WE BURIED THE JUNGLE UNDER TONS OF ASPHALT AND CALL IT HOME

RE-IMAGINING BEIRUT THROUGH THE SPATIAL PRACTICES OF LEBANON'S POST-WAR GENERATION

WRITTEN BY ANNA KLINKSPOOR

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MASTER THESIS CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY:
SUSTAINABLE CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract

Solidere, one of the main companies that was responsible for the reconstruction of Beirut's city center after the civil war (1975-1990), stated that they would ''provide a familiar and comforting physical environment, one which reinforces the citizens' sense of belonging.'' However, scholars argue that the opposite can be observed: they erased the memories of the past like a *tabula rasa* and built on the status quo of a fragmented, segregated city where only the elite have the right to. In this process of post-war rehabilitation, it is argued, young citizens are being marginalized. Based on three months of ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis sets out to explore how young urban activists and artists construct and negotiate feelings of belonging through actively (re)shaping Beirut's existing infrastructure in a bottom-up way. The research demonstrates that Beirut's public spaces are contested domains of in- and exclusion wherein ''being political'' is often associated with sectarianism, corruption and ''the war lords that are leading the country.'' In three arguments I demonstrate that the young Beirutis create spaces of belonging: by bringing back the civil war's memories into public spaces (chapter 1), by strategically using symbols, colors and ornaments that are not associated with political parties (chapter 2) and by creating 'alternative' public spaces on Beirut's public stairs – an environment where local and global processes intersect (chapter 3). Whether it is because of mere beautification strategies or because of circulating a critical understanding of a public space, they succeed to initiate at least debate about the importance of an open urban space and the remembrance of the war to reflect on Lebanon's current situation.

Keywords:

Post-war rehabilitation, the right to the city, post-conflict public space, urban activism, postmemory, belonging

Inside, I understood that audiences made stories, that stories made cities, that cities strived to be gardens, that gardens are liable to Eden. I understood that Eden was a subjective proper noun for the ultimate spatial beauty.

- Raafat Majzoub

Stay close to anything that makes you glad that you're alive.

- Hafez, Persian poet

Foreword

This thesis results from months of preparing, writing, doubting, laughing, crying. It was a period of surprises, disappointments, and of 'being native' in a small country that I honestly still don't understand, and probably nobody ever will. I am grateful to everybody who was there, during my fieldwork and afterwards, for me and my family.

Feeling at home in a foreign country is never easy, and therefore I want to thank Salome for being with me all the time, for creating our little Lemontreehouse. Merci bibi, for being at my side when I received the phone call from mum at Sip, for bringing me *za'atar* cheese *man'ouche* every morning, and for the unforgettable evenings on our balcony, drinking limoncello we made from our own lemons.

Feeling at home in Lebanon was especially enabled by Zeina. Thank you for that, Zeinita, for welcoming me to your warmhearted family during Easter, for secretly entering the beautiful abandoned mansions and train stations with me, and *akid,* for our bicycle trips in the mountains (and your lovely reactions towards car drivers). Thank you for keeping on believing in Lebanon's future, despite your countless frustrations.

Shukraan to all my friends who brought color to the often dark times that characterize Lebanon. Special thanks to Yousef, for giving me my graffiti name Foxy, now I finally understand what it means to ''act foxy, as a real Lebanese'', and to Jad, for exposing the wounds of the civil war and highlighting them with your colorful doodles.

Furthermore, I want to thank my supervisor Rebecca, for encouraging me to follow my intuition and for giving me the time I needed.

Special thanks goes to my mom, dad and brother, for being there for me, always. Merci papa, for motivating me to go to Lebanon and for the brainstorming sessions. Dankje Timber, for entering my life five days before I flew to Beirut and for giving me so much of your happiness, optimism and love ever since.

Dank aan iedereen die er voor mij was de afgelopen tijd, en die er was voor mama.

This thesis is dedicated to Jacques (1946-2018)

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View of Beirut - Photo taken by Nassim (2018)

