'marketplace' depends on patterns of spatial organization that keep it open to diverse forms of movement and circulation, and thus allow for adaptation and change over time. This directly contradicts dominant approaches to governing urban marketplaces as static spatial containers, defined by their confines and material infrastructures rather than by the multiple circulations that underpin their operation as sites of exchange.

Marketplaces therefore constitute a vantage point from which to analyze the divergent agencies of space-making that articulate different forms of urban politics in the present-day city. The participation in the organization of urban space—even through seemingly mundane, quotidian practices like *fripe* vending—is thus here considered as a political act that articulates claims to shared urban resources. Especially at this time of escalating socio-economic crisis in Tunisia, the capacity to access urban space and to transform it into trading grounds becomes an ever-more important and contested source of livelihood-making. At times, marketplaces thus turn into sites of complex negotiation—between state and non-state actors, or formal and informal market participants—that can allow plural agencies of space-making to coexist and complement one another. At other times, marketplaces articulate conflicts over what becomes legible as urban order and who can be recognized as a legitimate participant in its production. From incremental political acts of subversion through the production of new market forms to moments of outright confrontation between different ordering mechanisms, marketplaces thus foreground the analysis of diverging modes of spatial production as an entry point for engaging with urban politics.

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Transgressive Aspirations:
Regimes of Mobility and the Multiple Geographies of Mahraganat Dance Music in Egypt

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Mahraganat is a do-it-yourself, Egyptian electronic dance music genre that emerged from the informal peri-urban neighborhoods of Cairo and Alexandria. These degraded neighborhoods belong to a broader urban topology called *ashwaiyyat*, literally informal or haphazard and indicates quarters that are informally developed and lack public service. This paper unpacks the relationship between mahraganat music, its neighborhoods of origin, and the social imaginaries the music engenders. My investigation of the socio-spatial underpinnings of this male-dominated underclass music analyzes the political economy of mahraganat in terms of production relations, media technologies, and modes of circulation. Based on participant observation, in-depth interviews, and commented walks and rides with mahraganat artists conducted throughout 2022, I seek to illuminate how those *ashwaiyyat* are not merely the birthplace of mahraganat and its artists. Rather, they function as an integral part of the music's political economy and a formative place of its artists.

The paper argues that the literacy of mahraganat artists in the virtual geographies of transnational platforms, coupled with their reliance on communal support networks, has enabled their cultural production to bypass the state. This affordance, in turn, has radically transformed the landscape of cultural production in Egypt, leading to a war over what constitutes art and culture. I further argue that the power of mahraganat lies in the extent to which the music and its artists transgress the hegemonic norms of social mobility and media circulation, disrupting the established doxa, and changing the limits of the possible for underclass young men.

On Music and Earthquakes

What are the cultural responses to urban disasters and the state's failure to address them? Can earthquakes generate cultural changes more seismic than their geographical ones? There is a street in Cairo's peri-urban informal neighborhood of El-Salam city that is called شارع الزلزال (Shāriʿ 2zilzāl, the earthquake street). The street, which is named after Cairo's 1992 catastrophic earthquake, indexes a temporary place that has turned permanent. Most of the inhabitants of this street and other parts of El-Salam are internally displaced families who lost their inner-city apartments during two main urban disasters: the 1992 earthquake and a rockslide that hit the western neighborhood of Duweika in 2008. A decade and a half later, young men who were newborns at the time of the earthquake became the inventors of mahraganat music. While the popularity of the music soon extended beyond El-Salam to reach national, pan-Arab, and even international audiences, the cultural producers of the genre, particularly singers, belong exclusively to *ashwaiyyat*; both peri-urban and innercity ones.

Mahraganat literally means festivals (sing. mahragan). The "handle" or self-classificatory term for the genre is electro-*sha'bi*: electro because it relies heavily on the synthesizer, and *sha'bi* denotes its association with low-income classes, connoting crudeness, unsophistication, and vulgarity for aspiring elites (Armbrust, 1996). The genre started in the street weddings of El-Salam and its surrounding neighborhoods where families who were not able to hire wedding singers hired local DJs instead. The DJs improvised, using turntables and synthesizers, and sampled from a wide spectrum of musical genres, while MCs electronically manipulated their voices.

In an in-depth interview, one of the genre's founders, Fifty "Al-Ostoura" (Fifty the Legend) told me how he moved to El-Salam as a baby with his family after their house in Bab El-Shaaria collapsed during the earthquake. Fifty is what could be described in hip hop language as an MC:

"I was 14 years old and I would go to street weddings and tell rhymed stories, *ḥikāyāt.*" Figo, who worked as a DJ in El-Salam weddings, convinced Fifty that he could work on his rhymed stories, put a beat to them and make them more danceable. Together they came up with the distinctive sound of mahraganat. Understanding what it means to grow up in the wake of an urban disaster and in a place where policing and surveillance are the main manifestations of the state's presence is pivotal to our analysis of the music's political economy and the labor it deploys.

In this section I trace the emergence of this genre and analyze its various regimes of mobility (Schiller & Salazar 2013). My aim is to highlight the compounded economic modalities that underlie mahraganat production and discuss them in relation to *ashwaiyyat* economies more generally. The guiding question for this section is: How have mahraganat artists achieved transnational popularity, despite being heavily censored by the state-affiliated musician's syndicate, denied access to state radio and television media technologies, and lacking record label deals, at least during its first decade of its emergence?

Doing Mahraganat with Love

As the popularity of mahraganat songs increased around the years of 2005–2007, young boys in *ashwaiyyat* started to experiment with music on a massive scale. Internet cafes turned into musical laboratories where kids taught themselves and each other how to use programs like FruityLoops, Acid Pro, Mixcraft, and other digital audio workstation software. Aspiring artists' reliance on neighborhood social networks and infrastructure was key to how they produced songs, shot music videos, advertised their songs, and finally shaped the songs' modes of mobility and circulation. Young men in El-Salam, El-Marg, Mattariya, Ain Shams, and similar quarters in Alexandria borrowed cameras, outfits, and cars from their neighbors and friends. They used local amateur poets, directors, graphic designers, street dancers, and computer wizards to produce the songs. Friends also appeared in the music videos to provide the street life element and the image of local gangsters. At this time, friends, neighbors, and fellow *ashwaiyyat* residents were the primary audiences and committed fans of mahraganat. This reliance on locality reflects the broader self-sufficiency that typifies the informal economy of the *ashwaiyyat* (Ibraheem 2022). While El-Salam city represents an extreme example of "economies of abandonment" (Povinelli 2011), its conditions are barely exceptional as internal displacement and hyper-policing are becoming Egypt's new paradigm of urban government under the pretense of developing informal areas (Mandour 2021).

Responding to my question about the significance of his neighborhood to his music, a 28-year-old, little-known mahraganat artist from the informal neighborhood of Ain Shams, told me:

> You gain a lot if people here like you. If people love you here, that's it, you have passed. Nobody could truly brag in Ain Shams. Look at the neighborhood, it is run by drug dealers and their interests. So, if you are loved here, you gain so much. People here observe you. If you sang one song with a famous artist, they would wait and see if you are going to change on them or not. If you stay humble, they will make you even more successful. They will add to your views, appear in your videoclips, share your songs. One hand cannot clap, you know!

Street weddings, USBs loaded with music, and battery powered speakers of autorickshaws (the tuktuks) and micro-buses have functioned as an alternative circulation grid for these songs. In the Egyptian context, one can compare this web of small technologies to the role of audio cassettes and the privately-owned micro-buses in popularizing *sha'bi* music starting from the 1970s well into the early 2000s. Audio cassettes were also crucial to the organization of an Islamic counterpublic in the 1990s, as Charles Hirschkind (2006) argued, through the circulation of Islamic sermons on cassettes and the ethical debates and discussions these sermons engendered in Cairo's public sphere. USBs, tuktuks, speakers, mics, and computers are not merely small technologies, they are affective infrastructure (Bosworth 2022) the peri-urban youth mobilized to advance the mobility and circulation of their cultural production along with broader sonic and visual ashwaiyyat aesthetics including high volume and tuktuks' decorations.

Tuktuks (auto rickshaws) circulating mahraganat in an informal neighborhood in Cairo (photo by author).

Producing, mediating, circulating, and consuming mahraganat is thus an all-encompassing neighborhood economy that folds in many of the neighborhood's young men, even those who are not singing. This economy includes people who manage the studio, those who give up their rooftop rooms or parts of their ground floor shops for the artists to turn into studios, tailors, cameramen, social media specialists, and definitely hairstylists. There are no written contracts, and in many cases there is no money involved in these production relations. Nonetheless, as Julia Elyashar (2005) has pointed out in her ethnography on workshop masters in El-Salam City during the 1990s, there is a strong element of reciprocity in this economy. And although the terms of this reciprocity are never clearly spelled out, all artists I spoke to expressed that there is always a way for things to even out. A young mahraganat artist described this mode of labor and producing music to me by saying that this is doing mahraganat "بالحب" ("with love"). This brilliant descriptor indexes the gift economy that underlies this cultural production and foregrounds its affective nature. This gift economy is always pronounced in terms of kinship as mahraganat artists constantly describe their fellow artists and their local folks as brothers, family, and kin. A pivotal element in this gift economy is hustling; people always have to be on the move, they must keep trying because nobody knows which song will be the new hit. This constant hustling defers financial agreements. People collaborate to produce songs and then if one of the songs goes viral, they can negotiate the distribution of profits. In many instances, profit can be non-monetary as well. This resonates with Nevola Luco's (2015) observation that impoverished people in Yemen had faith that God would help sustain them as long as they were not indolent and inactive. A similar moral economy governs mahraganat production where fortune always favors the hustler.

A rooftop mahraganat studio in Ain Shams (photo by author)

A Local- Transnational Bricolage

While mahraganat is built on the informal labor that characterizes social life in the *ashwaiyyat*, the music's unprecedented success suggests that there is more to this economy than gift modalities. Many economic and social anthropologists have shown how gift economies

usually co-occur or are even integrated with other forms of capitalist economies (Appadurai 1986; Thomas 1991; Barry & Bloch 1989; Miller 2001; Lapavitsas 2004; Carrier 1990). In the case of mahraganat, this capitalist mode of production can be identified in the transnational cultural governance of YouTube and similar music sharing platforms. These platforms, which could be compared to the NGOs and transnational entities Ferguson and Gupta (2002) described two decades ago, function on the same scale as the nation-state and should be analyzed as such. YouTube, TikTok, SoundCloud and the likes have revolutionized music making in Egypt in three primary ways. First, they function as an alternative web for the dissemination, mediation, and circulation of this subaltern form of cultural production, not locally as in the case of the auto rickshaws and USBs discussed earlier, but on a transnational level. The partial democratization of cultural production the platforms allow has given the peri-urban underclass the ability to compete with state-sanctioned cultural production. Second, by making views, trends, and virality the new markers of success, these online platforms significantly disarm cultural gatekeepers like television and radio anchors and music critics who were previously the sole arbiters of what is hot and what is not. Now mahraganat cultural producers are equipped with evidence and discourse with which they can respond to attacks by the state and high-brow critics. Third, the real game changer is that these transnational platforms allow artists to monetize their popularity, fame, and success. Through contracts, usually brokered by small and medium-sized media companies, artists are paid after a certain number of views and through advertising.

The compounded economy of mahraganat, which interlaces threads from local informal labor with modes of transnational cultural governmentality, can be called a local-transnational "bricolage" because mahraganat artists are making do with whatever at hand and are creating something new with it (Levi-Strauss 1968). In this case, mahraganat artists do not only bypass the state (Polese 2023), but the national is also reduced to a mere threshold. These songs, which champion noise aesthetics and tackle taboo subjects like drugs, sex, and imprisonment, geographically encroach upon affluent physical spaces, transcending them to circulate all over the globe. But can you really bypass the state?

Mahraganat stars celebrate YouTube's awards (photo by author)

The state was a late arrival to the geographies created by online platforms. A decade after the appearance of this music, in 2015, the state-affiliated musicians syndicate waged a relentless war of censorship and interdiction against mahraganat artists. During these years (2015-todate), state radio and television channels were prohibited from broadcasting mahraganat songs, many of the genre's artists were banned from singing in public and private places, and artists were required to change their stage names if they wished to be allowed to sing. This culminated in granting the syndicate's secretary general the power of arrest. However, this was swiftly revoked after public criticism. During 2022, the syndicate prohibited

the use of the word "mahraganat" as a genre and replaced it with أداء صوتي (vocal performance). Furthermore, mahraganat singers were to be fined if they used playback singing. Moreover, state-backed cultural gatekeepers have deliberately popularized a discourse that dismisses mahraganat as sonic pollution and emphasizes its artists' undeservingness of fame and wealth.

State's rampant censorship of mahraganat is only indicative of this music's capacity to transform the urban poor's conditions of possibility. The socio-cultural affordance of this local-transnational bricolage is primarily a scalar one. It has turned impoverished men, *en masse*, into famed and wealthy artists, fundamentally transforming what these underclass youth can aspire to. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) defined doxa as the fit between people's objective order and their subjective beliefs: people aspire to what is granted to them and refuse what they are refused (Cresswell 1996). The brilliance of the local-transnational bricolage that mahraganat artists invented is that it expanded underprivileged young men's resources and consequently their "capacity to aspire," a capacity that Appadurai (2004) characterized as a cultural one. By changing what is possible, mahraganat music has altered how young men in *ashwaiyyat* perceive themselves and their neighborhoods. More importantly, it altered their dreams and aspirations. Nonetheless, these transformations are not straightforward ones. For even if mahraganat artists manage to partially bypass the state, it always turns out to be not fully escapable.

Discussion

While some analysts attribute the state's ceaseless censorship of mahraganat to the state's lack of control over this cultural production, others propose that the state wants its share from the artists' massive monetary gains. Many commentators insinuate that this censorship is strongly motivated by the state's deep contempt of the sensibilities of the urban poor. There is probably a grain of truth in each of these arguments. However, focusing on the transgressive nature of mahraganat could enrich our understanding of the state's response to this music. Rather than reducing or romanticizing this underclass expressive cultural modality to one of resistance, I am suggesting that mahraganat power lies in the extent to which this music and its artists are transgressing (Bakhtin 1984; Stallybrass & White 1986) multiple norms, including socio-spatial, cultural, and economic ones.

Dokdok, a famous mahraganat artist kneeling down for a photo with some residents of El-Marg; his neighborhood of origin (photo by author).

By leaving their "uninhabitable" (Simone 2016) *ashwaiyyat* and moving into gated communities on their capacities as artists, mahraganat singers make a bifocal claim about their entitlement to proper dwelling and to cultural production. The habitus of urban *ashwaiyyat* suggests dire prospects for youth in these quarters that include working as handymen, hustlers, traders within the economy of counterfeit goods, mechanics, or even being incarcerated over petty crimes. In fact, most mahraganat artists have worked in one or more of these low-paying jobs and many of them were previously incarcerated. In his analysis of Egyptian migrant workers' aspirations, Samuli Schielke differentiated between two types of what he called "the power of imagination" (2020, 58). The first one refers to dreams that are so socially compelling that they seem inevitable, like getting married. The second power of imagination, Schielke proposed, is to have other dreams that do not enjoy the same social acceptability or potentials

for success, such as seeking a love marriage instead of arranged marriage. In this regard, becoming a mahraganat artist would not simply belong to the second power of imagination, it opens new "imaginative frontiers" that were not previously available to *ashwaiyyat* youth (Crapanzano 2004).

Denied access to the meritocratic educational ladder, those young men invented a new one that enabled them to make money and garner fame and popularity, *en masse.* In so doing, these artists dismissed the social scripts that were granted to them and re-wrote novel ones with new conditions of possibility that were previously unthinkable. What is most threatening about mahraganat and its artists is that they are undoing their doxic constructions, destabilizing their sense of limits, and refusing what the state presents to them as their objective truth.

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Tehran's Nightlife and Spatio-Temporal Configurations

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The transformations in the Islamic Republic of Iran's regime of power in the last two decades have been accompanied by a new kind of political economy. The density and concentration of large capital, a predatory and highly rentier economy, and a certain kind of clientelism—along with a distinctive politics of identity and religion—have caused many strata of society to be excluded from various political, economic, and cultural spheres. One of the consequences of this transformation has been the emergence of the military bourgeoisie and the concentration of power and capital in the hands of non-democratic, non-elected governing institutions, primarily under the purview of Iran's supreme leader, military forces and other influential power blocs within the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), resulting in a notable departure from democratic norms. This political economy has manifested itself most powerfully in the temporal and spatial occupation of cities. For example, in Tehran almost the entire metropolis is under the control of the dominant regime of power, which is striving to reconstruct and control space, place, and time according to its requirements. But the very political economy, urban policies, and associated identity politics that sustain this regime are also laying the groundwork for the emergence of new and unintended strata and groups. In particular, a stratum of youth with distinct cultural and identity characteristics has formed in everyday urban life precisely as a result of the struggle over the regime and capital's control of the temporal and spatial territories of the city.

This paper argues that nightlife and marginal spaces reveal the contradictions, absences, and unintended consequences of capital and power's quest for control. Public space in Tehran may be flooded by day with the capital of the dominant regime of power and its ideological apparatus, but the night, and some marginal areas, are reconstructed and constituted with distinctive features by new strata and groups. For example, at night, in an ongoing and uneven process, young people in Tehran are constructing new spaces and establishing new times for congregating. But this is a dynamic form of spatial consumption, dominance, or spatio-temporal configuration because the regime of power does its best to destroy these spaces and recapture them based on its own rationale and interests. Therefore, we are faced with new forms of spatio-temporal configuration in Tehran's nightlife in which fluidity, relationality, and indeterminacy are the main pillars; configurations that have been constructed in an ongoing antagonism. While examining the conditions of possibility of these new spatio-temporal configurations, the present article will analyze the configuration of spaces called simply "view" in four locations in Tehran and will highlight their key characteristics. The term view is utilized by the actors themselves to designate certain locales in the foothills of Tehran. During the first half of the 2010s, these areas were significant sources of spatial conflict. Over time, due to the rapid and unregulated proliferation of these spaces coupled with the resilience of everyday actors and the inability of the police and ideological forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran to assert full control (along with the subsequent advancement of Tehran's informal nightlife in recent years) views have evolved into a form of established spatial configuration.

Tehran as a Contesting City

Mahsa Amini, a young woman from one of Iran's small Kurdish towns, decided to travel to the legendary capital of her country in September 2022. As she excitedly disembarked at the Haghani metro station to visit one of Tehran's touristic sites, she was arrested by the city's morality police, who impose the standards of the Islamic regime on the spaces of the city with authority and violence. Her lifeless body was found a few hours later in a hospital in Tehran. Her only words before being arrested were: "We are strangers in this city."

The capital of Iran swallows its own children. Tehran is a revealing mirror of contemporary Iran. It creates a contradictory feeling of fear and fascination with its urban disorder and mismanagement; chaotic architecture; uneven development; endless and extensive crises; narrow and dark alleys; intense conflict of interests; endless traffic jams; severe air pollution; occasional mass migrations; emergence of neighborhoods with different ethnic backgrounds; towers and neighborhoods more expensive than Beverly Hills; cafes, restaurants, and shopping malls like the ones in East Asia; unofficial gambling houses like Las Vegas; and parties that are more luxurious than many European casinos. Since being designated as the capital of Iran two centuries ago, Tehran, like many other metropolises in the Global South, has undergone significant, uneven, and broad changes that reflect local political as well as economic contexts.

The city of Tehran has been marked by various regimes of power over the last two centuries. Numerous studies cast the city as a passive object, merely subject to the urban policies of different governments (Madanipour 2006; Mashayekhi 2019). These studies have delved into the social, cultural, and pathological consequences of such policies (Moeini et al. 2018), explored political, ideological, and class conflicts (Bayat 2010), and investigated the intersections of capital and space within the framework of political economy (Shalchi and Jong 2016). Each of the studies highlight and conceptualize aspects of this complex and heterogeneous city, but they typically fail to consider Tehran as a distinct entity and an independent platform for constructing temporal and spatial configurations. Instead, Tehran should be seen as a master space for different types of heterogeneous configurations. Akin to numerous capitals in the Global South, Tehran serves as both the subject of regimes of power and an active agent, catalyzing diverse and extensive developments. Consequently, comprehending Tehran necessitates recognizing it as a distinct and dynamic entity, possessing internal coordinates and unfolding transformations, within the broader context of Iran's macro-level developments.

Many spaces within Tehran are constantly and unevenly shaped by conflicts and contradictions, particularly in the conflict domains of formal and informal territories, day and night, time and space, official ideology or politics and the resistance of the masses, as well as between those with capital and those without, ruling elites and ordinary people, residents and outsiders, and between city dwellers on the margins and in the center. These conflicts are more prevalent in Tehran than in other Iranian cities, and it is their occurrence in this city that renders them influential. Any change in the ruling regime of power precisely transforms the various facets of these conflicts in Tehran. And conversely, Tehran, as the core of the country, becomes the origin of other extensive developments on a national scale. Hence, studying this perpetual process necessitates an approach that, while acknowledging the conflicts' meaningful indeterminacy and fluidity, considers them within the framework of a complex entity known as Tehran. Here, the idea of configuration is used to make sense of the indeterminacy, fluidity, unevenness, and connectivity in the construction of some urban spaces in Tehran (Jong 2023, 2022).

