

*Beyond the Square: Urbanism and the Arab Uprisings* focuses on the urban spatial dynamics of the mass protest movements that have convulsed the Arab region since December 2010. The volume shifts attention away from public squares — and in particular Tahrir Square in Cairo — to consider the broader urban context in which the uprisings unfolded and how it has intersected with the events themselves. The essays are topically and geographically diverse, exploring a range of sociospatial phenomena in countries that have been at the heart of the Arab uprisings as well as those countries that have appeared peripheral to the regional upheaval. This breadth of perspective highlights the centrality of space and spatial concerns to the ongoing political transformations in the region. In this way, the volume provides a distinctive — and critical — analysis of one of the most significant political events of our time.

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"Revolutions do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they are caused by a complex mix of domestic and international factors. They ultimately come to fruition in places, and not just in central squares. *Beyond the Square* fills a major gap in our understanding of how urban space factors into popular uprisings. It is a valuable contribution to the analysis of space and politics."

Asef Bayat, author of *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*

"Deen Sharp and Claire Panetta's *Beyond the Square* is unique in its scope and theoretical sophistication. Discussions of MENA (Middle East and North Africa) urbanism have tended to focus on a few "usual suspects": Cairo, Dubai, or the Maghreb. *Beyond the Square* expands the conversation, covering a much wider range of case studies and orchestrating them in a coherent way that speaks to the sociospatial in theoretically generative ways, going beyond the central, highly visible urban forms and delving deeper into less tangible but no less important sociopolitical contexts of contemporary urban politics in the MENA."

Ahmed Kanna, author of *Dubai, the City as Corporation*

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#### Cover Image

Mogamma (A Painting in Four Parts), 2012

Part 1 (detail)

Ink and Acrylic on Canvas  
180 x 144 inches (457.2 x 365.8 cm)

Photograph by Ben Westoby  
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# UR05

Published by Terreform

ISBN 978-0-9960041-4-5

Beyond the Square: Urbanism and the Arab Uprisings

Deen Sharp and Claire Panetta, Editors

UR

# BEYOND THE SQUARE

URBANISM  
AND THE ARAB  
UPRISINGS

Deen Sharp and Claire Panetta, editors

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# Beyond the Square: Urbanism and the Arab Uprisings

Claire Panetta and Deen Sharp

It has been more than four years since protests swept across the greater Middle East, unraveling – if only temporarily – the region’s political fabric. Ignited by the self-immolation of a poor street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi in the small Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid, the Arab uprisings have generated a staggering body of scholarship that explores the myriad dimensions of the political upheaval.<sup>1</sup> The sheer volume of this literature begs the question of whether yet another publication on the topic is warranted. However, as we aim to show below, scholars have neglected (though not ignored) a critical area of study – namely, the sociospatial dynamics of the uprisings.

While a small body of work has addressed the historical and architectural significance of spaces that were central to the uprising – i.e., the squares – limited attention has been paid to other sociospatial concerns. This volume attempts to redress that gap in the scholarship by exploring some fundamental questions about the relationship between the uprisings and spaces beyond the square: what role have places outside the metropolitan public square played in the Arab uprisings? What have the uprisings told us about the sociospatial connections between either different cities or different areas within a given urban context? Have certain spatial connections been forged or broken as a result of the recent political

1. Numerous expressions have been used to refer to the political tumult discussed in this volume: the Arab Spring (which later spawned the Arab Winter), the Arab Revolution, the Arab Revolts, etc. These terms have been questioned and debated among scholars *ad nauseum*. While our choice is surely vulnerable to critique as well, we have opted to refer to the events as the Arab uprisings. We prefer this expression because it allows us to elide two questions that have troubled scholars more generally: first, whether the events of 2011 truly represented a “spring” or “dawn” given the resurgence of authoritarian rule in several places; and second, whether or not the upheavals in individual countries can accurately be described as revolutions. With regard to the scope of the uprisings, we consider them to be the series of protests that began in Tunisia in December of 2010 and subsequently gripped the region over the course of 2011 – with Turkey being the major exception, where the Gezi Park protests did not occur until the summer of 2013.

upheaval? How have cities that lie beyond the traditional purview of the Arab uprisings impacted or been impacted by the turmoil? How have the Arab uprisings generated new ideas about – or uses of – urban space?

The essays in this volume tackle these questions from a range of perspectives, contexts, and moments in time. They address sociospatial concerns in areas that fall outside what is traditionally considered the Middle East (Turkey and Iran), in places that have yet to experience mass uprisings (Algeria, Palestine, and Jordan), or at moments predating (Iran in 2009, Egypt pre-2011) or postdating (Turkey after the Gezi Park protests) the outbreak of the uprisings in 2010. They also examine a wide variety of sociospatial phenomena, including spatial fragmentation, neoliberal urban development, the practices of urbicide, the rise of suburbs and gated communities, processes of gentrification, and the relationship between the so-called center and periphery.

