

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

A CITY GROUND TO A HALT:
POLICYMAKING IN TRIPOLI AND THE REALITY OF PROMISES

by
OBEIDA TAKRITI

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of Political Science and Public Administration
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Tripoli, Lebanon
December 2019

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

A CITY GROUND TO A HALT:
POLICYMAKING IN TRIPOLI AND THE REALITY OF PROMISES

by
OBEIDA TAKRITI

Approved by:

Dr. Tariq Tell
Assistant Professor
Political Studies and Public Administration

Advisor



Dr. Charbel Nahas
Distinguished Practitioner of Public Policy-in Residence
Political Studies and Public Administration

Co-Advisor



Dr. Mona Fawaz
Professor
Architecture and Design

Member of Committee



Dr. Nikolas Kosmatopoulos
Assistant Professor
Political Studies and Public Administration

Member of Committee



Date of thesis defense: December 16th, 2019

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THESIS, DISSERTATION, PROJECT RELEASE FORM

Student Name: **Takriti** **Obeida** **Nasser**
 Last First Middle

Master's Thesis Master's Project Doctoral Dissertation

I authorize the American University of Beirut to: (a) reproduce hard or electronic copies of my thesis, dissertation, or project; (b) include such copies in the archives and digital repositories of the University; and (c) make freely available such copies to third parties for research or educational purposes.

I authorize the American University of Beirut, to: (a) reproduce hard or electronic copies of it; (b) include such copies in the archives and digital repositories of the University; and (c) make freely available such copies to third parties for research or educational purposes

after:

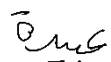
One ---- year from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.

Two ---- years from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.

Three ---- years from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.

Date of thesis submission: January 30th, 2020

Signature



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During my journey developing and writing this thesis, I was blessed by the support of great professors whose direct and indirect influence was essential in shaping my thoughts and methodologies. I am grateful for my advisor and mentor Dr. Charbel Nahas who is constantly teaching me that politics is the intersection of philosophical enquiry, societal wellbeing, and value-driven activism. I would also like to thank Dr. Nikolas Kosmatopoulos who has directed me to the immersive research methodologies, Dr. Tariq Tell who has taught me about the importance of looking historically and comparatively to development, Dr. Mona Fawaz who has changed the way I look to the city and its dynamics, and Dr. Mahmoud Haidar who has introduced me to the real world of policymaking.

My journey would have been impossible without the constant support of my family and friends. I am grateful for my mother Ghinwa Makkawi who has always pushed me forward, and my father Nasser Tekriti who was always interested in hearing my ideas. I am deeply grateful for Youssef Tekriti and Najwa Sahmarani who have always gave me their generous insightful feedback; they have pushed beyond my limits. I would also like to thank Abed Rahman Tekriti, Ahmad Tekriti, and Taha Tekriti who made sure that I have the space and support to write my thesis at home.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who have helped me directly and indirectly shape this journey.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Obeida Takriti for Master of Arts
Major: Public Policy and International Affairs

Title: A City Ground to a Halt:
Policymaking in Tripoli and the Reality of Promises

While exploring the city of Tripoli, one would immediately notice that the city is occupied by huge “monuments” of past glory yet modern failures like the International Fair, the Oil Refinery, and the old Souk. The failure of these projects is usually explained either by referring to a “conspiracy” against Tripoli or to the lack of consensus between the city’s main leaders. In the last few years, Tripoli has witnessed the launch of major new projects, and Tripoli Special Economic Zone (TSEZ) is one of these projects that is promising 'Tripolitans' the city’s economic “revival”. In this thesis, I go beyond the conspiracy theory and the consensus argument to identify the real processes and values that are running in the background of both the old and new projects. This research focus on TSEZ, as a specific case study, documenting its journey, identifying its stakeholders, and analyzing its functions. To achieve these goals, relevant politicians, public servants, and TSEZ staff were interviewed in addition to tracking all the official documents related to TSEZ. My journey to understand the way TSEZ is unfolding led me to identify the five main values that I believe are governing policymaking in the city; these values, being it held by almost all the stakeholders, are leading to the underdevelopment, deterioration, and decay of Tripoli as a City.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
PREFACE.....	1
INTRODUCTION	
ANOTHER HUGE “PROJECT” IN TRIPOLI.....	3
A. A Hidden Cronyism	5
B. The Loss of Functions.....	6
C. The Art of Vindication.....	8
D. A City Without A Vision.....	9
CHAPTER	
I. THE SOUK AND THE MAARAD.....	12
A. The Loss of Experience.....	15
B. The Art of Hibernation.....	18
II. THE NATIONAL AND THE LOCAL	22
A. The Birth of TSEZ	25
B. The National Labyrinth	27
C. The Representatives in the North.....	31

III. THE BUREAUCRAT AND THE EXPERT	36
A. The Million Dollars Contractors.....	38
B. The Bureaucratic Challenge	40
C. The Quest for Management Consultants.....	43
IV. THE LOCAL INSTITUTIONS.....	48
A. A Window to the Sea	50
B. The Mayor of Papers and Employees	52
C. The Coordinator in the North	54
V. THE MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC	57
A. A Rentier State without Resources	59
B. The “Rich” Foreigner as the Hero	60
C. Blaming the “Others”.....	63
CONCLUSION	
THE LENS OF AN ACTIVE CITIZEN	67
A. How People and Politicians Define Politics.....	70
B. The Answers to My Questions	74
C. The City’s Future.....	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. The Prime Minister Hariri promising to create 900,000 job opportunities during the 2018 Parliamentary Elections	3
2. Nature in the process of reclaiming the train station in Tripoli	11
3. An Abstract of Women Genital at Tripoli International Fair	12
4. Mannequins Dressed As “Lebanese” at The Tailors Khan	21
5. How to Cover a River Full of Garbage instead of Cleaning It by CDR	22
6. How to Build and Sell Match Boxes (Tripolitan’s Metaphor for the Newly-built Apartments) by Tripoli’s Contractors and Land Owners	35
7. One-Minute Walking-Distance from My Room When I Used to Live in Dubai Media City	36
8. The 3rd Most Inefficient Public Institution in Tripoli	47
9. The 2nd Most Inefficient Public Institution in Tripoli	48
10. Toufic Dabboussi has succeeded in convincing almost everyone about his initiative	56
11. “Civil Society” Groups Fighting Hard to Stop Another “Disastrous” CDR Project	57
12. The Impoverished Areas Renting their Buildings’ Walls to the City “Leaders”	66
13. The Tripoli Special Economic Zone 550 m2 Land Fill with Al-Fayhaa Landfill in its Background	67
14. Does a City Horizon Affects the City Horizon?	78

PREFACE

Growing up in Tripoli, I heard a lot about the city's "golden" history, its "miserable" present, and its "promising" future. It is only when a Tripolitan leaves his/her city that he/she starts questioning these three portraits. Living in cities like Dubai and Amman in addition to visiting tens of cities like San Francisco, Aleppo, New Delhi, and Prague, I have reached a point where I can no longer live with an outdated and misleading image of my hometown. This has led me to a long and personal journey to explore why the city has been ground to a halt on all levels, and I have decided to embark on this thesis as part of this exploration. This study is, therefore, for individuals and researchers who are similarly seeking to better understand how politics shape their cities.

The research is an ethnography that focuses on the Tripoli Special Economic Zone, a governmental project that was promising the city a new role in regional trade. In order to better understand the project, I have first gone through all the documents produced by or for TSEZ like its law, decrees, marketing materials, and reports. Then, I have conducted eight interviews with local politicians and general directors who worked directly or indirectly with the project. Being it an ethnography, my journey in investigating TSEZ is also one of the methods that I have followed throughout this thesis, and this reflected mainly in the literary format of the research.

After going through this journey, I have thought that TSEZ would take me into the world of economic zones, regional trade, and law, but I have discovered that TSEZ has more to tell me about the politics in the city. I have, therefore, focused on analyzing the processes, values, and interactions of TSEZ, and I have framed my conclusions into five values that I believe describe

policymaking in Tripoli. In the first chapter, I talk about the International Fair, the Souk, and the Special Economic Zone, and I argue that these three projects demonstrate the discontinuation and fragmentation of the public sphere. The story of TSEZ, from its initiation till the appointment of its first board, is told in the second chapter, and it illustrates how politicians and public servants limit their role to being merely ambassadors. The third value that I talk about is the fear of responsibility, and this was evident in the responsibilities that the contractors, consultants, international organizations, and TSEZ authority decided to claim. The role of the local institutions like the Municipality of Tripoli, the Port, the International Fair, and the Chamber of Commerce are presented in the fourth chapter, and it was alarming how helpless each of these institutions is feeling concerning the project and their role in it. In the fifth chapter, I argue that both politicians and the public believe that the power lies outside, and it is always the mandate of the national government or an international one to develop the city. Hence, the five values, that I believe guide policymaking in Tripoli, are 1) The discontinuation of the public, 2) the politician as an ambassador, 3) the fear of taking responsibility, 4) the political helplessness, and 5) the power lies outside. These values, however, are not to be seen as everlasting principles of the policymaking of a city or a nation. In fact, while writing this thesis, I was witnessing not only how these values were reinforced but also how they were questioned. For the city to embark on a new path, Tripolitains have no choice but to redefine politics, update their political values, and create a positive and vibrant vision.

INTRODUCTION

ANOTHER HUGE “PROJECT” IN TRIPOLI

As a reaction to the decay of Tripoli, TSEZ was proposed as one of the solutions that can save the city deteriorating economy by upgrading its ability to facilitate regional and international trade. Tripolitains are promised hundreds of jobs and opportunities with the launch of TSEZ, and there is almost no criticism nor concerns for the development of this project. Before diving in the details of Tripoli Special Economic Zone, I have tried, in this introduction, to locate TSEZ within the policymaking landscape in the city. For instance, there is a clear rift in Tripoli ‘s population between the impoverished and the ultimately rich. The latter is hindering the development of almost any project. Moreover, the city is struggling to stay functional as most of its old roles have either turned obsolete or transferred somewhere else. Lastly, I talk about the lack of a shared vision in Tripoli which usually turns the discussion about TSEZ to a conversation over the future of the city. Afraid of the future, everyone is hoping that this project would be Tripoli’s route to prosperity without explaining how it would be different from its predecessors. By contextualizing TSEZ within the policymaking scene in the city, it is apparent that there are fundamental problems not only in the project but in the values that guide policymakers and policymaking in Lebanon.



Figure 1. The Prime Minister Hariri promising to create 900,000¹ job opportunities during the 2018 Parliamentary Elections²

¹ [Hariri: Cedre Will Insure].” 2018.

² Jisr. Facebook, March 2018.

During the last parliamentary election, I was invited to a closed meeting with one of the main politicians in the city, Samir al-Jisr³. Trying to motivate the attendees to vote for his party, he was talking about the potential jobs, trade opportunities, and economic “revival” that the Tripoli Special Economic Zone (TSEZ) would bring to the city. Although he was convincing for most of the attendees, one would be able to feel that al-Jisr himself had his doubts. This wasn’t, after all, the first time he talked about a new project and its promise. The Future party, which Samir al-Jisr is one of the main founders of, along with Rafiq Hariri, has led many projects in the last decade, such as the Cultural Heritage and Urban Development Project (CHUD) that are struggling to provide any added value to the lives of Tripolitans. Trying to be polite with the MP, I asked him to elaborate on the reasons behind the failure of the previous projects which he was involved in, and if he could explain what would make this project deliver its promise where the others have failed. It wasn’t a question that he would respond to in such a session, so he avoided the question by encouraging me and the other young people in the meetup to develop our interest in politics because this field needs our energy and spirit.

This question did not rise purely out of this discussion; it is a question that has been puzzling me for some time, as a Tripolitan who can clearly see that his city is struggling to survive. People usually claim that this failure is a natural outcome of the eternal conspiracy against the city either from the national government or from a mysterious global entity. In addition, the absence of consensus between the city “leaders” is seen as another reason behind the current chaos. However, these explanations become excuses that both politicians and laypeople use in every political

³ Jisr, Discussion, April 2018.

discussion. Attending a conference⁴ on TSEZ progress, I heard many people repeating the same arguments, blaming either a “foreigner” to the city or an insider conspiring against his or her city. Blaming policymakers for their moral or technical failure is an easy thing to do if someone is looking for a scapegoat, but it is never a suitable answer for someone who has learned about the complexity of policymaking. In this research, I will endeavor to go beyond these simplistic explanations to pinpoint some the processes, values, and structures, that are governing the city development. In the last few years, the only project that has claimed to be the “savior” of the city is the TSEZ, so I have decided to look closely at the way this project is unfolding.

A. A Hidden Cronyism

While Tripoli is considered to be one of the poorest cities in the country, it is also home to the richest people in the region. For instance, Bab el-Tebbeneh is the poorest neighborhood on the Mediterranean based on the UNDP Millennium Development Goals Report for 2013-14⁵. On the other hand, passing through the streets of Azmi, Maarad, and Dam w Farz, you would think that you are passing through the richest neighborhoods in Lebanon. Bruno Dewailly, in his dissertation on Tripoli, argues that this vast difference is a direct result of the rent economy that evolved in the city over the last few decades. Focusing on real estate of the wealthy Tripolitans has led to the formation of an “illusio real estate” that favors real estate instead of production. In the past, Syria Road, the road that connects Bab el-Tebbeneh and Jebel Mohsen, was known as Bab al-Dahab, the Gold Market, where trade and industry were flourishing. This shift from crafts, trade, agriculture,

⁴ “المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع” [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Seminar, Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

⁵ “Lebanon Millennium Development Report 2013-2014.” UNDP & CDR, 2013.

and industry is usually explained as an international macro phenomenon similar in a way to the international wave of the special economic zones. However, the international nature of some transformations should not prevent us from looking at the micro transformations on the local level. Dewailly asserts that the current rent seekers in Tripoli are actually the same political leaders of Tripoli since 1950 with rarely any expectations. A new project like TSEZ is certainly affected by the current local and national stakeholders but a new project may also mean the creation of a new set of stakeholders with different values and interests.

B. The Loss of Functions

Last week, I asked my younger brother to deliver something to Tal, the old city center of Tripoli, but I was amazed to know that he did not know where this area was. He knew the “Nour” Square because the Taxi would drop him off there before taking another Taxi to Mina, Dam w Farez, or Kazdoura street. He was amazed to learn that the name “Nour” is not the only name for this square because others call it either Abdul Hamid Karami Square or Allah, God, Square. I was really upset for him not knowing his city, but he resisted my anger arguing that there is no reason for him to know Tal. This area means a lot for me as it is a main part of the Souq that I used to visit with my grandmother. It is also a transportation hub for most areas in the North, as well as a home for the main public institutions in the city, such as the municipality and the ministry of finance. For an older generation, al-Tal was the heart of the city where people gathered to celebrate, shop, and meet up. Khaled Ziadeh, in his trilogy on Tripoli⁶, discusses the importance of Tal not only on the

⁶ Ziadeh, Madina. *مدينة على المتوسط: ثلاثية* [A City on the Mediterranean: Trilogy]. 2010.

social level but also on the political level. Qahwet al-Tal al-Ulya, the upper Tal café, has hosted many political gatherings that have affected politics not only in Tripoli but on the national level. This area was a turning point in the city urban development because the Ottomans started experimenting with new urban planning models specifically in Tal. I have realized that I rarely go to Tal these days, and I was only bragging about something from the past. It is just another area of this small city that people rarely interact with unless they are being nostalgic.

