

Contesting property: urban commons, statecraft, and the ‘tyranny’ of liberalism in Lebanon

ALICE STEFANELLI *Durham University*

As heterogeneous forms of commodification threaten the survival of urban commons worldwide, in Beirut a group of residents and professionals has resorted to civic advocacy to keep the beach of Dalieh of Raouche accessible, including calling on public authorities to intervene. Combining Polanyian analysis and recent developments in the anthropology of the state, civic advocacy is recast here as a case of ‘grassroots’ statecraft, adapted to, as well as shaped by, the logics and discourses of late capitalism that it seeks to undo. As such, counter-movements are reconceptualized as not only defensive, but also offensive and explicitly generative of new political projects and modes of governance. At the same time, the article pushes the argument further to suggest that ‘grassroots’ statecraft in the context of the protection of the commons is inherently multivocal, and that calls for, and rejection of, state intervention may be contained at once within this counter-movement, forced to coexist by the constraints imposed by the neoliberal political-economic system it confronts.

On a sunny weekend day, Beirut’s seaside promenade, the Corniche, is alive with people and activity. The broad paved walkaway is punctuated with joggers, families out for the day, children on their bikes, and friends catching up. The parapets are lined with people fishing or more simply enjoying the view of the sea, while beyond the railings young men dive from the rocks into the Mediterranean, socialize, or listen to music out of portable loudspeakers. Around them, street vendors sell coffee, *kaak* bread, and an array of toys. The Corniche is one of the city’s few leisure spaces that is free of charge and accessible to all city dwellers, from Lebanese of different sects and classes (Barakat & Chamussy 2002; Delpal 2001) to Palestinian women (Khalili 2016) and other refugee populations. At the height of the refugee crisis in the mid-2010s, the *nāṭūr* (conciERGE) of the hotel next to my house would often remark, disparagingly, that going to the Corniche these days was ‘like [being in] Syria!’ He nonetheless walked there in the mornings, partly to secure his daily fill of *riyāḍa* (sport or physical activity) and partly because he hoped to run into the uncle of a woman he wished to marry.

One of the busiest – and farthest – parts of the Corniche, and a prime site for *sīāḥa* (tourism or leisure), is the area surrounding *ṣakhrat al-Raouche*, the two famous rock

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.) 29, 421–438

© 2023 The Authors. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Royal Anthropological Institute.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

formations that are one of the country's national symbols. Here, inhabitants have the rare opportunity to reach the sea by taking a downward path to Dalieh, a small, rocky peninsula that embraces Raouche from the south and that has been at the centre of fishing, swimming, and socializing in that part of the seafront for decades (Bekdache & Saksouk 2015). This state of affairs, however, has been thrown into question in the past ten years. Dalieh is officially privately owned by the Hariri family, a powerful Lebanese political dynasty¹ that control the land through three real estate companies, having bought the plots in the 1990s. Since, previously, owners were not allowed to build any permanent structure on site, the land was for decades informally accessible to inhabitants. Recent relaxations of building regulations have meant that this pre-existing, informal status quo has been questioned by owners with a view to redevelop the land. In 2013, fishermen living in the area began receiving eviction notices, and the following spring security forces appeared on the Corniche and erected a long metal fence lined with razor wire to obstruct the main path to Dalieh. Local inhabitants and other Corniche-goers gathered to protest the measure and, in a bid to placate them, security forces left a section of the fence temporarily open. This appeased inhabitants for the time being, but the fence remained a visible and material reminder of the impending privatization and disruption to normal life in the area.

This process of privatization-cum-redevelopment, however, did not go unremarked. The protests were reported by a few publications and noticed, amongst others, by a group of active Beirut residents who came together to establish the Civic Coalition for the Protection of Dalieh of Raouche in 2014. Since then, this heterogeneous group of campaigners has worked to raise public awareness about Dalieh's predicament and to pressure authorities to step in and stop privatization, forming part of a growing wave of activism protesting the political (mis)management of urban issues in Beirut (Chamas 2021; Geha 2019; Harb 2018; Kiwan 2017; Musallam 2020). Dalieh is not alone in its predicament, neither in Lebanon nor abroad (Khechen 2016), as the conversion of 'non-real' objects into market commodities becomes a global marker of the late capitalist era (Hann 2007; Holston 2019; Susser & Tonnelat 2013). In response, inhabitants of cities across the world have organized against the neoliberalization of urban space (Leitner, Peck & Sheppard 2007). The dynamics of late capitalism have thus sparked a host of 'new double movements' (Hann 2007), which, in Polanyian terms, are constituted by an attack on society on the part of capitalism and a protective 'push back', or counter-movement, on the part of society (Polanyi 1944). The state is central to these processes, as this protective 'push back' crucially engages public authorities and stems precisely from society's ability to see through the liberal discourse on the 'invisible hand' of the market and recognize the state's interventionist role in market economics. In a setting where the state is posited – by the liberal ideology itself – as the regulator, and the regulator is considered to be partial, then it is not surprising that today, as was the case in the nineteenth century, the state becomes the target of advocacy.

I take these preliminary observations as an analytical springboard to investigate the relationship between civic advocacy, privatization of urban commons, and public authorities in Dalieh of Raouche. The intricate nature of the politics surrounding coastal property in fact offers an opportunity to examine not only society's 'push back' strategies, but also the affective dimension of city dwellers' relation with the authorities they call into action through their advocacy. My aim is not that of offering novel analyses of the privatization of coastal commons in Beirut, which other scholars in urban studies have done eloquently, including but not limited to Bekdache and

Saksouk (2015), Ghandour (2016), Khouri and Tabet (2016), Saksouk (2014), and Saksouk-Sasso (2015). Rather, building on such insights, I aim to contribute to an anthropological understanding of advocacy and statecraft in the specific context of the protection of urban commons.

The state, it has long been shown, is not a coherent structure with harmonious functions, or even a single entity, delimited clearly in opposition to other social spheres as proposed by the Weberian tradition; yet its 'effects' have real consequences in the world (Mitchell 1999; also Obeid 2015). Routine encounters with bureaucracies, politicians, the justice system, and civil servants are some such 'effects' which shape people's understanding of the state and reify it in their everyday life (Gupta 1995; Sharma & Gupta 2006; Thelen, Vetter & von Benda-Beckmann 2014), making it possible for them to talk and think of 'the state' after all. Despite widespread scholarly and popular perceptions that the state is 'weak' or 'absent' in Lebanon (Hermez 2015; Mouawad & Bauman 2017; Salloukh 2019), state effects mark the everyday life of inhabitants, albeit in ways that are shaped by political sectarianism and the hybridization between state and non-state actors (Fregonese 2012). Citizens' access to public structures and services is thus often mediated by clientelist networks based on sectarian affiliation (Cammett 2014; Joseph 1997; Nucho 2016; Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab & Mikaelian 2015).

