

# CHALLENGING LEBANESE POLITICS-AS-USUAL ONE NEIGHBORHOOD AT A TIME? THE ROLE OF LOCAL MUNICIPAL PLATFORMS IN PROCESSES OF DEMOCRATIZATION

BAHAR MAHZARI  
*Lund University (Sweden)*  
*babarmazari@gmail.com*

*Abstract:* How does the municipal platform Beirut Madinati challenge relations of subordination through its nuanced facilitation of radical democratization processes in Beirut and beyond? Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with electoral candidates, founders and volunteers of Beirut Madinati and an analysis of documents provided by the participants, this study argues that Beirut Madinati has facilitated nuanced processes of radical democracy, which can disrupt patron-client relationships and challenge sectarianism, by attempting to advance egalitarian political structures through the enhancement of participation for and representation of Beirut's diverse population. In particular, the Lefebvrian Right to the City approach implemented by Beirut Madinati through its various activities is a practical example of radical democracy. For example, the municipal platform organizes residents through its Neighborhood Groups to demand public goods and service provision from the municipality instead of being dependent on local chapters of sectarian political parties. At an institutional level, Beirut Madinati's Alternative Municipality functions as a shadow municipality, which keeps officials and sectarian political parties accountable. Its Electoral Working Group, on the other hand, pursues political mobilization countering the sectarian political establishment attempting to build an independent labor union movement and co-creating a national coalition comprising civil society groups and independent parties for the 2018 parliamentary elections in Lebanon. The research explores Beirut Madinati's role and impact at a national and global level examining specifically the transnational character of municipal platforms, which are able to frame local everyday struggles in a global context.

*Keywords:* Beirut Madinati, municipal platform, the right to the city, radical democracy, transnational social movements.

ISSN 2283-7949  
GLOCALISM: JOURNAL OF CULTURE, POLITICS AND INNOVATION  
2019, 1, DOI: 10.12893/gjcepi.2019.1.4  
*Published online by "Globus et Locus" at <https://glocalismjournal.org>*



Some rights reserved

## INTRODUCTION

The 2015 waste management crisis in Lebanon, which resulted in a paralysis of trash collection in the wider Beirut area, led to a large wave of protests and the emergence of various citizen-led initiatives. These initiatives had a rights-based discourse and called out the failure of the Lebanese state in providing these rights (Chaaban et al. 2016: 2). Out of this experience of cross-sectarian, anti-establishment mobilization, the municipal platform Beirut Madinati<sup>1</sup> attempted to transform previous street anger into electoral gains. Activists of Beirut Madinati aimed to address the political crisis Lebanon was facing instead of portraying the waste mismanagement as a technical issue. Its municipal program and activities criticize overarching issues such as corruption, violation of human rights, socio-economic injustice, a lack of safety due to political tensions and the sectarian political system, and provides solutions. Beirut Madinati, which I describe as a citizen municipal platform, entered Beirut's municipal elections as one of the main alternative campaigns in 2016 and competed as the main oppositional contender against Lebanon's political establishment in the capital city. Citizen municipal platforms have caught attention since the Spanish local elections in Madrid and Barcelona in 2015, where citizen-led electoral lists emerged and competed, following the Indignados protests of 2015. The term "citizen municipal platform" is borrowed directly from Barcelona En Comú, which has been described as an example for this social phenomenon (*How to Win Back the City En Comú: Guide to Building A Citizen Municipal Platform* 2016: 4). According to Kate S. Baird (2015: 2), these platforms generally consist of loose alliances of citizens and are driven by activists from social movements. Since its formation in fall 2015, Beirut Madinati has functioned as a municipal platform consisting of three different task forces: the Alternative Municipality, the Electoral Working Group and the Neighborhood Groups. Each of these has facilitated nuanced processes of radical democracy through a Right to the City approach with effects beyond the local sphere.

In Lebanon, the social denominator of the various groups is their sect. Hence, Samir Hermez (2011: 527) views

sectarianism as the major constraint on democratization in Lebanon, where sectarian identities are sustained through clientelist networks. Lebanon's weak state institutions enable clientelism, where material payoffs and services are exchanged for political loyalty (Cammett 2014: 134). Consequently, individuals, who are on the receiving end, are treated as clients rather than residents with rights. Therefore, the disruption of patron-client relationships between sectarian political parties and supporters is necessary in order to stop the reproduction of sectarian identities and enable a democratization process. Political competition by non-sectarian political parties with an issue-based program and grassroots social mobilization establishing self-determination of the residents offer chances for democratization (Geha 2016: 28; Deets, Skulte-Ouaiss 2016: 525-527). In this case, Beirut Madinati disrupts patron-client relationships and challenges sectarianism through its Right to the City approach. Henri Lefebvre states that the Right to the City consists of two intertwined rights of participation in and appropriation of the urban sphere. It is fulfilled through "autogestion"<sup>2</sup> of the city dwellers. According to Mark Purcell autogestion in the Lefebvrian context "means people managing collective decisions themselves rather than surrendering those decisions to a cadre of state officials" (2014: 147). Throughout the development of autogestion people realize their own power and understand that they are "perfectly capable of managing their affairs on their own" (Purcell 2014: 148). With this as a point of departure, this study aims to explore Beirut Madinati's Right to the City approach by placing it into the theoretical framework of radical democracy. Here, the fight for egalitarianism pursuing a city for everyone against structures of domination, in the form of patron-client relationships and sectarianism primarily, but also challenging classist and patriarchic power structures through different activities, is at the forefront. Hence, the research question asked is "how does the municipal platform Beirut Madinati challenge relations of subordination through its nuanced facilitation of radical democratization processes in Beirut and beyond?"

Following the disillusioning developments of the 2011 Arab uprisings, the Occupy Movement and other mass

mobilization efforts worldwide, municipal platforms have provided an example of how public discontent can be successfully translated into political action. The thesis proposed in this paper aims to explore the attempts of democratizing social and political structures and challenge power asymmetries in the Lebanese context by reference to Beirut Madinati. I hope that the research findings can enable activists from across the globe to not only learn from each other and share knowledge, but also build solidarity among activists striving for radical democratic politics.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *The Right to the City: Towards an Urban Commons?*