Many parts of the city have similarly lost their main functions and devolved into despair. The Oil Refinery, for instance, lost its function decades ago because the oil route was changed, not only as a result of the Lebanese Civil War but of other regional events like the creation of the Gulf states in the 70s. Charbel Nahas⁷, in his paper on the Tripoli International Fair, argues that the Fair is conceptually dysfunctional because the current leaders are trying to push for a concept that has already died on the international level. Nahas believes that the solution lies in coming up with new functions based on the needs of the city, like uniting its divided community for example. The discussion of functions is not limited to the local level as it is important also to discuss the functions of the city on the national and regional level as the World Bank Report, “Reshaping Economic Geography”⁸, suggests. Regional changes, for instance, can revive a dead facility, as happened a few weeks ago when it was announced “The giant Russian oil company Rosneft is set to soon start storing oil reserves in a specially built storage facility at the northern port of Tripoli”⁹. The functions of TSEZ differs on each of these layers, regional, national and international, as it can mean something for the Tripolitan looking for a job, something else for a Lebanese businessman,

⁷ Nahas. “La Foire Internationale et Tripoli [The International Fair and Tripoli].” 2007.

⁸ Gill. *Reshaping Economic Geography*. World Bank, 2009.

⁹ “Russian Oil Giant to Revamp Tripoli Facility.” The Daily Star, January 2019.

and something different for a Turkish or Emirati company. Currently, politicians, businesspeople, and citizens are all hoping that the Chinese may put Tripoli on their New Silk Road¹⁰.

C. The Art of Vindication

Ask anyone in Tripoli about TSEZ, he or she would immediately start bragging about the importance of this project to the city. The importance lies in the amount of jobs that this zone would offer for the citizens who are leaving the country looking for a decent income. Yet, no one would answer you if you ask about the nature of these jobs. If you ask how these jobs would be created, a Tripolitan would start talking about the “international” companies who will open an office at TSEZ. Yet, no one would answer you if you ask what these companies would do in Tripoli nor why would they be interested in opening an office in the TSEZ. These thoughts are stressed by the city politicians who have personally worked in, or through their parties, on TSEZ. If you were a supporter of the Future Movement, led by Hariri, or Azm w Saadeh, led by Mikati, you would be praising this project. During the 2019 Parliamentary by-election, Dima Jamali, the Future Movement nominee, announced that TSEZ will provide Tripolitans with 5000 job opportunities¹¹. On the other hand, Nahas, in his article about the Special Economic Zone, explains how this zone is just another way for the corporate world and the capitalist in the country to escape from Lebanese rules specifically concerning workers and taxes. I have tried explaining this argument to a few Tripolitans, and I was amazed by their reaction as they were both offended and puzzled. They were

¹⁰ Shaar. “سفير الصين الشعبية في لبنان وان كيجيان [The Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China]”. el-Shamal News, 2017.

¹¹ Dhaybi. “ديما جمال وصورها وتيارها: مدينة المهانة الانتخابية” [Dima Jamali, its Pictures, and Its Party: The City of Election Humility]”. al-Modon, March 2019.

puzzled because they needed to find answers for the questions I previously asked; and they were offended because they felt that these questions made them doubt one of the few “positive” things that is still giving them hope for their city’s future.

D. A City Without A Vision

While Exploring the streets of Tripoli, one would immediately notice that most of the city is occupied by huge “monuments” of past glory and modern failure, like a huge unfinished International Fair, a Citadel turned into a military post, an old downtown lost in dust, a rusty oil refinery, a landfill about to explode, an abandoned train station, and a souk struggling to survive. In the last few years, Tripoli has witnessed the launching of several major new projects like the Cultural Heritage and Urban Development Project (CHUD), the Renovation of the Sunday Market, the Rehabilitation of the Corniche, the Unfinished Vegetables and Fruits Market, and the rejected “Parking” project. The Tripoli Special Economic Zone (TSEZ) is one such project that is promising Tripolitans the economic “revival” of their city. The list of projects old and new that I have just mentioned are indeed huge, involving millions of dollars in assets or funding in addition to the thousands of meters squared that these projects occupy from the city.

It might be easier to understand these projects if there was a defined vision for them that has its supporters and its critics. There have only been a few attempts at a vision document for the city, each made by one stakeholder, like Tripoli 2020, led by Najib Mikati along with the other MPs in the city in 2011¹², and Lebanon Special Economic Zone of Greater Tripoli by Toufic

¹² Shaar. “خطة انماء مدينة طرابلس بحضور الرئيس المكلف نجيب ميقاتي” [Tripoli Development Plan with the Presence of the Designated Prime Minister Najib Mikati].” el-Shamal News, 2011.

Dabboussi¹³, the president of the Chamber of Commerce in North Lebanon, and the municipality of Tripoli five-year plan¹⁴. Analyzing any of the projects in the city as part of a vision is irrelevant, because most of these visions are not only highly criticized in general, but the sole praise for them comes from only one or two politicians. The projects, however, are being looked at as independent projects without referene to any holistic vision, so it would be beneficial to study the creation, flourishing, and failure of each project in Tripoli on its own. Thus, we can define the planning doctrine of the city which is the set of notions, guidelines, and strategies that each city has concerning its development strategies and its spatial organization¹⁵. Focusing on TSEZ would not necessarily draw a clear picture of the whole planning doctrine of Tripoli but it would help me explore and argue about some of the values that currently guide policymaking in Tripoli. Understanding the way TSEZ is unfolding is just a step to better understanding the processes of policymaking, urban planning, and decision-making that are governing Tripoli's development, or underdevelopment as the case may be, but it is an important one.

¹³ Dabboussi, Interview, May 2019.

¹⁴ Chamaa. «طير وفرقع يا بوشار» [Tripoli Municipality Plan: It's Popcorn Time]. IMLEBANON, 2017.

¹⁵ Faludi and Van der Valk. *Rule and Order Dutch Planning Doctrine in the Twentieth Century*. 1994.



Figure 2. Nature in the process of reclaiming the train station in Tripoli¹⁶

¹⁶ Halawani. Facebook, 2013.

CHAPTER I THE SOUK AND THE MAARAD

TSEZ is another governmental project that is promoted as unique despite the fact that other entities, like the old Souk and the International Fair, are comparable in many respects. Hence, this chapter starts by comparing TSEZ to both the Souk and the International Fair on the legal and philosophical perspectives, and the fact that TSEZ is located within the different range of projects which do not complement each other, and this is causing a huge loss in space and time. Lastly, I talk about the slow progress in the project by presenting TSEZ achievement and activities in the last 11 years. This chapter concludes with one of the values that governs policymaking in Tripoli, and in Lebanon in general, which is the discontinuity both on the spatial and temporal level. TSEZ is a strong example of the discontinuation in the national policymaking, and TSEZ, as seen in this chapter, is in reality disconnected not only from the other institutions in Tripoli and in Lebanon but also lost in a time where the special economic zones were the “solution”.



Figure 3. An Abstract of Women Genital at Tripoli International Fair¹⁷

¹⁷ Collins. “Under the Skylight.” Facebook, 2016.

Tripoli International Fair (TIF) is one of the main destinations any Tripolitan would immediately think about when someone is visiting the city for the first time. Mira Minkara, an active tourist guide in Tripoli for the last 17 years, organizes tours periodically to the Fair, and I once invited one of my Bahraini friends to one of these tours. I was amazed to learn that she would sometimes name the event “Modern Ruins of Tripoli”, and this tour would consist of a visit to the Fair followed by a visit to the Old Train Station. Mira also organizes an “Old City Tour” where she takes people for a walk in the old souks showing people what remains of the Crusaders, Ottomans, and Mamlouks heritage in Tripoli. Tripoli Souk, or souks, is currently a long corridor that unifies the old town through its different sprawling branches. While you would be amazed by the architecture of the Fair, it is just a “modern” ghost town that would only spark fear, sadness, and anger within you. On the other hand, the walk in the “old” Tripoli is a lively experience where you will meet hundreds of merchants, taste many delicious traditional foods, and encounter thousands of city dwellers. I still remember how my grandmother used to shout my name in the middle of the street, waking up the whole neighborhood. We used to have a weekly journey to the Souk, and I remember never knowing the goal of our trip in advance, and so I was never properly prepared. We would get some groceries, buy new clothes, or visit my grandmother’s friends. There is even an imaginary end in my head for the souk, and I am still wondering if I could reach it. I have never visited the fair with my grandmother, and I do not recall she visited this place at all.

If you ask anyone about the relationship between the Souk and the International Fair, he or she would look at you in wonder, as if you are talking about totally different concepts. They would be more amazed if you add the Special Economic Zone to your question. In reality, the definitions for these three projects are almost identical. *Al-Mantaka al-Iktisadiya al-Khassa*, the Special

Economic Zone, is defined in one of the presentations¹⁸ by the Tripoli Special Economic Zone (TSEZ) staff as being a geographical area with the proper infrastructure, financial and tax incentives, and administrative and legal support to encourage and facilitate economic activity. *Maarad Tarablous al-Duwali or Maarad Rachid Karameh al-Duwali*, Tripoli International Fair (TIF), is also another geographical area, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, in order to promote and empower the economic activities between Lebanon and the world¹⁹. *Al-Souq* is yet another place, a marketplace, where merchants gather to exchange products and services with city dwellers²⁰.

While their definition is almost identical, there are three main differences between these three entities that you can easily notice looking at the laws for both the Fair and the Special Economic Zone²¹. The first one is that the government directly owns, manage, and invest in the Fair and the Special Economic Zone. However, the government, through the Public Authority for Consumer Markets, has set a plan in 1996 to invest and manage different Souks in Lebanon, but the authority did not clarify its relationship to the existing souks. The authority is even considered to be one of the neglected and useless institutions in the Lebanese government²². The second one is the focus on encouraging foreign investments and the facilitation of export as a main reason for the initiation of both the Fair and the Special Zone. The third one is the limitation of the

¹⁸ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس [Tripoli Special Economic Zone].” Presentation, June 2015.

¹⁹ إنشاء معرض لبنان الدولي الدائم في طرابلس [The establishment of Lebanon’s Permanent Fair in Tripoli], al-Jarida al-Rasmiya, 1960.

²⁰ ما هو تعريف السوق في علم الاقتصاد؟ وما هي أهم أشكاله؟ [What the Definition of Souk? And What is Most Important Forms].” Bayt.com, 2017.

²¹ إنشاء المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس [The establishment of Tripoli Special Economic Zone].” al-Jarida al-Rasmiya, 2008.

²² Haj Hassan. “تعرفوا إلى المؤسسات المعطلة... وموازنتها “شغالة”. [Get to know the disabled institutions and their running budgets].” al-Modon, 2018.

geographical space of TSEZ and the Fair within a specific land while the Souk is not bounded to a specific area by law.

A. The Loss of Experience

The absence of any relationship between the Souk, the Fair, and the Special Economic Zone means a huge loss and unnecessary fragmentation of the economic capacity of Tripoli. In his book *Epistemologies of the South*²³, De Sousa Santos explains this phenomenon of abyssal thinking that grants “modernity” the power to distinguish between what is legal and illegal, good and bad, visible and invisible. For instance, in the last few years, the main project that targeted the Souk and the “Old” city was called the “Cultural Heritage Urban Development”, which focused on the cultural importance of this area. Dewailly²⁴, in his dissertation on Urban Reproduction in Tripoli, explains how the power behind this project evolved with time but its logic did not change that much. The name of the project at the beginning was “Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development Project”, and subsequently the word tourism was substituted with “Urban” (Dewailly). On the surface, it may seem that the logic behind the project has changed from focusing on archeology and architecture to the recognition of the thousands of the old city inhabitants. However, the change in power dynamics was the reason behind this change because Rafik Hariri simply wanted to eliminate any interference from the ministry of Tourism in this project²⁵. As a result of this change, the project had to interact with the civil society in the old city to organize events instead of relying on the Ministry of Tourism. For instance, Khan al-Askar, one of the renovated buildings, has

²³ De Sousa Santos. *Epistemologies of the South*. 2014.

²⁴ Dewailly. “Pouvoir et production urbaine à Tripoli [Power and Urban Production in Tripoli].” 2015.

²⁵ Ibid.

opened its doors for a few days in the last few years for events such as concerts and exhibitions; it was merely used as a venue space decorated with old stones. Historically, Khan al-Askar was one of the institutions that played a key role in regional trade by hosting merchants in its first floor while giving them the opportunity to offer their products on the ground floor. This abyssal thinking can easily be seen in so many projects in Lebanon, and the Tripoli Special Economic Zone is no exception to that.

The waste in experience is not solely limited to the conceptual level but is also made manifest in the material level. A visit to the Souk, the Fair, and the Special Economic Zone summarizes the history of three different layers of economic idioms that the world has witnessed in the last decades. This historical exhibition of economic idioms occupies huge geographical areas across the city, with the zone occupying 550,000 m² in a reclaimed land located in the Port of Tripoli²⁶, while the Fair occupies 700,000 m²²⁷; the souk doesn't occupy a specific area as it is integrated within the old city. In addition to this combined 1,200 km², each of the three entities interacts with the government through a different body. TSEZ is by itself a governmental entity that interacts directly with the prime minister. The Fair is another governmental entity that has its independent board, and it interacts mainly with the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Tourism. The Souk and the old city are considered to be the responsibility of the Municipality of Tripoli by convention, as the Mayor of Tripoli explains²⁸. TSEZ adds to the waste of experience because it promises, in its law and in its communication materials, the replication of many

²⁶ “المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس” [Tripoli Special Economic Zone].” Presentation, June 2015.

²⁷ Nahas. “La Foire Internationale et Tripoli [The International Fair and Tripoli].” December 2007.

²⁸ Qamr al-Dine, Interview, May 2019.

governmental services by building a dedicated port, developing new registration and regulation procedures, and delivering infrastructural projects and facilities²⁹³⁰.

The institutional relationships between the different entities can often appear to be quite jarring. I was genuinely astonished when I read the following on one of TSEZ brochures:

ADDITIONAL INCENTIVES: By law, power is allowed to be generated in the TSEZ by third-party private providers. Thus, the potential exists for uninterrupted and affordable power in the TSEZ. TSEZ will develop a secure environment around the sites, including security staff and full security systems. TSEZ sites are far from the areas that have witnessed security conflicts in the past³¹.

In fact, the area where the conflicts used to happen is the easiest place to access from TSEZ, and you would only need around 20 minutes walking or 7 minutes driving to reach the “conflict” zone. In addition, during a seminar³² featuring the team of the TSEZ on March 25th, someone from the audience asked about the Zone’s strategy to attract merchants, industrialists, and craftspeople from the city to be part of the new project. The person who asked the question was an industrialist who moved his factory back to Turkey a few years ago. The answer started of course positively by stating that the zone had been created in the first place for similar industrialists. However, he was then told that he needed to be proactive by forming a group of people in a similar situation to him, then apply to rent a space like every other international company. The type of relationship between

²⁹ Haj Hassan. “موازنتها "شغالة"” [Get to know the disabled institutions and their running budgets].” al-Modon, 2018.

³⁰ TSEZ Website.

³¹ TSEZ Brochure.

³² “المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع” [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

the zone and the local industrialists, entailed in the answer, defies the idea of forming an economic zone that would be able to support the local economy. Members of the Municipality of Tripoli were attending the event and asked questions as if it was their first time hearing about the project. A member of the Tripoli Municipality, known for his cynicism, extended the waste of experience to the national level by asking about the logic behind initiating two new special economic zones in Batroun and Tyre respectively. Ironically, he continued by insisting that the “Lebanese Government” should give the North the right to have their own airport.