The relationship between people and 'the state' that emerges from these encounters, in Lebanon and elsewhere, is therefore complex and emerges often as ambivalent rather than univocal: desire or resistance, attachment or refusal (Laszczkowski & Reeves 2018). People's criticism and feelings of disaffection for different manifestations of the state are in fact at odds with their subjection to the same state structures (Navaro-Yashin 2012), since the latter are often critical to achieve a 'better' or 'normal' life (Jansen 2015; Jovanović 2016). The Dalieh Coalition did solicit public authorities to make a stance against privatization: the state and municipality held significant power over Dalieh's fate, so campaigners needed to persuade or put pressure on politicians to stop the privatization process. Borrowing Jansen's definition of statecraft as what the state 'does, claims to do, and should do' (2015: 12), I thus conceptualize the active participation of Beirutis in Dalieh campaigning activities as an instance of statecraft 'from below', or 'grassroots' statecraft, aimed to alter how public authorities act – or do not act – in the privatization of the commons. Here I draw particularly on Obeid (2010) in conceptualizing campaigners' statecraft as the rejection of one 'face' or manifestation of the state that goes hand in hand with an attempt to find or, in this case, re-fashion authorities to match a preferred incarnation (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2002).

However, I also show that participation in advocacy targeting the state does not necessarily or neatly correspond to an endorsement of state authority over the commons. An attentive examination of the campaign to protect Dalieh of Raouche shows in fact that while 'grassroots' statecraft may be propelled in part by the desire or necessity for the state to stop privatization, this does not automatically entail an affective or ideological endorsement to state authority in the governance of the commons. Campaigners were in fact acutely aware that, as Saksouk-Sasso (2015) has argued, Dalieh originally emerged as an urban common precisely because it escaped the reach of state power. Beyond halting privatization, state intervention along the coast could therefore destroy the common's very conditions of existence. For some campaigners, the choice to engage in statecraft might therefore be motivated by a necessary pragmatism to save Dalieh rather than effective desire to see the state more active in the governance

of the commons, or a genuine belief that the state can, as an institution, create a 'good' life for city dwellers in these peripheral spaces.

Rather, I argue that the kind of organized, collective 'new' double movements of which Dalieh's civic campaigning is representative are expressive of a host of heterogeneous attachments to *and* detachments from the state and its intervention in urban governance. The strength or 'tyranny' of the liberal paradigm of 'possessive individualism' (Macpherson 1962), founded on the alignment between state and economic interests, in fact narrows the range of options that are available to 'push back' against the propertization of urban commons. With public authorities holding the power to facilitate or halt this process, a counter-movement targeting the state is a forced choice amongst few realistic possibilities, and one where a host of heterogeneous feelings for the state are forced to converge into the search for a 'better', though not 'ideal', face of the state. The article thus offers an analysis of contemporary double movements that recognizes the multivocal nature of 'grassroots' statecraft and highlights the stifling force of possessive individualism in determining the structure and scope of society's push back in the neoliberal age. Ultimately, the article conceptualizes 'new' and 'old' counter-movements as mobilizations that are creatively and finely tuned to, yet forcibly shaped by, the ideological discourses and concrete workings of the political-economic system they confront.

Dalieh of Raouche

The coast of Beirut has served for decades as the city's urban commons, a stage where spontaneous social and economic practices could unravel unhindered and unpoliced. Yet, today, unregulated access to the shore is critically compromised: cafés and restaurants block access to the water and even the view of the sea for long stretches of the littoral, while luxury resorts and hotel complexes built on the beach eat away larger and larger portions of the maritime public domain (*al-āmlāk al-'ama al-baḥrīa*), public property that is formally inalienable. This process of privatization has been long decades in the making. Lebanon is governed by a consociational power-sharing arrangement amongst the political parties representing the country's major Muslim and Christian sectarian groups. In this competitive political system, clients of different sectarian groups are pitted against each other, yet elites often share similar economic and class interests and legislate together in certain areas (Safieddine 2019; Salloukh 2019; Traboulsi 2014). In a show of cross-sectarian co-operation, successive parliaments and governments have amended building regulations governing coastal land, allowing private ownership and particular interests to prevail over both formal and informal rights of the citizenry. Hussain,² a seasoned environmentalist who had worked for decades to protect the Lebanese coast, was rather blunt when he explained: 'The reality is that they [politicians] trade favours with each other, or how do you explain that political sides opposed to each other on everything are still able to agree and [the government] hasn't yet exploded?'

The privatization of the coast, already underway in the 1960s, accelerated in the aftermath of the 1975–90 Civil War with the inauguration of a wave of neoliberal reconstruction and urban regeneration projects, starting from the capital city (El Hibri 2009; Hourani 2015; Makdisi 1997). As Hannes Baumann (2016: 4) has argued, Rafic Hariri's reconstruction project joined 'liberal talk' to 'illiberal walk', as the policies that supported it were profoundly illiberal (see also Dib 2020). The 'creative destruction' of the built and social fabric of Beirut was in fact largely fuelled by and benefited wealthy

local and expatriate elites in an instance of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2003), where less affluent inhabitants have been progressively pushed out of the city centre. Most relevant to this article, the official reconstruction project of Downtown Beirut, known as Solidere, saw poorer residents of central neighbourhoods displaced by law in the 1990s (Sawalha 2010), their homes replaced with an expensive and sanitized Beirut Central District that caters to the wealthy, Lebanese and foreigners alike, by excluding all other inhabitants. More recently, a further blow has been dealt to social diversity in the city, as increasing numbers of Beirutis have been forced to relocate not only due to the increasingly unaffordable living costs in the city but also the liberalization of previously controlled rents (Bekdache 2015). Although shaped in specific ways by histories of empire, civil war, and contemporary sectarianism (Bou Akar 2018), Beirut's urban redevelopment is also implicated in broader transnational processes of capital accumulation, well documented in the Arab world, that mix authoritarianism, neoliberalizing policies, and real estate investment (Abaza 2001; Barthel 2010; Bogaert 2018; Elsheshtawi 2004; Ghannam 2002; Ismail 2006).

The roots of Dalieh's current predicament as a private-public entity are found in the historical evolution of land tenure in Lebanon, itself entangled with such phenomena. Under the original late Ottoman regime, most agricultural and coastal land in Beirut was *arḍ āmiriā*, state-owned land that was usually rented out to tenants for the payment of a fee, though it was sometimes endowed to notables by authorities themselves (Saksouk-Sasso 2015). In the mid-1920s, French mandatarial authorities implemented a pervasive land reform aimed at restructuring the pre-existing system of land tenure and taxation with the objective of opening up agricultural land in the region to international, mainly French, capital investment (Williams 2015). Significantly, this entailed emphasizing private ownership of land and the creation of an ad hoc French-style cadastre, where former *āmīriā* land was sometimes registered as full property (*mulk*) of its tenants (see also Lamy & Bou Aoun 2017). Yet, even after the shift to the French land tenure regime, parts of Dalieh remained firmly under state ownership. The sea, rocks, sand, and shore up to the highest point of the tide in winter were designed as maritime public domain, destined for public use. As such, these areas remained accessible and, above all, inalienable. Furthermore, the new 1954 Beirut masterplan identified the littoral, or Zone X, as *non-aedificandi*, leading the municipality to ban all permanent construction on the sea front and attenuating owners' enjoyment rights to their properties located on coastal land.