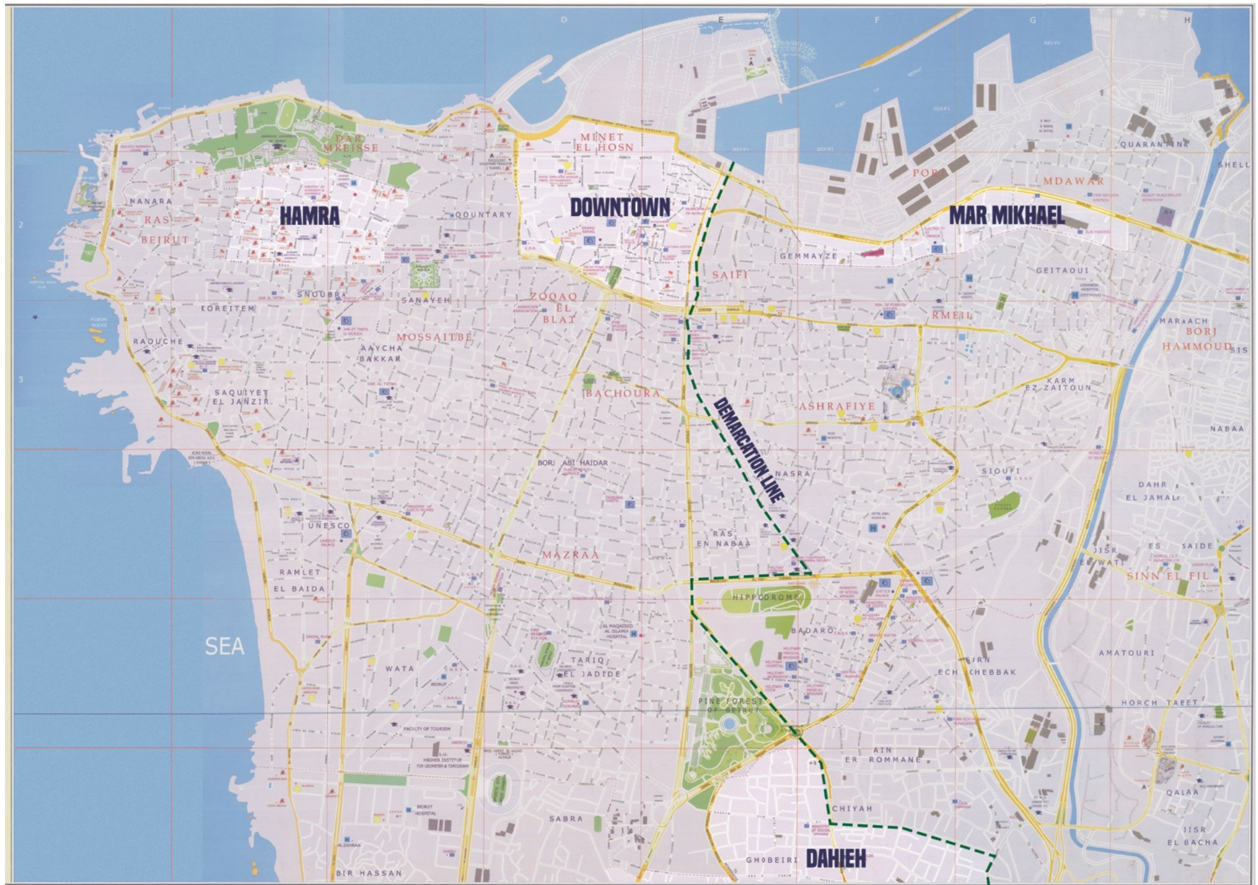

Figure 1. Map of Beirut, neighborhoods highlighted that were referred to by my interlocutors

مقدمة INTRODUCTION

Introduction

I am driving on the highway on the scooter together with Nassim, happy to drive freely without being stuck in traffic. We just passed the new blue mosque and the seven surrounding churches near Downtown while heading towards the southern suburbs, where you can see an abandoned tower reaching the sky. On my right, ''Muslim'' West Beirut, on my left ''Christian'' East Beirut and the war-torn building that is painted over by street artists, but on top covered by a huge advertisement facing the highway that crosses the Fouad Chehab bridge. On the pillars of the bridge is written, ''Before I die, I want Lebanon to...'' Nassim tells me that this project was initiated by students and some local NGOs to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the civil war. They chose this highway because it is built on the former separation line of East and West Beirut. On the corners of the pillar, I can still read, ''Be united as a nation! Be free! No corruption! Become beautiful, be green!'' but most of the other wishes are now covered with posters of politicians. Nassim laughs, ''Vote me! No, vote me! We are your future! We are the same warlords as fifty years ago! We won't change anything in Lebanon!'' A minute later, pointing to his graffiti mural on the highway: ''You know, this is why we graffiti artists are trying to own the city!''[1]

During the preparations of the Lebanese upcoming elections of May 6th 2018, I witnessed Lebanon's capital Beirut being transformed into a political battlefield that characterized the complexity of its political landscape. The vignette above illustrates Beirut's young activists' views of the city's current situation, one wherein discourses, practices and desires are tied to urban pasts, presents, and futures (Till 2012, 4). To use Nadine Sinno's words: ''The erasure and resurrection [of street art] attests to the ways in which a city's visual culture is continuously reimagined by numerous intersecting discourses including statements and actions of street artists, public officials, media figures, and city residents - all of whom interact and compete in *the production and interpretation* of the visual culture in which they coexist.'' (Sinno 2017, 94, own emphasis)

The following ethnographic account engages in the attempts of Beirut's post-war generation to challenge the contested status quo of the 'exclusivist and amnestic' city (Larkin 2010, amongst others). More than two decades into rehabilitating the war-torn city, the contested promise of an inclusive city center that ''reinforces the citizens' sense of belonging by restoring life to its vital part of the country'' is believed by only the elite and influential decision makers (Solidere 2009 in Nagle 2017: 154). However, I discovered that most of the citizens don't feel that they belong to their capital anymore. In the research on the transformation and rebuilding of Lebanese cities, little attention has been given

[1] Personal diary, 20-04-2018

to how the postwar generation in Lebanon is negotiating the cities' rehabilitation and segregation, while youth is one of the biggest groups that got excluded from the city and the public sphere (Larkin 2010; Monroe 2011, 94; Harb 2016). During three months of ethnographic fieldwork, I tried to understand how Beirut's youth remembers, re-imagines, and recreates their city by constructing and negotiating feelings of belonging and by creatively (re)shaping the existing infrastructure.

> The broken city is a canvas for the same faces,
> plastered with the promise of change
> - Nour (2018)

Beirut sparked my interest after some photos I saw on social media in the summer of 2015: tens of thousands of young Lebanese protesters occupied Beirut's streets, holding up banners with slogans stating, "No electricity, no water, no security, no president and on top of it all – rubbish!". Demanding the government to take action against the country's rubbish collection crisis, the activists broke through the police lines, rushed to the Lebanese parliament building, and agitated for a healthy city without roads, rivers and a coastline entirely covered with rotting rubbish. The garbage crisis triggered a growing social movement against the corrupt practices and political dysfunction of the Lebanese government (Nagle 2016; al-Aljeera 2015) and part of this *YouStink!*-movement was, at the time of my fieldwork, about to run for the upcoming elections in May 2018. That same year, some of the activists organized a theater performance at the entrance of Beirut's largest green space, the Horsh Park, located at the intersection of socially segregated neighborhoods and close to two main refugee camps. Since the rehabilitation of the city, the park was only accessible to foreigners and people with a certain social status. In an artistic and funny way, the performers addressed the municipality's responsibility to re-open the park for the public. They articulated their desire for a public recreational area that could serve the diverse Lebanese society and allow them to meet and interact. To this end, the park re-opened to the public one year later (Environmental Justice Atlas 2017; Beirut Report 2016).

Reclaiming the right to the city

This call of Beirut's civil society, coming from mostly young activists, to reclaim public spaces in urban contexts is illustrative of what is at stake around the world: from Istanbul's Gezi protests, contesting the urban developing plan of the central Gezi park, to the anti-gentrification protests in Brixton: all together accusing their governments of the growing inequality, air pollution, lack of economic diversification, youth unemployment and corruption (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2018; Hill 2015; Göle 2013). Especially the reclaiming of public space seems to be a main topic nowadays amongst social protests taking place in city squares and along main streets, holding governments and its neoliberal policies

accountable for the shrinking public spaces (Harb 2013). The appearance of neoliberal capitalism has resulted in an enormous transformation of public spaces. Former public parks and beaches are now owned by commercial interests and put under permanent surveillance (Mitchell 2003). Billboards are positioned on public squares without respecting the local contexts, access to national museums is limited only to people who can afford to pay entrance fee, and so forth. When the public is turned into the ''ideal consumer'', and public space functions mainly as a commodity, privatized by commercial interests, the sense of shared ownership declines (Poposki 2011, 143).