To understand Beirut Madinati's political claims and collective action, I approach my findings using the perspective of the Right to the City. The city has been studied as a fascinating place for rights-based change, citizen mobilization and revolution. David Harvey (2014: 119-136) deconstructs the meaning and potential of the city for broad-based movement building. Much of the traditional left has ignored the "revolutionary potential" (Harvey 2014: 119) of urban social movements. These urban social movements often have been described as too reformist and dealing with specific, rather than systemic issues (Harvey 2014: xiii). However, developments of the past four years, including the substantive success of municipal platforms such as Ahora Madrid<sup>3</sup> and Barcelona en Comú have put urban-based movements under the spotlight. Harvey (2014: 3) defines the Right to the City as a form of a collective right similar to workers', minority, gay, and women's rights. Originally introduced by Henri Lefebvre in 1968, the concept of the "right to the city" entails two intertwined rights: *a*) the right to participation in the design and production of the urban space, and *b*) the right to appropriate the urban space so that it meets the needs of urban residents (Lefebvre 2016: 197). These two intertwined rights of participation and appropriation are relevant to meet city dwellers' various needs (housing, work, education,

information, relaxation, leisure and green spaces). Lefebvre further describes the Right to the City as a concrete example of human and civil rights. The most significant public goods around which the Right to the City revolves include water, electricity, gas, transportation, media as well as modern goods (Lefebvre 2016: 40). Daniel Mullins (2014: 67), in his interpretation of Lefebvre's work, adds an unrestricted access to public services to the list of city dwellers' needs. The fulfillment of these can be achieved through "autogestion" (2016: 147) in Lefebvre's words, which refers to self-management of the city by its dwellers. Mullins interprets autogestion in the following terms: the city dwellers' own control over public goods, political disputes and negotiations as well as the appropriation of spaces, which illustrates a consolidation of democracy (Mullins 2014: 67). Hence, it demonstrates a form of direct grassroots democracy, which consists of a constant process of disputes, self-reflection, negotiations and struggles among city dwellers. The abovementioned public goods are necessary to fulfill city dwellers' needs in concrete terms. Here it is interesting to refer to David Harvey's interpretation of public goods, their transformation into so-called "urban commons" (Harvey 2014: 79) and how these urban commons tie back to Lefebvre's Right to the City.

Harvey points out that the dynamics of class exploitation are not confined to the traditional idea of the factory proletariat only present at the workplace. The city itself is produced through the process of urbanization, which consists of the labor of all those reproducing urban daily life. Therefore, the Right to the City is inclusive of a wide range of actors from construction workers, teachers to business administrators. All of them have an entitlement to this collective Right to the City, which calls for social justice and a decent living environment (Harvey 2014: 137). In this sense, the concepts of work and class have to be reformulated from a narrow definition "attached to industrial forms of labor into a far broader terrain of the work entailed in the production and reproduction of an increasingly urbanized daily life" (Harvey 2014: 139). Such reformulation would include middle-class residents demanding their right for public goods in the city. Members of society should not be

categorized based on their class when it comes to their potential to be actors pushing for democratization (Della Porta 2013: 127). Instead scholars should use the approach that “those who have the most to gain from democracy will be its most reliable promoters” (Della Porta 2013: 127). The control of the surpluses generated in the process of urbanization lies only in the hands of a few, who exploit and profit off public goods including sanitation, water, electricity, affordable housing, paved streets and the like (Harvey 2014: 72-74). According to Harvey, a public good turns into an urban common when social forces “appropriate, protect and enhance it for mutual benefits” (Harvey 2014: 73).

*Radical Democracy: A Framework for the “Right to the City”?*

Radical democracy, which was originally introduced by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, aims to be inclusive of a multiplicity of identities. The strive for equality is core to the concept of radical democracy as it attempts to provide a framework for struggles against inequalities and those challenging relations of subordination (Laclau, Mouffe 2014: 172). Radical democracy is not a form of government, but a process of confrontations and disagreements between the oppressor and the oppressed (Mullins 2014: 109), where striving for equality is accompanied by embracing differences. Laclau’s and Mouffe’s concept of radical democracy attempts to point out a contemporary democracy deficit due to the prevention of conflicts and disagreement (Mullins 2014: xvii-xviii). Instead the process of reaching an agreement based on a rational consensus has been established (Mullins 2014: xvii-xviii). Laclau and Mouffe refer to the necessity of disagreement among people as “antagonisms” (Laclau, Mouffe 2014: 138). Antagonisms arise when relations of subordination exist or when acquired rights are called into question. In the case of feminism, for example, antagonisms arise, because “women as women are denied a right which the democratic ideology recognizes in principle for all citizens” (Laclau, Mouffe 2014: 143). This is also the case, for example, with ethnic minorities, who demand their civil rights.



In order to have a better understanding of this theory, it is important to break this process down into two components: radicalism and pluralism (Laclau, Mouffe 2014: 150-152). Mullins interprets radicalism as a process of aiming for egalitarian practices in political and social life, while pluralism refers to the acceptance and autonomy of the different identities (Mullins 2014: 110). Joan Minieri and Paul Getsos attempt to provide for a more practical interpretation of Laclau and Mouffe's theory. In practice, radical democracy entails that people can participate in all aspects of the political system, "from holding elected officials accountable to running for their local planning boards" (Minieri, Getsos 2007: 19). The aim is to stop the exclusion of different people in the political process and "create communities in which rights, resources, and opportunities extend to everyone, equitably and peacefully" (Minieri, Getsos 2007: 20).

The Right to the City offers the opportunity to achieve a more practical understanding of radical democracy and makes both of these concepts accessible for activists, urban planners, architects, social workers and city dwellers, who aim at making their city more inclusive and socially just. Both radical democracy and the Right to the City seek to create more egalitarian and inclusive spheres of participation, where different opinions can clash, while striving for equality. Mullins (2014: 144) points out that autogestion can be viewed as a practical implementation of radical democracy as it allows different groups within the city to maintain their autonomy and participate in political decision-making processes, while seeking equality and social justice for all city dwellers. This radical-democratic approach towards the Right to the City builds on the practical competences and knowledge, which city dwellers have as residents of their neighborhoods and users of public services. Donatella Della Porta (2013: 7) highlights the importance of creating opportunities for participation in order to empower citizens. In a radical democratic vision of democracy, political space broadens beyond the electoral arena often manifesting itself in the public sphere and spaces. It includes civil society organizations as well as neighborhoods, as pointed out earlier by Minieri and Getsos (2007: xx-xxi).

*The City: A Space for Change?*

How does the city generate change at the national and global level? As established in the previous sections, the literature on the Right to the City and radical democracy demonstrate how urban grievances can lead to mobilization for a more inclusive and socially just urban space. These grievances include, among others, the struggle for affordable housing, gentrification, service provision, environmental degradation of urban spaces and urban poverty (Beirut Madinati Municipal Program 2016: 4). First, it is important to define the concept of urban social movement, which is collective mobilization around demands for collective consumption, urban planning, political self-determination and social justice (Andretta, Piazza, Subirats 2015: 3). However, the impact of urban social movements is not solely confined to the city (Loopmanns, Nicholls, Uitermark 2012: 2548). The local and the global are deeply intertwined, because the process of globalization has had significantly affected social movement mobilizations. Lefebvre (2016) thinks in similar terms, when he states that the modern city is a product of industrialization and neoliberal economy which exploits the working and middle classes in the city (Lefebvre 2016: 95). Hence, the crisis of the city is global. Mullins adds to Lefebvre and states that while cities are not all the same, one can find very similar processes of segregation and oppression in cities around the world (Mullins 2014: 158). The Right to the City has been a major slogan for politicizing and bringing different conflicts under a common framework such as affordable housing, sanctuary cities for refugees, environmental and heritage preservation at the urban level (Mullins 2014: 11). It is therefore interesting to provide insights into how these struggles are faced by cities around the world and how they mobilize people beyond the local level. Bryon Miller refers to this as “militant particularism” (2014: 227) based on the original work by Raymond Williams, which can build global solidarity by focusing on everyday concerns. However, urban social movements need to “frame and reframe broad messages so they will resonate with a diverse array of collectivities in a wide range of place-



specific and not so place-specific circumstances” (Miller 2014: 228).

