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ABSTRACT

A decade on from the Arab Uprisings, politics across the Middle East remains contested, both within and between states. As a mix of strategic alliance, security community, and ideational network, the Resistance Axis provides a compelling study into questions of regional order in the Middle East, given its long-standing counter-hegemonic outlook vis-à-vis the US and its regional allies. While comprised of a number of constituent parts, what holds this complex alliance network together is a broadly shared normative vision of regional order articulated in discourse, driven by ideational heritage and made real through spatial performance. We refer to this normative vision as nomos. In focusing on the Resistance Axis, this paper looks at the ways in which spatialized notions of resistance have been deployed by actors within the axis, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah. With an empirical focus on Lebanon, we draw on fieldwork conducted in the country exploring the articulation of resistance narratives through different cultural and memorialized spaces that both actors have created. Our contention is that nomos has a utility as an alternative conceptual tool for understanding manifestations of order alongside more mainstream approaches.

Introduction

A decade on from the Arab Uprisings, politics across the Middle East remains contested, both within and between states. Rivalry between regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran plays out across the region with devastating repercussions for the people of states affected, with competing visions of order creating complex and malleable relationships between actors at different levels of analysis. The current sense of transformation and challenge in the international order provides an opportune moment to think about how different regional and ideational perspectives perceive the notion of such a shift. As a region that is experiencing this shift first-hand, through a perceived ‘drawing down’ of US strategic engagement and support for its close allies, the Middle East remains an important arena for contending visions about its future. Here, we can observe a number of key regional and external powers vying to shape a new regional order through often-
competing hard and soft power strategies. These are manifested in multiple projects, from formal military alliances and strategic (re)alignments, to attempts at influence and co-optation through economic, religious and cultural ties.

One of the more prominent visions of order is articulated by the so-called Resistance Axis. As a mix of strategic alliance, security community, and ideational network, the Resistance Axis provides a compelling study into questions of regional order in the Middle East, given its long-standing counter-hegemonic outlook vis-à-vis the US and its regional allies. While the Resistance Axis is not a homogenous entity, and contains multiple political projects and interests within it, there is a shared ideational heritage and normative vision for how the quest for regional order should be realized, one which transcends state borders. The key power behind the ‘axis’, the Islamic Republic of Iran acts as something of a middle-ranking power globally, while seeking to maintain its position as a major power within the Middle East, drawing on its religious and ideational power to sustain this alliance network. Though much debate centres around groups within the axis serving as so-called proxies due in part to the well-known provision of Iranian funding, a fact that is not denied by Iran nor such groups, the reality is a more complex alliance network that affords considerable agency to its constituent parts. While comprised of a number of constituent parts, what holds this complex alliance network together is a broadly shared normative vision of regional order driven by ideational heritage, articulated in discourse, and made real through spatial performance. In seeking to understand this vision, we use the concept of nomos, the fundamental ordering principles of society, as a means of understanding the emergence and reproduction of an alliance that cuts across national, ethnic, spatial and temporal borders.

As a means of highlighting this comparatively underexplored aspect of order, this paper repurposes the idea of nomos as a means of understanding the ways in which order resonates across—and shapes—time and space. At its core, nomos refers to the ways in which life is organized in accordance with a set of ordering principles which may include the material and the ideational in an effort to performatively shape time and space, cutting across existing communal divisions through recourse to a more powerful unifying force. Originating in the Ancient Greek as a term to denote law or custom, in recent years the concept has found traction in Political Philosophy as a means of understanding the foundational ordering of global politics. Scholars such as Carl Schmitt, Peter Berger and Robert Cover have all used the concept of nomos—albeit in dramatically different ways ranging from the “blood and soil” of Schmitt to the discursive construction of Berger and Cover—in an effort to understand the fundamental ordering principles of either society or global politics. Following the work of Berger and Cover, we use the concept of nomos to interrogate the emergence of an alternative normative vision of order.

In focusing on the Resistance Axis, this paper looks at the ways in which spatialized notions of resistance have been deployed by actors within the axis, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah. Resistance narratives are articulated through different

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cultural and memorialized spaces that both actors have created in the country. Two key sites in Southern Lebanon, Hezbollah’s Mleeta museum and the Iranian Garden located on the border with Israel, are presented as ‘sites of resistance’. These are spaces where transnational, national, local and ideational elements combine to present a resistance narrative that has important corollaries for how regional order can be understood. Here, we can observe a vision of order which is ‘made real’ through forms of cultural production, cultural diplomacy and exchange, and heritage tourism. The paper draws on field work conducted in Lebanon, which included semi-structured interviews carried out with the Iranian cultural attaché to Lebanon, Mohammad Mehdi Shariatmadar, and with the chief of Hezbollah’s tourist and heritage organization, Sheikh Ali Daher. The field work also included site visits to the Iranian cultural centre in Beirut, operated by Iran’s cultural diplomacy arm, the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO), two visits to Hezbollah’s Mleeta museum, and a visit the Iranian Garden in Maroun el-Ras.\(^4\)

While we acknowledge the importance of studies into power projection, military capability, and alliance formation as key to understanding efforts to shape and conceive regional order, we contend that there is also space to complement this work through an exploration of how ideational and, ultimately, normative visions are articulated by regional actors. Competing discourses provide a natural focus for such a study, but there is also space for an exploration of how such ideas are performed and realized.