Due to the worldwide urbanization and gentrification processes that prey upon (democratic) public spaces, anti-globalization movements at the 2006 World Social Forum meeting in Caracas, Venezuela, pleaded together for 'the right to the city' to be part of the international human rights system (Fahmi 2009). Critically, this shows how important the matter of public space-decline is perceived of by the excluded groups in society, and the concept of Henri Lefebvre's ''the right to the city'' (1974), that pleas for all the citizens to access and make the city[2], seems to be more influential than ever (Harvey 2008). His theories are being used by scientists and practitioners all over the world. Lefebvre reminds scholars that the discourses, practices and desires tied to urban pasts, presents and futures are inherently political because they inform how individuals make and justify their decisions and actions. At a conceptual level, it is important to document the structural problems that lead to urban inequities as well as the urban imaginaries and managerial strategies that result in these projects and their failures. Lefebvre pleads for scholars to appreciate and understand the *lived realities* of inhabitants of the city – including cultural identities, dynamics of the everyday and symbolic words – instead of only focusing on the *representations* of the city like maps and designs that often ignore the complex spatialities and temporalities of the lived city for most residents in the world (Lefebvre 1974; Till 2012, 4; own emphasis). Therefore, the question of who constitutes the city and who has the right to what, depends on the context and the variety of actors and *lived realities* in that specific context who give their own interpretation of the concept of 'the right to the city' (Margier and Melgaço 2016).

Artistic practices

With the YouStink-movement and theater performance in front of the Horsh Park in mind, I chose to do my fieldwork in Beirut in order to understand these *lived realities* of young street artists in Beirut who are claiming their rights to the city by using public space as its realm of action. To reclaim the right to cities and trying to engage marginalized citizens that have been excluded from the public realm,

[2] It constitutes two rights: the right to *participate* in city making, by the design, conception and implementation of the production of urban spaces; and the right to *appropriate* urban spaces – through use, access and occupation – by producing them in ways that meet the needs of all the citizens (Lefebvre 1974 in Fawaz 2009).

social movements around the world are using art as spatial production. This is a way to reshape the city into a different social *image* than that given by the powers of developers backed by the neoliberal capitalistic state apparatus (Harvey 2008, own emphasis).

Within cultural anthropology, there is a growing interest in the value of using street art by social movements that are engaged in issues around human rights and reclaiming public space. Many people either consider street art as vandalism and as a lack of direction and deviance in youth, or as a symbol of growing criminalization and lack of police control. Alternatively, people often consider street art as merely an urban beautification strategy (Poposki 2011). However, cultural anthropologists have shown how street art can be an important vehicle to contest and express cultural ideas and construct a physical place where political debate and awareness can be shaped. The artistic expressions can be used as a pedagogical tool to explore and understand the city[3] and as a public voice through which activists and social movements could influence and challenge political discourses all around the world[4].

Beirut's post-war generation

As the vignette in the beginning of this introduction showed us, the young street artists' visions of Beirut's current situation are tied to its past. Through history, Beirut went through an endless process of destruction and regeneration, and became a highly segregated city, on both the social-economical and sectarian levels (Larkin 2010). After having been physically and economically devastated by the 15 years of civil war (1975-1990), that costed the life of an estimated 100,000 citizens, wounded twice as many inhabitants and displaced two-third of its population, Beirut's reconstruction has been a process of contradictory impulses of erasure and recovery, remembering and forgetting. The Lebanese that were born after 1990, a baby boom, went to school in the neighborhoods and villages of their own religious background and their schoolbooks only treated Lebanese history until its independence from France in 1946 and thus any knowledge about sectarianism and the civil war was kept private (Makdisi 1999, 258).

The politicians sought to reintegrate Lebanon in the global market and to revive its tourism sector (Sinno 2017). However, the rehabilitation was done in a way that accentuated the East-West division and reinforced spatial and social segregation; average citizens were excluded and a more affluent clientele was favored, prioritizing commercial private interests and an infrastructure-led urban

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[3] See Calvin, 2005; Civil, 2010; Iveson 2007, 2010a; Nandrea, 1999; Burnham, 2010 in Zielenic 2016.

[4] See for example, Hill and White (2012) on the wall paintings related to the Northern Ireland peace process; Chafee (1993) on the artistic practices of the Democratic Wall movement in China; Adams (2002) on the artwork of Shantytown women's protests during the Pinochet's regime in Chile; and Saunders (2011) on the well-known Palestinian graffiti on the West Bank barrier.

planning over public goods and services. Many Lebanese and international scholars, activists and artists argue that these ‘cosmetic’ changes have been alienating and exclusionary (Nagle 2017; Haugbolle 2005; Harb 2015). Upscale development projects, including Solidere’s (infamous) reconstruction of Beirut’s city center Downtown, did not truly reflect or honor the Lebanese people’s struggles, local talents or unique history, they state[5]. They argue that the rehabilitated center could have been vital to peacebuilding since it had the potential to create a shared public space for all the different communities to mingle (Nagle 2017, 159, amongst others). However, Lebanese reconstructed (or better call it privatized) public spaces are now seen as the embodiment of its postwar failings: inequality, corruption and segregation (Larkin 2010, 435). Besides, since 9/11, the assassinations of politicians and journalists (especially after the death of prime-minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2016) and the attacks of ISIS, most of Beirut’s public spaces and buildings are under surveillance. This also gives people the feeling that they are not welcome there (Harb 2015; Fawaz 2009).

Having a generation of youth that has been raised in this collective amnesia in Lebanon, or raised abroad[6], it is interesting to investigate the ways in which they perceive contemporary Beirut and its growing urbanization and inequality (Haugbolle 2017).[7] The Arab uprisings in 2011 and the You-Stink movement in 2015 are good examples of how the Lebanese post-war generation is motivated by what’s at stake in the world and how they are shaping feelings of belonging and citizenship through their spatial practices (Hermez 2011; Rabbat 2012).

This leads me to my main research question: ‘’How do young urban activist attempt, through spatial practices, to reshape the senses of citizenship and belonging to Beirut?’’