## METHODOLOGY

### *Study Population*

This study consists of a diverse but small sample of people associated with Beirut Madinati composed of 10 semi-structured interviews, where nine were conducted in a face-to-face setting and one via Skype. It was necessary to engage in informal conversations with active members, former members and journalists knowledgeable about Beirut Madinati before starting the interview process. A former founder of the platform provided the contact details of co-founders and current members. Additionally, the establishment of rapport with various scholars at the Department of Architecture and Design at the American University of Beirut (AUB) gave insights into Beirut Madinati and initiated contact with members of the platform.

I relied on purposive snowball sampling throughout the research in order to explore different perspectives on Beirut Madinati. Therefore, research participants were asked to suggest people they knew, who might share relevant experiences for the purpose of this study.

To be eligible for the study, there was only one inclusion criterion requiring that the participants are current or have been former members of the platform regardless of the period of engagement. I sought to interview former candidates running for the 2016 municipal elections, founders of Beirut Madinati and related campaigns such as Naqabati<sup>4</sup> and LiBaladi<sup>5</sup> as well as members and volunteers from the three working groups. Significant interest was also paid to deviant cases including former volunteers, who consciously left Beirut Madinati due to strategic and ideological disagreements, in order to gain better knowledge about the complexity of this urban phenomenon. My sample consists of participants ranging from their twenties to their early fifties with everyone having pursued some form of higher education. While I aimed towards gender balance, my



final population sample included four female and six male participants.

### *Data Collection*

The purpose of this study is to achieve a more detailed understanding of municipal platforms and how they can facilitate inclusive participation channels for locals and challenge Lebanon's sectarian political order as well as classist and patriarchic relations of subordination. Hence, this research provides for an illustrative single case study, which explores and describes the complex phenomenon of Beirut Madinati. An intrinsic motivation to acquire an in-depth understanding of this case guides the research design due to the dynamic and constantly developing nature of Beirut Madinati. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to generate a theory or provide for generalizations and predictions. Rather this study aims to demonstrate how the specific socio-political and economic context of Lebanon and its capital city Beirut have influenced the development of a municipal platform, its activists' attitudes towards participatory practices and facilitated place-specific democratization processes. No extensive research has yet been conducted on Beirut Madinati, which links previous literature on urban social movement theory and the Right to the City to concepts such as radical democracy and the relation between the local and global in social movements formation. Hence, the research design and data collection process were accomplished in the absence of hypotheses.

Due to the diversity of the sample population, the semi-structured interview guide featuring open-ended questions varied. However, the general structure of all interviews was composed of the same topical sections covering the personal dimension, the urban dimension and global dimension of the interviewee's activism. Probes and follow-up questions were essential for a deeper understanding of the connections participants saw between Beirut Madinati, inclusive participation and radical democratization. Whereas all interviews lasted between 1-2 hours, the setting for the interviews varied. Some took place

publicly in Cafés, while others took place privately in the participants' offices or homes. In order to respect the fundamental research ethics principles, an informed consent form was provided, which outlined the purpose, expectations and possible risks of the research (Mack et al. 2005: 9). After three of my research participants asked to have their names concealed, I decided to change the names of all my interviewees for the purpose of anonymity.

In addition to the audio-recordings of the interviews, field notes were produced summarizing non-verbal details such as body language and the environment. Next to in-depth interviews, other primary data has been analyzed including documents related to the Neighborhood Groups such as calls for action and neighborhood maps as well as Beirut Madinati's 2016 municipal election program.

### *Data Analysis*

A key process in my analysis of the qualitative data was coding, where the data was categorized based on a set of pre-set and emergent codes. In a re-analysis the generated codes were grouped together in overarching topics, which demonstrated patterns of relationship between the different codes in order to make sense of the nuances of radical democratization processes facilitated by Beirut Madinati. I identified five main themes, which address Beirut Madinati as *a*) a platform established by Beirut's activists, *b*) a third political option, *c*) a force for grassroots organizing, *d*) a force for electoral organizing, and *e*) a local actor in a global movement.

## RESULTS

### *Context: The Formation of Beirut Madinati*

While Beirut Madinati initially started off as an electoral campaign running for the 2016 municipal elections in Beirut, it has since developed into a municipal platform covering three

working areas: the Alternative Municipality, the Electoral Working Group and the Neighborhood Groups. The first two work on an institutional level, whereas the Neighborhood Groups operate on the ground and engage with grassroots activities in tandem with the respective residents. There are 32 members of these working groups. The Neighborhood Groups are open to any resident and do not have a maximum capacity of members, while the Neighborhood Core Group, which is responsible for the coordination of all sub-groups and for setting the strategies, consists of Beirut Madinati members. The Alternative Municipality monitors the current municipal council and its policies, proposes alternatives and follows up on the municipal budget. It holds the current municipality accountable and pushes for transparency in policy-making and financial matters. On the other hand, the Neighborhood Groups work together with residents on re-claiming their rights and restore a decent living and social justice.

While Beirut Madinati's organizational structure does not include a leading figure acting as the public face of the platform, an organizational hierarchy exists, which can restrain radical democratic processes. However, in the case of Beirut Madinati, clashes of ideologies and identities have been permitted and have led to the constant reconfiguration of the Platform. Due to the dynamic nature of this municipal platform, my research only accounts for the state of Beirut Madinati until January 2018. Beirut Madinati is institutionalized to a degree that it includes a Collegiate Body consisting of seven elected members acting as a representation to the media and a General Assembly, which functions as a parliament of sorts, and consists of more than 140 members. Working groups within Beirut Madinati can be compared to parliamentary committees in their status and role.

### *Beirut Madinati – A Platform Established by Beirut's Activists*

My interviews allowed me to identify a network of activists and urban studies academics (such as urban planners and architects from various universities including AUB), who had

initiated the formation of the municipal platform in Beirut. Many of the volunteers were contacted through their professors as George remembers. Farah explains that Beirut Madinati was formed through the collective organization of Beirut's diverse activist scene: "those were people I had advocated with for Dali<sup>6</sup>. Those were people I had advocated with against the Fouad Boutros highway<sup>7</sup>". George has a similar perception, where Beirut Madinati members currently belong to one current social class "not necessarily financially speaking, but at least intellectually speaking". However, he adds: "it happened that people, who have access to certain knowledge, understood that they could do something, because they have the access to knowledge. Now what is important is not who started this movement, but how it will grow". Rather than pinpointing only technical knowledge in the field of urbanism, engineering, architecture, legal studies and economics stemming from higher education as well as activism skills including campaigning as the deciding factor, Farah argues that being from the middle and upper-middle class allows Beirut Madinati members to be independent and form and join such a platform: "if you are working class in Lebanon and you manage to survive, you very likely have a family member, if not more, who is actually employed by someone from the local ruling elite. So, if you have that you are more tied up in your political choices, you are more constrained, have less independence, less freedom". Here, she refers to patron-client relationships between working class individuals and sectarian political parties in Lebanon, which force individuals with few financial resources to resort to the material support provided by sectarian parties in exchange for political loyalty since public welfare institutions fail to meet people's needs. While class diversity is lacking, the plurality<sup>8</sup> of sect, gender and age among members of Beirut Madinati is perceived as strength by many of my research participants. For example, when preparing the electoral list consisting of 24 candidates for the 2016 municipal elections, Beirut Madinati intentionally kept a diverse balance in terms of sectarian affiliation, splitting the list between 50 per cent Christians and 50 per cent Muslims – although candidates for municipal election in Beirut do not run for allocated seats per sect as it is currently the case in

parliamentary elections – as well as gender with a 50 per cent female and 50 per cent male list. Amir further refers to keeping diversity geography within the list. Geography is significant in the case of Beirut as many neighborhoods are still segregated based on sect combined with other social factors such as sect and ethnicity according to Naeff (2017: 12). Ideological differences were also discussed among my interviewees. For example, Farah outlines the ideological diversity of supporters of the platform, who unite based on the idea that the current sectarian political elite cannot govern the country: “we did not get together because we had a similar political ideology. We came together because we had a similar assessment that the current political class, no matter where it stands, is unable to run the country appropriately”.