Transformations in the Regime of Power in Iran and Emerging New Strata

In the last two decades, the Islamic Republic has witnessed severe political, economic, and cultural conflicts between the internal currents of power and different social and political groups. One of the consequences of this contention has been the emergence of the military bourgeoisie, the new influential conservative clergis—who are the owners of large capitals— and the rentier groups affiliated with them. More specifically, the rise of the military bourgeoisie was the result of the deepening of three general characteristics of Iran's economy: it is predatory, a highly rentier economy, and exhibits a distinct kind of clientelism (Vahabi 2015; Kepel 2002). The last decade in contemporary Iran was a period of decline for traditional market businessmen (Bazaari), the neoliberal rentier bourgeoisie, technocrats and entrepreneurs, the middle classes and influential forces of civil society, as well

as for dominant clerics and religious authorities affiliated with the IRI, and networks and currents associated with the traditional left and right wings within the IRI. Their decline was matched by the rise of the military bourgeoisie and their rentier and corrupted institutions and networks who were able to direct abundant oil revenues from the official economy to their unofficial or governmental enterprises and institutions. This development led to a huge concentration of capital and the emergence of a new economic sector. This new sector was largely controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its (in)direct affiliates (as well as the governmental institutions under the supervision of Iran's supreme leader and conservative clerics) and worked according to their institutional and ideological requirements, relationships, and interests.

Tehran was both the platform and the target of these power struggles. The severe conflict over the Tehran Municipality and the nearly two-decade rule of IRGC commanders and affiliates over the municipality is one manifestation of this process. Various policies have been employed by this military force to capture urban spaces in Tehran. One of the outcomes of this accumulation of capital and its related policies was the reconfiguration of Tehran's urban spaces and urban politics, which manifested itself most of all in the (re-)construction of consumer and entertainment space, in the unbridled occupation of urban spaces, and in the real estate sector. The accumulation led to the construction of many shopping malls, as well as residential towers, commercial centers, and luxury housing. The great expansion of the financial sector, as well as its close relationship with Tehran's real estate market, created hidden realms of money laundering and rent distribution for this emerging bourgeoisie. But the huge accumulation of capital urgently needed consumers. Therefore, at the beginning of the 2010s, we witnessed the emergence of the largest shopping malls and entertainment centers in Tehran, centers that, although their ownership was not clear, were all related to military or governmental institutions. Along with the IRGC, the Iranian army, the police force, and the Ministry of Defense engaged in extensive economic activities as well as in Tehran's real estate market so that they could benefit from the state's huge oil income.

The new spaces developed in Tehran in the last decade also served as a platform for the emergence of a new consumer stratum, which, as a result of the rapid expansion of mass communication, had extensive global and transnational characteristics. These groups, which were mainly composed of teenagers and young people from the urban middle classes, could consume whatever they liked with relative freedom in shopping and entertainment centers. These youth, who had been socialized in contradictory spaces between the official ideology of the Islamic regime and the private and unofficial spaces of families and peers, were now being resocialized into the consumer society on the margins of official and ideological spaces and apparatuses of the regime. This resocialization was accompanied by social configurations in which many dominant and official cultural and identity categories were suspended and reconstructed. These configurations were mainly built in the context of permanent differentiation from the signs of official Islamic identity and ideological politics in the cultural-consumption fields (Jong 2016b, 2016a). The dominant regime of power did not consider the relative freedom, new social configurations, and emergence of new strata as a serious threat to its existence but rather saw the strengthening of mass consumer culture as an opportunity to suppress the educated and organized forces of Iranian civil society. However, as time passed, this freedom and new stratification came to pose a serious cultural and social challenge for the Islamist regime. The wide spread of these strata in Tehran's everyday life granted them relative cultural and then social independence, which generated the potential for mass social mobilization. This unintended consequence posed a serious challenge for the ruling regime and provided the basis for profound transformations in contemporary Iran. Therefore, it began to deal harshly with these strata, their configurations, and their constructed spaces. Many of the urban spaces of contemporary Tehran were built as the result of this conflict.

Tehran's Night Life

The intersection of time and place in Tehran plays a vital role in constructing different types of social configurations. The regime closely monitors the city by day, especially in formal or official spaces. This surveillance is in line with the interests of big capital and the military bourgeoisie and their unlimited desire to conquer urban spaces. Cultural restrictions, particularly those pertaining to clothing and the body, are much less stringent in shopping centers and other areas primarily owned by the military bourgeoisie and governmental institutions than in other public and entertainment spaces. If Mahsa Amini had gone to one of the big shopping malls or centers in Tehran, such as Kourosh Complex or Iran Mall, instead of going to the nature bridge and Taleghani Park, where she was arrested, it is quite unlikely that she would have been detained by morality police. The city at night and some marginal areas were for a long time also safe for many excluded strata to build their own spatio-temporal configurations, for different reasons. Tehran's unofficial nightlife is an excellent and unique territory to identify and understand these strange and distinct configurations, a realm that well represents the informal and underground reality of Iran's four decades under the Islamist regime.

Unlike many cities in the Middle East, Tehran does not have a formal nightlife, but what happens at night in this metropolis cannot be seen in any other city in the world. In general, Tehran's nightlife can be divided into two official and unofficial spheres. The official spheres—which are open day and night—include urban transportation, hospitals, terminals, the Tehran International Airport, some holy shrines (especially in the north as well as south of Tehran), some entertainment centers, and a very small number of restaurants that have official permission to work after midnight. On special religious days such as Ashura (Moharam) or Ramadan, restaurants, sport complexes, cinemas and theaters, entertainment centers, and shopping areas are allowed to be open around-the-clock and provide services.

In Iran, shopping, entertainment, and business centers must close at midnight. Even many parks and public places are evacuated at this time, especially during the week, with a police warning. Meanwhile, many informal nightlife spaces are formed on the outskirts of the same formal places and are also active during the night. For example, next to hospitals, many families of patients who travel to Tehran stay out in the open, and this presence creates a new space. Because some restaurants on the outskirts of shrines are permitted to operate 24 hours a day, many young people congregate there and stay until morning. However, the true nightlife of Tehran is formed primarily outside of these spaces. According to the social nature of spatial configurations, in general, three types of spaces can be identified in Tehran's unofficial nightlife: pathological spaces, entertainment and leisure spaces, and unofficial economic spaces. The focus of this paper is on the construction of public and urban entertainment and leisure spaces in Tehran's nightlife.

On different days of the week, especially on weekends, Tehran continues its life with a different face after midnight. Parks, tourist centers, food trucks and many restaurants are resisting closure. Young people mainly gather at one of the entertainment centers based on their social and economic accessibility. The upper classes spend their time in the streets, patrolling with luxury cars, and in restaurants, parks, and certain touristic places in the north of Tehran. The lower classes (young people from the middle and lower classes and even from the suburbs of Tehran), gather in certain public places in their neighborhoods and also try to reach Tehran's entertainment spaces in the center or north of the city. Social networks play a pivotal role in introducing public spaces for the gathering of young people at night. Their presence in these locations is more than just a physical presence for fun and entertainment. In these nightly gatherings, many of the dominant values and cultural norms are suspended. The ways women wear hijab and the ways these young people express themselves through their bodies, activities, interactions, patterns of consumption, and even their underground economy, are all in serious

conflict with the culture and identity politics of the Islamic Republic. Therefore, in many cases, the formation of these spaces is accompanied by a violent reaction from the police, from closing some streets, confiscating cars, to arresting women and young people, or collecting and shutting down food trucks and coffee vans after midnight.

The coercive treatment of the government and the resistance by young people in the northern parts of Tehran, where the majority of these spaces are constructed, have laid the groundwork for articulating distinct spatio-temporal configurations in marginal places. One of these types of spaces in Tehran is called "view." These spaces are located in the foothills of Tehran's northern mountains in remote locations but with a view of the city from above. They have a wonderful visual appeal and provide a distinct space for citizens of Tehran away from the surveillance and confrontation of the police, Basij, and other repressive forces and generally dominant and official norms. Other locations, such as some highways in Tehran, where visual capacity and remoteness coexist, are also used by youth for gathering and spending time. Five years ago, I identified seven active and expanding views—also known as "Baam" (two cases on highways, one official Baam, and four informal views)—through participant observation. My research is focused on four of them.

Many young people from different parts of Tehran came to these places at night. According to the participants, they served as a platform for the formation of various types of social configurations. Young people from different social strata, especially those who had personal vehicles (or had friends who do), were the main creators and consumers of these spaces. A common feature of these configurations was that most of them were constructed in opposition to the signs, acceptable behaviors, and norms imposed by the regime of power, Tehran, and family. In these spaces, the youth had the unique opportunity, even if only for a short time, to suspend various social, political, and economic pressures, to think about themselves, their city, and their society on the horizon of Tehran. Young women in these places could express their true selves in a public place and escape the limits on their bodily expression imposed by patriarchal norms. Sometimes when a song was sung or music was played from a car, boys and girls danced freely together. Gradually, food trucks and coffee vans, as well as drug and alcohol dealers, also entered these places. After evening parties, many young people visited these locations, a practice known as "after." They believed that after partying and drinking alcohol, being in such places gives them a sense of intoxication and emancipation. Even those who intended to commit suicide came to these places and spent hours thinking about themselves and their past from this vantage point. Many people, including women, sought refuge in these locations from domestic violence. Some young people came to this place with their dogs because their pets are prohibited from entering public parks and other places. This place became a place for young women and men to get to know each other.

Gradually, as these places moved toward consolidation, their photos were posted on Instagram or Facebook. The large presence of young people and the construction of new social configurations provoked the police, the morality police, and Basiji forces. At night, the police and Basij attacked these places and forced the youth to leave. When the youths resisted, either their cars were impounded, they were physically or verbally abused, or they were arrested. If the resistance was serious, the police would close the streets leading to the view with concrete barriers or put up obstacles to prevent the cars from stopping. Following these brutal police actions, the young people would seek out a new spatial position (with the same qualities and characteristics) and relocate. The cycle of configuration, stabilization, brutal police reaction, resistance, and then collapse would repeat itself for many of Tehran's views.

The result of the conflicts and innovative resistance of young people in recent years has led to a significant growth in these spaces within the domain of Tehran. Particularly following the 2022 Iran uprising, young people have gained greater recognition and increased freedoms within the spaces. Simultaneously, during this period, and especially amid challenging economic conditions

and the waning of strict government oversight, Tehran's informal nightlife has experienced substantial progress, yielding notable economic benefits for the ruling political economy. Consequently, the municipal planning apparatus, under the deep influence of IRGC, now seeks to co-opt these informal nightlife spaces by transforming them into sanctioned religious pilgrimage centers, nighttime city tours, and other controlled initiatives. This pattern is repeatedly evident in the construction of Tehran's urban spaces, wherein spaces are created by people's actions in everyday life, immediately targeted for destruction by the ruling regime, leading to intense spatial conflicts in which ordinary actors emerge victorious. However, these aforementioned conflicts within Tehran's urban spaces, which were clearly manifested during the Iranian 2022 protests, remain the primary basis for the formation of complex urban spaces, particularly those prevailing during the night. These conflicts are deeply rooted in the contemporary political, cultural, and economic transformations of Iran, especially the rise of military-led power and its contemporary implications.

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The Food Geographies of Filipina Migrants in Beirut

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All the photographs featured in this article were captured by the author, and permission was obtained from the participants to include them in this publication.

"My sister, for example, she's coming from the Philippines, she will get me seeds, which I will plant. Or I will give the seeds to my friend, who will plant them in Jounieh where she works at the madam's place who has a farm. So, she plants there, I will buy the harvest from her, or she will give me for free. If my sister is coming, she will get me milkfish and every other Pinoy products I need, or the Armenian friend downstairs, she's getting containers of Philippines products; she sells them and she earns a lot of money. She's loving my food and I'm loving her products."— Sarah, Filipina migrant domestic worker

"All we need to do in this country is to save dollars. Today, the dollar is 58,000 Lebanese Lira, tomorrow, maybe 100, it is a marathon. [1]

"All Lebanese are haram.[2] *Some of the Lebanese and some of the Syrians are [robbing the Filipina in broad daylight], making them give away their earnings because they don't have any."—Sarah*

These statements by Filipina migrants working in Beirut, evocative of a precarious state of living, provide a glimpse of creativity, maneuverability, risk-taking, new socioeconomic relationality, and racialization.[3] Overcoming poverty and vulnerability at home by migrating to another country entails the risk of further violence and subjugation for many workers. According to the latest estimates, there are about 250,000 African and Southeast Asian migrant domestic workers in Lebanon.[4] Despite anecdotal evidence that they are returning home due to worsening living conditions, there are still hundreds of thousands of migrants in the country. Their situation may be akin to what Rhacel Salazar Parrenãs presents in her book *Unfree: Migrant Domestic Work in Arab States* when workers willfully choose to migrate to the United Arab Emirates and endure the "unfreedom of [racialized] servitude over the unfreedom of poverty in the Philippines."[5] Does this apply to the case of Lebanon?

Urban public space is rapidly changing and has been profoundly challenged in Lebanon as the dollar has hit a record low and the number of people living below the poverty line has rapidly expanded. For example, a series of protests at the Central Bank in early 2023 led to the closure of gas stations due to a sharp increase in fuel tariffs.[6] Locals and migrants share the unprecedented economic burden of high food costs (along with the expenses of provisioning, production, and consumption) amid political paralysis, economic depression, and a tragedy-ridden environment. Yet, migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, whether live-ins or live-outs, continue to work—legally or illegally—and are egregiously vulnerable to extreme poverty, abuse, and the discriminatory practices of the state.[7] In their "improvised lives" as Simone AbdouMaliq calls it, these migrants "carry [their] bodies forward and back between destinations that are altered in each approach, each retreat."[8]

The kafala system, which regulates migration to Lebanon like elsewhere in the region, has been heavily critiqued for its racist, prejudiced, and exploitative features that govern the labor and living conditions of migrant domestic workers. With historical roots in the Gulf region, this system means that the contract of any foreigner entering an Arab state to work is connected to the kafeel or sponsor. Workers are allocated to a sponsor through a chaotic process of recruitment by placement agencies (located either in the sending or receiving countries) who manage this domestic work business. As such, for migrant domestic workers living within the quarters of their employers, it becomes challenging and nearly impossible for them to request support from the employers, state,

and/or recruitment agencies to control, prevent, or even mitigate the risks that they are exposed to. Instead, it becomes the responsibility of migrant activists, NGOs, think-tanks, and migrants themselves. For the past four years, an Ethiopian-run organization, Egna Legna Besidet, has been fighting for the rights of migrant domestic workers with the aim of abolishing the kafala system. Their struggle serves as an inspiration to other migrant workers, motivating them to create organizations that are designed by and for migrants, such as Tres Marias, which advocates for education, economic empowerment, and societal change. Long-standing groups such as the Anti-Racism Movement, Alliance of Migrant Workers, and the Migrant Community Center, among more recent others such as Migrant Workers' Action, have been rallying to educate and sensitize women about this oppressive regime.

Recent years have witnessed significant engagement with migratory routes, space, and race as scholars unpack the everyday resistance and informal networks of alliances that are conceived of and operationalized by migrant workers.[9] Food geographies have been recognized in the writing of many scholars, but seldom explored in the context of migrant domestic work in Lebanon. By food geographies, I mean the way food is grown, procured, arranged for, exchanged, and eventually packaged and sold in informal markets, shops, and restaurants, in specific localities and sometimes transnationally, across borders. Food geographies emphasize a different narrative: a narrative of conviviality, care, interdependence, and placemaking through food. In other words, migrants' food geographies tell a story of struggling to make ends meet and adapting by selling food, transforming it, and saving money. It is a story inextricably interlaced with class, race, gender, religion, status, and other forms of difference in the domestic sphere and beyond. Identifying food geographies adds texture to stories of contemporary struggles and acknowledges migrants' agency as they engage in diverse economic endeavors, which contribute to their social well-being and economic progress.[10]

Such a sensitivity to interlocutors' agency is akin to what Alex Shams, Dalia Ibraheem, Gehad Abaza, and Elizabeth Saleh point out in their work about everyday struggles and manifestations of solidarity to resist structures of power. It is what Nasser Abourahme terms the "politics of inhabitation" in which "refugees and migrants hold ground but only temporarily until the right pathway is opened up."[11] How, then, are migrants surviving and managing remittances? How are they relating to food from their home country and what sorts of food-centered survival strategies do they enact? In the process, how are they changing relationality and belonging in the city? This essay attempts to show how food becomes a site for encountering others to forge new socioeconomic connections and overcome racialization. It is about how food becomes a place for caring and staking a claim in the city. The food geographies I investigate form a crucial aspect of remittances, significantly contributing to the local economies of their countries of origin. Additionally, migrants' food spaces play a vital and empowering role in providing social mobility for their own children. This empowerment is exemplified by the inspiring stories of women like Tina, Balma, Sarah, and others who generously shared their experiences during my field research.[12]

The Sunday Market, Street Food, and Placemaking

Using pieces of an ethnographic vignette, I showcase the varied ways migrant workers create a sense of belonging and togetherness in a constantly disorienting and unlivable place.[13] Walking is how I came face-to-face with urban migrant food spaces. Steven Seidman writes, "urban streets promise more than steady flows. They offer sensual and intellectual excitements by exposing us to a collage of sounds, scents, sights, and chance happenings."[14] It is also in walking that these women find pockets of freedom and experience the city on their "officially" permitted day off.[15] Walking helped me enter Filipina migrant food spaces in different neighborhoods. Although other Black and Brown migrant workers have created their own food spaces in the city, I focus on two live-ins whose working conditions "recognize them for their humanity," a term Parrenãs introduces to indicate the relative freedom of mobility, which amongst other freedoms allows them to negotiate

and conduct their food activities as opposed to being infantilized or dehumanized.[16]

At 7 am, I reached the Sunday Market, situated behind the renowned Horseshoe building on Cairo Street, which is also referred to as Little Manila in the Hamra neighborhood. A market scene unfolds in a transformed parking lot. It becomes a space where all kinds of encounters between people, things and infrastructures take place. Filipina migrants sell their food alongside Bengali, Syrian, Armenian, and local vendors who sell food and beauty products primarily to Filipina migrants. Outside the market, a middle-aged man sells salmon from iceboxes attached to the top of his parked car. Men keenly assist Filipina street vendors in setting up their impromptu food stalls, disassemble them, and sometimes even dedicate their day off to help until they are finished. Long established as a street that supported Filipino-run shops, it also reflects the fact that some Filipina women married Lebanese men and achieved their entrepreneurial dreams to abolish their sponsorship and obtain a license to work.

Restrictions and Creativity in Racialized Urban Food Spaces

Forays between September and October 2022 started as part of the preliminary research for assessing the relations of geography and food work. Migrant food geographies revealed how placemaking is an important element of migration and racialization. It is unfathomable how a country that hosted migrant domestic workers for over three decades has not integrated their foodways into the mainstream. However, workers who married Lebanese men were able to open restaurants. These workers reside and rent in Hamra, Jnah, Badaro, Nabaa, Basta, Daora and other affordable places (see map), either alone or in partnership with others. Norah rents a place with a Bengali vegetable vendor and a Syrian part-time worker, who helps her with the cooking. She then sells her products at the Sunday Market with other Filipina women. Tina, who used to have a restaurant catering to an Ethiopian clientele, now makes injera and sells it to Ethiopian workers and other customers at Badaro's farmers market every Sunday. Ethiopian domestic workers also prepare food and share it communally during religious celebrations at church or in the street. Betty, 36, shares the Ethiopian food her parents sent to her through a friend who came back from a holiday break in Addis Ababa. Food is carried in travel bags from Ethiopia to Beirut as a taste of home to those living here. Then, it is shared when friends meet up to eat together on their day off.

Sarah, 56, is from Dagupan city on Luzon Island in the Philippines and she enacts her sense of place through food. Like many others, she moved to Lebanon seeking social and economic advancement. Sarah explained that acquiring domestic work (and eventual care work) was her key reason to migrate, so that she would then have the means to improve her family's life resources and find happiness. She has been living in the country for three decades. Since she was married to a Palestinian man, she does not have the right to obtain Lebanese citizenship for herself or her daughter. Upon her divorce, she concentrated on cooking to support her daughter, whom she sent to the Philippines for a private education. She tells me,

> I've been cooking since my daughter was 6 years old, and today she's 23. I learned by watching my father cooking all the time, and it is still fresh in my mind. I am the eldest and when I was 8, I learned how to cook. That is because we're living in poverty, and you must learn and be independent. I learned doing spring rolls and started selling them in the streets. That's how I survived here in Lebanon. I raised my daughter based on my cooking enterprise because my husband is not supporting me anymore.

