

MIDDLE EAST REPORT

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POLITICS ON THE MOVE

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN LEBANON ■
TRAVELING PALESTINIAN ART ■ OPEN HILLEL



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COVER Outside Saint Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, Cairo, after the bomb attack inside on December 11, 2016. (David Degner)

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The surprise election of Donald Trump as President of the United States has already had a dramatic and troubling impact on the domestic politics and foreign policy of the US, and it is sure to affect international relations around the world. Trump is the very caricature of the most negative aspects of the US at its worst—celebrity culture, xenophobia, bigotry, sexism, greed, arrogance and ignorance. Certainly, his corruption, his erratic personal behavior, and his seemingly cozy relations with the alt-right and Russian president Vladimir Putin have combined to create an unprecedented situation in the White House. It would be a mistake, however, to focus solely on Trump himself. Doing so risks reducing real and alarming agendas to a personality-driven phenomenon. It misses the social fault lines being carved and wars being waged. Even if Trump were to be impeached, or lose reelection in four years, the broader themes of his policies, and what they really represent, would remain.

For all his personal idiosyncrasies, and despite his tendency to drive his critics to distraction via his penchant for inflammatory rhetoric and governing by Twitter, Trump is part of a much larger domestic and even global trend of right wing populism that is a fundamental danger to democracy in the US and well beyond. He is in many ways a democratically elected authoritarian, and hence similar to other world leaders such as Putin, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, or Egyptian president Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. But he is also part of a broader phenomenon of politicians channeling right wing populism and nativist nationalism in order to achieve power. Like his counterparts in other democracies, like Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen in France, and even Nigel Farage and the UK Independence Party in Britain, Trump makes ethnocentric appeals on an imaginary basis of a unified past that erases others living in that space.

It is also easy to become distracted by the Trump administration's rapid and repeated violation of the established norms of the US presidency. Thus far, the most outrageous of these are the flaunting of falsehoods, the attacks on the free press, the appointment of cabinet nominees who are adamantly opposed to the mission of their agencies, and the unwillingness to recognize or adequately deal with numerous conflicts of interest for Trump, his staff, and his cabinet. But the apparent hubris of the administration and its willingness to reset the standards of acceptable practice masks its continuities with past administrations.

What the Trump administration has done, in many ways, is to make transparent the conduct of politics in Washington, laying bare (or exposing the barely hidden) interests that shape much US policy. A critical look at the Trump phenomenon demands careful parsing of precisely which policies and practices are unprecedented and which are already well established.

Nationalism and Neoliberal Globalism

Many on the left were outraged by the nomination and confirmation of former Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson for Secretary of State. How could the administration allow an individual with deep commitments to the oil industry assume such a powerful position in shaping US foreign policy? But long before 1961, when President Eisenhower's farewell address warned citizens of the influence of the

the difference between the worldviews of Tillerson and Trump's top adviser, Steve Bannon. Tillerson and other corporate figures in the administration support a neoliberal globalism at odds with Bannon's white nationalist project and those of his allies in the alt-right movement. But even this tension is not new. The Trump administration reveals what has long been a contradiction of US empire. The American nation-state is committed to both a bounded national landscape and a boundless marketplace. And yet, what distinguishes the Trump era is that rarely are the contradictions of empire so stark. On the one hand, some within the Trump administration, including Bannon and Stephen Miller (another senior advisor to the President), are backward looking, hoping to reinvigorate a lost sense of white nationalism and right wing populism. This influence within the administration led to the promulgation of multiple immigration restrictions, especially towards those from countries in the Middle East with majority-Muslim populations, and a general hostility toward civil rights. On the other hand, the State Department and military, led by Tillerson and former army general James Mattis, seem to prize geopolitical preeminence and the status quo. They might be seen as more traditional corporate conservatives and foreign policy realists.

The retrograde nationalism of Bannon and Miller seems contradictory to the normative globalization of Tillerson and Mattis. The populist white nationalism of Bannon and Miller actually undermines the stability sought by Tillerson, Mattis and many others in the military, diplomatic and intelligence communities. This contradiction may mark a turning point, with the US remaining a global military and economic power, but one that seems barely able to influence global events, and instead turns inward toward a herenvolk democracy.

Middle East Implications

Even though there is a tension between nationalism and neoliberal globalism in Trump's administration, they can create a toxic mix when it comes to US foreign policy in the Middle East. But again this is not entirely new. Trump's administration has in fact doubled down on existing alliances in the region, with a particular affinity for leaders who share his thuggish outlook and disdain for any dissent. He held a notable high level meeting with leaders from Saudi Arabia, after relations had cooled during the Obama administration in part due to Obama's support for the Iran nuclear deal, all while inflaming nativist fears in his Islamophobic rhetoric and justifies them through travel bans that mainly affect Muslims (but not Saudis). Indeed, the administration's disdain for so-called radical Islam is highly selective. Saudi Arabia's extreme application of its interpretation of sharia law got a pass during a White House meeting between Saudi's Deputy Crown Prince, Muhammad bin Salman, and Trump. They discussed shared military, economic, and energy interests and the prince dubbed Trump a "true friend of Muslims." This was in part due to Trump himself parroting the Saudi government's line on sectarianism, with

a view to ensuring that there is a moderate Sunni coalition to counter both Iran, on the one hand, and ISIS on the other. And in another seeming irony, the administration views Turkey most favorably for its zero tolerance of dissent and its willingness to cooperate militarily with the US, even though Erdoğan's regime is the quintessential example of an Islamist party coming to power through elections only to undermine the democratic process and establish an autocratic regime. But the Trump administration seems fine with the massive repression in Turkey and with similar crackdowns elsewhere—including in Egypt, the US government's longtime ally currently governed by an authoritarian military man who was the first foreign leader to call Trump after the election to congratulate him on his win. Thus, for pro-democracy and human rights activists across the Middle East (and beyond), this White House should be seen mainly as a green light for authoritarian retrenchment, much as earlier administrations were.

Meanwhile, Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies can be expected to embolden both ISIS and al-Qaeda, both of which celebrated the administration's attempted travel bans against Muslims. Trump's binary portrayal of Islam versus the West fits precisely the worldview of these jihadi organizations, which remain committed to destroying what they see as the gray areas of coexistence and tolerance of Muslim communities in Western countries. In short, ISIS, al-Qaeda and other such groups can be expected to use Trump's policies and words in their own recruiting drives, by simply saying to prospective militants, "we told you so, you are not wanted there."

Decisions made by the Trump administration will also have significant effects on the everyday lives of people across the Middle East. Administration travel bans either block or dissuade people from the region from coming to the US for work or education, which will have real effects on remittances as well as training for people in various fields that need strengthening back home. Difficulties in attaining citizenship for Middle Easterners on visas working and studying in the US, as well as increased targeting of their communities, could also have a negative effect on family cohesion, as family members will not be able to join their relatives in the US, and those in the US may not be able to travel back home with assurance of return.

Another major area of concern is funding for development projects, whether through USAID or through private US-based organizations. In the Middle East, from Morocco to Iraq, USAID sponsors projects in important realms such as emergency resource provision in war-torn areas, gender equity programs, health services, educational initiatives, and projects to combat water scarcity and other effects of climate change. Although worldwide, USAID programs constitute just 1 percent of the federal budget, any cut by the Trump administration could have negative concrete effects on various programs for women, children and the poor across the

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Posters of Lebanese candidates running in Tripoli's municipal and mayoral elections, Lebanon, May 30, 2016.

OMAR IBRAHIM/REUTERS

Municipal Politics in Lebanon

Ziad Abu-Rish

The municipal system has been a key pillar of debates on administrative decentralization, economic development and political participation in Lebanon. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, activists sought to stop the demolition of the 1924 Barakat Building on the basis that it was a heritage site. In response to public pressure, the Municipality of Beirut expropriated the building in 2013, and has since overseen a contentious process of transforming the space into a memory museum. International donors have increasingly directed aid flows for Syrian refugees in Lebanon through municipalities instead of the central government. Concomitantly, many of these municipalities have imposed curfews and other systematic violations of the civil and human rights of Syrian refugees residing or working within their boundaries. During the 2015 garbage crisis, protesters demanded that waste management revert back to municipalities in Beirut and Mount Lebanon

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rather than the central government's Council for Development Reconstruction (CDR). At the same time, several municipalities colluded with the government to create makeshift dumpsites that threatened environmental and health risks. Across such examples, municipalities serve as a crucial site of political praxis in Lebanon.

Yet in the lead-up to the 2016 municipal elections, political elites differed on whether or not to hold elections—depending on how they evaluated their potential for success. Activists—wary of the formal political process that has yielded little or no meaningful change—debated the merits of participating in the elections. Municipalities in Lebanon have long been sites for the construction of political power and economic privilege. They also have served as sites for containing popular discontent at key historical moments. The 2016 elections nevertheless featured a sense of hope for many. The potential for change politicized new constituencies and mobilized new alliances across the country. Shut out of national institutions

such as Parliament and suffocated by the jockeying of those in power, many in Lebanon turned to the smallest denominator of representation and administration—the municipality. Status quo forces largely succeeded in maintaining their monopoly over all levels of state institutions. But the texture of municipal politics reflects Lebanon's shifting constellations of power. Such politics also echo the historical legacies of institution building in Lebanon and the place of municipalities within that history.

The Municipal System

In administrative terms, Lebanon is comprised of governorates (*muhafazat*), which in turn are divided into districts (*qada'*), each of which contains any number of municipalities (*baladiyyat*). Municipal governance is thus the third (local) level of public administration in the country.¹ Lebanon's eight governorates are Beirut, 'Akkar, Baalbak-Hermel, Bekaa, Mount Lebanon, Nabatiyya, North Lebanon and South Lebanon. There are 26 districts in total, containing a total of 1,030 municipalities, unevenly spread across the country.

The 1977 Law of Municipalities and its amendments govern the current system.² Each municipality has jurisdiction over all matters of public interest and work in its boundaries. This includes setting and balancing the budget, collecting fees and taxes, managing properties, and establishing or maintaining a range of public utilities and infrastructure such as health, sanitation, water, lighting, local transportation, streets and gardens. However, many of these functions are subject to various degrees of supervision by the district commissioner (*qa'im maqam*), governor (*muhafiz*) or minister of interior (*wazir al-dakhiliyya*). Furthermore, a lack of adequate administrative and fiscal capacity characterizes many municipalities. Such dynamics are a function of the laws governing public employment, municipal taxes and fees, and the transfer of municipal funds from the central government.³

Each municipality has a council that serves as the decision-making body. Municipal councils range in size from 9 to 21 members, determined by set proportions to each municipality's registered population. The smallest councils preside over municipalities of 2,000 people or fewer. The largest councils represent municipalities of 24,000 people or more. Beirut and Tripoli are exceptions, with 24 council members each. In all cases, members elect the council's executive, who holds the title of president. The vacancy of fifty percent or more of the council's seats automatically results in the dissolution of the municipal council and the scheduling of new elections.

Voters elect municipal councils for a six-year term in a bloc-vote list (as opposed to a proportional-vote) system. Each municipality is a single unified voting district. In contrast to the parliament, there are no sectarian quotas. Each voter casts a single list with up to as many names as available spots. Candidates who win the highest number of votes are elected. This system encourages cross-sectarian electoral alliances since candidates require the support of constituencies greater than

their own to be elected. The system also allows voters to cast ballots from different lists and party affiliations if they so choose. However, the system enables a winner-take-all outcome. One electoral list can monopolize the council if its candidates receive the most votes. A popular list, party, or candidate can win significant votes but still not make the council. The voting age in Lebanon is 21, despite a failed 2008 attempt to make it 18.

Another aspect of the election system merits consideration. Individuals are restricted to both vote and run in the districts of their official town of origin. In Lebanon, one's official town of origin is traced through the father for men and unmarried women. For married women, the government maintains her official town of origin as that of the father (if the husband is non-Lebanese) or transfers it to that of her husband (if Lebanese). These gendered administrative-geographic designations of Lebanese families (*nufus*) were first established by Lebanon's only official census, which was conducted in 1932. Thus, while a large proportion of Lebanon's population currently resides in Beirut, only a small percentage of them are registered to vote and run for elected office there. This system of population and voter registration is a direct outcome of the French colonial and early post-independence policies. Top-down attempts to manage sectarian-based parliamentary elections have further consolidated this colonial legacy—as it effectively makes permanent (and thus known) the sectarian composition of voting districts. In principle, it is possible to change one's place of registration. In practice, it is extremely difficult for most people to do so because of bureaucratic obstacles and political corruption.

Historical Legacies and Precedents

Lebanon's municipal system, like that of the institutions of governance in many parts of the Levant, has its origins in the dramatic transformations of the late Ottoman Period (1831–1918). The imperial palace and local elites collaborated, however unevenly, in the introduction of municipal governance and representative politics in Anatolia, the Levant, Mesopotamia and parts of the Arabian Peninsula. The 1864 Ottoman Provincial Law and the 1877 Ottoman Municipal Law anchored this system. It was an important element of Istanbul's broader efforts to reorganize provincial administration in an effort to centralize and expand the power of the state.⁴ These municipalities served as vehicles of electoral competition, urban development and social transformation in cities and towns like Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and Dayr al-Qamar. By World War I, a number of municipalities operated across the territories that would form the future Lebanese state. During the war, the Municipality of Beirut played an active and central role in managing food supply in the context of the famine that plagued much of the region.⁵

The municipal system was crucial to colonial and post-colonial state-building projects in Lebanon. At the end of World War I, Britain and France dismantled the Ottoman



Supporters of different electoral lists hand printed ballot papers to a voter as he enters a polling station during the municipal elections in Sidon, Lebanon, May 22, 2016.

MOHAMMED ZAATARI/AP PHOTO

Empire and established the post-Ottoman successor states of Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. French colonial rule in Lebanon was the context for the reorganization and institutionalization of the municipal system in Lebanon. The 1922 Law of Municipalities inaugurated this latest phase in municipal politics. Differences between the Ottoman and Lebanese systems of municipal governance were minor. They pivoted around issues of national authorities' degree of centralization as well as various functional procedures.⁶

During the colonial (1920–1943) and early post-independence (1943–1975) periods, the municipal system offered one institutional means for mobilizing both financial resources and local constituencies in the service of executive political maneuvering. Both reforms to the municipal system and the holding of municipal elections were therefore episodic. Between the state's establishment in 1920 and the outbreak of civil war in 1975, the government held only three municipal elections (in 1934, 1952 and 1963). It extended the mandate of elected councils, appointed persons to replace deceased ones or—in some instances—dissolved the council altogether. Political-institutional interests drove municipal reforms. In most cases, executive decrees established new laws, amendments and supplements. The executive branch attempted to shield the broader system from parliamentary debate, oversight or imposition. It did

so by decreeing changes rather than subjecting them to the legislative process.

The municipal system and its reorganization offered one avenue for the shaping of new political relations and economic privileges. It helped reorganize constellations of power at several historical junctures. In the 1930s, the French colonial authorities in Lebanon faced depression-era economic dislocation and escalating opposition to their military and political presence. After suspending the constitution in 1932, the French authorities restored it in 1934 and initiated the first round of municipal elections since the state's establishment. In the 1950s, Camille Chamoun sought to consolidate his presidential regime in the wake of a popular uprising that forced the resignation of his predecessor, Bishara al-Khuri. Once in power, Chamoun quickly jettisoned the populist and leftist forces that facilitated his rise. Faced with a depleted social base and a parliamentary majority that remained steadfast Khuri supporters, Chamoun turned to reforming the municipal system, including removing sectarian quotas. He held the first round of post-independence municipal elections in 1952, indeed the first since 1934. In 1958, Fu'ad Shihab was elected president in the wake of a three-month armed rebellion and subsequent US military intervention. Throughout the 1960s, Shihab sought to bolster his regime and advance an unprecedented expansion and centralization of state bureaucracy. Both political adversaries

and entrenched institutional interests within the bureaucracy opposed his statist agenda. Shihab also turned to municipal elections in 1963 to consolidate his power.