However, Amal strongly criticized Beirut Madinati’s candidate list as one consisting mainly of middle-class individuals and not providing “true representation” in terms of including people directly from the neighborhoods in Beirut Madinati’s candidate list. Then she stated that the Neighborhood Groups aim to find residents to run for public offices themselves. However, when asked about what holds Beirut Madinati together, all my interviewees referred to a set of values including human rights, transparency and a civil state with rule of law.

### *Beirut Madinati – A Third Political Option*

During all interviews it became clear that Beirut Madinati members and former volunteers oppose the sectarian system governing both political and social life of residents, and seek a functional democratic civil state with a rights-based approach. Therefore, repeatedly, my interviewees distanced themselves from the political elite and placed themselves outside of the political schism, which has paralyzed Lebanese socio-political life since 2005, namely the March 14-March 8 division<sup>9</sup>. Jad identifies certain characteristics with these two camps and positions Beirut Madinati in opposition to them stating that “both are sectarian, both have strong links to regional and international powers”. Therefore, he advocates for political content outside

of these two camps, where sectarianism is abandoned. Furthermore, Beirut Madinati's standpoint on economic development envisions a socially just city "that sustains economic growth, supports employment generation, and recognizes the right of all its dwellers to enjoy a decent living" (Beirut Madinati Municipal Program 2016: 4).

While Beirut Madinati did not win any seats in the municipal council due to the electoral law of the winner takes it all, it was able to secure 40 per cent of the votes (Chaaban et al. 2016: 4). In the Christian-dominated Achrafieh neighborhood Beirut Madinati received 60 per cent of the votes, while 30 per cent of the votes in Sunni neighborhoods, which are inhabited by many Hariri partisans, did not go to Hariri's Future Movement party showing that political loyalty based on social benefit provision is not sufficient in keeping supporters (Dagher 2016: 4). According to Chaaban, many Sunni voters abstained from voting, as they are increasingly feeling disenfranchised with the current Sunni political leadership under Saad Hariri (Chaaban et al. 2016: 11). Furthermore, Beirut Madinati gained greater support from Shia voters than the Beirut List, which might be attributed to the lack of clear directives from Hezbollah according to Chaaban et al. (2016: 12). As a response to not winning any seats in the municipal council, Beirut Madinati now functions as a watchdog monitoring the actions and policies of the municipality. Marylyn, who joined the Alternative Municipality, which functions as a sort of shadow municipality, sees it as an external opposition to the municipal council. The latest action, which the Alternative Municipality took, was to demand the 2017 municipal budget. According to the 2017 Access to Information Law, citizens can demand any document from public institutions, which in turn have the obligation to reveal those for transparency purposes. The municipality is even obliged to publish public documents (such as the budget) online. Hence, the Alternative Municipality ensures transparency by pressuring the municipality to make those documents available to the general public. Marylyn further elaborates on the motivation behind the Alternative Municipality by adding: "the best way to be active [after elections] is to create some sort of a shadow municipality that is formed...but also creating a



link between the Alternative Municipality and the Neighborhood Groups. So actually seeing what the problems are and referring them to this Alternative Municipality, because maybe we have an answer for that”.

### *Beirut Madinati – A Force for Grassroots Organizing*

One of the major recurrent themes throughout the research is the question of reform versus revolution. My interviewees can be divided into two camps advocating for two different strategies: a focus on organizing at a grassroots level at the one hand and, on the other hand, pushing for political reform by being part of the system. The former envisions abolishing the sectarian political system through community organizing, mainly in the neighborhoods. The aim of the community work done in the neighborhoods is to foster participatory practices, which seek to disrupt client-patron relationship. Residents claim their rights and determine their own life in the city without depending on being loyal to any politician, who will in turn offer them different kinds of services. Amir points out that Beirut Madinati aims to serve all city dwellers of Beirut regardless of their sect and personal connection to the platform: “people started to understand that what we were proposing was different than the politicians, who asked for loyalty in a specific position that can get you services out of it. We were saying, ‘no, we are demanding a program that benefits the masses’”.

Beirut Madinati has facilitated several grassroots processes through its participatory planning approach towards the city. In my interviews and observations, I could notice that the Masahat Niqash<sup>10</sup> and Neighborhood Groups make up the core of these participatory practices. Indeed, the open discussion spaces organized during the campaign, which included the neighborhoods of Tariq al-Jadideh, Mar Mikhael, Sioufi and Bachoura amongst others, led to the creation of the Neighborhood Groups. These specific neighborhoods were chosen in order to have a diversity of sects and classes included in the Neighborhood Groups. Amal was one of the initiators of these open discussion spaces:



I said that there is something lacking that has to do with the local scale, because the dominant talk is about policy at a municipal level. And policy is not a framework that a lot of citizens can relate to, because it is not like we have a history of politicians talking about policy, and so I was arguing that the program needed to be broken down into components and then tailored to neighborhoods. (...) Like in any country there are local councils, then reach up to the municipality.

According to Amal, the Neighborhood Groups were a natural continuation of the open discussion spaces due to the established relationship between Beirut Madinati volunteers and respective residents. These volunteers had identified the problems and needs of the neighborhoods, in collaboration with the residents, in order to find adequate solutions during the 2016 campaign. Following the campaign, Beirut Madinati members interested in grassroots work conducted a detailed study of the urban context of Beirut. They created their own map of 66 neighborhoods. Currently, there are two active Neighborhood Groups in Christian-dominated Mar Mikhael and Sunni-dominated Zuqaq al-Blat which function as pilots in order to see whether this project of community organizing works. The Mar Mikhael neighborhood group consists currently of 50 residents. According to the 2016 municipal program, these neighborhood groups are established based on geographical criteria, including a diversity of residents (youth, women, elderly, religious groups, special needs persons or groups, NGOs, private sector, family organizations, trade organizations) as well as members of Beirut Madinati. Amal describes the work done by the Neighborhood Groups as “a toolbox for community organizing” and explains why the grassroots work does not primarily serve the purpose of elections:

we discussed a lot the relationship between the Neighborhood Group and Beirut Madinati. [...] As a beginning it is an experience in community work, which is something that Beirut’s neighborhoods have not witnessed [in this form]. Sectarian political parties have only tackled it so far.