Methodology

I would like to pay attention to theorist Lauren Berlant’s (2011) notion of public spaces, which are structured and dominated by emotions and affects, sentiments and feelings of hope and fear. Public spaces are ‘’always affect worlds, worlds to which people are bound by affective projections of a

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[5] See for example, Saree Makdisi’s ‘’Laying Claim to Beirut’’ (1997), Caroline Nagel’s ‘’Reconstructing Space, Recreating Memory’’ (2002), John Nagle’s (2017) ‘Ghosts, Memory, and the Right to the Divided City and Aseel Sawalha’s ‘’Reconstructing Beirut: Memory and Space in a Postwar Arab City’’ (2010).

[6] Often raised abroad, because their parents found economic prosperity after the war in the Gulf, or in North America and Europe (giving their children an opportunity for a second nationality).

[7] For example, ‘’while Beirut may once again be a city in transition, its future is invariably tied to an ongoing negotiation of its past.’’ (Larkin 2010: 415). ‘’[it has been a process of] contradictory impulses of remembering and forgetting, erasure and recovery (…) in its national collective reimagining.’’ (Larkin 2010, 415). ‘’Beyond discourses that problematize the city’s social amnesia (Hanssen and Genberg, 2002), historical myopia (Smakdisi, 1997), nostalgic longing (Khalaf, 2006), and management of cultural heritage (Fricke, 2005), there is a need to understand how the next generation of Lebanese is negotiating Beirut.

constantly negotiated common interestedness'' (Berlant 2011 in Bax, Gielen and Ieven 2015, 17). Through multi-sensory ethnography I tried to grasp the ''sense of Beirutness'' (The Outpost 2015, 12) and the affective world of the public space. I tried to work in a holistic way - by incorporating smell, vision, touch, sound and taste - to understand the complex phenomena that occurred during my fieldwork in Beirut. In order to understand the worlds of my participants, I believe that participant observation is the best way, through ''talking the talk'' and ''walking the walk'' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). By taking part in daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people in a certain context, I as a cultural anthropologist investigated both the explicit and the tacit aspects of their daily lives and cultures (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 238).

I followed young graffiti-artists, theater makers and performers, a dancer, a documentary maker, and members of a cycling-promoting initiative. Most of them were born after 1990 and a lot of them participated in the You-Stink!-protests and the Open Horsh Park sit-ins. I participated in their daily activities, such as organizing cycling workshops on a primary school and on the office of the International Rescue Comittee with Syrian street children in Tripoli and painting murals with the participants and organizers in different neighborhoods, and drove through Beirut with graffiti artists to find a strategic spot for a new piece, including tagging[8] my own graffiti name which they had given to me. I attended their theater and dance performances and went to the open spaces where free exhibitions and film screenings were shown by some of my interlocutors, and together we secretly visited abandoned mansions and ruins. The interviews were semi structured and open ended, allowing themes and stories to emerge naturally. English and French were used interchangeably depending on the context and fluency of the interviewee. When Arabic was spoken or written, my interlocutors translated it for me – even though they were all fluent in English, I am aware of the fact that this can influence the objectivity of my research. I collected literature from the local universities, books, posters, magazines, websites. I mapped the scene together with some of my interlocutors, which provided important data for understanding the spatial practices and relationships in the field and allowed me to pay attention to detail (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 82). To these maps, I connected soundscapes and photos that we took together. Given the sensitive nature of representation and proportionality in Lebanon, a country of eighteen politically recognized religious sects, I attempted to reflect Lebanon's diverse religious composition by reflecting the views of my interlocutors who all have different religious backgrounds. Besides, they are raised in different urban and rural areas of Lebanon or abroad, but they all live, work or study in Beirut. However, since I choose to do my research amongst street artists and university students and alumni, I am aware of the fact that they probably have a

[8] Piece and tagging are part of the graffiti vocabulary. Piece means a bigger art work, also referred to as a mural. Tagging means to sign your own graffiti name, often small of size and done in a quick way.

more critical view on society and phenomena that occur and I can therefore not speak for the whole of Beirut's post-war generation. As a result of this, all names in this thesis are pseudonyms in an effort to anonymize the identity of my informants.

Structure of the thesis

I asked myself during my fieldwork why Beirut's post-war generation is motivated (or not) to re-imagine Beirut's public spaces in a way that is different from the status quo. Why do they want to communicate with the former generation about their memories? And how do they want the current situation to be different? The answers to this are part of my first chapter that discusses the right to represent the past, which is considered a right to the city (Lefebvre 1974). The artists in this chapter are creating their own monuments by bringing life to the capital ruins (Tsing 2015) in order to create spaces of belonging. With this chapter I will elaborate on Marianne Hirsch' (1992) and Craig Larkin's (2010) concept of postmemory.

The second chapter delves into the political landscape: how do the young Lebanese look towards the upcoming elections? In this chapter, I show how many Beiruti are linking politics to sectarianism, corruption and the ''warlords that are leading the country''. By using Schachter's (2012) concept of 'ornaphobia', I argue that the artists are avoiding certain colors, words, forms and symbols in their work, and therefore distance themselves from politics on the one hand. On the other, they are inherently political by stating to be nonpolitical and by creatively initiating a ''moment of interruption'' (Dikeç 2005).

The first two chapters are coming together in the last chapter. There, I use the neighborhood Mar Mikhael as a case-study, a neighborhood where my interlocutors are the most active with their artistic practices and where they feel at home, in cafes on the stairs that are ''away from the asphalt'' and the ''high-heeled society''.

Concepts about and debates on public space and Lefebvre's spatial triad and right to the city are interwoven throughout the thesis. In doing so, I argue how the post-conflict public spaces in Beirut are contested domains of in- and exclusion and social segregation wherein the young urban activists construct and negotiate feelings of belonging through actively (re)shaping the existing infrastructure. Furthermore, the three chapters reflect on the youth's longing for a ''safe'' space, where sectarianism and class don't seem to matter.

In order to understand how young activists have had the opportunity to breed an urban social movement in its geographical and historical context, as well as the source of their motivations, it will be necessary to give a brief overview of Lebanon's violent and turbulent historical events that caused Beirut's spatial segregation and social exclusion of the urban public realm that represents a battlefield

in the long-running struggle over national identity and sectarian inequality in Lebanon (Nagel 2002). It is to the historical context that this thesis turns to first.

