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Transnational identities in practice: Lebanese Turkmens between Turkey's adhocratic governance and Lebanese disinvestment

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Introduction

A vast literature has focused on the multifaceted hard and soft power strategies Turkey has employed in the past two decades to strengthen its foreign policy posture. Whether via cultural and/or humanitarian diplomacy (Altunışık 2019; Demirtaş 2015), international ambitions or geopolitical projections (Çevik 2019; Benhaïm and Öktem 2015; Altınay 2008), Turkey's external projection has been reshaped through the elaboration of a transnational strategic identity narrative. This narrative is based on historical, cultural and geographical inheritance, embracing "kin communities" (*akraba topluluklar*) such as Turkish citizens or Turkic people/ethnic Turks abroad, Sunni Muslims generally and those who live in the post-Ottoman space (Ennis and Momani 2013; Zenonas 2019:5).

Within the wide literature on Turkey's proactive foreign policy (Keyman and Gumuscu 2014), the case of Lebanon is quite understudied yet significant for two main reasons. First, in the past few decades, the Sunni community has undergone a leadership crisis, leading to a partial retreat of Saudi Arabia's influence (Meier and Di Peri 2017), which boosted foreign countries' attempts to influence political programmes and resources. Second, the historical Sunni Lebanese Turkmen community has been involved in this process to benefit from Turkey's identity-based foreign policy. Not only are Lebanese Turkmens one of the main recipients of projects implemented by Ankara in the country, but their identity practices have also recently been revitalised. In February 2010, the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) published a report entitled "The Forgotten Turks: Turkmens of Lebanon" (ORSAM 2010) to outline the situation of Turkmen communities in Lebanon, their distribution across the territory and their demographic and socio-historical evolutions. While investigating Turkmens' identity and possible connections with Turkey, the report concluded that "Lebanese Turkmens do not have relatives in Turkey, and therefore regular visits to Turkey are out of the question. Only people educated in Turkey who maintain their professional contacts visit Turkey [..] Thus Lebanon's Turkmens' relationship with Turkey is restricted to their ties with our Beirut Embassy and the Turkish military unit (ORSAM 2010: 41)."

Since the publication of the ORSAM report, the regional situation and transnational ties have profoundly changed. In Lebanon, especially since the outbreak of

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the war in Syria in 2011, the geographical context in which the majority of Turkmens are concentrated – the northern area of the country, including the Akkar and Tripoli regions – has transformed significantly. These regions, historically marginalised and mostly ignored by the Lebanese state (Carpi 2014; Gilsenan 1990), have been further excluded from the development strategies of the post–civil war reconstruction, becoming targets of ad hoc security practices aimed at containing the possible spillover effects of the Syrian war in Lebanon (Kudsen 2017; Lefèvre 2014). Lebanon's lack of long-term governance of marginal areas and the implementation of these ad hoc securitisation policies have contributed to enhancing transnational identities among Turkmen communities. These communities have turned to Turkish state and non-state transnational actors for attention and socio-economical support. Since the early 2000s, Turkish state agencies and institutions have been established in Lebanon to cultivate Lebanese Turkmen and Sunni communities as recipients of cultural and humanitarian diplomacy. While promoting a transnational identity narrative based on common cultural and religious heritage, Turkish institutions established direct contact with the Lebanese Turkmen associations and deployed grassroots adhocratic governance through issue-specific and targeted humanitarian and development aid.

We began by questioning how Turkey's "adhocratic governance" (Natter 2023), namely all those measures taken at various levels when identity becomes temporarily dominant (or marginal) in political decision-making processes, contributes to the identification practices of Lebanese Turkmens. More broadly, how do forms of governing impact identity processes?

Relying on projects and policies implemented by Turkish agencies in Lebanon between 2010 and 2023, the article contends that i) Turkey's ad hoc and geographically defined policies towards Turkmen communities occur in a context of systematic disinvestment by the Lebanese state, and ii) this adhocratic governance has contributed to enhancing Turkmens' transnational identification practices. While Lebanon disinvested in marginal yet strategically relevant areas or focused solely on securitisation policies, Turkey framed its foreign policy in terms of cultural-religious kinship, particularly in these marginal areas. Both political processes are continually characterised by competing bundles of identifications, which temporarily and incompletely acquire a privileged status in (foreign policy) decision-making (Bucher and Jasper 2017:394). This analytical lens allows us to combine studies on identity with those on adhocracy (usually applied to public policy or migration studies). It introduces, on the one hand, the centrality of space and time in debates on how identity has contributed to redefining the state's role in the domestic and international arena and, on the other hand, the extent and ways in which ad hoc measures at the micro-scale of identification processes influence the macro-level identity–legitimacy nexus. The intertwining of these two analytical lenses, combined with an understudied case such as the Turkmens in Lebanon, offers a fresh and original perspective, representing the empirical innovative contribution of the paper.

