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EMOTIONS AND BORDERS

IN THE

MIDDLE EAST

The relation between emotions and borders, especially in the Middle Eastern territory, remains an underexplored research field. The borders of the Middle East mirror the agitation of the region since the continuous conflicts have dramatically transformed the area. The distinctive geopolitical status of border and borderland areas affect people's emotional dynamics. Under these fraught circumstances, strong feelings of belonging or excluding are expressed, which are interpreted as emotions of fear and hope. Therefore, emotions do not represent authentic diachronic experiences but instead are cultivated and produced within these historical, social and cultural changes.

Eleni – Panagiota Stoupa

Emotions and Borders

THE RELATION BETWEEN EMOTIONS AND BORDERS remains an underexplored field of research, especially within the complexity of the Middle East. Although traditionally generated emotions are analyzed as part of timeless human nature, a strong controversy has deployed in the last decades. The nature of emotions should not be analyzed physically but instead through their historical, cultural and social reproduction. Therefore, the discussion around borders includes an asymmetry of perceptions that are maximized in the transnational stages of social changes and historical timeframe. These transformations not only affect the political and social norms of people living in borderland but also generate emotions cultivated and produced inside these historical, social and cultural changes.

The symbolic boundaries between nations, populations and cultures are shaping identities, frame categories and develop distinctions between "in" and "out", illuminating borders as a tool to mold personalities, classifications and emotions. Social borders and their definitions represent the result of a universal human norm that creates various differentiations among individuals.[1] The essence of the border is established and empowered through the differentiation between the 'self' and the 'other', providing a canvas on which human emotions are developed and expressed. The physical and symbolic structure of the 'other' shares a significant role in the delineation of the 'self', underlying a dialectic relationship and interdependency between them and the feelings raised.[2] Therefore, the complex identification process that is developed in borders and borderlands cannot be understood without focusing on emotions.[3] The experience of reality through emotions represents their cultural context expression and a sign of how this context was embodied. Therefore, sentimental manifestations generated in borders do not represent authentic experiences embodied in a diachronic process, but instead a cultural defined situation as part of the social interaction of their performance.

The feelings created at borders reenact emotion as a fundamental human experience that narrates and expresses a different understanding of the world.[4] Visioning emotions as part of an intersubjective process acknowledges that the distance between us is always relational, representing a prism of making and unmaking the world. Feeling is an action with performativity that conceals elements of agency in the world-making process. Conflicting discourses and practices are expressed and reinforce strong feelings of belonging or excluding, which are interpreted in the emotions of fear and hope.

Borders of Fear and Hope

All over the world, borders are identified as governmental institutions with symbolic dimensions, epitomizing state's sovereignty and recalling history, memories and emotions. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the region of the Middle East has been transformed radically. In the dawn of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of new states, the influence of French and British authorities transmitted the model of national state to all former Ottoman territories.[5] Nevertheless, the challenges of national construction, along with the exacerbating divisions of the MENA region, state building, and consequently the identification of the 'self' and the 'other', is still problematic.[6]

The borders in the Middle East interrelate territoriality with state sovereignty as well as the creation of national consciousness

and identity, highlighting the current crisis in the region. The emerge of the Islamic State and its consistent gaining of grounds in Syrian and Iraqi borderlands affected the entire system of nations in the MENA territory, menacing the borders of other states such as Turkey and Lebanon. Earlier, in 2010-2011, the upheavals and uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa brought a major transformation of the regional state, bringing the regional system under great pressure. In their aftermath, the Arab uprisings developed into civil wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen and affected the territorial borders of the region by challenging the territorial integrity of states, which gradually led to their disintegration.[7] At the present time, ten years after the Syrian uprising, the transformation of Iraq into a federal state and the internal disintegration in states such as Yemen and Libya, a unique correlation underlies the Middle East region: the permanency of the state borders is inextricably linked with the challenges of the border system.

Nowadays, the spectrum of borders in the MENA region is captured between unmarked and highly fenced demarcations, while the conflicts and regional turmoil of the last years are pushing for more changes. All these border redefinitions are shaping not only nations but also their people, challenging the way of living in their local communities, forming their representations, enforcing or weakening their national belonging. Under these formations, the incorporation of the tribal world within their borders produced several adaptations and influences, creating hybrid demarcations in the states. In these hybrid demarcations, minority groups such as Kurds, Palestinians, Houthis or Shi'ites, have struggled for their independence impinging upon the shaping of states such as Israel/Palestine, northern Iraq or Yemen.

In a landmass of disputes and clashes, national constructions such as borders represent the arena of contentions and challenges, while divisions are exacerbated in periods of conflicts such as the ones in Syria and political instabilities such as the ones in Iran and Israel. As complex political, social and discursive constructions, borders fulfill different functions and scopes.[8] While the borders of the Middle East were never hermetically sealed, their changing nature shares an important meaning not only for international and national politics but also for the personal and sentimental state of the people living at borders.[9] Borders are occupied by individuals with their own unique experiences and conceptualization, carrying on their biographical status and the emergence of their emotional situation.[10]

The recalcitrant conflicts of the Middle East rather represent a matter of ideologies and values that share an emotional character. In borders and borderland territories, wherein state and nations meet, mix and contest, emotions have a significant dynamic, where power is embodied and expressed. In border regions -especially in the Middle East- the emotional dynamics that were generated and embodied through the conflicts and within borders affect not only the images or the definitions of the borders but also the relation-

ships between the Middle Eastern population and their homeland. Therefore, emotional experiences are not strictly reduced to the biological infrastructure of the human body but are instead diffused through cultural scripts, customs and prejudices and are projected before our past, offering an interpretation on what is happening and how it feels.[11]

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COLONIALISM AND THE BORDERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Due to the turmoil in the Middle East in the last decades, coupled with the recent centennials of the Sykes-Picot agreement and the Balfour Declaration, the discussions on how the Imperial and Colonial policies have created 'artificial' borders in the Middle East have resurfaced, calling for a redrawing of those lines. While the impact of the European powers in the formation of the region is undeniable, to attribute today's problems in the structures that the states originally received erases decades of agency, as well as cultural and political developments.

Charitini Petrodaskalaki

EVEN IF THE FORMAL MAP OF THE MIDDLE EAST HAS NOT CHANGED in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, the old borders do not necessarily reflect the reality on the ground. Syria, Libya and Yemen are still in civil war; the security situation in Egypt, particularly in Sinai, is precarious, and various distinct political entities, such as in Iraqi Kurdistan, Rojava, and the short-lived Islamic State (ISIS), have emerged. As a result of the regional upheavals of the last decade, tribal, sectarian and ethnic identities have become more pronounced than ever, thus leading to discussions about change in the borders that were drawn about a century ago.[1] In June 2014, ISIS released a video called "the end of Sykes-Picot", where militants bulldozed the border between Syria and Iraq, claiming to erase the "artificial" border that separated the two regions; Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2012 also put the blame on the Sykes-Picot agreement and its "dreams of partition" to justify the unrest in his country.[2] For many people in the Middle East and beyond, the Sykes-Picot agreement has become a symbol of imperialist arrogance and proof of the illegitimacy of the contemporary state system, while some attempt to explain the current upheavals of the region in the specific conditions under which the states were created.

The Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, named after a British and a French diplomat, was a way to carve out imperial spheres of influence by dividing the Ottoman lands between themselves, loosely based on geography, ethnicity and religion. A great emphasis of this agreement is given to commerce and trade; for this reason, Alexandretta and Haifa are designated a "free port" with regards to British and French goods.[3] This secret agreement was among other war-related commitments of the Great Powers, such as the Balfour Declaration or the correspondence with Hashemites, aiming at increasing their chances of winning the war as well as securing their interest in a post-war order. However, the Sykes-Picot agreement was never implemented. In fact, the borders of the region were not set by this agreement, but after the establishment of the mandates system in the treaty of Versailles in 1919 and adjusted after the Lausanne treaty in 1923. The reality differed from the original drawing; for example, Palestine became a British mandate, Syria was divided into several states, and Alexandretta became a Turkish port, and the only present-day border that corresponds to the Sykes-Picot line is the southern section of the border with Syria. It is obvious that this was just one of the many agreements and developments that determined the boundaries that were established after the division of the Ottoman Empire.[4] However, within Arab political discourse, "Sykes–Picot" refers to both the colonial conquest of the Middle East as well as the attempts to retain control over the Middle East by dividing the population into separate, weaker states.

The Western imprint is not only visible in the drawn borders, but in the perception of the region as a whole; westerners imagined the "Orient" and its inhabitants as primitive and inferior, thus domination over these "others" became necessary, without consideration of their different identities. The European

colonial powers exported the Westphalian concept of the state to the region, where the borders were meant to define the authority of the state, its territory, and the population living within it, forming a political community. They also shaped the political order accordingly in order to install pliant regimes, according to their own image: monarchies in the case of Britain, republics in the case of France.[5] In addition, the new states needed to be incorporated into the world market, thus becoming peripheral areas whose economic roles were limited to exporting primary products and importing manufactured goods from the metropolis.[6] This reshaping of borders according to the Western needs did not guarantee real nation-states in the Middle East; the model that was imposed by colonial powers took little to no consideration of the various realities or local identities that make up the great diversity of the region, creating tensions between this state model and the pre-existing transnational identities. What is more, the importation of theories of nationalism in the region led to a contradiction between a non-territorial Arab nationalism that encompasses all Arab states and the loyalty to the new nation-states.[7] Despite the fact that many countries, particularly Iran or Turkey, have distinct historical, cultural and/or linguistic characteristics, with advocates for distinct entities, the actual creation of separate nation-states, such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and the smaller Gulf monarchies, is the making of the European colonial powers.[8] As the region was shaped in relation to the West, which was economically and militarily much stronger, it led to the habit of western military intervention (whether invited or uninvited) for the regional crises, while oriental discourse legitimizes U.S. foreign policies in the Middle East to this day.[9]

However, in the last century, the region experienced a great range of political and ideological developments, and the borders often changed in wars. It is wrong to assume that people of the Middle East remained passive agents of imperial policies; on the contrary, they contested the borders as well as the colonial powers from the beginning, and they resisted Britain's declared intent to create a Jewish homeland on Arab soil as a particularly insidious attempt at keeping them divided. Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism, which emerged as alternative nationalisms, were very influential throughout the years, transcending the nation-states imposed on them with a distinct anti-imperial orientation.[10] At the same time, despite the objection to western imperialism, the concept of nation-state has not been directly challenged overall. Along with the unifying ideologies, there was also a rise in nationalist movements from individual states, as most of them represent identities that extend beyond an Islamic or Arab character. Over time, people invested in the borders that they inherited and embraced their separate identities that distinguish the states of the modern Middle East. In some cases, minorities, for example Shi'as in Lebanon or in the Gulf, have come to accept the state that they live in despite being underrepresented and working with transnational networks.[11] Moreover, Pan-Arab ideology was used to justify interferences in domestic affairs of other countries, leading to a competition for regional hegemony among nation-states; plans for unification, such as the United Arab Republic, were short-lived, if they even get off the ground.

