is constituted not only by the surviving traces but sometimes more by non-surviving ones. Taksim Square still harbors the bones of the past generations and their struggles. This chapter aimed to excavate the horizon of hegemonic struggles and meanings in Taksim Square as a monumental space.

Taksim Square, at first sight, appears to contain an architectural cacophony of past meanings. Some have undergone modifications, some are blunted or blurred in time. The early Republican construction of space has already lost its coherence with new added buildings. ACC, which used to house art exhibitions and cultural events, has become a dead building. The large Marmara Hotel overlooks the center and dwarfs the Monument of the Republic. With unhealthy urbanization in the 1980s, side roads were enlarged encircling the square with overloaded traffic and urban chaos, shifting the Monument of the Republic away from the geometric center. The recently completed Taksim Pedestrianization Project with its hard concrete floor and un/geomeric shape gives the impression that the Square is under construction. Ironically, as Lefebvre tells us, it is indeed. Construction of space is a never-ending process.

In the years since the Gezi Uprisings – at the time of writing this chapter – Taksim Square has been dominated by infamous riot control vehicles equipped with water cannons and teargas bombs, along with scores of police officers constantly patrolling the area. These authoritarian measures are the reminders of the Gezi Resistance and of the increasing discontent and legitimacy crisis of the state. The forcible exclusion of any protests in Taksim Square is pronounced silently by space itself. It seems that the turmoil is inevitable as long as the space is enclosed as a result of aggression and repression. Lefebvre warns that enclosed space – practically and symbolically to any meaning – would not create concord but violence: “Space as a whole becomes prone to sudden eruptions of violence.”

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1. For Tarlibap Boulevard and its effects on the Republican Monument: Aşlan, Amt ve Meydanlardaki Oran.
2. Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 224.

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URBAN OPEN SPACES AND THE REVOLUTIONARY EVENTS OF 2010–2011 IN TUNIS: A TENTATIVE TYPOLOGY

Nora Lafi

Introduction: reflections on the meaning of public space

The series of revolts, uprisings, coups d’état and revolutions that swept the Arab world in 2010–2011 produced very different outcomes depending on the respective countries: civil war and foreign intervention in Syria, Libya and Yemen, an autocratic counter-revolution in Egypt, a fragile and at times ambiguous democracy in Tunisia, and acts of repression almost everywhere. The movements that initiated these developments functioned according to different logics and were rooted in unique local histories and geopolitical constellations, despite their apparent similarities and partially shared contexts. Yet, all of them also highlighted a new relationship between local civic movements, dynamics of mobilization and urban space. The revolts and acts of repression connected to public squares like Midan Tahrir in Cairo, Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain, Casablanca in Tunis or Saray al-hamra square in Tripoli, and to the most remote locations in peripheral neighbourhoods and smaller cities, profoundly changed the meaning and use of public space in the Arab world. Public open spaces often played a central role in this transformation. They were variously occupied by protesters, became sites of police repression, were symbolically opened after being closed, forcefully closed after being open to the public, or closed by inhabitants of neighbouring streets to avoid the violent actions of agents provocateurs and looters. This dialectic of mobilization and repression induced a reinterpretation of the function and symbolical

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meaning of open places. These dynamics must not, however, be seen only as manifestations of exceptional times. They are all rooted in the historical anthropology of urban spaces and constitute specific reinterpretations and adaptations of said anthropology in specific circumstances and in times of tension.

Urban open public spaces that were used, occupied, and imbued with new political meaning by oppositional and revolutionary movements during the 2010-2011 mobilizations have unique histories and symbolic meanings of their own. They were not chosen just by accident, or just for their specific morphological or functional characteristics, even if such criteria might have played a certain role. Reflections on Haussmann’s transformations of Parisian public space have shown the complex link between urban form, the political meaning of space and the likeness of sparking demonstrations. It goes well beyond connecting the width of a boulevard to the intensity of a politically motivated mobilization. Other factors, like the political imaginary of places, the existence of a tradition of civic mobilization, the proximity of a specific political symbol, the memory of a fact or anecdote involving the place, or the geography and nature of power and repression, are important as well. This is why the study of this complex subject not only provides new perspectives on and helps better understand the meaning of urban open spaces, but also sheds light on social movements.