After presenting the methodological and analytic framework illustrating how it

contributes to the study of transnational identity and adhocratic governance, the article introduces the context of Turkmen communities in Lebanon. The two sections of the analysis refer to how Turkey's adhocratic governance (i) operates and (ii) affects the Lebanese Turkmens' identity processes.

1. Transnational identities in practice and adhocratic governance: Theoretical framework and methodological premises

To investigate how Turkey's foreign policy aspirations and Lebanon's domestic disinvestment play a role in Lebanese Turkmens' identity, the article relies on the literature on identity claims at the intersection of domestic and foreign policy. This approach stems from a state-centred perspective that often defines identity as a substantive object, enabling the unveiling of the rationale "behind" states' actions (Bucher and Jasper 2017; Urrestarazu 2015; Peterson 1993). Identity as a causal variable explaining why states act in certain ways has been employed to investigate states' domestic and foreign governance and the way geopolitical and economic goals are forged and reshaped, as well as states' priorities and responses to local and global threats (Hintz 2018; Campbell 1998). Scholars have examined not only how identity matters in states' aim to enhance their positive images in the international arena (Adar and Yenigün 2019; Browning 2015; Anholt 2011) but also how multiple and overlapping identities are articulated at the transnational level and employed as tools to justify foreign policy decisions (Wastnidge 2019).

Transnational identity claims are crucial for examining not only how identities constitute forms of belonging that transcend state territorial limits (Adamson 2012; Bauböck 2010) but also how they play a role in strategic foreign policy as both an arena for identity pressures and contestation (Hintz 2018; Zarakol 2010) and the basis for cultural/humanitarian diplomacy and policy initiatives (Hudson 2014). This framework brings identity studies closer to the concept of "adhocracy", referring to those adhocratic forms of governing that are intentionally ambiguous, pragmatic and flexible in a way that can secure state power (Natter 2023). Ad hoc measures, projects and institutions undertaken by states claiming identity beyond their territory, while reflecting the micro-scale of identification processes, also contribute to affecting the macro level of identity–legitimacy nexus.

In the past three decades, a vast literature has scrutinised the flourishing of ad hoc institutions, agencies, policies, cultural and/or humanitarian diplomacy and bureaucratic apparatuses through which nation-states maintain political, economic and identity ties with their respective communities abroad (Mencutek and Baser 2018; Gamlen 2014; Varadarajan 2010). Thus, it is crucial to investigate the transnational mobilisation activities conducted by political entrepreneurs engaged in strategic social identity construction (Adamson 2012:25). Moreover, transnational identity claims contribute to shaping the socio-political structures in which individuals "belong" to communities or are excluded from them. Nation-states' transnational institutions and governmental bodies act as powerful actors aimed at governing cross-border pro-

cesses (Öktem 2014) or even reshaping historical kinship and consciousness abroad (Zadrożna 2017; Jabbour 2021).

Actor-centred approaches to how identity claims are governed contend that states' identities might strongly differ from those of individuals and that identities interact with each other with a dynamism that occurs in both cooperative and competitive ways. Moreover, since national identity might not overlap with sub, trans or supra-national identities, the scale of this dynamism and its redefinition over time and space have led scholars to emphasise that, as Yıldız and Çitak affirm, "An interpretation of actions of agents is incomplete without considering their multiple senses of belonging since these emerge as available channels and opportunity structures of thinking and acting" (Yıldız and Çitak 2021:340). The paradigm shift to identity as a process of multiple acts of identification analyses not only the "empirically accessible, spatial and temporal relational processes that intertwine actors and society, past and future" but also those "competing bundles of identifications, which temporarily and incompletely acquire a privileged status in (foreign policy) decision-making" (Bucher and Jasper 2017:394). While examining forms of governance in marginal zones where the state's sovereignty is not fully exerted and identity claims emerge as the result of local communities' needs or are directed by foreign states, the paper contributes to the literature on the impact of ethnoreligious fractions in identity formation and belonging, especially in the Middle East (Hinnebusch 2003; Yıldız and Çitak 2021).

The paper draws on interviews conducted in Lebanon in 2017, 2018 and 2022 with Turkmen communities in the north of the country and the Turkmen Association in Lebanon (*Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği*) in Tripoli, civil society actors and members of Lebanese politics related to the Tripoli region and Turkish institutions operating in Lebanon, such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the Yunus Emre Institute in Beirut. Interviews have been anonymised and analysed in conjunction with secondary resources, such as academic and non-academic publications on Lebanese Turkmens. Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, and under Ahmet Davutoğlu's mandate as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey (2009–2014), a vast literature has examined the effect of the "strategic depth" doctrine advocating a shift in Turkey's foreign policy posture towards the former Ottoman geopolitical space (Murinson 2006). Against this backdrop, the Lebanese case has been understudied in the literature with very few exceptions. While this context contributes to the article's originality, it also invites further investigation into Lebanese Turkmens to shed light on the intertwined links between transnational identity claims and states' acts of ruling.