Municipal residents were not passive in this process. In some instances, they utilized elections to further their own interests vis-à-vis both the central government and various political elites. In other cases, like the nationalization of the Beirut Water Company in 1950, they championed the jurisdiction of a municipality over that of the central government in hopes of checking cabinet ministers' rent-seeking logic of policy-making. Between 1920 and 1975, the government frequently took the lead in creating new municipalities. Yet residents of specific areas also mobilized to either create a municipality where none had existed or to separate from an existing municipality. Examples of the latter are the 1952 breakaway of Burj Hammud residents from the Jdaydeh Municipality and the 1956 creation of the Ghbayri Municipality over what was previously a part of the Shiyyah Municipality. Throughout this history, local residents turned to the institution of the municipality to negotiate their place in the broader political economy of power in Lebanon. The combined effect of these dynamics was the "municipalization of Lebanon."⁷ In 1932, there were 120 municipalities. By 1958, that number had jumped to 400. The most dramatic growth took place in the 1960s. The 1963 Law of Municipalities facilitated the establishment of municipalities, leading to the creation of the majority of those currently in existence. There is a direct correlation between changes to the municipal system—through laws, elections and municipal boundary making—and the implementation of broader programs to reorganize intra-institutional and government-citizen relations. While reforms and elections were episodic in the early independence period, they were central to reconfiguring power relations.

The 1975–1990 civil war interrupted but did not erase municipal politics as a site of executive power maneuvering. The government passed the 1977 Law of Municipalities, which is the legal edifice of the current system. The closing months of that year represented a particular juncture in which political elites, local laypersons and foreign observers incorrectly (though understandably) predicted the war's end.⁸ It is thus noteworthy that municipal reform and elections were one of the major items on the agenda of state elites in the aftermath of the "two-year war." Yet it would not be until after the civil war ended in 1990, and in a very different context, that the reforming of the municipal elections and holding of elections would once again serve as a focus of elite and popular mobilizations.

The political settlement that ended the fifteen-year civil war featured constitutional and institutional reforms that reflected the political equilibrium between the major militias who survived the war.⁹ The cabinet—officially called the Council of Ministers—now exercised many of the political powers previously vested in the office of the president. Parliament and its speaker had upgraded powers as well, while the president

continued to wield power. The new political system established what many called "troika politics," a dynamic that featured near identical political powers among the "three presidents": the president of the republic (the president), the president of the council of ministers (the prime minister), and the president of parliament (the speaker of parliament). This "power sharing" resulted in the chronic incapacity for effective government decision-making. Such paralysis was coterminous with the institutionalized presence and political interference of the Syrian military.

In this context, the troika politics incentivized parties to turn to municipal politics to bolster their position. In 1996–1997, Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri sought to expand his political capacities by turning to municipal politics. He called for reforming the municipal system and holding elections. President Elyas Hrawi joined this call. Hrawi believed that "local democracy" would strengthen his position with the Maronite constituency. But Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri opposed this proposal, fearing that local elections would allow Hizballah, his Amal Movement's main rival in certain Beirut suburbs and southern Lebanon, to make inroads in state administration. It was a national grassroots mobilization known as the "Rally for the Municipal Elections" that broke the gridlock. In 1998, the campaign forced a realignment of forces and achieved the holding of the first municipal elections since 1963. Municipal elections have been held every six years since (2004, 2010 and 2016). Throughout each of these instances, municipal politics reflected Lebanon's shifting constellations of power.

The 2016 Municipal Elections

The May 2016 elections took place in four rounds. Polls opened for twelve hours each Sunday in specified governorates: Beirut, Bekaa and Baalbak-Hermel on May 8, Mount Lebanon on May 15, South Lebanon and Nabatiyya on May 22, and North Lebanon and 'Akkar on May 29. The national turnout rate was estimated at 48.54 percent, continuing the trend of overall decreasing voter turnout since the 1998 municipal elections. 24,939 candidates competed for 12,139 municipal council seats. Of these hopefuls, 6.9 percent were women, as were 5.6 percent of the winners. Yet national statistics tell only part of the story.¹⁰

Whether or not these municipal elections would take place was itself in question. Parliament had twice (in 2013 and 2014) extended its six-year mandate. Those same legislators were unable to reach a simple majority agreement on a new president for over two years (May 2014–October 2016). These dynamics reflect the deadlock between the two major political coalitions in Lebanon, known as March 14 and March 8. Since their 2005 founding in the wake of Hariri's assassination and the Syrian military withdrawal, both alliances have subsumed parties and politicians. Between 2005 and 2015, their interaction was increasingly a zero-sum game. Yet, as Sami Atallah pointed out, municipal elections were the lowest price these elites agreed



Beirut Madinati candidates and delegates cheer while monitoring ballot counts for the municipal elections, May 8, 2016.

MOHAMED AZAKIR/REUTERS

to pay to maintain the shards of political legitimacy they had left.¹¹ Not holding elections would have been too costly given the parliament's dubious mandate, the presidential void and the 2015 garbage crisis. That said, the 2016 municipal elections were not business as usual. As has historically been the case, such elections reflected and helped produce the constellations of power that undergird the contemporary political economy of Lebanon.

At the most basic level, the municipal elections highlighted the unity of political elites in the face of challenges to the status quo. In 2010, the March 14 and March 8 rivals competed against one another in the majority of municipal elections. In 2016, leading members of the March 14 and March 8 coalitions joined forces to overcome challenges from aspiring political elites and popular forces external to the country's established network of political elites. Whether this trend was a function of structural crisis in Lebanese politics, political learning on the part of previously excluded groups or a combination thereof continues to be debated in the Lebanese press. To maintain their dominance of municipalities, political elites pooled resources and formed joint lists. The contours and effectiveness of such alliances were contingent on the very local (municipal) contexts in which they materialized. These practices reveal once again the imperative of exclusion that characterizes political

elite practice. The stakes of the elections were clear: maintaining the monopoly over local representative institutions, even if it meant carrying over the policy-making gridlock witnessed at the national level.

Nowhere was this elite cohesion more visible than in Beirut, where the competition between *La'ihat al-Biyarta* ("The Beirutis' List") and *La'ihat Bayrut Madinati* ("Beirut Is My City List") featured prominently on the streets of the city and social media accounts of citizens of all sympathies. The Beirutis List was an alliance between a cross-section of Lebanon's major political parties: the Amal Movement (headed by Nabih Berri), the Future Movement (headed by Saad al-Hariri), the Free Patriotic Movement (headed by Michel Aoun), the Lebanese Forces (headed by Samir Geagea), the Phalanges Party (headed by Sami Gemayel), and the Progressive Socialist Party (headed by Walid Jumblatt).¹² Their challengers, Beirut Is My City, defined themselves as a technocratic, politically unaffiliated coalition, and represented an array of middle-class and popular interest. The list included an assortment of architects, engineers, businesspersons and artists. Hope and expectations for change in the Lebanese status quo peaked in the weeks prior to the elections. The Beirut Is My City campaign mobilized a range of activists, politicized new constituencies, and thus united a disparate coalition of volunteers and voters. For some, it was

the hope of delivering a political blow to status-quo forces that inspired them to show their support. For others, it was an experiment of bringing into the formal political process the energies and aspirations that had motivated grassroots episodes like those of the 2015 protests.¹³

The status quo list ultimately swept the Beirut elections. Due to the bloc-vote system, Beirut Is My City failed to secure a single seat on the municipal council, despite garnering nearly 32 percent of the total votes cast. A number of factors caused this mixed outcome. Support for status quo forces is declining. At the same time, independents are exploring new forms of political organizing. The elections also revealed tensions within specific political parties. In the Free Patriotic Movement, disgruntled members broke ranks to advocate for Beirut Is My City. More a protest than anything else, those members were eventually disciplined or expelled from the party.

Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city, featured a similar dynamic of elite cohesion, though with different results. There, Hariri's Future Movement allied with local business moguls and Hariri rivals—Najib Miqati, Faysal Karama and Muhammad al-Safadi—in the “For Tripoli” List (*La'ihat li-Tarablus*). They nevertheless lost more than 18 of 24 municipal seats to the “Tripoli's Choice” List (*La'ihat Khiyar Tarablus*). This loss signaled a collapse of the city's existing political hierarchy.¹⁴ Ashraf Riffi, former minister of justice and past head of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF), headed the challengers' list and served as its driving force. Despite his position, Riffi represented outsider politics in these elections. The long held understanding of Hariri and Miqati as twin anchors of the national and local Sunni political establishment cemented Riffi's outsider status. The victory of Tripoli's Choice depended on voter sentiment. Riffi drew on popular criticisms of the security and economic conditions of the city, which features chronic unemployment and underdevelopment as well as episodic bombings and other violence.¹⁵ Most notably, Riffi's list represented a broader coalition than just a typical assortment of leading families as it also drew from the popular neighborhood of Bab al-Tibbaneh. Riffi and his allies had neither the institutional nor financial capacities to confront the Hariri-Miqati alliance. After the elections, some local analysts claimed that the loss was the final nail in the coffin of the Hariri political project—which the late prime minister had established as the leading Sunni, and cross-sectarian, political umbrella. The loss also indicates Miqati's weakening legitimacy and capacity since he led, bankrolled and appointed the largest share of the list's candidates. This explains the stakes of Hariri's current stint as prime minister, which backers hope will represent his political comeback.

Similar electoral competitions pitting pro- and anti-status quo groups characterized a number of other municipal elections. In Zgharta, the independent “Development” List (*La'ihat al-Inma'*) challenged the “Together for Zgharta and Ihdin” List (*La'ihat Ma'an li-Zgharta wa-Ihdin*). The Frangiehs and Mu'awwads, longtime notable local families, organized the

latter list. The independent list failed to win a single one of the 21 seats, yet it garnered approximately 25 percent of the votes cast. If not for the bloc-vote system, that accomplishment would have been enough to establish a meaningful presence within the new council. Furthermore, its supporters showed significantly more discipline: A much larger percentage of those of who voted for the independent list than supporters of the Together List voted in accordance with their respective lists. For example, the head of the Together List came in fourteenth despite the entire list winning, indicating that supporters rejected the leadership structure of the list.

In several Christian-majority municipalities, the elite cohesion manifested in joint lists between the two leading Christian political parties: the Lebanese Forces (of March 14) and the Free Patriotic Movement (of March 8). This alliance was not simply a manifestation of the national trend. It represented a historic, if temporary, reconciliation that ruptured more than twenty-five years of bitter and at times deadly political rivalry between the respective leaders, Geagea and Aoun. The two announced their rapprochement in January 2016, in the midst of political jockeying over the Lebanese presidency. The municipal elections provided an important testing ground for this alliance. In Bsharri and Zgharta, independents organized an anti-status quo list. The LF-FPM alliance coalesced with local notable families to prevent their challengers from succeeding in these two localities. In most other areas, where no independents competed, the division between the LF-FPM alliance and notable families formed the axis of electoral competition and in fact a primary motive for the alliance. While they scored important victories, the alliance lost to local families in al-Qubayyat and Tannurin—highlighting the limitations of this strategy in general and the deteriorating relationship between the Lebanese Forces and Christian independents allied with the March 14 coalition in particular.

Even municipalities that March 8 allies Hizballah and the Amal Movement have historically dominated featured important shifts. In some areas, anti-status quo lists, forged from alliances between communists and independents or other smaller leftist groups, made important electoral gains. They increased their share of municipal council seats from two to six in Srifa, zero to three in Kufr Nu'man and zero to four in Ansariyya. These results revealed that support for Hizballah, and to a lesser degree the Amal Movement, in the “Shi'i milieu” is neither self-evident nor inevitable. Both parties coordinated their responses to such losses. They maneuvered to dissolve those councils whose election results were out of step with their preferences. In Haruf, for example, the entry of three independents onto the council upset the 8-to-7 division the parties had agreed to. Eight winners from the joint list subsequently resigned, dissolving the 15-member council and forcing new elections. As one Amal representative put it: “Representation will be corrected and the Haruf experience will not be repeated. Rather, we have agreed to correct the representation in all other municipalities.”¹⁶

Politics, Regimes and Institutions

The 2016 municipal elections highlight a number of important lessons. Support for status quo forces in Lebanon is eroding. On the one hand, this diminishing support is directly related to their decreasing fiscal capacity to mobilize their traditional constituencies. On the other hand, it reflects resentment of either the general state of affairs in Lebanon or the specific policies and alliances of individual parties. In both instances, fewer voters turned out for the status quo forces than previously. They voted for others or simply declined to show up. Such dynamics might help explain the Kata'ib Party's recent rhetorical turn to populism. Excluded from the LF-FPM rapprochement, and seeking to capitalize on the anti-status quo sentiment expressed in the municipal elections, the party has taken a very public stance against the 2017 increase in various taxes and fees. But without an effective political alternative, the weakening of status quo forces means little more than a potential reshuffling of the hierarchies between existing political elites.

Independents and their allies are experimenting with different forms of political mobilization. Both the street protests of 2015 and the electoral campaigns of 2016 highlight this fact. Despite its structural limitations, the municipal system provides different possibilities for electoral competition than parliamentary elections. Smaller voting districts, the absence of sectarian quotas, and different functions and jurisdictions allow for a framing and mobilization not possible at the parliamentary level. The diversity of contexts across different municipalities also opens up the possibility of competition between groups that are otherwise allied at the national level.

Yet independents face a numbers of obstacles traversing these possibilities. On the one hand, pressure needs to be generated to push through much-needed reforms: replacing the bloc-vote system with one of proportional representation; establishing a meaningful women's quota; lowering the voting age to 18; and directly electing the mayor. Such reforms, to say nothing of overhauling the voter registration system, would positively affect both voter turnout and election results in favor of independents. On the other hand, those within the independent milieu need to better bridge personal and tactical differences. The 2016 elections featured a number of very public divisions. Some of this is due to political learning by what were effectively electoral novices. But it was also a function of long-standing infighting within independent and leftist circles.

Perhaps most important, independents are taking note of how organizational capacities and mobilization strategies differ between the terrain of street protests and electoral competition. Rather than viewing them as identical or fixating on one form of political engagement over the other, both must be tactically deployed in their respective contexts. Activists continued to discuss many of the lessons they learned during the 2015

protest movement. Similarly, groups such as Beirut Is My City held a series of meetings since the elections to reflect on strengths and weaknesses, as well as how they should conduct themselves during the post-election period. Divisions over these issues have put strain on the group. Some insiders and outsiders alike question whether it will ever be the dynamic coalition it was in 2016.

The organizational requirements for competing in municipal elections are tremendous, even without taking into consideration campaign violations and ballot box manipulation by incumbents. In Beirut, for example, there were over 800 polling stations located in some 70 schools. Each candidate or list was legally entitled to a set number of official representatives at each polling station to monitor voting during the day and ballot counting that night (or however long it took). This number does not include those persons who would be needed to canvass, distribute voting lists, liaise with government authorities and disseminate public statements. That kind of election machine requires many volunteers, a sophisticated level of coordination and an adequate information management system. This is to say nothing of the financial resources required given that many of the status-quo lists paid these representatives and volunteers for their time (including meals).

