Urban Development

Middle East – Topics & Arguments

CONTENT

EDITORIAL

Urban Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Deconstructing Visions, Politics, and Identities

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Battlefields, visions, and construction sites: the urban as an arena of contest. This is how urban development[1] in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is presenting itself at the end of this decade. Urbanity and identity are still violently transformed into ruins in long-lasting civil, and in fact international, wars. They destroy the homes and livelihoods of millions of people and eradicate not only national but also world heritage in some of the culturally richest and longest-urbanized areas on earth. In contrast, other urban landscapes in the region seem to fascinatingly prosper and are being massively pushed upward to the global scene.

Research Opportunities

In the region under scrutiny, sensational and iconic urban development megaprojects, such as the Palm Islands in Dubai, have caught the attention of a global public. Accordingly, the majority of existing studies have concentrated on cities in the Gulf region, first of all Dubai and subsequently places such as Doha and Abu Dhabi. Academic research has paid much less attention to other issues. Even though there has been a boom in urban studies of the region from various disciplines in recent years, the existing body of knowledge still seems to be very incomprehensive, fragmented, and developable. This is

quite astonishing, given the dramatic increase of the urbanization rate in the region, rising from 35% in 1960 to 65% in 2017 (The World Bank).[2]

Notably, there are large research gaps to be noticed in countries affected by war. Cities such as Aleppo and Kobanê in Syria, Sinjar and Mosul in Iraq, Tripoli and Benghazi in Libya, and Ta'izz and Al Hudaydah in Yemen have been bombed and destroyed by various conflicting parties. Thousands of people have lost their lives, and the urban heritage has been seriously damaged or even lost forever. Other people found refuge, over decades, in huge, rapidly emerging camp cities, conceived as temporary, yet consolidating in the long run, like the Near Eastern Palestinian refugee sites Tindouf, Algeria and Zaatari, Jordan. The destruction of cities can not only be interpreted as the ultimate outcome of a struggle about space and place, it also reflects the intrinsic logics of rule, conflict, political economy, and development opportunities, which are highly under-researched, perhaps aside from the cases of Beirut (e.g. Schmid, "Reconstruction"; Hourani) and Erbil (Ibrahim et al.).

Overall, the already difficult environment for critical and independent research has worsened in several MENA countries in the last few years. This is not only due to security concerns in areas under conditions of war and conflict; in countries under more or less authoritarian rule such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and increasingly Turkey, it is hardly feasible to conduct research safely and freely on politically sensitive topics such as marginality, labor migration, political decision-making, and economic interests. Inside the countries, the rigidity of the neo-traditional authoritarian structures in the Arabian Gulf states (Gray) and of neo-patrimonial authoritarian regimes in North Africa and the Levant (Cavatorta) strictly limits public debate about controversial ideas for the future of these societies. In contrast, the urban sphere often functions as an arena where conceptions for the future of those in power are expressed. Because of this tension, the urban visions of the ruling elite are (sometimes timidly, sometimes eruptively) socially and politically contested.

However, political systems and research opportunities in the MENA region are quite diverse. Recent evolutions have opened up new perspectives, allowed for new independent research, and generated new questions about urban development in countries that transformed into more democratic societies, such as Tunisia, or which more or less reformed their political regimes, e.g. Jordan and Morocco (Stadnicki et al.). Nevertheless, the list of insufficiently investigated topics in the region seems to be endless: from livelihoods and survival strategies in the destroyed cities, reconstruction plans for the old city centers and their gentrification, and the emergence of central business districts and large residential areas to the political economy of urban planning and the role of new actors such as China in mega-projects. The strengthened attempts at place branding, which means transforming cities' characters from a socio-political arena into an easily readable object of investment and consumption, have not gained as much academic attention as could be expected; the same is true of the simulation and staging of heritage and the heritage preservation policies behind them.

There is a general lack of studies about urban models on the move, their local adoption and adaptation, and the integration of cities in global and regional urban, production, and transport networks. Additionally, "secondary cities" that are not at the forefront of public attention, are infrequently studied (Wippel). However, in the last decade, comparatively unrecognized urban development in the Maghreb

and the Mashreq has been turbulent and dynamic, too, and has been partly influenced by the upheavals in the course of the "*Arab Spring*" and protests in Turkey and Iran. For instance, Tunis is trying hard to democratize its urban governance structures and to introduce participatory elements (Beier), Tangier has profited from a huge redevelopment of its port facilities to become a global hub (Haller et al.), and Erbil endeavors to become an appropriate, occasionally Dubai-style, capital under conditions of emerging statehood (Sama). Finally, perspectives from below (especially with reference to marginalized groups), gender issues, and the question of how individuals and groups enact, contribute to, and deal with current urban transformations are neglected, too.

Notwithstanding important colonial research, the academic struggle to systemically understand urban development in the MENA region was initially largely met by English, French, and German scholars from the 1950s on (Raymond). In this issue, Anton Escher shows that, within this debate, German geographers, especially Eugen Wirth and the large number of succeeding professors from his academic school, played a central role. Dealing not solely with urban develop-

ment in, but also about urban research on (and from) the MENA region, one has therefore to ask what is left of (and still relevant in) this early research and what we can learn today by looking at these first pieces of urban studies in the region. This question is even more important, considering that the early approaches imply predominantly a structuralist thinking, aiming at model-building, which was later accused of producing essentialist and Orientalist stereotypes of an eternal "Islamic", "Arab", or "Oriental" city. In contrast, recent urban studies of the MENA region are more process- and actor-oriented, investigating questions of power, influence, and resource allocation in urban development processes within the context of specific socio-cultural dynamics and developments. As Heeg puts it in her meta-conceptual article (in this issue), instead of identifying general structures of urban development, current research should predominantly aim at place- and time-sensitive analyses that regard urban landscapes as socially produced and continuously reproduced spaces.

Hence, this book *Middle East – Topics and Arguments* (META) tries to shed light on complex and multifaceted dimensions of urban transformations in the MENA region in recent years from a critical, de-essential-

izing perspective.[3] We do not consider urban development in the MENA region to be exceptional, but rather linked to ongoing processes in other parts of the world, while proceeding on sometimes quite diverse individual trajectories. Even though local circumstances seem to be crucial to understand what is going on in the region, we argue that urban change in this part of the world is largely influenced by four – overlapping and interpenetrating – regional and transregional megatrends: first, the *Dubaiification* of the idea and the shape of the urban, where Dubai functions as a model for urban development elsewhere, in the region and beyond; second, the ambitions of states and cities to present themselves on the world stage in order to gain recognition, an endeavor called *worlding*; third, the *neoliberalization* of urban development and urban planning, where the role of the state is reoriented to provide private and notably foreign investors an attractive environment and promising opportunities for creating wealth; and fourth, the use of *place branding* to perform a double task, one outward-oriented to create and disseminate politically, economically, and culturally appealing images, but another directed toward the local population to (re)shape urban and national identities and legitimate political action.

The edited META volume at hand is composed around these four mega-trends, which are investigated in a number of theoretical and empirical papers, aiming at contributing to a deeper understanding of recent processes of urban reconfiguration in the MENA region and of cities, which are still heavily "under construction" (Bromber et al. 2014).

Dubaiification

The first of these trends, the *Dubaiification*[4] of cities, is based on the realization of large-scale projects. In this respect, Dubai functions as a role model in the wider region for its seemingly successful and attention-drawing kind of urban development. These projects are accompanied by a boom of so-called "visions", embedded in the political economy of the region and driven by the political struggle to foster societal cohesion and to create new national and urban identities. The materialized vision of the ruler fascinates people and provides him legitimacy in a non-democratic state (Steiner). Thereby, fascination not only has a political impact, but is becoming an economic resource in its own right (Schmid, *Economy of Fascination*). Consequently, the Dubai model has been adapted elsewhere (Wippel et al.; Elsheshtawy 249-279). This global and regional movement and local

adaptation and circulation of planning ideas and strategies deserve more attention than ever from academia. Accordingly, we encounter Dubai as a model and mega-projects as an essential element of urban development in most of the papers – from Qom to Istanbul – in this issue of META.[5] However, insights from the Cairo (Loewert and Steiner) and Rabat cases (Amarouche and Bogaert) also show that cooperation with Gulf investors and hence immediate transfer of models and modalities can finally fail.

In this context, it seems as if, currently, the whole region has become extremely visionary. In the Saudi Vision 2030, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz stated, for instance: "All success stories start with a vision." (6) Cairo Vision 2050, Qatar National Vision 2030, Visions for Oman's Economy 2020 and 2040, Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, Amman 2025 and Istanbul 2023, to name just a few prominent examples, all formulate prospects for a bright future of their nation states and cities (cf. also Hvidt). A German reader is reminded of the famous quotation from Germany's former chancellor Helmut Schmidt (1980): "Whoever has visions should go to a doctor." Nevertheless, such visions are very influential when it comes to their realization,

even though they are purely a matter of the ruling elite and may be interpreted as a symptom of an undemocratic form of urban planning.

This phenomenon of visions is remarkable in at least three ways: first, in recent years, the rhetoric of long-term but rather vague visions seems to have increasingly replaced the barren technocratic medium-term "development plans". Second, these visions for a distant future always imply a quasi-transcendental core that is difficult to contest, because they are often not published by bureaucratic state institutions, but announced by the unassailable autocratic ruler himself. And third, this rhetoric gets its power by applying the visionary discourse of big enterprises (Den Hartog and Verburg) to the management and the marketing of the state and cities. Visions are notably behind cities' aspirations to gain worldwide recognition (Beier, this issue). Impressive examples of attempts to realize such visions are the construction of the New Administrative Capital in Egypt, presented by Patrick Loewert and Christian Steiner, and the new city project of NEOM in Saudi Arabia, analyzed by Hend Aly, both in this issue, too. In the latter case, however, it is even less the project than its royal mastermind behind it who *is* the vision itself.

Emphasizing visions of urban futures goes hand in hand with a de facto lack of consistent urban planning. In consequence, more or less vague master plans for individual projects and construction zones are leading urban development, overriding local planning and building competencies and generating a fragmented development of urban spaces, typical of postmodern cities as ideally incarnated by Los Angeles (Soja). Looking like a bingo game board (Brorman Jensen), urbanism is occurring on a quasi-random field of opportunities. Capital touches down as if by chance on a parcel of land, ignoring the opportunities on intervening lots, thus sparking the development process. The relationship between development of one parcel and non-development of another is a disjointed, seemingly unrelated affair. Thus, it is evident that the traditional, center-driven agglomeration economies that have guided urban development in the past no longer apply.

In such postmodern cities, the urban structure resembles the patchwork of a "splintering urbanism" (Graham and Marvin) of extreme social, economic, and cultural polarization and segregation, which are materialized in the form of edge cities, technoburbs, corporate "citadels", gated communities, theme parks, ethnic enclaves and fantasy-made hyperreal spaces (Dear and Flusty). However, more and more urban areas are being transformed into interdictory spaces of consumption and surveillance (Dear 32), where minorities and poor groups of the population are hardly tolerated and systematically kept at bay. Therefore, these places are usually negatively connoted. Nevertheless, they may be Janus-faced: Stefan Maneval, in this issue, debates how even spaces of fragmentation such as residential compounds, beach resorts, and shopping malls imply the potential to establish some kind of counter-publics in Saudi Arabia and therefore contribute to opening up space for individual freedom, deviating body practices, and more liberal interaction between the sexes.

Worlding

Besides a postmodern reading of contemporary urban developments, the globalization approach has gained much prominence. Current urban research experienced a general upswing particularly with the turn to "world" (Friedmann) and "global cities" (Sassen). These cities closely integrate world-spanning material and human flows and notably constitute command centers of the global economy, especially in fields such as finance, insurance, and real estate. Yet, this approach has drawn much criticism, as it focuses too much on certain economic dimensions and considers only a very exclusive number of cities, concentrating on the global North. Since then, the range of cities considered has been considerably enlarged, but remains limited.[6] Instead, scholars are asked to turn attention also to the huge number of "ordinary" (Robinson) and "secondary cities" (Roberts), which are also "*globalizing*" and in many cases achieve substantial hub positions in specific far-reaching (e.g. cultural, political, institutional, and transport) networks, often based on current infrastructural mega-projects. In the Middle East, this includes religious centers like Jerusalem, Mecca, and Qom, with annual flows of millions of pilgrims.

Moreover, there is an urgent demand for "disoccidentalizing" urban research (Choplin). Hence, in this issue, Raffael Beier advocates an alternative reading of the processes of globalization and Dubaization, from a "Southern" perspective. He argues that cities that seem to copy the Dubai model do not so much intend to build up a "Dubai elsewhere" as to try to present themselves on a world stage in order to gain recognition and to build up what is perceived as "world-class". The underlying strategy may be named

"worlding" (Roy and Ong), offering an alternative reading of current trends in Middle Eastern and Arab urbanism. Consequently, the aspiration to become excellent is undoubtedly a major motivation behind various urban development strategies, even if it has not gained much academic attention yet.

In fact, it is empirically hard to say if a city is simply copying the Dubai model, especially as there have been a multitude of urban role models – from Paris to New York and Singapore – in the past and present. The previous explanations of the post-modernization, globalization, and worlding of cities have shown that urban development in the MENA region is subject to diverse global and regional trends (cf. Verdeil and Nasr; Barthel 254). As Beier emphasizes in his article (this issue), too, Gulf countries have an important role, but are not the only references. Hence, planning experiences in Maghreb countries are still strongly reminiscent of French practices. Contemporary waterfront revitalization, another popular urban feature, originated in North America, from where it spread all over the world (Hoyle) and crossed the Mediterranean from North to South (with Barcelona being another role model). Even though often mediated via Dubai, many urban development trends

stem originally from postmodern American models of urbanism, as becomes evident in Duaei's case study of Qom in this issue. According to other articles in this issue, developers in Rabat even pronounced themselves in principle against too-cocky Dubai-style architecture (Amarouche and Bogaert); and finally, the promoters of NEOM portray it as an exceptional place giving birth to a new "post-Dubaiification" era (Aly).

Neoliberalisation

The third mega-trend, neoliberalizing Arab and Middle Eastern cities, is strongly interwoven with Dubaization, postmodernization, and worlding processes. Urban change in the region has become strongly connected to the worldwide spread of neoliberal policies in recent decades: here, likewise, the privatization of urban planning, the erosion and fragmentation of public spaces, and a strict orientation toward consumption- and business-oriented development concepts meet the securitization of urban spaces and opaque, undemocratic decision-making processes (Al-Hamarneh et al.). According to this neoliberal logic, cities are being regarded primarily as economic projects. The strong presence of international actors (investors, developers, donor organizations, operators, etc.) in such entrepre-

neurial cities goes hand in hand with a downward scalar shift of governance, i.e., increasing responsibilities and competencies on the local level. Hence, various individual and institutional actors, with their respective interests, ideas, and strategies, intervene in the implementation and use of the diverse locally implanted projects from different spatial scales, as Loewert's and Steiner's case study on Cairo (this issue) demonstrates. While these shifts multiply the number of options available, they nevertheless increase the competitive pressure among the cities. Therefore, in her theoretical contribution, Susanne Heeg tries to clarify what neoliberalism might mean in regard to urban policies and urban development in the MENA region, including all its local variegations. In their conceptual explanations and respective case studies, other authors in this special issue also explicitly refer to neoliberal inspirations for urban transformations.

Concurrently, neoliberalisation in the MENA region accompanies increasing socio-economic and spatial fragmentation. Therefore, cities become arenas of societal struggles about economic and political participation and power. Exploitation, the displacement of established populations, rising socio-economic

and cultural segregation, unequal access to urban infrastructure, growing crime rates, incidents of political unrest, protests and social counter-movements, and an increasing level of surveillance and political suppression by local governments are typical "*side effects*" of neoliberal, authoritarian urban development policies.

In line with this diagnosis, the contribution of Maryame Amarouche and Koenraad Bogaert in this issue asks whether the market dictates urban planning and how globalization, dispossession, and the transformation of authoritarian government are connected in the Bouregreg Valley project in the Rabat-Salé metropolitan area. Part of the upcoming urban governance in the neoliberal context is the outsourcing of responsibilities to even less-accountable special agencies (*agencification*), established by the central state. They have the exclusive planning, execution, and management rights over important areas, to the detriment of local competencies and, similar to the Cairo case, thwart endeavors for more decentralized and participative procedures. Yet, these urban development strategies imposed from above and ignoring local social constraints, interests, needs, and desires have also repeatedly triggered civil society counter-engagement and social, occasionally peaceful,

occasionally violent protests against neoliberal policies and state oppression, not least leading to the 2010/11 *Arabellions*, but often enough did not result in much but individualized complaint and resignation.

In contrast to this politico-ethnographic analysis of the Moroccan capital area, Kamaluddin Duaei demonstrates that these kinds of policies even influence less well-investigated secondary cities such as Qom and shows that neoliberal policies and religion need not be seen as opponents at all. Especially in the Iranian context, his paper convincingly exhibits that, besides the widely discussed Dubaiification, the *Tehranization* of urban development, i.e., a growing similarity to the national primary city, is apparent.

Branding
Investments in cultural, sports, educational and business districts, hyperreal shopping and leisure facilities, huge waterfront developments, iconic mega-projects, and the redevelopment of religious heritage sites not only aim at broadening the economic basis to cope with demographic growth in the region, to conform with economic liberalization for some countries while preparing the post-oil era for others. Concurrently, they are

intended as tools for city branding in the globalized competition among places, which we currently identify as the fourth mega-trend of urban development in the region. In the contexts of globalization and worlding strategies, neoliberal policies and postmodern urban development, they constitute signs to create widespread, broadly-based positive images of progress and modernization, as well as of long-lasting tradition and cultural profoundness for international investors, clients, tourists, and potential residents. Dubai and other Gulf cities have become role models in this respect, too (Govers and Go). But urban development projects also function as a means to help identity politics to (re)shape the urban and national identities of cities' and states' citizens.

In consequence, fierce communication strategies have sometimes become more important than the erection of real buildings and infrastructure (Fırat et al.). Even more, urban development frequently has become subordinate to simulations as exemplified by the computer game *SimCity* (Soja). In line with Baudrillard (10), such simulations (including maps, models, and 3-D animations) precede, predetermine, and sometimes even replace material development on the ground. Soja also

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pointed out that, in postmodern times, entire settlement complexes are conceived in accordance with mottos and themes.

Thus, place branding has a pronounced political nature. Annegret Roelcke's paper about the Eyüp quarter in Istanbul in this issue demonstrates how the *genius loci* of urban areas itself has increasingly become an intentionally created product. In her example, it is the connection of Islamism, advocated by the ruling AKP party in Turkey, with urban development that leads to the production, staging, and museumization of a local neo-Ottoman heritage for varying ends and addressees, but which ultimately is a strategy to legitimate the rule of the current regime. However, the AKP is not solely aiming at re-inventing the history of Turkey in line with its conservative-Islamist ideology; it also instrumentalizes the means of urban development and branding in conjunction with changing orientations toward the EU, the Middle East, and the Islamic world. In line with this case, if Aly is right, also the branding of NEOM has served not just to position the to-be-built city within the global competition of places and attract the desired creative "dreamers", but also to brand the Crown Prince and reaffirm his power. Therefore, she asks if the aforementioned

visions are giving birth to a new kind of "PowerPoint cities", existing solely digitally, and even wonders if the object of such presentations is actually a city, or rather a start-up, a country, or a person's idea. And as much as in Istanbul, in Qom, too, according to Duaei (this issue), rebranding the religiosity of the city is intended to appeal to the growing consumerist middle-class and to modernize the place's historical identity.

Outlook
The current reconfigurations of the urban in the Middle East and North Africa have to be understood as outcomes of recent economic and societal disruptions and upheavals. In these processes of social and urban change, cities function as central laboratories for their societies' futures and as arenas of contest – not only on the battlefields of devastation, but also in all those areas in which they aim at becoming world-class or in which elites produce new interpretations of the identity of places in order to back their ideological perspectives and to sustain their autocratic rule. The experience of rapid, spectacular development, based mainly on big urban projects, has not only impacted important local transformations, but also shows wider effects and is part of larger reconfigurations, both on several spatial scales.

Against this background, this themed META issue brings together various papers that critically tackle and deconstruct the visions, politics, identities, complex transformations, and disparate development paths of contemporary urban dynamics in the region. Besides widely noticed global cities, this also endeavors to include some less-investigated secondary cities that nevertheless undergo much the same experiences.

In the future, it will be interesting to see how responsible authorities will proceed further in the balancing act between worlding strategies and social responsibility (Beier). Whereas all urban policies described here imply a more or less reacting logic, the Arab Spring – despite its many setbacks – and slowly changing global settings have raised the timid hope for a new future mega-trend of urban advancement. The debate about pathways for a *sustainable* economic and urban development is increasingly pushed forward from two sides in the region.

On the one hand, the oil-rich countries are beginning to arrange for the post-oil era and trying to explore new technological ways of urban development. The transformation of urban transport models, for instance, is a central element in this regard.

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In this issue, Maike Didero, Aysha Farooq, Sonja Nebel, and Carmella Pfaffenbach demonstrate how, in the Muscat capital area, grass-roots actors have the ability to contribute to the incipient emergence of postmodern, technologically innovative, and ecologically more sustainable urban transport patterns, even if many questions of equal access, data privacy, and gender equality still remain unanswered. But except for the expanding establishment of more advanced public transport schemes across the region from Casablanca to Dubai (cp. Nolte and Özdemir), positive role models from within the region are not yet well developed, beyond the disappointing advancement of a few model cities like Masdar that promote ecological progress and innovation.

On the other hand, sustainability is starting to be more comprehensively debated in terms of social participation, ecological balance, and economic prosperity. In this respect, notably Eric Verdeil's contribution to the anti/thesis section allows us to anticipate possible directions of future urban development. At the moment, Arab cities still focus on *global* ecological issues, and existing discourses on cities as "*green*" and "*smart*" are part of worlding and branding strategies catering mainly to the expectations of international institutions and neoliberal rhetoric. These cities seem reluctant to stay the course of sustainability more ambitiously, due to the short-term prioritization of social and political stability. Instead, responsible actors need to consider more closely *local* shortfalls in sustainability, in ecological but also broader socio-economic terms, and approaches from below are required for more inclusive and participatory development. Both would also contribute to (if they are not in fact an essential precondition for) more solidity and progress in the long term.

Another pressing issue that will bind much intellectual, financial and practical capacities in the near future, besides general issues of urban habitat and architecture preservation, is the reconstruction of destroyed and devastated urban sites or of entire cities (Niva). This issue is coming up after the end or extensive containment of wars and even under continued conflict, e.g. in Iraq and Syria (Agarwala; Sengupta), but it risks playing into the hands of still-reigning dictators and consolidating brutal regimes. Hence, efforts, notably with international aid, should not come too early, have to be scrupulously scrutinized, also academically, in all their inherent aspects and should be carefully prepared to accommodate the harm to and hardship of the civil population and to support civil democratic participation, too. This also opens up the chance to plan more sustainable cities that cater for economic, social, political, and cultural progress. Having raised these final points for further investigation, we hope that this themed issue provides fresh ideas about the manifold development processes in MENA cities.

Notes

[1] As in most social and cultural disciplines today, the editors understand "urban development" as an open, non-linear, and non-teleological process of recurrent transformation, reconfiguration, and change covering a broad range of aspects and going far beyond urban planning and architecture alone. However, the term "development" is not neutral and should itself be attentively scrutinized.

[2] Compared with an increase of worldwide urbanization from 34% to 55%. However, the portion of urban in total population varies largely, from 25% in Afghanistan to 99% in Qatar (2017).

[3] This thematic issue is an outcome of a series of scientific events co-organized by the two guest editors in recent years, among them the symposium "Neoliberal and Postmodern Urban Re-Configurations in the Middle East and North Africa" at the Fifth World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES) in Seville in July 2018 and the panel discussion "Contemporary Urban Transformations in the Middle East and North Africa" at the 25th International Congress of the German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO) in Frankfurt am Main in October 2018.

[4] Terms vary. Among them, we also find "Dubaization" and, in a broader understanding, "Gulfication", Gulfization" and "Gulfanization". In fact, Dubaization can be understood in manifold ways, using several transmission channels: the copying of urban planning practices, economic development policies, and architectural attention strategies, or an invasive presence of Gulf investors and developers and the transplantation of home and architectural style models by working migrants.

[5] Wirth already studied Dubai's ascension as a regional and global platform for trade.

[6] From the MENA region, the GaWC has continuously listed Dubai, Istanbul, Cairo, and Beirut at the top of global rankings, on which also regional urban research has essentially concentrated. In the latest 2018 listing, only Dubai, Istanbul, and Riyadh rank among global "alpha" cities.

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Neoliberalism and Neoliberalization: Helpful Devices for the Analysis of Urban Development in the Middle East and North Africa

Susanne Heeg

Neoliberalism is a widely used in social science to refer to processes such as privatization, deregulation, commodification, and austerity. Quite often in this interpretative framework, neoliberalism is also associated with the dismantling of the welfare state, the opening up of free trade and investment, and an increased emphasis on the private sector. In the academic discussion, various authors criticize the use of the term because it lacks analytical clarity and/or is used as a political slogan to denounce social and economic change. The aim of the article is neither to question the analytical dimension nor to develop an irrefutable definition, but to provide insight into the strength of a place- and time-sensitive discussion of neoliberalism.

Keywords: Urban Development, MENA, Variegated Neoliberalism, Neoliberalization

Introduction

Many analyses of urban neoliberalism identify market-driven reorganizations of public space, policy, and politics. These contributions usually aim at explaining changes in everyday life in their connection with neoliberal policy and politics. Sometimes they give the impression that, even before the analysis starts, neoliberalism is already taken for granted, and the categories used only confirm this perspective. Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore moreover identify a tendency in the debate to portray neoliberalism as "predetermined, universalizing, territorially immobilized, and rigid" (201). Many authors notice a lack of more sophisticated structural analyses that accommodate variation, or variegation (Collier 188; Ong). Thus, conceptual and theoretical contributions to the debate on urban neoliberalism are not very frequent. Seen from this angle, it is not surprising that various authors criticize the use of the term because it lacks analytical clarity (Collier) and/or is used to denounce social and economic change (Willgerodt). The question then is whether it makes sense to use the term analytically and, if so, when and why can something be described as neoliberal? This is not easy to answer, because a tool kit for neoliberal urbanism does not exist. This is no surprise, considering the

variegated answers to local restructuring. From this perspective, an analysis requires the examination of ambivalences and breaks within neoliberalism. To understand the diversity of political answers, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to strengthen our understanding of neoliberal transformation processes, the following contribution aims at a theoretical and conceptual discussion of neoliberal thinking and development in order to give an answer to the confusing complexity of urban neoliberalism.

It makes sense to start with the historical foundations of neoliberal thinking. This means, first, to explore the path-dependent development of different strands of neoliberalism. A discussion of neoliberalism as a process rather than as a condition will follow. Taken together, I will explore a logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts and urban settings. The overall intention is to provide insight into the strength of the debate on neoliberalization as a place-sensitive and process-oriented analysis. Considering that much of the discussion of neoliberalism and urban neoliberalization is coming from the global North, the question is ultimately what neoliberalism or neoliberal urban development means for the MENA region.

Origin of the Debate: Schools of Neoliberal Thinking

Neoliberal thinking was never a straightforward success story or a one-dimensional way of thinking (Peck). Nor was it a return to 19th-century laissez faire ideology. The development of neoliberal thinking was more a meandering project starting in the 1930s as "an experimental and polycentric project aimed at the contradictory problem space between the state and the market" (Peck 4). At that time, neoliberal thinking was marginal and consisted of diverse conceptual approaches; according to Jamie Peck, "it did not rest on a set of immutable laws, but a matrix of overlapping convictions, orientations and aversions, draped in the unifying rhetoric of market liberalism" (6). Important strands were the Chicago School of Economics (van Horn and Mirowski) and the *Ordoliberalism* of the German Freiburg School (Ptak).[1] What connects these schools of thought is that its protagonists, such as Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Walter Eucken, Wilhelm Röpke, Milton Friedman, etc., were embedded in the academic and political environment of Europe and North America – so, it is clearly a Western thinking claiming to propound truth to the whole world.

Neither Ordoliberalism nor the Chicago School of Economics are uniform conceptual approaches (van Horn and Mirowski; Mitchell). Similarities between the schools are that both strands highlight the market as the central institution for addressing economic and social issues. Differences are that Ordoliberal protagonists are convinced of the necessity of a framework that effectively structures the relationship between state, market, and society. In contrast, in the Chicago school conception – particularly in its post-World War II version – the state is necessary only for those activities that the market cannot solve and to regularize market exchange.

While the Chicago School assigns the state a role in ensuring a free market economy, in Ordoliberalism the state has to initiate and ensure a competitive order. The state must create a proper legal environment for the economy and safeguard competition against firms with monopoly (or oligopoly) power, which will in the long run undermine the advantages offered by the market economy. For Walter Eucken, one of the central figures of Ordoliberalism, a *humane and functional order* was the major concern. According to him, economic development must go hand in hand with social security as a precondition for political and economic stability. Thus, economic performance and regulatory interventions, on the one hand, and social

security and political freedom, on the other hand, are two sides of the same coin. However, this stabilizing function of the state should go without intervening directly in economic spheres. Eucken coined the slogan "State planning of forms – yes; state planning and steering of economic processes – no" (Peters).

Scientists at the University of Chicago also agreed in its early pre-war years that the maintenance of a market system requires the exertion of state powers. In that sense, Ordoliberalism and the Chicago School shared the view that it was necessary to re-engineer the state around the ideal of a market order. Peck writes, "Laissez-faire was not a 'do-nothing policy', but in fact necessitated a 'positive' role for the state, in maintaining competitive conditions, controlling currencies, protecting property rights, curbing monopoly power and (even) maintaining social welfare […]." (16). However, although in the early years of the school, the state was perceived as necessary for promoting a free market, political control was denounced. So on a temporary basis, state intervention was justified because a successful market system is not a natural effect in passing but needs a sound framework to function. This changed after World War II. Milton Friedman, in particular, revolutionized

neoliberal thinking by reframing the state. In his theoretical work, he flattened the state/market distinction by postulating, "[…] the state was merely an inferior means of attaining outcomes that the market could provide better and more efficiently […]" (van Horn and Mirowski 162). From this perspective, the state is in competition with market actors. Accordingly, the task of the state should consist in protecting property rights and safeguarding monetary stability by means of the Federal Reserve Bank. Moreover, it should actively engage in cutting social program funding; privatizing state companies, education, and public services; eliminating price controls; liberating trade; deregulating financial markets and capital flows; and reforming the labor sectors and the tax system. According to the Chicago School, the state has the task to meet the interests of market participants. As Friedman notes in his book *Capitalism and Freedom*: "The wider the range of activities covered by the market, the fewer are the issues on which explicitly political discussions are required." (15)

The aim of discussing Ordoliberalism and the Chicago School of Economics was to show, first, that neoliberalism is not synonymous with 19th-century laissez faire ideology, but is an independent way of

thinking. Secondly, neoliberalism is not a self-contained mindset, but consists of different schools, ideas, conceptions, and opinions. Third, neoliberalism does not just arise. It needed a long struggle to establish itself. However, considering that neoliberalism comes in different shapes: what does this mean for the murky everyday policy and politics of urban development? To answer this question, the next sections will deal with neoliberalization as a place-specific process of implementing the neoliberal program. There is no one program, but neoliberalization is a permanent struggle to adapt reform, and innovate neoliberalism in practice.

Implementing Neoliberalism: Neoliberalization
Although the ambitions to reformulate a coherent neoliberal theory and agenda started in the 1930s, neoliberalism only gained prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. An explanation for this is that the belief in the welfare state, economic growth, and prosperity began to crumble with the global economic crisis in the 1970s. This is the case not only in the global North, but also in the South. Tim Mitchell describes the declining trust in Socialism à la Nasser and harsh economic conditions under Sadat triggering a change in economic policies in Egypt (Mitchell).

The Keynesian policy of compensating a shortfall of demand did not help to deal with such challenges as rising unemployment, widespread economic deindustrialization, growing impoverishment, etc.. Instead, demand policy remained largely ineffective, but contributed to increasing public debt and undermined confidence in the future viability of redistributive policies. Taken together, decreasing confidence in the effectiveness of interventions and demand management opened the door for neoliberal arguments. Political changes started in the US under the presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and in the UK under Margaret Thatcher (1979-1992). However, even before the free-market philosophy became the dominant economic ideology in the US and UK, neoliberal policy was introduced in Chile. This started during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). With help from the "Chicago Boys", that is the Chicago School of Economics, in the period from 1975-1982 the regime introduced an extremely orthodox neoliberalism to drive economic development (Davis-Hamel). So, Chile, the US, and the UK as role models helped to develop neoliberalism into the dominant global ideology since the 1970s.