B. The Art of Hibernation

In the past 11 years, the TSEZ Industrial and Logistical Center (ILC) has reclaimed 550,000 m² of land on the Lebanese coast. This area is still desolate, with nothing but sand and the scent of the adjacent landfill. When you go into the TSEZ website³³, you can actually interact with the map of the industrial zone by looking at the different plans for the area. The other part of TSEZ, the Knowledge and Innovation Center (KIC) also remains desolate, and a competition was launched recently for its design³⁴. The KIC is another area of land that TSEZ has reclaimed, not from the sea and port, but from the International Fair as part of recent legislation that enables the government to divide, allocate, and manage different parts of the Fair³⁵. Looking at the main picture on TSEZ website, you can clearly see both the desolated areas of TSEZ and the modern ruins of the International Fair. Apart from a few exhibitions each year, the International Fair is completely

³³ TSEZ Website.

³⁴ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

³⁵ Jisr, Interview, May 2019.

desolate; you can only jog in it if you have a special card that you pay for. The fair is also considered a modern ruin, visited by the few tourists that come to Tripoli each year. On the other hand, the Souk is still vibrant and alive with thousands of city dwellers and hundreds of merchants. Despite the lack of investment in the souks and the deteriorating situation of the infrastructure, Tripolitans would always tell you to go the Souk to find any item you are looking for. The Souk, however, has no website, legal documents, or reporting mechanisms, and this makes, for some policymakers, most of the Souk's economic activities "informal". This informality is also seen in the absence of this area in the mind of some policymakers.

In 1996 we created a series of activities in Khan al-Sabun, Khan al-Khayyatin and Hama al- Jadid... we attracted performers from Homs and Halab as well as other religious groups... there was an event every night ... and communal response was quite good...the Minister of Tourism at the time, who is originally from the North of Lebanon visited the city and then called me two days later to say that this was his first visit to the souk and that prior to that he was afraid of entering the area!! The same story occurred with one of the MP's. Abdallah Ghandour, VP Chamber of Commerce³⁶.

It is truly remarkable how three different layers of economic idioms exist in the city of Tripoli; the Souk, the International Fair, and the Special Economic Zone. In reality, the Souk is the only among these idioms that delivers part of its promise while the others remain empty, decorated vessels of unfulfilled promise. Applying the Lindy Effect³⁷, which argues that the future of an idea or project is proportional to its life, it is most likely that the Souk will last for another 1,000 years

³⁶ Nahas. "Stakeholder Analysis and Social Assessment for the Proposed Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development Project." 2007.

³⁷ Taleb. *Antifragile*. 2012.

while the International Fair may not operate at all. Billions of dollars and hundreds of meter squares were wasted on the Fair project, and any attempt to stop this waste was always rejected. For instance, Nahas emphasizes, in one of the conferences³⁸ on Niemeyer's fair, the important role the fair can play by rectifying the divided city of Tripoli through different projects. For instance, the Lebanese University campus in the North could have been located in the fair instead of spending millions of dollars and more than a decade to build a new campus. The question remains whether TSEZ would be able to follow a different path than the Fair, and if it can build this path upon other projects and experiences in Lebanon and Tripoli. The other option would be for TSEZ to build another well-decorated empty vessel. To avoid this fate, there should be some attempts to handle the **Spatial and Temporal Discontinuity** that clearly defines policymaking in the city.

³⁸ Nahas. "La Foire Internationale et Tripoli [The International Fair and Tripoli]." 2007.



Figure 4. Mannequins Dressed As “Lebanese” at The Tailors Khan³⁹

³⁹ Mira's Guided Tours Page, Facebook, 2019.

CHAPTER II THE NATIONAL AND THE LOCAL

Tripoli's isolation is usually attributed to the immense challenges that the city faced in the last century. TSEZ was seen as an attempt to break this isolation by entitling it to a national, regional, and international role. In this chapter, I cover the story behind the birth of the project in 2002. Then, I dive into the national labyrinth that the project went through by following the development of TSEZ in the Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The dynamic between the different politicians and elites resulted in distinguishing between the Zaims, the sect leaders, and the Wujahaas, the local elites. Reducing the role of policymakers to being ambassadors for the city or the sect, I believe, is one of the reasons that is, contrary to the common belief, fueling the isolation of the city, hence its decay. TSEZ, as a result, is just another project that is catered to the needs and aspirations of the businesspersons and the local elites who rally around the Future Movement; and such kind of projects are either doomed to fail or to transform into another corruption hub. In order to succeed and achieve its promise, TSEZ would have to break from its chains to transform into a national project that answers to the aspirations of Tripolitains and of Lebanese in general.



Figure 5. How to Cover a River Full of Garbage instead of Cleaning It by CDR⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Franjiyeh. "إعتراضات على مشروع "حماية الإرث الثقافي لمدينة طرابلس"" [Objections to the "Cultural Heritage and Urban Development" Project]. Annahar, 2013.

The story of TSEZ started as a by-product of another attempt by the national government to repair its relationship with Tripoli. Muhammad Abou Samra, in his book *Tripoli: God's Square and the Modern Seaside*⁴¹, argues that the history of Tripoli, since 1920, is just a series of battles between Tripoli and Lebanon, neither of which were able to accept each other. If you attend any conference, protest, or political campaign, you will always hear Tripolitans blaming the national government for conspiring against their city. I have even once heard a young researcher claiming that Tripoli is being punished because Tripolitans resisted the French mandate. Another shouted that Tripolitans also supported the Palestinians.

This kind of discourse has actually been repeated in most interviews that I have done, and I was amazed when Abdul-Ghani Kabbara⁴², PM Saad Hariri's adviser in the North, spent half of the interviews talking about the history of the city's marginalization. As the adviser for the former PM Rafiq Hariri in the North, Kabbara was explaining to me how hard it was to deal with all the consequences incurred by regional and national incidents. He listed a series of events starting from the Palestinian Nakba in the 1940 up to the Syrian "Civil" War since 2011. He argues that the tens of events he mentioned have not only marginalized Tripoli politically, but have also stopped any successful attempts at development. For instance, the Syrian Army's occupation of the fair prohibited the Lebanese government from doing anything in it for years. However, he failed to mention that the Citadel and Olympic Stadium are currently unavailable because the Lebanese Army are using them as bases.

⁴¹ Abou Samra. *ساحة الله وميناء الحدائثة: طرابلس* [Tripoli: God's Square and the Modern Seaside]. 2011.

⁴² Kabbara, Interview, April 2019.

International and regional geopolitics is constantly changing, and Lebanon is certainly affected. Local “elites” use the argument of changing geopolitical situations to claim that everything is out of their hands, and that they are merely representative of the different Lebanese sects⁴³. They are using to the Arabic word “Zaim” literally as the person who claims to be the representative of a community. They add to it the Arabic word for politics, “Siyasi” as an adjective to describe the Zaim; Siyasa in Arabic is the act of guiding horses⁴⁴. These two words combined give the elites an immense power internally and externally; a politician is guiding his community internally and presenting its interest externally. There are also additional layers for leadership, and Tripoli local leaders segregate themselves from Lebanon by claiming to be the Wujahaas (plural of Wajih) of Tripoli. The word Wajih comes from Wajh, a face, making the local leader the face of his or her community.

The main problem with this idea is the assumption that the relationship between these layers is only a one-way interaction. There is an assumption that the politicians in China, the US, France, and Russia are constantly thinking and deciding about Lebanon. Then there are Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Syria, and the UAE who are thought to be making more detailed plans for Lebanon. Then there are the national Zouama, plural of Zaim, taking the definitive decisions, and these leaders would usually delegate local Zouama to implement these decisions on the local level. For example, the interest of Dubai Development Authority in investing in TSEZ is seen to rival the interest of Chinese in investing in North Lebanon. Ahmad Tamer, Port of Tripoli director, thinks that the Chinese model is far “harsher” in this aspect because they would do everything on their

⁴³ Nahas. “«Orient» en flammes et «Occident» en désarroi [“Orient” in flames and “West” in disarray].” 2016.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

own, from development to operation, without direct interference from national and local stakeholders. The other interested stakeholders, he explains, would still delegate most of the tasks to regional, national, and local stakeholders.

This assumed one-way interaction was best refuted in 2016 when Aoun was elected as president. Lebanese politicians failed to elect a president for two and a half years because the balance of power in Syria was ambiguous between 2014 and 2016. In 2015, there was an international and regional consensus on electing Suleyman Franjiyeh as the president, representing the Iranian-Russian-Syrian axis, while Tamam Salam, as the Prime Minister, would represent the Saudi-American-Turkish axis⁴⁵. Nahas explains how this consensus has led the other two Maronite leaders to reconsider their alliances, and the regional consensus has died out after Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces, declared his support for his rival Michael Aoun, leader of the Patriotic Movement. The interactions within one layer is similar in a way to the interactions between the layers because it is based on the power of each stakeholder, and it is certainly not as simple as politicians claim it to be. Yet, you would still hear wherever you go in Lebanon about the international-regional-national decision to update the national educational curriculum, to install traffic lights, or to jumpstart a project like TSEZ.

A. The Birth of TSEZ

In 2002, Kabbara, empowered by the Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, organized a conference about the future of Tripoli at the Grand Serail, with Najib Mikati, Mohamad Safadi, and the

⁴⁵ Nahas. "العهد الجديد: دولة أو طاولة حوار" [The New Era: A State or A Discussion Table].” 2016.

Municipality of Tripoli also participating. Before this conference, which was named “Tripoli Development Conference”, Kabbara was skeptical of all the development projects since none of them so far had given Tripoli any function so that it could sustainably flourish. Most of these projects, he said, were really important, but all of them were infrastructure projects that would not bring any prosperity in the medium or long term. Reflecting on Dubai with its free zones and Tripoli with its strategic location, Kabbara thought that there should be an area, a special zone, where trade would flourish, and industry would be incentivized. Tripoli’s location, he followed, is ideal since it connects the many Arab countries to the Mediterranean Sea. With this thought, he went immediately to the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, just a few blocks away from his house in Hamra. He went directly to the Minister at the time, Bassel Fleihan, who immediately liked the idea. They immediately left for the paid Garage, where Fleihan had parked his car, so they could go present their idea to the Prime Minister at the time, Rafiq Hariri. Hariri welcomed them at his home in Kraytem, and, as Kabbara later explained, it took Rafiq Hariri only a few minutes to be totally convinced and amazed by the idea. Hariri had only one condition for the project, which was to “oblige” the companies wishing to operate in the zone to have a minimum of 50% Lebanese workers. With the endorsement of Hariri, the project began its life as one of the main projects of the 2002 Tripoli Development conference.

This story amazes me because I did not expect to hear this part of it. I expected him to tell me about the brilliance of Hariri to propose this idea, as the other two interviewees from the Future Movement actually did. The other proposed ideas in the conference were suggested by the other participating ministers, members of parliament, advisors, and municipality representatives. They had only to propose ideas and projects, but they were not asked to present any plans. Thus, the

conference was not an attempt to come up with a strategic plan for Tripoli, but it was rather a governmental promise to develop Tripoli through a set of promising projects. For Rafiq Hariri, this conference was a necessity for the city especially after the clashes between an “Islamic terrorist” group with the army in 2002 in Dennyeh, a district in North Lebanon. For the other politicians from Tripoli, the conference was a lever for them to legitimate themselves, as Misbah Ahdab⁴⁶, a member of parliament at that time, told me. He was even not invited to this conference, which was limited to the Future Movement in addition to Tripoli’s two billionaires, Najib Mikati, the Minister of Public Works at that time, and Mohammad Safadi, a member of parliament back in 2002. Mikati, Samir Jisr, and Abdul-Ghani Kabbara were the initiators of this conference, and their aim was to push for a radical solution for the Tripoli “problem”, Kabbara explains. Kabbara’s concern about the function of the city on the strategic level was indeed important to turn the conference from an emergency response to an actual strategic plan. Yet the format of the conference, with 43 proposed projects, in addition to the nature of the attendees made it just another governmental failure. People still refer to this conference as a promise that was never fulfilled. Part of this failure is due to the process that most of these projects, particularly TSEZ, had to go through.

B. The National Labyrinth

The other interviewee who was able to tell me about TSEZ before 2008, was Samir Jisr, a member of parliament and a former minister. Jisr, being the representative of this project in the parliament, witnessed how TSEZ evolved between 2002 and 2009. After the conference in 2002,

⁴⁶ Ahdab, Interview, April 2019.

the Minister of Public Works, Mikati, took the lead, and his team started working on developing the project before sending it to the parliament. However, in 2004, the government was overthrown because it was believed that Hariri was after the UN Security Council Resolution 1559 that called all foreign troops (the Syrian Army in this case) to withdraw from Lebanon. In 2005, both Rafik Hariri and Bassel Fleihan were assassinated in an event that dramatically affected the entire political scene in Lebanon. The Syrian Army left Lebanon in the same year, followed by an Israeli war against Lebanon in 2006. In 2007, the North witnessed the emergence of many “Islamic terrorist” groups, and a major clash between one such group, Fath al-Islam, and the Lebanese Army, in Nahr al-Bared. A series of skirmishes also erupted in 2008 between a pro-Syrian neighborhood, Jabal Mohsen, and another Sunni neighborhood, Tebbeneh. These skirmishes lasted until 2013 when the government declared its security plan for the city. In 2011, the Syrian “civil” war began, and its implications on Lebanon have grown since.

I have tried to summarize some of the incidents that I have heard the interviewees blame for the hindrance of TSEZ. It is true that these events affected TSEZ development but the main problem behind its slow pace was something totally different.

In 2005, Mikati became the Prime Minister for a transitional government mandated to prepare the parliamentary election. At this point he finally found an opportunity to officially launch TSEZ, a project that his team had been working on since 2002. After Mikati proposed the TSEZ bill in the Council of Ministers, the project moved to the parliament, where they started working on developing it further before the parliament would vote on it. Jisr explains how the bill went first to the National Economy, Trade, Industry and Planning Parliamentary Committee where discussions stumbled with the question of ministerial guardianship of the project. Even with Nabil

De Freige, an ally with the Future Movement, leading the committee, it was really hard for the committee members to agree on the nature of the project within the current hierarchy of the Lebanese Government. There was a dispute over whether TSEZ would be a project under one of the ministries, a project under the guardianship of multiple ministries similar to Tripoli International Fair, or a public institution like Electricity of Lebanon. Jisr intervened, as a guest to the committee session, to explain the reason behind the idea of having TSEZ. He explained how TSEZ, as a basket of exemptions, was proposed to help the marginalized Tripoli get back on its feet through a strategic project. He then proposed that TSEZ should be directly under the guardianship of the office of the Prime Minister since most of the ministries are connected directly or indirectly to the missions of the Zone. The committee then discussed the idea of creating a subcommittee to discuss the project further or to move the project to the joint committees. This was, for Jisr, the first attempt by the different political parties to obstruct this project. These two propositions meant that the bill would last years. The second attempt at obstructing the project was the proposition that such a zone should be replicated in most of the Lebanese areas, not only in Tripoli. In fact, two additional special economic zones in Tyre and Batroun were issued on 20 March 2019 by the Lebanese parliament⁴⁷. Gebran Bassil, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs and the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, asserts that the creation of these different zones would help attract foreign investment in the country, and he does not see them as rivaling or competing zones⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ باسيل: اقرار المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة بالبترون وصور عمل جيد يشجع الاستثمارات“ [Bassil: The establishment of the Special Economic Zones in Tyre and Batroun is a Good Job to Attract Investments].” el-Nashra, 2019.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

As a solution for the TSEZ' long pause in parliament, Farid Makari, vice president of the National Economy committee, proposed that a subcommittee be created with Jisr as its president. Feeling that nothing would move further, Jisr went back then to Nabih Berri, the Speaker of Parliament, and asked him personally to facilitate the development of TSEZ. Berri decided immediately to cooperate, so the subcommittee was formed with direct orders from Berri. The general director of Transportation, Abdul Hafiz Qaisi, was appointed to further develop the bill. It took Qaisi a year to propose an elaborated bill full of incentives and exemptions that would motivate businesspeople and the industry to invest in the first special economic zone in Lebanon. The challenge, as Jisr clarifies, is that the bill would need to go again through the joint committees, comprising of 16 committees total. It was 2008 at this point, a year that witnessed a critical and major conflict between Hezbollah and the March 14 government. It was 7 May 2008 when Hezbollah decided to conquer Beirut in response to the government decision to shut down Hezbollah Telecommunication network. This led to the eruption of skirmishes in Tripoli as mentioned earlier. To calm the events in the North, Jisr decided to go to Berri again to push TSEZ further, hoping that improving the economic situation would dry up the roots of violence. Berri, being aware of the bill through his party's MPs, again cooperated with Jisr by "illegally" bypassing the joint committees to put the bill to vote. Berri himself introduced the bill, and he asked the members to support this project that would help the afflicted Tripoli. In one of the parliamentary sessions in 2008, the bill passed with not a single objection to it by any party.