لمحة تاريخية

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Historical Overview

> Bombs fell, warriors fought, people ate, and the garbage piled up on the corners of our streets. Cats and dogs were feasting and getting fatter. The rich were leaving for France and letting their dogs roam loose on the streets. The most expensive pack of wild dogs roamed Beirut and the earth, and howled to the big moon, and ate from mountains of garbage on the corners of our streets.
>
> Rawi Hage (2013, 95)

The question how and why the Lebanese civil war happened is a sensitive topic, since there is still little consensus over the exact nature and underlying causes of the conflict. Besides, as Craig Larkin wrote in his essay ''Remaking Beirut: Contesting Memory, Space, and the Urban imaginary of Lebanese Youth', ''the dichotomies and visions appear endless and complex as the Lebanese experience itself'' (Larkin 2010, 624). Nevertheless, this ethnography tries to understand the ''Lebanese experience'' of the post-war generation that is ''caught between the contradictory forces of collective remembrance and social forgetting'' (Larkin 2010, 629), and it is therefore important to understand Lebanon's geographical and historical context.

Lebanon until the civil war

Over the last 150 years, Beirut transformed from a small Ottoman coastal town to a Middle Eastern financial, economic and cultural center. Its urban transformation was influenced by an interplay between local, regional and global forces and events and changes in the global economic system through trade and capital flows. Lebanon, an ''improbable, precarious, fragmented, shattered, torn'' nation, proliferated in a mosaic of eighteen different religious communities (Larkin 2010, 418; Luyendijk 2008). On the one hand, Christians divided into Maronites, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox, and on the other, Muslims divided into Sunni, Shi'a, Alawites and Druze. With Beirut, Byblos and Sidon as three of the oldest cities in the world, with ruins dating from the Phoenician, Roman and Ottoman empire, Lebanon has been a land that was ruled by empires, colonial powers and indigenous elites. The country is seen as a playground for the rich, a battleground for the religious and political ideologies and a gateway for the Christian West and the Arab East (Larkin 2010; Yassin 2012).

The country was governed by the Ottomans from 1516 until the beginning of the Second World War. Together with Syria, Lebanon became under French mandate in 1920. France led the country together with the Maronite Christians (that were the small majority of the country by that time) until its national independence in 1943. In attempt to maintain a balance of power between the religious groups, the 1926 Constitution of Lebanon was adopted to divide the parliament seats according to a

six-to-five Christian-Muslim ratio. The principal political and administrative roles were going to the six largest communities.[9] The pact concretized the sectarian nature of the Lebanese political structure and apportioned parliamentary seats in favor of the Christians. Important to note here is that the sectarianism in Lebanon is connected to the sects' associated elite families. Networks that are based on kinship and clientelism (also called *wasta* in Arabic) therefore characterize Lebanese social and political organization (Monroe 2009).

From the late 1940s until the late 1960s, Lebanon transformed into a 'Switzerland of the Middle East' with the prosperity of its merchant economy. Beirut particularly was flourishing, being known as the city in the Middle-East for nightlife, free press and a laissez-faire economy (Haugbolle 2017). The capital was the trade center of the region and home to financial institutions, but dependent on the relationship with the newly oil-rich Gulf. The oligarchy that ruled the economic and political systems represented class solidarity across sectarian lines which reinforced the economic inequities of the country. Therefore, it was primarily a minority of Lebanese citizens who benefited from this 'Golden Era' (Monroe 2009; Haugbolle 2017). Due to the poor redistribution of wealth around the country, and lack of protection for the domestic agricultural protection sector, people from the villages migrated to Beirut in search for work. It was mostly the Shi'a who represented the largest impoverished community, often living in the underdeveloped agricultural southern and eastern parts of the country. Following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, hundreds of thousands Palestinians migrated to Lebanon, most of them were Muslims. This influenced the country's demographic balance and by 1960, the Muslims were thought to constitute the majority of the population. Their demands for a new census were not being responded to by the Lebanese government, which resulted in an escalation of tensions between the different communities in Lebanon (Monroe 2009).

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) established a base in Beirut in 1971 and its growing resistance groups clashed with Israelis along the southern border. The Lebanese army was not strong enough to face the two groups which threatened Lebanon's security (Monroe 2009). Lebanon's position between Syria and Israel, its growing sectarian and elitist cleavages and the growing weakness of the national army resulted in a state where people practically had to take the side of either the Palestinian resistance or the national army that consisted of primarily Maronite militia (Monroe 2009).

[9] The country would be ruled by a Christian Maronite president and Commander of the Army, a Sunni Prime Minister, a Shi'a Speaker of Parliament, a Greek Orthodox Deputy Speaker of Parliament and Prime Minister and a Druze Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces.

> The war needed to happen to some degree. This war is like many of the Lebanese civil wars, an uprising of the poor and then the revolution was shifted into civil conflict
>
> Craig Larkin (2012, 629)

The Civil War (1995-1990)

After the growing tensions, the breaking point was on April 13, 1975, when a bus with 28 PLO members in East Beirut was being fired upon by Christian militiamen. All the passengers were killed and this bus massacre is seen as the starting point of the civil war. The left-wing and pan-Arabist Lebanese groups formed an alliance with the Palestinians and the Soviet-aligned Arab countries. During the war, the alliances shifted constantly, and foreign powers like the United Nations, Syria and Israel[10] became involved, supporting different alliances. [11] In Beirut, Muslims were forced to migrate to the western part of the city and Christians towards the east, with a nobody's land in between. After a couple of years, this nobody's land was taken over by nature and turned into a green line, following the Damascus Road that began in Downtown near the waterfront and continued southward (see figure 1). Militias took control over the streets and entire neighborhoods and patrolled entry and exit points (*hawajez*), constraining resident's mobility to travel and work outside their neighborhoods. Residents could be killed based on their national identity cards, when being of the opposite sect or political group (Larkin 2010).

The highest buildings and hotels near Beirut's separation line were used by different forces as a strategic vantage point to shoot from, using the rooftops and top-floor rooms (in Lebanon known as the ''Battle of the Hotels''). Public spaces were the spaces of fear, where civilians were the most vulnerable to be victims of the militia's bullets, bombs, or kidnappings.[12] Downtown, the former shared public space, based on the demarcation line, was in no time physically and socially destroyed by gunfights, shelling and mortar attacks between the militias (Fricke 2005, 164). Fearful for their lives, ordinary civilians hurriedly walked through the hazardous, dirty streets to get from one place to another. Once home, they searched for safety inside their houses, using basements as bomb shelters.