Throughout the century, borders in the Middle East have changed and they will probably change again, particularly when the dust has settled in disputed territories. Particularly in the last decade, the Middle East state system has displayed contradictory patterns of fragility and durability, witnessed multiple regime changes alongside high levels of popular mobilization, violence and transnational

activism. This was due to the internal popular unrest and dissatisfaction before and after the Arab Uprisings, as well as the strengthening of transnational networks due to the overall sectarianization of public spheres, bringing forth new actors such as Shi'a militancy.[12] However, even if the states in the Middle East are not strong in the Westphalian sense, the permanence of nation state borders in the Middle East more or less endures, despite predictions of a total collapse of colonial lines. It is plausible that new borders will be drawn, stemming either from regional initiatives and desires, or they could be redrawn by foreign powers on the negotiating table. It is important to remember that state borders are more complex than lines on a map, and the world order today has changed significantly in the last century.

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BALANCING BETWEEN THE BORDERS

Iranian Afghans' quest for (re)integration

Dimitris Papanikolaou

The longstanding war in Afghanistan has forced millions of Afghans to migrate to neighboring Iran as both refugees and immigrants. Tehran's repatriation and deportation policies, along with the state and social oppression, forced many of the Iranian Afghans to return to their homeland. In Afghanistan, besides insecurity, they have to confront severe re-integration hardships and discriminatory policies, which lead many of them to take the route of migration again. While others flee from Iran to Turkey, where they face new challenges forcing them to migrate yet again. Thus, Iranian Afghans are caught in an endless cross-border endurance race.

Crossing the borders anew: "voluntary" repatriation and deportation

DURING THE LAST FOUR DECADES, over 3,5 million Afghans have crossed the borders to Iran. Deteriorating economic and political conditions, such as Trump's "ultimate pressure" doctrine and COVID-19 effects, might shape Tehran's policy concerning Afghan immigrants. Equally, Tehran seems to instrumentalize the refugee–migration issue in order to apply pressure on Kabul's government as well as the US-led coalition. Indicatively, Iranian authorities recruit Afghans for the war in Syria and use them as "human shields" in return for legal documentation or better economic conditions for their families upon return.[1]

The shifting Iranian policies concerning the Afghan population can be examined on two levels. First, policies of direct repatriation – deportation of the Afghans and, second, other socioeconomical policies and their impact on Afghans' integration and living conditions in Iran. In 2020, almost 860,000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran, marking the year with the most returns on record, while 418,962 returned as of May 2021. Even if those returns have been labelled "voluntary", Afghans are not properly informed about the process and returning is not always their decision.[2]

Hardships of integration. A border never crossed?

While Tehran does not always apply the policy of direct returns, its long-time policies regarding Afghan citizens and their implications, consequentially push them, again, towards the borders. This time, Afghans do not flee from armed conflict but from Tehran's contradictory and abusive policies that target them.

Since the early 2000s, Iran started to cut down services offered to Afghan people, such as education or medical care. Bureaucratical hardships towards Afghans also included obstacles in the asylum process and the acquisition of a legal status. Tehran also applied limitations to the access of Afghans to basic needs such as the labour market, housing, banks, social, cultural and political activities. Consequently, they were forced to find alternatives in order to deal with the hardships, by means of working without a legal status or by forming their own schools.[3]

Tehran appears to be pushing Afghans towards leaving the country by depriving them of their basic human rights and access to fundamental services. Apart from instant deportations, Iranian Afghans suffer physical abuse, racism and structural violence from both the Iranian government and its population. Thus, they appear condemned to live under perpetuating insecurity, mobility restrictions and, in some cases, tolerate derogatory attitudes.[4]

Is this my homeland? Quest for re-integration

Repatriated Afghans face the challenge of re-integration in a country that might be their homeland, but in fact, they are not familiar with its context. Various pre-return factors, such as weak social-economic ties with their home country and the harsh circumstances under which they decided to return might initially decrease the ability of Iranian Afghans to re-integrate into the Afghan society. Returnees are facing the challenge of re-building their lives in a social context that might not be compatible with their diverse back-

grounds and needs, deriving from their previous experience in Iran. While some Iranian Afghans seem to maintain linkage with their home country through cross-border kinship, professional networks, family and friends, those ties do not ensure their successful re-integration.

In fact, Afghans returning from Iran face significant re-integration obstacles in their daily life, as in many cases, they are stigmatized as "Iranized" by both the state and the local society. Thus, they deal with barriers and restrictions in essential services such as the issuing of civil documentation, access to healthcare, housing, work, education, even food and electricity. Many returnees have also reported incidents of forced labour, intimidating treatment and other types of physical and mental violence. Consequently, the re-integration is a fragile, temporal status that could lead them to flee again at any given moment.[5]

Perpetually crossing borders: a vicious circle of displacement and the "deadly route" to Turkey

While in Iran, Afghans might feel like they never crossed the border and were never freed from insecurity, abusive policies and marginalization. Once they set foot on Afghan soil, returnees cannot decide clearly whether to stay or cross the border back to Iran or head towards another destination. Regardless of their final decision, they turn from foreigners struggling to integrate into the Iranian society into aliens in their own country, struggling-once again-to deal with discrimination and to claim access to basic goods and services.[6]

Consequently, Turkey has also emerged as a popular destination for Afghans who lived under harsh conditions in Iran. Iranian Afghans are attracted by Turkey's more stable economy and the existence of more opportunities compared to Iran, which has been affected by US sanctions. As a result, Afghans constituted the majority of the asylum seekers in Turkey in 2020, with many of them coming from Iran.[7]

Afghans arrive/travel to Turkey either by foot or a vehicle, often helped by smugglers to cross the Iran-Turkey land border into the eastern border provinces of Turkey, such as Van, a well-known hub of smuggling. An indicative incident of this "deadly route" is the one of June 2020 in lake Van, where 61 asylum seekers and migrants, mostly Afghans, died in a shipwreck. Moreover, there is an ongoing cooperation between the Iranian and Turkish authorities that aims of deporting Afghans back to their home country. Tehran and Ankara are also intensifying border controls as well as building a fence at the Turkish-Iranian border.[8]

While Turkey was initially a transit country for immigrants, it is now permanently hosting hundreds of thousands of Afghans, who live between deportations, a deteriorating

economy and a hostile social environment, but still intend to stay there. Furthermore, Ankara would not grant work permits to Afghans entering from Iran during the periods of increased arrivals, forcing them towards seeking jobs in the black market. Ankara also seems to politicize the influx of Afghans through detentions, relocations, or even rejecting "by default" asylum applications. All these factors are, once again, pushing Afghans towards the Turkish borders fuelling another displacement.[9]

In conclusion, both Tehran and Ankara instrumentalize the Afghan population depending on recent developments and national policies. For instance, the COVID-19 outbreak brought widespread job losses for Afghan migrant workers and, consequently, massive returns to Afghanistan. In Turkey, Afghans who arrive from Iran face additional racism accused of "carrying the virus with them" due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran. In the same vein, it would be worth paying close attention to how significant developments—such as Biden's Iran policies or the upcoming US withdrawal from Afghanistan—will affect the displacement of Afghans, as well as Tehran's and Ankara's respective policies.[10]

There is a notable nexus between the circle of repeated migration of Iranian Afghans and their secondary displacement to other destinations such as Turkey and the EU. In turn, repatriation of Iranian Afghans appears to be more of a problem than the solution to the longstanding "Afghan exodus", as it creates a vicious circle of displacement and migration. Nevertheless, it seems that Afghan refugees and migrants, raised or born in Iran, are doomed to perpetually cross borders from one country to another and migrate to flee insecurity and abusive policies of host states.

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FENCES, WALLS AND BORDER ENGINEERING

The case of the Holy City's (un)Holy Divisions

Ilias Mitrousis

Last May, the world witnessed yet again a flare-up of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, the cognizance of the international community fixed upon the war in Gaza failed to emphasize the root causes of the 73-year-old conflict. Even more so, it failed to focus on the ongoing Israeli policies that divide the Palestinian population and 'Israelize' Jerusalem in and around the Holy City.

IT IS NOT SURPRISING that the igniting spark of the conflict can be traced back to Jerusalem and the recently attempted evictions of several Palestinian families in the city's eastern part. Nevertheless, the latest events are the tip of the iceberg. Regardless of Israel's official position on the two-state solution, in reality, its policies reflect a well-planned and long-standing effort to separate Palestinians and segregate them from the Jewish Israeli state. Apart from the permanent siege of Gaza, this is explicitly evident across the West Bank. The Israeli policies comprise of illegal expropriations of Palestinian land, forced evictions, an aggressive Jewish settlement program, and the erection of a long barrier that separates the land that Israel claims and the land it does not (yet). Although less covered in the local or international press, the separation policies are also evident within Israel's mixed cities and the discrimination that Arab Israeli citizens face. However, East Jerusalem is the epitome of how separation is employed. Apart from its core historical and sentimental value to both sides, the Holy City represents the most striking example of Israel's strategy for the 'Israelization' of large parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

Following its victory in 1967 and the proclamation of Jerusalem as its "eternal and undivided capital," Israel extended the city's municipal boundaries to vast swathes of land in the east. The rationale was to include as much space for Israeli development and either cut off or encircle the city's existing Palestinian communities. The construction of new Jewish 'neighborhoods' in the eastern part of the city has effectively altered the demographic balance to approximately 70%-30% to the detriment of Palestinians, whom Israel sees purely as a national security threat. In the same context, the state has, in various ways, practically hindered Palestinian urban growth.[1] The designation of large areas in and around Palestinian neighborhoods as "open areas" or national parks, the established limitations on building permits, and the revocations of residential permits all create asphyxiating conditions for development. Hence, given the limited space for residential use by Palestinians (currently 15% of the land for a population that accounts for 30-40% of East Jerusalem), the subsequent spike in illegal residential constructions results in frequent home demolitions. Indicatively, between 2004 and 2018, and in 2020, 803 and 170 Palestinian housing units were respectively deemed illicit and demolished by the Israeli authorities.[2] In addition, it is well documented that the municipal budget is comparatively lower for Palestinians regarding access to education, employment, and proper healthcare and sanitation facilities. That, only further deepens the existing divisions.[3] Notably, Palestinian Jerusalemites have the status of 'permanent residents' of the city and do not have Israeli citizenship. Another method that has been employed to 'legalize' the segregation and push away Palestinians is the "Legal and Administrative Matters Law" of 1970 that allows Jewish citizens to claim property lost before 1948 if they can prove previous ownership. This encourages Israeli settlers to claim residence within Palestinian neighborhoods. However, for Palestinians forced to abandon their homes in the 1948 conflict to seek refuge, similar rights are denied by the 1950 "Absentees' Properties Law".[4] The most evident example of this colonial policy is the latest eviction orders in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighborhoods.

The barrier that separates Israel from the West Bank has added one more layer to East Jerusalem's isolation. Following the second Intifada, Israel began constructing the separation barrier, citing security concerns regarding Palestinian terrorism from the West Bank. The barrier was completed in 2016, and while having the form of a typical border fence, in East Jerusalem, it took the form of an

eight-meter-tall concrete wall. Approximately 85% of its total route runs past the Green Line and inside the West Bank. Around Jerusalem, it followed the post-1967 revised municipal limits, thus guaranteeing Israeli control of annexed lands. Most importantly, though, by going through Palestinian neighborhoods and cutting off numerous suburbs from the metropolis, the wall severely impacts East Jerusalem's Palestinian social fabric. Indicatively, Kafr 'Aqab and the Shu'fat Refugee Camp, two areas that are home to more than 140,000 Palestinians were instead deliberately left outside the barrier despite belonging to the Holy City's new boundaries.[5] Palestinians whose lives are inextricably linked to Jerusalem and now reside on the 'wrong' side of the wall are compelled to issue military-approved permits, cross checkpoints, and be subjected to extensive border controls in order to reach the city. Many choose to move inside the metropolitan area to avoid such hardships, thus draining once socially and economically flourishing suburbs.[6] In essence, Palestinians are presented with a blunt dilemma. They had to choose either a life in suburban blight past the wall or one behind it, plagued by occupation taxes, the constant sentiment of besiegement, and the reality of being a second-class citizen.