It may seem as if this story is about to end, but the history of the TSEZ was only starting, a long process of bouncing between the parliament and the council of ministers for different decrees to be issued and additional bills to be voted on, according to Jisr. The government worked on

developing these new decrees under the guidance of prime minister Fouad Siniora; then the decrees were sent to the State Consultative Council, who were responsible for making sure that the decrees did not contradict the constitution or any Lebanese law. In 2009, during the final session of the Siniora government, the decrees were finally issued. Then, Saad Hariri succeeded Siniora by forming a new government in 2009. Hariri, Jisr, and the Minister of Finance at the time, Raya el-Haffar, agreed on allocating three million dollars for the initiation of TSEZ. However, the government was about to be overthrown in 2010 as a result of the conflict between Hariri and Aoun. Furthermore, the next government, under Mikati, could not issue the necessary three million dollars because the state budget itself was not issued during this year. It wasn't until the next government in 2014, led by Tamam Salam, when the Council of Ministers was able to assign the first board members for TSEZ, in addition to the allocation of one million dollars to prepare an implementation plan for the Zone.

C. The Representatives in the North

Raya el-Haffar was appointed president of TSEZ board along with six other members in 2015. Hassan Dannawi⁴⁹, the current director of TSEZ, explains how Rachid Derbass, being a Minister back in 2005, played a major role in issuing the board when everyone else had failed. Even Mikati, with four Ministers from Tripoli, failed to finalize this step during his time in government. These six members first needed to abide by the convention that insists on the equality between Christians and Muslims in public positions. However, the real challenge with the

⁴⁹ Dannawi, Interview, April 2019.

appointments was that each party and each local leader wanted a representative in the board. There was a clear a clash between Saad Hariri and Najib Mikati which led to the exclusion of the latter from any representation in the board. The Future Movement describes this exclusion as a result of Mikati accepting to lead the government of March 8, who had overthrown Hariri's government in 2011. The Future Movement's Christian allies were also excluded from the board, and al-Kataeb were the first to express their jealousy of the rival Christians parties since Hezbollah takes his Christian allies seriously in all his decisions⁵⁰. Suleiman Franjiyeh, leader of the Marada Movement, the Christian leader of Zgharta, and the nominee for the presidency in 2015 by Saad Hariri, were represented through Rafli Diab, son of the Marada Movement coordinator in Tripoli. Asheer el-Dayeh is an ally of both Mohamad Safadi and Faysal Karami, currently an MP, thus representing both to local leaders in Tripoli. Shia, the Amal Movement in particular, was represented by Wassim Mansouri, the previous manager of MTC Touch, one of the Lebanese mobile telecommunications companies. The Free Patriotic Movement selected Antoine Habib, the former chairman of Tripoli Port Authority, as their representative in the board. Jihad Azour, the former Minister of Finance, and Ramzi el-Hafez both represented the Future Movement along with Raya el-Haffar, the former Minister of Finance, as president for the board. Azour is currently suspended because he did not interact with the board since his appointment in 2015⁵¹. Currently, Hassan Dannawi is playing the role of the president after el-Haffar was appointed as the Minister of Interior Affairs and Municipalities⁵².

⁵⁰ al-Samad. "الرابحون والخاسرون في تعيينات منطقة طرابلس الاقتصادية" [The winners and losers in the appointments of Tripoli Economic Zone]." al-Akhbar, 2015.

⁵¹ "Dannawi as a President by Proxy for Tripoli Economic Zone." [Dannawi as a President by Proxy for Tripoli Economic Zone]." al-Markazia, April 2019.

⁵² "Dannawi as a President by Proxy for Tripoli Economic Zone." [Dannawi as a President by Proxy for Tripoli Economic Zone]." al-Markazia, April 2019.

Some of the names of the board members have surprised me because their names felt familiar, yet I had not heard about them before. Khalid Ziadeh tells the story of having a similar feeling when he was doing his ethnography of the history of Tripoli⁵³. He started suddenly meeting the descendants of families whom he had only read about in history books, and it is the same for most of the names in the TSEZ board. Asheer el-Dayeh for example is the name of one of the main streets in Tripoli, and it was named after one of the a significant public servant in the Municipality of Tripoli during the 1970s. Rafli Diab is the son of Antoine Diab who was one of the main Christian leaders in Tripoli. Azour is not famous in Tripoli because he was the Minister of Finance, but his family name is known in the city because his brother Antoine Azour owns and manages the “hated” company Lavajet, al-Fayhaa’s waste management contractor. Ramzi el-Hafez is the son of Amin el-Hafez, a Lebanese Politician from before the Lebanese Civil War and a Prime Minister in 1973. Antoine Habib is still “active” in the social field in Tripoli through his NGO, the Association of Developing Tripoli and Mina. Khaled Ziadeh questions in his book whether these families can ever go back into politics, and I think the answer lies in the TSEZ board. These families can return in different forms by being businesspeople, public servants, or consultants.

Up to this point, nothing has actually happened on the ground, but TSEZ has at least managed through the “battles” on both the national and the local level. By framing them as battles, the city leaders are considering themselves as heroes who are fighting on behalf of Tripolitans. For instance, Ashraf Rifi, the former director of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, asserts that TSEZ was approved only as a result of the struggle on the national level since 2008⁵⁴. Most of the

⁵³ Ziadeh, Madina. *مدينة على المتوسط: ثلاثية* [A City on the Mediterranean: Trilogy]. 2010.

⁵⁴ “Rifi: TSEZ was obstructed with wickedness and astuteness.” el-Nashra, March 2019.

Lebanese projects have similar dynamics to TSEZ, and the two pictures I am using for this chapter are no different. The first picture is for a “failing” project where the national dynamic was more powerful than the local one. Dewailly, in his dissertation on Tripoli⁵⁵, explains how the Cultural Heritage and Urban Development project (CHUD) was manipulated by Rafik Hariri, who was trying to legitimate himself as the Sunni leader in opposition to the local elites of the city. The other picture is for another project that Dewailly also analyses, and it is the *Dam w Farez* project where the municipality decided to annex then re-distribute land in its effort to better plan for the city development. While CHUD struggled as a result of national and sectarian conflict, the dynamic of this project was mainly local, concentrated between the landowners, construction contractors, and local politicians. Dewailly argues that this project is responsible for the passive economic model that made real estate take over any industry or productive sector in the city. TSEZ’s future, or any other project in this country, relies on the ability of the national and local elites to shift from being **The Zaims and the Wujahaas** to become policymakers and leaders who proactively interact with politics.

⁵⁵ Dewailly. “Pouvoir et production urbaine à Tripoli [Power and Urban Production in Tripoli].” 2015.



Figure 6. How to Build and Sell Match Boxes (Tripolitan's Metaphor for the Newly-built Apartments) by Tripoli's Contractors and Land Owners⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Remax Experts Website. www.Remax-Tripoli.com.

CHAPTER III THE BUREAUCRAT AND THE EXPERT

After issuing the needed laws and decrees, the responsibility to push TSEZ forward was transferred to three main groups: the development contractors, the management consultants, and the TSEZ employees. In this chapter, I identify all the entities, companies, and individuals who have a role in the manifestation of the project. TSEZ is still struggling in the first place to realize its physical space due to the contractor's procrastination, secondly to formalize its processes as a result of the rigid Lebanese bureaucracy, and in the third place to build its capacity considering the lack of funds. These different groups have almost no "Skin in the Game", and TSEZ is left without any individuals or entities to actually lead. In order to avoid any responsibility for the failure of TSEZ, all are trying to distance themselves from the project. Without having few individuals with the courage to lead TSEZ, there is no chance that this project would actually launch in the first place.



Figure 7. One-Minute Walking-Distance from My Room When I Used to Live in Dubai Media City⁵⁷

⁵⁷ "Quick Guide to Dubai Media City." Time Out Dubai, 2016.

While the period between 2002 and 2015 was a political battle, the period between 2015 and 2018 was a bureaucratic battle. Both Raya el-Haffar, the former president of TSEZ, and Hassan Dannawi, the current temporary president of TSEZ and el-Haffar consultant for TSEZ since 2015, were praised by almost everyone I have met during my interviews. They were seen as the real fighters who believe in TSEZ, and they were seen constantly running to build partnerships and secure resources. The people who were able to push TSEZ on its way like Jisr, el-Haffar, Kabbara, and Dannawi all shared the idea that they were Tripolitans whose reputations would be affected by the success or failure of the project. They have skin in the game, as Nassim Taleb⁵⁸ put it, which means that long-term effective decisions are only made by people who may incur risks and gains by being involved in a project. Taleb give the example of the Roman architects who were obliged to sleep underneath the bridge they built for a specific time to prove its stability. This concept entails that mere public servants who are totally detached from reality would not be able to do a good job compared to employees who have skin in the game. Some of the other players in the history of TSEZ did not have a direct effect on its success or failure, and they certainly had different concerns, aspirations, and fears. CDR is a really good example to illustrate this because any contractor or CDR employee is not directly affected by anything happening in the city but rather by decisions made on the national level by the CDR main office, the office of the Prime Minister, or another frustrated minister. The reliance on contractors, consultants, and investors, in addition to the insistence on delegating all TSEZ functions to the private sector completely avoid this problem. TSEZ has become the perfect project for any politician because it has only potential gains with no risks whatsoever.

⁵⁸ Taleb. *Skin in the Game*. 2017.

A. The Million Dollars Contractors

After 13 years of developing TSEZ law and decrees, the physical work on TSEZ was launched in 2015 along with the appointment of the board. The Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) started reclaiming the land in 2015, and they should have delivered the project to TSEZ within 18 months as Hassan Dannawi stated in 2015⁵⁹. However, the CDR has not yet delivered the project, and the reclamation of the land is not yet over, as Jisr noted. CDR awarded the project for \$22 million to al-Jihad for Commerce and Contracting with Rafik El Khoury & Partners as the consultant⁶⁰. The work on the infrastructure of TSEZ was estimated to start a few years ago but the launch of the tender process has not yet started. The question of whether the process would be started by CDR or TSEZ is still not answered. The answer to this question is based on the nature of the fund and whether it is allocated by the government directly or through grants and funds directed by CDR. For instance, the \$22 million for the reclamation of the land was redirected from el-Meraab, the Parking, project. The CDR was going to start working on this project back in 2016 but the Municipality of Tripoli and the “Civil Society” rejected this project that the Municipality approved back in 2002. The dynamic of the tender process would slightly differ between the two entities because the CDR and the TSEZ have different stakeholders represented in their boards. However, both of these entities are directly under the guardianship of the office of the Prime Minister. While the TSEZ board has not yet undergone a similar process, the CDR is well known in Tripoli for its failures in planning, contracting, and execution. The Parking is one of those projects rejected from the beginning before its launch. The objection to the

⁵⁹ Alieh. “Land Reclamation in Tripoli Economic Zone Begins.” Business News, 2015.

⁶⁰ Alieh. “Land Reclamation in Tripoli Economic Zone Begins.” Business News, 2015.

project was based on the failure of the CDR in its previous projects like the CHUD and the restoration of roads and infrastructure in the city⁶¹.

The infrastructure tender process was still waiting for the allocation of the funds by the council of ministers, as el-Haffar stated, and she estimated that \$30 million is required to launch the process in addition to the \$15 million already provided by the government⁶². Jisr told me in the interview that they have finally redirected \$76 million dollars from the rejected Parking project towards TSEZ. Yet, that does not mean that TSEZ has got the funding, and there is still no final answer for this question since the parliament did not vote on the Public Budget for this year. The current economic challenges that Lebanon is facing means that the government may not be able to allocate funds for TSEZ, as most of the interviewees have asserted. Dabboussi believes that the governmental shortage of funds would not be a problem since the Public Private Partnership model allows TSEZ to rely on the private sector to invest in building the needed infrastructure. Yet, I wonder if the private sector is truly willing to adopt this model as it means they will have to be exposed to immense risks, especially if the Zone failed to deliver on its promise. There is a huge difference between a contractor who is paid \$30 million and an investor who is paying these millions from his pocket. Whether it is funded by the Government or the Private Sector, the 2020 deadline that TSEZ predicts on its website does not seem valid anymore.

⁶¹ Dhaybi. . "ثورة على مجلس الإنماء والإعمار" [Tripoli: A Revolution against CDR]." al-Modon, 2017.

⁶² Alieh. "Reclamation Complete at the Tripoli Economic Zone." Business News, 2017.

B. The Bureaucratic Challenge

TSEZ was one of those institutions created to bypass the “rigidity” of the Lebanese bureaucratic system, as Kabbara explains. It is almost impossible for a Lebanese person to disagree about the rigidity of the Lebanese bureaucracy because each citizen will have to battle with this bureaucracy to complete any official document he or she needs. Yet, the best way to handle this bureaucracy remains arguable. The government can run from bureaucracy by creating another one or starting to truly work on developing it. The duplication of responsibilities and assignments of the different public institutions creates major problems, and the continuous battles between the municipalities, CDR, and the Ministry of Public Works are evidence of problems created by these complications.

TSEZ has been given many duties and functions that replicate almost everything in the government so it can operate “faster”. For instance, TSEZ has the ability to grant visas for both visitors and workers at the zone⁶³, and this would help avoid the lengthy visa process that any foreigner has to go through. However, the actual “problem” was the guardianship given for the Ministry of Finance in addition to the guardianship of the office of the Prime Minister, as Dannawi explains. It was not a “problem” when the decrees were created because the Minister of Finance was “always” appointed by March 14 coalition up until 2011 when the Ministry of Finance was re-allocated to Berri. Yet, the actual challenge is not political with the current Minister, as Dannawi clarifies, but a clash over the actual legal authorities of TSEZ. For instance, the Ministry of Finance is not only the one accepting the TSEZ budget but also the one setting it, because TSEZ was not

⁶³ تحديد شروط منح التأشيرات للمنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس” [Determining the visas’ requirement for the people coming to Tripoli Special Economic Zone].” al-Jarida al-Rasmiya, 2009.

able to get employees in the last few years. The employee assigned by the Ministry of Finance is always afraid, Dannawi makes clear, of any contradictions in the TSEZ law and decrees so the process is halted often, while waiting for further legal clarification. The ambiguity of the decrees should be solved at a later stage to avoid such complications but the creation of the TSEZ team can solve all these problems at the current moment, Dannawi explains. At this time, TSEZ has only some consultants in addition to a few employees who are working directly for the TSEZ Authority, or TSEZ board, but there are no employees for TSEZ. The division between TSEZ and its authority at the moment may seem a bit bizarre, but this hierarchization is normal in the evolution of TSEZ, if we keep in mind that each stakeholder is trying to avoid any potential risk or responsibility.