Even though she is a live-in domestic worker, her employers have granted her pathways to increase her savings. During the week, after domestic work at her employer's home, Sarah prepares meals in her rented space on the second floor of an Armenian Lebanese trader's shop for the Sunday market. Even though she gets paid as a live-in, she is reclaiming the occupational-entrepreneurial identity she created back in the Philippines.[17] Spread across the kitchen floor and counters are pots filled with typical

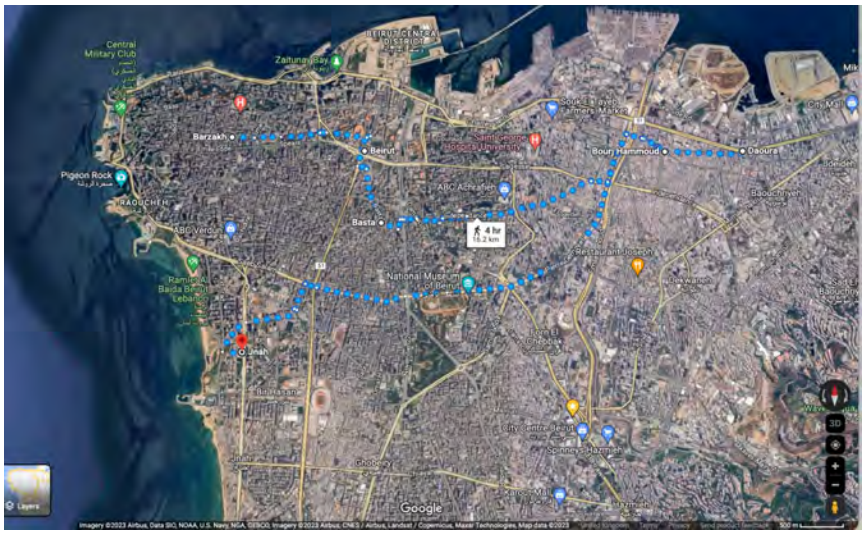


Figure 1 The areas I visited are located in the Beirut governate and are within 18 square km radius of the capital

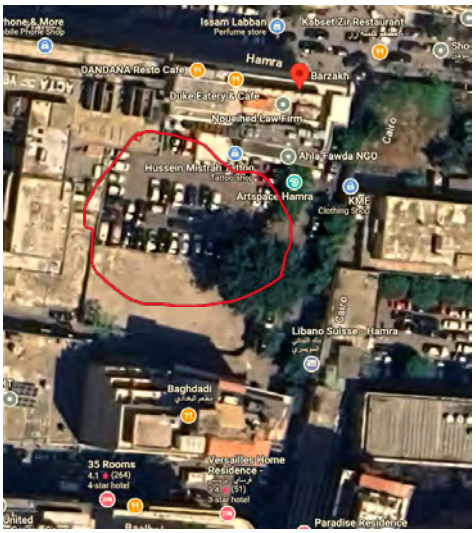


Figure 2 The circled area is where the market takes place

Tina's store displaying Ethiopian products and selling injera (Ethiopian sourdough flatbread made from teff flour).

meals such as: adobo, pork sisig, menudo, pancit canton and pancit bihon, chicharron, binagoongan baboy, spring rolls and other foodstuffs. Filipina women congregate and sometimes sleep over at Sarah's kitchen. They depend on one another, relieve each other from debts, and have a strong friendship. They socialize around food as they share stories of deaths, sicknesses, intimacies, and returns home. It is all about building community for these isolated women. They also help Sarah prepare food and manage the sales on Sundays. Sometimes they arrange sleepovers and birthday parties. Sarah stresses how being independent allows her to escape the patriarchy and work restrictions she experiences in Lebanon.

Betty received Ethiopian food products from her family via a friend who went to Ethiopia and back, Hamra.

A close-up of the dish: kitfo is minced raw beef marinated in mitmita (a chili-powder-based spice blend), with mild cheese called ayibe and cooked greens known as gomen served on injera and kocho (fermented flat bread made from enset).

Suzanne Hall's reading of urban spaces in the streets reveals what she calls the "migrant's' paradox:" oscillating between the need to belong and finding protective ways to fend for themselves against discrimination.[18] As Sumayya Kassamali aptly puts it, "The kafala system is not simply a place where white Madames and Misters exploit their black servants. Instead, it is a system that produces the Lebanese citizen as white and Master, at the same time as it produces the African or Asian migrant as black and servant."[19] It is legally impossible for migrants to open a shop without the support of Lebanese sponsors. Just as the kafala system produces racial and social hierarchies, the locations of food spaces are also subject to the social and sectarian orders of Lebanese society, which render placemaking possible.

The making of the city has been extensively researched over the past decades.[20] From this perspective, the ongoing process of shaping, reshaping, and transforming the city is, in part, driven by hierarchical and colonial dynamics and its inhabitants who are redefining exchange and work relations at both the territorial level and through the convergence of flows, global migration, and networks facilitating the interchange of goods, commodities, and their circulation. Critical scholarship on migrant (food) entrepreneurship, embodied placemaking and resourceful lifeworlds, show how migrants make sense of urban spaces as they open shops, procure businesses, and attain economic sufficiency.[21] I followed these women and paid attention to their resourcefulness and their interactions with others. When I asked Jane, a friend of Balma, if they collaborate with and know Sarah she told me, "The food that is sold here is from Zamboanga city in Mindanao, it is Muslim, no pork, Sarah cooks with pork." Such regional variations reflect food identities and signify the real and metaphorical food journeys from their birthplaces as they traverse pathways to economic advancement. Each bite revealed new discoveries, and I felt touched by the generosity of spirit cooked into every dish. They always invited me in and offered me free food. I was fortunate

to be invited to Sarah's kitchen to make Turon with them during late Saturday nights. Their shared stories reveal collaborative survival strategies by which migrants "make do and get by."[22]

For example, Sarah recounts how vegetables commonly used in Filipino dishes become readily available during the summer season, either brought by visiting friends from their home country or cultivated by Filipino gardeners within Lebanon. Not only does she make more money through selling her food at the market, but she also extends her generosity by providing surplus food to Filipinas suffering from insufficient nourishment due to challenging live-in working conditions. As well, Sarah clandestinely coordinates with doormen to deliver the food she prepared to the women in need. Sarah also establishes connections beyond the urban environment to secure access to pork produced on the agricultural property of a Filipina, whose husband operates a pig farming enterprise.[23]

Balma and others also reclaim the street as an urban food space in which the social and economic geographies they practice reflect the moral economy of labor migration and domestic work. They are unbothered by comments on the streets by masculinist and domineering shop owners, such as those of one Beiruti proprietor who said, "they [Filipina women] need to move their display of food products down the street, they are blocking our shop."[24] These women skillfully dismiss those remarks.

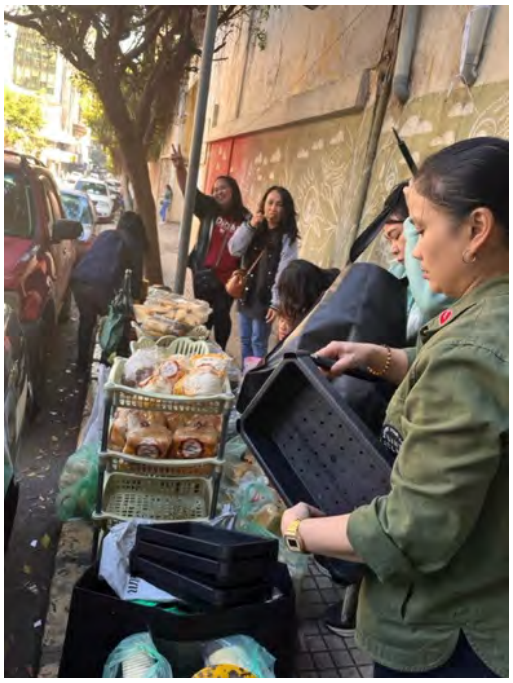
By taking over sections of the sidewalk and selling food, Filipina migrants are altering the way they are viewed, transitioning from being seen as passive workers to becoming self-driven, empowered, and resilient women. A taxi driver takes them back and forth to their employers' homes. In such instances, users of the city are changing too, as interactions have become more open-ended and interconnected for the sake of economic betterment, thus obfuscating the social stratification experienced in the past.

These women sell the cuisine of their home countries, transact with local Pinoy food enterprises, and form alliances. They help one another earn extra money and disrupt the hegemonic patriarchal space of the streets. Food from elsewhere changes the urban space and politics of consumption too. Lebanese men are chipping into these food spaces and creating cross-cultural expressions. In what seems like a reversal of client-seller relations, the Lebanese are purchasing salmon too. Here, racialization of space through food is evident. Salmon was once a luxury item in Lebanon but is an indispensable food item in Southeast Asian cuisine. As a "foreign" food with European connotations associated with conspicuous consumption, can the purchase of salmon by the Lebanese at the Sunday Market be seen as part of the continuous search for indulgence in the wake of rising food costs?

Possibilities of Migrant Urban Food Spaces

For this brief essay, I examined Filipina migrant workers' food geographies as they are unfolding in the streets of Hamra as well as some activities of Ethiopian food cultures in different parts of the city. Racialized food spaces often are performed in the urban margins yet provide areas for informal gatherings formed around feminist networks of care and sorority kinship. On a recent visit, I was invited to a massive migrants' event organized by and for migrants by the Alliance of Migrant Workers, entitled Keeping Our Traditions Alive. Filipina, Ethiopian, Cameroonian, Kenyan, Sri Lankan, Malagasy, Ghanaian, Sierra Leonian, and many other women were side by side, sampling each other's food, learning about defending their rights, selling their products, and abolishing the kafala system in different geographies around the city.

Female migrant workers, with the freedom to move around in the city, and return to their home countries occasionally, alongside their assemblies on weekends embody only some possibilities for imagining alternative food geographies and even movement and circulation of bodies and goods across border. Women are taking on more than one form of work and moving to the streets—whether formally or informally—to make ends meet. These social and economic logics of securing access to



Clockwise, from top left: Sarah at her wok station in the morning preparing pancit bihon and other meals, Hamra.

Freelance Filipina laborers who help Sarah on Sundays, Hamra 2022.

Street food selling slowly unfolds at Balma's stand and friends start purchasing Pinoy street food, Hamra.

resources are redefining social relations, though ephemeral at times. Sarah, selling food and sharing it, builds a sense of belonging to two homelands: Lebanon and the Philippines. Yet she is cognizant that Lebanon is a place without a future; without citizenship there is only the concern to save money for her distant family and liberate herself from the "unfreedom of poverty in the Philippines."[25] Domestic workers from Ethiopia are also getting involved in food work, bringing food to other Ethiopians along with a taste from home. Food then is either shared among their social circle as a gesture of kindness and diasporic belonging or retailed at small stores such as beauty and hair salons, which sell ethnic food and products as well.

As a way of conclusion, the city, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write is "of course, not just a built environment consisting of buildings and streets and subways and parks and waste systems and communications cables but also a living dynamic of cultural practices, intellectual circuits, affective networks, and social institutions."[26] Migrant food geographies comprise many of these elements and such food spaces reflect an

abundance of ingenuity and getting by in the wake of continued precarity and contingent belonging.[27] However, for migrant food geographies to thrive requires both the acknowledgement of their rights by employers in the micro-geographies of the household and at a minimum the support of the larger political community of the city where they live and purportedly belong. Making tactical connections with farmers, compatriots, and family back home becomes an economic choice to ensure migrants' food spaces can flourish. Migrant food geographies in changing times provide an opportunity to search for the invisible and visible ways migrants stake a claim and negotiate the city. [28]

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Endnotes

[1] The dollar has plummeted to 100,000 Lebanese pounds at the time of writing this piece. See: Al-Jazeera, "Lebanon's currency value plunges to 100,000 against US dollar." https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/3/14/lebanons-currency-value-plunges-to-100000-against-the-dollar. The erratic devaluation of the lira is not only changing economic relations but also socialization in a particularly striated society is perceived to be transforming entire neighborhoods.

[2] The term "haram" originally means something culturally forbidden or sinful in an Islamic sense. However, in this context, it has become part of an everyday vernacular which is articulated to express sympathy. In the quote above, Sarah is proficient in the colloquial Lebanese Arabic language—further indicating complex relations of undervaluation and neglect to how many migrants effortlessly master a difficult language of the country they move to. In this case, she uses it flawlessly to say, "oh, poor thing," or "I sympathize with the situation of Lebanese people."

[3] The initial interviews for this research took place in the Hamra neighborhood from October to January 2023, and the migrant workers' accounts featured in this article are drawn from these interactions.

[4] Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2022: Events of 2021." https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/01/World%20Report%202022%20web%20pdf_0.pdf

[5] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Unfree: Migrant Domestic Work in Arab States* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), 54.

[6] L'Orient-Le Jour (2023, January 25). Collapsing Lira, Closed Gas Stations, Protests: A Complicated Morning in Lebanon. https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1325764/collapsing-lira-closed-gas-stations-protests-a-complicated-morning-in-lebanon.html

[7] I use the term "live-in" to refer to female migrant domestic workers who are legally obligated to reside in their employers' homes. These live-ins typically remain within the family's quarters, as they adhere to traditional societal norms that limit women to household roles. On the other hand, "live-outs" are migrant workers who choose to live outside their employers' homes. Some live-outs may have been formally recruited through standard sponsorship processes with employers like banks, ministries, or other institutions. However, there are also live-outs who escape from their employers' homes, opting to live on the fringes of society. In these situations, their rights are often violated, but they strive to maintain their dignity. Estimating the ratio of live-ins to live-outs is challenging because many live-ins effectively become illegal live-outs under the sponsorship system. This makes it difficult to determine the exact numbers of each group.

[8] AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 10.

[9] Simone Anna Reumert, "Good Guys, Mad City: Etiquettes of Migration Among Sudanese Men in Beirut." *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 7, no. 2 (2020). See also Sumayya Kassamali, "Migrant Worker Lifeworlds of Beirut," PhD Dissertation. Columbia University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2017.

[10] Lisa Law, "Home Cooking: Filipino Women and Geographies of the Senses in Hong Kong," *Ecumene* 8, no. 3 (2001): 264–283.

[11] Nasser Abourahme, in this issue and his piece on the politics of inhabitation

[12] Liza Rose Cirolia, Suzanne Hall, and Henrietta Nyamnjoh, "Remittance Micro-Worlds and Migrant Infrastructure: Circulations, Disruptions and the Movement of Money," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*.

[13] Daily concerns about the capricious fluctuation of the Lebanese pound and selling imported products based on world market prices is difficult. For a more in-depth analysis of racial formations, race, and racialization in the region and how Black Sudanese women overcome gendered and racial discrimination see the valuable work of Gehad Abaza.

[14] Steven Seidman, "The Politics of Cosmopolitan Beirut: From the Stranger to the Other," *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 2 (2012): 3.

[15] Although the standard employment contract stipulates one day off every week for migrant domestic workers, many employers do not provide it. Since the contract is written in Arabic and rarely translated or explained to domestic workers they are not always aware of their rights.

[16] In a rigorous ethnographic study of migrant domestic workers in Dubai, Rhacel Salazar Parrenãs concludes that the absence of domestic labor laws leads to three cultures of domestic work across the UAE: infantilization, dehumanization, and recognition of the humanity of domestic workers. Parreñas, *Unfree: Migrant Domestic Work in Arab States,* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021): 150.

[17] Geraldine Pratt, "From Registered Nurse to Registered Nanny: Discursive Geographies of Filipina Domestic Workers in Vancouver, B.C.," *Economic Geography* 75, no. 3 (1999): 215–236.

[18] Suzanne Hall, *City, Street and Citizen: The Measure of the Ordinary*, Routledge Advances in Ethnography (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012).

[19] Sumayya Kassamali, "What is Race in the Kafala System?" *Makhdoumin*, "Maid for Each" documentary website, Chapter 4: Black and White, https://makhdoum.in/en/chapterfour/#blackandwhite.

[20] Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 407–429; Doreen B Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005); Suzanne Hall, Julia King and Robin Finlay, "Migrant Infrastructure: Transaction Economies in Birmingham and Leicester, UK," *Urban Studies* 54, no. 6 (2017): 1311–1327.

[21] Assaf Dahdah, *L'art du faible: Les migrantes non arabes dans le Grand Beyrouth (Liban)* Vol. 7. (Beirut: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2012); Sumayya Kassamali, "Migrant Worker Lifeworlds of Beirut," doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2017; Dalia Zein, "Embodied Placemaking: Filipina Migrant Domestic Workers' Neighborhood in Beirut," *Mashriq & Mahjar Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 7, no. 2 (2020); Kamil Micheline Ziadee, "Migrant Infrastructures in Beirut," master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 2017; Amrita Pande, "'Weekend-Families' of Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon," in *Migrant Domestic Workers and Family Life: International Perspectives*, edited by Maria Kontos and Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, 300–316, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship (Houndmills, Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Nayla Moukarbel, "Sri Lankan Housemaids in Lebanon: A Case of 'Symbolic Violence' and 'Everyday Forms of Resistance.'" Imiscoe Dissertations. Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2009; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Unfree: Migrant Domestic Work in Arab States*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).

[22]

[23] Pork is not universally abundant as a protein source in Lebanon, but it is enjoyed by certain communities. In recent years, there has been a rise in small-scale pig farms, contributing "high-quality pork" to the culinary diversity of Lebanon, even in the wake of challenging times marked by hyperinflation and an economic downturn.

[24] A shop proprietor in his late 70s told me how he is one of the indigenous Christian families in Hamra, asserting his history of place and obviously irritated by its changing demographics.

[25] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Unfree: Migrant Domestic Work in Arab States* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), 153.

[26] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009: 154).

[27] LaToya Eaves, "Fear of an Other Geography," *Dialogues in Human Geography* 10, no. 1 (2020), 34–36 and Janice Monk, "Place Matters: Comparative International Perspectives on Feminist Geography," *The Professional Geographer* 46, no. 3 (1994), 277–288.

[28] Imported food supplies are increasingly unaffordable with the global rise in oil prices, cost of living, and inflation, especially for a state that imports more than 85 percent of its food. See Anahid Z. Simitian, "Infrastructures of Food Security and Food Sovereignty in Lebanon," *Society and Space Journal, Investigating Infrastructures III* 40, no. 6 (2022). https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/infrastructures-of-food-security-and-food-sovereignty-in-lebanon

In Search of the Black "Ghetto:"
Racial and Spatial Stigma in Tunisia

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In a blog post published in French in 2013, blogger Ahmed Amri described Gabès governorate, which lies around 400 kilometers south of Tunis, as one of "the most colored zone[s] in Tunisia."[1] He noted the social marginalization faced by Black minorities in Tunisia and went on to call the neighborhood of Gahbaya in Gabès city, the capital of Gabès governorate, a "ghetto" where "a high density of Blacks" live.[2] Amri's description of Gahbaya neighborhood reflects a larger discourse in Tunisia, including among the inhabitants of Gabès city, that constructs Gahbaya as a Black "ghetto." During my fieldwork over 2021–2022, many residents of Gabès city portrayed Gahbaya and its people as uniformly Black, poor, dangerous, aggressive, and lacking in morality. Both the place and its people were spoken about interchangeably as if they formed the same denigrated urban object.

When I set out to look for Gahbaya in June 2021, however, I found no place that corresponded to my preconceived ideas about a so-called Black ghetto, which derived from popular descriptions of what Gahbaya looks like as well as my readings on "ghettos" in the American context. After my first visit *in* Gahbaya, I falsely concluded that I had failed to find it. During the afternoon that I spent asking people on the streets where "a lot of *soumour* [brown people, a Tunisian vernacular term used to refer to people racialized as Black] live," I was told to cross a street and go *ghadi* (to the other side).[3] I spent the entire afternoon walking in circles towards this *ghadi*, and never found it.

During my subsequent visits, the Tunisian social imagination of Gahbaya as a clearly defined space and people with unique socio-spatial characteristics began to fall apart. For example, the question of where *exactly* Gahbaya is located generated a contested response among Gahbaya's residents. While there was agreement over where Gahbaya is located in relation to other neighborhoods of Gabès city, there is no agreement over the boundaries of the neighborhood.

This essay interrogates the discrepancy between the descriptions of Gahbaya and its people as a Black "ghetto," and the notes gathered from observations and interviews *in* Gahbaya that destabilize this description. In order to understand this discrepancy, I use semi-structured interviews with Black and non-Black inhabitants of Gabès city that I collected over 2021 and 2022 during field visits totaling around four weeks. I look specifically for anecdotes that reflect the discursive construction of Gahbaya among Gabès city's inhabitants.[4] While conducting interviews and field observations in Gabès governorate, I categorized those I interviewed and observed as Black and non-Black because my question of whether they self-identified as Black was met with incomprehension.

I supplement the interviews with observations on urban structures in Gahbaya to argue that the discursive construction of Gahbaya as a space-people amalgam, as reflected in its description as a "ghetto" (where its characterization as Black is made explicitly or implicitly), represents a combination of racial and spatial stigma. I examine how this construction is the result of historical and contemporary processes that categorize and stigmatize the space and its people based on overlapping factors that include race, socio-economic class, and land quality.

Where is Gahbaya?

Gabès city, the capital of Gabès governorate, lies on the southern coast of Tunisia and faces the Mediterranean Sea. According to the last census, conducted in 2014, its population is around 153,000. Traditionally, most of Gabès' economy has depended on its land and water in the form of agricultural products from its oasis and fish from the

sea. With the establishment of chemical industries, including phosphate-treating factories that release toxic waste into Gabès' land, water, and air, the traditional sites of livelihood have become polluted, forcing Gabès' inhabitants to find work in other sectors.[5]

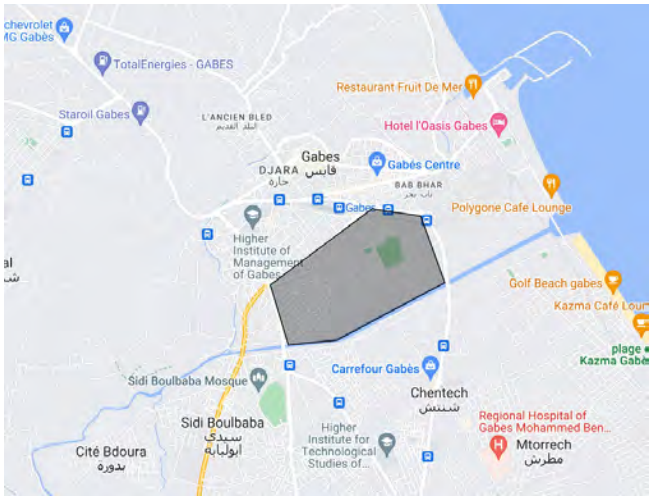

Image 1: Map of Gahbaya neighborhood in Gabès city. The borders of the neighborhood represented here are the ones defined by racial and spatial 'outsiders' to Gahbaya (map produced on Google Maps by Shreya Parikh)

Gahbaya neighborhood, located around two kilometers inland from the sea, was one of the first urban extensions of the city of Gabès after Tunisia's independence in 1956. The neighborhoods of El Menzel and Jara, which lie to the north of Gahbaya and closer to the large oasis, were the traditional centers of habitation and commerce. Later, during the period of French colonization (1881–1956), the neighborhood of Bab Bhar, which lies to the northeast of Gahbaya, developed as Gabès' administrative and commercial center.