Crisis phenomena as catalysts of neoliberal reorganization were particularly visible and felt in cities as sites of industrial centers. Neoliberal policy with its orientation toward open markets and abandoning price controls affected manufacturing by triggering plant closure and deindustrialization. From the 1970s up to the 1990s, cities experienced a deindustrialization and an accompanying economic downturn resulting in high unemployment and dependency on welfare (Bluestone and Harrison; Häußermann and Siebel; Adham). As an effect, many cities felt obliged to adapt to new forms of policy that David Harvey (Harvey) coined as urban entrepreneurialism. Modes of expression were an initially hesitant and then – in many cities – broad transition to neoliberal initiatives. The idea of competition and free markets gained prominence in urban policy. These ideas have a strong economic orientation and include a dismantling of the welfare state and of distributive policies, as well as a transition toward new orthodoxies of policy discourse and practice including fostering individual responsibility, employability, and empowerment. Although it can be argued that these changes work across all spatial scales, the urban scale is particularly central.

Cities are the arena of intensifying competition, new economic initiatives, and conflicts over the locational strategies of transnational corporations, urban marketing, speculative exploitation of the urban built environment, and the reorganization of growth alliances (Heeg). Thus, cities have been *battlegrounds* for establishing new understandings of urban governing in the context of constrained financial possibilities and heightened economic uncertainty.

Although deindustrialization affected cities, cities have also been sites of wealth creation and economic growth in leading economic sectors in the last 30 to 40 years. As space for the FIRE sector (finance, insurances, and real estate) and business services, cities have become nodes of combined processes of global integration and regional concentration of economic activity (Sassen; Storper, and Scott). However, these sectors have been benefiting from trade liberalization, financial deregulation, and market opening – that is, policy measures from the neoliberal tool kit – and contributed to social disintegration, exclusion, and a dramatically uneven spatial development in and between cities (Sassen; Kronauer). Already in the 1980s, cities were places of local economic initiatives to renew growth

from below. Whereas these initiatives often tried to maintain established socio-political orders while fostering new dynamic sectors, from the 1990s on, attacks on traditional alliances and socio-economic initiatives became widespread in order to unleash growth potentials. Cities are now the arena for the privatization of state companies, for security strategies, for a marketization of public services, and for a commercialization of public space as dominant development paths. Parallel to the transformation of the economic pattern, neoliberalism also accompanied a significant reallocation of economic coordination and steering functions, away from the sovereign state down to the regional and urban levels[2] (Brenner). In this sense, both processes – economic regionalization and the rescaling of the state – are embedded in processes of neoliberalization and contributed to an increased importance of cities after Keynesianism and Fordism. Cities are places of change, adaptation, and reform, of conflict and upheaval, and, as such, laboratories of social, economic, and political transformations. They are places where new economic, social, or political ideas are introduced and tested.

Although it seems that these processes have taken place from the 1970s on and are now stabilized, neoliberal reform agendas are not limited in time but represent an ongoing destruction and reshaping of the political-economic space. To avoid analyzing neoliberalism as a "big Leviathan" (Collier), that is a macro-structure, explanatory background, or overriding argument against which other things are understood, it is necessary to apply a place-specific perspective. Neoliberalism is a logic of governing that travels and goes along with different actor networks and diverse political contexts (Ong).

This implies the need to stress neoliberalization as a path-dependent and crisis-driven development (Theodore et al.). As a term, neoliberalization highlights the ongoing changes in urban contexts and policy as attempts to foster neoliberal remedies, but also to develop answers to ongoing contradictions, crisis, and failures in the neoliberal reshaping of the urban situation. There is a deep rift between neoliberal ideology (either Ordoliberal or Chicago style) and its social and economic effects, namely increasing social inequality in more and more countries and cities (Wehler; Brandmeir et al.; Mitchell; Fahmi). However, it is necessary to keep in mind that crisis tendencies and social problems as an effect of neoliberal politics have been handled differently in different places. This *handling* implies distinct attempts to reshape the urban situation and to apply neoliberal measures in order to react to challenges of neoliberal restructuring.

In this respect, "neoliberalism is conceptualized not as a fixed set of attributes with predetermined outcomes, but as a logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts" (Ong 3). Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell offer a stylized attempt to analyze the ongoing transformation of neoliberal experimentation between destructive and creative moments of liberalism. They identify two waves of neoliberal transformation that they dub *roll-back* and *roll-out* neoliberalism ("Conceptualizing"). Rollback neoliberalism was in the period in the 1980s when deregulation and dismantling the welfare state was the dominant form of development. This consisted in an active destruction of the Keynesian welfare and social collective institutions. For Egypt as part of the MENA region, this meant privatizing former state companies, rescinding price controls, ending housing programs, and supervising labor relations and trade unions (Joya; Mitchell; Adham; Cox). Roll-out neoliberalism, in contrast, presupposes that Keynesian institutions have already been forced back and that new

modes of social and penal policy-making is taking place in response to social problems, due to neoliberal restructuring in the wake of neoliberalism (Anderson). This is based on an aggressive reregulation that includes modes of disciplining, but also placing responsibility on individuals ("Space").

While the terms rollback and rollout neoliberalism help to differentiate between phases of neoliberalism, it is also necessary to point to differences between national, regional, and urban neoliberalisms. Regarding urban development in the MENA, it is important to take note of the production of such new spaces as gated communities, malls, and theme parks. These spaces have helped to transform urban economies in a way that mirrors new elite consumption. An example of this is Cairo, where public land was transferred to private ownership and then used to build luxury condominiums, particularly at the edge of the city (Adham). Meanwhile, poor households where forced into an informal expansion of old areas and squatting. As a form of spatialized Egyptian roll-out neoliberalism, there are attempts to clear the city of informal settlements (Amjahid). Components like parks serve to rebuild parts of the city in exclusive zones, excluding the poor and have-nots (Madoeuf). This urban develop-ment and the accompanying politics characterize cities in the MENA where the only options for poor households to acquire a place to live are to squat and/or to build without formal approval. In many cities in the global North, in contrast, informal housing is prohibited and suppressed. The general aim of such strategies is to realize urban regeneration as a spatial economic restructuring of city neighborhoods by reinvesting in disinvested spaces (Porter). The city is to be *reclaimed* from its formerly poor inhabitants and to be given to wealthier households. In this sense, cities in MENA and in the global North are quite similar – but the strategies and contexts for achieving this goal vary.

Outlook

Taken together, neoliberalism is a governing logic that is affecting and shaping cities in the global North and South. Neoliberal policy has travelled around the globe during the last 30 to 50 years. As an effect, cities in MENA are not out of the world, but are exposed to similar measures and policy instruments as cities in the global North. However, several differences have to be taken into account in order to engage in a place-, space-, and time-sensitive analysis. That means being attentive and open-minded about local specificities and political pathways.

Patricia Martin argues that, in many countries in Latin America, military dictatorships and military governments were a precondition for the forced introduction of neoliberalism (Martin). These governments have – quite often violently – eradicated alternative ideas and concepts to handle the economic crisis in countries of the South. It is worth thinking about the relevance of this argument. In Western Europe and North America, that is, the heartlands of neoliberal thinking, governments were elected with the promise to implement neoliberal concepts. Neoliberal policy was adopted in the context of fierce discussions about the right and appropriate way out of economic crisis. However, even in the global North, there are countries where it is disputable whether decisions are democratically legitimated. Examples of this are Greece or Portugal where the Troika (the European Union, International Monetary Fund, and European Central Bank) has succeeded in the context of the European "debt crisis", dictating harsh neoliberal cuts (in pensions, welfare measures, privatization of state enterprises, etc.) (Vaiou). In the MENA, many governments, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates, etc., have been and are still authoritarian regimes. Decisions about urban development and

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economic, labor, and health policy are made under authoritarian rule.

However, not only governments imposed their will; international reform projects, most notably structural adjustment programs, also had a say. The neoliberal economic model was actually extended to countries in MENA through Washington-based developmental institutions, namely, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which offered loans in exchange for neoliberal reforms, most notably, but not only privatization and an end to price controls. Tim Mitchell notes that, in the late 1980s, USAID and the IMF succeeded in imposing restructuring policies that removed price subsidies, privatized state companies, and pushed a policy reorientation toward exports as the solution to the country's economic problems (Mitchell).

Another difference is the influence of international donor and development organizations that introduced *Good Governance* in MENA and other countries of the South. The concept of good governance pushed forward by the World Bank and IMF has contributed to a rescaling of political control and/or to the participation of new actors in order – as was argued – to counter government misrule. Limiting the

state was seen as a precondition for a market-friendly policy and an open economy. Particularly interesting in respect to Good Governance is that, in this understanding, its management requires not just less government, but better government – government that concentrates its efforts less on direct interventions and more on enabling others to be productive – that is, roll-out neoliberalism (Kiely).

In sum, to pay attention to place-related and political differences, it is necessary to be aware of multiple factors and forces contributing to neoliberal urban and national government. Of utmost importance are – this has not been a topic of the paper but should not be underestimated – ambivalences and breaks within actually existing neoliberalism due to protest, unrest, and political contestation (Agathangelou). We see in MENA no pure Ordoliberalism or pure Chicago school neoliberalism, but a mixture of them and constant changes to it. Considering the transitions since 2010 in MENA, it is all the more relevant to be open-minded about the effects of contestations.

Notes

[1] This leaves out other important neoliberal schools and respectively reasoning. Those who are interested in this debate should read (Peck) or (Ptak).

[2] But as well up to the international scale.

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Worlding Cities in the Middle East and North Africa – Arguments for a Conceptual Turn

Raffael Beier

This article suggests analyzing megaprojects in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as worlding practices, hence, as a way to influence emerging countries' own status of being in the world. This analytical lens differs from traditional perspectives that have tried to identify regional particularities such as the influence of Gulf countries and an authoritarian way of planning. Seeing megaprojects as worlding aspirations, instead, helps to see them embedded in a wider global context, stressing the post-colonial and developmental dimension of this significant planning trend. It further allows emphasizing interactions with other urban policies such as slum resettlement.

Keywords: Worlding, Megaprojects, Urban Planning, Urban Policy

Urban renewal, waterfront development, and other mega-projects, as well as the hosting of international events, have emerged as significant characteristics of urban space in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region since the 1990s.[1] Most prominently, the Arab Gulf countries have invested in unprecedented forms of urbanism. This motivated scholars to consider Arab Gulf cities as emerging global cities (Elsheshtawy, "Redrawing Boundaries") following the logics of the "economy of fascination" (Schmid) or the "economy of attention" (Franck).[2] However, mega-projects have also appeared in other parts of the MENA region, where authors such as Barthel, Benlakhlef and Bergel, and Choplin and Vignal have stressed the direct influence of Arab Gulf countries through money, project developers, and images – sometimes even referred to as "Dubaization" (Elsheshtawy, "Dubai").

To explain these developments in the MENA region, authors borrowed concepts from Europe and North America (Hubbard and Hall; Harvey; Swyngedouw et al.), but tried to distinguish an "Arab" form of mega-projects (Barthel). On the one hand, mega-projects were framed as the outcome of a new entrepreneurial urban governance and as an expression

of globalized urban neoliberalism (Barthel and Planel; Hourani; Krijnen and Fawaz; Heeg, this issue). On the other hand, authors highlighted the specific significance of authoritarian regimes as driving forces behind so-called "presidential" or "royal" mega-projects (Barthel 137; Bogaert; Safar Zitoun).

I argue that traditional concepts from the Global North are not sufficient to explain the dynamics of mega-projects in the MENA region. Moreover, regional characteristics may be more comparable to those of other countries of the Global South. Therefore, I suggest a different conceptual perspective, seeing urban mega-projects as distinct features of *worlding* strategies that follow national interests. The concept of worlding cities (Roy and Ong), developed mostly in the Asian context and in response to calls for more southern, post-colonial urban theory (Robinson, "Global and World Cities"; Roy, "The 21st-Century Metropolis"), offers a comprehensive, post-colonial perspective rooted in the Global South itself. As such, the worlding concept goes beyond notions of entrepreneurial planning and urban neoliberalism, taking into account the specificities and unique dynamics of southern urbanism. This includes the notion of post-colonial emancipation (or

"emergence"), discourses about modernization and development, and the strong role of the central state in urban planning. Moreover, seeing mega-projects through the eyes of worlding may make it possible to break with the increasingly questionable conceptual entity of the MENA region. Hence, this conceptualization may be seen as the logical continuity of earlier claims in MENA urban research that sought to turn away from traditional concepts of the "Arab", "Oriental" or "Islamic" city (El-Kazaz and Mazur; Elsheshtawy, "The Middle East City"; Kanna). Stressing the diverse worlding processes within MENA cities helps to see them more closely embedded within global urban dynamics framed under southern urban theory. This could help to ease comparisons with other parts of the world and to overcome regional deadlocks, such as the repeated notion of the regional leading role of Arab Gulf countries. As I will show below, the role of the Arab Gulf countries for mega-projects in other parts of the MENA region is significant, but it is by far not exclusive (Verdeil and Nasr).

Thus, the worlding concept suggests a different perspective that breaks with the notion of *exceptional* MENA cities, seeing them as *ordinary* "cities in a world of cities" (Robinson, "Cities in a World of Cities") –

without being blind to (sub)regional specificities. Therefore, the aim of this article is to use the worlding city concept as a way to integrate MENA cities in discussions on southern urban theory and to inspire comparisons that seek to understand similarities and differences in urban development on a global scale without being bound to regional borders. The article is based on a review of literature and documents on urban mega-project developments in all parts of the MENA region, but with a focus on Morocco and Egypt.

Origins and Characteristics of Worlding

Since the 1980s, new concepts have arisen that refer to the increasing importance of big metropolises within globalized networks of capital. Sassen's *Global City* and Friedmann's *World City Hypothesis* introduced new city hierarchies that conceptualized a few cities of the Global North as the leading control and management nodes of the world economy. However, these concepts created a vast, powerless periphery without any structural relevance, leaving most of the world's cities "off the map" (Robinson, "Global and World Cities"). Malkawi asserts that "the debate over global (world) cities ignores most cities around the world, including Arab cities" (27). Because of that, the global city concept – despite its popularity far beyond

academia (Roy, "Worlding the South") – is inadequate to explain various globalized dynamics that have shaped and transformed emerging cities in the Global South at a much greater speed and to a greater extent than in the Global North (Robinson, "Global and World Cities"; Roy, "Urbanisms, Worlding Practices and the Theory of Planning").

In response to the northern global city concept, Roy and Ong introduced the more qualitative concept of worlding, to emphasize the dynamic and shifting realities of subjective worldviews ("worldliness"). According to Ong, worlding "is linked to the idea of emergence, to the claims that global situations are always in formation" (12). In contrast to the static hierarchies of the global city concept, worlding implies that governments of emerging countries – irrespective of their actual position within global hierarchies – are able to boost their own status in the world by influencing worldviews, pictures, and images. This means that central governments have an increasing interest in city development and branding. Mega-projects and the hosting of international events become tools to project a renewed national image to external tourists and investors, but also to enhance internal political legitimacy. Ong argues that

because of the increasing importance of cities as "centers of enormous political investment, economic growth, and cultural vitality, [major cities in the developing world] thus have become sites for instantiating their countries' claims to global significance" (2).

Hence, the notion of "aspiration" is central. Different from the status of a "global city" derived from the city's *measurable* position in the world economy, worlding means an aspiration of emerging cities to a subjective, constantly negotiated, and changing notion of what is urban world-class. Competition and comparison are therefore central to worlding aspirations – expressed by plenty of city rankings, the competition to have the highest tower or the longest bridge, and the global circulation of presumptive urban world-class features, such as buildings designed by star architects, waterfront developments, green-city blueprints, or skyscrapers. Verdeil (this issue) notes that worlding can also mean the circulation of progressive global planning trends, such as sustainability. However, by the nature of the worlding concept itself, the main objective remains the striving for international attention and recognition – often rather short-termed. Finally, while speed and speculation are distinct elements of worlding

practices, the circulation of values, visions, and money *among* cities of the so-called Global South (and not only from north to south) further questions the hegemony of northern urbanism (Ong; Roy, "Worlding the South"). This seems most relevant for North Africa, where, as noted, the influence of Gulf countries and also China (i.e., in Algeria) is strong.

MENA Cities Aspire to Urban *World-Class*
Research on urban worlding aspirations has ignored the MENA region, with few exceptions (Beier; Haines). This is surprising following Elsheshtawy, who observed that cities "are increasingly being viewed as a product that needs to be marketed" ("The Middle East City" 7) in order to encourage investment and tourism. Likewise, Barthel is convinced that "mega-projects are at the core of contemporary Arab town planning" (133). I argue that seeing these mega-projects as worlding practices offers two main advantages. First, it allows us to see them in relation to similar developments in other parts of the developing world – not only the Arab Gulf – by using a post-colonial perspective. Second, worlding provides a more comprehensive analytical framework that does not see mega-projects as isolated urban planning phenomena, but, in line with Bogaert, as strongly interconnected with

other urban developments, such as shantytown evictions. In fact, I argue that worlding aspirations in most Arab cities are – as in other parts of the developing world – the main drivers behind urban development, including mega-projects, the hosting of mega-events, infrastructural upgrading, and the fight against supposed urban "*eyesores*" such as slums or street markets.

Worlding aspirations become most visible in planning visions and masterplans. In 2009, the General Organization of Physical Planning (GOPP) presented the vision Cairo 2050 as the flagship of a national modernization strategy seeking to boost international competitiveness and to portray national power – clear attributes of worlding. The vision compares Cairo with other "world cities" (GOPP) such as London and Paris, but also Mexico City, Shanghai, and Abu Dhabi – for example concerning the number of green areas per capita, spatial density, and subway network. Existing Cairo is portrayed as a significant, but ill-equipped and disordered developing city that needs Haussmann-like boulevards, luxurious hotel developments, and spatial decentralization to become world-class itself. Undesired existing structures such as the village Nazlet El Seman, located in proxim-

ity to the pyramids, simply disappear from the map. Although officially abandoned in reaction to the uprisings in 2011, the vision has remained present within individual projects, such as the new administrative capital (see also Loewert and Steiner, this issue) that – according to its self-portrayal – should become a "well-planned city", inspired by "the best civic environments from across the globe".[3] The sheer magnitude of Cairo 2050 and the prominent notions of "world-class" aspiration, political emergence, and national (not so much local) power go far beyond the explanatory power of concepts that were classically used to analyze mega-projects in the Global North.

Similar signs of worlding may be found in almost all other MENA countries as well. Concerning Rabat, several infrastructural "upgrading" and urban renewal projects, such as the waterfront development Bouregreg (Amarouche and Bogaert, this issue), aim to project "an image compatible with the status of Rabat as capital and to confer an international dimension by reinforcing the competitiveness of the city" (Mouloudi 231). According to Rabat's urban development plan, the leading urban development objective is to ensure a "*rayonnement digne des grandes métropoles mondiales*" (luminous appeal

of a global city) (AURS 46). Thus, similar to Cairo, the capital should portray Morocco's self-conception as an emerging, powerful, and emancipated nation – a key characteristic of worlding aspirations. Slums – framed as the antithesis of the modern city – obviously do not fit the aspired image of the "world-class" city. Its dwellers have been largely confronted with eviction and displacement (Bogaert 2).

Beyond the externally oriented demonstration of (emerging) national power, circulating global planning trends also shape worlding practices. Thus, fashionable key words such as "sustainable", "green", or "smart" within urban masterplans should *mark* (if not *market*) progression and innovation. However, if related urban projects are not embedded within broader urban planning strategies, their effectiveness in changing realties on the ground remains low. For example, the tramway of Casablanca, built to fight air pollution and traffic congestion, among other reasons, deters these goals, as it has accelerated the displacement of thousands of shantytown dwellers to the unconnected urban peripheries. Other flagship projects such as eco-friendly Masdar City in Abu Dhabi have shifted away from ambitious plans after initial media attention and financial

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support faded (Brorman Jensen; Verdeil, this issue).

Conclusion

There are a couple of general aspects that come out of these MENA-related reflections on worlding. First, the top-down nature of "presidential" or "royal" urban mega-projects that some scholars considered a distinct feature of MENA urbanism is in fact nothing unique. Following the logics of worlding, it is the result of the strong national interest in urban mega-projects, seen as a tool to materialize and portray emergent national power. Thus, second, their related external orientation toward foreign tourists, investors, and politicians can be considered an aspiration to influence the country's own status in the world. The latter is nothing static, but constantly changing and negotiable through comparison and competition among cities and aspects of urban "world-class" around the world – not only through the media, but also as an integral part of planning documents. Finally, these comparisons, as well as the circulating key words of international planning concepts, underline that Arab Gulf countries are not the exclusive reference points for urban planners in the Middle East and North Africa. Hence, using the analytical lens of worlding is helpful to analyze mega-proj-ects in relation to other planning strategies, to stress their post-colonial and modernist dimension, and to overcome the limitations of a questionable regional homogeneity.

Notes

[1] A regional pioneer was the waterfront and new town project *Les Berges du Lac Tunis,* which has been developed jointly by Tunisian and Saudi Arabian investors since 1983.

[2] For an overview, please see the work of Wippel et al.

[3] http://thecapitalcairo.com/vision.html.

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ANTI-THESIS

Arab Sustainable Urbanism: Worlding Strategies, Local Struggles

Eric Verdeil

Unlike many metropolises that use green urbanism as a worlding strategy, Arab cities seem reluctant to embark on ambitious schemes addressing sustainability issues. To explain this situation, the article highlights three arguments. Firstly, as state-led governance prioritizes social stability, existing green plans have been scrapped in the face of political threats. Second, large, allegedly sustainable projects such as Masdar should not hide ongoing unsustainable urbanization features. Thirdly, the dominant framings of sustainability tend to focus on global issues (greenhouse gas emissions and low carbon energy), hence neglecting local claims for sustainability that do not fit into global environmental narratives.

Keywords: **Green Urbanism; Climate Change; Megaprojects; Rentier States; Arab Cities**

Record-breaking summer temperatures in Kuwait in 2016, or in Ouargla in 2018, have made their way to the headlines of the international press. They are echoing frightening predictions by scientists of dramatic climate change making life in Arab and Middle Eastern Cities more difficult or almost impossible in the face of expected burning summers and sea-level rise in maritime cities such as Alexandria.

However, despite such warnings, many clues suggest that Arab national and urban agendas have not really addressed these issues (yet?). It is true, as Elsheshtawy recently pointed, that Arab governments have endorsed the commitment of the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda, with its twofold sustainability understanding of environmental preservation and social inclusion. All have also ratified the 2015 C21 Paris Agreement. However, at the urban level, it is hard to find strategies explicitly focusing on urban sustainability and concrete policies and projects to implement them. For instance, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group includes only three Arab cities: Cairo, Amman, and Dubai. Out of more than 1500 members, the Local Governments for Sustainability Network includes only ten from the Middle East and North Africa, five of them being Turkish.[1] Metropolitan energy and environ-

mental transition initiatives do not seem to abound in Arab cities. How to understand this seemingly paradoxical fact?

Research on urban sustainability around the world has shown that climate change concerns have triggered major changes in urban governance for at least the last fifteen years. This came both as an answer to global calls to implement ecological transitions and as a way to protect and boost metropolitan economies in a time of increased competition and environmental pressures. This encompasses a set of strategies, experiments, and projects whose diversity cannot be discussed here, some of which can be labeled green or sustainable urbanism (Hodson and Marvin; Bulkeley et al.). This is clearly part of worlding practices aiming to draw attention to cities, as well as investments such as megaprojects, big international events, etc. Beier (this issue), following on the work of Roy and Ong, argues that MENA urbanization needs to be understood along these lines, too. But then, why does green urbanism in MENA countries seem to be underdeveloped when in other places, such as Singapore or Cape Town for example, they are at the core of this worlding process?

Answering these questions leads to developing two lines of reasoning. The notion of worlding puts the emphasis on policy transfers and city marketing in a world of metropolises, driven by strong states stressing their economic emergence. Despite international calls for greening policies, I make the hypothesis that in Arab cities, beyond their diversity, a specific urban governance gives precedence to rentier or semi-rentier states' concerns for social stability in return for modern forms of consumption made possible by the distribution of hydrocarbon-based rents. This has undermined attempts at implementing the environmental policies governments adopted to conform to international pressures—with of course some nuances between oil-rich and energy-dependent countries. In addition, it is also necessary to highlight the contradictions among those worlding cities' practices, such as resource-intensive megaprojects and resource-saving policies. In recent years, the Arab Spring mobilizations in many countries have called into question environmental concerns and resulted in postponing them.

As a second point, it is also essential to critically examine the bias of the ecological and energy transition agendas, with their emphasis on climate change mitigation, pushed by international and Western powers (funding agencies for instance). Indeed, they do not acknowledge other ways of constructing and framing policy challenges, where citizens and local governments are more concerned with local constraints and issues than global ones hailed by international conferences (the 2015 C21 Paris Agreement on Climate Change for instance, with its focus on carbon emissions). Defining sustainability is a hugely contested process.

To make both arguments, the article briefly reviews two strands of research that have addressed sustainable urban strategies in several Arab cities. The first is a set of works by Francophone researchers, led by Pierre-Arnaud Barthel, that have collectively explored a series of urban sustainable development experiments in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (Barthel and Zaki; Barthel and Verdeil). Modest and diverse, these experiments have mostly stalled in the wake of the Arab Spring. The second set of literature approaches urban sustainability through flagship megaprojects, the most famous being Masdar City. It has highlighted that beyond strong and greatly mediatized environmental ambitions, such projects illustrate a move toward post-oil economic diversification without overcoming the

contradictions regarding urban sustainability.

A short-lived urban sustainable policies moment

The collective research Pierre-Arnaud Barthel shepherded at the start of the 2010s has brought precious inputs about sustainability in Arab Mediterranean cities (rather than on the Gulf). Researchers addressed urban sustainability as the result of policy transfers involving international aid agencies, aiming at replicating, if not mimicking, the environmental turn of planning policies in (Northern) Europe. However, in contrast to Europe, the states, not the local authorities, took the initiative to introduce sustainability in the local policies. In so doing, they were seeking legitimacy in the eyes of their international partners, and securing grants and loans. They sometimes overplayed the success of their projects locally. Several analyses of Tunisian projects have documented the limits or even contradictions in the implementation of projects deemed sustainable but de facto destroying fragile milieus in the name of enhancing urbanization or tourism (Barthel; Barthel et al.).

At the local level, projects encompassed variegated objects and tools: city development strategies emphasizing sustainable objectives, such as in Sfax (Tunisia) or in Tripoli (Lebanon); introduction of sustainable measures in the building codes and new environmental labels; or eco-neighborhoods or sustainable new tows, for instance in Morocco. The projects were not limited to building and planning; they also included sustainable collective transportation schemes (tramways in Rabat, Casablanca; Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in Amman) as well as policies aiming to save energy and to promote renewable energy (Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco).

These projects have faced a number of issues and triggered resistance. In a context of underdeveloped national legislation, ecobuilding projects implementation in Morocco revealed the over-reliance on imported environmental labels rather than adapting the norms to the local environment and better identifying the needs of the population. As elsewhere, these innovative projects proved difficult for the local administrations to appropriate and to efficiently integrate into wider planning policies. Overall, they remained isolated and limited initiatives, far from representing an alternative approach to ordinary planning and building practices.

The so-called "Arab Spring" protests and uprisings have represented an opportunity for increased resistance to these sustainable projects. As the governments were in a defensive mood against mobilizations targeting them in the name of corruption, authoritarianism, and rising inequalities, they did not hesitate to scrap sustainable projects, at least temporarily, in order to cool the situation. For instance, in Sfax, the closure of a heavily polluting phosphate plant, planned by Ben Ali in response to calls by environmental organizations, has been repeatedly suspended because the local union section rejected the job losses or displacements that would have resulted from the measure (Bennasr et al.). The movements also resulted in a shortening of funds for sustainable projects, both private investments and aid, at a time where social priorities appeared of utmost importance. This explains the stalling of several initiatives. Eventually, political shifts and violence also shelved projects that had been advertised as sustainable, such as in Cairo's West- and Easttown, and all the more in Damascus, where eco-neighborhoods were planned in 2009 (Barthel et al.).

Sustainability in the Masdar-stage of urban development

Other research focused on Gulf sustainable megaprojects and primarily investigated the case of Masdar, the famous

carbon-neutral city in the suburbs of Abu Dhabi, designed by Norman Foster. Launched in 2008, the ecocity Masdar uses brand new technologies in building design, energy management, renewable energy, and water and waste management, as well as innovative transportation technologies. It is intended to become first a lab and then a model for future urbanism in the region and beyond (Reiche). The project indeed became a showroom, as Abu Dhabi also managed to attract the headquarters of the International Renewable Agency and to develop spectacular solar projects connected to the neighborhood. However, the real estate crisis of 2008-09 administered a blow to the project. It was downsized and reprofiled as a more classical real estate project. It did not fulfill its ambitious technological promises, even if the project already represents a strong departure from ordinary planning practices in the region. Altogether the project appears as an element of a wider strategy of economic diversification in the post-oil era, where clean techs and real estate stand at the core of the new green capitalism that has unfolded. Elsheshtawy even dubs the project as "greenwashing" (Elsheshtawy 3).

The contradictions and the limits of the sustainable goals heralded in the policy discourse surrounding Masdar City can be tracked at several levels. Despite comprehensive master plans, such as Abu Dhabi 2030, that include collective transportation and promises of building according to green labels, the massive urbanization that is envisioned remains car-centric and privileges individual sprawling housing for the nationals, both of which can only thrive thanks to massive energy and resources consumption and environmental losses (Elsheshtawy). The political stability of the regime rests on the generous access to resources and a right to individual housing. As Laurence Crot puts it, "the social contract between Abu Dhabi's rulers and the local population constitutes a challenging context for the pursuit of environmental sustainability" (2809).

These critical reflections about the seminal case of Masdar apply to various other similar urban projects, such as in Dubai, Doha, Kuwait City, and Saudi Arabia, with KAEC (Moser et al.) or the latest Neom (Aly, this issue), despite their specificities. Urbanization by mega-projects has spread far beyond the Gulf and oil-rich countries. Mediterranean Arab capitals all have their project(s), sometimes enrobed in sustainable rhetoric, inspired and largely funded by Gulf money (Wippel et al.). New towns in Morocco and in Egypt, with the new Cairo projects (Loewert and Steiner, this issue), illustrate that trend. These sustainable discourses do not hide the capitalist quest to cater to the desires of the upper class, at the expense of the advertised sustainability.

Challenging the framing of urban sustainability

The review of past research on the governance of urban sustainability in this region shows, overall, a lack of ecological concern among policy makers who promote these strategies and projects. Even if the rhetoric of climate change is used in international arenas, this issue is not a strong claim in most cases. Rather, the concerns that drive these strategies and projects relate to the will to address local energy pressures that can be caused by an external vulnerability (for instance, the gas supply threatened by terrorist attacks between Egypt and Jordan after 2011) or internal, because of the strong energy demand everywhere, sometimes met with rolling power cuts (Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria…). This leads to promoting energy efficiency or renewable energy, but also other less sustainable sources (natural gas, nuclear projects, and even oil shale for electricity generation) (Verdeil). The recent drive to

cut subsidies to basic services such as electricity, water, or gasoline can of course serve a sustainable agenda, and it is sold as such to international bodies. However, such moves remain limited (El-Katiri and Fattouh) and reflect more the fiscal constraints these countries are facing than a concern for the environment. In many cases, local issues, such as pollution or congestion, can lead to sustainable strategies or projects that are neither motivated by international calls for ecological transitions, even if they can help to get funding, nor inspired by a worlding strategy. For instance, the sustainable strategy of the city of Sfax in Tunisia owed much to local mobilization against industrial pollution of the coast and the air. Despite its endorsement, its implementation to date has been slow (Bennasr et al.).

In Arab cities, not unlike other emerging economies, states remain everywhere in control of urban governance, leaving at best a minor role to municipal authorities. This applies to urban sustainability governance as well. State power is deployed through infrastructural national utilities and specific agencies created to control urban changes, specifically mega-projects, including so-called sustainable ones (Bogaert). They also increasingly empower private local and foreign investors, while

they leave civic and grassroots actors at the periphery of the game. Noteworthy is the weakness of green and environmentalist parties in urban governance, which comes in stark contrast to metropolitan green coalitions in Europe for instance.

In contrast to the high-tech and exclusive understanding of sustainability promoted by private and state-led coalitions, dissenting groups try to push alternative conceptions of what could be termed urban sustainability—albeit sometimes without using this word. Firstly, urban activists, at times supported by scholars and aid agencies such as GIZ or AFD, have advocated for considering the usually overlooked and disdained sustainability of ordinary urban practices. Cairo is a case in point (Barthel and Monqid) with the emergence of alternative discourses and actions that emphasized the sustainable qualities of informal settlements. Built densely, and thus not wasting land and infrastructural cost-saving, they are often close to the city center and suited for walking. Their dwellers often develop cheap and low-tech solutions for a range of issues. For instance, they use informal collective transport instead of individual cars, saving transportation costs and CO2 emissions. The activists call for in situ rehabilitation and

upgrading instead of destruction and removal to the outskirts (Deboulet).