Combined with the wall, the uninterrupted advance of Israeli settlement policies in the OPT presents Palestinians with yet another dividing reality. It threatens to completely isolate East Jerusalem from the rest major Palestinian urban centers of the West Bank. Ma'ale Adumim, Gilo and Har Homa, and Pisgat Ze'ev are only some of the eleven large Israeli settlements within the West Bank. If they continue to expand, they will form an outer ring, hence disconnecting East Jerusalem from both Bethlehem and Ramallah in the south and north, respectively. Even if Israeli settlements have been declared illegal under international law by the UN, they continue to expand especially given that Israel's relevant policy has been highly incentivizing.[7] For instance, by designating settlements as a 'national priority', the state investment enables cheaper mortgages, tax reliefs, and easier payment models for the settlers compared to citizens living within Israel. The UN estimates the number of settlers across the Jerusalem Municipality at approximately 220.000 alongside 340.000 Palestinians. What is more, the settlers have the right under Israeli law to carry firearms and enjoy military protection, a fact that allows a high frequency of lethal, ideologically motivated attacks on Palestinians and their properties.[8] Consequently, the prospect of a growing settler population in sizeable wall-enclosed enclaves around East Jerusalem practically magnifies the cumulative effect of all the aforementioned Israeli policies and measures. By the same token, the developing settlement perimeter around Jerusalem reinforces the barrier's effectiveness and gives it the characteristic trait of 'mobility'. In other words, the bigger the settlements become around the Holy city, the more the barrier may expand deeper into the OPT. That way, Israel solidifies its dominance and ensures that Jerusalem remains practically out of the negotiating table for a future two-state solution.

Considering all the above, one can fathom the grim reality of the 'Divided City'. For Jerusalem to finally become the eternal and undivided capital of Israel, every non-Jewish claim on it has to be de-rooted or permanently suppressed. As Klein accurately puts it: "The East Jerusalem metropolis must be destroyed both by damaging its periphery and by weakening of the center itself, as well as cutting it off from its natural hinterland."[9] By all its actions

and policies, Israel progresses mathematically in that direction even beyond Jerusalem. These policies of barriers that 'protect' by segregation are present all around the West Bank, Gaza and even within the Arab or mixed cities of Israel.[10] Last but not least, the 2018 Basic law that formally acknowledged the right of self-determination only to Jewish Israelis had a considerable effect. It has led Arab Israelis, a long-supposed 'pacified population', to face second-class citizens' reality, similar to their brethren in East Jerusalem. That is precisely the cause of the massive and most inclusive Palestinian mobilization Israel has seen since the Second Intifada. The methods by which Israel attempts to divide the Palestinian population and 'Israelize' Jerusalem are not only present in and around the Holy City. The proliferation of both tangible and intangible borders imposed by Israel is evident, and there is nothing 'holy' about it.

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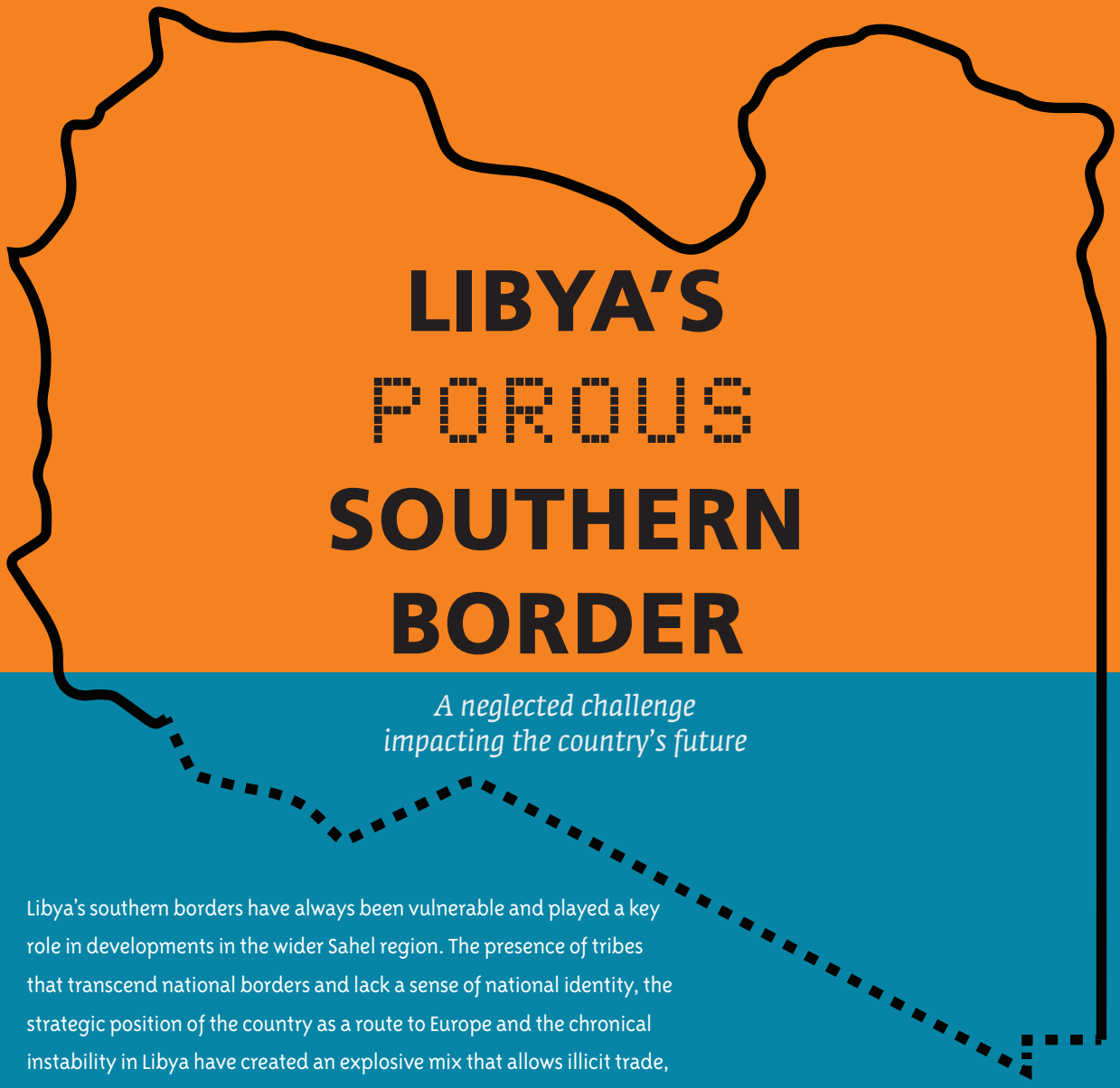

LIBYA'S POROUS SOUTHERN BORDER

A neglected challenge impacting the country's future

Libya's southern borders have always been vulnerable and played a key role in developments in the wider Sahel region. The presence of tribes that transcend national borders and lack a sense of national identity, the strategic position of the country as a route to Europe and the chronical instability in Libya have created an explosive mix that allows illicit trade, trafficking and tension to travel beyond the country's periphery. Since the death of Qaddafi, the region has attracted fighting from other areas of the country, illegal activities, radical and rebel groups from neighboring countries, as well as jihadists. This analysis aims to offer a look into the way the war has affected the situation in Libya's southern border, the challenges posed for the security of the wider region and the possible impediments to a sustainable solution for the country's future.

Alexandra Nikopoulou

THE SOUTH OF LIBYA, and in particular the southwestern region of Fezzan, is known as a sparsely populated desert with rich oil resources, ethnically diverse and politically fractured. Fezzan is a transit zone between Sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean, particularly when it comes to –mainly illicit– trade. It is home to several big and smaller tribes such as the Qadhadhfa and the Awlad Suleiman, as well as to non-Arab minority ethnic groups such as the Tebu (or Teda) and the Tuareg.[1] Even prior to the uprisings of 2011, a hybrid situation existed in the south as tribes were spread across the borders, with Niger, Chad and Sudan, maintaining control of the borders and the movement between the four countries. That was a result of both the nomadic nature of these tribes but also due to a traditionally limited government presence in the area and a lack of a single national identity. The latter, particularly in the case of the Tebu people, was due to their segregation from Arabs also residing in the region and a rivalry with the Qaddafi regime that had deprived them of their citizenship in 1998. Even more, many Tebu and Tuareg people had never been able to receive Libyan nationality, further weakening the sense of belonging to a single state.[2] This situation was exacerbated after the fall of Qaddafi that allowed tribal people from the border to encroach the ungoverned south of the country and create a new status quo.

During the war, this sparsely populated area became a battlefront in the fight between allies of the Government of National Accord (GNA) - particularly Misratan forces - and the Libyan National Army. Since 2014, the two have engaged in a conflict with the UN-backed GNA governing the country from Tripoli in the West, while the LNA enjoyed support from the Tobruk-based government of Abdullah al-Thani in the east.[3] After the fall of Qaddafi, the stakes in the south were mainly related to local and material interests and war in the region can be described as an intercommunal fight for influence and power. Fights over control of territories, oil resources and trafficking routes broke out in several southern cities such as Sebha, Ubari and Kufra. When it comes to the wider conflict, the –largely autonomous– Tebu were mostly supporting the LNA and Khalifa Haftar, while the Tuareg and Arabs were on the side of Misratan forces. The fighting also attracted Chadian and Sudanese foreign fighters that offered their services to both sides of the conflict, further deteriorating instability in the region. What needs to be underlined is that loyalty of both tribes and fighters in the conflict was shifting throughout the conflict and was largely affected by local interests.[4] When it comes to the wider rivalry, Haftar's forces maintained more influence in the region, while the GNA was mainly relying on occasional allies.[5] Albeit, to this day, there is no single actor in the inter-tribal fight able to claim the south. Following the ceasefire and the election of a new interim government, the region is represented by Musa al-Koni, a widely respectful figure originating from the Tuareg ethnic group. Nonetheless,

Tebu and other tribal actors maintain their influence on the ground, while foreign forces such as Russia and the UAE still have interests in the region.[6]

Regarding the regional impact of Libya's porous borders, the latter is particularly evident in the (lack of) stability and security in its neighboring countries, namely Mali, Sudan and Chad. In the first case, instability in Mali occurred in early 2012, shortly after the uprising and the beginning of the civil war. Vast quantities of weapons that the Libyan leader had been stockpiling were retrieved from unattended warehouses. These weapons included rockets, small arms, machine guns and even anti-aircraft systems that reached the hands of Tuareg rebels who then spread them across the Sahara. The Tuareg not only sold the weapons to the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, the main rebel group in Mali, but also formed an alliance with Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar Dine, taking over control in northern Mali and creating a permanent threat in the northeast of the country that sparked a French intervention in 2013.[7] Similar were the cases of Sudan and Niger. Regarding Sudan, convoys from Libya passed weapons from the border of the country to Darfur rebels, while the border with Niger became a route for weapons to reach Lake Chad in the borders between Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon, thus creating a security challenge in the wider Sahel region. Most importantly, Libya's military equipment reached the hands of extremist elements, including fighters of Boko Haram and other groups affiliated with ISIS or Al Qaeda.[8]

Chad has lately faced the most significant challenges due to the practical inexistence of Libya's southern border. During the last years, the south of the country has been home to many Chadian rebels of the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) that participated in the Libyan civil war along with the Libyan National Army, thus being trained and well-equipped. As the peace process in Libya progressed, those rebels, that were also labeled as bandits due to their criminal activities, were being chased out from the country by tribes trying to reclaim their influence in the area, thus destabilizing northern Chad and moving illicit activities to this region. However, these developments had a more significant consequence. In April of 2021, Chadian rebels advanced from the Libyan border towards N'Djamena fighting forces of the regime in Chad, trying to deter them from taking over the capital. This fight resulted in the death of newly re-elected President Deby, who was a key ally of the West and a fierce fighter of jihadist threats.[9] All the above cases underline the impact Libya's disintegration had on the Sahel and the spill-over effect that benefited both extremist elements but also rebels that aimed at challenging authorities in several neighboring countries.