We start with a brief overview of works that interrogate questions of order in the politics and international relations of the Middle East more broadly, before presenting some of the key factors determining the axis’ relationship with questions of regional order. This focuses Iranian conceptions of international and regional order, Lebanon as a site of resistance, and multilevel geopolitical considerations. This is followed by an exploration of nomos’ utility as an alternative conceptual tool for understanding manifestations of order across time and space. The paper then presents the two empirical cases noted above, drawn from fieldwork in southern Lebanon, as examples of how a vision of order is ‘made real’ through space.

**Assessing regional order in Middle East**

The question of regional order, and the myriad influences that shape and influence it have long been the focus of scholars exploring the politics and international relations of the Middle East, ranging from systemic to identity considerations.\(^5\) Moreover, the wide-ranging work that has explored the so-called sectarianization of regional politics also has important corollaries for our understanding of order. Primordialist assumptions of immutable sectarian difference impacting on regional order have resonated in policy and media circles, being cited as an explanandum for how Iran and its allies

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\(^4\)Maroun el-Ras is on the sensitive border region with Israel, and the area remains under the partial supervision United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Official permission to travel to the region therefore needed to be sought, and was granted through visiting the Lebanese Army’s Mohammed Zugheib barracks in Saida (Sidon) on the day of the visit.

operate. However, alternative analyses have sought to plot a middle path that avoids the essentialising tendencies of the above, while also acknowledging more instrumentalised understanding of the sectarianization approach.

Moreover, broader systematic issues, notably the perceived decline of US power in the region and the growing role of China have begun to play an increasing role. The sense of diminishing US hegemony in the Middle East is seen as creating conditions for increasing military interventions by regional actors. This shifting regional order has thus been influenced by changing US foreign policy priorities and increasingly assertive Arab monar chies, resulting in what Beck and Richter term as a ‘highly contested multipolar system in flux’.

This is a rich area of study that by necessity covers the multiple and complex intersections at play when trying to understand regional order. This intersectionality necessarily transcends material and ideational issues, cutting across state borders and raising questions about the praxis of states, religious identities, external actors and more. However, the issue of how alternative normative visions are manifested rarely goes beyond highlighting of discourses or alliance formation in response to various shifts, often working at a level of abstraction from actual ‘on the ground’ manifestations. We contend that our account, which draws on in-country fieldwork and the conceptual insight provided by the idea of nomos, allows for a fuller understanding of how order can be conceived and ultimately articulated through the use of space. Several points are worth stressing before we continue in examining Iran and the wider axis’ conceptions of regional order further. First, it is important to reflect on shared visions of order which cut across state borders. In particular, both material and ideational factors come to the fore, yet are not, in our view, adequately captured in existing debates which typically are more transient, often policy-oriented, and fail to capture the salience and legacy of such visions.

Iran, the axis and regional order

The Resistance Axis is a unique form of multi-lateral network that has a strong ideational slant, and which is concerned with defending Iran and its allies. The alliance between its core members of Iran, Hezbollah and Syria in particular has a long history, and was rooted initially in defensive considerations and their resistance to Israel and support for the Palestinian cause. In the following, we provide an overview of Iran’s position on

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questions of regional and wider international order since the revolution, Lebanon as a site of this resistance, and how notions of resistance have been articulated at multiple levels.

**Iran and international order**

Since the revolution, Iran has sought to present an alternative vision of international order, drawing in part on its experience as a revolutionary state, and also on its perceptions of injustice in the international system. The idea of justice is used to provide what Moshirzadeh defines as a ‘meta-discourse’ that gives meaning to Iranian foreign policy. Key to this is fighting oppression through the notion of siding with oppressed (the *mostazafin* in Islamic Republic revolutionary discourse), something that forms part of the Islamic Republic’s constitution, and which has been selectively applied in Iranian foreign policy over the last 40 years when deemed geopolitically expedient. In the early years of the Islamic Republic, this was manifested in the total repudiation of the previous regime’s pro-American orientation, and through active support for various groups with which it found common cause in global politics. This took the form of prioritizing support for fellow Shia in Bahrain, Iraq and Lebanon, a commitment to the Palestinian cause, and a wider identification with counter-hegemonic forces seeking to challenge the primacy of the US-led, liberal international order. Despite the differing priorities of successive Iranian administrations over the years, these causes remain central to the Islamic Republic’s foreign policy and worldview, and Iran has cultivated alliances with groups that share these outlooks.

Though often conflated with religion and more ideological interpretations of Iran’s views on international order, Iran’s development of this network of alliances also has a practical intent at its heart. This is because Iran’s resistance outlook forms part of its own strategic depth projection in the region, something that is seen as vital for its own security, acting as deterrent against its enemies. On both a practical and rhetorical level, this serves as Tehran’s justification for its involvement in Syria, Iraq, and its continued support for the Palestinian cause. On the former, this has seen the axis develop its role from one primarily focused on Israel and its Western allies, to one that is shaped around fighting the ‘extremism’ of groups such as *Daesh*, who it cites as being sponsored by its regional rivals. On the latter, this has allowed Iran and its allies to support groups including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, all of whom Tehran views as constituting a key part of the axis. Indeed, the presence of Hamas’ Ismael Haniyeh, Islamic Jihad’s Ziyad al-Nakahlah, and Hezbollah’s Sheikh Naim Qassem on the front row of Ebrahim Raisi’s presidential inauguration in Tehran in August 2021,