NGOs, aid agencies, and innumerable academic works dealing with the zabbaleen communities and the recycling of waste in Cairo have particularly emphasized the efficiency of local, informal waste management systems (Florin and Debout). But the Egyptian government has strongly destabilized the system with its privatization policy and the slaughter of pigs in 2009 that the local Christian Coptic population of the zabbaleen areas raised. In many other places, protests over deficient waste management systems confirm this is a primary concern for urban citizens, and activists claim the implementation of alternative policies, for instance in Lebanon, shattered by the huge failure of the waste treatment infrastructure since 2015 (Harb).

Sustainability has become a slogan for international agendas and an option among other worlding strategies that big metropolises and their networks such as the C40 can appropriate and operationally translate. But in Arab cities, the question is rather to understand why such strategies are absent or very limited. At best, high-tech flagships cannot hide the contradictions of the sprawling cities of oil-

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rich countries or of the aspiring upper middle class elsewhere. We need to turn to specific factors like the political economy of (semi-)rentier states and their fragile social contracts. Focusing on global and high-tech oriented sustainability as a worlding strategy might also lead to overlooking claims for local and ordinary sustainable policies that care for the provision of essential services to the majority of urban citizens, at affordable prices, in order to improve everyday life.

Notes

[1] See: http://www.c40.org/cities; http://www.iclei.org/iclei-members/iclei-members.html?memberlistRegion=North+Africa%2C+Middle+East%2C+West+Asia.

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FOCUS

Reshaping Space and Time in Morocco: The Agencification of Urban Government and its Effects in the Bouregreg Valley (Rabat / Salé)

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Since the turn of the new century, urban mega-projects became a new growth strategy in Morocco. Yet, in contrast to their utopian promises, urban mega-projects do not solve the contemporary urban crisis in the region, but reproduce it in different ways. A paradigmatic case is the Bouregreg project in the valley between Rabat and Salé. This article considers the ways in which this megaproject represents a means to extract profits and privatize public wealth, but also how it represents an urban laboratory for the development of new modalities of government, control, and domination. Finally it assesses the social impact of the project on small-scale farmers and private landowners.

Keywords: Morocco, urban government, neoliberalism, new state spaces

Battles are fought against the encroachments of a central authority and state pressure. But we know that the real problems lie elsewhere, that the most important decisions are made elsewhere. (Lefebvre 183)

From the terrace of Café Maure in the casbah of the Oudayas, one can enjoy the panoramic view of the Bouregreg Valley (figure 1). The 12th-century citadel is built on the rocky shore where the Bouregreg River flows out into the Atlantic Ocean between the Moroccan capital Rabat and its neighboring city, Salé. Especially on summer evenings, the riverbanks look full of life. Jet-skiers are taking off, men are fishing, families are strolling along the quay, teenagers are diving in the water, and ferrymen take you across the river from one shore to the other.

The valley is surrounded by the remains of Morocco's rich past: the casbah, the Hassan Tower, the Mohamed V mausoleum, the medinas of Salé and Rabat, and further into the valley, the Chellah, a fortified medieval necropolis. Each one of these sites has become an important tourist attraction. Yet, the estuary attracts not only tourists, but also real estate investors. A whole new urban center is arising on the shore of Salé right across the casbah, with

Figure 1: View on Bouregreg

1,700 new residential units, a new marina, luxury hotels, retail facilities, bars, and restaurants. La Marina Morocco, as its Abu Dhabi developer Eagle Hills calls it, has become a new luxury hub for living, leisure, and entertainment. But that's not all. A new bridge (Pont Moulay Hassan) now connects the two riverbanks. Together with two tramlines, a tunnel underneath the casbah, and a brand-new belt highway further along the valley, these state-of-the-art infrastructures improve mobility between two cities plagued by traffic congestion.

The most remarkable feature of the valley's transformation so far is situated right behind the bridge. The ongoing construc-

tion of the Grand Theatre, designed by the late "starchitect" Zaha Hadid, will become Rabat's newest landmark. The fluid sculpture form of the theater, inspired by the movement of the river itself, symbolizes the capital's own aspiration for a "Guggenheim effect" (Rodríguez et al). It is the cornerstone of an urban renaissance that aims to turn a dull administrative city into a top-notch cultural destination – for now, at least. Only a few hundred meters from the construction site of the theater, billboards already announce another landmark endeavor: The Mohamed VI Tower, a 55-storey skyscraper. The deal to build Africa's tallest tower, which was announced in the summer of 2017, is a multimillion dollar partnership between

the Moroccan real estate company Travaux Généraux de Construction de Casablanca (TGCC), headed by Othman Benjelloun, one of Morocco's most influential entrepreneurs, and China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC).

These future material icons of showcase urbanization are part of a long-term project that stretches fifteen kilometers inland along the Bouregreg River up to the barrage Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah. Launched in January 2006, the Bouregreg project encompasses a territory of six thousand hectares and will be developed in six different phases (figure 2). The first two phases are currently underway.

The developments in Bouregreg Valley are a salient example of a broader process of economic and political transformation that embodies the reign of King Mohammed VI ever since his accession to the throne in 1999. Under his impetus, the launch of urban megaprojects and large-scale infrastructural works came to characterize a new development strategy, an "urbanism of projects" (Cattedra) or a "new culture of projects" (Barthel and Zaki), trying to link networks of investment capital in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East and if possible Asia and the United States. This new development strategy

should also be situated within larger entrepreneurial shifts in which megaprojects become the cornerstones of the current spatial re-organization of globalization (Brenner and Theodore; Harvey; Massey). Mega-projects are considered key for the commercial redevelopment of urban centers and the promotion of the city's "unique selling position", both in the Global North (Flyvbjerg) and the Global South (Ren and Weinstein), and more specifically the Arab region (Wippel et al.).

What matters here are not just the material changes in the urban landscape, but also how these projects reveal new political practices and agency that materialize in the interplay between global capitalism and local places such as Rabat and Salé. Cities like Rabat, but also Casablanca and Tangiers, became the privileged vehicles of economic regeneration and capital accumulation, as well as testing grounds for the re-invention of (authoritarian) politics and urban government (Bogaert). In other words, the transformation of the Moroccan city tells a broader story about the transformation of politics, the state, and the economy within a context of globalization and neoliberal reform.
In this article, we question some of the promises and logics behind Morocco's urbanism of projects. One the one hand,
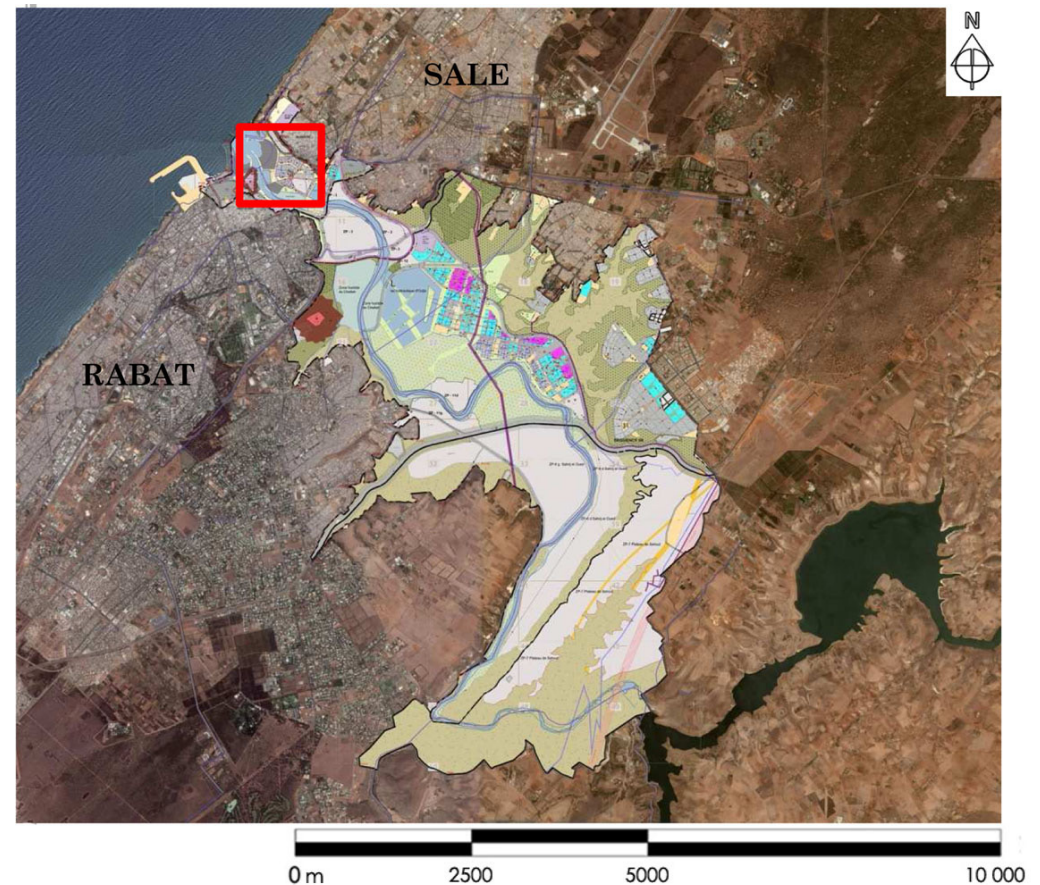
Figure 2: The Bouregreg Project

they can be a site for the production of new political imaginaries, future aspirations, and expectations of social justice (Strava). But more often, they produce new forms of social exclusion and feelings of marginalization. Our examination first analyzes the new institutional and govern-

mental arrangements that emerged within the context of the Bouregreg project. Second, we want to draw attention to the expectations and concerns of some of the people who live in the valley and reflect on their relations with the project.

This article is based on joint ethnographic fieldwork and expert interviews with officials and other stakeholders conducted in April and July 2018. It also draws on findings from earlier fieldwork between 2007-2013 (Koenraad) and 2014 and 2018 (Maryame).

New state spaces and ad hoc urbanism in the Moroccan capital

To realize the Bouregreg mega-project, the Moroccan authorities created a new institutional model of state power: the Agency for the Development of the Bouregreg Valley. Law 16-04, which created the agency in November 2005, gives the agency exclusive authority over the project within its legally defined territorial boundaries (the six thousand hectares). Within that territory, local governmental entities such as the prefectures, the local municipalities, and the Rabat-Salé Urban Planning Agency are effectively sidelined. The Bouregreg Agency is authorized to develop zoning plans, organize public inquiries, provide public infrastructure, allocate land for construction, deliver construction permits, regulate all deeds of sale, and expropriate private land deemed necessary for the advancement of the project. All state-owned land was transferred to the agency free of charge.

The agency functions as a quasi-state within a state.

This particular form of neoliberal statecraft is a salient example of what Neil Brenner has termed "new state spaces" (Brenner). It implies not just a rescaling of state power (i.e., from the national to the urban scale), but also a whole new assemblage of power by which foreign actors are integrated in the decision-making process. The Bouregreg Agency operates as an intermediary between various investors from around the world and the Moroccan context. It not only attracts investors such as the Abu Dhabi investor Eagle Hills (first phase) and the sovereign wealth fund Wessal Capital[1] (second phase), it also gives them decision-making power. As a semi-public entity, the Bouregreg Agency is allowed by Law 16-04 to set up private enterprises and create joint ventures with private investors. Not surprisingly, plans, goals, and strategies are adapted regularly within the institutional and legal framework of the project in order to better serve the interests of foreign investors.

Three examples can be given. First, before the official launch of the project, a Royal Commission assembling all kinds of experts and policy-makers drafted a 165-page plan that can still be consulted on the official website of the Bouregreg project. Especially the first phase, now La Marina Morocco, was worked out in detail and the Commission anticipated the construction of a central, open, and green public space in front of the medina of Salé, where inhabitants of both cities could come together, stroll, and picnic. It was important, the commission stated, that the new public place would be "planned with less density than the shore of Rabat to allow a larger variety of uses by the population of the city" (Royaume du Maroc 40). Eventually, as an official of the Bouregreg Agency admitted, the whole plan was revised and the building site was densified to increase the profitability of the private investor.[2] Where they once planned a public park, there is now a gated community.

Another example can be given with regard to the second phase. Originally, this phase was going to be developed by Sama Dubai, before it defaulted in 2008 due to the financial crisis. Sama Dubai had planned a luxurious residential islet that was dubbed Amwaj (the waves) and subdivided – Venetian style – into smaller waterways. Residents would be able to reach their villas by boat. The Amwaj project was eventually replaced by the Grand Theatre, financed by public money, while

a new investment fund was contracted (Wessal Capital) to urbanize the zone around it. What is striking, however, is that several officials of the Agency confirmed to us that the partnership with Sama Dubai was a mistake from the very beginning. The all seemed to agree that Morocco did not need megalomaniac Dubai-style residential projects like The World or Palm Jumeirah. Some of these officials were relieved that it had failed. When we then asked one of them why the agency had accepted the deal with Sama Dubai in the first place, despite the seemingly general consensus that it was a bad idea, he answered, "Well, what do you do when somebody comes with a check for two billion dirhams."[3]

A final example relates to the later phases, which are still in their conceptual phase. Again, according to officials from the Agency, several factors (i.e., considerable delays in the first two phases, the saturation of the real estate market, and the opposition of small landowners) played a role in the decision – for now – to plan the urbanization of these phases for the long term, in partnership with local inhabitants and with less density than originally planned. Nevertheless, a lot can change in the future, as an official stated:

In ten years we can always revise the urban development plan (*plan d'aménagement*). For example, because of the demographic pressure. For now, it's the current plan that works for us. But you never know whether there will be new opportunities. It's the market actually that dictates the planning.[4]

Urban planning and government are thus subject to fluctuations in the market and become more accountable to investors than to the citizens who actually live in the zones under development. Even if local governments in a country such as Morocco were to become more democratically accountable, democracy itself has been short-circuited by institutional arrangements like the Bouregreg Agency. Authority in the Bouregreg Valley is thus the result of a particular relational configuration between local, regional, and international actors (Allen). This does not mean that power and authority are slipping away from the traditional power center in Morocco (the regime, the monarchy), only that central state power has been reconfigured and reassembled so that it is now entangled, negotiated, and shared with other forces (e.g. Gulf capital) to pursue common interests within a rapidly changing global context.

As a result, urban planning in the valley seems to evolve quite ad hoc, answering to specific – but also contingent – market problems and solutions. In an interview with an official of the Urban Agency of Rabat-Salé, which is responsible for the coordination of urban planning in the whole metropolitan area, he lamented, "The Wilaya (the governorate) does its best to assure a coherent vision (on urban planning), but how do we reconcile this with the Bouregreg Agency, which seems to escape from everything. It's really another country"[5].

The Bouregreg Agency is not an exception. For each specific development problem there seems to be the need to create a specific governmental entity or new state space. Over the past two decades, we have seen the establishment of several similar state agencies within the domains of urban planning, industrialization, tourism, etc.. Some examples are the Marchica Med Agency in Nador, Casablanca Finance City Authority, and Tanger Med Special Authority. There seems to be a general strategy to take all large development projects and government dossiers out of the hands of conventional and elected state government institutions in favor of an "agencification" of public policy (García and Collado) and the increas-

ing dominance of "technocratic structures" loyal to the palace (Hibou and Tozy). This has been a trend not only in Morocco, but also in many different urban development settings all around the world (Ong). Moreover, urban mega-projects, such as in the Bouregreg Valley, also symbolize a fundamental shift in Moroccan authoritarianism. Whereas Hassan II ruled with an iron hand during the *Years of Lead* (*les années de plomb*), Mohammed VI seems to rule via holdings, funds, and specialized state agencies (Bogaert).

Stuck between different "*times*": life in a valley under construction

The following analysis of our field notes does not strive to be exhaustive, only to point out some aspects of the social impact of the project that are not obvious at first glance. While others have focused on those populations that were directly affected by La Marina Morocco, the first and most advanced phase of the Bouregreg project (Mouloudi), we want to draw attention to those people living in areas that are not yet under development. More specifically, we focused on the small farmers, gardeners, and other inhabitants of Oulja, a large agricultural plain and wetland integrated in phase three of the project, and the people of Sidi Hmida in the district of Hssain in phase five. Our goal is

not to map the conditions of the entire population affected by the project, only to reframe the agency's own promoted values of citizenship (*citoyenneté*) and sustainable city planning.

It's important to know that between the launch of the project in 2005 and the publication in 2009 of the *Plan d'Aménagement Spécial* (PAS), a complete zoning plan for the valley, the Bouregreg Agency suspended all private (land) transactions except those done by the agency itself. After the publication of the PAS, no land can be sold or bought without the permission of the agency. Legally, the agency also has the authority to expropriate any private land within its designated zone at a fixed price determined by the value of the land in 2005. This creates a particular situation. Those who still own private land in the valley cannot really bring that land into the market. Land prices are de facto locked by the Bouregreg Agency.

The agency explains this as follows: as a financially autonomous semi-public entity, the agency's business model depends on revenue generated in the first phase to finance the second phase, and so on. In other words, the Bouregreg Agency depends on the surplus value created on public land and/or expropriated land in

one phase in order to advance to the next phase. This revenue model is by its very character a gradual process. One cannot market all available land at once, because that would create oversupply and possibly a rapid fall in land prices.

From the point of view of the inhabitants who live in those areas still "under development", this produces an uncomfortable standstill. While the direct impact of the megaproject is clear-cut and visible for those people who live in the surroundings of La Marina Morocco (e.g. through expropriation, gentrification, the privatization of public space, etc.), it is much less so for those who live deeper in the valley. This doesn't mean, however, that they are less affected. All they seem to be able to do is wait for the project to arrive. In the meantime, they cannot really get on with their lives. Most of them don't know what will be in store for them. Many people we talked to, especially in Oulja, told us that they were left completely in limbo.

During one of our visits to Oulja, we met with the owner of a small tree nursery. He took over the business from his parents and had lived in the valley all his life. But since the launch of the project, he doesn't really know what the future will bring. Will he be able to stay? Will his tree nursery

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have a place in the project? Or will he have to leave?

I cannot even plant extra trees to expand my business, because the agency wouldn't allow it and I wouldn't be compensated for the extra trees if the moment comes that they expropriate me.

The price he would get for his land was fixed at 250 Moroccan dirhams per square meter, less than 25 euros.

With that kind of money you cannot find something suitable in the city. Besides, I don't want to live in the city. I want to keep my tree nursery. But where else will I find a plot of land this close to the city and this fertile? Not for the price we'll get. There are no other lands in the proximity of Rabat where you can dig up water at five or six meters.[6]

But not everybody living in this area is a private landowner. We also met with a family of peasants who cultivated Habous land in the valley.[7] They have already been there for several generations. The head of the family had worked the land all his life and now he shared it with his seven sons and their families. "This is *Ard Jdidna* (land of our grandparents) and we don't want to

leave this place".[8] However, all Habous land was taken over by the Bouregreg Agency, and the family did not know what was going to happen to them once their land would be subject to development. They told us that the Ministry of Habous even stopped accepting the families' rent for the usufruct of the land. Their fate was now in the hands of the agency, they felt.

Power inequality and social hierarchy can be understood here through the different use and experience of time. The Bouregreg Agency has time. Time that many of the inhabitants of the valley do not have. Thus, the agency and the inhabitants of the valley are operating in different time frames, with one side dictating a particular time schedule conforming to its own interests, while the other side tries to cope with that schedule's effects of uncertainty and distorted temporality. It's logical that a megaproject of the magnitude of the one in the Bouregreg Valley unfolds over a timespan of several years and even decades. Moreover, given its revenue model, it is obliged to take the time necessary to anticipate (better) market opportunities and developments. In the meantime, the inhabitants might be – quite literally – stuck there for another five years, maybe ten, who knows, even fifteen before the project reaches their spot.

People like the owner of the tree nursery or the small peasant family feel that they cannot go somewhere else, but at the same time, they also feel they cannot really build a life in the valley, either. On every issue, for example building permits, renovation permits, electrification, access to water or sewerage, they have to deal with the Agency. Actually, many inhabitants in the area lack access to drinking water and have no connection to the sewage system. But given their "temporary status" within the timeframe of the project, the agency does not seem to be willing to provide these people with what they need. Many inhabitants feel powerless.

When we address the caid or the mqaddem (the local authorities),[9] they all say that we have to talk to the agency," another of our interlocutors told us. Many feel that there is not much they can do. "Fighting against the agency is like fighting the ocean. You cannot stop it.[10]

Not everybody in the valley, however, resigns himself to the omnipotence of the Bouregreg Agency. In Rabat and especially Salé, associations such as Sala Al Mustaqbal, Ribat Al Fath, and Association Bouregreg have tried to negotiate with or put pressure on the Bouregreg Agency, albeit not always successfully (for more

details see Mouloudi). This fits within a longer history of substantial growth of associational life in Morocco, more particularly in cities, and especially since the 1990s when the Monarchy allowed more political scope for maneuvering and tried to reconfigure its relations with a growing urban middle class (Abouhani).

Also in Sidi Hmida (integrated in phase five), a neighborhood that experienced an influx of urban middle-class and even upper-class residents in recent decades (Amarouche), inhabitants have organized to influence the direction of the project. At first sight, social class status and personal networks seem to make a difference here, unlike with the inhabitants of Oulja.[11] When people in Sidi Hmida heard about possible scenarios for their zone, some of them, mainly those with a middle class background, founded an association. One of the members of the association, who used to work for the Ministry of Agriculture and now owns two tree nurseries, stated that they actually managed to convince the Bouregreg Agency to redraft a new master plan for their specific zone. "It was thanks to this association, which was founded mainly by public executives, physicians, and army colonels, that we managed to put pressure on the agency to change her plans".[12] Moreover, although

his personal situation was in many ways similar to some of the people we met in Oulja (he could not sell his property and the agency could still always expropriate him), he seemed much less pessimistic about the future.

It's true we are governed by the agency, the municipality has no business here. But that doesn't bother me. The agency is better organized. It's easier to talk to them than with a bureaucratic state apparatus (…). The agency consists of serious people. Much more competent than those at the municipality.[13]

Time, space and the broader political significance of urban planning in Morocco
Urban planning can serve as an interesting lens to understand changing relations between citizens and political authority, including by producing different temporalities. A mega-project such as the Bouregreg project produces a particular temporality influenced by schedules, plans, market demand, delays, etc. and by expectations of (future) profit and value. But due to the particular legal situation created by Law 16-04 and the specific characteristics of ad hoc urbanism, the project enforces a quite different experience of time upon the actual inhabitants

of the valley, who are, to be clear, not considered part of the project. Their time experience is reduced to a condition of waiting (for the advancement or delay of the project), often with limited possibilities for a way out. If the whole purpose of the Bouregreg project is to create a form of "progress" – based on promises of economic growth, better infrastructure, environmental protection, and even the protection of historical heritage – the particular situation in which the inhabitants of the valley are kept actually precludes their very efforts to make progress in life.

This is closely related to a broader political significance. The changing nature of contemporary Moroccan politics is hidden within the relational complexes of power that produce urban mega-projects such as the Bouregreg project. In the process, the city itself is turned into a privileged vehicle for capital accumulation and speculation, while at the same time, decision-making processes are breaking loose from more conventional political entities. The process of agencification in Morocco entails that decisions about the future city, and hence, also about the future of millions of urban citizens, have been increasingly concentrated in exceptional governmental zones like the Bouregreg Valley and entrusted to

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new state agencies that share power with and are made accountable to global capital, resulting in decisions made *elsewhere*, outside the scope and boundaries of the national state or the regime.

The Bouregreg Agency, as a new state space, involves a deeply political move to dispossess both public and private land and bring the Valley into the global circulation of capital in a way private investors could never do on their own. Massive public funds are mobilized for infrastructural improvements (the bridge, the tunnel, the tramway, etc.) and for the creation of new landmarks (the Grand Theatre), most likely to improve primarily the attractiveness and profitability of urban land and real estate projects.

Yet, will these efforts also benefit the majority of citizens in Rabat, Salé, and their outskirts? The truth is that the Bouregreg mega-project is not just a wasteland being renovated, developed, and/or preserved, as it is often presented in official communication. It represents the creation of a globalized space, one that opens up and reaches out to the rest of the world, i.e., to foreign investors, tourists, and cosmopolitan consumers, while at the same time drawing new social, economic, political,

and spatial boundaries between those who can afford it and those who cannot.

Notes

[1] The multinational fund consists of Moroccan capital and money from several Gulf countries.

[2] Personal Interview, September 2013.

[3] One Euro corresponds to approximately 10 to 11 Moroccan dirhams, Personal Interview, April 2018.

[4] Personal Interview, April 2018.

[5] Personal Interview, July 2018.

[6] Field notes, July 2018.

[7] Habous is an Islamic legal institution of religious mortmain property. The property is administered by the Ministry of Habous. Usufruct can be granted to farmers, for example, often in return for a form of rent.

[8] Field notes, July 2018.

[9] The caid and the mqaddem are representatives of the Ministry of the Interior on the city and local neighborhood level. They are part of a parallel power structure in Morocco, loyal to the Monarchy that exists alongside elected government bodies.

[10] Field notes, July 2018.

[11] This is our hypothesis based on preliminary fieldwork. More empirical work needs to be done.

[12] Personal Interview, July 2018.

[13] Personal Interview, July 2018.

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Qom after Islamic Neoliberalism: A Narrative of the City in Limbo

Kamaluddin Duaei

Despite its classically appreciated rank in the constellation of the Shia world and its key but contentious role in the politics of modern Iran, Qom has been one of the least-researched cities of the country. Especially taking into account the arch-structures of capitalist political economy and the undercurrents of middle-class consumerism, this study aims at building up a critical, materialist take on the neo-liberal politics of Qom, particularly with regard to the developments of the last decade. It argues that recent trends in the urban formation and municipal policy of Qom betray the historical image they pretend to sustain and the ideological ideals they seem to pursue.

Keywords: Qom, Neoliberalism, Shia, Urbanism, Hedonism

"Church and morality say: 'a generation, a people destroys itself through vice and luxury'. My *restored* reason says: when a people is destroyed and becomes physiologically degenerate, this *leads* to vice and luxury." (Nietzsche 177)

Introduction

The British diplomat and traveler Sir Robert Ker Porter, who in the early 19th century had trekked through Iran, wrote of the city of Qom as "one of the most desolate-looking places… that imagination could have pictured" (374-375). In his inspection, "the most conspicuous objects" were "old houses falling into rubbish, crumbling mosques, and other edifices, all tumbled into heaps, or gradually mouldering down to that last stage of decay" (375). Qom, on the whole, would strike one as nothing but a "large straggling wilderness of ruins" (375). John Ussher, another Londoner who travelled through Iran around half a century later, this time "solely for purposes of pleasure and amusement" (v), found himself similarly unsettled by "devious and tortuous streets lined by half-ruined and dilapidated houses" (607) when visiting Qom. "A mass of ruins," he expands on the description, where "the buildings, both public and private, were neglected, dilapidated,

and decayed" (608). Twenty years later, Edward Stack, an Englishman working for the British civil service in Bengal and traversing Iran in 1881, wrote of this town as "shrouded in a haze of heat and dust" (136-137). The colonial functionary observes, "no place in Persia left on me such a profound impression of loneliness and melancholy as Qum" (136).

The single spectacle that disrupted this disconsolate conception, the sole exception to the rule of the Orientalist deprecating Qom, was the *Haram*, the holy shrine of *Hazrat-e Ma'soumah*. Ussher writes that "its gilded dome was visible for a long distance" while approaching the city, "glittering brightly in the sunbeams" (607). The dome "shone bright in the morning sun" for Stack (135), too. It in fact caught the eyes of every other alien visitor (Price 26; Wills 387; Cresson 137). The shrine appeared to Ussher as "a modern building" (607), while William P. Cresson, an American architect and diplomat, called it "one of the finest specimens of religious architecture in Persia" (139).

Twenty years ago, when I was a ten-year-old boy living in Qom, although the city did not seem ruinous in the sense described by voyagers, it still had conserved its tone of monotony. It so far

seemed to offer, in the words of Edward Stack, "plenty of religion" (139). Yet, for a generation that in the utmost innocence of its childhood under traditionalism was abruptly exposed to the joys and glitz of modern lifestyles, mostly through soap operas and commercials newly disseminated by Iranian TV, Qom was beginning to look unsatisfactory. And the shrine of Hazrat-e Ma'soumah was actually a rare place where one could enjoy a variegation of sight, praying and purifying the soul under the infinite, refulgent exchange between chandeliers and mirrors encompassing the halls and the mausoleum.

Subsequently, I lived for fifteen years in Mashhad, another decidedly religious city in the country, and then moved to Tehran to study North American Studies for three years there. I returned to Qom three years ago and I found myself in a city that in many senses shared nothing but its name with the Qom I had left two decades ago. And it peculiarly began to present connotations that a graduate of American Studies could not help curiously noticing. What was it with the place that brought forth the offspring of the most anti-American revolution of the past half-century and now seemed so grotesquely Americanized? Why was a town historically treasured for religious traditionalism

and moral asceticism now, at least in part, in such a materialistic panic lest it lag behind the demeanors of cosmopolitan consumerism? How could Islam and capital be worked out so placidly next to one another?

Poles apart from a naïve nostalgia, I was genuinely touched by the urgency of the matter, as I faced it throughout as a Qomi citizen, an insider living it and hoping to delve behind the bizarre surface in order to realize the situation and its inconsistencies. Therein lay the rub: despite its classically appreciated rank in the constellation of the Shia world, its key role in the turbulences that led to the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, and its contentious relevance since the establishment of Islamic Republic, Qom was one of the least-examined cities of modern Iran. Aside from some quantitative studies of narrowly defined cases and historical surveys pertinent to theological, juristic movements or particular personalities and places, no thought seemed to be given to the way the materiality of Qomis' way of life and the immaterial hermeneutics of their unconscious could be connected to, most significantly, the arch-structures of the capitalist political economy and the undercurrents of middle-class consumerism.

Indeed, neither these examples nor other inquiries that have addressed Qom in their introductions or, have sought to deal with *matters* before or beyond ideas, with materialities preceding or even circumventing mindful beliefs and ideational dynamics, but rather have mostly striven to find out and reveal how reformists, conservatives, modernists, reactionaries, etc. have evolved through chains and networks of *ideas* (Axworthy; Dabashi; Rajaee). So, besides my three years of lived experiences and field observations, I had no one by my side but Alexis de Tocqueville, Lewis Mumford, and Fredric Jameson. To the degree that materiality is given priority, odds are higher that orientalist exoticizations around ideas and beliefs that are so natural to the local consciousness but peculiar to the other's mind can be avoided. As much as Qom looked American, a critical discussion of its material spaces seemed sensible and seemed more plausible to be made sensible to the non-Iranian audience. Dichotomies such as Western vs. Islamic, or modern vs. traditional, no longer apply to the situation: one is sociologically enthused to divulge the traditional within the modern and the American within the Iranian, to decipher the Islamic capital and untangle neoliberal Shi'ism. This is perhaps the first attempt to adopt a subjec-

tive-interpretive methodology and the first materialist treatment of Qom: scrutinizing what Pierre Bourdieu determines to be "the material of a social psychoanalysis", whereby "ordinary choices of everyday existence, such as furniture, clothing or cooking" can reveal "deep-rooted and long-standing dispositions" (*Judgement of Taste* 77).

Islamicized Neoliberalism: Unfolding of a Gilded Age

For the last ten years, two sets of economic upheaval have shaken things in Qom up: first, the general surrender to neoliberal capitalism on the level of central government, marked by "liberalization, deregulation, privatization, depoliticization and monetarism", universalizing "a new market-centric 'politics'" by shrinking the state's responsibilities and unleashing "market forces wherever possible" (Mudge 704-705). This can be seen, in the most primary approach, where poorer parts of Qom are municipally abandoned to their urban adversity, while richer areas egregiously prosper on a daily basis. Second, and very much in a causal relation with the former factor, the recent proliferation of new-rich and super-rich publics and correspondingly their idiosyncrasies of consumption, which have colonized the attention and enflamed the desires of the

masses, making upward growth exclusively a matter of commodity coquetry (Forrest, Koh and Wissink). The money that has been channeled into the hands of these neo-plutocrats, particularly in Qom, came from "waves of speculative bubbles" (Kotz and McDonough 112), most significantly in the real estate market. The latter aspect is manifested in the accretion of shopping/consuming means and places anywhere riches have been accumulated. As a predictable result of these two strands, gentrification is the urban strategy ruling over Qom's development and therefore the "consummate expression" (Smith, "Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy" 446) of its neoliberal urbanism. As much as the material junction between Qom and capitalist cities is concerned, Neil Smith in fact deserves reference in deeming this phenomenon "a thread of convergence between urban experiences in the larger cities of what used to be called the First and Third Worlds" (441).