TSEZ is currently struggling to form its team and pass decisions, but Raya el-Haffar was able to move further through alternative courses. For instance, the current offices along with the salary of a few employees were offered by Toufic Dabboussi⁶⁴ through the Chamber of Commerce. Dabboussi explains how this support is aimed at facilitating the development of TSEZ without constantly waiting for the national consensus. Another milestone, Dannawi adds, is the feasibility study done by the World Bank as an update of the 2011 USAID feasibility study for TSEZ, and it was done after the TSEZ authority request for assistance. The TSEZ feasibility 2016 study was part of a bigger report by the World Bank on the economic opportunities in North Lebanon. It also included investment and Public Private Partnership (PPP) options, analysis for TSEZ estimated financials, and recommendations for the needed infrastructure. In order to support and attract the Lebanese diaspora, the TSEZ authority received a grant from Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, a German political organization that “offer a wide variety of civic education conferences and

⁶⁴ Dabboussi, Interview, May 2019.

events”⁶⁵. In addition, an initial Master Plan for ILC, the Industrial and Logistical Center of TSEZ, was sent to the Lebanese Authority for Urban Planning after being prepared by Khatib & Alami Firm and ECODIT Liban, in addition to an environmental assessment. The tender documents for the ILC infrastructure are also ready for TSEZ to launch the bidding process for TSEZ infrastructure.

Another major request was made by the TSEZ authority to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) for the development of the interim licensing regime and regulatory framework. Additional frameworks are also critical for the development of TSEZ because the main duty of TSEZ, Dannawi believes, is to be neither a developer nor an operator, but rather to be a regulator for private firms who are able to do a better job than the TSEZ Authority. In their visit to Tripoli last month, the Chinese are still showing interest in TSEZ, and Kabbara believes that this interest may translate into the Chinese developing TSEZ, Kleyate Airport in Akkar, and the Train Rail to Homs. Jisr talks about the Dubai Free Zone Authority that is also interested in developing and operating the Zone. There are clearly international, regional, and national players who are interested in TSEZ, including the Americans, Germans, Chinese, Emiratis, and certainly the Lebanese private sector. Dannawi, Kabbara, and Jisr insists that having these private operators, who are totally “detached” from the political and bureaucratic battles, would be key in the future success of TSEZ.

As a response to the criticism of the location of TSEZ near the landfill, the TSEZ team have started working on finding a reasonable alternative. A decree⁶⁶ was signed by the Council of

⁶⁵ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Website. www.KAS.de.

⁶⁶ “تحديد موقع المنطقة الاقتصادية في طرابلس” [Defining the Location of Tripoli Special Economic Zone].” al-Jarida al-Rasmiya, 2018.

Ministers in 2018 granting TSEZ part of Tripoli International Fair (TIF) so the Zone can use it as its offices. A Knowledge and Innovation Center (KIC) was then declared to be the name of this area, and it would serve as the hub for innovation in the knowledge and innovation sector, mainly focused on technology. The original location was then named ILC, the Industrial and Logistical Center. With the collaboration of the two Syndicates Engineers of Beirut and Tripoli, TSEZ Authority has launched the first phase of an international architectural competition for KIC. The designs should take into consideration the architecture style of Oscar Niemeyer, one of the most famous architects in the world, who designed the Fair in the 1960s. TSEZ has partnered on this project with the Lebanese Federation of Engineers and Architects, the Union of International Architects, and the Union of Mediterranean Architects (UMAR). In a seminar⁶⁷ on TSEZ in the Chamber of Commerce, both Dannawi and Chawki Fatfat, an architect and the competition coordinator, explain that the reason behind launching such a competition is to avoid any criticism or objection that TSEZ is ruining the “beauty” of Niemeyer’s fair. Also, they believe that an international competition would help in promoting Tripoli and its special economic zone to the whole world. The second phase of the competition is about to start with 400 architects who sent their applications during the first phase.

C. The Quest for Management Consultants

While TSEZ law and decrees provide principles and guidelines for the management of TSEZ, it does not clearly provide or define management processes. With the support of the Office

⁶⁷ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Seminar, Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

of the State Minister for Administrative Reform (OMSAR), TSEZ hired Team International, a Lebanese consultant firm, to develop its management system. Neither Dannawi nor el-Haffar were satisfied with Team International's deliverables, so they have contacted another firm in order to get better and more profound results. This other firm, Intelligile, is an international firm that offers a business architecture solution called MAP, and their current team in Lebanon resides in Tripoli. The office in Tripoli is led by the company's Tripolitan founder, and they currently offer, in addition to MAP, consultancy and business architecture modeling services to companies, factories, and public institutions. I have personally worked for Intelligile for two years as a junior business architect before co-founding a Social Innovation Accelerator in the city and before enrolling in a Master's in Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB. The Intelligile team has worked for almost a year on developing the workflow, procedures, and processes for the support activities of TSEZ, but they have only developed the financial, administrative, and human resources capabilities so far. A member of the team clarified that the core activities and services of TSEZ were not part of this project, and another phase is planned to not only develop the core services but also train upcoming TSEZ employees. A junior business architect from Intelligile explained how the funds allocated to Intelligile were minimal compared to the work they have done. On the other hand, the main contractor, Team International, has gotten huge shares of the project budget without doing any work. The project is not yet closed, and Intelligile is still waiting for the project to be closed so they can prepare for the second phase. The first phase of the project is currently stuck due to disputes over the project deliverables. OMSAR is asking about the unmet requirements written in the contract that was signed by TEAM International. Meanwhile, TSEZ Authority has developed another set of requirements with Intelligile who ended up doing the project.

While there is a huge difference between the methodologies of Team International and Intelligile, the dynamics of the teams are also different by nature. Team International supposedly relies on its arsenal of consultants who develop projects all over the world, and their methodology consists of conducting analysis followed by a set of recommendations. This kind of expertise, Taleb claims, is the reason behind the shallowness of the recommendations because the consultants do not incur any direct risk for their suggestions; hence, they have no skin in the game. However, Intelligile team members, being Tripolitans residing in the city, are working on one of their most important projects. The failure of this project would mean the end of their career in this field in the city, while their success could open new doors for them, as one of the team members describes.

TSEZ team is still limited to few personnel, and the developed business models would need to wait for the political consensus over the recruitment of the upcoming Zone team. In April 2019, during a seminar⁶⁸ on TSEZ and its achieved milestones, Oussama Ziadeh, founder and CEO of Intelligile, presented the different models. A few questions were then raised during this seminar about technical matters, and the audience were satisfied with Ziadeh's answers because they showed not only his knowledge of TSEZ, but also his belief in it. The problems started when the audience began asking political questions about the other newly created special zones or the unreasonable delay in getting TSEZ functioning. Dannawi tried first to answer the political questions by initially blaming the delays on the complexity of Lebanese politics, but he then refrained from answering any questions. Ziadeh intervened to answer some of these questions but I believe that he utterly failed to do that. He ended up answering political questions with technical

⁶⁸ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Seminar, Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

answers about the lack of competencies in the country, the failure of the academic system, etc. He then jumped to talk about the bright future that is awaiting all of us if we work harder. His answers were truly genuine and deep, especially when he started talking about the future of work and the importance of knowledge and innovation, which is his main expertise. Yet, none of his arguments were actually true when he was explaining the politics affecting TSEZ, and his arguments were extremely annoying for the audience. Technical weakness or political conflict are not the only explanations for the failure of governmental projects, so we should not fall intentionally, or unintentionally, to these two arguments. For instance, the inefficiency of some public institutions, like the Serail in Tripoli, would usually be explained either by the Government's lack of interest in the city or by the employees' lack of competencies. Yet, we should not miss the fact that neither the current politicians, nor most of the employees, are focusing on providing better services because they have practically **No Skin in the Game**.



Figure 8. The 3rd Most Inefficient Public Institution in Tripoli⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ibrahim. “حملة أمنية في قلم النفوس” [Tripoli: A Security Campaign at the Registration Bureau].” *Safir al-Chamat*, November 2019.

CHAPTER IV THE LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

While TSEZ is directly run by the office of the prime minister, the project would not function smoothly without the cooperation of the main local institutions: the Port of Tripoli, Tripoli International Fair, the Municipality of Tripoli, and the Chamber of Commerce in North Lebanon. This chapter follows the communication of the mentioned institutions with TSEZ, and I have tried to identify all the activities which these entities are either doing or planning to do in order to support the development of the zone. Both the Port of Tripoli and Tripoli International Fair share physical spaces with TSEZ, and the Chamber of Commerce is working closely with the zone on few shared activities. The Municipality is the only institution that is barely interacting or contributing to the project. While claiming responsibility over their mandates, none of these entities, as similar to the political leaders, claim responsibility for the current status of the city nor its future. The disconnection between the different local institutions has led to the fragmentation of the public sphere in Tripoli, and none of the leaders of these institutions is claiming any responsibility for the current status of the city. Even when you ask any of them about their responsibility over their fragment, they would always find someone else to blame.



Figure 9. The 2nd Most Inefficient Public Institution in Tripoli⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Karimeh. "Bashaer El Ezz" in the municipality of Tripoli looks forward to strengthen its block]." Lebanon24, 2018.

Tripoli is famous for being the second largest city in Lebanon after Beirut, and I remember I once seeing an advertisement by IDAL, the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon, stating that Tripoli is a one-million-consumer market⁷¹. I still wonder about the thought process behind using a road banner telling consumers about their number instead of promotion for industrialists. In this advertisement, IDAL missed out on the fact that the strength of the North does not lie only in its market size but also in the promise of its industries and in the potential of its institutions. These industries and institutions are the ones that previously made Tripoli the capital for the North and Akkar. These two areas combined are almost the same size as the Beirut Metropolis in population, with around one million and a half citizen and refugees. Some of these institutions have died a long time ago, like the train line and the airport, but there are still plenty of living institutions. Some of these, like the Municipality, are failing to do its role while other institutions, like the Chamber of Commerce, are trying to compensate for the failure of the first. The “failing” institutions are either obsessed with signing papers or with insisting on their independence; however, these two obsessions are not, I believe, reasons by themselves for the failure of these institutions. The public servants would certainly add the political problem as another reason for their failure, but all arguments hide behind a fear of claiming responsibility for the current reality.

⁷¹ IDAL Page, Facebook, 2017.

A. A Window to the Sea

Sitting in the office of Ahmad Tamer⁷², the director of the Port of Tripoli, I wondered why they decided to build his office in the port yet not have a sea view. Tamer's office was one of two offices during my interviews that were full of books; the other office being Samir Jisr's office at Maarad. There are three essential pillars, Tamer started immediately explaining, for the success of TSEZ, and these are 1) political stability, 2) proper education and training, and 3) an appropriate business and legal environment. His work, or Raya el-Haffar's work on TSEZ, would be meaningless if these three are not well developed by the ruling politicians, he adds. After asking me about my study, he went to the library to bring me a book. He gave me a book he wrote, offering in it a conceptual analysis of ports in general, as well as a strategic assessment for the Port of Tripoli (PoT). Supporting me with data, he immediately sent me by WhatsApp the PoT report that has all the data I would need for my research.

Abdallah Ghandour, the previous president of the Chamber of Commerce, was the first one to tell Tamer about TSEZ in 2010. Tamer believes that TSEZ is one of the best projects for Tripoli because it can give the city an important role in international trade. Unfortunately, after doing a great job as the president of TSEZ, el-Haffar became a minister, he sadly said. Tamer wished that politicians would assign Dannawi, his consultant, as a successor so he can continue the good work and coordination that he was doing as el-Haffar's consultant. It took 7 years for the board to be assigned, and Tamer insists that this slowness was down to a lack of political consensus. This continuing lack is already deadly for the port, and it will be the same for TSEZ. His insistence about the political "challenge" made me feel as if he was talking about something that would never

⁷² Tamer, Interview, May 2019.

change and would make the work of all public servants meaningless. Yet, he is one of the relatively good examples of public servants who are doing as much as they can within their limits. Tamer is currently working on expanding the port from its current capacity of 400 containers to 1,300 containers.

The Maarad, on the other hand, is a huge inactive space that people either use for exhibitions, concerts, or jogging. The board of Maarad, Tripoli International Fair, only plays the role of a lender of the facility it manages, and it may offer it for you for free if you have the right connection. Yet the lack of maintenance is making the Fair dangerous to use, and Quality Inn, the hotel managed by a private investor, has severely deteriorated in the last decade. At the beginning of this month, the hotel was closed as a result of legal and monetary problems between the Maarad and the hotel. The Maarad and the hotel have become the main examples in Tripoli of the mismanagement of both public institutions and the private sector respectively. Yet, “politics” has re-intervened to open the hotel, and the clash between the Maarad and the hotel is still bouncing between the legal and the political⁷³. While it is always easy to blame politicians for such a conflict, it seems that it is more like a conflict between businesspeople who are getting political support. Nahas, in his lecture⁷⁴ in Tripoli on the analysis of the 2018 parliamentary election, explains how this group of businesspeople, public servants, and officers heavily affects politicians’ decisions. Nahas describes how these people would easily blame the politicians from the rival group for all their failures, and they will salute their own leader for his effort to push for reforms. Yet, many of

⁷³ Dhaybi. “أقفل بالقانون وأعيد فتحه بالسياسة.” [The Only Hotel in Tripoli: Closed by Law and Reopened with Politics].” al-Modon, April 2019.

⁷⁴ Nahas. “الانتخابات النيابية: بين المتاجرة بالقلق ومواجهة الواقع.” [Parliamentary Elections: between Trading with Fears and Facing Reality].” Conference, 2018.

the failures do not have anything to do with politics, and both public servants and businesspeople are sometimes the ones who lack competencies, will, and vision.

B. The Mayor of Papers and Employees

The mayor, Ahmad Qamar el-Dine, spends all of his time in the municipality signing all kind of papers, Bassem Bakhach⁷⁵ explains. Bassem was one of the elected members of the Municipality of Tripoli back in 2016, and he is currently one of the members opposing the renewal of Qamar el-Dine's presidency. Each Municipality Council in Lebanon is expected in June 2019 to either back their current mayor for three additional years or to elect a new one; Tripoli is one of the few municipalities that is witnessing a "battle" on the leadership of this institution⁷⁶. When I asked Bakhach about the TSEZ, he explained how the Municipality cannot directly affect the progress of TSEZ because it is an independent entity that happens to be in Tripoli. Yet, for him, the city should benefit from such an opportunity by starting to develop the city properly in order to become an economic hub for the region. The current status of Tripoli does not allow it to be a hub because everything is at its worst, he adds. The roads are barely safe to drive on, and there are no proper hotels for businesspeople or tourists. Bakhach believes that the Municipality is the main entity to blame for the current status of the city, and he does not see, as an insider, any political problem. The problem, for Bakhach, is the incompetent mayor who is not only wasting his time signing papers but also the incompetent staff he has at the municipality. Ahmad Qamar el-Dine⁷⁷,

⁷⁵ Bakhach, Interview, May 2019.