Many of Gabès city's residents noted that Gahbaya was not inhabited prior to the 1950s because the land is saline and hence not useful for agricultural production, unlike the fertile oases surrounding Gabès city. The salinity of the land is linked to the (now dry) *oued* or riverbed that borders Gahbaya to its south and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. This riverbed also makes Gahbaya prone to flooding, despite the canal that was constructed to contain the water. It was onto these "insalubrious grounds" that a "spontaneous" neighborhood of "poor construction" was built, according to scholars Alioua et al.[6] Hence, prior to becoming an inhabited space, Gahbaya's value as a physical space was already categorized as low.

Image 2: The street in Gahbaya that faces the dry oued (riverbed) that lies to the left (not in picture). All photos have been taken in November 2022 by Shreya Parikh.

Gahbaya's Foundation as a Black "Ghetto"

Gahbaya, an undervalued physical space, came to host a population that is marginalized both racially and socio-economically and collectively carries the taint of the history of enslavement of Black populations in the region. Over time, both the undervalued land and the poor Black populations came to justify the relegation of the other, hence naturalizing the socio-spatial marginalization of the urban space of Gahbaya as well as its people.

According to anecdotal histories about the neighborhood that circulate in Gabès city, Gahbaya has been a Black neighborhood since its inception in the 1950s. Using these anecdotal histories, scholar Moutaa Amin El Waer writes that the first families who came to live in Gahbaya were exclusively Black; they constructed "anarchic" houses that became a slum, separated from the rest of the city by empty saline lands and a cemetery.[7] Anis*, a non-Black resident of Gahbaya in his mid-30s who does construction

and painting work, told me that the Black Hamaida tribe from neighboring Arram village was the first to settle in Gahbaya in the 1950s and 1960s.[8] According to him, the *soud* (Black) families also came from other towns and villages in Gabès governorate as well as from neighboring governorates like Kébili, Médenine, and Gafsa in southern Tunisia.

Through informal conversations with Gahbaya's residents whom I identified as Black, I sought to verify this anecdotal history recounted by non-Black residents of Gabès. Many told me that their families had indeed arrived in Gahbaya from neighboring towns like Arram, Hamma, and Mareth or from Kébili governorate, all of which have a high proportion of Black Tunisian families. For example, Souad* (27 years old) and Fatma* (in her 40s)—two women who married into a Gahbaya-based Black family—are from Hamma and Mareth respectively. Black Tunisian scholar and activist Maha Abdelhamid's family, whom I met in Gahbaya, trace their origins to Arram. M'hamed*, a Black taxi driver in his 40s, told me that his paternal grandfather moved to Gahbaya from Kébili governorate to work as a *khadim* (meaning servant and used to refer to Black day workers) on local farms and saved enough money to buy land in Gahbaya like many other migrants. With his parents, siblings, wife, and children, M'hamed continues to live in the house built by his grandfather. I suspect that the land prices in Gahbaya were comparatively cheaper (in relation to other neighborhoods like Bab Bhar or Jara) given the salinity and flood prone nature of the land in Gahbaya. Hence, Black families who migrated to Gabès city and who were poorer compared to land-owning non-Black residents of Gabès city bought land or settled in Gahbaya.

Where do the Black families in towns like Arram, Hamma, and Mareth come from? Abdel Jabbar Rguigui, a non-Black 60-year-old retired school teacher who serves as Gabès governorate's head of the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH), said that the presence of Black families in Gabès is "linked to the histories of sub-Saharans who came [to Gabès] as slaves."[9] He pointed out that the port in Gabès served as a transit point for the slave trade, which Tunisia participated in until its abolition over the 19th century.[10]

The Black families that settled in Gahbaya were previously landless, a mark of their poverty in a region where land ownership is key to economic sustenance. Many Black families that live in Gahbaya today worked as agricultural workers or *khammas* in the mid-20th century. For example, the Gbellaoui family in Gabès, which traces their origins to Kébili (like M'hamed's family mentioned earlier), worked as *khammas*.[11] The term *khammas* derives from the term *khamsa* (five in Arabic) and refers to those who are paid with a fifth of what is produced; in the case of agricultural workers, labor is paid for in the form of a fifth of the crop. As Maha Abdelhamid points out, the work of *khammas* in the oases of south Tunisia (including Gabès) was "for a long time undertaken by Black men, most of whom originated from slavery."[12] The *khammas* system is a continuation of the social structure that enforced the economic dependence of the enslaved on their enslavers; for example, the owners of the land they worked would fix marriages of the daughters of the *khammas* families. While some *khammas* inherited plots of land from those who dominated them, they have no official papers detailing the transfer of land ownership. Overall, this socio-economic structure has guaranteed the intergenerational reproduction of poverty among many Black Tunisian families across Gabès.[13]

Gahbaya became synonymous with these Black families even though over the years Gahbaya has become racially mixed. Starting in the 1970s, non-Black Tunisians belonging to lower social classes, many of them migrants from surrounding villages and towns, progressively moved into Gahbaya, creating a racially mixed working-class neighborhood.[14] Starting in 1972, the industrial zone developed on the coast of Gabès city, providing employment opportunities and bringing in families from across the south of Tunisia. But, according to El Waer, the inhabitants of Gahbaya did not benefit from the economic opportunities created by these industries. Instead, most

locals continued to work in so-called informal jobs in construction or as manual workers. At the same time, newer neighborhoods (like Hay Amel where Abdel Jabbar Rguigui and his family lives) developed to host socio-economically privileged migrants who took up stable jobs in the industrial zone and became the middle class of Gabès city.

Present-Day Gahbaya as a Black "Ghetto"

That Gahbaya is racially mixed is apparent when walking around the neighborhood. At the same time, the proportion of Black population in Gahbaya is higher compared to the national average.[15] El Waer estimates that around 50 percent of Gahbaya's population is Black; according to estimates cited by Black activists, between 10 to 15 percent of the Tunisian population is Black.[16] This comparatively high concentration of and visibility of Black populations in Gahbaya may explain why the popular image of Gahbaya as a Black "ghetto" has persisted.

The contemporary globalized understanding of the term ghetto as inner-city neighborhoods where poor Black people live derives from the descriptions of majority African-American neighborhoods in cities across the United States.[17] Like in the United States, ghetto—a term used in the Tunisian Franco-Arabic vernacular—designates "those stigmatized neighborhoods situated at the very bottom of the hierarchical system of places that compose the metropolis."[18] While many neighborhoods across Tunisia's urban centers face stigmatization, it is the neighborhoods that are imagined as uniformly Black that come to be described as a ghetto.[19]

Gahbaya continues to be talked about as a Black "ghetto" as reflected in Amri's blog post as well as in descriptions of Gahbaya by Gabès city's residents who do not live in Gahbaya. For example, many Black and non-Black residents of Gabès city not living in Gahbaya told me that they had grown up hearing stories of danger and criminality in an all-Black Gahbaya, and that they would always avoid walking or driving past the neighborhood.[20] During a conversation about Gahbaya with Mabrouka*, a 34-year-old Black Tunisian woman living in the middle-class neighborhood of Mtorrech in Gabès city, she remarked that:

> People in Gahbaya are very aggressive. There used to be lots of fights there, not between whites and Blacks but among Blacks. My mother told my brother not to be friends with kids from Gahbaya. When he was in school, he had Black friends from Gahbaya in his class and my mother asked him to stop being friends because they [from Gahbaya] are aggressive.[21]

These discourses of aggressiveness attributed to the Black residents (especially to young Black men) of Gahbaya are used to police them disproportionately compared to the non-Black residents. Seif*, a Black Tunisian in his 30s who is an active member of Gabès' civil society, recounted that a group of young Black boys who were drinking alcohol in a public space in Gahbaya were arrested by the police and accused of a fabricated list of crimes.[22] Seif* explained that while there is a legal interdiction on consumption of alcohol in public spaces in Tunisa, it is common to see men drinking in public and the practice is tolerated by the state. But according to Seif* the boys in Gahbaya were harassed and arrested by the police because they are Black and they fall into the stereotype of a *clochard* or derelict.

Black populations who live outside Gahbaya also have a nostalgic imagination of solidarities among the working-class Black residents of Gahbaya. For example, Hamid* (a Black Tunisian in his 30s, contractual worker at a pharmacy in Tunis) who traces his origins to Gabès, told me that "no one touches the Black people in Gahbaya… [and] if there is something that happens, then everyone comes together to fight against the whites."[23] While Mabrouka*'s and Hamid*'s descriptions of Gahbaya may seem contrasting, they co-exist. Overall, in discourses that portray Black populations in Gabès as aggressive or possessing solidarity, the assumption of a race-based homogenous group remains. Yet, the heterogeneity of socio-economic class as well as migration trajectory produces social tensions across the population racialized as Black.

Image 3: A residential street in Gahbaya. During weekday afternoons (outside of school vacations), the streets remain empty.

In addition to the stereotypes about the aggressive nature of Black residents in Gahbaya, the "spontaneous" or non-formalized construction of residences in Gahbaya is described as an anomaly specific to that neighborhood. While walking around Gahbaya, I noticed both working-class and middle-class residences, depending on the lane I chose to walk on. Most residences are brick houses and a majority are in the perpetual state of being under construction with additional one or two floors built over time by families to accommodate their children and grandchildren.[24] Most residences and their extensions have been built without government licenses. But this type of residential structure is not specific to Gahbaya, nor is it an anomaly. Rather, most residential spaces in cities and towns across Tunisia are structured in this fashion as a result of high demand for housing, low availability of affordable housing, and the recourse to semi-formalized or non-formalized methods of obtaining land for constructing residences.[25]

At the same time, there are visible differences between Tunis and Gabès city, reflected in the comparative lack of public goods and services in the latter. For example, I was repeatedly advised by Gabès' residents to avoid drinking tap water (unlike in Tunis). The urban landscape is devoid of parks (or similar green spaces) and the air is filled with smoke from the industrial complex on Gabès' coast. During summer, the temperature reaches above 45 degrees Celsius, making it difficult to breathe for those living in the city. The sand and the sea water on the beach, which is the only public leisure space in the city, are polluted.

The challenges of accessing clean water and air are worse in Gahbaya compared to other neighborhoods in the city. For example, during my fieldwork in November 2022, I saw private water tanks brought in by the residents of Gahbaya because of persistent cuts in state-run water. Ahlem*, a 65-year-old Black resident of a comparatively privileged neighborhood of Gabès, said that while water cuts are frequent across Gabès, it is worse in marginalized neighborhoods like Gahbaya.[26] In addition, the air is polluted by foul smells from the heaps of garbage accumulating around the dry riverbed, the fumes from *mazout* (combustible remains produced from the distillation of petrol that is smuggled from Libya), and exhaust from the industrial complex.

While the practice of slavery and *khammas* may have ended, the stigma that essentialized Blackness, poverty, and descent from slavery continues. In Gabès, like elsewhere in Tunisia, there is an assumption that all Black Tunisians trace their ancestry to enslaved Black families even though some arrived through other types of migration, including voluntary migrations.[27] This assumption of homogenous ancestry is used by outsiders to justify the use of status terms to designate skin color. For example, when referring to Black people, Anis* would use the terms *soud* (a neutral term for Black that I had employed in my questions to him) and *'abid* (a term that means slave in Arabic) interchangeably. As Black Tunisian scholar Afifa Ltifi writes, terms like *'abid* and *khadim* (used by M'hamed* earlier) that indicate servitude have become "synonymous with a phenotypical and a genealogical blackness, where new biological racial meanings and an ahistorical blackness-slavery-nexus are maintained."[28] At the same time, the term *hurr*—an Arabic term which means "free" or those who were not enslaved—is used to designate those who are seen as *abyadh* (white) in Gabès.[29]

But Where *Exactly* Is Gahbaya?

For those who look at Gahbaya from the position of either spatial or racial outsider, Gahbaya is a clearly defined and bordered space, with homogenously Black and poor residents. For example, according to Anis*, a non-Black resident of Gahbaya (mentioned earlier) and racial-outsider to Gahbaya (as constructed discursively), Gahbaya forms a rectangle that is around 800 meters wide and 1.5 kilometers long—Boulevard Mohamed Ali runs parallel to the *oued* (riverbed) and marks the northern boundary, Avenue Jamal Abd el Nasser is to the west and Avenue Abou el Kacem Chebbi is to the east.[30] To Gahbaya's south, on the other side of the *oued*, lies the neighborhood of Essobkha, whose name means marshland and is derived from its location on saline coastal plains like the ones on which Gahbaya sits.

Image 4: Avenue Jamal Abd el Nasser, which forms one of the boundaries of Gahbaya, according to Anis.*

Yet, Gahbaya's Black residents contest these commonly attributed borders. Fairouz*, a Black retired social worker in her 80s, owns a family house in the more middle-class section of Gahbaya. She told me that while most people "call [her] neighborhood Gahbaya, it is actually Hay Mohamed Ali!"[31] She told me repeatedly that Hay Mohamed Ali is considered a respectable neighborhood, unlike Gahbaya on the other side of the street. She pointed in the direction of Rue de Paris, a few meters away from her home, and indicated that the neighborhood that lies on the other side of the street is Gahbaya. She explained that Hay Mohamed Ali houses many public-sector employees and institutions (unlike Gahbaya). Like Mabrouka*, she recounted stories of avoiding Gahbaya because, according to her, Black families there were aggressive and did not have enough education and culture. What Faizouz*'s relationship with Gahbaya reveals is that, despite being Black, she can distance herself from Gahbaya (which is synonymous with racial and spatial stigma) because of her relative socio-economic privilege.

The social imagination of constant interracial tension and aggressiveness attributed to Gahbaya by those who are spatial outsiders destabilizes when *in* Gahbaya. My attempts at finding manifestations of "aggressiveness" and racial tensions in the public spaces yielded no data during my fieldwork in Gahbaya. Furthermore, I was told repeatedly by most residents of Gahbaya that both racial groups co-habit without tensions. According to Amel El Fargi, a non-Black anthropologist, both racial groups share a friendly relationship based on regular interactions and linked familiarity with each other.[32] At the same time, El Fargi pointed out that there are two sites where racial tensions remain: in everyday language when it comes to naming Black and non-Black populations (through the use of terms like *'abid* to refer to Black individuals, for example) and in the taboo linked to interracial marriage.

The Black residents of Gahbaya also contest the claim that the high concentration of Black people in the neighborhood's population is unique to Gahbaya. When asked whether there are many Black families living in Gahbaya, Souad* (27 years old) and Fatma* (40 years old)—both Black inhabitants of Gahbaya who run a corner grocery store—told me that while there are a few Black families in their neighborhood, most live in the Essobkha neighborhood on the opposite side of the dry riverbed.[33] When walking from Gahbaya to Essobkha, I noticed no difference in the urban structures or the visible demographic characteristics (racial and socio-economic) between the two neighborhoods. Yet, the spatial and racial stigma carried by Gahbaya is heavier than that carried by Essobkha. It is Gahbaya that has come to represent

the Black "ghetto" in the Gabesian (and Tunisian) social imagination.

Black "Ghetto" as a Marker of Racial and Spatial Stigma

The discrepancy between Gahbaya's description as a Black "ghetto" with fixed borders and a homogenously Black and poor population, and the interviews and observations with the Black population in Gahbaya reveal that the neighborhood itself has become a marker of racial and spatial stigma carried by the Black residents. The presence of a Black population has come to be naturalized into the space denoted by Gahbaya. Outsiders assume that the residents trace their ancestry to slavery, not to Gabès city or elsewhere in Tunisia, hence marking them as perpetual non-citizens in the social sense. This construction of a homogenous popular image of Gahbaya's inhabitants is generated in relation (and opposition) to an unnamed "us" that represents Gabès city's so-called authentic inhabitants.

The designation of Gahbaya as a Black "ghetto" is not about the fact of the neighborhood being peopled by those who are Black. Rather, through the dialectic processes of racialization of space and spacialization of race, the fact of living in Gahbaya (itself is a marker of socio-economic class) and having black skin have been made synonymous.

Endnotes

1 Translation of "la zone la plus colorée en Tunisie."
2 Translation of "où se concentre une forte densité de Noirs." See Ahmed Amri, "Tunisie: Justice pour tes enfants mal-aimés!" *Tunisie: politique et culture,* April 22, 2013. http://amriahmed.blogspot.com/2013/04/tunisie-justice-pour-tes-enfants-mal_22.html (Accessed March 13, 2023.)
3 I used *soud* (plural of *asouad* or Black) earlier in my conversations since it is the least pejorative term to refer to Black populations in my understanding of Arabic. But this term did not make sense to Gabesians, who would repeat my question and use the term *soumour* instead. So I began to use *soumour* (plural of *asmar* or brown) as well.
4 Both Black and non-Black inhabitants whose interviews I use for this article are Tunisian citizens. Gabès city hosts a small group of Sub-Saharan migrants, including students and transiting guest workers. Like in the case of Black Tunisians, these migrants are also racialized and marginalized as Black. Yet, given the different histories of the two groups, the mechanisms and manifestations of the racialization and stigmatization of these two groups are significantly different.
5 See Adel Azouni, "Gabès, a Victim of Industrial Pollution in Tunisia," Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP*),* October 27, 2022. https://timep.org/2022/10/27/gabes-a-victim-of-industrial-pollution-in-tunisia/
6 K. Alioua, M. Berriane, J. Charmes, A. Hakik, R. Lamine, and B. Moktar, *Pôles industriels et développement urbain au Maghreb (articulation ou désarticulation ?) : les cas de Gabès (Tunisie) et de Mohammedia (Maroc) : rapport intermédiaire* (Paris, France: Ministry of Research and Higher Education, 1987) 112.
7 Moutaa Amin El Waer, "Les noir.e.s du quartier Gahbaya à Gabès: racisme méthodique et résistance difficile," in *Etre noir, ce n'est pas une question de couleur : Rapport d'enquête : les représentations du racisme chez les noirs de Tunisie* (Ariana, Tunisia: Nirvana, 2017) 13–42.
8 This conversation was recorded in Arabic in November 2022 during a field visit to Gabès. All names followed by an asterisk indicate use of pseudonyms. The story recounted by Anis* is also the story recounted by Aicha, a Black inhabitant of Gahbaya interviewed by Maha Abdelhamid. See Abdelhamid in Stéphanie Pouessel, editor, *Noirs Au Maghreb: Enjeux Identitaires.* (Paris, France et Tunis, Tunisie: IRMC et Karthala, 2012) 108.
9 Interview recorded in French in November 2022 in Gabès. Gabès indeed served as an important transit point in the trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean trading of goods as well as of enslaved people. See Salah Trabelsi, "Réseaux et circuits de la traite des esclaves aux temps de la suprématie des empires d'Orient : Méditerranée, Afrique noire et Maghreb, VIIIe-XIe siècles," 47–62, in *Esclavages en Méditerranée : espaces et dynamiques économiques* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2012).
10 Slavery in Tunisia was formally abolished in 1846 by Ahmed Bey and in 1890 under the French Protectorate. Yet, the trade in and practice of slavery would continue until early 20th century. See Inès Mrad Dali, "De l'esclavage à la servitude: Le cas des Noirs de Tunisie," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 45, 179/180 (2005): 935–955.
11 Gbellaoui is a last name derived from the name of the region Kébili, which is pronounced Gebili in the southern Tunisian accent. See Maha Abdelhamid, "Les Transformations Socio-Spatiales Des Oasis de Gabès (Tunisie) : Déclin Des Activités Agricoles, Urbanisation Informelle et Dégradation de l'environnement à Zrig, Des Années 1970 à Nos Jours" (Doctoral thesis, Université Paris Nanterre, 2018) 149.
12 Ibid, p.68.
13 See Mrad Dali (2005).
14 See El Waer (2017) p.17.
15 There are no official statistics enumerating the Black population across Tunisia, including in Gahbaya neighborhood. Hence, most of the numbers that are cited by scholars and journalists are estimates.
16 See El Waer (2017) for proportion of Black population in Gahbaya. For estimates of Black Tunisian population, see Stephen J. King, "Democracy and Progress Towards Racial Equality in Tunisia: Interview with Zied Rouine," *Arab Reform Initiative,* 2021. https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/democracy-and-progress-towards-racial-equality-in-tunisia-interview-with-zied-rouine/
17 See Elijah Anderson, "The Iconic Ghetto," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 642, 1 (2012): 8–24.

[18] See Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008) 1.

[19] The neighborhood of Bhar Lazreg in Tunis which hosts a significant number of Sub-Saharan migrants has also come to be descried as a "ghetto." For more information on Bhar Lazreg, see Shreya Parikh, "Fieldnotes from Bhar Lazreg: Research Methods from the Margins of Tunis," *Jadaliyya,* 2022. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/44515

[20] This type of description of and relationship to stigmatized neighborhoods (including neighborhoods described as a "Black ghetto") is held by urban dwellers across the world. For example, White residents of Chicago avoid the use of urban greenways that pass through racially stigmatized neighborhoods. See Brandon Harris et al, "Fear of the Unknown: Examining Neighborhood Stigma's Effect on Urban Greenway Use and Surrounding Communities," *Urban Affairs Review* 57, 4 (2021): 1015–1048.