Distinctive of Qom in this pattern is the way religion, i.e., Shiite Islam, as both an element of socio-cultural identity rooted in history and a project politically defined, developed, and deployed by the nation-state, has complicated and mystified the state of affairs. In this regard, the city constantly holds those in charge of it, or influ-

ential in its policies, in a dilemma of dualism: although being the last bastion of religious purism entails exertions to keep specific elements near their past, traditional status, the need to market the city for the global tourist/consumerist taste, and hence the urge to modernize, prettify, and gentrify in accordance with the latest standards of urbanism makes "all that is solid melt into the air, all that is holy profaned". The result being an implicit spiritualization, or as Cihan Tuğal observes, "molecular Islamization" of the neoliberal economic discourse ruling over urban policies, without which the latter could not be sustained (55). The message is sent *nolens volens* that "Islam is compatible with a Western-influenced, consumption-driven lifestyle" (Atia 64), in which "Islamic knowledge, performances, and selves are more and more mediated through increasingly commoditized cultural forms and spaces" (Gökariksel and McLarney quoted in Atia 95). One may assume that the development of Islamic research institutes paralleling the proliferation of shopping centers and leisure places, mostly in central parts of the city, and their shared practitioners and practices despite their contradictions, is a manifestation of this tendency.

Additionally, as the religious capital of the country, Qom is too close to Tehran, the secular capital of Iran. However, until ten years ago, the former was disallowed from growing like the latter. This began to change a decade ago: an explosion of pleasure-taking Mammonism allowed Qomis who could afford it to imitate Tehran: Qom was exposed to Tehranization, so to speak, as its window to the cosmopolitan, neoliberal experience of urban life. Inspected from this angle, recent developments in Qom can be contextualized in the broad-spectrum trend branded and vastly scrutinized as the neoliberalization of Muslim and Persian Gulf cities. Pathologically quite analogous to the Cairo's upper-class arousal after the *Infitah* (openness) policy, in which an "increasing infatuation and fantasy with Western, particularly American, ways of life, an urban Occidentalism" (Adham 135) has led to "the construction of a new hybrid, globalized Americano Mediterranean lifestyle" (Denis 49), to "McFalafel" as "a metaphor for the neoliberal promise in Egypt" (Peterson 196). Akin to Amman under neoliberalism, in which the city has been "obliged to create the right milieu, a competitive business climate, and first-class tourist attractions in order to lure people to live, invest, and be entertained in them"

(Daher 46) aThings are similar in the Arab arena all around.

The accumulation of these processes has resulted in a Gilded Age, resembling physiognomies of *fin-de-siècle* American metropolitan areas. Virtually, two "dangerous classes", the very poor and the very rich have been engendered and established (White 793), with a newcomer, *petit-bourgeois* middle class in between, whose main objective is to demarcate itself "as sharply as possible from the working classes" (Hobsbawm 181).

Rich and Poor across Spaces: The Miracle of the Withered River

Geographically, the segregation of classes inside Qom seems seamless. A channel, historically known as the river of Qom but now turned into motorways, cuts through the city from the northeast, touches the shrine at the midpoint, and leads the way to the southwest. It has practically facilitated this spatial segregation. The upper side of the river, generally known as *Niroogāh* (the power plant) but encompassing much greater areas than the historical region called Niroogāh, houses the poor, precarious population, most of whom are immigrants, and is ever expanding as a result of new waves of immigration. It displays the least refined infrastruc-

tural, environmental, municipal features of the city: a pathetic quasi-urban, semi-rural landscape, "occupied by sub-proletarian dwellers who arrived from the villages but never quite made it into the town" (Derluguian 57).

On the lower part, from the middle areas toward the southeast, including the *Bājak, Ammār-e Yassir, Somayyeh*, and *Resālat* neighborhoods, the population belongs to the old middle class and newer lower middle class, although mostly consisting of native Qomis. From *Payāmbar-e A'zam Boulevard* toward *Jomhouri-e Eslāmi* Boulevard, down to *Ensejām Street* and *Shahrak-e Shahid Zeynoddin* (also known as the *Bonyād* region), multistory, mass-produced apartment buildings mushrooming everywhere signify the existence of a newly fledged middle class. And last in this inquiry, the neighborhoods of *Attārān, Shahid Sadouqi* (also known as *Zanbil-Ābād*), *Muhammad-e Amin Boulevard*, and *Sālārieh* epitomize the wealth of the nation.

Complying with the global fabric of "our neoliberal urban age", Qom has pathologically been spatially split into two halves: a parasitic half, comprised of the two upper economic strata, ruled by "a non-working yet… consuming elite"

(Merrifield 110), "where the most rabid activity is the activity of rabidly extorting land rent, of making land pay anyway it can", whereas most non-parasitic, generative activities have been dispatched to the other half, involving "dirt and grime… dirty and grimy people" (111). Even a random walk in the city reveals that the most perceptible basis of difference between Sālārieh and Niroogāh lies in what Pierre Bourdieu calls "the opposition between the tastes of luxury (or freedom) and the tastes of necessity" (*Judgement of Taste* 177). Jobs in the poor neighborhoods of the upper side, i.e., *Qal'e Kāmkār, Shād-Qoli Khān*, and *Sheikh-Ābād*, are mostly excruciating, like well-digging, construction labor, waste-collecting, and scrap metal working, auto garages and repairing, window frame and sash construction, and so on. Homes in this region are typically limited to two- or single-story buildings, presenting unrefined, sketchy architectures, and all too often lacking any façade. Everything there has stopped at the pre-luxury, pre-show-off level. The middle class of the lower middle parts live in multistory condominium buildings that, although they sometimes present design extravagance on their façade, provide nothing inside but a kind of dormitory suburban life. Most of the people who live here are small shopkeepers, teachers, civil

servants, bureaucrats, and white-collar workers.

In Zanbil-Ābād, Amin Boulevard, and Sālārieh, there are plenty of banks, language schools, beauty parlors, cosmetic stores, health clubs, chic restaurants, interior design and decoration services, bedding and wedding and layette emporiums, and dozens of malls encompassing mostly boutiques, lifestyle, and bric-à-brac shops. They belong to a class of landowners, high-profile businessmen, doctors, lawyers, dealers and smugglers, etc. The area accommodates a new middle class, a *nouveau riche bourgeoisie*, that seems to be distinguishing "itself more by its spending than its saving", and "much of its claim to culture rests on the conspicuous display of good taste, whether in the form of kitchenware, 'continental' food, or weekend sailing and cottages" (Samuel quoted in Smith, *Gentrification and the Revanchist City* 90). Had Alexis de Tocqueville Tocqueville visited Qom in recent days, he would have repeated his observation about the "men whose fortune is upon the increase, but whose desires grow much faster than their fortunes: and who gloat upon the gifts of wealth in anticipation" and therefore are "very willing to take up with imperfect satisfaction, rather than abandon the object of their desires alto-

gether" (58). Qom, now in contrast to its past, proves to present much more "hypocrisy of luxury" than "hypocrisy of virtue" (60). Seemingly in a reversal of religio-cultural enrichment, no week passes in Qom unless a new restaurant or shopping center announces its opening, exploiting every advertisement opportunity possible, from social media channels to billboards and banners.

The aestheticization of the lower left side of the city, in Amin Boulevard and Sālārieh, is predictably "cultivated and maintained through spatial exclusion that acts to protect the pristine and beautiful landscape from the urban poor in the city" (Pow 373). One significant manifestation of this urge to aestheticize is the proliferation of bourgeois Romanesque buildings in middle- and upper-middle-class neighborhoods. Conspicuous neoclassical buildings "in the midst of unpaved streets and rudimentary infrastructure" reveal "the contradictions of urban development" (Leontidou 48).

White Houses Galore on Every Avenue: The nouveau riche Neo-Classicism

"Of all the arts", maintains Fredric Jameson, "architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic" (5). Now in Qom, Neoclassical architecture is bur-

dened with all the claims of wealth and economic omnipotence. Façades are pathetically pressured to parade a resemblance to the Parthenon, sometimes merely minimally through a sculpted, abstract arch at the top of the building or a pair of carved column-like shapes beside the entrance. It is almost as if Qom is under an aesthetic assault launched by City Beautiful, Beaux Arts neoclassicism, a non-heritage industry, postmodernly disengaged from its secular roots in Western civilization, yet to reinforce the recent function of fringing class supremacism and new-rich mannerism.

Quite remarkably, the façades of almost no two buildings look alike, and still they all look alike in one way or another. Almost no aesthetic rule is observed when designing and executing façades for buildings. Architects, thus, are left uninhibited to gratify the ostentatious desires of their clients in lucrative ways. Stone does the miracle while arbitrarily employed to make the owner feel flush and the designer creative. Now, the hastiest, simplest way this new upper middle class has found to express abundance, "to indicate stability and the dignity of wealth" (Joedicke 9), would be to appropriate and assemble Western classical traditions of architecture. A replication of what Nan Ellin refers

to as "drag and drop forms from other places and other times" (quoted in Knox 103): an ironic reproduction of American "Vulgarias" in the heartland of anti-Americanism, while the overall effect is "an outlandish brashness of contrived spectacle, serial repetition, and over-the-top pretension" (Knox 163).

Sālārieh is the high tide of this architectural exhibitionism: a mélange of kitsch and pastiche that, thanks to the ceaseless importation of travertine stone, has partially satisfied the plutocrat class's desire for luxury and panache. My spontaneous observation of the phenomenon is perhaps best explicable by engaging Lewis Mumford and his ruthless dissection of New York City during the Gilded Age of the early 20th century America. He links this trend to "the shift from industry to finance" and consequently to "a shift from the producing towns to the spending towns: architecture came to dwell in the stock exchanges, the banks, the shops, and the clubs of the metropolis…" The keys to this period are opulence and magnitude: 'money to burn'" (125). The result is an architecture that is nothing but "a pompous blare of meaningless sounds" (151). Making matters even more grotesque, there are now seminaries in Qom, for instance the ones newly constructed in

Mo'allem street, whose appearance of curtain walls and modernist architecture utterly reveals similar propensities of ornateness, fundamentally in contrast with the pious, apathetic identity the people of religious institutions are traditionally known to claim. "Given the fact that a majority of seminary students live a lower-middle-class life and a majority of seminaries in Qom are of ordinary or outdated edifice, the new developments of elite architectural taste somewhat reveal the way class disparities exist also within the religious establishment."

Thousands of Qom inhabitants, day after day, have to pass by the emblems of wealth, whether extravagant homes, luxurious cars, or splendid brand shops, and unconsciously undergo the agony of lack. Occasionally eating at the restaurants of Sālārieh or Amin Boulevard, some can afford to compensate. This only deepens the agony: the conspicuous accumulation/consumption of capital on one side of the city accompanies the amassing of antipathies on the other side. Small wonder that the city of Qom, which is naturally expected to be an island of stability, has witnessed several eruptions of street turmoil during the past year.

Paul L. Knox has called these cityscapes Vulgaria and believes they naturalize "the neoliberal ideology of competitive consumption and disengagement from notions of social justice and civil society" (163). "The landscapes of Vulgaria," he adds, "are an embodiment of neoliberalism as well as a setting for its maintenance and development" (173). An inherent element of Vulgaria, the postmodern kitsch is linked to the middle-class hedonistic mentality. Resisting "the 'terror' of change and the meaninglessness of chronological time flowing from an unreal past into an equally unreal future" (Calinescu 248), the bourgeoisie employs it in order to fight the nihilism both rooted in and bearing the fruit of their poor-afflicting pomposities. It was this very Romanesque, genteel culture that best served to justify and disguise the brutality of the Gilded Age in the American city (Fairfield 54) and most likely does so in Qom. A city once anticipated to overcome Washington, D.C. is now overwhelmed by dozens of White House simulacra on every avenue. "All roads," unfortunately even in Qom, "lead literally to Rome" (Mumford 138).

Branding Like the State
Writing on Iran in 1908, William P. Cresson observed, "It would be hard to find a more desolate stretch of country than that lying

between Teheran and the Holy City of Kum" (136). Presently, the strategic road between the secular capital and the religious one not only accommodates travelers with one of the most refined freeways in the whole country, the *Khalij-e Fārs* (Persian Gulf) freeway, it also features a variety of fashionable rest areas, namely the *Mehr-o-Māh* (Sun & Moon) tourist service center, publicizing itself in advertising outlets as *the most modern one* of the like that can be found in Iran. At Mehr-o-Māh, one is provided with every sort of facility fit for a joyful, cosmopolitan halt along the way: a fuel station; public toilets that make you feel like you are taking a rest in a tropical garden; classy cafés, restaurants, and fast food parlors; and luxurious stores that stock consumer goods from global brands. Occupying an area of forty thousand square meters, the center was opened in 2016 with a special event attended by high-ranking officials, such as the speaker of the Iranian parliament, who is also a representative of Qom. Notwithstanding, the way the place is branded exposes much about the discursive strategies at work around the branding of Qom itself.

Mehr-o-Māh, in fact, is erected and sustained by a food company named after its founder *Muhammad-e Sā'edi-Niā*. The

firm specifically produces a traditional toffee called *Sohān* that originally comes from Qom. Sohān is, in a way, the only food product known in Iran and the world as belonging to Qom. Yet *Sohān-e Sā'edi-Niā* has managed to rebrand the product, making it into a distinctive object of modern, cosmopolitan consumerism. For instance, for the first time, it produces Sohāns whose idiosyncratic packaging presents world maps drawn by 18th-century European explorers. Its marketing strategies are definitely in line with the branding strategies it has employed for Mehr-o-Māh: located six kilometers from Qom, the modern exterior view of the building absorbs sightseers at night with three huge, completely lit business signs featuring the logos of Sohān-e Sā'edi-Niā, LC Waikiki, and Adidas.

In an interview after its inauguration, the founder expressed his motivation for building the center, interspersing religious, national, political, and economic motifs with one another in less than a paragraph. "This city," he claims, "has always been one of the most dynamic foci of Shi'as, and every year receives millions of pilgrims who come to visit this sanctum of the Prophet's holy family, and hence, the current dearth of suitable tourist centers seems unbecoming on the city." He then

adds, "This year has been named by the sage leader of the revolution as The Year of the Economy of Resistance: Action and Implementation, so we regard the opening of Mehr-o-Māh as conducive to the development of the tourist industry, making jobs in the private sector, and the government's efforts for advancing the economy of resistance." Concluding his thoughts, he maintains, "What incited [me] to construct this building was rooted in our passion for the prosperity of our dear Islamic homeland" (Golden Business Magazine). Neoliberal entrepreneurialism in a package decorated by Islamic nationalism: as sweet, edible, and pleasurable to the Qomi taste as a piece of Sohān. No matter that the haven of comfort and convenience is ordinarily affordable only to middle- and upper-middle-class customers, who are commonsensically either passengers traversing the motorway and making no stop at Qom for pilgrimage, or the *nouveau riche* Qomis who visit there and find themselves for a few hours at a home of dream.

It is as though Mehr-o-Māh has exploited a psychological niche, as it were, in the market of Qom: secular Iranians are known to be avoiding Qom for its seemingly politico-religious unpleasantness; so a stopover so close to Qom yet supplying

whatever signifies the opposite of their perception of Qom, is tantalizing. On the other hand, for the new rich consumers of Qom who yearn to enjoy Tehrani lifestyles, the center on the way to the capital yet attached to Qom provides a desirable destination. Isn't the naming of the place itself, i.e., Sun & Moon, laden with a connotation on the way the relationship between Tehran and Qom is preferred to be developed?

Caught between the old holy town of Qom and the modern metropolis of Tehran, between asceticism and hedonism, between aspired ideals of religious tradition and banalities of consumer society, and between the Islamic Republic and the United States, Qom is indeed a microcosm of the whole state.

Concluding Remarks

The urban field of Qom's main street is, in Bourdieuian terms, mostly mobilized by a consumerist or escapist habitus, making the distribution of capital and the stability of inequalities, and thus representations, actions, and tastes deeply embodied, internalized, naturalized, and unconscious (Christoforou and Lainé 38). At the insistence of the municipalities and other authorities inside and outside of Qom, building up the middle-class appeal of the

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city is held to be a strategic factor in the project of rebranding the religiosity of Qom on a global scale. Quite contrarily, nevertheless, the very existence and expansion of the bourgeois middle class, "whose practice and whose thought, whatever its formal religious belief, are *fundamentally* irreligious… and totally alien to the category of the sacred" (Goldmann 55), hinders religiosity in Qom.

Through namings and brandings, through installing elements publicizing spiritual ideals of the past, the municipal authorities of Qom aspire to conserve the religious identity of a city long pillaged by materialistic hedonism. But the frustrated endeavors only mystify the horrendous essence of the inequalities observable throughout Qom and render more efficient the assimilation of the religious strata of the middle class into consumerist urbanscapes. What would, for instance, a huge mural of the late *Ayatullah Muhammad-Taqi Bahjat*, a clerico-theological giant famed in all his profiles for asceticism and abstinence, in the middle of a street inundated by beauty salons and fast food restaurants, function other than by suppressing unconscious displeasures peculiar to traditional families? The reality is, Qom, in its contemporary look, betrays on every corner and from every angle

both the historical image of its divine quiddity it has attempted to preserve and the branding campaign that has recently been set out to modernize that historical identity. It is as if a constant enterprise of embalming kept the departed from disappearance by way of ornamentation, yet, concomitantly, subliminally accentuated the fact that the dead has no lifeblood but death.

Let's imagine taking refuge for a moment in the shrine: it, notwithstanding, rests there in the middle of the town, at the isthmian junction of the old and the new, isolated from and enduring urban vicissitudes, remaining a last vestige of Shiite sacrosanctity. "It stands," William Cresson noticed a century ago, "among miserable dwellings that encompass it on every side, seeming strangely out of keeping with their squalor and decay" (139). Now trespassed by modern hotels and shopping centers, it still appears to be the only place providing moments of defiance.

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The New Administrative Capital in Egypt: The Political Economy of the Production of Urban Spaces in Cairo

Patrick Loewert, Christian Steiner

The New Administrative Capital reshapes Egypt's urban landscape thoroughly. Nevertheless, empirical research on its political economy and spatial imaginaries is lacking. Building on a political geography framework and extensive qualitative fieldwork, we aim at contrasting official constructions of space with an analysis of the hidden interests, actions, and power struggles among its main stakeholders. Whereas foreign and private investors are officially key to the project, our analysis demonstrates that state institutions compete for control over it, providing the military with new rent sources. The location and size of the new palace indicates a lack of democratic conviction, and citizen participation is largely missing.

Keywords: New Administrative Capital, Egypt, Urban Development, Mega Projects, Political Economy, Power Struggle

Introduction

On 13 March 2015, the Egyptian government announced to the public at the Economic Development Conference in Sharm al-Sheikh the breathtaking mega-project of the New Administrative Capital (or NAC for short)[1]. Envisioned to be inhabited by 5 to 6.5 million people and built from scratch in the vast territory of the Eastern Desert 40km east of the Cairo agglomeration, the project is intended to host a new government quarter, including the parliament, ministries, the supreme council, diplomatic missions, and a new president's palace. Skyscrapers up to 450m tall were depicted, as well as 30 sub-projects, one of them being an airport larger than London Heathrow and another an amusement park four times the size of Disneyland. The total investment is estimated at up to 500 billion US dollars. On display boards, the mega-project was defined as *Madīnat al-Jamīʿa, a City for Everyone*.

The project is remarkable in various ways. It absorbs enormous resources in terms of planning efforts, space, and money. The latter is especially noteworthy, since Egypt has faced severe economic problems in the aftermath of the 2011 Egyptian revolution against Mubarak and the 2013 *coup d'état* against president Mursi. Second,

the history of the project is very colorful, since it has been promoted by three very different presidential administrations.

However, even though many international visitors at the 2015 conference welcomed the project as a symbol of new investment opportunities, there was also widespread criticism. Critics pointed to its high investment costs and size and fueled doubts about the social responsibility of the project that some said is meant to host only the richest members of the society and to serve the government's interests (e.g. Tadamun; Egyptian Streets; Mohie). On the other side, the President and ministers pointed out several times that the NAC will encourage foreign investments, deepen international collaborations (e.g. CNN), and will not cause any burdens for the Egyptian taxpayer, but instead will make a profit for the Egyptian treasury (NUCA; Ghanīm and ʿAmāra).

Against this background, the lack of empirical research on the political economy and spatial imaginaries of the project is astonishing. Therefore, we aim at contrasting the officially created images of the project with an analysis of the underlying and partially hidden interests of the main actors and the power struggles among the main stakeholders. Building on a political

geography framework about the strategic construction of space, we therefore analyze examples of the actions and argumentations of central stakeholders concerning three central elements of the NAC: first the role of foreign investors, second the disavowal of responsibilities for project funding, and third locating of the presidential palace. This analysis enables a deeper understanding of how and why the project developed the way it did and provides insights into the quality and extent of citizen participation.

Theoretical and Methodological Background

Theoretically, this article advocates a political geography perspective referring to Paul Reuber's idea of strategic constructions of space (Reuber, *Konflikte*). Reuber argues that every actor selectively gathers information about his or her environment in order to develop clear objectives of future actions. At the same time, actors aim at enforcing their point of view in a way that argumentatively secures their objectives in relation to competing actors and/or the public. Thereby, they consciously create subjective, selective, and condensed images of reality, which Reuber calls "strategic constructions of space" (*Konflikte* 22-44; *Politische Geographie* 116-129). These specific con-

structions of space and their underlying logics are presented to the addressees as quasi-objective presentations of reality, whereas they are primarily intended to back the actor's position in the power struggle over the production of space (Reuber, *Politische Geographie* 127). Of course, an actor can use different strategic constructions of space in from one addressee to another. Their analysis allows an interpretative reconstruction of the hidden agendas and aims of the actors (Reuber, *Politische Geographie* 127). Therefore, building on such a perspective helps to understand the actions and argumentations of project stakeholders.

Of course, organizations do not always act coherently. Individual interests often compete within organizations.[2] Since our paper focuses on the power struggles among actors, it nevertheless seems viable to concentrate on the outcome of the analyzed actions of stakeholders and to largely ignore their internal power struggles, especially since most of them are quite hierarchically organized. We investigated the publicly oriented actions and argumentations that bring the strategic constructions of space of distinct actors into life by using publically available journalistic media sources, speeches, documentations, and advertisements. The pro-

cesses within and among the collective actors are, however, hard to grasp, especially because many stakeholders see withholding (even public) information about such a project as a question of national security. Additionally, the involved institutions in Egypt are notorious for protecting their turf and in general do not publish sufficient data (Sims 140, 245, 281; Wahdan 10, 60). For this reason, a 14-month ethnographic field research project was carried out, including professional activity in the NAC project. During this time, 36 qualitative interviews were conducted with various project participants whose identity will remain anonymous, given the sensitivity of the topic. With few exceptions, the time horizon covers the period from spring 2015 to early 2018. The interviews were transcribed and a content analysis has been made. Afterward, the information based on interviews, field research, working experience, and public sources was triangulated. Since the gathered information was partially contradictory, it underwent an interpretative analysis to reconstruct as well as possible the processes that took place in the field.

Pathways to and Basic Components of the New Administrative Capital

The history of attempts to relocate the governmental center to the desert reaches back to the *City of Revolution* under President Nasser in the 1950s. Under his successors, presidents Sadat and Mubarak, new endeavors to relocate state institutions were made in the deserts west and east of Cairo, but they all failed due to a lack of funds, the resistance of state employees, and political circumstances (Stewart; Feiler 302-303). Finally, in 2014, President Sisi's government resumed the plans of a new capital, which subsequently became one of the top priority projects of the national development strategy *Egypt 2030* (MPMAR 51-61). Its priority is highlighted by the surprising progress the project has made in the past few years, considering the unsuccessful earlier attempts to relocate the governmental capital. The motifs of the importance of a new capital and the revival of the idea are open to speculation, but most interlocutors agree that among the reasons are the need for a big vision to legitimize presidential rule and the intention to evacuate governmental institutions from the center of turmoil that waned only shortly before. The overall size of the mega-project was set at 753 square kilometers, of which 126 square kilometers were developed in the first phase until 2018. The area to be developed in this first project phase can be divided into four large zones (as at February 2018):

1. Six so-called Wadian, isolated, green, and high-rent residential quarters with at least 25,000 units each, including social infrastructure and the supply of shops and services such as malls, libraries, mosques and churches, social care centers, gas stations, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, banks, police stations, citizens' service centers,and club houses.
2. A park complex covering 23 square kilometers in the first phase and 30 square kilometers in total. Its serpentine shape intends to imitate the course of the River Nile.
3. The governmental quarter, containing the parliament, ministries, the supreme council, diplomatic missions, and other government- related and international entities.
4. The presidential palace

In the West and Northwest, the project area borders on the easternmost quarters of Cairo proper (see fig. 1). Thus, unlike the name suggests, the NAC will be part of a contiguous urbanized area and a mere extension of the urban expansion of Cairo agglomeration. This spatial continuity is made clear by the fact that the mega-project will not have its own governorate, but instead will be under the administrative responsibility of the governorate of Cairo (Hasan, "*Aşima*").
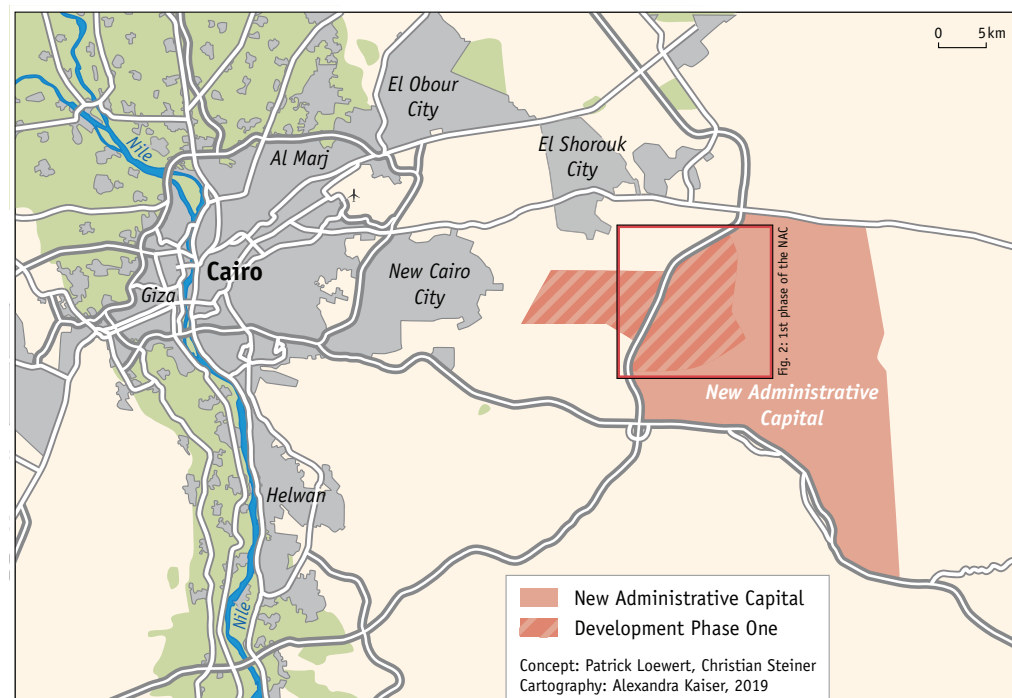
Fig. 2: 1st phase of the NAC

New Administrative Capital

New Administrative Capital
Development Phase One

Concept: Patrick Loewert, Christian Steiner
Cartography: Alexandra Kaiser, 2019

Fig. 1: Location and Size of the New Administrative Capital in Relation to the Greater Cairo agglomeration

The Role of Foreign Investors

In official speeches and interviews, the President and ministers pointed out several times that the NAC is one of the main projects in Egypt to encourage foreign investments and to deepen international collaborations (e.g. CNN). This specific strategic construction of space was intended to counter critics, who feared that the project would be a burden for the Egyptian state and society.

In March 2015, the Dubai-based businessman Muhammad al-Abbar was presented to the public as a potential investor. However, negotiations between him and the Ministry of Housing had already begun in summer 2014. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed, and two of Abbar's companies, Capital City Partners and Eagle Hills, were supposed to assume a large share of the project development. In June 2015, the negotiations were cancelled, and the cooperation was brought to an end for the time being. Officially, the involvement of the foreign businessman came to a halt because he refused to involve his UAE-based company Emaar as a guarantor of loans. As a result, foreign funding for the first development phase could not be secured.

On the side of the Egyptian government, legal regulations constrained al-Abbar's scope for maneuver, since the area of the future new city was not cleared of military units. In consequence, the construction was not likely to begin in the foreseeable future (e.g. ʿAbd al-ʿĀṭī). According to the authors' interlocutors, this obstacle indicated a deeper conflict among different project stakeholders. The negotiations with al-Abbar were led mainly by the Ministry of Housing. Its former Minister, now additionally Prime Minister, Mustafa Madbuli, succeeded in excluding other ministries from the project development and took over its management (al-Sayyid). Thus, the influence of the military became limited, even though the Armed Forces Engineering Authority was initially in charge of supervising construction. The military supposedly reacted and insisted on its legal right to keep all desert land that, by law, is owned by the Ministry of Defence and affiliated authorities (Sims 262-263). By using this opportunity of

intervention, it countered the takeover of the mega-project by the Ministry of Housing.

In December 2015, Presidential Decree No. 446 allowed the Armed Forces Land Projects Agency to "expand its commercial activity and form for-profit corporations, both on its own and jointly with national and international capital sources" (ṣawāf). Among other things, this move enabled the military to participate in the negotiations about the development of the mega-project. Another presidential decree in February 2016 awarded the agency with the supervision of the construction of two development projects, one of them being the NAC (ibid.).

The international scope of the military involvement was secured by two further incidents: first, representatives of the Armed Forces joined international delegations to attract foreign investors and developers. Second and consequently, the military expanded its influence on international investors in August 2016, when a military-owned company was provided with the authority to give binding instructions to various international developers. Another blow to the Ministry of Housing already occurred in April 2016, with the establishment of a company

called *Administrative Capital Urban Development* (ACUD), which was founded, among other things, to control the implementation of the many sub-projects in the new city. Whereas three of its 13 Members of the Board of Directors belonged to the Ministry of Housing, five members were related to the Armed Forces (Hasan, "Majlis"). Finally, in August 2017, General Aḥmed Ḏakī ʿAbdīn was appointed the new CEO of the ACUD, replacing a civilian, and was entrusted with substantial competencies. His new deputy was General al-Laṭīf, the former managing director of the company.

Even though the Ministry of Housing continued to lead the negotiations with foreign investors, the Ministry of Defense had taken fierce control of the project development. Recently though, there seems to be a downturn of military control. Some interview partners claim that the ACUD lost track of the various developers participating in the NAC, something that benefits the position of the Ministry of Housing. Its importance, though, seems to be reduced by the ambitious Investment Minister, Saḥar Naṣr, who sometime in early 2017 gained ground regarding the negotiations especially with Chinese foreign investors, engaged in the NAC's business district.

This example demonstrates that the Ministry of Housing and the military continuously engaged in a power struggle to gain control over the project development on the expenses of foreign investors. By helping the military to get a hold on the project, President al-Sisi, himself formerly a leading general in the Army, indirectly allocated new investment opportunities to the influential Egyptian military-economic complex. Therefore, officially framing the NAC as a space of international investment opportunities not only helped to counter public criticism, but also veiled the allocation of rent sources to the Egyptian military, which contributes to assuring the loyalty of the armed forces and is therefore vital to sustain Egypt's continued "neopatrimonial" political system of rule. (Pawelka)

The Disavowal of Responsibilities for Project Funding

The former Minister of Housing Mustafa Madbuli repeatedly advocated a strategic discursive construction of space in which the NAC would not cost the Egyptian state "a single cent", but instead will make a profit for the Egyptian treasury (NUCA; Ghanīm and ʿAmāra). Other decision-makers recurrently supported this argumentation (Aḥmad; Ahram).

Despite official statements, funding of the project was not as easy as hoped. Even though the NAC is considered to be a project of national significance, initial concepts envisaged that private investors would finance the greater part – up to 83 percent – of the project. However, investors dropped out because they did not expect an acceptable return for their involvement in costly endeavors like a national conference center and ministerial buildings. Although some private Egyptian developers stated that national companies would comprehensively support the project (e.g. Mounir), the state had to invest additional money to sustain the project. The scapegoat was the *New Urban Communities Authority* (NUCA), a sub-authority of the Ministry of Housing, originally founded in 1979 to supervise the development of new towns. From the very beginning, the authority had to inject money into the mega-project, especially indirectly via the ACUD, which was mainly financed from the budgets of the NUCA and the Armed Forces. Both hoped for returns on their participation in real estate projects. The NUCA, however, had to relinquish its responsibility in the new capital city to ACUD and to various independent companies and corporations and therefore lost influence on real estate sales. Thus, the NUCA became increasingly dis-

connected from the possibility to control the real estate revenues, which it needed to recoup its investments. At the moment, it seems very likely that the ACUD and the military are exploiting this reorganization by appropriating returns from land sales, which means that a new mechanism to transfer huge assets from the NUCA to the ACUD and the military has been implemented. By April 2018, the authority had pumped loans and subsidies totaling at least 15 billion Egyptian pounds – around 720 million Euro – into the mega-project, which will provide the ACUD and the military with a multiple in revenues.

