Bidaya بداية

CALL FOR PAPERS

BIDAYA JOURNAL · ISSUE 6

Environment and Inequalities in the Arab World



PROPOSALS DUE BY

29 January 2027

bidaya@carep-paris.org
carep-paris.org

Argument

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, together with the Mediterranean basin, rank among the most vulnerable areas to environmental change. Already characterised by arid and semi-arid climates, the region is increasingly exposed to a combination of environmental pressures, including rising temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, sea-level rise and the growing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. These challenges further exacerbate existing pressures on scarce natural resources, intensifying water stress, land degradation, and the broader environmental vulnerabilities of the region. These changes particularly affect the water, energy, and agriculture sectors, undermining the region's economy and security. Whilst climate change and environmental degradation are sources of major tensions, they are also seen as a turning point, offering an opportunity to initiate an energy transition and develop sustainable economic models.

This special issue of *Bidaya* has a twofold aim: to document the environmental changes taking place in this region and to offer a critical understanding of them. It calls for contributions that provide an overview of environmental degradation and its effects on societies in the region; and, on works that critically examine the causes and consequences of such degradations. This dual approach builds on two research traditions. The academic field was initially shaped by a descriptive analysis of environmental impacts, focusing on resource scarcity as well as the security and economic risks it entails. A second body of work draws on political ecology (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987; Gautier & Benjaminsen, 2012) to examine the power relations, conflicts, and historical inequalities that shape ecological processes. Defined by Robbins (2012) as a "community of practice", political ecology seeks to identify root causes of issues rather than their symptoms, by examining "the materiality of the earth, livelihoods, and the discursive construction of scarcity and resilience" (Jadaliyya, 2026), beyond soil erosion or biodiversity decline.

By bringing together these two perspectives, one descriptive, the other critical, this issue aims to shed new light on the subject through three conceptual shifts. First, we seek to analyze the distribution and management of the region's natural resources. We propose to explore their depletion (water, energy, and agricultural land) and the ways in which they are distributed. We also aim to examine the materiality of infrastructure (private generators, desalination plants, informal networks) as sites of political, economic, and social reconfiguration. Next, we suggest exploring the link between environmental degradation and spatial inequalities in the region. To this end, we examine how militarization, occupation, and industrial pollution produce "slow violence" (Nixon, 2011) a phenomenon permanently embedded in bodies, soils, and helps reinforce the structural inequalities underpinning these societies. Finally, we would like to propose a reflection on adaptation strategies and the reliance on technosolutionism. Many countries in the Arab world have embarked on technological modernization to address climate change, as exemplified by Morocco's "Green Deal." Without succumbing to techno-pessimism, this issue seeks to examine the scope of these major state-led adaptation projects, while also giving central prominence to the customary knowledge and citizen mobilizations that are emerging around them. Two questions drive this discussion: To what extent does techno-solutionism undermine vernacular and subaltern ecological practices? Conversely, how can political ecology account for the internal inequalities and power asymmetries that characterize many of these practices, rather than idealizing their transformative potential?

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By bringing together perspectives from the humanities and social sciences, this sixth issue of the journal Bidaya seeks to offer a descriptive and critical framework for understanding environmental disruptions in the Arab world. We therefore place particular emphasis on studies informed by

previously unpublished fieldwork data. Submissions from early-career researchers and doctoral candidates that fall within the four research areas listed below are especially encouraged, though please note that this list is not exhaustive.

Theme 1: The State, Finance, and Environmental Policy

This theme looks at the ways states address environmental issues and the financial mechanisms which underline these initiatives. Given their ability to mobilize support, environmental projects are often appropriated, and sometimes instrumentalized, by political parties and state actors (Karagiannis, 2024), who use them to advance narratives and initiatives that exhibit varying degrees of greenwashing. In the Gulf states, "green" initiatives serve as a lever for economic diversification, preparing for the post-oil era while strengthening the GCC's influence on the international stage. This dynamic contributes to the reconfiguration of inequalities within the Arab world. Indeed, while some states possess the financial resources to invest directly in transition technologies, others, such as Morocco and Jordan, must instead leverage their natural resources (land, water, etc.) to participate in this race. Although this allows them to gain access to external financing, it also places them in positions of structural dependence. This dynamic is illustrated by the growing practice of agricultural land grabbing, particularly documented in Morocco and Egypt, which is contributing to the reconfiguration of South-South relations. The governance of scarce resources is also reshaping inter-state relations across the region. These issues are increasingly framed through a security lens, whereby control over natural resources becomes entangled with questions of cooperation, sovereignty, and geopolitical power. This is particularly evident in the case of Israel, where access to and control over water resources, including those associated with the Golan Heights and the Litani River, constitute significant geopolitical stakes. Water has thus become a strategic instrument through which processes of normalization are pursued and regional influence consolidated. This raises several critical questions: To what extent has ecology become a matter of political legitimacy and sovereignty? What are the implications of these policies for local populations? How do the greenwashing narratives advanced by regional actors intersect with, or diverge from, those promoted by Western states? And, ultimately, to what extent do these state-led environmental policies contribute to advancing climate justice?