The porousness of the southern border also had an impact on illicit activities and, in particular, on migrants' smuggling and drug trafficking. Prior to the uprising, most illicit trade activities were under the regime's control, however, actors have multiplied after the fall of the regime. Migrant routes are controlled by several tribal groups and most migrants enter Libyan territory from the south and particularly Niger and Chad, aiming at finding their way to Europe. Revenues from people trafficking reach up to $1.5 billion, making this a highly profitable activity. When it comes to drugs, the disintegrated southern areas of Libya host the most significant routes for smuggling drugs from Western Africa and the Sahel countries. The most infamous route is that of the Salvador Pass between Libya, Algeria and Niger and serves the trafficking of cannabis. Cocaine has also found its way into the

region. In the latest years and due to increased controls in shipments in the Mediterranean and the coast of Libya, cocaine from Latin America reaches West Africa through sea or air and is then transferred from southern Libya to Europe. Other illicit activities include fuel trafficking that reportedly creates revenues of $2 billion/year, as well as gold mining.[10] After the war, with most legal economic activities in the country having ceased, claiming a share of the pie of illicit trade is now highly important for survival. Borders and particularly those that are loosely controlled hold a pivotal role in facilitating those activities, ensuring revenue flow for tribes, bandits and other actors aiming at increasing their power and influence in the region.

All of the above paint a rather bleak picture for Libya's future. Widespread trafficking, illicit activities, tribal conflicts and the complete lack of state control have created a lawless situation in the country's southern border that have practically rendered it non-existent. The country's stability and a path to peace cannot be achieved without considering the reality in the south. These issues should be addressed collectively, with any sustainable solution needing to be inclusive of elements of the south. The new interim government will have a difficult task in doing so. The new Presidential Council can be described as a representative with a head from Tripoli and a Deputy Head from the West and the South. The southern Deputy, Musa al-Koni, is the least controversial of the three, having previously resigned from Fayez al-Serraj's government in 2017 and having gained respect across the country. However, being a member of the Tuareg tribe will probably lead to issues with other tribal groups in the area.[11] What is more, this governmental scheme leaves out forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar, who also has the most supporters in the south. Al-Koni's election is a hopeful step, however, it is likely that local forces will still try to secure their rule in the south and impede the process. These factors, along with the historical lack of ties between southern Libya and central governance, indicate that this challenge will require time, incentives for the locals and the gradual building of infrastructures that will ensure a smooth transition to a new era.

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HAMAS

Between Governance and Resistance

Christina Chatzitheodorou

Hamas is generally seen as a violent non-state actor by many states. Yet Hamas is also treated as a political actor, which is considered a valid candidate in national elections, a local government provider, and a key influencer of regional politics. Without having control over its external borders, Hamas has found ways to transfer goods and weapons in order to both govern and resist Israel. While the organization has accepted the borders of 1967, in its declaration in 2017, it has not fully abandoned the group's original objective of liberating the whole region from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean, including what is now Israel.

HAMAS WAS FOUNDED WITH THE DUAL GOALS of fighting Israel militarily (headed by its military wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades) and offering social welfare programs. However, on June 14, 2007, Hamas, by completing the seizure of Gaza, which ended the conflict with paramilitary forces belonging to Fatah, became the ruler in the Gaza Strip. The seizure of Gaza came after more than a year that Hamas broke the political dominance of Fatah by winning the parliamentary elections in 2006.[1]

The 2007 events blurred the line between state and non-state actor and made it more difficult to categorize the organization. Since then, Hamas became the dominant authority there, and hence, the organization was entrusted with administering the roughly 1.7 million Palestinians who lived in the densely populated Gaza Strip. However, Hamas is not an independent state, and therefore, has no control of Gaza's external borders; Israel controls Gaza's airspace and territorial waters, as well as two of the three border crossing points; the third one is controlled by Egypt.[2]

The case of Hamas authority resembling a government in Gaza is unique due to the parameters under which the organization has been operating since 2007, including the continued Israeli occupation of the Strip along with tightened restrictions imposed by both Israel and the international community and the persisting disunity among the Palestinian forces. As a result, governance forms an important part of Hamas political resistance. Moreover, given that Gaza is not an independent state and hence the inviolability of borders is not applicable. As such, Israel has a free hand on bombing and invading Gaza without violating another state's borders.[3]

From a state building perspective, effective governance is a key factor in determining the survival of Hamas domestic sovereignty. Despite the fact that Hamas' governance initiative is far from ideal in delivering services to the population, it has been typically more effective than the previous governance from the Palestinian Authority. Immediately after the takeover, Hamas spent the first year concentrating on obtaining control of all institutional areas of life in Gaza by ousting Fatah related officials from power as well as securing a monopoly on the use of force while keeping possible internal rivals at bay. For instance, it initiated a reform plan by disbanding its own internal police, known as Executive Force, and merged its personnel into four security organizations integrated into the Ministry of Interior, with the aim of centralizing its command in order to have full control over it. With the restructuring came an official distinction between the security sector, which emphasized Hamas' desire to promote the image of a legitimate authority in charge of security and law enforcement, and the Qassam Brigades, which dealt primarily with external resistance against Israel.[4]

Hamas' ability to govern is hampered due to the Israeli and Egyptian blockade. Since the embargo of supplies that pass from Israel and Egypt, all vehicles entering Gaza have had to be inspected and approved by border officials. This, along with an Israeli border barrier, which

was strengthened after 2005, and the Egyptian border barrier, effectively isolated the enclave and made it uninhabitable.[5] Israel tightened restrictions on cross-border flow of goods and persons into Gaza with the aim of weakening its capacity to govern, which culminated in the blockade in January 2008, Hamas came under a lot of pressure to find alternative routes. With Israel's control of Gaza's territorial waters, which prevents Hamas from moving goods by sea, the cross-border tunnels became the solution to the problem. With Israel placing restrictions on the good allows to enter, the tunnels that connected Gaza with Egypt became the only way for Gazans to meet the demand for all other goods, such as construction materials, fuel, some pesticides, hoes, shovels, buckets, sprinklers, and even irrigation pipes.[6]

Tunnels from Gaza to Egypt are also a major source of weaponry for Hamas, with nearly all of Hamas' munitions passing via these tunnels. Smuggling has always existed between Gaza and Egypt, but it exploded when Hamas took control in 2007 and Israel imposed a siege. However, since assuming power in 2014, Egyptian President el-Sisi has tightened its security apparatus along the Gazan border by shutting down many of Hamas' tunnels. Such loss is a serious logistic challenge for the organization, given its importance for smuggling weapons and goods.[7]

Although Hamas has assumed the role of a government, it continues to pay attention to the idea of resistance legitimacy, which is a key facet of Hamas' narrative and crucial to the group's objective of statehood. As Musa abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' Politburo, mentioned, "We are a government, yes, but the government is not a whole. We are a government under occupation."[8] As such, Hamas is using its rocket arsenal to preserve its domestic image of armed resistance to Israel by reminding Israel that the Palestinian Issue remains an unresolved matter. Moreover, Hamas has unsuccessfully used its rocket fire trying to put pressure on Israel to satisfy some of its requests, such as infrastructure development and a major relaxation of Israeli restrictions on the movement of products and people in and out of Gaza. At the same time, Hamas came up against a second dilemma after the complete take-over in 2007; controlling Gaza necessitated greater collaboration with Israel and the international community in order to avoid more economic restrictions, which put some limitations to its resistance discourse.[9]

On May 1, 2017, Hamas unveiled its new charter; this charter was made public in Doha by its Political Bureau Khaled Mashal, and it was significantly diluted from the prior one of August 1988. In its new charter, Hamas articulates a stance that represents the movement's agreement on the two-state solution, and hence, the establishment of a Palestinian state along 1967 boundaries. However, to counterbalance this concession, and at the same time demonstrate flexibility by providing murky areas for future political maneuvering, the new charter also states that Hamas "rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea." Hence, acceptance of a Palestinian state along the lines of 1967 by Hamas without openly recognizing Israel does not exclude the full liberation of Palestine at the borders before the establishment of Israel in 1948.[10]

In sum, after the seizure of Gaza, Hamas tried to consolidate its power. Hamas' governance struggles due to the restrictions imposed by Israel and the international community forced the organization to redouble its efforts to portray itself as the face of the resistance and the future of the Palestinian state. The new charter has altered the movement's attitudes and practices farther

toward pragmatism, while it created areas of ambiguity for political maneuver regarding the recognition of Israel and the borders of a Palestinian state.[11]

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BOUNDARIES RELOADED

IRAQ-SYRIA BORDERS DURING AND POST-ISIS ERA

Ilias Tasopoulos

The Arab uprisings highlighted the fragility of state structures in the Arab world after a long time of stability, especially in border regions where changes are fundamental for every state. ISIS attempted to alter the Iraqi-Syrian borders provoking scenarios of multidimensional changes. The eventual outcome, however, was unforeseen

SYRIA AND IRAQ BORDERS became a focal point of analysis after the massive regional scale of the Arab uprisings in a development that has been difficult to include in traditional state-centered theory patterns.[1] Until the 1990s, the constant military antagonism in the border regions was dominant, minimizing cross-border connections, making these districts dependent on the central state. However, the impact of the collapse of the Iraqi state in 2003 and Syria in 2011 was spectacular as their borderline structures unraveled at a storming pace. The Syrian regime and the Iraqi central government considered the challenges to their rule in main urban centers to be more important than international borders. Borders were rather neglected as, especially in the case of the Assad regime in Syria, its defeat in 2014 appeared imminent.