For now, the Neighborhood Groups in Mar Mikhael and Zuqaq al-Blat meet on a weekly basis to work on various issues.

For example, the main issue identified in Mar Mikhael by the residents is a gentrification process reinforced through the unregulated nightlife sector of bars and clubs in the area. The expansion of the bars and clubs is a recent phenomenon with many residents of Mar Mikhael suddenly facing problems such as a lack of water and electricity due to overuse by the bars, immense noise pollution and rocketing housing prices. According to my interviewees many of these bars are illegal, as they are not supposed to be located in residential areas. In Zuqaq al-Blat, one of the projects is to work with local schools on how the students imagine their rights to the city. Nour describes the motivation behind the strategy of the Neighborhood Groups to let the residents decide what kind of issues they want to focus on, and propose a solution with the support of the Group. Several achievements by the Neighborhood Groups are described by my interviewees, including turning individual effort into communal effort, doing press conferences and releases, organizing awareness and media campaigns as well as visits to relevant institutions.

Throughout my interviews with members of the Neighborhood Groups, I noticed tensions between the Neighborhood Group and other working groups due to differing approaches to challenge relations of subordination. Amal perceives the tensions as a difference in strategy towards political work, where she favors a combination of grassroots and institutional work:

grassroots and top-down work need to be both of a priority and go hand in hand. This is how I always saw Beirut Madinati. That it is a group that monitors the municipality. Then there is building a grassroots movement or network and then both together could hopefully make us win next.

Since most residents in the neighborhoods follow one of the establishment parties, the strategy of the Neighborhood Groups is to not tag the work done in the local communities as Beirut Madinati in order to not alienate people. It is simply described as community work done by Beirut Madinati members, who also happen to be residents of the respective neighborhoods, together with other residents of the areas. This

observation is important as it demonstrates that the Neighborhood Groups do not merely aim to mobilize potential voters, but engage in long-term community building. Amal seeks to build up a critical mass until the next municipal elections in 2022, which will break the political sectarian order at a city level. In her opinion, “the municipality is one battle within a lot of battles to break the sectarian regime”.

### *Beirut Madinati – A Force for Electoral Organizing*

A significant number of respondents sought change by accessing political institutions including Beirut’s municipal council, labor unions and the national parliament. In addition to the municipal program, Beirut Madinati has been the initiating force behind two other electoral campaigns in the following two years. One of them was Naqabati, which ran as an independent electoral list for the elections of the OEA at the national level, and won. Naqabati started as a project of the Electoral Working Group of Beirut Madinati and developed into an independent labor union movement including many non-Beirut Madinati members. The other one was LiBaladi, which ran as part of a broad civil society alliance for the parliamentary elections in May 2018. The political program of LiBaladi shared an issue-based, technocratic approach focusing on a more progressive tax policy, free health care, tuition-free education, an affordable housing policy, introduction of an optional civil law regulating family relations and improvement of the situation of migrant workers by abolishing the sponsorship system (Electoral Program 2018: 1-24). While assessing the impact of the different electoral campaigns, it is important to acknowledge structural challenges including the current electoral laws and the limited power of municipalities. For example, for municipal (as well as for parliamentary) elections, voters can only vote in the area where their paternal ancestors are from. According to Nabil this system is used to divide people and somehow control the election results. In the case of Beirut, many were pushed to the suburbs of Beirut due to rising housing prices (Sawalha 2010: 51). Nabil elaborates on this issue explaining that Beirut

Madinati's municipal campaign did not reach the people who can vote, but was very appealing to many, who live in Beirut, but do not have the right to vote for the municipality. Indeed, some of my interviewees supporting Beirut Madinati were not registered in Beirut and, hence, were unable to vote. However, rather than seeing this solely as a structural failure due to the electoral laws, Nabil states that Beirut Madinati "missed out on a lot of things" in their position paper and did not actively reach out to those communities living outside Beirut, who could have been potential voters. These electoral laws do not only affect voters, but also volunteers on Election Day. In the case of Beirut Madinati, and according to George, many volunteers were not allowed to count the votes and enter the polling stations, if they were not from the respective neighborhood. Nonetheless, a general sentiment among all my interviewees is the need to access political structures by running for public office. Amir refers back to the Arab Spring to justify the ineffectiveness of street protests, if unaccompanied by any collective action to mobilize for elections or engaging with institutions.

Two of my respondents talked about the attempt to build an independent labor union campaign for the Order of Physicians based on their experiences with Naqabati. Jad added that they "want to encourage independent labor union movements [...] and create a new Naqabati on other orders". The experiences of Beirut Madinati were crucial in making the Naqabati campaign successful, because many lessons had been learned in terms of improving data gathering and communication, automation of working procedures and an improvement of the performance of volunteers on Election Day. For example, Jad points out that Beirut Madinati failed on Election Day to mobilize undecided voters, while Naqabati volunteers had prepared a list of potential voters to call. Another important factor in winning, in Jad's opinion, was also the active coalition building with the Communist Party and the civil society group The Professional Choice. In contrast to the municipal elections, traditional political parties could not be ignored for the OEA elections, as two very strong associations consisting of the Graduates of USSR Universities in Lebanon and Club of the Ukrainian Universities Graduates in Lebanon had many potential

voters among their ranks, who are affiliated with the Communist Party. However, Amir indicates that any alliance and coalition building should occur only with like-minded groups in order to keep the campaign's integrity in terms of values and content.

The most recent offspring of Beirut Madinati is LiBaladi, a party that ran as part of the national coalition Koullouna Watan<sup>11</sup> of opposition groups and civil society organizations for the 2018 parliamentary elections. These parliamentary elections have been accused of a high number of irregularities and even fraud (Lebanon Civil Society Candidates Suspect Electoral "Fraud" 2018: 3), which limited the number of seats obtained by the nation-wide coalition. After the majority of Beirut Madinati voted to remain a municipal platform, because of the lack of a unified political vision at the national level and short-term engagement at the grassroots level, and not run for parliamentary elections in 2018, LiBaladi was formed as a response.

### *Beirut Madinati – A Local Actor in a Global Movement*

In the previous section, I outlined how crucial the respondents view the impact of Beirut Madinati on the local and national level for enabling democratization efforts. But the phenomenon of Beirut Madinati has even wider implications at an international level. Throughout the interviews, inspiration was drawn from Spain's municipal platform in Madrid, the leftist Spanish party Podemos<sup>12</sup> and Greece's ruling Syriza party. Beirut Madinati is perceived as part of this global trend of anti-establishment electoral initiatives, which try to shake the system from within. Nour, who has lived in Spain for a long time, immediately saw the similarities between Beirut Madinati and Madrid's municipal platform Ahora Madrid, where an organized electoral platform developed out of a street movement in 2015. She compares the 2011 Indignados protests in Spain to the YouStink protests of 2015, because while they might not be "comparable in scale, (they are) comparable in how much society was affected in that specific moment" creating hope for change. Nabil also views Beirut Madinati as part of this larger

anti-establishment trend, where newly founded parties such as Syriza and Podemos “were able to challenge this overarching establishment by building a grassroots electoral platform”. Furthermore, two of my interviewees had attended the Fearless Cities Summit in Barcelona in the summer of 2017, because they had been invited to represent Beirut Madinati. The summit gathered local activists from more than 183 cities from around the world. George describes this collective of municipal platforms as a “global movement of independents, anti-corruption movements and anti-right extremist movements”, which share many experiences. He recounts a conversation he had with an activist from a municipal platform in South Africa:

she was also working on something related to housing evictions. We were able to pinpoint a lot of the strategies that are quite similar. We are so distant, we are so far apart, we are so different in terms of cultures, but then it is the same strategies that are being used.