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[10] Syria engaged in the war in 1976 and which troops officially left Lebanon in 2005, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and left it troops in 2000.

[11] As a reaction to the growing foreign occupation[11] (especially since the arrival of the U.S. military in 1982), a new Shiite resistance movement was founded under the name Hezbollah, ''party of God''In the decades that followed, Hezbollah gained a lot of popular support and became one of the most powerful political parties of Lebanon.

[12] For example, in 1977, the head of the Druze militia, Kamal Jumblatt (of the Progressive Socialist Party with ties with the Soviet Union and allied with the PLO), was assassinated. In the summer of 1982, the just elected president Bashir Gemayel got assassinated and his brother took it over.

The public spaces, including even the citizen's gardens and verandas, became deserted and the city's visual landscape was mainly comprised of ''pockmarked walls, crumbling buildings, posters of political leaders both dead and alive, menacing political slogans, and the logos of militias who fought to control the streets literally and symbolically'' (Monroe 2009; Sinno 2017, 71).

After fifteen years of fighting that costed the life of an estimate 100,000 people, wounded twice as many inhabitants and displaced two-thirds of the population[13], the Lebanese parliament agreed upon an amnesty law in 1991 that officially announced the end of war (Monroe 2009; Larkin 2012).[14] Lebanese parliaments together with the Arab League, formulated solutions to the conflict, by reproducing the sectarian political system that was based on the current demography and by creating more parliamentary seats. However, the aftermath built on the status quo by ''rebuilding the stones, but without rebuilding the people'' (Monroe 2009, 91). Structural forgetting was encouraged and any kind of reconciliation process was absent: the Amnesty law pardoned all political crimes prior to its enactment (there were no criminal tribunals, compensation schemes, or truth-and-reconciliation committees) and the 1994 broadcasting law that encouraged media-censorship, shifting the blame to external forces and providing a superficial historiography without critical examination (Larkin 2010, 618).

Beirut's post-war reconstruction

Post-war Beirut found itself devastated: buildings, parks, statues, and old ruins were destroyed, as well as the infrastructure that had been the primary locus of the conflict. Beirut's visual landscape was characterized by political posters and sectarian graffiti that served as ''weapons of war'': graffiti slogans reflecting sectarian visions, such as ''Their leader is a pig!'', ''Arab=Animal'' and ''Jumblat birthed a mule'' (Sinno 2017, 72).[15] On the walls, political leaders were elevated, the enemy dehumanized and ideas about dominating local and regional actors were shown to the public (Sinno 2017).

In the urban revival of the postwar era, Beirut's walls have endured an ''impersonal, sterile touch'' (Sinno 2017, 72) as the Lebanese leaders sought to reintegrate Lebanon in the global market and reinvigorate its tourism sector. The government chose to do this in a neo-liberal and often corrupt way, whereby infrastructure-led urban development was privileged, prioritizing car-centered mobilization over public transportation. Neighborhoods were divided by newly paved highways with

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[13] Ten thousands of Lebanese citizens had the opportunity for exile abroad, mainly in Europe, North America, Australia, the Arab Gulf and African countries.

[14] See the historical chapter of this thesis for more about the Ta'if Agreement.

[15] See for more about ''the Graffiti War'', Maria Chakhtoura's annotated survey (1978) of the graffiti slogans in Beirut during the civil war

walls that hid away poor peripheries (Salhani 2013; Harb 2013). These highways were built on the neighborhoods' public parks and parking lots, literally cutting away parts of the (often overpopulated and low-income) local residents' houses, giving them no other option than to leave.

One of the most discussed and criticized reconstruction project is Beirut's city center Downtown. The government delegated its responsibility for the reconstruction of Downtown and its *souks* in 1994 to the private real estate holding company Solidere[16]. Downtown has served historically as the public space where people of all different communities and classes met each other and where vital public functions were centralized (such as the parliament, municipal and financial headquarters, and religious edifices (Khalaf 2006). In the name of promoting ''the reunification of the Lebanese people'' (Traoui 2002, 9), Solidere destroyed 89 percent of the buildings and 60 percent of the (three layers of) ruins, reclaimed over half a million square meters of new land from the sea and excluded the land owners and tenant citizens from participating in rebuilding the city by favoring more affluent clientele. Downtown is now considered as the ghost-town of Beirut. (Makdisi 2013; Sarkis 2006, 283).

These interventions thus reinforced socio-spatial segregation, by benefiting the ruling elite and the upper class (Harb 2013; Mady 2017). Processes of securitization after 9/11, the 2004-2006 political crisis (including the assassination of president Rafik al-Hariri in 2005 and the following car bombs that killed or injured several individuals, mostly political figures and journalists), the ''2006 war'' with Israel[17] and the several Islamic State's attacks, heralded another period of reinforcing socio-spatial segregation. Beirut's public spaces and streets came to be under extreme surveillance (Harb 2015). In order to protect certain people and places from harm by a criminalized and differentiated public, the Lebanese security apparatus created lines of defense in the public realm through installations of barriers and blockades and reuse of the military checkpoints that were used during the war (Nagle 2017; Mady 2017).

Still, property developments are being financed by petrol-and diaspora dollars, having the political economy being constructed around banks and real estate. With the government still led by the Hariri family and other rich families with ties to banks and real estate companies, the ''Dubaization'' of Beirut continues (Saliba 2016). The Lebanese government focused mainly in large-scale commercial projects, prioritizing private interests over public needs by ''making exceptions'' to the law in order to build on public spaces such as parks and the coast. In reaction to the post-war failings such as the privatization of the public spaces, civil society organizations and (international) NGOs are nowadays taking over the responsibility (Harb 2015; Nasser 2012).

[16] Also referred to as 'Hariri's company' because of its controversial ties with billionaire businessman and the just elected prime minister Rafik al-Hariri

[17] During 32 days, but the conflict is still not ended

It is the voices of these civil society organizations that my thesis focusses on, but the first chapter will deal with the words of Schudson (1997) that stuck in my mind while writing this historical chapter: ''Memory often proves elusive and evasive, resisting dominant discourses and selective erasure [but] the past seeps into the present whether or not its commemoration is institutionalized.'' (in Larkin 2017, 618) It is to the ''seeping of the past into the present'' that this thesis turns to now.