Theme 2: Environmental Degradation, Conflicts, and Vulnerabilities

The second theme encourages submissions that examine the impact of environmental degradation on living organisms, whether resulting from industrial activities (Alkhudary, 2026) or armed conflicts (Zeybek, 2025; Henig, 2019; Yıldırım, 2024). Fossil fuel industries, pesticides, and urban activities lead to water, soil, and air pollution that disproportionately harms vulnerable populations. For example, Cairo, Tehran, Manama, Muscat, and Baghdad regularly rank among the most polluted cities according to the IQAir index. Additionally, the environment is increasingly becoming a priority target in recent wars, such as in southern Lebanon, where the Israeli army's use of white phosphorus and the targeting of livelihoods leads to the systematic destruction of urban and cultural landscapes, exacerbating population displacements. As in Gaza, this ecological devastation leads us to analyze these practices through the lens of ecocide. These acts of violence, whether linked to conflicts or industrial activities, lead to major damages with silent and slow-acting consequences (Carson, 1962; Nixon, 2011), extending across temporal and spatial scales, leaving lasting imprints on bodies and landscapes (Griffiths & Rubaï, 2025). Assessing and monitoring these impacts constitutes a major scientific, legal, and political challenge that must be brought to light.

Contexts of colonial occupation, both past and present, have given rise to territorial divisions: certain areas and species are protected, while others are destroyed (Braverman, 2023), establishing a form of necropolitics (Mbembé, 2019). These issues have been studied in particular in the West Bank and in colonial Algeria, where the creation of protected areas altered local populations' access to resources (Davis, 2011). These cases prompt an examination of the relationships between conservation, land use, and access rights.

How can we characterize and conceptualize environmental destruction and fragmentation linked to conflicts and industrial activities? Who measures, identifies, and quantifies them? What standards and tools do they rely on? What distinguishes the terms "ecocide," "futuricide" (Latte Abdallah, 2025), "environmental nakba," and "envirocide" (Kreike, 2021)? What is the legal scope of these concepts? What mechanisms for prevention and protection of vulnerable populations exist or could be put in place?

Theme 3: Environmental Inequalities, Intersectionalities, and Adaptation Strategies

This theme calls for contributions which seek to understand environmental inequalities both as a legacy of historical relations of domination (colonial, territorial, economic, etc.) and as the result of discriminatory public policies that climate change exacerbates (Daoust & Selby, 2023; Daoudy, 2020). We encourage papers which look at the distribution of toxic burdens (open-air dumps, diesel generators, industrial zones), environmental violence (caused by both industrial activities and conflicts), and natural disasters (droughts, floods, sea-level rise) through the intersection of religious, racial, class, and gender inequalities.

Furthermore, this theme could also include contributions addressing the various adaptation strategies emerging in response to environmental degradation, ranging from technosolutionism promoted by companies to which governments have awarded contracts (desalination, solar panels, wind power, green hydrogen, etc.), to vernacular practices (non-extractive agriculture), and informal optimization strategies (private generators and solar panels) (Verdeil, 2025, 2009; Chaplain, 2023). In what ways can migration also be understood as an adaptation strategy? To what extent do green technologies compensate for the depletion of natural resources? Who benefits from technosolutionism? How do these adaptation strategies illustrate the retreat of the state in the era of neoliberalism?

Theme 4. Resistance, Social Mobilization, and Alternative Futures

This theme aims to foster analysis which examines forms of collective action that emerge in response to environmental degradation, whether explicitly articulated in ecological terms or implicitly driven by environmental concerns. Such resistance can take the form of large-scale social mobilizations, as illustrated by the "You Stink" movement in Beirut (summer 2015), the "StopPollution" coalition in Gabès (October 2025), and "GenZ 212" in Rabat, all of which have brought attention to environmental degradation and its entanglement with corruption and social inequality. Collective action also manifests itself through more structured forms of environmental activism (Sowers, 2013), whose strategies and modes of organization vary according to the political context. In authoritarian settings, particularly in some Gulf countries, environmental activism must navigate restricted spaces for public expression and therefore often relies on alternative channels of engagement, including associations, expert knowledge and analysis, social media, and alternative media outlets.