The head of another sub-authority of the Ministry of Housing in 2016 described the involvement of the NUCA as a way to prevent the taxpayer from incurring any costs: "In fact, the national budget is not strained at all by the capital project because the NUCA took on the financing. This was in response to criticism that the Egyptian state squanders billions in this project" (Aḥmad).[3] Ironically, at the same time, the financial involvement of the NUCA is used to bypass citizen participation. If a national authority finances the project and the citizens do not bear any costs, then according to some planner's argumentation, citizens do not have the right to ask for participation. A large number of urban

planners and subordinates do not even see the necessity for further citizen participation and show a derogatory attitude toward a more integrated form of planning. Instead, many perceive "people" and "government" as two entities that are distinct from each other – as formulated by an advisor of the Ministry of Housing: "In the case of the new capital, we don't even need to think about asking the people, because it's a national project."

In sum, by shifting the financial burden to the NUCA, the government successfully pursued two aims: first, this made it possible to deny citizens a say in the mega-project because they allegedly do not contribute to financing, and, second, the main stakeholders sustained their official strategic construction of space by shirking responsibility for project funding.

Locating the Presidential Palace
Interestingly enough, the location and size of the presidential palace is a topic that is considered thoroughly neither by the critical national or international media nor by the government in its strategic constructions of space. In promotional videos and booklets on the NAC, the palace is not mentioned at all or only in passing by defining the palace as just one compo-

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nent of the governmental district (e.g. Oekoplan).

Initially, the palace was planned to be located in the heart of the new city. Together with the presidential advisory council on the mega-project, Chinese planners, who have been part of the project since an official visit by President al-Sisi in China in September 2015, played a key role in the conceptual design of the palace. The scheduled size of the palace district of 9.5 km^2 was not determined coincidentally, but derived from the idea that the palace should be as large as the areas of several foreign palaces combined – including the presidential complexes in Turkey and India – in order to underline the importance of the Egyptian president. In late autumn 2015, the palace compound was shifted to the northern border of the new city after the planners concluded that a more remote location might be safer. The new complex was even larger and measured 10.5 km^2. The palace district was planned to be fully covered by manors and guesthouses, presidential gardens, and security buildings. A solar plant was supposed to make the palace independent of the urban power supply. Some of the authors' interlocutors claimed that, since then, the location of the palace has not changed, while by the beginning of

2018 its size has shrunk to an area of around 6 km^2, most probably because of the omnipresent lack of finance.

Interesting as well is the composition of the governmental in relation to the palace district (which most tellingly are planned as two separate areas), which latter was sketched out and developed in cooperation among Chinese and Egyptian companies, too. Initial plans aimed to develop 12 ministry buildings in the NAC. Their relocation from Cairo's city center was defended by arguing that the ministries concerned did not need to deal with the citizens on a daily basis, even though they included the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Health and Population, which directly address concerns of the population. Six additional ministries successfully demanded to join the relocation – "out of fear to be left behind", as an involved planner put it. As of the beginning of 2018, more than 30 (of approx. 50) ministries and higher authorities are supposed to move to the new district. The ministries will be built close to the southern edge of the palace area, resembling a promenade directed toward the entrance of the palace. The Council of Ministers and the Parliament are located on the right and left sides of the north-south axis leading to the palace, as though they serve as
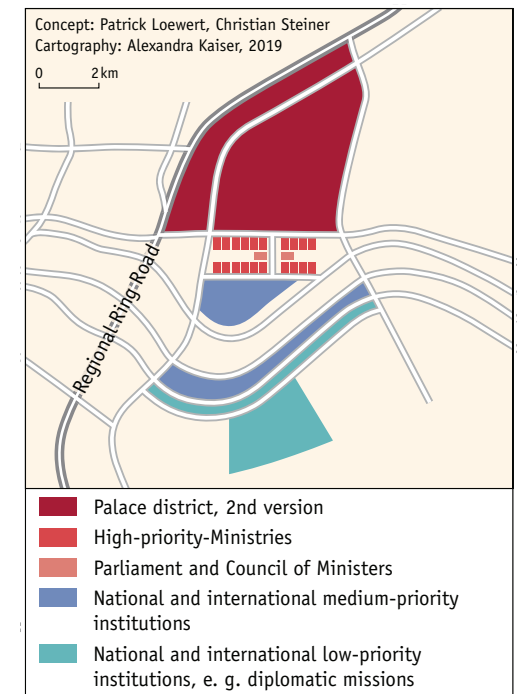

Concept: Patrick Loewert, Christian Steiner
Cartography: Alexandra Kaiser, 2019

0   2 km

Regional-Ring-Road

■ Palace district, 2nd version
■ High-priority-Ministries
■ Parliament and Council of Ministers
■ National and international medium-priority institutions
■ National and international low-priority institutions, e. g. diplomatic missions

Fig. 2: Composition of the eastern first phase of the NAC before the reduction of the palace district

its mere gatekeepers. The spatial composition and the distance to the palace reflect the importance that is attached to various institutions, while the palace itself represents the spatial center of power (fig. 2).

In sum, the available plans and our interviews indicate that it was the aim of the planning authorities from the very beginning to bring a centralistic idea of urban development to life. Similar to the idea of

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absolutistic cities in Europe in the 17th century, this emphasizes the almost absolute power of the head of state.

Conclusion

The analysis of three central elements of the NAC aimed at contrasting the officially created images of the project with the underlying and partially hidden interests of and power struggles among the main stakeholders in the production of urban space. We thereby demonstrated that the power relations within the project constitute a complex field of organizational interests. We also revealed how decisive actors try to interpret and sometimes even hide essential information about the negotiations and financing connected to the NAC, as well as the location and size of one of its largest and politically most delicate sub-projects, the presidential palace.

Whereas official announcements repeatedly emphasize the role of foreign investors and private funding, our analysis demonstrates that the national Ministry of Housing and the military took over control of the project. The two Egyptian entities thereby engaged in a power struggle, which President al-Sisi decided in favor of the military. While the official framing of the NAC as a space for private international investors counters public criticism of the project's financial burden on the Egyptian state, this strategic construction of space also helped to veil the allocation of new rent sources to the Egyptian military-economic complex, to which President Sisi himself belongs. This strategic shift can be interpreted as a means to assure the loyalty of the armed forces in order to sustain the political system.

In this system, the president is the ultimate source of power and wealth. This idea of statehood is mirrored in the centralistic concept of the NAC, which parallels the model of absolutistic cities in Europe in the 17th century by putting the presidential palace in the very center of the project. Since this understanding of a modern Egyptian state contradicts democratic ideas, which fueled the revolt against the Mubarak regime, it is not surprising that external and internal constructions of space are diverging and the role of the palace is not made a topic of public debate.

In line with these findings, it is not surprising, either, that the NAC can be seen as a counterexample of participative urban development. It is misleading, though, to locate the responsibility for these deficiencies exclusively at the top of the command chain, since urban planners often do not see the necessity and benefit of further citizen participation, either. In sum, it seems as if the development of the NAC unfortunately mirrors the Egyptian state's undemocratic pathway of development after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime. Restoration is back again.

Notes

[1] The name of the mega project changed several times. Even though a competition was held to find a proper name in spring 2018, no final decision has been announced yet. Therefore, the authors refers to the project as "New Administrative Capital".

[2] E.g. within the Armed Forces, there is a strong competition among officers potentially resulting in incoherent actions and strategies of the military (Marshall 18). Moreover, a notorious partisan feuding between members of two sub-divisions of the Ministry of Housing is well known that has continued for decades (Denis 150).

[3] This line of argumentation is based on the original assumption in the 1970s that the NUCA might regain the costs of implementing new towns in the desert by resales of land. The problem is that the authority is deep in debt and the resales rarely paid off for various reasons (Sims 168-170, 218-219).

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Counterpublics in Saudi Shopping Centers, Beach Resorts, and Gated Communities

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In recent decades, Saudi Arabia, much like other places around the world, has witnessed a trend towards the privatization and securitization of urban space. In this paper I argue that although indisputably exclusive, gated communities and other types of privatized public spaces in Saudi Arabia enable practices which, outside the walls of such developments, are strictly banned. In a country known for its strict moral standards and lack of civil liberties, these architectures permit the formation of "counterpublics." Offering alternative perspectives on gender relationships, modesty, and nudity, such "counterpublics" challenge prevailing notions of what public and private mean.[1]

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Public Space, Counterpublics, Privatization, Gated Communities, Urban Development

When I asked a 29-year-old architect from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where young people in his hometown spend their spare time, he responded:

> Young men and women meet their friends in cafés, restaurants, or shopping centers. When the weather is nice, they spend time with friends and relatives in vacation spots at the seaside in Obhur. Some families have their own holiday cottage on a private piece of land. Others rent chalets, either for several years, or for shorter periods, in one of the hotel firms' "holiday villages." In those neighborhoods in Obhur, one spends time with other people, in a kind of closed-circle of acquainted families. This makes it possible to use public spaces and green areas together with others. Normally, there is no opportunity to do so in the city.[2]

His response highlights a problem that many young people in Saudi cities face: a lack of what are generally called "public" spaces, green areas and places that allow people to meet and spend time with one another. The solution he describes in his e-mail, i.e. meeting and socializing in shopping centers, beach resorts, cafés, and gated communities, is not available to everyone. Only the middle and upper

income groups can afford it. For better or for worse, such ways of spending time are part of the global trend towards the privatization of urban space. Critics of this trend contend that it intensifies social, economic, and racial segregation (Low 11, 224–28). This is due to the fact that shopping malls, amusement parks, gated communities, beach resorts, etc. are owned by individuals, or companies, who have the right not only to police who enters the premises, but to prohibit unwanted activities—among them, the assertion of one's civil rights (Kohn; Alhadar and McCahill). Access to such places depends on a person's financial resources, personal contacts, racial identity, or nationality. Such places, so the argument goes, are not really public, because of their limited accessibility and exclusive character (Scharoun 88-96; Sorkin).

Without questioning the exclusions introduced by the privatization of urban space, other authors have, more recently, considered the phenomenon from a different angle, focusing on social interactions in such places. They have emphasized that shopping centers, for example, not only serve the purposes of commerce and consumerism, but also generate new forms of sociability and new social practices (Abaza, "Shopping Malls", *Changing Consumer Cultures*; Nissen; Scharoun). In this paper, I extend this argument by showing that in Saudi Arabia, shopping centers, beach resorts, and gated communities of various types fulfil an important role in the public lives of many people. Although privately owned, such developments allow for, and to some extent foster, communication between strangers. It is in this sense that they can still be considered public, or rather, *privatized* public space.

The publics that form in such places have little in common with the Habermasian ideal of a public sphere (Habermas). Habermas's normative concept defines the public sphere as a forum for citizens to engage in rational debate about issues pertaining to the common good, preferably in a "neutral" language, undiluted by religious beliefs or other ideological convictions. By contrast, my understanding of the term "public" is informed by Michael Warner, who conceives of a public as an imaginary social entity, which comes into being through communication, or "by virtue of [its participants'] reflexively circulating discourse" (11-12). This somewhat abstract conception of publicness has the advantage of being open to all sorts of topics and discourses, as well as to various forms of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. The formation of publics through non-verbal means of communication cannot be overestimated in a political context like Saudi Arabia, where freedom of opinion, expression and assembly are not formally granted. In the Habermasian sense, which still seems to shape common Western notions of what a public is, or should be, this lack of civil liberties would seem to prohibit the emergence of a critical public sphere. As I show in this article, images and bodily practices (such as clothing, haircuts, embodied gender roles, body language, and behavior) are important forms of expression through which people in Saudi Arabia contribute to public discourse, while manifesting both their belonging to a particular social group and their identification with (or rejection of) specific values and ideals. Finally, Warner's emphasis is on publics, plural, in contrast to a single, cohesive public sphere. Public space, then, is both the place and material framework that enables these social entities to form, and to contribute to public discourse. My use of the term "public space" is further influenced by Doreen Massey, who emphasizes the contested nature of public spaces: groups and individuals compete for power and influence, for access to and distribution of both capital and resources, for the right to define the terms and conditions of social coexistence, the right to

occupy spaces in the city, and the right to determine their use. Religious beliefs and ideological dispositions play an important role in these struggles and cannot simply be bracketed off. I will show how, in the context of Saudi Arabia—a country known for its strict moral standards, gender segregation, and government that typically denies the aforementioned civil liberties—gated and securitized private spaces enable social practices which are banned in public, and in conflict with the prevailing normative order. Privatized urban spaces even permit the formation of "counterpublics," a concept I borrow, again, from Michael Warner, who uses it to describe the kind of exposure, or publicity, sought by groups aiming to challenge the norms of their social environment.

My focus here is on the city of Jeddah, where I conducted five months of fieldwork for my PhD between 2009 and 2012. In the Saudi context, Jeddah is considered less conservative than the capital, Riyadh, and many other places. Yet, both my brief visits to other cities and other scholars' research (cited below) suggest that elsewhere in the country privatized urban spaces are used in similar ways. Therefore, I believe that even if most of the material presented in this article is from the relatively liberal port-city of Jeddah, my main

claims hold for a broader cross-section of Saudi society. They may also go some way toward explaining the social meaning and attractiveness of gated developments, and similar forms of privatized urban space, in other places throughout the Middle East, where private capital secures pockets of a lifestyle that deviates from the moral standards of the wider social environment.

This article thus contributes to recent debates on the meanings and practices of publicness in non-Western contexts (Qian). First, I discuss public aspects of privatized urban space in Saudi Arabia. Here, my aim is to draw attention to the particular social functions that such spaces serve, and to the public life they enable, in the Saudi social context. The paper's second part deals with counterpublics as specific forms of publicness in Saudi beach resorts, amusement parks, and other gated developments.

Public Life in Private Urban Developments
Today, gated communities can be found in every major Saudi city. They are a common type of dwelling for all social strata, from poor migrant workers—who often live in overcrowded, gated, mass accommodations owned by the companies for whom they work (Fadan 103-128; Citino;

Vitalis) —to the royal family, who hide their opulent lifestyle from view behind high walls, surrounding vast plots in Riyadh and Jeddah. My concern here is with the middle-class gated communities, which are owned and administered by private real estate companies. Skilled foreign employees and upper middle class Saudis do not live together in the same "compounds," as these developments are called: Saudis live in special Saudi-only compounds, and foreigners from the US, Europe, the Middle East, India, etc., in non-Saudi compounds. The latter are particularly secluded and well protected. Since the early 2000s, when a series of bomb attacks targeted symbols of Western lifestyle in Saudi Arabia, security measures have been strengthened and entry control tightened (Alhadar and McCahill 317). These gated communities are like cities within a city: maintenance and services are provided, in addition to various commercial and leisure facilities, such as shops, restaurants, swimming pools, tennis courts, and libraries. Such gated housing compounds are not subject to the strict norms and rules of the broader social environment. This makes them especially attractive to foreign professionals used to a more liberal lifestyle than the one prescribed in Saudi Arabia. Inside the precincts of a gated community, unrelated

men and women intermingle, wear clothes that reveal more skin than otherwise appropriate in mixed publics, and have garden parties where they sip home-brewed wine (a euphemism for an alcoholic beverage produced by fermenting grape juice bought in tetrapacks); there, women can smoke cigarettes, take a dip in the pool, and drive cars and bicycles. As one of my interlocutors, who had moved to Jeddah with her husband in 1984, told me, "If you want to live something like a 'normal' life here, you have to live in a compound"[3]. In Saudi-only gated communities, rules are less liberal, because many Saudis reject such practices on religious grounds. Yet, in some such developments, residents do enjoy more freedom than elsewhere in the city: young men and women party together in the "club," or common rooms, and some women do not find it necessary to wear a veil, or an abaya.

In terms of rules of conduct, the Red Sea coast beach resorts (mentioned in the opening e-mail quotation) are very similar. To the north of Jeddah, large swathes of land have been sold to private investors, who have filled them with exclusive hotels and restaurants, or private beach resorts, blocking access to the sea for all but a small number of affluent customers. There, hotels shuttle visitors gate-to-gate, on

Figure 1: A beach resort in Obhur. Photo: © Stefan Maneval 2012.

their way to and from the remote resorts. Other properties belong to companies that have built gated holiday developments, either exclusively for their own high-ranking employees, or for holiday-makers in general. Tenants of chalets in such developments are permitted to invite guests; as a mere visitor, this is certainly the most comfortable way to access such resorts. Another option is to leave one's passport at the entrance to one of the luxury hotel's beaches and pay a fee (approximately 100 Saudi Riyal, or 20 euros, in 2012). Once inside, one can observe unrelated men and women talk-

ing to each other. Men wear shorts that do not cover their knees; women wear swimsuits and bikinis. Some smoke cigarettes and shisha, while some play loud music and some go swimming.

Elsewhere in the world, the ethnic, national or racial exclusion facilitated by walls, gates, and entrance controls in gated communities and other privatized public spaces typically affects ethnic minorities, migrants, and non-nationals. In Saudi Arabia, the opposite is true. With few exceptions, Saudi nationals are not allowed to enter many of these develop-

ments, as the social practices permitted therein are regarded as deviant, or immoral, by both the religious authorities and large parts of the Saudi population. These practices are permitted in gated developments because the Saudi state depends heavily on the expertise of Western and other foreign professionals, who are often unwilling to completely adapt their behavior to the kingdom's rigid moral standards and social norms. Thus, the privatization of Saudi public space generates "cultural enclaves" (Glasze and Alkhayyal), in which privileged expatriates can experience what, for them, is a "normal life." Naturally, this involves social practices that many conservative Saudis consider alien to, or forbidden by, Islam. The majority of those who reject such practices are willing to tolerate the existence of these enclaves. Nonetheless, these developments are protected against terrorist attacks by armored military vehicles and soldiers with machine guns to make residents and visitors feel safe and encourage them to stay in the country.

Although many beach resorts are closed to Saudi nationals, the e-mail at the beginning of this article indicates that similar developments exist for Saudis, too. The activities described by the architect from Jeddah are not as clearly in conflict with

Wahhabi rules of conduct as, for example, the exposure of almost completely naked bodies. Yet, the mixing of unrelated men and women, or *ikhtilāṭ*, common in such holiday resorts, as well as the fact that women in such places often forgo the abaya, are subject to much debate in Saudi Arabia (al-Rasheed 159-172; Meijer; van Geel, "Separate or Together?", *For Women Only*). One holiday resort to the north of Obhur, called Durrat al-ʿArus, is particularly ill-famed for its parties and lax public morals. Just as in Saudi-only gated housing compounds, rules of conduct in Saudi-frequented beach resorts are less strict than in other mixed public spaces. To the extent that only Western-oriented, more or less liberal-minded, Saudis (i.e., those comfortable with *ikhtilāṭ* and other practices common to beach resorts) are likely to spend time there, the exclusive character of such privatized public spaces permits more freedom, more liberal bodily practices, and less restricted communication between strangers than the surrounding social context.

Shopping malls in Saudi Arabia differ from gated communities and beach resorts, in that they do not distinguish between Saudis and people of other nationalities. In principle, everyone can enter without having to pass a guarded gate. In addition,

whereas shopping centers for lower and medium income groups are usually mixed, most upmarket shopping malls are gender-divided (Le Renard, "Engendering Consumerism"). Normally, the mall's ground floor is reserved for men, and the upper floors for women and families. Neither in the family sections of gender-divided malls, nor in the mixed, medium to lower income shopping centers in Jeddah's city center, is it permissible for men to strike up conversations with women. Nonetheless, all shopping centers create opportunities for men and women to meet and interact.

An upscale shopping center in the northernmost part of Jeddah may serve as an example. On the first floor, the building's entrance hall is spanned by a bridge, which serves as the "families only" sitting area for a coffee bar. Many female customers prefer the seats immediately next to the transparent balustrade, facing the building's entrance. From there, they can see other customers entering the building and, exposed like actors on a stage, be seen by them. Since they are, officially, sitting in the family/female section, many of them do not feel obliged to wear the *niqab*, the part of the veil covering the face. Some do not even cover their hair. Women sitting on this stage apparently

seek, and probably find, some public attention. Here, the mall's architecture allows women to be publicly visible, while supporting non-verbal communication between unrelated men and women.[4] In shopping centers with a less-permeable gender divide, an unmarried man may only enter the family section accompanied by his sister—or by any woman he claims is his sister. I once observed young men pretending to belong to a group of women while taking the escalator to the family section. They passed the security guard and immediately left the group, giggling, after reaching the first floor. Inside the family section, many women forgo the veil. There, or in mixed shopping centers for the lower income-groups, one may, from time to time, observe a man dropping a small piece of paper with his telephone number while passing a young woman. Men and women also make contact using the Bluetooth technology on their mobile phones and laptops. This medium of communication allows men to contact women, or women to contact men, without physically approaching one another. Since the wireless connection's range is short, those using it for this purpose require a mixed environment, such as the cafés and restaurants in the family section of a shopping mall. Once they have made contact—either by virtue of a woman, for example, having

Figure 2: Amusement ride in the Mall of Arabia in Jeddah after the abolition of gender segregation. Photo: © Stefan Maneval 2019.

called the number she received from a man, or having previously gotten to know him somewhere else—the cafés and restaurants in shopping centers, Western hotels, or other commoditized spaces offer them a chance to meet. As a 26-year-old engineer from Lebanon, who had lived in Jeddah for three years, once told me, "No one checks if the woman you go out with is really your wife, or your sister".[5]

Amusement parks are used for similar purposes as shopping malls. Unaccompanied men, in contrast to their female counter-parts, are generally denied access; they may only enter in the company of their female relatives, or wives. While women are permitted to ride roller coasters and carousels, men may only watch. And watch they do. The fact that amusement parks are predominantly female spaces, designed for women to pass time in a spatially confined place, makes them particularly attractive to young men interested in seeing, or dating, women. Amusement parks and shopping centers attract women for the same reasons; many go not merely to shop or ride roller coasters, but because

they enjoy being in public. In such places, they can meet other women, and men. There, they can see, be seen, and be desired.

In Saudi Arabia, all of this is hardly possible in non-privatized urban areas. There, the range of leisure activities is limited, and many of them are commoditized. All major Saudi cities are modelled on the American-style automotive city (al-Hemaidi; Menoret chap. 3-4). The only streets used by pedestrians are in the lower-income commercial and residential areas, which members of higher social strata usually avoid. In Jeddah, the corniche is the only strip of public land used for family outings, besides roundabouts or roadsides, which seem to be an option only for the less-well-off South and Southeast Asian migrant workers who picnic there.

Counterpublics

Lack of alternatives is one reason why privatized public spaces have become popular meeting places in Saudi Arabia; another is the fact that the walls, gates, and entrance controls of such places keep out prying eyes and unwanted visitors. In YouTube videos, young men can be seen dancing in the streets within the precincts of Durrat al-ʿArus. They can do so only in

a secluded place, in the company of people who, by and large, share their attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and the body. In the remainder of this paper, I want to delve more deeply into the fact that so many young Saudis, post similar videos on YouTube and other social media. My aim is to explore why they record activities considered shameful or immoral, and share these documents with an anonymous audience.

A 2012 photo essay by the British photographer, Olivia Arthur, titled "Jeddah Diary," shows Saudi girls riding bicycles and walking down the streets of Durrat al-ʿArus at night, unveiled, wearing tight-fitting Western clothes and no abaya. In other images by Arthur, women wearing fashionable—and extremely short—dresses and hot pants, party with men in a gated community. The women in the images did not object to their publication. They only demanded that their faces not be visible. Rather than legitimizing the circulation of the portraits, Arthur's omission of faces serves to render the women unrecognizable. They want to be photographed, and they want to be seen. But, as such visibility might damage their reputations, they prefer to hide their identities.

Olivia Arthur's images were not produced to be shared with family and friends, and her subjects were fully aware of it. Arthur is a member of the renowned cooperative, Magnum Photos. Her pictures of Saudi Arabia have been exhibited from New York to London, while her "Jeddah Diary" has been the subject of writing in the German weekly, *Die Zeit*. The series can be purchased online and viewed anywhere in the world. Having one's picture taken by a professional photographer from Europe, and agreeing to let the pictures circulate, is—like posting videos of oneself on YouTube—a way of seeking publicity. Some videos of dancing Saudi men have been viewed over 200,000 times. The dancers of Durrat al-ʿArus, like Arthur's women, who hide their faces but not their bodies, are obviously addressing a global public. Some of them are even *posing* for it.

It is important to note that the practices documented in the aforementioned photographs and videos can take place only within the confines of an architecture that, by excluding certain parts of the Saudi public, creates a more or less private setting. Critically, according to prevailing social norms, that which is thus made public belongs, properly, to the private realm: naked skin, the female body, certain types

of movements and gestures, as well as interactions between unrelated men and women.

To the extent that secluded, privately owned facilities enable encounters between strangers, they also encourage the formation of publics. The people who meet in these places render public such practices as are conventionally restricted to the private sphere. In so doing, they challenge, and demonstrate their discontent with, prevailing norms and moral standards. This is particularly evident in an example given by Amélie Le Renard, who reports that on September 25, 2008 (the national holiday commemorating the Saudi Kingdom's founding), customers in a Riyadh shopping mall spontaneously expressed their opposition to the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, or moral police (Le Renard, *Society of Young Women* 115-116). They turned the mall into a stage for civil disobedience and posted videos of their protest online, thus publicizing their dissatisfaction with the moral police and challenging its authority.

In many ways, the practice of documenting and sharing alternative notions of publicness recalls the concept of counterpublics, elaborated by Michael Warner.[6]

Groups of people whose sexual identities, or moral attitudes, conflict with the norms of their social environment can often only congregate in secluded places. Meeting in private settings to avoid social stigma, they may nonetheless record their activities—for example, by taking pictures. The imagined publicity creates a feeling of glamour, as Warner puts it, which allows them "to experience their bodies in a way that would not [be] possible without this mutual witnessing and display" (13). For Warner, counterpublics are distinguished from other publics precisely by virtue of their being in conflict with the norms of a larger, dominant, restrictive cultural context. I do not mean to say that every chalet tenant in Obhur or Durrat al-ʿArus participates in a counterpublic. Some are merely holidaymakers, divers, shisha smokers, or bored youths. With regard to those seeking to publicize their own deviation from wider social norms, however, the concept remains a useful analytical tool.

In such cases, the longed-for publicity is not merely imagined; tens of thousands of video-views, tens of thousands of newspaper readers, and hundreds of visitors to an exhibition constitute a very real kind of public attention. Communication with the world beyond the gates is important to those who make, appear in, and circulate

such images. It renders public what in this particular cultural environment cannot otherwise be openly articulated. Like the "counterpublics of sex and gender" elsewhere (Warner 62-63), the counterpublics of Jeddah challenge prevailing notions of what public and private mean, in a wider social context. They offer the general Saudi public alternative perspectives on gender segregation, female modesty, desire, and shameful nudity. Outside the realm of the private, they show their bodies to anyone they please—friends and strangers, men and women. By publicly challenging prevailing norms, they renegotiate the very boundary between the public and the private.

To conclude, I want to emphasize once more that the motivation behind my argument is not to justify the privatization of urban space—neither in general, nor as it is currently practiced in cities around the globe (i.e., as part of a neoliberal urban planning policy through which land, formerly accessible to all, is sold to the highest bidder). The consequences of privatization are severe, and I hope I have made it abundantly clear that they have taken a great toll on Saudi Arabia, where almost all recreational spaces and leisure activities outside the home are commoditized. One's access to such spaces depends on

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one's financial capacities, personal con-
nections, gender, nationality, or ethnicity.
As indicated above, such exclusions give
rise to discriminatory practices, suffered
by migrant workers and Saudis alike.
Nonetheless, in societal contexts such as
Saudi Arabia, where strict gender politics
and rules of conduct govern public
space—and in which the state radically
restricts the very possibility of constituting
alternative publics—gated communities
and similar types of privatized urban
space permit those with access to them to
enact alternative notions of publicness
and privacy, thus enabling the formation
of counterpublics capable of assaulting
prevailing norms.

Notes

[1] Gender segregation continues to play an important role in public life, even after its abolition in certain places, such as shopping malls, under crown prince Muhammad bin Salman (since 2017). Although some of the cases presented here are already history, the points I want to make with regard to the use of privatized public spaces as places of encounter thus remain valid.

[1] Personal interview, February 2012.

[2] E-mail received July 4, 2009, originally in German, my translation.

[3] See Alhadar and McCahill for further examples supporting this claim.

[4] Personal interview, January 2009.

[5] Warner borrows the term "counterpublics" from Nancy Fraser ("Rethinking" 121–24). Whereas Fraser was mostly interested in "subaltern counterpublics," Warner's focus is on "counterpublics of sex and gender." He thus extends the concept to other discourses and demonstrates its applicability to different social classes and contexts.

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Urban Oman: From Modern to Postmodern Mobility in Muscat?

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In our contribution, we discuss how modern types of urban structures and mobility have developed in Muscat, Oman. We argue that a transition from modern to postmodern types of mobility will be closely related to the transition from a car-dependent society to a society with options for multi-modal and smart mobility as well as new organizational forms. We raise the question of the extent to which specific social groups are disadvantaged by the existing mobility system. Furthermore, we explore if current plans will turn the future mobility system into a more postmodern and more inclusive one.

Keywords: Modernity, Postmodernity, Mobility, Urban, Oman, Muscat

Introduction

In 1970, *Sultān Qabūs bin Saʿīd Al Saʾyyid* (Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said) ascended to power in Oman, and many observers have identified this event as Oman's entry point into a new era, its *renaissance* period[1]. The discovery and exploitation of oil and gas have significantly shaped Oman's development and have contributed to the welfare of its citizens. The United Nations Development Programme has described Oman's progress between 1970 and 2010 as a "success story" because Oman could report "the fastest progress" in the Human Development Index by "converting oil to health and education" (54). In this paper, we discuss on the extent to which the development in the last five decades can be considered a progress toward modern and postmodern structures. In particular, we focus on everyday mobility in Muscat Capital Area.

Section 2 lays the conceptual groundwork for the paper, introducing the terms "modern" and "postmodern" and how they are used with regard to society and to urban development. Section 3 discusses how social and urban structures have developed in the last five decades in Oman and whether specific elements can be characterized as traditional, modern, or postmodern. Section 4 focuses on the mobility

dimension. The first part introduces the reader to (modern) current-day automobility in Muscat. The second part presents new trends toward a smarter and more sustainable (postmodern) mobility. Section 4 is based on our empirical fieldwork conducted in Muscat in 2016 and 2017. To collect first-hand data on mobility patterns, we realized a large-scale quantitative household survey (n= 850), as well as 39 individual qualitative interviews. To learn more about urban and transport planning, we also conducted four expert interviews with representatives from the Muscat Municipality, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MOTC), and the transportation company Mwasalat. Since this paper focuses on a conceptual discussion of current mobility, we will only briefly touch on the concrete results of the survey (for more details, see Didero et al.). In section 5, we discuss the extent to which specific social groups of Muscat's urban society are disadvantaged by the existing mobility system. We also explore if future MOTC plans will turn the current mobility system into a more postmodern and more inclusive one.

Postmodernism and Postmodernity in Urban and Mobility Studies

When discussing postmodern urban mobility, a short reflection on the general meaning of the term postmodern is required. Both the adjective *postmodern* and the corresponding nouns *postmodernism* and *postmodernity* are hard to differentiate. They have been used in a variety of disciplines in reference to different concepts and issues. In general, there are three major sets of meaning:

as an aesthetic movement (especially in the arts, in literature, but also architecture) since the late 1950s (Klages)

as a philosophy or a view of the world (Knox and Marston) connected to scientific methods and approaches, such as post-structuralism or deconstruction (Dear and Flusty).

as a specific historical era that is closely connected to a specific social formation and economic system (Nicol)

As a philosophical and scientific approach, postmodernism is generally seen as one that is replacing modernist attitudes such as objectivism, rationalism, and realism (Klages) with a more subjectivist and constructivist view of the world that distances itself from the fundamental premises of modernism and its "grand theories" (Wood 132). The definition of postmodernity as a specific historical period is based on the observation of substantial changes in economic and social structures that emerged during the late 20th century (Nicol 1). Some authors conclude that we are currently living in a postmodern period that is distinct from a previous era of modernity (Lyotard). Other writers rather argue for a change that is emerging from the condition of modernity itself. Instead of using the term postmodernity, they therefore propose alternative terminologies to describe this phenomenon, for example "reflexive modernity" (Beck) or "liquid modernity" (Baumann).

