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# The Political Ecology of Water Justice: A Case Study of Tripoli, Lebanon

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Master Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies in partial

fulfilment of the requirements for

Masters of Environmental Studies in Geography

Wilfrid Laurier University, 2017

# Acknowledgements

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Two years ago when I first embarked on this research, I had no idea how I'd storm through what felt like the biggest project of my life. Yet time proved once again that it always manages to fly by, much faster than I could ever grasp. It's been an eye-opening journey, one enveloped with uncertainties yet rich with beautiful moments. I shall look back at this chapter of my life with longing.

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# Abstract

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Despite the continuous efforts of the international community to address water scarcity, millions of people continue to lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation services. Water problems are often explained as natural phenomena or the result of technical failures, overlooking the fact that in many cases, water crises are those of socio-political inequalities rather than of scarcity. Examining water inequities, as political ecologists maintain, requires paying attention to the underlying power structures that perpetuate those injustices, and the agency available to people. My case study, located in Tripoli, Lebanon, attempts to understand those dynamics, specifically in relation to the role of civil society in enacting mass mobilizations around water issues. The latter was clearly lacking in the context of not only Tripoli but also on a national level. The Lebanese experience shows that the possibility of mobilizing for water equity does not solely depend on the prevalence of injustices, but is determined by other factors. This also underscores the possibility that hydrosocial agency doesn't just manifest through political claims for water justice such as mass mobilizations. Other invisible struggles must not be forgotten when water inequities are the object of interest. Political ecologists, therefore, need to pay closer attention to how other forms of agency operate in the absence of social mobilization, for such agency is certainly social and ecological, and forms part of the fabric of power relations. If this thesis only scratched the surface of such practices, I would put them foremost on the future research agenda for understanding hydrosocial relations in Lebanon.

## Table of Contents

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

<b>1</b>	<b>Research Problem</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Research Objectives</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1	<i>The Nature of Water</i>	10
3.2	<i>Towards a Political Ecology of Water Justice</i>	12
3.3	<i>Water security</i>	13
3.4	<i>Governance</i>	16
3.5	<i>The Potential and Limitations of the Right to Water</i>	17
<b>4</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1	<i>Literature Review</i>	20
4.1.1	<i>Ethnographic Approach</i>	20
4.1.2	<i>In-depth Interviews</i>	20
4.1.3	<i>Non-participant Observation</i>	21
4.1.4	<i>Discourse Analysis</i>	21
4.2	<i>Data Collection and Analysis</i>	23
4.2.1	<i>Interviews</i>	23
4.2.2	<i>Limitations</i>	28

### **Chapter II: Context of Tripoli, Lebanon**

<b>1</b>	<b>Historical and Political Context</b>	<b>30</b>
1.1	<i>Emergence of modern Tripoli</i>	30
1.2	<i>French Colonialism and the Birth of Greater Lebanon</i>	31
1.3	<i>Post-independence</i>	32
<b>2</b>	<b>Socio-economic conditions</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1	<i>Social makeup</i>	32
2.2	<i>Economy</i>	33
2.3	<i>Living Conditions</i>	34
2.4	<i>Repercussions of the Syrian crisis</i>	35
2.4.1	<i>Economic impacts</i>	35
2.4.2	<i>Political impact</i>	36
2.5	<i>Marginalization</i>	36

### **Chapter III: The Right to Water**

<b>1</b>	<b>Legal Context of The Right to Water</b>	<b>39</b>
1.1	<i>Historical Perspective</i>	39
1.2	<i>Contemporary Laws</i>	40
1.2.1	<i>Code de L'eau</i>	41
<b>2</b>	<b>Governance Scheme of the Water Sector</b>	<b>42</b>
2.1	<i>A Shift Towards a Neoliberalized Water Sector</i>	45
2.2	<i>Involvement of the Private Sector</i>	46
<b>3</b>	<b>Current State of The Right to Water in Tripoli</b>	<b>49</b>
3.1	<i>Water Availability and Accessibility</i>	51

3.2	<i>Water Demand and Consumption Patterns</i>	54
3.3	<i>Condition of the Water Infrastructure</i>	55
3.4	<i>Water Quality</i>	56
3.5	<i>Water Affordability</i>	57
3.6	<i>Injustice for Low-income Populations</i>	59
3.7	<i>Neighbourhoods Suffering from Water shortage – Coping Strategies</i>	60
<b>4</b>	<b>The Right to Water: Findings and Analysis</b>	<b>62</b>
4.1	<i>Perspectives on the ‘Right to Water’</i>	62
4.2	<i>Discourse of Water Scarcity, Technical Solutions and Privatization</i>	67
4.3	<i>Public Engagement and the Right to Participate in Policymaking</i>	69
4.3.1	Perspective of Government Officials and Water Professionals	71
4.3.2	Perspective of NGOs and Activists	72
4.3.3	Friends of Water Association	74
<b>Chapter IV: Social Agency</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Historical Context: Overview of Arab Social Movements</b>	<b>80</b>
2.1	<i>Origins and Evolution of Civil Society in the Arab World</i>	80
2.2	<i>Re-emergence of Arab Civil Society</i>	82
2.2.1	Arab Civil Society and Democracy	84
<b>3</b>	<b>Case Study: Tripoli, Lebanon</b>	<b>85</b>
3.1	<i>Overview of Advocacy Networks and Campaigns</i>	86
3.1.1	Advocacy for Public Spaces	86
3.1.2	Response to the Waste Crisis	87
3.2	<i>Explanations for the lack of mobilizations around water justice</i>	88
3.2.1	Complexity of the Water Sector	89
3.2.2	Invisibility of Water Injustices	90
3.2.3	Clientelist networks	91
3.2.4	Weak Civil Society – Weak Mobilization Base	92
3.2.5	Passivity and Forced Adaptation	95
<b>Chapter V: Concluding Remarks</b>		
4.1	<i>Obstacles and Challenges to Social Mobilization</i>	99
4.2	<i>Future Opportunities and Strategies for CSOs</i>	102
4.3	<i>From Water Justice to Hydrosocial Agency</i>	103
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>106</b>
<b>Appendix A – Water Sector Actors</b>		<b>116</b>
<b>Appendix B – Water Laws and Regulations</b>		<b>118</b>
<b>Appendix C – NGOs and Advocacy Networks</b>		<b>119</b>
<b>Appendix D – Advocacy Campaigns</b>		<b>126</b>
<b>Appendix E – Reflexivity</b>		<b>134</b>

# Introduction

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*“Until justice rolls down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”*

– Martin Luther King

## 1 Research Problem

Water is life, and its vitality for social wellbeing, dignity, justice, and mere existence is irreplaceable. Nevertheless, and despite the continuous efforts of the international community to address water scarcity, millions of people continue to lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation services (Sadoff et al., 2015; World Bank, 2015). In the Middle East specifically, 75% of the population is identified as living under the water scarcity level, defined as 1000 m<sup>3</sup>/year, which is further exacerbated given the violent conflicts the region is currently experiencing (UNESCO, 2015). Lebanon is no exception as it is believed to be facing a water crisis that is exacerbated by climate change (World Bank, 2012), and the recent influx of Syrian refugees (ACTED, 2012). Figure 1 demonstrates a map of Lebanon.



Figure 1: Map of Lebanon (Source: ArcGIS Online)

## 2 Research Objectives

There is a need to uncover and challenge the underlying socio-economic and political power relations that continue to shape and produce inequitable hydrosocial configurations. The main objective of my research is to examine the role of civil society organizations in promoting water justice, understood here not only as a more equitable distribution of water resources, but also as a more democratic approach to water policy. In turn, the research also aims to characterize the obstacles that may prevent change towards greater levels of water justice. Broadly speaking, the research is informed by



the conceptual framework provided by political ecology, combining concerns for political economic power relations with other dimensions such as the role of knowledge and discourse in shaping debates and limiting democratic access to policy decisions.

Tripoli is the second largest urban centre in Lebanon and one where poverty levels reach as high as 57% (Nehmeh, 2010). Recognizing that poverty exacerbates people's experience of social and environmental injustices, Tripoli represents a relevant case study for the research topic at hand. Additionally, Lebanon has undergone institutional transformations that align with the neoliberal agenda (Makarem, 2015), and is believed to be "the closest [of developing countries in the region] to fulfilling the prescription of the mainstream development discourse" (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014, p. 19). A neoliberal agenda that values free Market and economic growth above all else was seen as capable of transcending violent conflicts that became most vivid during the civil war (Baumann, 2012). New policies have opened the way for the private sector to become increasingly involved in water services in Tripoli. This is occurring in response to failures in the public system of water treatment and delivery, but also in a context where the human right to water is increasingly touted by global organizations, transnational corporations and political actors at various scales. In light of these circumstances, I set out to investigate what the 'right to water' means and to what extent civil society is involved in grassroots mobilization to address prevalent water injustices. The overarching research focus on water justice and civil society organizations translates into these specific questions for the case study:

1. Is the 'right to water' being invoked in relation to water provision for marginalized neighbourhoods in Tripoli, and what kinds of water policy agendas are promoted within this discursive frame?
2. To what extent are civil society organizations active in advocating for water justice, and what are the nature of the barriers that they encounter as they seek to influence policy debates?
3. Are civil society organizations effective at building capacity for ordinary citizens to become engaged in public debates over water policy?

In the early stages of research I found that, aside from occasional sparse voices, there is no evidence of social movements in relation to water advocacy in Tripoli. This led me to focus greater attention on two related questions:

4. How can we explain the lack of mobilization around water issues, given the deteriorated state of water services in Tripoli in particular and Lebanon in general?
5. Given the lack of social mobilization around water justice, what other kinds of agency are available to citizens, especially those in marginalized neighbourhoods, as they deal with water scarcity?

The lack of local social movements in Tripoli, along with the relatively modest influence of the civil society landscape there, also led me to expand some of my research activities to Beirut in order to capture a broader picture of the opportunities and constraints shaping citizen engagement with water issues in the country.

The rest of this introductory chapter presents a literature review of how water problems are explained from the perspective of mainstream neoliberal worldview vs. that of political ecology. I then describe the methodology and fieldwork procedures. The rest of the thesis falls into three main chapters. Chapter II provides a brief overview of Tripoli's historical, political, and social context. Chapter III explores water issues within Tripoli, especially focusing on the nature of public discourse around the 'right to water' and what it means from the perspectives of research participants. Finally, chapter IV offers explanations for the lack of mass mobilization around water injustices, and illuminates the largely invisible ways in which citizens cope with water injustices.

### 3 Literature Review

#### 3.1 The Nature of Water

There is a universal acknowledgement of, and efforts to address, the current threats and scarcities that water resources are under, yet the very nature of water is differently perceived, and even contested, across different fields of knowledge (Melo Zurita et al., 2015). Within the mainstream international discourse, water is valued for its importance in realizing social equity, economic growth, and ecosystem integrity – the three pillars of sustainable development as enshrined in the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The United Nations, for example, defines water as “an essential primary natural resource upon which nearly *all* social and economic activities and ecosystem functions depend” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 9). Along the same lines, the World Water Council describes water as a public *good* and economic *resource* vital in generating benefits, and a social resource important for wellbeing (WWC, 2015). Clearly, water according to the hegemonic worldview is considered a *resource* and a

wealth-generating good that can be managed and controlled with appropriate *technical* solutions realized through *financial* investments to achieve global sustainable development.

Echoes of this discourse can be found in the news, where the value of water in promoting socio-economic growth is emphasized (McCarthy, 2015), and water itself is perceived as a commodity that invites the intervention of the private sector (McKenna, 2015). Indeed, Peter Barbeck-Letmathe, the chairman of Nestlé, has called for collaboration with the private sector (Mathiesen, 2016) to achieve the intended water goals as framed in the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda: “Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” (United Nations, 2015b, p. 20). The hegemonic conceptualization embodies a neoliberal orientation to water issues as characterized by Karen Bakker (2005), who warns that such a worldview promotes the privatization of water, which consequently leads to further marginalization of the poor and the reinforcement of pre-existing inequalities (Castro, 2008).

While water according to the neoliberal worldview is identified as a commodity, there are other ways of viewing water and water security. For instance, a historical materialist approach suggests that material inequalities, i.e. water injustices, lie in political and economic processes. Water insecurity then needs to be understood as a result of human-nature dynamics, including the social relations of production (Loftus, 2015). From the perspective of historical materialism, water is perceived “as a combined physical and social process, as a hybridized socio-natural flow that fuses together nature and society” (Swyngedouw, 2009, p. 56). This relation between water and

society is embodied in certain hydrosocial configurations that are produced through political, economic, physical, cultural, and social processes (Swyngedouw, 2009). To highlight the role of economic and political dominance in affecting water circulation, water activist Robert Kennedy once remarked: “Water no longer flows downhill. It flows towards money” (Quoted in Swyngedouw, 2009, p. 56).

Taking a historical materialist approach as its underlying theoretical basis, the rest of the literature review provides an overview of the concepts of water security, water governance, and the right to water. Perspectives from the field of political ecology are particularly central to arriving at a final characterization of water justice, which in turn informs my study.

### **3.2 Towards a Political Ecology of Water Justice**

With its roots in political economy, political ecology further expands to study human-nature relations under the influence of power, which plays a significant role in shaping, politicizing, and constructing those relationships (Biersack, 2006; Heynen, Kaika, & Swyngedouw, 2006; Peet, Robbins, & Watts, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2009). Hence, political ecology aims to investigate the underlying causes of manifest socio-economic and environmental inequalities.

As demonstrated earlier, vulnerable populations have, and will continue to have, less access to adequate water and sanitation services as an outcome of the contemporary global water crisis, which is only expected to intensify in the foreseeable future (World Bank, 2015). A political ecology approach helps in investigating *why* the poor have less access, and *how* incidents of water injustice persist even in cases where access is apparently improved (Truelove, 2011).

Political ecologists concur that the right to water should necessitate the right to participate in shaping and/or reshaping the hydrosocial landscape (Boelens, 2014; Castro, 2007; Linton, 2012; Loftus, 2015; Melo Zurita et al., 2015; Swyngedouw, 2009). In pursuit of more equitable hydrosocial landscapes, political ecology is essential in understanding processes that underlie water injustices because a political ecology of water justice helps in understanding how different political, economic, social, and cultural power relations intertwine to produce and reproduce prevailing conditions of inequalities. Bringing this perspective to the fore can help us see some of the key limitations in the dominant discourses around water security, water governance and the right to water.

### **3.3 Water security**

“Ours is a world in which ‘thirsty agriculture’ and ‘thirsty energy’ compete with the needs of ‘thirsty cities’”; this is how the senior director of the World Bank’s Global Water Practice (GP) described water scarcity, a phenomenon characterized by the increased “stress” on water resources, and hence the lack of access to adequate water quantity and quality (World Bank, 2015). Some of the identified causes of water stress include pollution of freshwater bodies, rising demands of different sectors, rapid population growth, unsustainable consumption rates, and an increase in the likelihood and magnitude of climate disasters such as floods and droughts (OECD, 2013; Sadoff et al., 2015; World Bank, 2015; WWC, 2015; WWF, 2016). Several sources point to the associated economic, social, and physical risks, some of which have already started to materialize, and are predicted to affect a large proportion of the world’s population –

mainly the poorest – by 2050 (McCarthy, 2015; OECD, 2013; Sadoff et al., 2015; World Bank, 2015; WWF, 2016).

In the face of increasing water stress around the world, the notion of water security has become central to global dialogue and cooperation to address the issue. Water security is defined as the ability of populations to access adequate quantity and quality of water necessary for maintaining healthy livelihoods, ecosystems, and economies within a politically stable atmosphere (UN-Water, 2013). Ultimately, improved water security is closely linked to improved human security, the latter defined by Barnett and O'Brien (2013) “as a condition in which people and communities have the capacity to respond to threats to their basic needs and rights, so that they can live with dignity” (p. 375).

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a number of international initiatives have sought to promote water security, the first being the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which aimed to “halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation” (United Nations, 2015a, p. 58). Shortly afterwards, the decade of 2005 to 2015 was declared by the United Nations General Assembly as the ‘Water for Life Decade’ to further stress the importance of universalizing water services (UNO-IDFA, 2015). Other initiatives include the Global Water Partnership’s (GWP) strategy 2009-2013 and that of the World Water Council (WWC) 2016-2018, both of which call for universalizing water security. Despite the significant increase in the proportion of population now using enhanced water and sanitation services, “[m]ost of developing countries remain water insecure” as millions still lack access to basic water and sanitation (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2015;

WWF, 2016). Hence, the goal of water security remains a priority post 2015 as part of the new SDGs agenda, which envisions a world in which water becomes available for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2015).

These international initiatives arguably fall short in addressing the root causes of water insecurity. The dominant approaches to water issues in the international community seem to attribute the contemporary water crisis to scarcity in physical resources, a problem better addressed through improving the efficiency of water services, increasing technical and financial capacity, mitigating water-related risks (OECD, 2013; Sadoff et al., 2015), and enhanced water management and governance (OECD, 2013; Sadoff et al., 2015; World Bank, 2015). This perspective overlooks the broader socio-economic forces provoking water scarcity, and hence fails to provide lasting solutions. Critics of this approach argue that what we need is not just water security, but also water justice.

At the core of the global water crisis, therefore, lie socio-economic inequalities. Political ecologists argue that water scarcity is not necessarily the outcome of environmental phenomena; rather, it is very much the result of economic and political power differentials that determine who has access to and control of water resources (Swyngedouw, 2009; Mascarenhas, 2012). Mascarenhas (2012) also attributes water scarcity to poverty and injustice as he observes: “power, poverty, and inequality are at the heart of today’s water crisis” (p. 52). As access to water, or lack thereof, remains shaped by gender, race, religion, and social status (UNO-IDFA, 2015), vulnerable populations will continue to bear the greatest burden of water scarcity until further



opportunities of empowerment materialize (for more information about regions and populations most susceptible to water insecurity, see Sadoff et al., 2015).

### 3.4 Governance

Unequal socio-economic power that results in water scarcity can take the form a governance scheme that privileges some and marginalizes others. To some degree, such failures are recognized in mainstream approaches to water security, the prevalent water crisis being described as largely a “crisis of governance” (WWAP, 2006, p. 49). In other words, the potential of water in generating prosperity is undermined given the current inadequate, in many cases fragmented and undemocratic, governance framework, which – if enhanced – can lead to improved service delivery (World Bank, 2015; WWAP, 2006, 2015). Additionally, governance is believed to be essential in achieving integrated water resources management (IWRM) and limiting pollution of freshwater systems (World Bank, 2015; WWAP, 2006), hence the targeting of water governance in the SDGs (United Nations, 2015b). An effective water governance framework, therefore, is seen to be one that leads to reaping maximum socio-economic benefits as part of achieving greater global water security.

On the other hand, many scholars call attention to the shortcomings in mainstream treatment of water governance. Castro (2007), for instance, notes that within international institutional discourse, governance is deemed a mere *instrument* for achieving specific social and economic goals; this, he argues, risks de-politicizing and neutralizing water management by rendering the process purely technical. Instead, governance should be looked at as a *process* that recognizes the role of social relations (Castro, 2007). Castro further emphasizes the importance of reorienting water

governance towards a more democratic approach that stems from concerns related to sustainability and social justice rather than being reduced to technical fixes. This notion of 'water democracy' is defined by Bakker (2007) as "decentralized, community-based, democratic water management in which water conservation is politically, socio-economically and culturally inspired rather than economically motivated" (p. 442).

While the mainstream worldview promotes a top-down approach to water governance, where the role of the *market* remains vital, a democratic framework as put forth by political ecologists embodies a grassroots approach that considers water first and foremost a public good. Achieving a collective water democracy where the overall societal interests are respected is believed to reduce the dire consequences of human-made water scarcities.

### 3.5 The Potential and Limitations of the Right to Water

Around the turn of the century, global movements for water democracy became fixated on the human right to water as a key lever for more just and inclusive water governance schemes. In many cases, especially in Latin America, social mobilizations at the grassroots level succeeded in achieving legal recognition of the right to water (Mottiar, 2011; Naidoo, Davidson-Hardin, & Harden, 2007; Perera, 2012; Sultana & Loftus, 2012), though implementing this right proves to be a process that is at best protracted. In response to these movements, the right to water was enshrined in the constitutions of a number of Latin American countries before it obtained global legal recognition alongside other human rights. First, the UN General Assembly recognized "the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights" in its 2010 resolutions (A/RES/64/292, 2010).

Later during the same year, the right to safe drinking water and sanitation was incorporated in the Human Rights Council resolutions as well (A/HRC/RES/15/9, 2010).

Consequent to the growing involvement of local and global water justice activists in the 'right to water' movement, scholars have cautioned that the 'rights' approach can be limiting (Bakker, 2007; Castro, 2008; Linton, 2012; Sultana & Loftus, 2012). Using the 'right to water' as a rallying cry by opponents of privatization overlooks the fact that the term is not incompatible with the delivery of water services by private companies, the strategies of which have often aggravated pre-existing injustices (Bakker, 2007; Castro, 2008). Furthermore, the 'right to water' term bears the risk of being reduced to the right to fixed quantities of water as opposed to signifying a broader notion of rights that are associated with social equity and democratic participation in water-related decisions (Bakker, 2005; Linton, 2012; Sultana & Loftus, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2009). According to Linton (2012), the hegemonic notion of the 'right to water' ignores "the social nature of humanity as well as the processual nature of water" (p. 48). Therefore, alternate terms such as the 'commons' (Bakker, 2007; Shiva, 2002), 'economies of water,' 'cultures of water' (Linton, 2012) and 'water democracies' (Castro, 2007) have been suggested to refer to hydrosocial relationships that are democratic and inclusive, where water is a public good governed by communities. In sum, the 'right to water' notion could be reductionist, vague, and one that doesn't necessarily entail water justice.