Since its economic value as private property was virtually non-existent, owners left Dalieh to itself, and it remained an unrestricted space for several decades. Tabet explains that 'Dalieh of Raouche served as a shared space (*misāha mushtaraka*) accessible to a wide and diverse public (*jumhūr*) of Beirut's residents' (Khouri & Tabet 2016), and Bekdache and Saksouk point out that 'for a long time, the marking of land in property registers as "public" (*khāṣa*) or "private" (*āma*) did not affect the way the city's inhabitants used it' (2015: 2). A wealth of social and economic informal practices enlivened the slopes of Dalieh. On holidays and at weekends, Beirutis would congregate there to smoke *arghile* (shisha) and picnic together.

The surrounding cliffs became a hot spot for swimming and diving. Fishermen resided on site, and a number of small and cheap cafés were also established, together with several event halls between Dalieh and the nearby Ramlet al Bayda beach, where some of my acquaintances' parents held their engagement parties in the 1980s. Although parts of Dalieh remained private and others public, as Saksouk-Sasso has

argued, the whole area emerged as a 'space for the public,' 'generated by users' spatial practices rather than property maps' (2015: 302). Dalieh was thus produced by city dwellers' access to and use of the land over time, a kind of 'enactment' of property, in Blomley's (2004) terms.

Things began to change in the 1960s, when successive parliaments passed decrees amending existing Zone X regulations. These acts allowed owners of large plots greater and greater rights to build real estate projects on their land, hence making property in the area profitable once more. Two such decrees, 4918/1982 and 169/1989, were conveniently approved during the Civil War. Moreover, the latter decree never appeared in the *Official Gazette* as legally required, though it was enforced as normal. Another decree, 402/1995, favouring the redevelopment of coastal land for touristic projects, was a much-debated, temporary tool intended to help economic development which was, however, renewed multiple times, becoming de facto semi-permanent. In the course of their research, campaigners also noticed that, seemingly, Dalieh's maritime public domain had been encroached upon in current cadastral maps. The Coalition tried to find the original 1926 French map in the local archives, but to no avail. After contacting the National Archives in Paris and receiving confirmation that the map had been entrusted to the Lebanese government at the time of Independence, campaigners concluded that the document in use today must have been forged, possibly in the midst of the Civil War.

Existing legal configurations are a constraint that coalitions working for the protection of the commons worldwide have to confront, as collective rights to land are often not recognized by legal regimes inspired by liberal conceptions of property (Xu & Clarke 2018). The issue is particularly acute in the case of urban green spaces, which, as Abram and Blandy (2018) have noted, are a type of communal property that transcends rigid distinctions between private and public. A similar argument can be made for Dalieh. Rather than being formalized or recast as adverse possession, in the shift from the Ottoman to the French property regime, these informal rights to the coast were transferred and restricted to the specific institution of the maritime public domain, though in reality popular practices continued as before. The governance of urban commons therefore became based on a specific variation of the general liberal model, founded on an interpretation of individual ownership as possessive individualism that has enabled encroachments on the public domain by both legal and semi-legal means. Arguing against the Marxist tradition, Mitchell (2002) argues that property law does not *actually* turn land into property objects; rather, it reorders reality according to the arbitrary principles of liberal individual ownership, then acts to naturalize the order it itself has created. Yet, even from this perspective, the 'effects' of this reordering through the law have concrete repercussions on reality itself. In Dalieh, shifts in planning regulation eventually began to affect the long-established status quo, culminating in the erection of the fence. Dalieh was now one step closer to being effectively private.

The dominance of individual ownership

[I]n their zeal to protect one of the last vestiges of Beirut's coast from development, some activists have fallen afoul of the truth, wittingly or not. The vast majority of Dalieh is not public property. Owners' claims to the land and development rights are, as currently legislated, valid.

Executive Editors, 'Save your reputation', *Executive Magazine* (2015)

The article reporting on the Dalieh Coalition in the above terms was published in June 2015 by a leading Lebanese business magazine. The Coalition had been very active since its foundation a year earlier, organizing protests, public talks, and events in Dalieh, and the press had begun to discuss their work. During this time, *Executive Magazine* had published a series of articles on Dalieh and Ramlet al Bayda – a beach in Beirut also threatened by redevelopment – as part of an ongoing investigation into the state of real estate development on the coast, and had been fairly supportive of the Dalieh cause. Another important business magazine, *Francophone Commerce du Liban*, had kept a similar line. However, in the summer of 2015, new pieces in *Executive Magazine* took a different tone. These articles seemed to have been conceived with the purpose of correcting a skewed understanding of the issue of Dalieh. In these, readers are reminded that Dalieh stands on *private* land, suggesting that inhabitants mobilizing for its protection are in denial of this fact, whilst campaigners are described as ‘embracing falsehoods’ and promoting ‘distorted narratives’ (Executive Editors 2015). Rainey particularly condemns ‘a simplistic narrative of an unwinnable battle between the helpless fishers of Dalieh and “evil developers” bent on robbing Beirut of one of its last communal, free spaces’, as ‘legally, the Hariri claim to develop Dalieh is pretty strong’ (2015: 12). In other words, no privatization was taking place.

The same position was espoused by major public authority figures involved in the debate. Both the Mayor and Governor of Beirut responded to public appeals to act by reiterating the limited jurisdiction they had in a case of private ownership. Repeatedly challenged by campaigners, the Mayor justified his inaction by explaining that the municipality has no prerogative to intervene when the land is private. He reportedly said: ‘Instead of going and speaking poetry and philosophy, let’s speak facts of life: this is a private property’ (Rainey 2015). The Governor was quoted by the press in agreement with his colleague. Unsurprisingly, owners deployed the same argument. Media reports describe them as emphasizing their right to make use of the land freely and to have their property safeguarded by the state.

Asked how the landowners will respond to the Ministry [of the Environment]’s call to tear down this fence,³ the representative says, ‘It was put up to protect the private property from squatters and encroachments, hence, I believe the owners would oblige to calls to take down the fence, if and when a responsible and reliable authority guarantees their rights and the protection of the subject private property’ (Nash 2014).

In public discourse, campaigners protesting against privatization were seen as either naïve and unprepared or outright malicious. This reading of the clamour surrounding Dalieh was not confined to media outlets and politicians, but rather seemed to have had a certain currency amongst the general public too. This became most apparent to me when I began joining campaigners in their activities on site.

The Coalition for the protection of Dalieh of Raouche was initially born with the launch of an online petition when some of its founders heard that fishermen were protesting against the eviction notices they had received. Many of these early activists were professionals of the built environment, such as architects and urbanists, as well as environmentalists, journalists, and artists. However, by the time I was doing fieldwork in 2015, the Coalition enjoyed the support of a diverse base that included other professionals, university students, and ordinary Beirutis who made use of Dalieh in their spare time or simply wanted to protect it. At the end of every public event the Coalition organized, more people queued to put down their names on the ever-growing

mailing list campaigners had created. This in itself was a testament to the Coalition's hard work, as well as a reflection of both the dire lack of green space and the presence of a lively associational panorama in Beirut. Rather than being an isolated initiative, the Coalition for the Protection of Dalieh was in fact part of an expanding landscape of urban activism lobbying the government to end the political mismanagement of various urban issues, from the privatization of public space to the waste disposal crisis.