The formation of Daesh (Islamic State in Iraq-ISIS) from the offshoots of al-Qaeda in Iraq and partly by remnants of the former Saddam Hussein's regime shook the "border fixity"[2] that had been established in the region, declaring a caliphate for all Muslims across borders. The loss of power created discontent and insecurity among the Sunni community in Iraq. Jihadist groups and networks exploited these adverse circumstances and formed al-Qaeda in Iraq, which –albeit not eliminated– was later defeated by the Anbar coalition of US forces with tribal leaders. With the Syrian uprising, cells regrouped themselves in the form of ISIS and started action in Syria, attracting fighters from abroad and then reversed the route attacking Iraq and occupying a large part of the north and central provinces of the country. In 2013, ISIS proceeded to take control over lands and cities in northeastern Syria. Apart from the tribes that clashed with the jihadists in Iraq, some other tribes pledged their allegiance to ISIS, while the jihadists cooperated with tribal networks and formed several tribal militias from many Syrian army defectors. The establishment of the Euphrates Region as a single administrative unit removed previous barriers, challenging a norm that had dominated for decades there. "We've broken Sykes-Picot," ISIS fighters cried against the alleged artificiality of the borders, designed by the Europeans a century ago.[3]

The region contained the most fertile lands near the border that allowed sufficiency in food and supplies to whoever controlled it. ISIS managed to do something that al-Qaeda had not: control a territory and establish a functioning apparatus. A 2014 report prepared for the United Nations Security Council warned that ISIS possessed sufficient reserves of small arms, ammunition and vehicles to wage its war for Syria and Iraq for up to two years. In 2015, tens of foreign fighters crossed Turkish-Syrian borders to join ISIS, while the "caliphate" held its ground. There were serious concerns that this could herald the arrival of a new de facto entity in the region.[4]

The intervention of a great power was the defining factor that eliminated the military strength of ISIS, as neither Syria nor Iraq could. Despite its reluctance, the United States' involvement turned the tide against ISIS,[5] although they never managed to restore borders in their previous state. Barbaric acts, including abhorrent executions, sectarian killings and destruction of cultural monuments, helped to legitimize an acceptable outside intervention. American air supremacy and U.S.-led coalition operations enabled the recapture of ISIS strongholds by Kurdish and Iraqi Forces and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces at Iraq and Syria, respectively, in 2017 and 2018. The established boundaries remained a constant in the region, regardless of the ability of each state to safeguard them.

When a state collapses, neighboring countries often step in to ensure that repercussions are contained. Turkey, for example, joined the international coalition fighting the extremist ISIS, while at the same launched attacks against the Kurdistan Workers' Party and entered Iraqi territory to pursuit its members. The Turkish presence in Iraq, either in the form of Kurdish "hot pursuits" or operations against ISIS, brought up memories in Turkey from the time that the Ottoman Empire ruled Iraq. The presence of a major power, however, such as the United States, restricted its margins for action. The United States objected to the participation of Turkish forces in the liberation of Mosul from ISIS, as Washington was suspicious of Turkish plans to establish a permanent force in a region historically claimed to belong to Turkey rather than Iraq. Nevertheless, the situation has now changed. Turkish cross-border operations are very often while Turkey has been establishing new military bases in northern Iraq, ostensibly to prevent the militant Kurdish group PKK from finding safe refuge. By 2021, more than 5.000 Turkish soldiers are currently stationed inside Iraq, more than double than US troop numbers.[6]

Even after ISIS control in the region minimized, tranquility has not returned on the borders. Military groups remained involved in local governance, security, and economic affairs, while covert routes for border-crossing networks are still available. ISIS expansion has not managed to change the tribal structure, where tribes functioned as guardians of the borders for decades before the Arab uprisings. Central authorities had faced many difficulties in the past to impose a rule on clan networks spreading across large swathes of territory, as tribes in Iraq and Syria felt as if political borders had divided their members. Until today, border crossings are not easy to control without any functioning apparatus on both sides of the borders and tribes. Clans continue to benefit by smuggling activities across borders, where state control has fainted. At the same time, displacements are still taking place, as, for example, Iranian-backed militias have taken control of the Bukamal and Qa'im region, connecting Iran and Lebanon via Iraq and Syria, ousting Sunni and other inhabitants.[7]

While the nature of border control is indicative of power relations in a region, the symbolic boundaries significantly shape the region. Borderlands between Syria and Iraq were exploited to project power by external powers, states and local militias, as ISIS attempted to capture lands. Political and social fragmentation allowed forms of sectarian, tribal and religious authority to emerge, where Syrian and Iraqi central hegemony has been imposed for decades. Uncontrolled militarization ultimately dominated, as even Christian groups took up arms in view of ISIS advancement in Syria.[8]

The Arab Spring reframed the border situation, adding many dimensions in the levels of sovereignty and the way it is exercised, as semi-sovereign authority over territory appeared, reframing notions of the territorial state and the population state and highlighting the issues of separate identities

and functions in international boundaries. Massive, forced population transfers and competing claims to territory and sovereignty made the Iraq-Syria border actually mobile as local communities and their attachments to the land were radically transformed.[9] Borders, previously considered unchangeable, were also seen in a different light.

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3. VICE News, "Bulldozing the Border Between Iraq and Syria: The Islamic State," August 13, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxX_THjtXOw For a critique on the artificiality thesis, that "does not necessarily rely on an originary moment" see Sara Pursley, "'Lines Drawn on an Empty Map': Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State (Part 1)," *Jadaliyyah*, June 2, 2015, www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32140 see also Louise Fawcett, "States and sovereignty in the Middle East: myths and realities," *International Affairs* 93, no. 4, (July 2017): 797-9.

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KURDISH FRONTIER

IDEOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES ARE THE HARDEST TO TRANSCEND

Katia Zagoritou

For the first time in the modern history of Syria and Iraq, two de facto Kurdish autonomous entities – the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), as well as various Kurdish forces, share control of border portions on both sides, in Northwestern Iraq and Northeast Syria. This geopolitical shift invigorates the discussion around Kurdish unity and the concept of "Greater Kurdistan" highlighting the longstanding political and ideological boundaries concomitantly among the Kurdish political movements. These boundaries, alongside the socio-cultural ones, mirror different approaches vis-â-vis territoriality and governance, rendering Kurdish unity goal elusive.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KURDS AND THE BORDERS has been historically important and of a particularly complex nature, considering the very geographical position of the Kurdish-majority regions, mainly in the borderlands within the states they live. From the first partition of the Kurdish homeland in the 16th century following the Battle of Chaldiran (1514) between the Ottoman and the Safavid Empires to its split into four states in the Middle East – Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria - in the aftermath of World War I, Kurdish regions have served as buffer zones, while their partition has not hampered cross-border activities and transnational relationships.[1] Yet, apart from the differences among Kurds due to the existing state borders and their respective assimilation policies, boundaries do exist and persist between them, not only in socio-cultural - linguistic or religious - terms, but also in political ones which translate into different goals pursued by the various Kurdish political actors often leading to intra-Kurdish fights. Hence, in the absence of a unified Kurdish movement echoing the spatial fragmentation of the Kurdish space,[2] each national movement has rather opted to invest in the political field of the state within it has been evolving in order to promote its political and cultural rights.[3]

The divergences among the Kurdish political parties and movements have obtained, however a new dimension in the light of the weakening of the Syrian and Iraqi central governments and the growing Kurdish autonomy. The intricate state of affairs in the Iraq-Syria border is telling. The KRG and the AANES have so far managed not only to effectively control the two sides of the border but also to erect new crossing points (Symalka-Faysh Khabur, al-Waleed), acting as state-like actors at the local level and shaping new transnational spaces.[4] The border crossings' control constitute an essential military, political, and economic resource enabling the movement of both people and goods. More specifically, the Symalka and the al-Waleed crossings primarily serve the growing trade between the KRG and the AANES while they enable the transfer of aid, wounded patients in the KRI and the US troops' movement. Importantly, both crossings, alongside the al-Faw one, constitute key entry points for Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and affiliated groups' fighters. Still, these crossing points reproduce the political power plays between the two sides with the border's closure and opening as a means of pressure or punition. This ongoing regional development has therefore had a twofold effect: the somewhat formation of the Kurdish frontiers has invigorated the Kurdish transboundary unity making it appear more feasible while it has not ceased to generate, if not exacerbate, intra-Kurdish rivalries.[5]

Kurdish space in the re-making

As for the Kurdish territory's transformation, the Kurdish space(s) in both Iraq and Syria has been reshaped owing to the central governments' weakening and the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In Syria, for the first time, the geographical unification of the Kurdish-majority areas has been partially achieved, with the exception of Afrin enclave, whose linkage was thwarted by two Turkish military operations in 2016 and 2018, the latter leading to its occupation. Afrin's unification would have further redrawn the northern part of Syria by extending the Kurdish region of Rojava closer to the Mediterranean Sea; Turkey's Hatay province being the only gap preventing Rojava from accessing the Sea.[6]

Furthermore, another important territorial shift took place in Rojava after the liberation of the Syrian border town of Kobanî. In-

deed, Kobanî's victory was followed by a territorial expansion beyond the core Kurdish-majority areas in Northeast Syria, related with the campaign of Raqqa's liberation from ISIS and gradually led to the AANES's control of about a third of Syria - a region stretching from the Euphrates River's left bank to the Turkish and Iraqi borders - at the time that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) captured the last ISIS's stronghold, Baghuz, in March 2019. Ünver notices that the Kurdish expansion in Syria generated the move of the Kurdish space's western barrier from the Tigris river system as far west to the Euphrates.[7]

Similarly, Kurdish territorial expansion went hand in hand with the fight against ISIS in Iraq. However, the 2017 independence referendum held by the KRG and its aftermath led to the loss of Kirkuk and other disputed territories to Baghdad, gained and controlled by Peshmerga forces during their fight therein against ISIS. This event stresses the fluidity and the shifting nature of territorial transformations amidst wartime. Nevertheless, the KRG's control on segments of the Iraq-Syria border remains whilst the situation is more complicated in the Yazidi-majority district of Sinjar (in Nineveh province) and the al-Faw informal border crossing whose location has been strategic to various armed groups as an entry point to Syria. Al-Fawl was used by the PKK and the People's and Women's Protection Units (YPG/J) in 2014 in order to secure a safe corridor to Syria for thousands of Yezidis who fled the ISIS onslaught.[8] Hence, the PKK boosted its presence therein and alongside Yazidi militia Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ) and Yazidkhan Women's Units (YJÊ) control parts of the district.[9]

Intra-Kurdish antagonisms

In addition to Rojava and Qandil mountains, Sinjar has become the main theatre for the rivalry between the two dominant Kurdish actors, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the PKK, following the former's inability firstly to protect Yazidis during ISIS's attack in 2014 and later, in 2017, to annex Sinjar to the KRG. Sinjar's case also highlights the fluid and transient nature of the Kurdish territorial boundaries: the district passed from the KDP's control (from 2003 until 2014) to the growing influence of the PKK since 2014, notably after 2017. Moreover, the October 9, 2020 agreement between Erbil and Baghdad with the aim to eliminate the PKK's and Popular Mobilization Units' (PMU) presence in Sinjar suggests the alliances' shifting nature when it comes to intra-Kurdish rivalries.

The longstanding antagonism between the KDP and the PKK has transcended the borders of the states within they first emerged as each one has sought to assert itself as the legitimate representative of the Kurdish cause. Their profound political differences entail differentiated agendas and goals while they engage different social constituencies. The depth and extent of this cleavage are embodied in the rivalries which endure despite the momentum created by the fact that the KRG and the AANES enjoy simultaneously

a degree of autonomy, albeit at different levels, and the growing geographical connection between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and Rojava.