Despite the problematic nature of the 'right to water,' Sultana and Loftus (2012) argue that it can still be a powerful notion vis-à-vis other alternative terms. Legal recognition of the right to water, they argue, can be effective in holding authorities accountable, thus empowering marginalized communities and mobilizing social

movements as demonstrated by water struggles in Bolivia, Uruguay, and Colombia (Perera, 2012). Future debates should ensure that the 'right to water' moves beyond the limitation of fixed quantities towards establishing water democracies where citizen participation in decision-making is a fundamental right (Linton, 2012; Sultana & Loftus, 2012). Although legal and political recognition of the right to water continues to be relevant, for the purpose of this thesis the notion of water justice offers a more appropriate framework for addressing these issues and overcoming the limitations of the former term.

## **4 Methodology**

For my case study, I adopted two major methodological approaches: ethnography and discourse analysis. The ethnographic approach involved in-depth semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Data collected by means of the indicated methods, in addition to reviewing various kinds of physical and digital documents, informed the discourse analysis conducted afterwards. The following sections provide a brief overview of the selected methods and field procedures.

Ethics clearance was obtained in May 2016, prior to the commencement of fieldwork and recruitment of participants. To ensure the privacy and wellbeing of participants, I used pseudonyms, coded field notes, restricted access to data, and kept electronic notes on a laptop protected by a password. Potential risks to participants were deemed minimal. All electronic and physical data will be disposed of as indicated in the ethics contract post the completion of the project, anticipated to take place in August 2017.

## 4.1 Literature Review

### 4.1.1 Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography as a methodology is common within the social sciences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Hörschelmann & Stenning, 2008; Wall, 2014) due to its interdisciplinarity and appropriateness for exploring “various kinds of social practices, performances, or lived practices” (Scholl, Lahr-kurten, & Redepenning, 2016, p. 58). Although traditionally time intensive (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), ethnographic research in its contemporary adaptations is often employed without extended periods of time in the field (Wall, 2014), thus being appropriate for short-term qualitative research. One such variation is *focused ethnography*, which is characterized by a specific research question, short-term fieldwork, and intensive data collection (Wall, 2014). Within an urban setting, this data is usually collected through interviews and non-participant observation (Jackson, 1985). Given both my familiarity with the context of the selected case study and my interest in establishing profound understanding, focused ethnography offers an appropriate methodology for intensively collecting data over the two-month duration of my fieldwork.

### 4.1.2 In-depth Interviews

The purpose of interviews is to elicit responses and explore beliefs and motivations through verbal exchange with the subjects of research (Dunn, 2005). Interviews can be powerful in capturing varying perceptions and opinions about complex issues, empowering otherwise marginalized voices, and uncovering meanings beyond the scope of other methods, such as non-participant observation or surveys (Dunn, 2005). According to Dunn (2005), “[i]nterviews are an excellent method of gaining access to

information about events, opinions, and experiences” (p. 80). Furthermore, valuable insights can be gained by paying attention to “not just *what* people tell you, but also *how* they tell it” (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 43, emphasis in original). This can be especially informative for the discourse analysis approach used to analyze important aspects of the data.

#### **4.1.3 Non-participant Observation**

On their own, interviews are insufficient in developing a profound understanding of the lived experiences of the research participants and the meanings they associate with a certain place – hence the need for a less formalized method of interaction between the researcher and participants (Bell, 2013; Kearns, 2005). Moreover, data collected through non-participant observation complements interviews such that it allows for a better understanding of the social, political, and cultural context in which interviews take place (Bell, 2013).

My research seeks to understand people’s perceptions and experiences, and the particular discourses that shape their social realities related to water. Thus, it is important to go beyond what has been said or written by looking also for silences, which can be achieved through observing the social dynamics and contexts within which such interactions take place. During my fieldwork, I observed dynamics in places such as NGO offices, public spaces, and communities where water problems are manifest.

#### **4.1.4 Discourse Analysis**

Foucault’s theories about the role that language and knowledge production play in shaping people’s realities dominate the discourse analysis methodology (Feindt & Oels, 2005; Waitt, 2005). According to Foucault, discourse is the sum of statements produced

through the intertwining of power and knowledge to determine what beliefs are taken to represent the 'truth', hence, shaping people's practices and realities (Feindt & Oels, 2005; Waitt, 2005). Discourse, therefore, is a power mechanism that has the potential not only to construct unjust realities, but also to have those realities viewed as inevitable or even justified (Waitt, 2005). Consequently, the goal of discourse analysis is to "understand how particular ideas are privileged as 'truth'" (Waitt, 2005, p. 168), usually through analyzing both textual and spoken material (Johnston, 2002). In other words, the goal of discourse analysis is to understand what and why certain statements circulate more widely than others, what beliefs are shaped by these statements, what realities are constructed by those beliefs, and the power mechanisms manipulating the whole process (Waitt, 2005).

Investigating discursive structures that produce and maintain inequalities is, therefore, crucial to research with justice inclinations. Discourse analysis offers a valuable vehicle for this purpose given that:

Environmental justice scholarship [needs] to actively work at its connections to activism and its engagement with those at the sharp end of injustice, however it is understood, and to bring theory to bear in meaningful ways into praxis and diverse forms of public engagement (Holifield et al. cited in, Schlosberg, 2013, p. 50).

In sum, discourse analysis intersects with environmental justice in challenging oppressive power structures (Johnston, 2002; Stanley, 2009), which is central to my research. Sources typically analyzed include "manifestos, records of debates at meetings, actions of political demonstrators, newspaper articles, slogans, speeches,

posters, satirical prints, statutes of associations, pamphlets, and so on' of a time, a place, and a people" (Johnston, 2002, p. 67).

## **4.2 Data Collection and Analysis**

For my study, I reviewed international reports, scholarly literature, a draft of Lebanese Code de L'eau,<sup>1</sup> governmental documents, informative brochures distributed by Tripoli's water office, Lebanese NGO and private sector documents, and Lebanese media material related to the discourse about water in general and the 'right to water' in particular. Understanding the contradicting notions of the 'right to water' among citizens, government officials, private sector representatives, activists, and civil society actors constitutes the basis for the discourse analysis of this study. Identifying the ongoing debate around the 'right to water' in Lebanon helps in understanding what the term means for different actors, how it is being used, and to what end.

The majority of the materials indicated above were accessible in Arabic, the official language of the state. Aside from a few scholarly articles that were only available in French, I encountered no limitations related to language. Many sources were obtained through the Laurier Library, but others were only available from sources that I contacted while in the field. A few of the research participants made reference to documents that I was unable to access.

### **4.2.1 Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with two categories of informants: (a) experts such as NGO leaders, activists, academic researchers, representatives from the private sector, and policy makers; and (b) residents of an urban neighbourhood. Interviews with experts

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<sup>1</sup> A proposed law that aims to encapsulate all currently-scattered water laws in Lebanon.



sought to elicit perceptions and conceptualizations of the 'right to water' and 'water justice' notions, the extent to which these concepts influence the work of civil society, barriers that impede achieving water equity, and ways to increase the participation of marginalized communities in designing solutions to the prevailing water crisis. On the other hand, interviews with ordinary residents aimed to understand the coping mechanisms and forms of agency available to them, that is, the ways in which communities experience and respond to water injustices within the socio-economic structure in place. I was not able to examine those coping strategies in much detail due to the limited number of citizen-interviews I could secure. Yet I present in the coming chapters information on social agency, which I gathered from other sources in an attempt to achieve an adequate understanding of the overall situation of water access within Tripoli. The limited data I acquired in that regard led me to modify my approach to the analysis phase by focusing less on hydrosocial agency and more on the dynamics of civil society as I sought explanations to the lack of mass mobilizations around water problems.

### **Participant Recruitment**

Fieldwork took place over the course of two months. I corresponded with several local researchers before going into the field in order to gain insights about potential research participants and ideas about the lines of questioning I hoped to pursue. Those researchers were the first point of contact upon my arrival into the field. Purposeful, snowball sampling was used to recruit expert informant participants in order to ensure the relevance of the interviewees' input to the study. Residents, on the other hand, were

randomly selected based on (a) the socio-economic condition of their neighbourhoods, and (b) availability. No reimbursement was provided.

### Sample and Participant Profiles

I conducted a total of 23 interviews, of which 20 were with expert informants and 3 with residents. The expert informant interviews could be further broken down into 3 with government officials, 4 with academic researchers, one interview with 3 representatives of the corporate sector, and 10 with activists and/or NGO representatives. The interviewees were selected based on their expertise in the water sector, their involvement in water-related initiatives, or – more broadly – their involvement in advocacy campaigns that indirectly relate to the concept of water justice. Participants varied in age and gender; 8 were females and 15 males, all of them above 18 years old. Table 1 below provides a brief overview of the research participants. Only participants who consented to have their real names used have been identified using full names.

**Table 1: Participant Profiles**

Category	Participant Identification	Occupation
Academics	Christèle Allès	Researcher at Université de Nantes, Institut de Géographie et d'Aménagement Régional de L'Un
	Karim-Phillip Eid-Sabbagh	PhD, academic researcher specializing in development studies & political economy. Previously at the Asfari Institute at the AUB
	Jalal Halawani	Head of the Department of Health and Environment, Lebanese University
	Rania Masri	Associate director at the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship, American University of Beirut (AUB)
Civil Society Representatives	Hosn Khalaf	Social activist and previous member of the Friends of Water Association (FWA), Tripoli
	K.S.	Previous member of the FWA, Tripoli
	Samer Annous	Academic, independent activist, and leader of the Civic Mobilization Network in Tripoli

	Nariman Shamaa	Activist, president of Donia for Sustainable Development, and president of the Committee for Monitoring Tripoli's Projects
	Ali Darwish	Activist, researcher, & president of Green Line NGO, based in Beirut
	Nasser Nasrallah	President of Ibrahim Abd Al-Al Foundation, based in Beirut
	A.A.	Representative of Nahnoo, based in Beirut
	Chadi Nachabe	President of Utopia. Politician & municipal councillor
	Shafik AbdulRahman	Program manager at Utopia, Tripoli
	Omar Asaad	Representative of Utopia, Tripoli
Corporate Sector Representatives	George Akl	Deputy Chief of Party at Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), Lebanon Water Project (LWP), USAID Contractor <sup>2</sup>
	Salah Saliba	USAID Private Sector Engagement Team Lead at DAI LWP, USAID Contractor
	Bassam Jaber	Water expert. Consultant for DAI LWP, USAID Contractor. Former Director of Exploitation, Ministry of Energy and Water
Government Officials	Maher Tahsaldar	Head of the Department of Accountancy, North Lebanon Water Establishment (WE). Instructor at the College of Business Administration, Lebanese University
	D.S.	Employee in the North Lebanon WE
	Ziad Hayek	Secretary General of the Higher Council for Privatization of the Republic of Lebanon
Citizens	Citizens 1; 2; 3	Two housewives, one not determined

While most interviewees agreed to have their interviews recorded, a few refused, mainly due to workplace policies that prohibit recordings or for anonymity concerns. Interviews with expert informants lasted for an average of 45 to 60 minutes each, while those with residents were significantly shorter, each about 10 minutes long. The majority of expert informant interviews were one-on-one, but a few were conducted with 2 or 3 other individuals at the same time (at the request of participants). I adopted a semi-structured approach to ensure that the questions I originally set out to investigate

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<sup>2</sup> The views of Akl, Saliba, and Jaber are their own and do not represent those of USAID.

were addressed, while allowing for flexibility in incorporating emerging themes not previously identified. A semi-structured approach also helped reduce formality and establish rapport with informants (Dunn, 2005).

All 3 residents lived in what would be considered marginalized neighbourhoods in Tripoli. I met with 2 of them in their area of residence following my visit to the *Hawuz*, a public water fountain. There, I observed residents filling their water tanks from the public fountain and approached a few. One of the bystanders was affiliated with a local familial-based NGO, and he liaised with the community to secure the 2 meetings mentioned. The interviews were marked by the non-stop passage of bystanders and interrupted by occasional exchanges with neighbours. I met with the third citizen in the office of one of the NGOs that works in the resident's neighbourhood.<sup>3</sup>

Ten of the expert informant interviewees were based in Tripoli, and the rest in Beirut. Even though my intention was to focus on Tripoli, I had to expand my area of investigation to Beirut for a number of reasons. First, the centralized nature of policy-making means that certain important decision-making happens in the capital. Second, Beirut is the most vital urban centre, where much of urban activities and development projects take place. It hosts a variety of NGOs that work on a diverse range of causes throughout Lebanon. Third, the water sector in Beirut suffers from major problems; certain areas have witnessed water rationing lasting for a period of four consecutive weeks in 2016. This means that Beirut is a fertile ground for the emergence of social mobilizations around water. Finally, Beirut has recently witnessed a broad-based social

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<sup>3</sup> The NGO turned down my request to meet in the citizen's area of residence lest my presence might lead others in the neighbourhood to mistakenly expect potential development projects.

movement in response to the waste crisis (see Chapter IV), where no such examples were available in Tripoli.

Data collected from interviews was based on accurate and comprehensive field notes that I diligently typed up right after each session, referring to the recordings (where available) to jog my memory for details. Four interviews were transcribed verbatim. During the composition of field notes and the transcription phase, emerging themes were directly noted in a separate document. After the preliminary themes had been identified, data collected from the interviews was thematically categorized and added to this document. The thematic categories formed the basis for structuring the chapters and subsections of the thesis.

#### **4.2.2 Limitations**

Originally, I had intended to interview a larger number of ordinary citizens residing in marginalized areas. This, however, was not feasible due to the lack of personal connections, potential security risks in some cases, and the time factor. The two months period of fieldwork proved inadequate for establishing meaningful relationships that would have facilitated accessing certain segments of the population. While the data collected from the 3 interviews with householders is of limited utility, it does point to the necessity of further research in this direction. Furthermore, I tried to compensate for this shortfall through non-participant observation and through putting together pieces of information collected during interviews with participants from other categories. Indeed, interviews with water experts and NGO representatives provided information – based on first-hand experiences and long-term expertise – about how households meet their needs of water. The overall picture of water access in Tripoli that I have attempted to

construct in Chapter III, while not based on intensive personal interviews with citizens, is based on multiple sources of information (e.g. governmental publications, international reports, scholarly research, and interviews with experts and NGO representatives), which I often found to be in congruence.

# Chapter II: Context of Tripoli, Lebanon

## 1 Historical and Political Context

Tripoli (see Figure 2), the second largest city in Lebanon, sits on the Mediterranean Sea 85 km northeast of Beirut. Since its foundation in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE by the Phoenicians,<sup>4</sup> Tripoli has seen the rise and fall of several empires including the Mamluks, Crusaders, Romans, Ottomans, and more recently the French.



Figure 2: Map of Tripoli (Source: ArcGIS Online)

### 1.1 Emergence of modern Tripoli

Modern Tripoli emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the Ottoman Empire's rule over what is now called the Middle East (Einav, 2015). Due to its strategic location and topography,

<sup>4</sup> Various speculations about the date of the first settlement in Tripoli exist. Ginzarly and Teller (2016) suggest that Tripoli was founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

Tripoli became the main port of Syria's coast and attained distinguished status as a centre of the Ottoman Provincial administration. It emerged as an industrial and commercial site. Tripoli is believed to have been a living example of plurality, tolerance, and acceptance as different sects co-existed alongside each other in harmony (see Reilly, 2016 for an overview of historical analyses).

## **1.2 French Colonialism and the Birth of Greater Lebanon**

The period of French colonialism spelled the beginning of Tripoli's decline, starting with the birth of Greater Lebanon in 1920. During the demarcation of France's colonial territories, Tripoli was unwillingly separated from the Province of Syria and made part of the Province of Beirut, subsequently becoming part of the new state of Lebanon. The latter was not well received by Tripolitarians, "who saw themselves as an integral part of Greater Syria and not of the new state established in the spirit of the Maronite Christians and their French patrons" (Einav, 2015, p. 29). Under the new territorial arrangements, Beirut was given more importance, and as its status as an emerging cultural, political, and economic centre prospered, Tripoli's declined further. Khaled Ziade interprets this process as part of a broader trend of the retraction of the Islamic city in the face of the Western model portrayed by Beirut (Reilly, 2016). The tension between Tripoli and Beirut continued until after independence. Abd al-Ghani Imad argues that the residents of Tripoli associated themselves even more firmly with Arabism and conservative Islam as a means to express their alienation and to cultivate an identity separate from Western-spirited Beirut (Reilly, 2016). The Arab-Islamic orientation continues to characterize the identity of Tripoli to this day (Abi Samra, 2015).



### 1.3 Post-independence

Upon the end of French colonialism in 1943, subsequent political waves swept over Tripoli including Pan-Arabism (Nasserism) in the 1950s, communism, and Islamist movements. The history of Tripoli and the rest of Lebanon forever changed with the outbreak of the civil war in 1975. Tripoli became a site for active military conflicts, which left permanent damage to the pre-existing harmony and cultural ideals of acceptance and peaceful co-existence.<sup>5</sup> One fruit of the civil war was the armed dispute between two of Tripoli's poorest neighbourhoods: Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen; the violence has persisted ever since.

In 1985, Syrian troops entered Lebanon to end the civil war, thus marking the beginning of the era of direct intervention of the Syrian regime in Lebanon's internal affairs. Gade argues that the "internal solidarity" that prevailed among the residents and political leaders of Tripoli around anti-imperialism and traditional social norms ceased upon the intervention of al-Assad's regime (Gade, 2015, p. 20). The latter's direct involvement intensified clientelism such that client-patron relations between Lebanese political leaders and Syrian military leaders in Lebanon became prominent. Those with strong ties with Syrian authorities inevitably attained more clout.

## 2 Socio-economic conditions

### 2.1 Social makeup

Tripoli is the second largest urban centre in the country, with a population reaching nearly half a million. The social makeup consists of a Sunni majority, Christians, and

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<sup>5</sup> With the exception of the town of Mina, where Muslim Sunnis and Orthodox Christians refrained from engaging in sectorial conflicts during the civil war – aside from a few outlier incidents; both populations continue to live alongside each other (Touma, 2015).

Alawis. Sunnis represent 81% of the population, whereas Alawis constitute 9% (Gade, 2015). The majority of the Alawi population in Lebanon resides in the neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen. Finally, Christians, further identifying as Greek Orthodox, Maronite, Armenian, and Melkite Greek Catholic, make up 11%.<sup>6</sup> Tripoli also hosts around 70,000 Syrian refugees (Kabalan, 2016), the majority of whom gravitated towards areas of the city that are predominantly alike in religious terms (Mercy Corps, 2013).

## 2.2 Economy

Prior to Tripoli's integration into the State of Lebanon, it served as a port for Syria's inner cities. As its role as a major port declined, it became involved in the refining industry of Iraqi crude oil (Information International SAL, 2001). The main refinery was damaged due to several successive conflicts and is now non-functional (Information International SAL, 2001). Even after the decline of Tripoli's status as a main port, its economy has continued to be strongly connected to that of Syria. Tripoli also serves as a market for the produce of surrounding agricultural plains (Information International SAL, 2001).

In addition to oil storage and refining, trades that flourished in Tripoli include the processing of fruit and tobacco, soap manufacturing, fishing, and other artisanal crafts (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). Many of the traditional trades have vanished as a result of the modernization process, although some of them are currently seeing a revival (Information International SAL, 2001). As large-scale development projects in the area are lacking, the economy of contemporary Tripoli depends mainly on small business enterprises (Information International SAL, 2001). The most prominent is the food

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics vary by source.

industry e.g. Arabic sweet manufacturers, dairy and poultry factories, pastries, restaurants, and street vendors. Other businesses include bookstores, consumer shops, and furniture making in addition to a number of surviving traditional crafts such as fishing, Arabic medicine and spice trades, perfumeries, soap manufacturing, shoemaking, wood making, and coppersmiths (Information International SAL, 2001). Although Tripoli could potentially serve as an important tourist attraction due to its rich historical and cultural heritage, tourism is weak because of the beleaguered state of the city's infrastructure and the ongoing political instability.

### **2.3 Living Conditions**

Questions of water justice, the core of this research, necessitate discussing the underlying socio-economic structures that (re)produce and perpetuate injustices. In fact, the UN considers poverty an immediate cause of social and environmental inequalities that further undermine the ability of affected populations to access resources and fully enjoy their rights (Kukrety, Oxfam, & AUB, 2016).

While the influx of refugees, many of who now reside in impoverished neighbourhoods, has exacerbated the already precarious living conditions in Tripoli, the refugee crisis is not the root cause of prevailing political and economic problems in the city. Even prior to the Syrian conflict, poverty and deprivation levels were significantly high. Based on data collected in 2004 as part of a study on the poverty in Lebanon, Tripoli scored the second highest in poverty rates (for a comprehensive assessment, see Laithy, Abu-Ismaïl, & Hamdan, 2008). Another study conducted by UN-ESCWA and the Arab Development Institute, led by Adib Nehmeh (2010), identified 57% of the

households in Tripoli as deprived, and 26% as severely deprived.<sup>7</sup> Of the 7 districts in Tripoli, 4 are considered deprived, in which case the percentage of deprived households surpasses the city's average of 57% (Nehmeh, 2010). Nehmeh thus concludes that it is more accurate to describe Tripoli not as an urban centre with poverty enclaves, but rather as an impoverished city with sparse pockets of affluence.