The essays are divided into two groups, the first focused on places that did not witness a major “uprising” and the second on places that did. Collectively, however, the contributions are not geographically comprehensive. Notable exclusions include Tunisia and Yemen, both of which were (and continue to be) central to the regional political upheaval. Furthermore, the authors offer no easy answers to the questions outlined above – nor do they provide a definitive narrative regarding the sociospatial causes or consequences of the Arab uprisings. However, the geographical, topical, and temporal breadth of the essays compensates for the lack of comprehensiveness and the absence of a clear genealogy. This breadth allows us to gesture at sociospatial connections that transect time and space, providing ample fodder for future discussion and research.

It is our contention that we do not yet know the outcome of the Arab uprisings. As a result, this book – like many others – may become an artifact of its time, a reflection of geopolitical conditions at the moment of writing. Yet we hope it can have a lasting impact in its call to consider space as a structured and structuring force in the context of recent and ongoing regional events.

## THE ARAB UPRISINGS: A NEW MIDDLE EAST?

Almost from the moment they began in late December 2010, the Arab uprisings captivated regional scholars and observers. Journalists, academics, and policy experts quickly began to document and analyze the unfolding events, eventually producing a vast body of research on the political upheaval gripping the greater Middle East. This scholarship, which continues to accumulate, has investigated both the causes and contours of the

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uprisings as well as some of their consequences. In what follows, we provide a brief survey of this literature, first sketching the general parameters of the research and then narrowing in on the smaller body of work that has explored the sociospatial dimensions of the uprisings.

The initial wave of scholarship produced during or immediately after the events of 2011 was topically and geographically broad. One of its primary concerns was to understand why people were protesting and why at that particular moment in time. Ultimately, scholars reached little consensus on the aims of the various protest movements beyond general calls for regime change, greater “democracy,” and government accountability. However, concern with these basic questions tended to prioritize analysis by people from or in the region – including those actively engaged in the unfolding protests.<sup>2</sup> As a result, much of this early scholarship was tightly focused on events on the ground, which lent it a distinctive sense of immediacy (Amar and Prashad 2013; Gumbiner 2012; Haddad et al. 2012; Idle and Nunns 2011).

Academics writing during this time were also deeply concerned with providing appropriate sociopolitical and historical context for the protest movements—in part to better understand and explain their possible origins (Hanieh 2013; Lynch 2012; McMurray and Ufheil-Somers 2013). They were also eager to counter some mainstream media narratives and provide more nuanced readings of events (Amar and Prashad 2013; Filiu 2011; Gelvin 2012; Haas and Lesch 2012; Haddad et al. 2012). Specifically, some scholars questioned the popular notion that the uprisings were a “Facebook Revolution” rooted in the regional ubiquity and popularity of social media. Others wanted to debunk stereotypes about the so-called “Arab street” as a space of violence and disorder, or challenge the suggestion that “Arab culture” was fundamentally unfit for democratic politics (Amar and Prashad 2013; Gelvin 2012; Lynch 2012).

This first wave of scholarship also reflected the palpable excitement generated by the uprisings and the widespread hope that they marked the beginning of a new era for the region. Riding this sense of euphoria, some of the literature began to identify new geopolitical fault lines, suggesting that the revolts had given rise to a “new Middle East” (Amar and Prashad 2013), or else marked the end of postcolonialism (Dabashi

2012). But while some scholars pondered the extent to which the Arab uprisings represented a social and political rupture with the immediate past, others stressed the *longue durée* of the protest movements, highlighting deeply entrenched social, economic, and political grievances as well as long local histories of grassroots mobilization (Filiu 2011; Hanieh 2013; Levine 2013; Lynch 2012).

Despite the toppling of political leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, the regional momentum of the protests began to wane in 2012 and authoritarian rule was restored in several Arab states.<sup>3</sup> Scholars responded quickly to this shifting tide, turning their attention to the “counterrevolution” and to the assertion of power by new incarnations of old political orders (Amar and Prashad 2013; Haddad et al. 2012). They explored the political turmoil in greater depth and offered finer-grained analyses (Abdelrahman 2014; Amin 2013; Ehrlich 2013; Gerges 2013; Korany and El-Mahdi 2014). They also grappled with the deeper logics of the uprisings, generating or engaging in a number of scholarly debates concerning the roles of social media (Herrera 2014; Hudson et al. 2014) and gender (El Said et al. 2015); the implications for social movement theory (Bayat 2013; Beinin and Vairel 2013; Tripp 2013); the “robustness of authoritarianism” (Bellin 2012; Jebnoun et al. 2013); and the impact of wealth inequalities and neoliberal economic policies (Hanieh 2013).