[21] Field notes from May 2022 in Gabès. Conversation recorded in English.

[22] Field notes from June 2021 in Gabès. Conversation recorded in French.

[23] Notes taken during my interview with Hamid in October 2022 in Tunis. Conversation recorded in French.

[24] Like in the case of most non-formalized housing across the Global South, residents of these houses that seem to be perpetually under construction are usually waiting to have enough resources to undertake the next step like building a new floor, painting the walls, or adding furniture to the rooms.

[25] See Morched Chabbi, "The Pirate Subdeveloper: A New Form of Land Developer in Tunis," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 12, 1 (1988): 8–21.

[26] Field notes from May 2022 in Gabès. Conversation recorded in a mix of Arabic and French.

[27] See Inès Mrad Dali, "Les Noirs tunisiens ont-ils droit à leurs propres histoires?" *Heinrich-Böll*-Stiftung, 2021. https://tn.boell.org/fr/2021/09/22/les-noirs-tunisiens-ont-ils-droit-leurs-propres-histoires

[28] Afifa Ltifi, "Disarticulating Blackness or the Semantics of (Anti)Blackness in Tunisia," *Racial Formations in Africa and the Middle East: A Transregional Approach*, POMEPS Studies 44 (2021).

[29] Maha Abdelhamid pointed out during *Virtual Panel on Inequality and Racism in Tunisia* (April 6, 2023), which I co-organized with The Center for Maghrebi Studies, that those who carry last names indicating descent from enslaved populations are racialized and stigmatized as Black even if they are not dark-skinned. Hence, "being Black is not a question of color."

[30] This conversation was recorded in November 2022 in Gabès in Arabic.

[31] Notes from conversation recorded in November 2022 in Fairouz's home in French. This type of distancing from the stigma of the neighborhood one lives in by claiming that one does not live *in* it is a common strategy employed by many, especially those who have comparative socio-economic privilege. For example, in the case of the stigmatized Bhar Lazreg neighborhood in Tunis, those who live in its newer middle-class residences claim that they live in Soukra rather than Bhar Lazreg. For a description of a similar strategy employed by French residents of stigmatized *banlieue* (urban peripheries), see Loïc Wacquant, "Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality," *Thesis Eleven* 91, 1 (2007): 66–77.

[32] Amel El Fargi was teaching in Gabès at the time of our conversation, and alternated living between Gahbaya and Tunis. These notes are based on a conversation with El Fargi in May 2022 in Tunis.

[33] Field notes from November 2022 in Gabès.

Women and the Algerian Hirak:
Resistance and Negotiation

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Introduction

In February 2019, Algerians started taking to the streets every Friday to voice their dissatisfaction with the country's sociopolitical situation. They demanded the fall of the regime, including the military, and the destruction of the clientelist and bureaucratic system encompassing what the Algerians refer to as *le pouvoir* (the power) (Guemar et al. 2019). The movement, called the Hirak, was the first since the war of liberation from the French (1954–1962) to involve the active presence and participation of women contesting and protesting the country's status quo and political structures (Filiu 2019, 75).[1] The demands of the Hirak had been building up in Algeria for years. The dissatisfactions were the same as those that led to the 2011 uprisings across the region, but the goals and methods used were distinct (Ottaway and Ottaway 2020, 39).

When some Hirak protesters made demands about women's rights, identities, and religion, however, they were not seen as "political" enough by other protesters and vocal public figures of the movement.[2] Protestors saw such demands as unrelated to institutional changes and as therefore divisive (Abbas-Terki 2021, 11-12). For example, when feminist activists established a "feminist square" in the capital of Algiers to demand more rights for women, the square was portrayed as a resistance movement against the Hirak and its social discourse, and the female activists suffered physical and verbal harassment as well as smear campaigns on social media (Haddag 2021, 6).

This paper draws on interviews I conducted with women in the Kabilya region who participated in the Hirak. The women shared the protest's demands for the fall of *le pouvoir* and all its structures. I argue that out of fear of depoliticizing the Hirak, these women shifted their demands outside of the discourse of the protest to instead focus on their own daily life concerns. I argue that the collective assembly of women from different regions, social classes, and backgrounds in the Hirak's weekly Friday marches allowed them to come together to perform their agency by expressing their demands and dissatisfactions with authoritarian and patriarchal structures at all levels of society. Women were able to separate their demands as Algerian women from the ones they made as part of the Hirak. Their collective action was not organized or situated around a specific location. Instead, they were present in different spaces of the Hirak protests where women assembled as well as in spaces where women would routinely gather during the day such as at school pick up, grocery stores, and female gatherings at home—locations that Asef Bayat (2013) suggested constitute "sociospaces" which are spaces where these individuals legitimate illegitimate actions which in this case are demands made outside of the movement (Bayat 2013, 12-13). Additionally, women from all social classes wanted women's unpaid work in the household to be acknowledged by the government in the form of a monthly salary derived from the state's oil money, which they saw as being unfairly used by the state. Hence, the women are asking for the state and society to recognize that women are workers who can bargain, resist, and negotiate their terms of work not just tokens of the patriarchy (Federici 1974, 76).

Methodology and Postcolonial Feminism

This study is based on 25 unstructured interviews and observations in the region of Kabylia in the commune of Tizi Ouzou conducted in 2019, in the months leading up to the presidential election on December 12, 2019. I translated all quotes by the participants from French, Algerian Arabic, Tamazight (Berber), or a mixture of all three (Darija). This article adopts feminist intersectionality theory, which looks at women's experiences through

different but overlapping forms of oppression such as ethnicity, gender, education, and class (Crenshaw 1991). This theory is applied to recognize the diversity of women's demands and dissatisfaction with patriarchal and authoritarian structures. Hence, this article is written from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Algeria was colonized by the French in 1830 and did not gain independence until 1962. Colonialism shaped social and political structures within Algeria and had a greater effect on women than men, similar to how women are most impacted by authoritarian structures (Tripp 2019). The status of women in post-colonial nations has been shaped by the discourse of colonial powers.

Postcolonial scholarship examines the resistance against colonial powers that has shaped many cultures, structures, and individuals in formerly colonized states (Lazreg 2019; Tyagi 2014, 45). The lens of postcolonialism deconstructs the colonizer's power and discourse to understand formerly colonized individuals' experiences (Mohanty 2003). A feminist postcolonial approach focuses on women and tries to identify gender differences and constructions of women and their roles (Tyagi 2014, 45), while strongly criticizing the homogenization of women's experiences in the Middle East and North Africa by Western "white" feminists during and after colonization (Mohanty 2003).

Women's Demands and Dissatisfactions

The collective assembly of women from different regions, social classes, and backgrounds during the Hirak's weekly marches allowed women to come together in groups in unprecedented ways. Beyond their criticisms of the regime, they also shared a broad dissatisfaction with the patriarchal norms and values in Algerian society. However, women kept those dissatisfactions and demands separate from the ones they made as part of the Hirak. Their demands against the patriarchy were articulated in sociospaces that manifest in different places in public and private where women engage in what Bayat defines as "street politics" (Bayat 2013, 12).

Typical daily life practices of Algerian women include grocery shopping, picking up kids from school, and attending female gatherings in the home following a protest or general gathering of women. Such behaviors created sociospaces in both public and private spaces where women conveyed their dissatisfactions and made demands against the patriarchy together. These sociospaces, including women's engagement in street politics, provided women with safe spaces to perform their agency and verbalize their 'illegitimate' demands and dissatisfaction under the radar of the Hirak. Such a safe space was necessary because of the discontentment of many male protestors who did not accept that women's demands and women's rights were part of the Hirak. Instead, many men believed these issues were dividing and depoliticizing the movement (Abbas-Terki 2021, 11–12). As seen with the case of the feminist square in Algiers, women's inclusion of other demands outside of their usual sociospaces could even be met with violence by Hirak supporters who intended to make women comply with the discourse of the Hirak.

Due to the different barriers faced by women in Algeria, their demands and dissatisfactions expressed in public and private spaces varied. Women demanded a part of the state's oil money and a monthly allowance for Algerian housewives. The women, as well as protesters, argued that the state had been misusing state resources for their own benefit, as expressed by Maya, a 23-year-old student, "I hope the people will be able to take advantage of their wealth." All women in the study (housewives, homemakers, students, and working women) felt entitled to the oil money and wanted it to be spent on giving women economic independence from the patriarchal figures in their lives. Zohra, a 56-year-old housewife, shared her dissatisfaction with her economic dependency saying,

> Are you just supposed to wait for your husband? Every time you want something, you have to wait for the man. Once he gets his salary, he will give you the money, but when he does, he will ask you; what will you do with it, what are you going to buy with the

> money? He will not give you the money until you pass the investigation. We live in misery, women who don't work live in misery.

Women want housewives to have economic independence and to be able to move away from the household and their husbands to participate in the protest in a public space on a Friday. Another reason behind this demand lies in women's understanding of family dynamics and their role as mothers and wives, as shared by Karima, a 62-year-old housewife, "I want housewives like myself to get money for educating and raising the future leaders and the future Algerian generation. Hence, the state should reward us [mothers and wives] for our work." The women's narratives and demands demonstrated a back-and-forth between resisting patriarchal norms and supporting values that subordinate women in the household of the *umma* (meaning community) even as they were demanding economic independence from the patriarch. The household of the *umma* refers to the binary division of the role and space of women within the ideological division of Muslim societies, i.e., the public is often seen as male-dominated and the binary world of the household and home is seen as private and belonging to women and the family (Mernissi 2003, 15).

These kinds of paradoxical demands are deconstructed in Silvia Federici's (1974) seminal research on wages and housework. Federici argues that asking for a wage gives a worker the impression of making a fair deal by being paid for their work. The wage would be recognition that the women are workers and with this status they can bargain, resist, and negotiate around the terms and quantity of their work (Federici 1974, 76).[3] By demanding a wage for their housework, Algerian women demanded an end to work that is unpaid simply because it is being done by women. By making this demand the women were not implying they would continue to do the same work in the same way should they get paid. Instead, it is the first step in refusing to do housework and in making their housework a visible and legitimate job (Federici 1974, 81).

As expressed by Tassadit a 39-year-old housewife, "Housewives should get paid, they are also working and doing a job. Even though it is at home it is a legitimate job." The interviewed women, however, still supported patriarchal ideals of the "Muslim family," which reinforces women's traditional role in the household as part of the *umma*. This was voiced by women of all generations even students such as Malak, a 25-year-old student, "This allowance should be given to mothers and housewives as they are the ones taking care and raising us the new generation of Algeria, we are its future and they [mothers and housewives] should be rewarded for their work. " Women negotiated by using the Algerian state's own narrative of being a feminist and paternalist state that provides for women (Cheriet 2014, 152; Hatem 1992, 232).

The Algerian state's cooptation of women and women's rights through reforms and laws such as the family code has influenced the way women view themselves in Algerian society. The ideals and values that women often uphold as their part of the Muslim family reinforce patriarchal structures and heteronormative gender relations where women are subordinate (Moghadam 2003, 137). These ideals can be traced back further than the authoritarian regime. The role of women in post-colonial nations has been shaped by the discourse of colonial powers. Women were racialized and gendered by the colonizers who imposed stereotypes that objectified women and portrayed them as inferior (Elsadda 2019, 53; Fanon [1959]/2011, 21). These stereotypes were used by many Algerian women, who have internalized those stereotypes and become accustomed to being dominated by men as a result of the colonial structures of power (Golay 2007, 408). Arab feminists argue that the challenges and burdens of colonialism, Eurocentrism, and Westernization have shaped their lives and the lives of women in the post-colonial authoritarian states (Elsadda 2019, 53). Arab feminists such as Hoda Elsadda maintain that the Arab state represses women, and they contest the hegemonic power structures within the authoritarian state that have socially and politically controlled and appropriated women's rights questions (2019, 54).

By demanding a monthly allowance, women were negotiating a new social contract between the paternalistic state and women in Algeria. Hence one could ask the question, would women disregard their other dissatisfactions and demands if the regime complied with this demand? And would women stand behind the regime if they got their monthly allowance?

Gender Segregation and Islamic Morality

Women's dissatisfactions were not restricted to *umma* and the household. Women were dissatisfied with their exclusion from certain public areas as well as days of the week and times of the day. My participants explained that they were usually never outside in public on Fridays until the start of the Hirak, as expressed by Karima, a 62-year-old housewife, "I won't go out to do anything that's not appropriate, such as going out when it is dark outside. But I only go out when I have to." The Hirak opened up Friday spaces and cities for women, which until the Hirak were male-dominated, as expressed by Tassadit a 39-year-old housewife,

> Fridays are religious days. Men go to pray in the mosque and some women as well, but most women stay at home, pray, and prepare lunch for their husbands so that they can find lunch ready for them when they come back from the prayer. I never used to go out on Fridays before the Hirak, maybe once to buy milk, as it is completely empty. Only men and weirdos are outside on Fridays.

Hence, the Hirak made it possible for women to reappropriate public spaces on Fridays by walking in the protests alongside men but especially other women who do not usually occupy this space.

Other times and spaces restricted to women were public spaces after *salat al maghrib* (sunset prayer) and the *kahwa*, which is a male-dominated coffee house. Women were scrutinized and faced social pressure when in these spaces as their presence was seen as inappropriate due to the increased potential for men and women to interact. Their presence challenged Islamic morality because cross-gender interactions could lead women to violate social norms of permissible behavior (Shahrokni 2020,1).[4] Furthermore, because women are the symbols of Islamic morality (Ibid), they are the ones that need to be prevented from sinning by men who can monitor and protect them. Consequently, religious values exert a strong influence on how patriarchal structures in Algeria are shaped around Islam to justify gender segregation, which reinforces the division of the *umma* (private sphere) and the male-dominated public spaces (Mernissi 2003, 15). These restrictions on male-female interactions were not only present in the household but were also explicit in public spaces. This because social norms and legal systems such as family law and personal status law regulate women, which reinforces the division of the umma into the private sphere on one hand and male-dominated public spaces on the other. There is a clear connection between the authoritarian state's regulation of women's bodies through reforms and laws and the women's challenges and dissatisfaction in Algerian society.

Neopatriarchy is a combination of traditional and modern forms of patriarchy and reinforces the domination and authority of men in post-colonial societies. It emerged as a new form of governance in the Middle East and North Africa following failed attempts to modernize that left societies in limbo between traditionalism and modernism and where power remains in the hands of men in both the public and the private spheres (Sharabi 1988, 28–32). However, despite the regulation and control of women in both spheres, some women face more restrictions than others.

Working women and students have more freedom in public spaces as their occupations justify their presence. Working women also have a salary, which they can spend in the cities. They can prove that they are out in public for a reason beyond cross-gender interactions and going against Muslim family values and Islamic morality. Uneducated women and housewives do not have the occupation nor the money to justify their presence in and access to various public spaces. As Lindsey Benstead argues, poor women

are limited in their autonomy while wealthy women have more freedom, and the same limitations were also seen with educated and uneducated women, as well as between working women and housewives (2020, 3).

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the different ways women relate to authoritarian and patriarchal structures in the Hirak and their daily lives. Understanding women's interests and demands concerning social norms, religion, and traditions is important for understanding how they convey their dissatisfactions through street politics and sociospaces in the household and in public. Women's demands were shaped by public and private patriarchal structures, which restrict women's movement and agency in the neopatriarchal Algerian society. These patriarchal structures were shaped by traditional gender roles, the *umma*, and Islamic morality (Shahrokni 2020, 1; Mernissi 2003, 15). Nonetheless, the country's history of colonialism, Eurocentrism, and Westernization contributed to the women's current experiences of oppression (Elsadda 2019, 53).

Women's educational background and profession or occupation shape how much privilege, autonomy, and agency women have in Algerian society. Women's demands for more rights and participation in the Hirak were interconnected due to the connection between the authoritarian and patriarchal structures constituting the neopatriarchal society (Sharabi 1988). Hence, women's demands and resistance vis-à-vis the regime is resistance and negotiation against the patriarchy and vice-versa. Women were challenging, yet at the same time using in their favor, neopatriarchal structures by demanding an end to work that is unwaged because they are women. By making this demand, women want their work as part of supporting an Islamic morality to be acknowledged, which is the first step to later refuse, resist, or bargain to do the job or certain tasks (Federici 1974, 81).

Women resisted the social discourse of the Hirak by demanding that women live better lives in all spaces and structures of Algerian society. Women negotiated a new social contract with the state where women abide by the ideals of the Muslim family in return for a monthly allowance from the state that will provide women with more liberty in the tasks they choose to do as part of housework as well as legitimize their working conditions, tasks, and wages. Consequently, these demands and dissatisfactions of women in the Kabylia region would not have come to light without women's reappropriation of Algerian public space by participating in the Hirak on Fridays, a day that was previously male-dominated and reserved for the Friday prayer when women were expected to be home taking care of the household *umma*.

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Endnotes

[1] Different from other female mobilizations in Algeria, this mobilization was not feminist and included women from all over the country, from different social classes all participating in the discourse of the protest.

[2] The Hirak did not have a single leader. However, many vocal public figures from political parties and opposition groups spoke vocally about the movement in the media and had a strong influence on the protesters' views of the discourse of the movement (Dris Aït-Hamadouche and Dris 2019).

[3] Unwaged work is a powerful weapon in reinforcing the idea that household work is not an actual job. It also pushes women to seek this work as it is believed to be rewarding and proof of their worth and makes the men and male workers dependent on this unwaged work (Federici 1974, 77–78).

[4] It is important to note that male-dominated coffee houses also exist in non-Islamic countries. In the case of Algeria, Islamic morality and gender segregation remain the main reasons it is male-dominated and non-accessible to women. However, in Greece, for example, the coffee house is an informal meeting place shaped by Greek patriarchal structures that influence and shape the role of the family and the position of men and family in society (Photiadis 1965, 54).

The Politics of Arbaeen:
Transcending Militarized Urbanism in Iraq's Shrine Cities

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"As we got closer to Karbala," Zaynab explained, her voice tense with emotion, "the streets were so filled the van couldn't move. They wanted to drop us at the shrine, but the crowds were so large that we got out on the road. We walked the 15 kilometers to the center, surrounded by thousands of Iraqis. On either side, there were people pouring tea and passing out snacks. It was incredible." Zaynab is a 72-year-old Iranian woman who visited Iraq on pilgrimage in spring 2003, soon after the US invasion.[1] Unintentionally, she witnessed the first open Arbaeen walking pilgrimage after decades in which it was restricted under Ba'athist rule.[2] The commemoration of Arbaeen has grown immensely since, attracting upwards of 20 million pilgrims from across Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Lebanon, and beyond as millions of Iraqis provide food, drink, and lodging free of charge.[3] For Zaynab, as for the approximately 3–5 million Iranians who today join yearly, Arbaeen is "another world," a temporary urbanism that offers visions of an alternative social order in which horizontal relations of care take precedence. She noted:

> When you're on Arbaeen, there's no difference between rich and poor. Everyone is equal. It's like you've entered another world without differences. Everyone is concentrated on the path. For days, no one takes any money out of their pockets to pay for anything; it's all free. The route is full of people handing out things; there's so many, there's not an inch of space between them.

When Zaynab first visited, she encountered Iraqis walking freely toward Karbala. Yet to come were the attacks, civil war, and violence of occupation that would engulf Iraq, including repeated bombings targeting shrines and pilgrims. Iraq's shrine cities—Karbala, Najaf, al-Kadhimiya, and Samarra—would be reshaped into urban fortresses surrounded by blast walls and checkpoints. These changes were wrought by the urban planning policies enacted under US occupation (2003–2011) and later by Iran's Setad organization (2004 to the present) that coordinated the expansion of shrines with Iraqi authorities. In the name of countering "terror," both the United States and Iran militarized Iraq's urban landscape and embedded sectarian divisions into the built environment. But Arbaeen, a largely grassroots event organized collectively by thousands of local religious associations, has evaded these state projects, offering a glimpse of another, albeit temporary, reality that begins exactly where the shrines' concrete walls end. While narratives of Iraq since 2003 have focused on fears of violence, at Arbaeen a different vision emerges.

In this essay, I examine the reshaping of Iraq's shrine cities since 2003, focusing on three actors: the US military occupation, the Iranian state, and Arbaeen pilgrims. I argue that two distinct urbanisms emerged. First, I look at how US and Iranian state actors reshaped Iraqi cities through security urbanism based on a "counterterror" imaginary, naturalizing sectarian fear.[4] I then examine Arbaeen's modern evolution, arguing that it has evolved from a form of political protest under the Ba'athist regime to a temporary urban sphere and the largest transnational Shia Muslim public space. I analyze these urbanisms from the perspective of Iranian, South Asian, and Iraqi pilgrims, locals, and planners as well as Ba'athist and British colonial archives.