Within Tripoli itself, noticeable disparities exist between wealthy and impoverished suburbs, where segregation is primarily based on social class. Sharper than the concentration of poverty in marginalized neighbourhoods is the concentration of wealth in their affluent counterparts (Nehmeh, 2010). Such disparities reflect a wider pattern of territorial differential of access to rights and resources, which is fundamental to the Lebanese socio-political structure.

## **2.4 Repercussions of the Syrian crisis**

The repercussions of the Syrian civil war have been immediately reflected in Tripoli, leading to economic and political pressures.

### **2.4.1 Economic impacts**

The economic impacts of the Syrian crisis arise in at least two processes, (a) the consequent deterioration of an economic relationship with Syria, and (b) the internal competition for scarce resources as a result of the influx of refugees. The living conditions in some neighbourhoods that host Syrian refugees in Tripoli, specifically

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<sup>7</sup> The study defines poor families as those whose lifestyle falls below the socially accepted standard of living that is necessary to satisfy basic needs essential for leading a dignified life; this standard is usually determined through social norms in the area of residence (Nehmeh, 2010). The Urban Deprivation Index (UDI) was used to measure socio-economic deprivation. The UDI comprises of four categories: education level, economic conditions, housing, and health insurance. The indicators were used to identify the degree of household deprivation of basic needs, resources, capabilities, and rights.

Tabbaneh, are equally precarious for both the local communities and the refugees alike (Kukrety et al., 2016). This also has social implications that manifest in growing animosity towards the displaced Syrians.

#### **2.4.2 Political impact**

The increased tension in areas with high concentrations of Syrian refugees is only partly the result of increased economic pressures. It is also the outcome of trans-national political complications resulting from the longstanding ties between Tripoli and Syria (Einav, 2015). First, the crisis in Syria initiated armed conflicts across the Syrian-Lebanese border. Second, it refuelled the chronic local conflict between two of Tripoli's poorest neighbourhoods: Tabbaneh dominated by the Sunni sect; and Jabal Mohsen, inhabited by the Alawi sect. The ongoing civil unrest stems out of the deeper conflicting political positions between proponents (Alawis) and opponents (Sunnis) of the Syrian regime. While the conflict takes a sectarian tint, it is underpinned and fueled by political agendas set by dominant warlords. Such clashes create an atmosphere of fear among local communities and refugees alike, and compromise their safety (UNOCHA and REACH, 2014).

### **2.5 Marginalization**

Citizens of Tripoli believe they have been purposefully neglected by the state. It is not uncommon to hear echoes of discourse about Tripoli being a “forgotten city”, “neglected city”, and “marginalized city” in daily conversations, social media, newspaper articles (see, for example, Abi Samra, 2015; Abouzaki, 2012; Derbas, 2015), and scholarly studies (Laithy et al., 2008; Nehmeh, 2010). Such expressions reveal an underlying feeling of discrimination shared among the residents of Tripoli. To date, Tripoli and the

Northern governorate in general remain underserved in the eyes of the public (Abouzaki, 2012; MoSA & UNDP, 2007).

Several studies and political figures confirm this observation. For instance, the Social Affairs Minister and native of Tripoli, Rashid Derbas, states that Tripoli “has suffered from chronic marginalization and deprivation” (Derbas, 2015, p. 20). Similarly, Charbel Nahas, previous Labour Minister, reports that Tripoli has been historically neglected by the state, which had not taken measures to develop the city’s fragile economy that was already exhausted by the long years of the civil war (Abouzaki, 2012). Some scholars (Imad, 2002) and journalists (Abi Samra, 2015) believe that the strategic deprivation appears to be a form of punishment for Tripoli’s troubled relation with the state since the latter’s formation, and for its stronger affiliation with the principles of Arabism and Islamism than with those of a secular state. Feelings of persecution are further entrenched given the recurring militant tensions between different factions with armed forces (Einav, 2015).

This perceived neglect by the state may be explained by the territorialisation of power and resources. On a political level, an increased number of Sunnis believe they have been given a marginal role in the political process (Lefèvre, 2014). On an economic level, Sunnis also believe that the Sunni sect shoulders the highest burden of socio-economic disparities (Lefèvre, 2014). Moreover, current policies dictate that voting happen based on the town of origin rather than of residence. For instance, those who are eligible to vote in certain districts within Tripoli, namely the old city centre, reach at best 10-15% of the total residents (Information International SAL, 2001). Thus, a large

segment of the population lacks political representation and the interests of Tripoli are neither represented nor addressed.

The absence of a strong state necessitates devising alternative routes for accessing services. First, it gives way to the increasing role of NGOs as substitute service providers (Darwish, 2004). The preoccupation of NGOs with service provision undermines their ability to advocate for rights, including the right to water. This is examined in further detail in Chapter III. Second, the persistent political crisis reinforces and legitimizes patron-client relations within political parties linked to the country's sectarian factions, also discussed in a later chapter of this paper.

# Chapter III: The right to water in Tripoli, Lebanon

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In this chapter I investigate the notion of the right to water in the context of Tripoli. I start with an overview of the legal history of the right to water in Lebanon and the current national governance scheme. Then I explore more closely the state of affairs with respect to the right to water, that is, patterns of (in)access to water, at the level of Tripoli given the city's specific hydrosocial configuration. Finally, I present and discuss my fieldwork findings, focusing on the participants' perspectives on the right to water, its meaning, and mechanisms of realization to depict an approximate picture of the overall public discourse.

## 1 Legal Context of The Right to Water

### 1.1 Historical Perspective

Inspired by religious beliefs that view water as sacred and essential to all forms of life, the right to water has existed since ancient times in Lebanon. Customary laws acknowledged two major rights derived from Sharia: *haq al-shafa* (the right to drink), and *haq al-ray* (the right to irrigate and water livestock) (Ghiotti & Riachi, 2013; Makdisi, 2007). The word Sharia itself, conventionally referring to Islamic law, linguistically indicates the path to the water spring; it then means both the *path to water* and *water law* (Naff, 2009). Both *haq al-shafa* and *haq al-ray* were stipulated in the Medjellé, the Ottoman Civil Code, which was created in 1875 based on the juxtaposition of the French Civil Code, Sharia law, and customary laws (Ghiotti & Riachi, 2013). Thus, the



Medjellé, customs, and an established system of concessions constituted the regulatory framework for water use (Ghiotti & Riachi, 2013).

Other existing common proverbs during the Ottoman period that reflect the social acceptance of the right to water and the nature of water as a common resource include: “people are partners in three: water, pasture, and fire” (B. Jaber, personal communication, 2016). Another common proverb was that “water shall not bypass a thirsty person” (B. Jaber, personal communication, 2016). Based on this belief, no one could claim the ownership over water, and establishments were prohibited from denying water to anyone on the premise of water scarcity, unless technical difficulties were involved (B. Jaber, personal communication, 2016).

During the French mandate from 1920 to 1943, two major laws were enacted to regulate the water sector. Decree 144 stipulates water as a public domain belonging to the state, and decree 320 dictates the protection of public water including groundwater. Water rights as prescribed in the Ottoman and French legal provisions, as well as many of the usufruct rights to water acquired during that period, remain in effect today.

## **1.2 Contemporary Laws**

The historical recognition of water as a sacred right inspired by religion and culture continues to penetrate the consciousness of contemporary Lebanese society. As Makdisi (2007) argues, the right to water is also politically accepted such that “no Lebanese politician or policymaker would publicly deny that the right of every citizen to clean water is sacred, part of Lebanese custom, culture, religion and ultimately a state responsibility” (p. 374). Yet this political acceptance fails to translate into mechanisms

through which the right to water could be legally granted (Makdisi, 2007). Moreover, what this right actually means remains vague.

Based on the still-effective Medjellé code, decree 144, and decree 320, water is considered a public domain that can be neither sold nor owned; exceptions to this include rainwater that is collected by individuals, acquired rights to water issued pre-1925, or water resources existing on private land so long as the extracted amount does not exceed 100 m<sup>3</sup>/day (Makdisi, 2007). In 2000 the water sector witnessed a major reform since independence. The reform did not, however, explicitly stipulate the right to water as a legal right. In effect, water laws and regulations have remained scattered, ambiguous, and conflicting (B. Jaber, personal communication, 2016). In an attempt to address this ambiguity and confusion, a water law that encompasses all water laws was proposed in 2005.

#### **1.2.1 Code de L'eau**

Code de L'eau was prepared in 2005 by the MoEW and financed by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). It was to serve as a comprehensive water law to update the pre-existing, out-dated water laws and resolve the fragmentation of responsibilities across multiple bodies (The Republic of Lebanon, 2005). Code de L'eau is considered the first legal recognition of the right to water such that "water as a right was stated for the first time" (B. Jaber, personal communication, 2016). It further maintains the essence of pre-existing laws, where water is considered a public domain and water provision is overseen by the state (B. Jaber, personal communication, 2016). Clause #5 of Code de L'eau stipulates the right of every citizen to obtain enough water to cover basic needs for maintaining a dignified life (The Republic of Lebanon, 2005, p.

13). In return, citizens are required to pay a tariff specified by each regional water establishment to cover the costs of water service; the tariff is to be consumption-based, and should consider the socio-economic circumstances of the beneficiaries (The Republic of Lebanon, 2005, p. 30). Nevertheless, some of the law provisions are vague. For example, while clause #5 enshrines the right of every citizen to a quantity of water enough to satisfy basic needs, it does not specify what this minimum basic amount should be.

To date, Code de L'eau remains a legislative proposal, without active political processes to move it forward (B. Jaber, personal communication, 2016). Thus, besides the customary recognition of the right to water, no legal instrument exists to ensure its material realization. Expanding on this scenario, Makdisi explains that the discrepancy between the general acceptance of the right to water, on the one hand, and the lack of concrete law and regulations to protect that right, on the other, is due to four major constraints: (a) lack of political will, (b) lack of capacity, (c) transboundary water security, and (d) pressures for the neoliberalization of the water sector, which have been present at least since the turn of the century (for a thorough analysis of the four factors refer to Makdisi, 2007, p. 382). The next section explores some of these constraints in relation to water governance.

## **2 Governance Scheme of the Water Sector**

The current governance framework is informed by the codes and laws established during the Ottoman ruling period and the French mandate (see Appendix B for a list of effective water laws) (ECODIT, 2015; Farajalla, Kerkezian, Farhat, El Hajj, & Matta, 2015; Makdisi, 2007; MOE, UNDP, & ECODIT, 2011). In 2000, a major administrative

reform of the water sector took place. It encouraged the commercialization of water establishments, increased participation of stakeholders, adoption of integrated water resources management (IWRM) practices, and decentralization of water governance (Allès, 2012).

The reform was a precondition, required by international and bilateral lenders and aid agencies, for receiving international funds to rehabilitate the damaged water infrastructure after the civil war (Allès, 2012). Rehabilitation and development projects were financed by international funds in the form of loans and grants, namely through the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the European Union as well as French, Italian, German, Japanese, and Arab governments and agencies (Darwish, 2004). This raises questions of the political influence of international actors on the policymaking process (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014). Despite this influence, implemented projects lacked clear planning and were not immune to local political influence such that they were often executed according to the political interests of the elite rather than national concerns (Darwish, 2004). Through maintaining control over financial and administrative bodies, the elite are able to sabotage internationally-inspired policy reforms and development projects that fail to align with their interests (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014).

Prior to 2000, water was governed by the Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW) in addition to 21 regional water authorities and 200 local committees (ECODIT, 2015; Farajalla et al., 2015; Makdisi, 2007; MOE et al., 2011). With the introduction of law 221 in 2000, however, governance was decentralized to four Regional Water Establishments (RWEs) (Makdisi, 2007). Accordingly, the water sector is governed by

the MoEW in addition to the recently established RWEs, with supposedly more autonomy granted to the latter. It should be noted that the rearranged governance structure is sometimes described as “decentralized” (Allès, 2012; Makdisi, 2007), and other times as “centralized” (Allès & Brochier-Puig, 2013; MOE et al., 2011). The reform can be seen as decentralization given the increased devolution of responsibilities to the regional RWEs. Yet it can also be considered as regional centralization in the sense that (a) four regional RWEs replaced the 21 water offices and local 200+ committees that traditionally oversaw water affairs; and (b) the new regional RWEs have limited autonomy as the MoEW continues to be largely involved in the management of the water sector. Another aim of the administrative reform was to lay the foundation for the increased involvement of the private sector in water management through promoting the commercialization of the water sector. As we will see below, this aim was not fully implemented.

Despite the reform, water governance and legislation continues to be fragmented across several institutions and governmental bodies, with their roles poorly coordinated and often overlapping (Abbas & Lovett, 2014; Farajalla et al., 2015; MoEW, 2012; OECD, 2010; World Bank, 2010). Eid-Sabbagh identifies four categories of actors involved directly or indirectly in the water governance process. The main influencers include the MoEW and RWEs, followed by other ministries, municipalities, and legislative bodies (see Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7 in Appendix A for more information about relevant actors). In addition to the lack of financial and administrative capacity of the water management entities, water governance is further complicated by political influence from local leaders, especially given the prevalence of clientelism,

corruption, and lax law enforcement (Abbas & Lovett, 2014; Farajalla et al., 2015; MoEW, 2012; OECD, 2010; World Bank, 2010).

## **2.1 A Shift Towards a Neoliberalized Water Sector**

A mainstream neoliberal agenda, of which the reformed water sector was part, is promoted in Lebanon. As numerous scholars have noted, one key dimension of neoliberal discourse around water is to naturalize the notion of scarcity as the key issue to be resolved. A discourse of water scarcity is found in governmental reports such that the factors undermining adequate water quality and quantity are identified as “population growth and age structure, urbanization, economic growth and, more recently, climate change” (MOE et al., 2011, p. 53). In response to the anticipated scarcity and based on a discourse of technological fixes, the MoEW launched a 10-year plan in the late 1990s, proposing the construction of 17 dams throughout the country to harvest an additional 650 million m<sup>3</sup> (MOE et al., 2011). The plan also aimed to address wastewater issues and implement several irrigation and potable water ventures (Makdisi, 2007). The project was to be completed by 2010, but only one dam has been established since then (MOE et al., 2011). A report published by the Ministry of Environment (MOE) views the completed dam of Chabrouh as “a much-needed water reservoir for the upper Kesrouan region [which] should serve as a case study for future dam projects in the country” (MOE et al., 2011, p. 75).

Other examples of incomplete initiatives include, more recently, the National Water Sector Strategy (NWSS) proposed in 2010. The NWSS came as a reproduction of the 10-year plan (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014), emerging out of the collaboration between national stakeholders and international agencies such as the German Development

Cooperation (through GIZ), the World Bank, USAID, and others (MoEW, 2012). It aspires to address the projected increase in demand by reshaping the water sector and addressing its managerial and technical failures through dam construction, institutional reforms, the adoption of IWRM practices, and private sector involvement (MOE et al., 2011). Despite its ambitious aspirations, progress towards implementation of the strategy is very slow (El-Jisr & Chabarekh, 2012). With respect to the NWSS's embrace of the IWRM approach, several factors hinder its implementation as there is "not enough devolution to the regional water authorities to facilitate integrated basin level management", and "the approach remains top-down centralised decision making" (MOE et al., 2011, p. 81). There is little faith that this strategy will be successfully implemented, and no good reasons to believe otherwise; as one participant put it: "It is really just a marketing tool. Nothing has been implemented and it is all a lie" (D.S., personal communication, 2016). Also, the numerous newly-built wastewater plants in various cities remain non-operational, as raw sewage continues to contaminate surface and groundwater (MOE et al., 2011).

## **2.2 Involvement of the Private Sector**

The 221/2000 reform facilitated the commercialization of the water sector, leading to the establishment of the first public-private partnership (PPP) in Lebanon. Funded by AFD and contracted to Ondeo-Liban, which is a subsidiary firm affiliated with Suez-Environment, the PPP was established in 2003 to improve the quality of water services in Tripoli (Allès, 2012; ECODIT, 2015; Yamout & Jamali, 2007). Some of the successes this initiative has achieved are evident in the increased efficiency and continuity of water services in Tripoli, which enjoys better water supply than other areas (Allès, 2012;

ECODIT, 2015; OECD, 2010; World Bank, 2010). The contract was discontinued, however, in 2007 due to political complications and the lack of a clear regulatory framework for PPPs in Lebanese law (Masri, 2015; OECD, 2010).

Another recent initiative that illustrates the push for privatization in Lebanon is the recent Blue Gold Campaign. Proposed by the Civic Influence Hub (CIH), an organization founded by notable businessmen to promote economic and social development, the 5-year Blue Gold plan aims to increase water availability to 500 million m<sup>3</sup> by 2020, and to one billion m<sup>3</sup> by 2030 (CIH, 2013). This is to be done through increasing water harvesting, optimizing water demand, enhancing water quality, and implementing institutional reforms (CIH, 2013). Along the same lines, the Higher Council for Privatization has been advocating for a legislation that aims to facilitate and regulate PPPs, which, if implemented, will extend to the water sector (Z. Hayek, personal communication, 2016). Hayek, the Secretary General, indicated that the legislation attempts to achieve transparency and better governance by altering the current dynamics of power; it embodies a real partnership between all stakeholders: the private sector, ministries, municipalities, and civil society. The legislation has not been approved by the Council of Ministers due to political complexities (Z. Hayek, personal communication, 2016).

The water sector is also marked by an increased influence of private vendors. The inadequacy of the public network in meeting the needs of citizens along with the lack of trust in public water gave way to the increased involvement of private vendors, many of whom lack legal accreditation or official licensing (World Bank, 2010). The Ministry of Health reported that only 38 out of several hundreds bottling plants are



licensed (ECODIT, 2015). The water private sector remains largely unregulated yet critically influential given its dominance in the water market (MOE et al., 2011; World Bank, 2010).

Despite the pernicious effects of an unregulated bottled water industry, several participants believe that the private sector could have a positive role to play. As many would argue, the strategic involvement of the private sector could prove effective for improving water supply and relieving some of the current cost burden associated with obtaining bottled water (S. Saliba, and Z. Hayek, personal communication, 2016). The careful involvement of the private sector through management contracts and service provision, for example, may represent a move towards better accessibility to and affordability of water (S. Saliba, personal communication, 2016). Some observers close to decision-making processes see privatization as a potential solution to some of the governance issues in Lebanon. For engaging the private sector could be a strategy to combat the clientelism and corruption prevalent within governmental bodies, in other words, a way for developing public institutions independent from the elite's interests as suggested by the World Bank (Allès, 2012). In this sense, “the Odeco experiment could then be seen as a process of state territorialisation facing competing territorialisations led by local elites” (Allès, 2012, p. 397).<sup>8</sup>

Yet Salah Saliba<sup>9</sup> cautions that engaging the private sector is a “tricky matter” because it requires a strong state, good governance, transparency, and regulation (personal communication, 2016). These conditions are lacking within Lebanese politics. Ziad Hayek acknowledged the risks that may accompany the implementation PPPs,

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<sup>8</sup> Referencing Verdeil.

<sup>9</sup> Saliba is the Private Sector Engagement Team Leader of the Lebanon Water Program (LWP) at the Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), which is affiliated with USAID.

especially that the experience of PPPs worldwide has produced mixed results, both positive and negative, and thus has to be approached “with a lot of care” (personal communication, 2016). Additionally, engaging private firms in the management of the water sector is particularly risky given the failed privatization initiatives of the electricity and telecommunication sectors. According to Allès (2012), “past experiments with privatization in Lebanon have often been perceived as serving the commercial and political interests of the ruling elites of the country, especially the former prime minister Rafik Hariri and his entourage” (p. 397).<sup>10</sup>

As shown in this section, governmental experts recognize the ineffective governance and legislative structure of the water sector as an impediment to a functional water sector. Yet this recognition takes place within a mainstream neoliberal discourse that advances the involvement of the private sector as a solution. Given the absence of the preconditions for a successful privatization initiative that also protects the rights of citizens, as well as the failed precedents of privatizing the electricity and telecommunication sectors, serious concerns arise about the potential success of involving the private sector in the management of water affairs. As Allès (2012) argues, privatization projects, especially those undertaken by international companies that are detached from the local context, should be studied against the particular political economic situation within which they are intended to occur.

### **3 Current State of The Right to Water in Tripoli**

From the preceding assessment, it is clear that the water sector suffers from technical, financial, institutional, political, and administrative failures that undermine the realization

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<sup>10</sup> Referencing Leenders.

of the human right to water. Problems range from the fragile infrastructure, legal ambiguities, lax enforcement, depletion of water resources, public debt, and lack of capacity of the RWEs, to political complications such as corruption, clientelism, and a lack of political will to address water issues (Darwish, 2004; Eid-Sabbagh, 2014; Farajalla et al., 2015; Makdisi, 2007). Thus, despite the customary and political acceptance of the right to water, it remains inaccessible to certain segments of the population. This also remains true in the case of Tripoli in spite of the advances achieved through the Odeco-Liban PPP as shall be shown in the next section.

Accurate and up-to-date data on water availability, accessibility, and patterns of demand and consumption by regions is lacking for Lebanon. Estimates of water connection rates, demand, and usage at the national level exist, yet they vary across different reports, presenting challenges to constructing a cohesive picture in the sections that follow. Available information dates back to the period prior to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 (see, for instance, Republic of Lebanon & UNDP, 2013). Since then, the majority of recent international reports have assessed water and sanitation conditions in relation to Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities (ACTED, 2012). Given the lack of similar statistics at the level of Tripoli, I am compelled to use the available data on the national trends of water demand and consumption to provide an approximation. Needless to say, there is much room for error here and these numbers should be viewed with caution. The following sub-sections assess the current state of the right to water in Tripoli based on water availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality; infrastructure conditions; and the degree of access provided to impoverished populations and those without a legal status.

