

A Political Economic Analysis of Turkey-Lebanon Relations: New Regionalism and Shamgen Project

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Declaration of Originality

The intellectual content of this thesis, which has been written by me and for which I take full responsibility, is my own, original work, and it has not been previously or concurrently submitted elsewhere for any other examination or degree of higher education. The sources of all paraphrased and quoted materials, concepts, and ideas are fully cited, and the admissible contributions and assistance of others with respect to the conception of the work as well as to linguistic expression are explicitly acknowledged herein.



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Abstract

A Political Economic Analysis of Turkey-Lebanon Relations: New Regionalism and Shamgen Project

Hakan Kerim İLKER, Master's Candidate at the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University, 2024

Assistant Professor Seda ALTUĞ BULUT, Thesis Advisor

This thesis examines the political and economic relations between Turkey and Lebanon through the lens of new regionalism and the Shamgen Project (2009-2011). It scrutinizes the establishment and subsequent developments of the Shamgen Project, which emerged as a pivotal initiative aimed at fostering trade, cultural exchange, and political cooperation among Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. This initiative was conceived within the context of the evolving Turkish foreign policy framework that followed the end of the Cold War and the widespread adoption of neoliberal policies. Despite the limited successes of the Shamgen Project, the initiative provided significant insights into the dynamics of new regionalism in the Middle East. This study explores the business and cultural ties between Turkey and Lebanon during and after the Shamgen Project, situating this analysis within the political motivations of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era and the processes of regionalism. The objective of this thesis is to reveal the impact of the interplay between political events, business, and cultural ties on regional cooperation and economic relations, thereby contributing to the scholarly discourse on new regionalism.

39,937 words

Özet

Türkiye-Lübnan İlişkilerinin Politik Ekonomik İncelenmesi: Yeni Bölgeselcilik ve Şamgen Projesi

Hakan Kerim İLKER, Yüksek Lisans Adayı, 2024

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü

Doktor Öğretim Üyesi Seda ALTUĞ BULUT, Tez Danışmanı

Bu tez, Türkiye-Lübnan ilişkilerini yeni bölgeselcilik ve Şamgen Projesi (2009-2011) bağlamında siyasi ve ekonomik ilişkilere odaklanmaktadır. Soğuk Savaş'ın sona ermesi ve neoliberal politikaların genelde yaygınlaşması çerçevesinde değişen Türkiye Dış Politikasının bir parçası olarak, Türkiye, Lübnan, Suriye ve Ürdün arasında ticaret, kültürel değişim ve siyasi işbirliğini teşvik etmeyi amaçlayan önemli bir girişim olarak ortaya çıkan Şamgen Projesi'nin kuruluşuna ve sonrasını analiz etmektedir. Bu projenin başarıları sınırlı kalmış ancak süreç Orta Doğu'daki yeni bölgeselcilik dinamikleri hakkında değerli içgörüler sunmuştur. Tez, Şamgen Projesi süresince ve sonrasında Türkiye ile Lübnan arasındaki iş ve kültürel bağları, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) dönemi politik motivasyonları ve bölgeselleşmenin kuruluş süreçlerini bağlamında incelemektedir. Tezin amacı, bölgeselcilik çalışmalarında siyasi olayların, iş dünyası ve kültürel bağların etkileşiminin bölgesel işbirliği ve ekonomik ilişkiler üzerindeki etkisini ortaya koymaktır.

39,937 kelime





To My Biggest Supporter, My Grandma

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Thirdly and lastly, as a student pursuing his professional career, “time” is already a scarce resource for me. Therefore, I am going to show my appreciation to my colleagues, starting with my director, Hande, Burcu, Büşra, Furkan, Kültigin, and Tamer. They provided me with adequate time for thinking and writing and guided me in time management with their excellent competence and professionalism.

NOTE: The in-house editor of the Atatürk Institute has made detailed recommendations with regard to the format, grammar, spelling, usage, syntax, and style of this thesis.



Introduction



The term Levant derives from the French verb “lever,” which can be translated as “to rise,” referencing the rise of the Sun in the East. The region's core are the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea; and according to Britannica, the area has included the shores of Turkey and Greece at different times.¹ This geographical region approximately coincided with the “Bilad Ash-Sham” during the Ottoman Empire era, the Levant Republics during the Mandate Era, and the Western Al-Mashriq in the Modern Era. Currently, the Levant region consists of six countries:

¹ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Levant." Encyclopedia Britannica, July 12, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Levant>.

Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey. Several deserts and mountains enclose the region, with its western boundary defined by the sea. The Badiyat Ash-Sham is located between the hinterland of the city of Baghdad, and this separates the region from its eastern neighbors. Alongside, together with the Al-Hamad Plateau, this desert constituted nearly all of the region's eastern and southern borders.² As a northern border, the Orontes Valley and Taurus Mountain serve as possible northern borders if the Turkish and Greek shore are excluded. The area comprises numerous trading hubs, starting from its historical administrative center, the city of Damascus; Beirut, Tripoli, Jaffa, Saida, Haifa, Latakia, and Alexandretta ports; and the city of Aleppo. All of these cities and ports had historically been the center of trade between West and East, but they lost their significance to the several other ports in Egypt and along the Red Sea.

Until World War I, the entire region was part of the Ottoman Empire, which had been trying to implement several administrative reforms in the area that aimed to strengthen ties between the center, Istanbul, and regional elites and societies. Although this reform initiative was not directly focused on the region, its influence and implementation were facilitated by the Empire's geographical proximity. As part of this reform movement, especially during the Hamidian Era, the Empire sought to establish Istanbul as the center of the Arab region. Elites were welcomed in Istanbul, and several significant families from the region, such as the Azmzades, Melahes, Sursocks, and Habbabs, resided there in the late 19th century. This phenomenon created a sense of control over them for the Sublime Porte and paved the way for the emergence of a form of Muslim identity. At the same time, according to Minawi, it was an opportunity for notable men of the Levant in the latter half of the 19th century to transcend their families' traditional regional-level occupations through "the

² Owen, L. , Ochsenwald, . William L. and Holm, . Donald August. "Arabian Desert." Encyclopedia Britannica, November 16, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Arabian-Desert>.

right pedigree, education, and trans-imperial connections.”³ Although these connections and intimacies were disrupted just after the Hamidian Era and nearly finished after the Treaty of Lausanne and the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. However, the cultural importance of these ties persisted, such as the idea that “marrying a Turkish girl is a prestige for a Lebanese Family.”⁴

Similar to the Hamidian Era, during the early 21st century, other regionalization processes have started to be implemented. The project was envisioned by the AKP’s intellectual bases, and they named this project and the region the “Shamgen” region. The brand name was inspired by the European Union’s visa-free Schengen Zone. Due to its extroverted nature—characterized by enlargement plans and the ambition to connect global and local markets on a regional scale—analyzing the project and its aftermath presents a significant case for regionalism theory and its application in the Middle East.

The Shamgen Project was one of several concurrent regionalization initiatives that were initiated during the early years of AKP governments in Turkey, which may collectively be referred to as “gönül coğrafyası.” Through this project, the enterprises in Turkey have a chance to connect with the broader regional and global economic networks. AKP and its leader Erdoğan sought to harness regionalism’s regime-boosting effects by controlling and channeling the economic networks that are crucial for Turkish firms’ integrations. Moreover, it was also part of the public diplomacy discourse of new foreign policy orientation during the AKP governments. Erdoğan employed this rhetoric pragmatically and strategically, tailoring his narrative according to local contexts and historical experiences. Although the Shamgen project can be regarded as a short-lived amalgamation of several bilateral and multilateral agreements, this thesis deployed the term as a “Geist” of the era. In other words, this thesis is

³ Mostafa Minawi, *Losing Istanbul: Arab-Ottoman Imperialists and the End of Empire* (Stanford (Calif.): Stanford University Press, 2023), 6.

⁴ “Türk Gelin Lübnanlının En Büyük Prestijidir,” accessed November 23, 2024, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/yener-susoy/turk-gelin-lubnanlinin-en-buyuk-prestijidir-330507>.

going to use “Shamgen” to define the era that fostered increased intimacy between Turkey and regional countries that extended beyond these agreements to encompass the broader relationship nexus in the region during the AKP era.

Following AKP's election in 2002, initial efforts focused on enhancing diplomatic relations with the countries in the region. These efforts drew the borders of the region quite differently, excluding Israel, because of its hostility toward other regional countries. Moreover, in the early 21st century, Israel had already occupied some pieces of all regional countries except Turkey. On the one hand, Turkey positioned Israel as a partner and promoted an initiative called “Business for Peace”⁵; on the other hand, it deployed strong anti-Israel rhetoric in order to develop a cohesive regional identity.

Official meetings regarding agreements about the Shamgen region started after the 2006 election in Turkey following the AKP's consolidation of power. An official agreement was signed in 2010. The project itself was short-lived, and with the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, the official support from respective governments for the project was withdrawn. Although the project could not succeed in many of its premises in terms of trade and collaboration, similar to most regionalization projects, the effects of the project and the regional mindset of actors helped to reshape the economic, social, and political geographies of the region. It is important to note that, with the establishment of these networks and regional mindset, there were several continuities and reconfigurations between historical relations. As Lefebvre stated, “No spaces ever vanish utterly, leaving no trace,”⁶ The Shamgen region also has either connection or reference to past regional spaces, such as the Ottoman imperial space-building, the Mandate Era's colonial space, and the Cold War Era's polarized spaces.

⁵ “Filistin ve İsrail İş Dünyasının Ortak Görüşü: Tahkim Merkezi İsrail-Filistin Barış Sürecine Köprü Olacak,” accessed November 24, 2024, <https://tobb.org.tr/Sayfalar/Detail.php?rid=2202&lst=MansetListesi>.

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, Donald Nicholson-Smith, and Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33. print (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 164.

This thesis aims to contribute to the literature by investigating regionalism in the Middle East. The regionalization projects in MENA are often described as bleak due to the disruption caused by political violence. Indeed, political violence or general political shifts have increased the fragmented nature of regionalization. However, this fragmented regional environment does not dissolve but reshuffles its meaning and attribution by finding new ways to manifest itself. Concurrently, the attribution toward the region has also been subject to transformation.

Analyzing the Shamgen region will focus on specific bilateral relations for several reasons. First, it aims to show how the regionalization processes do not operate homogeneously, although the regional space is effective in the whole area. Second, in spite of the regionalization project—in this case, the Shamgen Project—being disrupted, its premises and actions were reshuffled. Although Jordan and Palestine were part of this Shamgen region, the influence of the project was significantly smaller compared to Lebanon and Syria. Moreover, with the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, Syria – Turkey relations worsened, and there was no legal trade or cultural policy between the two countries. Turkey's relations with Lebanon, in the context of the Shamgen region, serve as a critical case for such research. Therefore, this thesis focuses on relations between Lebanon and Turkey during the early 21st century.

Focusing on Lebanon-Turkey relations leads to the integration of several attributions that enrich the analysis and findings that resulted from the research. First, the sectarian system and the lack of state authority, which affects every aspect of life in the country, illustrate how AKP regionalism operates in sectarian spaces. Second, the highly complex societal ties in the country led the AKP to develop differentiated policies toward each actor. Moreover, Lebanon has not played a significant role in Turkish foreign policy. Most of the time, Turkey approaches Lebanon as either a playground of global or regional rivalries or a secondary country vis-à-vis Syria. In other words, Lebanon-Turkey relations are always embedded with Turkey-Syria relations.

Therefore, analyzing Lebanon-Turkey relations requires the integration of several concepts, like sectarianism, the involvement of multiple

actors, and the representation of a wide range of sectors, identities, and affiliations. Therefore, the thesis structure will resemble “a kaleidoscope, revealing different features as we realign the angles of our prism,” excerpted from Keshavarzian.⁷

Regionalist aspirations of Turkey have already been studied subject by several scholars, such as Altuğ,⁸ Evered,⁹ Sayari,¹⁰ etc. These studies focus on the relationship between regionalization and national identity, and interstate relations. On the other hand, this thesis aims to contribute to the literature by analyzing the regionalization projects implemented by Turkey through the lens of political economy and its relationship with the region and culture on which Turkish regionalization mostly depends. Second, this thesis aims to focus on the effects of regionalization on bilateral relations and agencies that have been knitting this project, aspects often omitted in discussions of regionalism.

§ 1.1 Methodology and Overview of Chapters

In light of this, the thesis examines the business and cultural ties between Turkey and Lebanon in order to analyze their agency during and after the Shamgen Project. Furthermore, it raises the question of how these ties were established and instrumentalized through political motivations and how they functioned within the framework of regionalization during the AKP era. This thesis relies on various qualitative data sources, including newspaper articles, archival records, and speeches by businesspeople and politicians. Alternative explanations and cases will be explained and

⁷ Arang Keshavarzian, *Making Space for the Gulf: Histories of Regionalism and the Middle East*, Worlding the Middle East (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2024).

⁸ Seda Altuğ, “New Turkey: Regional Aspiration and National Anxiety,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 24, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 182–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2060516>.

⁹ Kyle T. Evered, “Regionalism in the Middle East and the Case of Turkey,” *Geographical Review* 95, no. 3 (July 1, 2005): 463–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2005.tb00376.x>.

¹⁰ Sabri Sayari, “Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism,” *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 169–82.

analyzed in detail, and comparisons from similar regionalization projects will be provided to address the equifinality problem and enrich the understanding of regionalization.

The thesis is organized into several chapters, each addressing different aspects of the “kaleidoscope.” The next chapter provides a theoretical framework for understanding and attempts to combine several kinds of literature, drawing on the works of prominent political economy scholars such as Harvey and Sassen, regionalism thinkers Hettne and Söderbaum, and area experts whose research focuses on Middle Eastern regionalization such as Hanieh, and Keshavarzian. It explores the critical concepts of spatio-temporal fixes in the transnationalization of the state, which explains the regionalization processes’ interaction with globalization. This chapter also discusses the specific characteristics of regionalism in the Global South and North, highlighting how variations in geopolitical and economic contexts affect the understanding of regionalization. Then, it will deliver an extended historical background of Turkey-Lebanon relations, tracing the evolution of these ties from the late Ottoman period to the present. It examines the impact of critical historical events on the relationship between these two countries that are generally considered allies of the West in the eyes of the Global South. Moreover, it provides the complexities of ties between Turkey and Lebanon regarding the involvement of multiple actors. The chapter mainly explores the role of Syria and the emerging Gulf countries in shaping Turkish-Lebanese relations.

The third chapter will focus on business ties around the Shamgen project, analyzing the political, economic, and social factors that have enabled and disabled these ties. It discusses the role of business-state relations in the regionalization process, emphasizing the importance of networks and facilitators in intermediating trade and cooperation. The chapter also highlights the challenges posed by political instability and external interventions. These ties and projects that operate by these ties are significant in displaying the impact of neoliberal state restructuring and regionalization interact with each other. The chapter presents several key actors and projects involved in Lebanon, the influence of Gulf states on regional dynamics, and the impact of the Syrian Civil War on the

project. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the networks and relationships established or utilized through the region's development, offering insights into the broader implications of regionalism in the Middle East.

The fourth chapter analyzes the cultural ties between Lebanon and Turkey through their physical embodiments, such as several restoration projects and the idea of Turkey's rapprochement in the region, especially the figure of Erdoğan in Lebanon. The geographical and historical attributions of these restoration projects are analyzed, which directly indicates which emotions and memories Turkey is trying to resurrect in both Turkey and Lebanon. The institutionalization of these cultural activities was also analyzed, illustrating how the regional mindset prevailed. On the other hand, Erdoğan's speeches about Lebanon and his influence over Lebanese constituencies are analyzed in order to show how Turkey's intimacy with the region is highly contested and Turkey's strategic positioning due to the peculiarity of the region.

The last chapter of this thesis focuses on a smaller yet significant geographical unit in Lebanon, the Shamal Lubnan (Northern Lebanon) District, serving as a case study of the intersection of political and economic ties. Northern Lebanon's geographical proximity to Syria, political proximity to political Islam, and its inclusion of ethnically proximate groups to Turkey display unique attributions. Especially after the Syrian Civil War, the existing economic geography that informal economic activities had shaped deepened, and Turkey's involvement increased through the instrumentalization of the scrap metal market in the region, as well as humanitarian aid directed toward Turkish-originated groups in the Akkar region.

Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to understanding regionalism and regionalization in the Middle East by providing a detailed analysis of Turkey-Lebanon relations on the basis of the Shamgen Region. Moreover, it aims to enhance the analysis by highlighting the impact of political factors on business and cultural ties while examining the interplay between business-state and society-state dynamics. In other words, this thesis seeks to shed light on how regionalization in the Middle East, which

mostly has been seen as doomed to be unsuccessful because of the political violence that occasionally disrupts intercommunal and intergovernmental relations, affects the political and economic geography in the region. It is going to focus on the continuities and transformations that occurred during and after this regionalization scheme. The initial findings of this research indicate that, although regionalization in the Middle East often fails to achieve its goals of increasing trade between countries or enhancing regional security, the regional understanding and established networks continue to actively collaborate or explore new spaces, scales, or sectors for cooperation. In other words, regionalization projects in MENA are frequently characterized as bleak, largely due to the disruption caused by political violence. Indeed, political violence and overarching political transformations have contributed to the heightened fragmentation inherent in regionalization.

Nevertheless, this disjointed regional context does not dissipate; instead, it reconfigures its significance and associations by discovering novel avenues for expression. Throughout this reorganization, regionalism may be manifested in significantly smaller segments. This method can nearly be regarded as "fragmented regionalism." It is essential to examine these linkages within the reconfigured regional context.

Theoretical and Historical Background of Shamgen Region and Turkey-Lebanon Relations

The concept of regionalism has been employed since its inception to elucidate the interplay between local and global dynamics. Consequently, the development of neoliberal spatiality is of the utmost significance in terms of comprehending the genesis and function of a region that came into being in the early 2000s. Furthermore, regionalism, particularly in this region that was founded for hegemonic purposes, is significant when it comes to the examination of Turkey's regional aspirations. This thesis investigates this topic by examining historical linkages and ties, cultural connections, and the relationship between business and state. Although it would have been possible to undertake this study from the perspective of trade corridors and the securitized interactions that formed around them, as Khalili did in the Gulf, this method was not

adopted.¹ This research does not concentrate on logistics networks for a number of reasons, one of which is that there is a dearth of trade data that is freely accessible and shared by countries in the region.

Globalization and its premises —including interconnected and increasingly co-dependent relations, are by nature fragile in terms of both openness to overaccumulation and underconsumption problems and security of the supply chain, which are obstacles against the circulation of goods, capital, and norms that are one of the pillars of capitalism in the post-Soviet era. New solutions and innovations have occurred to deal with these new problems, which require novel modalities in terms of territoriality and lead to “new spatial arrangements.” Harvey, in his article that examines the relationship between “spatio-temporal fixes”² and capital accumulation, claims that the new imperialism deploys the capital fixations, which are physical and immobile assets such as infrastructure and long-term investments, to solve the overaccumulation problem, which is one of the contradictions of capitalist accumulation. Harvey also claimed that the new global political order facilitated the movement of capital around the globe and that imperialism provided necessary tools and spatio-temporal fixes to absorb surplus capital and sustain the accumulation.³

New spatial arrangements brought about by globalization have questioned the state's role in a globalized world. Robinson, in his “Capitalist Globalization and the Transnationalization of the State,” argues that the diminishing importance of national borders and the redefinition of borders as economic boundaries indicates a move towards “supersession of the nation-state as the organizing principle of capitalism, and with it, of the inter-state system as the institutional framework of capitalist

¹ Laleh Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula* (London ; New York: Verso, 2020).

² David Harvey, “Accumulation by Dispossession,” in *The New Imperialism*, by David Harvey (Oxford University Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199264315.003.0007>.

³ David Harvey, “The ‘New’ Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession,” *Social Register*, no. 40 (2004).

development”,⁴ similarly Hardt&Negri attributed to this development as the “decline of nation-state.”⁵ This decline of the nation-state should not be conflated with the decline of state argument; as Sassen argues, the traditional notion of state sovereignty is being eroded not necessarily because states are losing power per se but because the nature of power itself is changing.⁶ Therefore, state’s functions that project power is also changing with the involvement of new actors with supra-national and local characteristics, The state now engages more in negotiation and coordinates its power with these actors.

In addition to economic transformations driven by neoliberalism, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR reshaped concerns and priorities related to security. Much like the changing functions and apparatuses of states, the shift toward less military-focused security and the emergence of new security threats—such as environmental challenges and terrorism—deepened the integration of non-state actors. This transformation necessitated greater supranational cooperation to prevent or mitigate international conflicts. In other words, the concept of security has become far more dynamic and pluralistic. Notably, sustaining the circulation of goods, capital, and resources has emerged as a significant priority.

As the world navigates the transformative shifts ushered in by neoliberal economic policies and new security paradigms post-Cold War, it becomes increasingly clear that traditional geopolitical strategies and structures require reassessment. The dissolution of functions of nation-states, denationalized economies, and the rise of multifaceted global threats underscore the limitations of unilateral state responses, highlighting the necessity for more integrated and cooperative regional

⁴ William Robinson, “Capitalist Globalization and the Transnationalization of the State,” in *Historical Materialism and Globalisation*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, 1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed., [Nachdr.] (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003).

⁶ Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control: Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, University Seminars: Leonard Hastings Schoff Memorial Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

frameworks.⁷ This shift reflects the growing complexities of global economic interdependencies and security challenges, setting the stage for the re-emergence of regionalism in the late 1990s. This paradigm advocates for the importance of regional scales in addressing economic and security issues, promoting the role of regional collectives as stabilizing forces within the global order.⁸ Regionalism emerges as a strategic response, offering novel approaches to managing and enhancing interconnected global landscapes.

The concept of regionalism and the importance of regional scale in the economy became much more critical following shifts in both the global economic structure and security paradigms. Regionalism is a revitalized concept that emerged during the late 1990s to forecast the future of WTO and GATT agreements, which have resulted in three trading blocs: Europe, the Americas, and East Asia.⁹ According to Regionalism theorists, in the 1990s, the world experienced two waves of regionalism. The first wave of regionalism occurred after the devastating years of the World Wars when the establishment of the European Community was in 1958. It is characterized by regional cooperation to alleviate the adverse effects of global trade with regional tariffs. Because of this, it has been perceived as a threat to multilateralism.¹⁰ It has much more inward-looking attributions that characterize itself with economic protectionism in state-level cooperation. Although the first wave of regionalism occurred in the West, it has several implications and attempts in the developing

⁷ Louise Fawcett, "Exploring Regional Domains: A Comparative History of Regionalism," *International Affairs* 80, no. 3 (May 1, 2004): 429–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2004.00391.x>.

⁸ Edward D. Mansfield and Etel Solingen, "Regionalism," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 1, 2010): 145–63, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.13.050807.161356>.

⁹ Jaime De Melo and Arvind Panagariya, *The New Regionalism in Trade Policy* (Washington, D.C. : London: World Bank ; Center for Economic Policy Research, 1992).

¹⁰ De Melo and Panagariya, 4.

world, like the East African Common Market,¹¹ which is a way of development and sustained growth via “industrialization through regional import-substitution.” However, the first wave of regionalism was largely unsuccessful outside of Europe.

According to Hettne, the first wave of regionalism could not reach its premises and potential due to its economic inward-centrism and the cold-war environment, leading to economic protectionism that did not foster regional cooperation.¹² Moreover, regionalism in the 1950s and 1960s was state-centric, emphasizing the economic and political functions of inter-state cooperation while neglecting business relations, societal cohesion, and dialogue. Moreover, state-centrism creates a lack of ability in regional institutions to prevent regions from sufficiently reacting to new economic, political, and social problems.¹³ Consequently, this perspective on regionalism led scholars to focus primarily on formal integration between states, often using treaties such as Free Trade Agreements or Regional Cooperation pacts as key indicators of successful regionalism.

The second wave of regionalism, described as new regionalism by Hettne and Söderbaum, happened after the Cold War and was characterized by its relations with globalization. The main differences between new and old regionalism are regionalism’s extravert tendency, additional regionalizing actors, and more flexible regional cooperation.

Contrary to the first wave of regionalism, the second regionalism projects embrace global trade. In Hettne’s words,

Furthermore, many new regionalism theories may be considered new in that they highlight the close relationship between

¹¹ Shaun Breslin and Richard Higgott, “Studying Regions: Learning from the Old, Constructing the New,” *New Political Economy* 5, no. 3 (November 2000): 333–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713687784>.

¹² Björn Hettne, “Beyond the ‘New’ Regionalism,” *New Political Economy* 10, no. 4 (December 2005): 543–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563460500344484>.

¹³ Björn Hettne, “The New Regionalism Revisited,” in *Theories of New Regionalism*, ed. Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2003), 22–42, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403938794_2.

regionalism and the extra-regional environment, particularly globalization.¹⁴

According to Söderbaum,¹⁵ regional integration alongside regional cooperation is a tool to protect economies from global trade and regulate their relations with the worldwide economy. According to regionalism theorists, regionalism's relations with globalization are not mono-directional, and it cannot be captured by the simple contrast between global and local as Jessop suggests; these relations are far more complex, reflecting intricate interactions between regionalism and globalization,

This generates increasing complexity as different scales of action come to be linked in various mixes of vertical, horizontal, diagonal, centripetal, centrifugal, and vortical ways. This complexity cannot be captured in simple contrasts, such as global–national or global–local, or catch-all hybrid concepts such as ‘glocalization’ or the ‘transversal’. Instead, we now see a proliferation of discursively constituted and institutionally materialized and embedded spatial scales (whether terrestrial, territorial, or telematic) that are related in increasingly complex tangled hierarchies rather than being simply nested one within the other, with different temporalities as well as spatialities.¹⁶

Further research on regionalism highlights the region's relationships with other spaces and addresses scalarity problem. The scalarity problem in regionalism pertains to the complexities and discussions over the hierarchical arrangement and interplay of multiple spatial scales, including local, national, regional, and global levels. Conventional methodologies frequently regard regional scales as separate analytical tiers,

¹⁴ Hettne.