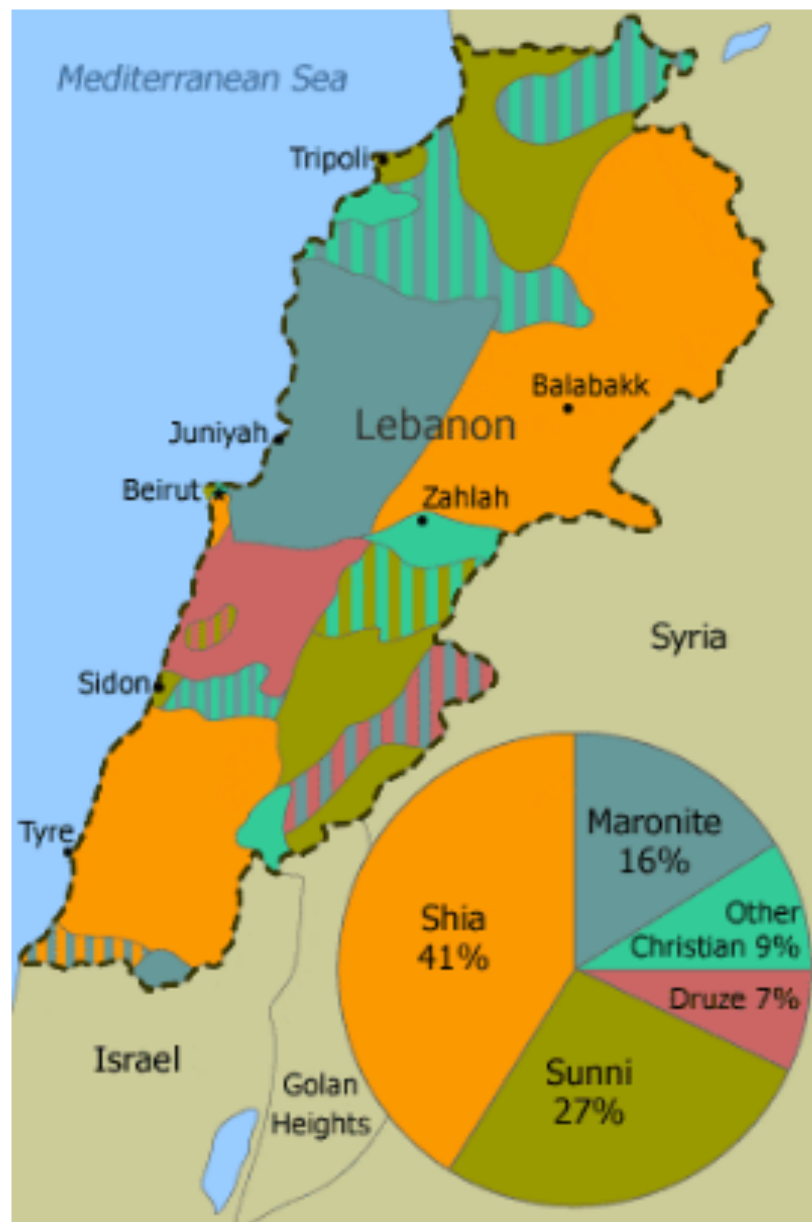

Figure 2. Current map of Lebanon by religious backgrounds[18]

[18] Juancole.com

THE RIGHT TO REPRESENT THE PAST

Chapter 1: The right to represent the past

> Peace is very much more complicated than war.
> Erin Daly and Jeremy Sarkin (2010, 9)

I asked myself during my fieldwork why the youth is motivated (or not) to re-imagine Beirut in a way that is different from the status quo. How are they attempting to represent the past? Why do they want to communicate with the former generation about their memories? And how do they want the current situation to be different? As I explained in the former chapter, Beirut's postwar reconstruction is being done in an amnestic and exclusivist way, wherein no official commemoration is installed. The lack of monuments resulted in a lack of opportunity to create social spaces by evoking feelings of identity and belonging (El Nour et al. 2015). The artists in this chapter are therefore creating their own monuments in order to create spaces of belonging. With this chapter I will elaborate on Marianne Hirsch' (1992) concept of postmemory, a term that refers to the transgenerational transmission of traumatic memories. I will work in line with Craig Larkin's notion on this concept, one that ''builds on these approaches by suggesting that traumatic historical events, whether distanced by time or obfuscated by political design, cannot be easily buried, erased, or forgotten but instead are reworked and renegotiated within present contexts, discursive spheres, and everyday encounters'' (Larkin 2010, 618).

At first, this chapter will focus on the youth's postmemory of the civil war, through the stories and fears of their parents but also their own memories of the more recent conflicts. Afterwards I will focus on the reimagining part, wherein I show how the young citizens are imaging an ideal Beirut that is different from the status quo. Finally, I will discuss the topic of recreating the city.

Re-membering Beirut

Memories

The civil war was barely mentioned during the youth of most of the young Beirutis I interviewed. Nassim (26), a graffiti-artists and student graphic design student at the Lebanese university, raised in the mountains of South Lebanon, remarked:

> I remember going several times to Jeita Grotto [East Lebanon] and sometimes to the theatre in Antelias [East Beirut] with my school. But then the teachers never explained anything about Beirut's recent history. However, my farther use to tell me stories about the civil war before I went to bed, like bed time stories [*laughs*]. I don't remember specific stories, but whenever we went to Beirut, I saw all the destroyed buildings – way more than you can see now - and I always had so many questions as a kid. My father answered them by telling me things like,

''this building was a hotel and they used to take it as a shelter,'' and he explained how the lines were separating areas from each other. Actually, my father was a history teacher, and used to be mine, too. But since our history books do not treat the civil war, we did not talk about it at school. It was too loaded, *yanneh* [I mean] too sensitive.[19]

According to filmmaker Myriam (36),

> It shows that these types of debates couldn't yet take place in Lebanon. There is a hole between the children of war and former combatants, and no discussions happen in the household. In fact, my parents never speak to me about the war either. And yet, my father took up arms and met my mom on a battlefield. You live in a country that you cannot appropriate, that doesn't resemble you.[20]

The Lebanese schools leave students ill equipped to process or engage with the past, as political scientist Craig Larkin's research amongst Lebanese high school students showed, as well: ''denying students the opportunity to critically appraise their contemporary history'' and ''neglecting to provide safe forums for cross-communal discussion'' leaves the responsibility for providing this forum up to the family, home and local community (Larkin 2010, 621).