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12See sections 3.16 and 154 of the Iranian constitution, which explicitly refer to supporting the oppressed in Iran’s foreign policy. Available at: http://pwerth.faculty.unlv.edu/Const-Iran(abridge).pdf
Lebanon as the site of resistance

As the main empirical focus of this paper, it is also worth briefly contextualizing the importance of Lebanon, and more specifically Hezbollah as a central actor and site of resistance. Hezbollah and Iran have been inextricably linked since the former’s inception as a force of resistance to the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. Its ideological alignment with core founding principles of the Islamic Republic centre on adherence to the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, though as Saad notes, this is mainly restricted to strategic issues such as the classification of friends and enemies. Scholarly work on Hezbollah has devoted much space to the notion that it has undergone a process of ‘Lebanonisation’ shifting from a resistance movement to a normalized actor in Lebanese politics. However, as Saouli has cautioned in his notable work on the topic, its political trajectory defies dominant explanations, such as the seemingly linear progression from religious movement surrendering its ideology to adapt to political realities.

The issue of Palestine and with it opposition to Israel and its occupation, constitutes a shared and enduring determinant of the Resistance Axis’ views on regional order. This is particularly important in terms of Hezbollah, due to its historical position on the frontline of the confrontation with Israel. Saad has emphasized how the party’s opposition to Israel and anti-Zionism constitutes one of its ‘invariable pillars’, while Bashir Saade highlights Hezbollah’s continued use of slogans around the liberation of Jerusalem/al-Qods to keep its regional perspective intact, thus solidifying the project of the resistance locally and regionally. The Israeli invasion and occupation of the South also arguably helped to stimulate ‘new forms of collective memory’ between Lebanese Shia and the Palestinians.

In terms of its international outlook, Hezbollah has at times emphasized civilizational struggle in terms of broader relations with the West, and as Saouli highlights, it has had a long history of making connections with other anti-US/anti-Israeli groups, with its 1985 manifesto emphasizing the need to rid the region of western hegemony. In recent years, the party has transformed from one focused on resisting Israel in the Lebanese context to becoming a regional power in its own right, thus challenging the ‘sponsor-proxy’ model

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26. Saad, ‘Challenging the sponsor-proxy model’. 
of understanding the Iran-Hezbollah relationship.27 Thus, we can see Hezbollah playing a key role not only in Lebanese politics, where it remains one of the most powerful actors, but also taking on a more assertive role regionally in supporting other members of the axis. This can be observed in its wider transnational operations across the Middle East, where in many ways they act as a ‘vanguard’ for Axis operations in the Arab world.

**Resistance geopolitics: both international and local**

Despite this deeper historical background noted above, the axis arguably only began to crystallize in wider global consciousness following the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war and gained increased prominence after the Arab Uprisings starting in 2011. Becoming a topic of interest to academics and policy-makers, analysis of the axis’ role in the region has often been undertaken in response to the perception of Iran and its wider allies efforts against the prevailing order,28 primarily focusing on the material and ideational aspects of its regional engagements. Meanwhile the musings of the DC beltway have also opined on the subject in their own, often partisan way, developing as a cottage industry to serve the whims of the US policy community.29 Despite regular declarations of its imminent demise from such analyses,30 and even refutations of its very validity as a categorisable, ontological fact from sections of the commentariat,31 the axis will likely remain a feature of regional politics, and thus debates about regional order, as long as the Islamic Republic endures.

Naturally, questions around international and regional order have been impacted by the geopolitical developments across the Middle East since the Arab Uprisings. What semblance there was of regional order was supplanted with widespread regional instability and subsequent interventions as a result of the emergence of competing visions of order post-2011.32 The Iranian narrative of the Resistance Axis is one of an alliance that draws on strong ideational ties and common security concerns of its various actors, and this has important ramifications for any discussion around a move towards an increasingly multipolar world order and any sense of a US draw down from the region. For the axis,

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32Valbjorn and Bank, ‘The New Arab Cold War’.
a key part of its ontological security is of course derived from its position vis-a-vis US interests in the region,\(^{33}\) however, another aspect of it is its multi-faceted nature that goes beyond purely material or ideational aspects. This draws on the wider ‘networked’ sense that the axis provides: being at once an ideational, and at times religious, network, a strategic alliance, and a presence in daily life through its cultural production and cultural diplomacy activities.\(^{34}\) These combine and feed into shared aims which find common cause with other counter-hegemonic forces in global politics, hence the links developed with the ‘pink tide’ governments in Latin America, or with Russia and China.

The nature of inter-state rivalry and its influence on regional order in the Middle East, is particularly acute when it comes to key protagonists such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. At the heart of this rivalry are contrasting visions about the organization of regional politics—broadly between the conservative vision of Saudi Arabia and the revolutionary vision of Iran—and the spatialization of these competing visions has had serious repercussions for people across the region. In the case of Lebanon, one can observe how this rivalry has manifested in its domestic politics in particular, as seen in the various efforts to shape and influence the delicate balance of interests there in the post-Taif era.\(^{35}\)

This reach and wider membership is secured through the articulation of a particular—and alternative vision—of order to that which plays an organizing role across regional politics. Indeed, the axis offers something of a normative vision or project for regional order that is predicated on core ideational commonalities and ultimately policy concerns across a number of actors. Fundamental to this is the articulation of a sophisticated foreign policy, underpinned by a fusion of security, ideational, cultural and political moves being made by Iran and the wider axis allies, predicated on ensuring its continued relevance to regional and indeed wider international order. Reducing the axis to its material or ideational aspects only tells part of the story, however. It is also an idea that exists across different utilizations of space, being (re)made through performance and memorialization that at once speaks to the local and geopolitical.