¹⁵ Fredrik Söderbaum, “Introduction: Theories of New Regionalism,” in *Theories of New Regionalism*, ed. Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2003), 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403938794_1.

¹⁶ Bob Jessop, “The Political Economy of Scale and the Construction of Cross-Border Micro-Regions,” in *Theories of New Regionalism*, ed. Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2003), 179–96, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403938794_10.

hierarchically situated above local contexts yet below global ones, presuming a linear and inflexible demarcation among these sizes. Keshavarzian refuses the deployment of “regional scale” as hierarchically over smaller spaces and prefers to use “multiscalar” in order to “disrupt notions of scales as mutually exclusive and neatly clustered hierarchically.”¹⁷ Moreover, recent studies and comments on regionalism focus on the apparatuses of region-making processes together with the functions of the region. While addressing regionalism, developing a vision beyond nations and nation-states as region-builder actors is crucial. Because in the regionalism approach, the concept of region is constructed and contested, with pluralistic attributions rather than given cultural and political blocks, therefore regionalism theorists prefer to define it as “regionalization” rather than regionalism, although these terms are still used interchangeably.

In the regionalization approach, it is essential to emphasize that regions, like nations, are artificial constructs, meaning they must be created, crafted, curated, and “imagined.” As nation-building is a process in which multiple actors and imaginations are contested and created, regionalization is another process that needs different and mostly conflicted ideas and imagination that occur, as Söderbaum articulated, as a set of ideas, identities, and ideologies related to a regional project.¹⁸ Similarly, Kupchan also explained regional orders as “packages of ideas and rules”¹⁹ that have to be idealized and internalized through power. Moreover, states are not the sole actors in these regionalization projects. In alignment with the evolving functions of the state, the role of states in regionalization processes has varied, encompassing contributions to FDI, channeling economic and social networks, and initiating significant projects. Moreover, with the regionalization approach new actors that can be exemplified as business elites, supranational organizations, and civil

¹⁷ Keshavarzian, *Making Space for the Gulf*.

¹⁸ Söderbaum, “Introduction.”

¹⁹ Charles A. Kupchan, “Unpacking Hegemony: The Social Foundations of Hierarchical Order,” in *Power, Order, and Change in World Politics*, ed. G. John Ikenberry, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 19–60, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139680738.003>.

societies that bond regions, cultures, or shared identities. The norms and beliefs become important actors that function as region-builders against or side with states' regional projects.

Although the regionalism theories are strongly linked with the economic transformation in which regions manifest themselves with increased regional trade and economic cooperation,

...regionalism is clearly a political project, but it is obviously not necessarily state-led, as states are not the only political actors around.²⁰

In other words, regionalism theories are significant for analyzing the relationship between political choice and economic imperatives because they posit a blurred line between the economic and political spheres. According to the literature, the old wave of regionalism is depicted as state-led regional arrangements characterized by top-down processes, such as free-trade agreements, strategic cooperation protocols, or security agreements. Conversely, the new regionalism theories and regionalization are defined as more interlinked societal and economic relations with lesser state integration. Then, making a claim about a novel approach to regionalism, which is more dependent on bottom-up processes and affected by economic imperative, can be articulated. However, due to the fragmented nature of regionalization processes, top-down processes and bottom-up processes can operate simultaneously.

Due to variegated visions toward regionalization and possible competing regional agendas, there is an existing gap between geographical visions or potentials and realities. "In short, regionalizations are aspirations to create homogenous geographic units, but like so many ambitions, they are prone to frustrations and incompleteness."²¹ This gap between the imaginary and reality occurs for several reasons, such as the lack of capacity to homogenize or to persuade. As Marchand et al. noted, "Within each regional project (official or not), several competing regionalizing

²⁰ Marianne H. Marchand, Morten Bøås, and Timothy M. Shaw, "The Political Economy of New Regionalisms," *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 5 (1999): 897–910.

²¹ Keshavarzian, *Making Space for the Gulf*, 12.

actors with different regional visions and ideas coexist.”²² Moreover, over the same unit, there can be several different regionalization processes that overlap, but these regionalizations do not need to be ordered hierarchically; rather, they can compete with each other, pluralistically co-exist, or cooperate. In this line, the conflict between several regionalization projects can also be a reason for the gap.

Also, Regionness is a crucial concept that should be taken into consideration when analyzing the homogeneity that regionalism aims to achieve. Regionness refers to the process by which a geographical area transforms from a passive entity into an active subject capable of expressing its own interests as a developing region. Hettne&Söderbaum, in their article, defines the five levels of regionness.²³ These levels of regionness are Regional Space, Regional Complex, Regional Society, Regional Community, and Region-States. Their articulation is a theorization of the European Union’s regionness, and they tried to apply these levels to other regional visions. However, different multi-level governance strategies can be developed for several political and practical reasons. Besides, those levels of regionness do not indicate a path that every regional vision should walk. Moreover, the stages of regionness outlined by Hettne do not suggest a fixed or planned trajectory to which any regional vision must adhere. Regions may develop in many manners contingent upon their unique historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical circumstances. Certain regions may persist in the nascent phases of regionality, marked by tenuous collaboration and restricted identity development, whilst others may swiftly advance to elevated degrees of integration and unity. The advancement through these stages is not inherently linear; places may experience regression or stagnation due to internal conflicts, external influences, or changing political and economic priorities. This adaptability highlights the dynamic and complex essence of regionalism, wherein distinct regions may pursue individual paths influenced by their specific circumstances, requirements, and ambitions. Consequently,

²² Marchand, Bøås, and Shaw, “The Political Economy of New Regionalisms,” 904.

²³ Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum, “Theorising the Rise of Regionness,” *New Political Economy* 5, no. 3 (November 2000): 457–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713687778>.

Hettne's framework needs to be regarded as a conceptual instrument for examining the processes and differences of region-making rather than as a prescriptive or universal paradigm.

In this sense, regionalization can be described as transforming a geographical unit into a homogenous region. However, the element of selectiveness factor should also be considered while regionalization projects are implemented. These projects require active penetration and extraversion strategies at the regional scale, which are inherently uneven and partial. In other words, the regionalization projects "by no means connect whole national economies"²⁴ or cultures or states.

Regionalism theories also provide insights into the field of international relations regarding hegemony and domination, although inter-dependency is the main point of the regionalism approach. Furthermore, the asymmetrical establishment of a region may indicate increasing control of hegemonic states over smaller ones, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council's action in the Middle East through financial capital.²⁵ In other words, regionalism can also be embedded within the strategy and ideology of imperialism and capitalism. Through fostering trade, building security corridors, and curating common cultural values, regionalization may result in the accumulation of wealth and cultural capital in the hegemonic partners. According to Acharya, regionalism primarily reflects power distribution rather than serving as a framework for cooperation or regional governance.²⁶ His position aligns with Mearsheimer's reflection on regionalism, which acclaims regional hegemony as a part of the role of great power in global politics.²⁷ Destradi explained and detailed

²⁴ Jessop, "The Political Economy of Scale and the Construction of Cross-Border Micro-Regions."

²⁵ Adam Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies: The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Political Economy of the Contemporary Middle East*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108614443>.

²⁶ Amitava Acharya, *Regionalism Beyond EU-Centrism*, ed. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199682300.013.7>.

²⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated edition, The Norton Series in World Politics (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

the ways of increasing their influence in the region of regional leading powers, which are dominant powers in regional settings, with three distinct strategies: empire, hegemony, and leadership.²⁸ In her conceptualization, empire refers to “domination based on the use or threat of military intervention”; hegemony, she gives a more nuanced hegemony with three levels, refers to an order that is established through either military force or material interests or common societal norms in order to realize the hegemon’s ends. Leadership means an initiation that is sparked either by the leader or the audience in order to reach a common goal. On the contrary, regionalism projects can be utilized as a survival strategy for smaller nations from global rivalry. For example, the African regional projects are mostly depicted as such. In other words, regionalization can occur in different regions with different aims, methods, and instruments. Because regionalization will lead to different capital arrangements with the global market, each regionalization effort may vary greatly.

In light of these theoretical frameworks, the manifestations of regionalism across different global contexts reveal distinct characteristics and underlying motivations. A region’s position in the world system becomes an important indicator of regionalization. As a comprehensive theory to Wallerstein’s world-system theory, there are different regionalization impetus and functions in the global north and the global south. These differences arise due to varying historical contexts, geopolitical interests, economic structures, and levels of development. Moreover, these relations are visible because the region’s relations with a history of colonialism or external interference may approach regionalism as a means of asserting autonomy and resistance against former colonial powers or hegemonic influences. Moreover, the specific political and economic goals of leading states, whether they seek to enhance their global standing, secure resources, or protect their spheres of influence, shape the nature and outcomes of regional projects. These divergent patterns underscore that regionalism is not a monolithic phenomenon but rather a

²⁸ Sandra Destradi, “Regional Powers and Their Strategies: Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership,” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 04 (October 2010): 903–30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001361>.

versatile instrument that can serve various political, economic, and cultural ends, depending on the context and actors involved. As we explore further, it becomes evident that the strategies and outcomes of regionalization are deeply influenced by the goals and power dynamics of the leading states within these regions.

Regionalism in the Global North, such as NAFTA and the European Union, is usually successful because it fosters regional trade, economic and security cooperation, social cohesion, and shared identities. The European Union (EU) serves as a prime example, where economic integration has progressed through establishing a single market and a common currency, fostering increased trade and economic stability among member states. Moreover, the constituents of the Union are considered as more or less equal partners.²⁹

Regionalism is a way of pursuing hegemonic projects over countries' hinterlands and protecting their influence zone against "Western" globalization; countries that challenge Western globalization, such as China and Russia, have initiated regionalization projects, although these regionalization projects show different characteristics than Western-initiated regionalist projects such as European Union or NAFTA. According to Kaczmariski, non-western actors' regionalization aspirations have more functionalist characteristics and built-in less-equal partners. Although Russia's and China's responses to globalization through their regionalization projects simultaneously reject and embrace it, both see the regionalization "as a means of claiming Great Power status for themselves in global politics."³⁰

In short, regionalism is quite a broad concept that can engage with various ideas and frameworks. The motivations behind regionalization and the instruments used to achieve its objectives are deeply rooted in the participant countries' historical ties to the region. In other words, existing historical spaces, the openness of regions to such initiatives, and

²⁹ Marcin Kaczmariski, "Non-Western Visions of Regionalism: China's New Silk Road and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union," *International Affairs* 93, no. 6 (November 1, 2017): 1357–76, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix182>.

³⁰ Kaczmariski.

the ability of region-making actors to persuade and coordinate various economic and cultural ties are critical in curating a homogenous region. Although its ultimate aim is to homogenize the region, the regionalization process is often bleak, fragmented, and scattered.

In the Middle East, where the Shamgen Region is also located, regionalization processes are directly tied to power distribution among countries, similar to all other regionalization processes. Also, in line with the global south regionalism, its engagement with global culture and market is complicated, especially in terms of its cultural engagement due to Turkey's position as holder of anti-westernism and harmony of the West and East. On the other hand, regionalization processes surrounding the Shamgen Region have elevated the Levant to an important scale for connecting to the global market.

§ 2.1 The Region Without Regionalism: The Middle East and Regionalism

The literature regarding the Middle East in the 1990s regarded the MENA region as an exceptional case with marginal relations with global trade, disrupted and bleak regionalization attempts, and violent conflicts that undermined all possible political integration and cooperation in the region.³¹ There have been several attempts at regional integration and cooperation, such as The League of Arab States, and pan-Arabist attempts, such as the United Arab Republic, but those attempts with institutional structure and motives behind their establishment more similar to the first wave of regionalism's motive than current understandings about regionalisms in terms of extraversion. More extroverted attempts, such as the Euro-Med initiative or the Barcelona Process, were initiated in late 1995. "The MENA idea, which flourished during the peace process, the Euro-Med initiative, and the most recent deliberations on a Greater

³¹ Ali Çarkoğlu, Mine Eder, and Kemal Kirişçi, *The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation in the Middle East*, Routledge Advances in International Relations and Politics 3 (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998).

Middle East Initiative are all cases of regional cooperation initiated outside the region.”³²

There are several factors that hinder the potential of regionalization in the Middle East. Most of the regionalization attempts in the Middle East, “Rather than representing an internal process based on interests, motives, and concerns of regional actors, they are attempts of global governance.”³³ In other words, regionalism in the MENA has been shaped by imperialism and colonialism, which could not succeed in homogenizing the region and enhancing the regionness. In addition to political obstacles to succeeding regional projects in the region, economic problems hinder regional projects. These problems can be listed as rentier economies, lack of complementarity between goods produced in different countries in the region, low levels of intra-regional trade, lack of autonomous business communities, high tariffs, lack of interregional FDIs, and lack of transportation.³⁴ Relations between Arab States in the region are also preventing cooperation in the region. League of Arab States analyzed the three sub-regional projects in the MENA region, which are the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), and the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), and concluded his analysis that “the Arab states do not coordinate; to the contrary, they compete. In the foreseeable future, the dominant strategy will be bilateralism, not regionalism or multilateralism”³⁵ Çarkoğlu et al. examine the regional cooperation patterns in the Middle East on the eve of globalization, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the Gulf War and posit that conflict and mutual distrust among the states in the region led to limited regional cooperation. They use Putnam’s two-level game analysis, which provides a more holistic

³² Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne, and Luk van Langenhove, eds., *Global Politics of Regionalism: Theory and Practice* (London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005).

³³ Farrell, Hettne, and Langenhove.

³⁴ Matteo Legrenzi, “Regionalism and Regionalization in the Middle East: Options and Challenges” (International Peace Institute, March 2013).

³⁵ Paul Aarts, “The Middle East: A Region without Regionalism or the End of Exceptionalism?,” *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 5 (October 1999): 911–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599913406>.

approach by connecting political and economic factors that interact at both international and national levels. Çarkoğlu et al. indicate how internal political dynamics affect regionalization projects.³⁶ Lastly, the region has not enjoyed a central position in the world-system. Although it possesses critical resources and ports that sustain the circulation of goods and capital, there is no cohesive impetus for region-making to coordinate and homogenize this position.

Although the region's marginal position in global trade and its political uneasiness is unchanged from the late 1990s, the regionalization attempts and attributes toward regionness of the region have become varied in the latest studies. In his seminal book on regionalism in the Middle East, Adam Hanieh examines how the Gulf Cooperation Council deploys its financial capacity to shape the Arab Middle East and reorganize its relationship with the global market through regional arrangements. He argues that globalization does not impose itself on sub-global units. Rather than that, "Seen in this manner, globalization is not a mono-directional implosion of global forces into sub-global realms'; instead, it involves a reconfiguration and re-territorialization of superimposed spatial scales' in which the relations existing between them should not 'be conceived as one that obtains among mutually exclusive levels of analysis or forces.' (Neil Brenner, cited in Marston 2000, p. 227)"³⁷ Hanieh positions "financial capital" of the Gulf in shaping the whole geography of the Middle East. He does not focus on a historical narrative of how the Gulf attempted to gain or utilize cultural capital while shaping the region. Similar to Hanieh, Keshavarzian also focuses on the regionalization processes in the Gulf area. In his analysis, he focuses on various aspects of regionalism, starting from its geographical attributions to urbanism. He also focuses on its ties with international and imperial actors like Britain, the USA, and the Gulfian identity through changing characteristics of the population in the region. He also examines how the presence of foreign security

³⁶ Çarkoğlu, Eder, and Kirişçi, *The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation in the Middle East*.

³⁷ Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies*.

apparatuses has shaped regionalization.³⁸ When these two pieces are combined, it becomes clear that there are multiple entry points for analyzing regionalization projects. Moreover, there are several characteristic themes in these regionalization processes as well. In line with Haniyeh's and Keshavarzian's analysis of the Gulf regionalism, the Shamgen region also displays intertwined relations between cultural relations as the transformation of a shared identity and economic relations.

2.1.1 *Regionalization Attempts Around The Middle East*

The Middle East and North Africa have great potential, excluding the non-Arab states, Iran, Israel, and Turkey, because of their common identity as Arabness and common history from their Ottoman legacy. However, the region is still considered a "region without regionalization" because attempts failed for several reasons. There were several top-down regionalism attempts in the region, such as the League of Arab States, which is the first institutional organization that aims to craft a region. The League was established in 1944 with the Alexandria Protocol. The protocol was followed by "The Joint Defence and Economic Cooperation Agreement" in 1950. There were several trade and economic cooperation agreements among the league states in 1956, 1973, 1981, 1984, 1992, and 2005. However, while these agreements were necessary conditions for regional cooperation, they were insufficient for regional cooperation, either economic cooperation or security cooperation. Except for the Palestinian issue, the League of Arab States could not reach a meaningful consensus over the regional issues until the Arab Spring. Besides the political and security cooperation, the League failed to facilitate economic cooperation in the region. In 1995, exports from Arab nations to other Arab countries constituted only 4.2 percent of their total trade, while imports from fellow Arab nations accounted for 5.9 percent, which is limited compared to well-functioning regionalism projects such as the EU and NAFTA.³⁹

³⁸ Keshavarzian, *Making Space for the Gulf*.

³⁹ Tarik Yousef et al., "Intra-Arab Trade: Is It Too Little?," *IMF Working Papers* 00, no. 10 (2000): 1, <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781451842685.001>.

One notable exception among unsuccessful regionalization projects in the region can be taken from one of the sub-regional organizations, the Gulf Cooperation Council, established in 1981 with the Abu Dhabi Charter. Over the years, the GCC has made significant strides in creating a unified economic agreement, including a customs union in 2003 and a common market in 2008.⁴⁰ Additionally, the GCC has been involved in addressing regional security issues, forming a collective defense mechanism in light of regional instability, especially after the Iran-Iraq War. However, the mechanism was not operationalized in inner conflict resolution during the Qatar-UAE crisis in 2017. The GCC, in order to avoid the complementarity problem that Middle Eastern Regionalization Projects has been facing, they are trying to “avoid duplication of industrial projects”⁴¹

In the literature, the Arab Spring is seen as a changing point regarding regionalization in the Middle East. Unlike other regionalization attempts, such as the League of Arab States and EuroMED, the notion of regionness developed as a bottom-up process. The protest movement that occurred in Tunisia transformed into a regional resistance toward authoritarianism. In these processes, Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera became regional presses that advocated regional resistance as both TV channels and newspapers, and civil society that was involved in protest became regionalized and showed solidarity with another protest movement in the region.⁴² Even the League of Arab States suspended the membership of Gaddafi’s and Assad’s regimes. From various perspectives, the potential for regionness has increased in the Middle East. Due to the heterogeneous nature of protests and revolutions, and interventions from outside complicated potential regional cooperation efforts; according to Gerges,

⁴⁰ Akram Masoud Haddad, “Analysis of the Bilateral Trade between Gulf Cooperation Council Countries,” *Management Science Letters*, 2019, 2357–68, <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2019.7.019>.

⁴¹ Reyadh Alasfoor, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Its Nature and Achievements: A Political Analysis of Regional Integration of the GCC States 1979-2004*, Lund Political Studies 149 (Lund: Department of Political Science, Lund University, 2007).

⁴² “Arab Civil Society after the Arab Spring: Weaker but Deeper,” Middle East Institute, accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/arab-civil-society-after-arab-spring-weaker-deeper>.

on the contrary, it exacerbated the existing lines that require regional co-operation to solve or alleviate.⁴³ Moreover, the absence of effective pre-existing regional institutions also hinders potential regional cooperation. The whole Arab Spring era was followed by political turmoil, which was described as “liquid alliances” that interrupted the possible regionalization in the Middle East.⁴⁴

In the adoption of the new regionalization wave, there are two critical dynamics in Turkey’s paradigm, which are the end of the Cold War, which completely altered Turkey’s security systems, and the shift in economic paradigm from import-substitution to export-oriented liberalization, which requires the rearrangement of economic relations, between Turkey and other countries starting from Europe. After the Cold War security system collapsed and Turkey’s globalization became intricately linked with neoliberal trade openness, Turkey became one of the pivotal region-builder actors in its region. However, Turkey has been pursuing its regional arrangements and regional agreements with the European Union, especially after the Cold War. Turkey attempted to diversify its regional activities toward the Caspian Region, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

In Çarkoğlu et al. piece,⁴⁵ Turkey has a contested vision of regionalization. One of them was becoming part of the European Union, which has been a long-lasting aim for Turkey since the establishment of the Union. As a secular and pro-Western country, this regionalization project has a lot of participants, although this projection faces internal and external challenges. On the other hand, Turkey, since the 1991 Gulf War, has been attempting to maintain and foster its relations with MENA countries. Due to historical and religious proximity, which ultimately have the potential

⁴³ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴⁴ Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Eduard Soler I Lecha, “Regionalism and Alliances in the Middle East, 2011-2021: From a ‘Flash in the Pan’ of Regional Cooperation to Liquid Alliances,” *Geopolitics* 29, no. 4 (August 7, 2024): 1447–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2268542>.

⁴⁵ Çarkoğlu, Eder, and Kirişci, *The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation in the Middle East*.

to boost Turkey's internal and external political gains, MENA has been a crucial partner for Turkey in terms of regionalism. However, Turkey's economic capacity to shape the region is limited. Turkey's regionalist aspirations are mostly focused on the advancement of regional trade and collaboration rather than direct FDI investments and cultural proximities that come from various sources, from ethnic ties to imperial legacy. Therefore, business-state relations in the region and historical background, which is the ultimate source of Turkey's cultural proximity with the Arab Middle East, are critical actors that have been analyzed in detail.

§ 2.2 The Business-State Relation in The Light of Regionalism

The role of business relations in the regionalization process is crucial. As mentioned above, the reason behind the increasing importance of business relations in regionalism varies because of the incentives of different actors from a part of extraversion strategies of the smaller nations and exploiting the regime boosting effect⁴⁶ to solve the capital fixation problems.⁴⁷ These business activities can manifest themselves in different forms and in different sectors or specific sectors—the flow of FDI and trade between countries is mostly deployed as the indicator for regionalization. However, due to the fragmented nature of regionalism, several other business ties can also be developed. Especially in sectors like energy, high-tech, and transportation, which have region-making characteristics by nature, regionalism can flourish in specific sectors.

In terms of regional development, business activity and economic cooperation between regional activities are crucial in terms of both building and sustaining peace nexuses, which are prerequisites for regional development and economic regionalism.⁴⁸ Because regionalization

⁴⁶ Jean-François Bayart and Stephen Ellis, "Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion," *African Affairs* 99, no. 395 (2000): 217–67.

⁴⁷ Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies*.

⁴⁸ David J. Francis, "Linking Peace, Security and Developmental Regionalism: Regional Economic and Security Integration in Africa," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 2, no. 3 (January 1, 2006): 7–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2006.875613387186>.

projects are, by nature, political projects that also have to be carried out by bottom-up structures such as civil society, business actors, etc., business-state relations are crucial for economic cooperation and regionalization. Personal relations are more important in regions where capital relations are not institutionalized and security concerns are more prevalent, such as in the African and MENA regions. Because cultural relations are instinctually linked with business relations in regionalism, the lack of institutionalized regionalism is compensated through familial, religious, ethnic, and sectarian ties. In terms of personal relations, which is the main source of trust that ultimately reduces the transaction cost and the risk, formal relations related to being a part of the same business organizations and informal relations like marriage are crucial. In other words, personal ties mitigate the deficiencies caused by ineffective or nonexistent institutions. Business transactions or trade agreements may depend significantly on personal guarantees instead of formal arrangements. These relations are also crucial to accessing potential investment opportunities, especially relations with the state, which become crucial in developing regional relations. Lastly, these personal ties are also crucial for security. Individual connections and unofficial networks become crucial tools for navigating systems and enabling political and commercial exchanges in areas with weak state capability or uncertain political contexts. This is especially important in regions afflicted by conflict or interstate distrust. Informal networks can function as tools for conflict prevention by promoting understanding and communication among participants, thereby diminishing misconceptions that may escalate into conflict.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in fragile governments, individuals frequently depend on non-state actors, such as community or religious leaders, to fulfill their justice and security requirements, underscoring the significance of human ties in sustaining social order.

In the Middle East and North Africa, there has been a strong tradition of state intervention as both economic actors and regulatory bodies since

⁴⁹ Mikael Weissmann, "Informal Networks as a Conflict Preventive Mechanism," in *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management in Northeast Asia* (Washington, DC and Nacka, Sweden: Silk Road Studies Program ; Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2005), 103–19.

the early days of the establishment of regional countries. However, these state interventions and central planning have had limited effects due to the lack of state capacity and the country being fraught. This means the state's intervention in the Middle East has not been a catalyzer of market economics; rather, it has been a part of political redistribution. In this sense, crony capitalism has been a prevailing force in the political economy of the Middle East region. These crony-capitalist relations between business actors and Middle Eastern States made more inward-looking, self-sufficiency-focused economies.⁵⁰ In other words, "The MENA economies made relatively less progress toward market-oriented policies, and today governments in MENA are still actively implementing traditional industrial policies."⁵¹ Crony capitalism and political factors lead to more keen and dependent relations between business actors and states, especially in terms of regionalization projects. Political strife that interrupted intraregional trade and dependencies to the state weakens the establishment of autonomous "interest groups," which is crucial in the regionalization process.⁵²

Since the early 1950s, the Middle Eastern countries have proceeded with protectionist policies with high tariffs and subsidized local industries, which are already lacking in complementarity in the region. Most Middle Eastern countries deployed horizontal and vertical industrial policies between 1950 and 1970. In this era, the main impetus for the development of these industrial policies was creating new growth structures and increasing development in the country through growth.⁵³ After 1980,

⁵⁰ Etel Solingen, "Pax Asiatica versus Bella Levantina: The Foundations of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East," *The American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (2007): 757–80.