Mobilizational dilemmas also exist. Primary among these concerns is the construction of the electoral list and the alliances that it reflects. No matter how attentive an electoral platform is to the public at large, election campaigns take lots of legwork. In the case of the Tripoli's Choice List, Riffi was able to draw on the local networks of the Bab al-Tibbaneh popular neighborhood by incorporating some of its leaders. This element was apparently lacking in the case of Beirut Is My City. Therein, the electoral list did not appear to represent an alliance between the campaign and any (independent) local leader. This might have been a strategic choice on the part of Beirut Is My City to not create such alliances. Alternatively, it could represent an impasse in negotiations over the number of seats on the list a local leader would have been able to appoint. This contrast between Tripoli's Choice and Beirut Is My City can also be read at a different level: Whereas the former succeeded in effectively capturing the anti-status quo sentiment in Tripoli, the latter failed to do so in Beirut. A similar opportunity was lost when Beirut Is My City failed to back any of the candidates in the elections for *mukhtar*, since many of these candidates can bring entire neighborhoods to the polls. While understandable in the immediate context of a first election campaign, working out a way to broker such alliances is essential for any group of independents competing in an election. These alliances are also critical to developing meaningful relationships outside of the independent's immediate social networks.

The 2016 municipal elections reflected and shaped the shifting landscape of interests in Lebanon. While the overall outcome largely maintained the monopoly of status quo forces on state institutions, the elections also helped create networks

and repertoires that independent activists, intellectuals and laypersons can draw upon in their continued struggle to shape public policies and institutional arrangements in more representative and equitable ways. Some activists continue to decry participation in elections on the basis that it legitimates a corrupt and sectarian political system. Many others seem to be developing an analytic and strategic insight that differentiates between the regime of forces in power and the bureaucracy of state institutions they depend on for that power. In all cases, there is little doubt that in the aftermath of the 2016 municipal elections, the municipality as an institution has become a more significant site of popular struggle—whether through electoral competition, public claim making or informal lobbying. ■

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Endnotes

1 A fourth level of administration could be identified as that of the *mukhtar* system, a network of neighborhood-level government officials charged with officially registering births, deaths, marriages, and certain commercial and other transactions. Neighborhood residents directly elect *mukhtars* for a 6-year term, yet such officials do not make policy. There were over 2,800 *mukhtar* seats up for election in 2016.

2 For the original law, see *Marsum Ishtira'i Raqam 188: Qanun al-Baladiyyat* issued on June 30, 1977. The government amended the law several times in the post-war period, most notably through *Qanun Raqam 665: Ta'dilat 'Ala Ba'id al-Nusus fi Qanun Intikhab A'da' Majlis al-Nuwuab wa-Qanun al-Baladiyyat wa-Qanun al-Mukhtarin* issued on December 29, 1997.

3 See Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, *About Administrative Decentralization in Lebanon*, (Beirut: LCPS, 2015).

4 For a detailed account of this context and its manifestations in the case of Beirut, see Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siecle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

5 For an account of the Municipality of Beirut's role in wartime famine relief, see Melanie Schulze Tanielian, "Feeding the City: The Beirut Municipality and the Politics of Food During World War I," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014).

6 For one of the rare discussions of continuities and breaks between Ottoman and French colonial municipal systems in the territories that constituted the Lebanese states, see Walter H. Ritscher, *Municipal Government in the Lebanon* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1932).

7 While Agnes Favier coined the term, I am grateful to Mona Harb for alerting me to it and for sharing much of her own research on municipalities in Lebanon. The numerical growth (including the 1950s examples) indicated in this article is drawn from her "Much Ado About Nothing? Municipalities in 1950s Lebanon," paper presented at the inaugural meeting of the working group on "State Building, Economic Development, and Social Mobilization in Lebanon, 1943–1958," Beirut, Lebanon, June 27–28, 2015.

8 See, for example, Samir Makdisi, "An Appraisal of Lebanon's Postwar Economic Development and A Look to the Future," *Middle East Journal* 31/3 (Summer 1977).

9 For a detailed account of the post-war political settlement and how it framed state building and economic development in Lebanon between 1990 and 2005, see Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State Building in Postwar Lebanon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

10 For official statistics concerning the 2016 municipal elections in Lebanon, see the website of the Republic of Lebanon's Ministry of Interior and Municipalities: <http://www.interior.gov.lb>.

11 Sami Atallah, "Lebanon Needs More than Municipal Elections to Effect Change," Center for Lebanese Policy Studies (April 2016), <http://www.lcps-lebanon.org/featuredArticle.php?id=72>.

12 It is worth noting that this list was understood as a Hariri list, given that Sunni Muslims make the majority of the electorate of the Municipality of Beirut. In this sense, there was a second logic undergirding the alliance in Beirut: ensuring representation of Christian political forces in an election that is void of sectarian quotas.

13 For an account of the context for and dynamics of the 2015 protest movement in Lebanon, see Ziad Abu-Rish, "Garbage Politics," *Middle East Report* 277 (Winter 2015).

14 In contrast to the Beirut elections, neither list included representation of non-Sunni Muslim political forces, which ironically was a function of the intensity of intra-Sunni rivalry that characterized Tripoli.

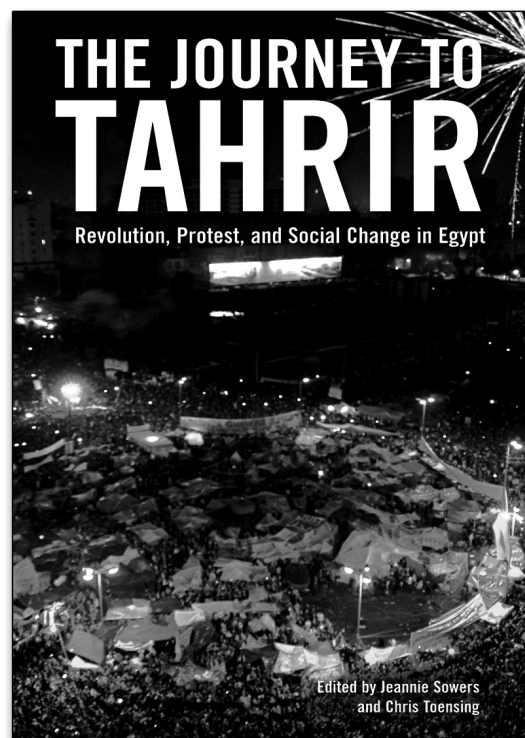
15 Many of Tripoli's Sunni-majority voters viewed the Hariri alliance with Miqati and Karamah as crossing a red line. The latter two are March 8-affiliated allies of Arab Democratic Party (ADP), whose primary constituency is the city's Alawi residents in general and those of the Jabal Muhsin neighborhood in particular. The ADP is a Syrian regime-allied political party formed in the midst of the Lebanese Civil War. It regularly battled Tripoli-based groups hostile to Syrian intervention and presence in Lebanon. Its leader, Ra'fat 'Id, is accused of having orchestrated the 2013 Tripoli mosque bombings on behalf of the Syrian regime. Residents of the Sunni-majority Bab al-Tibbaneh and Alawi-majority Jabal Muhsin have a long history of armed clashes dating back to the civil war, but also annually since 2008.

16 Quoted in Subhi Amhaz, "Hizballah-Amal: Hal al-baladiyyat al-ghayr tawafuqiyya wa-tard al-mustaqillin," *al-Mudun*, July 27, 2016.

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A migrant at an immigration center in Mineo, Sicily, 2015.

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Into the Emergency Maze

Injuries of Refuge in an Impoverished Sicilian Town

Silvia Pasquetti

It was a sunny and warm day in February 2015, in the midst of an otherwise atypically rainy and cold Sicilian winter. Awate and Drissa¹ sat next to one other on the edge of the covered balcony at the small reception center for asylum seekers where they lived. Both wore headphones but their bodies moved out of sync as they followed the different rhythms that pumped into their ears. Driving past the center² with his car window down, Roberto commented as I sat next to him: “They always seem so relaxed, with their headphones and flashy shoes. They are taken care of. I wish someone would think about me, too.” Roberto is an unemployed graduate in his mid-twenties, who was born in Sicily and lives with his parents just a couple of blocks away from the center. Roughly the same age as Roberto, Awate escaped indefinite forced military service in Eritrea, and Drissa fled abuses of both armed groups and state security forces in Mali. They both

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reached Sicily in 2014 after surviving a sea journey along the deadly central Mediterranean route departing from Libya.³ Unlike many migrants who arrive in and quickly leave Sicily, Awate and Drissa decided not to embark on another uncertain journey towards a Northern European destination, and instead entered the institutional maze of Sicilian reception centers for asylum seekers. Awate was forcibly fingerprinted and thus obliged to apply for asylum in Italy according to the Dublin Regulation.⁴ Drissa felt exhausted after years on the move and a particularly traumatic sea experience—the boat he was on capsized and he was rescued by the Italian Navy just when he thought he had no strength left to stay afloat. His plan was to stay put and try to find what he called “peace and stability” in Italy. However, what Awate, Drissa and many other asylum seekers mainly have found so far is a widespread climate of suspicion and resentment. The comment made by Roberto, their new Sicilian neighbor, is just a small sign of such tension.

Refugees as Targets of Resentment

Since its opening in 2014, the small reception center has hosted about 30 male asylum seekers, most of them in their twenties and coming from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. It has contributed to the local economy, but resentment from local residents has exposed migrants to abuse and exploitation. The center has created new jobs for the residents of the impoverished Sicilian town, hiring six staff members in roles such as social worker, educator, and language teacher. Most of those hired have little professional background, were previously unemployed and obtained the jobs through family connections. Yet working conditions are tough as payment is often delayed for months at a time and professional training is practically non-existent.

In addition to employment, the center has indirectly contributed to the municipal budget. In a town starved for resources and stricken by debt, the municipality has silently but repeatedly redirected the funding sent by the Ministry of Interior to support the center toward long overdue payment of public employees, especially when they have threatened to strike.⁵

Local residents know little about the center's contribution to the economy, and instead view it as an institution that, as one resident put it, "takes care of migrants," whereas they, as citizens, feel neglected by the Italian state. Inaccurate information about reception centers—for example the widespread rumor that asylum seekers receive 35 Euros per day—cements residents' belief that they are experiencing institutional betrayal by a government that is against citizens and in favor of migrants. In reality, the 35 Euros per day go toward the overall workings of the center, including services such as food, housing and clothing. Asylum seekers themselves only receive about 1.50 Euros per day as pocket money. Residents accuse migrants of being privileged by the state, an accusation that fits with a longstanding local routine of complaining about state abandonment and disregard. Yet it is asylum seekers who arguably find themselves at the bottom of the local socioeconomic order. For example, although they are legally entitled to work six months after they claim asylum, they are exposed to highly exploitative working conditions, especially in the many greenhouses surrounding the town and, in the summer months, in the restaurants and bars at nearby seaside tourist locations.

The highly mediatized scandals of corruption that engulf the institutional system of reception for asylum seekers deepen the climate of suspicion within and around the center. This is particularly true for the so-called "Capital Mafia" (*Mafia Capitale*) scandal. As part of the investigation into this scandal, a conversation between a public administrator and the head of an organization managing reception centers was recorded in which they refer to these centers as more lucrative than anything else, including drugs.⁶ The transcripts of this conversation were widely circulated on national and international news. Against the backdrop of this negative media coverage, the Sicilian reception center's staff and asylum seekers throw additional accusations of dishonesty and manipulation at

one another. The former accuse some of the asylum seekers of using the center or the state as "a cow to milk" (*una mucca da mungere*). Migrants accuse the staff and, more generally, "the Italians" of making a profit out of their presence, saying things like, "They eat all the money" (*loro mangiano tutti i soldi*). Local residents resent everyone involved in the reception system, including "the corrupt politicians" in the distant seats of national power, the many organizations involved in managing centers of reception, and the migrants who in their view are "waited on, hand and foot" (*serviti e riveriti*). All are viewed with suspicion.

Protracted and Dispersed Emergencies

Suspicion and resentment are reproduced by a migration emergency policy discourse that, despite Italy's now well-established status as a destination country, continues to frame migrant mobilities as threatening but temporary "invasions" and to manage them through emergency measures. While most undocumented migrants in Italy are those who overstayed student or work visas, the arrival of migrants by boat has been central to official "emergency" talks and the resulting public moral panic about "migration invasions" since 1991 when boats arrived from Albania to the shores of Puglia, a southern region.⁷ So-called emergency measures have punctuated Italy's approach to migrant mobility at an accelerated pace in the last five years, including the 2011 North African emergency plan to deal with the arrival by boat of about 30,000 Tunisians in the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution in 2011;⁸ the 2014 Mare Nostrum ("Our Sea") rescue operation in response to the increasing number of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean;⁹ and the still developing project of European Union-sponsored hotspots in Southern Italy (and Greece) to fingerprint and process arriving migrants.¹⁰

Italy's definition of emergency does not stop at rescue operations at sea or processing procedures at arrival points. Rather, it suffuses the entire Italian reception system for asylum seekers. This system patches together different institutions, including thousands of temporary structures for immediate support; a dozen large centers of reception (CARA) concentrating hundreds or at times thousands of asylum seekers, often in southern rural areas and urban peripheries;¹¹ and hundreds of smaller centers (SPRAR), which, compared to CARA centers, are supposedly more attentive to asylum seekers' individual needs and more oriented toward life after the institutional reception system. The center that was opened in Roberto's hometown is one of the 430 small SPRAR centers dispersed throughout Italy.¹² Established in 2002, the SPRAR system was, for over a decade, a very small program catering to only 3000 asylum seekers per year. In 2014 the state decided to expand it to over 20,000 centers, sending a growing number of asylum seekers directly to them rather than to the corrupt and scandal-ridden CARA centers.¹³ The ongoing expansion of the SPRAR system has meant that, over the course of two years, hundreds of new SPRAR centers have



African refugees are housed in Torre di Canicarao Agritourism, Comiso, Sicily, 2014.

GIULIO PISCITELLI/CONTRASTO/REDUX

been established, many of them in Sicily and other southern regions.¹⁴ While some of the SPRAR centers remain true to the initial role of acting as a bridge towards the broader society, informing asylum seekers of their rights and listening to their needs, many other SPRAR centers, especially those hastily opened under the pressure of the recent expansion, arguably resemble the larger centers in their opportunistic, controlling and inward looking approach to the management of asylum seekers.

These centers effectively impose on the asylum seekers they host what, in his analysis of “total institutions,” sociologist Erving Goffman describes as “an enclosed, formally administered round of life.” This institutionalized “round of life,”¹⁵ which is limited to six months and renewable for another six months, is oriented inward, toward the preservation of order through practices of scrutiny and control¹⁶ rather than toward life after the center. Thus, life after the center is often marked by abandonment and abjection.

An Enclosed Institutional Life under Scrutiny

Scrutiny and control are central to the operation of the center that houses Awate and Drissa and 28 other asylum seekers. Threaded within the fabric of its institutional life is a process by which staff members attempt to identify what they conceive of as trustful and grateful personalities, and encourage or even forcibly move out of the center (and the town) those refugees

with the “wrong” types of personalities. This process is visible and vocalized in discussions during staff meetings, and it also spills over into everyday interactions between staff and asylum seekers, especially at times of tension and disagreement.

Sitting on a bench in the main square of the town, Awate, who counts on the legal advice of the center to obtain his papers and then apply for reunification with his wife and young daughter waiting in a Sudanese camp, told me how it is important for him to avoid the reputation of being a troublemaker: “I am in the hands of the government. Everything they do is fine with me.” Then he added: “If it is not fine, it is still fine.”

Personality matters: it can mean the difference between support and expulsion. The staff of the center rely on everyday interactions to categorize asylum seekers along personality traits such as “submissive” (*servizievoli*) and “willing” (*volenterosi*) versus “distrustful” (*sospettosi*). The enclosed institutional life of the center denies the complexity of migrants’ inner lifeworlds, especially when affected by forced displacement. Monica, a social worker at the center in her early thirties, expressed her self-confidence in detecting different personalities:

I get to know them Individually. They are all different People. Some are friendly, some are willing, some are distrustful... What I see every day tells me what this person is all about... it is not so difficult to understand if this person is a sincere person, a person that is really trying to do something good in their life... in the same way it is quite easy to

understand if the person only knows how to complain, if the person is not interested in understanding, in adapting...and unfortunately in these cases we are obliged to send them away.