The proximity of the Occupied Territories to Southern Lebanon is not only significant in terms of more conventional understandings of regional geopolitics. Ideas around injustice rooted in Shi’ism have led to a strong identification of southern Lebanese culture with the Palestinian cause, particularly in terms of the literary culture of the area.\(^{36}\) These borderlands arguably play a key role in the shaping of Hezbollah’s identity,\(^{37}\) and this is reinforced through the forms of cultural production activity hosted by the Iranian Garden discussed later on this paper, where themes around the Palestinian struggle predominate. Sites such as the Iranian Garden and Meeta show how the geography of this part of Lebanon is intertwined with multiple transnational and regional actors,\(^{38}\) positioning the local within the regional and the regional within the local As Larkin and

\(^{33}\)Saad, ‘Challenging the sponsor-proxy model’, p.635.


\(^{35}\)For further insight into the impact of the Saudi-Iran rivalry on political life in Lebanon, see Hussein Kalout, ‘The Irreplaceable Piece: Lebanon’s strategic value in the Saudi-Iranian foreign policy chess board’, in eds. Edward Wastnidge and Simon Mabon, Saudi Arabia and Iran: The struggle to shape the Middle East (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), pp. 118–140.


Parry Davis’ work on museums that address Lebanon’s history of conflict demonstrates, the symbolic borderlines and spatial rupture points of such sites are also important in an affective sense. To help understand this less explored aspect further, this paper utilizes the conceptual prism of nomos to examine the two empirical case studies in which Iran and the Resistance Axis’ vision of order is ‘made real’ spatially.

Nomos and sovereign power

The establishment of political projects in the Middle East took place on pre-existing communities underpinned by a range of regulatory structures. Whilst sovereign states were established and formalized through the creation of a range of institutional structures, the currents that regulated life prior to the establishment of such projects remained. Thus, understanding the interaction of political-legal—formal—and normative—informal—structures is central to understanding contingency and sovereign order. In such environments, people were typically trapped between forces which did not always align. Such tensions between law and norms can be seen prominently across the Middle East, as competing sources of authority—sovereign, tribe or religious leader—lay claim to power often in contrast to the other. Consideration of these tensions can be explored through reflecting on competing claims of order to look at the relationships between rulers and ruled, playing out in the context of the establishment of the polis over a complex normative environment where power resides in a range of places. Central to this is the idea of nomos.

Inextricably linked to ideas of law through semantics and politics, the idea of nomos is one that has been understood in myriad ways by scholars from a range of disciplines. It is fundamentally concerned with the framing, location and organization of human, political and social existence, yet such observations occur in a number of different guises, shaped by competing interpretations of order, of the rule of norms and the way in which sovereign power interacts with agency. To understand how this concept relates to our inquiry, let us begin with a brief genealogy of the concept.

The idea of nomos within International Relations is traditionally understood as the rooting of law to land, adding a spatial character to law. In The Nomos of the Earth, the German jurist Carl Schmitt notes that ‘land appropriation is the primeval law-founding act’, which returns us to the beginning of political life, naming ‘the originary and primordial relation of law to the earth and to the soil’. Offering a more nuanced reading than Schmitt, Hannah Arendt suggests that the nomos is coeval with the foundation of the polis. From this, nomos ‘was identified with boundary line which in ancient times was still actually a space, a kind of no man’s land between the private and the public, sheltering and protecting both realms while, at the same time, separating them from each other’.

As Schmitt and Arendt observe, there is a clear spatial dimension to nomos and how the interaction of territory and law—fundamental to nomos—gives meaning to those

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40 Ibid., p.81.
residing within. With this in mind, according to Arendt, all legislation ‘creates first of all a space in which it is valid, and this place is the world in which we can move in freedom. What lies outside this space is lawless and properly speaking without a world’.44

Building on these ideas in On Revolution Arendt observes that freedom is spatially limited, from the freedom of movement top the borders of the national territory or the walls of the city-state. While there are forms of guarantee in place internationally, even under these conditions, ‘the elementary coincidence of freedom and a limited space remains manifest’.45

In such observations, Arendt points to a normative component within her spatial observations, demonstrating how particular commitments can transcend the ‘Westphalian straitjacket’. Similarly, religion also serves as a means through which order is created—and protected—beyond the borders of the state. Furthermore, shared normative projects—for example, Pan Arabism, Pan Islamism, or ideas of resistance—have historically cut across state borders, posing challenges to those wishing to regulate life within the confines of the territorially grounded polis.

Yet the normative can also serve as a means of ordering the polis itself, albeit creating a zone of indistinction from which the state may be contested. Writing two centuries before Thomas Hobbes, the Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun observed the fusion of spatial and normative in the establishment of the polis:

[1] The world is a garden the fence of which is the dynasty. (*) [2] The dynasty is an authority through which life is given to proper behaviour. [3] Proper behaviour is a policy directed by the ruler. [4] The ruler is an institution supported by the soldiers. [5] The soldiers are helpers who are maintained by money. [6] Money is sustenance brought together by subjects. [7] The subjects are servants who are protected by justice. [8] Justice is something familiar, and through it the world persists. The world is a garden . . . 46

Khaldun’s work is populated by his Islamic faith, which he argues is responsible for shaping nomos, creating a community ordered by belief, albeit in a non-territorially grounded way.