2. Turkmens in Lebanon: context and relevance

The origin of the Turkmens presence in Lebanon is contentious, dating back either to migrations of ancient nomad populations from the Turkestan region or as the result of the 1516 decision by Ottoman Sultan Selim to send families to secure the pilgrim-

age route towards Palestine. Until at least the mid-2000s, the Turkmen presence in Lebanon was not of particular interest to either the Lebanese or the Turkish governments. In a country marked by the presence of 18 recognised confessional communities and different ethnic groups, this minority, demographically and politically insignificant, appears marginal and is mostly included under the umbrella of the Sunni community, to which the Turkmens religiously belong. ORSAM was the first institution to promote systematic studies on the presence of Turkmens in Lebanon. These studies follow the transformation of Turkish foreign policy, which, especially after the publication of Ahmet Davutoglu's 2001 book "Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position", has been guided by security and identity imperatives (Sandrin 2009), grounded on historical and geographical depths (Kastoryano 2013). This caused Turkey to reconsider its foreign policy towards the Middle East based on geographical proximity and historical-identity roots, particularly the Ottoman Empire heritage.

Through the electoral lists and data collected by various associations of Lebanese Turkmens, and despite the absence of an official census in Lebanon since 1932, it is possible to estimate that Turkmens in Lebanon number around 18,000 (Jabbour 2021). Data is indeed contentiously presented: According to the *Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği,* about 18,000–20,000 Turkmens live in Lebanon[1]. Turkish personnel working at the Yunus Emre Institute in Beirut affirm that out of 50,000 Lebanese citizens who also have Turkish citizenship, 15,000 are Turkmens[2]. As Sunni Muslims, Lebanese Turkmens were involved in large processes of assimilation and Arabisation, which differ in the various regions in which the Turkmens reside (more marked in multi-confessional areas and less or not present at all in predominantly Turkmen villages). Despite the awareness of being Turkmens, this consciousness did not bring about specific identity policies or identification processes among the community members until at least the early 2000s. When referring to Turkmen communities, various interlocutors belonging to the Sunni community included Turkmens as "fully part of Lebanese society" and "inhabitants of huge historical Ottoman lands" and "not determined to be part of Turkey"[3].

The most homogeneous group in Lebanon is represented by the Turkmens of the Akkar governorate in northern Lebanon, in the two villages of Qawashra and Aydamun. These villages are 100% inhabited by Lebanese Turkmens and have been, at least initially, at the core of the adhocratic strategies promoted by Turkey. In addition, the Turkmens of the Bekaa Valley in the eastern part of the country reside in the villages of Sheymiye, Duris, Nananiye, Addus, Hadidiye and Al Qaa and represent a minority within these villages. Moreover, the Cretan Turks mainly lived in the city of Tripoli, in the governorate of North Lebanon, and were subjected to a strong process of cultural assimilation, identifying with the socio-economic fabric of the city. Another group is composed of Turkish citizens living in Beirut (not necessarily Sunni and

[1] Conversation with the president of the Turkmens' Association in Lebanon (*Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği*), Tripoli, 12 June 2022.

[2] Conversation with a representative from the Yunus Emre Institute Beirut, 14 June 2022.

[3] Conversation with local civil society representative, Tripoli, 11 June 2022.

often ethnic Kurds), many of whom migrated to work before the civil war from the city of Mardin in southeastern Turkey, as well as Syrian Turkmens also located in the capital. Finally, the Circassian Turkmens, who migrated from the Balkans to the Middle East after the Ottoman–Russian War (1877–1878), are dispersed in different regions of the country and have forgotten Turkish language (ORSAM 2015:39).

This spatial fragmentation resonates with the communities' fragmentation. As the president of the *Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği* affirms: "There are more than five associations of Turkmens in Lebanon, how is it possible? Each of them has different programmes and is led by personalisms and personal initiative. [...] Being so scattered, we are less powerful"[4].

The majority of Turkmens in Lebanon live in marginal areas; the northern and eastern regions are predominantly rural, with agriculture being the main occupation, while the industrial sector is weak and insignificant (Gade 2019). These areas are economically depressed and historically affected by underdevelopment and a lack of investment from the Lebanese state. Their decline started after the spatial and territorial reconfiguration following the formation of Greater Lebanon in 1920, which led to sectarian remodelling and the increasing centrality of Beirut (Di Peri 2017; Kassir 2010). The northeastern regions were further marginalised by reconstruction plans after the civil war (1975–1990). These plans, promoted by then–Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who was elected in October 1992, sought to revalue the Lebanese pound, cut inflation and launch a massive economic reconstruction plan. However, these plans did not include measures to reduce poverty for large sections of the population, as the Prime Minister believed the reconstruction programmes (e.g. Horizon 2000) would also alleviate poverty by stimulating foreign investment. On the contrary, the plans imposed expenses that excessively burdened state coffers, leading to a lack of funds for social sector policies and underdeveloped regions (Butter 1995:3). Furthermore, it led to a rapid increase in foreign debt (which grew by 67% between 1994 and 1996, reaching 1.4 billion dollars) and internal debt (which reached 7 billion dollars in 1995). This produced a rise in interest rates, which, combined with the revaluation of the Lebanese lira against the dollar, increased capital inflows (especially from abroad) into the Lebanese market. The accumulation of foreign capital, oil revenues from the Gulf countries and remittances from immigrants (Tufaro 2019; Baumann 2016, 2019), along with the macro-economic strategies undertaken after the civil war, gradually led to a rentierisation of the Lebanese economy. However, instead of promoting a redistribution of the generated income, the wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few (Traboulsi 2014, 2012). All these elements contributed to fuelling financial and construction bubbles, strongly neglecting investments in productive sectors and social policies and increasing regional disparities. Reconstruction plans' investments were mostly concentrated in Beirut and the Mount Lebanon governorate, largely neglecting the northern, eastern and southern regions (Hamdan 2000). Furthermore, as Salti and Chaaban (2010) point out, the allocation of public spending in those