War on Terror Urbanism

The development of Iraq's holy cities—Najaf, Karbala, Samarra, and al-Kadhimiya—is tied to the shrines at their heart, which for centuries have attracted pilgrims, merchants, and students. In the 1800s, their populations were a cosmopolitan mix of Persians, South Asians, Arabs, and Turks, and their charitable endowments, called *waqf*, were sustained by a transregional Shia Muslim network

looking more to Lucknow, the Deccan, and Tehran than to Istanbul.[5] British colonization besieged these connections, as borders became more rigid and led to expulsions of those deemed non-local according to emergent definitions of Iraqi identity. This process continued after independence, undermining the shrine cities' prosperity, culminating in the Ba'athist regime's mass deportations of Iraqis suspected of having Persian heritage. At Arbaeen in 1969, hundreds of thousands were expelled to Iran—representing 6 percent of Iraq's population.[6] More were deported throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[7]

Under Saddam Hussein, state suspicion targeted both shrines and their pilgrims.[8] In 1977–1979, as the state increasingly repressed independent social organizing, Iraqis turned Muharram commemorations into protest spaces, which in turn triggered bans on Shia Muslim rituals. During the 1991 uprising, shrine courtyards hosted large protests, acting as open public spaces. Authorities directly attacked them, and subsequently bulldozed large sections of Karbala and Najaf's historic cities, ostensibly to ease overcrowding but more likely to facilitate military access.[9] Authorities feared grassroots walking pilgrimages like Arbaeen because they viewed them as impossible to fully control.[10] They allowed pilgrims to drive to shrines but conducted education campaigns warning Iraqis against walking, labelling the practice as heretical, "backwards," and a "Persian innovation" (*bid'a farsiya*).[11] Iraqis defied authorities by avoiding checkpoints and walking on small paths along the Euphrates, while thousands more opened their doors to pilgrims, risking imprisonment, torture, and forced conscription if caught. Iraqis turned pilgrimages into acts of grassroots solidarity. In 1995, thousands left Baghdad's Shia suburbs to walk to the shrine in Samarra, where locals, overwhelmingly Sunni, met them with food and drink.[12] Shia rituals became sites to defy repression by building networks of friendship across Iraqi society. This mirrored events during the 1919–1920 Iraqi uprising against British rule, when religious rituals became sites of pan-Iraqi solidarity against colonial domination.[13]

In 2003, a US-led coalition invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein. The military occupation soon provoked revolt. The coalition responded with heavy-handed tactics that did not spare shrine cities. In 2004, US forces responded to an uprising in Najaf by assaulting Wadi al-Salaam, the largest cemetery in the world, and Imam Ali's shrine, where insurgents took refuge.[14] As the occupation dragged on, the United States became an urban planner, enveloping Iraq's cities and shrines in checkpoints and walls. Concrete T-walls—often between a dozen to 20 feet high and weighing thousands of pounds—played a central role in remaking Iraqi cities.[15] Originally developed and deployed on a grand scale by Israel's military, they were initially imported from the United States, creating hundreds of millions of dollars for concrete companies and contractors.[16] These concrete walls dramatically reshaped Iraqi cities, creating a pedestrian-hostile geography of roadblocks that limited mobility and produced massive traffic jams. Alongside tanks and bullets, the urban planning of the War on Terror produced a thriving political economy—and in the process, converted shrine cities into militarized fortresses.[17]

A US military helicopter fires into Wadi al-Salaam cemetery in Najaf, Iraq in 2004. The golden dome of the shrine of Imam Ali can be seen in the background (Public Domain).

Simultaneously, US authorities plotted out Iraq's self-governance, producing a political system organized not around equal citizenship but sectarian identity.[18] Similar to colonial-era governance such as the French constitution for Lebanon, Iraq's political system—first instituted in 2005—mandated that Iraqis vote according to sectarian identity.

While US administrators imagined they were organizing society based on already-established Iraqi identities, by making political participation dependent on sect they were institutionalizing and crystallizing it to an unprecedented degree.

At the same time, Wahhabi-inspired groups like al-Qaeda launched attacks against Shia Muslim holy sites and pilgrims. These triggered reprisals by Shia Muslim outfits against Sunni civilians, which escalated into sectarian civil war. Military authorities began using T-walls to divide Iraqi cities in the name of security.[19] Militias were using violence to divide Iraqis based on religious identity; the military took the process a step further, making sectarianism concrete, literally etching it into the urban landscape. These walls provoked protests by Iraqis. Many feared that by turning vague lines into fixed borders, the United States was delineating where militias should engage in ethnic cleansing. In a 2008 march, protestors decried plans to "turn the city into a big prison," opposing a wall that would surround the neighborhood of al-Adhamiya, located immediately beside the shrine neighborhood of al-Kadhimiya.[20] One demonstrator compared it to Israel's wall in the Palestinian West Bank. The walls, however, continued to go up, with US military authorities likening the walled enclaves to "gated communities."[21] The walls acted as a materialization of potential threats, indicating the constant need to be afraid of those beyond them, producing "security affects" that materialized a horizon of forever conflict and division.[22] As anthropologist Kali Rubaii notes, "Iraq became an archipelago of T-walled enclaves, which now often appear more and more as if they offer protection from the world they have produced," a physical manifestation of "counterterror" and sectarian security logic.[23]

The Iranian Setad-e Bazsazy-e Atabat Aliyat (Headquarters for the Reconstruction of the Exalted Thresholds, henceforth, Setad) emerged in this context. In the 2000s, as Iranian pilgrims poured across the border, they encountered scenes of neglect and warfare. Influential voices called for Iranians to aid their "brotherly" nation. Among them was General Qassem Soleimani, who was present during the US assault on Najaf and credited the scenes he witnessed for spurring him to establish Setad.[24] Originally focused on architectural renovation, Setad brought experts from Iran to rebuild the shrines. The influx of funds and expertise was welcomed by the Iraqi shrine authorities. Setad began to focus on expanding the shrines, acquiring vast swathes of the shrine cities. Over time, projects became increasingly ambitious: the Najaf shrine's footprint expanded to 22 times its previous size, while Imam Hussein's shrine in Karbala expanded 14 times. They grew larger and more luxurious, outfitted with air conditioning and 24-hour electricity, even as infrastructure failed across Iraq. Although these projects spurred an economic boom, the lack of participatory planning led to complaints against Setad, which works almost exclusively with Iranian companies, especially those linked to the Revolutionary Guards. In the multi-billion-dollar project to expand the Najaf shrine's central plaza, for example, 85 percent of profits reportedly returned to Iran.[25] These contributed to a perception among Iraqis that Iran was "taking over," especially as Iranian security apparatuses used Setad to expand their influence.

These projects went hand-in-hand with continued security construction. T-walls reshaped the urban experience, producing a sense of threat reverberating long after the bombings ceased. This situation is most striking in Samarra, north of Baghdad. After several shrine bombings, the US military created a walled-off path for pilgrims leading to the shrine at Samarra's heart. In the process they eliminated the tourist bazaar, removing the main source of income for many local residents. After the United States left, the walls remained, adopted by Iraqi and Iranian actors overseeing the shrine.[26] The walls represented a transfer of the infrastructural practices and imaginaries of US counterterror urbanism, cultivating a shared and tacit "common sense" of how to understand Iraqi society.[27] When I visited in 2018, pilgrims entered through a walled corridor, overlooked by deserted buildings cleared of residents. They walked through a militarized bunker, in fear of those behind the wall. Indeed, the sense of threat is repeatedly stressed in the stories of pilgrims to Samarra, even in the absence of present danger; I heard religious

preachers in Iran point to the experience of visiting Samarra as a way for pilgrims to meaningfully understand and feel the persecution faced centuries ago by the Prophet's family. Pointing to the securitized architecture, parallels are drawn between pilgrims and the Imams buried at the shrine, both braving danger amidst *ghuraba* (strangers). The shrine was long a symbol of Samarra's identity, the keys entrusted to a local family.[28] But the wall now deems local residents, who are overwhelmingly Sunni, as outsiders, producing sectarian division spatially and economically.

Pilgrims walk in the passageway through the heart of Samarra toward the shrine. The buildings visible over the walls are emptied of residents. (Photo: Alex Shams).

General Soleimani once described Setad as having "rescued" the shrine from *ghorbat*, or estrangement. Today it has been brilliantly rebuilt, its golden dome brighter than before. But standing in the walled corridor, it feels that the shrine's *ghorbat* has become permanent, as Samarra's people have become strangers, *ghuraba*, in their own city. Once a symbol of coexistence—a Shia shrine protected by Sunni locals whose economy catered to Shia pilgrims—it is today an icon of division. The urban policies of the US War on Terror's forever war have been adopted by Iranian authorities, who frame regional wars as "Defense of the Shrines," a never-ending conflict protecting Shia Muslims from unknown threats, as well as by local militias. They view Iraq as a battleground, turning cities and holy sites into bunkers whose architecture justifies endless military intervention.

Posters of "Defenders of the Shrine," Iranians who died fighting in regional conflicts, on a street in Tehran, 2017. (Photo: Alex Shams)

Heterogeneous Spaces

But something remarkable happens on the road between Iraq's two most important shrines: a grassroots pilgrimage that is today the largest yearly gathering on Earth. During Arbaeen, 25 million people gather to walk from Imam Ali shrine in Najaf to Imam Hussein's shrine in Karbala, greeted by millions along the way providing everything free of charge. Iraqis line the road passing out refreshments from simple structures called *mowkeb*. In the mornings they invite pilgrims to bread, eggs, and tea; in the afternoon, cauldrons of stew followed by sweet Iraqi coffee; and in the evenings, dates covered in tahini and coconut flakes or vermicelli bathed in condensed milk. "*Ya zowar! Sharakou mn el tabarouat! Mowafageen inshallah! Mansoureen!*" they yell, smiling to an unceasing crowd slowly drifting forward. "Pilgrims! Take your share of these offerings! You will be successful, God willing, you will be victorious!" The joy is palpable as a social dynamic emerges that is very different from the state-dominated shrines at its edges.

Arbaeen is one of the great untold stories of post-invasion Iraq. Southern and central Iraq empty out yearly as nearly half the country takes part. "About two weeks before, me and all my friends from the local *husseiniya* travel to our *mowkeb* on the Najaf-Karbala road," Haydar, originally from Hilla, explained to me during an interview.[29] *Husseiniya* are local associations focused on Muharram commemorations. They collect donations during the year to fund the *mowkeb*, which line hundreds of miles around Karbala, but only come alive at Arbaeen. While the Iraqi state provides security, it is absent from the pilgrimage itself; the *mowkeb* are Arbaeen's central organizers.

Arbaeen is a temporary reorganization of society on a mass scale, centering a radical equality removed from US and Iranian state counterterror and economic logics. It is no wonder people call it "another world." Arbaeen resembles a Bakhtinian "carnival" in the way hierarchies collapse to allow free and open communication between people from near and far, and how young people, women and men alike, enjoy social freedoms.[30] Although Arbaeen marks a mourning holiday, the mood is joyful. Along the way, connections are formed across social and geographic boundaries. Every act of friendship acquires greater meaning in the pilgrimage as it is imbued with *thawab*, religious merit.[31]

Pilgrims walk along the Arbaeen route (Photo: Alex Shams).

As Iraq has become increasingly repressive, Arbaeen offers possibilities for expression of dissent. Amidst recurring protests in 2018–2022, in which security forces killed hundreds, protestors advertised their beliefs during the pilgrimage. In 2019, protestors carried signs reading "Today I am a pilgrim, tomorrow a revolutionary," while others carried Zulfiqars and crosses, expressing their rejection of sectarian politics.

An Iraqi pilgrim holds a sign in solidarity with protests in Basra along with a cross and Zulfiqar, symbolizing inter-religious unity, 2018. (Photo: Alex Shams)

Arbaeen provides a space for activists to meet free of surveillance. It is also revolutionary in the material realities it produces. The necessity of cooking food for thousands means that Iraqi *mowkeb* are well-trained in the art of feeding crowds and possess the tools to do so. When protestors demanding an end to the sectarian political system occupied Baghdad's major squares, their presence required a constant supply of food. The massive woks and pots used during Arbaeen were re-used, facilitating the emergence of spaces of revolution in Iraq's capital.

Preparing kebab and socializing at an Arbaeen mowkeb. (Photo: Alex Shams)

Arbaeen's significance is not limited to Iraq; it has emerged as a transnational Shia Muslim space for new forms of belonging and subjectivity. Posters highlight political prisoners in countries as diverse as Azerbaijan, Nigeria, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Since 2010, yearly Iranian attendance has soared from around 40,000 to nearly 5 million.[32] For Iranians, Arbaeen is a religious space free from their own government's meddling. Some carry portraits of alternative religious leaders, such as Ayatollahs Sistani and Shirazi, in simple but powerful expressions challenging Iran's ruling ideology, based on the supremacy of Ayatollah Khamenei. It has provided a space for bridging tensions between Iranians and Iraqis, who were on opposite sides of the 8-year-long Iran-Iraq War. And for Shia Muslims from countries where they face persecution, Arbaeen represents a space of visibility and solidarity like no other.

Arbaeen's growth has attracted attention from states and militias. Today, Iran's government sponsors hundreds of *mowkeb* and Iraqi Shia militia actors try to steer it into a symbol of sectarian identity. Arbaeen's evolution as a Shia transnational event could potentially feed into these politics, reflecting the context of its emergence: military occupation, sectarian governance, and civil war. But because it is grassroots and temporary, no actor has managed to dominate Arbaeen. In contrast to the quest for neat division and perfect renovation that guide US and Iranian urban policies, it is precisely Arbaeen's messiness that creates a space of momentary possibility in which friendship can disrupt sectarianism's securitized logics.[33]

Recently, non-Shia Iraqis have increasingly taken part. In 2018, convoys of Christian Iraqis participated holding large crosses. They were welcomed not only by fellow pilgrims but also at Imam Hussein's shrine, where their arrival was enthusiastically announced over loudspeakers. For non-Shias, participation is an act of faith in the possibility of a non-sectarian future through "embodied friendship" in the present.[34] In a society where sectarian difference has been instituted and violently policed for two decades—and in which pilgrims are still targeted by bombings—their presence disrupts dynamics of power that depend on neat sectarian categorization. Arbaeen may be a Shia pilgrimage, but the infrastructure it creates is a heterogenous space, allowing for complicity and dissent between those who refute sectarian logics, reminiscent of when Samarra's residents welcomed those taking part in illegal pilgrimage under Ba'athist rule.[35] Fostering an egalitarian spirit characterized by horizontal relations of care, Arbaeen creates possibilities of solidarity.

A group of Iraqi Christian pilgrims hold a cross aloft as they approach Imam Hussein's shrine during Arbaeen in 2018. (Photo: Alex Shams)

In a country, region, and world of ever-expanding walls, where shrines have become bunkers and the future has become a space of terror rather than hope, it is precisely these temporary spaces that allow us to dream of alternatives. Zaynab, the pilgrim whose words opened this article, explained:

> When you leave and return to your life, you long for Arbaeen. You don't understand why the whole world can't be like that. There are 90-year-olds walking, children running. People from all over the world, Muslims and Christians. It's impossible to describe. You have to see it for yourself.

An Iraqi pilgrim walking with a sign that reads: "Today I am a pilgrim, tomorrow I am a revolutionary." (Photo circulated anonymously through the internet)

Endnotes

[1] Interview. Conducted by Alex Shams. Oct. 11, 2018. Tehran, Iran.

[2] Arbaeen marks the 40th day after the Ashura holiday, which commemorates the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD when Imam Hussein and other members of the Prophet Muhammad's family were killed by forces loyal to the Caliph Yazid. Although marked as a tragic event by all Muslims, it is particularly important for Shia Muslims, the vast majority of Arbaeen pilgrims.

[3] Iraqis, who are about 80–90 percent of the pilgrims taking part, walk from wherever they are toward Karbala. Non-Iraqis, for the most part, arrive in Najaf and from there walk to Karbala, which usually takes about five days.

[4] For more on "security urbanism" see: Glück, Zoltán. "Security Urbanism and the Counterterror State in Kenya." *Spaces of Security: Ethnographies of Securityscapes, Surveillance, and Control*, edited by Setha Low and Mark Maguire. New York: New York University Press, 2019.

[5] For more on the politics of pilgrimage in Iraq's shrine cities in the 19th and 20th centuries see: Cole, Juan. *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2002; Jabar, Faleh. *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*. London: Saqi, 2003; Nakash, Yitzhak. *The Shi'is of Iraq*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994; and Shams, Alex. "From Guests of the Imam to Unwanted Foreigners: The Politics of South Asian Pilgrimage to Iran in the Twentieth Century," *Middle Eastern Studies* 57:4 (2021): pp. 581–605.

[6] Hamdan, Faraj Hattab. "The Development of Iraqi Shi'a Mourning Rituals in Modern Iraq: The 'Ashura Rituals and Visitation of Al-Arb'ain." Arizona State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012: pp. 74.

[7] It is difficult to estimate how many people were affected by these deportations. Beside the 1969 deportation, there were numerous episodes of mass deportation in the 1970s and 1980s, with the majority of affected individuals being forced across the border to Iran.

[8] This historical sketch is based on research in the Ba'ath Party Records at the Hoover Institute as well as interviews with Iraqis. For a more general overview, see: Fahd al-Qaisi, Muhammad and Ali Khadr al-Akili. "*Mawqef al Solta al Hakemah man Ziyarat al Arba`in* 1968–2003 [The Position of the Ruling Authorities on the Arbaeen Pilgrimage, 1968–2003]," Karbala Center for Studies and Research, 2019: pp. 75–98; Hamdan, Faraj Hattab. "The Development of Iraqi Shi'a Mourning Rituals in Modern Iraq: The 'Ashura Rituals and Visitation of Al-Arb'ain." Arizona State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012, as well as Alshamary, Marsin R. "Prophets and Priests: Religious Leaders and Protest in Iraq." Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020.

[9] Zubaida, Sami. *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*. I. B. Tauris, 2010: p. 93.

[10] Authorities devoted huge amounts of time and energy to policing the streets of Shia-majority regions during the Ashura ritual season. In 1995, for example, authorities in Dhi Qar and Basra provinces assigned 25 percent of the total police force to be present on the street during Muharram 1–6, 50 percent during Muharram 7–8, and 100 percent during Muharram 9–11, indicating the high level of threat they perceived from the street processions. Hizb al-Ba'th al-'Arabi al-Ishtiraki. *Hizb al-Ba'th al-'Arabi al-'Ishtiraki [in Iraq] Records, 1968–2003*. Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party Regional Command Collection (BRCC). Boxfiles Dataset. Hoover Institution Archives. Box: 3134. 01_3134_0002_0325.

[11] BRCC, Letter from the Ba'ath Party: Baghdad al-Karkh Section, Number- 002/2, 5/1997, To: Baghdad al-Karkh Section Branch Leaders. Box: 3134, 01_3134_0002_0008.

[12] BRCC, Box: 3134, 01_3134_0002_0125.

[13] Batatu, Hanna. *Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978: p. 23.

[14] For detailed analysis of the uprising from the perspective of the US military, see: Wright, Donald P. and Timothy R. Reese, *The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003-January 2005*: *On point II: Transition to the New Campaign*. US Army Combined Arms Center, 2008: pp. 39–41, 323–337. For a broader analysis of the rise and fall of Sadr's Mehdi Army, see: Krohley, Nicholas. *The Death of the Mehdi Army: The Rise, Fall, and Revival of Iraq's Most Powerful Militia*. London: Hurst and Company, 2015.

[15] Different walls have different names according to their sizes, each named after different US states such as Texas, Colorado, and Alaska. In Iran today, concrete blast walls are referred to in Persian as "New Jersey." See Spencer, John. "The Most Effective Weapon on the Modern Battlefield Is Concrete." *Modern War Institute*, United States Military Academy West Point, Feb. 12, 2018, https://mwi.usma.edu/effective-weapon-modern-battlefield-concrete/.

[16] Rubaii, Kali. "'Concrete Soldiers:' T-walls and Coercive Landscaping in Iraq." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 54 (2022): pp. 357–362.

[17] For an overview of concrete barriers as part of US military strategy in Iraq, see: Sharp, Deen, "Concretising Conflict," *The Journal of Architecture* 27/1 (2022): pp. 6–12.

[18] Haddad, Fanar. *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011: pp. 150–151.

[19] Izady, Michael M. "Urban Unplanning: How Violence, Walls, and Segregation Destroyed the Urban Fabric of Baghdad." *Journal of Planning History* 19/1 (2019): pp. 60–61.

[20] Rubin, Alissa J. "Outcry Over Wall Shows Depth of Iraqi Resentment," *New York Times*, April 23, 2007. https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/23/world/middleeast/23cnd-Iraq.html.

[21] Yates, Dean. "Baghdad Wall Sparks Confusion, Divisions in Iraq." *Reuters*, April 25, 2007. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-wall-idUKL2317282720070425.

[22] Masco, Joseph. *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

[23] Rubaii, Kali. "'Concrete Soldiers,'" 360.

[24] "Ravayat-e Bonyangozar-e Setad-e Bazsazy-e Atabat-e Aliyat Az Arezouyesh Baraye Towse'eh-ye Haram-e Samarra [The Tale of the Founder of the Headquarters for the Reconstruction of the Exalted Thresholds About His Wish for the Expansion of the Shrine of Samarra]." *Setad-e Towse'eh Va Bazsazy-e Atabat Aliyat*, Jan. 7, 2020, https://atabat.org/fa/news/497/روایت-بنیان-گذار-ستاد-بازسازی-عتبات-از-آرزویش-برای-توسعه-حرم-سامراء-فیلم%E2%80%8C .

[25] *International Quran News Agency*. "Mantegh-e Towse'eh va Bazsazy dar Atabat: Sud-e Eqtesadi ya Raf'-e Niyaz-e Za'er [The Logic of Expansion and Renovation of the Threshholds; Economic Profit or Addressing Pilgrims' Needs," Feb. 9, 2020. https://iqna.ir/fa/news/3783100/منطق-توسعه-و-بازسازی-در-عتبات-سود-اقتصادی-یا-رفع-نیاز-زائر

[26] This includes Iraqi non-state actors as well, including militias like Saraya al-Salam.

[27] Chu, Julie. "When Infrastructures Attack: The Workings of Disrepair in China." *American Ethnologist* 14/2 (2014): pp. 351–367. See also Larkin, Brian. "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): pp. 327–343.