### 3.1 Water Availability and Accessibility

The MoEW estimated the available renewable water resources per capita as 1,100 m<sup>3</sup>/year (MOE et al., 2011). The North Lebanon Water Establishment (WE) serves Tripoli along with 7 other districts, each having its own water sources (D.S., personal communication, 2016). Two major springs supply water to Tripoli: Hab and Abou Halqa, both of which provide around 70,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water per day to 100,000 registered users; the deficit is compensated with groundwater coming from wells (J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016). In total, the WE has the capacity to supply 90,000 m<sup>3</sup> on a daily basis, a quantity believed to exceed demand (D.S., personal communication, 2016), although a report by the World Bank suggests that the RWEs fall short in meeting the basic needs of households (World Bank, 2010). Accurate statistics on the total population in Tripoli is unavailable, but estimates range from 450,000 to 600,000 including Syrian refugees (J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016); the World Bank estimates Tripoli's inhabitants at 500,000 (World Bank, 2010). The increased demand on water as a result of the influx of refugees has been estimated at 7% (Republic of Lebanon & UNDP, 2013).

The fact that only 100,000 of the residents are official subscribers to the network raises questions about water accessibility for the rest of the population. Some obtain water through alternative means, which may include illegal connections to the public network, private wells, water facilities installed by internationally-funded NGOs, or reliance on public fountains, social networks, or private sources such as bottled water. For instance, the majority of residents in the Dam & Farz affluent neighbourhood are not connected to the public network and rely instead on groundwater, despite the fact that

the area is relatively newly developed (D.S.; J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016). Due to the proximity of the neighbourhood to the coast, the overuse of groundwater and the consequent sea intrusion has affected the quality of groundwater, thus compelling the residents to eventually subscribe to the public network anyway (D.S., personal communication, 2016).

While water shortage and frequent rationing stretches all over Lebanon, accessibility is especially an issue in marginalized areas as the allocation of resources, including water, happens on the basis of class and regional privileges (Makdisi, 2007). Ultimately, the uneven patterns of accessibility pertain to sectarian and political divisions of power and resources, because “while all regions are confessionally mixed, each one – with the exception of Beirut – has one pronounced sectarian majority” (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014, p. 75).

On a national level, the proportion of the population that uses the public network for drinking purposes varies between 35% (Republic of Lebanon & UNDP, 2013), and 56% as reported by the CDR (Makdisi, 2007). Table 2 below summarizes the proportions of households that relied on different sources of water in some of Tripoli’s neighbourhoods in 2006 (see Figure 3 for a map of Tripoli’s layout). Despite the agreement on the superiority of the supply service in Tripoli in comparison to most other areas in the country, close investigation reveals invisible problems with access to water within some of the impoverished suburbs in the city (as discussed in section 3.7).



Figure 3: Layout of Tripoli (Source: Basemap obtained from Google Maps)

Table 2: Household water supply in Tripoli 2006 (%). Adapted from (Kayal, 2006, cited in Allès, 2012)

Sources of water by household	Qobbeh	Abou Samra	Old City	New City
Public network	69	58	67	3
Artesian well	13	4	-	9
Public fountain	-	5	-	-
Public network + artesian well	1	2	22	2
Public network + artesian well +bottled water	1	2	2	24
Public network + bottled water	11	15	7	48
Artesian well + bottled water	5	12	1	14

Illegal connection	-	-	1	-
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### 3.2 Water Demand and Consumption Patterns

Lebanon has been long believed to possess ample amounts of freshwater in comparison to neighbouring countries. Yet its water resources fail to satisfy the needs of the growing population and current consumption patterns. Water shortage and poor quality is a nation-wide issue, especially during the dry season. Some believe, however, that Lebanon's precipitation levels should be sufficient to satisfy demand *if water resources were properly managed* (Darwish, 2004; Republic of Lebanon & UNDP, 2013).

Due to the lack of water metering in Lebanon, available data on consumption patterns is meagre. Nationally, across both rural and urban settings, domestic water demand represented 25% of the total demand in 2003, expected to reach 45% by 2030 (World Bank, 2010). Estimates of domestic water consumption range from 100 L/day, the national average (J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016), to 140 L/day, 180 L/day, and 200 L/day depending on the report (MOE et al., 2011). Within urban dwellings, the average daily consumption is estimated at 200 to 250 L/person (Makdisi, 2007). Water consumption can reach as high as 265 L/day in affluent neighbourhoods, as is the case in the Dam & Farz neighbourhood in Tripoli (J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016). This amount is projected to reach 300 L/person/day by 2030 (Makdisi, 2007). The World Bank (2010) further breaks down domestic water consumption of the households connected to the public network into categories depending on the source of water supply: public water, delivery truck, water gallons, bottled water (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Estimated expenditure and consumption by water source for connected households** (adapted from World Bank, 2010, p. 33)

	Price range (USD/m <sup>3</sup> )	Annual household expenditure (USD/HH/year)	Estimated consumption (L/capita/day)
Public water supply	0.3 – 0.8	112	187
Delivery trucks	3 – 6	72	10
Gallons	100 – 220	143	0.5
Water bottles	440 – 500	72	0.1

### 3.3 Condition of the Water Infrastructure

The literature reports a poor condition of the water infrastructure, devastated during the civil war and never fully rehabilitated afterwards (Darwish, 2004; Eid-Sabbagh, 2014). According to experts, 100% of the primary network has been rehabilitated within the past 20 years in comparison to 80% of the secondary network and 50% of the tertiary network (J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016).

In terms of maintenance, the RWE assumes responsibility for the maintenance of the primary and secondary networks, while ensuring a clean and functional water supply network from the entrance of a building to the individual apartments is the responsibility of the house owner or tenant (J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016). Estimated network losses range from 35% to 50% (El-Jisr & Chabarekh, 2012; MOE et al., 2011; World Bank, 2010). Despite the reported significant decrease in network losses in Tripoli as a result of the 2004 – 2007 PPP project (World Bank, 2010), assessment reports indicate that the contracting company, Ondeo, fell short in meeting its objective of loss reduction (Allès, 2012). The network performance, thus, remains inadequate.



### 3.4 Water Quality

Data on the quality of drinking water in Lebanon is scarce. Yet several reports admit the widespread issue of water contamination all over Lebanon due to the lack of wastewater treatment, inefficiency of the sewer system, and seawater intrusion (El-Jisr & Chabarekh, 2012). Nationally, contamination levels were found to be as high as 70% in tested water, both piped and at the source, while 24% of the sampled privately-supplied water was found microbiologically contaminated (Makdisi, 2007). Additionally, coastal aquifers, which represent a major source of drinking water for many households in Tripoli, are characterized by high levels of salinity due to the overuse of groundwater and the consequent seawater intrusion, as has been the case in the Dam & Farz neighbourhood; many of the wells are no longer operational (MOE et al., 2011). Nevertheless, and although data is lacking, water professionals across a number of organizations believe in the superiority of the quality of municipal water delivered by the North Lebanon WE (D.S.; J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016). According to Halawani, 50 water samples are tested at the source, storage tanks, and pipes on a daily basis.

This view is not shared by citizens, many of whom distrust the quality of tap water. This is evident in the fact that a low percentage, 35% or 56% depending on the report, of connected households use the public network for drinking purposes. Mistrust seems to be an issue even among authorities at the North Lebanon WE as apparent from the incident one participant recounted in one of the interviews. During a meeting between the members of the Friends of Water Association and authorities from the WE, a particular governmental official used bottled water and refused to drink tap water in

fear of waterborne disease. Upon the participant's insistence, the official reluctantly conceded to drink a cup of tap water, but jokingly promised to sue her were he to come to any harm. Also, previous reports of pollution during the olive-harvesting season have aggravated the public's mistrust in the quality of public water (B. Jaber; H. Khalaf, personal communication, 2016). Olive processing factories are known to have dumped untreated waste into open water bodies, with residue making its way into the drinking water system, altering the quality of tap water and generating an unpleasant taste. Despite efforts to crack down on this practice (D.S.; H. Khalaf; J. Halawani; S. Saliba, personal communication, 2016), people's trust has not been restored. Even in cases where affluent citizens receive a continuous supply of municipal water, they continue to rely on other sources to secure drinking water.

### 3.5 Water Affordability

The current tariff structure is a flat rate based on a fixed annual subscription, regardless of consumption patterns or socio-economic conditions. Fees are based on the spatial area of residential units as shown in the table below. The minimum subscription fee is based on a maximum consumption rate of 1 m<sup>3</sup>/day. An ascending consumption-based fee applies when consumption volumes exceed 3 m<sup>3</sup>/day (D.S., personal communication, 2016). While the minimum subscription fee, equivalent to USD 145, is not considered extravagant, it does not take the user's income into account (World Bank, 2010). Users unable to pay the full amount have only the option to pay the fees in smaller instalments over the year (North Lebanon Water Establishment, 2012).

**Table 4: Water tariff in Tripoli as of 2012** (North Lebanon Water Establishment, 2012)

Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Minimum quantity (m <sup>3</sup> /day)	Fees (L.L.)	Fees (USD)
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<200	1	220,000	145
200 to 300	2	420,000	280
>300	3	618,000	410

Nationally, households connected to the public network nevertheless spend around 65% of their total water expenditure on private vendors whereas un-connected households spend up to 75%. Of that expenditure, 35% is spent on water gallons,<sup>11</sup> 21% on water supplied through delivery trucks, and 16% on small water bottles (World Bank, 2010).<sup>12</sup> The expenditure on gallon and bottled water is high despite their low quantity consumption in comparison to that of water supplied through the public network or delivery trucks (World Bank, 2010).

Water prices according to the source of supply are as follows: 0.3 to 0.8 USD/m<sup>3</sup> for public water, 3 to 6 USD/m<sup>3</sup> for delivery truck, 100 to 220 USD/m<sup>3</sup> for water gallons, and 440-500 USD/m<sup>3</sup> for bottled water (See Table 3). The total amount a single household spends to purchase privately-supplied water (gallons, bottled, and truck-delivered) becomes close to USD 300. One of the interviewees, however, reported higher numbers:

According to the World Bank, people spend from \$250 to \$300 a year to buy bottled water because of the lack of trust in the public service. Also, during periods of intermittent supply of water people resort to water tankers. So if you

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<sup>11</sup> The report does not define water gallons. It is assumed, based on conventional terms, that a gallon here indicates a water container with a 5-gallon capacity.

<sup>12</sup> The mismatch between the reported numbers and the total comes from the original source.

account for these, one pays \$800 to a \$1000 a year to get water on top of that supplied through the public network (S. Saliba, personal communication, 2016).

In any case, as the majority of households, connected or unconnected to the public network, rely on private sources to obtain drinking water, users end up paying twice or triple the water tariff (El-Jisr & Chabarekh, 2012). The resultant financial burden proves especially taxing for economically deprived households.

### **3.6 Injustice for Low-income Populations**

The injustice inflicted upon the socio-economically disadvantaged segments of society is manifold, pertaining to both the water tariff and intermittent water supply. Although the flat water tariff fee is considered affordable (World Bank, 2010), the minimum quantity is fixed and may still prove taxing for some. A fixed tariff means that low-income users will have to spend a larger portion of their income on securing water in comparison to more affluent users. Subsidies for deprived households do not exist, and the official policy states that users who fail to pay the annual fee are disconnected from the public network. With over half the population in Tripoli identified as deprived (Nehmeh, 2010), water affordability becomes jeopardized.

Low-income households are also more vulnerable than their affluent counterparts to the intermittence of water supply, which involves multiple layers of injustices. As mentioned earlier, the World Bank considers the expenditure on water for connected households to be considered affordable, such that it is within the water expenditure affordability threshold identified as 5% of the total household budget (World Bank, 2010). The intermittent public water supply, however, which tends to be least reliable in

deprived communities, compromises the ability of socio-economically disadvantaged individuals to access water. This means that they have to either purchase expensive private water they cannot afford, or go through other forms of hardship in pursuit of securing water. The overdependence of low-income households on unregulated private sources or the unsafe storage of water further increases their vulnerability to consuming contaminated water. Moreover, in cases of being affected by waterborne diseases, poorer individuals lack the socio-economic means to seek appropriate healthcare.

Water shortage is also partly associated with the ongoing rationing of electricity. Since electric pumps are used to fill roof tanks with water, the daily electricity rationing that lasts for several hours at a time temporarily disables the pumps and so the tanks are not refilled once emptied. Households without subscriptions to private electric generators may run out of water during the periods of no electricity if the tanks are emptied too soon, and thus need to be more careful about their water consumption. Since low-income households are unable to afford the expensive subscription to private electric generators to compensate for the chronic electricity rationing, their ability to access water is further undermined. Other forms of hardship come from having to negotiate with neighbours or carry water from public fountains. As Makdisi (2007) indicates, deprived urban suburbs suffer “severe deprivation” of access to water (p. 378).

### **3.7 Neighbourhoods Suffering from Water shortage – Coping Strategies**

Despite the illegality of discrimination in the Lebanese constitution, inequitable access to water is evident, and is part of a larger-scale discriminatory system characterized by uneven regional development (Makdisi, 2007). Within Tripoli, discrimination in water access largely affects poorer populations and those without a legal status. Areas that

suffer from water shortage in Tripoli include the suburbs of Abou Samra and Qobbeh, both considered impoverished (Nehmeh, 2010). The elevated geographical location of both suburbs, and the fact that they are located in the extremities of the system, introduces technical difficulties that compromise the quality of service delivery, such as low pressure of delivered water (J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016).

Additionally, Palestinian refugees in the Baddawi camp in Tripoli, like all Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, are denied civil and social rights as they continue to live in apartheid after six decades of their forced displacement from Palestine. Established in 1955, the Baddawi camp lies five Km North of Tripoli's centre, and today hosts around 30,000 individuals who lack access to all kinds of public services including water (UNRWA, n.d.). Instead, the residents of this camp rely on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to obtain basic services.

NGO representatives who are directly involved in water service provision report that some of the ways in which residents in marginalized areas cope with the chronic water shortage include storing water in containers or roof tanks (usually installed by NGOs under the umbrella of WASH), carrying water from *Hawuz* (public fountains), or by negotiating with neighbours who may have access to private wells (C. Nachabe, S. AbdulRahman, and O. Assad, personal communication, 2016). In Qobbeh, for example, many households use municipal water points to obtain their drinking water (ACTED, 2012). In some instances, residents obtain water through the illegal tapping into

groundwater or the public network (Darwish, 2004). In the case of Palestinian refugee camps, the UNRWA takes care of water provision and infrastructure (Makdisi, 2007).

## **4 The Right to Water: Findings and Analysis**

The following subsections capture the perspectives of my research participants, and other sources of data, on what the right to water means and their opinions on the engagement of citizens in policymaking. The discussions should give the reader an idea of the kinds of discourse specific to this case study, and reflect the general understandings that shape widespread beliefs. Where applicable, I categorize the discussions according to the occupation of participants (i.e. government officials, water professionals, and NGO representatives). No discussion of citizens' perspective on the right to water exists in the upcoming analysis, since the interviews I conducted with this particular category were too few to yield sound conclusions. I conclude with a brief note on a previous initiative for public engagement in Tripoli: the Friends of Water Association.

### **4.1 Perspectives on the 'Right to Water'**

Although the right to water is theoretically well accepted by governmental officials, experts, and authority figures, it is mainly understood in the neoliberal sense. The 'right to water' has been used to promote an agenda of neoliberalizing the water sector by involving the private sector. Evidence of this is found in governmental documents, internationally-prepared reports, and privatization promotion material (CIH, 2013; MoEW, 2012; North Lebanon Water Establishment, 2012). For instance, the National Water

Sector Strategy (NWSS) proposed by the MoEW portrays water in its slogan as “a right for every citizen, a resource for the whole country” (MoEW, 2012).

Among research participants, the belief in water as a human right seems to be unquestionable and taken for granted. In fact, the majority of research participants pondered over the intent of the question about what the right to water means. The majority gave similar answers: that water is vital to life, the source of all living beings, and thus is fundamentally a basic right that long predates its recognition by the UN. Chadi Nachabe, president of Utopia, described the right to water as “very basic, and as important as the right to live in dignity, to eat, and to play” (personal communication, 2016)). Nasser Nasrallah, president of Ibrahim Abd Al-Al Foundation, further stated:

The right to water is sacred, and this is true for all religions. Water should not be available and accessible only to those who could afford it. You can't let people die of thirst just because they are not able to pay. The UN acknowledged this right in terms of the right to a fixed quantity, but this is an inevitable thing; the right to water is as old as life itself (personal communication, 2016).

Despite the general acceptance of access to water as a fundamental right, perceptions of what this right actually means and how it can be achieved varied among participants. The dominant understanding of the right to water is one that entitles citizens to a certain quantity of clean water to cover their basic needs. The participants' initial response about what the right to water might entail revolved around access to sufficient quantities of clean and safe water at an affordable cost. Hayek, for instance, articulated his perception of the right to water as ensuring universal coverage, whether it



be through governmental or private sector coverage (personal communication, 2016). While mainstream perception of the right to water as the right to a fixed quantity is clearly prevalent in the Lebanese context, specific numbers about how much this minimum amount should be and affordability criteria seem to exist in expert documents only.

Sometimes talking about the *right* to water was framed in relation to *responsibility*. Discussions about the meaning of the right to water were accompanied by discussing (a) the government's responsibility to secure water, and (b) citizens' responsibility to conserve water. This discourse was especially noticeable among government officials, water experts, previous members of the Friends of Water Association, and representatives from the DAI NGO. One representative of the public sector communicated her understanding of the right to water as the WE's responsibility to serve citizens: "Our job is to make this water available" (D.S., personal communication, 2016). Indeed, water on North Lebanon WE's informational pamphlets is recognized as a "right for every citizen" (North Lebanon Water Establishment, 2012). Furthermore, "securing water is a shared responsibility" such that it is the WE's responsibility to secure and deliver water to subscribers, after which it becomes the responsibility of the subscriber to ensure the conservation of this water and its protection from pollution (North Lebanon Water Establishment, 2012). As a civil society member notes, "securing water should be the responsibility of the government, but conserving water should be observed by citizens" (K.S., personal communication, 2016).

On the same note, the justice in "water justice" elicited answers related to the current structure of the tariff system, suggesting that the right to water, i.e. water justice,

can be achieved through establishing a consumption-based tariff structure and the installation of meters to monitor usage and induce conservation. Furthermore, As Saliba, the Private Sector Engagement Team Leader of the LWP at DAI, put it, a small proportion of people consume the majority of water. With the flat fee currently implemented, everyone is treated equally (or unequally in this case) regardless of consumption habits or socio-economic conditions. The current lump sum fee resembles flat taxes on basic goods, which targets the poor rather than the rich; in effect, the poor are subsidizing affluent consumers (S. Saliba, personal communication, 2016). One way to address water inequities is through social tariff, that is, government subsidies based on socio-economic needs (Z. Hayek, personal communication, 2016). Indeed, many participants believe that applying a consumption-based tariff, complemented with the installation of monitoring meters, while providing a minimum amount of water for free would help to address the right to water (H. Khalaf; J. Halawani; M. Tahsaldar; S. Saliba, personal communication, 2016). Roland Riachi, a political ecologist, believes that water is a human right and the state should satisfy the need of every citizen for water at little or no cost (Lebanese Economic Association & Friedrich Nauman Stiftung Für Die Freiheit, 2016). Jalal Halawani, a water professional, identified the minimum amount that should be supplied for free as equal to 50 L/person/day.

Overall, the majority of participants disagreed with the current tariff structure and thought it unjust, with the exception of D.S, and employee at North Lebanon WE. Although D.S. concurred that the current minimum amount of tariff is too large, she believed it is reasonable and barely covers the WE's expenses associated with water treatment, maintenance, operation, and delivery. The financial deficit is also the result of

illegal connections to the public network and the low rate of fee collection, reported as 10% across Lebanon in the early 2000s (Makdisi, 2007). The World Bank (2012) reported a higher collection rate, estimated at 47% at the national level in 2010. In Tripoli, the rate of fee collection improved with Ondo's PPP (World Bank, 2012), reaching 55% after the contract had terminated (Allès, 2012). D.S. claimed that the problem lies not in the tariff but in the lack of public trust in the WE services. A few participants also complained about the prevalent misunderstanding among citizens in regards to the tariff and the resulting uncooperative attitudes (D.S.; G. Akl; J. Halawani; K.S., personal communication, 2016). The misconception has to do with people's expectations around the cost of water such that – in the opinion of governmental officials and NGO representatives – people expect water to be completely free since it is a basic human right. The participants emphasized the need to correct this view such that water itself is indeed free but people need to pay for maintenance and operational costs of water infrastructure (D.S.; G. Akl; J. Halawani; K.S., personal communication, 2016).

In sum, it would seem that interpretations of the right to water align with the neoliberal view, where granting the right to water for every citizen is best achieved through promoting conservation, reforming the current tariff structure, or involving the private sector. In many cases, the right to water was seen as inseparable from users' responsibility to conserve. In addition, terms such as "customers" or "consumers" were repeatedly used to refer to the users of the public network (D.S.; H. Khalaf; J. Halawani; K.S., personal communication, 2016). On more than one occasion, citizens informally

referred to the WE as the Water Corporation, although the WE is a not-for-profit public establishment.

## **4.2 Discourse of Water Scarcity, Technical Solutions and Privatization**

In alignment with neoliberal perspectives, discussions of the right to water often take place in relation to a discourse of scarcity and technical fixes. Notably, this is a perspective that is amenable to the involvement of private capital in water supply solutions.