Nour elaborates on how the global scale of municipal platform affects her personal motivation to support Beirut Madinati: “seeing this as a movement that is beyond just one country or one area or continent and seeing that this has been happening in very different contexts and this has been giving positive results in very different contexts would give you the motivation to continue doing that”.

## DISCUSSION

### *The Right to Beirut: Practicing Radical Democracy*

One of my major findings in relation to the Right to the City is its use by Beirut Madinati in order to disrupt patron-client relationships and consequent reproduction of sectarian identities. Through its Right to the City approach Beirut Madinati provides Beirutis the space to turn from clients into residents with rights. In their empirical work and theories, both Lefebvre (2016) and Harvey (2014) illustrate how participation in shaping the city and appropriation of urban spaces establish

a radical democratic process. As part of this process, public goods are transformed into urban commons. The findings show how Beirut Madinati specifically mobilizes around public goods and services including water, electricity, transportation, (youth) employment, housing, waste management, green spaces, urban safety, cultural activities and heritage preservation. Furthermore, it is important to point out the agents of change, who in the case of Beirut Madinati have been described as bourgeois members lacking legitimacy in representing ordinary residents of the city (Louthan 2017: 38). Although, the municipal platform was initiated and is in its majority composed of middle- and upper-middle class individuals, and only its neighborhood groups include mainly working-class residents – this classist argument appears to be flawed. In the Lebanese context, the political establishment presents the exploitative force of a few. The clearest sign for this neoliberal influence can be seen in the lack of inclusive urban planning of Beirut manifested by rapid gentrification of many low- and middle-income neighborhoods, a dysfunctional housing market and the rise of land prices serving the interests of the wealthiest groups only (Fawaz 2009: 843). A lack of accountability and arbitrariness in the decision-making process have overshadowed Lebanese state and municipal institutions contributing to the corruption and to unregulated profit-making (Leenders 2012: 116). The opposition of Beirut Madinati to the privatization of public goods, spatial control, policing and surveillance of public spaces demonstrates how it creates urban commons through its efforts of protection and enhancement of mutual benefits for all Beirut residents. As Harvey (2014: 128-130) points out, the middle-class residents are included in the struggle of claiming the Right to the City as the dynamics of class exploitation are not limited to the traditional idea of the factory working class. My findings also point out that in the Lebanese context, clientelism restricts the working class in their political choices, because they are dependent on sectarian political parties for welfare distribution, employment and service provision (Cammett 2014: 12-14). Therefore, the middle class has the financial resources to maintain its independence. Furthermore, rather than seeing it merely as an issue of class, my findings highlight that

Beirut Madinati has been formed by the city's activist scene combining their experiences and skills from long-term activism in various fields.

Beirut Madinati demonstrates practices of radical democracy through its Alternative Municipality, Neighborhood Groups and electoral campaigns. Similarly to Lefebvre's idea of autogestion, which aims at inclusive participation in shaping the city, the activities of Beirut Madinati provide examples of self-management. Material payoffs in terms of public goods and services contribute to clientelist dynamics, which can only be disrupted through the provision of rights and self-determination giving dignity back to the people according to Hermez (2011: 531). The Alternative Municipality functions as a watchdog monitoring the municipal council, public officials, budget and proposing alternative policies. Institutional structures contribute to the reproduction of sectarian identities in Lebanon, because sectarian political parties fill the state's role of the service provider and create clientelist networks (Leenders 2012: 231f). Therefore, it is important to keep responsible institutions accountable and serve the residents in a transparent manner. Additionally, Beirut Madinati's Neighborhood Groups attempt to include low-income urban dwellers to participate in organizing and designing the city through various initiatives, which can challenge traditional relations of domination. The plan to identify residents within the Neighborhood Groups who would run for public offices is a practical example of radical democracy, one that attempts to create an inclusive access to political participation at all levels.

Both elements of radicalism and pluralism, which are the pillars of radical democracy (Laclau, Mouffe 2014: 150-152), can be identified in the context of Beirut Madinati. Through its Right to the City approach, Beirut Madinati acts in terms of radicalism by seeking to establish egalitarian social and political structures. Here, everyone shares a set of values including human rights, transparency and a civil state with rule of law. Pluralism, on the other hand, describes the acceptance and autonomy of different identities according to Mullins (2014: 110). It appears as Beirut Madinati wishes to function as a public forum open to participation of all residents of Beirut, but is unable to



fulfill this vision. While a plurality of sect, gender, class and age is visible within Beirut Madinati, a clear intersectional design of actions geared towards ending relations of subordination for a multiplicity of identities is necessary in order to establish radical-democratic politics at all fronts. Here I refer to an engagement with black residents and residents of color, queer communities and refugees, which should be focused on by Beirut Madinati. Nonetheless, Beirut Madinati brings together residents with a plurality of identities and perspectives leading to difference of opinion and occasional clashes. These conflicts, which Laclau and Mouffe (2014: 150-152) define as antagonisms, are central to the concept of radical democracy. As a result of this radical democratic process, political contestation within the platform led to the creation of LiBaladi.

#### *Towards Democratization: Not a Question of “Chicken-and-Egg”*

The political strategy followed by Beirut Madinati can be divided into two approaches. On an institutional level, Beirut Madinati follows a top-down approach to change, which is based on the technocratic expert background of many of its members. It acts as political opposition towards the municipal council and creates political competition by participating in local elections. On a grassroots level, Beirut Madinati engages in community organizing in order to mobilize the residents around their Right to the City. My findings show that the Alternative Municipality functions as a platform to lobby for the demands originating from the Neighborhood Groups. Both approaches need to occur together when striving for change.

Beirut Madinati has been functioning as a democratizing force by introducing political competition at various levels through its initiation of electoral campaigns for labor union and national elections. One of my major findings in relation to electoral organizing is the importance which members of Beirut Madinati attribute to running for public offices. This line of thinking can be traced back to the disillusioning developments of the Arab uprisings, which focused on the street rather than any engagement with the institutions. As a result of these

electoral campaigns, political parties are now forced to provide an issue-based program and show a certain level of transparency. This change of political discourse poses a challenge to the usual way of doing politics in the country where establishment parties such as the Kataeb and political figures such as Michel Aoun and Saad Hariri have adopted Beirut Madinati's issue-based language when it comes to the environment, institutional budget and corruption. In the Lebanese context, municipal level politics offer some extra advantages. While national level institutions are largely under the control of sectarian political parties and often gridlocked, a group with limited resources and an issue-based political program can more easily access the municipal level (Kastrissianakis 2016: 74). However, some of my interviewees highlight the limitation to political reform due to structural challenges such as the current electoral laws and the limited power of municipalities in affecting national legislation. Therefore, it is crucial to simultaneously mobilize grassroots forces in order to work towards democratization and challenge institutionalized power structures.