The Coalition devised a number of different ways to fight Dalieh's privatization, including publishing an open letter to the architectural studio that was supposed to design the new project for the land development and keeping an active social media presence. Organizing events on site was also important to draw Beirutis to Dalieh, and free guided tours of the area were one – very popular – such initiative. On select weekends throughout the warm season, on-duty Coalition members would gather by Bay Rock Café on the Corniche and lead eager attendees to Dalieh. Campaigners had researched in depth the archaeology, geology, and social history of the area, consulting the cadastre, speaking to local fishermen, and collecting old photographs from archives and members of the public: tours were an opportunity to share their knowledge and raise awareness about Dalieh's cause.

I first joined a tour on a sunny day in mid-spring 2015. At this point, I had been doing fieldwork following various campaigns for the protection of green space in Beirut, including Dalieh, for about eight months. I had been at a number of meetings, public events, and protests, but this was the first time I had the opportunity to see how members of the public would react to learning about the privatization of the coast while *in* Dalieh. As usual, I was a little early, so I sat down on a bench overlooking the sea. The day was warm and the area was alive with passers-by; young men smoked *arghileh* on the grass at the edge of the pavement, and two mothers led their small children through the open fence towards the sea. Below me, Dalieh was also awash with sun and people; a few children rode horses for a fee, while a dromedary grazed placidly nearby, his owner waiting for custom. When the time of the tour came, I walked to the meeting point to find a group of university-age young people killing time by the café's entrance; some of them were talking to the woman leading the group, while others were busy sketching the landscape. They seemed to be architectural students accompanied by their professor, a friendly-looking middle-aged American woman.

Slowly, other participants flowed to the meeting spot, until the pavement was dotted with small groups of people chatting to each other. Once the first campaigner, Reem, made her way to the café's entrance, I greeted her and thanked her for allowing me to come along. The turnout was impressive, I mentioned, looking around. Reem agreed and said that until four days earlier, only four or five people had registered for the tour, but that the number had since ballooned to thirty-five. As this was their first tour, she was very pleased with how successful it had proven, particularly as many attendees were students and other inhabitants who simply wanted a chance to get to know Dalieh better. As Reem began taking people's names, I caught sight of a friend on the other side of the broad walkway. Soha was, like me, in her twenties and worked in the environmental sector; she had moved to Beirut a few years back and had recently developed an interest in the protection of Dalieh, having heard about it from her boss. On a previous occasion, I had asked Soha if she had been to Dalieh often before and, unsurprisingly, she had no idea that this place existed before learning about the Coalition. This made sense since she was not from Beirut and even Beirutis often overlooked the area. Soha added, however, that she had apparently visited it as a young child, brought there by an uncle

during a day trip to Beirut. It was unclear how her uncle knew about Dalieh, but we concluded that he must have known about it from before the Civil War, when its fame would have stretched well beyond the capital.

Eventually, other campaigners arrived and participants were gathered to make a start. Soha and I joined others in attendance as campaigners led the way through the hole in the fence, guiding us through a patch of plants and high grass, then gravel, quickly reaching the bottom of the steep slope. Climbing down, we crossed paths with other Dalieh-goers, many of whom were parents carrying or leading children uphill after a visit to the shore; it was evident that Dalieh had never stopped being a site of leisure for many in Beirut. Once at the foot of the slope, campaigners began touring the area, stopping in several places to explain the different characteristics of the site: the rare flowers; the colonies of bats and the seals inhabiting the caves underneath; the diving competitions that had taken place from the cliffs in the past.

The walk ended with a boat tour, itself a popular local pastime. The two middle-aged women next to whom Soha and I happened to be walking visited Dalieh in their youth; they seemed to only have vague memories of the place but were a bit nostalgic and eager to learn more about it. As our group stopped near the cliffs on the northwestern side of the peninsula, campaigners began retelling the social history of Dalieh, focusing on stories of how Beirutis had been enjoying spending their free time there for generations. At the end of the explanation, campaigners encouraged questions, and one of the two women asked whether Dalieh was private (*khāṣa*) or public (*ʿāma*). Over time, I realized that this was a popular query, partly because many tour participants had only become aware of the peninsula's existence after the controversy surrounding its privatization had landed in the press. Many thus wanted a clearer sense of the legal status of the land. In replying to the woman's question, our guides approached the issue calmly and openly. They explained that land in Dalieh was primarily privately owned, before describing how this situation had come to exist. This seemed to satisfy both the women and the rest of the group. However, as the controversy over Dalieh gained visibility in the media, the issue surrounding ownership grew with it and, although the Coalition never stated that the land was publicly owned, the press implicitly accused them of doing precisely that. The Coalition's first and most arduous task, therefore, was to find ways to effectively argue around the restrictive public discourse and ultimately beyond it, in order to convince their audience that preserving Dalieh in its current state not only mattered, but also mattered more than legal ownership itself.

Moving beyond possessive individualism: the public good discourse

Shifting legal-political regimes in Dalieh have caused conflicting interests and rights of multiple parties to coagulate around the same object over time, making of Dalieh a 'bundled' property object (Maine 1986 [1906]; von Benda-Beckmann, von Benda-Beckmann & Wiber 2006). Although recent developments have brought this tangled situation to the fore, this 'bundled' nature continues to be obscured by the ideological structure of the liberal paradigm, which neither recognizes such entanglements nor accepts the broader public as legitimate claimants. Ownership is discursively posited as an exclusive relation between owners and property, rather than a complex relationship amongst people in relation to property objects (Blomley 2004; Fawaz & Moumtaz 2017; Hann 1998). This greatly restricted campaigners' ability to reject Dalieh's privatization since, as Fawaz (2017a) has argued, planning interventions not only are instrumental to the reproduction of the social inequalities that are embedded in property relations,

but also drastically limit the claims that non-owners can make over the natural and built environment. Since the legitimacy of claims around Dalieh is disproportionately assessed in relation to a particularly narrow notion of individual ownership, its owners have the upper hand in this conflict. As Ghandour (2016) aptly points out, the natural and social history and characteristics of the site have no place in this discourse, as 'this abstract vision (*al nazra al mujarrada*) of the land focuses on the valuable exchange (*al-tabādul al-qaiyyimī*) of landscapes, slopes, region, and structures pertaining to it'. Likewise, Sharaf (2014) notes that the city's social history becomes an 'unimportant detail' (*tafsīl ghair muhim*) that may be dismissed.