Participants concurred that water supply in Tripoli is one of the best in the country but they also shared concerns about a prospective water shortage. A discourse of water scarcity due to climate change, population growth, increasing demand due to the influx of Syrian refugees, aging infrastructure, and unsustainable consumption is dominant among representatives of the public sector and NGOs. As one participant mentioned: “We are completely to run out of water by 2070. If we don’t conserve water now we won’t find any in the future” (H. Khalaf, personal communication, 2016). Another water professional commented that Tripoli has no water scarcity problems at the present time, but issues will arise 10 years from now when groundwater resources are depleted (J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016). Participants see the solution to water scarcity through the promotion of conservation, protection against pollution, water harnessing through dams, a consumption-based tariff, effective management, and rehabilitating the water infrastructure (D.S.; H. Khalaf; J. Halawani; K.S., personal communication, 2016).

Echoes of the conservation discourse are also found in governmental leaflets. For instance, the informational pamphlets distributed by the WE portray water

conservation as the insurance against future shortage (North Lebanon Water Establishment, 2014). Slogans such as “Conserve a little, so that enough water shall remain for every neighbourhood” are used on pamphlets that promote water conservation through encouraging the alteration of water use habits and the adoption of water-conserving technologies (North Lebanon Water Establishment, 2014). It is worth noting that these brochures have been produced in collaboration with international agencies. While raising awareness about wise consumption is critical, it fails to address the root causes underlying water shortage.

Finally, it is crucial to note the way these preceding framings of water challenges leave an opening for the right to water to be taken up as part of pressures for water privatization. For instance, Ziad Hayek believes that the involvement of the private sector through PPPs is one way for achieving universal coverage of water needs and thus addressing the right to water (personal communication, 2016). In one key example, the compatibility of the ‘right to water’ with privatization is manifest in the Blue Gold project. As part of Blue Gold’s promotional campaign, its proponents employ the ‘right to water’ to attract supporters (CIH, 2013). In this case, the ‘right to water’ is used to reinforce the neoliberal agenda. Rania Masri, an academic researcher, believes that the initiative advances a hidden agenda of privatizing the water sector (R. Masri, personal communication, 2016). So do the journalists Firas Abou-Mosleh (2014) and Ward Abdallah (2015). The former describes the Blue Gold as a “deceitful plan to commodify water in Lebanon”, and the latter accuses it of planning to transform water from being a *natural right* for citizens to a commodity subjected to the risk of monopoly. It is interesting to note that Abdalla (2015) supports water harvesting through dam

construction as one possible solution to the manifold water problems. By denouncing Blue Gold yet approving of dam construction, Abdalla demonstrates some of the further ambiguities in the way the right to water can enter political discourse.

What all of the preceding discursive uses of the right to water close off is a discussion of what Lebanese political ecologists have emphasized: the economic and political power structures that are the root cause of water injustices (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014; Masri, 2015). While some attribute the water crisis to both climatic factors and failed management, they, unlike mainstream experts, refute the appropriateness of dams in the case of Lebanon for several reasons.<sup>13</sup> Such perspectives are uncommon in public discourse, with technocratic fixes clearly dominating mainstream perception of water supply solutions in the Lebanese context. In raising this distinction, my aim is by no means to underestimate the challenges posed by climate change or to dismiss the importance of water conservation. Rather, I aim to emphasize the need to move beyond the simplistic interpretation of water shortage as “natural” towards addressing – and challenging – the power relations underlying physical scarcity.

#### **4.3 Public Engagement and the Right to Participate in Policymaking**

The process of policymaking in Lebanon is enveloped with a lack of transparency, a politics of secrecy, and the absence of information dissemination to the public—in short, a reluctance to engage citizens. Policies are not posted online and obtaining access to

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<sup>13</sup> Roland Riachi attributed the infeasibility of dam construction in Lebanon to the karstic limestone nature of Lebanon’s geology, which results in high volumes of infiltration, the nature of Lebanon’s deep valleys such that higher walls are needed to retain small amounts of water, high costs, uncertain feasibility, and the seismic faults underlying Lebanon’s topography makes dam building a risky undertaking (Lebanese Economic Association & Friedrich Nauman Stiftung Für Die Freiheit, 2016).

government documents is extremely difficult. The case of water is no exception to this tendency, and Makdisi's (2007) comment on the lack of available data on water usage and the status of water resources remains true today. This is partly a problem of transparency, and partly a result of the fact that much important water data is never collected in the first place (Darwish, 2004; Makdisi, 2007). The result of this lack of information is a public lack of trust in government, and by extension in the water supply system. Unfortunately, this lack of trust is reciprocal, where public discussions of water issues are perceived as a threat to the reputation of the government and thus discouraged (Darwish, 2004). Overall, access to information remains difficult as secrecy surrounds the making of policy (Darwish, 2004). Even in cases where initiatives aim to encourage citizen participation, the latter has been reduced to mere feedback on completed plans, as was the case in the Ondo PPP (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014). One of the objectives of the project was the promotion of the participation of "customers", facilitated through establishing a customer desk to directly receive people's complaints without resorting to local leaders who act as intermediaries (Allès, 2012). The same is true for the 2000 reform, which limited "the consultation of the national water strategy to a select group of public officials, international donors and hand-picked civil society members involved with technical expertise rather than social concerns" (Makdisi, 2007, p. 377).

When prompted as to whether the right to water should also entail the right to participate in policymaking, participants in the research had conflicting opinions. Some strongly endorsed the involvement of civil society in the decision-making process, while others opposed. The opinions of the rest of the interviewees were somewhere in between, with the majority approving of the *cautious* and *strategic involvement* of the

public. Overall, I found that the opinions of participants with respect to the engagement of the public and civil society did not depend on their occupations. The following subsections breakdown the opinions of participants according to occupation.

#### **4.3.1 Perspective of Government Officials and Water Professionals**

Ziad Hayek, Secretary General of the Higher Council of Privatization, supported citizen involvement only insofar as to correct misconceptions about tariff payment (i.e. that it covers the cost of extraction, treatment, maintenance, and distribution rather than the cost of the water itself), and to raise awareness about the need for conservation (Z. Hayek, personal communication, 2016). On the other hand, he deemed the process of policymaking too complicated to involve citizens, particularly where PPP is the subject of interest. PPP, Hayek believes, is a complex and controversial concept that people generally misunderstand as absolute privatization, which is generally perceived as incompatible with the notion that water is a right and should, therefore, be free. Since the general public lacks the necessary information needed to make informed decisions about PPPs, for instance, what is needed instead is “policymakers making responsible decisions” (Z. Hayek, personal communication, 2016). Maher Tahsaldar, head of the accounting department at the North Lebanon WE and faculty at the Lebanese University, supported the participation of citizens in policymaking, but indicated the need to first clarify important concepts pertaining to the nature of water—whether it is a public, private, or community good. For instance, a community governance scheme that follows Ostrom’s model cannot take place in cases where water is considered a public or a private good (M. Tahsaldar, personal communication, 2016). In Tahsaldar’s words: “If we were to use Ostrom’s model for example, where water is governed by the



community, it is not possible for a community to govern a public or a private good. This is the problem”. Another employee at the North Lebanon WE showed cautious openness to the opinions of citizens, but thought it infeasible to involve citizens in every decisions because there are certain institutional procedures that need to be respected (D.S., personal communication, 2016).

When asked about the willingness of the government to consider the opinions of citizens or civil society members in the decision-making process, Tahsaldar responded that the government is not receptive at all as individuals in power do not believe in sharing with the people; he attributed this to the failure in management and administration. J. Halawani shared the same opinion about the unwillingness of policymakers to acknowledge the rights of citizens or civil society actors to participate in decisions around water governance. Saliba indicated that the process is “at an embryonic stage” as “engaging the public is a risk the government is unwilling to take” (S. Saliba, personal communication, 2016).

Nevertheless, D.S., the employee at North Lebanon WE, reported the recent launch of an initiative undertaken by the North Lebanon WE in the district of Bcharri. The project aims to consult with citizens in regards to a directive blueprint for wastewater by bringing together local farmers, citizens, municipal members, and entrepreneurs (D.S., personal communication, 2016). Assessments of the project are unavailable yet as it is still in its early stages.

#### **4.3.2 Perspective of NGOs and Activists**

Perhaps surprisingly, opinions among NGOs and activists were quite divergent, with only a few speaking strongly in favour of robust citizen engagement in water policy

making. Some representatives of NGOs and community members showed scepticism towards the involvement of citizens in decision-making. “Decisions”, as a previous member of the Friends of Water group stated, “should be left to the experts”, while citizens must be “*educated*” or “*made aware*” of the vices of wasteful consumption (K.S., personal communication, 2016). On the other end of the spectrum, the activists Hosn Khalaf and A.A. strongly supported the engagement of citizens in policymaking. Khalaf further saw the ideal situation as one where the public sector, private sector, and civil society collaborated together. Also, representatives of Utopia, an NGO that advocates for social justice and undertakes small-scale water provision projects in Tripoli (see section 4 in Appendix C), endorsed a democratic approach to water governance, emphasizing that “the process of policy-making should be participatory” and confirming the need for collaboration between the public sector, private sector, and communities (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016).

Ali Darwish, President of Green Line, and Nasser Nasrallah, President of Ibrahim Abd Al-Al Foundation, had a more cautious approach and suggested that engaging citizens should happen through their elected representatives. Ali Darwish believes that it is infeasible to consult with the public on every single decision since their rights are already accounted for via elections (A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016). However, there should be space in municipal meetings where public audiences can participate (A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016). Salah Saliba and George Akl, representatives of DAI, acknowledged the importance of involving civil society and citizens in general, but also cautioned that the latter may be unprepared for this kind of engagement as they lack the necessary knowledge of water issues (G. Akl and S.

Saliba, personal communication, 2016). Nevertheless, DAI works on engaging civil society along with the government and the private sector as part of the NGO's work on water problems that are caused by inefficient markets and incompetent governance (DAI, n.d.).

Given these ambiguous views about citizen involvement from within civil society organizations, it should perhaps come at no surprise that there is a general absence of advocacy for improved water access, and a scarcity of NGOs that work on water issues outside the framework of water provision. Even this latter kind of work fell out of favour in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Darwish, 2004), but was taken up again after the outbreak of the Syrian war due to the increasing demand (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016). Several Western-based NGOs have acted as service providers to compensate for the inadequacy of the state, by installing water facilities and establishing connections in underserved areas (ACTED, 2012). Additionally, several local NGOs, e.g. Utopia, have partnered with international agencies for the same purpose, and continue to rely on international funding to support the development of water projects in neighbourhoods undergoing armed conflict. From a human rights perspective, though, the right to water is currently not on any organization's agenda (C. Nachabe; J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016).

#### **4.3.3 Friends of Water Association**

To highlight the difficulties surrounding the relationship between the government and civil society, it is worth examining one particular failed strategy for greater public engagement. In 2009, the Friends of Water Association (FWA) emerged out of the collaboration between the North Lebanon WE and the French agency Rhône Alpes (H.

Khalaf, personal communication, 2016). The aim of the top-down initiative was to bridge the gap between the WE and citizens in hopes of repairing the WE's tarnished reputation by engaging members of the civil society. The main goal of the FWA, as indicated by Hosn Khalaf and K.S., both previous members of the initiative, was to *educate* citizens about the merits of water conservation (H. Khalaf and K.S., personal communication, 2016). It is notable that being educated was the extent of citizen involvement envisioned for the initiative. Moreover, the civil activists were *selected* by the organization. After completing several training workshops about water facilities in the north, treatment plants, effective communication, etc., the activists were unable to undertake their assigned tasks of raising awareness among citizens due to tensions between the WE and the FWA; the committee eventually split up, and the association was discontinued (H. Khalaf, personal communication, 2016).

Hosn Khalaf, blamed the failure of the initiative on the uncooperative behavior of the WE authorities, who strived to maintain control and protect their status by disempowering the selected activists. In her opinion, governmental authorities felt threatened by an empowered, well-educated civil society and thus were apprehensive of potential conflicts over power (H. Khalaf, personal communication, 2016). On the other hand, K.S. gave no particular reason for the termination of the initiative, but indicated the lack of communication between the WE and the public as one possibility (K.S., personal communication, 2016). Jalal Halawani, Head of the Department of Public Health and Environment at the Lebanese University and training professional for the FWA, questioned whether members in the initiative had sufficient access to resources, and suggested this might be a reason for its failure. Finally, D.S., employee

at the North Lebanon WE, attributed the failure of the initiative to the lack of capacity in finance and human resources at the WE, such that no single employee could be dedicated to oversee the project (personal communication, 2016).

Whether it be lack of political will or lack of logistics, a meaningful relationship between the government and the public is clearly absent. Corruption, clientelism, struggle for power, and the lack of trust between the government and citizens persist, hindering the success of water reform initiatives and putting any hopes of democratic water policy processes at a considerable distance.

## **5 Conclusion**

Lebanon suffers from a complex series of water problems, manifest in the intermittent supply and poor water quality. While Tripoli is doing better than most other regions, water accessibility and affordability is still a widespread issue. Lack of access to water reveals, and is connected to, various forms of hardship that most adversely affect the vulnerable segments of society, who carry a heavier burden of water shortage. The dissatisfaction of citizens with the performance of the public sector has opened the door to the increased involvement of the private sector, as the majority of the population get their drinking water via alternative means.

While there is political acknowledgement of water problems, they are mainly articulated from the neoliberal perspective, often attributed to climate change, unsustainable consumption, population growth, weak institutions, and ineffective management. These are to be addressed through increased water harvesting, infrastructure rehabilitation, conservation promotion and education, institutional reforms, and the careful involvement of the private sector.

The problems of the water sector, however, should be understood as socio-spatial inequalities inherent to the complex political makeup of Lebanon that is mainly characterized by clientelism, corruption, and sectarian territorialisation of power. "All water problems are inherently political", thus "requiring a political process for solution" (Naff, 2009, p. 39). Given this and the several failed reformative initiatives, it can be predicted that any superficial treatment of water issues in the existence of the current political infrastructure is doomed to fail.

Faced with this context, the right to water plays an ambiguous role. Although the right to water has existed since ancient times and is politically and socially well accepted, it is mainly understood in the neoliberal sense: as access to a basic amount of safe water. Yet even this humble goal remains unachieved. Inevitably, the democratization of water policymaking is alien in this context. On a political level, the right to water is rarely politicized, as there is a scarcity of NGOs and other forms of civil society that work on water from a political standpoint. Even when the right to water is employed, it is not incompatible with the mainstream neoliberal agenda such that both proponents and opponents of privatization use the right to water ambiguously to advance conflicting goals. Aside from the occasional sparse voices that advocate for the right to water every now and then, mobilizations around water issues are almost non-existent.

# Chapter IV: Agency and Social Mobilization

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## 1 Introduction

The literature on environmental justice seeks to understand the origins and dynamics of socio-environmental advocacy around the world. While this literature helps us understand why mobilizations occur, it does not address as extensively the question of why and how such mobilizations are sometimes absent even when environmental injustice is clearly present. Given that water problems, specifically intermittent supply, compel the majority of citizens to seek alternative sources in the case of Tripoli, and of Lebanon in general, we might expect to see the right to water taken up by social movements and civil society organizations (CSOs), as we do in other parts of the world. Yet this study has found instead that the discourse around the right to water is only weakly present and has a rather ambiguous political impact in the context of Tripoli. How can this be explained? What are the limitations to political agency for marginalized populations, and what kinds of considerations shape the approach of civil society working on water issues in the country? And why has Tripoli not seen citizens take to the streets as they have in other parts of the world?

The absence of water advocacy might suggest that water injustices do not exist. Yet this is clearly not the case as demonstrated in Chapter III. In the present chapter I explore various explanations for these findings. Developing these explanations requires a better understanding of the dynamics of activism and the role of civil society<sup>14</sup> in enacting mass mobilizations to address social and environmental injustices. I argue that

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<sup>14</sup> For this research, I delimit civil society as *“the place where a mélange of groups, associations, clubs, guilds, and groups [sic] come together to provide a buffer between state and citizen”* (Augustus Richard Norton, cited in Yom, 2005, p. 18).

even though social agency around water is largely absent within citizens' interactions with government, and does not take the form of mass mobilization in Tripoli, it does exist through invisible coping strategies and alternate networks. To set the stage for pursuing this argument, I first sketch out the regional historical processes of modernization and colonialism that led to changes in the social order throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, shaping the context for contemporary social mobilization.

The chapter starts with an overview of social mobilization within the Arab World. I then narrow my focus to study this phenomenon in Tripoli, Lebanon, focusing on the role of select Lebanese CSOs<sup>15</sup> that advocate for various issues of social justice. As I pursue an answer to the question of why water justice advocacy seems relatively absent from Tripoli, I discuss those CSOs with a few specific issues and questions in mind. For a start, I am interested in the extent of their involvement with citizens, and thus their potential in establishing a strong mobilizing foundation and advocacy network. Second, given my focus on linked questions of social and environmental justice, I query the role of CSOs in challenging systemic oppressions that are embedded in the socio-political structure in place. Finally, I turn my attention towards the broader landscape within which CSOs operate to investigate the challenges we find there that impede progress towards democratizing policymaking and increasing citizen participation in political life.

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<sup>15</sup> CSOs are only one part of what can be considered mass mobilization, but they are key points of articulation that can help us understand the broader landscape of civil society. Nevertheless, some of my exploration of the case study will draw in other elements, such as activist networks.



## 2 Historical Context: Overview of Arab Social Movements

To better understand the dynamics of contemporary social mobilization, it is worthwhile to first sketch out the regional historical processes of modernization and colonialism that led to changes in the social order throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### 2.1 Origins and Evolution of Civil Society in the Arab World

Up to the early 1900s, communities under the Ottoman reign were essentially self-governing for most matters. A study by Abraham Marcus (1992) describes the pre-modern Middle Eastern cities as consisting of active, localized, and organic communities that provided the backbone of social welfare independently from a central state. Only transboundary security affairs, the judicial system, and large-scale infrastructure projects fell to higher authorities. The forms of civil society that existed at the time included kin-based associations, professional and trade groups, charity organizations, as well as self-regulated committees and institutions that managed financial affairs. Charitable trusts, the *waqf*, covered the majority of expenses falling to public government in the West.

This decentralized social governance meant that local leaders, tribal chiefs, religious and ethnic figures, or familial notables (depending on the societal structure in place) were the first point of contact with commoners, often endeavouring to provide services, resolve local conflicts, and even challenge Ottoman decrees when they had impacts on local well-being (Marcus, 1992). These influential figures essentially acted as intermediaries between the community and authorities. The resulting multi-scale interaction between the different networks that made up the societal fabric gave communities pathways for mobilizing to express social discontent. While community ties

have weakened over the time, they continue to represent an important avenue for social support.

The pre-existing social order started to disintegrate with the era of modernity and as a result of the wave of colonization that swept over the Middle East on the verge of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to the pre-existent guilds, charities, and familial groups, new classes of society emerged such as trade unions and student associations (Ibrahim, 1998). The social reformation based on the fusion of old localized networks with emergent classes gave way to the birth of modern NGOs, first appearing in Egypt and the Levant in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and often linked to anti-colonial grassroots movements (Ibrahim, 1998). These movements, and the associated revolts against imperial powers, were repressed during the consolidation of French and British control in the region in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nevertheless, they subsequently grew in importance, and with the eventual end of colonialism in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of those who were active in civil society organizations and struggles for independence took up roles in government. Though this originally made for a friendly political environment for NGOs, populist regimes that emerged in parts of the Arab World in many cases led to authoritarian, reduced freedoms and a diminished civil society (Ibrahim, 1998). The authoritarian state replaced pre-existing forms of community associations, acting instead as the sole provider of social benefits in return for citizens' loyalty.

It should be noted that political process in Lebanon unfolded somewhat differently, largely to the benefit of civil society. Post-colonial Lebanon enjoyed a relative degree of political freedom in comparison to neighbouring states, especially prior to the

direct involvement of the Syrian regime in Lebanese affairs. Thus, Lebanese civil society did not undergo the same pressures as its counterparts elsewhere. Additionally, the civil war and successive political unrest since 1975 rendered the state dysfunctional, a condition that forced civil society to take the lead and resulted in the emergence of other kinds of social support. In fact, many of the combatant militias themselves took on the role of service provision within districts under their control (Aghina, 2015). The resulting social and political order features various kinds of networks, including patron-client relations, which have in turn played a major role in shaping contemporary civil society in Lebanon. These social and political networks were transformed again in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with the global advent of neoliberal ideology. The following section treats this transformation in the broader context of a re-emergent civil society in the Arab world.

## **2.2 Re-emergence of Arab Civil Society**

Civil society in the Arab world regained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, given a few transformational factors. The role of the state as the main provider of benefits such as education, housing, health, food and fuel subsidies, and so on (Bayat, 2002), retreated in favour of the private sector and free market, as most Arab states adopted liberal economic policies during and after the 1980s (Yom, 2005). At the same time, the region had been experiencing population growth, increase in income disparity and poverty rates, and rapid urban expansion, hence necessitating alternative means of meeting social needs (Asfari Institute, 2016). In tandem, international institutions and NGOs began to promote the notion that civil society is a precondition for the transition towards democracy in countries governed by the tight grip of authoritarian regimes

(Yom, 2005). Voluntary associations that maintained independence from both the state and familial affiliations were seen as *the* pathway to challenging oppressive structures and gaining civil liberties (Yom, 2005). The transformations that resulted from the globalization of neoliberalism and human rights ideals opened "new spaces for social mobilization" (Bayat, 2002, p. 2).

