

The Abu Dhabi investor Al Maabar co-designs the urban spectacle of the Bouregreg Valley in Rabat, while Wessal Capital, a joint venture between the Moroccan Fund for the Development of Tourism and four GCC-members (UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia), will radically transform the skylines of Casablanca, Tangier, and also Rabat in the near future.

The increasing privatization of public space involves, not only in Morocco but throughout the contemporary urban world, the growing control over urban space in the hands of “non-democratically-elected owners.” As a result, places such as the Bouregreg Valley or the shoreline of Casablanca may well be become “globalized spaces,” in the sense that they connect different actors from other parts of the world, but this does not mean they will be open spaces that will be easily accessible, let alone affordable to the grand majority of urban residents.[3]

What we commonly understand as neoliberalism is not some social order or political rationality immune to change itself. In my own research, my goal is to understand how particular places and projects contributed to the making of neoliberal government and globalization, and how they might serve as laboratories or models for other places. In the analysis of this relational geography, places such as Casablanca and Rabat are of course not starting points but nodes of connection in the global flow of ideas, methods and struggles that have made our neoliberal social order into what it is today.

Accordingly, the study of the politics involved should take into account two important dimensions. The first dimension is both spatial and relational. The production of urban space involves many different actors coming from different places outside the city itself, while the power relations articulated through the urban process cannot be situated exclusively within a national political context. In other words, neoliberal urban projects are global enterprises and involve all kinds of actors, both foreign and domestic, that influence and even control decision-making processes. As mentioned above, in the case of Morocco, Gulf capital in particular is playing an increasing political role over the past decade in the reshaping of the urban environment.

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The second dimension is institutional. More precisely, it concerns the role of the state. The common misconception that increasing globalization leads to a retreat or a decline of the state, both in the West as in the rest of the world, has been refuted for a long time now by a great number of critical scholars coming from a wide range of disciplines. What we observe today is not so much a crisis of the state, but rather a radical transformation of its modes of intervention. State power has been absolutely vital in the remodeling of the city. More specifically, mega-projects have been linked to the creation of specialized state agencies and exceptional zones

of sovereignty that make government manifest itself differently across space and establish exclusive or privileged connections to other political actors, mostly private investors.

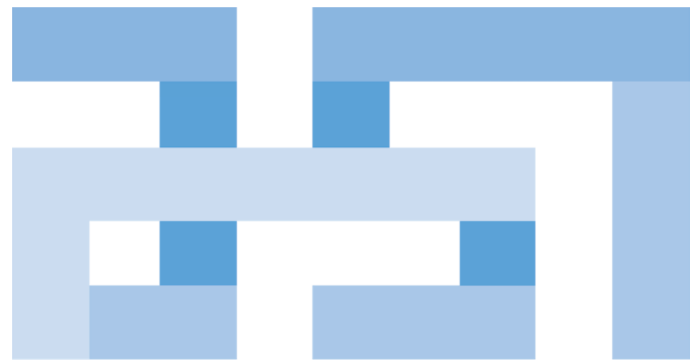
To conclude, understanding the contemporary politics of neoliberal globalization through the eyes of mega-projects is not an attempt to redefine the local and its relationship vis-à-vis the global, but rather to localize a phenomenon we usually ascribe to the global. It represents the local production of globalization, while at the same time drawing new social, economic, and spatial boundaries between ordinary citizens on the one hand, and political elites, foreign investors, and global consumers on the other hand. The nature of contemporary politics in Morocco is hidden within the relational complexes that produce those urban spaces. They have given rise to new forms of government, new forms of control and domination and have also, of course, contributed to the creation of the context in which new forms of social protest emerged over the past few years.

[This article is a revised version of a piece that originally appeared in the Cairo Observer publication *Logics of Place in the Middle East Today*, released in March 2015 in Beirut and Cairo.]

[1] Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 165.

[2] Clement Henry and Robert Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 223. Italics added.

[3] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 152, 190.



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