[4] Conversation with the president of the Turkmens' Association in Lebanon (*Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği*), cit.

years in Lebanon essentially followed sectarian channels, favouring communities or community leaders with greater demographic and political weight. The provision of public goods and essential services became a tool for nepotism and rent-seeking dynamics. Checks and balances were replaced with reciprocal political consent, with politicians tolerating each other's misdeeds. This resulted in the proliferation of corruption, facilitated by the scale of reconstruction projects involving many intermediaries (Corstange 2012).

In the face of institutional neglect, the northern and eastern regions hit the headlines with the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, as they suffered the immediate consequences of the arrival of Syrian refugees (Knudsen 2016). This, in a way, drew the interest of the Lebanese government, concerned with security issues: the arrival of the Syrian refugees generated competition for resources among the poor in impoverished regions, potentially igniting sectarian clashes. This was precisely what happened. The presence of an Alawite minority supporting President Bashar al-Assad, especially in the Tripoli area, caused opposing positions between Alawites and Sunnis (the latter siding with the Syrian rebels), leading to even more intense clashes, especially in Tripoli (Naufal 2012; Assir 2012). Furthermore, the northern border areas experienced violent clashes aimed at stopping possible jihadist infiltrations within the country between 2013 and 2014, when the Islamic State arose (Salloukh 2017).

3. Turkey and Turkmens in Lebanon

The Lebanese state's long-standing systematic disinvestment has profoundly affected areas inhabited by Turkmens, which lack basic infrastructure such as drinkable water, electricity, roads, schools and hospitals. These conditions of deprivation and abandonment have been documented by reports prepared by the Ministry of Social Affairs in collaboration with the UNDP, which have attempted to map the socio-economic conditions of Lebanese families. The first "Mapping of Living Conditions" report dates to 1998 and carried out an analysis by district (*caza*) and not just by governorate (*muhafazah*). Other reports followed, including "The Living Conditions in Lebanon: A Comparison between 1995 and 2004", published in 2005, and "Poverty, Growth and Income Distribution in Lebanon" in 2008. The latter analysed poverty in Lebanon for the first time starting from the measurement of family spending. Even before the crisis that has affected Lebanon since 2020, data from these reports underlined a particularly disastrous situation for northern Lebanon (both the governorate of North Lebanon and the Akkar governorate) compared with other regions of the country. The 2008 UNDP report highlighted that families living in the northern regions (about 21% of the Lebanese population) represented 46% of the poor, and 38% of them lived in situations of extreme poverty, which is structural and longstanding. The same report underscores that while the North is more disadvantaged in terms of access to health, education and family earnings, the South faces greater disadvantages due to a lack of housing and basic services (ibid.: 58). As Dewailly (2019) points out, regional productivity in the north is very low and mainly

linked to the construction sector. This meant that even in the face of cautious development and poverty reduction in other areas of the country, such progress was not possible in the north, where the chronic lack of liquidity limited investments in this sector. The civil war gradually led the region, particularly the city of Tripoli, into a strong process of de-industrialisation and destruction of infrastructure, which has not yet been restored (Le Thomas and Dewailly 2009). Moreover, as many conversations reveal, the marginalisation was not just geographic and economic but also political. Support for the Palestinians and, more generally, a Pan-Arab vision contributed to politically marginalising the northern regions, which were seen as a stronghold of a specific Sunni vision that did not align with the one promoted by Harirism[5].