Supporting this view, Peter Berger, a sociologist of religion, argues that society and our engagement with it is a dialectic phenomenon, wherein society is a product of humanity that simultaneously shapes it. Each individual plays a prominent role within this dialectic, where each individual story is ‘an episode within the history of society, which both precedes and survives it’.47 These stories offer an ordering of experience, where power, and normative weight allows particular stories and visions to be imposed on the experiences and meanings of others. Thus, nomos emerges through the interaction of individuals within a spatial area, coeval to the establishment of the polis through any form of interaction. This nomos is, for Berger, a ‘shield against terror’, with humans ‘craving for meaning’ which has the ‘force of instinct’. From this, Berger suggests that men are ‘congenitally compelled to impose meaningful order upon reality’, yet this order is built upon ‘the social enterprise of ordering world construction’.48

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48Ibid, p.22.
Nomos must exist simultaneously as objective and subjective to allow for the emergence of different interpretations and identities, but also as an arena within actors can perform their identities in both word and deed. Returning to Arendt, we see support for such a position, where she argues that the world is given meaning through the interaction of people, in the form of dialectic relationship.49

Moreover, as the world is given meaning through interaction, so too is nomos: ‘The organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be . . . can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere.’50 Thus, nomos is concerned with the regulation of space as a necessary (coeval) condition for political organization. It exists as a metaphysical container to capture identities, ideologies, history and memory within spatial borders. Once established, nomos is ‘a dispensation or system of provinces, within which all the activities of a community are parcell out and coordinated’.51 It is here where we must build on conventional understandings of nomos to include the residue of history, wherein regional experiences of colonialism, Arabism and Islamism also have an impact upon spatial governance, forcing people to behave in a particular way.

With this in mind, for Robert Cover, a legal scholar with an interest in the ordering capacity of religion, ‘to inhabit a nomos is to know how to live in it’. For Cover, principles are not purely thos demands made upon us by society, the sovereign or God, but rather exist as signs through which we communicate with others. Acts signify something powerful when we acknowledge that this act is ‘in reference to a norm’; put another way, norms can imbue acts with significance.52

Thus, nomos exists as a source of possibility, serving to regulate life, simultaneously letting it live but also regulating behaviour. This occurs not only through the formal regulation of space that is traditionally caught up in the legal idea of the nomos, but also through the normative, where narratives and ideologies shape the interpretation of legal structures and performance. An integral aspect of this is the ability to close off a community against an outside, seen by Hans Lindahl as a fundamental characteristic of a political community.53 Yet consideration of the religious components of nomos reveal, this need not necessarily be spatially grounded and can cut across state borders.

Nomos serves as a way of looking at the interaction of competing visions of order and community, aiding exploration of the way in which power is exercised across space, shaping interactions between states, institutions and populations. Myriad competing visions of sovereign power exist across state borders, with ‘localized forms of sovereignty’ often ‘nestled’ within ‘higher sovereignties’.54 The concept of nomos helps to understand how communities exist and operate across state borders. As such, a community may be closed off against an other through membership derived from common faith, which may

transcend spatial borders. Here, an obvious issue arises amidst the potential for competing loyalties to contending communities, as recounted in the tale of Antigone, a Greek tragedy where the eponymous character was caught between loyalty to her faith and loyalty to the polis.

Of course, nomos can be shaped by agendas and hegemonic interpretations to allow for the establishment of new paradigms of behaviour that will shape life in a particular way. Such a vision may simultaneously unite and divide a community, wherein the paradigmatic creation immediately establishes divisions between people who interpret the concept in different ways. The creation of a paradigm and establishment of unity within it immediately brings its downfall through the divisions that emerge concerning its implementation and true meaning. This constant process of interpretation and negotiation is what establishes nomos. It is through this that life gains meaning, providing context and justification for action. In Islam, this regulation and meaning is provided by the Quran, Sunna, hadith and, where deemed necessary, by fatwas.\(^5\)

Legitimacy remains key for the establishment of a dominant paradigm, where narratives and myths emerging from chaos must find traction within the nomos. Such traction is often found through stronger claims to legitimacy or authority, yet it can also be created through hegemonic status. Such hegemonic status may also be ensured by actors beyond nomos who support those acting within the nomos, wherein political agendas are supported by regional agendas. In what follows, we seek to demonstrate that efforts to cultivate communal loyalty amidst deep communal difference finds traction through positioning discursive efforts within political, theological and spatial practices that give meaning to discourse. Such an approach requires moving beyond a simplistic discursive analysis to look at the ways such visions of order are made real. Yet such visions are not bound up within state borders, but rather are situated within broader regional developments and a shared vision of nomos.

Yet the manifestation of such visions of nomos in a spatialized form raise further questions about the ways in which such orderings can cut across state borders. This point is inherent within the thought of Ibn Khaldun who raises the importance of religion and tradition in ordering life, albeit beyond—before—the confines of the Westphalian order. More contemporary visions of nomos—such as that presented by the Italian Philosopher Giorgio Agamben—define nomos in a way that refers to sovereign power and space. Yet as some have begun to observe nomos cuts across these borders predicated on shared visions of order. As we shall see, the presence of a shared nomos transcends alliance building and also results in the making real of an alternative vision of order.