Scholars at first paid limited attention to the role space played in shaping events on the ground. That said, a number of articles and essays explored the spatial layout and architectural history of the streets and squares in which protestors had gathered. Predictably, much of this work focused on Tahrir Square in Cairo, which had quickly become a metonym for the uprisings (Adham 2013; Attia 2011; Butler 2011; Elshahed 2011; Rabbat 2011, 2012; Ramadan 2013; Said 2015; Salama 2013; Ziada 2015). However, studies also focused on other prominent public spaces that were central to the protest movements, including Pearl Roundabout in Manama (Khalaf 2013), Change Square in Sana’a (Alwazir 2011), Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis (Ayeb 2011), and Taksim Square and Gezi Park in Istanbul (Abbas and Yigit 2015; El-Kazaz 2013). Collectively, this literature has examined why people gathered in these particular spaces, highlighting their historical and sociopolitical significance, and the ways in which they

2. This close working relationship between scholars and activists during the uprisings has been retrospectively critiqued. Marc Lynch (2014) notes that scholars have acknowledged that their preoccupation with activists on the ground may have impacted their ability to assess events. In this vein, some academics concluded, “Caught up in the rush of events, and often deeply identifying with our networks of friends and colleagues involved in these politics, we may have allowed hope or passion to cloud our better comparative judgment” (POMEPS 2014: 3).

3. The Tunisian president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, was removed from power on January 14th, 2011, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stepped down on February 11th, and Muammar al-Qaddafi was captured and killed in Libya on October 20th. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh was the last dictator to fall in 2011, agreeing to transfer power in November and finally ceding power in February 2012. (However, Saleh was directly involved in the September 2014 Houthi takeover in Yemen and their seizure of the Presidential Palace in January 2015).

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enabled certain kinds of visibility and performance during the protests (Butler 2011; Gregory 2013).<sup>4</sup>

Academics concerned with the sociospatial dynamics of the Arab uprisings have also contributed to broader scholastic discussions of the protests. Most significantly, they have intervened in debates over the respective roles of social media and neoliberal economic policies in the uprisings. Their input has served to emphasize the importance of (urban) space to our understanding of each phenomenon.

Debate has been robust regarding the extent to which the uprisings – and particularly the January 25th Revolution in Egypt should be considered a social media phenomenon. Some observers and activists lauded the Egyptian uprising as “Revolution 2.0” or the “Facebook Revolution” (El-Nawawy and Khamis 2013; Ghonim 2012). Following this assertion, others investigated the different forms of social media used in the protests, examining who was posting material, how it circulated online, and how it drew people to particular sites of protest (Aday et al. 2013; Aouragh and Alexander 2011; Armbrust 2012; Herrera 2014; Hudson et al. 2014; Johnson 2013; Lotan et al. 2011; Tufekci and Freelon 2013). Still more scholars explored the historical rise and spread of social media in the region, considering how and why it became so influential (Herrera 2014; Hudson et al. 2014).

Academics on the whole, however, have been reluctant to declare the uprisings a “Facebook Revolution” and have suggested that social media had only a limited role in shaping events on the ground (Herrera 2014). Working on the assumption that relationships between politics and social media are complex and dependent upon multiple local variables, these scholars have questioned our ability to discern social media’s impact on the uprisings. Marc Lynch (2011), for instance, argues: “While protesters effectively used social media in their struggles, it is surprisingly difficult to demonstrate rigorously that these new media directly caused any of the outcomes with which they have been associated” (302). Similarly, Zeynep Tufekci and Deen Freelon (2013) maintain that media technologies cannot be treated as “super tools” that bend to the will of their users; rather, they exist in particular commercial, political, and civic environments that both structure and limit their potential (844).

Sociospatial research on the intersection of space and social media has advanced a two-fold concern: first, to emphasize the interrelationship

4. With regard to the question of visibility and performance, Judith Butler (2011) has contended that acting and speaking politically is not limited to spoken and/or written language, and thus bodies make political claims by virtue of their appearance and visibility in particular places—in this case, the bodies of protestors in Tahrir Square.

between the virtual and the physical realms, and second, to reintroduce the physical as a critical factor in the uprisings’ development (Al-Sayyad and Guvenc 2015; De Souza and Lipietz 2011; Elshahed 2011; Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian 2011; Tawil-Souri 2012a, 2012b). This literature has argued that physical places (e.g., the streets and squares of the city) are still vital to the pursuit of social and political change, even as other venues (e.g., the virtual realm) have created new spaces for the expression of dissent (Tawil-Souri 2012b: 162). As Nezar AlSayyad and Muna Guvenc (2015) contend, “What happened in Tahrir Square, on Bourguiba Avenue and in Taghyeer Square shows that, even in the 21st century, urban space remains the most important arena for the expression of dissent and demand for social change” (2030).