According to the ESCWA report, which covers the years 2019–2021, families in the governorates of North Lebanon and Akkar suffer from multidimensional poverty, affecting various areas of life and access to services and facilities. National data for 2021 indicates that approximately 4 million people live in a situation of multidimensional poverty and 1,650,000 in extreme multidimensional poverty. However, data from the two northern governorates paint an alarming picture. In the governorate of North Lebanon, 137,000 households (85% of the total) live in poverty, and 50,000 in extreme poverty (32.6%). In the Akkar governorate, 76,000 households (92%) live in conditions of multidimensional poverty, and 40,000 (51.5) in extreme multidimensional poverty. These percentages are very high compared with other regions that have also experienced high overall impoverishment (e.g. Mount Lebanon and South Lebanon). This informs Turkey's ad hoc and geographically targeted projects to reach these marginalised areas. Although Ankara's humanitarian and socio-political policies in Lebanon started at the end of the Lebanese civil war, this engagement has been reinvigorated in the past 20 years. Specifically, on 31 July 2009, then–Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu[6] visited Lebanon. The official visit occurred when Turkey was praised as an undisputed "model" for the Islamic world in London, Brussels and Washington. The echoes of a growing economy and a modern Islamo-conservative democracy that could influence the entire region coincided with Davutoğlu's "strategic depth" foreign policy doctrine, which envisaged strengthening the link between Turkey and the Middle East. Davutoğlu's speech underlined three main aspects: First, the two countries "share a vast cultural heritage which is still alive in our daily lives today". Second, Turkey's "multidimensional, proactive, constructive and forward-looking foreign policy initiative" is committed to establishing "a belt of peace, stability and prosperity" in the region. And third, "Turkey will continue to support Lebanon and stand by its brotherly people". While Turkey's proactive and multilevel presence in Lebanon was detailed during this official visit, it was only in the following year, in November 2010, when then–Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan travelled to Beirut, that these goals – to foster a shared cultural heritage, promote political and economic stability and grant brotherly support – became the three pillars of projects

[5] Conversation with local activists, Tripoli, 10-12 of June 2022.

[6] The entire discourse, published on the Lebanese newspaper Daily Star, is available on the website of Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: https://shorturl.at/4uNCp (Consulted 11 February 2024).

and policies implemented by Turkish governmental and non-governmental associations and state agencies.

Turkey's broader attempt to establish a foothold in Lebanon materialises through a composite foreign policy that includes state agencies and both pro-governmental and para-governmental associations. Many Turkish state agencies and institutions are involved in Lebanon. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) operates in two offices: one in Beirut (since 2012) and one in Tripoli (since 2019)[7]. The Yunus Emre Institute has been in Beirut since 2010[8]; the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) and the Turkey Diyanet Foundation (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfi, TDV) related to the Presidency of Religious Affairs are also active. Although these agencies synergistically operate in Lebanon, they specialise in specific issues and target recipients for their projects. To assess the magnitude of projects conducted by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), is important to note that 93% of over 30,000 projects and activities implemented to date have been carried out since 2002[9]. As mentioned during President Erdoğan's 2022 official visit to Lebanon, Turkey implemented over 140 projects worth more than 34 million dollars in total between 2010 and 2022[10]. While presenting TIKA's development cooperation in Lebanon as a "South–South model", the coordinator of the Beirut office affirmed that "84% of their projects are dealing with social infrastructures and services", as they "follow the priorities of each country and listen to society's demands providing projects not credit"[11].

In 2010, TIKA financed the Saida rehabilitation and trauma hospital in the south and modernised both the equipment and the entire building in 2021. The same year, an agricultural project focused on the northern area of the country, where the unemployment rate is above average, enhancing the cultivation of olives and the production of olive paste[12]. In 2022, TIKA also funded a project on water supply and recycling solid waste such as plastic, paper and glass as a model response to the serious garbage crisis in Lebanon.

The president of *Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği* in Tripoli noted how Turkey's ad hoc projects aimed at enhancing infrastructure and services in Turkmen villages also serve to legitimise Turkmen political actors: "We try our best to be autonomous in Turkmen villages where, at the local level, we elect our leaders to build infrastructure such as water, electricity, telephone lines and roads." However, Turkey's adhocratic governance should be considered as a whole: Explicit Turkish attempts to maintain

[7] Since the 1990s, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı*, TİKA) is actively engaged abroad and today runs projects in Balkan countries, the Middle East and Africa.

[8] The Yunus Emre Cultural Institutes were established in 2007 to promote Turkish language and culture.

[9] "Turkish aid agency to continue global outreach in 2024: Head of organization" https://shorturl.at/qYIFw (Consulted on 4 May 2024).

[10] Joint Press Conference with Prime Minister of Lebanon Mikati and President of the Republic of Turkey Erdogan, February 1, 2022: https://shorturl.at/wRJvY (Consulted on 4 May 2024).

[11] Conversation with Orhan Aydin TIKA Beirut Office Coordinator, 14 June 2022.

[12] İ. Durhat, G. A. Ergüler, H. N. Uslu, E. Resuloğulları, *TIKA 2021 Faaliyet Raporu* [2021 TIKA Activities Report], 2022, https://shorturl.at/ILxh3 (Consulted May 4 2024), pp. 116, 154.x

links with perceived kin communities reinforce the governmental narrative of the country as a leader of the Global South.