The consequential effects of this everyday scrutiny are not lost on the asylum seekers. This is particularly the case for so-called distrustful dispositions. After a heated argument with a member of staff, a young refugee from Sudan named Suleyman worried about his reputation and pondered whether to try to mend the damaged relationship or, given that he had obtained his papers, prepare to leave the Sicilian town. The argument was about an apparently banal matter: where to keep the original copies of Suleyman's documents. Suleyman had expressed his desire to keep the originals while the staff member had emphasized with increased impatience that established practice at the center is to keep the original copies in a locked cabinet accessible only to the staff. Keeping the documents in his room was a sign of control and independence, Suleyman explained to me after the altercation. Yet Suleyman's preoccupation was warranted. Marco, the staff member who had eventually thrown the documents into Suleyman's face telling him that he was a "pain in the butt" and that he "could leave," later explained to me that the center does not tolerate expressions of distrust. He later added with evident disappointment, "Why doesn't he trust us, that we keep the originals in good shape?"

I am sure he was thinking 'my documents are safe only with me, with them who knows what they are doing with them.'"

Center employees look for welcome signs of gratefulness and goodwill toward the center and the broader hosting community. One way for asylum seekers to exhibit these appreciated traits is through their participation in volunteer activities. During staff meetings, social workers compile lists of asylum seekers they will ask to volunteer and those they plan to exclude for various reasons, such as their employment commitments or their unwilling personalities. Those asked to join the activities face the dilemma of accepting or refusing. Such was the case for Drissa one early April morning as he was standing a few meters behind Antonio's car. Antonio, a staff member at the center in his late twenties, was locked in a game with Drissa for about 20 minutes. Antonio would shout at Drissa to get in the car but Drissa would not move. So Antonio would spin the car, signalling that he was going to drive away without Drissa. At that point, Drissa would shout for Antonio to wait for him while starting to walk slowly toward the car, but when Antonio would stop the car, Drissa too would stop walking. Antonio was half amused and half annoyed at Drissa's behavior. He was playing with him but also trying to convince him to get in the car. He was also running out of time as he was supposed to drive Drissa and two other asylum seekers to clean a nearby beach, a volunteer activity that the center regularly co-organizes with a local environmental organization. This

GIULIO RISCIUTTI/CONTRASTO/REDUX

SPRAR center (Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) in Ragusa, Sicily, 2014. Burmakana and her son Fares are from Eritrea.



game between Antonio and Drissa seemed at first glance like an innocuous contest between old friends. Yet Antonio and Drissa were neither peers nor friends, and as Drissa sensed that Antonio's irritation was growing he ran to get in the car and participate in the volunteer activity. This activity, which lasted about five hours, entailed the removal of cans, plastic bags and other items of trash from the beach and ended with a series of photos of the refugee volunteers, which would later be featured on the website of the environmental organization. A few days later, as Drissa and I talked informally about the volunteer activity, he expressed his frustration: "I don't want to work for free. Work for free and work for photos—this is [a sign of] our weakness." At the same time, he feared disappointing the center's staff. Asylum seekers attempt to anticipate or manage the taxonomic power of the reception centers where they live, either by cultivating the type of personality that the center rewards or preparing to deal with the consequences.

Chains of Marginality

When asylum seekers arrive on the Sicilian shores they do not just arrive in Europe; they arrive in a marginalized periphery with its own history of dispossession and emigration and its own present condition of socioeconomic crisis. Far from operating in a vacuum, the Sicilian reception centers for asylum seekers are enmeshed in these histories and experiences of marginality. In this sense, the dispositions that the center's staff and other local residents display in their everyday interactions with Awate, Suleyman, Drissa and other globally displaced people cannot be fully explained by generalizing, abstract frameworks that emphasize institutional violence against refugees, or racist attitudes toward noncitizens or non-Europeans. European colonial, racial histories and postcolonial structures of power play an important role in shaping the moralizing and resentful attitudes that arriving asylum seekers from Asia, the Middle East and Africa experience in Sicily. However, so do the distinct local histories and experiences of marginality.

Refuge in impoverished Sicilian towns is therefore chained to local marginalities in a double sense: marginality works as both a fetter and a link. It creates feelings of being stuck in a place marked by injustices more than rights, by exploitation more than respect. While these feelings are real for both local residents and arriving asylum seekers, they are caused by different life experiences and raise fears of scarcity, which push local residents to cling to their own sense of injustice and downplay that of marginalized asylum seekers. As a result, rather than producing empathy or solidarity, these chains of marginality produce distinct injuries for those seeking refuge.

A final illustrative example can help flesh out how these nested marginalities play out in the institutional reception of refugees. The center's social workers express irritation at asylum seekers' complaints about humiliating and exploitative working conditions and are particularly aggravated with those who refuse certain types of jobs, for example agricultural jobs. As Antonio puts it, "This is the situation.

If you have an opportunity to work, don't let it go or don't complain about it...if it is heavy work, you do it, if they give you 35 euros per day you don't spit on them." Antonio adds: "The reality is that we all work off the books, we are not protected. All the jobs I did were without contracts, in the restaurants, bars, supermarkets...what is the alternative?" In his interpretation of "the situation," what Antonio resists is an acknowledgment of the marginality of others—in this case, globally displaced people who are profoundly exposed to misrecognition, indignity and exploitation. Similarly, researchers on refugees in an Italy and Europe marked by longstanding inequalities must recognize these nested marginalities and experiences of suffering. In so doing, they may help identify potential bases for solidarity across marginal groups rather than estrangement between them. ■

Endnotes

1 All names are fictitious. Sentences and words in quotation marks come from my interviews and informal dialogues with asylum seekers, staff and residents in a Sicilian town. I do not identify the town's name to ensure the anonymity of the asylum seekers and refugees that I encountered. I conducted my fieldwork from January to April 2015 and revisited the town in May and August 2015 for ten days each time.

2 Asylum seekers would typically use the word "camp" to refer to the reception center. For space limits this article signals but does not analyze this preference.

3 Migrant arrivals in Italy through the central Mediterranean route were 170,100 in 2014, 153,842 in 2015, and 181,436 in 2016. They stood at 15,582 in the first three months of 2017. Recorded migrant deaths in the Mediterranean as a whole were 3,279 in 2014, 3,673 in 2015, and 5,079 in 2016. The central Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy was the most popular and deadly from 2014 until mid-2015, while the eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece was intensively used in 2015 with 850,000 arrivals, and was particularly deadly in the second half of the year. In 2016, the central Mediterranean route was once again the most used and deadly one. This trend continued through the first three months of 2017, during which there were 525 recorded deaths, almost all of them in the central Mediterranean route. Needless to say, many deaths in the Mediterranean go unrecorded. For details on sea arrivals and deaths in the Mediterranean see <http://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-top-363348-2016-deaths-sea-5079>. For an early account of the central Mediterranean route see Naor Ben-Yehoyada, "The Clandestine Central Mediterranean Passage," *Middle East Report* 261 (Winter 2011).

4 According to the Dublin Regulation, asylum seekers should claim asylum in the first EU country they reach. They should be fingerprinted and entered in the European database called Eurodac in the first port of arrival. Intra-EU migrant mobilities have challenged this regulation.

5 This redirection of funding obviously has negative repercussions on the services that the center can offer to asylum seekers.

6 The recording is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NzEXUMmMyo>.

7 These boats carried about 15,000 Albanian migrants. The Italian government collectively detained them in a sports stadium without adequate services and deported them in the following weeks.

8 On the state of emergency declared by Italy in 2011, see Glenda Garelli and Martina Tazzioli, "Arab Springs Making Space: Territoriality and Moral Geographies for Asylum Seekers in Italy," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31/6 (2013), pp. 1004–1021. See also Amanda Ufheil-Somers, "Lampedusa, A Primer," *Middle East Report* 261 (Winter 2011).

9 Mare Nostrum was subsequently repealed and substituted by the still active Operation Triton, which has an emphasis on border control rather than rescuing lives. On the Mare Nostrum and Triton rescue operations, see Martina Tazzioli, "Border Displacements: Challenging the Politics of Rescue between Mare Nostrum and Triton," *Migration Studies* 4/1 (2016), pp. 1–19.

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11 Some of the largest CARA centers in the southern Italy are situated near agricultural areas renowned for attracting migrant labor.

12 On the expansion of the SPRAR, see http://www.sprar.it/images/Atlante_Sprar_2015.pdf.

13 The "Capital Mafia" corruption scandal involved the management of CARA centers in Sicily.

14 Sicily has the highest percentage of SPRAR (21.9 percent) of all Italian regions except the central region of Lazio, where most SPRARs are concentrated in Rome, the capital city (22.9 percent).

15 Goffman's full definition of "total institution" is "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life." Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), p. xiii.

16 For an insightful and concise account of the moralizing regime of control imposed on asylum seekers in centers of reception in Italy, see Barbara Pinelli, "After the Landing: Moral Control and Surveillance," *Anthropology Today* 31/2 (April 2015), pp. 12–14.



High voltage lines on the outskirts of Dubai, UAE.

ARTUR WIDAK/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Arab World's Non-Linear Electricity Transitions

Zachary Davis Cuyler

For many, especially in the United States, the Arab world is closely associated with fossil fuels. But over the past several years, a raft of news articles, opinion pieces and analyses have hailed the advent of renewable energy—especially solar power—in Arab countries. Many such pieces open with images meant to defy the reader's expectations. In the first line of an essay in *The Atlantic* titled, "Why the Saudis Are Going Solar," the author notes that according to his first impression, "Everything about [Prince Turki of Saudi Arabia] seemed to suggest Western notions of a complacent functionary in a complacent, oil-rich kingdom."¹ Yet he was surprised to find that "Turki doesn't fit the stereotype, and neither does his country" because of the prince's leadership in Saudi Arabia's drive to develop a domestic solar industry.² In a similar vein, an *Economist* article on the blossoming of solar energy in the developing world opens with an anecdote

about solar arrays being built in an arid part of Jordan, accompanied by a Getty Images photograph of a solar panel resting in front of a sand dune in an unidentified locale—solar power making the desert bloom, so to speak.³ Also fitting this pattern, the International Energy Agency (IEA)'s 2016 *World Energy Outlook* misleadingly summarizes a "New Policies" scenario for Middle East power generation that includes oil, gas, nuclear, hydro, wind and solar energy with the statement, "Natural gas is gradually joined by renewables as the fuel of choice."⁴ A more accurate summary of the IEA's own data might read, "Oil and gas continue to dominate a more-diverse energy mix."

According to such analyses and representations, the use of fossil fuels in power generation lies with the Arab world's stagnant past; the future is in technologically advanced renewables (and a more judicious use of fossil fuels, as more honest observers acknowledge). These arguments and images embody an admirable hope for progress in the fight to move the world

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The turbine hall at the Jiddah South power plant, which burns crude oil to produce electricity, Saudi Arabia, 2016.

SERGEY PONOMAREV/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

away from fossil fuel dependence, and provide opportunities for Arab leaders to showcase their economies' modernity, for journalists to elicit editors' and readers' surprise that Arabs would "go solar," and for international agencies to make their projections seem mildly optimistic. But the shift underway in the power sector of much of the Arab world is likely to be much more complicated than the linear energy transition suggested by these representations.

In the Arab world as elsewhere, the power sector has received the most media attention as the site of potential reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. This is more or less justifiable, since alternatives to fossil fuels in electricity generation are much more readily available than alternatives in industry and transportation, especially in the automobile-dominated Arab world. But it is not at all clear that most Arab countries are actually undertaking a decisive transition from fossil fuels toward renewable energy in power generation. Coverage of the power sector in more sober business and economic media, including especially the *Middle East Economic Survey* (MEES), shows that many Arab states indeed appear to be diversifying their fuel mixes by adding renewables like solar and wind in addition to other low-carbon fuels like nuclear and hydropower, but also by constructing larger amounts of fossil fuel power generation capacity. Most of the Arab world's planned new power plants are set to use natural gas, petroleum products and even imported coal,

as well as older low-carbon technologies like nuclear and hydropower. These energy sources are likely to provide much more of the region's electricity than solar or wind power in the foreseeable future.

The desire to limit greenhouse gas emissions is only one reason that Arab states are diversifying their generation mixes, and it does not seem to be the most important driver of power sector diversification. To use the language with which policy-makers tend to address these matters of concern, other motives for fuel diversification include a desire to dilute the risk of price increases of individual fuels, to lower spending on imported fuels, or to increase energy security. For oil and gas exporting countries, the most compelling and immediate benefit of diversification is often to exporters' fiscal balance: burning petroleum or natural gas that could otherwise be exported represents a real and often significant opportunity cost, because every barrel of oil burned to generate electricity would earn hard cash if exported instead. But fossil fuels are often cheaper than renewables, creating strong incentives to continue burning familiar fuels or even import new fossil fuels like coal. Furthermore, in oil and gas producing countries, the abundance of local oil and gas expertise and infrastructure encourages the continued construction of plants that burn domestically-produced fuels, as does the political economy of accumulated vested interests in power plants that burn those fuels.⁵

Given both the likelihood that electricity demand will grow rapidly across the Arab world over the coming decades and governments' sensitivity to popular demands for service provision following the 2011 Arab uprisings, familiar technologies that burn cheap fuels are especially attractive to Arab governments.⁶ In short, there are important reasons to diversify the power sector's fuel mix, but there are also strong disincentives to diversification, and compelling reasons not to diversify toward renewables. It can be argued that the climate change mitigation benefits of moving toward renewables outweigh such considerations. But as will be shown, this does not appear to be the calculation that Arab governments have made, despite the relatively ambitious renewables targets that many of them have announced.⁷

Regional Trends

A review of the power plants that have been announced as planned or under construction in the Arab Middle East and North Africa, as reported by MEES and other sources, shows that many Arab countries are in fact diversifying their fuel mixes. A few are even doing so in a way that significantly increases the importance of low-carbon power generation relative to fossil fuels. Yet based on the type and amount of generating capacity that are being planned and constructed as of July 2016, it seems likely that oil and gas are going to remain central to power generation in the Arab world. Older non-fossil fuels like hydropower and nuclear are likely to be at least as important as wind and solar, and imported coal appears set to play at least as important a role in power generation as all non-fossil fuels put together. The future of electricity generation in the region will not look like its past, but unless a much more decisive shift is just over the horizon,

neither will it resemble the "solar panels covering the Empty Quarter in Saudi Arabia [and] windmills across the Sahara" that MERIP's editor imagined nearly two decades ago.⁸

This argument is sustained by data from MEES reporting from July 2015 through July 2016, supplemented by other news sources as well as statistics compiled by the IEA, the Arab Union of Electricity, and national power sector regulatory bodies in the Arab Middle East and North Africa.⁹ These sources suggest that at a regional level, power plants that consume fossil fuel account for around three-quarters of the capacity of the power generation projects currently in the pipeline. Among these fossil fuel projects, plants that burn less carbon-intensive natural gas are likely to gain in importance relative to plants that burn crude oil or petroleum-based fuel oil or diesel, while carbon-intensive coal is slated to become a major new fuel source. Of the non-fossil fuel capacity planned, hydro and nuclear power will provide almost as much capacity as renewables like solar and wind, and will probably provide more electricity to the grid than renewables. But despite a real push to increase the role of non-fossil fuels, coal appears likely to provide almost twice as much new capacity as renewables, and about as much new capacity as all non-fossil fuels combined.