With regards to research on neoliberal economic policies, a number of scholars have argued that the socioeconomic fallout of such policies represented a crucial vector for the uprisings. Meanwhile, others have suggested that the true problem was in fact the failure to implement these policies more completely (380). As Beth Baron and Sara Pursley (2011) note, “Some [scholars] have interpreted the uprisings as a demand for free-market economics, while many others have read them as protests *against* neoliberalism” (380, emphasis Baron and Pursley).

Those critical of neoliberalism propose that economic policies led to the dissolution of the social contract between the state and its citizens, evidenced by high unemployment, deep socioeconomic inequalities, and the collapse of social services – all of which contributed to the widespread frustration underpinning the protests (Armbrust 2011; Bayat 2013; Dahi 2011; Hanieh 2013; Kanna and Hourani 2014; Richards et al. 2013). As Ahmed Kanna and Najib Hourani (2014) observe, “The de-humanization that neoliberalization requires, provokes multiple, and very human, forms of resistance” (600). The opposing view argues that these policies were not aggressive – or neoliberal – enough. For example, Adeel Malik and Bassem Awadallah (2011) contend that the economic underpinnings of the Arab uprisings are found in the absence of a viable private sector. This leads them to call for a “genuine *infatāh* (economic opening) that dismantles entry barriers, replaces privilege with competition and ensures a decentralized and rules-based framework for decision-making. Viewed in this light, the struggle for a new Middle East will be won or lost in the private sector” (27).

Within this debate on neoliberal economic development, work has also emerged that looks explicitly at so-called “neoliberal urbanism” and its role in the protest movements. In this domain, scholars have argued that

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various initiatives like urban megaprojects and renewal initiatives, gated communities, and special economic zones created urban conditions that were critical to the development of the uprisings (Adham 2005; Bayat 2013; Bogaert 2013; Hourani and Kanna 2014; Kanna 2011; Schwedler 2015; Sharp 2012a). Specifically, they have highlighted the spatial segregation of gated communities and satellite cities, as well as the (sometimes violent) displacement of the poor that urban megaprojects have entailed (Bogaert 2013; Hourani and Kanna 2014).

Somewhat in contrast to this view, Asef Bayat (2013) argues that the regional model of the “neoliberal city” in fact facilitated the types of popular mobilizations witnessed during the uprisings. He claims that the neoliberal city is the “city inside-out,” a place where the poverty and dispossession resulting from economic policies compel large numbers of people to operate, subsist, and socialize in public spaces. In turn, these spaces become “fertile ground for the expression of street politics” (12).

This literature, while invaluable to our understanding of the sociospatial dimensions of the Arab uprisings, leaves many lines of inquiry to be pursued. In particular, it reflects an almost myopic focus on the metropolis and the centrally located spaces within it. Mobilizations in smaller cities — let alone in towns and/or rural areas — have been neglected. This gap in the scholarship has by now been partially addressed, but it warrants further investigation, as noted by many of those already writing on the topic (Abu-Lughod 2012; Bogaert 2015; Huber and Kamel 2015; Schwedler 2015; Sharp 2012b; Singerman 2011; Verdieu 2013).

In addition though, the literature has shown a preoccupation with cities directly affected by the uprisings — particularly Cairo, which has received the lion’s share of this attention. The upheaval’s broader sociospatial reach and/or the ways in which it has articulated with sociospatial dynamics in urban contexts not experiencing a major domestic protest movement are two topics that have not yet been studied. There has been a similar focus on those spaces within the city that have been central to the uprisings—i.e., the streets and squares in which the protestors repeatedly gathered. Other areas in the urban landscape—and their relationship to the centers of protest—have received little attention. The essays in this volume represent a first attempt to tackle some of these other spatial concerns and contexts.<sup>5</sup>

5. In this way, the essays gesture at Allegra et al.’s (2013) assertion that the Arab uprisings provide us an opportunity to question the categories and concepts we use to analyze the city and even “the very definition of [it] as an object of study” (1676).