Open public spaces are considered here not only as institutionally planned sites (understood as deliberately planned spaces without buildings amid a built environment), but also as places that may be appropriated by the population. The intention of this article is to focus on the interaction between the planned or unplanned form of places and their popular interpretation, as well as on the civic and political aspects of this. A typology of open spaces for (re)interpreting the 2011 events is proposed here on the basis of an analysis of the case of Tunis. This typology is not conceived as a static spatial vision, but rather as the result of the dynamic interactions between an urban society and places imbued with meaning, as well as their historically constructed and socially, anthropologically and politically codified purposes. This typology aims to encourage reflection on the logics of mobilization and appropriation, the roots of violence, and most importantly, on the social construction of space. This proposed typology is not one of open spaces only but rather of the interaction between given types of urban open spaces and specific processes of appropriation during the events.

The choice of Tunis as a case study

The proposed typology has been developed on the basis of a case study on Tunis. This choice derives from my expertise on both the history and current affairs of the region: I have been conducting archival research on urban spaces in Tunis during Ottoman and colonial times for two decades, and have been a direct witness of various phases of the 2010–2011 revolution. I also closely followed the evolution of the city and of the country over the last 20 years. I could also have chosen Cairo, as I was writing a chapter on urban violence and public space during the Napoleonic occupation in Egypt’s national archives in 2011, just as violence began erupting outside. I also witnessed various phases of civic mobilization on Taksim square in Istanbul while conducting research on petitions by urban protesters in the central archives of the Ottoman Empire (BOA), and saw how residents from various neighbourhoods, like Kadiköy, collectively defended themselves against police repression. As for Tripoli, the archives I used for my doctoral thesis on Ottoman municipal institutions and the civic sphere were located in the castle in front of which many of the 2011 events occurred. I know every inch of this square and followed every moment of the 2011 events on television and the radio, and discussed them on the phone with friends and colleagues. I also conducted research on factional violence in the city. I was in Aleppo for a research study classified urban open spaces according to seven categories: food production areas, parks and gardens, recreational spaces, plazas, streets, public transport facilities and incidental spaces in between all these types or in between the morphological expressions of the built environment.

5 See, for example: Thierry Oblet, Gouverner la ville. Les voies urbaines de la démocratie moderne, Paris 2005.
7 For a reflection on the origins and various uses of this notion: Nubia Moreno Loche / Alexander Cely Rodriguez / Liliana Rodrigues Pizzinato, Pensar y imaginar la construcción social del espacio: balances y retos, in: Folios, 2013, p. 141–156.
8 For reflections on the typologization of urban open spaces: Benjamin Stanley / Barbara Stark / Katrina Johnston et al., Urban Open Spaces in Historical Perspective: A Transdisciplinary Typology and Analysis, in: Urban Geography 33–8, 2012, p. 1089–1117. The authors of this
10 For very stimulating reflections on the link between theoretical work on a subject (in her case the notion of public space in Italy and Europe) and the analysis of another situation that the researcher is witnessing, see: Chiara Sebastiani, Una città una rivoluzione. Tunisi e la riconquista dello spazio pubblico, Cosenza 2014. For a review in English of this book, see: Denis Bouquet, Reflections on Public Spaces in Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Tunis, in: Jadaliyya, April 17, 2015: http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/21378/reflections-on-public-spaces-in-revolutionary-and-
project on urban violence and factions during the 1819 revolt just a few months prior to the events that later degenerated into civil war and a foreign intervention.  