Political divergences are reflected in each actor's vision of territoriality, state-building and governance and, therefore, in its alliances. In the same vein, although Ünver sees major incentives for a KRG-AANES unification in issues related to water security and oil policies linked with a potential access to the Mediterranean, he recognizes though the existence of "fundamental cultural differences between them in terms of administrative structures, their approach to tribalism and religion and their global orientation". In this sense, tribalism in the KRG and its gradual transformation into rentier state has increased its dependency on external actors – the US and Turkey- and has rendered it unable to dominate other Kurdish actors in its vicinity, such as the PKK and its affiliates. The KRG's relationship with the latter becomes more problematic considering, on the one hand, its ties with Turkey in economic and commercial terms - which constitute for Turkey a way to deepen intra-Kurdish rivalries and counter the PKK's presence in Qandil - and on the other hand, the PKK's growing presence within the KRI. The KRG, despite being reluctant to openly collaborate with Turkey against another Kurdish group, shares Ankara's concerns not only in relation to the PKK's presence in its territory but also to the Democratic Union Party's (PYD) dominance in Syria.[10]

Regarding Rojava, the AANES's state-building experiment significantly differs from the KRG's one in that it officially rejects secession claims and instead promotes the building of a multi-ethnic entity with decentralized administration and representative bodies within Syria. It is besides noteworthy that historically, Kurdish political parties in Syria have never sought to challenge Syrian national borders. Additionally, Greater Kurdistan does not constitute a political goal for the Kurds in Syria while in the PYD's view, Rojava constitutes a space to be shaped by its political project and not a political project with a bordered territory along ethnic lines. Moreover, unlike the relative stability of the KRG's territorial boundaries, Rojava's territoriality remains elusive despite the fact that a wide range of political actors seem to take its political project for granted.[11]

In conclusion, the current and in process formation of Kurdish-Kurdish frontiers in the Iraq-Syria border with the control and domination of its segments by a variety of Kurdish forces has been unprecedented in the modern history of the region, making Kurdish territorial unity appear less elusive. Yet, intra-Kurdish competition, as well as a number of challenges - the increasing Turkish presence in the KRI and the occupation of Rojava's regions, and a future withdrawal of the US military and financial support to name but a few- seriously hamper such an outcome. Last but not least, taking into consideration the different aspirations and political agendas of each Kurdish political actor alongside the strong transnational nature of the Kurdish movement(s), the concept of the "Greater Kurdistan" might be currently rather read through symbolic lenses.[12]

NOTES

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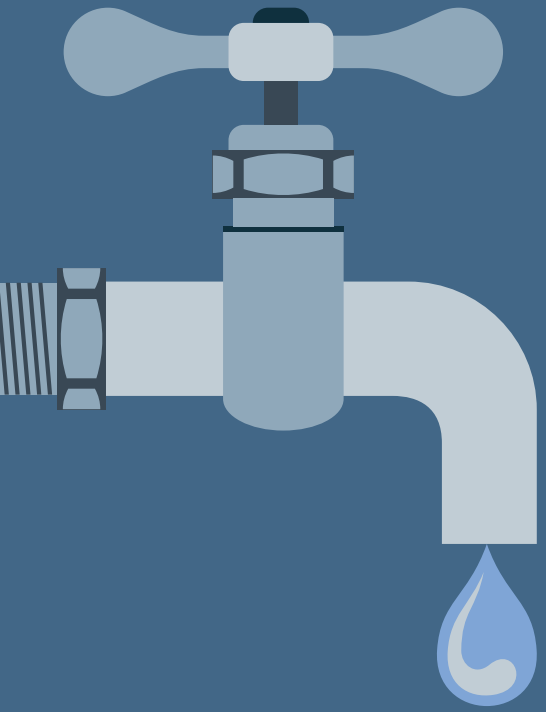

WATER ISSUE & TURKEY-SYRIA-IRAQ

Iraq and Syria are heavily dependent on the Tigris and Euphrates, which are the major sources of water in the region. Ankara's decision to build massive dams for electricity generation and irrigation after the 1950s reflects the Turkish government's perception of water resources as a matter of survival. Hence, the transboundary twin rivers originating from Turkey are at the center of the debates on water issues between Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The extreme drought experienced in this region due to climate change further strengthens the fact that these two main water bodies will continue to maintain their status as important bargaining factors for these countries.

Özgür Kurşun

THE FIRST CONFLICTS over the distribution and use of water resources came to the fore in the 1970s, when Iraq, Syria and Turkey unilaterally started developing water infrastructure projects: Iraq's Thartar Canal, Syria's Euphrates Valley, and Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Development Projects (GAP) respectively. Syria and Iraq have been greatly concerned about the Turkish GAP, one of the world's largest water and development projects, covering 22 dams, 19 hydroelectric power plants, and the irrigation of 1.7 million hectares of land.

As Turkey completed another large dam such as Ilisu in 2018, filling this reservoir meant reducing the Tigris's water volume by more than 50%. This caused tensions between Baghdad and Ankara. As an act of goodwill for good neighborliness and cooperation, Turkey postponed filling the dam in 2018 after Iraq complained about the water shortage. However, these temporary concessions do not eliminate the fact that a permanent formal agreement on key issues such as river water flow is required in a sustainable way. Being located at the headwaters, Turkey dominates the water politics in the region. Ankara has strengthened its hydro-hegemon position in the recent period, while Syria and Iraq have been grappling with internal conflicts and the rise of ISIS.[1]

Another major source of friction between Turkey, Syria and Iraq that complicates consensus on the shared water resources is that the three countries disagree on the definition of the river system. While Turkey considers the Euphrates and Tigris as 'transboundary' rivers, Syria and Iraq define them as 'international'. Adopting the doctrine of absolute territorial sovereignty, Ankara concluded that the Euphrates and Tigris were born in Turkish lands and that they are Turkish rivers flowing through its lands and determined that Turkey does not have to share its waters with its neighbors. In the words of the former Turkish President, Suleyman Demirel "Turkey's resources are Turkeys. The oil resources are theirs (Arabs'). We do not say we share their oil resources; and they cannot say they share our water resources." This raised a parallel between the legal status of water and oil. Syria adhered to the doctrine of limited territorial sovereignty and argued that the Euphrates must be shared according to the water demands of the riparians and the capacity of the river. At the same time, Iraq has adopted the doctrine of absolute territorial integrity by insisting on the historical right of the Euphrates and Tigris and its prior rights of use.[2]

Turkey's policy on the Euphrates and Tigris basin and its influence on bilateral relations with Syria and Iraq show that water can be used both as a weapon and a source of cooperation during conflicts. Knowing that it has a potentially strong security card to play, Syria helped the PKK organization to encourage Ankara to solve the water problem. The Euphrates and Tigris issue has become an area of hydropolitical conflict between Syria and Turkey since the 1960s. When Turkey launched the GAP, Syria's response was to use the PKK as leverage to undermine the project. Relations between the two countries experienced a rapid political rapprochement in the 2000s after the capture of Ocalan. This crucial improvement lasted until the Syrian war. Until 2011, important steps were taken to stimulate cooperation on water issues. One of them was the construction of a joint dam on the Orontes River. As a symbol of political rapprochement, the dam was named the "Friendship Dam." Also, Turkey sought to dissuade Syria from its claims on Alexandretta, in the Hatay province of Turkey, through this show of goodwill. However, a decade-long political rapprochement ended when the Syrian civil war began in 2011.[3]

Nowadays, what has become worrying is the decline of the Euphrates River to critically low levels. In May 2021, the Tishreen dam, one of the biggest dams in Syria, was almost empty. Moreover, the depth of the Euphrates river around Raqqa has dropped to 5 meters. The YPG, PKK's Syrian offshoot and controls northern Syria, accuses Turkey of destabilizing the region. It claims that Turkey is failing to comply with flow rates over dam waters, which specified in the 1987 Syria and Turkey water-sharing agreement. However, the water crisis in Syria is not purely a hydropolitical problem; it is more of an environmental issue. Apart from Turkey's role, climate change in the Euphrates basin, excessive use and poor management of water and the effects of groundwater pollution should also be considered as the causes of drought. According to the latest reports, it would be an incomplete assessment to define drought only as a result of hydropolitics in the basin, ignoring factors such as low rainfall in northeastern Turkey/Syria, lack of infrastructure, and increased salinization. Given the expected water scarcity in Syria, Iraq and Turkey due to the weak rainy seasons and the recent events in the Euphrates, an increase in cross-border competition for water is inevitable in the current climate and will further trigger diplomatic discussions.[4]

In addition, Human Rights Watch claims that Turkey has failed to supply sufficient water from the Allouk water pumping station to YPG-controlled areas in northeast Syria. Another claim is that this puts the lives of residents struggling with the Covid-19 outbreak at risk.[5]

The Allouk water station, which Turkey seized during the Operation Peace Spring in the north of Syria in 2019, is the main source of drinking water for approximately 600.000 people living in al-Hasakah, Tall Tamr and affiliated areas under the control of YPG. Turkey is accused of interrupting the operation of the Allouk station.[6] However, Turkish sources denied the allegations and announced that the water station could not operate at full capacity because the Syrian administration cut the electricity under the pretext of maintaining the plant.[7]

Regarding Iraq, recent history shows that it can successfully maneuver against Turkey's dam projects. Previous Baghdad governments used the state's oil resources as a bargaining chip to force Turkey to regulate water issues. Iraq halted oil exports to Turkey in the 1970s in response to Ankara's World Bank-sponsored dam plan on the Euphrates. Today, the situation is quite different. While Iraq remains Turkey's largest oil supplier, most of the oil comes from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, which has billions of dollars in economic, trade and energy ties with Ankara. If Iraq wants to use oil as a diplomatic tool, it must first reach an agreement with Erbil. But the mistrust between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) does not easily make this possible.[8]

The existing contradictions in the Iraqi constitution regarding the management of water resources have turned into a political conflict of interest between the KRG and the central government of Baghdad. In the KRG referendum in 2017, Massoud Barzani stated that his next objective is negotiations with Baghdad on political borders, oil and, more interestingly, water resources, which will undoubtedly increase geopolitical risks and water tension in the region. From a geopolitical perspective, riparian countries including Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq have been viewing the Kurdish autonomous region as a national threat. Both Syria and Turkey worry about losing their unified state structures in the future. From a hydropolitical perspective, the emergence of a new downstream/competitor player on the map will make the problem more complicated than ever.[9]

Considering the other regions of Iraq, the Regional Kurdish Government is very rich in terms of water resources since it covers the mountainous area in the north of Iraq. Apart from many branches of the Tigris River, Dokan and Darbandikhan - which are important hydroelectric power plants in Iraq - are also within the borders of the Kurdish Regional Government. The Mosul Dam, which is the largest dam and hydroelectric power plant in the country located on the main tributary of the Tigris River, remained under the joint control of the KDP and PUK until Baghdad took over directly as a result of a rapid operation of the Iraqi central government in 2017.[10]

At the regional level, being a downstream country gives Iraq little room for maneuvers. For the time being, it seems difficult for a relatively weak Iraq to influence the results in favor of Baghdad in negotiations with Turkey and Iran regarding the water inflow of the Euphrates and Tigris. Domestically, the geographical position of the Kurdistan region is fundamental for the control of the Tigris and the national water management of Iraq. Close cooperation between the upstream KRG and the downstream Baghdad central government can successfully cope with the upstream state, Turkey, and the challenges associated with the Euphrates and Tigris.[11]

Moreover, The Turkish Embassy in Baghdad has recently announced that the Memorandum of Understanding on waters shared between Turkey and Iraq will be soon in effect. Turkey claims that the water problem in Iraq is not due to the existing water quota but due to Baghdad's inability to use water resources in the best way. Stating that the extreme drought in 2018 and the flood in 2019 showed that Iraq was not able to manage water well, Turkey claims it is ready to help Iraq in terms of both technological and human resources.