⁵¹ Mustapha K. Nabli et al., "The Political Economy of Industrial Policy in the Middle East and North Africa," in *Industrial Policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Ahmed Galal, Rethinking the Role of the State (American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 109–36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15m7jxf.10>.

⁵² Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, 3rd ed (Boulder (Colo.): Westview press, 2008).

⁵³ Ahmed Galal, *Industrial Policy in the Middle East and North Africa* (American University in Cairo Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.5743/cairo/9789774160509.001.0001>.

these countries tended to protect their existing systems and regimes with selective support, hindering the establishment of autonomous business class, although implementing various liberalization of market strategies. In other words, business-state relations are designed in favor of state dependency. This state-dependency leads to a more fragile business environment in the political atmosphere.

2.2.1 *The Business-State Relations in The Levant*

Unlike some other subregions in the Middle East, such as the Gulf or Algeria, the Levant region, which includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel, is not known for its natural resources. However, economic challenges are pervasive, with each state grappling with governance and corruption issues. Moreover, the political issues in the region, such as the Lebanese Civil War, the Palestinian Issue, and the Syrian invasion of Lebanon, made the area much more interconnected than subregions in the Middle East. The region's political economy is characterized by economic polarization and reform movements to adopt a neoliberal economy. In this part, analyses of business-state relations in Syria and Lebanon will be delivered for the sake of focusing on the scope of this thesis, excluding Jordan, Palestine, and Israel.

The political economies of Lebanon and Syria are shaped by their historical trajectories, political systems, and external influences. Lebanon, with its confessional political system, fosters a business-state dynamic characterized by patronage networks and elite capture. The distribution of economic opportunities often aligns with sectarian affiliations, creating an uneven economic landscape where political elites leverage their positions to extract rents and distribute benefits within their constituencies.⁵⁴ This fosters what Duursma termed "state-fragmenting patronage,"⁵⁵ where elites prioritize their own survival and legitimacy over

⁵⁴ Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 12.

⁵⁵ Allard Duursma, "State Weakness, a Fragmented Patronage-Based System, and Protracted Local Conflict in the Central African Republic," *African Affairs* 121, no. 483 (May 16, 2022): 251–74, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adac012>.

institutional capacity-building. In contrast, Syria, under the Ba'athist regime, maintained a centralized economy with state-led development until the late 20th century. This model was upended by economic liberalization policies in the 1990s, which concentrated wealth and power among politically connected elites.⁵⁶ The Ba'athist regime extended its patronage by centralizing power within the Assad family and its loyalists, translating political loyalty into economic privilege, a phenomenon linked to authoritarian consolidation.⁵⁷

In Lebanon, the private sector dominates the economy, particularly in banking, real estate, and services. The absence of strong state institutions has led to a reliance on informal networks and sectarian elites to mediate business transactions and regulatory frameworks. This environment has fostered corruption and inefficiencies, with economic power concentrated in the hands of a few oligarchic families.⁵⁸ Moreover, the Lebanese economy is heavily influenced by remittances and external funding, making it vulnerable to regional and global economic fluctuations. Political instability and recurrent crises have further undermined trust in state institutions, leaving the sectarian-affiliated private sector to fill governance gaps.⁵⁹

Syria's political economy underwent significant transformation with the economic reforms initiated under Bashar al-Assad. The shift from a state-controlled to a market-oriented economy was marred by crony capitalism, where state resources were privatized to benefit regime loyalists. Key sectors, such as telecommunications and construction, were dominated by individuals with close ties to the ruling family, creating a new elite class⁶⁰. This concentration of economic power exacerbated

⁵⁶ RAYMOND HINNEBUSCH, "Syria: From 'authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 88, no. 1 (2012): 95–113.

⁵⁷ HINNEBUSCH.

⁵⁸ Fauwāz Ṭarābulusī, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, Second Edition (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

⁵⁹ Imad Salamey, *The Government and Politics of Lebanon*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203746424>.

⁶⁰ Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria under Asad*, Paperback ed (London: Tauris, 1997).

socioeconomic inequalities and alienated rural populations, contributing to the grievances that fueled the 2011 uprising.

The civil wars in both countries have reshaped business-state relations. In Lebanon, the post-civil war period saw the reconstruction of the economy dominated by private-sector actors like Solidere, reinforcing sectarian and elite interests in urban redevelopment.⁶¹ Similarly, the ongoing conflict in Syria has entrenched war economies, with new actors emerging to profit from smuggling, reconstruction contracts, and control of natural resources. These dynamics have reinforced authoritarian governance and undermined prospects for equitable development.⁶²

External actors have also played a pivotal role in shaping the political economies of Lebanon and Syria. In Lebanon, Gulf countries, Iran, and Western donors have influenced economic policies and state capacities through aid and investment. In Syria, the regime's alliances with Russia and Iran have shaped its economic survival strategies, particularly in wartime. These external dependencies further complicate efforts toward economic reform and sovereignty.⁶³

2.2.2 *The Business-State Relations in Turkey*

Even in Middle Eastern countries where capitalism is more institutionalized and the notion of free-market is much more settled, such as Turkey, business-state relations have depended on the state. In her pivotal book about Turkey's business atmosphere, Buğra also underlined the importance of the state as a continuous variable in different periods. She claimed that entrepreneurial behavior in Turkey did not solely follow the market requirement but also derived from state intervention and

⁶¹ Hannes Baumann, *Citizen Hariri: Lebanon's Neoliberal Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶² Steven Heydemann, "War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East," in *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2000), 1–30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp1cw.4>.

⁶³ Leenders, *Spoils of Truce*; HINNEBUSCH, "Syria: From 'authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?"

direction.⁶⁴ Moreover, this dependency on the state remained consistent despite several economic transformations that Turkey followed through. In her argument, the concept of uncertainty has an important role. This uncertainty, which was resolved through state action, made enterprises dependent on the state. This uncertainty stems from the state's unpredictable policy changes, arbitrary enforcement of regulations, and shifting political priorities. These factors prevent a stable and predictable business environment, compelling industrialists to adapt and seek state favor to secure their interests constantly. Buğra emphasizes that this uncertainty undermines long-term planning and investment, influencing how businesses operate and grow within the Turkish economy.⁶⁵ This dependency resulted from short-lived policies and influenced Turkey's regionalization processes toward the Shamgen region.

Due to the state dependency on business in Turkey and the lack of autonomous interest groups in the Middle East, business circles in Turkey had to depend on the proximity of the state while finding regional partners, drafting cooperation, and implementing the projects. The proximity can embodied in various ways. The most obvious one is the utilization of firms and corporations that are located near government circles. Throughout their rule in Turkey, AKP leads to the creation and enhancement of its own bourgeoisie elite, whose networks reaches several networks through strategic alliances, economic patronage, and political leverage. These networks have become essential in AKP's regionalization strategy in the Shamgen Region.

At the same time, a new capitalist class started to emerge. According to Buğra and Savaşkan, the rise of the AKP has led to the emergence of a new capitalist class in Turkey, closely linked to the ascent of political Islam. These new entrepreneurs, primarily originating from Anatolia, rapidly accumulated wealth by leveraging the political opportunities provided by the AKP. This transformation occurred in a context where the state's role in economic life did not diminish but rather shifted in form.

⁶⁴ Ayşe Buğra, *Devlet ve işadamları*, 2. baskı, İletişim Yayınları Araştırma-inceleme dizisi, 319 51 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995).

⁶⁵ Buğra.

The AKP government offered significant opportunities to these new entrepreneurs through privatizations, public tenders, and public-private partnerships, enabling a previously marginal group in the business world to ascend. Meanwhile, the traditional capitalist groups of the Republican era maintained a more distant yet connected relationship with the AKP. This situation created polarization within the business world, shaped by political ideologies and cultural identities.

Buğra and Savaşkan also argue that the favoritism of the AKP era was less about overt violations of the law and more about achieving goals through legal amendments and circumventing regulations. This dynamic was also evident in the close relationships between the AKP government and the new entrepreneurs, often mediated through family networks. Such examples illustrate how political influence became a critical tool for economic success in a setting where economic and political interests were deeply intertwined. The authors highlight the role of new entrepreneurial organizations, particularly MÜSİAD and TUSKON, which cultivated close ties with the AKP government to advocate for their members' interests. These organizations also sought to foster trust and solidarity among their members by leveraging religious capital, further demonstrating the organizational integration of political Islam into the economic sphere and its growing influence in Turkish society.

Especially during the early years of the AKP, its relations with existing business elites were much better because the party became the symbol of the new order that has been replacing the criticized old regime in terms of bulk bureaucracy that hinders industrial developments, which is a common pattern among the newly industrialized countries starting from the late 1980s. AKP, through either intermediaries or political incentivization, collaborates with those elites; most of them have no cultural/religious affinity with the AKP regime. These intermediaries are the second way that AKP's business-state relations policy is a manifestation in Turkey. This duality resonates with the claim of Buğra and Savaşkan

that there is an ambiguous consensus and conflict between two capitalist models and their elites in contemporary Turkey.⁶⁶

The role of cultural and religious affiliations in business-state relations in Turkey also indicates how these networks operate in the regional setting, which is characterized by more political religionism, and how AKP's economic policies regarding the regulation of business-state relations include two things: direct support for the liberal economy through privatizations and public-private partnerships; and legal and extra-legal support to organizations that are supporting the AKP government directly. The business elites actively engaged in the AKP's regionalization initiatives by providing direct support and direction, while the established business elites accessed regional activity through facilitators. The state's proactive involvement in controlling and directing these networks substantiates Buğra's theory. Proximity to the state is essential for elite groups to mitigate "uncertainty" amid fluctuating and complex economic strategies and favoritism; similarly, engaging in business near the state alleviates "regional uncertainty" in a politically volatile context. Consequently, particularly during the initial phases of regionalization prior to the Syrian Civil War, both elite factions and their corresponding economic strategies were able to coexist.

However, the role of religion in these networks has to be underlined. While analyzing the role of religion in business state relations during the AKP rule, Buğra & Savaşkan claimed that.

Our research on developments in Turkey, religion, and the market in the economic relations between actors and their used to build trust in their dealings with the government relationship capital. Shared religious identity is the network of economic and political relations that stabilizes, including some economic actors and excluding others.⁶⁷

The instrumentalization of religion in order to gain trust among the business elites can also be found in regionalization processes as well.

⁶⁶ Ayşe Buğra et al., *Türkiye'de yeni kapitalizm: siyaset, din ve iş dünyası*, 1. baskı, İletişim yayınları Araştırma - inceleme dizisi, 2087 349 (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014), 224.

⁶⁷ Buğra et al., 44.

Religion as common ground between partners helps to strengthen the economic networks that are eventually bound by political motivations. In other words, religion has several roles in economic networks around regionalization projects. Firstly, Turkey channeled its “trusted by religion” partners in these networks, either as facilitators or direct partners. Secondly, these partners seek to find a trusted partner in the region as well.

Similar to religion, even more important than religion, familial ties have a significant role in business-state relations. These ties bring Ostromian institutional mechanisms to these networks. Ostrom claims that institutions have roles in economic activities such as facilitating collective action, establishing rules and norms, resolving conflicts, ensuring accountability, adapting to change, building trust and reciprocity, and enhancing knowledge and information sharing.⁶⁸ Similar to religion’s effect on regionalizing economic networks, familial ties also benefit states and firms. These familial ties can be manifestations of cultural proximities. These familial ties are not necessarily built upon parental relations. Marriage and close friendships also have the same effects as other familial ties in terms of enriching relations. During the AKP era, several milder versions of familial ties were also utilized in both regime consolidation and regionalization. However, the importance of familial relations in regulating and enjoying state support started with neither AKP nor regionalism. From the post-1980s, the Turkish public has already been used to scandalous, fraught cases that include several family names that used these relations in order to gain maximum profit, starting from Özal and Çiller families.⁶⁹

Besides the questions of who actively shaped business-state relations and which mechanisms are significant for these relations and their implication for Turkey’s regionalization projects, the question of which part of economic activities were utilized during these relations as well is also important. In other words, as networks shaped the economic geography of

⁶⁸ Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1990), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511807763>.

⁶⁹ Buğra et al., *Türkiye’de yeni kapitalizm*, 89.

the region, the sector that these networks built upon and operated is also important. Especially in regionalization, dominant sectors can be varied due to regionalism's embeddedness in geographical, economic, and political realities. However, some sectors are, by nature, regional, such as energy, and mining, metal sectors, due to their technical requirements.⁷⁰

§ 2.3 History of Turkey-Lebanon Relations: Under the Shadow of Turkey-Syria Relations

In this part, the relationship between Turkey and the Arab Middle East will be in light of Turkish-Levant relations beginning from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which is one of the most significant milestones for the countries and societies in the region. This analysis will shed light on how the relationship between national and regional actors is intertwined, how several regionalism projects prevailed during the century, and how regionalism was derived in the 21st century. It also indicates the cultural aspects of regionalism, which are mostly shaped by historical linkages between actors. In other words, how Turkey's presence as the successor of the Ottoman Empire shaped the cultural field in the region. Especially how Syria-Lebanon relations have been embedded in each other in different political settings and regionalism projects over time.

Due to historical connections directly shaping the cultural environment and the existing networks, analyzing the historical relation is fruitful for understanding the ways and potentials of regionalist aspirations.

⁷⁰ Kathleen J. Hancock, Stefano Palestini, and Kacper Szulecki, "The Politics of Energy Regionalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Energy Politics*, by Kathleen J. Hancock, Stefano Palestini, and Kacper Szulecki, ed. Kathleen J. Hancock and Juliann Emmons Allison (Oxford University Press, 2021), 171–95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190861360.013.5>.

2.3.1 *The Complex and Peculiar Nature of the Levant: The Foundation of Lebanon and Lebanese Identity*

The fall of the Ottoman Empire, as the foundational event, did not just lead to the establishment of all countries except Israel in the region but also created borders that separate societies that live together under one societal unit. In this sense, the Ottoman legacy is one of the critical elements in regionalist attempts as an ideological root and in the establishment and sustainment of standard networks that operate as regionalizing powers in the region. The networks and ideas of the Ottoman legacy were not homogenous in the area. Those networks and ideas are more powerful in some clusters in the region, especially clusters that gained from Ottoman rule or were not harmed by the rule.

Moreover, the shared history of the Ottoman Empire operates as a regionalizing element for different regionalisms, too.⁷¹ At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Arab nationalism and the idea of an ecumenical Arabian country became an important force, too. Especially at the ideational and political level, pan-Arabism as regionalization attempts became much more powerful. These regionalizing ideas, such as pan-Arabism, have lost their influence with the empowered nationalisms that occurred in the region. Moreover, regionalizing factors that usually compete with each other can be found since the Nahda (the Arabian Renaissance), which was a cultural and intellectual awakening in the Arab world during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, marked by a revival of literature, science, and reformist ideas aimed at modernizing society and reclaiming cultural identity.

Similar to other regionalizations, the regionalization of the Middle East, or more specifically, the Levant region, has different regionalist aspirations, regionalism, and regionalizations. Simultaneously, as a part of the Nahda movement that occurred in Egypt, Christian-Arab intellectuals such as Butrus Al-Bustani also conceptualized the revival of Arab identity separated from the Ottoman Empire, with more secular or ecumenical

⁷¹ USSAMA MAKDISI, *AGE OF COEXISTENCE: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World*. (S.l.: UNIV OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2021).

attribution, according to Makdisi.⁷² He established a school called Al-Madrasa Al-Wataniyya in 1863 after the Lebanese civil war in 1860. Al-Bustani is considered one of the founders of the distinct Syrian-Lebanese identity from both the Ottoman Empire and Arab nationalism.

The political-economic background of the Levant region, or Al-Mashriq in Arabic, was different from the other parts of the Middle East in terms of its societal composition, economic relationship with the West and the Ottoman Sublime Porte, and political events that shaped the region. There were important trade hubs in the region, such as Beirut, Latakia, and Sidon. These hubs have been important gateways to Middle Eastern markets for Western goods. Therefore, the Western influence was a significant factor in the region. In terms of social composition, the ethnic and religious composition has been much more diverse, and the Christian population was much more impactful, especially in Mount Lebanon, due to the peculiarity of the region and its relationship with the Western Imperial powers. However, those relations were not free from colonial and racist attributions; mostly Christian-Arab communities in the Levant have been attributed as imperfect Europeans and subjected to missionary action. "Christian-Arab intellectuals were mostly aware that they were both victims and beneficiaries of Western penetration. In this sense, they preferred to become 'proud Arabs' not 'imperfect Europeans.'" All of these indigenous factors led to the birth of Syrian Lebanese identity, which is dominantly Christian-Arab identity, and Bilad-Al-Sham as a region that coincided with most of the territories of contemporary Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

In light of Nahda's envisioned Arab identity and the region, the Syrian-Lebanese relations and the Bilad-Al-Sham region, the Levant has hosted several regionalisms simultaneously, and the plural regionalism and conflicts that have occurred paved the way to the establishment and dissolution of regionalist attempts in the region as well as more nuanced regional identity and more complex intra-regional relations in the

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MAKDISI.

Levant. An actor in the Levant located several conflicting regions with different cultural affiliations.

The Bilad-Al-Sham was subjected to a French Mandate at the end of the First World War, excluding the Jordanian and Palestinian territories, which separated the region into three parts: Syria and Lebanon under the French Mandate and Jordan under the British Mandate. The border between these new states under tutelary was arbitrary and divided Greater Syria and established Greater Lebanon. However, the border between Syria and Lebanon was not enforced until the Syrian Land Reform in 1958-61, which led to sustaining the interconnection between actors and communities in the region. Even the social cleavages and hierarchies pierced the border. For example, zuama in the Akkar region, which is the northern part of Lebanon, maintained their positions and power over the Syrian peasants.⁷³ Trade relations between commercial communities and hubs in Lebanon and Syria were active.

As already mentioned, the division of Bilad Al-Sham created two separate countries, which are Lebanon and Syria. While drawing the border between these two countries, some places traditionally associated with Damascus, Aleppo, or Homs separated from the Syrian Republic and merged with Beirut-centric Lebanon. For example, Tripoli, considered the harbor of Homs and Damascus, became part of Lebanon. After this division, Tripoli developed a sort of city identity and corporatism, and Tripolite elites became supporters of Syrian nationalism until the early 2000s.⁷⁴

During the great transformation of the Levant region, the Beirut elites, which were the supporters of Greater Lebanon and distinct Christian-Arab identity, and Sunni Arab elites, who were mainly from Sidon and Tripoli, made a concessional agreement in terms of regulating the power-sharing of the Lebanese state, which is called Misaq Al-Watani.

⁷³ Michael Gilsenan, "Lebanon's Gateway to Syria: Akkar before the Civil War," *Middle East Report*, no. 162 (1990): 31-33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013283>.

⁷⁴ Tine Gade, *Sunni City: Tripoli from Islamist Utopia to the Lebanese "Revolution,"* Cambridge Middle East Studies (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Precisely, the peculiar attributions of the Levant region, which paved the way to the creation of Greater Lebanon, and complicated identarian politics in the area make the region open to several regionalization processes and, at the same time, weaken the possibility of regionalization attempts of those projects which increased the necessity of the state intervention and facilitating.

2.3.2 *The Foreign Relations Between Turkey and Lebanon*

Seeking separate relations that knitted around well-defined foreign policies between Turkey and Lebanon is extremely difficult. Regional dynamics, more specifically, the meaning of the existence of the Syrian Arab Republic for both Turkey and Lebanon, directly affect Turkish-Lebanese relations. There are two main reasons behind it: Syrian influence over Lebanon, especially after the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, and the importance of the Syrian border for the Turkish side. During the era that this these is covering the succession of Bashar Al-As'ad after Hafiz Al-Asa'ad, the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, and the mass migration from Syria to Turkey and Lebanon after the eruption of civil war in Syria has been effective toward the bilateral ties between these two countries. Especially after the Syrian civil war, the relationship between Turkish political actors and Lebanese ones is determined by their position in the civil war.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of how Syrian relations between Turkey and Lebanon affect Lebanese Turkish ties, I would like to introduce some touchpoints of Syrian-Lebanese and Syrian-Turkish relations with a more concrete focus on actors rather than states and more contemporary events instead of historical ones.

Starting from the "Armenian Issue," Turkey had been following the issues in Lebanon via Beirut Embassy reports; however, it did not take any action that can be called a political intervention about the issues it covered. The Embassy directly reported the political and cultural activities of Armenian groups. There are two main issues that the Turkish Intelligence Services and the Turkish Embassy in Beirut investigated: "The Armenian Issue" and the "threat of Socialism/Nasserism," which also

included the Palestinians in Lebanon. Archival records indicate that Turkey follows the newsletters from Arab-Socialist circles, especially against the possible Nasserist turnover of Lebanon. Moreover, Turkey was one of the critical partners of the Baghdad Pact and later CENTO, which was established in order to prevent Soviet influence in the Middle East. At first, under President Chamoun's leadership, Lebanon had been interested in joining the pact after the visit of Adnan Menderes, the prime minister of Turkey, in the 1950s. "However, strong domestic opposition to the Pact led to the downfall of the Lebanese government and to Lebanon not signing off on the Pact."⁷⁵ On the other hand, Lebanon refuses to join the reactionary faction that consists of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. In other words, during the 1950s and the 1960s, Turkish interests in Lebanon were aligned with the denial of the Armenian Genocide and Turkey's partnership with NATO and CENTO.

After the 1960s coup in Turkey, "the new government also made clear its intentions to improve relations with countries in the Arab world."⁷⁶ However, they sought to portray themselves as a representative of Western interests in the region. As the Turks grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of Western support regarding the Cyprus issue and faced the rising costs of oil, Turkey intensified its efforts in the Middle East, eventually achieving some level of success. During the Lebanese Civil War that outbreak in 1975, Turkey maintained its traditional "non-involvement" policy toward conflict and was keen to avoid actions that might draw it into a proxy conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. However, Turkey maintained its concerns about "Syria's support of the Kurds and the Armenians, who shared strong opposition to Turkey."⁷⁷ On the other hand, Turkish Leftist/Marxist groups have imminent involvement in regional conflict because of the intertwinement of the Lebanese Civil War and the Palestinian Issue. Palestinian Liberation Organization and Turkish Marxist, and later Kurdish Separatist groups relations prevailed. Those militia

⁷⁵ Michael B. Bishku, "Turkey's Relations with Lebanon and Jordan," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 68–91, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsa.2012.0010>.

⁷⁶ Bishku, 79.

⁷⁷ Bishku, 84.

groups were actively involved and trained in the Beqa'a Valley until the 1990s.

In the post-civil war era, Turkish-Lebanese relations could not flourish due to the deterioration in relations between Turkey and Syria because of Syrian support to Kurdish and Armenian guerrilla organizations, namely PKK and ASALA. "In January 1996, Turkey accused Syria of committing aggression and asserted that it was entitled under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter to adopt measures of self-defense against Syria." Turkey's relations with Syria contained problems until the 1998 Adana Agreement, which envisioned the expulsion of PKK from the Turkish-Syrian border, and the agreement became the symbol of normalization between Turkey and Syria.

In the 1980s and 1990s, all of the countries in the region faced significant political and economic transformation in order to orient their position after the collapse of the USSR and align with the rise of the neoliberal economy. Turkey, mainly after the 1980 coup, drafted numerous regulations in order to transform its import-substitute model economy into a neoliberal economy model. Turgut Özal, who was Prime Minister and then President of Turkey, was an important figure in this reform era. He implemented a series of neoliberal reforms to liberalize the Turkish economy, reduce state intervention, and encourage foreign investment. These policies resulted in substantial economic growth, though they also exacerbated income inequality and social unrest. Özal was dedicated to expanding Turkish market integration with foreign markets such as the Arab World, Balkans, and Central Asia.⁷⁸ Especially, he created an environment conducive to the inflow of Arab capital. This was particularly significant as Özal sought to strengthen Turkey's ties with the Gulf states, many of which were flush with petrodollars following the oil booms of the 1970s and 1980s. This influx of Arab money played a crucial role in developing sectors such as construction, finance, and tourism in Turkey, further integrating the Turkish economy with the broader Middle

⁷⁸ Bishku, "Turkey's Relations with Lebanon and Jordan"; Ziya Öniş, "Turgut Özal and His Economic Legacy: Turkish Neo-Liberalism in Critical Perspective," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 4 (July 2004): 113–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200410001700338>.

Eastern economic sphere. At the same time, Özal's economic policies and political vision facilitated the rise of the Islamic bourgeoisie, a new class of entrepreneurs and business elites with strong ties to both Islamic values and global markets. The liberalization of the economy under Özal allowed these groups to expand their businesses and influence, particularly in Anatolia, where the so-called "Anatolian Tigers" emerged as key players in the Turkish economy.⁷⁹ These Islamic business groups, which benefited from the inflow of Arab capital and the liberal economic environment, became important supporters of Özal's policies and contributed to the transformation of Turkish society. The Islamic bourgeoisie also played a pivotal role in the increasing visibility and political influence of Islam within Turkish public life, challenging the secular establishment and laying the groundwork for the eventual rise of political Islam in Turkey.⁸⁰

Similarly, Rafic Hariri, who became Lebanon's Prime Minister in the early 1990s, championed neoliberal policies in the post-civil war reconstruction of Lebanon. Hariri's approach focused on rebuilding Beirut as a financial hub, attracting foreign capital, and privatizing state enterprises. However, this strategy also led to increased public debt and deepened socioeconomic disparities in Lebanon.⁸¹ Hariri was also instrumentalized his networks with Gulf States, especially with Saudi Arabia because of his marital relationship with a royal family member and his company based on Saudi Arabi (Saudi Oger), to create investment opportunities for the reconstruction of Beirut and Lebanon. He utilized his personal connection with Saudi Arabia in the political landscape, which created a potential for Hariri to develop a balanced foreign policy toward Syria and the reconstruction process through the Solidere Project.