In the context of urban geography and urban mobility studies in general and for our approach in particular, all three of the term's dimensions (as a style, a method, and an era) are relevant. However, while "postmodern architecture" and "postmodern scientific approaches" (Wood 132, 137) might be referred to at some point, this article is mainly concerned with an analysis of postmodernity as a historical, economic, and social condition that has been (and will be) influencing the urban (intra-) structure, governance, and mobility.

Postmodern cities are shaped by more general alterations of social and cultural structures, as well as by the development of lifestyle groups, consumerism, rising incomes, and free time availability. Soja described postmodern cities as characterized by structural fragmentation, loss of a functional core, social polarization processes, and the privatization of public spaces. They feature large-scale urban projects and *privatopias* such as waterfront developments and inner-city rehabilitation projects, gated communities, and large-scale urban entertainment centers. In addition, they are places of material and visual consumption (Knox and Marston 232, 239). Examples of postmodern urban structures have been described mainly for Western cities. Nevertheless, with globalization trends shaping cities worldwide, Wood suggests that the concept can be used as a sort of "searchlight" (145) for empirical urban studies in other parts of the globe as well. This is what we intend to do in the case of Muscat, with regard to both city structures and urban mobility.

Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern Structures in Oman and Muscat

The discovery, exploitation, and export of oil and gas since 1967 and the ascendance to power of Sultan Qaboos bin Said in

	1970	2010
Life expectancy[1]	49.4 years	75.5 years
Fertility rate[1]	7.2	3.1
Hospitals[1]	2	58
Schools[1]	3	1,283
Students[1]	900	623,389
Telephone subscribers[1]	557	3,493,527
Human Development Index[2]	0.36	0.79

Table 1: "Modernization of Oman 1970-2010", own design, sources: 1) McMillan 6; 2) UNDP 29

1970 have been identified as Oman's entry point into a new era (Whelan). Under the auspices of Sultan Said bin Taimur, Sultan Qaboos bin Said's father, Oman was characterized by extreme international isolation. Peterson classifies Sultan Said bin Taimur as a "neo-traditional ruler"," (4) since he aimed at preserving the existing traditional society and values. Other authors explain his policies with his desire to avoid financial risk and maintain Oman's independence from foreign influence (Jones and Ridout 161). Although at that time, pressure on the state to allow socio-economic changes and to promote systematic development efforts was growing (Peterson 4), the modest development programs before 1970 resulted in only two hospitals, three schools, and around ten kilometres of asphalted road (see Table 1 and Table 3).

Oman: Modernizing and Modern

In one of his first declarations, Sultan Qaboos bin Said explained his intention to develop and modernize the country. Between 1980 and 2000, a share of 40-45% of GDP was invested in building public infrastructure (Valeri 84). These investments have significantly shaped the development of the Sultanate and contributed to a rapid modernization process. The countrywide programs included technical infrastructure (roads, electricity, etc.), as well as social infrastructure (schools, hospitals, etc.). In addition, a welfare system for Omani nationals was established, financed through the redistribution of oil rents and covering areas such as education, health services and medicine, and social assistance programs. Moreover, the state started playing the role of a "universal employer", offering income opportuni-

	1970	2010
Urbanization	30%[1]	75%[2]
Population	30,000[3]	776,000[4]

Table 2: "Urbanization of Oman and Population Growth of Muscat Capital Area 1970-2010", own design, sources: 1) Bontenbal 33; 2) al-Raisi 14; 3) Scholz 162; 4) al-Raisi 28

ties in the public and para-public sector (Valeri 84, 86, 251).

Although the evidence of the modernization programs is undisputed, political and historical scientists do not perceive contemporary Oman as a modern country. The monarchy's state and society are patriarchal (Peterson 5, 8), and Oman is considered a post-traditional country as well as a "nation in transition" (Al-Barwani and Albeely 122), where profound social change is taking place.

Changes are also taking place in Oman's economic sectors, with traditional sectors (agriculture and fishing) declining and post-traditional structures (export of natural resources) continuously growing. Since the beginning of the millennium, there have been a number of efforts to diversify the Omani economy, and new sectors such as tourism, (private) education and communication have emerged, constituting a trend toward modern economic structures.

Young urban Omani women are particularly affected by the ongoing social changes. They marry at a later age and tend to have fewer children (see Table 1). They work as lawyers, doctors, dentists, engineers, economists, bankers, and university professors (Chatty 248). However, despite the integration of women in the education sector and workforce, family bonds and obligations still hold strong. Thus, their everyday lives are shaped by traditional norms and gender roles, as well as by modern habits and lifestyles.

Muscat: Modern and Postmodern

Over the last five decades, Oman has experienced extreme urban growth, driven by natural population increase, rural-urban migration, and international labor migration to the country. Consequently, Oman turned from a predominantly rural society into a highly urbanized one (Bontenbal). Muscat Capital Area witnessed the highest growth rate (see Table 2). In 1970, only 30,000 to 50,000 people lived in the area; by 1980,

that number had grown to 226,000, among them 108,000 non-Omanis (Scholz 162). The Development Strategy Plan of 1975 shaped the development of Muscat, where the most important economic activities and political and administrative functions were to be concentrated (Hawley; Whelan). In contrast to other metropolises of the global south, urban poverty and irregular housing were counteracted quickly and efficiently by implementing large-scale government housing projects (Scholz 138, 177). Simultaneously while the low-income and social housing was being built, new neighborhoods for high-income families of Omani and Western origin developed in close proximity to the coast.

In 2010, 776,000 people lived in Muscat Capital Area (Al-Raisi 28), 48 percent of them foreigners. Despite the rapid population growth and urban sprawl westward, within a short time the newly developed neighborhoods were equipped with modern infrastructure (roads, schools, electricity, water, etc.; Nebel and Richthofen 25). The first urban structures that can be considered postmodern were developed after the turn of the millennium. In 2006, the construction of a first large Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC), called *al-mouj* (the wave) started. Because it was staged as a *Mediterranean* harbor, shopping, leisure,

and housing area, it is seen as a postmodern project. Other postmodern projects catering to the consumerist needs of well-off young urbanites include luxurious malls such as Muscat Grand Mall (opened in 2015) and Muscat City Centre (enlarged in 2013). The newly developed urban areas and the heterogeneity of urban society point to an increasing fragmentation of urban space because of the postmodern urban development.

This section has shown that, in contemporary Oman, (post-)traditional (political and social), modern (economic and urban), and postmodern (urban) structures exist side by side. In the following, we discuss the extent to which mobility structures and mobility patterns in Oman can be considered modern and postmodern.

Mobility Structures and Practices in Muscat

As Rammler and other authors have pointed out, the era of modernity coincided with a significant increase in the frequency and extent of human mobility. Lash and Urry therefore concluded that "[m]odern society is a society on the move" (252).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, everyday urban mobility has increasingly

	1970	2010
Asphalted roads[1]	10 km[2]	31,000 km (2012)
Registered cars[2]	-	776,000 (2009)

Table 3: Modernization of Transport and Mobility in Oman 1970-2017, own design, sources: 1) National Center for Statistics and Information; 2) Islam and Hadhrami 907f.

been dominated by automobility (Lanzendorf and Schönduwe). After World War II, the general increase in wealth and welfare turned both the private car and the owner-occupied house from luxury goods into common goods. Suburbanization and surging levels of private car use went hand in hand. While the automobile allowed for more dispersed settlement structures, these structures in turn made the use of private cars compelling. From a social scientist's perspective, city structures that adapted specifically to cars have created a "new spatiality" (Elsheshtawy) of "motorscapes" (Edensor) and have made for a novel experience of the urban as such (Sheller and Urry 210).

In the last few decades, social and economic transformations including globalization processes, the broad availability of air travel, the Internet, and smartphone applications have obviously had a substantial impact on individual mobilities in general. The picture of urban everyday mobility in particular is less clear. In most

cities in the West, the private car remains the cornerstone of everyday mobility. For the individual user, the private car's convenience, non-stop availability, and privacy seem to outweigh and mask its negative ramifications, such as air pollution, traffic congestion, and considerable expense. On the other hand, authors like Lanzendorf and Schönduwe argue that indicators from both the supply and the demand side of everyday mobilities hint at a future paradigm shift toward postmodern forms of mobility. Postmodern transport options based on new technologies include car-based solutions like Uber or carpooling platforms, but also include public mass transportation systems. The broad availability of smartphones and app-based solutions for ticketing, trip planning, and real-time traffic monitoring, for example, could render the use of public transportation significantly more convenient. A shift from a modern private car dominated urban mobility toward multi-modal forms of postmodern mobility would in most cases include a more important role for

public transportation and car-sharing schemes. This could reduce congestion and improve accessibility and social inclusion for all those who cannot afford to own a car. This shift could thus enhance the sustainability of mobility structures.

In Oman, the modernization of the transport system, the construction of asphalted roads, went hand in hand with the urbanization and motorization process (see Table 3). Responding to the need to cover long distances in a short time and in keeping with the guidelines of the Supreme Committee for Planning issued in 1991, the road network has continuously been developed. In Muscat Capital Area, particular attention was given to upgrading and extending the highway network. By contrast, a true public transportation system[2] was missing until 2015.

Muscat: a Modern City of Cars

Against the backdrop of the modernization processes and the development of a more or less affluent society, the car has developed into the main means of transportation. (see Figure 1)

In 2017, the average household in Oman disposed of at least one private car, and the motorization level was 304 vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants (National Center for

Figure 1: "Sultan Qaboos Highway, the main intra-urban backbone of mobility in Muscat opened 1974 and gradually upgraded to an 8-lane highway", courtesy by Dominik Elsmann 2012, usage rights by the authors.

Statistics and Information, our own calculations). The costs for acquiring and maintaining a car and petrol prices (0.45 €/liter) are low (even after the petrol price increase since 2016), and thus automobility is affordable for almost all income groups. Only low-qualified labor migrants could not and still cannot afford to have their foreign driver's license recognized or to buy and maintain a car. By contrast, in well-off households – regardless of nationality – almost every household member above the age of 18 years has a driver's license

and a private car at his or her disposal (Deffner and Pfaffenbach).

Our survey in Muscat Capital Area[3] revealed that only 2% of the polled households do not own a car. Likewise, only 2% of the surveyed households are without at least one member holding a driver's license. The analyses of our data show that the households without a car are almost exclusively Indian families with a monthly income below 1,000 OR (2,200 €).

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In a city without a dense network of public transportation, car mobility is not a luxury for leisure trips, but a necessity. The car is needed, for example, to get to one's workplace (87% of the respondents take the car to get to work). Since workplaces are clustered and widely dispersed, employees have to cover distances anywhere from less than 5 kilometers to up to more than 50 kilometers (one way). On average, work trips take 30 minutes. Comparing different neighborhoods, we found that trips to work from recently developed suburban neighborhoods take twice as long as from older neighborhoods situated closer to the major workplace clusters. However, even long commutes to the workplace can be covered in a reasonable amount of time due to the good road infrastructure and the highways (speed limit of 100 km/h and higher within the metropolis).

The current high degree of car-dependency, however, does not offer the same degree of mobility to all residents in Muscat. In particular, women without a driver's license and/or being a member of a family that owns only one car, elderly people, children, teenagers under the driving age, and low-income labor migrants are faced with noticeable restrictions to their daily mobility.

Alternatives to the Private Car: Modern Options

For residents of Muscat who do not own a private car, the alternatives have been quite limited. Until 2015, there was no true public transportation system. Options were limited to either privately organized licensed taxi or microbus services (Baiza buses[4]) or informal transport options. According to the Royal Oman Police in 2014, there were 13,400 taxis and microbuses operating in Muscat (Jimenez et al.). However, many people did not consider them appropriate alternatives to the private car because taxis had no set fares and prices were often excessive and arbitrarily set by the taxi drivers. Especially female passengers often do not feel safe using taxis. The microbuses operate only on a few fixed routes (mainly along the central Sultan Qaboos Highway) and are often overcrowded. They have neither a regular timetable nor official bus stops.

As an answer to this lack of viable alternative transportation, some residents have started to offer informal shared private taxi services. Although this service is not officially recognized by the Royal Oman Police, it has been operating since the 2000s. Most passengers come into contact with it through personal relations and word of mouth, as the service technically speaking is not legal and cannot be formally advertised. Passengers contact the driver by phone and the driver then determines the route along which he picks up the passengers. This is a good option for people who have a regular route throughout the week. However, the drivers are also available for unplanned trips and can pick their passengers up on request. The drivers are usually Indian, and either they or their Omani sponsor owns the car. Although this service is illegal, Omani sponsors still participate in the service because it provides additional income for them.

Passengers are predominately Indian. Among them, women make up almost half of the passengers. For the passengers, this option is more cost-effective than owning a private car. It also avoids the tedious process of attaining an Omani driver's license, which can be a costly and time-consuming process for expatriates with low income and demanding working hours.

Future Mobility: Postmodern Structures and Practices?

So far, our results clearly show that mobility patterns in Muscat have been deeply rooted in modernity because of the dominant transport means (private car) and the operational modes displayed by the rare

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alternatives (taxi and microbus). We argue, that a transition from modern to postmodern types of mobility would be closely related to the transition from a car-dependent society to a society with options for multi-modal and smart mobility, as well as new forms of organization in the public transportation sector. In Muscat, some first developments in this direction already have taken place.

Public Transport 2.0
The Oman National Transport Company was founded in 1972. In late 2015, the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MOTC) decided to radically restructure and reorganize Oman's public transportation sector. The company was rebranded into *muwāṣalāt* (transportations).

Under the organization and legislation of the MOTC, Mwasalat has been developing toward a company with a multifaceted profile offering a variety of services: intracity and inter-city bus transportation services, cargo and freight delivery, and shuttle services. Mwasalat also offers a taxi service accompanied by a telephone application for pre-booking and immediate service. MOTC has granted operational licenses for taxi services to two companies (Ibtikar IT Company and Mwasalat) to support the public bus service, which

still lacks feeder buses that service the bus stops along the fixed routes (MOTC 28ff). These new taxi services have been installed as a result of the new Land Transport Law (RD 10/2016), which aims to "encourage the participation of private investors in public transport sector" and to "break the monopoly of public transport services and open the way for free competition in the provision of public transport services to guarantee the provision of diversified and quality transport services" (MOTC 26).

In a recent development, the public bus system is introducing a hybrid version of bus transportation that combines modern elements (street-bound without separate bus lanes) with postmodern elements (app-based; organized as a public-private partnership).

App-based Car-sharing
Although our data so far shows us that private car use is the predominant method of transportation in Muscat, some students are developing ways toward a smarter, more sustainable, and socially inclusive automobility.

A closer look at the students' mobility patterns lends evidence that it is quite common for students to carpool to and from

the university with their roommates or friends who share similar class schedules. Students share rides not only to share costs, but also to share each other's company during the drives. Another reason for carpooling is that many students from the interior regions of Oman do not bring their cars to Muscat during study weeks and thus seek other means of transport to and from the university.

At the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the largest university in Oman, students took this concept to another level. In September 2017, they formalized and spread the car-sharing process with WhatsApp. About 250 students from SQU are now part of a campaign called *Hamlat Kalbunian*. Most of the users are male Omani nationals[5]. Approximately 50 of the participants have a car and 200 are students seeking transportation. There are currently three different WhatsApp groups, categorized by the participants' residence areas. Drivers use a message template in their respective WhatsApp group to notify their upcoming route, and passengers use it to post their requests for pickups. The volunteer drivers use their own private cars and are not compensated for fuel expenses. For this reason, the campaign has won a university award for a charitable nonprofit cause.

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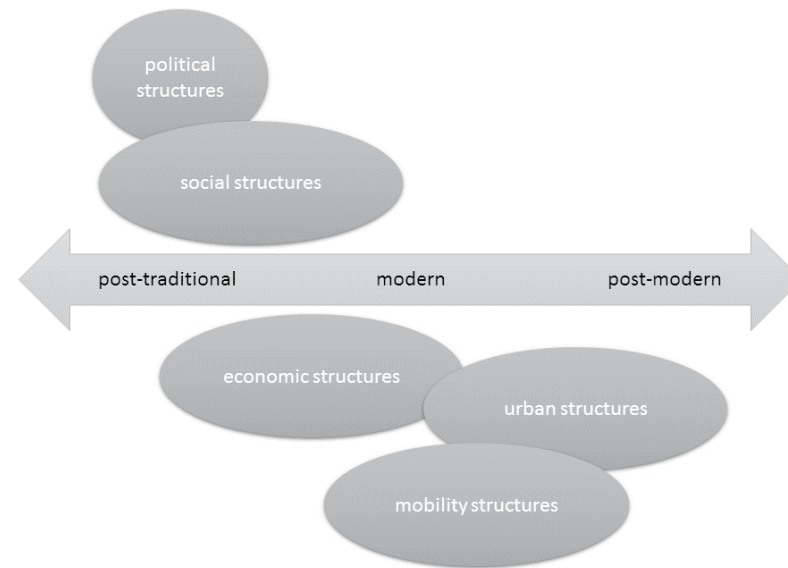**email:** sonebel@hotmail.com

Figure 2: "The Transition from Post-Traditional to Modern and Postmodern Structures in Muscat" own design. copyright by the authors.

oped only recently. The variety of mobility options that display modern as well as postmodern elements reflects very well the heterogeneity of the urban society (see Figure 2). Specific social groups develop differing mobility patterns with regard to existing financial and cultural constraints. Consequently, modern mobility options (private cars, carpooling, and conventional taxi/microbus services) and postmodern ones (hybrid bus as a prerequisite for multi-modal mobility, app-based options) exist simultaneously.

The various mobility options and preferences become obvious in particular with regard to public transportation. According to our survey, the new buses are used neither by the interviewed Omanis nor by those Indian families who have the means to own and maintain a private car. In our expert interviews, our interlocutors assumed that the increasing number of passengers of Mwasalat buses results from the foreign workers with low incomes who cannot afford a car. Their access to the city depends to a large degree on public mobility options. Therefore, for them, the ongoing expansion of the bus network is of the utmost importance.

Women also remain disadvantaged within the current mobility structures. Omani

Because this type of car-sharing is based on new technologies, it can be considered a postmodern mobility option. Although until recently only a small number of users has been involved, our interviews indicate that postmodern app-based mobility practices will most likely spread in the near future because of the broad availability of smartphones in Oman and a young population with great affinity to new technologies. This opportunity has already been seized by the Middle East ride-hailing service *Careem*, which announced in October 2018 that it will introduce an app-based taxi-calling service in cooperation with a private taxi service in Muscat in the upcoming months.

Muscat's Citizens between Modern and Postmodern Mobility Options
Current mobility patterns in Muscat are still car-dependent and therefore deeply rooted in modernity. This has not changed since a new public transport offer (Mwasalat buses) was introduced. Informal smart solutions for mobility also devel-

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women, in particular, cannot imagine using means of transportation other than the private car, for cultural reasons (restrictions on using public places when men who don't belong to the extended family are present). Women who don't have a driver's license and/or don't have a car at their disposal are therefore still extremely restricted in their access to the city.

To sum up, the current hybrid modern and postmodern mobility options are still rather selective and disadvantage certain population groups. The question is whether plans by the government to transform the current urban mobility system in Muscat will contribute to turning it into a more sustainable and more inclusive one. Assuming that most people will reduce car mobility (and turn toward other options) only if the car becomes more expensive, the Ministry is planning to introduce road tolls and parking meters. In parallel, it plans to continue its endeavors to establish an affordable, accessible, safe, and smart integrated transport system. If truly established, this new mobility system would be more inclusive because it will offer public transport that is affordable for all income groups and makes the city more accessible for those without a private car. At the same time, however, segregation of mobility will increase

because only middle- and high-income households will be able to afford car mobility.

Notes

[1] In addition to the noted authors, Hamda al-Hajriy contributed to this project as research assistant. Furthermore, during our fieldwork in Oman Dr. Hamad al-Gharibi, Director of Planning and Survey at the Ministry of Housing in Buraimi supported us in many ways. We owe all our local collaborators a huge debt of gratitude. In addition, we would like to thank the German Research Foundation for their financial support for the project.

[2] As defined par example by the Cambridge Dictionary "a system of vehicles such as buses and trains that operate at regular times on fixed routes and are used by the public".

[3] We exclusively focused on Omani and Indian households living in Muscat because they make up the two largest nationality groups. In order to be able to compare mobility patterns, we looked at higher paid Indian nationals who live with their families in Oman. We excluded lower paid Indian nationals since they usually depend on their employers with regard to their housing and mobility.

[4] Baiza is the minor coin of the Omani Rial (OR).

[5] This campaign does not include female students yet. Since SQU is a segregated university, the segregation extends to the campaign. There is, however, a budding request from female students to have the same service.

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Royal Dream: City Branding and Saudi Arabia's NEOM

Hend Aly

Introduction

As we watch, something of a revolution is happening here in Saudi Arabia. As the kingdom looks to growth, let me introduce the vision behind that growth story […]. Prince Muhammed bin Salman ("Day1 Coverage")

Using these words, the new futuristic mega-city NEOM was introduced by the launch event. The Crown Prince announced the city. It is planned to cover an area of 26,500 km^2 by the Red Sea, making it just slightly smaller than Belgium. The futuristic city's name means new future: NEO is the Latin word for new, and M is the first letter of the word *mustaqbal* (future). NEOM will cost $500 billion, invested by the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund and local and international investors. The city aims to attract the "best talents" offering them "unmatched livability" (neom.com). It is envisioned not only to lead the future in technology, energy, and livability, as the website shows, but to also to diversify the Saudi economy, rebrand national identity, and, importantly, reaffirm the Crown Prince's power position.

As a branded image, NEOM emerged in a context in which "*new cities*" are booming regionally and globally. In the same region, the Dubai model has emerged,

In 2017, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia announced the new mega-city NEOM. The city is envisioned to be a "start-up the size of a country", and it aims at attracting the "best talents", offering them "technology with livability at its core." The paper foregrounds city branding to understand what NEOM is all about: its imagined society and proposed governance. It further explores how city branding strategies position NEOM and the Kingdom regionally and globally and reaffirm the Crown Prince's power. It also questions the conceptual nature of the branded object itself, as branding documents show that NEOM alternates between being a city, a start-up, a country, and the Crown Prince's legacy.

Keywords: New city, branding, creative, corporatization, urban development, Saudi Arabia, NEOM

and since then, it has been reproduced and replicated all around the world. Academically, urban development in Dubai has been analyzed as a model, as well as a process of Dubaification, a neoliberal urban development trend and brand (Elsheshtawy; Hvidt; Adham). Some studies went further to analyze the "Dubai Effect" (Turan).[1] Within this competitive context, NEOM was portrayed as "not just one more new city", or a new replica of Dubai, but rather as an exceptional futuristic city in which its offers go beyond the Dubai model, introducing a post-Dubai era to the world.

NEOM is not the first new city in Saudi Arabia; it was preceded by six new "economic cities", which were not as ambitious in their promises, but also aiming at economic growth (SAGIA). Notably, the Kingdom is going through social, economic, and political instability, which it hopes to solve by diversifying the economy and shifting toward a knowledge economy. Social liberalization has been intensified since Muhammed bin Salman became the Crown Prince. Cinemas have been opened and women are now able to attend concerts and drive, but are still imprisoned if they demand greater freedoms. More importantly, the Crown Prince has affirmed his position by rearranging

the power balance, which has included sweeping arrests among the elite. NEOM is part of this process; it has been presented as the legacy of Prince bin Salman, which signifies rerouting the kingdom toward a knowledge economy, technology, tolerance, diversity, and liberalization. However, the killing of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoqji in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul has massively affected the project, as many companies, businessmen, and public figures do not want to be associated with the Crown Prince at this moment and pulled out of either the City Board or the Saudi Economic Conference in October 2018 (Perper).[2]

Given this conflicting context, by analyzing city-related branding documents such as the official website and launch event, the paper explores how NEOM's city branding has been utilized – not only to position the city within the global competition among places, but also to brand the Crown Prince and reaffirm his power. The paper analyzes the image and the discourse constructed around the city, with a particular interest in what the city in itself is all about, its imagined society, and proposed governance. Moreover, the study conceptualizes NEOM as a brand, employing the basic conception of city and place branding. It interlinks Harvey's entrepreneurial-

ism and Florida's creative class to focus on the complexity and the vagueness of the branded object.

City Branding between Florida's Utopia and Harvey's Dystopia

The rise of neoliberalism led to the emergence of various scholarly debates and concepts that deal with the shifting perceptions of the city and its role. Within the neoliberal turn, cities are perceived as rational actors that seek opportunities and growth and compete in the global competition of places. Therefore, attracting investments and developing a unique image and a brand became main functions of city governance.

The study analyzes the image created by NEOM's city branding. It is worth mentioning that the branded object in this case is not entirely clear, as it has been presented as a city, not a city, a startup, a country, and a legacy of the Crown Prince. For that reason, the conceptual framework engages with the vague and complex branded object, firstly, based on a basic conception of city and place branding evolving from corporate branding. Secondly, under the overarching concept of city branding, the study conceptualizes NEOM as neoliberal urban development using Florida's creative class and Harvey's conception of

entrepreneurialism as urban governance and its extreme realization in Moser's analysis of new cities ("New Cities").

City or place branding has emerged from corporate branding. It has been defined as creating an image that makes the city more competitive and attractive for investments, businesses, and tourists. This process has been strongly connected to the neoliberal urban agenda and the emergence of the entrepreneurial city. Studies of city branding can be divided into two groups; the first focuses on defining it and specifying how it should be done, such as the studies conducted by Ashworth and Voogd, Kavaratzis, and Dinnie. Second, critical studies by scholars such as Paddison, Savani and Bennett, and Anttiroiko have questioned the process of creating a brand, arguing that it is not democratic. This leads to the production of an image that is detached from the everyday life of its citizens and rather reflects the economic and political interests of investors and decision makers.

Harvey is one of the scholars who dealt critically and early with the strong interlinkage between urban development and economic growth. In the 1980s, he wrote on the shift in city governance from managerialism, which is based on local provi-

sion of services to the inhabitants, to entrepreneurialism, which rather focuses on fostering economic growth by appealing to market rationality. Harvey argued that this shift directs city resources toward having innovative, creative, and entrepreneurial city governance that is able to compete and attract more resources and capital (3-7). This turn, which Harvey pointed out in the 1980s, has since then grown as a global trend among cities, pushing more urban governments toward functioning like corporations in a highly competitive market.

A growing number of new emerging cities are an extreme case of what Harvey noted, as they often actually follow a corporate model. Moser, in a talk at McGill University, presented her study of the phenomena of the new cities in which she tracked 110-150 ongoing new cities in more than 40 mostly developing countries ("New Cities"). She noted that the vast majority of these cities, if not all, adapt a corporate model in which the city is headed by a CEO, not a mayor, in the complete absence of an elected city council. The driving factors behind the new cities are mainly economic and political; the cities are shifting toward a knowledge economy and rebranding the national image. Importantly, most of these cities have not reached the targeted pop-

ulation, and some of them exist only in PowerPoint presentations and websites – as what Moser calls the PowerPoint Cities.

Attracting human creativity has been utilized as an urban development strategy that aims at economic growth in the post-industrial era. This has generated a myriad of perspectives. Some argue that having firms in the creative industries leads to economic growth, while others argue that attracting creative people is the key driver. Florida belongs to the latter group. He has developed the concept of the creative class, which became instantly popular among city planners. The creative class and its critique are central to the analysis of NEOM, as its conception greatly relies on the attraction of creative people, or as the Crown Prince calls them, "the dreamers".

According to Florida, the creative class includes scientists, engineers, university professors, artists, entertainers, actors, designers, opinion makers such as writers, think-tank researchers, and "creative professionals who work for knowledge intensive industries such as the high-tech sectors, financial services, legal and healthcare professions, and business management." (8) The main line in Florida's argument and consultancy is that what attracts this class

to a place is not primarily job opportunities, but more importantly place characteristics such as tolerance, diversity, and a high quality of life. In short, the path for cities to economic growth is investing in the quality of the place, represented in what he called the 3Ts, talent, technology, and tolerance, aiming at attracting the creative class (10).[3]

The concept of the "creative class" has been criticized by various academics. Conceptually, criticism is directed at its universalism and the "one size fits all" prescription (Pratt 126). Additionally, the concept was criticized for the absence of a causal mechanism between attracting creative class and economic growth (Peck 757). Importantly, various scholars have considered the creative class to be a component of the neoliberal agenda that revolves around competition, consumption, and place marketing (Peck 740, Pratt 124). As the concept demonstrates, an embedded inequality and regressive distribution model that targets the few "creative people" offers them a better quality of life at the expenses of the whole (Pratt 125). Furthermore, it ignores the division of labor by leaving behind the working and service classes that cater to the creative class (Peck 754). Also criticized has been the assumption that the creative

THE FUTURE HAS BEGUN

The land of the future, where the greatest minds and best talents are empowered to embody pioneering ideas and exceed boundaries in a world inspired by imagination.
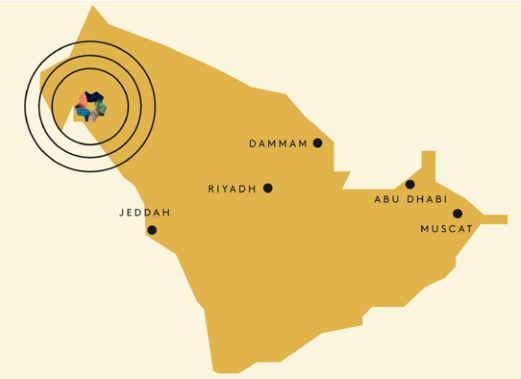
Figure 1: The Future has begun.

class is exceptionally spatially mobile and seeks soft factors like place quality rather than hard factors such as job opportunities (Martin-Brelot et al. 868).

Such debates and concepts have marked the centrality of the city within the rise of neo-liberal, just as Harvey's entrepreneurial dystopia has been intensely realized and Florida's utopian city for the creative class has proved to extremely influential within policy circles all around the world. These concepts, which have evolved in the context of cities in the US and Europe, are being realized worldwide in versions even more extreme than their original place of provenance. The paper presents NEOM as an extreme realization of both Florida's utopia and Harvey's dystopia.

Constructing an Image Comes First
The new future is not only the name of the city, but also a crucial selling point. The website presents, NEOM is "where we live the future, as we create the future." NEOM is planned to "pioneer the future" of the eleven sectors it is going to develop, including energy and water, biotech, etc. (figure 1). Technology that shapes the future, accompanied by an "idyllic life style paired with excellent economic opportunities" is what the city offers and importantly what the creative class or the dreamers are imagined to be seeking (neom. com). The next few paragraphs present the image constructed by NEOM's creators through branding.

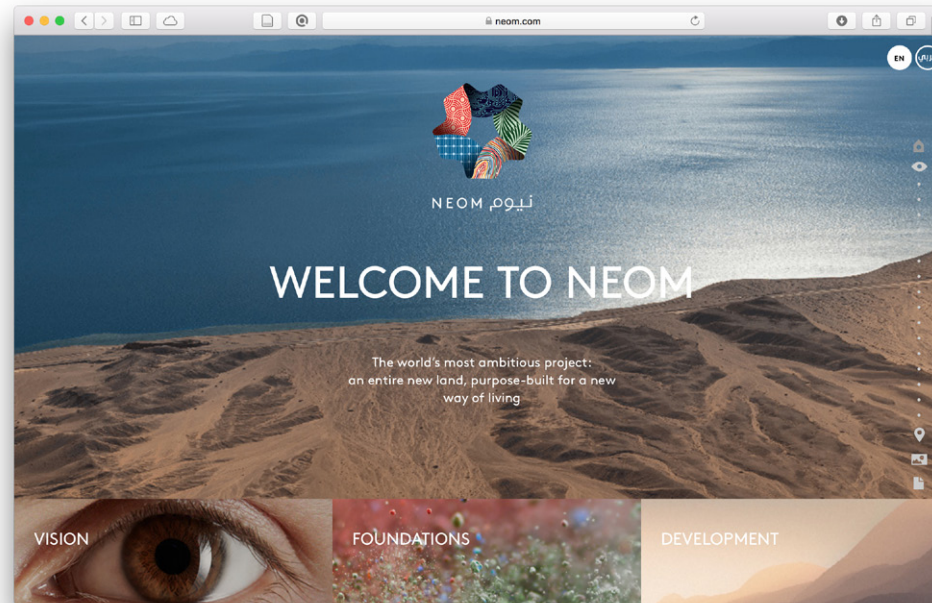Two main tools have been utilized in branding NEOM: the official website and

Figure 2: Welcome to NEOM

the launch event. neom.com is a well-designed website that presents a broad view of the city, the vision, the mission, the objectives, and the supporters (figure 2). At first sight, it looks like the webpage of a huge firm, but this is not uncommon among cities. The launch event was held at the Future Investment Initiative Conference in October 2017 and hosted by the Saudi Public Investment Fund. The session was composed of the Crown Prince and four more panelists, including

Masayoshi Son, the richest person in Japan, the Chairman and CEO of Softbank Group vision fund, which backed Alibaba.[4] Stephen A. Schwarzman, ranked 35th in Forbes' list of the 400 wealthiest people in the US, was present as the CEO and co-founder of Blackstone. Marc Raibert attended as the founder and CEO of Boston Dynamics, one of the leading US companies in robot production and famous for the BigDog and WildCat robots that were funded by the US army. Last,

Klaus Kleinfeld, the former CEO of Siemens, Alcoa, and Arconic, and at the time, designated CEO of NEOM was on hand. Notably, they are all stars in the world of business, entrepreneurialism, and technology and control huge shares of the global market. However, none of them are city planners, nor do they have any kind of expertise on urban issues. The choice of the panelists signifies the nature of investment, the needed expertise, and the priorities of city planning.