[28] Jiyad, Sajad. "Samarra: Shi'i Heritage and Culture." In *The Shi'a of Samarra: The Heritage and Politics of a Community in Iraq*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2012.

[29] Interview. Conducted by Alex Shams. Nov. 30, 2019. Tehran, Iran.

[30] Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, pp. 7–8, 65–66, 92.

[31] On the political possibilities of friendship see Derrida, Jacques. *The Politics of Friendship*. Trans. by George Collins. Verso, 2020.

[32] For more on Iranian participation in Arbaeen see Mazaheri, Mohsen Hessam. "*Arbaeen Irani* [Iranian Arbaeen]." In *Piadehravi-ye Arbaeen* ["The Walking Pilgrimage of Arbaeen"], edited by Mazaheri, Mohsen Hessam, Nashr-e Arma: Tehran, 2018.

[33] One can think of this space of possibility as being part of the "surrounds," a space that creates the possibility of new propositions and produces "the rehearsal of experimental ways of living that circumvent debilitating extraction, surveillance, and capture—for the time being." See: Simone, AbdouMaliq. *The Surrounds: Urban Life Within and Beyond Capture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022, p. 6.

[34] I draw on Hussein Ali Agrama's analysis of inter-sectarian fasting between Christians and Muslims in Egypt to think about how friendship can disrupt power in quotidian ways. Agrama, Hussein Ali. "Friendship and Time in the Work of Talal Asad." *Religion and Society* 11 (2020): pp. 16–18.

[35] This can also occur for transnational Shia visitors. In Iraq, many South Asian pilgrims visit the town of al-Kifl, which is located smack in the middle of Karbala and Najaf—and is historically Iraq's most important Jewish pilgrimage site, with a synagogue adorned in Hebrew calligraphy sitting at the heart of the mosque. Iraqi custodians do not hide this fact, though it is unclear if tour guides highlight it. Shams, Alex. "A Jewish Shrine inside a Mosque: The History of Ezekiel's Tomb in Iraq." *Ajam Media Collective*, March 3, 2019. https://ajammc.com/2019/03/03/ezekiels-tomb-jewish-iraq-muslim/.

Checkpoint as Paradox:
Notes from Baghdad

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wayn rayah?

For the better and worse part of two decades, security checkpoints have structured vehicular mobility across Baghdad. These installations were placed and populated in 2003 first by occupying US soldiers, and soon thereafter by a collection of Iraqi security forces—to say nothing of the militants and militias who once established their own. Checkpoints operated by US and Iraqi forces once numbered close to 1,500.[1] Yet attempting to discern the precise number of checkpoints at any given time is a fraught endeavor, not least because temporary or "flying" checkpoints come and go with insecuritized winds and the desperate whims of commanders grasping to establish urban control.

In the run up to every election held in Iraq this century, politicians have sought to garner favor with the citizens they ostensibly represent by seeking, however nominally, to improve everyday circumstances. This usually appears in fleeting enhancements to public provisions, such as electricity. More power ensures more power, the political calculus seems to go. But with checkpoints, provisional symbols of another public good—security, broadly defined—the opposite often seemed more true. Politicians would target and commit to the removal of checkpoints from Baghdad's streets, a top-down wink and nudge to voters that everyday life, which for so long was defined by incessant insecurity, was slowly but surely becoming more liveable. That it usually was not seemed less important to candidates than voters, those whose participation in post-2003 elections has declined at a steady clip.

Variable checkpoint presence does not offer a clue into any coherent electoral strategy. Instead, that questionable political motives are implicated in the shifting permanence of checkpoints necessitates digging into the paradoxes these installations represent and generate.

This brief intervention is more exploratory than explanatory. It reflects on contradictions that help constitute checkpoints in Iraq's capital city. The central paradox pulsating outwardly from and hovering spectrally over every single one of these past and present installations is grounded in a popular lamentation. Most residents of Baghdad insist that pervasive checkpoints fanned out across their city for nearly two decades have done very little to quell the insecurity through which their persistence is justified. Security commanders too have long acknowledged their inadequacy in this regard, even while extending their longevity. Why do they remain? What effects are being produced if security is not one?

Paradox

These puzzling conditions and lived realities offer an entry point into considering what might be illuminated through approaching checkpoint as paradox—or paradoxes, for there is hardly only one. For starters, while deployed to conjure a semblance of physical security and on-the-ground order, Baghdad's checkpoints became sites of insecurity early and often, targeted with car bombs by militants seeking to further destabilize the tenuous new authorities claiming the power to rule the capital and the country. Checkpoints peppered across Baghdad's highways, byways, and laneways meant they could host and even facilitate spectacular violence almost anywhere. Such a persistent prospect of violence may appear more justificatory than contradictory of checkpoints themselves. But this interpretation justifies through sacrifice—of everyday life lost in vehicular queuing, of lives lost waiting at the wrong time and place.

Insecurity at checkpoints cannot be decoupled from the formidable presence and capabilities of parastatal armed actors—groups once known as militias that operated their own "fake" checkpoints during the urban violence

in the mid-aughts, where abductions and killings were commonplace. These groups have since been variably tolerated, enabled, and eventually legalized by Iraqi state authorities; they are also collectively and invariably granted *laissez passer* through Baghdad's checkpoints. That this privilege is not granted to most other citizens is unsurprising. More bewildering is that members of these groups, representing and sometimes enacting an imposing counter to state power (at least in its idealized form), literally pass by the faces of security personnel standing in the name of the state as such. Baghdadis often criticize these groups for contributing to the very conditions of violence through which the maintenance of checkpoints is rationalized.

To the extent that the city's residents have long deplored and mocked these apparently "useless" installations, their intermittent removal over years has also generated pause and consternation among those most affected. As much as checkpoint persistence has been a source of derision in the face of experiential evidence that they are only there for show, abrupt removals have raised eyebrows, concerns, fears of the unknown. "Is it really safer?" "Is it the right time for this?" "What about those attacks the other day?" While through most of their existence Baghdad's checkpoints have conjured lament for their folly, fits and starts of removals reveal conflicted feelings and seemingly irreconcilable opinions about their effects.[2] Removals have only accelerated in recent years; but they do not render these conflicted feelings, and the checkpoints with which they are associated, things of the past. While constant, Baghdad's checkpoints have never been static, unchanging. The shifting forms and frequencies of these installations, their appearances and disappearances, have long been a reflection of the mercurial political authority they serve—a capriciousness helping sustain popular unease with state power that outlasts the life of a checkpoint.

Questions

The three sections of this intervention are framed by three questions in Arabic, respectively translated as: Where are you going? From where are you coming? Carrying a weapon? These three questions comprise a line of political-geographic querying long asked of travelers moving through Baghdad's checkpoints. On the ground, these questions help show the ways in which space and subjectivity intersect through the coercive governance of mobility. But here I place them on the page to think with them. These mundane queries have long pestered Baghdadis simply trying to get on with their days and lives. Maybe their nuisance has something more to offer.

Where am I going? I suspect one core reason why these checkpoints are maintained and sustained through paradox is because they are intimately wrapped up in the form, function, and inexorability of the state effect—the mechanisms and practices of power that structure an apparent entity we call the state.[3] From where am I coming? Part of my answer, at least conceptually, opens with works that have grappled with checkpoints elsewhere, particularly in Palestine, and hinges on notions of intention, agency, and contingency intrinsic to how these installations operate and are operated.

As for weapons? I brandish briefly specificity by way of stories from Baghdad. The sharp point of particularism often provides the means to make astute analytical incisions, in this case slicing open checkpoints to help reveal their composition beyond strictly coercive characteristics. Checkpoints are hardly universal in how they play out, in why they are deployed, in how they work. Yet accounting for esoteric specificities does not preclude extracting insights that travel. Put differently, asking of weapons in Baghdad evinces a double understanding of checkpoints anywhere, as grounded in setting, and girded by the state.

min wayn jai?

Intention

The Qalandia checkpoint sits at the separation between the northern West Bank and Jerusalem. Examining checkpoints in and around Palestine, Helga Tawil-Souri convincingly argues that Qalandia is a social-spatial

contradiction—at once an "anthropological space and a nondescript nonplace."[4] Activity around it makes Qalandia and like checkpoints sites of "social life;" Palestinians are left no choice but to congregate at them, in the process generating forms of economic activity such as food stands.[5] But Tawil-Souri insists the checkpoint is also, following Marc Augé, a "nonplace" akin to airports, spaces of transit or "anonymous zones, where one Palestinian is no different than the other, all subject to [the] same methods of surveillance and control."[6] Yet while Palestinian bodies are universally subject to coercive practices, the checkpoint leads to particular outcomes for different Palestinians; some are quickly let through while others are held up for extended periods, even occasionally from the same family. Are such "layers of contradictions" designed deliberately?[7] Are paradoxical practices intended to play out as such?

Hagar Kotef and Meerav Amir offer an answer by scrutinizing what they call the "imaginary line"—an arbitrary, invisible mark behind which Palestinians are directed to stand as they wait their turn to pass through checkpoints.[8] Israeli soldiers conjure this line by pointing to a blank spot on the ground. Kotef and Amir insist that this imaginary line, when "transgressed" by Palestinians under settler colonial occupation, is "an intrinsic failure" that helps constitute Israeli checkpoints.[9] Failure is intrinsic because it is "built into the spatial configuration of the checkpoints" intentionally, helping produce Palestinians as "undisciplinable, and hence as subjects whose occupation is justifiable, if not necessary."[10] Through this logic of rule, failure is success.[11] Kotef and Amir ultimately argue that such practices are "not paradoxical at all," for they are in fact "meant to fail."[12] For them, intention renders paradox a misnomer.

The point is compelling. I dwell on it because security failure—or breakdown[13]—at and around Baghdad's checkpoints is their most central and consequential paradox. Yet I stop short of ascribing intention to checkpoint failure. I do not insist that practices at Baghdad's checkpoints are "meant-to-fail."[14] The evidence from Baghdad does not support such a claim, and seeking proof for one would overlook structuring effects produced through security practices irrespective of intention. Put differently, as it relates to how state power is conjured, asking of intention in security breakdown interrogates as black and white a site through which haziness is productive. A range of practices, interactions, and affects constitute the checkpoint and its representation. What people do, say, and feel matters most.

Agency

"Roadblocks and checkpoints are ubiquitous features of militarized spaces and conflict zones."[15] This opening line from Rema Hammami is innocuous, obvious even—and that is the point. It simultaneously betrays and gestures toward her phenomenal interventions into Palestinian agency at and amidst Israeli checkpoints. By way of ethnography, her "personal coping method" amidst years of checkpoint imposition on her lifeworld, Hammami details how those subjected to these physical interruptions live through them.[16] In addition to descriptions of her own movements, Hammami presents us with Palestinian narratives that show how "embodied confrontation and interaction" between Palestinian traveler and Israeli soldier are central to "the constitutive dynamics of checkpoint interactions, as well as their gaps and vulnerabilities."[17] Not walls merely cordoning off one side from the other, checkpoints are instead sorting technologies sifting through while reifying "corporeal difference"—not between colonizer and colonized, but rather only amongst the colonized.[18] Just because they are technologies that de-humanize, however, does not mean they are non-human.

Hammami's arguments are a jolt to allies and allyship as she takes to task "critical Israeli writers" who "[d]espite political sympathies (or because of them)" miss the ways in which Palestinian agency undercuts Israeli technological "mastery and control."[19] Instances of colonial breakdown must be attended to by foregrounding everyday Palestinian life. Hammami's contentions powerfully raise still more questions. If embodied interactions among those subjected to and through checkpoints can destabilize authority, might they also unintentionally reify that order?

Incessant encounters with checkpoints help reveal how social and political effects are generated through them. But dissimilarity abounds. In Baghdad, residents do not congregate at checkpoints to carry out essential social activities, as Tawil-Souri describes of Qalandia. Nor are they subjected to a settler colonial regime that seeks to produce undisciplinable subjects, as Kotef and Amir show—a regime that, according to Hammami, is not as impenetrable as it seems. And while imperialist conditions were present at US military checkpoints during the height of its occupation of Baghdad, offering generative comparisons with Israeli settler colonialism,[20] the securitized conditions have since shifted. Iraqi security personnel manning these checkpoints have inherited routines and procedures, yet how they play out has changed. Dissimilarities are thus both internal to Baghdad across time, and external through further away geographies like Palestine. These differences raise the prospect that checkpoint paradoxes can be made sense of by turning to particularities, eschewing the possibility of checkpoint universality as setting specifics always trump. But this move feels unsatisfying. Paradoxes may be situational, generated out of context, but their import stems, to a far greater extent, from their place as constitutive of political authority anywhere.

shayal slah?

Stories

Everyone has checkpoint stories. One of the first shared with me was more than a decade ago, in the summer of 2012. Sinan, a Baghdadi then in his late twenties, was casually criticizing checkpoints.[21] He recalled how one night, towards the end of 2005, he had been out late with an old friend, Wissam. Their socializing dragged out, as it almost always had. They were finally heading to their homes, carefully moving between neighborhoods in western Baghdad, where they both lived; they figured their circumscribed, localized movements rendered trivial a curfew then in place across the capital. Wissam was in the driver's seat with Sinan his passenger. The two turned a corner onto a main road leading to the Saidiya district and chanced on bad luck: Iraqi soldiers had set up a flying checkpoint. As they slowly approached the soldiers, breaking curfew was hardly their main concern. It was instead, Sinan insisted, the weapon in their possession. A Kalashnikov rested in between them, stuffed in the cranny between the gear box and driver's seat. There was no time to hide it.

"Where are you going?" began one of soldiers as he leaned onto the open driver's side window. "Don't you know it's past curfew?" Wissam apologized without demur, respectfully explaining that while it was late, they were on their way home. The soldier nodded to the expectable response. Spotting the weapon, the officer shifted his eyes between Wissam and the rifle, then glanced back at Wissam and asked calmly: "Carrying a weapon?" Of course not, Wissam quipped, not missing a beat. "You sure?" For sure. "Okay then, get home quick," replied the soldier. Wissam and Sinan pulled away, silently stunned.

This shortest of interactions is saturated with mundanity—and it confounds. Why hadn't the soldier pressed these two young men? Had he not wondered who they were? Was it just too late in the night that he couldn't be fussed? Perhaps 'it was fear, a worry that one of them was backed by a greater power than his own authority as a state functionary. Or maybe a still more discerning understanding inflected the soldier's actions, through which he came to judge Wissam and Sinan innocent of malicious movements.[22] Neither of them knew for sure.

I recently recounted this story to Othman. A writer from Baghdad, he left Iraq more than five years ago. He laughed with the story heartily, knowingly, though a tinge of disbelief intoned his last bits of chuckle. "You have to remember," Othman insisted, "we think about what we say to the men as we pass through the checkpoints. How we answer." Sure, of course, but say more, I pleaded. "It matters how you interact, you know. How you respond. So when a soldier or police officer would ask me about weapons, if I had any," he recalled, "I would reply to him with my own question. I'd ask, 'What do I need a weapon for? For what?' I'd tell him. 'You're my weapon, brother. You're my weapon.'"

State

Dwelling on intention and agency at checkpoints necessitates close inspection of the interactions occurring through them. Such conceptual framings are insightful entry points into how the messy machinations of everyday life can present us with moments that give us a word just when it feels like we have no voice at all—a prospect that is itself paradoxical. Still, that contradiction helps constitute checkpoints suggests paradox is essential to the formation of political authority. Checkpoints are sites of control (*saitarat*), as they are called in Iraq, installations supposedly intended to at once represent and reify stability—a condition most Baghdadis yearned for during the worst of their city's post-2003 violence. Lament for what these so-called architectures of security fall short of providing raises questions about the equivocal relationship between ruler and ruled. Put differently, it seems one of the central reasons why the state can be conjured out of abstraction in the first place is because of our collective ambivalence towards it. Ambivalence helps to affectively compose the state, and so too the checkpoint.

Writing of political subjectivity in Ma'an, in the Jordanian south, José Ciro Martínez sensitively shows how a "constitutive ambivalence" helps form the relationship between citizen and state.[23] Ma'anis can "decry the ways they are governed" and the deprivation for which they deem the state responsible, while demanding that apparent entity, indeed expecting it, to improve their conditions.[24] The point is not that such conflicted feelings are "paradoxical but hardly incongruous."[25] Rather, that ambivalence is central to our political subjectivity and the authority to which we acquiesce might make both inexorable.[26] Ambivalence is agency, even—perhaps especially—amidst statist strictures.

Ambivalence, like checkpoints, hardly plays out similarly or equally everywhere. To suggest so would preclude examining the particularities and histories of exception inherent, for example, to settler colonialism and the dastardly practices on which it and its stateness is propped.[27] Instead, if checkpoints and roadblocks are omnipresent across landscapes and streetscapes of conflict, it is because claims to political authority always remain outstanding, unresolved, indeed contested. Such techniques of rule matter because they help us see the ways in which the state, and claims on and for it, remain ever processual; like checkpoints, stateness is constituted through time, place, and movement.

Checkpoints are not as totalizing as they may appear. Their ubiquity betrays power's instability, in turn helping engender interactions with authority that in many intolerable instances are dripping with acerbic condemnation of coercion. But other moments are drenched in desire for better governance, in a recognition or a demand—especially prevalent during times of physical insecurity—that someone must carry the weapon. That condemnation and desire are both evident reminds us that ambivalence is temporally situated, grounded in past and present experiences, even in the futures we wish can unfold.

Endnotes

[1] * Thank you to the Beirut Urban Lab, the Project on Middle East Political Science, and The Policy Initiative—and particularly to Mona Harb and Marc Lynch—for a thoughtful and engaging workshop. I am also especially grateful to José Ciro Martínez whose comments and pushes on earlier drafts of this piece only made it better. International Crisis Group, *Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal*, Crisis Group Middle East Report no. 99, 2.

[2] José Ciro Martínez and Omar Sirri, "Of bakeries and checkpoints: Stately affects in Amman and Baghdad," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 5 (2020): 849-866.

[3] Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 77-96.

[4] Helga Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint as Space and Nonplace," *Space and Culture* 14, no. 1 (2011): 5.

[5] Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia," 15. See also: Rema Hammami, "On the Importance of Thugs: The Moral Economy of a Checkpoint," *Middle East Report* 231 (2004): 26-34; Nasser Abourahme, "Spatial Collisions and Discordant Temporalities: Everyday Life between Camp and Checkpoint," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 2 (2011): 453-461; Amahl A. Bishara, *Crossing a Line: Laws, Violence, and Roadblocks to Palestinian Political Expression* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).

[6] Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia," 17; Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to An Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 2000).
[7] Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia," 13.
[8] Hagar Kotef and Merav Amir, "Between Imaginary Lines: Violence and its Justifications at the Military Checkpoints in Occupied Palestine," *Theory, Culture and Society* 28, no. 1 (2011): 55.
[9] Kotef and Amir, "Imaginary Lines," 61.
[10] Kotef and Amir, "Imaginary Lines," 61.
[11] Kotef and Amir, "Imaginary Lines," 63.
[12] Kotef and Amir, "Imaginary Lines," 61, 58.
[13] Judith Butler, "Performative Agency," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3, no. 2 (2010): 147-161.
[14] Kotef and Amir, "Imaginary Lines," 75.
[15] Rema Hammami, "Destabilizing Mastery and the Machine: Palestinian Agency and Gendered Embodiment at Israeli Military Checkpoints," *Current Anthropology* 60, sup. 19 (2019): 89.
[16] Hammami, "Destabilizing Mastery," 88.
[17] Hammami, "Destabilizing Mastery," 96, 87.
[18] Hammami, "Destabilizing Mastery," 89.
[19] Hammami, "Destabilizing Mastery," 95.
[20] See Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).
[21] Pseudonyms are used for all interlocutors.
[22] José Ciro Martínez and Omar Sirri, "Bureaucraft: Statemakers in Amman and Baghdad," *Cultural Anthropology* 38, no. 3 (2023): 386-410.
[23] José Ciro Martínez, "Ambivalent states: Paradoxes of subjection in the Jordanian south," *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 41, no. 2 (2023): 394.
[24] Martínez, "Ambivalent states," 398.
[25] Martínez, "Ambivalent states," 398.
[26] Laurent Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
[27] Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 5.

