



Bazari Teyrawa in Hawler (Erbil), Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), by Levi Clancy via Wikimedia Commons.

Beyond war, another common framework used to analyze cities in the Middle East region is neoliberalism. But, instead of general statements condemning this political economy, the two articles we feature here provide empirical accounts of the circuits of capital and the legal tools used to transform cities. Gebara, Khechen, and Marot produced an original dataset to analyze how the restructuring of municipal Beirut is taking place through extensive real estate investments, and to demonstrate how the reassembling of land parcels act as a key tool that fuels gentrification—the process by which older and often poor dwellers get evicted by upper middle class individuals and investors.

*We thus need to understand cities and regions not only as backgrounds and contexts for processes and practices, but rather as environments that have determining impacts on these, and that human interactions also shape.*

Moving to the other side of the Mediterranean, Koenraad Boegart examines globalization as a major force that does not merely operate externally but is very much located within cities, restructuring them from inside, as he discusses in the case of the Casa-Marina megaproject in Casablanca. In another chapter, his analysis is applied to the financialization of nature, revealing how the appropriation of land in the name of renewable energy and the fight against climate change also dislocates people. In both Moroccan stories, neoliberalization spurs its discontents, who struggle to preserve bits of their livelihoods and spatial practices, and more so to assert their own meanings and dignity in the face of disdain and capitalist violence. Such violence is epitomized in the new Justice Palace of Çaglayan, in Istanbul, analyzed by Ayşe Öncü. The Palace symbolizes the blending of Erdoğan's authoritarianism with the hegemony of neoliberalism, which provides the building with the typology of a shopping center. Nonetheless, the palace is also the stage of small but persistent demonstrations of solidarity with the victims of Erdoğan's recent purges.

The multiplicity of practices that dwellers perform and the diversity of meanings they assign to urban space challenge the widely circulating stereotypical representations of Middle Eastern cities portrayed as destroyed by violence or anesthetized by bigotry and patriarchy. Yaseen Raad's chapter defies the common views of Baghdad as the theatre of bombings and explosions. He features its historically plural urban geography, which is still materialized, albeit weakly, in its parks along the river, bringing together young men and women, families, and elderly to enjoy *magsuf* and hoo-kah under the summer breeze. Additionally, while others merely mention public squares as repositories of political action, Farha Ghannam unravels how and why Tahrir square is a heterotopic space that has been embodying protests for decades. In homage to *flânerie*, Lana Salman's chapter celebrates her fieldwork in Tunis as a rich collection of bodily encounters and stories of the everyday that always escape simplistic interpretations. And, in contrast to touristic clichés that complacently portray Beirut as the future of queerness, Maya Mikdashi underscores the embedded violence, domination and abjection that these images tend to blur, foregrounding the precariousness of livelihoods.

This *JadMag* closes with reflections on urban policies. Eric Verdeil's article on the seemingly banal issue of lighting the city unravels the urban inequalities in the city and positions the claims of ordinary dwellers for street lighting vis-a-vis the financial and technical struggles of municipalities attempting to cope with these claims. Further highlighting the struggles of local governance, Mona Harb's critiques the policy paradigm celebrating decentralization, as spearheaded by the Habitat III Lima conference and the new urban agenda, noting the pitfalls of retreating states, unequal resources, and unaccountable political systems that often result in inefficient and discriminatory practices.

[1] For further reading, see Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies, The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 2010).