## INTERROGATING THE URBAN BEYOND THE SQUARE

The contributions here are remarkably diverse, covering a range of events, contexts, and timeframes. This makes it particularly challenging to identify shared themes; however, there are some clear resonances across these different case studies. One is the suggestion that, depending on context, a single sociospatial phenomenon can be mobilized in opposing ways. We see, for example, how sociospatial fragmentation hindered the development of a protest movement in Algeria and yet enabled movements in Syria and Bahrain to coalesce. The flexibility of sociospatial phenomena emerges as a central theme of this volume, and one we hope will inform future research on the Arab uprisings and contemporary life in the region more broadly. In this section, we attempt to tease out this notion of flexibility as well as a number of other ideas that recur across the essays. We have organized what follows around the concepts of sociospatial relations, sociospatial fragmentation, and neoliberal urbanism and urban development.

### Sociospatial Relations

A number of these pieces explore sociospatial relations, which can be broadly understood as the various connections, whether physical, discursive, or ideological, that make up the urban landscape. These connections can be generated through interpersonal bonds, and also through links between people and places; however, sociospatial relations can also be produced via the material forms of the urban landscape itself.<sup>6</sup> The essays at hand grapple with the full spectrum of these connections, while simultaneously recognizing that the relationship between the social and the physical is fundamentally co-constitutive.

Several authors address the sociospatial relationships between the so-called “center and periphery” of urban spaces, exploring how they informed or were impacted by various protest activities. For example, Khaled Adham looks at pre-2011 representations of the Egyptian urban landscape found in two dystopic novels and a government-sponsored urban planning document. He suggests that the novels’ futuristic settings serve partly to critique Cairo as it existed at the time of writing — and in particular, the contemporary rise and proliferation of gated communities and satellite cities on the capital’s periphery. The resulting socioeconomic polarization between the center and the periphery is itself part of

6. The material forms of the urban landscape refer to the city’s physical dimensions—e.g., its infrastructure and/or built environment. As scholars working in both domains have illustrated, these forms are both reflective and productive of social relations (Ghannam 2002; Larkin 2008; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003).

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a broader “unjust urbanism” that Adham argues must be understood as one of the drivers of the January 25th Revolution (203).

In a different context, G. Ollamh and C. Lanthier examine the endurance of the protest movement in Bahrain, which has largely depended on a shift from the center to the periphery. They track how the suppression of protests in Manama’s centrally located Pearl Roundabout engendered ongoing activities in the capital’s “villages,” neighborhoods that are part of the city yet exist “on the periphery – both symbolically and in terms of their physical integration into the urban fabric” (148). They argue that although the transition of protests from the city center to the villages transformed both their form and content, later activities must nonetheless be understood as outgrowths of those that took place at Pearl Roundabout. In so doing, they highlight two critical ideas: first, that the spatial dynamics of different locations can shape the character of a protest movement, and second, that the center and the periphery are deeply interrelated or even “co-constitutive” (144).

Duygu Parmaksizoglu traces a similar set of dynamics in her essay on Fikirtepe, an informally developed neighborhood in Istanbul that remains on the socioeconomic periphery despite its physical absorption into the metropolitan area. She explores the mobilization of Fikirtepe’s residents in response to the Turkish government’s controversial urban development campaign and the impact of the Gezi Park protests in June of 2013 on their efforts to challenge the government plan. In so doing, she offers another assessment of the complicated relationship between protest activities and spatial practices occurring in urban centers (in this case, Taksim) and those that transpire beyond the urban core.

Together, these essays underscore the interdependent – yet fluctuating – relationship between central and peripheral spaces in the urban landscape. Adham’s concern is to show how this relationship both generated and indexed socioeconomic tensions that catalyzed the January 25th Revolution. That is to say, the economically unjust development of peripheral spaces informed the protestors who gathered in Tahrir Square. In contrast, Parmaksizoglu and Ollamh and Lanthier seek to document how protest activities in the center generated varying responses at the socioeconomic periphery, either concurrent with the protests or in their aftermath. Collectively, these authors illuminate how people, ideas, and activities flow in divergent ways between the so-called center and periphery. In the context of an inquiry into the spatial dynamics of the Arab uprisings, this reminds us to consider causes and consequences that move in multiple directions.

With this in mind, we turn to some of the other sociospatial relations explored throughout the volume. In his essay on the Syrian uprising, Deen Sharp argues that urbicide is not only the deliberate destruction of the built environment, but also the violent imposition of urban arrangements, or the struggle for control over them. Focusing on the vertical dimensions of the urban fabric, he details how the Syrian army’s aerial bombardments have driven citizens and resistance fighters underground. His analysis illuminates the interconnectedness between these aerial and subterranean spaces, highlighting the fact that sociospatial relations are not limited to the lateral or the horizontal, but extend in other directions as well. He further argues that physical destruction can be generative of new sociospatial relations and configurations, an idea to which we return below.