Admittedly, the project pipeline is not a perfect indicator of how much generating capacity will actually be built: Projects can be cancelled for any number of reasons, including changes in planning, difficulty securing financing and changing commercial circumstances like fluctuations in fuel prices. Moreover, it should be noted that the project pipeline provides an indication of the amount of generating *capacity* that will be built, which does not correspond neatly to how much of each fuel is likely to be used. Assuming that the projects discussed here are built as planned and reported, there will be

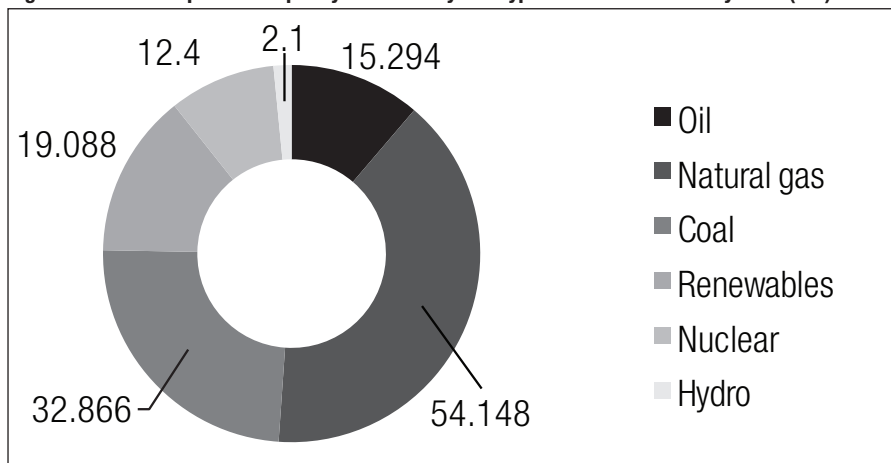
Table 1. Estimated existing generating capacity by fuel type in July 2016 (GW)

Fuel Type	Morocco	Tunisia	Algeria	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	KSA	UAE	Qatar	Kuwait	Oman	Bahrain
Oil and gas	2.89	4.92	16.81	31.73	4.61	2.76	77	28.85	8.63	17.82	8.26	3.92
(gas)	*	*	16.45	*	*	0	*	28.85	8.63	*	7.91	3.92
Coal	2.75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Renewables	0.96	0.27	0.39	0.69	0.123	0	0	0.113	0	0	0	0
Nuclear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hydro	1.77	0.06	0.23	2.8	0.01	0.28	0	0	0	0	0	0

Sources: MEES, ECRA 2014 Annual Report; Arab Union of Electricity 2015 Statistical Bulletin, IRENA, Oxford Business Group, press sources.

* Many sources categorize power plants that burn oil or gas by design (i.e., steam, gas, or combined cycle turbine), rather than by fuel used. These designs can often run multiple types of fuels—typically crude oil, petroleum products like diesel or fuel oil, or natural gas—or can be readily upgraded to do so. It can therefore be difficult to determine precisely which fuel they use. For countries that almost exclusively use natural gas in such plants, this capacity is recorded under "Oil and gas (gas)." For an indication of what fuels such plants actually used on a country-by-country basis in 2013, refer to Table 2 below.

Figure 1. Estimated planned capacity additions by fuel type in Arab MENA in July 2016 (GW)



Sources: MEES, Oxford Business Group, Clean Technica, Morocco World News, Société Tunisienne de l'Electricité et du Gaz, Daily Star.

large differences in the “capacity factor”—the proportion of generation capacity actually used over time—of plants that use each of these fuel types.

How much of a power plant’s capacity is utilized is a fairly complex question, but generally speaking, coal and nuclear plants are used for “base load” power, meaning that they operate much of the time because of how long it takes to start or stop their operation. Nuclear plants tend to have a capacity factor of between 75 and 95 percent, while coal plants vary between 45 and 75 percent, according to statistics collected in the United States.¹⁰ Plants that burn crude oil can be switched on and off quickly but are inefficient, so they tend to be used for “peaking,” meaning that they only operate when electricity consumption is high (e.g., during Saudi Arabia’s summer air conditioning season). They therefore have a relatively low capacity factor. Natural gas plants are relatively inexpensive to run and quick to start, so they can be used either for base load or for peaking, and tend to have a capacity factor comparable to coal’s.¹¹ Petroleum products like fuel oil and diesel tend to be used for peaking, base load or both, so their utilization rates vary considerably (i.e., from 0.5 percent in Tunisia to 52 percent in Saudi Arabia in 2013).¹² The utilization rates of solar and wind power depend upon climatic conditions (i.e., amounts of sunshine and wind), making their operation constant but intermittent. Finally, hydroelectric dams have reservoirs that allow their operators to modulate water flows and power generation—enabling hydro’s use as base load, peak, or both—but reservoir levels are rainfall-dependent. In the United States, hydro plants have a capacity factor of between 30 and 55 percent, wind turbines’ capacity factor is between 20 and 40 percent, and various types of solar installations have capacity factors between 10 and 45 percent.¹³ In short, renewables’ intermittency suggests that they are likely to be even less important to the region’s future fuel mix than their share of the project pipeline might lead one to believe. Likewise, the tendency to use crude oil as a peaking fuel means that petroleum is likely over-represented relative to coal and

natural gas. By contrast, coal, natural gas and nuclear plants are likely to be more important than their share of the project pipeline suggests.

Still, non-fossil fuels including nuclear, hydro, solar, and wind are likely to be more important in the region’s future generation mix than they have been in the past, growing from a miniscule 4 percent of capacity in the current mix to a more respectable 24 percent in the project pipeline. If all planned nuclear plants are built—which remains an open question—the region’s estimated 12 GW of nuclear power would likely be more significant than its estimated 19 GW of additional

renewables and 2 GW of additional hydropower because of nuclear plants’ much higher capacity factor.

As a further caveat, these shifts will take a long time to work their way into the system as new plants slowly come online and old plants are gradually retired. By the same token, this specific pattern of diversification will be locked-in for decades even if there is a more robust push toward renewable and other non-fossil power sources in the future. In other words, assuming that the region’s power sector diversifies as planned, the modest planned decrease in fossil fuel use will not be realized for years, and the new fossil fuel plants that will be built will likely continue operating for decades. To borrow Andreas Malm’s phrasing, such investment in the present “encumbers the next decades with an even more ponderous mass of infrastructure into which carbon has been locked... [as] *the causal power of the past inexorably rises*.”¹⁴

National Trends

Though useful for identifying large-scale trends, this regional-level analysis does not capture the extent to which national-level energy strategies and patterns of fuel use impact the region’s future fuel mix. It also does not showcase the variety of diversification strategies among Arab states, or give due credit to countries like Morocco, Jordan or the UAE, which are disproportionately responsible for diversification into non-fossil fuels despite their sizeable investments in new oil, gas and coal-fired plants. Though fuel pricing, market structure, capital availability, regulatory frameworks and political economy considerations for new power sources like nuclear and renewables are critical to any in-depth analysis of the prospects for these countries’ future electricity mixes, an in-depth discussion of these factors is outside the scope of this essay. I aim only to illustrate the diversity of power generation strategies within the region, and to place planned capacity additions in the context of Arab governments’ apparent policy goals. With those caveats, it appears that no Arab government has made a



Karadeniz's power ship Fatmagul Sultan docks in front of Lebanon's main electricity plant of Zouk, February 26, 2013.

JOSEPH EID/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

decisive commitment to a linear transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy in the power sector. While most Arab states' power sectors are undergoing major shifts, to measure them on that linear basis would be to badly misunderstand their probable goals and likely outcomes.

As Figure 3 and Table 3 show, four states—the UAE, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco—are responsible for the majority of the region's diversification away from oil and gas in power generation. These four countries have distinct existing fuel mixes, diversification strategies and reasons for diversification. The UAE currently relies almost completely on natural gas for electricity, which provided around 99 percent of electricity generated in 2013 (see Table 2) and currently accounts for almost all of the country's 29 GW of generating capacity (see Table 1). While plans exist for almost 5 GW of additional natural gas

capacity, the UAE is also investing heavily in nuclear, coal and renewable energy (see Figure 3 and Table 3). A consortium of South Korean companies has begun constructing four nuclear power plants to be sited in Abu Dhabi, with a total of 5.6 GW of generation capacity, and reportedly aims to have them operational by 2020.¹⁵ The second major component of the UAE's planned low-carbon power generation is an estimated 6.45 GW of planned renewable capacity additions, mainly solar units including small distributed rooftop panels as well as large-scale "solar parks." Yet the UAE will remain quite dependent on fossil fuels, reportedly planning an estimated 4.68 GW of additional natural gas-fired plants as well as an estimated 3.87 GW of coal-fired power plants never before used in the country. To its credit, the UAE has made public commitments to developing prestigious renewable energy sources, including hosting the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). But energy security, the conservation of natural gas for export, the reduction of spending on natural gas imports, and the dilution of the risk of price fluctuations appear to be at least as salient as climate change mitigation as motives for fuel diversification.¹⁶

Egypt is likewise making massive investments in a wide variety of fuel sources, including especially coal (see Figure 3 and Table 3). Indeed, coal makes up the majority of planned capacity additions (a staggering estimated 27.26 GW), followed by renewables (an estimated 9.36 GW), natural gas and nuclear (nearly 5 GW each) and hydropower (an

Figure 2. Estimated built and planned capacity in Arab MENA, fossil vs. non-fossil fuels in July 2016 (GW).

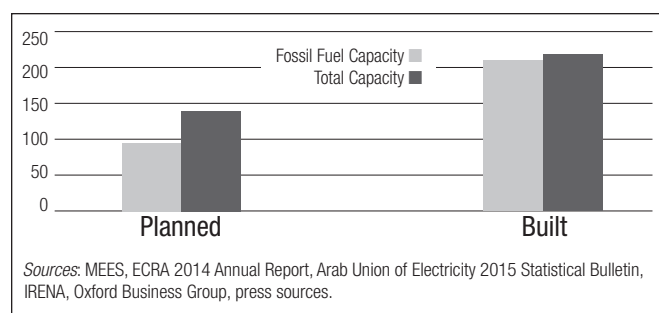


Table 2. Electricity generation by fuel type in 2013 (percent of generation mix)

Fuel type	Morocco	Tunisia	Algeria	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	KSA	UAE	Qatar	Kuwait	Oman	Bahrain
Oil	21	<1	7	15	74	93	61	<1	0	63	3	0
Natural gas	21	96	93	77	25	0	39	99	100	36	97	100
Coal	43	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Renewables	5	2	0	<1	<1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hydro	11	<1	<1	8	<1	7	0	0	0	0	0	0

Sources: IEA, MEES. Note: Because of rounding, not all columns add up to 100 percent.

estimated 2.1 GW). This marks a clear departure from Egypt's current reliance on natural gas and petroleum, which together accounted for 92 percent of electricity generated in 2013, but a continued deep dependence on fossil fuels. Still, Egypt is investing in by far the largest amount of hydro and renewables capacity additions in the Arab world. But as elsewhere, renewables' intermittency will diminish their impact on Egypt's future electricity mix, while coal's role as a base load fuel will make it disproportionately important. Egypt's first nuclear power plant will also play an outsize role as a base load power source, assuming that it is financed and built.¹⁷ And although the Egyptian government mainly trumpets its high-prestige investments in renewable and nuclear power sources, coal is set to make by far the largest contribution to the diversity of the country's fuel mix.¹⁸ The desire to meet rising demand and fulfill President Sisi's promises of economic growth while ensuring energy security and the financial solvency of

the electricity sector, rather than any strong commitment to climate change mitigation, seems to account for the diverse but coal-intensive mix of Egypt's future.¹⁹

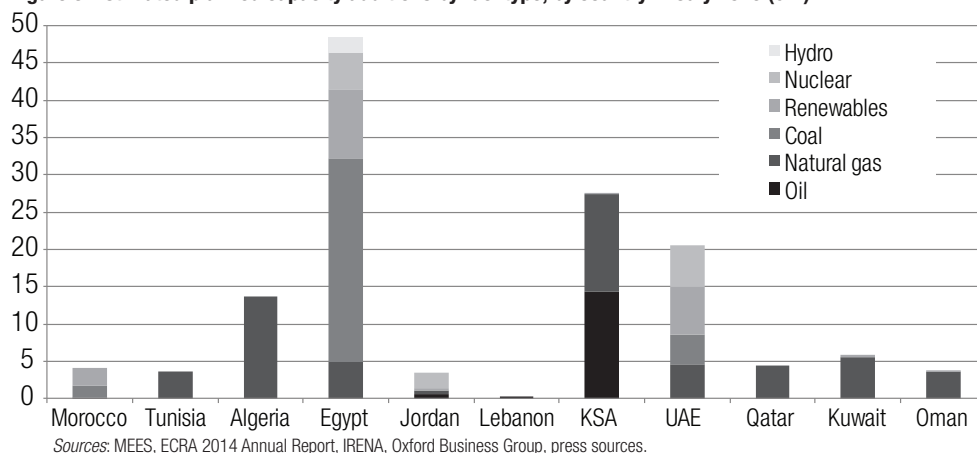
Morocco, which owes the current diversity of its power sector to a lack of domestic oil and gas resources, is likely to move even further away from oil and gas toward coal and renewables. The country currently relies primarily on coal, oil and gas for power generation, with a substantial contribution from hydropower and a smaller but nonetheless impressive proportion from renewables (see Table 2). The country's project pipeline, however, includes a near tripling of renewables capacity (an estimated 2.28 GW of new capacity compared to around 960 MW in 2016) and a continued investment in coal (an estimated 1.7 GW of new coal capacity on top of 2.7 GW of existing capacity in 2016) (see Figure 3 and Table 3). As a major energy importer, Morocco has been diversifying its electricity mix for more

Table 3. Estimated planned capacity additions by fuel type, by country in July 2016 (GW)

Fuel type	Morocco	Tunisia	Algeria	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	KSA	UAE	Qatar	Kuwait	Oman	Bahrain
Oil	0.072	0	0	0	0.55	0.272	14.4	0	0	0	0	0
Natural gas	0	3.648	13.71	4.9	0.56	0	12.96	4.68	4.52	5.5	3.67	2.85
Coal	1.736	0	0	27.26	0	0	0	3.87	0	0	0	0
Renewables	2.28	0	0	9.36	0.338	0	0.28	6.45	0	0.33	0.05	0
Nuclear	0	0	0	4.8	2	0	0	5.6	0	0	0	0
Hydro	0	0	0	2.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Sources: MEES, ECRA 2014 Annual Report, IRENA, Oxford Business Group, press sources.