⁷⁶ "عزام عويضة رئيساً لبلدية طرابلس؟" al-Akhbar, June 2019.

⁷⁷ Qamar el-Dine, Interview, May 2019.

on the other hand, explains how the municipality has already started playing its role by providing vocational training. He went on to explain the work of one of the International donors who started delivering vocational training in one of the municipality buildings. TSEZ, for Qamar el-Dine, would positively affect Tripoli in the short and long term. Yet, the municipality, he said, does not have anything to offer the TSEZ. The Zone would be the one to help the Municipality by employing many of its citizens who will end up paying their municipal taxes. The municipal taxation is barely reaching 30%, Qamr el-Dine emphasizes. Bakhach has noted that the municipality actually has around \$90 million in its treasury at the moment, and the municipality does not have a clue about the ideal way to use it.

The mayor insisted that the municipality is trying its best to interact with all the stakeholders in the city. His insistence was not shared by Bakhach, who thinks that he himself has failed in the last three years to do his job as a member of the municipality council. Bakhach believes that his job is to strategize, monitor, and develop the municipality services and projects. He ended up helping citizens getting their requests and permits moving through the enormously slow bureaucracy of the municipality. Jisr⁷⁸ believes that the Municipality has become an institution that works only in offering favors for the municipality employees and the members of its council. Ahdab⁷⁹ thinks that the problem lies in the dominance of politicians, mainly Hariri and Mikati, over the municipality; he believes that these two politicians are the ones using this institution to offer the municipality services as favors.

⁷⁸ Jisr, Interview, May 2019.

⁷⁹ Ahdab, Interview, April 2019.

In the introduction, I mentioned my brother who did not know Tal; so, I immediately asked him, while writing this paragraph, about the location of the Municipality. He just laughed saying that it is certainly in Tal. On the other hand, when I asked him about any other public institution that he knows, he immediately told me about the Chamber of Commerce.

C. The Coordinator in the North

In fact, the Chamber of Commerce is not a public institution but rather a semi-public one, because it facilitates legal processes for businesses. There are many reasons for my brother to know the Chamber of Commerce since it plays many roles in the North, and it welcomes almost everyone who knock on its doors. The Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture in Tripoli and North Lebanon (CCIAT) has been led by Toufic Dabboussi since 2009. Dabboussi⁸⁰ is known to be one of the most successful businesspeople in the North as the founder of Dabboussi Group that works in the automobile, financial, and construction services. Dabboussi is seen as one of the main Maestros in the North, and he is constantly coordinating with all the international, national, and local stakeholders exceeding any politician in the city. He launched an initiative in 2017 that called for Tripoli to be the economic capital of Lebanon. Dabboussi is trying to convince as many stakeholders as he can since 2017, and you would be shocked to see that there is almost no one in the country who did not hear about the project from Dabboussi himself. For instance, the picture below is from when Dabboussi presented the initiative to a group from the World Bank. In this meeting, Dabboussi also invited Ahmad Qamar el-Dine, the mayor of Tripoli and al-Fayhaa;

⁸⁰ "The Founder." Dabboussi Group Website. www.DabboussiGroup.com.

Ahmad Tamer, director of Port of Tripoli; and Hassan Dannawi, the current director of TSEZ, in addition to other businesspersons from the North.

Dabboussi has recently launched a new project called “The Special Economic Zone in Lebanon from the Greater Tripoli”. Before I started my interview with Dabboussi⁸¹, he asked the videographer to come to record the interview so his explanation of the project could be shared later on. He asked the videographer to only start recording after the first answer, when he told me how the current location of TSEZ is disastrous. This zone does not have any future with all its current limitations, he asserts. The location of the landfill, slaughterhouse, and the sewage dump would push any corporations or businesspeople away from investing in this zone. Then Dabboussi added that the other problem concerns the capacity of the Zone and the Port because it does not allow to be actual player in the regional trade. He was one of two interviews where I heard actual numbers and statistics; the other one being Ahmad Tamer, director of Port of Tripoli. The capacity of the Port of Beirut and Port of Tripoli combined cannot serve the needs of Iraq and Syria, he explains, because it is estimated that they will need 20 million containers every year during the reconstruction period. Beirut Airport is also limited not only in its current size but also in its ability to expand. Dabboussi’s project does not even need a new law, he clarifies, because this would be under the umbrella of TSEZ. Dabboussi’s project is about creating a special economic zone that connects Port of Tripoli to the Kleyate Airport. This area does not need funds or investment from the government or any bank because it will rely on the private sector as the main partner in the construction and operation of the zone. Even with the Chamber’s support for TSEZ by providing them with office space and some employees’ salaries, Dabboussi believes that Raya could not

⁸¹ Dabboussi, Interview, May 2019.

accomplish much in TSEZ. Her failure is due to the current limitations of the project, so TSEZ should expand as a project for it to be of real interest to major players like China and the US, he noted. Apart from Dabboussi not blaming anyone in the country for the delay in TSEZ, he was also the only one to offer alternative courses of action. The public servants in the city could have also built a similar proactive mindset if only they decided to claim **Responsibility over the Reality** around them.



Figure 10. Toufic Dabboussi has succeeded in convincing almost everyone about his initiative⁸²

⁸² “Daboussi Met a Delegation from the World Bank.” Immar wa Iktisad, 2018.

CHAPTER V THE MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC

Tripolitains started raising their concerns about TSEZ fearing that it would turn to another failed project, thus added as the 7th project that start with an “M”. After presenting the failed six projects, I argue how they are all treated by the Public in the same way. These failures are all seen as projects that can provide jobs, preferably a public job, and not opportunities. Then, the International players are brought into the discussion with the identification of the governments that are showing interest in TSEZ. Lastly, I talk about the way people identifying with this project as being an organic manifestation of the Lebanese capacity as merchants. This chapter concludes with the public reliance on blaming as another feature of policymaking in Tripoli; there is always someone to blame as a justification for the decay of the city without offering any insight about any other factor. TSEZ should not be considered neither as a threat nor as the route to development, Tripolitains should look to it as an opportunity to proactively shape this project as they want through politics instead of keep shouting “Wayniyeh el-Dawleh”, where is the State.



Figure 11. “Civil Society” Groups Fighting Hard to Stop Another “Disastrous” CDR Project⁸³

⁸³ اعتصام للمجتمع المدني في طرابلس احتجاجا على تنفيذ مشروع مرأب التل “ [A protest for the civil society in Tripoli against the implementation of the Tal parking project].” el-Nashra, March 2016.

The special economic zone was not the first project that Tripolitans were promised to be the solution to their problems. In fact, TSEZ was lately added as the 7th “M” of Tripoli, which is a list of projects that some Tripolitans believe would turn Tripoli, if properly supported, into an economic capital in the region. However, these “M”s are currently a curse that needs to be lifted, and some people have suggested that the city has already crossed this word from its alphabet in order to avoid usage of this cursed letter⁸⁴. It is no wonder that the “civil society” groups have stood against the Meraab Parking project, fearing that another failed M would be added to the list. You would hear these Ms in every protest and seminar in Tripoli, and it was actually mentioned during TSEZ seminar⁸⁵ in the Chamber of Commerce. An attendee raised concern over the success of TSEZ, being one of the Ms, with the absence of TSEZ sisters, the rest of the Ms.

The “Mimat” (Ms) of Tripoli got their name from the Arabic Letter “م”, spelled Mim, simply because each project in this list starts with the letter M. The first M is none other than the Maarad, Tripoli International Fair, that we have talked about more than once in this research. The second one is the Misfat, the Oil Refinery, and we have talked about the Russian company that has recently signed a contract with the Ministry of Energy and Water to manage and use this long-forgotten facility. The Marfaa, Port of Tripoli, is the third project, and Tripolitans believe that port should raise its capacity to be equivalent to the Port of Beirut. Mahattat al-Qitar, the Train Station, is the fourth one, and it is imagined as a station that connects Beirut, Tripoli, Homs, Halab, and eventually Istanbul. The fifth M is the Matar, Kleyate Airport or Rene Muawaad Airbase, and it is usually raised against Hizbullah “control” of Beirut Airport. The sixth project is the Malaab al-

⁸⁴ Haydar. “طرابلس تحذف " الميم " من الابجدية.” [Tripoli deletes the M from its Alphabet!].” aliwaa, 2018.

⁸⁵ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Seminar, Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

Olympi, the Olympic Stadium, that is currently used as an army base. You would hear some people add other Ms like Mahattat al-Tasfir, the Travel Station, or al-Mantaka al-Sina'iyah, the Industrial Zone, but these projects are still mere dreams, unlike the other Ms listed above. The seventh M is TSEZ, being al-Mantaka al-Iktisadiya al-Khassa in Tripoli. These projects do not only share the letter M or their struggles to operate, but they also share the same economic model in the minds of people.

A. A Rentier State without Resources

“These projects can secure hundreds and thousands of jobs for the Northerners”, someone shouted⁸⁶. Whether it is the port, airport, or the train station, people believe that the public jobs that these institutions would bring are the solution to unemployment. Another businessman in the seminar opposed this argument explaining that these projects would only be a burden if they were not as active as they should be. A young man surprisingly asked why we are not looking to the opportunity that the North has in the reconstruction of Syria. The discussions went on for a long time focusing mainly on the role of government in creating jobs. The jobs they were talking about were “lazy” public jobs that would secure their future, and many Lebanese believe that a public job is the ultimate solution for anyone to live decently in this country. The discussion shifted when a Lebanese businessman asked the TSEZ team about the incentives they would offer him to move his factory from Turkey back to Tripoli. Then the questions dramatically shifted towards the ideal methods for creating a flourishing business environment.

⁸⁶ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Seminar, Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

TSEZ is different in this aspect because it does not promise public jobs but offers instead a business platform for entrepreneurs to employ at least 50% of their employees from Lebanon. Oussama Ziadeh⁸⁷, CEO of Intelligile and the Business Architecture consultant for TSEZ, has explained that this way of thinking is not that different from the Lebanese understanding of a public job. He explained that we should not end up taking the low skilled, thus low paid, jobs, but we should instead work on developing the needed competencies to become entrepreneurs in TSEZ, not only workers. Kabbara, adviser for Hariri for the North, is skeptical about the Tripolitans' ability to understand what's actually needed to build a business environment. While he was excited about TSEZ, he was not so sure if Tripolitans would be able to play an active role in TSEZ' success. Jisr and Bakhach, on the other hand, believe that the people are not to blame but rather the Municipality, whose main role is to strategically prepare the city. Dannawi, during the seminar, insisted that the main players are the Lebanese entrepreneurs and the Lebanese expatriates who have the capital and the experience to confidently launch new endeavors. The discussion consisted of a long list of players to blame for the failure of the TSEZ, in addition to another list of potential stakeholders that are responsible for TSEZ potential success.

B. The “Rich” Foreigner as the Hero

There are four words that the audience in the seminar, and Lebanese people in general, use for entrepreneurs: Raed A'mal, Rajol A'mal, al-Sina'iyon and Tajer. When the word “entrepreneur” is used in Lebanon, it typically refers to someone who is launching a startup in

⁸⁷ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Seminar, Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

technology. Raed A'mal, an entrepreneur, is rarely used in the Lebanese dialect, and it is usually substituted with Rajol A'mal, a businessman. Also, there are al-Sina'iyon, the industrialists, who built their own associations like the Association of Lebanese Industrialists. Some of these industrialists are currently moving to the public sector like Neemat Frem, founder of Indevco Group, who became a member of parliament. Mohamed Chukeir, CEO of Patchi, is another industrialist who became the Minister of Telecommunications. However, the most used word for business in Lebanon is Tاجر, a merchant. Carolyn Gates, in her book *The Merchant Republic of Lebanon*⁸⁸, explains how the geographical location of Lebanon in addition to its financial system have pushed the economic agents to play intermediary roles. They have done that either by facilitating trade in the region, offering financial services for big regional corporations, and providing consultancy services for the growing economies of the Middle East. However, this role was obstructed by the Lebanese Civil War for 15 years. When the war ended in 1990, the Middle Eastern states had already developed their own capacities. This loss of function did not lead to the development of productive endeavors, but it rather led, as Nahas⁸⁹ explains, to the development of a real estate based economy. Dewailly⁹⁰ further clarifies how Tripoli built its economy on real estate and construction post-1990.

Yet, the Lebanese, specifically Tripolitans in this case, did not give up on the idea of imagining themselves as Tاجر, merchants in Arabic. For instance, Tripoli International Fair developed a plan in 2000 to dedicate 80 thousand square meters for a permanent fair for Chinese

⁸⁸ Gates. *The Merchant Republic of Lebanon*. 1998.

⁸⁹ Nahas. "Land as A Financial Asset Versus as An Input for Economy: Processes, Adaptation And Adjustment." Conference, 2017.

⁹⁰ Dewailly. "Pouvoir et production urbaine à Tripoli [Power and Urban Production in Tripoli]." 2015.

exhibitors⁹¹. People usually blame the 2001 Iraq War and the 2006 war with Israel for the cancellation of this project. But three interviewees have insisted that the real “obstacle” was Omar Karame, a previous prime minister and one of the main political leaders in Tripoli. Karame is believed to be the one who opposed the project since the beginning because it was seen as another Hariri project in the city. In 2017, Adnan Kassar, previously a minister and a president of the Chamber of Commerce in Beirut, with the support of Fransabank, invited the Chinese ambassador along with his economy and trade consultants to Tripoli⁹². Kabbara⁹³ explains how this meeting initiated a series of meetings with the Chinese. After this invitation, Kabbara was invited to China to meet the team leading the Silk Road Project. The Chinese were showing their eagerness to invest in Tripoli as part of the Silk Road Project, but they were also worried about the political stability in Lebanon. Yet, this did not prevent the Chinese from visiting Tripoli again last month in May 2019 to hear about the current project in North Lebanon. Kabbara has welcomed the Chinese in his office in Tripoli where Toufic Dabboussi, Ahmad Tamer, and Hassan Dannawi all presented respectively about Dabboussi’s Big Special Economic Zone, Port of Tripoli, and Tripoli Special Economic Zone.

You would hear people talking in the street or read many articles about the importance of this meeting for the future of Tripoli and the North; however, Tamer⁹⁴ and Dabboussi⁹⁵ are not that

⁹¹ “نبذة تاريخية عن تأسيس وتطور مراحل معرض رشيد كرامي الدولي” [Historical Outlook on the establishment and development of Rachid Karamah International Fair].” Maarad Rachid Karami al-Duwali Website.

⁹² Shaar. “سفير الصين الشعبية في لبنان وان كيجيان” [The Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China]”. el-Shamal News, 2017.

⁹³ Kabbara, Interview, April 2019.

⁹⁴ Tamer, Interview, May 2019.

⁹⁵ Dabboussi, Interview, May 2019.

excited about this project. Tamer believes that the Chinese could take over everything from development to operation. This would leave the Lebanese government and its institutions as observers. Dabboussi believes that we should rely on private sector investment instead of incurring additional debts to the Chinese. Lebanon's Economic Bodies insist on the importance of collaborating with the Chinese, and they have visited the Chamber of Commerce in Tripoli at the beginning of this year to explore these opportunities with Dabboussi⁹⁶. The decision to have the Chinese develop or operate any project is not an easy question as some people or politicians may think the economic burden, in addition to the demographic change the Chinese would bring, could be disruptive⁹⁷. Bakhach⁹⁸ beautifully gave a simple answer to my question by asserting that the solution is never to rely on the national private sector, Gulf investors, or the international "community". The solution, he believes, is first to have strong public institutions who can regulate and positively interact with any of these stakeholders.