The Assad regime in Syria adopted neoliberal policies more cautiously, beginning with Bashar al-Assad's rise to power in 2000. The

⁷⁹ Yıldız Atasoy, *Islam's Marriage with Neoliberalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230246669>.

⁸⁰ Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁸¹ Baumann, *Citizen Hariri*.

Syrian government initiated economic reforms, including reducing subsidies, liberalizing trade, and encouraging private sector growth.⁸² Despite these efforts, the Syrian neoliberal opening was limited and uneven, failing to achieve widespread economic development while contributing to growing social and regional inequalities.⁸³ Similar to Turkey and Lebanon, new geo-political requirements and liberalization of economies were linked to more warm relations with the Gulf. Syria joined the US-led coalition in the Iraqi-Gulf War during 1990-1991, and the accession of Bashar Al-Asa'ad's reform movement aimed to attract Gulf investments, particularly in the real estate and banking sectors, which were crucial for the economic reform agenda. This period saw an increase in Gulf tourism and business ventures in Syria, signaling a warming of ties.⁸⁴

Adana Agreement was a significant point in rearranging Turkey's relations with the region. The agreement eased the ongoing crisis between Syria and Turkey, and Syrian influence over Lebanon, which had been invaded by Syria in 1975, directly affected Turkey's relationship with Lebanon. Although problematic issues between Syria and Turkey were resolved with the agreement, Turkey's position was still greeted with skepticism by countries in the Levant because of Turkey's keen relations with Israel in the 1990s. The election of political newcomers, AKP and its Islamic Bourgeoise, in 2002 was a milestone for Turkey's interaction with the Middle East.

2.3.2.1 The Rise of AKP and The History of the Shamgen Project

AKP's positions regarding the Middle East transformed the Turkish foundational security-based foreign policy to an economy-driven one. Kirişçi

⁸² HINNEBUSCH, "Syria: From 'authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?"

⁸³ Omar S Dahi and Yasser Munif, "Revolts in Syria: Tracking the Convergence Between Authoritarianism and Neoliberalism," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 47, no. 4 (August 2012): 323-32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909611431682>.

⁸⁴ HINNEBUSCH, "Syria: From 'authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?"

deploys the concept of “trading state”⁸⁵ while analyzing these novelties. The proportion of Turkish exports to the region rose significantly, growing from 12.4 percent in 2002 (equivalent to US\$4.5 billion) to 22.2 percent in 2020 (equivalent to US\$37.6 billion)—this economy-centric shaped with the Turkish model of democracy as a Moderate Islamist Muslim Democracy. Turkish model of democracy was exported to several Middle Eastern countries—moreover, actors in the foreign policy of Turkey diversified. As the regionalism theory underlines, these actors come from business cycles and international NGOs. Firstly, the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) became a significant actor in Turkey’s foreign policy. Although the organization itself was founded in 1985, with new legislation drafted in 2014, the responsibility of the organization was enhanced to pursue “foreign economic relations on behalf of the Turkish private sector.”⁸⁶ DEİK developed its networks in Middle Eastern countries after 2003 and became a focal point in facilitating economic relations between Middle Eastern countries and Turkey. Another new actor was the Independent Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (MUSİAD), which was founded in 1990. MUSİAD became a representative of the newly organized Islamic bourgeoisie and Anatolian Tiger that the government-backed since Özal. International NGOs and state agencies that aimed to foster international aid and cooperation became significant actors in this new foreign policy approach. In other words, “economic motivations, identitarian outlook, and diversification of actors shape AKP’s approach to foreign policy”⁸⁷

Neo-Ottomanism is usually deployed when evaluating the foreign relations of AKP’s foreign policy, especially in the early 2000s. The discourse of Neo-Ottomanism has double meanings and attributions attached to it. By definition, Neo-Ottomanism is based on the common

⁸⁵ Kemal Kirişçi, “The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40 (2009): 29–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600005203>.

⁸⁶ Sinem Adar, “Turkey in MENA, MENA in Turkey: Reasons for Popularity, Limits to Influence,” *SWP Research Paper*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2024RP03>.

⁸⁷ Adar, 10.

Ottoman past shared by the Balkans, Anatolia, and most Middle Eastern regions and connoted to the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, which is mainly described as the last peaceful times of these regions by Turkish historians and intellectuals. In other words, the discourse of Neo-Ottomanism is deployed to reinstitute the Ottoman order to bring peace and welfare to the area. This attribution toward the Ottoman past and re-imagining Turkey as the heir of the legacy prevailed in pieces about the foreign policy of AKPs. This kind of logic can be visible in the founders of the AKP's foreign policy ideas, such as Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey during the reproached era, and İbrahim Kalın, who is a prominent figure in AKP's ideological establishment.⁸⁸

On the other hand, the legacy of the Ottoman Empire as the main point of the Neo-Ottomanism argument has negative connotations and attribution from national groups besides Turkish groups. If an example should be given, Maronite or Christian groups in Lebanon understood the Ottoman past not as a time of relief and emancipation; instead, they located the Ottoman Empire as an oppressor that hindered those societies' development and freedom. This negative connotation of the Ottoman era led to the deployment of Neo-Ottomanism as a brand name for Turkey's imperial visions and plans for the region. This concept has occasionally been deployed in Lebanon to explain Turkey's intervention in Lebanon's affairs.

Although the logic of Neo-Ottomanism can be traced in the writings of the ideological founders of AKP's foreign policy, the state authorities have denied it. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA)'s Beirut director denied the deployment of a Neo-Ottomanist framework and complained about the invisibility of reconstruction and renovation attempts of Greek Orthodox and other Christian groups and churches that TİKA has carried out.⁸⁹ However, the Ottoman Order did not deny the rights and religious freedom of non-Muslim groups in the Ottoman

⁸⁸ Tuba Yildiz, "Lebanese-Turkish Relations after the 2000s and the Neo-Ottomanist Discourse in Lebanon," *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi* 10, no. 2 (December 30, 2023): 103–25, <https://doi.org/10.26513/tocd.1315959>.

⁸⁹ Yildiz, 119.

lands. The order indicates the existence of non-Muslim groups, but it claims the leadership and privileges of Sunni Muslims. This action becomes an integral part of the imperialism argument, for the people do not support Turkey's new foreign policy toward the Middle East.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Jean Obeid's visit to Ankara in 2004 indicated the new era of Lebanese-Turkish relations.⁹⁰ The prime minister Rafic Hariri also visited Ankara in the same year. In alignment with the new foreign policy objectives and priorities of the AKP government, Turkey has been developing intensive relations with Lebanon. Although Turkey sought a cautious intervention in Lebanese politics, especially Lebanon's relationship with Syria, new foreign policy Turkey developed a strong emotional link with Lebanon. After Rafic Hariri's assassination in 2005, an international court, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), was placed in order to investigate the assassination. Turkey was one of the signatory states and financial contributors in establishing STL with other regional actors, such as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iran, and some Latin American countries where significant Lebanese descendants live.⁹¹ There was strong reaction to dismiss Syrian army and end to Syrian occupation in Lebanon. Different groups participated in several rallies to either support or denounce the Syrian influence over Lebanon. The assassination increased the political strife between different groups and split the country into two camps, namely on March 8 and March 14.

Turkey's position regarding Rafic Hariri's assassination prioritized Turkey's newly developing relations with the As'ad regime in Syria, which can be accepted as ambivalence⁹² Abdullah Gül who had Foreign Minister of the new AKP government and became the president later, visited the Hariri family just after the assassination to display condolences.

⁹⁰ Yildiz, 122.

⁹¹ Mario Odoni, "The Establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and Domestic Jurisdiction," *HAGUE JUSTICE JOURNAL / JOURNAL JUDICIAIRE DE LA HAYE* 4, no. 3 (2009): 195.

⁹² Robert Rabil, "Lebanon-Turkey Relations: Reclaiming the 'Sword' and 'Crescent' of Islam," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2021.1886512>.

On the other hand, the President of Turkey, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, visited Damascus two months after the assassination in order to show his support for the regime's influence over Lebanon.⁹³ This dual action has two meanings; firstly, it implies that Turkey was trying to maintain balanced diplomatic relations by prioritizing its security concerns, and there was a conflict in Turkish foreign policymakers in terms of a new foreign policy agenda. The conflict related to the Lebanese issue was maintained during Turkey's participation in UNIFIL forces in Beirut in 2006. President Sezer underlined its hesitations on every occasion while the spokesperson of the government claimed, "Turkey cannot remain just a spectator, like a country which is distant from events taking place in the Middle East" and added, "Turkey is going to take on its responsibilities and play an active role."⁹⁴

The ambivalence in Turkey's foreign policy decreased after the election of Gül to the presidency of Turkey in 2007. Turkey's policy during the Israel-Hezbollah War of July-August 2006, which was notably independent of the U.S., EU, and pro-Western Middle Eastern states, significantly enhanced its reputation in Lebanon. Prime Minister Erdoğan condemned Israel's 2006 offensive against Hezbollah as "illegitimate," in contrast to the relatively more cautious responses from countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia.⁹⁵ Following the war, Turkey ranked among the top countries in terms of aid sent to Lebanon, contributing medical assistance, and initiating reconstruction projects. During the 2006 war, Turkey also participated in aid campaigns for Palestinians in Lebanon. Turkish aid organization Kızılay (Red Crescent) sent a convoy of 18 trucks that carried aid to Lebanon.⁹⁶

⁹³ "Sezer Boosts Ties With Damascus in Defiance of US | Arab News," accessed August 17, 2024, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/265313>.

⁹⁴ "Turkey Agrees to Send Troops to Lebanon," DAWN.COM, 00:00:00+05:00, <http://beta.dawn.com/news/207921/turkey-agrees-to-send-troops-to-lebanon>.

⁹⁵ Rabil, "Lebanon-Turkey Relations."

⁹⁶ "Turkish Red Crescent Sends Aid to Lebanon - Lebanon | ReliefWeb," August 3, 2006, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/turkish-red-crescent-sends-aid-lebanon>.

In 2009, the foreign minister and one of the chief executives of the AKP's foreign policy, Ahmet Davutoğlu, visited Lebanon and attempted to develop two separate political camps in Lebanon. He tried to enhance Turkey's political network in the region, and he visited the Turkmen community, which has been neglected and forgotten in Akkar.⁹⁷ The charisma and fame of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was the Prime Minister of Turkey, exponentially increased all around the Middle East and also affected the Lebanese people, especially Lebanese Sunnis. During his visit in 2010, the crowd welcomed him graciously. "Many of them called him rayyes(president) or za'eem (leader)."⁹⁸ His main motivation during his visit was mediating two political camps, and he signed a bilateral agreement that included Lebanon's trade zone through a Free-trade agreement that had already been actualized with Syria in 2009.⁹⁹

Although Turkey initially attempted to develop good relations with wider groups from both camps, not all sectarian groups welcomed Turkey's motivation and actions in the region. Firstly, Armenians in Lebanon actively opposed Turkey's intervention. They protested Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide every year¹⁰⁰ and also during Erdoğan's visit.¹⁰¹ Tashnaq, one of the biggest Armenian political parties in Lebanon, denounced Erdoğan's intervention and claimed Turkey's action in

⁹⁷ "Davutoglu Promotes Stability in Lebanon," accessed August 17, 2024, <https://jamestown.org/program/davutoglu-promotes-stability-in-lebanon/>.

⁹⁸ Jana Jabbour, "Is Turkey a Shaper and Mover in Lebanon? Myths and Realities about Turkey's Role and Influence" (AUB Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2021).

⁹⁹ "Turkish PM Receives 'Gracious Welcome' in Lebanon - Region - World," Ahram Online, accessed August 17, 2024, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/574/World/Region/Turkish-PM-receives-gracious-welcome-in-Lebanon.aspx>.

¹⁰⁰ "Lebanese-Armenian Protesters Trap Turkish Ambassador in Beirut Theater - Ay-sor.Am - Hot News from Armenia," accessed August 17, 2024, <https://www.ay-sor.am/en/news/2015/03/23/Lebanese-Armenian-Protesters-Trap-Turkish-Ambassador-in-Beirut-Theater/923347>.

¹⁰¹ "LEBANON – TURKEY Erdogan in Beirut, a Mediator on a Neo-Ottoman Quest," accessed August 17, 2024, <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Erdogan-in-Beirut,-a-mediator-on-a-Neo-Ottoman-%20quest-20088.html>.

Lebanon was a form of new imperialism in Lebanon. Moreover, Christian opposition, which had supported Syria, namely the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and Michael Aoun, which were allies of Hezbollah, did not also support Turkey's new policy. The image of the Ottoman legacy was revitalized by the famine of 1915 and the "state terror" of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰² Turkey's focus became developing solid relations with the Future Movement (FM), which is the party of the Hariri family, headed by Sa'ad Hariri, the son of the assassinated prime minister, and crafting direct relations with the community and Palestinians in Lebanon through aid, and symbolic power. The relationship between AKP and FM was solid on both institutional and personal levels. FM appointed a permanent representative in Ankara in order to "consolidate relations between two parties," and Erdoğan invited Hariri to his daughter's wedding in order to become a witness.¹⁰³ Tripoli, which is the second biggest city and port in Lebanon, became a focal point for Turkey's foreign policy because of its Sunni population and city affiliation with the Future Movement. Turkey pursued a humanitarian diplomacy that primarily focused on Sunni Groups in Tripoli, which is the least developed region in the area. Between 2010 and 2020, Turkey made 33 million USD in development aid to Lebanon.¹⁰⁴ These aids were mainly directed by TİKA, Diyanet Foundation, Humanitarian Relief Foundation (İHH), or Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). In lots of villages in the region, the photos of Erdoğan or Turkey's flag have been hanged. However, in terms of becoming the protector of Sunnis in Lebanon, Turkey had different opponents, namely Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Jabbour claims Turkey's foreign policy in Lebanon has been suffering from an "over-achievement" problem, which led to increased

¹⁰² "Lebanon Summons Turkish Ambassador after President Raised Ottoman Era Atrocities," Arab News, September 3, 2019, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1549146/middle-east>.

¹⁰³ Jabbour, "Is Turkey a Shaper and Mover in Lebanon? Myths and Realities about Turkey's Role and Influence."

¹⁰⁴ Jabbour.

appreciation toward Turkey not becoming loyal.¹⁰⁵ This over-achievement problem causes “fifteen minutes of fame”¹⁰⁶ for Turkey.

In terms of economic development between Turkey and Lebanon, after then-Prime Minister Erdoğan's official visit to Lebanon on November 24, 2010, and the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)—which has yet to be ratified—bilateral trade between the two countries saw improvement, reaching a volume of one billion USD by 2019. However, the trade balance is unfavorable for Lebanon, with its imports from Turkey (940 million USD in 2019) far exceeding its exports to Turkey (61 million USD).¹⁰⁷ Lebanon primarily imports foodstuffs, clothing, and construction materials from Turkey. In 2002, DEİK's Lebanon branch was established. Lebanon became an important gateway for Turkish business groups that would like to make an investment because of several factors, including Lebanon being an important re-export center, Lebanese business groups having an important Middle Eastern network,¹⁰⁸ reaching the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), and the relevancy of confirmation letter that held from Lebanese banks while making ties with the Gulf.¹⁰⁹ During 2004-2010, Turkey and Lebanon signed and ratified ten various cooperation agreements that are not sector-specific.¹¹⁰

The importance of Syria and its regional scale has also emerged during this era. ShamGen, or the Levant Quartet, was an important attempt that aimed to foster regional stability and peace through trade and cultural exchange. It was inspired by the European Union's Schengen Agreement, which facilitates the free movement of people and goods across

¹⁰⁵ Jabbour.

¹⁰⁶ “A Place in the Sun or Fifteen Minutes of Fame? Understanding Turkey's New Foreign Policy,” accessed August 17, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/undefined?lang=en>.

¹⁰⁷ “Türkiye - Lübnan İş Konseyi - DEİK | Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu,” accessed August 17, 2024, <https://deik.org.tr/turkiye-ortadogu-ve-korfez-is-konseyleri-turkiye-lubnan-is-konseyi?pm=&sm=kunye>.

¹⁰⁸ “Türkiye - Lübnan İş Konseyi - DEİK | Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu.”

¹⁰⁹ *Mehmet Habbab Lübnan Türkiye Ticaret İlişkileri* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XD1_DyoQaww&t=1s, 2017).

¹¹⁰ “T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı - Beyrut Büyükelçiliği - Bilgi Notları,” accessed August 17, 2024, <https://beyrut-be.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowInfoNote/254151>.

member states; the ShamGen project seeks to establish a similar framework within the Levant region, namely Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. It was established in 2010 with the establishment of the Levant Business Forum, whose secretariat is in Beirut. Anthony Ghorayeb, a board member of the International Chamber of Commerce in Beirut, the counterpart organization of the DEİK Lebanon, was elected as the forum's general secretary.¹¹¹ Initially, it aimed to establish a customs union and common visa system. Although it failed to create a customs union, the visa requirements between these countries halted in 2010. Besides that, Turkey's Central Bank also organized a conference in 2011 in order to synchronize the banking system in the region under the name of "Enhancing 'ShamGen' Banking: Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan" with the joint host of Al-Bank Wal-Mustathmer¹¹² which is a magazine that distributed by Maga Group that has an office in Beirut, Damascus, and İstanbul.¹¹³ The project aimed to overcome the compatibility problem that Middle Eastern regionalisms faced, with coordination of different sectors to different countries, such as Turkey to trade, Syria to energy, Jordan to transportation, and Lebanon to tourism.¹¹⁴

The project of Shamgen has been suspended, and the relationship between Turkey and Lebanon was disrupted by the Syrian Civil War that erupted in 2011. The crisis in Syria led to catastrophic results, starting from mass migration from the country, a suitable place for Islamic-Jihadist organizations to be nourished. The spillover effect of the civil war brings violence and perturbation in neighborhood countries. Hezbollah's political immunity in Lebanon and their military support to the Asa'ad

¹¹¹ Business News, "'Levant Business Forum' Sees Light," BusinessNews.com.lb, accessed August 17, 2024, <https://www.businessnews.com.lb/cms/Story/StoryDetails/1056/'Levant-Business-Forum'-sees-light>.

¹¹² "Merkez Bankası'ndan İstanbul'da 'Şamgen' Konferansı," Haberler, March 23, 2011, <https://www.haberler.com/ekonomi/merkez-bankasi-ndan-istanbul-da-samgen-2610062-haberi/>.

¹¹³ MagaGroup Moderator, "Company – MAGA Group," accessed August 17, 2024, <https://magagroup.com/company/>.

¹¹⁴ "Şamgen oldu kangren," Milliyet, August 23, 2011, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/ekonomi/samgen-oldu-kangren-1430292>.

regime in 2012, and Turkey's participation of coalition powers and support to anti-regime forces, namely the Free Syrian Army, directly led Turkey and Lebanon to face political problems. However, Turkey's and Lebanon's relations were not affected directly; these two countries maintained their cooperation in terms of migration management and aid. Lots of Syrian business people maintain their trade with Turkey over Lebanon. Moreover, Turkey banned trade with Syria in 2011, and the deteriorating situation in Lebanon transformed the Shamgen Project.



3

Cultural Ties That Enable and Disable Shamgen Region

In this chapter, cultural investment, aid, and the discourse of intimacies between Turkey and Lebanon are going to be examined. The analysis of the cultural ties and the agencies who have been maintaining these networks is critical because of the understanding of how the regional complex, regional society, and regional community in the Hettne&Söderbaum articulation is curated by these actors.¹ Moreover, opinions and imaginations toward the reproachment of Turkey are also going to be part of this chapter in order to indicate how cultural proximities and antagonisms are deployed in the regionalist vision of AKP's foreign policy. In terms of culture, this analysis deployed a broad vision, which means it will consist of not only direct cultural investments and

¹ Hettne and Söderbaum, "Theorising the Rise of Regionness."

embodiments but also general how Turkey's actions in Lebanon have been curated by Turkish actors and internalized by the Lebanese actors.

These cultural relations are also critical to analyzing economic relations in Turkey's regionalist aspirations because the economic capacity of Turkey as a regionalizing actor has been limited when compared to other regionalizing actors in Lebanon, such as France, the Gulf, or, more specifically, Saudi Arabia. In terms of relations with cultural and economic ties, Turkey's regionalization can be compared with the Iranian regionalist aspiration of the Shiite Crescent. In both regionalist aspirations, although the narrative is curated more inclusively, there is a lot of fragmentation and contestation that is directed toward a more culturally bounded community, which is mostly bounded by cultural-sectarian identities. In both regionalizations, the cultural ties, either coming from similar identities or historical legacies, become important reference points for political and economic activities. These references directly shaped the ways of cultural engagement, emotions, and agents that are active in these ties.

While analyzing the cultural ties, their connections with economic networks should also be taken seriously because the interaction of economic cooperation and cultural cooperation is fundamental in regionalism. As Breslin&Higgott underlined, the role of the synergy between economic cooperation and cultural ties in regionalism, which together created a sense of societal cohesion.² Especially in AKP's foreign policy, revoking the past of Ottoman Legacy and the imagination of the common past has a central role. It also embodied the personal charisma of the leader of AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose aim was to be one of the symbolic leaders of Sunni Muslims in the region, and the success story of the Turkish Republic as the only secular democracy in the Middle East. Furthermore, this chapter will analyze how these cultural initiatives align with and reinforce the broader geopolitical goals of the AKP government while also encountering obstacles due to Lebanon's multi-sectarian society.

² Breslin and Higgott, "Studying Regions."

As Keshavarzian claimed while analyzing the regionalization of the Gulf, he claims shared experiences, shared sea borders, trade, and tribal kinships shaped the establishment of the regional identity. Moreover, he approaches the regionalization-culture relations as dynamic and unstable.³ He deployed terms of “homogenization” and “heterogenization.” Homogenization denotes the processes that seek to establish uniform identities, cultures, and political frameworks. Heterogenization, conversely, underscores distinctions and diversity. In other words, the effects of culture over regionalization can also be homogenized and heterogenized.

Especially in a sectarian context, cultural ties can result in the homogenization of several sectarian groups while exclusion and marginalization of other critical groups. In other words, this homogenization can focus on the whole population of the country and a specific sectarian population simultaneously. In Turkish regionalist aspirations toward Lebanon, these two-layered cultural relations can be visible. On the official narrative, several political actors, starting from Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, deployed anti-sectarian and inclusive language. On the other hand, through the actions of relevant agents, these regionalizing activities focus on a specific sectarian identity, Sunnis. This indicates that the line between homogenization and heterogenization is blurred, and under the homogenization process, favoritism toward one particular group is possible.

§ 3.1 Turkish Discourse and Imaginaries Regarding MENA

Turkey, asserting itself as a power that embraces the Ottoman legend, has developed its spheres of activity, adopting a narrative of shared history throughout the Balkans, the Middle East, and Central Asia. In this context, the late Ottoman legacy, the Islamist rhetoric of the Abdul Hamid era, and the shared history during World War I are particularly emphasized. By doing so, the AKP government sought to gain a claim of indigeneity. This claim highlighted their cultural proximity and aimed to

³ Keshavarzian, *Making Space for the Gulf*.

distinguish their regional activities from Western/colonialist interactions. When examining the language used in the campaigns of Islamist groups in Africa, it is evident that Turkey and the AKP government underline their own whiteness, carrying the burden of the white man while also positioning Turkey as the "good white."⁴

While developing this interaction with Muslim countries, particularly with the Muslim Arab countries in the Middle East, this approach included narratives of modern Muslim democracy and Westernized secular Islam, with an increased emphasis on shared historical discourses. According to the thinking among the intellectual founders of AKP foreign policy, Turkey, which had successfully fought against Western colonialist powers but had adopted an inward-looking stance in foreign policy for various reasons, would resume its activities in these regions with its modern appearance. Moreover, in the struggles against Western colonialist powers, the Arab world was not an enemy but an ally. The great battles of World War I and the artificial borders that come with the "Skyles-Picot Agreement" are particularly quoted actively in this process. This increasing cultural interaction, coinciding with AKP and Erdoğan's "one-minute" incident, finds new unifying elements, and with the strained relations with Israel, the Palestinian cause also becomes part of this narrative.

The foreign policy actors of the period varied this narrative according to the country and context. These variations altered both the rhetoric of the policymakers and the perception of these narratives by the regional populations. In Lebanon, which differs from other countries in the region due to its sectarian composition and lack of an integrated state structure, this narrative is constructed in a distinct manner, and its perception varies across different sects in the region. This differentiation is influenced not only by the geopolitical alignments and global politics of the time but also by the Ottoman legacy's different meanings for each sect.

⁴ Ezgi Güner, "Rejoicing of the Hearts: Turkish Constructions of Muslim Whiteness in Africa South of the Sahara," *Africa* 93, no. 2 (May 2023): 236–55, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972023000220>.

Over time, this cultural interaction becomes institutionalized and evolves into a process involving various state and NGO actors. The financial and cultural exchanges that develop alongside this institutionalization ensure that this narrative is embodied in the historical structures and restoration projects carried out by official Turkish agencies like TİKA, YTB, and the Beirut Embassy.

In this section, the discourse between Turkey and Lebanon will first be examined, followed by an analysis of the agencies facilitating cultural interaction and their activities. Thus, while examining the role of cultural ties in the processes of regionalization and how this role complements the business ties, the focus will also be on the potential differentiations and alterations that may arise within the regional narrative.

The AKP's foreign policy towards Lebanon is intensely utilizing the discourse that underlies cultural proximity and historical ties, particularly those stemming from the Ottoman period. This is part of a broader motivation of AKP's Foreign Policy to locate Turkey as a developing player in the Middle East, using cultural diplomacy to foster goodwill and facilitate cooperation besides its warmer ties with the Western Powers and comparatively economic well-being in manufacturing. Turkey's cultural investments are multi-faceted, ranging from promoting itself as a role model for the Middle Eastern country in terms of development and adaptation to Western ideas to indicating proximity through restoration projects of Ottoman-era landmarks to cultural exchanges and festivals aimed at rekindling shared heritage.