Early responses to neoliberal shifts took the form of mass protests. One example was the mass demonstration in Beirut in 1987 against the drop in value of the Lebanese currency (Bayat, 2002). Bayat asserts that such mobilizations were merely a response to major events of rare occurrence and scale, and hence inconsequential in terms of generating lasting political change. Indeed, people resorted once again to social ties, still relatively strong, to obtain services and supports not provided by the state in the context of the economic crisis. Instead, Bayat (2002) emphasizes other kinds of activism as more prominent: community activism, Islamic social movements, and what he calls "quiet encroachment" (p. 19). The latter he defines as the form of support that people obtain, often illegally, through social networks and alternate safety nets. As we will see in section 3.2.3, it is this form of agency that predominates in Tripoli today.

Movements related to environmental justice are not widely documented as part of this growth of modern Arab civil society. One example discussed by Bayat (2002) is that of a grassroots movement in a small, socio-economically marginal Egyptian community that protested the pollution caused by local smelters. Another similar environmental movement, described by one environmentalist as the "first environmental *intifada*" (uprising) in the Arab world, took place in Hay al-Sollum in Beirut in 1997 to denounce a

polluting incinerator in the neighbourhood (Kingston, 2001, p. 60, emphasis in original). No other cases of similar nature are reported in the scholarly literature.

### **2.2.1 Arab Civil Society and Democracy**

Despite the widespread contributions of CSOs to democratization in different parts of the world, CSOs in the Arab world have produced more mixed results. Yom (2005) goes farther to argue that Arab CSOs have essentially failed to spark democratic change, despite the enormous financial support that local organizations received from the international community. Arab societies have been dominated by stubborn and persistent autocratic regimes that Yom (2005) describes as “exceptional” in the world (p. 16). The capacity of CSOs to foster greater public participation in political decisions, such as involvement in the making of water policies, depends on a number of factors, including relationships with the state, the internal structure of the CSOs themselves, public responses to civil society action, and patron-client networks.

The latter is especially central in the case of Lebanon where patron-client relations work on multiple levels. First, they permeate people’s lives by compelling them to seek services through local leaders. In turn, the latter’s status is reinforced. Second, clientelism shapes the interaction of civil society with citizens and limits its potential such that within a patron-client framework, the role of civil society is reduced to “expand[ing] the scope of clientelist exchanges” (Kingston, 2001, p. 57). In some cases, Kingston argues, civil society organizations themselves get absorbed into the patron-client framework.

The following case study of Tripoli explores these factors in more detail, occasionally broadening the analysis to a national scale in order to round out the

explanatory narrative. Bearing in mind the relative lack of mass mobilizations in general, and ones related to the 'right to water' in particular, I also delve into the role of activist networks. My intent is to illustrate the dynamics of social and political mobilizations in order to explore the potential for grassroots endeavours to break through prevalent patron-client relations and effect real change. Throughout this exploration, I chart where the 'right to water' fits on the map of rising struggles, consider explanations for its absence, and highlight other forms of agency.

### **3 Case Study: Tripoli, Lebanon**

Tripoli is situated within a political landscape that is divided along sectarian lines, where division of power and resources happens according to certain political arrangements and sectarian quotas. For although the political structure in Lebanon is considered constitutional democracy, actual power operates through "informal networks" that are controlled by "sectarian elites" (Kingston, 2001, p. 57). Instead of the typical state-citizen model found elsewhere, the patron-client model dominates Lebanese socio-political structure and transcends people's daily lives. This system of patronage exists within a locally territorialized structure organized on a sectarian basis.

Accordingly, each leader provides for his clients, who most often belong to the same sect as the leader (Makdisi, 2007; Lefevre, 2014; Eid-Sabbagh. 2014). Yet "the issue with Tripoli", in addition to its neglect by the state, "is that it has many leaders but lacks leadership" as one political figure notes (cited in Lefèvre, 2014, p. 8). In this vacuum, Patron-client relations continue to dominate access to resources. Furthermore, service provision has been transformed through the struggle over power into "a privately

contested terrain” that has turned even “municipal authority into an extension of these struggles” (Information International SAL, 2001, p. 86).

### **3.1 Overview of Advocacy Networks and Campaigns**

Citizen mobilizations in the post-civil war era have rallied along the lines of political and sectarian affiliations, where political leaders (zu’ama) usually recruit the masses to advance political agendas. Recently, however, a few timid mobilizations with social or environmental justice orientations have taken place. Extremely unusual in the context of post-war Lebanon, these movements were not tainted by sectarianism, but started as non-partisan (Kassir, 2015). Two major themes stand out: advocacy for public spaces and the demand for a resolution to the waste crisis.

#### **3.1.1 Advocacy for Public Spaces**

Recent years have witnessed the emergence of new advocacy networks that have adopted social justice issues. The networks vary in type: some are official NGOs, such as Donia for Sustainable Development, and Nahnoo (in Beirut); some are coalitions, such as the Committee for Monitoring Tripoli’s Projects; and others are unofficial networks, such as the Civic Mobilization Network (see Appendix C for more information about each group). These networks have launched several campaigns to advocate for a variety of social issues, most prominently public spaces.

One such campaign is Our Sea, Our Land (see Appendix D, section 1 for more details) that calls for the protection of public properties on the sea front in Tripoli against the multiple illegal transgressions of public space. The campaign was launched by Donia, headed by Nariman Shamaa, and supported by the Civic Mobilization Network, led by Samer Annous. Other similar campaigns include the Underground Garage in

Tripoli, which consisted of a coalition of activist networks to oppose the construction of an underground garage that was to take place at the centre of Tripoli; and Horsh Beirut, a campaign launched by Nahnoo to demand the reopening of the last green space in Beirut (see Appendix D, sections 2 and 3 for details).

### **3.1.2 Response to the Waste Crisis**

In late 2015, a movement emerged in the wake of a waste disposal crisis that affected Beirut for eight months. Following the closure of a landfill site close to Beirut, garbage accumulated in the streets. Consequently the You Stink movement, literally referring to the garbage and metaphorically implying the corrupt government, picked up momentum (BBC, 2015; Nader, 2015). The waste management crisis was but a reflection of the political dysfunction that runs deep in the state. As one blogger commented: "[t]he trash crisis in Lebanon is just a reminder of the system we live in. Stop being surprised. That's what we built" (BBC, 2015). Recurring political deadlock, interlocked with increasing economic hardships, seem to have exceeded citizens' tolerance, leading to the apparent breakage of the sectarianism and eventually the launch of the movement (BBC, 2015). Far from being a mere reaction to the waste crisis, the series of protests represented a response to the absurd living conditions, starting from the ongoing electricity and water rationing to the sell-off of Beirut's remaining public properties (The Economist, 2011). As one citizen complained, "No electricity, no water, no security, no president and on top of it all – rubbish" (BBC, 2015). The movement ultimately attacked the overall corrupt political regime.

It should be noted that mobilization initiatives, specifically the You Stink campaign, are controversial and their impacts questionable. On the one hand, activists



are prone to being politicized by the zu'ama and it is difficult for mobilizations to survive the pitfalls of sectarianism. Even if when they do, their potential for effecting real change is highly doubtful, for the Lebanese political structure paralyzes any initiative that falls outside the negotiated sectarian and territorialized division of power. For instance, when the recent 2016 municipal elections in Tripoli went against the ruling elite, they responded by utilizing their political influence to disable and impede the function of the elected municipal council. The next section examines the neutralization of popular mobilization in more detail.

### **3.2 Explanations for the lack of mobilizations around water justice**

If environmental campaigns are few, then campaigns that specifically target water injustices are noticeably fewer, not only in Tripoli but also at the national level. The finding of Ali Darwish remains true today:

There is still a gap in the approach to water access from a human right concept. Very few national non-governmental or community-based organizations dealt with the water issues from an integrated human-rights-based perspective (2004, p. 22).

Where local NGOs are involved with water, it is often to assume a role in service provision. Many work closely with international agencies such as Oxfam, CARE, and the UNHCR to provide water services for Syrian refugee camps and deprived neighbourhoods in Tripoli. For instance, the UNHCR has partnered with local NGOs to implement the WASH program, providing water and sanitation services in impoverished communities. One local NGO that works on the WASH project in Tripoli is Utopia.

According to representatives of Utopia, the latter started as a grassroots movement with advocacy orientations (C. Nachabe; personal communication, 2016). It eventually evolved into an established NGO, but lost its advocacy dimensions along the way. Utopia covers a range of activities that focus on capacity building and providing humanitarian aid to deprived populations (see Appendix C, section 4 for more information about Utopia).

In fact, water advocacy is not prominent on the agenda of any organization nation-wide (C. Nachabe; J. Halawani, personal communication, 2016). Of all the activists and NGO representatives interviewed during the research, the only organization claiming to have plans to pursue water advocacy was Nahnoo, an NGO based in Beirut. In the extensive 5-year study that Nahnoo is undertaking on all of the public services in Lebanon (including water, electricity, waste, etc.), water will be the last on the list (A.A., personal communication, 2016).

In what follows, I explore a few different and interrelated explanations for the relative absence of activism on water issues.

### **3.2.1 Complexity of the Water Sector**

The easiest place to start when attempting to explain the absence of activism around water is its complexity. The first reason for this complexity is that water management and policy making is scattered across several bodies, making it difficult for organizations like Nahnoo to mount campaigns that would achieve concrete policy change (A.A., personal communication, 2016). Second, the topic of water is manifold; there is water extraction, water monitoring and treatment, water delivery, water pricing and metering, etc. Third, and despite law 221/2000 that centralized water governance into four

regional establishments, many local committees that previously oversaw water governance remain in operation, and the RWEs are unable to stop them (A.A.; B. Jaber, personal communication, 2016). Fourth, the problem of illegal tapping into the public network is an issue that has become exacerbated given the increased demand after the influx of Syrian refugees, numbering 70,000 in Tripoli (CARE International, 2015). Finally, corruption exists in the form of water theft, where some intercept the public network at one point and sell it elsewhere, in which case municipal water becomes the object of black market exchange.

### **3.2.2 Invisibility of Water Injustices**

The complexity of water issues is not the only reason for its absence on the agendas of CSOs. Despite its pervasive role in daily routines, paradoxically, the social life of water seems easy for people to ignore. Water is invisible in many ways, such that the hydrosocial cycle itself is hidden as water runs under the streets and is thus out of sight.<sup>16</sup> In some ways, inequitable access to water is invisible in the sense that “nobody has died of thirst” as Ali Darwish mentioned (personal communication, 2016). Also, other daily struggles seem to be more pressing than the lack of household water as various activists have reported (S. Annous, C. Nachabe, and A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016). Recognizing the limited data obtained through interviews with citizens, it should nonetheless be noted that a citizen of Tabbaneh, identified as the most impoverished neighbourhood in Tripoli, exclaimed that even when an aid agency installed water filters and cisterns in the neighbourhood, some residents chose to sell

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<sup>16</sup> Based on discussion with Dr. Karim Eid-Sabbagh.

them out of extreme poverty in order to buy bread (citizen #3, personal communication, 2016).

Unlike other problems that are experienced with greater severity (such as electricity rationing, unemployment, extreme poverty, taxes, and lack of public spaces), people seem to find ways around water shortages such as resorting to bottled water, illegal wells, municipal public fountains, and water storage facilities. These strategies, in addition to the existence of social networks and other sources of income, have alleviated some of the burdens associated with water shortage (Darwish, 2004; Eid-Sabbagh, 2014). While such practices do not address the fundamental problem, they do act as “pacifiers” (A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016).

### **3.2.3 Clientelist networks**

Given the nature of the Lebanese socio-political structure, political affiliations and patron-client relationships have become more prominent than state-citizen relations. People have learned to reach out to their patrons, who represent them politically and on the basis of religious sects, to seek services unfulfilled by the state. Local elites intervene in the water sector, i.e. maintaining patronage relationships, through charity and service provision (Allès, 2012).

In terms of water services, local elites have used their political clout to secure water sources for and bring development projects to Tripoli, sometimes funding infrastructure projects themselves (Allès, 2012). Elites can also utilize their political networks to obtain permits that legitimize the existence of illegal wells, regardless of the capacity of groundwater. As Kingston states: “In a political system where political influence, rather than legal claims, have a dominant bearing on service provision and

law enforcement” (cited in Makdisi, 2007, p. 381), patrons have the power to cover their clients’ “fraudulent practices” (Allès, 2012, p. 399). Finally, local elites “act as indispensable intermediaries between the water users and the public utility” (Allès, 2012, p. 399). Similar practices can be found across Lebanon, where the elite are actively involved in distributing power and resources to secure self-interest and maintain control (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014).

### **3.2.4 Weak Civil Society – Weak Mobilization Base**

The case of water gives us a window onto the weakness of civil society in Tripoli. Civil society in Lebanon, as Kingston (2001) describes it, is “weak and divided” (p. 56). It further lacks a large mobilization base as the impacts of local activism fail to transcend to the national-level (Kingston, 2001). NGOs, in particular, have limited freedom since they operate in areas that fall under the control of local leaders (Kingston, 2001).

When CSOs do undertake mobilization efforts, public response tends toward apprehension or outright rejection. Several activists indicated that citizens tend to be slow in trusting and supporting civil society (A.A.; H. Khalaf; N. Shamaa; S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). The lack of public involvement is possibly related to several factors: lack of trust in NGOs and their transparency in general, lost faith in the responsiveness of the government, preoccupation with trying to make a living, and absorption in sectarian and political conflicts (A. Darwish; S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). As per Shamaa’s observation:

The majority of participants in protests are the same; the same people keep on showing up again and again because it is difficult to mobilize citizens. This is

because the majority of people are politicized<sup>17</sup> while the rest have no interest in participating (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016).

Samer Annous, the leader of the Civic Mobilization Network in Tripoli, made a similar comment, indicating that not many people were responsive to the network's recent mobilizations around the protection of public spaces and historical monuments. In fact, many opposed. "The elite could easily recruit opponents [to our campaigns]", he said, "including even academics and students" (personal communication, 2016).

Even without the direct interference of sectarian elites in response to popular mobilizations, an absence of trust in CSOs could also be tied to the continuous disappointments and unmet expectations on the end of citizens. There is a lack of trust in the government's responsiveness on one hand, and suspicions around the real motivations of the civil society groups themselves, on the other. Moreover, the presence of several negative experiences have led people to constantly question the hidden agendas of NGOs, especially given the fact that the elites have started to crowd the landscape with their own CSOs.

Underlying these responses to the work of CSOs and activist networks is the chronic sectarianism of Lebanese politics, which has played a major role in redirecting ordinary people's focus from social welfare issues towards divisive contentions. People have been pulled into sectarian conflicts, which are drawn out by political leaders over the course of decades. The public is involved (consciously or unconsciously) in advancing the agendas of the elite like pawns on a chessboard. According to Shamaa, "Sectarianism is causing colour-blindness" as it further distracts people away from the

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<sup>17</sup> Politicization here means affiliation with a particular sectarian group. As a result, individuals refrain from engaging in mobilizations that originate outside that group or misalign with its agenda.

root causes to their problems and conceals entrenched injustices (personal communication, 2016). As a result, the space for public dialogue—and the formation of public opinion—is almost non-existent. Indeed, George Akl and Salah Saliba, both representatives of the DAI development company, claim there is no genuine public opinion. Rather, there is a mosaic of conflicting public opinions, the majority of which are the result of sectarian propaganda and political recruitment.

Considering the You Stink campaign as an example, since it has been the largest of its kind in recent years, internal and external problems manifest. The mobilization failed in sustaining long-term momentum. Furthermore, the attempts of authority figures to hijack the movement succeeded in swaying some participants (G. Akl; A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016), a process aided by the internal confusion within the movement itself. According to Ali Darwish, who also participated in the mobilization: “There were 60 groups, the majority of whom got off track by their little disagreements...They were then penetrated by politicians here and politicians there”. Equally problematic was its representativeness of the larger population (G. Akl, personal communication, 2016); at best, the protesters reached 30,000 (A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016). Some even believe that the You Stink campaign was a political fabrication (G. Akl, personal communication, 2016).

It should further be noted that the work of NGOs and activist networks is more reactive than proactive. For the most part, activists are engrossed in dealing with urgent issues related to the immediate impacts of development projects, which dictates the nature of issues that make it to the groups’ agenda. Often, activists have to act on short notice to mobilize against unexpected actions by the government (A.A.; S. Annous; A.

Darwish; N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). In the case of the Civic Mobilization Network, the activists are volunteers who have other full time commitments. This responsive mode helps to explain the lack of mobilization around water injustice, an issue that is chronic rather than acute, and does not seem to make headlines in the news.

### **3.2.5 Passivity and Forced Adaptation**

More subtly, the “resigned” attitude towards water displayed by many citizens can be explained by Mehta’s (2016) analysis, which suggests that underserved, semi-legal populations tend to accept their situations as inevitable. Instead of seeking social welfare and other services from the government, they tend to “opt out of the formal system, devise their own strategies and do not hope for any benefits from the state” (Mehta, 2016, p. 38). I noticed a similar condition in Tripoli through non-participant observation and interviews with citizens; while the majority of people constantly express their discontent with the government’s performance, they seem to have no expectation of any improvements. Ali Darwish described this pattern as “forced adaptation”, stating that: “They’ve tamed people over the past 25 years after the war to accept the situation” (A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016). Concerning Tripoli in particular, this passivity comes at no surprise given the systematic marginalization of the city (see Chapter II). The Minister of Social Affairs, also a native of Tripoli, expresses his discontent with the “striking passivity of the city’s vital forces, leaders and figures, and even its citizens in confronting this abnormal state of affairs”, further arguing that “Tripoli appears to have lost its internal vitality and its ability to advocate vocally for its rights” (Derbas, 2015, p. 20).



## 4 Conclusion

From what has preceded, it is clear that mass mobilizations around the right to water are non-existent, neither in Tripoli nor on a national scale. Recently, timid local movements have emerged in response to certain issues – not including water – in Tripoli and in other areas in Lebanon. Some of the recent mobilizations have managed to halt top-down projects, others have failed, and all of them have encountered internal and external crippling impediments, including internal dissent, external pressures, sectarianism, and difficulty mobilizing the masses. One point to bear in mind is that the majority of activists and participants in those mobilizations belong to the middle class. This is important for two reasons. First it is crucial to note that middle class citizens can afford to buy more expensive privately-supplied water, and as a result are not likely to take up advocacy for water justice. Second, and more importantly, civil society activism is carried out by those who are politically enabled. If civil society had more room to operate in Lebanon, and could become an enabling space for a broader cross-section of Lebanese society, then perhaps water would find its way onto the political agenda.

More prominent than mass mobilization are other forms of agency. Some of the ways in which residents in marginalized areas cope with the chronic water shortage include storing water in containers or roof tanks (usually installed by NGOs under the umbrella of WASH), carrying water from *Hawuz* (public fountains), or by negotiating with neighbours who may have access to private wells (citizen #1, personal communication, 2016). It is common for many households to use municipal water points to obtain drinking water (ACTED, 2012). In some instances, residents obtain water through illegal tapping into groundwater or the public network (Darwish, 2004). While such acts may be

criminalized or considered unlawful, they reveal an underlying discontent with the performance of the state and perhaps even rejection of its authority. They represent a silent form of protest against injustices, and should therefore be seen as an expression of social agency rather than mere acts of disobedience.

## Chapter V: Concluding Remarks

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The world is witnessing a water crisis, manifest in the scarcity suffered by a large proportion of the global population. In mainstream discourse, water scarcity is normalized as natural, and solutions are seen to rest with proper management and technological fixes. In contrast, political ecology offers a different perspective based on the inseparability of human-nature relations. Political ecologists argue that underneath physical scarcity lie political, economic, social, and cultural power relations that perpetuate injustices. Water inequities should be recognized as problems of socio-spatial inequalities rather than of scarcity, and need to be explained in light of the operating power structures.

My case study, located in Tripoli, Lebanon, fits this perspective, where a hobbled political system embeds all kinds of social and environmental injustices. As shown in this paper, Tripoli suffers from widespread water problems that most adversely affect impoverished populations. With the majority of the population reliant on private sources for water supply, we might expect to see some sort of social movement taking place to assert citizens' right to water. Nevertheless, I have argued throughout the thesis that inequitable access to water, even when it is a large-scale issue, may or may not result in its politicization in the form of mass mobilization. Although in some parts of the world water injustice has been a lightening rod for initiating mass mobilization, this link is not inevitable. Tripoli provides an excellent example where politicization of water injustices has not occurred. In fact, even mobilization around other kinds of social justice issues are of limited number, scale and consequence.

The Lebanese experience shows that the possibility of mobilizing for water equity does not solely depend on the prevalence of injustices, but is determined by other factors. Historical and political processes have produced contemporary societal spaces and structures, with the various kinds of opportunities and barriers they represent. In the case of Tripoli we can describe that structure as somewhere in-between an older pre-modern model of self-regulating communities and the Western model of states and individual citizens. The resulting social order neither succeeds in transitioning towards democracy, nor manages to recover a robust renewal of pre-existing familial and social ties. This is a social order that preserves the localized nature of communities through territorial and sectarian divisions of power, where patron-client relationships prevail as mediating factors in the distribution of social welfare and state services. Water injustices can be understood as one outcome of this fragmented landscape, which irrepresses, restricts, or at best distorts any potential social dissent around water or other social and environmental injustices.

#### **4.1 Obstacles and Challenges to Social Mobilization**

The kinds of barriers that social justice activists have faced and will continue to face in Lebanon need to be approached strategically. Internal hurdles stem from the divided nature of the Lebanese political scene, where neutrality is a rarity. Even in the case of neutral CSOs that are not tainted by a certain political orientation, quite often the members will have varying political backgrounds, which increase their susceptibility to external pressure, potentially threatening the unity and solidity of the CSO. This is especially an issue in the case of coalitions that bring together NGOs and activists belonging to a wide range of political and sectarian alignments to work on a common

goal, in which case conflict and dissent are more likely to occur. Indeed, the diverse political inclinations of participants in some of the campaigns mentioned above, specifically the You Stink and Underground Garage, suffered from schisms generated by a few key participants (S. Annous; A. Darwish; N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016).