4. Turkey's adhocratic governance and Lebanese Turkmens' identification processes

The leadership crisis within the Sunni community boosted Turkey's adhocratic governance in Lebanon and renewed attention to Turkmen communities. The ascent to power of Saad Hariri after his father's assassination in 2005 and the creation of the *Al-Mustaqbal* party initially seemed to create conditions for the continuity of Sunni political leadership to counter Hezbollah's expansion. However, the charismatic and controversial leadership of Rafiq Hariri was not equalled by Saad. The "Harirification" of Sunnism, a gradual process led by Rafiq to appropriate all the main Sunni institutions at political and religious levels, with support from Saudi Arabia, stalled after his assassination. This happened for two main reasons: Saad's incapacity to preserve his father's political legacy and the shifting ideological boundaries of Sunnism. Saad was unable to manage the political and economic capital that his father had accumulated during the 1990s, leading to unstable relations with Saudi Arabia, difficulty identifying a strong and unified leadership and a transformation of the boundaries of the Sunni community. The anti-Hezbollah stance became a mantra in Saad's rhetoric, pushing some Sunnis to abandon their moderate posture, creating space for the emergence of radical fringes that had been latent in Lebanon since 2011 (Meier and Di Peri 2017)[13]. In marginalised areas, socio-economic abandonment intersects with a leadership crisis within the Sunni community. Many interlocutors mentioned how the lack of leadership has strengthened the non-Sunni communities' narrative of "other-directed radical Sunni groups"[14] and pushed foreign actors like Turkey to attempt to strategically fill the void[15].

The political vacuum led to a Turkmens' identification process that is not a reaction to the discriminatory politics of the Lebanese state but rather the result of active entrepreneurship by local leaders who maintain solid relations with Turkish institutions, as well as a form of self-identification of Muslims (Jabbour 2021). The president of *Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği* confirmed this while welcoming us to their office in Tripoli. As we entered the room and saw the framed photo of the association president next to Erdoğan, he told us that it was taken in 2010 when, during his official visit to Lebanon, Erdoğan went to the Turkmen village of Qawashra and met with local Turkmen community. "Although we started cooperating with the Turkish Embassy in 1989–1990, it is since 2010 that Turkey's interest in our communities has been growing and the relationship has intensified", he affirmed[16]. This interest should be read in

[13] Conversation in Tripoli with a former Sunni party MP, Tripoli Nini Hospital 12 June 2022, and with local filmmaker, 10 of June 2022.

[14] Conversation with a former Sunni party MP, Tripoli Nini Hospital 12 June 2022.

[15] See: "Turkey is slowly trying to fill the void in Lebanon neglected north": https://shorturl.at/quej2 (Accessed 14 May 2024).

[16] Conversation with the Turkmen Association in Lebanon (*Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği*), Tripoli, 12 June 2022.

combination with the transformation of Lebanese politics and the end of foreign armed presence in the country. The 2000s represent a crucial moment due to the withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian armies in 2000 and 2005, respectively. The Syrian presence was not just armed but also political, functioning as a "protectorate" (Assi 2016). The presence of Israeli and Syrian forces, along with the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran, prevented other regional actors from advancing their interests within the country. The loss of influence of Saudi Arabia due to the crisis of Lebanese Sunnism paved the way for the expansion of Turkish interests, which were already tangible before Erdoğan's visit in 2010. In 2006, during the Israel–Hezbollah war, Turkey provided a large contingent to the UNIFIL troops (around 1,000) stationed on Lebanon's southern border (Flanagan and Brannan 2009). Such activities were also an attempt to re-establish Turkey's credibility in Lebanon. Verbal attacks from Hezbollah for Turkey's intervention in the Syrian war, negative publicity from Lebanese Armenians and the lingering bad perception of the Ottoman Empire's domination contributed to creating an adverse image of Turkey (Houssari 2018).

To foster cultural heritage deriving from centuries of common cultural history during the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency has funded restoration projects for Ottoman buildings like the large clock tower in Tripoli's central Al-Tall square, the Al Takiya Al Mawlawiya, an old Sufi hospice in Tripoli and, more recently the Ottoman building hosting the Şehit Müftü Hasan Halid public high school in Beirut. In Lebanon, Ottoman heritage is presented as strategic by Turkish institutions that finance these projects. As the president of the Turkmens association affirms: "In the case of the restoration of historical Ottoman buildings like the Tekke [the Al Takiya Al Mawlawiya Sufi hospice], they decided according to their interest and intent to preserve Ottoman civilisation, but we were not consulted in these projects"[17].

Similarly, the Turkish Embassy in Beirut sent language teachers to Beirut, Tripoli and Aydamun for periods of up to five years. However, since its foundation in 2012, the Yunus Emre Institute in Beirut has conducted most of its cultural and language activities. In 2022, 15 Turkish language teachers operated in Lebanon, providing courses at three universities and the Yunus Emre Institute for different segments of Lebanese society[18].