 Sites of resistance: the case of Lebanon

This section provides empirical context in exploring the articulation of resistance narratives through different cultural and memorialized spaces in Lebanon. Here, we view resistance as a vision of order which is then ‘made real’ through forms of cultural

production, cultural diplomacy and exchange, and heritage tourism. These are initiatives that are either run through Hezbollah’s cultural and tourism departments, or by Iran’s cultural bureau in Lebanon—which is run by the Islamic Culture and Relations Organizations (ICRO). Comparable to the British Council, or Confucius Institute, the ICRO acts as Iran’s cultural diplomacy arm. It is separate from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (who employ the ambassadors and embassy staff), reporting to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and its head is appointed by the Supreme Leader.\textsuperscript{56}

The ICRO have an active presence in Lebanon. This draws on Iran’s a long-standing links with Lebanese Shia and is furthered through the shared aims of promoting a form of ‘resistance culture’ to combat Israel and the United States,\textsuperscript{57} and more recently the threat posed by groups such as Daesh. The cultural events and exhibitions aimed at the Lebanese Shi’i community and Iranian expats are very much based around the resistance theme, and include exhibitions of ‘revolutionary’ and ‘resistance’ art, among other varied cultural events.\textsuperscript{58} When asked about what role arts and culture play in the axis, the Iranian cultural attaché in Beirut, Mohammad Mehdi Shariatmadar, noted that:

> The arts and literature of resistance can play an important role in the strength of the resistance movement, the record of its victories and its achievements, the critique of successes and failures, and the creative articulation of the goals of resistance to public opinion.\textsuperscript{59}

Iranian parastatal organizations like the ICRO help manage the cultural cooperation between Iran and its partners in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{60} An important articulation of this is found not only in the cultural production work around common, resistance-linked themes, but also in the way that memorialized spaces have been developed as a physical manifestation of such aims.

As Ibn Khaldun, Arendt and others acknowledge, communities are ordered by normative values which articulate a set of principles through which it engages with the world. The two projects outlined below show how ideas of resistance are transposed on to projects that provide a spatial representation of the axis’ vision of order which then take on additional importance as means of reproducing this narrative amongst visitors. The two projects highlight the ways in which shared visions of order cut across spatial—and Westphalian—borders, pointing to a more nuanced reading of nomos that fuses the exception and material power, with the ideational.

**The Iranian garden**

The first example of what we are referring to in this paper as a ‘site of resistance’ is the ‘Iranian Garden’. This site is located just outside the town of Maroun el Ras on the border with Israel. Located a mere 400 metres away from the border fence, the garden is an extraordinary example of Iranian extra-territorial largesse. Maroun el Ras was the site of key battles between resistance forces and Israel in the 2006 war, and so the choice of location for the garden is no coincidence. Here, it acts not only as a direct and obvious

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\textsuperscript{57}Edward Wastnidge, ‘Shi’i Diplomacy’.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59}Interview with Iranian cultural attaché, Mohammad Mehdi Shariatmadar, Beirut.

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid.
challenge specifically to Israel in a sensitive area, but as an expression of Iran and the wider axis’ vision of regional order, in which resistance to Israel acted as arguably the primary formative factor in developing the initial relationship between Iran and Hezbollah.

The garden was built with the financial support of the Iranian Committee for Reconstruction of Southern Lebanon and was inaugurated by then-Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a gift to the people of Southern Lebanon on his visit there in 2010. According to the town’s mayor, the garden provides an opportunity for people to ‘offer their material and moral support to the resistance, its audience and its people’. The garden itself is built around discrete viewing platforms that each correspond to specific Iranian provinces. Each section contains notice boards with information pertaining to the related province. This way you are able to sit in Khuzestan, or Markazi province for example, with a view directly into ‘enemy territory’. The representations of Iran in this sensitive location are not only limited to its geo-administrative characteristics, however. Iranian flags adorn the military-style watchtowers, which visitors can climb, and are juxtaposed with the accompanying presence of an outdoor gym bedecked in the colours of the Iranian flag. One of the most symbolic features of the Iranian Garden is the replica of al Quds’ Dome of the Rock, which takes centre stage. The building while unmistakably an homage to one of the most scared buildings in Islam and a symbol of the Palestinian struggle, is here reimagined in a distinctly Iranian style. Thus, one can see Persianate tile work adorning its façade, and the Iranian flag flying proudly on its roof. The pièce de résistance, however, is the calligraphic inscription of ‘Allah’ as transposed from the Iranian flag, onto the tilework on the Israel-facing side of the building. Intended to be clearly viewable from the Israeli side, the reproduction of this iconic site serves as reminder of Iran’s transnational reach in the region, and a tacit warning to its Israeli foe.