Susana Galán’s essay on gender and access to public space in Cairo after the January 25th Revolution explores another sociospatial connection – namely, that between the street and the square. In her discussion of grassroots responses to the post-2011 increase in sexual harassment and assault in Cairo, Galán shows how various local initiatives forged a bridge between these spaces. Anti-harassment activists have sought to address simultaneously the sexual violence that Egyptian women face during protests and in daily life on the streets – phenomena that have tended to be considered in isolation. In so doing and in arguing that women should have access to both spaces (without threat to their safety or security), these activists have connected the streets and the square. This sociospatial link is not only physical but temporal as well, in that it transcends a perceived divide between moments of protest and everyday life. Thus, Galán’s essay suggests that these organizers have (perhaps unintentionally) challenged the idea of Tahrir Square as a liminal space during the Revolution.

Another essay focused on sociospatial relations is Helga Tawil-Souri’s analysis of Kufr ‘Aqab, an area inhabited by some 15,000–20,000 Palestinians that exists as an “interstitial space” between Ramallah and Jerusalem (48). Tawil-Souri proposes that Kufr ‘Aqab is best understood as an *exopolis* – a space “outside the urban environment that helps to sustain that very same urban center, a space defined by and responding to urban changes beyond its reach, a space where residents remain largely outside urban (and national) citizenship” (48–49). Though this description may be suggestive of a periphery, Tawil-Souri maintains that Kufr ‘Aqab is a qualitatively different space because its residents are caught up in a process of political, social, and economic “out casting” as they are denied access to various civil and infrastructural services. Though her analysis does not focus specifically on protest activities linked to the Arab uprisings, it is nonetheless relevant to

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the topic. She contends that Kufr 'Aqab's status reveals something about the absence of a Palestinian uprising or third intifada: "What stands in the way of a Palestinian uprising, let alone a resolution to its political ills, is precisely the mix of conditions that have made the exopolis possible" (61).

Tawil-Souri's careful framing of Kufr 'Aqab and its distinctiveness encourages us to think beyond traditional paradigms of sociospatial relationships. The essays by Sharp and Galán likewise prompt us to rework old models. All three remind us of the need to consider the contextually and temporally specific ways in which sociospatial relationships are generated and/or modified. More generally, the essays discussed here underscore the idea that sociospatial relations are unstable phenomena that emerge and evolve in myriad ways and with varied and often unintended consequences.

### Sociospatial Fragmentation

A number of the essays mentioned above suggest that sociospatial relations can be challenged, reformulated, and/or destroyed. This leads us to the book's second theme: sociospatial fragmentation. Understood as the fracturing of social relations and/or material connections across space, the phenomenon comprises a critical dimension of the Arab uprisings. As already noted, however, the role of such fragmentation varies according to context: while some authors propose that it has inhibited protest movements or functioned as an obstacle for demonstrators to overcome, others suggest that it may have, in fact, facilitated protest activities.

Ed McAllister's essay on the Bab al-Oued neighborhood in Algiers offers the most explicit engagement with the idea that sociospatial fragmentation stymied the development of an uprising. As McAllister explains, the "identity politics" of the 1980s and the civil strife of the 1990s sowed distrust among neighbors in Bab el-Oued. Coupled with an exodus of long-time residents to the capital's growing suburbs, this distrust eroded the neighborhood's social fabric and the cohesion that was thought to define it up until the 1990s. In McAllister's analysis, this breakdown of social relations has hindered the development of a widespread protest movement. He further suggests that the contrast between nostalgic recollections of life in the 1970s and the reality of subsequent political upheavals has engendered a deep skepticism that has left many Algerians reluctant to pursue broad-based political mobilization.

In contrast, other authors show how variations on such fragmentation have been successfully challenged and overcome, allowing protest movements to coalesce. Parmaksizoglu's essay looks at the *gecekondu* of

Fikirtepe. The *gecekondu* is a particular manifestation of fragmentation in which an area is socially, economically, and politically isolated from the broader urban landscape. However, Parmaksizoglu examines how this sociospatial isolation was transcended in the context of the Gezi Park protests: although the protests initially received only limited support in Fikirtepe, some residents eventually allied themselves with the urban solidarity platforms that both organized and emerged out of them.

Azam Khatam's essay on Enqelab and Valiasr Streets in Tehran offers another illustration of the surmounting of sociospatial fragmentation. Considering the use of these streets during the 1979 Revolution and the election protests of 2009, she asserts that their spatial features and layout enabled Iranians to overcome the city's sociospatial fragmentation. More specifically, she contends that the streets' location, orientation, and accessibility permitted affluent residents of Tehran's northern suburbs to join forces with the poorer residents from the south. Khatam argues that this union of residents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds allowed for the development of a "heterogeneous public," a feature that she further suggests was critical to the successful mobilization of the protests.