Figure 3. Estimated planned capacity additions by fuel type, by country in July 2016 (GW)



Sources: MEES, ECRA 2014 Annual Report, IRENA, Oxford Business Group, press sources.

than two decades with the goals of energy security, insulation from price fluctuations, and greater reliance on domestically produced energy rather than imports.²⁰ While Morocco has made a very large investment in renewable capacity, the country's apparent intention to cease constructing new oil and gas-fired plants while dramatically adding to coal-fired capacity and investing in liquefied natural gas terminals mark an equally important shift in Morocco's fossil fuel base.²¹ The IEA nonetheless chooses to use a stock photo of wind turbines sitting atop sand dunes to represent this complex transition on its website.²²

Jordan, which is also famously import-dependent due to its lack of domestic oil and gas reserves, is more intensively diversifying toward locally abundant fuels. Though the country is reportedly planning an additional half-GW of natural gas-fired capacity, it is also reportedly planning an equal amount of generating capacity fueled by domestically produced kerogen, an unconventional (and dirty) precursor to oil.²³ Perhaps more importantly, the Jordanian government has announced plans for two nuclear plants to be fueled with locally-available uranium with a total of 2 GW of capacity, far overshadowing the mere 338 MW of planned renewables capacity and making up the majority of the country's planned capacity additions.²⁴ Jordan's experiences with the cutoff of oil imports caused by the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and the interruption of gas imports from Egypt between 2011 and 2013 caused by pipeline sabotage in the Sinai have made energy security and self-sufficiency the critical considerations in the country's power sector planning.²⁵

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait also are undergoing significant transitions in their energy mixes, but are primarily attempting to make greater use of natural gas and consume less petroleum in order to save money, generate electricity more efficiently and preserve oil for export. Of the 27.98 GW of capacity that Saudi Arabia plans to construct by 2019, a reported 14.4 GW would burn petroleum and nearly 13 GW would burn natural gas (see Figure 3 and Table 3). This represents a significant shift toward natural gas, which is set to capture

peak electricity demand. Since 2010, direct crude burn has fluctuated between roughly 300,000 barrels per day in the winter and 800,000 or 900,000 barrels per day in the summer. Saudi Arabia's summer burn can consume nearly 10 percent of the country's total oil production.²⁷ With electricity demand growing rapidly and threatening to drain a rapidly increasing proportion of its oil output, Saudi Arabia appears to be aiming to replace as much petroleum as possible with natural gas in power generation, and to burn petroleum products rather than inefficient crude oil to meet the remainder of its electricity demand.²⁸ The country's estimated 280 MW of planned renewables capacity will constitute a minute contribution to the effort to conserve petroleum for export, raising the question of whether the Saudis are in fact "going solar" (see Table 3). Yet a recent and ambitious commitment to 9.5 GW of renewables by 2030, recent removals of oil subsidies, and stated intentions to build out nuclear power capacity could mark the beginning of a transition away from fossil fuels in power generation if Saudi leadership follows through and investment capital materializes over the long term.²⁹

Similarly, Kuwait aims to dramatically increase the share of natural gas in power generation to lower crude burn and conserve oil for export. In fact, nearly all of the country's planned capacity additions primarily run on natural gas, alongside a small amount of wind and solar energy (see Figure 3 and Table 3).³⁰ Like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait received around twice as much electricity from petroleum as from gas in 2013 (see Table 2), with refined heavy fuel oil slowly edging out crude oil.³¹ Also like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait is unlikely to add enough renewables in the near future to effect any significant shift in its deep fossil fuel dependency or its consumption of otherwise exportable crude oil (see Figure 3 and Table 3).³²

The remaining states of the Arab Middle East and North Africa are not diversifying their fuel mixes. Qatar, Oman, Algeria, Bahrain and Tunisia, which already produce the vast majority of their electricity from natural gas, each plan to make fairly substantial further investments in natural gas

a growing share of electricity generated, gradually rising above its 2013 share of 39 percent (see Table 2). Equally important is the shift from burning crude oil to petroleum products including diesel and heavy fuel oil, which must be refined or imported but are more efficient and cost-effective fuels.²⁶ Crude oil currently represents a major source of fuel for power generation, especially during times of

capacity to meet growing demand. Qatar, Oman and Algeria are all gas exporters with large but dwindling reserves, and appear to have elected to meet growing demand using familiar, cheap, relatively abundant and domestically produced gas. All three countries are also making official nods toward gradual investment in renewables to conserve existing gas supplies, while simultaneously exploring for additional gas reserves and even considering the possibility of importing gas from Iran, in Oman's case.³³ Yet vocal popular opposition to hydraulic fracturing in the Sahara has made gas exploration more difficult for Algeria, though it is unclear if protests against shale gas drilling will force the government to change its strategy. Tunisia and Bahrain will likewise need to increase gas imports or find a larger domestic supply to meet growing demand in the absence of expanded renewables investments.³⁴ Lebanon, hampered by a dysfunctional electric company and political system, currently imports electricity from a Turkish power ship anchored in Beirut's port and has plans to build only a pair of small, diesel-powered plants to help mitigate its persistent electricity crisis.³⁵

The Arab Middle East and North Africa is undergoing a dramatic period of change in its power sector. Yet despite sensational headlines and picturesque images in mainstream reporting and analysis that suggest a linear move from fossil fuels to renewable energy, that transition is much more complex. Renewables are taking on increased importance in the region's power mix, but a much larger amount of oil- and gas-fired generating capacity is currently planned to be built across the region. Moreover, older low-carbon technologies like nuclear and hydropower seem likely to be more important to the region's future electricity mix than renewable power sources like solar or wind. Perhaps most strikingly, imported coal is likely to be at least as important as the Arab world's new renewables, hydropower and nuclear plants combined. Dramatic shifts in the region's power sector are underway, but not on a linear path from fossil fuels to renewables. ■

Endnotes

1 Jeffrey Ball, "Why the Saudis Are Going Solar," *The Atlantic* (July/August 2015).

2 Ibid.

3 *The Economist*, April 16, 2016.

4 International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2016*, November 16, 2016, p. 281.

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8 "From the Editor," *Middle East Report* 216 (Fall 2000): <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer216/editor>.

10 US Energy Information Agency, "Monthly Generator Capacity Factor Data Now Available by Fuel and Technology," January 15, 2014: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=14611>.

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12 Arab Union of Electricity, *Statistical Report 2013* [Arabic]: http://www.auptde.org/Article_Files/2013.pdf.

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Artist Suleiman Mansour with his painting *Jamal al-Mahamel* in Dubai, March 2014.

SALEH SALEM/REUTERS

The Straw That Broke the Camel's Back

Dina Ramadan

In January 2015, Christie's announced that a painting by the Palestinian Suleiman Mansour, *Camel of Burdens II* (*Jamal al-Mahamel*), would be the highlight of its annual auction of modern and contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish art held in Dubai. The piece was listed as the second version of the 1973 original, which was thought to have belonged to Muammar al-Qaddafi, the long-time Libyan dictator, and to have been destroyed in the US bombing of his Tripoli military compound in 1986. An iconic portrayal of Palestinian steadfastness (*sumud*) in the struggle for a homeland, it was expected to sell for somewhere between \$200,000 and \$300,000.

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But the piece's authenticity was called into question when a London-based collector who saw the auction catalogue objected that he owned the original 1973 artwork. Upon investigation, Christie's was able to verify the collector's claim and further reveal that Mansour had in fact produced not two but three versions of the painting.¹ The second, 1975 version, it now appears, was the one that burned up in Qaddafi's stronghold. On display in Dubai was *Camel of Burdens III* (2005), the result of Mansour's eventual decision to recreate his painting, which he had been thinking about doing since hearing news of the bombing. Version three ultimately sold for \$257,000 to Ramzi Dalloul, a Palestinian economist and investor who has the largest private collection of Arab art with over 3,300 works.



Cairo, 2014.

DINA RAMADAN

Still another incarnation of *Camel of Burdens* had popped up before the public eye several months before the auction, in the streets of Cairo and other Egyptian cities. This rendition, not by Mansour, refashioned the visual paean to Palestinian resistance into a poster backing the candidacy of Field Marshal 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt's May 2014 presidential election. Dozens of other iterations of pro-Sisi graphic design took well-known images out of context, and it is hardly a novelty in Arab politics to appropriate the Palestinian struggle for partisan advantage, as this particular poster did. But the Sisi poster is indicative of something else as well: The mutation of *Camel of Burdens* on its travels from the West Bank to Libya, Dubai and Egypt also endows the image itself with a different set of meanings, often in tension with the original message. The transformations of this painting are inextricable from the transformations of the region's political geography.

Traveling Camels

Camel of Burdens, also known in English as *Camel of Hardships*, began its life in Suleiman Mansour's West Bank hometown

of Birzeit. Mansour, a key figure in Palestinian art since the 1970s, was first trained in portraiture. He studied at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem. Especially early in his career, he was central to the development of an iconography of the Palestinian struggle.² Key images that recur in his paintings have emerged as quintessential symbols of resistance to dispossession and Israeli rule: The orange tree and olive tree, respectively, represent the *nakba*, the military defeat and mass displacement of 1948, and the *naksa*, the Israeli occupation of the remainder of historical Palestine in 1967. Scenes of village life figure prominently in Mansour's oeuvre, as does traditional Palestinian embroidery, in vivid detail. The Palestinian woman, the mother who both births and protects the nation, is likewise a main protagonist.³ Within this rich repertoire, *Camel of Burdens*, which was given its original Arabic title by the novelist Emile Habibi, is not only one of Mansour's most famous works, but also the focus of much critical analysis.

In the original 1973 oil painting, an elderly porter, facing right, dominates the canvas. He bends under a heavy load, a large sack ocular in shape and strapped to his forehead

with a thick, braided rope. Inside the bundle is the dream of a Palestinian homeland, with the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem shining at the center. The image of Palestine inside an eye appears repeatedly in Mansour's paintings, and commentators have suggested it refers to the Arabic idiom that describes the beloved as the "pupil of one's eye."⁴ In the aftermath of the 1967 war, Jerusalem, the fractured and lost capital of Mansour's student years, is like a boulder on the porter's back. And yet he stoically bears his burden; he is old, he is tired, his journey has been long, but he perseveres, slowly, doggedly, the very essence of *sumud*. Most striking to the viewer is the exaggerated size of the porter's hands and feet; both are strong and steady, and there is a reassuring tautness in the muscles of his forearms, despite his otherwise worn features. The background, the road he has come down, is undefined; beyond the horizon, little else is distinguishable. His gaze is determined; he looks straight ahead to the future, uninterested in what lies behind him. He is a wanderer, an exile, destined to carry the dream of his homeland wherever he goes.

Shortly after Mansour painted *Camel of Burdens*, prints began to circulate. It became a hugely popular image of resistance in the 1970s and 1980s; that it was reproduced on posters, postcards, stickers and t-shirts shows "the extent to which the painting has entered the popular vernacular and the collective imagination."⁵ Mansour himself was surprised that he had created an "icon" when he intended only to "express the relationship of the Palestinian to Jerusalem."⁶ In his ethnography of Palestinian resistance, Nasser Abufarha points to the ways in which viewers have attached significance to the artwork that far exceed the artist's intent; the reproduction of the painting in these varied forms is "a cultural performance that has taken on a life of its own."⁷ Indeed prints were hung in both homes and public spaces, and traveled far beyond the borders of the Occupied Territories, gaining in both audience and meaning.⁸

Camel of Burdens III, the 2005 version that sold in Dubai, is larger and more colorful than its forebears. In the updated piece, Mansour made a few alterations. First, after porters from Jerusalem brought it to his attention that the braided ropes were not suitable for lugging such a heavy load, he replaced them with flat ropes that would cause less slippage. Second, Mansour developed the cityscape of Jerusalem so as to include Christian landmarks, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which he had previously ignored.

The fact that several versions of *Camel of Burdens* exist, one rediscovered only in 2015, and that the artist revised his work, demonstrates its fluidity as an image. For Mansour the painting's originality or "aura" is not threatened by its reproduction, and may even be enhanced. *Camel of Burdens* is a living, evolving artwork, much like the struggle it represents: The struggle of 1973 was very different from the struggle of today, shaped as it is by the first *intifada*, the 1993 Oslo accords, the formation of the Palestinian Authority, the 2000

uprising and all that ensued. During this period, Mansour's relationship to the cityscape of Jerusalem has changed, as the situation of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem has become increasingly precarious. His additions, aimed at accentuating the city's neglected Christian history, demonstrate a more complex understanding of Jerusalem that extends beyond its symbolic political significance as capital of an envisioned independent Palestine.

Equally important is that as Mansour's painting itself travels, in its multiple versions, it becomes part of regional developments. It is a victim of the US airstrike on Libya and a beneficiary of the booming art market initiated in the United Arab Emirates. At each point Arab audiences experience the artwork through both their local context as well as the worsening occupation of Palestine. The more it travels, the heavier and more fraught the porter's burden becomes. He does not merely carry a changing Jerusalem, but is weighed down as well by all that the Palestinian struggle has come to represent in the region, the weight of an increasingly symbolic solidarity, often intended to fend off local dissent.

The Camel-General

But it seems there is a straw that can break the camel's back. The posters imitating *Camel of Burdens* and plastering the Egyptian public sphere in the months leading up to the 2014 election were part of the wave of "Sisi-mania" in which the field marshal's face was put on everything from birthday cakes to lingerie.⁹ These items often were not official campaign products but gestures of support by individuals, sometimes unidentified, and they were largely minimal in terms of original design, involving little more than the superimposition of Sisi's face upon existing images. Placing the presidential candidate in unlikely or even fictitious situations, many of these paraphernalia emphasized what they imagined to be his sheer physical strength, often that of a lion.

By contrast, the rendition of *Camel of Burdens* is a rather humble portrayal of Sisi. Here he is the everyman, the simple small farmer or *fallah* who does what he needs to do, with unassuming endurance. The poster brings to mind Sisi's own words, in an interview with the *Washington Post* shortly after the coup, during which he insisted: "I am not a hero. I'm just a person who loves his people and country and felt hurt that Egyptians were treated in such a way."¹⁰

The provenance of the poster is uncertain but it appears to exist in at least two versions. One is titled "Memorabilia" and carries the endorsement of an individual, "Hajj Amin's son." Another is targeted at the presidential election as indicated by the number "one" and the symbol "star" in the bottom right-hand corner, directing voters to the candidate of choice. In a video interview posted on May 7, 2015 the presenter asks Mahmoud Muhammad Mahmoud, an older man, about the poster hanging in his small store.¹¹ Mahmoud starts by saying that he and Sisi come from the same Cairo neighborhood

and then explains that he chose this image because whoever governs Egypt must carry all of its many problems on his head and shoulders. It is not entirely clear in the video or the accompanying text that Mahmoud produced the poster; both refer to him as drawing it but he never claims credit.

In a brief commentary for the Palestine Poster Project, Adel Iskander suggests that since most Egyptians do not know Mansour's painting, the poster can be passed off as "a novel piece of art."¹² Indeed, in the above interview the presenter at least seems to think Mahmoud is the creator of the image. But the poster's success is dependent on the fact that there is something familiar about it. In the appropriation of *Camel of Burdens*, the Sisi supporter might not have been aware of its importance in Palestinian and Arab art history, and those who saw it might not have identified it as manipulation of Mansour's painting. The image, however, draws on a representational history of *sumud* that is rooted in the Palestinian struggle but is legible across the region. Rather than start from scratch the designer built upon a preexisting mythology. But in Egypt, the porter is transformed into the *fallah*, a figure with an equally long history as a symbol of national resilience. At a moment when Sisi supporters perceived Egypt as under attack by foreigners determined to bring down the state, the appropriation of this image of perseverance was particularly fitting.

The Sisi poster features several additions to Mansour's painting aside from the most obvious—the insertion of his face in place of the porter's—as well as some omissions. Perhaps less immediately noticeable is that the porter's distinct large feet are shod in black boots, presumably because it is inappropriate for a national leader to walk barefoot. He is modest but not needy. The boots are also a reminder of the return of the military—into which most Egyptian men are conscripted—to its rightful position at the center of the national project following the 2013 coup. While the feet are a striking part of the original painting, they attract no attention in this appropriation. More eye-catching is that Sisi's load seems heavier, his eye-shaped bundle being more laden with portentous landmarks. The Dome of the Rock no longer glows in the middle, but is pushed to one side to make room for the Pyramids and the Citadel, two distinctly Egyptian rather than pan-Arab or Muslim sites. Now it is the grandeur of Egyptian civilization that is on display. The inclusion of the Citadel, part of the medieval fortification of Cairo against Crusaders, is particularly appropriate for this inward-looking moment in Egypt's history. The surroundings are also altered to resemble Cairo's shantytowns rather than neighborhoods of old Jerusalem.