In the case of NEOM, as with many other new cities, branding and constructing an image precedes any other construction processes. However, what is special about NEOM, in my opinion, is not that it is going to be a technology hub, or that it offers economic opportunities and is promising to lead the future. What I find striking is that the object that is being branded is not clear to those who brand NEOM. Although they sometimes call it a city, they also refer to it and partially fund it as a start-up and insist that it is on the scale of a country. One might think that this merely reflects the branding strategy, but the former CEO has confirmed otherwise:

It's twenty-six thousand five hundred km², so when we say city it's not giving a justice. […] I'm not even using, per-

sonally, the word city, because it comes with so many garbage. You know I'd love it to be villages, communities, where people interact with each other. And to make tons of money […]. ("Day1 Coverage")

As importantly, the image of the Crown Prince was also being constructed. During the launch event, he was referred to as the vision of an exceptional leadership, a pioneer, a visionary, etc. This image was systematically constructed throughout the event. Schwarzman started his words by telling the story of the first time he met the Crown Prince:

He was so passionate and so visionary, so unique, that I had never met anybody in the world who had a vision of this type and who I could tell by force of personality was going to make it happen. […] Great leaders create great outcomes. ("Day1 Coverage")

According to Raibert, bin Salman is "a universal-scale big dreamer." ("Day1 Coverage") This demonstrates that NEOM is not only about the dream of the city, but more importantly, about the dreamer, the Crown Prince.

As the city remains in the imagination, or as Moser phrased it, a PowerPoint city

("New Cities"), it is interesting to contrast what is being branded with what is actually taking place on the ground. The interactive map on the website, which is supposed to reflect progress on the ground, has remained undeveloped since the launch of the website. There have been no reports of actual construction progress. More importantly, the plan, its details, and the planner were not mentioned during the launch event or afterward. Nevertheless, it has been reported that Saudi King Salman has spent his vacation in NEOM ("Saudi King Begins Holiday"). Having dreamers visit the imagined city, as if it actually exists, appears to be an attempt to reify the dream without actually starting its construction. Overall, imagination and reality remain starkly divided, while public information on the city is scarce. For now, it is impossible to say if NEOM will develop as dreamt or will remain a mere PowerPoint city.

On Society: Robot Dreams

The way NEOM is envisioned, the creative class, or as the Crown Prince calls them, the "dreamers", constitute the core of, if not the whole society. Bin Salman stated that:

We try to work only with the dreamers. This place is not the place for conven-

tional people or conventional companies. ("Day1 Coverage")

As he has clearly pointed out, the rest are not just unwelcome, they also should not take a position on the city:

Those who cannot dream should not negotiate with us should not come to NEOM. We only welcome the dreamers who want to reach to a new world. ("Day1 Coverage")

Accordingly, the branding documents have repeatedly claimed that the creators know what the dreamers actually want and need. NEOM's former CEO Kleinfeld mentioned that:

I have got two daughters […] when I listen to them and their friends you know there is a different generation. There is a different view of how the future should look like. Sustainability plays a big role. Quality of life plays a big role. And they all want to be part of the technological revolution. ("Day1 Coverage")

NEOM's offer echoes Florida's prescribed 3Ts, tolerance, technology, and talent. First, guaranteeing tolerance and diversity is among the highlights of city branding strategy. NEOM's promotional video

shows a very diverse group of people, mixed genders, all happy, young, and free. This image was accompanied by affirmation that the city provides a "truly global culture from every place and background." Notably, this image is detached from everyday life in the Kingdom. Two main issues were addressed as guarantees of tolerance and diversity. First, NEOM will be independent from the current governmental structures, as discussed below in more detail, and, second, the Crown Prince promotes the movement toward moderate Islam. He stated this clearly while introducing the city in the launch event and promised to eradicate extremism.

On technology, NEOM promises to be the future of biotech and technological and digital sciences. It offers its future residents fully automated public services, comprehensive Internet coverage, branded as "digital air", the "next generation of healthy living and transport", innovative construction, sustainability through renewable energy, and buildings with zero net carbon fingerprints, large-scale solar power generation, and next-generation advanced robots (neom.com; "Day1 Coverage").

Last, regarding talent, the city is envisioned to be fertile soil for innovation and talent to flourish. The city offers unique education and a perfect business environment full of economic opportunities, materials, and methods for advanced manufacturing, etc. The promotional video defines the city as:

A part of the world set aside for those who want to change the world. […] A place where pioneers and thinkers and doers can exchange ideas and get things done […] No set ways of thinking no restrictions, no divisions, […]! Just endless potential! (neom.com)

Adding to the 3Ts, the city offers entertainment, modern architecture, lush green spaces, cultural and art spaces, etc. Such elements were highlighted by Florida as essential attractions.

In line with Florida's belief in the mobility of the creative class, NEOM's creators and promoters bet on the mobility of the dreamers. This was mentioned several times during the conference, as expressed by Son:

We will create the largest solar power generation in the world in NEOM […] the largest and most advanced robot

generation in the world. So all the engineers from all around the world […] will come […] and develop the technology together. ("Day1 Coverage")

The question remains: who will cater to the "dreamers"? The answer is robots. Robots are meant to take over all the low-paid service jobs, even elderly care. As stated several times in the launch event, the city is going to have more robots than humans. On residents, NEOM's official website states:

The population of NEOM will grow organically in line with its automation and robotics developments, set to reduce labor-intensive manual tasks. This will, in turn, ensure the growth of a highly skilled labor force that will fill creative and strategic positions. (neom.com)

NEOM transcends Florida's idealized no-collar workspace city with creative class dominance to be a city with actually no working and service classes, exclusively made up of highly -skilled labor. NEOM is envisioned to be a city where the division of labor is only between the dreamers and the robots.

To conclude, NEOM's branding targets the creative class. The city creators believe that they know exactly who the dreamers

are and how to influence their life decisions. This is accompanied by betting on the mobility of the dreamers, which can be risky, as this assumption has been refuted by earlier studies such as Eckert et al. Moreover, city vision disregards basic issues such as wealth distribution, inequality, etc. while being highly concerned about the wellbeing of the dreamers, as if they will be all equal in power, opportunity and wealth.

On Governance: Money Rules
NEOM's governance as presented by its creators transcends Harvey's shift toward entrepreneurialism and presents a full corporate model. It is also claimed to be an independent entity within the Kingdom's jurisdiction. However, it is not autonomous from the Crown Prince's authority. It is the Crown Prince's legacy, and it is his plan for the dreamers all around the world.

Like many other new cities, NEOM has a CEO, not a mayor. The first announced CEO was Kleinfeld, a key figures in the business world. During the NEOM conference, Schwarzman, one of the other panelists, said about him:

> He doesn't stop, he is a very on top of it, effective, aggressive, executive […] they picked a very good person who

has knowledge and connections all over the world. ("Day1 Coverage")

Although the city has not yet moved from the website to reality, Kleinfeld was named an advisor of the Crown Prince and replaced by Nazmi al-Nasr ("Klaus Kleinfeld named adviser"), a chemical engineer. The new CEO is a member of the founding board of NEOM and has held various prominent positions in Saudi Aramco, among them project manager of Ghawar, the largest known oil field in the world.

Apart from the city founding board's public announcement of the selection of the new CEO, the selection process was not public. This leaves a number of unanswered questions, such as what the selection criteria were, what the function of the CEO exactly is, what the role of the Crown Prince is, what the limits of his authority are, and if there is any hope that in the future the CEO or the "mayor" will be elected. Furthermore, according to the official website, the Kingdom has formed a "special authority to oversee NEOM, chaired by the Crown Prince", with no further details available on its role, authority, and members. Apparently, the city's independence from the Kingdom does not necessarily imply independence from the

Crown Prince. The power of the CEO in the city, once built, could prove to be substantial. According to the Crown Prince:

> This is the first of such experience in the world that serves business people to formulate their own regulations and laws that serve them. ("Day1 Coverage")

Although this might sound attractive to businessmen and entrepreneurs, it does not offer much on how power relations and balances among actors in the competitive business world would reflect on this idealized view of the city in Florida's utopian sense, in which class and hierarchy diminish and differences merely produce and contribute to tolerance, not to conflict. In addition, it signals that business is the sole function of the city, and "business people" are the only residents who will exist in it or matter.

The question of governance is further complicated by the fact that NEOM is planned to extend for 1000 km^2 – into the Egyptian Sinai and to Aqaba in Jordan (neom.com; JT; Kalin). It is not entirely clear which regulations are going to apply on the non-Saudi parts of NEOM. Notably, the official website states that the project is entirely owned by the Saudi Public Investment Fund. There are no clarifications from the Egyptian and Jordanian

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leadership and government on how this will function.

To conclude, NEOM's proposed leadership, regulations, and funding do not look at all like those of a city and pose more questions than answers. Earlier, I discussed NEOM's imagined society, which is supposedly inclusive to all dreamers. However, the proposed governance indicates that it is at best accessible to an even smaller segment of the dreamers: the business people. Not all the dreamers are allowed to dream about governance. Moreover, the city is celebrated for being independent from the Kingdom's government structure. However, what makes it more independent from the Kingdom, might make it more dependent on the Crown Prince. More importantly, internationally, the Crown Prince's promises of tolerance and liberalization became even more shaky and unrealistic after the killing of the Saudi journalist Khashoqji in 2018.

Conclusion

By analyzing the branded image, the paper has shown that a city that functions as a company, welcoming only the creative class and replacing the working and service classes by robots, is an extreme realization of Harvey's dystopia and Florida's utopia. In this case, city branding focused on portraying NEOM's leading role, its imagined society, and its governance. However, it did not make clear what NEOM actually is. This made it challenging to approach NEOM conceptually. In this paper, I decided to deal with NEOM as a city, a new version of neoliberal urban development. Even if its developers imagine it as an exceptional post-city entity, NEOM has its roots in the neoliberal urban agenda that has been continuously shaped and reshaped since the 1980s. The paper has presented NEOM as an end product of a branding process, rather than of a construction process. Therefore, whether its developers consider it a city or not and whether it is going to be realized or not, NEOM as an idea is one more layer of neoliberal urban development.

NEOM city branding has discussed the details of its techno-utopian fantasy, providing a good quality of life and economic opportunities. However, it has barely presented any concrete information on how this city will be planned, by whom, or even the targeted population size. This focus on the fantasy left the actual object out of the picture. Although constructing a fantasy is common in city branding, the stark ambiguity of the branded object is striking. As the launch event demonstrates, the core of NEOM's branding focuses on bin Salman as a visionary and dreamer, rather than on the city as a dream. Taking this into consideration, it is apparent that keeping the city imaginary contributes more to the brand of the dreamer than to a city in reality. However, fantasy is not sufficient in itself if the city continues to develop. On the other hand, this strong association between the dream and the dreamer can in itself threaten the project, as the killing of Khashoqji shows.

Notes

1 Inspired by the "Bilbao Effect".

2 Including a former US secretary, a former Vice President of the European Commission, the owner of Los Anglos Times, the co-founder of Blackstone, etc.

3 Although Florida later dealt more critically with his concept, it is still popular among city planners.

4 Alibaba is an e-commerce and retail Chinese multinational holding. It has been an unprecedented success story. Remarkably, Son mentioned it during NEOM's launch event, assuring that his confidence in NEOM is great as well.

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Constructing the Capital of Peace: Changing Branding Strategies for Istanbul's Eyüp Quarter

Annegret Roelcke

This article analyzes how the Justice and Development Party (AKP)-led local municipality changed branding strategies for Istanbul's Eyüp quarter since its predecessor took office in 1994. Portraying itself as the savior of Eyüp's heritage and Eyüp as the symbol of a larger imagined Islamic-Ottoman community, the AKP legitimizes its political rule on various levels. The diachronic comparison of municipal city guidebooks illustrates how the framing of Eyüp and its branding strategies changed with shifting political contexts. The recent strategy to attract diverse tourists as multipliers to consume and spread the AKP's identity narratives demonstrates the political nature of tourism branding.

Keywords: Urban Heritage Politics, City Branding, Eyüp, AKP, Neo-Ottomanism, City Guidebooks

Introduction

On a sunny day in November 2016, I visited Pierre Loti Café on the cemetery hill in Istanbul's Eyüp quarter to enjoy the view across the Golden Horn to the Historic Peninsula's mosques. In the aerial tramway leading up, I encountered a friend. Seeing her in Eyüp surprised me, as many Istanbulites, who like her consider themselves secular, suspiciously regard the place as Islamist and conservative. However, she avoided the actual quarter and only enjoyed the hilltop's view.

People of various backgrounds from Istanbul, Turkey, and abroad visit Pierre Loti Café, and many of them never enter the adjacent quarter. Others come after visiting Eyüpsultan[1] Mosque and Shrine in Eyüp's center, which is crowded on religious holidays. Shops offer religious paraphernalia to visitors and so-called historical Ottoman cuisine.

Although various people experience Eyüp in rather different ways, many of these images have been shaped by the same Eyüp Municipality. Since the mid-1990s it has launched a broad range of activities to construct and promote an identity for Eyüp through interventions into the quarter's physical fabric, so-called cultural

events, and the propagation of narratives through publications (Hammond 98-144).

Studies on place branding identify investors, tourists, and residents as the main target groups of branding activities that aim mainly to attract capital and visitors in a global competition among cities (Braun et al. 18; Philo and Kearns 3). Studies examining place branding as a means whereby elites propagate narratives legitimizing power structures and aim to control social behavior often describe locals as targets. They discuss attempts to make residents identify with the constructed image, support branding activities directed at investors and tourists, and back urban development projects that serve elites' interests but may be diametrical to their own (Braun et al.; Broudehoux; Gotham; Philo and Kearns).

While these dynamics apply also to Eyüp's branding, this article shows that since the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP), the predecessor[2] of today's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), took office locally in 1994, these parties' activities to brand Eyüp have been closely linked to their narratives legitimizing their political power not only locally, but also nationally and regionally by portraying Eyüp as a symbol of a larger

imagined community's identity (Anderson). Tourists, for some time the main addressee, are attracted not merely for economic profit, but also to have them spread the AKP's identity narratives. This points to the political nature of tourism branding. This article further demonstrates how the Eyüp Municipality's branding strategies changed with shifting prospects for political and economic profit.

Research on the AKP's urban politics in Istanbul describes its attempts to transform the city's image into one of Ottoman glory and to attract global capital at the same time (Akcan; Öncü), primarily through mega-projects and the large-scale transformation of existing quarters. Mass evictions and demolitions led to protests. State institutions were granted major rights regarding renewal projects, resulting in widespread state-led gentrification since the mid-2000s, in parallel with gentrification processes through the settlement of higher status groups in historical areas (Akcan; İslam and Sakızlıoğlu). The gentrified areas' characteristics differ with the gentrifiers, developing areas such as Beyoğlu into nightlife hubs, while Üsküdar and Eyüp are transformed to fit religious Muslim middle and upper classes' lifestyles.

Research further shows how the AKP's and its predecessors' rhetoric and mobilization strategies transformed after they assumed power. The rhetoric changed from anti-establishment to pro-ruling elite (Tuğal); and they shifted from catering to the urban poor to addressing the growing Muslim middle and upper classes, promoting a lifestyle that combines consumerism with Islamic aspects (Çavdar). More generally, the AKP changed its rhetoric on the international level, based on shifting contexts, adopting certain categories for collaboration with the European Union (EU) (Girard and Scalbert Yücel) but others for Turkey's policy toward countries in predominantly Muslim and formerly Ottoman regions (Insel).

Although Eyüp occupies a central place in both the AKP's and its predecessors' narratives and in Istanbul's topography, only few scholars have studied its developments since the RP took office in 1994 (Hammond; Ulubaş). Transformations in the presentation of Eyüp by the AKP and its predecessors could, however, due to its symbolic value, shed light on general transformations in the AKP's narratives.

Based on an analysis of city guidebooks on Eyüp published by the Eyüp Municipality between 1996 and 2016, this

article examines the historical changes within the Eyüp Municipality's narratives and branding strategies for Eyüp since 1994 in relation to wider political developments. Tracing these changes, in contrast to the Eyüp Municipality's essentialist rhetoric, the article points to the constructedness and volatility of a place's identity (Massey). The article further argues that by aiming to attract diverse groups to consume a particular narrative about Eyüp, which is presented as a symbol of a larger imagined community, branding Eyüp plays an important role in the AKP's identity politics on different scales.

Changing Narratives about Eyüp and Political Rule

In the past, Ottoman narratives established a symbolic connection between Eyüp and political rule by claiming that the grave of the Prophet's Companion Ebu Eyyub had been rediscovered during the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Ebu Eyyub had died around 669, when the early Muslims unsuccessfully attempted to conquer Constantinople. Shortly after its Ottoman conquest, Sultan Mehmet II built a shrine for Ebu Eyyub outside Constantinople's city walls and near the Golden Horn (Coşkun 47-77, 121-128). The cult around Ebu Eyyub as a "patron saint of the new Ottoman capital"

(Necipoğlu 2523) after the conquest can be seen as part of an imperial policy to establish Islamic legitimation for Ottoman rule over Constantinople. (Necipoğlu 23 -26) At least from the 17th century onward, throne ascension ceremonies for sultans took place at the shrine, which had developed into a pilgrimage site. The surrounding quarter was the center of one of the four administrative districts of Constantinople (Coşkun 142-197). The image of Eyüp's Islamic character was further stressed, in contrast to its neighboring quarters of Fener and Balat, inhabited until the mid-20th century pogroms by Greeks and Jews.

With the foundation of the secular Republic of Turkey in 1923, Eyüp ceased to be connected to such official narratives. The shrine was closed in 1925, along with most shrines in Turkey. With increasing industrialization along the Golden Horn from the 1950s on, Eyüp came to be imagined as a poor and polluted workers' suburb, crowded with informal settlements (Hammond 111). In the meantime, symbolic value continued to be attributed to Eyüpsultan Shrine. Some politicians referred to it to display their agendas' connectedness to the Ottomans and Islam. In this context, the shrine was one of the few

to be reopened by the new Democrat Party government in 1950 (Coşkun 13).

AKP and Eyüp

The AKP and its predecessors, in office in Eyüp and Greater Istanbul since 1994 and nationally since 2002, have repeatedly displayed a connection to Eyüpsultan Shrine. After winning the constitutional referendum in 2017, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan prayed there. This was interpreted as imitating Ottoman enthronement ceremonies, and thus as Erdoğan positioning himself as the inheritor of the Ottoman sultans' position (Acarer).

Using the rhetoric of Ottoman and Islamic revival, the AKP and its predecessors position themselves in contrast to the secular republic's elites, whom they blame for Westernizing Turkey and breaking with its heritage. They claim to represent the religious and conservative groups who felt suppressed by measures taken in the name of modernization and secularization after the republic's founding. They portray the RP's 1994 election victory as paralleling Constantinople's Ottoman conquest in 1453. As the former Ottoman capital, Istanbul is central to Ottoman revivalist narratives (Çınar; Öncü). Due to the claimed connection of Ebu Eyyub to the Prophet and to the Ottoman conquest,

Eyüp is of central importance within Istanbul.

Consequently, after taking office, the RP expended considerable energy to rehabilitate the quarter and to transform its image as a poor industrial suburb into one representing Islamic and Ottoman glory (Hammond 98-144). Referring to urban rehabilitation activities since 1994, the party presents its taking office as a turning point in the quarter's history and itself as the savior of Eyüp's imagined identity. Since the area's deindustrialization in the 1980s, its economy began to shift to the service sector (Yenen et al. 103-139). With the Golden Horn's cleaning, historical buildings' restoration, and infrastructural investments, Eyüp started to attract tourists, middle-class residents, and non-governmental institutions, based on Eyüp's religious and historical image. Rising real estate prices and new consumption offers targeting tourists and Muslim middle classes suggest that a process of gentrification is ongoing. Renewal projects and a planned metro station presumably accelerate the process.

From Attractive Residential Area to Capital of Inner Peace

Inderpal Grewal and Rudy Koshar demonstrate how guidebooks are related to the construction of imagined authentic and stable larger collectivities and of distinctions between the *Self* and the *Other*. With the composition of objects into landscapes representing these entities, guidebooks make it possible to experience these abstract ideas and seemingly prove them true. Instructions on how to approach and interpret sights as parts of a larger meaningful entity shape the guided person's expectations, experience, and understanding. By selecting and interpreting objects and by interpreting the reader's relationship with them and the entity they represent, guidebooks reinforce difference and power structures, while masking their own role by using objective language (Grewal 2, 85-101; Koshar). The guides published by the Eyüp Municipality offer only a particular interpretation of Eyüp, define the reader's relationship to the place, and provide strong advice on how to approach it. However, the compositions of the routes proposed in the guidebooks change over time, mobilize different frames of cultural and religious significance, and connect to different general identity narratives. This indicates changes in the AKP's strategies for identity politics in changing political circumstances.

In 1996, two years after the RP took power locally, the Eyüp Municipality Mayor's Office published the first city guide about Eyüp. Dedicating it to Eyüp's residents, mayor Ahmet Genç states in the preface: "Eyüpsultan, where the Ottoman sultans were girded with the sword during their throne ascension ceremonies and which they found as a source of legitimation for their power, can with the determination of Eyüpsultan's people win back the same spiritual mission" (*Eyüp Sultan Rehberi 1996* 1-2). The booklet presents the quarter primarily as being significant for the Ottoman conquest and the Ottoman state and society. Based on Eyüpsultan Shrine, it is referred to as the Ottoman sultans' "source of legitimation".

An "encyclopedic" section (*Eyüp Sultan Rehberi 1996* 21-38) of the guide illustrates that Eyüp's identity is envisioned as being "Ottoman" – all structures listed were built during the Ottoman period. But "Ottoman" is mainly understood as Islamic, as most buildings presented are related to Islam. Mosques, lodges, and shrines make up the vast majority. The second to last category, "Other Structures", comprises two industrial buildings. In last place, after what is called "other" and thereby ranked as the least important, are two Armenian churches. Although their existence points to the presence of Armenian residents during the Ottoman period, the text pre-

ceding the list mentions non-Muslims only concerning the pre-Ottoman past, regarding the Byzantine settlement of Cosmidion at the site of today's Eyüp; concerning the Ottoman period, it regards only visitors from outside such as the French Orientalist writer Pierre Loti. Non-Muslim residents during the Ottoman period are never mentioned and thus not considered part of Eyüp's true identity.

Directed at current and possible future residents, the guide describes Eyüp as an attractive place to live with modern infrastructure and provides information about services such as health care and education (*Eyüp Sultan Rehberi 1996* 12-15, 39-47). The RP-led municipality's aim during this time was to promote an image of Eyüp associated with its glory during Ottoman times, as part of the party's Ottoman revivalist activism in the 1990s. In addition to portraying the new government as saving Eyüp's true identity, the guide introduces the RP's governance as resident-focused and based on scientific and modern principles. The guide is part of the RP's project to prove itself to its electoral base while trying to institutionalize its new political power locally and, with more difficulty, nationally.

Ten years later, the Eyüp Municipality's 2006 Strategic Plan, optimistic about economic opportunities, promotes mass tourism as a prime goal. It praises Pierre Loti Hill's transformation, where restaurant and hotel facilities were opened and which was connected to downhill Eyüp with an aerial tramway (Eyüp Stratejik Plan). A second guide published by the Eyüp Municipality in 2008 mainly reprints the 1996 edition's text, but as a high-gloss paperback with numerous photographs, its design is completely different. The text in Turkish and English addresses foreigners as well as people from Turkey. The turn toward visitors and toward making Eyüp more consumable is also visible in the presentation of a route. Next to religious activities and heritage sightseeing, it includes moments framed as relaxation and enjoyment, such as having coffee at Pierre Loti Café, which "relieves all your tiredness of the day" (*Eyüp City Guide 2008* 37).

While the 1996 guide connects Eyüp's significance to the Ottomans based on Eyüpsultan Shrine, the 2008 preface claims that the shrine has made Eyüp "one of the Islamic world's most visited sacred places after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem" (*Eyüp City Guide 2008* 7). Eyüp's Islamic significance is stressed to attract Muslim tourists, especially those

from Arab countries, reflecting the AKP's foreign policy to make Turkey a central power in the region. Bolstered by the economic boom and the consolidation of the AKP's power since taking office nationally in 2002, by the mid-2000s the AKP was employing self-confident rhetoric about Turkey being an internationally powerful actor and about Istanbul being a "global city" (Insel; Öncü). At the same time, the AKP catered to European tourists as well, pursuing amiable relations with the European Union in expectation of Turkey's accession. Thus, the 2008 preface describes Eyüp also as the "shared heritage of humanity", important also for non-Muslims due to its numerous historical structures (*Eyüp City Guide 2008* 7). Possibly for this reason, Ottoman Armenian Eyüp residents are mentioned in 2008 as well.

Compared to 1996, the 2008 guide shifts Eyüp's framing both in content and scale, describing its significance as an Islamic sacred place and part of the "heritage of humanity", not only for the Ottomans' descendants, but also on a global level. While the loss of Eyüp's historical structures was lamented in 1996, after several years of physical restructuring, in 2008 the presence of history is promoted as a main characteristic: "Nowhere [else…] is it [sic]

possible, [… to] experience history so thoroughly and become part of it." (*Eyüp City Guide 2008* 7) Tourists, unaware of Eyüp's earlier state, are now the main focus of the municipality's branding activities, rather than residents, as tourists promise economic profit and, through their mobility, can spread the image that the municipality creates of Eyüp.

In 2009, AKP member İsmail Kavuncu replaced Genç as Eyüp's mayor. A new edition of the 2008 guide was published in 2011. In the preface, Kavuncu frames Eyüp's significance mainly in Islamic terms, stressing that "being neighbor" to Ebu Eyyub "for us carries inestimable value" (*Eyüp City Guide 2011* 7). He references the prominent Islamist writer Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), whose teacher's lodge is located in Eyüp. Referring to a relatively contemporary figure's relation to Eyüp, Kavuncu portrays Eyüp as a "sacred" place with a "metaphysical" quality present not only in Ottoman times, but also today, and calls the guide a "handbook for religious tourism" (*Eyüp City Guide 2011* 7-9). More than a mere pilgrimage, this is to include heritage tourism of "our civilization" of Islam and the consumption of Eyüp's "mystical" atmosphere, catering to the growing Muslim middle and upper classes and providing opportunities for

Figure 1: Eyüp as the "Capital of Inner Peace" (huzur başkenti) – Slogan on the Municipal Poster
Source: Annegret Roelcke 2015.

economic profit. The stress on Eyüp's Islamic identity occurs in the context of shifting Turkish foreign policies in the early 2010s. Following setbacks in the EU accession negotiations, internal consolidation of the AKP's power, and the Arab Spring in 2010/2011, the Turkish government turned more toward the Middle East and adopted Islamic rhetoric while aspiring to become a leader in the Muslim world (Insel 192).

Since his accession in 2014, AKP mayor Remzi Aydın has branded Eyüp the

"Capital of Inner Peace (*huzur başkenti*)" (figures 1: In contrast to mass tourism, as aimed for in 2006, Eyüp is portrayed as a calm, peaceful, and spiritual place of escape from modern chaotic urban life. A new guide published in 2016 illustrates increased efforts to make Eyüp consumable, containing six routes and information on restaurants, hotels, and souvenirs. The preface welcomes visitors to "one of the centers bearing our civilization" and a place of "escape from urban life" (Özafşar and Uyar 1). The text is in Turkish only,

intended for visitors from Istanbul and Turkey more broadly. Most of the routes' headings seem to offer objective representations of the areas by applying neutral-sounding categories in accordance with geographical references.

The route "Eyüp Center" suggests a spatial concentration of Eyüp's identity. It is composed entirely of Ottoman-era monumental structures, mainly tombs of religious and state authorities, mosques, and lodges. The only exceptions are the

Figure 2: "Ramadan in Eyüp with Inner Peace – [Sultans'] Enthronement Street's Gate" – Municipal Street Sign
Source: Annegret Roelcke 2015.

Feshane factory and an Armenian church (Özafşar and Uyar 34-67). Byzantine ruins, reminders of Ottoman social history, and republican structures are not included. The route propagates only a particular interpretation of Eyüp's identity related to the Ottoman state and the religious elite, and as Islamic.

The route "Eyüp Cemetery and Pierre Loti" attempts to change the image of the hill with the panorama spot, famous also among Istanbulites and tourists uninter-

ested in what many perceive as Islamic downhill Eyüp. The route's sites, Ottoman-era lodges and mosques, with Pierre Loti Café only appearing at the end (Özafşar and Uyar 70-78), suggest that the place's identity is mainly Ottoman and Islamic rather than related to the French Orientalist.

Eyüp's industrial past does not feature in Eyüp's heritage. While the guide includes factories, they are, except for Feshane, only points on the route "The Golden Horn's Opposite Side". The fact that also Eyüp's side of the Golden Horn was lined with industry is omitted. The geographical separation implies a qualitative difference between the opposite bank and "central" Eyüp. The guide values the factories as an attractive environment in their current use as museums and a conference center (Özafşar and Uyar 82-85); but by not mentioning that some were built during Ottoman times, it dissociates industrialization from the Ottoman heritage (Öztürk 41).

Eyüp as Inclusive Symbol for a Larger Imagined Community

The 2016 guide uses seemingly objective language coupled with a rhetoric of recreation, entertainment, and a return to one's origins, as it is common in contemporary

Figure 3: Eyüp as the "Capital of Inner Peace" (huzur başkenti) – Municipal Poster
Source: Annegret Roelcke 2015.

norms (Şenler). Today, the term can have an Islamic meaning, but it is also used without any religious connotations to refer to social or inner peace (Glassen 13-26). In Eyüp, huzur can be understood as being physically close to the saint. Additionally, the Eyüp Municipality uses the notion in branding Eyüp as a positive place, in opposition to modern, stressful urban life. With huzur, it unites the different aspects of Eyüp's image, such as its sacredness, its historical atmosphere, and its natural environment, including the cemeteries' trees and the Golden Horn's water. Presented in this way, Eyüp relates to more general desires for harmony, spirituality, and recreation (Öztürk 42).

I argue that the complex concept of huzur, connected to a mystical atmosphere, through its ambiguity can invite people from various backgrounds to experience Eyüp in a way directed by the Eyüp Municipality, and therefore promote the municipality's narratives about Eyüp. Huzur acts as an "empty signifier" (Laclau 72; Laclau and Mouffe), which, through its polysemy and underdetermination, can connect to and unite different groups and help to establish cultural hegemony. Especially in the context of the rising social and political tensions in Turkey, huzur, while understood differently by different

tourism discourse. In this way, and by including elements not usually associated with Eyüp's Islamic-Ottoman image, such as the area's industrial heritage and Pierre Loti, the guide also addresses feelings distant from the AKP's Islamic-Ottoman rhetoric. However, within Eyüp, the guides and the physical environment prepared by the Eyüp Municipality direct visitors to experience the place in a way leading to a very particular interpretation of Eyüp's identity as Islamic and Ottoman.

The notion of *huzur*, (inner peace), as in Eyüp's slogan "Capital of huzur", is central to the municipality's discourse. Visible on the widely distributed municipal information and self-promotion posters, the slogan is very present in Eyüp's public space. Huzur is a complex concept of social and inner peace that entered the Ottoman language via Islamic mysticism. 20th-century Turkish literature treated it in terms of its lack in the early republican years of social change (Tanpınar) or as an ideal lifestyle based on Islamic and Ottoman social

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people, can function as a unifying signifier of something desired but absent. By promising to deliver this desired quality and to revive the "golden age" of the imagined community identified as Ottoman, of which the condition of huzur is promoted as a central feature, the AKP is trying to legitimize its power. As the *capital* of huzur, Eyüp is constructed as a powerful center of that imagined identity, from where the quality of huzur is supposed to spread. Additionally, Eyüp itself is portrayed as a symbol of the larger imagined Islamic-Ottoman community.