The garden also contains facilities that are regularly utilized by the ICRO, Hezbollah and Palestinian refugee groups in Lebanon for cultural and artistic events. Here, on the border with Israel, we therefore have regular resistance-themed showcases of local artists and commemorations of Lebanese and Palestinian battles against Israeli occupation. For the ICRO, it is about providing space to support projects emphasizing ‘resistance, defence of justice, and freedom’ as opposed to the ‘occupation, terrorism and aggression’ of the ‘Zionist regime’. It also contains several statues of Iranian literary and revolutionary figures, including a bust of the former Iranian cultural attaché, Ebrahim Ansari, who was killed in a suicide attack by the al-Qaida-linked Abdullah Azzam Brigades on the Iranian cultural centre in Beirut in November 2013. The park also contains a commemorative plaque to Hossam Khoshnevis, the head of the Iranian Committee for Reconstruction of Southern Lebanon, who played a key role in establishing the garden. Khoshnevis was killed in a suspected Israeli strike on Iranian targets in Syria in 2013, with commemorations held at the garden subsequently. In February 2020, a temporary statue commemorating the assassinated Iranian Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani was installed at the garden, replete with accompanying Palestinian flag, with the figure pointing towards Israel and the Occupied Territories.

61 http://www.bintjbail-um.gov.lb/?p=1635
62 Interview with Iranian cultural attaché.
63 https://archive.bintjbail.org/article/63,983
As a means of reinforcing Iran and the wider axis’ ability to challenge Israel, visiting dignitaries from Iran are often taken to the garden where they can stand on one of the several watchtowers and peer deep into Israeli territory. Such visits have included those of former Iranian parliamentary speaker Hadad Adel, and current Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.65 Also, other allied figures from the wider axis fold are also given tours of the garden on their visits to Lebanon, including the assassinated former Iraqi PMU leader Abu Mahdi al Muhandis.66

The garden reveals much about how visions of order cut across state borders and are reproduced—and made real—in different contexts. The manifestation of this vision of order and resistance—originally articulated in Iran yet existing in southern Lebanon—highlights the interplay between the transnational and the local in the process of making real. Moreover, it also allows for the continuation of communal belonging despite geographic difference.

Hezbollah’s memorialization of resistance

The above example of Iran’s expression of opposition to the prevailing order, manifested as it is through the use of symbolic artefacts in the physical space of the Iranian Garden on Israel’s border, is part of a wider effort to promote a form of resistance culture through a range of cultural outputs. These are often most clearly articulated ‘locally’ through Iran’s allies, with Hezbollah perhaps the most notable among them. A common thread that ties the cultural production work of various Resistance Axis actors is the idea of ‘maslaha’ (the common good or public interest/expediency) as interpreted by Khomeini and Khamenei. As Alagha has highlighted in his work on Hezbollah’s various cultural outputs, maslaha in this interpretation is very much linked to resistance and political struggle, thus making all art ‘resistance art’.68 The work of Hezbollah’s cultural production arm, Risalat, is carried out in this vein, with its creation drawing on the need to promote a ‘well-managed cultural front of the resistance’.69 This forms part of a wider mission by the party to curate and manage what Harb and Deeb refer to as an ‘Islamic milieu’ of (Shi’i) Muslim leisure space in Lebanon, though as we note below, Hezbollah are conscious of not overstating the religious element in this instance.

Mleeta is an open air resistance museum, built by Hezbollah to tell the story of the resistance. El-Hibri has discussed how the museum offers visitors the chance to share the ‘secretive experience’ of guerrilla combat through its memorialization of a previously ‘concealed’ space.71 In doing so, Mleeta’s use of space articulates a vision of how the world should be arranged, whilst simultaneously dealing with the import of a key historical moment in the party’s existence.72 As with the Iranian Garden, the focus is on resistance

67https://twitter.com/oumami_qouds/status/1,288,541,600,134,639,619
71Hatim El-Hibri, Visions of Beirut.
against Israel, but it plays an important symbolic role for the wider resistance movement. Iranian and other axis dignitaries are also regular visitors to the museum.\textsuperscript{73} Sheikh Ali Daher, some time head of Risalat, and Hezbollah’s tourist and heritage organization, Siraj, explained that the idea was born after the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, and that it came from a ‘... need to tell the true story of the resistance, to counter the narrative coming from the West that Hezbollah are a terrorist group.’\textsuperscript{74} According to Sheikh Ali, the location was chosen as it is where the spirit of resistance was strong, and that the party wanted to base it in southern Lebanon as this was the home of the resistance against Israel.\textsuperscript{75} There was a lot of debate within Hezbollah as to the type of audience it was aimed at. One view was to keep it for a more local audience. This was predicated on a ‘simpler idea’ that it would have an already captive audience, who would like it regardless. For Sheikh Ali it was about telling a story: ‘We want to tell a story ... To show that the resistance is not terrorism but a real and heroic struggle against oppression. The logic was to broadcast our message more widely, not just locally.’\textsuperscript{76}

The second, and ultimately the successful prevailing view, was to instead make it a national project with international appeal. Because of this decision, it was important to go with modern architectural styles, to appeal to a wider international audience visiting Lebanon. There was a keen desire to help improve broader receptivity to the resistance narrative and culture.\textsuperscript{77} As such, the finished project emphasized the Lebanese/national element of the resistance. It was deemed important to demonstrate that this was not just Hezbollah’s victory, but a national one that moves the country beyond the division of the civil war. Indeed, at the time of visiting, apart from the museum shop, visitors do not see overt or religious-oriented expressions of loyalty to the party and resistance—as Sheikh Ali explained ‘We chose not to be too bold with the religious message here, because this was a national resistance. Of course for us [Lebanese Shia] there is a strong religious core to our resistance, but the struggle in this place was national too’\textsuperscript{78} Indeed, as Larkin and Parry-Davies have noted, in doing so the museum ‘attempts to displace the legacy of a destructive and fractured civil war with a triumphant liberatory struggle against Israel’.\textsuperscript{79}