The aim of community organizing at the grassroots level is to disrupt the sectarian-clientelist nexus by implementing inclusive participatory practices such as the Masahat Niqash and activities of the Neighborhood Groups. These practices allow residents to share their knowledge and competences as users of urban spaces and public services, and distance themselves from patron-client relationships through self-management. The findings of my research show that residents, who participated in the Neighborhood Groups gained knowledge on the Beirut municipality's responsibilities and their rights and, hence, were empowered to claim them. Sawalha argues that an increase of residents' knowledge of their rights and municipal structures can weaken clientelist networks (Sawalha 2010: 125-126). Beirut Madinati's form of community organizing stands in contrast to community building through welfare distribution instrumentalized by sectarian political parties in Lebanon. Instead of politicizing public goods and services around sectarian identities, the residents of the Neighborhood Groups seek egalitarian structures for the distribution of these public goods and services to everyone inhabiting these neighborhoods. Furthermore, the

process of enhancing participation for residents and representation of their different identities and interests can destabilize the sectarian political order. Radical democratic processes extend beyond the electoral arena and often manifest themselves in the public sphere and spaces, as is the case with the Neighborhood Groups. Beirut Madinati has transformed into more than just an electoral machine, but a citizen municipal platform claiming the city dwellers' Right to the City. Nonetheless, the Right to the City in today's global urban context needs to go beyond sectarianism, the class struggle and women quotas, but also address questions of queer identities, race, ableism and environmental justice as intersectional structures of oppression.

For the near-term future Beirut Madinati needs to foster a synergy between grassroots organizing with diverse communities and political competition at the municipal level. Substantial community organizing paired with electoral engagement at the municipal level, which allows for more freedom to maneuver electoral politics as compared to parliamentary elections, is necessary in order to advance towards systematic change in overcoming sectarianism and other relations of subordination. Furthermore, the Municipal Act of 1977 benefits municipalities in terms of financial and administrative independence, when it comes to local activities and provision of public services (Chaaban et al. 2016: 2). Hence, oppositional forces with limited resources can more sustainably access political contestation at the local level within the current Lebanese political system. Beirut Madinati activists decided to refrain from parliamentary elections in 2018 and have since focused on the city-level due to the lack of consensus with regards to national policies and structural difficulties to compete electorally for parliament due to complex electoral laws, which make a change of the political landscape and an end of sectarian politics highly unlikely (Lebanon's 2017 Parliamentary Election Law 2018: 3-32). Therefore, long-term grassroots mobilization through community organizing should be prioritized in order to support informed and empowered residents for the 2022 municipal elections in Beirut, who can collectively attempt to win back the city.

### *A “Glocal” Movement on the Rise*

While Beirut Madinati’s activities are solely focused on Lebanon’s capital city, the platform links to social movements and radical democratization efforts on both a national and global level. The findings highlight that the points of departure for the mobilization of Beirut Madinati are not particular to the city of Beirut, but can apply to many different cities in and outside of Lebanon – including national municipal campaigns including Baalbek Madinati of 2016 and municipal platforms such as Spain’s Ahora Madrid. Both Lefebvre (2016: 115) and Mullins (2014: 158) describe the crisis of the city as global, and argue that very similar processes of segregation and oppression can be found in cities across continents. On a global scale, Beirut Madinati has interacted with fellow municipal platforms by participating in the Fearless Cities Summit in 2017 in Barcelona. In line with my findings, I argue that the city can offer a space for building solidarity among transnational movements concerned with urban issues such as housing, sanctuary for refugees, grassroots politics, corruption, public services and environmental protection. Miller’s interpretation of “militant particularism” (2004: 227) can be illustrated by the similarity of strategies against housing evictions in South Africa and Beirut. This similarity of strategies connects these various municipal platforms into one global movement fighting for egalitarianism against oppressive political structures. Hence, nuances of radical democratization processes enabled by Beirut Madinati through its Right to the City approach are not limited to Beirut only, but translate into the emergence of “glocal relationships” (Miller 2014: 225). Miller uses the term “glocal”<sup>13</sup> (2014: 225) in order to describe the linkage between the local and global level of transnational social movement mobilization, where “solidarity with distant Others” (Miller 2014: 234) emerges from shared experiences due to a globalizing world economy affecting people in similar ways (Miller 2014: 234). The above-mentioned experiences of Beirut Madinati, both at a local and global level, demonstrate how place-specific experiences in an urban context can have universal dimensions.

## LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Amal [pseudonym] (Female, member of Neighborhood Core Group and Mar Mikhael Neighborhood Group, long-term activist concerned with issues of post-war reconstruction, public spaces and displacement, architect and urban planner) [interview at her residence in Geitawi, Beirut 07/12/2017] current Beirut Madinati activist;

Amir [pseudonym] (Male, candidate of Beirut Madinati's list for the 2016 municipal elections, journalist), [interview at public place in Downtown, Beirut 09/11/2017] current Beirut madinati activist;

Èmile [pseudonym] (Male, professional in the field of good governance, administrative reform and development) [interview at his office in Badaro, Beirut 26/10/2017] current Beirut Madinati activist;

Farah [pseudonym] (Female, co-founder of Beirut Madinati, long-term activist concerned with issues of accountability, anti-sectarianism, securitization and informal settlements, professor of Urban Studies and Planning at the AUB) [interview at her office at AUB, Beirut 24/10/2017] current Beirut Madinati activist;

George [pseudonym] (Male, member of Mar Mikhael Neighborhood Group, designer) [interview at public space in Gemmayze, Beirut 08/12/2017] current Beirut Madinati activist;

Gilbert [pseudonym] (Male, member of Electoral Working Group, former activist of Civil Society Movement in Lebanon) [interview at public space in Hamra, Beirut 01/12/2017] current Beirut Madinati activist;

Jad [pseudonym] (Male, candidate of Beirut Madinati's list for the 2016 municipal elections, co-founder of Naqabati and LiBaladi, opinion pollster) [interview at his office in Clemenceau, Beirut 30/11/2017] current Beirut Madinati activist;

Marylyn [pseudonym] (Female, member of Alternative Municipality, humanitarian aid professional) [interview at her office in Achrafieh, Beirut 03/11/2017] current Beirut Madinati member;

Nabil [pseudonym] (Male, volunteered with Beirut Madinati's 2016 municipal campaign, journalist) [interview via Skype, 22/10/2017] former Beirut Madinati volunteer;

Nour [pseudonym] (Female, participated in the activities of the Neighborhood Core Group, PhD student in Urban Studies) [interview at a public space in Hamra, Beirut 31/10/2017], former Beirut Madinati activist, but still participates in activities sometimes.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Translates to *Beirut, My City*.

<sup>2</sup> Autogestion is a socio-critical term, which translates into self-management.

<sup>3</sup> A municipal platform in Madrid formed after nation-wide protests against austerity and inequality, which won municipal elections in 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Translates to *My Union*, which was an independent campaign for the 2017 labor union elections of the Order of Engineers and Architects (OEA).