Compared to the discourses in other Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, it can be said that Turkey's cultural interaction with Lebanon highlights different aspects. In other words, the history-making processes, which are an important part of the AKP's regionalism, operate differently in Lebanon compared to other Middle Eastern countries.

3.1.1 *The Narrative of "Reis" Erdoğan*

The perception of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and AKP's Turkey in the Middle East has always been a controversial issue. Particularly, the AKP has

been heavily criticized for its close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni Islamist organization active in many countries, and has, at times, been approached as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Turkey. Besides their cultural proximity stemming from similar ideological foundations, Turkey's and Qatar's closeness with Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated political groups in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria during and after the Arab Spring has strengthened this interaction. Apart from its close relationship with Islamist groups in the region, the Davos Crisis in 2009, also known as the "One Minute!" The crisis positioned Erdoğan as one of the spokespersons for the Palestinian cause in the Middle East. Although Turkey is among the most actively engaged countries with Israel in the entire Middle East, according to the Arab Barometer survey conducted in 2016 and 2021, Erdoğan was elected the most popular head of state in the Arab World, and although he occasionally lost this top position over the years, he remained one of the closest contenders for this title. In 2014, the Pew Research Center reported that Erdoğan received significant support from Sunni Muslims, with 76% holding a favorable view and 58% of Christians. In contrast, only 10% of Lebanese Shia Muslims had a positive opinion of him.⁵

The fame of Erdoğan on this matter has been significantly influenced by the gradual expansion of visa liberalization towards most of the Arab world. Along with visa liberalization, the number of tourists coming to Turkey from the Middle East increased more than threefold between 2006 and 2017. With tourism, regional people's knowledge of Turkey and its cultural interactions also accelerated. Additionally, Turkey's export of television series to the region has increased, emphasizing the image of Turkey as a Western, democratic, Muslim state, which it has used as a tool for self-promotion.

Although the close relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood and the image of Turkey and Erdoğan successfully synthesizing the East and the West may seem contradictory, these two characteristics have positioned

⁵ Pousther Jacob, "Support for Turkey's Erdogan drops sharply in Middle East" Pew Research Center, July 30, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2014/07/30/erdogan-favorability-topline-2/>

Turkey as a role model for Arab countries after the Arab Spring, which the newly elected Islamist government is trying to achieve. In other words, "Reframing secular policy debates within the rhetoric of political Islam is one of the strategies Erdogan has used to strengthen his ideological hegemony."⁶

These effects were also significant for Lebanon. In Lebanon, which had closer relations with Turkey due to its aristocratic ties from the Ottoman period, being connected to Turkey was considered prestigious even before 2002. Marrying a Turk was deemed an acceptable decision, especially for families with bourgeois and aristocratic backgrounds.⁷ On the other hand, among Lebanese Christian groups, Turkey was perceived as an oppressor due to the Great Famine during World War I and the settlement of some Armenians in Beirut who had fled the Armenian Genocide. With the Shamgen project, the accelerating political and economic relations significantly contributed to the perception of Turkey and the cultural interaction between Turkey and Lebanon.

Precisely during the years when the Shamgen project was most actively planned and implemented, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visits to Lebanon in 2010 had several symbolic meanings besides his political motives. When he arrived at Rafic Hariri Airport in November 2010, he met with the key politicians in the country. During these meetings, people were in the street to welcome and greet the Erdoğan. Moreover, he participated in a rally in Kuashra, Northern Lebanon, with 20,000 people, together with Lebanese Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri. In Tripoli, a predominantly Sunni city with strong historical ties to the Ottoman Empire, Erdoğan was greeted by large crowds, where he emphasized the shared religious and cultural bonds between the two countries.

While delivering his speech, Erdoğan repeatedly mentioned shared memories and feelings between the people of Turkey and Lebanon. He

⁶ Rikar Hussein, "How Turkey's Erdogan Portrayed Syria Offensive as a Pan-Islam Struggle," Voice of America, November 13, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch-how-turkeys-erdogan-portrayed-syria-offensive-pan-islam-struggle/6179309.html>.

⁷ "Türk Gelin Lübnanlının En Büyük Prestijidir."

noted, "Throughout history, we have experienced pain, sorrow, joy, and enthusiasm together, and we have always shared them. History has made the people of this region, this geography, brothers. No one will ever have the power to disrupt this brotherhood or sow discord among us." In his narrative, a regional community with similar problems and shared feelings has significant importance. Additionally, he condemned the Israeli occupation in 2007 and the Mavi Marmara incident as a part of creating a regional complex. He drew a similarity between pains caused by Israeli aggression, "The bombs that mercilessly rained down on Lebanon, the inhumane attacks on Lebanon's children, also pained our hearts. Just as we felt Lebanon's pain in our hearts, I am sure that Lebanon also felt the sorrow of the nine Turks martyred on the Mavi Marmara in its heart."⁸

It is interesting that Erdoğan constructs his regional complex through the Mavi Marmara Incident and the threat of Israel for regional peace when we compare the engagement strategy of Erdoğan and the AKP deployed with other Middle Eastern countries. During his speech, Erdoğan did not actively use the history-crafting methods employed by the AKP government.

The AKP frequently references history in both domestic and foreign policy, repositioning the history and historical realities according to their political maneuver and ideological stances. This sometimes manifests in domestic politics as Erdoğan attempts to reconstruct the established Kemalist historical narrative in order to eliminate the "cultural hegemony" of Kemalists. He diminishes the date Mustafa Kemal set foot in Samsun, which is accepted as the beginning of the War of Independence in the established Kemalist narrative, and says, "I reject the understanding of history that almost starts the thousands of years of our nation's history from 1919."⁹ Moreover, it also manifests itself while engaging with societies

⁸ "Erdoğan, Lübnan'dan Seslendi: 'Katilden Hesap Soracağız,'" accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c36-TURKIYE/n42389-erdogan-lubnandan-seslendi-katilden-hesap-soracagiz>.

⁹ "T.C.CUMHURBAŞKANLIĞI : 'Milletimizin Binlerce Yıllık Tarihini, Neredeyse 1919 Yılından Başlatan Tarih Anlayışını Reddediyorum,'" accessed November 18, 2024,

abroad. Especially through the utilization of the Gallipoli War and later Kut-ul Amare War, Erdoğan attempted to create a unified identity. While delivering a speech to commemorate the Gallipoli Wars in 2022, he claimed, “When we look at the tombstones right beside us, we see this truth very clearly. Here, there are not only the graves of heroes from every province, every district, and almost every village of Turkey but also the graves of martyrs who came from all corners of our spiritual geography and fell here. For 107 years, the children of Sarajevo, Skopje, Komotini, Baku, Batumi, Aleppo, Gaza, and Jerusalem have been lying side by side with the children of Istanbul, Ankara, Çorum, Yozgat, Antep, Mardin, and Edirne on these sacred lands. Therefore, Çanakkale not only expresses our eternal and perpetual brotherhood as a nation but also symbolizes and reflects the brotherhood and shared destiny of this entire region, even the Islamic world.”¹⁰ Besides the creation of regional identity, these wars also utilized in drawing the borders of the region. While claiming, “During the Gallipoli Wars, the city of Idlib was a part of the Ottoman Empire,”¹¹ Erdoğan directly justifies Turkey’s involvement in the Syrian Civil War. He also mentioned, “There were martyries that had been born in Idlib in Gallipoli.”¹²

Similar to the utilization and recrafting of the Gallipoli War, the invention of the image of the First Kut War, the Kut-ul Amare War, has been located centrally in the AKP’s positioning. The First Kut War was not remembered or commemorated until 2016. The First Kut War, which occurred between December 1915 and April 1916 during World War I, was a significant victory for the Ottoman Empire against British forces in

<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/43802/milletimizin-binlerce-yillik-tarihini-nere-deyse-1919-yilindan-baslatan-tarih-anlayisini-reddediyorum.html>.

¹⁰ “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Çanakkale, İslam dünyasının kardeşliğini ve kader ortaklığını da yansıtır,” accessed November 18, 2024, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-canakkale-islam-dunyasinin-kardesligini-ve-kader-ortakligini-da-yansitir/>.

¹¹ “Erdoğan: Atatürk, Çanakkale’yi savunurken İdlib vatan toprağıydı; Kılıçdaroğlu bilmiyor - Diken,” March 4, 2020, <https://www.diken.com.tr/erdogan-kilicdaroglu-canakkale-kadar-idlibin-de-vatan-topragi-oldugunu-bilmiyor/>.

¹² “Erdoğan.”

modern-day Iraq. Although the fate of the front changed with the British victory, eventually, it became a symbol of resistance for Turkish authorities. Similar to the Gallipoli War, the utilization of it challenges the established Kemalist historiography, which generally stressed fronts that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk actively participated and considered the rise of Arab nationalism in the Ottoman lands during the First World War as a betrayal of the Empire.¹³ “An exaggerated highlighting of the FBoK in the general history of the war helps to define Muslim solidarity under the Ottoman/Turkish flag as a general Arab tendency. It thus serves to glorify the Pax Ottomana and to marginalize the rise of Arab nationalism as a Christian–Western plot.”¹⁴ This narration resonates with Erdoğan’s speech about the arbitrariness of the borders of Lebanon and the Middle East in general; “...The Turkmens, in the same way, have been divided into three separate states. Even the Druze people, who were very few in number in Lebanon at the time, were also divided into three separate states.”¹⁵ Moreover, the reinvented histories of the First Kut War create similarities between “the victory of the Turks and the success of Islam. This serves to strengthen the nationalist imaginary with an imperial historical background and with an imperial neo-Ottomanist/pan-Islamist agenda.”¹⁶

¹³ “Ottomans’ World War I Victory at Kut al-Amara, Iraq,” accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/ottomans-world-war-i-victory-at-kut-al-amara-iraq/2575793>.

¹⁴ Burak Onaran, “New Histories for a New Turkey: The First Battle of Kut (1916) and the Reshaping of the Ottoman Past,” in *The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Turkey*, ed. Pierre Hecker, Ivo Furman, and Kaya Akyıldız (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 207–24, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474490313-016>.

¹⁵ “CUMHURBAŞKANIMIZ SAYIN RECEP TAYYİP ERDOĞAN’IN MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ’NİN 2014-2015 AKADEMİK YILI AÇILIŞINDA GERÇEKLEŞTİRMİŞ OLDUKLARI KONUŞMALARI,” accessed November 19, 2024, <http://www.sirnak.gov.tr/cumhurbaskanimiz-sayin-recep-tayyip-erdogan-in-marmara-niversitesi-nin-2014-2015-akademik-yili-a-ilisinda-ger-eklestirmis-olduklari-konusmalari>.

¹⁶ Burak Onaran, “New Histories for a New Turkey: The First Battle of Kut (1916) and the Reshaping of the Ottoman Past,” in *The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Turkey*, ed. Pierre Hecker, Ivo Furman, and Kaya Akyıldız (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 207–24, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474490313-016>.

However, when Erdoğan was delivering his speech in Lebanon or any other speeches he was talking about Lebanon or Lebanese-Turkish cooperation, he did not mention any of these historical claims or inventions. Rather, he was insisting on the threat of Israel and posing it as a regional complex; in other words, as a common enemy that we should unite against. He mentioned how Western influence disturbed the Pax-Ottomana and attributed the threat of Israel as one of the results and extensions of this Western influence. Lebanese peculiarity in terms of its sectarian composition influenced his choice. In the imagination of the Ottoman past, Lebanon is another contested area. Historically, Maronites, Druzes, and other Christian groups often link the Ottoman era with oppression and mismanagement, as shown by the 1860 Mount Lebanon Civil War, which demonstrated the Empire's failure to settle sectarian conflicts successfully.¹⁷ Furthermore, the rule of Cemal Pasha and the catastrophic starvation during World War I, intensified by Ottoman requisition tactics, deepened adverse sentiments within numerous Lebanese populations.¹⁸ French colonial narratives perpetuated these attitudes, depicting the Ottomans as alien oppressors who suppressed local sovereignty and Arab identity.¹⁹ Turkey's increasing influence in Lebanon, particularly through the restoration of Ottoman-era monuments, has reignited discussions over the legacy of the Ottoman period, eliciting reactions that vary from nostalgia to skepticism. These conflicting narratives demonstrate the enduring influence of the Ottoman legacy on Lebanon's socio-political structure and cultural memory. The Ottoman era had different meanings for each sect. It is worth mentioning that the AKP government's initial strategy was to develop all sectarian groups in

¹⁷ Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Ussama Samir Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, History and Society of the Modern Middle East Series (New York Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Lebanon as possible while keeping Lebanese Sunnis closer than other ones. Therefore, Erdoğan delivered his speech sided with Sa'ad Hariri and preferred to craft the regional identity and complex by challenging Israel. Hence, Erdoğan also seeks approval of Hezbollah in the region by praising the Resistance that Hezbollah has been coordinating against Israel, indirectly. In order to develop a better understanding of Erdoğan's speech and how and why Erdoğan developed such a narrative, each sect's imagination of Turkey and Erdoğan should be analyzed.

Erdoğan and AKP's positioning in Lebanon was perceived differently by different sects, even different groups among sects. For many Sunnis, Turkey's engagement with Lebanon is a kind of leadership of Sunni communities against those who view Turkey as a counterbalance to the influence of Shia Iran, mainly through Hezbollah, although Turkey did not enter into direct confrontation against Hezbollah. Moreover, it is another balancing mechanism against the overlords, such as Syria, Saudi Arabia, or other Gulf countries. For Lebanese Armenians's Party Tashnaq and lots of Christian groups, Turkey, under the Islamist-Autocracy, is not so different from the other Sunni overlords, such as the Gulf of Egypt. For Hezbollah, Turkey's position in the Lebanese political scene is more complicated. Although Erdoğan's narrative of the regional complex included Hezbollah as the main militant opposition against Israel in Lebanon, AKP hesitated to be affiliated with Hezbollah. The lack of direct contact between these two organizations transformed into hostility with the Syrian Civil War, which led both of them to support opposing camps.

The main contestation between opposition groups and supporters for Turkish influence over Lebanon has been the April 24 commemorations of the Armenian genocide. Lebanese Armenians strictly opposed Turkish attributions; they protested Turkey's participation in UNIFIL forces in Lebanon,²⁰ during Erdoğan visits in both 2007 and 2010²¹ and each

²⁰ Asbarez Staff, "25,000 Protest Turkish Troops in Lebanon," *Asbarez.Com* (blog), October 14, 2006, <https://www.asbarez.com/25000-protest-turkish-troops-in-lebanon/>.

²¹ "Hundreds of Lebanese Armenians Protest Turkish Premier's Visit, Clash with Army Troops," *Daily Sabah*, November 26, 2010,

Armenian Genocide commemorations day.²² In Armenian rhetoric, especially after Karabakh war, Turkey, as a member of NATO, engaged with the region, particularly with Lebanon, as an apparatus of the USA's plans that attempted to dissolve Hezbollah in the region, which coincided with Turkey's aim to hinder Armenian presence in Lebanon.²³

§ 3.2 The Institutionalization of the Cultural Field: TİKA Beirut Office

Turkey, through one of the most significant state agencies in terms of its cultural investment in the Middle East, which will be mentioned in detail later, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), has undertaken several significant restoration projects in Lebanon. As Altunışık and Martin have pointed out, cultural diplomacy in the Middle East often operates on symbolic levels, where historical restoration projects are used as instruments of political influence.²⁴

TİKA's institutionalization also indicates several things in terms of AKP's regionalization strategy in the Shamgen region. TİKA's first office in the region opened in 2006 in Damascus, and this office was also responsible for the activities in Lebanon and Jordan. After violent crashes worsened in Syria, TİKA Beirut and TİKA Amman offices were established in 2012 and 2014, respectively, and TİKA Damascus office relocated

https://www.dailysabah.com/world/2010/11/26/hundreds_of_lebanese_armenians_protest_turkish_premiers_visit_clash_with_army_troops.

²² I. C. C. Editor, "Lebanese Armenians Singled Out in Protests," *International Christian Concern* (blog), June 15, 2020, <https://www.persecution.org/2020/06/15/lebanese-armenians-singled-protests/>.

²³ Edmond Y. Azadian, "Turkey's Ottomanist Ambitions Target Armenians in Lebanon," *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator* (blog), June 18, 2020, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2020/06/18/turkeys-ottomanist-ambitions-target-armenians-in-lebanon/>.

²⁴ Meliha Benli Altunışık and Lenore G. Martin, "Turkey and the Middle East and North Africa under the AKP: A Three Level Analysis of Foreign Policy Change," *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 20, no. 78 (June 25, 2023): 79–96, <https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.1285200>.

in the Beirut.²⁵ It also resonates with how Lebanese-Turkish relations have been embedded in their relations with Syria during the Shamgen project. Additionally, the increasing activities of TİKA and the institutionalization of humanitarian activity in the region indicate the importance of Lebanon both for the country itself and humanitarian activities in Syria; after 2012, the Beirut office has been responsible for the activities in Syria, as well. Although, TİKA established its office in Beirut, Beirut and Beirutis cannot be claimed as their central focus and target group. After this institutionalization of TİKA, the investment and effort regarding Lebanon increased. The nature and attributions of these investments transformed. Before the Syrian Civil War, business ties and relations had a central position, while after the civil war, the cultural meanings of these investments became much more important and visible. Restoration projects, training activities, and festivals have become more widespread around the region, especially among the Sunni population in Lebanon.

3.2.1 *Restoration Projects*

There are several notable examples of these restoration projects that serve as heritage preservation and a symbolic event that aim to reinforce and embody AKP's narrative of historical proximity and bringer of order in the region. Moreover, the selection of the heritage that is going to be restored is also an essential parameter. Historical artifacts' location, backgrounds, and their correspondence for the AKP's historical narrative, which has been narrating both internal and external audiences, indicates how those renovation and restoration projects deployed in enhancing the regionness. By doing so, AKP attempts to create both a regional complex, regional society, and regional community.

The first of these restoration projects is "the Mina Hamidiye Mosque" in Tripoli, which is one of the significant cities for Lebanese Sunnis. The

²⁵ "Ürdün - Amman Program Koordinasyon Ofisi," *TİKA* (blog), accessed December 8, 2024, <https://tika.gov.tr/office/urdun-amman-program-koordinasyon-ofisi/>; "Lübnan - Beyrut Program Koordinasyon Ofisi," *TİKA* (blog), accessed December 8, 2024, <https://tika.gov.tr/office/lubnan-beyrut-program-koordinasyon-ofisi/>.

mosque was restored by TİKA in 2021 in cooperation with the General Directorate of Islamic Endowments of Lebanon.²⁶ The mosque was built in 1902 by people in order to celebrate the 25th year of Sultan Abdulhamid II's accession to the throne. There were several similar mosques in different parts of the world, which were also restored by TİKA. However, due to the lack of attention, the mosque's structure had altered in the 1960s—the reconstruction and restoration of the mosque held by the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ). As Hettne and Söderbaum have argued,²⁷ regionalism in the contemporary world is not only political but also cultural, where symbols of shared history play a pivotal role in creating a sense of collective identity. By reviving these Ottoman-era symbols that were built to celebrate Sultan Abdulhamid's accession to the throne, Turkey seeks to project itself as the successor of the Abdulhamid reign.

The second restoration project, which is also directly related to Abdulhamid II, is the restoration of the clock tower in Tripoli.²⁸ Similar to the Hamidiye Mosque, the clock tower was also restored by TİKA in 2015 in cooperation with the Tripoli Municipality. The third restoration project related to the 25th celebration of the accession of Abdulhamid II to the throne was the Beirut Water Fountain.²⁹ Similar to the mosque and clock-tower, TİKA was a primary organization in the restoration project of the fountain. Unlike the others, the fountain is not located in Tripoli. The fourth restoration project held by TİKA was Baturij Hamidiye Mosque.³⁰

²⁶ Yeni Şafak, "TİKA Restores Ottoman-Era Mosque in Lebanon's Tripoli | Middle East," Text, Yeni Şafak (Yeni Şafak), accessed October 29, 2024, <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/world/tika-restores-ottoman-era-mosque-in-lebanons-tripoli-3661236>.

²⁷ Hettne and Söderbaum, "Theorising the Rise of Regionness."

²⁸ "Trablusşam Hamidiye Saat Kulesi Eski Güzelliğine Kavuşuyor," *TİKA* (blog), November 21, 2015, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-trablussam_hamidiye_saat_kulesi_eski_guzelligine_kavusuyor/.

²⁹ "Kültür Envanteri - Hamidiye Sebili, Beyrut," December 5, 2021, <https://kulturenvanteri.com/tr/yer/hamidiye-sebili-beyrut/>.

³⁰ Yeni Şafak, "TİKA Restores Ottoman-Era Mosque in Lebanon's Tripoli | Middle East."

The importance of projecting AKP's presence as not just the Ottoman Empire's successor but, more specifically, Abdulhamid II's successor is significant for the creation of a regional complex. By doing that, AKP is attempting to achieve its domestic and international goals. Abdulhamid II's reign (1876-1909) has been portrayed as a period of both internal consolidation and external diplomatic maneuvering, themes that resonate deeply with the AKP's own governance strategies. Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdulhamid II has been reimagined as a symbol of solid leadership, Islamic identity, and a successful balance between modernization and tradition, which is also a part of AKP's self-imagination that has been attempting to promote in the region. In other words, the revival of the image of Abdulhamid II is tied with three aspects of AKP's foreign policy in the area, namely, Islamism, harmony between tradition and modernism, and protection of order.³¹

The context of the choice of restoration projects and the city they concentrated on indicated several things. Firstly, how being a candidate of the Sunni Leadership in Lebanon and Neo-Ottomanism's non-sectarian policy maneuvers are complementary aspects of AKP's imperialist vision. Secondly, how Lebanese Sunnis have been crucial for the AKP's vision, especially after the eruption of the Syrian Civil War. Lastly, how regionalization projects did not affect the whole region equally and homogeneously while engaging the region; on the one hand, Erdoğan hesitated to deploy sectarian language; on the other hand, through more instrumentalized cultural engagement, AKP attempted to reinstitute the imagery of a curated memory of the Ottoman Empire, as the leader of Sunni Islam.

3.2.2 *Cultural Festivals and Exchanges: Building Soft Power*

In addition to restoring historical buildings, AKP has invested in fostering cultural exchanges and aid programs through festive and educational projects. For example, the Turkish Film Festival in Beirut, organized by

³¹ "The Revival of Ottomanism in Shaping Turkey's Influence in the Muslim World," accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2017/09/26/the-revival-of-ottomanism-in-shaping-turkeys-influence-in-the-muslim-world/>.

the Turkish Embassy in Beirut, has become an important yearly event that showcases Turkish culture through cinema. Moreover, by establishing the Beirut Yunus Emre Institute (YEE) in 2009, Turkey organized Turkish courses and cultural events to promote Turkish culture in the region. These Turkish courses became popular in the Turkmen villages in the Akkar region, and the institute developed several projects with some public and educational bodies, including the Lebanese Army, Lebanese Police Forces, some universities, and Al-Iman school, which is an Islamic Private school conglomerate that has branches in both Beirut and Tripoli.³² Moreover, the institute created and co-coordinated a Turkish Language and Literature Program at the Lebanese University, the only state-funded university in the country, starting in 2017.³³ Such efforts promote Turkish cultural production and create opportunities for dialogue between Turkish and Lebanese audiences, fostering mutual understanding. The Turkish University scholarships make these links and cultural promotion efforts more meaningful. For most Turkish course attendees, learning Turkish is a way to escape Lebanon and settle in Turkey. Although Middle Eastern students are not new to Turkish Academia, because of the experience of Middle Eastern Technical University, with the more structured program called “Türkiye Bursları” Turkey Scholarship, it became a vital element of the AKP’s foreign policy. This program allows Lebanese students to study in Turkish universities, creating a pipeline of future networks with personal and educational ties to Turkey. According to Tugal,³⁴ educational exchanges are a strategic investment in the future, as they create a cohort of foreign nationals who are likely to view Turkey favorably and maintain professional and personal relationships with the

³² “Lübnan’daki YEE’nin Türkçe Kurslarına Yoğun İlgi,” accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/lubnandaki-yeenin-turkce-kurslarina-yogun-ilgi/1350681>.

³³ “Lübnan Üniversitesi Türkoloji Bölümü İlk Mezunlarını Verdi,” Türkiye - Merkez, December 24, 2020, <https://www.yee.org.tr/tr/haber/lubnan-universitesi-turkoloji-bolumu-ilk-mezunlarini-verdi>.

³⁴ Cihan Tuğal, *The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought down Islamic Liberalism* (London New York NY: Verso, 2016).

country. In Lebanon, this scholarship program has been active and nearly 500 people have been enjoyed this scholarship to this day.³⁵



³⁵ ““Türkiye Bursları”nın Lübnan’da Tanıtımı Yapıldı,” accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.star.com.tr/dunya/turkiye-burslarinin-lubnanda-tanitimi-yapildi-haber-1845013/>.

Business Ties that Enable and Disable Shamgen Region



The regionalization theory indicates that actors in regionalization processes become diversified as the focus of region-building activities changes from intergovernmental relations to integrated relations between societies, economies, and cultures. It resonates with the new foreign policy of AKP in the 2000s that focuses on its identarian politics and humanitarian, people-centric foreign policy, which ultimately aims to foster trade relations in the region. Regarding cultural and economic ties, the necessity of political will to actualize this project forces states to transform from regulating states to proactive states in international trade.