The museum is centred around a sunken open air amphitheatre called ‘the abyss’, into which the spoils of the Resistance’s military victories against Israeli forces have been placed. Taking pride of place is a captured Israeli Defence Force Merkava Tank, with its gun barrel symbolically tied in a knot to demonstrate its impotence. It also contains ruined writing in Hebrew, designed to be seen from the air, in what El-Hibri describes as a form of ‘vertical taunting’ designed to be visible to aerial surveillance of the enemy.\textsuperscript{80} Dotted throughout the grounds are various examples of military equipment that were used in fighting the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. In a telling example of perhaps the intended audience, and ultimately its source of funding, the tri-lingual guides of the museum and of its website are in Arabic, English and Persian.

\textsuperscript{73}See, for example https://archive.alahednews.com.lb/details.php?id=40407, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9WYb59Vjas; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8cvdY7V_mA
\textsuperscript{74}Interview with Sheikh Ali Daher, Mleeta, Lebanon.
\textsuperscript{75}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79}Larkin and Parry-Davies, ‘War Museums in Postwar Lebanon’, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{80}El-Hibri, ‘Visions of Beirut’, p. 159.
translations offered for the various speeches and films shown in the museum’s cinema auditorium.

Sheikh Ali was keen to emphasize that they were trying to create a type of ‘resistance tourism’, and that their hope is to have a number of resistance sites across the country. As part of this effort, they want to collaborate more internationally, but it is difficult because of Western and Arab allies’ views of Hezbollah. The efforts to broaden the museum’s appeal beyond its core constituency are borne out in the proportion of visitors, with over half of its nearly two million visitors to date being non-Lebanese, and 25% of those coming from ‘Western’ countries.

Part of this broader attempt to showcase the resistance is borne of religiously informed notions of justice and fighting oppression that find resonance across the axis. In contrast to the material, military successes it had, Sheikh Ali was keen to emphasize that there is a spiritual dimension to the resistance, and that moral and spiritual resistance is in fact greater than any kind of military effort. For Sheikh Ali:

‘resistance culture originates with Imam Hussein – it was he who planted the culture of resistance and we are the fruits of his ideas [and that] form him the world can learn how the weak can defeat the strong. This legacy us perhaps the defining characteristic of resistance culture. It is not terrorism but a real, defensive struggle against oppression.’

Tellingly, this is something that was seen as providing common cause among Hezbollah and its allies, and now that resistance was a broader notion (now also tasked with confronting Sunni extremist groups such as Daesh), it was a case of ‘the same enemy but with different faces’. In a similar vein to the Iranian Garden, Mleeta also acts as a site for gatherings of scholars, artists and politicians allied to the resistance, to attend commemorations for events such as Qods Day, a commemorative event inaugurated by Ayatollah Khomeini after the Iranian revolution to support the Palestinian cause, and which takes place on the last day of Ramadan. This broader transnational link is important when considering Mleeta as an articulation of the ‘resistance nomos’, the spatialization and making real of a vision of order posited against Israel. Here, we can see it serving an important function in what Harb and Deeb describe as a ‘transnational war of memory and history, [and] an inscription of resistance history that competes on a global level as the suppressed history in the face of discourses of Zionist history supported by the U.S. and Israel’.

Conclusion

Although possessing different emphases, the Iranian Garden and Mleeta both offer tangible articulations of the nomos of the Resistance Axis. The spatialized grounding of this narrative allows it to be ‘made real’ and, in the process, to be understood by people beyond verbal communication. The construction of these spaces allows them to be

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81 Interview with Sheikh Ali Daher.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 See, for example http://www.taghribnews.com/ar/news/272531/A
87 Harb and Deeb, ‘Culture as History and Landscape’, p. 27.
transformed into physical articulations of the resistance axis—a *nomos* defined by a vision of what regional order *should* look like—in which themes can be explored, articulated, and reinforced. This plays out in the development of the two sites and the very spatialization of the Iranian garden in which the *nomos* of the axis is ‘made real’. This helps to advance understanding of how regional order can be conceived and articulated. While being receptive to the conceptual tools that have historically been used to explain regional order in the Middle East, it is our contention that *nomos*, as applied in this context, can be a further conceptual prism to aid this understanding, especially in the less materially defined domains of cultural production and memorialization.

The use of cultural production, including art exhibitions, across both sites serves to emphasize the narrative of resistance, framed in such a way to unify distinct units around a common theme, that of a shared *nomos*. In contrast to other approaches, using the concept of *nomos* allows for more existential engagement with a vision of order and the ways in which group membership is formed across time and space.

Moving beyond conventional understandings of the axis—which typically rely on material or ideational understandings of alliance construction—is important to understand its ongoing resonance and the ways in which it is reproduced across time and space. This idea of *nomos* allows for greater analytical insight into the ways in which a shared vision of the world is produced across time and space but in a way that facilitates group membership through closing a community off against an outside. In creating and reinforcing this *nomos*, Iran and Hezbollah (in particular) are seeking to ensure communal cohesion and to secure their position within the world.

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