But for the case of Tunis, I think that I am able to propose a viable typologization of the relationship between the population in a time of revolutionary exaltation, fear and doubt, and open public spaces. Although this article only focuses on examples from Tunis and its surroundings, it is important to recall that the Tunisian revolution of 2011 was not limited to the capital city. The revolution was sparked in Sidi Bouzid and also capitalized on years of experience with protesting against the dictatorial regime of president Ben Ali in the south of the country, mostly in the context of Gafsa mining crisis. During the first days of the 2010 upheaval, many Tunisian cities were the site of mass demonstrations, and citizens participating in these demonstrations were the first victims of repression. All these places, and many others, should thus be kept in mind even if what follows is about the capital city only.  

Avenue Habib Bourguiba: from Ottoman urban modernity to present-day demonstrations

This avenue is named after Habib Bourguiba who lead the rebellion against French colonial rule and then became Tunisia’s first president after independence. It has been the theatre of one the most mediatized moments of the Tunisian revolution. When on January 14th 2011 a crowd began chanting the “dégage” (go away) slogan on the avenue in front of the Ministry of the Interior, this immediately became one of the most powerful symbols of the revolution. The president left the country to seek refuge in Saudi Arabia with his family on the same day, after having first tried to save his regime by announcing a change of government and then declaring a state of emergency. Of course the demonstration was not the only direct reason for the fall of the regime.

16 As for the case of Tunis, a team of Italian researchers proposed a multimedia spatialization of the mobilization: Raffale Cattaneo / Francesca Governa / Maurizio Memoli et al., Al centro di Tunisi: Geografie dello spazio pubblico dopo una rivoluzione, Turin 2014, http://webdoc.unica.it/t/index.html/Home.
Some have underlined how elements of the army and the chief of the Presidential Security Unit, Ali Seriati, pressured the dictator to flee the country in what could also be seen as a coup.17 What is sure is that the Soot al Sharb (The Voice of the People) played an important role in catalyzing this regime change, as another widely chanted slogan on the Avenue made clear. In the previous days, Avenue Habib Bourguiba had been the place of numerous demonstrations against the dictatorial nature of the regime and later against its brutal acts of repression. The police had used live ammunition against the crowd and killed numerous protesters. The army was seen as less brutal. Some of its units refused to shoot at protesters. The demonstration against the Ministry of the Interior on January 14th was also a protest against the police, the core instrument of the dictatorship.

If Avenue Habib Bourguiba was deliberately chosen by protesters, then for a number of reasons. One of these, aside from the nearby Ministry of the Interior, is the fact that earlier mobilizations had occurred on the avenue during the previous decade. The regime had occasionally permitted the population to express collective political sentiments and allowed it to channel its discontent with international events into public protests. Otherwise, demonstrations in this cruel dictatorship were not allowed and when they happened spontaneously, like in mining cities of the south, they were repressed with great violence. In September 2000, December 2002 and January 2009, various demonstrations expressing solidarity with Palestine and protesting against the aggressive stance of US president George Bush in the Arab world were tolerated on the avenue. Many trade unionists, intellectuals and citizens thus experienced this avenue as a space for political demonstrations. The adjacent Ministry of the Interior, meanwhile, had been sealed off by a fence for years. As tension began rising in 2010, more and more open space began being cordoned off with barbed wire. During the demonstrations in this time, the crowd formed to reconquer some parts of the avenue that had been closed off. The urban form of the avenue as an open space also made it an attractive site for demonstrations. Avenue Habib Bourguiba connects the old city (medina), and particularly the Bab al-Bahr Gate (Gate of the Sea) and the harbour, as well as a station on the Tunis-La Goulette-La Marsa suburban railway link.18 Avenue Habib Bourguiba was conceived during the time of the Ottoman reforms in the second half of the 19th century as an axis for communicating with the port and the railway station, and as a means of urban extension. The avenue shares commonalities with open axis in other Ottoman cities like Salonica or Istanbul with regard to its form and underlying planning concept. Modern Ottoman urban planning made the avenue the main axis of urban extension. It was first named a promenade, and then an avenue.19 Engineers of the late Ottoman municipality designed the regular grid of this new urban extension in relation to this axis. Most of the new public buildings of the time were built alongside it.20 The Maison de France, symbol of the growing influence of the country that was to colonize Tunisia in 1881, was established there in 1860. Colonial urbanism maintained the centrality of the avenue which was renamed after Jules Ferry, the minister who promoted colonization.21 Tunis, now a "European" city during colonial times, developed according to the grid of the end of the Ottoman era. The French built the Saint-Vincent-de Paul cathedral on the avenue in 1897 and the Municipal Theatre in 1920. Urban plans from the colonial period by Valensi (1920), Chevaux (1935), Zehrufus (1945), Amabi (1948) and Michel (1957) all confirmed the central role of the avenue, although this manifested itself differently with ongoing urban extensions.22 Numerous post-independence projects confirmed the importance of this avenue, including a plan by Kosmin to extend the avenue through the old town up to the Kasbah, even though it was never realized.23