There is something uncomfortable about this vision. In contrast to Mansour's original dreamscape—clear, focused, serene—here the imagined future is cluttered by the past, with symbols piled on top of each other. The sense of crowdedness spills out of the sack as the Sisi character is engulfed in text. Above his head, in bold black type, is the caption, "Sisi

is the hope of the nation." And in case the magnitude of his task is not evident from the image, another slogan appears on the right-hand side of the poster, printed over strips of red, white and black, the colors of the Egyptian flag: "It is not easy to shoulder this responsibility." The field marshal, it seems, does not shoulder his burden with the same quiet patience of the porter. Instead, the poster entreats the viewer to show the appropriate gratitude for Sisi's sacrifice. The ocular shape of the bundle no longer calls to mind the saying about the "pupil of one's eye," but rather evokes Sisi's own unnerving refrain about the Egyptian military's supposed love for the citizenry: "Don't you know that you are the light of our eyes?"

Palestine, But Not Palestinian

The decision to keep the Dome of the Rock in the Sisi poster is important, even if the monument is pushed to one side. Sisi will continue to champion the cause of Palestine, the Dome's presence says; Egypt will continue to play its historical role in Arab affairs. The Palestinian, however, is absent. The erasure of the porter, combined with the continued inclusion of Jerusalem in the eye-shaped baggage, the dream of past and future Egyptian glory, highlights the ways in which the Palestinian cause can and does exist independent of the Palestinians. Within the logic of this image, there is nothing that inevitably places the Palestinian porter (and the people he represents) at the center of the struggle for Palestine. In fact, the two are easily separated. Palestine is a symbol removed from the reality of Palestinian lives under Israeli occupation and Egyptian complicity therein.

This divorcing of Palestinians from the fight for Palestine has been a part of Egyptian authorities' approach to regional politics for decades, arguably since the decision of President Anwar al-Sadat to conclude a bilateral treaty with Israel in 1979. In the last years of his reign, Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, thawed out the "cold peace" with Israel by enforcing the total blockade of the Gaza Strip following the victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections. The siege, punctuated by four major Israeli military assaults, has devastated the livelihoods of Palestinians in Gaza.

After Mubarak fell and the Muslim Brother Muhammad Mursi won the presidency, the forces of the *ancien regime* stoked constant public outrage over the Brothers' connection to Hamas. But the Brothers did not depart significantly from Mubarak-era policies toward Palestine and Gaza in particular. In opposition, the Brothers had backed the Hamas government's argument that the tunnels dug underneath the Gaza-Egypt border were lifelines bringing consumer goods and fuel into the coastal enclave. But once in power the Brothers did nothing to refute the long-standing rationale for destroying the tunnels and closing the border. The tunnels are used not only for essential supplies but also for weapons and fighters eager to join the Islamist militants in the Sinai Peninsula. The

Mursi government endorsed the Egyptian military's flooding of the tunnels with sewage in February 2013.

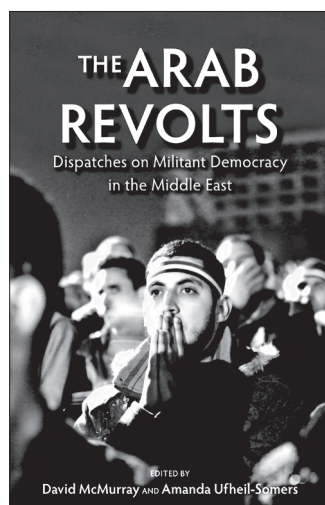
The siege of Gaza, including the most aggressive tunnel demolitions, continued after the 2013 coup. By this point, however, Egyptian public opinion had shifted strongly in favor of such measures following a media campaign scapegoating Palestinians and Syrian refugees living in Egypt, repeating accusations made by the military and security agencies that the Muslim Brothers had hired them to shoot anti-Mursi protesters. One of the most horrifying articulations of this xenophobia was former parliamentarian Mustafa al-Gindi's call on the privately owned satellite channel ONTV for the execution of Palestinians and Syrians caught at checkpoints. Certainly the Sisi government has adopted an increasingly pro-Israeli position as Egypt tries to reinsert itself into regional affairs once more. Israel's seven-week ravaging of Gaza in the summer of 2014 elicited scant condemnation from the Egyptian authorities. In the summer of 2016, Foreign Minister Samih Shukri went to Jerusalem (not Tel Aviv), the first such visit by someone of his rank since 2007, during which he watched the Euro Cup competition with Benjamin Netanyahu. It was a public declaration of the "warmer peace" that Sisi wants, and one which found an echo in the Donald Trump administration's threat to move the US embassy to Jerusalem.

On its last stop to date in its pan-Arab travels, the image in Suleiman Mansour's *Camel of Burdens* is not merely an example of appropriation, modification and mutation. Instead, with the man who is now Egypt's president replacing the porter, it has been transformed from an icon of resistance into a manifestation of counter-revolution. Jerusalem remains Sisi's burden to bear, not as a part of dream of a Palestinian homeland, but as a place where his top diplomat can enjoy a soccer match with the Israeli prime minister. ■

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*Dispatches on
Militant Democracy
in the Middle East*

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and
Amanda Ufheil-Somers

Written for a broad audience of students, policymakers, media analysts, and general readers, *The Arab Revolts* reveals the underlying causes for the Arab Spring by extending analysis back over the last two decades to investigate some of the most important historical forces leading up to the recent insurrections.

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Jewish students and community members, organized by Open Hillel, march in Washington, DC, November 8, 2015.

GILI GETZ

Open Hillel

A New Campus Politics on Israel

Mimi Kirk

Lodge 5 at Swarthmore College is a dignified building in gray stone, the aesthetic match of much of the rest of the bucolic campus located 20 miles outside Philadelphia. The structure houses three floors supporting Jewish student life: a kosher kitchen, a lounge and a library whose walls are heavy with such texts as the Talmud and Midrash. It is the natural place for Kehilah, Swarthmore's Jewish student group, to meet in order to plan events and attend to other business.

Kehilah, which means "community" in Hebrew, acquired its name only recently. Before it disaffiliated in 2015, it was called Hillel, part of Hillel International, the "largest Jewish student organization in the world," which has more than 550 chapters on campuses in North America and abroad. Hillel International

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promotes Jewish life at universities through programming such as Shabbat services and panel discussions.

In December 2013, Swarthmore's Hillel declared itself an "open Hillel," following an initiative by Harvard University students in 2012. That year, when Harvard's Progressive Jewish Alliance (which is affiliated with Harvard Hillel) scheduled an event titled "Jewish Voices Against the Israeli Occupation" with the university's Palestine Solidarity Committee, the Hillel director informed the students that the panel could not proceed. "He told us that Harvard's Hillel chapter would lose \$1 million [withdrawn by the Boston Jewish Federation and angry donors] if we went ahead with the event," says Rachel Sandalow-Ash, a board member of Harvard's Progressive Jewish Alliance at the time and now the national organizer for Open Hillel.¹

Hillel International, it turned out, had in 2010 established “standards of partnership,” which bar Hillel chapters from inviting groups or individuals who “demonize” Israel or support the movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)—an effort to pressure Israel through economic and cultural isolation to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and follow international law in its treatment of Palestinians. What Hillel International’s rules mean is that Hillel chapters are effectively not allowed to invite or co-host events with Palestinians, as almost all Palestinian groups support BDS. Progressive Jewish organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace (which endorses BDS) are also banned.

In the end, the co-sponsored event did take place, but not under the auspices of Harvard Hillel. “It seemed deeply wrong [for Hillel] to exclude Palestinians from the conversation,” says Sandalow-Ash. “If you have a university event about racism in the United States, you would include black students.” Sandalow-Ash and others at Harvard then petitioned Hillel International to change its standards of partnership, calling their campaign Open Hillel. Hillel International declined.

About a year later, the Swarthmore Hillel chapter decided by consensus to become “open”—that is, to join the campaign to persuade Hillel International to alter its rules about invited speakers. Then, in 2015, the Swarthmore group planned an event featuring four Jewish veterans of the civil rights movement in the American South in the 1960s who likened that work to today’s struggle for Palestinian rights. “I guess Hillel International got wind of the event,” says Amit Schwalb, who at the time was a junior at Swarthmore. “We got a letter threatening legal action if we were to continue using the Hillel name.”² Students like him then voted to call themselves Kehilah.

Other than Swarthmore, the Hillel chapters at Guilford College, Vassar College and Wesleyan University have declared themselves open. (Harvard’s did not, due to donor pressure.) Hillel International also threatened Guilford with a lawsuit for using the Hillel name, and accordingly the Guilford chapter now calls itself Chavurah (Hebrew for “fellowship”).³ Vassar and Wesleyan have yet to be so admonished. When asked about Hillel International’s policy toward Open Hillel, spokesperson Matthew Berger simply e-mailed, “Hillel International welcomes all students interested in being a part of the global Hillel movement.”

Challenging the Status Quo, Delicately

The Open Hillel movement has evidently struck a nerve with the pro-Israel establishment in the US. One likely reason is that it demonstrates that two powerful ideas about Jewish identity, Israel and anti-Semitism are being questioned among youth on American college campuses. The first is the notion that being Jewish automatically means supporting Israel, and the second is that being critical of Israel makes one anti-Semitic.

These rigid equations have historically helped maintain the status quo in American discourse on Israel, making many Jews

and others who would challenge the Israeli government for its policies toward Palestinians fearful of being labeled as “self-hating Jews” or anti-Semites. The Open Hillel campaign aims to decouple the linkages by sponsoring discussions that include Palestinian and more critical Jewish voices.

Because Open Hillel’s goal is inclusivity and diversity—a welcoming of all ideas and opinions about Palestine and Israel—it does not take political stances. But many of the students who are involved lean to the left, some taking a pro-BDS position such as that of Jewish Voice for Peace. “This makes sense, as those are the people who were excluded previously,” says Jeremy Swack, an alumnus of Oberlin College who is finance coordinator for Open Hillel.⁴

But it is clear that Open Hillel is indeed open. Some members express skepticism about BDS, if not outright opposition—though they support the right of their fellow young Jews and others to back it. Anna Fox, a junior at Wesleyan University who serves on Open Hillel’s Steering Committee, says that she is glad her movement is not affiliated with Students for Justice in Palestine, for example. “I don’t always agree with them,” she says, “but I think it’s important to make space for pluralism. For Hillel to be, like, ‘If you’re supportive of BDS, you’re anti-Israel,’ that oversimplifies the conversation. Just because someone supports a tactic you don’t agree with doesn’t mean they don’t have something of interest or value to say.”⁵

With such a variety of opinions coming together in one space, Open Hillel seems to be about community building first—and activism perhaps later, or in collaboration with external groups. Indeed, many students involved in Open Hillel are also involved in other, more activist groups, such as Jewish Voice for Peace or If Not Now, which consists of young Jews organizing to end the American Jewish community’s support for the occupation.

Origins of a Shifting Outlook

While the students involved in organizations like Open Hillel or If Not Now represent a fairly small sample of Jewish youth, at the same time they signify a broader shift in public opinion—or at least certain segments thereof. A 2016 Pew Research Center poll showed an increase in sympathy for Palestinians among liberal Democrats and millennials, and in a 2014 Gallup poll, only 25 percent of respondents 18–29 years old found Operation Protective Edge—Israel’s attack on Gaza in the summer of that year—to be “justified.” Fifty-one percent called it “unjustified.” Results among the group aged 65 and over were the reverse, with 55 percent finding the assault justified and 31 percent unjustified.

How has this shift come about? Growing youth awareness of the inequities in Israel-Palestine, combined with more heavy-handed tactics for curbing this consciousness, seem to have spurred it on. By trying harder to suppress public criticism of Israeli policies toward Palestinians, organizations like Hillel International may in fact be lending it a megaphone.

Open Hillel members often speak about the omissions in their early education, such as at Hebrew school. Rachel Sandalow-Ash



Wellesley College, MA.

MATTHEW J. LEE/THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES

was an eighth grader in 2006 when Israel bombarded and invaded Lebanon. She asked her teacher in Jewish day school why most of the school supported that war but not the US war in Iraq. “I got silence in response,” she says. “After that, I felt like I didn’t want to touch issues around Israel and Palestine. It put everyone on edge.”

At Harvard, Sandalow-Ash became involved with the Progressive Jewish Alliance—initially, out of interest in doing domestic social justice work—and through that group began to learn about such issues as Israel’s violations of Palestinian human rights. “I was, like, ‘Oh my God, there’s so much stuff I was never taught,’” she says. “I felt kind of betrayed by my Jewish community—that I had been told a lot of partial truths.”

Other Open Hillel students spoke of similar lacunae leading to later epiphanies. Rachel Brustein, a graduate of Goucher College who served on Open Hillel’s Steering Committee, recounts how she began to realize that she was not being told the whole story. “I noticed that every time we talked about Israel [at my Jewish summer camp], it was about culture—seemingly apolitical things.” Brustein’s camp employed about 30 Israelis, and she and her fellow counselors were told in so many words to “be sensitive” in conversations pertaining to Israel so as to “protect their emotions.” “That made things personal and didn’t create an open discourse,” she says.⁶

And Jeremy Swack notes that while his parents urged him to be critical of Israel during his childhood, they were less enthusiastic about him asking questions at Hebrew school. “They were part of the Jewish community in our town [in suburban Boston],” he says. “They didn’t want to push any buttons.”

Swack feels that people of all ages are now learning more about the occupation than when he was growing up. “As much

hasbara [propaganda] is being shoved down your throat—‘Israel is defending itself’—anyone who reads the news will ask, ‘What the hell is going on? Why is Israel bombing Gaza, an open-air prison? Why is this happening every two years?’”

Palestinian-American analyst Ali Abunimah has observed that Israel’s defenders in the US fear this growing awareness, particularly among students and youth, as “something that looks very solid can crumble very quickly.” As with the decades-long effort to legalize same-sex marriage, it is among millennials where the crumbling is most apparent. “The Israel lobby and Israel’s supporters know that if there is a sea change on college campuses, it’s unstoppable,” he said.⁷

Challenges

It is thus not surprising that powerful devotees of Israel like billionaire businessman Sheldon Adelson have been fighting BDS efforts and other criticism of Israel on college campuses with massive donations. Adelson held a summit in 2015 in which he helped raise \$50 million to “get all pro-Israel actors on campus to work together against BDS.”⁸

It is not entirely clear how this funding is being deployed. Sandalow-Ash says that the tactics are secretive. She notes that Adelson does not fund Hillel International, though he does bankroll Birthright, the organization that sponsors ten-day trips to Israel for young Jews “to strengthen Jewish identity, Jewish communities and solidarity with Israel.” Hillel International is a major proponent of Birthright. Sandalow-Ash further points to “sketchy job postings” seeking recruits to fight BDS and listing no employer, and to focus groups in which college students are paid \$100 to identify the anti-BDS arguments they find most persuasive.

Pro-Israel donors are also intervening on campuses by giving money to student government campaigns. In 2014, it came to light through leaked e-mails that Israeli-American philanthropist Adam Milstein had donated \$1,000 to a UCLA student's 2013 campaign. The student, Avi Oved, was subsequently elected. His words to Milstein in a message were telling: "I [am] prepared to make sure that UCLA will maintain its allegiance to Israel and the Jewish community." Oved also promised to fight BDS on UCLA's campus.⁹

Pro-Israel groups have even sent a robot to an event they considered too left-leaning. At a Brown University panel discussion on Palestinians in March 2016, the Israel advocacy organization StandWithUs dispatched a wheeled automaton with an iPad for a head. The iPad transmitted the face (and voice) of StandWithUs' northeast executive director. While StandWithUs claimed the remote-controlled emissary was there to "enrich" the discussion, since in its view the panel lacked diversity of opinion, Open Hillel countered that the robot "harassed [students] about why they were attending the event."¹⁰

These maneuvers are but a few, some more obvious than others, from a long playbook. The pressure to make being part of the Jewish community contingent on adopting a pro-Israel stance has likely helped to impel those Jews who disagree to create new spaces for themselves—spaces in which they can remain part of the Jewish community but diverge in their political views. The more these tactics are used—and the more oppressive they are—the more students and others are likely to balk.