Both the emphasis on cooperation in the field of water resources management of the Tigris and Euphrates in the memorandum of understanding signed by the two countries in December 2014 and a consensus on the assessment of water share and resources of the two countries are promising developments for the future.[12]

The Euphrates and Tigris, which are the two largest rivers of Southwest Asia and located in the middle of the region, will continue to be used as hydro-politics issues in the problems between Syria, Iraq and Turkey in a geopolitical area where water is gaining importance day by day. In the basin, which is in turmoil ethnically, religiously and politically, it seems difficult to find a solution on water easily.

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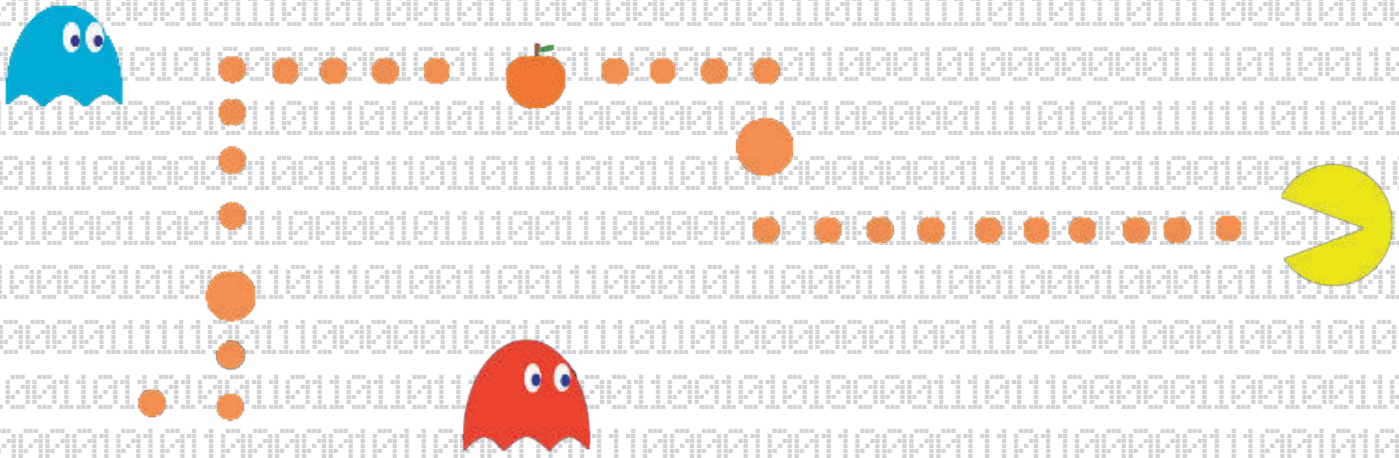
THE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF CYBER BORDERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST_



During the past decade, a number of countries of the Middle East have established extremely strict "cyber borders". In other words, regimes restrict access to foreign and independent news websites, platforms and social media if they seem critical of the state or against the countries' political or economic interests. As a result, this issue can lead to further isolation from the rest of the world for the states' citizens.

Elena Ntarvis Tampar

INTERNET CENSORSHIP REVEALS ASPECTS with regards to the political alliances and conflicts within the MENA region. Internet access has become a key instrument for domestic policies, as filtering and blocking can be used in order to exclude information originating from countries that dispute or contradict state narratives. For instance, the bilateral rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is exemplified by the fact that one government bans the websites of the other and vice versa.[1] In addition, Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia block content related to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah.[2] Another dimension of the geopolitical internet censorship also applies to economic interests and rivalries. Countries hamper commercial websites in order to limit competition to their local markets. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that use internet blocking for economic priorities. More specifically, Riyadh blocks the domain of Qatar's national air carrier, Qatar Airways and BEIN Sports, a network owned by Qatari businessmen.[3]

Moreover, freedom of expression via the internet can be viewed as potential headaches and threats to authoritarian regimes vying to stay in power, as well as maintain control over political domestic confrontations. This pattern of authoritarian internet control seems to have spread across countries in the Middle East to lesser and greater effect. For instance, Bahrain is one of the most repressive states of the Middle East and internet freedom is extremely limited for the general public. Online journalists and activists have been arrested and even tortured for the content they shared on social media platforms and websites. Nabeel Rajab, one of the most important human rights activists in Bahrain, was imprisoned several times after 2012 for his online activity and finally, in 2018, was sentenced to five years in prison with charges based on his Twitter posts.[4] Furthermore, in 2018, Egypt passed the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law in the name of national security. This law allows the authorities to block any website considered "suspicious" with regards to its content. Authorities may also impose strict penalties on citizens attempting to hack government systems or share anti-government propaganda. The most vulnerable groups exposed by the new legislature were journalists, bloggers and media organizations. Hence, prime examples of government censorship are the arrests of many journalists, such as Wael Abbas over his government criticism and Egyptian activist Amal Fathy who was arrested by the Egyptian security forces. In other words, internet surveillance has morphed into an additional tool for the suppression of society's dissident voices.[5]

In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a critical government tool is the National Information Network (NIN). The NIN is also known as internet-e paak that means internet "pure" or "clean" in Farsi. The aim of the NIN is to create an independent internet platform, according to the religious values of the Islamic Republic, with no access to the global internet. It is of note that China is helping Iran to replace its internet services with national ones controlled by the regime. As a leading state on information control, China started advising Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Supreme Council for Cyberspace and the Working Group for Identifying Criminal Content (CCDOC).[6] Nonetheless, these government measures have led to the emergence of proxy tools such as Psilon and Lantern, used by many Iranians in order to gain access to international news and information and bypass state filters.[7]

The CCDOC has the authority to block websites under the judiciary's supervision and supervises policy and its implementation for the websites that need to be filtered. It searches for "inappropriate" content on the web and forwards to specific authorities (such as the ICT Ministry, the Telecommunication Company of Iran, and the Telecommunication Infrastructure Company) a list of the

websites that should be blocked. Hence, a critical dimension of internet access in Iran is the censorship implemented both on international and domestic networks during periods of political instability. As such, in 2019, during the widespread demonstrations throughout Iranian territory related to the gasoline price rise, the authorities effectively switched off internet access for several days, blocking the demonstrators' means for communication through social media or the Whatsapp and Telegram applications. The ensuing internet blackout enabled a violent crackdown by Iranian security forces against the demonstrators, resulting in more than 300 people dead and thousands arrested. Many human rights organizations shared their concern over the shutdown as a clear violation of human and civil rights.[8] More recently, events also occurred in the Sistan and Baluchistan regions in February 2021, as internet blackouts took place when protesters started sharing on the internet video content of the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Guards Corps opening fire against unarmed civilians, leading to the deaths of more than ten people including a child.[9]

It is of note that over the past decade, the Iranian regime has managed to create a centralized national "intranet" in order to provide internet access to its citizens and, at the same time, limit and control the quality of information coming from foreign sources. Iran invested heavily in developing its domestic internet known as the National Information Network (NIN) or "SHOMA" and promoted information state control in order to assert its hold over the public and private communication means of Iranians under the pretext of national security. However, even though the Iranian sponsored domestic intranet provides better speeds and is priced at an appealing discount, the majority of Iranians opt instead to use other well-established international applications.[10] As such, particularly in the case of Iran, the cyber borders issue is not limited to the exclusion of foreign news sources but also restricts the means for domestic means of communication.

In other words, cyber borders and control over internet access create a challenging situation for online freedom of expression. For this reason, private and public actors found it crucial to develop anti-censorship tools and techniques in order to bypass these restrictions. As a result, one type of anti-censorship software is CGI (Common Gateway Interface) and is being used by Middle Eastern people that want unhindered access to the worldwide web. Other types of anti-censorship software are HTTP proxies and rerouting tools, which divert the blocks and filters of the state server. In addition, virtual private networks (VPN) are used to hide users from detection by the authorities. As such, more than 400 million people use free VPN services for information and communication purposes. Whereas the regimes' response to these anti-censorship tools varies depending on the country and the case, there usually is a legal framework in place for deterring the use of tools for bypassing internet restriction, which can include imprisonment or financial penalties. For instance, the sentence for hacking in Saudi Arabia sentence is ten years of imprisonment.[11]

Lastly, internet access control in the Middle East provides

the means for shaping and maintaining a new form of borders, i.e. digital borders. The internet, as an invention and new tool of the late twentieth century, has led authoritarian regimes to twist its purpose and instead use it for surveillance and purposes of state control. While cyber borders originate from strict content limits and domestic control, citizens have come to regularly use and alternate between anti-restricting means and applications in order to ensure their unhindered rights of freedom of information and communication. Nonetheless, in many cases, states often double down on their internet policies, resulting in related penalties and arrests, which in turn provide additional fodder for the continuous use of anti-censorship means.

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PILGRIMAGE IN MODERN TIMES

CHALLENGES FOR MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS

Fragkiskos Plytas

The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia signaled the birth of modern nation-states, the establishment of borders and the political secularization process. However, religion nowadays retains its national and supranational characteristics by affecting international state relations. A key supranational institution of religion that has survived to this day is pilgrimage to places of worship, such as Jerusalem for Christians and Mecca for Muslims. Pilgrims face difficulties in making their journey and the pilgrimage itself can even become a national rivalry.[1]

PILGRIMAGE HAS DEEP HISTORICAL ROOTS and shares common elements in nearly all monotheistic religions. With population movement being associated with social and political factors, pilgrim duty is an experience that is both personal and collective, corporal and spiritual, in other words, a polymorphic situation. The sentiment of religious fulfillment and anticipation associated gives rise to intensive population movements. Pilgrimages create collective itineraries which have a political and/or economic impact.[1]

Hajjis are the largest transnational religious pilgrimage in the Islamic world. Despite their differences in religious doctrine, all Muslims around the world agree upon the "Five Pillars of Islam." Hajj, as one of the "Five Pillars," is explicitly regarded as a sacred duty in the Quran and takes place during the prescribed months in "the first House of worship" at Mecca. Hajj, according to the Quran, is God's will and attendance is mandatory. This gives the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia an international advantage. Apart from the related financial benefits, Saudi Arabia exploits this out, mainly by controlling the number of pilgrims per country allowed to visit Mecca and Medina.[2]

In the past, Pilgrims faced problems mainly pertaining to antiquated means of transportation, the long duration and the high cost of the trip. Furthermore, the situation on the site was chaotic, crowded and with unbearable heat. However, nowadays, it is easier to fulfill Hajj duties. In 2019, the number of pilgrims was 2,489,406, of which 1,855,027 were foreigners.[3] Yet, pilgrims are still facing many problems, the main being the Hajj Quota Allocation System, which regulates the percentage of pilgrims per country that will operate Hajj. The final number of pilgrims per country arises through transnational agreements, based on the population of the countries interested to send pilgrims. However, the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah decides on the final numbers. As a result, pilgrims are subject to the current state of relations between their country and Saudi Arabia in a matter that is supposed to be supranational. For example, in 2017, Saudi Arabia limited the number of Qatar pilgrims to 1,200 as opposed to 12,000 in 2016 due to the embargo imposed on Qatar by Saudi Arabia and its allies. Also, in 2017, media reports in Lebanon revealed that Prime Minister Saad Hariri, once a trusted Saudi ally, had not received his usual share of Hajj visas. Local media claimed that the drop in visa quota was in retaliation to the breakup of Prime Minister's Hariri relationship with Saudi Arabia and accused Riyadh of "preferential treatment." In 2019, Saudi Arabia blocked Palestinian refugees from Syria to hold Hajj citing insufficient travel documents. This is a result of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel, in an attempt to push Palestinians to claim citizenship and forgo refugee status.