Automation Zones:
Expanding the Digital "Frontier" of Labor and Trade in Aqaba

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Introduction

The multiple narratives surrounding the Aqaba Digital Hub (ADH), the self-proclaimed "new gateway to the Middle East," present a puzzling window into the spatial dynamics of digital transformation within Jordan and the wider region. According to *The Economist*, ADH forms part of "Israel's data-cable diplomacy" enabling Israel to further normalize ties with its neighbors through Google's Blue Raman submarine cable.[1] This will land at Aqaba (via ADH) before crossing the border into Eilat, linking up with Google's three data centers in Israel as well running connections into Europe thereby superseding Egypt's "Digital Suez" (the internet's pre-eminent bottle neck).[2] Others attribute these developments to Saudi Arabia "redrawing the map" of regional digital infrastructures, as they rush to implement "vision 2030" by raising their internet capacity through Blue Raman and adjacent cable projects such as the Trans Europe Asia System (TEAS). Like Blue Raman, this will also bypass the Digital Suez via Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel, this time via a new terrestrial route. By boosting regional internet capacity and computing power, these cables will therefore provide an infrastructural footing for projects like Neom, Saudi Arabia's highly publicized (and wildly ambitious) smart mega city. Meanwhile, given the sheer weight of Saudi and Israeli-centric narratives, it would perhaps be easy to overlook how ADH features within the Jordanian state's own economic vision to pivot from "buffer to bridge" in part by (re)marketing Jordan as a vibrant digital hub emerging from the shadows of its more dominant neighbors.[3]

How might these multiple narratives reflect, complicate or at times completely obscure what digital transformation, as a spatial project, really entails?[4] From the perspective of critical logistics scholars, ADH's bid for digital transformation inside the apparatus of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) cannot be contained, no less explained by any one narrative of national economic development, but instead must be situated within the growing imperative of global capital to circulate.[5] Seen through this lens, as Jordan and its neighbors' economies re-route towards global demands through the "modular" technologies of free zones, they require greater internet and cloud capabilities to help automate their just-in-time trade geographies. Meanwhile, scholars working at the intersection of platforms and logistics point to how digital infrastructures not only graft onto or accentuate trends encapsulated through the "logistics" revolution but also create infrastructural footholds for new forms of "scale thinking" within a nascent digital economy.[6] These footholds enable the rapid spatial expansion of tech firms like Google, Amazon or Uber by tapping into the machinery of financial markets and venture capital.[7] Finally, scholars of managerialism outline how the ideological moorings of capitalism today are increasingly tethered to a universalizing ethos of technologically driven empowerment, enacted by "quasi-revolutionary" networks.[8]

In this essay I delve into these literatures to help unpack the spatial politics of digital transformation in Aqaba. I aim to do this by exploring how digital transformation is produced as an identifiable, if largely imaginary, capitalist frontier which is reified through infrastructural changes that suffuse across economic geographies. Within this, I build on two concrete points. First, that ADH, as a digital hub, grafts spatially onto both the city and the SEZ in ways inextricably tied to the historical and temporal processes of these sites' ongoing formation. Second, as hubs like ADH grow, they shape broader transformations in economic geography across multiple scales of formality and patterns of circulation. These transformations are as much political as they are technical in nature, held together by and in turn reproducing what I label somewhat speculatively an *automation effect.*

Grafting on Cities, Producing Hubs

The frontier designates horizons of progress at the point where spatial expansion ends yet is seemingly forever resurrected in capitalism in the name of expanding knowledge and markets to continue processes of accumulation by other means.[9] Frontiers, both imagined and in various stages of materialization and expansion, help to fashion the (re)production of capitalism across multiple temporalities and trans-urban geographies. They provide a useful framework for thinking across histories of colonialism and the early expansion of cities, to urban reproduction today. Processes of (neo)liberal development relate to this episodic production of frontiers by relying on racially-constituted imaginaries of a *tabula rasa* through which development can expand while erasing, appropriating, or destroying that which was there before.[10]

Seen in this light, the expansion of a digital frontier within an old city like Aqaba, which has become a new SEZ and incipient digital "hub," appears to graft onto ongoing processes of urban renewal. ADH builds upon previous frontiers that were erected, expanded, and repurposed prior to and since the neoliberal era. These new geographies of labor and trade are engineered through processes of development encapsulated by successive waves of infrastructure. Indeed, the literature on SEZs suggests they help catalyze this process by engineering geography to maximize trade and the accumulation of capital.[11] In Max Hirsh's view, SEZs engineer "frontier urbanism"—occupying the remote borderlands of national cultural spheres and the apex of global networks of capital and trade. In the case of Aqaba, hemmed into a narrow buffer zone between Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Red Sea, this nascent urbanism has catalyzed processes of spatial reconfiguration of the city, economy, and state.[12] It spells "ruination" for neighboring cities like Ma'an, whose long decline as a permanent trade hub on the now defunct Hejazi railway, directly contrasts with Aqaba's growing regional gravitas.[13] Meanwhile, within Aqaba, processes of urban center renewal are catalyzed by erasing allegedly illegal informal settlements like Shalalah, dismantled to make way for the relocation of the container port.[14]

Through the lens of temporality, the establishment of the SEZ in Aqaba and subsequent attempts to graft infrastructurally upon it through the development of ADH constitutes a collision of timescapes as Aqaba synchronizes with global supply chains. Taking Harvey's macro lens, this appears to set in motion cycles of accelerated urban dismantlement and renewal which is reflected in the work on social engineering and dispossession well documented in Jordan and across the region.[15] Yet, seen through Bear, there is also a "corrosive" temporality of the everyday made more tangible by this rising pressure to synchronize with capitalist time across neglected, or partially neglected infrastructural geographies.[16] Paradoxically, rising global rhythms of capital rely, not just on the uneven implementation of technologically more advanced infrastructures but also older infrastructures whose willful neglect has become a prominent feature of the neoliberal state in and beyond Jordan.[17]

The simultaneous move to expand the frontier of development and synchronize Aqaba into the rhythms of global trade builds on the technological advent of SEZs which, seen through an urban lens, appear "retrofitted" within neoliberal geographies inhabited and ultimately shaped by informality.[18] Yet, this view of zones also reflects how urban temporality is continuously altered by new rhythms of connectivity both prior to and since the era of digital transformation.[19] ADH then, appears to graft itself upon the spatial and temporal processes set in motion by previous infrastructural and urban intensive development. However, as I explore, in attempting to graft a digital frontier, digital hubs (re)engineer economic, urban and infrastructural geographies, thus inscribing new conditions akin to a spatial effect of automation.

Logistics and Spatial Dynamics

The idea of automation as a spatial effect intertwined across different patterns of circulation and across varying degrees of labor formality, resonates with Neilson and Rossiter's thesis on the "environmentality of automation."[20] They argue that automation differs from mechanisation in so far as it engineers kinetic feedback

across infrastructural, media and logistically networked geographies. In this view, automation does not simply displace labor as some have argued, rather it changes its environmental conditions.[21] That is not to say automation is capable of rendering geography into a unified "hyper object" of governable space as others have argued, but it does provide grounds for considering how different forms of power are newly mediated within networked geographies.[22]

Digital transformation via the expansion of the cloud is already inscribing Aqaba's economic geography with the effect of automation.[23] One example is the deal signed with the digital arm of AD Ports Group for "an advanced Ports Community System (PCS)" to "generate considerable cost and time savings for stakeholders and customers, reduce CO2 emissions and streamline services."[24] ADH will provide the infrastructural basis for this deal, helping to connect fragmented geographies, making them synchronous across different "timescapes" and thereby providing a necessary boost for Aqaba's SEZ as a conduit of global capital circulation.[25] Yet, in producing allegedly green, automated shipping zones, such projects overlook the severe labor struggles, where recent strikes have contested oppressive and at times lethal working conditions.[26] The port therefore represents a pertinent case where Aqaba's logistics-led accumulation is reproduced by digital infrastructure in ways that embed labor imbalances, reflecting concrete ways that the "environmentality of automation" makes its presence felt.[27]

ADH also markets its capacity to export high-powered connectivity over the border to the "all-green, all-sustainable" Neom, Saudi Arabia's controversial smart region project which promises to be "underpinned by the best ICT infrastructure [that] engineers can imagine and money can buy."[28] Within this, there are fascinating parallels between plans for Oxagon, "the industrial hub of Neom" which claims to be "the world's first truly-integrated port and logistics hub" and Aqaba's Container Terminal which aims to make Aqaba a "new sustainable gateway to the Levant."[29] The latter envisages a logistical and industrial hub in which shopping, community and recreation are all integrated around the container port. This is mirrored by Oxagon on a grander scale, rebranding zone and city through "new paradigms of livability."

These smart projects reflect the "vision" described by Jordan's minister of the Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, to "create a digital environment that supports growth, motivates entrepreneurship and at the same time plays a major role in social and political stability."[30] Yet, often overlooked is a political grammar of exclusivity, elided within these socioeconomic visions which the designs of automated urbanisms bring to light. These projects will in fact rely upon a preponderance of precarious workers who are not so much displaced or removed in practice but eviscerated from the aesthetic imaginary of high-tech urban life.[31] Furthermore, as discussions within urban studies attest, patterns of global circulation also bleed into milieus of informal labor which simultaneously calibrate and are calibrated by these patterns.[32] In these cases, the volatility of algorithmically governed and deregulated financial markets in the neoliberal era introduce new temporalities within localized patterns of circulation where people are forced to adapt to the incessant and unpredictable rhythms of price rises.[33] These rhythms suffuse across labor geographies as workers are forced to mediate global capitalist time.[34] Within this, platform labor arguably reflects a particular technological means of reframing labor as the sole mediator of these volatile fluctuations of demand.

Performing Automation in Aqaba

In this final section I delve into the practices of businesspeople and technology consultants who I suggest play a key role in the rearticulation of digital transformation in Aqaba and thus the proliferation and reification of automated spatial imaginaries. These visions, through repertoires of business "expertise", render technologies designed to exacerbate labor precarity and exploitation into enlightened innovations through recourse to "security," and business friendly "talent landscapes."[35]

Indeed, Aqaba's SEZ and within it, ADH, are shaped and reshaped by the design practices of business consultancy firms. These practices are inscribed with what Laleh Khalili has called the "theology of capital," which subdues labor power with managerial expertise, makes businesses more "efficient," and state planning more amenable to capital accumulation.[36] In Aqaba the consultancy firm Bearing Point (now Deloitte), successfully advocated replacing the municipality government with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) and later its "economic" responsibilities were delegated to the newly established Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC). Not only were the large number of business experts populating these new institutions allocated eye-wateringly high salaries, but they made huge returns for the ruling monarchy, among other regional and international investors, as they privatized and sold off state-owned lands.[37]

Delving into the business practices surrounding ADH, a similar theology is clearly at work.[38] Through its peering networks (clients connected to its digital network) and LinkedIn presence, ADH imbeds itself into corporate and state circles. For example, associates of ADH recently attended digital conferences like MENA ICT where they struck deals with Palestinian ministries and telecoms against the backdrop of sermons about "Jordan's talent landscape" from international consultancy firms like PwC.[39] Associates were also at the Special Operations Forces Exhibition (SOFEX) attended by Jordanian royalty, esteemed military generals, and a host of military industry representatives who discussed "long-term strategic industrial policy and future programs."[40] Seen in this light, ADH mediates between two different, but overlapping networking venues: a corporate digital transformation realm, as well as a special forces realm animated by securitization logics. At these sites, capitalist theology is practiced and performed, the spatial imaginaries they construe illuminating the potential of digital transformation for catalyzing the expansion of trade and labor geographies.

Within this milieu, the securitization thread reflects the blurring of trade and military boundaries through processes of commercialization.[41] This can be linked back to the logistical turn as the militarization of trade speaks to but also goes beyond processes to inflect trade relations with a military logic of precisely choreographed supply chains.[42] Indeed, what Rafeef Ziadah describes as "the close imbrication of the UAE's humanitarian logistics networks with the country's military and commercial ambitions," resonates with business-military networks within Aqaba and Jordan.[43] Not only has Jordan's enormous US-sponsored security budget turned the military into a commercial venture, the effects are simultaneously rendered through the securitization and militarization of Jordan's economic geography.[44] Within this process, digital transformation helps produce increasingly automated and securitized networks of supply within SEZs.[45] Meanwhile, from the bordered trade geographies of SEZs to its urban attachments, this automation effect suffuses into life beyond the zone with the increasingly granular surveillance of urban space through ongoing investment in the smart city.[46]

Seen in this light, ADH's role as mediator and catalyst reflects an important infraction point for a networked business elite for whom digital transformation is integral to the expansion of their own wealth via the symbiotic processes of military commercialization and securitizing business environments. Perversely, the growing gulf between rich and poor help justify the policing of those increasingly vocal about their visible neglect by the state, making securitization and its commercialization appear as both a product and ongoing imperative of neoliberalism.[47]

Highlighting the soft power through which this process is enacted, Benjamin Shuetze points to the inculcation of authoritarian and neoliberal logics in Jordan produced through new hierarchies crystallizing around "protector/service provider and protected/customer."[48] He suggests that this synthesis of military and commercial hierarchies plays an important role in forging the conceptual space through which entrepreneurial leadership is theologized.[49] This resonates with but also creates a certain tension in the neoliberal language of leadership that ADH's networked business world embraces, a language that foregrounds a

universalizing vision of tech empowerment embodied by the catchall metaphor of "talent landscapes." In contrast to the process identified by Schuetze whereby military hierarchies filter into the corporate-authoritarian veneer of business culture, ADH appears to speak to a more recent trend in managerial dogma that attempts—at least superficially—to flatten hierarchies.[50] Seen through the lens of automation, this channeling of empowerment narratives appears patently performative. It does not so much reflect the humanitarian solutions of an altruistic business elite as it does the artificial flattening of class dynamics in order play into processes of automation. Indeed, how might an emphasis on "talent landscapes," where a precious few are empowered, gloss over labor geographies characterized by displacement, precarity, and securitization? And if this provides even a glimpse into the machinations of networked assemblages as they perform automation by forging frictionless, secure, and compliant trade corridors, what are the broader implications for digital transformation?

Conclusion

Digital transformation as a capitalist imaginary of connectivity and set of business practices that invoke tangible infrastructural changes across transurban environments, reflects an understudied political force at multiple scales.[51] It produces spatial effects with repercussions across geography, restructuring these differentiated yet interconnected scales of circulation in the process. In this sense, we need to take seriously the transformative capacities of projects like ADH within spatial and political spheres underexplored by previous research.

Indeed, in her excellent account of Masdar, an underwhelming smart city project in Abu Dhabi's desert, Gökçe Günel points to its "dynamic materiality" and capacity to inhabit "different scales" which, while unable to galvanize it into a success, produces an ongoing effect that is politically generative, encoding the present condition of capitalist rule into the future.[52] However, when compared to ADH, pertinent questions surrounding the broader dynamics driving digital transformation remain unanswered. What are the politics embedded in the production of Aqaba as it attaches to a similar imaginary repertoire to Masdar while grafting onto much broader shifts in transregional geographies of trade? Can we really square Aqaba with Masdar's designation as a mere "technical adjustment?"[53]

I suggest that ADH operates somewhat differently to Masdar whose "innovation frontier" is, according to Günel, a tenuous, market-led one, leaving minimal imprint on the geo-economic landscape and more bent on tethering futures to relations of power inscribed (if no longer fully sustained) by economies of oil.[54] Though Günel makes a compelling case for Masdar, a gap exists between the status-quo-inducing fantasy realm it frames and the wide-reaching processes and effects of digital transformation taking shape in Aqaba. This gap reflects a dynamic materiality underpinning Aqaba, more rooted in the ongoing changes that are entangling distribution, production, and the automation of geo-economic space. Multiple scales are interacting in ways that strategically streamline capitalism and profoundly alter its scope, reach, and environmental effects. Wading further into this digital, political, urban, and logistical milieu—imbricated within processes of political transformation and effect—will be the object of future research.

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Endnotes

1 *The Economist*, "Israel Hopes New Data Cables Can Make Friends of Former Enemies."
2 *Middle East Eye*, "How Saudi Arabia is redrawing the map of the future with fibre-optic cables,"
3 See the online interview with Jordanian Minister of Digital Economy. *Woodrow Wilson Centre*, "Jordan's Digital Future."
4 As Adam Hanieh has shown, the broad political and economic milieu inscribed within regional digital transformation is highlighted by the elaborate multisector plans that Gulf (and Gulf financed) telecommunication companies have drawn up for the implementation of Smart City projects. Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies*, 170.
5 For critical logistics/free zones see Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade*; Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*; Debruyne, "Spatial Rearticulations of Statehood;" Chua and Cox, "Battling the Behemoth;" Plonski, "Ma'an's Material Debris—The Railroad Graveyard."
6 For platforms/logistics see Chua and Cox, "Battling the Behemoth;" Bier, "Displacement Without Redistribution." Hanna and Park, "Against Scale: Provocations and Resistances to Scale Thinking." Gebrial, "Racial Platform Capitalism."
7 For work linking financial machinery and platforms see Mitchell, "Uber Eats: How Capital Consumes the Future." For work on the racial fabrics of platforms see Gebrial, "Racial Platform Capitalism;" Jones, *Work Without the Worker*.
8 Chiapello and Boltanski, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, XXXiV.
9 For literature that deals with the historical production of frontiers see for example Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*; Appel, "Walls and White Elephants;" Hirsh, *Airport Urbanism*; Günel, *Spaceship in the Desert*; Meiton, *Electrical Palestine*; Chua and Cox, "Battling the Behemoth;" Plonski, "Ma'an's Material Debris;" Rabie, *Palestine Is Throwing a Party and the Whole World Is Invited*.
10 As well as previous examples, also see Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession*; Plonski, "Ma'an's Material Debris—The Railroad Graveyard in Political Economy of Infrastructure in the Middle East and North Africa;" El-Kazaz, "Building 'Community' and Markets in Contemporary Cairo."
11 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*; Debruyne, "Spatial Rearticulations of Statehood;" Alaime, "Le paradoxe extraterritorial au cœur des territoires mondialisés. Le cas de la zone économique spéciale d'Aqaba, Jordanie;" Hirsh, *Airport Urbanism*; Jenss and Schuetze, "Rethinking Authoritarian Power;" Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade*. Some describe them as "infrastructural fixes" (Harvey), "modular technologies" (Khalili), or "extra-territorial fragments (Alaime), while others connect them to forms of urban governance enabling the "spatial rearticulation of the state" (Debruyne) or forms of urbanism centred around circulation and transit (Hirsh).
12 For commentaries specifically on Aqaba see Debruyne, "Spatial Rearticulations of Statehood;" Alaime, "Le paradoxe extraterritorial au cœur des territoires mondialisés. Le cas de la zone économique spéciale d'Aqaba, Jordanie;" Martínez, *Performing the State*; Jenss and Schuetze, "Rethinking Authoritarian Power."
13 For comparisons between Ma'an and Aqaba see Martínez, *Performing the State*; Plonski, "Ma'an's Material Debris."
14 Debruyne, "Spatial Rearticulations of Statehood."
15 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 98. See footnote 9.
16 Bear, "3 For Labour."
17 This neglect may reflect a willingness to allow infrastructure to decay: Bear; Plonski, "Ma'an's Material Debris;" Chua and Cox, "Battling the Behemoth." Alternatively, neglect is palpable where they have never been built. Appel, "Walls and White Elephants;" Howe et al., "Paradoxical Infrastructures."
18 Howe et al., "Paradoxical Infrastructures."
19 Mackenzie, *Wirelessness*; Jones, *The Emergence of the Digital Humanities* and Amin, "Animated Space" all reflect how the digital suffuses into the urban environment.
20 Neilson and Rossiter, "Theses on Automation and Labour," 200.
21 For recent arguments pointing to automation as the displacement of labor see Bier, "Displacement Without Redistribution."
22 Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*. For more of an infrastructural/logistical reading of software/digital networks see Rossiter. *Software, Infrastructure, Labor* and Starosielski, *The Undersea Network*.

[23] For discussion of cloud geographies see Amoore, "Cloud Geographies."
[24] "AD Ports Group and Aqaba Development Corporation Sign Multiple Agreements for Development of Tourism, Transport, Logistics and Digital Infrastructure."
[25] Bear, "3 For Labour."
[26] Davis, "'A Disaster.'" Also see Schwedler's accounts of Aqaba's dockworker protests. Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan*.
[27] Neilson and Rossiter, "Theses on Automation and Labour," 200.
[28] Roberts, "The Rising Digital Infrastructure in The Middle East and Africa."
[29] ACT, "Sustainability - Aqaba Container Terminal;" Neom. "Oxagon: a reimagined industrial city."
[30] Woodrow Wilson Centre, "Jordan's Digital Future."
[31] Günel, *Spaceship in the Desert*, 59-61.
[32] Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession*; Saleh, "Scrap Metal and Syrian Labour in Beirut's Informal Economy;" Grüneisl "Second-hand shoe circulations in Tunis."
[33] MacKenzie, *Trading at the speed of light.*
[34] Günel, *Spaceship in the Desert*, 24, 40
[35] Schuetze, *Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism*, 151; Yazid Ziad Hijazeen, LinkedIn.
[36] Khalili, "In Clover."
[37] Debruyne, "Spatial Rearticulations of Statehood," 190. Schuetze, *Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism*.
[38] Thinking about "hybrid governance" in development circles in Egypt. Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession*.
[39] Yazid Ziad Hijazeen, LinkedIn.
[40] Services, "Sofex 2022 Amman Jordan."
[41] Schuetze, *Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism*, 206.
[42] For scholars making this argument see footnote 21 (as well as next footnote).
[43] Ziadah, "Circulating Power."
[44] For more on this argument see Schuetze, *Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism*, 170–222.
[45] For more on securitization and logistics see Cowen, "A Geography of Logistics."
[46] For smart cities see Breslow, "The Smart City and the Containment of Informality;" Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies*, 170; Günel, *Spaceship in the Desert*. Particularly relevant is Hanieh's observation of surveillance-heavy multisector plans that Gulf (and Gulf-financed) telecommunication companies have drawn up for the implementation of Smart City projects.
[47] For increasingly violent policing of protest in Ma'an, Aqaba, and elsewhere in Jordan see Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan*; Martínez, *Performing the State*.
[48] Schuetze, *Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism*, 213.
[49] Schuetze, 213. Also see Khalili, "Stupid Questions."
[50] Chiapello and Boltanski, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.
[51] For literature on urban circulation see Graham and Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism*; Howe et al., "Paradoxical Infrastructures;" Chua et al., "Introduction;" Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies*; Chua and Cox, "Battling the Behemoth." For literature with more of an emphasis on global circulation see Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*; Hirsh, *Airport Urbanism*; Ramos, *Dubai Amplified*; Ziadah, "Circulating Power;" Jenss and Schuetze, "Rethinking Authoritarian Power;" Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade*.
[52] Günel, *Spaceship in the Desert*, 24, 40.
[53] Günel, 10–11.
[54] Günel, *Spaceship in the Desert*.

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The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York. For more information, see http://www.pomeps.org.

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