At the same time that activists navigate internal divisions, they are also presented with external challenges. One pertains to the general lack of a large mobilization base, which undermines the ability of advocates to attract supporters and exert influence (A. Dawish, personal communication, 2016). Second, the international push toward an increased role for civil society since the 1990s, together with the availability of international funds, has led to the proliferation of NGOs. This has resulted in an overwhelming number of organizations in competition for scarce resources (volunteers and funds), limiting each group's presence and influence (A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016). Moreover, local NGOs compete with those manufactured by the elite, who have more power and clout to influence the direction of funds and decision-making about projects. Finally, the reliance of local NGOs on international funds has created relationships of dependence that could limit their agency.

The third factor relates to the role of the media, which, although has been positive in some cases, proved restricting in others. Not only do activists lack access to and a strong presence in official media channels, but they also have to deal with distorted depictions of their mobilizations that are propagated by elite-controlled news sources aiming to diminish their significance or discredit their voices. In some cases, mobilizations are even subjected to a coordinated response, amounting to a "forced-

media blackout” (Kassir, 2015). Activists often resort to social media as an alternative mode of communication, with varying degrees of success in combating the dominant media’s messaging.

Fourth, activists who work to expose prevailing corruption face various kinds of risks. Many have been accused of being “anti-development” or “pro-poverty” as part of a counter-discourse propaganda employed by the elite (S. Annous; N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). This kind of discourse can be problematic because the majority of civil activists belong to the middle class and, by implication, are not perceived as representative of the poor (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). Therefore, they are vulnerable to such critiques, and potential delegitimization in the eyes of marginalized populations—even when activist efforts are directed at defending the rights of those populations. Furthermore, by using anti-development discourse against activist organizations, elites subtly advance neoliberal ideologies (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). Even more concerning, some activists have received life-threatening warnings, and protestors have been subjected to violence at the hands of security forces (Kassir, 2015).

A final obstacle faced by organizations advocating for substantive policy change lies in what some activists call the “invisible system”. This term refers to the ambiguity surrounding the decision-making process, which is related to the inter-sectoral elite bargaining that occurs out of reach of democratic process. In other words, policy decisions are often made behind the scenes and it is difficult to identify the points of influence that have determined the outcome.

## 4.2 Future Opportunities and Strategies for CSOs

The challenges discussed thus far provide lessons for future advocacy and other kinds of civil society work. Perhaps foremost among these lessons is that earning the public's trust is key for the successful work of CSOs and for determining their degree of political influence. Attaining credibility and building a popular basis for CSOs among the public could help break the cycle of sectarianism as supporters unite around common social issues rather than around divisive religious and other loyalties. It is therefore important for CSOs to maintain a clear vision, transparency and overall political neutrality.

Ali Darwish suggests that more broadly speaking, one potentially effective starting point for shifting systemic patterns of political influence is advocating for a change in electoral laws (personal communication, 2016). Since voting happens based on the place of origin rather than of residence, a large population in Tripoli and other cities remain unrepresented. This further undermines feelings of belonging, and forgoes an opportunity to hold authorities accountable. A change in the voting system could also help empower municipalities, which in the experience of activists are easier to influence than remote national authorities. Also, municipalities hold significant powers that remain under-tapped.

In terms of a target population, there is consensus among research participants that youth are the most receptive to and believers in the work of civil society. They become especially enthusiastic once they realize the powers and privileges the municipalities hold and how effective they can be in causing change. For instance, Utopia strategically involves youth from marginalized communities in projects that foster place attachment, a sense of belonging, and social empowerment. Similarly, Nahnoo

has benefited from the involvement of youth in the project of Horsh Beirut, especially during the initial phase of conducting participant research to identify social needs and preferences (A.A., personal communication, 2016). The youth involved in that project continue to have a significant presence as volunteers to help with ongoing maintenance of the park and running events.

Finally, given the struggle of many CSOs with official media channels, social media represents a powerful alternative, one that may even be more effective in influencing public opinion. Several activists indicated the significant role the social media had played in raising awareness and rallying for causes, and as a platform to counter mainstream discourse. One issue lies in the need for human resources in order to maximize the utility of social media, a capacity that many local NGOs and CSOs lack (S. Annous; A. Darwish, personal communication, 2016). Engaging the youth in social media affairs might help to address the lack in human resources while at the same time fostering a strong sense of community and activism.

#### **4.3 From Water Justice to Hydrosocial Agency**

I started out this research with specific questions: to look for water justice movements that identify themselves as such. This approach proved to be limiting, for hydrosocial agency isn't just manifested through political claims for water justice such as mass mobilizations. Whether or not water issues gets mobilized is shaped by the interaction of intertwining factors related to priorities, capacities, power structures, and political opportunities within the particular socio-political context in which a case is situated. Instead of mass movements, nuanced coping strategies were more relevant in the case study I undertook. Agency of this kind takes a silent form, manifesting through



navigating patron-client relations or more subtly through what would be considered unlawful acts of disobedience. If not directly political, such agency is certainly social and ecological, and forms part of the fabric of power relations. It embodies people's endeavour to reclaim access to their habitats and ultimately sustain their existence. While I had not explored those coping strategies in depth, I should underscore them as crucial and emphasize the importance of further research in this direction.

Navigating water inequities are in many ways unseen, related to the very nature of the water landscape. The invisibility of daily water struggles should come at no surprise given that water itself – its sources, allocation, and distribution – flows through channels that fall outside the immediate consciousness of most people. Both literally and metaphorically, water is hidden; it runs deep under the streets and so do the daily struggles in its pursuit. While political ecology scholarship points us to the importance of paying attention to the political claims for water justice, other invisible struggles must not be forgotten when water inequities are the object of interest. Keeping in mind that the politicization of the 'right to water' relates to the ways in which water injustices unfold in the public sphere, political ecologists need to pay closer attention to how other forms of agency operate in the absence of social mobilization. Zwarteveen and Boelens (2014) argue that "some injustices never produce open disputes or struggles but instead consist of the silent sufferings" (p. 15). It is my assertion that not only suffering is silent; a range of other "quiet" practices by which people lay claim to water resources should attract our attention as researchers. If this thesis only scratched the surface of such practices, I would put them foremost on the future research agenda for understanding hydrosocial relations in Lebanon.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A – Water Sector Actors

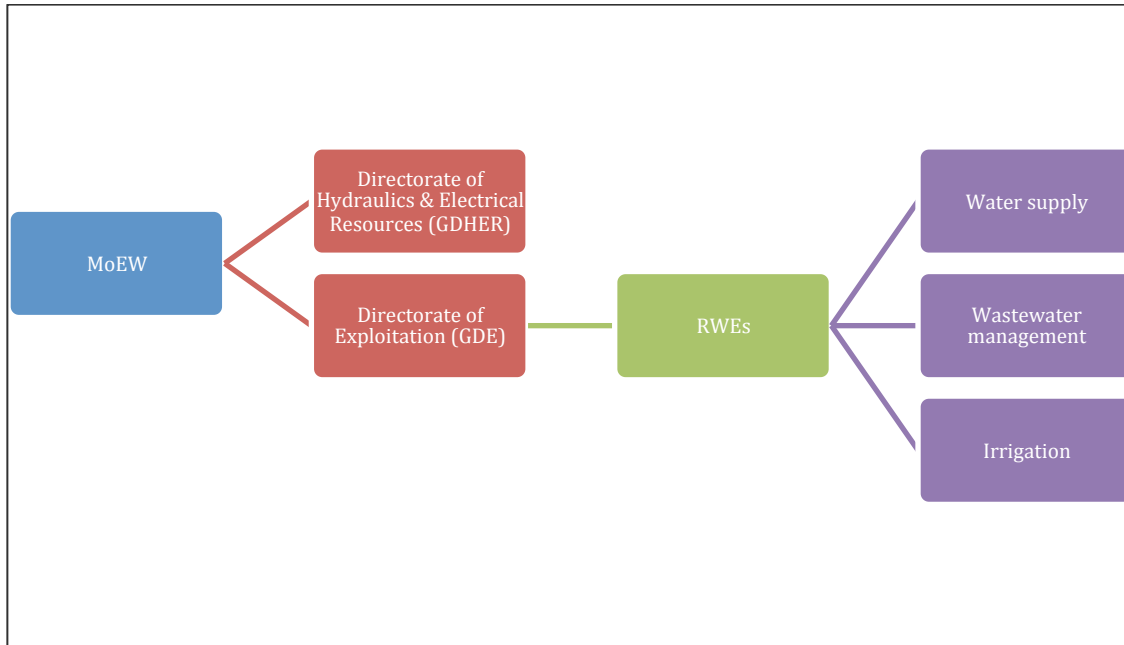


Figure 4: First category (reproduced from Eid-Sabbagh, 2014)

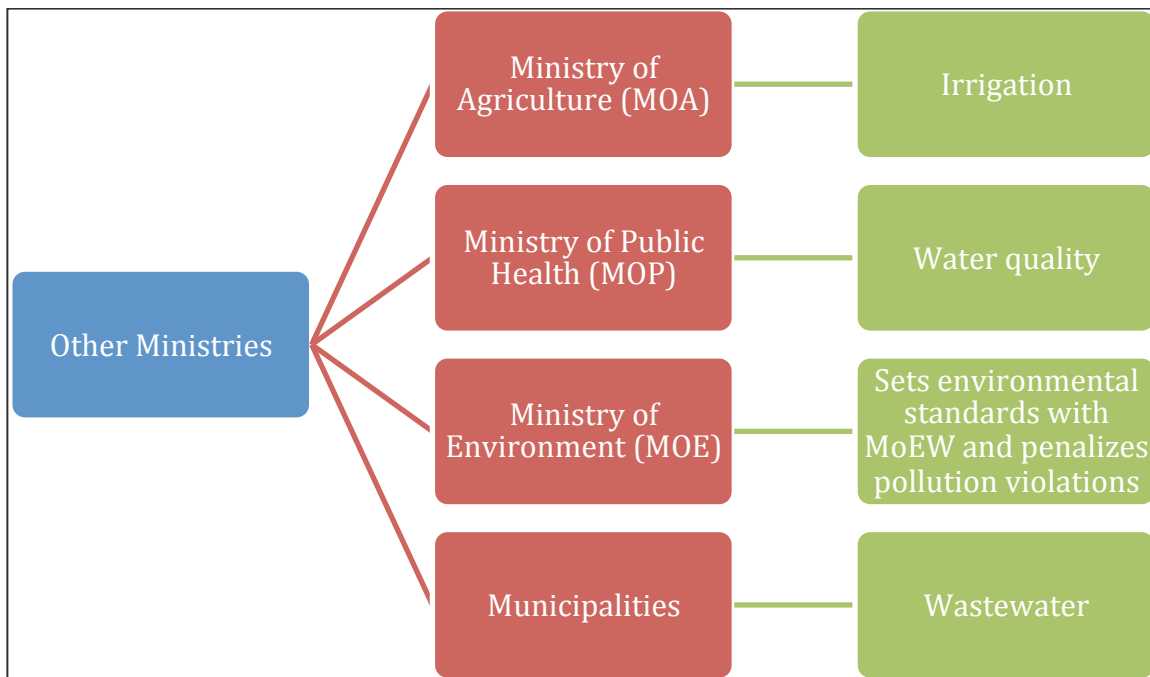


Figure 5: Second category (reproduced from Eid-Sabbagh, 2014)

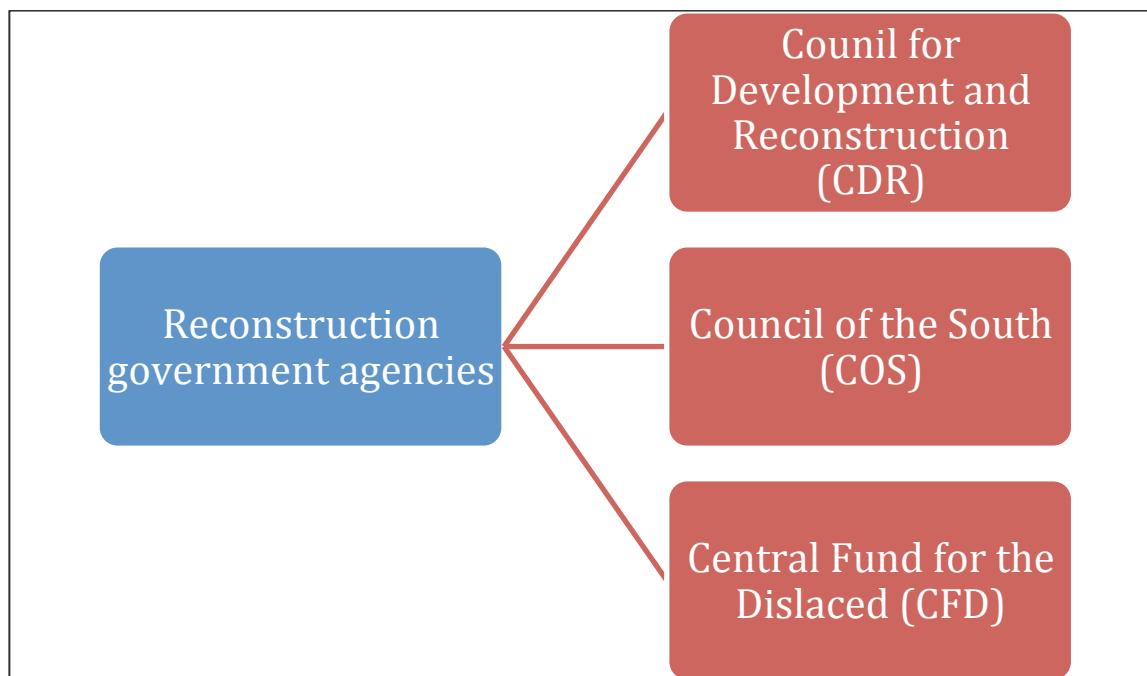


Figure 6: Third category (reproduced from Eid-Sabbagh, 2014)

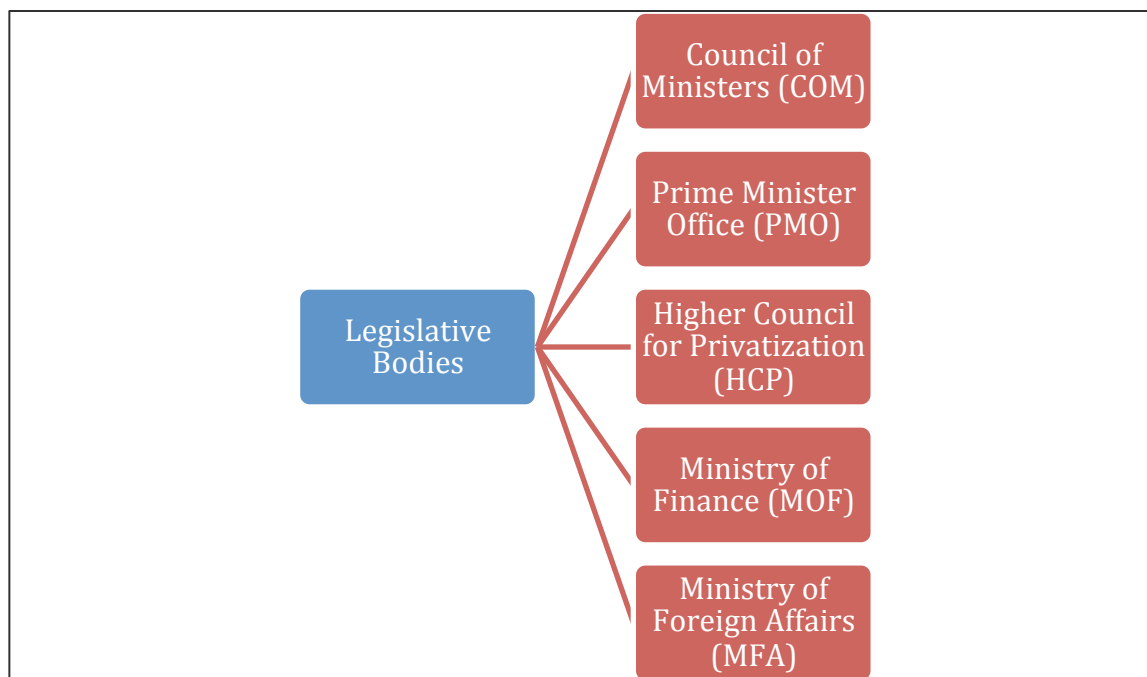


Figure 7: Fourth category (reproduced from Eid-Sabbagh, 2014)

## Appendix B – Water Laws and Regulations

Table 5: Select Lebanese water laws and regulations (reproduced from Farajalla et al., 2015, pp. 30-32)

Law	Purpose
Law 1913	Irrigation Law of the Ottomans
Order No. 144, 1925	Protection of surface water and groundwater resources
Order No. 320/26, 1926	Protection of catchment areas
Decree No. 10231, 1955	Tripoli Water Investment System
Decree No. 10276, 1962	Protection zones for water sources and recharge areas
Law No. 66/20, 1966	Creation of the Ministry of Water and Electrical Resources
Decree No. 3275, 1972	Creation of independent establishments for drinking water
Decree No. 9627, 1996	Creation of a public institution called North Lebanon Water Establishment and the merging of some water authorities and committees within this authority
Law 221, 2000	The consolidation of local water offices and committees into four regional water establishments, overseen by the MoEW
Law 228, 2000	National privatization law to encourage the participation of the private sector in all sectors, including water and electricity. Law 228 establishes a framework where future public-private initiatives will be able to: Regulate the economic sector in question; Identify regulatory bodies to oversee public-private transfers and monitor privatized projects; Specify the duration of transactions pursuant to Article 89 of Lebanon's Constitution
Law 337	To separate between macro and micro management of water, and strengthen the policy of decentralization by granting more autonomy to regional WAs
Law No. 401, 2003	Public participation in the management of the Tripoli Water Authority was approved
Order of the Council of Minister No. 3, 2003	10-year water plan for dams and mountain lakes

## Appendix C – NGOs and Advocacy Networks

### 1. Donia for sustainable development

A not-for-profit NGO based in Tripoli, Donia was established in 2013 and is headed by the activist and freelance journalist Nariman Shamaa. It is part of a larger inter-governmental network of NGOs that come together under the umbrella of Anna Lindh Foundation, which aims to empower civil society across the Mediterranean to achieve cultural understanding (Anna Lindh Foundation, n.d.-a). Similar to its sister cross-national NGOs, Donia aims to achieve holistic sustainable development that takes into consideration the social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental aspects in light of international treaties and conventions (Anna Lindh Foundation, n.d.-b).

Areas of focus include social justice, democracy, human rights, gender equity, economic and environmental sustainable development, and heritage preservation (Anna Lindh Foundation, n.d.-b). From a social lens, the main objectives of Donia include reducing poverty, empowering marginalized populations, fostering a culture of peace and non-violence, and promoting gender equality (Anna Lindh Foundation, n.d.-b). Economically, Donia works on fostering sustainable modes of consumption and production in an environmentally-friendly fashion while also creating employment opportunities for women, refugees, and immigrants (Anna Lindh Foundation, n.d.-b). The cultural piece manifests in Donia's campaigns for preserving historical heritage and monuments of cultural value (Anna Lindh Foundation, n.d.-b). Politically, Donia advocates for human and civil rights, promoting citizenship, and increasing political participation (Anna Lindh Foundation, n.d.-b).

Donia played a crucial role in launching several campaigns, as Shamaa



recounted. Shamaa and her group of activists first started with a campaign to save Tripoli's historical heritage. They signed petitions and rallied in front of the historical buildings and monuments that were to be demolished based on governmental decrees. Shamaa reported that this kind of mobilization had been absent before. Donia also gave birth to *Our Sea, Our Land* campaign that advocates for the protection of public properties on the sea front in Tripoli, and against the multiple illegal transgressions of public spaces.

## **2. Committee for Monitoring Tripoli's Projects**

The committee was founded by *Donia for Sustainable Development* in 2014 and is also headed by Nariman Shamaa. It comprises of a number of unions, community and familial organizations, associations (most notably the Association of Academics), experts (e.g. engineers and lawyers), former and current municipality members, business owners, and civil society activists, all having diverse political backgrounds (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). The committee started with around 74 members, 40 of which were independent, but the number dropped as affiliated members resigned under political pressure; currently the committee consists of 54 members (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016).

The committee oversees development projects proposed for the city of Tripoli and selects numerous social and environmental issues to focus on (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). Examples of these include the protection of Tripoli's historical heritage and public properties. They also focus on exposing the prevailing corruption, especially at the level of municipalities, and raising awareness among citizens (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). The committee issued a

declaration in 2015, demanding (a) the democratization of the decision-making process, particularly through involving civil society in regards to development projects concerning Tripoli; (b) implementing projects based on a clear vision as part of a holistic development plan that takes into consideration the historical significance of the city; (c) accelerating the completion of the construction of the eastern and western belts of El-Mina bridge, which has been ongoing for decades; and (d) addressing the traffic crisis in the city centre (Alwifak, n.d.).

A pivotal focus for the committee is unveiling corruption in Tripoli's municipalities and empowering the latter to assume its powers. The current mechanism of decision-making within the municipality is not based on comprehensive studies that put the interest of the citizens of Tripoli at the forefront (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). Shamaa attributed the strengths of the committee to the thorough research it undertakes to study proposed development projects. This approach, she continued, enables expert members to point to legal loopholes in prospective enterprises concerning the city. The members then coordinate with municipality members to discuss future steps. Some of the committee members are concurrently municipal officials. Shamaa believes that the committee's work strengthened the status of civil society as a whole: "It has gained us, and thus civil society, credibility" (personal communication, 2016).