This urban open space provided a highly visible arena for demonstrations, both in the collective imaginary and in practical terms. During the revolutionary developments of 2011, demonstrations occurring on the avenue after the January events acquired a new dimension in the political imaginary. In February 2011, demonstrators gathered outside the French embassy at the western end of the avenue, near Bab al-bahr, to protest against declarations made by the new ambassador Boris Boillon, which were seen as neo-colonialist, and to protest against the atti-
tude of the French government. Proposals made by French interior minister Michèle Alliot-Marie in December 2010 to adopt a repressive savoir-faire attitude towards the dictatorship had provoked demonstrations in front of the embassy before. During the January events, the Al-Kitab bookshop, situated on the avenue, served as a place where activists could sign a petition against the violent repression and for the right of people to hold demonstrations. The bookshop placed tables on the sidewalk and used the open public space for this risky political activism. This illustrates the potential of urban open spaces to instigate or strengthen political activism. It also illustrates how in the context of Tunisia and many other post-Ottoman countries ranging from Syria to Greece, demonstrators do not just simply occupy public space or merely stroll along it. They also use it to confront those in power with formal petitions. In the Ottoman Empire, the petitioning system was one of the main features of imperial and local governance and the main channel for resolving conflicts. Of course, other avenues in Tunisia like Avenue Mohammed V, where president Ben Ali’s RCD was headquartered, also played a role in the January 2011 events. However, the way the crowd occupied the open space of Avenue Habib Bourguiba was unmatched in terms of symbolism and significance.

Occupying a central public square, symbolic monuments or buildings

Efforts to develop a typology of open public spaces that were used during the Tunisian revolution of 2011 reveal that the Kasbah is one such location. This complex, which is composed of several official buildings and Government square, borders on the old city in the west. Since the Middle Ages, this place has come to symbolize political power in the city. Nowadays, the residence and office of the prime minister are located here, as well as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture. The Kasbah is also a traditional gathering place for demanding justice. During times of the old regime, people used to bring their petitions here and file complaints. During the popular protests, they converged there to present their requests, grievances and demands to the representatives of the government. On December 28th 2010, 300 lawyers gathered in front of the offices of the prime minister on the public square to protest against violent police repression in cities where demonstrations against the regime had occurred during the previous days. On January 6th 2011, the lawyers went on strike and demonstrators on Government square began occupying the open space. On January 13th 2011, as the government decided to ask the army to stop the re-

24 See an interview of Samia Dhib, a scholar who organized the demonstration: http://www.bastamag.net/Tunisie-La-France-ne-comme-une.

25 See: interview of the bookshop owner in: Cattedra / Governo / Memoli et al., Al centro di Tunisi.


billion, the open space on the tiny square was cordoned off with barbed wire. Now, the central space of the square and offices of the prime minister were no longer accessible, forcing the protestors to withdraw to the other side.