Conclusion

Based on a diachronic comparison of city guidebooks, the article demonstrates how the Eyüp Municipality, ruled by the AKP and its predecessors, despite its revivalist rhetoric about an essentialist quality of Eyüp's identity, has considerably modified its narratives and branding strategies for the place in accordance with changing prospects for economic benefit and political influence in shifting social and political contexts.

After taking office in 1994, the RP promoted Eyüp as being significant for the Ottoman state and society in the context of the party's Islamic neo-Ottoman activism and as an attractive, modern place to live, in order to stabilize its new hold on power among Eyüp's residents and to attract higher-status residents. After several years of physical restructuring and the AKP's consolidation of its power on the national level, as well, in the late 2000s the municipality described Eyüp as one of the most important spiritual centers of the Islamic world and as the heritage of humanity to attract tourists from various backgrounds. Following setbacks in the EU accession negotiations and in the wake of the Arab Spring, the Eyüp Municipality focused on attracting Islamic religious tourism in the context of Turkey aspiring to become a leader of Muslims in the region. In contrast, since 2014, Eyüp has been branded as the "Capital of Inner Peace", aiming at diverse types of visitors. The changing framings of Eyüp indicate the constructedness and volatility of a place's identity, which is always produced by specific actors at specific moments in time and is therefore unstable and open to change (Laclau and Mouffe 96, 99-104; Massey). The transformations in the narrative by the same party and its predecessors point to the possibility of even more varying interpretations of Eyüp by other actors.

The shifting narratives about Eyüp matter beyond the quarter, as the AKP and its predecessors present Eyüp as a concentration of a larger imagined community's essential qualities and therefore as that community's symbol. By presenting themselves as the saviors of Eyüp's and thereby the imagined larger community's identity, the AKP and its predecessors seek to legitimize their political rule on various levels. The branding activities by the Eyüp Municipality thus demonstrate the political nature of place branding toward local residents and various groups of tourists.

Notes

[1] "Eyüpsultan" respectfully refers to the Prophet's Companion Ebu Eyyub, whose shrine is in Eyüp. Using it for the whole quarter stresses the saint's significance for the place's identity. The administrative district was renamed "Eyüpsultan" in 2017. As my research concerns pre-2017 times, I call the place "Eyüp".

[2] It is debated whether the RP (1983-1998), the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP, 1997-2001), and the AKP (since 2001) constitute successors. For Eyüp's local context, the description seems adequate because of various continuities, such as Ahmet Genç's mayoralty (1994-2009), which has continued under all three of the parties.

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CLOSE UP

Eugen Wirth (1925-2012) – Geographer of the Oriental City in North Africa and the Middle East

Anton Escher

The article is a personal review of the scientific work of Eugen Wirth. It briefly highlights the essential aspects of the role of Eugen Wirth in the German community of geographers during the last decades of the 20th century. The text focuses on his scientific work concerning the "Oriental City". Eugen Wirth's publications on the *Oriental City* consist of empirical work and mapping in innumerous old quarters of Islamic cities. Also, this close-up documents his influence on scientists in various disciplines, not only geographers.

Keywords: Eugen Wirth, Oriental City, German Geography, History of Geography, Urban Research

Eugen Wirth (1925-2012), Professor of Geography, was based at the Institute of Geography at the Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg from 1964 to 1991. In the 1970s and 1980s, Eugen Wirth was a member of a more or less existing informal professorial circle, which organized and determined the dynamics of content, finances and personnel in the German-speaking geographical scientific landscape to a considerable extent. It seems not only impossible, but also extremely difficult to discuss the content-related effects and scientific influences of the *Ordinarius* of Geography distanced from today's perspective and as his last academic student. In consequence, his substantial scientific publications are the only basis to discuss his achievements. Thereby I follow the constantly expressed opinion of my seriously respected teacher (despite insurmountable differences after the young scholar had distanced himself from his mentor): „All that remains of us as scientists are our publications"[1], he said to me several times during joint research stays. In this sense, Eugen Wirth notes a key position in his self-written scientific curriculum vitae „freely according to Plutarch: If I have written a good book, it should be my monument" (Wirth, "Lebenslauf" 3). For this reason, the following sections will attempt to use his own

written statements to discuss Eugen Wirth's work on the *Oriental City*.

The Oriental City – the Scientific Protégé of Eugen Wirth

In accordance with other German-speaking geographers from that period, Eugen Wirth's scientific interest was broadly diversified and based on his studies of geography, history, philosophy, and sociology. His academic curiosity extended to theoretical explanations of geography at large, theoretical explanations and practical examples of regional geography, planning problems of traffic routes, and statements about wine and carpets. In addition, he was particularly concerned with different ways of life in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. His publications list immediately demonstrates that the phenomenon known as the *Oriental City* was his research topic par excellence. This can be attributed to the fact that German-speaking geography interpreted North Africa and the Middle East as the "Orient" (with Eugen Wirth as the scientific leader), shaped by the ways of life of the *city dwellers*, *nomads*, and *peasants*. In the second half of the 20th century, this perspective on forms of life was shared implicitly among the scholarly *orient researchers* of German-speaking geography. In his self-perception, Eugen Wirth states: "In the course of more than thirty years, during which I worked on the cities of the Middle East and North Africa, I have written five books and almost fifty essays on questions of the Oriental-Islamic city." (*Orientalische Stadt* XIX). With this statement, he underlines the importance of the subject for his various empirical research. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Eugen Wirth not only significantly influenced urban research on North Africa and the Middle East, but also contributed to a reinvention of all modern, contemporary, and interdisciplinary Middle East research.

The Starting Point of Any Research on the Oriental City Is the Thematic Map

Eugen Wirth began his research on the city in the "Orient" at a time when – in addition to ethnographers, Orientalists, and linguists – archaeologists and historians from former colonial nations were studying this topic. The methodological approach of these predominantly humanities disciplines was based mainly on European-language writing traditions in texts and books as well as on interpretable artefacts. In addition, their explanations usually remained on a metaphorical and *flowery* level. Eugen Wirth distanced himself from this tendency and put another emphasis on his access to knowledge: "In contrast, the author deliberately places more emphasis on so-called realities and material culture, which can be proven by empirical field research." (*Orientalische Stadt* 12). As common in geography, the map was his fundamental instrument of analysis, documentation, and knowledge generation. In the course of time, this turn to materiality, to empiricism, and thus to the exact mapping of life-worldly phenomena as a methodological strategy of understanding became almost a manic idea of the Erlangen geographer.

Eugen Wirth did not fail to explain the significance and effects of the imperative of thematic mapping. "The constant compulsion to precisely localize the observed or ascertained facts and the compulsion to fill gaps still existing in the map image, work across borders, opens up questions and aspects that remain closed to other scientific disciplines" (Escher and Wirth 12). Quoting the German historian C. Haase, Eugen Wirth emphasized that empirical work on site goes far beyond knowledge gained from the written and traditional texts: "If gaps in the written text can simply be concealed or covered up by mentioning other facts, they are clearly brought to the fore when working on a map" (Escher and Wirth 12). However, Eugen Wirth was also aware that maps

alone were not adequate: "In cultural geography, mappings without parallel surveys, interviews, etc. are limited in their significance" (Escher and Wirth 10). Overall, his publications on the *Oriental City*, almost without exception, show a tendency toward the subjects of architecture and archaeology. In the latter, Eugen Wirth was also very active in science policy. Among other things, he was notably involved in the opening of the German Archaeological Institute in Damascus.

As his outstanding publications on Isfahan/Iran (Gaube and Wirth, *Isfahan*), Aleppo, Syria (Gaube and Wirth, *Aleppo*), Sanaa, Yemen (Kopp and Wirth), Dubai, UAE (Wirth, *Dubai*) and Fez, Morocco (Escher and Wirth) show, descriptive documentations in the form of comprehensive mapping of the cities of the "Orient" have been his main activity. Furthermore, the exact inventory of the functional and representative buildings of these places can be seen as his central legacy. Besides these cities, Eugen Wirth was probably the scientist who knew most (possibly almost all) cities in North Africa and the Middle East from his own experience: "The author has certainly personally experienced a three-digit number of cities in all parts of North Africa and the Middle East and mapped dozens of cities himself"

(*Orientalische Stadt* 11). This demonstrates that Eugen Wirth implicitly pursued the strategy of scientific geographical comparison, a synopsis, so to speak, of countless cities in the region. Based on his field visits, experiences, and mappings, the synthetically-analytically conceived model-like phenomenon, the *Oriental City*, emerged.

Eugen Wirth's Attempt at a Theory of the Oriental City

Ancient Oriental cities, Islam, and architecture were, in distorting brevity, the concepts and references in Eugen Wirth's attempted modelling and theory building of the *Oriental City*. Also in his last writings, Eugen Wirth looked at the *Oriental City* historically, starting from an ancient city complex. Against this background, he firmly insisted on the assumption that the religion of Islam had no significant impact on the design and planning of the *Oriental City*. Eugen Wirth merely allowed Islam the task of spatial expansion: "It would be conceivable that Islam as a religion did not substantially shape the *Oriental City*, but that the legal and social order connected with it contributed decisively to the spread of the manifestations of the city as it developed in the Old Orient throughout the world dominated by Islam" (*Orientalische Stadt Überblick* 88).

I do not adhere to these explanations, which form the theoretical basis for the descriptive and functional model of the *Oriental City* (well known in German-speaking countries and in didactic mediation). Briefly sketched, the model consists of the following material elements: disintegrated city layout, dead-end street structure, courtyard house, and (ethnically) separated quarters. In addition, there is the defensive function of the city, which protects the citizens on the one hand from insecurities from within (arising from the city governor and various ethnic groups) and on the other hand from latent threats from outside (e.g. nomads). This is visible in the architecture of the houses as well as in the citadel, walls and gates. The social, political, and religious rules and norms are reflected in the design of large architectural complexes (e.g. bazaar, mosque with bath and oven) that are considered a characteristic feature of the Oriental-Islamic city. The design of the city points out a strict separation of public and private spheres (Wirth, *Konzeption*). Eugen Wirth described the central souq or bazaar, the commercial center of the city, as one of the enormous independent cultural achievements of the Islamic Middle Ages ("Zum Problem des Bazars"). For him, it is the only fundamental distinguishing ele-

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studied geography, philosophy and Islamic studies at the Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg. In 1985, he did his Ph.D. with an empirical thesis on the Kingdom of Morocco and habilitated in 1990 with a study on the regional development of the Syrian Arab Republic. Since 1996 he is working as Professor of Cultural Geography at the Johannes Gutenberg University (JGU) in Mainz. Anton Escher is Director of the Institute of Geography and Director of the Center for Intercultural Studies at JGU. His academic focus lies on historical Arab cities, feature films and geography, diaspora and migration as well as cultural mediation and intercultural communication.
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ment of the Oriental-Islamic city (*Orientalische Stadt* 517-527).

Unfortunately, his works do not go beyond these descriptive models. Thus, I formulated earlier with reference to other academic students of Eugen Wirth: "The Oriental City as the definite icon of the classical Oriental geographers, (co-)invented by Klaus Dettmann, has been unmasked by Herbert Popp as an 'almost impermissible generalization' and by Frank Meyer as a 'historically relevant special case'" (Escher 143). The explanations and the theoretically generalized approaches remain on the level of materiality and of binary social and political concepts. Unfortunately, in his theoretical reflections on the *Oriental City*, Eugen Wirth also ignores numerous local and international researchers (e.g. Eckert) who deal with religious regulations, legal concepts, or cultural practices as explanatory factors for the form of the Oriental City.

Academic Effects and Potential Yield of Eugen Wirth's Studies

Eugen Wirth was an academic scholar with outstanding personal commitment in motivating and supporting younger colleagues from all disciplines. From the 1970s to the end of the 2010s, numerous publications on the city in North Africa and the Middle East have made it impossible for them not to thank Eugen Wirth in their prefaces. Regardless of the discipline, whether ethnology, architecture, history, or sociology, authors and scholars did not fail to express their gratitude to the mentor of German Oriental geography for his advice. For example, Elke Niewöhner-Eberhard thanked Eugen Wirth for encouraging her to continue her work over nine years (1), Dorothée Sack for his critical questions since the beginning of her work and for "thankfully reviewing the manuscript several times", (IX) and finally Stefan Weber, director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, "for his unreserved support". (12).

The gratitude toward and recognition of Eugen Wirth is supplemented by absolute admiration for his mapping, whether by the American ethnologist Dale F. Eickelman, who characterized the maps of Fez as "outstanding", (100) or by Said Ennahid, Professor of Islamic Art, Architecture, and Archaeology at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco, who recently wrote about Eugen Wirth's publication on Fez that he was "very much impressed by the quality and details of your maps" (Ennahid). In the end, Eugen Wirth's impulses, motivations, and suggestions will continue to have an impact on scientists from a wide range of disciplines in the humanities. Although his theoretical explanations can and should be discussed critically, the exact, fascinating, and unique cartographic recordings and the architectural inventories of the *Oriental City* are important documents of their cultural heritage. Not only the scientific community, but also the inhabitants of and visitors to the old towns in North Africa and the Middle East have to be grateful to the geographer Eugen Wirth for his work and efforts.

Notes

[1] All quotations are translated from German into English language.

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REVIEW

Koenraad Bogaert: "Globalized Authoritarianism. Megaprojects, Slums, and Class Relations in Urban Morocco."

Christoph H. Schwarz

Morocco's metropolises offer interesting cases of urban development, not least because cities like Casablanca, Tangier, and the capital Rabat are by now home to several mega-projects that showcase current models of city planning in the Global South and their global connectedness. However, not far from these projects' construction sites, the attentive visitor will find slums – poor, informal neighborhoods that are likewise objects of urban development: Morocco is a trailblazer in "slum upgrading". For one such apparently successful and inclusive program, *Villes sans Bidonvilles* (VSB), the country even received a prize from UN Habitat in 2010. Such social initiatives and several political reforms in the last decades lead some observers to consider Morocco an example of political liberalization and gradual democratization in North Africa/West Asia (NAWA).

The book under review here contests this view, precisely by taking both mega-projects and "slum development" programs in Morocco as prisms through which to read class relations and authoritarianism, in order to show "how authoritarian government converges with increasing globalization and transforms through its interaction with a rationale of economic liberalization" (9). Koenraad Bogaert, Assistant Professor in the Department of Conflict and Development Studies at the University of Ghent and a member of the Middle East and North Africa Research Group (MENARG), has published extensively on the political conditions and processes in Morocco and the wider region. His first book is a highly important and eye-opening contribution not only to debates on urban development and political change in Morocco in particular; it also presents a fresh perspective on the broader logics of statehood and governance in NAWA, always understood in their interconnections and global dimensions. Since 2007, the author has conducted fieldwork in Morocco and interviewed program directors and managers of mega-projects and "slum upgrading" programs, as well as affected inhabitants. With a spatial perspective and a "problem-driven approach" that does not limit itself to a particular method, the book takes the city as an entry point "not only to understand political change in Morocco in relation to neoliberal globalization but to question this phenomenon of neoliberalism itself" (24).

The book is divided into three parts that tackle different aspects of neoliberal politics in six chapters: Part One, "Neoliberalism as Projects", lays out the general theoretical perspective and introduces a concept

of globalization not as an external, inevitable phenomenon that impinges on a country like Morocco, but as a process that is coproduced there, in its local, particularly urban spaces. Chapter 1 problematizes what happens if we apply, in the sense of Massey, an "aspatial" perspective on political change, and consider "democratization", associated with free markets, as an end goal of an unstoppable process of globalization. The author critically revisits the debates on politics and democratization in the NAWA region before and after the "Arab Spring", an event he considers an opportunity to break away from a particular dichotomy: on the one hand, a "transitology" perspective that seems too focused on indicators of democratization, and on the other hand, a "post-democratization" perspective that instead permanently aims to explain the "persistence" of authoritarianism as a matter of fact, thus often implicitly attributing it to cultural traits. Both perspectives are fraught with a particular spatialized development logic in the sense that the "local" (a reified notion of "the Arab regime", "crony capitalism", or clientelism as family business that has not yet been "modernized", etc.) is seen as the problem, whereas globalization is considered an external, anonymous process that is essentially associated with democratization and free markets. A "city

lens", on the contrary, challenges these perspectives that both consider the nation-state or the "Arab regime" as the privileged domain of politics. Bogaert argues that the continuity of authoritarianism in a country such as Morocco should be understood through the practices and global encounters of various agents of transformation within new complexes of power that are involved, for example, in the reproduction of urban space. In this sense, he proposes to conceive of neoliberalism as "projects", which

is not an attempt to redefine the local and its relationship vis-a- vis the global but rather an attempt to localize a phenomenon we usually ascribe to the global. By identifying projects, we can *situate* global capitalism. Identifying projects not only means that we make the connections between places around the world visible, but it also helps us to understand how all these connections produce the global situation from within different places or localities. The concept of projects makes globalization concrete, tangible, and thus also contestable. If globalization remains this abstraction, always something out there, always somewhere else, somewhere global, and thus in a way unlocated and untouchable,

it becomes in the end apolitical, with the properties of a force of nature, as it were. (46)

Against this conceptual backdrop, Chapter 2 offers an overview of the history of urban development in Morocco in recent decades and reconstructs major turning points in urban politics. The author broadly distinguishes a phase of state developmentalism after independence, characterized by a steady increase of public spending and public employment, to which the debt crisis and structural adjustment programs put an end in the early 1980s. What followed were two phases of neoliberal restructuring, first a phase of rolling back social spending and "creative destruction" that mainly dismantled welfare elements and, in the case of protests, drew on heavy-handed repression; since this approach was unable to combat poverty, it also compromised the further development of the neoliberal order itself. Mohamed VI's ascent to the throne in 1999, in turn, marks the beginning of a roll-out phase of neoliberal consolidation that is epitomized by urban mega-projects, on the one hand, and social programs, on the other. However, this current phase is not characterized by a return to a welfare model, but by an increasing privatization of the state and a systematic reconfigura-

tion of the state apparatus itself, by outsourcing central competences of urban planning to agencies that work mainly according to a market logic. The mega-projects illustrate this managerial approach, which systematically aims to attract global capital, particularly from Gulf investors, and follows a conceptually new, more technocratic, but also more competitive logic.

The second part, "(State-)Crafting Globalization", challenges predominant ideas about the role of the state and its relation to its subjects/citizens in globalization and current neoliberalism, by pointing out its key role in neoliberal government. Chapter 3 specifies the notion of projects as *class* projects and revisits the discussion of class relations in the NAWA region. According to the summary, many scholars considered the explanatory potential of class as an analytical category to be difficult to apply to the countries of the region, since no social stratum seemed to ultimately fit a concept like that of *bourgeoisie*, i.e., a class in possession of the means of production and with a relative independence from the regime. Instead, the elites appeared to rather consist of *ruling families* and their patronage networks, or, in the case of post-independence Morocco, as a *state bourgeoisie* made up

of technocrats who were completely dependent on the *makhzen*, the monarchy's own encompassing network of patronage and control. In these debates, Bogaert once more sees an aspatial logic at work, since such perspectives confine themselves to the framework of the nation state. In consequence, a localized version of crony capitalism is implicitly juxtaposed with a more abstract, place-less ideal type of capitalism, in which a bourgeoisie played the role of agents of democratization, as if there was an essential nature to them as a class. Instead, Bogaert argues for an understanding of class as "determined by what people actually do within the context of neoliberal projects and not by what they are 'supposed' to do" (117). From this perspective, which aims to bring Marx and Foucault together, class is not necessarily defined by the possession of the means of production, but rather by relations, in other words: class cannot be conceptualized as isolated from concrete projects and the localization of the regional, national, or global actors it brings together to extract surplus from a particular place. An illustrative example of such a project is the Bouregreg Valley project, a mega-project under construction between Rabat and Salé, which is in the focus of chapter 4 (see also Amarouche and Bogaert in this issue). In a detailed

analysis of the project and the agency that is commissioned to steer it, Bogaert points out how neoliberal authoritarianism functions through a technocratic logic, namely "agencification": a mega-project is set up that will take years of planning and realization. Despite a certain discourse of development and participation, in the end a semi-public agency is created that functions according to a business logic, since technically this appears as the only solution to unite the necessary expertise for the administrative chores of a project of such dimensions. Successively, decision-making power is transferred to the agency, while local municipalities are effectively sidelined. The agency acts as an intermediary that attracts international capital, mainly from the Gulf and Europe. In consequence, urban planning and government become more accountable to these investors than to the citizens living in the vicinity of the project, who have little capacity to influence the changes made to their city. Bogaert analyzes these processes as the creation of new state spaces in the sense of an assemblage and concludes: "Authority, such as in the Bouregreg Valley, is thus a particular relational effect of interaction between local, regional, national, and international actors rather than the sovereign exercise of an

'Arab regime' as the sole locus of power" (140).

The third part of the book, "Transforming Urban Life", gives insight into the urban politics beyond the mega-projects, namely on the role of social struggle, urban violence, and political instability in reconfiguring neoliberal projects and authoritarian government. In chapter 5, Bogaert discusses the "Changing Methods of Authoritarian Power", i.e., the reinvention of social policy under Mohamed VI, after the phase of rollback and repression under his father's rule. The aim behind today's mega-projects – to maximize the process of capital accumulation in the city – necessarily entails the question how to deal with the existing urban population. In this regard, two watershed moments in Casablanca – the "bread riots" of 1981 and the 2003 jihadist suicide attacks – are presented as turning points, in that they made it an imperative to tackle the social problems in the poor neighborhoods. In contrast to previous riots, to which the government simply reacted with heavy-handed repression by the police and army, the 1981 riots that erupted in reaction to the rollback in the course of the IMF-imposed structural adjustment mark the end of the *benign neglect* of the urban periphery and the beginning of a tighter control over urban territory. The ensuing thorough administrative redivision of Casablanca followed a logic of deconcentration and decentralization of state power, creating ever-smaller prefectures and minimizing the distance between the administration and the subjects administered, while at the same time connecting it closer to the Ministry of the Interior. These administrative reforms were supplemented with an encompassing urban restructuring strategy, creating new avenues that would make traffic more fluid and more controllable. In addition, the Hassan II-Mosque – equipped with the world's tallest minaret – appears as a neoliberal mega-project avant la lettre: Still imposed by the sovereign ruler alone, it responded to the Islamist challenge with a "reconfessionalization" of the city sphere; it addressed the citizens and faithful as co-financers; and at the same time it was a test case for waterfront development and the creation of a monumental tourist attraction. The chapter emphasizes that the processes since 1981 did not result in a return to the social policies of developmentalism or more inclusive models of "growth", but both social programs and repression have since been based on entirely different precepts, for which Casablanca has served as a "ville laboratoire":

The objective was to replace the old social contract of the developmental state, in which citizens had certain social privileges and rights in exchange for their loyalty (e.g., public employment), with a new contract between state and citizens in which people were "responsibilized" and encouraged to seize the opportunities of the (free) market. State power had to be redeployed and reorganized, not only to exploit strategic locations and redesign urban skylines but also to create neoliberal citizens (self-reliant, entrepreneurial, individualized), and facilitate their integration into the formal market ("inclusive growth"). (166)

Bogaert reads these processes, in which neoliberalism appears inseparable from authoritarianism, with Foucault's concept of governmentality: the 1981 response thus still largely followed a logic of sovereign power – aiming at control over territory and protection of the sovereign – and a strategy of "management by absence" (Zaki): maintaining the slum dwellers at the margins kept them in a state of legal insecurity that, according to the rationale, prevented them from collective mobilization and articulating demands. The response to the 2003 attacks, in turn, marks the predominance of biopolitics

directed at the individual lives of the slum population. Bogaert claims that the governmental social programs that were set up in the aftermath, namely *the Initiative Nationale de Development Humain* (INDH) and *Villes sans Bidonvilles* (VSG), aim to depoliticize the urban space by responsibilizing and disciplining the slum dwellers. Chapter 6 offers a detailed analysis of the latter program. VSB was launched in 2004, following an address by Mohamed VI in July 2003 that declared the living conditions in the slums a policy priority. Financed both by the Moroccan government, on the one hand, and international institutions and development agencies such as the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, and US Aid, on the other, VSB employs mainly a resettlement strategy. The inhabitants are offered housing on newly developed plots of land, usually on the city's outskirts, on the condition that they destroy their current informal dwellings. The program thus successively eliminates the slums as hardly governable spaces, while at the same time ending the inhabitants' legal insecurity, making them homeowners with a property title, and finally also including them in the market. In this resettlement scheme, the inhabitants usually build their houses themselves with a certain amount of financial support and easy access to loans.

However, Bogaert argues that behind the apparently successful statistics, such resettlement often actually results in deteriorated living conditions and even exacerbates urban poverty and marginalization, since the new neighborhoods on the outskirts offer less access to public services and markets or other places that are relevant for the petty economy that the inhabitants engage in. In addition, it also destroys the networks of solidarity that had developed over the decades in the old neighborhoods. Accordingly, the actual political rationale behind social programs such as VSB once more illustrates the intricate link between neoliberal governmentality and authoritarianism: on the one hand, such resettlement economically develops new territory, while at the same time it creates spaces that are more visible and better to control. On the other hand, it disciplines the subjects as individual self-entrepreneurs who now, since they are indebted and "included" in formal market procedures, have to abide by its rationale. Finally, VSB also clears the often valuable and usually well-connected land in the city's center for future investors, maybe even mega-projects.

Bogaert's analysis is highly innovative and convincing, just like the way he productively combines the theoretical perspectives of thinkers such as Marx, Foucault, Massey, Lefebvre, and Harvey. However, since he emphasizes a notion of power that aims at a more dynamic and relational perspective, it would have been interesting to hear more from those inhabitants who are affected by mega-projects and slum upgrading, and to reconstruct the rationale inherent in their patterns of action – can their eventual mobilizations also be read as "class projects", maybe even with a global dimension? Likewise, the book surely leaves any reader familiar with Moroccan realities with further open questions. Morocco is not only a prominent case involving mega-projects and "slum upgrading", but as Bogaert himself remarks, also has the greatest urban-rural divide in the NAWA region. Can an approach that takes the city as an entry point include the situation in the marginalized rural regions of Morocco? How is "globalization produced" there, on the periphery, and how is it connected to the metropolises? The book is published at a time when the Moroccan periphery, in particular, has become a place of unrest and massive social protests. This goes especially for the Rif, the northern part on the Mediterranean coast, which is likewise the region with the highest rate of migration to Europe, thus pointing to another key aspect of globalization.

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However, Bogaert has extensively discussed elsewhere questions of protest mobilization in the Moroccan metropolises and the periphery (Bogaert and Emperador Badimón; Bogaert, "Contextualizing the Arab Revolts: The Politics behind Three Decades of Neoliberalism in the Arab World"; Bogaert, "The revolt of small towns: the meaning of Morocco's history and the geography of social protests"), and it is up to the readers to productively include these analyses, which are clearly beyond the scope of this book.

To conclude, Bogaert develops a compelling argument and his book sheds light on often overlooked dynamics. It is a must-read for anyone doing research on urban development and the political process in Morocco, as well as for anyone interested in neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and globalization in general. As such, it is also highly recommended for teaching in a variety of courses, since it not only combines different theoretical perspectives in an innovative way and points to unexpected empirical connections, but is also written in a straightforward style that makes it a pleasure to read.

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Ibrahim Taha: 2016. The Fourth Dimension: Semiotic Debates with Palestinian and Arabic Literatures. Nazareth: The Arabic Language Academy

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Until recently, literary criticism among the Palestinian minority in Israel was dogmatic and ideological and did not meet the ethical standards of true literary critique. Rather, it was nourished by the ideological activities of the political party frameworks of that minority, mainly the Communist Party (RAKAH) and its newspaper *al-ittiḥād* (The Unity) and magazine *al-ghadd* (Tomorrow). The critique focused on praising the literary works for the author's intentions rather than for qualities of the literary text itself. Conversely, it would purposefully crush a work of literature because of the personality of the author or his political or ideological affiliations. I do not believe that this kind of literary criticism did justice to the texts that developed during the national and social struggle of this minority. This book by Ibrahim Taha attempts to address key questions concerning such literary criticism: what is the current state of the field? What key changes has Palestinian literary criticism in Israel undergone? Given the scarcity of literary criticism, how can one balance between the number of literary texts and methodical academic literary criticism?

Taha's book is a serious attempt to take a critical look at Palestinian literature in Israel in particular and Arabic literature in general, using methodical and scientific tools mainly involving the understanding of semiotic clues. I believe that the main importance of this book lies in understanding the Palestinian literary text in Israel by understanding the general literary work typical of that text. Unlike many other Palestinian critics, Taha emphasizes the dialogue between the text and the reader and the clues the text offers to enable the reader to reach a profound understanding of its hidden meanings.

Taha's book is panoramic in nature and contains an anthology of articles he published in the Israeli Arabic press from the 1980s to 2016. It relates directly to the works of 17 Palestinian and two other Arab authors. In addition to the preface, in which he lays out his theory of literary criticism, he provides three general articles: "The Politics of Palestinian Literature in Israel", "The Dialectical Connection between the Narrative Text and the Reader", and "The New Literature Curriculum in Arab Schools in Israel". Apart from the article on author Rāwiya Burbāra, TahaRawiya Burbara, Tāha does not engage with the works of fourth-generation Palestinian writers; rather, the book focuses on the works of second- and third-generation Palestinian writers living in Israel. Because of this, I do not believe that the book truly reflects the current experi-

ence of Palestinian literature in Israel (which was not its intention, anyway). It focuses on the mainstream literature of the national Palestinian minority in Israel and does not discuss its formerly marginal works, which have now become part of the literary center for this population.

In this context, it is important to note the theoretical preface that Taha devotes to the state of literary criticism within the Palestinian population in Israel. This preface differs from the articles themselves, since it pertains to the current state of Palestinian literary criticism. Taha believes there is a serious problem with the quantity and quality of Palestinian literary criticism in Israel, even though the literary texts offer us both quality and quantity. However, it is the problem of reading and critiquing that hampers the development of this literature. In this important preface, in a manner that is a rather too personal for my taste, Taha emphasizes the need for a critical text to accompany and guide the literary dynamic among the Palestinian population in Israel. Unlike other critics, he warns against letting literary criticism continue to be a kind of political and ideological "getting even", which can empty the cultural movement of its depth and esthetic and social context.

The book's title is indicative of what makes it unique. It also indicates its theoretical underpinning: the overall semiotic theory with its four dimensions: the writer, the text, the reader, and the historical diachronic context (p. 12). The semiotic debate in this book covers the profound and temporary contextual vertical and horizontal directions, but each approach stresses a different dimension. Taha's analyses stress the qualitative facet of the work, in other words, how the author created the various meanings in his work. According to Taha, this can reveal not only the meaning, but also some of the author's mentality and thinking. For Taha, under the influence of semiotic theory, the text is merely a mutual exchange between sender and recipient built up on the basis of markers and symbols, as well as indexical, linguistic, and expressive acts alongside general cultural and civilizational codes (343).

The author's aim in this book is to make it easier for the reader to access articles spread across various newspapers and journals in order to look at the development of Arabic Palestinian literature in depth and trace its development over a relatively long period. Thus, the articles in the book reveal different approaches, sometimes because of the amount of time

between their writing. In the earlier articles written in the 1980s, there is plentiful evidence of the broad Russian formalist and structuralist approach. In contrast, in his later articles, Taha analyzes the works using the semiotic approach that highlights the strong link between the work's meanings and the tools used to shape it. This is clearly expressed in the article about the story by Egyptian author Idrīs: Yūsuf 'Idrīs "Ḥālat Talabbus" (Caught Red-handed) (Taha 401-414).

Two things I feel are missing from this book, that could supplement its academic orientation. The first is a reference list containing all the bibliographical items he used, and the second is an expanded index containing most of the people and issues he discusses. Nevertheless, Taha's book fills a void in Palestinian literary criticism in Israel and presents a serious critique based on scientific tools and structured theories that unearth the ensemble of meanings in the literary text. Taha's critical and close reading of the text is profound and looks at Palestinian writings in comprehensive and interdisciplinary contexts. Taha's reading does not separate Palestinian writing from world literature and treats it outside the local parameters within which it was created.

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The book offers the Arab reader in Israel and elsewhere a broad picture of Palestinian literature from a viewpoint of extensive personal involvement. The articles not only reflect textual knowledge, but also first-hand knowledge of the emergence of Palestinian literature in Israel. The writer is not only a full professor at Haifa University, but is also personally involved in organizing conferences on Palestinian literature and supervises MA theses and PhD dissertations dealing with this literature. Moreover, he is a member of many Ministry of Education committees working to advance Arabic language and literature in Israel. Furthermore, he is also a member of public committees and journals dealing with Palestinian literature. This involvement in Arabic Palestinian literature in Israel is also clearly evident in the scholarly articles in this book, which not only deal with Palestinian literature drily and from a distance, but also experience the literary process in general, thereby truly reflecting the cultural experience of the Palestinian minority in Israel.