Supporting the idea that sociospatial fragmentation has, in certain contexts, engendered or enabled protest activities, one can return to Adham's work on dystopic literature and the January 25th Revolution. As noted above, this literature points to deep socioeconomic fault lines in the actual city of Cairo — in the form of satellite cities, gated communities, and a variety of other securitized urban spaces. Although these spaces worked to isolate different cross sections of Egyptian society, Adham suggests that this fragmentation ultimately encouraged citizens to mobilize against the government and its "unjust urbanism."

For Adham, Cairo's sociospatial fragmentation represented an urban condition around which citizens could rally, a galvanizing force at the level of ideology. Other authors in this volume explore manifestations of fragmentation that operated practically to facilitate protest activities or movements. Sharp's essay on urbicide in Syria, for instance, contends that the fragmentation of the built environment has allowed resistance and survival efforts to endure and evolve.

Ollamh and Lanthier make a similar argument about the consequences of the Bahraini government's suppression of the Pearl Roundabout protests. As the authors show, the government crackdown in the Roundabout fragmented the movement, forcing protest activities out into the city's "villages." This fragmentation had several consequences. On the one hand, it changed the demographic makeup of the protestors, which came



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to reflect that of the villages. This in turn resulted in the protest movement as a whole becoming increasingly sectarianized. On the other hand, the fragmentation also led protestors to mobilize in different ways, making innovative use of both social media and the villages' spatial layout.

What should be clear from this discussion of sociospatial fragmentation is how it has operated in highly divergent ways within the context of the Arab uprisings. As noted above, popular narratives have tended to claim that the protests transcended sociospatial fragmentation—with the demographics of Tahrir Square invoked most frequently in this regard. While this reading is certainly accurate in some contexts, it appears to be somewhat limited, treating fragmentation as a uniformly negative force and an obstacle to the successful development of broad-based protest movements. The essays here challenge this perspective by highlighting the complexity of sociospatial fragmentation and the ways in which it can also be generative.

### Neoliberal Urbanism and Urban Development

The discussion above covers a range of issues related to urban development—or more specifically, what we have described elsewhere as neoliberal urban development. As scholars have shown, the configuration of such development is locally and temporally specific; urban development policies pursued in Istanbul, Cairo, and Algiers, for instance, must each be considered on their own terms (Bogaert 2013; Brenner and Theodore 2002). With this caveat in mind, we can identify three general ways that these essays touch on the intersection of neoliberal urban policies and the Arab uprisings. First, they look at how conditions born of neoliberal urbanism facilitated or inhibited the development of protests. Second, they consider how the uprisings have informed neoliberal development processes elsewhere in the region—i.e., in cities and spaces not directly affected by the upheaval. Third, they explore how these urban conditions were addressed by protestors within the demands they brought against their respective governments.

Tawil-Souri's essay traces the absence of a Palestinian uprising to urban conditions born of neoliberal economic policies. She posits that Kufr 'Aqab's transformation into a politically and economically marginalized exopolis was in part a result of Ramallah's rapid growth. The rise of Ramallah—fueled by the Palestinian Authority's neoliberal development policies of the past decade—has depended on the invisible exopolis to enable its growth. At the same time, the city has contributed to rampant, unregulated development in Kufr 'Aqab that has decimated infrastructure and resources.

The consequent precariousness of life in Kufr 'Aqab is, as Tawil-Souri suggests, among the possible reasons why no Palestinian uprising has thus far developed.

Aseel Sawalha's essay explores the impact of refugees fleeing regional turmoil on Amman's changing neighborhood dynamics. More specifically, she looks at how Syrian (and Iraqi) refugees are contributing to neoliberal development processes already underway in Jordan's capital. This development is the product of government economic policies and initiatives that have transformed Amman, in part by greatly increasing land values, which in turn has impacted residential patterns and exacerbated socio-economic divisions in the city. Sawalha focuses on how the gentrification of certain neighborhoods has facilitated a flourishing art scene. The most recent wave of refugees has contributed to these processes through both settlement patterns, with affluent Syrians moving into upper class neighborhoods, and their involvement with the arts.

A number of essays here contend that protest movements related to the Arab uprisings were explicitly concerned with challenging neoliberal development. For example, Parmaksizoglu examines how spatialized inequality born of such development was taken up by protestors. As she explains, the Turkish government's neoliberal redevelopment projects aimed to transform Istanbul into a "global city," mainly through the creation of luxury housing and leisure spaces catering to the affluent. These projects came at the expense of the city's low-income residents, many of whom were displaced and dispossessed. She notes how protestors in Gezi Park took up these issues. She further shows that the residents of Fikirtepe—i.e., the very people who had been the target of these projects—responded to protestors' mobilization efforts and began to engage in similar efforts. In short, Parmaksizoglu reveals how the conditions produced by neoliberal urban development policies served not just as context for the political upheavals in Egypt and Turkey, but became explicit components of them.