After the fall of the regime, Government square became the central place for occupiers pressing for an actual implementation of the values of the revolution. It was here that activists protested against the ambiguities of the interim government, and that protesters and petitioners from the whole country came to present their demands to the government. There is a direct continuity between this civic practice and the legacy of civic activism in Ottoman times. Occupying the public space on the square was a mix of civic practices, combining trade union protest repertoires and a culture of occupation that has come to characterize movements of the early 21st century. In February 2011, various groups of young Tunisians began permanently occupying the square and asking for the resignation of the interim government of Mohamed Ghannouchi. The protesters came from all over Tunisia, including for example from Gafsa, Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid and Bizerte. In March, M. Ghannouchi resigned. Since then, the public open space on Government square, while considerably diminished in size due to fences, remained the main site for expressing grievances of all kinds. What the events of the 2011 revolution show and what this type of place illustrates, is not only a new kind of mobilization that uses modern technology and social networks, but also a revitalization of forms of civic participation that are historically rooted in the traditional civic sphere of the region.

Protecting neighbourhoods: citizens erecting barricades on the streets

This particular use of open public spaces also represents a combination of historical tactics from the time of the old regime and modern reinterpretations thereof. In Ottoman times, during moments of unrest and revolt, the city temporarily ceased functioning as a cohesive whole and began breaking down into compartmentalized cells at the level of streets and neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood faction would close the doors of streets leading into their quarter and thereby control access to it. This was done to prevent other factions from entering and potentially causing havoc. When public order was reinstated after a revolt, doors between the neighbourhoods of the old city (medina) were reopened and all temporary barri-


What is remarkable about the 2011 events in Tunis is that such collective mechanisms for protecting neighbourhoods were spontaneously initiated, even in neighbourhoods that did not exist in Ottoman times. Such tactics could even be observed in recently urbanized parts of the city, proving that the relationship between the civic sphere and urban public spaces is not a static one and that political activism is not linked to the mythical aura of the built environment. Instead, what matters is the civic conscience of the people. On January 14th 2011, just hours after president Ben Ali left the country and found refuge in Saudi Arabia, agents of the regime tried to spread chaos in the city. They enacted a premeditated scenario aimed at creating disorder to bolster support for the ruling party, Agents provocateurs of the regime sped through the streets in SUVs, firing at people and killing dozens. In a few hours, neighbourhood committees were created in many parts of the city to deal with this threat. Men of all ages and walks of life erected barricades at the entrances to their respective neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods, meanwhile, varied considerably in their urban form and social composition. The men used garbage cans, old cars and other available objects to seal off the streets. Men from the UGTT trade union helped erect the network of barricades, but also militants from the Islamist opposition. Thanks to these improvised check points they were able to control cars entering the neighbourhood and block drivers not linked to the district or without credible justification for heading there. They also organized squads to patrol neighbourhood streets. This mobilization clearly thwarted attempts by provocateurs to destabilize the country. It shows how open public spaces like these streets became centres of civic activism, and how their closure to outsiders became an expression of civic awareness.

A supermarket, a parking lot and the political meaning of open spaces

It is not only historical squares and avenues that qualify as urban open spaces. Sometimes, prosaic spaces, spaces of in-betweenness and spaces dedicated to specific functions, for instance to transportation, commerce or sport, belong to them as well. During the events that led to the overthrow of president Ben Ali in 2011 and those immediately following it, some of these spaces were used by the crowd to express its discontent. The fact that most of these spaces we not considered urban public spaces prior to this does not mean that they are without symbolic and political meaning. They are in no way non-locus. Instead, they are imbued with meaning through specific processes of social construction. The cases of the Carrefour supermarket parking lot and of the Carthage-La Soukra shopping mall illustrate this.