The committee's work is collaborative and the members utilize a variety of mechanisms to pressure the government. By having expert members from various disciplines on board, the committee is able to conduct comprehensive studies of prospective development projects the government plans to undertake in Tripoli.

Additionally, social media plays a major role in publicizing events, rallying the masses, and exposing non-transparent deals that harm rather than benefit Tripoli and its citizens. Members of the committee are well-connected such that they are able to stay informed of new endeavours given their manifold networks in municipalities and other sources (S. Annous; N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). In many cases, activists rely on word of mouth to keep up-to-date with governmental undertakings in order to plan their tactics/moves (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). This CSO collaborates with and receives valuable support from the *Civic Mobilization Network*.

### 3. The Civic Mobilization Network

An unofficial network led by Samer Annous, an academic and activist, the *Civic Mobilization Network* is both organized and unorganized in the sense that it does not have an official designation as an established NGO. In fact, Annous prefers this form of social order as he stated: “I don’t believe in NGOs”. The (un)organized social order allows him and his fellow activists more freedom and flexibility, and keeps them immune to the numerous pitfalls that come with being part of an official organization. In this way, they are able to be effective without stumbling over the drawbacks that most NGOs are susceptible to. Moreover, Annous expressed his suspicions surrounding several existing nongovernmental organizations, especially given that many corrupt figures have founded their own, adopting deluding banners. In his opinion, many environmental organizations and experts are, indeed, “partners in crime” (personal communication, 2016). He used the example of the You Stink mobilization, discussed further below, to illustrate how certain environmental NGOs were complicit. For instance, the Green Party had indicated that incinerators were harmless as the party’s secretary declared

her support of the minister (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). Overall, Annous acknowledged the efficacy of some NGOs but questioned the capability of existing traditional ones in Tripoli, in particular, to effectively lobby<sup>18</sup> for change. Indeed, he voiced his concerns with the lack of ability to lobby, as did Shamaa who indicated that her group's influence is not huge but partial and local.

In terms of how this group works, Annous indicated that he coordinates with members in his social network to respond at a short notice to projects that are to take place at any point in time (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). As soon as they learn of new issues they react immediately by spreading the word through social media and written articles. They also collaborate with activists affiliated with other groups such as Tripoli's Projects. The Civic Mobilization Network has been involved in several campaigns, including *Our Sea, Our Land*, which opposed the trespassing of the sea front of El-Mina and that of Tripoli. They had also taken part in the mobilization against the underground garage project, and in smaller protests against the demolishment of historical buildings in Tripoli (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016).

The network maintains working relationships with journalists, who offer valuable support to the group's endeavours. They also hold public meetings at the *Association of Academics* given that the latter is considered a neutral space. Another opposing mechanism is attending promotional events that the elite organize to market their projects; the activists offer a counter-discourse to raise awareness among the audience and expose the hidden agendas behind these projects (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). Of course, this has subjected the involved activists to various

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<sup>18</sup> This is the term the participant used.

pressures as discussed further below. In terms of the activists' backgrounds, Annous indicated that the majority of mobilizations have been initiated by academics or students since these tend to enjoy a relative degree of independence others may lack (personal communication, 2016). That is, this category of activists is better able to withstand various kinds of pressure than are conventional employees or shop owners, whose livelihoods may be jeopardized in the process (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016).

The approach that the *Civic Mobilization Network* adopts is responsive, and more reactive than proactive, a strategy that seems to be paying off. The network was able to temporarily halt the Tripoli Sea Land project.

#### 4. Utopia

According to representatives of Utopia, the latter started as a grassroots movement with advocacy orientations. It first focused on launching campaigns and eventually evolved into an established NGO (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016). In the past, Utopia worked on establishing a few public water points (*Sabeel*), but these got discontinued since the WE had a limited budget to spend on projects in Tripoli (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016). The committee of Utopia then decided to opt for more impactful projects such as solid waste management, drainage systems, drinking water treatment, and the installation of water tanks to cope with water shortages instead of smaller water supply facilities (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016). More recently Utopia has been involved in installing water pumps in some of the refugee camps in al-Koura. The other aspect of Utopia's work focuses on humanitarian aid and capacity building. Examples of such projects include

fostering recreational activities, skill-training workshops, women empowerment initiatives, and engaging youth in projects that aim to rehabilitate and enhance street aesthetics in their own communities (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016). The majority of its work is focused in Tabbaneh, Qobbeh, and Mallouleh, all of which are considered deprived, conflict zones (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016).

The process of project selection passes through several stages. Utopia first consults with members of the community to identify their needs. Based on the outcome of the consultations and on expert assessments, Utopia proposes potential projects to its partners, who then seek the approval of the MoEW (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016). Utopia's partners include all the NGOs that fall under the umbrella of the UNHCR e.g. CARE, Solidarity, René Mouawwad, and Coopi (C. Nachabe, personal communication, 2016).

## Appendix D – Advocacy Campaigns

### 1. Our Sea, Our Land

A few development projects started to take place on the sea front of Tripoli and the coastal town of Mina, raising a great deal of attention and controversy. The unofficial Civic Mobilization Network, led by Samer Annous, in collaboration with other activists have advocated for the protection of public property on the sea front in Mina. Over the past few decades, the shore had undergone several pavement projects issued by the municipality to accommodate the city's rapid urban expansion. On more than one occasion, though, the implemented pavement projects served as a preparatory stage for prospective investment enterprises of a private nature such as luxurious beach resorts. Annous explained how Tripoli's bourgeoisie used their political clout to obtain the government's approval of the proposed projects and to even alter the outcomes of environmental impact assessments to their favour (personal communication, 2016).

For instance, a new fish market was established by a prominent local figure, Safadi, using the money of the World Bank. This illustrates the corruption on the end of international donors (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). The fish market was doomed to fail, as it was unnecessary and could not compete with the well-established, traditional fish market in the town: "That new fish market is not working anymore. It is just sitting there and being ugly", one participant noted. Other failed projects include a life-saving boat, which cost around USD 100,000, donated by a European entity; the boat was quickly abandoned partly due to the lack of maintenance (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016).

Even in cases where development projects were designated as public spaces, the process of their implementation was full of ambiguities. For instance, the implementation of a public park established on the small island adjacent to the shore lacked transparency (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). The project was made possible because of the influence of the minister of labour, who is also a native of Tripoli; he relied on his network to get the project approved (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). A number of problems surrounded the project's execution. First, it was unclear how the project would be managed, who the beneficiaries were, or where the funding came from (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). This illustrates the double-sided role that NGOs can play, either positively or negatively. He further voiced his concern about the high probability of the presence of clientalism and nepotism in the undertaking of the project, and questioned its sustainability on the long term. Finally, the small zoo that was incorporated into the island, in his opinion, reinforces the colonial agenda that he and other activists are striving to combat. Below is an example of one project the *Our Sea, Our Land* campaign has targeted.

## 2. Tripoli Sea Land Project

Most recently, expansive sea pavement and construction work have taken place on the sea fronts of Tripoli and El-Mina in preparation for the establishment of a large-scale project called 'Tripoli Sea Land' (Shamaa, 2016). The neoliberal enterprise is the offspring of the collaboration of ten of the country's bourgeoisie (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). According to preliminary blueprints, Sea Land will comprise of housing units, touristic resorts, commercial facilities, and recreational amenities that will occupy a million m<sup>2</sup> of land, part of which is public property (Shamaa, 2016). The



contractor company even proposed dedicating 300 m<sup>2</sup> of land (currently occupied by municipal roads, gas stations, small convenience stores, and public spaces such as parks and mosques) towards the prospective project (Shamaa, 2016). If implemented, the project would require a daily water supply of around 1200 m<sup>3</sup>, an amount the North Lebanon WE is unable to provide (Shamaa, 2013). Additionally, a municipal report identified a total of 40 legal, environmental, and technical loopholes in the project (Shamaa, 2016). The contractor company had already proceeded with sea pavement along the shore well before a permit was issued by the municipality (Shamaa, 2016).

The danger of such initiatives, in Annous's opinion, is the associated demographic change they bring upon. Local residents, most of who come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, will be driven out of the area because they cannot afford the expensive housing. Moreover, the privatization of the sea front means that smaller kiosks and trades, and the day workers dependent on them, will no longer be welcome were the new developments to take place (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). Street vendors would not be able to make a living if grand projects replaced existing humble structures. Moreover, the sea front represents one of the very few public spaces still accessible for people with modest means (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). Any grand enterprise that follows the suite of the high-end Solidere or Zaytouna Bay in Beirut will be detrimental to existing populations (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016).

To promote these projects, stakeholders employ a discourse of *fighting poverty*, a propaganda Annous thinks is misleading as these projects are in fact fatal to the poor's livelihoods (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). In his opinion, the goal

behind these profit-oriented projects is not to serve the poor as proclaimed by the stakeholders, but rather to change the demography of the area. Given that the majority of the sea front dwellers are considered poor, their existence negatively affects the investment factor (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). He contended that promoting these development projects as potentially bringing prosperity to the region is delusive, yet it often attracts the category of population that will be harmed the most (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). The latter don't realize that had these projects been implemented, they would no longer be able to enjoy a cup of coffee for a few cents, or make a living by carrying on with street vending activities (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016).

Stemming out of the belief that any development project needs to consider the interests of the existing dwellers first and foremost, several civil societal groups coalesced to oppose the project, launching *Our Sea, Our Land* campaign (Shamaa, 2016). The main groups involved were the Civic Mobilization Network and Tripoli's Projects. They fought back through several mechanisms: demonstrations, counter-discourse, social media, and published articles (S. Annous, personal communication, 2016). When asking whether the struggle against the enterprise had been successful, Annous replied that the project did not pass, which would be considered a success. The movement's exerted pressure managed to disable 16 voting trials in a single year (Shamaa, 2016). Due to the increasing objections and the efforts of the involved activists, the project was temporarily halted, awaiting the decision of the then to-be-elected municipal council (Shamaa, 2016).

### 3. Underground Garage

Activists from the Civic Mobilization Network were also part of a campaign launched against a proposed underground garage that was to take place at the centre of Tripoli. The project had been on file since 2002 but never executed. Most recently, the Centre for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) pressured the municipality to accelerate the project's execution, but municipal members disapproved unanimously due to the environmental risks the project posed and the absence of a holistic development plan for the region (Al-Ankabout, 2016). Ten days later, the municipality revoked its refusal under pressure from the Future Movement political party, and the underground garage was soon underway (Al-Ankabout, 2016).

Yet the project elicited concerns and faced objections by Tripoli's Projects civil society group. In contrast to what was promoted, the underground garage would not help in solving the traffic crisis. Tripoli's Projects committee got sidetracked by the venture, and had to put aside the 12 issues it had identified of interest to the citizens of Tripoli in order to rally against the underground garage initiative (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016).

According to Shamaa, the activists had a clear vision and specific demands. They demanded that the municipality, which was unaware of the project, assume its responsibilities rather than remain marginalized in the face of decisions made by the CDR (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). Shamaa reported how some municipal members, who opposed the project initially, revised their positions under political pressure (personal communication, 2016). This resulted in animosity between the municipality and activists, who used a stern discourse against the government. The

activists were not “acting aimlessly” and were not necessarily opposed to the garage altogether, but rather to the mechanism through which it was being imposed (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). In other words, they requested an overview of the development plan for the area and a thorough study of the traffic issue and environmental risks, both of which were lacking, in order to make informed decisions (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016).

The activists endured various kinds of threats and intimidation from authorities. Shamaa reported that she and other participating activists received life-threats and were subjected to emotional and psychological pressure; they also had to deal with jobs that powerful figures had recruited to deter the activists. Besides, the activists lacked solid support from citizens, whose initial response was discouraging and at-best cautious.

While several groups initially coalesced to oppose the initiative, some of the participants eventually split up for various reasons. The intimidation techniques succeeded in discouraging a few people, and others were dissuaded by their political inclinations; the schism weakened the coalition (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). To pacify the outraged activists, the government conducted a study on the development of the city square, but Shamaa reported that the study was incomprehensive and contained ambiguities. Thus the protest continued, as did the implementation of the project. The breaking point was on a Sunday morning when Shamaa and three other women took to the street to prevent the commencement of construction work. They had to block the way with their bodies so as to stop the construction trucks from advancing. Following this incident, and after utilizing social media, the four activists finally managed to rally people around their cause. In the wake

of this mobilization, Shamaa re-invited the parties they were not on good terms with but found them responsive this time. So was Annous's Civic Mobilization Network, and all participants camped in the city square for days (personal communication, 2016).

The mobilization had a sounding effect, and managed to attract people from a variety of political backgrounds, including even proponents of the Future Movement, which was a major partisan of the project (N. Shamaa, personal communication, 2016). Shamaa reported that authority figures tried to hijack the movement by politically penetrating the participants, but their efforts were in vain since the activists succeeded in maintaining a strong presence on the ground despite their diverse political orientations (personal communication, 2016). Shamaa was pleased with the support the movement received, including logistic and social media support. Eventually the project did not pass. Moreover, active members of the mentioned association made it into the municipality, which promises a better coordination between the municipality and Tripoli's Projects committee towards the benefit of the city and its residents.

#### 4. Horsh Beirut

Nahnoo, a grassroots NGO based in Beirut, launched its first campaign in 2012 to advocate for the reopening of Horsh Beirut, the capital's largest green space that had been closed since 1992 (NDI, 2015). A member of Nahnoo tells the story of the reopening of Horsh Beirut; through conducting participatory research and surveys in which the youth were engaged, Nahnoo found that the need for public spaces represented a first priority for the residents of Beirut (personal communication, 2016). Representatives from Nahnoo approached the municipality to raise the citizens' concerns, but were faced with rejection on the premise that the municipality lacked the

resources to maintain the park once reopened (A.A., personal communication, 2016; NDI, 2015). Nahnnoo then mobilized for the cause and managed to arrange for a public meeting with municipal authorities to discuss the issue (A.A., personal communication, 2016; NDI, 2015). A.A. reported the official's initial hesitation, but indicated that he later subdued under the pressure from the audience. By lobbying the municipality and engaging the public, Nahnnoo succeeded in having Horsh Beirut reopened in 2015. It is worth noting that the NGO has played and continues to play a key role in supporting the municipality by preparing a plan for the proper management of the Horsh, overseeing its maintenance, and providing volunteers (NDI, 2015). Although the park remains open to date, Nahnnoo's struggle is ongoing against the government's persistent, systematic encroachment of the park.

## **Appendix E – Reflexivity**

Qualitative research encourages the practice of self-reflection in an attempt to invite the researcher to examine any prejudices or pre-held assumptions that may interfere with the credibility of research findings and analyses. Reflection is an opportunity for the researcher to situate him/herself and acknowledge the perspectives he/she brings into any particular research. Through recognizing personal biases, researchers become better capable of mitigating their impact on the quality of the research outcomes. Ultimately, those subjectivities shape not only the way a researcher sees and describes events but also determines how participants interact with him/her, and how the findings are later interpreted.

In this section, I share parts of my background to help the reader understand my position as a researcher and how my location might have affected the conclusions I arrived at. I also share my own reflections on the interactions I had and the fieldwork experience as a whole.

### **Personal Background**

I am a Muslim Sunni female of Middle Eastern ethnicity. At the time of fieldwork, I was in my mid twenties. I was born in the town of Mina, Tripoli the same summer the civil war ended, but my first-hand experience living in Lebanon was limited to the 24 months I spent there as an adolescent, besides short annual visits. In this sense, I consider myself both an insider and an outsider. I am an insider given my familiarity with the culture, language, and Tripoli's layout, and the fact that I could blend in as I am unlikely to be spotted as an outsider roaming about the city. This acted as a catalyst such that I

did not need extra time in the field to learn the language and find my way around. Tapping into the connections I already had helped me to recruit participants faster than I would have otherwise. My Middle Eastern identity and knowledge of Arabic also allowed me to connect to locals spontaneously and enabled me to understand daily conversations that took place in public spaces, thus enriching my data collection and overall field experience.

At the same time, I could be considered an outsider because of my minimal background living in the city; the sense of place I feel toward Tripoli differs from that of full-time inhabitants as I had a different level of attachment to and a more complicated relationship with the city. The latter is constantly shifting. Coming from a middle-class family and having had very limited experience living in Tripoli, I hadn't experienced water stress the way inhabitants of the city might have. Part of my outsider identity comes from my position as a novice researcher such that the knowledge I possessed of the water sector dynamics, the actors involved, and the political-economic landscape in my chosen case study was meagre prior to fieldwork. I believe this worked to my advantage in the sense that it increased the credibility of my findings. A lowered level of expectations helped me to keep an open mind to a variety of perspectives as I sought answers to the questions I set out to investigate.

Having been exposed to some kind of gender discrimination in Tripoli in the past, I expected to face a similar prejudice during my fieldwork. For the most part, this wasn't the case as I found most people I came in contact with extremely respectful. One exception was during an interview with a male participant; I felt intimidated by his interrogative behaviour. The gender factor also had some impact on my mobility,



especially restricting the time frame within which I could wander alone and determining the neighbourhoods I could visit unaccompanied. In some instances, I felt unsafe walking into isolated areas on my own, especially ones where armed conflicts have taken place more recently. However, I would say that my identity as an outsider to those communities played a more prominent role in holding me back from pursuing further interaction with residents than did my gender; I was self-conscious about my position as a Canadian researcher and felt concerned about how citizens would perceive me, and what power dynamics might be at play. In addition, the living conditions I witnessed during my brief visits to those neighbourhoods were disturbing and magnified my concern of the power distance. Both of these factors, in addition to the limited time I had in the field, prevented me from doing more work with those communities than I had hoped to. Other times, I felt that being a young female worked to my advantage, possibly rendering me less threatening and thus facilitating my initial interaction with others.

### Assumptions

Prior to conducting interviews, I wasn't sure what to expect but I had assumed to find it difficult to recruit participants because of the laid-back nature of the country. To the contrary, I found most people whom I had contacted responsive and timely. I was also concerned about the responsiveness of government officials, but found the majority willing to cooperate, except for one incident when a high-profile figure at a public facility refused to meet with me. A few other researchers I had been in contact with reported a similar response. Most of the other participants I had interviewed seemed cooperative and sympathetic, supportive even.

Given the existing sectarian divisions across Lebanon, I had concerns about how my identity as a Muslim, visible through my name and head cover, affected the way others perceived me. I wondered whether some would be apprehensive or feel uncomfortable participating in the research, but I encountered no such behaviour at all. To the contrary, most were friendly and open-minded. Being aware of the entrenched sectarianism, I felt uncertain—sometimes sceptical—of movements that claimed neutrality. After meeting several activists, however, I became convinced of their genuine anti-sectarian position.

Since I had already prepared a set of questions for each category of the participants, the questions I asked were fairly consistent across the interviews. The questions were approved by my supervisor prior to the commencement of fieldwork, which helped in eliminating personal biases I might have been oblivious to otherwise. The semi-structured design ensured consistency while allowing me the flexibility to pursue emergent themes I may not have accounted for. I had no emotional or other kind of personal connection to any of the participants. Being a naturally good listener, I am confident that I was equally attentive during all of the interviews regardless of the participant's position or status.

As a native of Tripoli, the major bias I brought to this project was the choice of the case study itself. To mitigate prejudice, I adopted a systematic approach when designing the study by adhering to the ethical standards of the academic institution, and the research protocol established by the social science scholarship. I also extensively discussed my research findings with my supervisor, and briefly with other researchers. Therefore, I'm confident in the transparency of the collected data and the credibility of

my analytical approach. Another bias I was aware of relates to the common belief in Tripoli's marginalized status, a discourse I had been repeatedly exposed to at different stages of my life. I was concerned that my location as a citizen of Tripoli had nudged me to unjustifiably believe in what could be identified as a conspiracy theory. I had initially avoided raising the subject or incorporating it in my written material out of concern of succumbing to an unverified bias. However, the marginality theme persistently appeared in people's daily conversations, newspaper articles, and social media. Taking into consideration that people's beliefs shape their realities and identities to a certain extent, I felt obliged to explore the topic regardless of whether or not the claim was true.

Throughout fieldwork, I found that I had to continuously remind myself to refrain from victimizing residents who struggle with water shortage, but to recognize their social agency in overcoming hardship. I wouldn't have arrived at such a mindset had I not been exposed to political ecology literature.

### Rethinking Fieldwork

If I were to do this fieldwork again, I would allow myself more time in the field in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the civil society landscape. Due to the lack of presence of many NGOs and activist network on the web (maybe more so the lack of a reliable database that documents existing ones), I found that I needed extra time on the ground to trace down existing organizations, and fully understand the extent of their involvement with citizens and the kinds of issue they work on. More time would have also allowed me to investigate in more depth the controversial issue of the Jannah dam, which is the closest to what we would consider an environmental movement. I would have also discussed my research findings with local researchers, whose expertise

would have provided different perspectives into my work and crystallized my understanding of the regional dynamics. Finally, if I were to do this research again, I would appreciate collaborating with a local NGO, which would have enabled me to do more work with communities.

The biases I have shared in this section are the ones I am aware of, but there are certainly other factors I may be oblivious to. I recognize that this work represents one snapshot of a specific moment in time and space, a single perspective of a multi-faceted reality. My research as I view it is but an attempt to engage in the ongoing academic conversation that had started long before me and will continue long afterwards. Realizing that no human work is perfect, I welcome opinions, feedback, and contributions with an open mind.