According to the president of the institute, there is a growing demand for Turkey's culture and language courses in various sectors of Lebanese society, primarily due to the country's image conveyed via TV series: "Turkey is popular in Lebanon because of TV series. There is a TV channel hosting only Turkish series. Saudi Arabia and the Emirates also have their own TV channels in Lebanon." Alongside Turkish language courses, the Yunus Emre Institute organises courses in the Turkish Ebru art of marbling, traditional Turkish and Ottoman music and summer schools in Turkey for a small group of students who obtain scholarships. Moreover, the institute promotes a scholarship programme (*Türkiye Bursları*) for master's and PhD students who study in Turkey, which

[17] Conversation with the Turkmen Association in Lebanon (*Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği*), Tripoli, 12 June 2022.
[18] Conversation with Yunus Emre Beirut President 14 June 2022.

has paved the way for Lebanese-Turkish associations in both countries. Jana Jabbour defines the proliferation of cultural projects as an attempt to shape Turcophone and Turcophile élites who are "attracted to Turkish culture and civilization" (2021:13).

In the case of Turkmens villages, while language and cultural heritage are at the core of an identity process that has historically forged these communities, the shared language and heritage do not necessarily imply an uncritical stance towards Turkish institutions' governance. On the contrary, a lack of involvement is lamented when it concerns Turkey-financed activities: "Turkey finances the restoration of Ottoman historical buildings. They are interested in the Ottoman civilization and want to preserve buildings like the *tekke* [Sufi lodge] in Tripoli. However, Turkey is not interested in our view on what is strategic to finance […] They [Turkish institutions] do it by themselves because they have money. [..] For instance, now the *tekke* is restored but closed and not used. They could have included an office for our community instead"[19]. The fragmented nature of the Turkmen communities is one reason why their claims are less vocal on cultural and socio-political levels. In the village of Duris, one of the most Turkmen-populated areas in the Bekaa region, TIKA activities in 2023 included building a cultural centre with a hall for social gatherings for the community[20]. In January 2023, the Yunus Emre Institute launched a programme entitled "Yunus Emre Institute backs the Turkmens in Lebanon", whose aim was to conduct field visits to "support the Turkish presence in Lebanon and to determine the activities that can be carried out in the region where Lebanese Turkmens live". The visit included Turkmens villages in the Bekaa Valley and north of Tripoli and was attended by the institute's Head of Education Department, who promised actions such as increasing the number of Turkish language teachers to preserve the Turkish language spoken and the 1,000-year Turkmen presence in Lebanon[21].

Beyond cultural heritage, Lebanon's political crisis is also affecting the perception of Turkey as a model of stability. While ad hoc measures in Lebanon tend to cover the broad scope of Turkey's transnational engagement, many conversations reveal the common view that this process occurs in the context of a power vacuum within the Sunni community. This is clear from the words of the president of the Turkmens in Lebanon association: "Unfortunately, Sunni community leaders have no vision. [..] In Lebanon, each party thinks about how to take a slice of the cake rather than improve the national interest. There are no leaders now. [..] We would love for Lebanon to be a strong state, but there are foreign powers like Iran that control the Shia community, Turkey, Saudi Arabia […]"[22]. In the case of the Turkmens, "Turkishness" is displayed in projects that combine modernity, economic technologies and political stability with Islamic values and ethno-nationalist ideology. Against this backdrop, Turkey emerges as one of the foreign powers trying to interfere with Lebanon's state sov-

[19] Conversation with local activists, Tripoli, 10-12 of June 2022.

[20] M. Nalçacıoğlu, E. Resuloğulları, E. Çopur, H. N. Uslu, S. İmre, *TIKA 2023 Faaliyet Raporu* [2023 TIKA Activities Report], 2024, https://rb.gy/x5zlud (Consulted on 5 May 2024), p.150.

[21] "Yunus Emre institute backs the Turkmens in Lebanon" https://rb.gy/vaykac (Consulted 4 May 2024).

[22] Conversation with the Turkmen Association in Lebanon (*Lübnan'da Türkmenler Derneği*) , Tripoli, 12 June 2022.

ereignty. As we will examine below, the conflicting intersection of national and ethnic identity might result in a lack of impact on the Turkish state. However, Turkey's bottom-up inclusive attempt to address the subjectivities and aspirations of local communities is combined with a top-down approach that emerges in specific instrumental policies, such as in the Turkmen village of Qawashra close to the Syrian border. In 2021, TIKA inaugurated the "Memorial for the Martyrs of 15 July", which commemorates the victims of the 15 July 2016 attempted coup in Turkey with 251 olive trees, one for each martyr. The attempted coup in 2016 is perceived as a watershed moment in Turkey's AKP era and a national symbol integral to the ruling ideology. It marked not only a bloody night in which citizens were mobilised to react against those factions within the army that orchestrated the coup but also the beginning of a two-year state of emergency during which the rule of law was suspended and members of political and civic oppositions were persecuted with purges and arrests. Over the years, the Turkish government's discourse on the attempted coup has been framed as a day commemorating the victory of democracy and national unity, thus strengthening consensus and polarising society between "martyrs" and "traitors" (Somer, McCoy, and Luke 2021). What does the presence of the 15 July attempted coup memorial in a Turkmen village at the Lebanese-Syrian border reveal about how Turkey attempts to maintain links and govern kin communities abroad? And how do the ad hoc projects aimed at providing basic services and economic support fit into this broader project that includes identification symbols and narratives closely related to Turkish politics? Adhocratic governance, which focuses on specific and strategic measures, seems coherent with a larger transnationalisation of Turkey. This is a process "through which the Turkish state creates and mobilises certain communities abroad as 'Turks' and promotes Turkishness – defined through religious and linguistic connections with Turkey, as well as loyalty to the AKP regime – beyond its own borders using various means such as economic incentives or semiotic presence in places of religious observance" (Maritato, Öktem, and Zadrożna 2021:105).