Mindful of their disadvantage, campaigners attempted different strategies to argue for the protection of the pre-existing status quo in Dalieh. Working within the legal framework of private property, they sought to show the rightfulness of their claim to the land by engaging with and referring to existing legal frameworks. For instance, they argued that existing 1920s legal provisions themselves prohibit the effective privatization of coastal land: if regulations were upheld, owners would not be able to fence off Dalieh because this would prevent the citizenry from accessing the maritime public domain. While the introduction of a European-style private property regime had been in a sense the 'original sin', mandatory laws were also useful legal tools. Campaigners also decried the usurpation of some of Dalieh's public domain and were critical of the manner in which legal frameworks had been altered through special decrees. As one campaigner remarked, 'If it's all an exception, it's not an exception anymore', echoing Fawaz's (2017b) argument that, rather than being aberrations, exceptions form the very basis of planning practice in today's Beirut.

While certain business journalism represented these processes as an operation 'to claw back [owners'] rights' (Rainey 2015), campaigners read them as an ongoing manipulation of the law at the expense of *citizens'* rights. These criticisms also fitted within a widely accepted understanding of the Lebanese political-economic system in which both political and economic interests are concentrated in the hands of the same group of corrupt politicians who use public office to advance not only sectarian but also their own class interests (Geha 2019). The legitimacy of the official discourse referencing the rule of law was thus questioned. The Coalition's advocacy efforts to argue from within the legal framework culminated in concrete legal action when a coalition of pro-public space campaigners filed a lawsuit demanding that decree 169/1989 be declared unconstitutional and discarded. The weight of private property was thus tempered by concerns around the manipulation of the legal framework, which was intended to question the legitimacy and transparency of the private property discourse which draws its force from an ostensible adherence to the rule of law. However, the Coalition also worked to establish the centrality of Dalieh in the life of the city of Beirut and its inhabitants from a non-legalistic point of view.

Campaigners worked hard to fashion an alternative discourse that spoke less of private ownership rights and exchange value, and more of the public good. This fitted well with their long-standing commitment to raise awareness about Dalieh: over the years, members and supporters of the Coalition launched a petition to stop privatization, released interviews and published articles in the local and international press, gave talks at Lebanese universities, and participated in panel and round-table discussions concerned with city dwellers' rights to the city. They also organized a competition for alternative visions for Dalieh, to stimulate the public's imagination and encourage people to at least become informed about, if not involved in, the

campaign itself. These events became opportunities not only to bring visibility to their cause, but also to promote an alternative understanding of the processes of privatization that underlay it. A brief exploration of a talk delivered to the alumni association of one of the main English-speaking universities in Beirut is a case in point.

Part of a lecture series, the event drew a fairly large audience and was well attended by members of the organizing association as well as external participants such as me, the difference being marked mainly by participants' age. Gathered around a small table equipped with a projector, four campaigners took turns to introduce Dalieh and their campaign. The four women worked in architecture or environmental protection, and the smooth and elegant way in which they delivered their presentations spoke both of their professionalism and of the long hours of preparation that lay behind the campaign. The centrepiece was a long and detailed genealogy of Dalieh which did not hide the official legal status of the land nor the fact that this made it difficult for the Coalition to campaign effectively in favour of its protection. As Farah, one of the presenters, said: 'This is a huge issue for us as it is the main excuse of the Mayor [to do nothing]: he can say "this has nothing to do with me, it's private property"'. In a similar tone, she then moved on to talk about the vanished maritime public property and the abuse of special decrees. This resonated with the audience's expectations concerning politicians in general: some guests looked shocked, others tutted vigorously, shaking their heads. Throughout the talk, a slideshow of old and new photographs of Dalieh rolled on in the background, illustrating campaigners' points. Finally, campaigners appealed to the audience for help. 'Spreading the word is the best way to support us', Farah said. 'We are always looking for more stories about the importance of Dalieh for people who used to go there, or still do.' The audience responded to the appeal with enthusiasm, and we spent well over three-quarters of an hour listening to stories of family outings and picnics on the coast.

Farah's public appeal was part of a prolonged effort to reconstruct the history of the site in a way that spoke of people's history as well as long-established practices and modes of sociability, and which pointed to the pivotal role of Dalieh in the city's everyday life. Campaigners regularly asked their audience for stories, and postcards showing old photos of Dalieh were part of their campaigning material. The point, however, was not history per se, but rather continuity, reinforcing the idea that Dalieh had been, and still was today, an important urban common at the service of urban dwellers. The pre-eminence of collective public interest in Dalieh was thus strengthened, actively 'unsettling' otherwise naturalized categories of 'public' and 'private' (Blomley 2004).

However, such a project required not only evocative images but also a specific vocabulary, as using the word 'public' ('*ām*', which can also mean 'general') could shift the debate back to the discourse on private ownership. Across the Coalition's advocacy material, Dalieh was rather described as an 'open-access shared space for the public' (*misāḥat mushtaraka ū mutāḥa li-l- 'āma*), using a word, *mushtarak*,⁴ that may equally be translated as 'common'. The phrase was also rendered in English-language material and conversation as 'shared commons'. The careful choice of words side-stepped the vocabulary of the official property discourse and thus enabled campaigners to circumvent the problematic private/public dichotomy. It also allowed them to attach new meanings to the idea of public ('*ām*') that were less dependent on legal categories and, crucially, state authority, and more bound to traditional social practices and

collective interests, hinging on what Saksouk (2014) calls *ḥaq jamā'ia bi-l-misāḥa*, a collective right to space. Ultimately, 'shared' was the conception of 'public' at the heart of the public discourse that the Coalition worked to stimulate. This resonates with an understanding of commons as autonomous spaces and 'shared property, in the form of a shared natural or social wealth – lands, waters, forests, systems of knowledge, capacities for care – to be used by all commoners, without any distinction, but which are not for sale' (Federici 2018: 93). At the same time, the campaign was less a project of new commoning (Federici 2018; Stavrides 2016) than one of protecting the commons that had already emerged spontaneously as *misāḥat mushtaraka*, by fostering a collective awareness of their nature as commons and their continued shared value for the city.

Two visions of and for the coast thus lie at the heart of the dispute surrounding Dalieh. The official discourse on the site represents owners' attempt – assisted by supportive politicians – to use the discursive strength of private property to realign function, access, and legal status towards individual ownership as possessive individualism. Cities are primary engines of capitalist accumulation (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]), not only objects but crucially makers of global neoliberal capitalism (Brenner & Theodore 2005; Massey 2010; Peck & Tickell 2002): by concretely privatizing Dalieh, owners and sympathetic politicians directly implicated the coast in this process of accumulation. The fence may be taken as the material sign of this project. Conversely, disputing owners' exclusive rights implies a reading of private ownership of urban shared commons in Fromm's (2013 [1961]) strong terms as a deprivation inflicted upon others. Campaigners' efforts to have Dalieh recognized as a long-standing and inalienable open-access, shared space, or urban common, invoked the pre-eminence of the social and moral rights of the citizenry, as well as establishing the traditional access and enjoyment of Dalieh as a form of collective right to the land.