These forms of resistance also manifest in everyday life through ordinary ecological practices (Stamatopoulou-Robbins, 2019; Shqair, 2026), which are particularly evident in the agricultural

sector: the planting and preservation of local seeds (baladi seeds), the revival of traditional irrigation techniques, and the transmission of vernacular knowledge. These practices, which can be described as place-based or "embedded," foster a meaningful reconnection with the land (Latte Abdellah, 2024; Ruck and Hatimy, 2025) and challenge the separation between human and non-human ways of life (Simaan, 2017). The spaces they shape, governed by customary norms, are recognized as particularly resilient in the face of climate uncertainties, as their management relies on a bottom-up approach and a strong understanding of ecological systems (Plieninger et al., 2023). In doing so, they help sustain the conditions for life amid violence (Khayyat, 2022), while reminding us that even in times of crisis, nature can remain a source of renewal (Tsing, 2015).

Nonprofit organizations and cultural actors also play a significant role in these processes. Through initiatives such as seed libraries, living archives, and artistic projects, they contribute to the preservation and circulation of knowledge, while opening up new horizons for imagining alternative futures. What lessons can be drawn from these movements and practices? How do they contribute to envisioning and building alternative futures? To what extent can comparative perspectives be developed between the Arab world and other geographical contexts shaped by similar forms of resistance?

Theme 5: Environmental Diplomacy and Security Issues

This axis invites contributions that analyze how states in the region turn the environment into an instrument of foreign policy and branding. Climate conferences, such as Egypt's COP27, the UAE's COP28 or Türkiye's COP31, along with regional initiatives (the Middle East Green Initiative, the Saudi Green Initiative), serve as so many stages of legitimation. They allow these states to downplay their environmental impact while presenting themselves as responsible actors in global climate governance. These arrangements also feed into the promotion of a "common environmental security" (Shqair, 2023) that includes Israel. One may ask to what extent this notion accompanies the normalization of Israel's relations with the states of the region. The axis will examine the promoters and beneficiaries of such a rapprochement, undertaken in the name of the fight against climate change: does the environment operate as a vector of depoliticization of cooperation, to the detriment of the Palestinian question? Egyptian environmental diplomacy also warrants particular attention. Since COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt has sought to position itself as a spokesperson for the Global South on climate adaptation and finance, while linking these issues to its security and economic priorities: water security and the Nile question, energy security and Eastern Mediterranean gas, and the attraction of green hydrogen investment. Contributions may examine how these registers are articulated, and what "climate" or "environmental" framing contributes to the regime's international and domestic legitimacy. The axis also addresses the ambiguous position of petro-monarchies in climate justice. As growing donors to the energy transition of the Global South, they are also major hydrocarbon exporters, and thus parties to the "systemic wrong" generally attributed to developed countries. How do they claim the status of partners of the South, even of climate creditors, without assuming the historical responsibility of the North? We also encourage contributions on the impact of the Israeli-American-Iranian war on this regional "green" diplomacy strategy. How is the security-environment architecture being reconfigured in light of the conflict? How does the vulnerability of the Gulf states to the degradation of vital infrastructure, such as desalination plants, contribute to the naturalization of these technologies, which are now conceived as natural resources in their own right? Finally, the axis invites the study of environmental branding policies, that is, the fabrication of a "green" image of states and projects. So-called "sustainable" cities, from Masdar City (Günel, 2019) to NEOM, including Egypt's new administrative capital, are both diplomatic showcases and instruments for legitimizing authoritarian regimes (Stadnicki, 2026; Sowers, 2013). This discourse,

which couples sustainable development with large-scale projects, also enables states to attract considerable investment, itself presented as "green."