In this chapter, the answer to the question of how political affiliations and business networks formed, utilized, and integrated during the Shamgen project is going to be raised, and common networks and

political proximities of business class in Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria are going to be analyzed. The relationship nexuses will be discussed through the history of several projects and people who had critical roles in these projects. In terms of critical people, the cluster is not exhausted with directors or owners of the companies, relevant ministers or ambassadors, addition to them, facilitators, beneficiaries, intermediaries, etc. can be regarded as can be described as “secondary” roles. The role of the latter groups in these projects indicates the diversification in not only key actors in foreign policy but also the type and role of actors in international trade. Moreover, in this relationship nexus, Turkish and Lebanese actors are not the only actors. Syrian and Gulf, more often Qatari, Saudi, and Kuwaiti, businesspeople had a decisive role in shaping trade dynamics through networking capacity and financial support. It can be seen the improvement in relations with Gulf finance and the Syrian market was the endpoint for Turkey’s economic ties with Lebanon. Indeed, lots of business people have been attributing Lebanon as a stepping stone to reaching the GAFTA region or, as mentioned, getting verification in the eyes of their Arab partners.¹

§ 4.1 Trade and Construction in The Shamgen Region: As a Way of Approaching Global Market

Turkey approached the Shamgen region, especially Syria and Lebanon, as a gate of the GAFTA region. At the same time, Turkey desired to reconstitute its position of being a bridge between Europe and Near Asia. In addition to these, similar to other regionalism projects, crafting a regional space was an instrument for reaching or collaborating with global trade. There were several reports issued by the World Bank in 2011 about how infrastructure networks have the potential to reach the Levant Area through Turkey.² The renewal of the infrastructure was crucial because countries

¹ Mehmet Habbab Lübnan Türkiye Ticaret İlişkileri.

² “Regional Cross-Border Trade Facilitation and Infrastructure Study for Mashreq Countries,” Final Report (World Bank, April 2011).

in the Levant “trade more with EU countries than they do among themselves.”³ The share of trade between countries in the Levant is about 17% of their total trade.⁴ The report also gave several pain points, which are the inefficiency of the existing trading system, lack of free trade zones, and trade facilitation services. The report also mentioned how the North-South corridor, which can be depicted as Saudi Arabia to Turkey that eventually reaches Europe, is significant for EU trade. This route is also important because of its connection with the Gulf region and Asian markets. In other words, with the political changes in Syria and the possibility of connecting Iraqi petroleum, Egyptian goods via Levant ports become much more possible. Even when the initial projects that initiated by Turkey, the energy sector and infrastructural development came forward.

Before the signing of CNETAC, the official name of the Shamgen Agreement, Turkey had already been a partner in several projects regarding the renewal of existing infrastructure or connecting/making it compatible with the European system.⁵ For example, Turkey had already started to implement road-building projects in Syria. Moreover, there was an internet infrastructure project that was funded by the World Bank, called JADI, which aimed to enhance the internet connection lines between Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.⁶

4.1.1 *The Overview of Turkey-Lebanon Trade*

According to Turkish Statistical Institutes’ data, the trade volume of Turkish-Lebanese trade relations nearly increased by 5 times between 1996-

³ “Over The Horizon: The New Levant,” Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Department (MNSPR) Middle East and North Africa Region (The World Bank, March 2014).

⁴ “Over The Horizon: The New Levant.”

⁵ “The Role of Turkey in the New Middle Eastern Economic Architecture,” accessed December 9, 2024, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-role-of-turkey-in-the-new-middle-eastern-economic-architecture/>.

⁶ Javier Albarracín, “The Role of Turkey in the New Middle Eastern Economic Architecture,” *Economy and Territory | Commercial Relations* (IEMed, 2011).

2013.⁷ It can be seen in Table 1 that there has been a significant increase in trade volume between these two countries. However, the trade between these two countries is still regarded as fragile due to political events and violence. Moreover, the impact of this volume has not been similar for both countries. The share of Lebanese exports in importers to Turkey is much smaller than the share of Turkish exports in importers to Lebanon. The imbalance between exports and imports is getting bigger.

Table 4.1 Turkey-Lebanon Trade Overview (1000 USD)

Years	Export from Tur- key to Leb- anon	Imports from Turkey to Lebanon	Bal- ance	Trade Vol- ume
1996	182.814	27.467	155. 347	210.281
1997	199.642	35.299	164. 343	234.941
1998	155.206	29.021	126. 185	184.227
1999	161.748	11.072	150. 676	172.820
2000	129.266	22.173	107. 093	151.439
2001	183.880	26.023	157. 857	209.903
2002	183.420	41.920	141. 500	225.340
2003	147.282	71.162	76.1 20	218.444

⁷ “T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı - Beyrut Büyükelçiliği - Bilgi Notları”; “Lübnan Ülke Bülteni” (İstanbul: DEİK, March 2014); “Lübnan Ülke Profili” (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ticaret Bakanlığı, May 2019).

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2004	234.400	147.355	87.0 45	381.755
2005	195.910	144.973	50.9 37	340.883
2006	239.663	124.655	115. 008	364.318
2007	240.599	126.685	113. 915	367.285
2008	393.217	116.014	277. 256	509.231
2009	664.914	178.781	486 .133	843.695
2010	686.574	107.897	578. 677	794.471
2011	619.481	228.536	390. 945	848.017
2012	718.536	282.744	435. 792	1.001.280
2013	846.091	176.392	669 .699	1.022.483

Source DEİK (2013).

Metal construction, textiles, and petrochemicals are the primary products that have been traded between these two countries, except electricity. Lebanon's main export items include mineral fuels, machinery, non-knitted apparel, motor vehicles, and cereals. The primary imports consist of iron and steel, organic and inorganic chemicals, raw hides, leather, and furs, as well as wool, horsehair, and their yarns and fabrics. In Turkey's exports to Lebanon, mineral fuels hold the top position, followed by iron and steel, non-knitted apparel, machinery and boilers, plastics and their products, electrical machinery, and devices, as well as cereals and dairy products. Turkey's imports from Lebanon mainly include semiconductor supports, smart cards, phosphoric acid and

polyphosphoric acids, fragmented scrap and waste, and raw hides of lambs that have not been wool stripped.⁸

Turkey became an important contributor to the Horizon 2000 program developed by Lebanon's Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) and issued by the Hariri government in 1992 to revitalize and recover the national economy and rebuild the physical infrastructure that was devastated during the long-lasting civil war; however, Turkey did not make considerable FDI to Lebanon. Rather than that, Turkish business partners made several investments and actualized projects with various financial partners. Among 42 projects listed by the DEİK report issued in 2014, only one of them was financed by Turkey, which was the building of a hospital in Sidon. 24 projects out of 42 get financed by either Gulf states or the Islamic Development Bank. The European Union and World Bank funded the rest of the projects. This phenomenon of the lack of Turkish FDI increased the fragility of Turkish-Lebanese trade, in addition to political problems and violence that occasionally disrupt regional integration. Projects were mostly focused on infrastructure, irrigation, and construction of public buildings.

The banking sector, as another critical sector between Lebanon and Turkey, holds crucial importance throughout the entire era. This is significant not only in terms of the importance and legacy of Lebanon's banking system and the meaning of Lebanese banking in Middle Eastern trade but also due to the efforts of key figures in Lebanon's banking sector to establish banks in Turkey.⁹ For instance, one of Lebanon's major banks, AudiBank, started its operations in Turkey under the name OdeaBank in 2012.¹⁰ Moreover, it is known that many key figures wanted to acquire

⁸ "Lübnan Ülke Bülteni."

⁹ Sadi ÖZDEMİR, "Ben Türkiye'de banka sahibi olmak istiyorum," July 6, 2007, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ben-turkiye-de-banka-sahibi-olmak-istiyorum-6839393>; "Tekstilbank'a göz diken Kassar'ın Türkiye'deki yatırım projeleri - Türkiye'de İş Dünyası," PatronlarDunyasi, accessed December 9, 2024, <https://www.patronlardunyasi.com/tekstilbanka-goz-diken-kassar-in-turkiyedeki-yatirim-projeleri>.

¹⁰ "Kurumsal Yönetim & Hakkımızda," Odeabank, accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.odeabank.com.tr/hakkimizda/kurumsal-yonetim>.

banks in Turkey but were unable to do so due to strict restrictions on bank sales to foreigners in Turkey. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that one of the efforts in the initial phase of the Shamgen agreements was aimed at developing joint banking regulations.

In addition to its significant role in the interaction between the two countries, the banking sector also acts as a gatekeeper sector in the increasing communication between the two countries in the early 2000s. Particularly on the Turkish side, it can be noted that figures with Islamic banking backgrounds played a more prominent role during the initial years of increased interaction. The role of Islamic banking here can be divided into two parts: first, the peculiar situation of the banking sector becoming the pioneer sector in Turkish-Lebanese cooperation. Secondly, the approach to Gulf investments in Lebanon and Syria, with Turkish Islamic banking models being based on Gulf Countries and approaching these investments in a coordinated manner.

§ 4.2 Pre-Syrian Civil War Economic Ties: The Era of Facilitators

Before the Syrian Civil War disrupted the suitable political atmosphere between countries, and the relationship between Turkey and Lebanon transformed into a more humanitarian fashion, agents during the cooperation between countries were DEİK and some facilitators such as Abdullah Tivnikli, Wajih Bizri, and Abd-Al Qadir Al-Sabra. In terms of the agency of DEİK, there were not many projects that were realized, but the active members of the Lebanon-Turkish Council indicated how the investment sphere attempted to achieve this enhanced cooperation.

In the early period of business ties between Turkey and Lebanon, the electricity generation and distribution sector stood out in alignment with World Bank and Islamic Relief projects. It is evident that during this period, the key figures in the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) were predominantly from the energy production and distribution sector. It was observed that not only in the Lebanon Business Council but also in

the Syria Business Council, there was a high concentration of individuals from the energy sector.

Electricity plays a crucial part in regionalization processes by facilitating the development of regional systems and infrastructures, both physically and institutionally. Energy systems inherently exhibit a regional character. Most energy extraction and distribution networks operate at a meso-scale, aka regional scale, positioned between local and global levels as regional designs.¹¹ The United States, Canada, and Mexico possess interlinked pipeline and electrical grid systems regulated by a complex amalgamation of transnational, national, and subnational agencies and entities.¹² In the European Union, regional energy governance includes EU-wide measures designed to enhance energy efficiency and decrease total greenhouse gas emissions. To fully understand the impact of electrical infrastructure on regionalization, it is crucial to take into account the following factors. Firstly, energy infrastructure cultivates connections among stakeholders that are difficult to modify, leading to path dependencies that hinder energy collaboration. For instance, South Africa can utilize hydropower resources through the Southern African Power Pool to complement its coal-centric output, whereas Zambia can enhance its practically exclusive hydropower generation with coal production. Moreover, the physical characteristics of energy resources influence regional government structures. Natural gas, oil, and electricity exhibit substantial disparities in mobility, processing, distribution, and storage necessities, which directly influence the regional management of these resources. Thirdly, electrical networks frequently develop around common resources and river basins, demonstrating regional and international interactions rather than solely national ones. The first development of electricity infrastructures in the early 20th century exhibited an integrated characteristic. Lastly, electricity and energy have historically

¹¹ Hancock, Palestini, and Szulecki, "The Politics of Energy Regionalism."

¹² Christina E. Hoicka and Julie MacArthur, "The Infrastructure for Electricity: A Technical Overview," in *The Oxford Handbook of Energy Politics*, by Christina E. Hoicka and Julie MacArthur, ed. Kathleen J. Hancock and Juliann Emmons Allison (Oxford University Press, 2021), 67–98, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190861360.013.33>.

been regarded as a security issue.¹³ Nonetheless, the purview of individual states is frequently overly limited, while global or continental entities, such as the African Union, may be excessively expansive in their purpose. Regional solutions provide the most efficient governance frameworks for tackling energy security and developmental goals.

In regionalization processes, not only the sectors actively utilized but also the actors contributing actively to the process play a significant role. In the early collaboration, it can be said that the Turkish companies encountered were not considered among the Anatolian Tigers and did not have direct ideological connections with the AKP. The business circles in this context interacted with both their own country's regime and the regimes of regional countries through facilitators who were close to these regimes.

Before the Syrian Civil War, the total number of projects undertaken by Turkish companies in Lebanon reached nine, with a total value of \$347 million, which most of them focusing of the energy or telecommunication infrastructure, besides two projects.¹⁴ First of them was the Turkish Trauma and Rehabilitation Center Kutay Group Construction began the construction donated to Lebanon by TİKA in June 2009.¹⁵ It was inaugurated in November 2010 with the participation of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The firm has been known for its subcontracting projects with Limak Holding.¹⁶ Secondly, Civil Engineer Şükrü Uzun started the construction of the Lebanese University Campus in Northern Lebanon, which was tendered by CDR, in December 2009.¹⁷

In the field of electricity, besides Karpowership Vessels that are going to be mentioned in detail, the project of construction of and

¹³ Corey Johnson and Stacy D. VanDeveer, "Energy Regionalisms in Theory and Practice," *Review of Policy Research* 41, no. 2 (March 2024): 290–309, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12422>.

¹⁴ "Lübnan Ülke Bülteni."

¹⁵ "Lübnan Ülke Profili."

¹⁶ "Kutay İnşaat iflas erteleme istedi," April 30, 2014, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/kutay-insaat-iflas-erteleme-istedi-26315971>.

¹⁷ "Lübnan Ülke Bülteni."

implementation of a hydroelectric power plant over the Bisri Dam, Özaltın Construction Company initiated.¹⁸ Moreover, STFA Energy Telecommunications Industry and Trade Inc. has secured a \$21 million project to develop an energy transmission system (expansion of the overhead high-voltage transmission line between Deir Nbouh and Ksara) on behalf of the Lebanese Ministry of Hydraulic and Electric Resources, tendered by CDR.¹⁹ STFA Marine Construction Industry and Trade Inc. won its second tender in Lebanon in April 2003. The project, costing \$10.3 million, pertains to the discharge of wastewater treatment plant effluents into the sea in Saida. In 2002, ÖZDİL Energy Contracting, Trade and Industry Inc. won a \$5.9 million energy transmission project. Özdil Energy Company completed the project for the construction of energy lines between Bekaa Valley and Syria under the “Six Countries Interconnection.”²⁰

4.2.1 *As a Focal Point of Change: The Role of DEİK in Shamgen Region*

The prominence of the energy sector is clearly evident not only in the construction activities directly related to energy networks but also in the institutions that institutionalized commercial networks in the region prior to the Syrian civil war. In the early 2000s, DEİK, as an institution that developed AKP's commercial relations and increased its influence in foreign policy making, reflected this prominence. The election of DEİK members generally directly reflected the commercial activities or commercial activity opportunities in respective countries. The Lebanon-Turkey Business Council, established in 2002, has carried this characteristic since its inception. Both of the Business Council's presidents before the civil war

¹⁸ “CDR - ProjectDetail,” accessed December 9, 2024, <https://www.cdr.gov.lb/Projects/ProjectDetail.aspx?contractId=20103>.

¹⁹ “LEBANON – STFA Construction Group,” accessed December 9, 2024, https://construction.stfa.com/portfolio_tag/lebanon/.

²⁰ “Lübnan Ülke Bülteni”; wgi.world, “Electrical Connection..a Quantum Leap for the New Al-Sham Project,” *World Geostrategic Insights* (blog), December 10, 2021, <https://www.wgi.world/electrical-connection-a-quantum-leap-for-the-new-al-sham-project/>; “CDR - Projects,” accessed December 9, 2024, <https://www.cdr.gov.lb/Projects.aspx?AgreementId=8246>.

– Rona Yırcalı and Mehmet Habbab – were actively involved in the energy sector.

Apart from these two presidents, Hasan Pekcan, the owner of Karon Engineering, which is closely associated with the AKP government, also served as a member of the Lebanon Business Council during this period. Karon Engineering provided consultancy for electricity transmission, electricity generation through hydroelectric power plants, and the establishment of water channels and pipeline systems.²¹ Notably, their activities in Lebanon often involved collaborations with Homan Engineering, a Lebanese company established in Nigeria. Interestingly, Hasan Pekcan is the husband of Ruhsar Pekcan, who was a member of the Syria Business Council at that time and later became the Minister of Trade.²²

After the Lebanon-Turkey Business Council was established in 2002, Rona Yırcalı and Habbab held the office and ruled the office in rotation. First, Yırcalı is a prominent Turkish businessman known for his extensive contributions to business relations and organizations. He was born in 1944 and, a third-generation member of his family completed his high school education at Robert College. He pursued higher education in Economics and Business Administration at the University of Miami in the United States. Yırcalı Holding operates across various sectors, including energy (specializing in transformers, hydroelectric, and wind power plants), textile and synthetic weaving, feed, food, tourism, and finance. He was also the chairman of The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) at that time. Moreover, he was also the chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce Turkey (ICC Turkey). ICC Network is an international network of chambers of commerce. These networks are also prevalent in Lebanon as well. These ties between business elites in both countries indicate how global institutional ties become

²¹ “DEİK İş Konseyleri Genel Kurulları 2017-2018 Başkan ve Yönetim Kurulları,” 2017.

²² “DEİK İş Konseyleri Genel Kurulları 2017-2018 Başkan ve Yönetim Kurulları”; “LÜBNAN BAŞBAKANI'NDAN TÜRKİYE-LÜBNAN İŞ KONSEYİNE YATIRIM VE ORTAK PROJELER İÇİN TAM DESTEK,” Milliyet, October 22, 2015, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/istanbul/lubnan-basbakani-ndan-turkiye-lubnan-is-konse yine-yatirim-ve-ortak-projeler-icin-tam-destek-11027083>.

important during these processes. In fact, the organization that is the counter to the Turkey-Lebanon Business Council is ICC Lebanon. This particularly illustrates how international institutional networks play an active role in regionalization processes and how these relationships serve to connect the region to the global. Yırcalı Holding operates in various sectors. National and international investments carried out through BEST Transformer A.Ş. hold a significant place in Yırcalı's interaction with the economic geography surrounding him.²³ The primary focus of Turkey's regional initiatives, as illustrated in the aforementioned project examples, is the electrical distribution networks. Consequently, transformer stations become one of the most essential requirements. The complementarity of these sectoral investments will be mentioned in the following parts.

Mehmet Habbab, who served as the chairman of the Turkey-Lebanon Business Council for a long period following Rona Yırcalı, is another notable figure. Habbab continues to be a member of the business council to this day. His connection to Lebanon is not only economic or business-related but also cultural and ethnic. The Habbab family is of Lebanese origin and settled in Turkey after the Republic had been established. Habbab was born in Beirut and, along with his family, acquired Turkish citizenship after 1967. He is also married to a Lebanese woman. In the early 1980s, Mehmet Habbab entered the oil and gas industry by founding Delta Petroleum Co. He established major facilities in Southern Turkey, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea, quickly expanding to become one of Turkey's leading oil service and trade companies. The company ventured into oil and gas trading in the Mediterranean and the Middle East and has been one of Iraq's main suppliers since 1985 through its over 25-year relationship with Iraq's SOMO. In 2012, the Group entered the mining industry in Turkey and, as of 2022, ranks among the top 5 companies in the country for chrome mining.²⁴ He is also the anchorman of Carlye Group

²³ "Hakkımızda | BEST Transformer," accessed December 9, 2024, <https://www.besttransformer.com/kurumsal/hakkimizda>.

²⁴ "Delta Group," accessed December 9, 2024, <https://www.deltastar.com.tr/yonetimkurulu>.

in Turkey, which is a multinational American corporation involved in private equity, alternative asset management, and financial services.²⁵ His background indicates that the figure of Habbab is a critical element for establishing regionalization. Both his significant position in the global economy and his close relationships with global economic circles, as well as his regional cultural proximity, make him a highly influential player in this context. His relations with AKP elites do not originate from ideological proximity.

In terms of cooperation possibility between these two societies, he claimed, "According to Arabs, a European is considered a degenerate, while Turks are seen as modern, making this distinction very significant. Turkey's path to the Arab world should definitely go through Beirut. This is because the greatest dream of an Arab is to own a house in Lebanon; for them, Beirut is like Paris. There is no language barrier, they can shop as they please, and there are women and alcohol everywhere. A Lebanese partner is highly reliable; they will not leave you stranded or betray you."²⁶

Habbab's role within the business council has been more long-lasting and diverse than Yırcalı's. This can be attributed to Habbab's connections in the region being both economic and cultural. As the owner of another energy-producing company, Habbab has been a significant figure in regional trade networks as well as global economic networks. His cultural affinity and family ties have also contributed to his ability to maintain his position for a longer period. These aspects not only make Habbab a part of these networks but also enable him to play a facilitator role. Two characteristics of the DEİK administration during this period are noteworthy. Both individuals are part of international business organizations and networks. This trait aids them in bridging their regional networks with global ones and vice versa. The second characteristic is that both leaders simultaneously hold membership or leadership positions in multiple

²⁵ "Ey Köylü!.. Sen Kime Kafa Tutuyorsun? - Bahadır Özgür," *Yeşil Direniş* (blog), June 9, 2020, <https://www.yesildirenis.com/en/2020/06/09/ey-koylu-sen-kime-kafa-tutuyorsun-bahadir-ozgur/>.

²⁶ "Türk Gelin Lübnanlının En Büyük Prestijidir."

Middle East-related business councils. This facilitates their navigation through networks between the Middle East and Lebanon. Furthermore, it highlights Lebanon's relational significance in Turkey's regional aspirations.

The facilitator role is crucial in establishing communication between regimes during the initial phase of Lebanon-Turkey relations. In this context, facilitators are individuals who directly interact with the regimes in the respective countries and connect the commercial networks between them. Not all of these individuals are part of a specific business organization; however, they hold key roles due to their professional backgrounds and political connections. The roles and backgrounds of two prominent figures in this regard—Abdullah Tivnikli, and Abdülkadir Sabra—will be discussed in more detail.

4.2.1.1 The Rise of Abdullah Tivnikli as Critical Case – Handy Abdullah Bey

During the flourishing era of Erdoğan's hegemony in the early 21st century, the Tivnikli brothers, Fahreddin Tivnikli and Abdullah Tivnikli, were positioned in influential and central positions. In order to focus on the rise of those brothers both politically and economically, especially the rise of Abdullah Tivnikli, who had been one of the prominent figures in the Turkish-MENA region during the AKP's rule in the early 21st century, the background of the Tivnikli family is going to be discussed in detail. With a deeper look at his life's details, we are going to see how the networks between Turkey and Lebanon were established via a series of different sources, including political and economic ones, and how those networks are inherently linked with the political atmosphere of Turkey and regional dynamics.

Abdullah Tivnikli has been an important persona in the network between Turkey and Lebanon. He has a strong connection with both the Levantine and Khaliji Arab Worlds due to his Islamic banking background. His and his family's proximity to AKP government elites and especially Erdoğan himself through Milli-Görüş circles and non-economic ties

strengthen his role as a nearly heliocentric figure in the MENA-Turkey business relations.²⁷

The Tivnikli family had been one of the important families in Erzurum, which is the family's hometown. When we think about the apologetic attitude of the book,²⁸ Temizcan claimed that the Tivnikli family is not a self-made family in the American sense; they were already elites of their society. They had a power in the Milli Görüş movement, especially Abdullah Tivnikli, who praised their proximity with Korkut Özal and Lütfi Doğan “Our relations with Korkut Özal and Lütfi Doğan were exceptionally good, we were like uncle and nephew... I learned it later that Korkut Özal said someone ‘Abdullah Tivnikli and Cüneyd Zapsu entrusted to me’”²⁹

Abdullah and his brothers were educated at Istanbul Technical University, and they were part of “Yeniden Milli Mücadele Hareketi (Renewed National Struggle Movement),” which was a student movement in the late 1960s and early 1970. The movement’s ideology consists of nationalist and Islamist tones harmoniously, and Tivnikli claims that it is the biggest difference between the Mücadele Birliği Movement and the Ülkü Ocakları.³⁰ Abdullah Tivnikli graduated from the Mechanical Engineering Department and went to Britain to made research on non-interest based banking models in order to establish the Islamic Finance in Turkey.³¹ During the 1980s, with his brother they found the “Exim Dış Ticaret” in 1984. Although the establishment of Exim was significant for the family, Abdullah Tivnikli have also different role in the Turkish economic sphere as one of the founders of Islamic Banking in the country

²⁷ For most of his life, Abdullah Tivnikli was not interested in public declarations, interviews, etc. Due to this fact, our knowledge about his memories is mostly coming from secondary resources. Yusuf Temizcan prepared an apologetic piece in order to defend the family during the 17-25 December Investigations in which the Tivnikli family was also accused of fraud.

²⁸ Yusuf Temizcan, *Abdullah Tivnikli: Muhsin Kivamında Yaşamak* (Aşina Yayınları, 2019).

²⁹ Temizcan, 57.

³⁰ Temizcan, 67.

³¹ “Kurucumuz | Abdullah Tivnikli Vakfı,” October 16, 2023, <https://abdullahtivniklivakfi.org.tr/hakkimizda/kurucumuz/>.

with a specific invitation from Turgut Özal, who is the brother of Korkut Özal and prime minister and president of Turkey. According to his official biography, “Abdullah Tivnikli played a pioneering role in preparing the legal infrastructure for participation banking in Turkey and in establishing Albaraka Türk and Kuveyt Türk. He served as a Board Member of Kuveyt Türk Participation Bank from 1988, as Vice Chairman of the Board in the same bank from 2001, and as a Board Member of Türk Telekom from 2005 onwards.”³²

His economic thought was suitable for the Geist of the era, which was the support of the open-market economy. In his memoirs, he recalled his family’s business environment with “the fear of there are enemies in everywhere” and followed it “This fear ties your hands and arms instantly. It was the story of Turkey in those days. If you believed that there are enemies in four corner of you, you would remained closed off the in-side... with Özal, Turkey opened itself to the world.”³³

After the establishment of “Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi” in 2002, Abdullah Tivnikli’s ties with the Milli Görüş movement and proximity to the Özal’s economic thought led to close relations with AKP and Erdoğan himself. His power and weight in the party is always rumored probably more than the reality. If an example should be given, even in the removal of minefields on the border of Turkish-Syrian border, his name is called an accelerator.³⁴ In those circles he called “Becerikli Abdullah (Handy Abdullah)”³⁵ However those relations indicate how he has intimate relations with the political figures in the AKP governments.