The confrontation around Dalieh is thus fundamentally a contestation over whose interest should be prioritized, and why, as well as a matter of deciding what kind of property object Dalieh may become next (Alexander 2005): a private one to serve owners' interests, or a public one (whether legally sanctioned as such or not) to serve the citizenry, broadly defined. Moreover, since private property is necessarily embedded in a network of social relations which structure society (Hann 1998; von Benda-Backmann *et al.* 2006), disputing changes in the use and enjoyment of Dalieh also entails challenging the broader network of sociopolitical relations that has made its progressive privatization possible, with a view of rearranging them. In this specific case, campaigners sought to shift the balance from a configuration that decisively favours developers and landowners to one in which other claims are heard and respected. By attempting to re-shape the social relations that produce the coast as a shared space, activists took steps towards ensuring that Dalieh is more decidedly reconstituted as a shared and accessible property object after this moment of transition.

Desire for the state?

Campaigners' attempts at remodelling public understandings of property relations through advocacy have broader consequences for the role played by public authorities as arbiters of disputes amongst different social groups and their interests in the governance of the commons. In the liberal discourse, public officials are non-interventionist figures limiting themselves to guaranteeing the respect of the law, which in practice means guaranteeing owners' smooth enjoyment of their property (Macfarlane 1998). As in a

Polanyian double movement, Dalieh campaigners' 'push back' recognized authorities' role in the propertization of the coast and aimed to protect it by changing authorities' official and unofficial practices. Moulding a new discourse on property around Dalieh, for instance, aimed to reorient authorities' practices towards the promotion of citizens' interests, turning them from guarantors of private property into defenders of the commons. The Mayor and Governor were criticized for their stance in siding with owners but, together with local MPs and government ministers, they were also solicited to take an active role in defending Dalieh. The Coalition, for instance, accepted the Minister of the Environment's offer to officially support their competition, which was launched with a joint press conference hosted in the Ministry itself. Likewise, campaigners supported in principle the Minister's plan for a new *marsūm* (decree) that may protect the coast from further developments. The statecraft at the heart of the Coalition's counter-movement seems to reveal the state as a site of desire, or hope (Spencer 2007) to save the commons: a sign of campaigners' wishes for more state presence, not as facilitator of privatization but as protector of the common good.

However, different campaigners and supporters had different ideas about the extent to which the state should actively become involved in the governance of these shared coastal spaces. In theory, bringing Dalieh under public ownership by means of expropriation at the hands of the municipality would have been a straightforward way to save it and other coastal sites from present and future redevelopment. Although inflated land prices created by the relaxation of building regulations precluded this option, some Coalition supporters desired this solution in principle for all endangered coastal commons. This was the case, for instance, for activists who supported the Coalition's work in Dalieh while also mounting a campaign for the protection of nearby public beach Ramlet el Bayda, also under threat of development. To these campaigners, making the coast public property seemed the best way to protect it from privatization once and for all.

However, other members of the Coalition felt that the state ought not to be involved in the management of the commons. Many would have preferred that Dalieh could simply be left alone, without the state participating in its governance in any substantial way, as had been the case for decades. These campaigners and sympathizers saw Dalieh as a *space for the public* rather than a *public space*, subject to communal rather than state sovereignty, as illustrated by Saksouk-Sasso (2015). From this perspective, Dalieh and the rest of the coastline constituted an unplanned and unregulated common that had not been 'given' to the city by authorities as a green space – as in the case of some public gardens – but represented an autonomous space beyond the direct control of authorities. It was precisely this lack of direct governance – and governmentality – that had allowed a thriving informal economy to emerge alongside other social and leisure activities that especially, albeit not exclusively, benefited marginalized urban populations. The fear was that authorities might manage Dalieh in a restrictive sense, imposing rules of conduct and securitizing the area, effectively stifling many of those precious and spontaneous practices (Schielke 2008). A municipal security booth, suddenly installed in Dalieh's vicinity, was accordingly seen with suspicion, its appearance foreshadowing the possibility of tighter control over life in the area if authorities were to become further involved. When it came to the management of the commons, the 'ideal' state, for these campaigners, was not one that involved itself substantially in the management of the coast. Rather, it was a public authority that defended the interests of Beirut's citizenry

by safeguarding the autonomy and openness of the commons against privatization and redevelopment, thereafter leaving the coast to itself.

Distinct and perhaps contrasting attachments towards state sovereignty in the management of the commons thus converged in advocacy around coastal commons. The terms of the discourse on individual ownership and neoliberal governance severely limited campaigners' ability to oppose private interest in motion in Dalieh while also bypassing the state. The discourse on private ownership and (neo)liberal practices obliged campaigners to appeal to authorities or pressure them through public opinion to defend the coast from propertization, even when campaigners in principle recognized state interference as a threat to the very endurance of the commons. Calling upon authorities was here a double-edged sword forced upon campaigners by what Navaro-Yashin (2012) refers to as people's condition of subjection to power, including the state's. However, attending to the nuances of the relationship between campaigners and authorities does not only highlight the concrete and discursive constraints that campaigners face. This approach also emphasizes the skilful ways in which these actors are continually required to tread a fine line yet find creative ways to work towards their goals, attracting and engaging heterogeneous groups of supporters and soliciting substantial public support. Not unlike Scott's (1985) notion of infrapolitics, Dalieh campaigners' invocations of state interventionism represent to a certain degree a type of productive *realpolitik*, a realistic yet fruitful strategy shaped by and honed to, in this case, the continued hegemony of the liberal political-economic regime in late capitalism.

Conclusion

After much commotion in the mid-2010s, things quietened down in Dalieh. Six years on, during what was my last pre-pandemic visit to Beirut, the shore was still accessible from the Corniche and no redevelopment had begun. Understanding what exactly had caused the halt proved difficult since available information was as usual scarce, and mostly unconfirmed. Yet the Coalition's efforts had been successful in sparking a public debate which had brought the issue of the coast centre stage. As one campaigner told me proudly, 'It was too loud a cry for them to ignore'. The Coalition's gains show that urban property is indeed far from 'settled' (Blomley 2004) and that cities are now more than ever sites of contestation of the neoliberalization of space and everyday life. The campaigning surrounding Dalieh shows particularly that 'settling' property hinges on upholding and emphasizing the liberal public/private dichotomy, and that defending the commons instead relies on exposing the tensions inbuilt in that very dichotomy. In Beirut, campaigners created an alternative public discourse about the commons that bypassed the public/private dichotomy and, in so doing, shifted the attention from the legal status of the coast to the collective rights and interest of city dwellers. An important aspect of this move was presenting Dalieh's predicament in the *longue durée*, thus also dispelling any illusions that property categories are natural and cannot be challenged or changed.

Counter-movements defending the commons thus emerge not only as strictly defensive but also as offensive projects of 'grassroots' statecraft that are generative of different discourses on property, visions to reorganize urban governance, and understandings of the state present and future. Yet it must be acknowledged that the counter-movement's call for state interventionism entailed in grassroots, 'bottom-up' statecraft does not necessarily represent a univocal affective or ideological endorsement

of state power and the governmentality that might come with it in the management of the commons. Rather, as the case of Dalieh of Raouche reveals, shaping statecraft of the commons within a neoliberal framework may require calling upon authorities to act in defence of communal spaces while also ensuring that the state does not extend its power and governmentality to them. Projects of statecraft 'from below' in the fight against propertization must then be acknowledged as forcibly plural and heterogeneous, creatively adapted to the constraints posed by global political economies, colonial legacies, and the complex and shifting attachments that are part and parcel of the ever-changing relationship between society and the state, and which counter-movements themselves help constitute.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the colleagues who gave comments on previous versions of this article, as well as my anonymous reviewers, for their time and useful feedback.