Indicative Schedule and Submission Guidelines

Proposals must be sent to the following address : bidaya@carep-paris.org
Deadline for submitting proposals: January 29, 2027

January 29, 2027 : Submission of proposals (abstracts of up to 500 words with 5 key references, accompanied by a short biography)
February 26, 2027 : Notification to authors
April 30, 2027 : Submission of full articles* (between 30,000 and 50,000 characters)

*Full articles must comply with the editorial guidelines of the journal Bidaya, available here: https://carep-paris.org/ligne-editoriale/le-dossier-central/

May/June 2027 : Peer review
July/August 2027 : Author revisions for Version 2
End of September 2027 : Final acceptance of the manuscript for publication
October–December 2027 : Editorial process
Publication of the issue: **February 2028**

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These forms of resistance also manifest in everyday life through ordinary ecological practices (Stamatopoulou-Robbins, 2019; Shqair, 2026), which are particularly evident in the agricultural

sector: the planting and preservation of local seeds (baladi seeds), the revival of traditional irrigation techniques, and the transmission of vernacular knowledge. These practices, which can be described as place-based or "embedded," foster a meaningful reconnection with the land (Latte Abdellah, 2024; Ruck and Hatimy, 2025) and challenge the separation between human and non-human ways of life (Simaan, 2017). The spaces they shape, governed by customary norms, are recognized as particularly resilient in the face of climate uncertainties, as their management relies on a bottom-up approach and a strong understanding of ecological systems (Plieninger et al., 2023). In doing so, they help sustain the conditions for life amid violence (Khayyat, 2022), while reminding us that even in times of crisis, nature can remain a source of renewal (Tsing, 2015).

Nonprofit organizations and cultural actors also play a significant role in these processes. Through initiatives such as seed libraries, living archives, and artistic projects, they contribute to the preservation and circulation of knowledge, while opening up new horizons for imagining alternative futures. What lessons can be drawn from these movements and practices? How do they contribute to envisioning and building alternative futures? To what extent can comparative perspectives be developed between the Arab world and other geographical contexts shaped by similar forms of resistance?

Theme 5: Environmental Diplomacy and Security Issues

This axis invites contributions that analyze how states in the region turn the environment into an instrument of foreign policy and branding. Climate conferences, such as Egypt's COP27, the UAE's COP28 or Türkiye's COP31, along with regional initiatives (the Middle East Green Initiative, the Saudi Green Initiative), serve as so many stages of legitimation. They allow these states to downplay their environmental impact while presenting themselves as responsible actors in global climate governance. These arrangements also feed into the promotion of a "common environmental security" (Shqair, 2023) that includes Israel. One may ask to what extent this notion accompanies the normalization of Israel's relations with the states of the region. The axis will examine the promoters and beneficiaries of such a rapprochement, undertaken in the name of the fight against climate change: does the environment operate as a vector of depoliticization of cooperation, to the detriment of the Palestinian question? Egyptian environmental diplomacy also warrants particular attention. Since COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt has sought to position itself as a spokesperson for the Global South on climate adaptation and finance, while linking these issues to its security and economic priorities: water security and the Nile question, energy security and Eastern Mediterranean gas, and the attraction of green hydrogen investment. Contributions may examine how these registers are articulated, and what "climate" or "environmental" framing contributes to the regime's international and domestic legitimacy. The axis also addresses the ambiguous position of petro-monarchies in climate justice. As growing donors to the energy transition of the Global South, they are also major hydrocarbon exporters, and thus parties to the "systemic wrong" generally attributed to developed countries. How do they claim the status of partners of the South, even of climate creditors, without assuming the historical responsibility of the North? We also encourage contributions on the impact of the Israeli-American-Iranian war on this regional "green" diplomacy strategy. How is the security-environment architecture being reconfigured in light of the conflict? How does the vulnerability of the Gulf states to the degradation of vital infrastructure, such as desalination plants, contribute to the naturalization of these technologies, which are now conceived as natural resources in their own right? Finally, the axis invites the study of environmental branding policies, that is, the fabrication of a "green" image of states and projects. So-called "sustainable" cities, from Masdar City (Günel, 2019) to NEOM, including Egypt's new administrative capital, are both diplomatic showcases and instruments for legitimizing authoritarian regimes (Stadnicki, 2026; Sowers, 2013). This discourse,

which couples sustainable development with large-scale projects, also enables states to attract considerable investment, itself presented as "green."

Indicative Schedule and Submission Guidelines

Proposals must be sent to the following address : bidaya@carep-paris.org
Deadline for submitting proposals: January 29, 2027

January 29, 2027 : Submission of proposals (abstracts of up to 500 words with 5 key references, accompanied by a short biography)
February 26, 2027 : Notification to authors
April 30, 2027 : Submission of full articles* (between 30,000 and 50,000 characters)

*Full articles must comply with the editorial guidelines of the journal Bidaya, available here: https://carep-paris.org/ligne-editoriale/le-dossier-central/

May/June 2027 : Peer review
July/August 2027 : Author revisions for Version 2
End of September 2027 : Final acceptance of the manuscript for publication
October–December 2027 : Editorial process
Publication of the issue: **February 2028**

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