The latter generally have low income and Saudis fear further problems associated with their financial capability.[5] Travel and accommodation expenses pose an additional difficulty to pilgrims. Countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh host a small number of pilgrims despite their large Muslim population. These countries mainly use indirect methods in choosing pilgrims. They either request enormous amounts of money

such as salaries of 10 years to acquire eligibility for the Hajj or decide based on favoritism and nepotism. Either method used effectively deprives religious people of the Hajj.[6] An additional issue is the health conditions during Hajj whenever a pandemic or an epidemic occurs. For this reason, Saudi Arabia heavily invests in new facilities in the Holy Cities. Nevertheless, the Hajj has been often disrupted due to health problems. During 2012 and 2013, Saudi Arabia warned the elderly and frail against making the pilgrimage due to concerns over Middle East Respiratory Syndrome. In 2014, due to the Ebola virus, Saudi Arabia temporarily banned citizens from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and in 2019 pilgrims from the Democratic Republic of Congo were banned as well. Last year, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, only up to 1,000 pilgrims per country were allowed. In 2021, Saudi Arabia started to gradually relax restrictions and allowed entry to immunized pilgrims. Nevertheless, pilgrim numbers for the 2021 Hajj will be small and symbolic.[7]

In the Christian world, the greatest and most significant pilgrimage is that in the Holy Land: in the cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and especially the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Although there is no rule for such pilgrimage in the scriptures, several thousands of pilgrims travel from all over the world to worship in the Holy Land. The pilgrimage historically started in the early Christian times, contributed to the Crusades and survived during the Ottoman Empire. In modern times, pilgrims face many problems associated with free access, security issues, Israeli policies and relations with local churches.[8]

The right of pilgrims to free access to Jerusalem has been negotiated internationally and is guaranteed by the United Nations General Assembly with resolutions 181 and 194. Yet, many pilgrims do not have access to places of worship. Firstly, besides arrest problems, Israeli policy denies Palestinian Christians freedom of movement and equal access, using walls/fences and military checkpoints. In addition, the Israeli permit system denies visas to Palestinians who want to visit occupied religious places in West Bank, especially during the holidays. Finally, local Christian leaders report that road checkpoints restrict the pilgrims' movement between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries. The barriers also cause delays and difficulties to foreign pilgrims. Secondly, Israeli authorities have instrumentalized archeological excavations for political purposes by overseeing and effectively de facto ruling nearly 160 disputed holy sites. On occasion, they control access by restricting entrance to both Christians and Muslims. Thirdly, despite the fact that the major religious and/or archeological sites are shared by the three religions, the Jewish perspective and importance are overemphasized.[9] Security concerns pose an additional difficulty to the pilgrims. In the past and more recently, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, involving rocket air strikes, human loss and a state of war, makes the pilgrimage very difficult if not impossible. While arson attacks by Israeli extremists in churches have increased the feeling of insecurity for pilgrims, on December 4, 2021, an Ultra-Orthodox Jew tried to set fire to the Church of All Nations at the Garden of Gethsemane.[10] Eventually, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Christian churches were closed on Easter in 2020 and very few pilgrims visited the Holy land.[11]

Both Saudi Arabia and Israel, as major pilgrim destinations, enjoy substantial financial gains from the pilgrimage economy. Hence, they aspire to control the associated population movement and further develop their tourism industry. The Saudi government, attempting to ease its economic dependency on oil, has invested in the commercialization of Hajj. Riyadh has tried to improve its

status as a tourist destination product by upgrading facilities with major construction projects, improving tourist packages and extending the duration of stay. Following the investment in tourist infrastructure during 2013-2017, the number of foreign pilgrims to Mecca increased reaching 1,758,722 in 2018 and 1,855,027 in 2019. In 2021, pilgrims spent between $5,000 or $6,500 during Hajj, with 75%-80% of that amount used for accommodation, food, gifts, transport, and communication. The expenses for pilgrims increased, since the Saudi government raised prices on all international visiting packages (for instance, the economic package was raised from $1,400 in 2005 to $6,000 in 2020).[12] A further increase is expected in the post-Covid-19 period. The economic impact is also present in the Holy Land's case. All-purpose tourist arrivals in Israel have increased from 2.8 million in 2010 to 4.1 in 2018, a 46% increase in 8 years. Nearly one third of these arrivals (29%) was attributed to religious purposes or pilgrimage. Jewish expansion, colonization and control of the Old City of Jerusalem have effectively diminished the presence of Palestinian tourist businesses in the area; for example, the number of active hotels in the Jerusalem Governorate has decreased to 41% between 2009 and 2016. The Israeli state, through taxation and multiple check points has marginalized the Palestinians who earned a living through pilgrims to the benefit of Jewish tourist corporations.[13]

To conclude, pilgrimage is a supranational institution that is still under the control of specific countries. Pilgrimages are major religious events in which commerce, knowledge and religion have been interlinked through the ages, triggering major population flows. This process acts as a crossroads, bringing together people from different cultures, political beliefs and social backgrounds, exchanging social practices and shaping their identity.[14]

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MAPPING OUT INTELLECTUAL BORDERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BLURRED LINES AND DEMARCATIONS

Ihab Shabana

Research on transforming intellectual and ideological borders in the Middle Eastern political environment has received a mounting research interest over the last two decades. In an attempt to conceptualize cross-ideological alliances, we examine examples of such alliances in the Middle East in the past and present, approaching them under the scope of social movement theory. Despite their dynamism and influential discourse, building on oppositional hybrid political identities, oppositional movements in the MENA milieu have their capacity limits.

WHEN HEZBOLLAH PROMULGATED its Open Letter Addressed to the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World, in 1985 during the Lebanese civil war, the Lebanese leftist forces were well aware of its existence and its operations; parts of the Lebanese National Movement, such as the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OACL), embraced the Islamist revolutionary discourse that largely embedded an anti-imperialist and anti-dependency discourse, alongside notions of personal and political freedoms and the struggle against western forms of hegemony. Ostensibly, Islamist and leftist political forces in the Arab world have been at odds; most Islamists are hostile towards the Left, both for its atheism and for its preoccupation with materialism. In tandem, the leftist and socialist camp has been widely critical of the intermingling of religion into politics, underscoring the alienation of political consciousness that is precipitated through religion and the backwardness that political Islam brings to the fore.

Arguably, intellectual and political borders are not only volatile and adaptable to transformative and politically constrained settings, such as that of the Middle East: ever-changing intellectual borders, although tactical and strategic, sometimes generate new hybrid political cultures that mitigate ideological divides, seeking to identify the factors that favor their success.[1] Coalition building, as Maha Abdelrahman suggests, develop a strategic mindset of consensus and independence; thus, they promote a "cooperative differentiation" that tries to ensure the movement's objective while maintaining constituencies.[2]

By paying closer attention to the social and political contexts of the Arab world in the last decades, one is not surprised to discover that temporary or more permanent cooperation between political Islam and the Left has largely taken place already since the late 1980s. Many scholars, such as Z. Lockman and J. Beinin, date these convergences to prior events, such as the 1970s "bread riots," or even earlier to the anti-colonial movements. Convergences mainly take two forms: intellectual debates and strategic alliances. The debate that took place between the stanch secularist Fu'ad Zakariyya and the integralists Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Muhammad al-Ghazali in the Egyptian Medical Association fall under the first form. With regards to the second, strategic collaborations between Egyptian leftist and secular forces, such as the Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in the 1984 elections context and the Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Liberals and the MB along with the 1987 elections, were an attempt to forge a dynamic alliance against Mubarak's standoff derived from his authoritarian policies.

Cross-ideological borders and fluid political cultures and identities in the 2011 Middle East uprisings are highlighted by a number of scholars, such as J. Beinin, Asef Bayat, Gianni Del Panta, Vincent Durac or Mario Diani. All of them have suggested that while mobilization repertoires are context-related, collective action can also be based on local milieu. Thus, community-based mobilization is of high importance for MENA; this type of mobilization often transcends the strict ideological and political affiliations, which showcases the fluid and transforming ideological borders.[3] Thus, the borders

of political activism often transcend traditional ideological boundaries, involving identities based on gender, class, ethnicity, generation, and even professional hierarchies. This volatility proves that resource mobilization approach solely is inadequate to explain political opportunities and openings are the main driving force in ideological and intellectual adaptation in the MENA region.

As evidence shows, the Middle East cross-ideological terrain is constructed under mainly three contexts: the elections conjuncture, the social movements' momentum and in times of war. According to J. Beinin, all three indicators are strictly connected with the political forces modus operandi under authoritarian regimes, such as those of the Arab world.[4] The aforementioned cases of Egypt fall under the first category and so does the Troika coalition between the Islamists of the Nahda party and two leftist parties after the fall of Ben Ali in 2011.[5] At the same time, we can examine the coalition of leftist and Islamist forces (Islamic Action Front) in Jordan in 1992 against the kingdom's normalization with Israel policies or the convergence of heterogeneous forces in Egypt with the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kefaya) after 2004, under the lens of the social movement context. All the more, the acclaimed Cairo anti-war conferences after 2002 and the development of the Palestinian "National and Islamic Forces" platform –undoubtedly with its national aspirations– during the second Intifada (2002) fall under the third category.[6]

In tandem, in the 2019-20 protests in Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan, we observe that people attempt to transcend traditional sectarian divisions, forging new contentious politics. For instance, protests in Lebanon attempt to overcome established sectarian divisions and try to forge new alliances to overthrow the Lebanese political elites and grasp political opportunities. Even the active Hezbollah has been cautious, rethinking its national but also regional involvement and practices.[7] At the same time, the protests in Iraq in the last years, which touch on issues of social, cross-sectarian, political and economic character, have seen a cross-ideological dynamic. Analysts stress the importance of coalition building process in the streets of Iraqi cities,[8] even though the involvement of regional actors, such as Iran, is often critical. Also, recent protests in Jordan are further characterized by a mounting diversity that has built upon past cross-intellectual and cross-ideological experiences, adopting mobilization repertoires from the 2018 and the Ramadan protests of 2019.[9]

However, cross-ideological coalitions have their limits and influential political cultures formed by these alliances do not normally outlive. Alliance durability and resilience is mostly based on "single issue" related temporary demands, which is also the main reason for not flourishing in the long term. As Matt Buehler highlights, failures mainly rest on programmatic discords, commitment problems as well as state repression.[10] Nevertheless, as we clearly observe, cross-ideological coalition building is easier and more rapidly mobilized when utilizing previous experiences and the lessons learned.

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