The perceived fragmentation of the Sunni community facilitates Turkey's engagement in terms of religious projection. While Rafiq Hariri, especially during his second mandate, became the pillar of tradition and played the religious card (e.g. controlling key institutions of Sunnism, such as charity organisations and, through them, the religious leaders who guaranteed the election of the mufti, the most prestigious position in Lebanese Sunnism) (Skovgaard-Petersen 1998), after his death, this strategy ceased, leading to a fragmentation of the Sunni community. In this fragmented context, Turkish support mostly materialised via specific projects connected to the restoration of Ottoman mosques, like the 2021 TIKA-funded restoration of the Mina Hamidiye Mosque in Tripoli[23]. However, the extent of Turkey's influence is not considered relevant by political actors of the Lebanese Sunni communities, who stress that there is little to no Turkish influence at political, religious and social levels, noting that "Iran is largely present in our country, and this is a threat, but not Tur-

[23] İ. Durhat, G. A. Ergüler, H. N. Uslu, E. Resuloğulları, *TIKA 2021 Faaliyet Raporu* [2021 TIKA Activities Report], 2022, https://rb.gy/64w09n (Consulted May 4 2024), p. 142.

key"[24]. One interlocutor minimised Turkish socio-political and economic projects, considering the United Arab Emirates' political and economic investments in Lebanon as more influential[25]. By contrast, civil society actors and members of the Christian community. like the curator of the Tripoli Film Festival, affirm that most projects in the city are financed by Turkey and target Sunni Muslim communities. In his view, the presence of Turkey, along with other foreign state and non-state Islamic actors, has affected Tripoli's multi-confessional and lively artistic environment, transforming it into a homogenous space focused on preserving the city's Ottoman heritage and Muslim culture. While the Turkish government seeks to promote leadership and ties with populations across the MENA region that are religiously and culturally close to the AKP electorate (Wastnidge 2019), transnational identity claims have emerged as a reinforcing, legitimating device for justifying Turkish foreign policy actions. This has contributed to strengthening Ankara's role conception as it seeks to enact new roles such as "regional leader", "protector of the oppressed" and "leader of the Muslim world". However, the prevailing narrative on Turkey's appeal in the MENA region since the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rise to power in 2002 has recently been questioned by scholars who argue that popularity and favourable attitudes towards Turkey do not necessarily translate into influence (Adar 2024). To date, the Lebanese case seems to confirm this remark.

Conclusion

In recent years, Lebanon and Turkey have both employed different techniques of governing (or non-governing) Lebanese Turkmen communities in terms of domestic and foreign policy, respectively. Lebanon has continued to disinvest in marginalised regions inhabited by Turkmen communities, except for securitisation policies aimed at stabilising the state's borders. This lack of governance is due not to discriminatory policies but rather to a long-lasting political and economic crisis that has weakened state institutions' ability to exert control over the entire territory. The leadership crisis that has affected Sunni communities in the past several decades has also contributed to the strategic political, humanitarian and socio-economical repositioning of foreign countries. These aspects speak to the Special Issue theoretical framework and are crucial to understanding how forms of governance impact identity processes and how time and space are pivotal in re-orienting transnational adhocratic governance. The fact that Turkey began to invest heavily after the loss of influence of Saudi Arabia and Syria is telling in this context. Similarly, the focus on space indicates that adhocratic governance has a greater impact in regions and areas where the State is not strongly present. Turkish ambitions to fill a power vacuum in Lebanon due to the reduction of Saudi influence and the weakness of Sunni political leadership have different meanings in Lebanese regions inhabited by Turkmens, where the effects of adhocratic governance on identification processes are more evident.

[24] Conversation with local civil society representative, Tripoli, 10 of June 2022.

[25] Conversation with a former Sunni party MP, Tripoli Nini Hospital 12 June 2022.

Against this backdrop, Turkey's international aspirations and the economic or security-driven interests shaping a strategic foreign policy have taken advantage of a window of opportunity resulting from both Lebanon's inactivity and the Turkmen associations' entrepreneurial activism. Formally engaged in providing social and economic needs to local communities, the number of projects funded by Turkish institutions proliferated in Lebanon over the past few decades.

While most scholarship has examined Turkey's international mission, less attention has been paid to how adhocratic governance may forge and foster transnational identity claims. This paper outlines how the Turkmens' identification process contributes to a process of transnational identification, which is daily shaped by Turkey and Lebanon's policies, economic contingencies and strategic positioning.

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