His centrality in both Turkey’s governmental networks and Middle Eastern business networks made him gain a specific attribution as a member of the interlocking directorate. In his article about the interlocking directorate structures in Canada, Ornstein claimed that interlocking

³² “Kurucumuz | Abdullah Tivnikli Vakfı.”

³³ Temizcan, *Abdullah Tivnikli: Muhsin Kıvamında Yaşamak*, 44.

³⁴ Temizcan, 82.

³⁵ “Becerikli Abdullah Bey’ Arapları tarıma çekti,” *Milliyet*, November 15, 2008, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/ekonomi/becerikli-abdullah-bey-araplari-tarima-cekti-1016344>.

directorates, in addition to indicating shared economic interests, serve both corporate and class interests, facilitating communication, control, and political coordination.³⁶ Abdullah Tivnikli was the board member of two critical and politically significant firms in both Lebanon and Turkey namely Karpowership in Lebanon, and TürkTelekom in Turkey.

POWERSHIP VESSELS IN LEBANON

Karpowership Company has been the main electric provider in Lebanon through its two electricity generation vessel units, namely Orhan Bey and Fatmagül Sultan after the city's electricity demand unexpectedly increased due to the Syrian migration.³⁷ The company is owned by Karadeniz Holding in Turkey, and it has several operations in several African countries, such as South Africa, Sierra Leone, and Lebanon, which is familiar with lots of construction and infrastructure companies that maintain their operations in Lebanon. The initial contract between Karadeniz Holding and Électricité du Liban (EDL) was signed in 2012. With two powership vessels, the company was responsible for the production of 404 MW of electricity, which is approximately 25% of the electricity need of Lebanon since 2013.³⁸ When vessels were placed in the Zouk and Jiyeh ports, the Minister of Electricity and Water Gibran Bassil claimed that it is a temporal solution for three years.³⁹ However, in 2018 third vessel placed to alleviate the electricity shortage, Esra Sultan.³⁹ This made the company the biggest private electricity provider in Lebanon.

³⁶ Michael Ornstein, "Interlocking Directorates in Canada: Intercompany or Class Alliance?," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (June 1984): 210, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393174>.

³⁷ "Karadeniz Powership FATMAGÜL SULTAN Arrives to Lebanon," *beiruting.com*, accessed August 24, 2024, https://beiruting.com/LeMag/Karadeniz_Powership_FATMAGÜL_SULTAN_arrives_to_Lebanon_/794.

³⁸ "Second Powership Arrives to Lebanon," *beiruting.com*, accessed August 24, 2024, https://beiruting.com/LeMag/Second_Powership_arrives_to_Lebanon/1411.

³⁹ "Karpowership: Esra Sultan Leaves Lebanon after a Successfully Accomplished Mission," *MTV Lebanon*, accessed August 24, 2024, <http://www.mtv.com.lb/en/news/articles/859100/karpowership-esra-sultan-leaves-lebanon-after-a-successfully-accomplished-mission>.

Electricity, just like other public goods in Lebanon, is operated along sectarian lines, and the “state is the only actor” in regulating and distributing it.⁴⁰ Traditionally, the Ministry of Electricity and Water is controlled by FPM, and EDL is controlled by the Amal Movement which is a Shi’a nationalist movement separated from Hezbollah but allied with them.⁴¹ However, it is not just a mimic of the sectarian politics. According to Nucho, “the channels of service provision are constitutive of a sense of community, while, in turn, a sense of community and belonging reproduces and reiterates the institutional channels and networked connections that created them in the first place.”⁴² In other words, she claimed the sectarian identity and politics that entangled them in navigating through these infrastructures. During the implementation of the infrastructural projects, the notion of sect became one of the concerns of only one part of governmentality.

Besides, its sectarian implications, these power plants indicate the complementary economic actions in the region. In the early stages of the Shamgen process, investments focused on electricity distribution emerge as a form of complementarity.

PRIVATIZATION AT BEST: THE SALE OF TÜRK TELEKOM

On the other hand, Türk Telekom used to be a public company that was the main telecommunication service provider. Several governments have attempted to privatize it. Firstly, the Özal government made efforts to start the process, but the first official attempt was made during the prime ministry of Tansu Çiller, who was the prime minister of Turkey between 1993 and 1996 and 1995. By Çiller, the privatization of the company was regarded as a solution to budget deficit and debt problems. Even Çiller

⁴⁰ Joanne Nucho, *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon: Infrastructures, Public Services, and Power*, Princeton Studies in Culture and Technology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁴¹ Daniel Corstange, *The Price of a Vote in the Middle East: Clientelism and Communal Politics in Lebanon and Yemen*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316227169>.

⁴² Nucho, *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon*, 127.

herself claimed, "In 1994, Turkey's domestic debt was 14-16 billion dollars. At that time, Telekom's value was 40 billion dollars. If we sold 50 percent of it, we would not have a debt problem."⁴³ It indicated the governmentality of the era; the governance of infrastructures was seen as part of the balance of payments. However, the social democrats politically contested the sale of the company, and the Constitutional Court canceled the privatization in 1996. Although succeeding governments also considered the privatization of Türk Telekom in different ways, privatization was not possible due to the change in the telecommunication market and the allure of the Eastern European Market to investors.⁴⁴ In 2005, Türk Telekom relisted in the privatization campaign of the government and with the efforts of Kemal Unakıtan, who was the Minister of Finance, and Abdullah Tivnikli, who persuaded the Hariri family to join to bid, the privatization actualized for six billion dollars. 55% of the company was sold to Oger Telecom. The privatization was part of the government's strategy to align global telecommunications standards and attract capital and expertise. It was also aimed to reduce the government's fiscal burden, as Türk Telekom had required public investment to upgrade its infrastructure. Besides Oger Telecom, Etisalat Telecommunication, which is a United Arab Emirates-based telecommunication firm, and a Turkish partnership whose name was TurkTell, a subsidiary of Koç Group, and Turkcell, Turkey's largest GSM operator, also joined the public procurement process, but they were rewarded.

§ 4.3 Post-Syrian Civil War Economic Ties: The New Economic Realities, The New Economic Geography

The commercial ties between Lebanon and Turkey are clearly influenced by the trade relations between Turkey and Syria. When looking at the

⁴³ bigpara@hurriyet.com.tr, "9 hükümet eskiten imza | Genel Haberler | Bigpara," bigpara.hurriyet.com.tr, November 15, 2005, https://bigpara.hurriyet.com.tr/haberler/genel-haberler/9-hukumet-eskiten-imza_ID541553/.

⁴⁴ Mehmet Tunçer, "Özelleştirme Sonrası Türk Telekom," *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi*, no. 62 (January 2011): 218.

projects developed between the business sectors of these countries and the key figures in trade, it is evident that Syria's geographical location, its political influence over Lebanon, and the interest of Gulf capital following its economic liberalization make it possible to see the reflection of any political event in Syria within the context of Lebanon. In other words, every political development between Turkey and Syria has a projection on the Turkey-Lebanon side as well. Therefore, the Syrian Civil War, which started in 2011 and Hezbollah's physical involvement in 2013, altered the economic geography of the region and hindered the new regionalist initiatives that began to form in the early 2000s. This change in economic geography led to shifts in the positions of regional actors and sectoral changes within institutional structures and resulted in the alteration of institutions that regulate relations between the two active countries. Before the shifts in economic networks following the civil war, it is possible to discuss the intermediary groups whose positions became highly fragile with the onset of the war. Because the state dependency, in other words, the proximity with the regime, is also critical in Syrian business-state relations, business elites like Abd Al-Qadir Al-Sabra have to maintain their operations in a slippery zone, and they may face forceful discard from these networks.

4.3.1 Syrian Businesspeople During the Disruption of Regionalization

Al-Sabra is a Syrian businessman with Lebanese and Syrian citizenship. He started serving as the Honorary Consul of Syria in 2012. He has also been a member and president of the Turkey-Syria Business Council. He has close ties with the As'ad Regime, especially with Rami Makhlouf, who is the cousin of Bashar Al-As'ad. Al-Sabra and Makhlouf have prolonged partnerships in the shipping sector under several company names, such as ShamHoldingCo, Riyamar, and Abd Al-Qadir Al-Sabra Shipping (AXA). Their activities were mostly focusing on Latakia, Jebel Ali, and Basra Ports. His business activities were sanctioned by the EU in 2020 due to his "financial and economic support to the Syrian regime, including through offshore companies...He is also involved in money laundering

and commercial activities in support of the Syrian regime and its associates.”

The Syrian Civil War's most significant impact on the region's economic geography was the sidelining of numerous energy infrastructure projects. Many projects initially aimed at renewing electricity distribution and internet lines across the entire Shamgen region were left incomplete. However, it is observed that some cooperations continued. For example, the power plant vessels deployed by Karadeniz Holding were placed after the civil war erupted. Along with this process, various changes were also observed in the management and members of the Turkey-Lebanon Business Council, one of the most influential institutions of the pre-civil war period. The primary change was sectoral-based. From its establishment in 2002 until 2020, individuals active in the energy sector were elected. In 2020, Abdülkadir Akkuş, whose background differs significantly from that of Habbab and Yırcalı, was elected as the business council president for the first time and continues in this role. Akkuş's industrial focus is on textile and construction.

The real estate sector, flourishing through property sales to foreign clients, has emerged as a pivotal industry in regionalization processes, after the Syrian Civil War. This sector is linked to regionalization in both cultural and economic dimensions. Moreover, the sector is mostly preferred by purchasers from Gulf nations, and Turkey's partnership with Lebanese business associates underscores Lebanon's position as a conduit for Turkey's entry into the Arab world. This collaboration, represented under the existing DEİK Administration, exemplifies the strategic use of regional economic connections and cultural affinities to promote wider regional integration. This sector can be considered a significant source of FDI for Turkey within the framework of regionalism while also being directly linked to Turkey's cultural ties with the region. Through citizenship-by-investment real estate sales, Turkey aims to position cities, particularly Istanbul, as regional hubs. This strategy is closely tied to the evolving global real estate market and the concept of post-national citizenship. By leveraging this system, Turkey seeks not only to maintain

its role in the global housing and construction market but also to connect the real estate sector to the global economy within a regional context.

In summary, this sector is of critical importance in strengthening Turkey's position as a regional center. Particularly in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War, it demonstrates how regionalization processes can adapt and persist despite shifting patterns of economic interaction. This resilience underscores the strategic value of real estate in Turkey's broader regional and global integration efforts.

4.3.2. *The New DEİK Administration: Anatolian Tigers in Regionalization*

Abdülkadir Akkuş was born in 1971, Mardin. He did not come from a bourgeois background, unlike the former chairman of the council. On the contrary, he started his professional career as a textile worker in İstanbul, and as a self-made man, he established a textile company. After the establishment of Akkuş Tekstil in 1995, Akkuş expanded into the chemicals, fuel, and real estate sectors, uniting all his companies under the umbrella of Akkuş Group.⁴⁵ With his career prospects, he can be accepted as one of the Anatolian Tigers; indeed, he was a member of the board of the Anatolian Lions Businessmen Association that is an association of Anatolian Tigers' founded in 1998 in order to "produce "justified riches" with the power it received from the accumulation of Anatolian lands and the principle of justice represented by our civilization"⁴⁶

Akkuş Group's direct relationship with Lebanon actually began when Abdülkadir Akkuş met another construction sector professional from Lebanon, Adil Al-Khatip. The two real estate and construction experts founded a joint company, BOSS4, which specifically deals with the sale of residential properties in Turkey that provide citizenship to foreigners.⁴⁷ This change is also directly related to the new economic preferences during the AKP era. The AKP government introduced the Citizenship by

⁴⁵ "Abdülkadir Akkuş," accessed December 8, 2024, <https://boss4.com.tr/team/amy-walker/>.

⁴⁶ "Who Are We? | ASKON |," September 12, 2020, <https://www.askon.org.tr/en/who-are-we/>.

⁴⁷ "BOSS4," BOSS4, accessed December 8, 2024, <https://boss4.com.tr/>.

Investment Program in 2017, which granted Turkish citizenship to foreigners who purchased real estate worth at least \$250,000. (later raised to \$400,000 in 2022)⁴⁸ The new regulations facilitated the influx of foreign direct investment (FDI) into the real estate sector, contributing to economic growth and development. Akkuş also appears as a key figure who has held positions in MÜSİAD's foreign relations structure and was involved in the founding of the Turkish-Arab Businessmen Association.

Moreover, it was not only the chairman of the Turkey-Lebanon Business Council who changed, but the economic activities of the council members also shifted accordingly. During the period when the effects of the civil war were less pronounced, the members of the business council were involved in various fields of energy production. After 2020, however, it can be seen that Akkuş's own network, including his own brother, Khaled Al-Khatip, who is his partner and interior designer of his real estate projects, representatives from the tourism and retail sectors, as well as a representative from the Lebanese Turkmen community in the council.⁴⁹

In addition to the changes in business organization, another major impact of the Syrian Civil War on the region's economic geography was the involvement of Hezbollah and Turkey directly in the war, as well as the war spreading to neighboring countries. This shift brought the region closer to informal ties that progressed through a large war economy.

⁴⁸ "Turkish Citizenship: Real Estate Investment Value Raised to \$400,000," *Ikamet*, May 13, 2022, <https://ikamet.com/blog/turkish-citizenship-real-estate-investment-value-raised-to-400000/>.

⁴⁹ "Türkiye - Lübnan İş Konseyi - DEİK | Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu."

Northern Lebanon And Tripoli As Intersection Of Political And Cultural Ties

In 15/07/2020, a Lebanese news website published an article that consists of a list of Lebanese politicians in the Northern Lebanon district, which has been backed by Turkey. The list includes several variations of Political Sunni Islamist movements, some Turkmen NGOs, and some specific politicians such as Ashraf Rifi and the Karami family, as well as several Sunni Islamic organizations like Al-Azm institution, Al-Ahbash, etc, that have been active Tripolitan political families in the Lebanese political scene.¹ Moreover, there was a report issued by The Kurdish Center for Strategic Studies that claimed that Turkey was preparing an invasion of

¹ "With Names and Instances: How Turkey Intervenes in Lebanon's Conflict - MENA Research Center," July 15, 2020, <https://www.mena-researchcenter.org/with-names-and-instances-how-turkey-intervenes-in-lebanons-conflict/>.

Northern Lebanon, Tripoli, in 2020.² Even the interior minister of Lebanon, Mohammad Fahmi, slightly verified these rumors by utilizing a smuggling accident that happened in Rafiq Hariri Airport and claimed, “We do not know whether these funds are for smuggling and manipulating the dollar prices, or to fuel violent movements in the street. Additionally, some instructions come from Turkey via WhatsApp to some parties in the popular movement.”³ The origin of these statements is not visible, but they have been disseminated by news sources such as Arab Weekly or Hezbollah-leaning Christian politicians like Fahmi. These rumors and statements were not novel in the Lebanese political scene. However, there were no rumors regarding the possible invasion of Lebanon from Turkey. AKP’s rapprochement strategy has been regarded as a protectorate of Sunni groups in Lebanon, especially in Tripolitan Sunnis.

Although the list published by the website and discussion about the Turkish invasion of Tripoli may not be accurate or did not represent reality as a whole, it indicates the special meaning and attribution of the region for Turkey-Lebanon relations. This chapter will focus on Northern Lebanon as a case study and its distinctive features in the regionalization during the era. It also gives a way to analyze how regionalization projects unevenly affect sub-regions in respective countries. In other words, this chapter aims to indicate how the fragmented nature of regionalization leads to the utilization of different tactics of region-making in the area. It also delivered an analysis of the regionalization after the Syrian Civil War in the region to show how violence not only reshuffle the regionalization but also paved a novel way of region-making.

As Keshavarzian and Hanieh noted, regionalism is not mono-directional. It is the intersection of local, sub-regional, and global realities and its effects are bounded by this intersection. This chapter aims to display how the relationship between local and regional is much more complicated. The case of Northern Lebanon, which is a close sub-region of the

² Shores Darwish, “Turkey’s Boundless Aspirations in Syria: Part II (1957-2019),” *The Kurdish Center for Studies* (blog), February 20, 2023, <https://nlka.net/eng/turkeys-boundless-aspirations-in-syria-part-ii-1957-2016/>.

³ “With Names and Instances.”

Shamgen region to the regional and even global power struggle, the Syrian Civil War, indicates several varied continuities and ruptures from the regionalist aspirations. Moreover, it indicates how this fragmented regionalism can transform into different shapes and impetuses.

Due to historical background is crucial both shaping and bounding culture and regionalization and its function, the a focused historical analysis of Northern Lebanon is going to be mentioned. This is going to indicate important attributions of regionalism and Turkish aspirations. Firstly, it will show that how even for the smaller part of region, region-making can deployed different ways of imaginations and tactics. Secondly, Turkey developed highly flexible notion of region.

§ 5.1 The Geography of Tripoli and Northern Lebanon

The city of Tripoli, which is the biggest city in the Directorate of Northern Lebanon and the second biggest city in Lebanon, is characterized by underdevelopment and poverty. Indeed, Tripoli is the least developed city with a shore to the Mediterranean Sea.⁴ Although there is a highly operationalized port in the town, the port and trade activities have been relatively limited due to more advanced ports near the city, namely Beirut and Latakia, until the 2020 Beirut Port Explosion, which destroyed the port of Beirut and resulted in the rising significance of Tripoli port. Northern Lebanon's historical pathway is quite different from Mount Lebanon and the city of Beirut, which resulted in a sense of exclusion among the inhabitants of northern Lebanon. This sense of exclusion, which was exacerbated by the underdeveloped environment of the region, made the region open to political violence and clashes.

As previously mentioned, The division of Bilad Al-Sham by France in World War I created Lebanon and Syria, with areas like Damascus and Homs becoming Beirut-centric Lebanon. Tripoli, a port, developed a unique city identity and corporatism, with Tripolite elites representing it until the Hariri and Mikati families aligned with Syrian nationalism. In

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Gade, *Sunni City*.

the 20th century, Beirut and Sunni Arab elites formed Misaq Al-Watani to regulate power-sharing in Lebanon. Until the 1980s, Tripolite elites like the Karami family were the main actors in the Lebanese Sunni political scene. However, “the habitus (the ingrained and acquired habits, skills, and dispositions) of the Sunni MPs in Lebanon differed from those of the Sunni masses.”⁵ The discrepancy between political elites and the masses lead to the increasing popularity of the Syrian National Party among both Sunni groups and the Alawite minority in Northern Lebanon. Moreover, this political vacuum also provides a suitable area for the rise of political Islam in the region. The grassroots movement of several Islamic groups initiated their operations in the region.

With the rise of Saudi-backed and Syrian-approved middle-class politicians like Rafiq Hariri and Najib Mikati among the Sunni masses, the power of Tripolite elites decreased yet not diminished.⁶ This phenomenon and the Syrian Invasion eventually led to the increasing popularity of political Islam among Sunni groups and Syrian influence over the Alawite community. This division between Sunni groups and Alawite groups creates sectarian tension, which occasionally results in sectarian violence starting from the civil war. This conflict has been named The Bab al-Tabbaneh–Jabal Mohsen conflict. It predominantly involves the Sunni Muslim residents of Bab al-Tabbaneh and the Alawite Muslim residents of Jabal Mohsen. Bab al-Tabbaneh, with its Sunni majority, has generally aligned itself with several Islamist organizations like Tawhid during the 1975 Civil War, then during the Syrian Civil War Jabhat Al-Nusra, ISIS, and Jamaat Al-Islamiyah. In contrast, the Alawite community in Jabal Mohsen has shown support for the Assad regime in Syria and later its allies during the Syrian Civil War, including Hezbollah and Iran. The intermittent violence has resulted in significant casualties, displacement, and destruction of property, highlighting the fragile nature of sectarian coexistence in Tripoli. Efforts to mediate and resolve the conflict have faced numerous challenges, with local, national, and international actors struggling to

⁵ Gade, 89.

⁶ Baumann, *Citizen Hariri*.

address the underlying socio-economic and political grievances that perpetuate the hostilities.

In short, the political landscape of Northern Lebanon has been characterized by underdevelopment and increasing sectarian tension, which has resulted in sectarian violence, which has been directly affected by geopolitical rivalries.

§ 5.2 Turkey's Intimacy with Sunni Islamism and Materiality in Northern Lebanon

The rise of Sunni Islamism in Northern Lebanon was linked with the Palestinian militias in the region and sectarian tension between Alawi and Sunni communities, which was exacerbated by the Syrian invasion. Through the intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, Syria aimed for political achievements such as gaining leverage against the potential Israeli invasion or controlling the Lebanese state in order to alleviate violence, etc. For the Syrian regime, the invasion was also crucial for economic reasons. Although there was an economic growth period in the 1960s and 1970s in Syria, the country suffered from a widening balance of payment gap starting in 1976. Numerous critics, such as Lawson, contend that Syria intervened in Lebanon to procure essential resources from the Lebanese financial system, the port of Beirut, and inexpensive Lebanese manufacturers to avert the intensification of domestic social unrest.⁷ During the Syrian mandate, transnational economic connections established converging interests among the Syrian authorities, Syrian merchants, and Lebanese merchants. The Syrian-Lebanese networks established new standards in Tripoli, prioritizing short-term profit over lasting economic policies focused on employment creation. Consequently, the Syrian-Lebanese networks established a novel "moral community" in North Lebanon, which contended with the traditional Islamic and anti-imperialist

⁷ Fred H. Lawson, "Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, 1976: A Domestic Conflict Explanation," *International Organization* 38, no. 3 (1984): 451–80.

principles of Tripolitanian Sunnism.⁸ Besides the official partnership between Lebanese and Syrian entrepreneurs, there has been ongoing smuggling and trafficking in North Lebanon, which derived from the war economy. The port of Tripoli, under the leadership of the Karami family, was the second largest in Lebanon and utilized for hashish trafficking to Turkey. During the civil war, Akkar served as the conduit for smuggling construction supplies, electrical appliances, and foodstuffs between Syria and Lebanon.

The invasion created a new economic geography in Northern Lebanon, and the new geography paved the way for the rise of Sunni Islamism in the region. Until the 1960s, Alawis and Sunni communities had similar political and social spaces. They shared similar apathy toward the Beirut-centric Lebanese state, and they preferred the Syrian and Egyptian Nasserite influence. Even “in the 1970s, urban poor Sunnis in Tripoli gave strong support to all of the Asad regime’s regional enemies.”⁹ Although it did not turn into a political conflict yet, from the 1960s, Tripolite Sunni masses adhered to leftist groups in the region and were directly affected by Yasser Arafat, while Alawis saw Hafez Al-Assad as a leader. The initial sectarian conflicts started around the Lebanese Civil War. It might be posited that the Syrian regime initially incited the peasant revolts to establish influence in North Lebanon and subsequently maintained these endeavors under Assad as preparations commenced for a more extensive military involvement. Although the revolt itself did not have sectarian characteristics, the social class composition in the region, most of the landlords were Sunni, and peasants were mostly Alawi, led Sunni landlords to seek support from Islamist organizations and Palestinian groups in Nahr Al-Bared and Beddawi. Although Tripolite elites, like Karami, celebrate the Syrian intervention, several Sunni groups opposed the Syrian intervention in order to protect PLO from potential crush. For example, the popular resistance in Bab-al Tebbaneh succeeded in hindering Syrian intervention in the district. The leader of this opposition was a former

⁸ Gade, *Sunni City*.

⁹ Gade, 28.

preacher of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (JI), Said Shaban. The first instance of sectarian armed conflict between Sunni Palestinian supporters in Bab al-Tebbaneh and Alawis in Jabal Mohsen occurred in the spring of 1979.

The opposition in the city of Tripoli was directed by another Islamist movement, Tawhid. They emerged from networks of evacuated PLO organizations. Shaban, who was the leader of the opposition, was also one of the founders of the organization. Fatah's evacuation resulted in the transfer of its weapons to Tawhid, hence enabling Tawhid's subsequent conquest of Tripoli. Tawhid engaged in conflicts with the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and eliminated numerous members of the Communist Party. It announced the establishment of an Islamic Emirate, mandated its own clerics to instruct religion in public and private educational institutions, and instituted a morality police force. Especially after the Syrian civil war in 1976-1982, a lot of Syrian Muslim Brotherhood members fled to Tripoli after the Hama Massacre, and the JI was accused of being the auxiliary of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood by the As'ad regime. Tawhid's conflict with the Syrian regime was different from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's struggle against the same regime. The conflict in Bab al-Tebbaneh against the Syrian army and Ali Eid's Arab Democratic Party represented Yasser Arafat's opposition to the Syrian regime. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the PLO, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq shared a mutual opponent in Syria, which fostered their unification. Besides the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis has also been one of the prominent Sunni Islamist groups in the region. These Salafi groups, which were not direct branches of Salafi schools but rather a local adaptation of it, eventually transformed into Fatah Al-Islam, which was part of the Syrian Civil War in 2013.

In other words, the geography of Sunni Islamism of Northern Lebanon in the early 21st century can be characterized by informal economic networks that exclude Sunni masses while integrating some Sunni elites approved by the Syrian regime and sectarian violence, which has been increasing since the Syrian invasion.

5.2.1 *Turkey and Scrap Metal*

Turkey's approach in Lebanon before the Syrian Civil War was an attempt to protect dialogue with every sect while prioritizing their cooperation with the Future Movement, aka the Hariri family. After the Syrian Civil War spilled over Lebanon through Hezbollah's direct intervention in the war and reaction in the North against Hezbollah, Turkey's position shifted along with its policy toward the Syrian Civil War. Turkey became the pioneer supporter of the Syrian opposition, which has also been supported by the Lebanese Sunni Islamists. This situation presents the following reality: with the Syrian civil war, a Hezbollah supporting As'ad on one side, and on the other, Lebanese and Syrian Sunni groups united by a shared ideological history and opposition to As'ad regime. At the same time, Turkey has positioned itself as the leader of all anti-As'ad factions. Naturally, this made the Sunni Islamist groups in Lebanon and Turkey natural allies. Especially with the involvement of various militants from the Fatah Al-Islam group joining Al-Nusra through Tripoli and Akkar has led to a rise in Sunni-Shia and Alawite conflicts in the region. The Aarsal War in 2014 and the Qalamoun War in 2017 led to intense clashes along the Lebanon-Syria border between Hezbollah, ISIS, and Al-Nusra. In both of the clashes, Hezbollah militants achieved to gain a victory against the Al-Nusra militants. During all these armed clashes, the Lebanese army maintained its neutrality, taking a defensive stance against attacks from ISIS. Turkey also adopted a stance against Sunni extremists in the Syrian civil war.