NOTES

¹ The family, whose wealth was created in the real estate industry in the Gulf, has produced two Prime Ministers in the post-war era, Rafic and his son Saad.

² I use pseudonyms in this article.

³ The Minister showed open support for the Coalition's work on a number of occasions.

⁴ The word *mushtarak* is also used for 'public' in other similar contexts: for example, public transport, *naql mushtarak*.

REFERENCES

- ABAZA, M. 2001. Shopping malls, consumer culture and the reshaping of public space in Egypt. *Theory, Culture & Society* **18**: 5, 97-122.
- ABRAM, S. & S. BLANDY 2018. Ownership and belonging in urban green space. In *Legal strategies for the development and protection of communal property* (eds) T. Xu & A. Clarke, 177-201. Oxford: University Press.
- ALEXANDER, C. 2005. Value, relations, and changing bodies: privatization and property rights in Kazakhstan. In *Property in question: value transformation in the global economy* (eds) K. Verdery & C. Humphrey, 251-74. Oxford: Berg.
- BARAKAT, L. & H. CHAMUSSY 2002. Les espaces publics à Beyrouth. *Géocarrefour* **77**, 275-81.
- BARTHEL, P. 2010. Arab mega-projects. *Built Environment* **36**, 132-45.
- BAUMANN, H. 2016. *Citizen Hariri: Lebanon's neoliberal reconstruction*. London: Hurst.
- BEKDACHE, N. 2015. Evicting sovereignty: Lebanon's housing tenants from citizens to obstacles. *The Arab Studies Journal* **23**, 320-50.
- & A. SAKSOUK 2015. Rasm khariṭa li manātiq al tanzi [Mapping picknicking and promenading areas in 1950s Beirut]. *Assafir*, 12 October.
- BLOMLEY, N. 2004. *Unsettling the city*. New York: Routledge.
- BOGAERT, K. 2018. *Globalized authoritarianism: megaprojects, slums, and class relations in urban Morocco*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- BOU AKAR, H. 2018. *For the war yet to come: planning Beirut's frontiers*. Stanford: University Press.
- BRENNER, N. & N. THEODORE 2005. Neoliberalism and the urban condition. *City* **9**, 101-7.
- CAMMETT, M. 2014. *Compassionate communalism: welfare and sectarianism in Lebanon*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- CHAMAS, S. 2021. Activism as a way of life: the social world of social movements in middle-class Beirut. *Partecipazione e Conflitto* **14**, 530-46.
- DELPAL, C. 2001. La Corniche de Beyrouth, nouvel espace public. *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine* **91**, 74-82.
- DIB, K. 2020. Predator neoliberalism. *Contemporary Arab Affairs* **13**, 3-22.
- EL HIBRI, H. 2009. Mapping Beirut: toward a history of the translation of space from the French Mandate through the Civil War (1920-91). *The Arab World Geographer* **12**, 119-35.
- ELSHESHTAWI, Y. 2004. *Planning Middle Eastern cities*. London: Routledge.

- EXECUTIVE EDITORS 2015. Save your reputation. *Executive Magazine*, 5 June (available online: <https://www.executive-magazine.com/leaders/save-your-reputation>, accessed 3 March 2023).
- FAWAZ, M. 2017a. Planning and the making of a propertied landscape. *Planning Theory and Practice* **18**, 365–84.
- 2017b. Exceptions and the actually existing practice of planning: Beirut (Lebanon) as case study. *Urban Studies* **54**, 1938–55.
- & N. MOUMTAZ 2017. Of property and planning: a brief introduction. *Planning Theory and Practice* **18**, 345–50.
- FEDERICI, S. 2018. *Re-enchanting the world: feminism and the politics of the commons*. Los Angeles: PM Press.
- FREGONESE, S. 2012. Beyond the 'weak state': hybrid sovereignties in Beirut. *Environment and Planning D* **30**, 655–74.
- FROMM, E. 2013 [1961]. *Marx's concept of man*. London: Bloomsbury.
- GEHA, C. 2019. Politics of a garbage crisis: social networks, narratives, and frames of Lebanon's 2015 protests and their aftermath. *Social Movement Studies* **18**, 78–92.
- GHANDOUR, M. 2016. Tamatta' b-al-misāhā al-khārijīyya [The enjoyment of open spaces]. *Bidāiat* **13** (available online: <https://bidayatmag.com/node/679>, accessed 24 February 2023).
- GHANNAM, F. 2002. *Remaking the modern: space, relocation, and the politics of identity in a global Cairo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- GUPTA, A. 1995. Blurred boundaries: the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state. *American Ethnologist* **22**, 375–402.
- HANN, C. 1998. The embeddedness of property. In *Property relations: renewing the anthropological tradition* (ed.) C. Hann, 1–47. Cambridge: University Press.
- 2007. A new double movement? Anthropological perspectives on property in the age of neoliberalism. *Socio-Economic Review* **5**, 287–318.
- HARB, M. 2018. New forms of youth activism in contested cities: the case of Beirut. *The International Spectator* **53**, 74–93.
- HARVEY, D. 2003. *The new imperialism*. Oxford: University Press.
- HERMEZ, S. 2015. When the state is (n)ever present: on cynicism and political mobilization in Lebanon. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) **21**, 507–23.
- HOLSTON, J. 2019. Metropolitan rebellions and the politics of commoning the city. *Anthropological Theory* **19**, 120–42.
- HOURLANI, N. 2015. People or profit? Two post-conflict reconstructions in Beirut. *Human Organization* **74**, 174–84.
- ISMAIL, S. 2006. *Political life in Cairo's new quarters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- JANSEN, S. 2015. *Yearnings in the meantime: 'normal lives' and the state in a Sarajevo apartment complex*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- JOSEPH, S. 1997. The public/private – the imagined boundary in the imagined nation/state/community: the Lebanese case. *Feminist Review* **57**, 73–92.
- JOVANOVIĆ, D. 2016. Ambivalence and the study of contradictions. *HAV: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* **6**: 3, 1–6.
- KHALILI, L. 2016. The politics of pleasure: promenading on the Corniche and beachgoing. *Environment and Planning D* **34**, 583–600.
- KHECHEN, M. 2016. Al-shuātā mulk al-sh'ab [The beaches belong to the people]. *Al-mufakra al-qānūniā*, 17 November (available online: <https://bit.ly/3xZFFQW>, accessed 24 February 2023).
- KHOURI, E. & J. TABET 2016. Beirut fi ḥūārīa al-riūāiā ū al-'māra [Beirut in the dialogue of novel and architecture]. *Bidāiat* **15** (available online: <https://bidayatmag.com/node/770>, accessed 24 February 2023).
- KIWAN, N. 2017. Emotive acts of citizenship, social change and knowledge production in Lebanon. *Interface* **9**, 114–42.
- LAMY, S. & C. BOU AOUN 2017. *Le littoral*. Balamand: Presses de l'Université de Balamand.
- LASZCZKOWSKI, M. & M. REEVES 2018. *Affective states: entanglements, suspensions, suspicions*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- LEFEBVRE, H. 2003 [1970]. *The urban revolution* (trans. R. Bononno). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- LEITNER, H., L. PECK & E.S. SHEPPARD (eds) 2007. *Contesting neoliberalism: urban frontiers*. New York: Guilford.