C. Blaming the "Others"

The seminar⁹⁹ organized by Mohamad al-Ahdab, an activist in Tripoli, at the Chamber of Commerce on the Challenges and Prospects for TSEZ was a great opportunity to witness Tripolitans' interaction with TSEZ team. When an angry attendee shouted asking about the reasons behind the unreasonable delay in TSEZ, Dannawi answered him that he is not interested in previous challenges but only on the current challenges he is facing. This answer has led most of the attendees

⁹⁶ الهيئات الاقتصادية اللبنانية [The Lebanese Economic Bodies]." Tripoli Chamber of Commerce Website, March 2019.

⁹⁷ "China's Trillion Dollar Plan to Dominate Global Trade." Vox Channel, YouTube, 2018.

⁹⁸ Bakhach, Interview, May 2019.

⁹⁹ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center]." Seminar, Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

to revolt against Dannawi because they are interested, as Tripolitans, to know who is conspiring against them, a member of the Municipality of Tripoli emphasizes. Like every other political event in Tripoli, the discussion went chaotic for half an hour with people blaming the National government to be conspiring against them. The angry participant started blaming specific political leaders like Mikati and the “sectarian” leader Saad Hariri. I have actually attended two other events in the same month, and I heard someone blaming the Americans who are punishing Tripoli for being a major supporter of the Palestinians. I have even heard another blaming France for its conspiracy against the city because Tripolitans were “ferocious” fighters against the French Mandate. On the other hand, some of the politicians, mainly from the Future Movement, have blamed the Tripolitans’ “mindset” because it is constantly leading to the failure of many projects like the Meraab, the Tal Parking project.

The chain of blame eventually ended with the intervention of Mohamad Ahdab, the organizer of the seminar, who explained that the reason behind organizing this event was not to nag but to better understand the current situation. Hassan Dannawi went on asserting how, as a Tripolitan, he is interested in the success of the Zone, but he cannot claim the ability to control the other factors that confine him. Ziadeh added that Tripolitans have to support TSEZ team because no one in the country would do that on their behalf. Most of the arguments I have heard in the seminar¹⁰⁰ were somehow true, and we have seen some of them in the previous chapters. Yet the problem resides, as Muhamad Abou Samra¹⁰¹ elegantly puts it, in the legendary explanation of the events and of the heroic interpretation of the players. Pan-Arabism, Arafatism, and Islamism are a

¹⁰⁰ المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع، [The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation Center].” Seminar, Tripoli Talks, March 2019.

¹⁰¹ Abou Samra. *ساحة الله وميناء الحدائنة*. *Tripoli: God’s Square and the Modern Seaside*. 2011.

few examples of the ideologies that Tripolitans previously relied on to save their city from falling. The Israelis, the Syrians, the Palestinians, and all the Lebanese Sectarian groups are also familiar groups that Tripolitans would usually blame for all their problems. Throughout my research, I have discovered that you can actually blame people, but you cannot accuse any of them for being fundamentally corrupt or intentionally conspiring against anyone. Everyone, but mainly politicians, relies on someone to blame to justify their failure, and this is a result of them feeling accused for the city's failure. Politics is not a legendary battle between good and evil, as some would imagine, but a constant discussion between stakeholders with different interests. The Politicians' pictures occupying the city is another manifestation of this heroic interpretation of events, and the city leaders are seen as Knights saving the city from the outsider. If Tripolitans truly realized the absurdity of this mode of storytelling, they would save the time they spent on **Finding the One to Blame** so they can actively take part in politics.



Figure 12. The Impoverished Areas Renting their Buildings' Walls to the City "Leaders"¹⁰²

¹⁰² Shadid. "انتخابات لبنان البلدية: أشرف ريفي.. نعم أستطيع." [Lebanon's Municipal Election: Ashraf Rifi, Yes I Can]." al-Mayadeen, 2016.

CONCLUSION

THE LENS OF AN ACTIVE CITIZEN

After 17 years, TSEZ lives only in few minds and on few papers, and there is little hope about the project accomplishing its upcoming milestones. In this conclusion, I summarize the five main values, that I argue, are the main reasons behind the hindrance of not only this project but maybe the other projects in the city as well. The policymaking in Tripoli is suffering first from a discontinuity on the spatial and temporal level. Second, the simplification of the role of a policymaker is hindering any attempt to develop a fruitful discussion over policies. In addition, policymakers and public servants are always denying any responsibility over the reality, and they always develop systems that minimize their risks, and hence their skin in the game. Lastly, I explain the idea behind “blaming” as a mechanism to escape any real assessment of the reasons behind the decay of the city. Fear, I argue, is the main component in the way Tripolitains, Lebanese in general, define politics. Yet, the city has no choice but to revise this definition if it wants to stop falling into oblivion.



Figure 13. The Tripoli Special Economic Zone 550 m2 Land Fill with Al-Fayhaa Landfill in its Background¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Takriti, Digital Image, May 2019.

Despite the tens of articles, announcements, discussions, and seminars, in addition to the TSEZ brochure and website, there were no pictures of the physical manifestation of TSEZ. There was a video from Dima Jamali, currently a member of parliament, where the video is focused on the group visiting the zone without any wide shot¹⁰⁴. The TSEZ team have told me that they have already showed, once in one of their seminars, an aerial shot of the land fill where TSEZ should be built. Yet I couldn't understand the reason there were no pictures for the zone from the perspective of a citizen. After doing my interview with Ahmad Tamer¹⁰⁵, director of the Port of Tripoli, I asked him if I could visit TSEZ. On my way to the land, I discovered for the first time how relatively big the port is. I could barely take the picture due to the mix of contaminated smells I was facing. On your way to visit TSEZ, you can see the abandoned train station and the al-Fayhaa Union of Municipalities, which are just beside the Port. Then you would reach the area where Tripoli and the neighboring areas dump all their solid waste. In addition to the huge landfill, there is also the sewage of al-Fayhaa being poured in the sea, the “official” Municipality slaughterhouse, and two factories, one for sorting waste and the other for processing organic waste. There is also a huge market for vegetables and fruits, as yet unused; no one knows if it will open its doors. Apart from the port, which is still “functioning”, everything in this area has been put there to be forgotten, specifically Abou Ali River. The river passes silently under the city until it joins the other failed projects in this city. TSEZ is not necessarily another disaster for the city but I am wondering if TSEZ can affect its surroundings, or if the opposite could happen.

¹⁰⁴ من جولتنا اليوم الى المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس، [From our tour today to TSEZ].” Dima Rachid Jamali Page, Facebook, March 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Tamer, Interview, May 2019.

During my interviews, I was able to sense the difference between the politicians and public servants who are in touch with the current reality of TSEZ, and those who are lost in the conceptual world of policymaking. The transformation of this conceptual world to reality is consistently slow, contrary to the conventional thought that this transformation accelerates during elections. Three parliamentary elections have passed since the announcement of this project, yet there are no signs that the zone will be operational soon. I wonder if TSEZ will open before the world introduces a new economic idiom besides the special economic zones. The scene, described by the people who worked closely on TZEZ, is mostly conceptual, and they will fail to show you any achievement apart from papers, dreams, and prospects. Having people who are genuinely working on the project is indeed positive but that does not mean that the Zone will operate anytime soon. Neither does it mean that TSEZ would truly be the ideal project to escort Tripoli into the future.

The idea of TSEZ itself promises Tripolitans the revival of the city's previous function as a main economic hub, not only for the North but also for the region. Imagining Tripoli as an economic hub in the past is somehow true as Dewailly¹⁰⁶ argues, but he believes that the world has changed since Tripoli was an actual hub. One project cannot save a city on its own, and the city has witnessed many projects, events, and ideologies that people thought were the solutions to all their problems. The problem, I have tried to argue in this research, lies in some of the values and ideas that guide our policymaking.

¹⁰⁶ Dewailly. "Pouvoir et production urbaine à Tripoli [Power and Urban Production in Tripoli]." 2015.

A. How People and Politicians Define Politics

Listening to the political discussions in this country, and in this city specifically, is mostly upsetting because you feel helpless in your role in the evolution of the city, even if you are a mayor, a Member of Parliament, a Minister or even a former Prime Minister. Deciphering the logic behind these discussions is necessary not only to understand how we understand policymaking, but is also essential for one to actively participate in this public discussion. This research was written as a journey, a journey full of discussions, observations, and contemplations. Hopefully, the different scenes and ideas, presented in this research, can ignite many new discussion points about politics in Lebanon. I would like to start this discussion by pinpointing five main ideas that I believe describe the way Lebanese people, and Tripolitans in specific, look at politics.

The “conflict” presented in chapter I, between the Souk, Maarad, and TSEZ can be looked at as a problem of discontinuity both on the spatial and the temporal level. There is a clear tendency to harshly divide the world around us into pieces. For instance, Tripolitans segregate themselves from Lebanon, particularly by assuming the conspiracy of the national government against them. Apart from the huge imaginary distance between Tripoli and Beirut, there are some cities that do not seem to exist in the minds of either the Public or the Policymakers, like the neighboring cities of Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo. There is an immediate jump beyond everything that surrounds the city to the Gulf first, then immediately to China, Russia, and the US. The distance between Batroun and Tripoli is immense in the minds of policymakers and some citizens, although it is absolutely absurd to argue for the necessity of two special economic zones in these two “cities”. Also, the segregation goes inward in the city, dividing it into millions of pieces, and it is apparent how each institution could consider itself as “independent”. Whether it is the port, the fair, the

municipality, or TSEZ, everyone wants to accomplish the specific tasks that they are obliged to do, and they totally miss their role in taking responsibility for the reality of their city. They are totally lost in the bureaucracy, signing papers instead of facilitating development. The city is divided into main areas like Baddawi, Qalamoun, Mina, New Tripoli, and Old Tripoli. Then, you can easily hear people identifying themselves within a specific neighborhood, political party, or even a café. The political parties are even divided up, and some interviewees from the same party were blunt about the different groups within their own party. While there is a discontinuity in time and space, there is absolutely no discontinuity in political leadership.

Tripolitans are not totally wrong about the divide between Tripoli and the rest of Lebanon, but this is also true of almost every other area in Lebanon. The country is divided into independent areas and autonomous sects. These areas and sects are represented by ferocious Zaims and pacifist Wujahaas who do not act as policymakers but merely as ambassadors. Thus, the local elites' role is first to elegantly represent the city and defend its rights. Then, the Wajih is also expected to represent the interest of the national Zaim and the regional power in his city. Looking to the politician as a representative explains how people do not blame politicians for their failure because 'they are not the one to blame'. The Zaim and the Wajih is doing as much as they can to make things happen, but the mysterious external power is always preventing him or her from doing that. The role of the local elites became, thus, like any other charity organization to provide support and help for those in need. The expected role of political leaders as representatives may explain people's behavior during elections, because they are choosing people who perfectly fit this role.

When discussing a policy matter with a public servant, a consultant for a public institution, or a political leader, you would certainly hear beautiful and powerful analysis of the situation in

addition to solutions. Yet, these people always fail to push for their ideas beyond these small talks. When you ask them about the reason behind their reluctance, they would immediately tell you that they are looking to live a long, healthy, and happy life. If we look at it closely, you can see that they are lost in their private life trying hard to push it forward. Thus, they have no actual interest in getting into the public life, which appears to be a totally opposite pursuit to the personal and individual one. Participating in public life certainly has its risks, but it seems that the perceived threats are too high for anyone to confront. These threats are rarely life threatening, but they are usually related to job, status, and family considerations. Even political leaders like Mikati, a previous Prime Minister, do not raise the conflict bar so high by always claiming to be a Wasati, the one in the middle. The Future Movement leaders in the city are also very subtle and indirect about their conflict with their national Zaim. The Members of the Municipality Council behave in the same way, and they barely tell you about the actual problem in the Municipality. They would always obscure such answers by praying that God protect us. As part of this research, I wanted to interview two public servants, but they politely rejected my request telling me they had had enough with politics. Whether a policymaker or a citizen, they both ignore the fact they have skin in the game of public life, whether they admit it or not.

No one is willing to claim responsibility for TSEZ, and everyone I met told me about another person who is responsible for the progress of TSEZ. Even the politicians that did not have “time” to meet me, all directed me to go to TSEZ because they are the only ones who can give me information on the Zone. However, even the TSEZ team told me that they would only be the regulator for a “private” developer and operator. While I understand the fear of taking responsibility for a project that is 17 years old, I wonder what public service means without the

courage to take responsibility. The idea of responsibility might look redundant because the previous three ideas entails it, but I am here arguing that the avoidance of any responsibility has become systematic. Privatization, forming committees, and bureaucratization are processes that we continually use to diffuse responsibility. Even the national Zouama, plural of Zaim, who claim some responsibility over reality, would always reach a point where they start blaming the regional and international conflict for the “dire” situation.

When Tripolitans fail to find someone to blame, they will immediately blame Nature, God, and Fate. It is another systemized process, and you can hear and read about it in all kinds of discussion. The “Civil Society” groups blame the Mayor, he blames the Municipality Council and employees, the Municipality would always blame the National Government, and the National political leaders blame Syria, “Israel”, Iran, Turkey, Russia, China, France, the UK, the Gulf, and the US. While we can look at it as a process to justify failure, it can be also seen as a precaution that some politicians start with to secure themselves in advance. If you ask anyone to identify the players to blame, as I did in my interviews, they would tell you, after acting surprised as if everyone knows the answer, that this is the inevitable fate of the city. The usually “demonized” players would become, thus, mere players in this “cosmic” destiny. The cycle of blaming usually ends when you ask the person about his or her contribution to solving this “problem”.

Fear, I believe, is at the center of the way Tripolitans, and Lebanese in general, define politics. It is at the core of the five ideas that I have just highlighted. It does not matter if you are a citizen or claiming to be a policymaker, the fear is shared on all levels. There is a fear of the past, specifically from 1975 until 1990. For instance, my father still rejects the idea of living in any city other than Tripoli, and he justifies his rejection to us by telling us that we did not live during the

Civil War. The city is afraid of an external threat, and in the city, everyone is afraid of each other. The Wajih or the Zaim is afraid to go beyond his or her expected role. There is also an immense fear in “jeopardizing” the progress on the private level for something that is public and collective. It is even considered foolish for one to claim responsibility while he or she can easily blame someone else for it. I am not arguing that a certain level of fear isn’t to be expected or normal, but this anticipated fear is too high for anyone to confront. This fear cannot be broken individually by people claiming to be heroes, but it can probably be broken collectively by political groups. Forming a political group, without the previous ideas in mind, would just add another political group that its main role is nag, blame, and grieve, so it is critical to be conscious of them.

B. The Answers to My Questions

At the beginning of this research journey, I was excited to dig deeper into the many projects in my city. I was luckily advised to choose one project to focus on, and I chose TSEZ because it is the project that everyone in Tripoli is looking forward to. I had the assumption that it would be easy to understand everything about this project since it is still confined within papers and talks. In fact, this project has a complex dynamic with many stakeholders on the national, regional, and international level involved. There are so many processes that I wish I could dig deeper into it. For instance, TSEZ laws have stayed in the parliament for almost 10 years, and it is important to understand the dynamic between the members of parliament and the committee to explain this lengthy process. The relationship between the members of parliament and legal advisers is another potentially interesting element to study. The legal and philosophical thinking behind the special economic zone is not exclusively Lebanese, and it is important to understand how TSEZ law

evolved based on the international literature in this field. The international interest in the North is yet another serious matter that needs to be analyzed, as the reconstruction of Syria cannot be the only reason behind the high interest of all these players.