Amid all these armed clashes, the informal economic networks in northern Lebanon continued to operate. The export of scrap metal to Turkey, particularly through the Port of Tripoli, was substantial and often extended beyond sectarian networks. Turkey has been the world's largest scrap metal importer. "According to Steel Exporters' Association chief Namik Ekinici, the bulk of scrap metals imported by Turkey is steel scrap as the country's steel industry supplies raw materials for the railway,

machine, and automotive industries.”¹⁰ Turkey’s demand of scrap metal increased in order to maintain its sector’s competitiveness regarding the Chinese manufacturing. China increased its metal exports which led to competitor states like Turkey to maintain their price advantages.¹¹ Therefore, Turkey started to increase its scrap metal instead of raw materials imported from all around the world.

The share of Lebanese scrap metal is small, but it is highly crucial for the Lebanese economy, especially for the communities in Northern Lebanon. In 2011, ferrous scraps, as well as ingots of scrap steel and iron, were Lebanon’s highest exports to Turkey. By 2014, scrap iron exports reached \$153 million, and scrap copper exports \$133 million.¹² In 2018, Lebanon exported more than 40% of the total scrap metal to Turkey. This trade can be valued at approximately \$100 million annually for the Lebanese economy.¹³

Although the scrap metal industry in Lebanon did not start with the civil war – in fact, the Lebanese garbage crisis can be cited as the primary factor in revitalizing this sector – the Syrian civil war and the destruction it brought played a critical role in further expanding the industry. Although the trade of scrap metal has not been united in Tripoli, indeed,

¹⁰ “How Turkey Leads Global Scrap Metals Industry |Turkey | SCRAP REGISTER NEWS,” accessed October 28, 2024, <http://www.scrapregister.com/news/4378/how-turkey-leads-global-scrap-metals-industry>.

¹¹ “Chinese Overcapacity Is Crushing the Global Steel Industry,” *The Economist*, accessed December 8, 2024, https://www.economist.com/business/2024/09/17/chinese-over-capacity-is-crushing-the-global-steel-industry?utm_medium=cpc.ad-word.pd&utm_source=google&ppccampaignID=18151738051&ppcadID=&utm_campaign=a.22brand_pmax&utm_content=conversion.direct-response.anonymous&gad_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAADf4AbYt-TqcrmnS1F38AAQ63ijmC2&gclid=CjoKCQjw7Py4BhCbARIsAMMx-_LSD3-itq3oyFU5nujp5O4WfQYBkvCo_9Q6O4DrqjZlpVsXjq3m7eY-aAvC8EALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds.

¹² Elizabeth Saleh, “The Master Cockroach: Scrap Metal and Syrian Labour in Beirut’s Informal Economy,” *Contemporary Levant* 1, no. 2 (July 2, 2016): 93–107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2016.1242231>.

¹³ Jana A. Malaeb, “Turkey Lifts Trade Ban on Lebanon,” *The Diplomatic Insight* (blog), February 8, 2022, <https://thediplomaticinsight.com/turkey-lifts-trade-ban-on-lebanon/>.

there is scrap metal export from Beirut and Sidon; the port of Tripoli is the main center of this trade.¹⁴ Particularly in Tripoli and Akkar, scrap collectors often cross the Hezbollah-controlled border to collect various scrap metals in war-torn cities in Syria.¹⁵ Here, Syrian refugees both provide guidance and precariously sustain the workings of this economy, notes Saleh.¹⁶

As previously noted, while scrap metal imported from Lebanon holds a critical position for Lebanon, its significance is low for Turkey. On the other hand, on February 19, 2014, the Turkish Ministry of Trade issued an internal order (No. 2014/81) introducing an import ban on scrap metals from Syria,¹⁷ and this flow of scrap metal emerged as an alternative war economy method sustaining itself. This flow of scrap metal indirectly reaches Turkey through the Lebanese market. In 2018, Turkey imposed a ban on Lebanon similar to the one applied to Syria. This ban was enacted following a proposal by Lebanon to prohibit the import of various products from Turkey, such as clothing, food, and more.¹⁸ Although this ban was initially postponed at the request of Hariri,¹⁹ who held no official government position at the time, the two measures were ultimately

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- ¹⁴ "تركيا تمنع استيراد الخردة من لبنان خوفاً من الإشعاعات", almodon (المدن), accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.almodon.com/economy/2018/12/8/-لبنان-خوفا-من-الإشعاعات>.
- ¹⁵ "Smuggling of Subsidized Products to Syria via Hezbollah Controlled Border Points Making Lebanon's Own Crisis Much Worse – Ya Libnan," April 6, 2021, <https://yalibnan.com/2021/04/06/smuggling-of-subsidized-products-to-syria-via-hezbollah-controlled-border-points-making-lebanons-own-crisis-much-worse/>.
- ¹⁶ Saleh, "The Master Cockroach."
- ¹⁷ "Global Trade Alert," accessed October 28, 2024, <https://www.globaltradealert.org/intervention/101204/import-ban/turkiye-turkish-government-imposes-a-ban-on-the-import-of-scrap-metals-from-syria>.
- ¹⁸ "Ban of Import of Cloths, Food from Turkey to Support Domestic Industry," WEEPortal, May 29, 2018, <https://www.weeportal-lb.org/news/ban-import-cloths-food-turkey-support-domestic-industry>.
- ¹⁹ "Upon Hariri's Request, Ban on Turkish Imports Postponed," WEEPortal, June 8, 2018, <https://www.weeportal-lb.org/news/upon-hariri%E2%80%99s-request-ban-turkish-imports-postponed>.

banned on 13 November 2018.²⁰ Just before the ban, in 2018, local scrap metal shipping agents reported that five ships carrying 50,000 tonnes of scrap metal were being sent to Turkey monthly.²¹ Sellers noted that this number had increased exponentially, particularly after the Syrian Civil War. They stated that the ban directly impacted the scrap metal market in Lebanon, causing prices to drop from 230 USD to 180 USD within a week.²² Just after this ban, there was a protest in Tripoli by the workers in the port and the metal scavengers. They claimed some precautions from the Lebanese government. The ban was halted in 2022, with a series of meetings held by Amin Salam, who has a more moderate relationship with Turkey.²³

§ 5.3 Turkmen Identity in Akkar: Sect for Ourselves

Northern Lebanon and Tripoli have significant importance in Turkey-Lebanon relations. Moreover, the northern area of northern Lebanon, the Akkar region, has a specific attribution, which is the Turkmen identity in the Akkar. There are several historically unrelated ethnically Turkish-originated groups in Lebanon: Cretean Turks in Tripoli, Mardinites in Beirut, and Turkmens of Akkar and Beqaa Valley. Turkmen society was nearly accidentally found by a Turkish soldier during his NATO mission in 1989.²⁴

Turkmen in Lebanon has been a considerably small and underdeveloped community that did not have a position in the sectarian power-sharing arrangement after the Ta'if Agreement. They have a political

²⁰ "Global Trade Alert."

²¹ "إحسان،" تركيا تمنع استيراد الخردة من لبنان خوفاً من الإشعاعات

²² "Turkish Scrap Metal Import Ban Hurting Local Traders. - Free Online Library," accessed October 28, 2024, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Turkish+scrap+metal+import+ban+hurting+local+traders.-a0563322627>.

²³ "الوكالة الوطنية للإعلام - Salam Officially Announces Turkey's Lifting of Ban on Importing Scrap Metals: Provides Lebanon with Nearly 100 Million Fresh Dollars Annually," accessed October 28, 2024, <https://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/en/economy/520566/salam-officially-announces-turkey-s-lifting-of-ban>.

²⁴ Oytun Orhan, "The Forgotten Turks: Turkmens of Lebanon" (ORSAM, February 2010).

share in neither the local politics of Northern Lebanon nor Lebanon in general. They did not participate in sectarian clashes in Tripoli during both the Lebanese Civil War and the Syrian Civil War. Their population is usually estimated at around 10,000, according to a report issued in 2010.

On the other hand, Turkey's relationship with ethnically Turkish communities around the Middle East has been crucial in Turkish Foreign Policy. Especially the issue of Iraqi Turkmen, which are mostly inhabited in Kerkük, was occasionally raised during the Iraq Wars. These Turkmen communities have been seen as a proxy nation in conflicts by Turkey. However, as Yıldız argues, Turkey has a closer relation with Sunni Turkmen communities than Shiite Turkmen. It implies that there is also a sectarian aspect while analyzing Turkey's relationship with Turkmen communities. When Lebanese Turkmen communities are analyzed, Turkey's relationship is also focused on Sunni Turkmen in Akkar and Tripoli rather than Shiite Turkmen in Hermel and Baalbek. Turkey mostly approaches these communities as a sectarian entrepreneur and through sect-defining activities, which also pave the way for sectarianization processes as well. With deploying a more constructivist vision, Hashemi&Postel claim that "sectarianization occurs as a consequence of the manipulation of social and political dynamics by authoritarian regimes and sectarian entrepreneurs."²⁵ Although Hashemi&Postel focus on how authoritarian regimes are key to sectarianism, similar attributes can be observable in cases where a foreign political agent attempted to integrate itself into existing ties. In other words, colonial intervention and foreign imperialist influence attempts also intensify that process. As Mabon illustrates, geopolitical rivalries also played a significant role in the construction and mobilization of sectarian identities.²⁶ Yadav also claims in her analysis how transnational institutions played a role in the

²⁵ Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, "Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2017.1354462>.

²⁶ Simon Mabon, "Desectarianization: Looking Beyond the Sectarianization of Middle Eastern Politics," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 23–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1681776>.

sectarianization of post-2011 Yemen, it is not inevitable, and how sectarianism “that so many Yemenis sought to avoid—and indeed openly decried during the Arab uprisings—has been produced through war and has shaped lives and livelihoods in ways previously unimaginable.”²⁷

During the assertive AKP foreign policy, Turkey increased its attention toward Turkish-originated groups, specifically Lebanese Turkmen. It instrumentalized its cultural-academic institutions to curate communal history and frame some sectarian antagonisms, which are critical for establishing sectarianized identity. Although these communities made significant efforts to prove their existence and importance, such as counting the size of their population during the possible reform era that the Taif Agreement led to,²⁸ extensive research about them was done through collaboration with Turkish institutions and think tanks like ORSAM. Turkmen's efforts to pursue research are important because they show an attempt at sectarianization or identity-building prior to the Turkish rapprochement. During the Taif agreement period, which was characterized by a discussion of possible reform in the sectarian power-sharing system, they did archival research. They listed the family names in Lebanon to detect the population of the community because making a census is forbidden in Lebanon. After that research, ORSAM enhanced Turkmen's own research for crafting Turkmen history in Lebanon, especially focusing on the Turkmen population in Akkar and Beqaa Valley. There is an important disagreement between the findings of Turkmen and ORSAM data. According to ORSAM, those Turkmen tribes came to Lebanon with the Mamluks, while some Turkmen said that they came to Lebanon with the expedition of Selim I in 1514.²⁹ Both arguments can be utilized to

²⁷ Stacey Philbrick Yadav, “Sectarianization, Islamist Republicanism, and International Misrecognition in Yemen,” in *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, ed. Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁸ “Lebanese Turks Seek Political and Social Recognition | Al Akhbar English,” June 20, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180620232105/https://english.al-akhbar.com/content/lebanese-turks-seek-political-and-social-recognition>.

indicate Turkmen's originality in the land of Lebanon. ORSAM's attempt to underline that the Turkmen community is much more autochthonous in Lebanon than they claimed. This finding can be regarded as a part of the sectarianization motives of this organization. The lack of consensus over the identity of Turkish-originated groups in Lebanon can be one of the reasons behind the failure of efforts to build a self-sufficient and operationalizable Turkish-originated community in Lebanon. For example, some Turkish-originated Lebanese associations refuse to be a part of any of the umbrella terms of "Turk-ness" instead of Turkmen identity and hesitate to build direct cooperation with the Turkish government.

The Embassy of Turkey in Beirut was the most prominent actor until the Syrian Civil War and the relocation of TİKA Damascus Branches to Beirut. With the initiative of the Embassy, six associations across the country established a forum in order to increase coordination among associations. One of the results of this forum was the echoing voice of Turkmen about getting constitutional sectarian rights in Lebanon as well as other ethnic groups. Especially in a seminar that was held in Aidamoun in 2011, the participants emphasized the importance of this.³⁰ This forum even started to negotiate with some Sunni politicians, like the Future Movement in Tripoli, in order to get elected as a member of parliament. However, this initiative did not bring the results that Turkey and other actors hoped. However, the forum's administrative structure was not clear, and groups or people that were not invited to those meetings did not acknowledge their representation and denied Turkey having such an intention.

Moreover, similar to the utilization of Iraqi Turkmen against the Kurdish groups in Iraq, Lebanese Turkmen have been deployed against Lebanese Armenians. Although the antagonism against the Armenian Community in Lebanon deployed by the Turkmen from time to time, before Turkey's initiatives towards the Turkmen, there was no data regarding whether Turkmen groups were mobilized against the Armenian

³⁰ الجمعية الثقافية التركية في لبنان تنظم ندوة بعنوان: الاتراك في عكار: تاريخ و حضارة, "أخبار البلد", accessed October 23, 2024, <https://albaladnews.net/article/13211>.

genocide 24 April commemorations.³¹ However, after they started to establish organizations and Turkey's initiatives, this topic has frequently been mentioned among the Lebanese Turkmen. This indicates how the Turkish policy agenda, which mainly focused on the Armenian issue throughout its history, influenced the Turkmen groups.

Besides these history-making and political efforts towards ethnically Turkish communities in Lebanon, there have been several humanitarian initiatives also carried out through several state agencies such as the Turkish Diyanet Foundation (TDV) and TİKA. These aid and humanitarian efforts are mostly focusing on the villages of Aidamoun and Kouachra, which are villages that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited and participated in a rally during his trip in 2010. For example, TDV initiated a construction campaign in Kouachra. The design of the mosque was inspired by "Edirnekapı Mihrimah Sultan Camii" in order to "enhance spiritual bond and a sense of belonging."³² This construction is being carried out by Komaş A.Ş., which is 99.5% owned by the TDV. Komaş A.Ş. was established just after constructing the Kocatepe Mosque in Ankara, a highly debated construction in the Turkish political scene, to maintain retail management related to the mosque campus.³³ Moreover, the mosque TDV plans to build in Kouachra will include several workshops and retailing areas. It is noteworthy that Erdoğan and Davutoğlu also visited these villages in their trips in 2009 and 2010.

Besides TDV's effort to establish a commercial-religious complex in the Akkar region toward the Turkmen community, TİKA had several missions to improve the infrastructure in the area, besides several humanitarian or cultural aid campaigns. These projects have been mostly about employment, energy, and agriculture. The employment rate is crucial for Lebanese people, especially in the Northern Districts. Energy is another area of TİKA's infrastructural programs in the region. Reaching an

³¹ "Lebanese Turks Seek Political and Social Recognition | Al Akhbar English."

³² "Lübnan Kuaşra (Kouachra) Camii," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Resmi Web Sitesi* (blog), accessed October 23, 2024, <https://tdv.org/tr-TR/proje/lubnan-kuasra-kouachra-camii/>.

³³ "Hakkımızda," *Komaş İnşaat* (blog), accessed October 23, 2024, <https://koma-sinsaat.com.tr/hakkimizda/>.

electric generator or any other alternative solution becomes a matter of sectarian identity. When the fact of how energy is one of the main topics in Turkey-Lebanon relations in the early 21st century, energy-wise initiatives can mean empowerment and linkage with Turkey. In other words, as Nucho underlies the sectarian identities and the borders of these identities can be reshaped through everyday infrastructure investment. The enhanced electricity infrastructure does not just affect people's everyday lives; it also means the enhanced plantations and manufacturing system, which, combined with employment, leads to a semi-self-sufficient community. Although it has not been directly targeting the Turkmen Community.³⁴

In 2017, with the cooperation between TİKA and Kouachra Social Foundation, a textile atelier was founded to employ more than 20 women in the village directly.³⁵ Kouachra Social Foundation was established in 2005. It was one of the Turkmen Associations in the region, founded by the Khader family.³⁶ Similar to the textile atelier, in 2023, a carpet-weaving workshop was opened by TİKA with the cooperation of Aidamoun Municipality and the Turkish Culture Association in Lebanon.³⁷ The association was founded in 2009 by the Maksoud family.³⁸ The association's founder and the municipality's mayor was Kamal Maksoud. He was also a member of the DEİK Lebanon Branch and DTİK. His company, Sani Turka, has been importing several FMCG products from Turkey to Tripoli. He is also a partner in a telecommunication firm based in Lebanon.³⁹

³⁴ Nucho, *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon*.

³⁵ Buket Sezer, "TİKA'dan Lübnan'da Kadın İstihdamına Destek," *TİKA* (blog), December 6, 2017, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika'dan_lubnan'da_kadin_istihdamina_destek-2/.

³⁶ "الجامعة اللبنانية | التشريعات | تأسيس جمعية باسم: «جمعية الكواشرة الاجتماعية» مركزها: الكواشرة - قضاء عكار," accessed October 23, 2024, <http://77.42.251.205/Law.aspx?lawId=213971>.

³⁷ "تيكا التركية تفتتح مشغل للحياكة السجاد اليدوي في لبيد لبنان," *TİKA* (blog), December 4, 2017, <https://tika.gov.tr/ar/detail-detail-919/>.

³⁸ "الجامعة اللبنانية | مركز المعلوماتية القانونية :: التشريعات النافذة :: تأسيس جمعية باسم: 'الجمعية الثقافية التركية في لبنان' مركزها: عيديمون - قضاء عكار :: المواد :: 1," accessed October 23, 2024, <http://77.42.251.205/LawArticles.aspx?LawArticleID=910286&LawID=227108&language=ar>.

³⁹ "Türkiye - Lübnan İş Konseyi - DEİK | Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu."

Turkey, through TİKA, implemented several irrigation and plantation projects in the Akkar region. Agriculture in Akkar is crucial in the Lebanese context because, with the Beqaa Valley, the Akkar region is one of the few places in Lebanon that has agricultural activities. These agriculture projects included water pumps and well drilling, which require electricity for their operation. Especially after the shutdown of the Karpowership plants in Lebanon, there has been a huge electricity deficit in most of the country. This deficiency has begun to be felt more acutely, especially in this region. There were 23 hours of electricity cuts in Akkar. These power outages directly affected the operations of infrastructural aid. Although some direct aid campaigns were initiated in order to provide electricity generators, these also became contested in the Lebanese context because petroleum, which is a requirement for the generator, was scarce. Eventually, TİKA started to establish solar energy systems in order to maintain the operations of their infrastructure in Akkar, such as a fruit processing workshop in Mincez village, again built by TİKA.⁴⁰

This renewal of electricity infrastructure in Akkar has a cultural meaning as well. These solar energy plants are not just deployed for economic purposes. These solar energy systems are also used for the operations of the Yunus Emre Institute's Turkish courses, Kouachra High School, and established rooms in the village in order to display Turkish soap operas.⁴¹

⁴⁰ "TİKA Lübnan'daki Türkmen köylerine güneş enerjisi sistemi yaptırdı - QHA - Kırım Haber Ajansı," accessed October 26, 2024, <https://www.qha.com.tr/guncel/tika-lubnan-daki-turkmen-koylerine-gunes-enerjisi-sistemi-yaptirdi-446779>; Muhammet İLBAŞ, "TİKA'dan Lübnan'da Yaşayan Türkmenlere Enerji Desteği," *TİKA* (blog), May 8, 2023, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika_dan_lubnan_da_yasayan_turkmenlere_enerji_destegi/.

⁴¹ İLBAŞ, "TİKA'dan Lübnan'da Yaşayan Türkmenlere Enerji Desteği."

Conclusion



This study set out to explore the intricate dynamics of regionalism in the Middle East. It deployed Turkey-Lebanon relations in the early 21st century, during the Shamgen Project, as an analytical framework. Through a detailed analysis of historical, cultural, and economic ties, this thesis has sought to understand how Turkey and Lebanon navigated the regionalism of the Middle East during the early 21st century. By focusing on the intersection of historical legacies, political motivations, and economic networks, this research underscores the duality of continuity and transformation within regionalization processes. Due to the fragmented and incomplete nature of regionalization projects and changing geopolitics in the region, this thesis shows an eclectic framework that combines a wide range of literature and subjects starting from culture, business-state relations, and sectarianism.

The Shamgen project, though short-lived, provides a rich case study for examining the complexities of new regionalism in a politically volatile context. This thesis revealed several critical insights into the mechanisms and outcomes of regionalism as experienced through Turkey-Lebanon relations, which can be generalized in the MENA region. The regionalization projects in MENA are frequently characterized as bleak due to the disruption caused by political violence. Political violence and shifts have contributed to the fragmentation of regionalization. Nevertheless, this fragmented regional environment does not dissipate; rather, it reorganizes its meaning and significance by discovering new modes of expression.

Firstly, the historical ties between Turkey and Lebanon, deeply rooted in their shared Ottoman past, continue to influence their modern interactions. The analysis demonstrated how the Ottoman legacy shaped networks of trade, governance, and cultural exchanges that persisted into the regionalization efforts of the Shamgen project. Despite political ruptures, the symbolic and practical ties forged during this era remain influential. It is crucial to display how historical ties in the Middle East, which is highly complex and contested, directly influence the regionalization processes. Additionally, it shows how peculiar historical pathways influence the narrative and discourse related to regionalism. Then, it shows how this narrative can be diversified in the same region.

Secondly, the study found that economic ties played a crucial role in Turkey-Lebanon relations during the Shamgen period. This thesis was focused on not only general policies regarding regional cooperation but also how actors in business networks, supported by both private actors and state institutions, facilitated trade and cooperation. While analyzing these networks, this thesis suggested that informal ties like familial bonds, religious circles, etc., are also critical economic agents. However, these ties were unevenly distributed and vulnerable to external shocks, such as the Syrian Civil War, which disrupted regional trade routes and political alliances. Moreover, this thesis indicates that even when external shocks disrupt regionalization attempts, there are several continuities in cooperation and novel ways of re-establishing regional cooperation.

Thirdly, this thesis analyzes a much more narrow part of the region in order to display the range of maneuvers in the regionalisms in the field. Both scrap metal and Turkmen communities indicate how regionalism's relationship with sectarianism is complex and pragmatic. In general, it displays how regionalist aspirations and strategic shifts can lead to variation in the attribution of regionalism.

Lastly, the thesis highlighted the inherent challenges of regional projects like Shamgen, which operate in a fragmented and often polarized environment. Political instability, sectarian divisions, and competing regional interests frequently undermined the project's objectives. Despite these obstacles, the study found that regional networks persisted in alternative forms, suggesting a degree of resilience within fragmented regionalism.

In short, this research makes a significant contribution to the study of new regionalism, particularly in the context of the Middle East and the Global South. By focusing on the Shamgen project, the study expands the theoretical understanding of how regional initiatives can generate lasting socio-economic and political networks, regardless of their fragmented nature and constant disruption. It highlights the importance of multi-scalar interactions—where global, regional, and local actors interact dynamically—and the role of non-state actors, such as businesses and cultural institutions, in shaping regional dynamics. Moreover, it provides a nuanced view of regionalism in the Middle East, demonstrating how historical legacies and cultural proximities can act as both enablers and constraints.

While comprehensive, this study faced certain limitations. The reliance on qualitative data, including archival materials, newspaper articles, and interviews, provided rich insights but lacked the quantitative rigor to measure the full economic impact of the Shamgen project. Moreover, the lack of archive records of the relevant institutions or the collection of low quality archive material, the actors that can be encountered in the field, the elections in Turkey, the impact of the October 7 events in Lebanon, the actors refrained from speaking due to political and humanitarian reasons. This prevented this study from concentrating on a specific area.

However, different actors and issues connected with each other were effective in showing how fragmented yet connected the regionalization processes are.

Additionally, the exclusive focus on Turkey-Lebanon relations, while intentional, excluded broader regional dynamics that could have offered comparative perspectives, such as the geopolitical interaction between the Gulf States and Iran with this regional aspiration. Additionally, comparative studies involving other regionalization projects in the Global South, such as those in Africa or Southeast Asia, could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities of regionalism in politically fragmented contexts.

This thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of regionalism in the Middle East by examining the case of the Shamgen project and Turkey-Lebanon relations. Despite the political and economic turbulence that characterizes the region, the findings highlight the enduring relevance of regional networks and the transformative potential of shared historical and cultural ties. While fragmented regionalism poses significant challenges, it also offers opportunities for reconfiguration. By shedding light on the dynamics of Turkey-Lebanon relations, this study provides a valuable lens for understanding the complexities of regional cooperation in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

The current developments, the fall of the As'ad regime, and the attempts to re-establish order in Syria by Turkey-backed groups open new horizons for this study. In particular, whether the networks before the Syrian Civil War will be re-established and the reflections of these networks on Lebanon are important issues. In addition, how Turkey, which has a real order-making role, will use the legacy of the Ottoman Empire is an important issue for the research. In any case, it is obvious that Turkey-Shamgen interaction and, therefore, Turkey-Lebanon interaction will increase in the new period. Therefore, this study assumes a pioneering role for related studies to be conducted in the future.

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