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32 All the people evoked in the present narration are reputed innocent as long as justice has not declared them guilty.
33 Ben Ali then married Leila Trabelsi in 1992. Most of the scandals of corruption and nepotism that marked the end of the regime are linked to her family and entourage.
34 Jean Poncer, La mise en valeur de la basse vallée de la Medjerda, in: Annales de Géographie 70–77, 1961, p. 105. The institution took over the tasks of the previous colonial Commissariat of the same name in order to develop irrigation following the inauguration of a new dam in 1957.
The symbolic meaning of the site evolved over time and came to symbolize the financial manipulations involved in its development during the 2000s. In spite of the severe censorship that was enforced by the regime, the history of the dubious deal became public knowledge and was used as an argument against the regime on numerous blogs and social networks. On 14 January 2011, another supermarket, the Géant Casino, was also looted and destroyed in Tunis. It is the second largest of its kind in North Africa and was the property of the Mabrouk Group. One of the owners, Marouane Mabrouk, had married Cyrine, another daughter of president Ben Ali.\textsuperscript{35}

**Demonstrations in areas of recent urban development**

During the events of 2010–2011, most demonstrations were held downtown, either in the medina, on Government square, on the section of Avenue Bourguiba that was added in late-Ottoman and colonial times, or on the colonial era extension of avenue Mohamed V. But given the relocation of several embassies, including the US one, to the recently developed Berges du Lac neighbourhood, some demonstrations also occurred here.

The neighbourhood is one of the fastest growing urban expansions of the last three decades in Tunis. It was built along the shores of the coastal lake according to plans by a public development agency from the late 1970s and early 1980s. When the project was partially privatized, a public-private partnership between the Tunisian government and the Saudi Dallah el-Baraka group continued developing the neighbourhood. The Société de Promotion du Lac de Tunis was created as the result of this deal in the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{37} The municipality lost most of its say in urban planning. Such competences were directly negotiated in this urban enclave, of which 20 per cent have been reclaimed on the coastal lake, between the central state and private investors. Urban planning was oriented towards creating a neighbourhood for the new upper middle class. Many businesses also settled there during the 1990s and 2000s. The Berges du Lac neighbourhood also became an area where different sections of the population began spending their leisure time, given the new promenade and new bars, discos and restaurants.\textsuperscript{38} It is not the kind of place where one typically expects to see a political demonstration. But in 2012, as Tunisia was undergoing a political transition, open spaces in les Berges du Lac suddenly became the theatre of violent events. The first such instance was when a group of Salafist militants protested on the motorway linking Tunis to the new neighbourhood on September 14\textsuperscript{th} 2012. They were heading to the US embassy to protest against the provocative movie *Innocence of Muslims* by US-Egyptian director Nakoula Basseley Nakoula. On that day, violent incidents occurred in front of the embassy, with at least four demonstrators killed by security forces. An American school also situated in the Berges du Lac neighbourhood was looted. The fact that these violent, possibly instrumentalized, Salafists protests were held on a motorway and in a new neighbourhood developed according to principles very much unlike those of the city centre, seems unusual. They occurred in an open space that had not been associated with demonstrations previously. Yet, there is a historical analogy to this mobilization. During the 1857 riots, for example, various groups of protesters armed with light weapons travelled far away from the city centre to protest against governmental decisions. They adapted to the new geography of power and brought violence to spaces that were not directly related to traditional factional spaces in the medina.

**Conclusion**

This study suggests that history always matters with regard to the meaning of urban open spaces, even when events unfold in recently constructed spaces. History is not just materialized in concrete constructions and in historical spaces. It can also manifest itself in forms of political protest in spaces without unique meanings acquired through long processes of social construction. History, understood also as collective reflexes, habits and a civic conscience, can also be projected onto new open spaces. The meanings of such spaces, thus, is not predetermined by urban morphology. Instead, it is constantly redefined in a dynamic interplay between the history of a symbolic meaning and contemporary reconfigurations thereof. Space and society are closely connected. The former is constantly redefined by the latter. This study therefore wishes to stress the importance of this constant interaction, also with regard to existing typologies of urban open spaces. Any typology built only on morphology risks limiting its scope for interpretation. The civic dimension of urban open spaces is determined as much by the history of social practices as by that of the space itself. The interaction between both constantly redefines the relationship to and meaning of a particular space.