### VISUALIZING THE ARAB UPRISINGS: THE WORK OF JULIE MEHRETU

Before concluding, we want to make a few remarks regarding the artwork in this volume. Two works by the internationally renowned artist, Julie Mehretu, are included here: *Cairo* (2013), and *Mogamma (A Painting in Four Parts)* (2012). Both pieces are composed of complexly layered materials and images—acrylic and ink markings coupled with architectural drawings and other details from the urban landscape. Produced in the wake of the January 25th Revolution in Egypt, and explicitly reflecting back on the event,

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they provide a thought-provoking supplement to the essays, offering another perspective on the various ideas the latter propose and explore.

*Mogamma*, which means “collective,” is named after the large government administration building that overlooks Tahrir Square and that represents the heart of Egyptian state bureaucracy. Each of its four parts is comprised of architectural renderings of that building overlaid with drawings of historically important public squares from around the world: Tiananmen Square, Zuccotti Park, the Place de la Bastille, Independence Square in Tunis, Place des Martyrs in Sidi Bouzid.<sup>7</sup> The result is a collision of spaces, forms, and images – squares, buildings, centers, peripheries, points, planes, blots, and blurs – that challenges any simple conception of the relationship among them. As T.J. Demos (2013) notes in this regard, the series should be understood

“as a kind of geopolitical echo chamber of repetitions and transmutation; the structurings call up various historical episodes, geographical contexts, and scenes of past revolutions and uprisings, but the relationship they propose between the elements remains unstable and uncertain” (57).

In other words, Mehretu pulls together these different temporal moments, geographical contexts, and “a broad spectrum of systems – global interconnectivity, geopolitics, social networks, and urban-planning” (McClure 2014) and then emphasizes the instability of the relationship between them. In so doing, she offers much to consider vis-à-vis the essays in this volume. For one, by including a cornucopia of urban spaces and details in the paintings and suggesting that the connections between them are fluid, her work resonates with those authors looking at the urban sociospatial relations and fragmentation of the Arab uprisings. Collectively, the latter challenge any simple conception of the connections between different parts of the urban landscape – whether between the center and the periphery, the aerial and the subterranean. Mehretu’s play with multidimensional space offers a profound visual evocation of this idea.

In addition though, the paintings offer an exploration of how the protests are connected both spatially and temporally to past events and other geographical contexts. This idea also intersects with those essays that

7. The series was influenced by Nasser Rabbat’s (2011) article on the architectural history of Tahrir Square and the various buildings that overlook it and form its perimeter (Demos 2013: 56). Rabbat emphasizes the diversity of the structures that overlap and intertwine in the square – “Neoclassical, neo-Mamluk, historicist, modernist, totalitarian, and bureaucratic” – and illustrates how the protestors made use of this architectural heritage in laying claim to the country’s future (191). In discussing the Mogamma, he highlights its centrality to Egyptian life and its symbolic significance as the nexus of Egyptian bureaucracy (187–188).

encourage us to look beyond the moment of 2011 and the space of the Middle East as it is traditionally defined. Finally, Mehretu’s inclusion of myriad urban details challenges any narrow focus on public space – and specifically those squares in which protestors gathered – as the locus of the Arab uprisings. This challenge to popular understandings of the recent upheaval is an additional call to engage sociospatial relations “beyond the square.”

### CONCLUSION

The essays and artwork in this volume stress the need to adopt a broad temporal, spatial, and geographical framework in order to fully understand the Arab uprisings in general and their sociospatial dynamics in particular. In so doing, they support those scholars who have advocated a *longue durée* approach to thinking about the regional events of the past four years (Clancy-Smith 2012; Haddad et al. 2012). Looking at events and urban conditions prior to 2011 and those playing out on the ground today helps clarify the fluidity and diversity of the spatial practices that shaped, informed, and/or were born out of the uprisings. In addition, the authors here who focus on the moment of protest and its so-called aftermath suggest that, in some cases, the “aftermath” has yet to arrive. In short, we do not yet know how this story ends. Even as we write this introduction, Lebanon is in the grip of a new wave of protests that come on the heels of smaller protests in Tunisia and Iraq earlier this summer. Whether or not these protests will ultimately come to be considered part of the Arab uprisings remains to be seen; however, their occurrence should give us pause, for they encourage us to question whether the uprisings have truly ended and passed into history.

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