- MACFARLANE, A. 1998. The mystery of property: inheritance and industrialization in England and Japan. In *Property relations: renewing the anthropological tradition* (ed.) C. Hann, 104–23. Cambridge: University Press.
- MACPHERSON, C.B. 1962. *The political theory of possessive individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: University Press.
- MAINE, H. 1986 [1906]. *Ancient law*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- MAKDISI, S. 1997. Laying claim to Beirut: urban narrative and spatial identity in the Age of Solidere. *Critical Inquiry* 23, 661–705.
- MASSEY, D. 2010. *World city*. Cambridge: Polity.
- MITCHELL, T. 1999. Society, economy, and the state effect. In *State/culture: state-formation after the cultural turn* (ed.) G. Steinmetz, 76–97. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- 2002. *Rule of experts: Egypt, techno-politics, modernity*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- MOUAWAD, J. & H. BAUMAN 2017. In search of the Lebanese state. *The Arab Studies Journal* 25, 60–5.
- MUSALLAM, F. 2020. The dissensual everyday: between daily life and exceptional acts in Beirut, Lebanon. *City & Society* 32, 670–93.
- NASH, M. 2014. No project, but no public. *Executive Magazine*, 21 August (available online: <https://www.executive-magazine.com/business-all/real-estate/raouche-no-project-but-no-public>, accessed 3 March 2023).
- NAVARO-YASHIN, Y. 2002. *Faces of the state*. Princeton: University Press.
- 2012. *The make-believe space: affective geography in a postwar polity*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- NUCHO, J. 2016. *Everyday sectarianism in urban Lebanon: infrastructures, public services and power*. Princeton: University Press.
- OBEID, M. 2010. Searching for the ‘ideal face of the state’ in a Lebanese border town. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 16, 330–46.
- 2015. ‘States of aspiration’: anthropology and new questions for the Middle East. In *A companion to the anthropology of the Middle East* (ed.) S. Altorki, 434–51. London: Wiley.
- PECK, J. & A. TICKELL 2002. Neoliberalizing space. *Antipode* 34, 380–404.
- POLANYI, K. 1944. *The great transformation*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart.
- RAINEY, V. 2015. Tales from the sea. *Executive Magazine*, 4 June (available online: <https://www.executive-magazine.com/business-all/real-estate/dalieh-theses-from-the-sea>, accessed 3 March 2023).
- SAFIEDDINE, H. 2019. *Banking on the state*. Stanford: University Press.
- SAKSOUK, A. 2014. Al dalia. Haiāt al raūsha al makhfiyya qasran [Dalieh. Raouche’s forcibly hidden life]. *Bidāiat* 8/9 (available online: bidayatmag.com/node/478, accessed 24 February 2023).
- SAKSOUK-SASSO, A. 2015. Making spaces for communal sovereignty: the story of Beirut’s Dalieh. *The Arab Studies Journal* 23, 296–318.
- SALLOUKH, B. 2019. Taif and the Lebanese state: the political economy of a very sectarian public sector. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 25, 43–60.
- , R. BARAKAT, J. AL-HABBAL, L. KHATTAB & S. MIKAELIAN 2015. *The politics of sectarianism in postwar Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press.
- SAWALHA, A. 2010. *Reconstructing Beirut: memory and space in a postwar Arab city*. Austin: Texas University Press.
- SCHIELKE, S. 2008. Policing ambiguity: Muslim saints-day festivals and the moral geography of public space in Egypt. *American Ethnologist* 35, 539–52.
- SCOTT, J. 1985. *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- SHARAF, R. 2014. ‘an al-misāhāt al- ‘āma fi Beirut [On public spaces in Beirut]. *al-Mufakraal-Qānunia*, 5 August (available online: <https://bit.ly/3oJSEtN>, accessed 24 February 2023).
- SHARMA, A. & A. GUPTA 2006. Introduction: Rethinking theories of the state in an age of globalization. In *The anthropology of the state: a reader* (eds) A. Sharma & A. Gupta, 1–41. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.
- SPENCER, J. 2007. *Anthropology, politics and the state*. Cambridge: University Press.
- STAVRIDES, S. 2016. *Common space: the city as commons*. London: Zed Books.
- SUSSER, I. & S. TONNELAT 2013. Transformative cities: the three urban commons. *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 66, 105–32.
- THELEN, T., L. VETTERS & K. VON BENDA-BECKMANN 2014. Introduction to stategraphy: toward a relational anthropology of the state. *Social Analysis* 50: 3, 1–19.
- TRABOULSI, F. 2014. *Social classes and political power in Lebanon*. Beirut: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

- VON BENDA-BECKMANN, F., K. VON BENDA-BECKMANN & M.G. WIBER 2006. *Changing properties of property*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- WILLIAMS, E. 2015. Mapping the cadastre, producing the fellah: technologies and discourses of rule in French Mandate Syria and Lebanon. In *Routledge handbook of the history of the Middle East mandates* (eds) C. Schayegh & A. Arsan, 170–82. London: Routledge.
- XU, T. & A. CLARKE 2018. *Legal strategies for the development and protection of communal property*. Oxford: University Press.

Contestation de la propriété : biens communs urbains, pouvoir étatique et « tyrannie » du libéralisme au Liban

Résumé

Alors que des formes hétérogènes de marchandisation menacent la survie des biens communs urbains dans le monde entier, un groupe d'habitants et de professionnels de Beyrouth a eu recours au plaidoyer civique, y compris en appelant à l'intervention des pouvoirs publics, pour que la plage du *dalieh* de Raouche reste ouverte. En combinant analyse polanyienne et récents développements de l'anthropologie de l'État, l'auteur recadre ici le plaidoyer civique comme un cas de pouvoir étatique « de la base », adapté à la logique et au discours d'un capitalisme tardif qu'il cherche à déconstruire tout en étant modelé par celui-ci. Les contre-mouvements sont ainsi reconceptualisés comme non seulement défensifs, mais aussi offensifs et explicitement générateurs de nouveaux projets politiques et de nouveaux modes de gouvernance. Dans le même temps, l'article va plus loin dans son argumentation et suggère que le pouvoir étatique « de la base », dans le contexte de la protection des biens communs, est multivoque par nature, et que ces contre-mouvements peuvent contenir à la fois des appels à l'intervention de l'État et le rejet de celle-ci, contraints de coexister par le système politico-économique néolibéral auquel ils se confrontent.

Alice Stefanelli holds a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Manchester and is Assistant Professor in the same discipline at Durham University. Her main areas of interest are the anthropology of politics, property, and the state, as well as urban theory.

Room D118E, Dawson Building, Durham University, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK.
Alice.stefanelli@durham.ac.uk