<sup>5</sup> Translates to *For My Country*, which was a citizen-led political party running as part of the nation-wide coalition Kollouna Watani (translates to *We are all National*), which consisted of civil society organizations and opposition parties running for the parliamentary elections in May 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Dalieh is a sea-front facade in Raouche (Beirut), which is threatened by privatization leading to social and economic loss among local fishermen, restaurant owners and all residents of Beirut by being deprived of public space.

<sup>7</sup> The Fouad Boutros highway is a development project by the municipality of Beirut, while civil society activists are demanding more public green spaces in the form of a park.

<sup>8</sup> I refrain from adding ethnicity, as I was only able to identify Armenian-Lebanese besides Arab-Lebanese within Beirut Madinati. For example, Levon Telvzian, an Armenian-Lebanese, was a candidate for Beirut Madinati's list in the 2016 municipal elections.

<sup>9</sup> March 8 is a pro-Syrian coalition of Lebanese political parties including Hizbollah, Amal, and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). The date refers to the pro-Syrian mass demonstrations on March 8, 2005 organized by Hizbollah following the assassination of Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. March 14 includes parties aligned with Saad Hariri's<sup>1</sup> Future Movement and was formed after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Here, the date refers to the day of the counter-demonstrations responding to the March 8 protests. The main goal of the Cedar Revolution was to end the Syrian military occupation.

<sup>10</sup> Translates into *Discussion Space*. These discussion spaces were held in form of dialogues in public spaces in various Beirut neighborhoods including residents and candidates running for Beirut Madinati in the 2016 municipal elections.

<sup>11</sup> Translates to *We Are All National*.

<sup>12</sup> A Spanish left-wing party founded after massive nation-wide protests against austerity measures and inequality in 2014. Today Podemos is the second largest political party in Spain by number of members and has seats in the national and European parliament.

<sup>13</sup> The term "glocalization" was coined by sociologist Roland Robertson in the early 1990s. He elaborated on the term in his chapter "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity" in *Global Modernities* edited by M. Featherstone, S. Lash and R. Robertson and published by SAGE Publications (London) in 1995. In the book chapter Robertson explains how the term originates from the Japanese business market referring to the process of making foreign products suitable for local needs. He argues that contemporary forms of locality are produced in a global framework, but are not necessarily homogeneous. Therefore, he calls for an incorporation of the concept of glocalization into current debates on globalization.

## REFERENCES

K.S. Baird (2015), *Rebel Cities: The Citizen Platforms in Power*, in *Redpepper*, retrieved 11 September 2017, <https://www.Redpepper.org.uk/rebel-cities-the-citizen-platforms-in-power>.

Barcelona En Comú (2016), *How to Win Back the City En Comú: Guide to Building a Citizen Municipal Platform*, in *International Committee of Barcelona en Comú*, retrieved 22 November 2017, <https://barcelonaencomu.cat/sites/default/files/win-the-city-guide.pdf>.

M.C. Cammett (2014), *Compassionate Communalism. Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

J. Chaaban, D. Haidar, R. Ismail, R. Houry, M. Shidrawi (2016), *Beirut's 2016 Municipal Elections: Did Beirut Madinati Permanently Change Lebanon's Electoral Scene?* (Doha: Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies).

R. Dagher (2016), *What Beirut's Election Results Tell: Lebanon can Hope for Change*, in *Moulahazat*, retrieved 6 July 2018, <https://moulahazat.com/2016/05/11/what-beiruts-election-results-tell-lebanon-can-hope-for-change>.

S. Deets, J. Skulte-Ouais (2016), *Jumping Out of The Hobbesian Fishbowl and Into the Fire: Lebanon, Elections, And Chronic Crisis*, in "Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization", 24, pp. 513-530.



- D. Della Porta (2013), *Can Democracy be Saved? Participation, Deliberation and Social Movements* (Cambridge: Polity).
- Electoral Program (2018), *Libaladi*, retrieved 6 May 2018, <https://libaladi.com/2018-electoral-program>.
- M. Fawaz (2009) *Neoliberal Urbanity and The Right to The City: A View from Beirut's Periphery*, in "Development and Change", 40, pp. 827-852.
- France24 Correspondent (2018), *Lebanon Civil Society Candidates suspect Electoral 'Fraud'*, in "France24", retrieved 9 July 2018, <http://www.france24.com/en/20180508-lebanon-civil-society-candidates-suspect-electoral-fraud>.
- C. Geha (2016), *Civil Society and Political Reform in Lebanon and Libya* (London: Routledge).
- D. Harvey (2014), *Rebel Cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso).
- International Foundation for Electoral System (2018), *Lebanon's 2017 Parliamentary Election Law*, [https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/lebanons\\_2017\\_parliamentary\\_election\\_law\\_final.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/lebanons_2017_parliamentary_election_law_final.pdf).
- S. Hermez (2011), *On Dignity and Clientelism: Lebanon in the Context of the 2011 Arab Revolutions*, in "Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism", 11, pp. 527-537.
- K. Kastrissianakis (2016), *Exploring Ethnocracy and the Possibilities of Coexistence in Beirut*, in "Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal", 8, pp. 59-80.
- E. Laclau, C. Mouffe (2014), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso).
- R. Leenders (2012), *Spoils of Truce. Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
- H. Lefebvre (2016), *Das Recht Auf Stadt* (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus GmbH).
- T. Louthan (2017), *From Garbage to Green Space: The Rise of Beirut Madinati*, in "New Perspectives in Foreign Policy", 13, 37-41.
- N. Mack, C. Woodsong, K. Macqueen, G. Guest, E. Namey (2005), *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide* (Research Triangle Park, North Carolina: Family Health International).
- A. Massimiliano, G. Piazza, A. Subirats (2015), *Urban Dynamics and Social Movements*, in D. Della Porta, M. Diani (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements* (New York City: Oxford University Press), pp. 200-218.
- B. Miller (2014), *Spaces of Mobilisation: Transnational Social Movements*, in C. Barnett, M. Low (eds.), *Spaces of Democracy. Geographical Perspectives on Citizenship, Participation and Representation* (London: Sage), pp. 223-246.
- J. Minieri, P. Getsos (2007), *Tools for Radical Democracy. How to Organize for Power in your Community* (New York: John Wiley & Sons).
- D. Mullins (2014), *Recht auf die Stadt. Von Selbstverwaltung und Radikaler Demokratie* (Münster: Unrast-Verlag).
- Municipal Program 2016-2022 (2016), in *Beirut Madinati*, retrieved 8 May 2016, <http://beirutmadinati.com>.
- J. Naeff (2017), *Precarious Imaginaries of Beirut: A City's Suspended Now* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Neighborhood Flyers (2016) (Beirut: Beirut Madinati).
- M. Purcell (2013), *Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City*, in "Journal of Urban Affairs", 36, pp. 141-154.
- A. Sawalha (2010), *Reconstructing Beirut. Memory and Space in a Postwar Arab City* (Austin: University of Texas Press).
- J. Uitermark, W. Nicholls, M. Loopmans (2012), *Cities and Social Movements: Theorizing beyond the Right to the City*, in "Environment and Planning", 44, pp. 2546-2554.