Funding, the Achilles' Heel

Yet, in the view of Open Hillel leaders, the most powerful means of blocking criticism of Israeli policies is something both subtler and more entrenched—the fear of losing funding. As a result, Open Hillel is focusing its efforts on ensuring that financial support for Jewish organizations is not conditioned on ideological grounds.

It is noteworthy here that the only Hillels that have successfully become "open" are those that are mainly run by students and have guaranteed funding from their respective college or university. As such, they do not have a staff on salary or a dependence on outside donors who might cut off their gifts based on the content of the group's events.

Sandalow-Ash notes that the number of Hillels that have tried to become open but failed is "too many to count." She says, for instance, that MIT's Hillel debated hosting an event that violated the standards of partnership, but decided to give up the idea after considering the backlash and the difficulty that Harvard students faced for scheduling a similar panel. "There's a chilling effect," she says.

Open Hillel members also emphasize the importance of holding events such as cooking classes and Passover seders that aim purely to build Jewish community on campus. They recognize that the prospect of losing funding for such endeavors is a real deterrent to standing up to Hillel International's standards

of partnership. "Organizing a Shabbat dinner is a lot of work and costs a lot of money," says Swack. "Almost any campus Hillel gives you a free dinner. Everything's provided for, and there's a structure in place. It's hard to compete with that."

Off-campus, Sandalow-Ash reports that discussions with leaders of Jewish institutions such as the Workmen's Circle have revealed that these organizations' financial backing is also being threatened due to donors' preferences with regard to discourse on Israel-Palestine. "There's a lot of support for Open Hillel and similar movements within lefty Jewish non-profits," adds Swack, "but those who support us can't be vocal due to fear of losing funding."

Much of this money, says Sandalow-Ash, comes from the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA). JFNA, which according to its website distributes more than \$3 billion to Jewish organizations each year, has funding policies that are similar to those of Hillel International—though not explicitly so. "In practice, they do the same thing," says Sandalow-Ash.

In the fall of 2015, Open Hillel organized a mile-long march from the Jewish Community Center in the District of Columbia to the Washington Hilton, where JFNA was holding its annual general assembly. The demonstrators called for JFNA to stop conditioning financial support for Jewish organizations on their adherence to what large donors have decided is appropriate discourse regarding Israel. Students carried placards with such slogans as "Just Another Jew Against the Israeli Occupation" and "Jews Who Support Palestinian Rights Are Kosher, Too."¹¹

More recently, Open Hillel has been collecting stories from Jewish students and community members to create an inventory of instances in which JFNA has threatened to withdraw or has withdrawn monies from Jewish institutions because they held "unacceptable" programming on Israel-Palestine. Open Hillel is also in conversation with several JFNA leaders about changing the funding policies.

Trump and the Future of Open Hillel

Despite the victory of extreme pro-Israel Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump as well as a good deal of unconditional support for Israel under the Barack Obama administration, in both monetary and rhetorical forms, the American political and cultural climate looks promising for an initiative like Open Hillel.

Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders' more evenhanded stance on Israel-Palestine and his appointment of the more balanced voices of Cornel West and James Zogby to the Democratic Party's platform drafting committee is one such indication. Another is the appearance of polls revealing an increase in sympathy for the Palestinians among certain sectors. Open Hillel's goal of fostering critical discussion—perhaps leading to more activism—looks achievable.

Connections between Open Hillel and other civil and human rights campaigns—Palestinian, Jewish and other—also strengthen its hand. Indeed, Eric Fingerhut, president of Hillel International, has said that emerging bonds among

rights movements are a “large problem” that give him and his colleagues a “lot of work to do.”¹² After all, the event that prompted Hillel International to threaten Swarthmore with a lawsuit featured four Jewish activists who compared their work for African-American rights in the 1960s to today’s struggle for Palestine.¹³ As Tufts University Students for Justice in Palestine member Leila N. said: “We’re seeing an increasing focus on joint struggle—the notion that all forms of oppression are interconnected and interdependent and therefore our resistance and struggle against them must also be connected.”¹⁴

In November 2015, Open Hillel posted a Facebook message of solidarity with University of Missouri students protesting racism on campus: “Our institutions of higher education and the organizations that exist within them often function by silencing voices that challenge their own,” the post read. “We support student actions that are exposing injustices and demanding change. #Mizzou #BlackLivesMatter.” Sandalow-Ash says that Open Hillel makes no distinctions between various rights issues. “We’re deeply committed to engaging with all of them,” she says. “It’s our view that shutting down conversations on one issue shuts down conversations on others and promotes Jewish insularity.”

The issue of funding and the conditions upon which it is granted continues to dog Open Hillel. A week before Trump was elected, the movement launched a campaign to protest a \$22 million donation to Hillel International from an Israeli outreach initiative dubbed Mosaic International. Naftali Bennett, the leader of Israel’s religious-right Jewish Home Party, leads the initiative, which has described its goal as curbing “critical discourse regarding Israel” on college campuses in the diaspora. “The fact that Hillel International’s annual budget is \$25 million gives a sense of the magnitude of this donation,” says Sandalow-Ash.¹⁵

Open Hillel makes it clear it sees a leader like Bennett as similar to those in the Trump administration. Its open letter to Hillel International regarding the Mosaic donation declares, “As Trump, Bannon and Bennett promote a vision of exclusion and hate, we call on you, Hillel International, to pursue a vision of inclusion, hope and justice.”¹⁶ Says Sandalow-Ash: “In many ways the three men are ideological kindred spirits.”

This affinity between the right-wing movements of Israel and the United States may at first seem puzzling: What does an anti-Semite like Stephen Bannon have in common with Zionists? Yet these leaders not only share intolerance in the form of, for example, misogyny, Islamophobia and homophobia, but they also all espouse a nationalist, ethnic state. As Naomi Zeveloff wrote in the *Forward*, “Some on the alt-right...admire Israel as a model for white nationalism.”¹⁷

While more left-leaning Jewish organizations have denounced the Trump administration’s anti-Semitism, including the appointment of Bannon as a White House strategist, most mainstream Jewish bodies, such as JFNA, have chosen to remain silent. Right-wing groups have even defended Bannon. Bernie Marcus, a board member of the pro-Israel Republican

Jewish Coalition—who recently donated \$38 million to Hillel International¹⁸—said in November 2016 that he was “shocked and saddened to see the recent personal attacks on [Bannon].... Steve [is] a passionate Zionist and supporter of Israel.”¹⁹ Sandalow-Ash says that such partnerships between Jewish organizations and anti-Semites show that for some, “It’s more important to work with people who share right-wing Israel politics than to build and protect Jewish life.” And with a recent rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the United States, including cemetery desecrations and swastika graffiti, it would seem even more important for leaders to prioritize Jewish security.²⁰

The overtness of this Faustian bargain makes it increasingly difficult for American Zionist organizations to gloss over the ideological contradictions between liberalism and Zionism inherent in their guiding principles.²¹ Despite these partnerships—or indeed, perhaps because of them—Sandalow-Ash remains optimistic. She believes that the growing alliance between organizations like Hillel International and JFNA with the Trump administration will convince more and more people that these organizations must change their policies and practices. “While they might have the money, we can mobilize public opinion,” she says. ■

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Barbara Harlow (1948–2017)

I first met Professor Barbara Harlow in the autumn of 1992, while conducting field research in Egypt, when she gave her talk at the American University in Cairo on her new book, *Barred: Women, Writing and Political Detention* (Wesleyan University Press, 1992). This book examined the struggle of female political prisoners in different parts of the world through memoirs, novels, poetry and documentaries. In that lecture Harlow framed her book as an experiment that brought together history, criticism and journalism. She argued that scholars should pay critical attention to journalistic writings and subject them to close readings as they do literary texts. Similarly, fiction should be read, she stated, to raise historical, sociological and political questions. Harlow's writings on political prisoners, and her later work on biographies of literary figures who were also political activists in South Africa, Palestine and El Salvador, have guided many scholars toward the possibility of contesting the boundaries of the political and the aesthetic.

Harlow earned her bachelor's degree in French and philosophy from Simmons College in Boston in 1970 and a master's degree in Romance languages and literatures from the University of Chicago in 1972. She continued her studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études and the École Normale Supérieure in Paris as well as at the Free University in Berlin. She completed her doctorate in comparative literature in 1977 at the State University of New York, Buffalo. She wrote her dissertation on Marcel Proust and was an early translator into English of Jacques Derrida's *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. Harlow accepted her first teaching post, at the American University in Cairo, in 1977. While there she became immersed in Arabic literature and became an ardent supporter of the Palestinian cause, for example by producing a pioneering translation of Ghassan Kanafani's *Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and other Stories*.

After returning to the US, Harlow taught at Wesleyan University and at Hobart and William Smith Colleges before joining the University of Texas in 1985, where she was the Louann and Larry Temple Professor of English Literatures in the Department of English. In her long association with UT, she taught and trained students who have now become leaders in the field of postcolonial studies and teach in English and literature departments around the world. Harlow was also the founding member and coordinator of the Ethnic Third World Literatures Program at UT, in which students read the literature of recently decolonized nations alongside the writings of ethnic minorities in the United States. For the last fifteen years of her life, Harlow collaborated with faculty and students to organize the Sequels Symposium that showcased the work of students researching literature from different parts of the world. In her last years she was also closely affiliated with the Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice at UT where she championed an interdisciplinary undergraduate program on literature and human rights.

Harlow was a scholar who bridged many genres and disciplines. Her book *Resistance Literature* (Routledge, 1987) was one of the

first works in English to examine the fiction produced during national liberation struggles in the global south. Writing about the struggles and defiance of the oppressed and the marginalized in *After Lives: Legacies of Revolutionary Writings* (Haymarket Books, 1996), she examined three assassinated revolutionary figures of the late twentieth century: Ghassan Kanafani (the Palestinian writer murdered, presumably by Mossad, in 1972), Roque Dalton (the Salvadoran poet assassinated by fellow revolutionaries) and Ruth First (the South African anti-apartheid activist assassinated in London in 1982). Harlow was also an editor of several key postcolonial texts. With Ferial Ghazoul, she edited *The View From Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature* (American University in Cairo Press, 1994) and along with Mia Carter edited *Imperialism and Orientalism: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), *Archives of Empire: From the East India Company to the Suez Canal* (Duke University Press, 2003) and *Archives of Empire: The Scramble for Africa* (Duke University Press, 2003). In her last years, she dedicated her time to the study of Ruth First's biography, to issues of human rights and to African literature. She was a longtime supporter of *Middle East Report* and served on its editorial committee from 1992–1997. She often wrote for the magazine in those years, mostly about literature but on other topics as well. In 2003 she contributed a moving remembrance of Edward Said.

Harlow was dedicated to traveling and lecturing in various parts of Africa and the Middle East. She often traveled to South Africa for research, to lecture and to mentor younger scholars. At UT she was constantly attending talks, serving on committees, organizing conferences and workshops and mentoring junior faculty and students. In the past two years, she even traveled twice to Pakistan as a participant of UT's exchange program with a women's university in Rawalpindi. Those of us who accompanied her fondly remember her joy at being in South Asia and looked on with amusement as she tried to decipher Urdu written on signboards through her deep knowledge of Arabic. She was a champion of human rights and justice issues; in her final days was focused on teaching and writing on the culture of drones.

Harlow was a true scholar of the world who combined her scholarship and teaching with a deep faith in the human energies that could transform society. Her loss is irreplaceable on multiple levels. One of her last messages to me was, "fight the good fight, Kamran." In these coming days, we will need her insight and courage more than ever. Barbara Harlow passed away on Saturday January 28, 2017, after a brief struggle with esophageal cancer. She was 68. She orchestrated her final moments with family and friends who had assembled in her room. We raised our plastic glasses filled with vodka and tonic to resistance. She left us that day with courage, conviction and with a sense of profound dignity.

Donations in Harlow's memory to the American Civil Liberties Union or to the Center for Constitutional Rights will honor her lifelong fight against injustice.

—Kamran Asdar Ali

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Editorial continued from page 3.

region. Furthermore, it is quite possible that organizations doing charity and social services work in the region that depend on private US funds may see those sources turn towards stateside projects to assist US-based populations facing increasing marginalization and impoverishment due to Republican rollback of federal programs. Indeed, both the “America First” agenda and the budget threats to countless social service programs in the US portend a radical defunding of important development and humanitarian projects overseas.

Coalitions of Resistance

Trump is the only president to have his sparsely attended inauguration followed, the very next day, by the largest protest marches in US history. Very importantly, these marches were only the beginning of a broad and organized resistance to the reactionary and right-wing shift in US politics. The contradictions of both the Trump administration and US empire more generally have produced

unexpected coalitions between Middle East and Muslim-related constituencies and other groups. The Trump administration’s anti-immigration policies triggered dozens of protests where Latinos, Arabs, and Iranians, for example, joined forces. Immigration lawyers showed up at airports, working for free to help immigrants and refugees, forging new coalitions of those supporting immigrants from different groups. Palestine activist Linda Sarsour was one of the architects of the Women’s March on Washington the day after Trump’s inauguration. At the 2017 Grammy awards show, A Tribe Called Quest performed their new arrangement, “We The People,” featuring Muslim dancers breaking through Trump’s proposed border wall. The members of Tribe are themselves Black Muslims, raising Black and global Islamic consciousness through their performances. On college campuses, Trump’s surprise electoral victory triggered revivals of activism, uniting women’s, queer, Black, Muslim, and Students for Justice in Palestine student groups.

With the administration’s assault on immigrants, refugees, the poor,

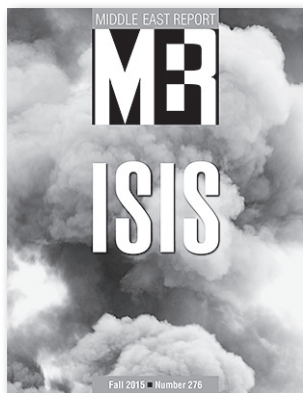
labor rights, women’s rights, public education and environmental protection, there is much to protest and much to resist, and the challenges of building coalitions will be many. But early indications, at least, suggest that such resistance is appearing not only in typically political venues, like street protests, but is expanding to Super Bowl halftime shows, court rulings and late night comedy television. The movement for Palestinian and Muslim rights is entering the mainstream, and joining forces with the movements for black lives, women’s rights, LGBTQ rights and immigrant rights. For all of this resistance to be effective, it needs to carry on for the long haul—because this moment is not just about Trump and his administration. It is about the longer history of US empire, militarism and neoliberalism. Even in the midst of the cheering demonstrators of the January 21, 2017 women’s marches across the US, there were some who were more somber. One woman in DC stood amidst the otherwise jubilant crowds with a sign that read simply “This is a Marathon.” And indeed it is. ■

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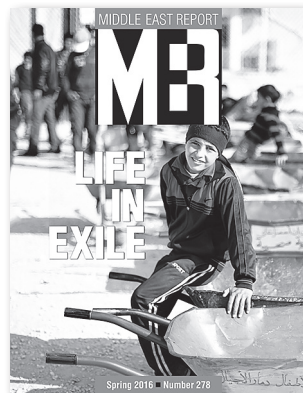
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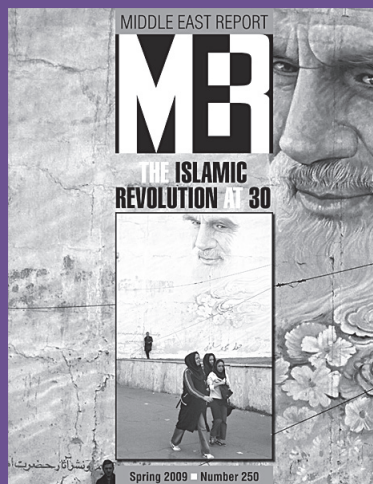
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