These questions about Tripoli, its present, and its future will persist as long as I am still insisting on living in this city and in this country. Reading Nahas, Ziadeh, Dewailly, Abou Samra, and other researchers writing about the city's social and political dynamics, I still have the feeling that there are many unanswered questions. A researcher from Tripoli was telling me how hard it is for him to work on any project about Tripoli or to actively participate in the city politics. The difficulty he is facing is in fact a result of the lack of research on the city and its people. He told me about the absurd research topics that he constantly hears about in the Lebanese University and how important is to start directing researchers to cover more essential topics. Some of these answers, however, cannot be answered by researchers but by Tripolitans collectively. Tripolitans must urgently shape the city they are living in, and it must start by envisioning the city's future.

C. The City's Future

During a seminar led by Charbel Nahas¹⁰⁷ in Tripoli, he explained how cities can turn from an active city to a simple assembly of people. Walking in Tripoli, you can still imagine that this city used to be vibrant. You can see it in the abandoned facilities, and you can hear it in people's tales. Yet the city's history does not ensure the city's future, and the functions that Tripoli lost over the years have brought the city to its deathbed. Hearing people waiting desperately to escape from

¹⁰⁷ Nahas. "الانتخابات النيابية: بين المتاجرة بالقلق ومواجهة الواقع" [Parliamentary Elections: between Trading with Fears and Facing Reality]." Conference, 2018.

the city is ultimately sad, and you would rarely meet any family without one of their number living abroad. I was abroad for five years before deciding to come back, and I have two brothers who do not consider Lebanon as one of their future destinations. Living in Lebanon, in Tripoli specifically, is sometimes unbearable. You can smell the odor of the city on a windy day as if it is a decaying corpse, you could drown in the city streets whenever it rains, and you should be ready whenever the termites decide to invade the city. The fear of violent extremists is always alive in the minds of Tripolitans, and the city went into chaos two days ago when an extremist decided to take “revenge” on the Lebanese government. I can still talk about hundreds of challenges and problems in this city, but this would be only part of the story.

The city’s current status has also pushed many people to proactively and positively interact with it. Tripoli is rich with initiatives and social activities that you would not see in any other city in the region. Taha Naji, founder of “We Love Tripoli”, recently started working on a research to map these initiatives. In a few hours, I have witnessed how people gave him the names of 140 grassroots initiatives since 2005¹⁰⁸. It would be really hard to map all these initiatives since the city is always witnessing the rise of a new campaign or initiative. It can be as simple as someone coming back from abroad to start his business in Tripoli. It can be seen in the group who fly lanterns during the two Eids each year. You would also see the power of the “civil society” groups when they gather together to stop another failing CDR project. As an activist myself and a researcher, I have decided to write this research as an attempt to contribute to this movement. There is a huge difference between the people who would like to keep on nagging, and the citizens who believe in their role in escorting their city and nation to the future. It was often quite dispiriting when I asked

¹⁰⁸ Naji, Facebook, February 2019.

policymakers during my interviews about the way they envision Tripoli in 10 years. Some of them were very pessimistic, some thought that this is an absurd question, and the others had a myopic and fragmented vision. I wonder why a policymaker would choose this profession if he cannot look to the future, and it is ridiculous for politicians and public institutions to keep on playing the role of firefighters, only combatting problems when they arise. I have genuinely realized, at the end of this research, that a city is a reflection of its citizens collectively. You can choose to focus on the beautiful part as well as the ugly one, and you can blame as many people as you want for not doing their job in cleaning or fixing the mirror. However, the city can only crystalize when people choose to organize and structure themselves as such.



Figure 14. Does a City Horizon Affects the City Horizon?¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Ghomrawi, Digital Image.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdul-Ghani Kabbara, Interview by Obeida Takriti, Kabbara's Tripoli Office, April 23, 2019.

Abou Samra, Muhammad. *طرابلس: ساحة الله وميناء الحداثة [Tripoli: God's Square and the Modern Seaside]*. Dar al-Saqi, July 5, 2011.

Ahmad Qamr al-Dine, Interview by Obeida Takriti, Municipality of Tripoli, May 11, 2019.

Ahmad Tamer, Interview by Obeida Takriti, Port of Tripoli, May 6, 2019.

الهيئات الاقتصادية اللبنانية: مشاريع غرفة طرابلس محورية لبنانياً وعربياً ودولياً،
Tripoli Chamber projects are central on the National, pan-Arab, and International levels].”
Tripoli Chamber of Commerce Website, March 17, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Alih, Yasmine. “Land Reclamation in Tripoli Economic Zone Begins.” *Business News, Lebanon Opportunities*, October 20, 2015. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Alih, Yasmine. “Reclamation Complete at the Tripoli Economic Zone.” *Business News, Lebanon Opportunities*, July 13, 2017. Accessed June 16, 2019.

المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة ومركز الإبداع: آمال وتحديات”
[The Special Economic Zone and the Innovation
Center: Hopes and Challenges].” Seminar, *Tripoli Talks*, Tripoli Chamber of Commerce,
March 25, 2019.

المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس” [Tripoli Special Economic Zone].” Presentation, June 2015.

الرابحون والخاسرون في تعيينات منطقة طرابلس الاقتصادية” al-Samad, Abuld-Kafi. “The winners and losers in the appointments of Tripoli Economic Zone.” *al-Akhbar*, April 10, 2015

Azzam Ouwayda “عزام عويضة رئيساً لبلدية طرابلس؟” [Azzam Ouwayda as a Mayor for the Municipality of Tripoli?].” al-Akhbar, June 12, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Bassem Bakhach, Interview by Obeida Takriti, Gingers Café, May 6, 2019.

Basil: “المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة بالبترول وصور عمل جيد يشجع الاستثمارات” [Basil: The establishment of the Special Economic Zones in Tyre and Batroun is a Good Job to Attract Investments].” el-Nashra, April 20, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Chamaa, Nariman. “خطة بلدية طرابلس: «طير وفرق يا بوشار»» [Tripoli Municipality Plan: It’s Popcorn Time].” IMLEBANON, June 7, 2017. Accessed June 16, 2019.

“China's Trillion Dollar Plan to Dominate Global Trade.” Vox Channel, YouTube, April 5, 2018. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Collins, Tony. “Under the Skylight.” Digital Image, Mira’s Guided Tours Page, Facebook. March 17, 2016. Accessed June 16, 2019.

“Condo Apartment For Sale Dam Wel Farez Tripoli 160 sqm.” Remax Experts Website. Accessed June 16, 2019. www.Remax-Tripoli.com.

Daboussi Met a Delegation from the World Bank, Mosle: “We Will Have a Future of Close Cooperation with Tripoli Chamber.” Immar wa Iktisad, February 28, 2018. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Dannawi as a President by Proxy for Tripoli Economic Zone.” [Dannawi as a President by Proxy for Tripoli Economic Zone].” al-Markazia, April 9, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.

De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. *Epistemologies of the South*. Routledge, 2014.

- Dewailly, Bruno. “Pouvoir et production urbaine à Tripoli [Power and Urban Production in Tripoli].” PhD Dissertation, François-Rabelais University of Tours, March 2, 2015.
- Dhaybi, Jana. “الفندق الوحيد بطرابلس: أُقفل بالقانون وأُعيد فتحه بالسياسة” [The Only Hotel in Tripoli: Closed by Law and Reopened with Politics].” al-Modon, April 4, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- Dhaybi, Jana. “ديما جمال وصورها وتيارها: مدينة المهانة الانتخابية” [Dima Jamali, its Pictures, and Its Party: The City of Election Humility].” al-Modon, March 4, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- Dhaybi, Jana. “طرابلس: ثورة على مجلس الإنماء والإعمار” [Tripoli: A Revolution against CDR].” al-Modon, June 19, 2017. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- Digital Image, IDAL Page, Facebook, October 17, 2017. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- Faludi, Andreas and Van der Valk, Arnold. *Rule and Order Dutch Planning Doctrine in the Twentieth Century*. Springer Science & Business Media, 1994.
- Franjiyeh, Tony. “إعتراضات على مشروع "حماية الإرث الثقافي لمدينة طرابلس" فوق نهر أبو علي - الهدف الإبقاء على أهلها” [Objections to the “Cultural Heritage and Urban Development” Project above Abou Ali River – The Goal is to Maintain the Social Fabric of the Area without the Displacement of its People].” Annahar, August 21, 2013. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- Gates, Carolyn. *The Merchant Republic of Lebanon*. I.B. Tauris, 1998.
- Ghomrawi, Omar. Digital Image, Omar Ghomrawi Digital Collection.
- Gill, Indermit Singh. *Reshaping Economic Geography*. Washington: World Bank, 2009.

Haj Hassan, Izza. "تعرفوا إلى المؤسسات المعطّلة... وموازنتاتها "شغالة" [Get to know the disabled institutions and their running budgets]." al-Modon, March 24, 2018. Accessed June 16, 2018.

Halawani, Natheer. Digital Image, Facebook. February 18, 2013. Accessed on June 16, 2019.

"سيدير" سيؤمن أكثر من 900 ألف فرصة عمل" [Cedre Will Insure]." Annahar, April 1, 2018. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Hassan Dannawi, Interview by Obeida Takriti, TSEZ Tripoli Offices, April 13, 2019.

Haydar, Marwan. "طرابلس تحذف " الميم " من الابجدية" [Tripoli deletes the M from its Alphabet!]." aliwaa, January 10, 2018. Accessed June 16, 2019.

"اعتصام للمجتمع المدني في طرابلس احتجاجا على تنفيذ مشروع مرأب التل" [A protest for the civil society in Tripoli against the implementation of the Tal parking project]." el-Nashra, March 10, 2016. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Ibrahim, Omar. "طرابلس: حملة أمنية في قلم النفوس" [Tripoli: A Security Campaign at the Registration Bureau]." Safir al-Chamat, November 3, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.

"إنشاء المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس" [The establishment of Tripoli Special Economic Zone]." al-Jarida al-Rasmiya, 38, September 5, 2008.

"إنشاء معرض لبنان الدولي الدائم في طرابلس" [The establishment of Lebanon's Permanent Fair in Tripoli], al-Jarida al-Rasmiya, 20, May 5, 1960.

Jisr, Samir. Digital Image, Facebook, March 27, 2018. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Jisr, Samir. Discussion. April 21, 2018.

Karimeh, Inas. "بشائر العز في بلدية طرابلس تتطلع لعزم كتلتها" ["Bashaer El Ezz" in the municipality of Tripoli looks forward to strengthen its block]." Lebanon24, May 22, 2018. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Website. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019. www.KAS.de.

"Lebanon Millennium Development Report 2013-2014." *UNDP & CDR*. December 2013.

"من جولتنا اليوم الى المنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس" [From our tour today to TSEZ]." Video, Dima Rachid Jamali Page, Facebook, March 30, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Minkara, Mira. Digital Image, Mira's Guided Tours Page, Facebook. February 18, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Misbah Ahdab, Interview by Obeida Takriti, Ahdab's Maarad Home, April 29, 2019.

"نبذة تاريخية عن تأسيس وتطور مراحل معرض رشيد كرامي الدولي" [Historical Outlook on the establishment and development of Rachid Karameh International Fair]." Maarad Rachid Karami al-Duwali Website. Accessed June 16, 2019. www.Lebanon-Fair.com

Nahas, Charbel. "«Orient» en flammes et «Occident» en désarroi: Des Sociétés en Quête d'Etat ["Orient" in flames and "West" in disarray: Societies in their Quest for a State]." Conference, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, December 1, 2016.

Nahas, Charbel. "La Foire Internationale et Tripoli, Quel Avenir? [The International Fair and Tripoli: What Future?]." Conference, Centenary of Oscar Niemeyer, Safadi Foundation, Tripoli, December 15, 2007.

- Nahas, Charbel. “Land as A Financial Asset Versus as An Input for Economy: Processes, Adaptation And Adjustment.” Conference, The Financialization of Housing and Real Estate in Lebanon: An Exchange, Orient Institut Beirut, November 1, 2017.
- Nahas, Charbel. “Stakeholder Analysis and Social Assessment for the Proposed Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development Project.” Charbel Nahas Website, November 3, 2007. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- Nahas, Charbel. “الانتخابات النيابية: بين المتاجرة بالقلق ومواجهة الواقع” [Parliamentary Elections: between Trading with Fears and Facing Reality].” Conference, Citizens in A State, al-Rabita al-Sakafiya, December 2, 2018.
- Nahas, Charbel. “العهد الجديد: دولة أو طاولة حوار” [The New Era: A State or A Discussion Table].” Citizens in A State, November 3, 2016.
- Naji, Taha. Post, Facebook, February 11, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- “Quick Guide to Dubai Media City.” Time Out Dubai, April 19, 2016. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- “ريفي: المنطقة الاقتصادية في طرابلس عرقلت بخبث ودهاء” [Rifi: TSEZ was obstructed with wickedness and astuteness].” el-Nashra, March 25, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.
- “Russian Oil Giant to Revamp Tripoli Facility.” The Daily Star. January 26, 2019.
- Samir Jisr, Interview by Obeida Takriti, Jisr’s Tripoli Office, May 11, 2019.
- Shaar, Amer. “خطة انماء مدينة طرابلس بحضور الرئيس المكلف نجيب ميقاتي” [Tripoli Development Plan with the Presence of the Designated Prime Minister Najib Mikati].” el-Shamal News, April 21, 2011. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Shaar, Amer. “سفير الصين الشعبية في لبنان وان كيجيان يلتقي دبوسي والقصار بحضور كبارة” [The Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China Wan Kijian Meets Dabboussi with the Presence of Kabbara]”. el-Shamal News, February 8, 2017. Accessed June 16, 2019.

Shadid, Maysaa. “انتخابات لبنان البلدية: أشرف ريفي.. نعم أستطيع” [Lebanon’s Municipal Election: Ashraf Rifi, Yes I Can].” al-Mayadeen, May 30, 2016. Accessed June 16, 2019.

“ما هو تعريف السوق في علم الاقتصاد؟ وما هي أهم أشكاله؟” [What the Definition of Souk? And What is Most Important Forms].” Bayt.com, April 11, 2017. Accessed June 16, 2019.

“تحديد موقع المنطقة الاقتصادية في طرابلس” [Defining the Location of Tripoli Special Economic Zone].” al-Jarida al-Rasmiya, 22, May 3, 2018.

“تحديد شروط منح التأشيرات للمنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة في طرابلس” [Determining the visas’ requirement for the people coming to Tripoli Special Economic Zone].” al-Jarida al-Rasmiya, 29, June 18, 2009.

Takriti, Obeida. Digital Image, Tripoli, May 6, 2019.

Taleb, Nassim. *Antifragile*. Penguin Random House, November 27, 2012.

Taleb, Nassim. *Skin in the Game*. Penguin Random House, December 28, 2017.

“The Founder.” Dabboussi Group Website, Dabboussi Group, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019.
www.DabboussiGroup.com.

Toufic Dabboussi, Interview by Obeida Takriti, Tripoli Chamber of Commerce, 9 May 2019.

Tripoli Special Economic Zone Brochure. Tripoli Special Economic Zone, 2019.

Tripoli Special Economic Zone Website. Tripoli Special Economic Zone, 2019. Accessed June 16, 2019. www.TSEZ.gov.lb.

Ziadeh, Khaled. *مدينة على المتوسط: ثلاثية* [A City on the Mediterranean: Trilogy]. Lebanon: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2010.