Sectarianism

A consequence of this silence surrounding the past is also a lack of discussion of sectarianism. Most of my interlocutors did not even know about the existence of other religions in Lebanon before the death of Hariri in 2005. Nassim went to school in the south, so never really had contact with people with other religious backgrounds. ''I always knew I was Muslim, but my parents never told me about the difference between Shi'a and Sunni, nor about all the other religions in Lebanon. So when Hariri died, I started asking my parents why.''[21] Nour (24), co-founder of the cycling promotion group, went to a primary school in her village in the mountains, east of Beirut, ''so it was super Christian,'' she explains. ''There, nobody ever told me about sectarianism in Lebanon, not even my parents. When I was twelve, Hariri died, and that was the first time I learned about sectarianism but still vaguely.''[22]

Even though, as Larkin mentioned, teachers don't provide a safe forum for discussion, it was just at high school that Nour and Issa learned about other religions, because of other students' stories. ''When I was fourteen, I went down to the city [to go to high school], where we were mixed with the

[19] Interview with Nassim, 22-02-2018

[20] Interview of Joey Ayoub with Myriam, 19-07-2018

[21] Interview with Nassim, 22-02-2018

[22] I asked Nour again, and she told me that she never heard about the Islam before Hariri's assassination and when they explained her why he died, she said that they ''actually just continued with being in our own bubbles in the village'', 03-02-2019

students with other religious backgrounds,'' she explained, ''so this is how we really started to learn that some people were Muslim and some were Christian. But in terms of making friends and who spent time with whom, it was not an issue at all.''[23] ''I remember vaguely that there were some Shi'a/Sunni things going on and we were older. Especially in 2007 there was a mini war between Hezbollah and the Future Movement[24] in Beirut so people were teasing each other about being with certain parties''. Issa (23), a sociology student at the Lebanese University who is reclaiming public spaces in Hamra, went to school in Dahieh, a Shi'ia neighborhood. *''*I remember that my friends at school started to ask each other: 'Hezbollah or Amal?' and got divided, not wanting to sit next to each other anymore. We don't dare to talk about these conflicts, especially our parents.''

''My parents actually only, *yanneh*, allow me to go to AUB[25] and to our village in the mountains of Beirut with my friends.'' Michael (20), city guide and student political sciences at the AUB, told me. ''They know that my friends are also Christian and that their families have houses in the same area in the mountains as us. We go from one safe bubble to the other, connecting by another safe bubble which is our car! [l*aughs*]''[26] Issa's parents are still afraid to go to East Beirut. ''When I had my first side job in the ABC shopping mall in Ashrafieh, which is in *charieh* [East Beirut], my dad insisted on taking a taxi: 'and make sure he drops you at the entrance of the mall!' he said. They are still thinking in stereotypes when it comes to that. I can understand, they had to leave their house in Sin-el-Fil [East Beirut] during the war, and squatted a house in Dahieh'' '' And you know? I noticed that since then, they somehow became more religious''.[27]

This last part is what Mona (33), a dancer from the south of Lebanon, also told me about her parents,

> [My parents] are distancing themselves from the society. I remember that they were really socially active when I was younger, but they are not like that anymore. My parents never were really into religion, but these days my mum delves herself into the Koran. But I can see in her eyes that she actually does not believe in Allah. When I ask her why she is suddenly so much into religion, she tells me that this is the only hope she has and that religion gives her safety. I have been raised to be ambitious, to break the walls and not to end up having kids and a family only. But now suddenly, they ask me about having kids and making a family. They were so ambitious and they dreamed, always! The system now oppresses them, I can see a huge

[23] Interview with Nour, 13-02-2018

[24] 'Hariri's party', a primarily Sunni party

[25] American University Beirut, located in Hamra, West Beirut

[26] Interview with Michael, 20-03-2018

[27] Interview with issa, 03-04-2018

> difference between how they are now and how they were in the sixties. My mother rejects me every time when I want to talk about this, my dad keeps silent. I can feel his insecurity.

In Beirut, Mona noticed the growing segregation and postwar anxiety:

> The neighborhood divisions are stronger than ever [*silence*]. The young, independent people like us, are trying to move to neighborhoods with other religions, but still the majority of the people, like the families, want to be separated from the others. A Shi'ia and Maronite family living next to each other? Impossible. […] I remember, between 2001 and 2006, taking a *servees* [shared taxi] from Hamra to Ashrafieh was easier than now. The districts are being more and more distant to each other. The taxi drivers are more afraid somehow. A few years ago, some of my friends noticed that the taxi drivers have a way to show from which religion they are. I personally never noticed it, but I do very believe so, since we are talking about Lebanon! [laughing]. We are still being asked about religions, we have a separate identity card with our religion and people can still ask for this document […] I don't think this system will ever change! Fuck, we have the same president of the parliament since, since, since always! Since I was born![28]

State of fear

Fear is not only noticeable amongst parents; recent conflicts influenced the youth themselves as well. Nassim remembers the anxiety he felt during the bombings of Hezbollah and the Israeli army, when he was still a child. ''When me and my family went back to the south, we saw some Israeli military bases on the high mountains around my village, and there was a road that takes you to the far south which was closed and we couldn't go there, so we asked why. This is how they started telling us about the occupation and Israel. In 1996 we were home when Israel started a war and started bombing, so my mom took me and my sister and went to Beirut in a taxi under the sounds of bombing. I was only five years old and got so terrified.''

However, when I asked Nassim if he is afraid for a new war to come, he laughed and said, ''no, never! I don't believe so.'' This is the reaction I got most of the time. As BBC reporter Max Pearson said, ''the new generation has it in their DNA not to want another war again. Nobody ever wins in a civil war, and that message is passed by the first generation. You don't have a feeling that there's a tinderbox waiting to explode, in terms of the Lebanese'' (Pearson BBC podcast The History Hour 2017).

During my fieldwork, I mostly spoke to youth that said they were not afraid for a new war to come. However, when I spoke to Maroun (29), a theater maker and performer that worked with his theatre on public space issues and the circumstances of migrant workers, he told me that he does not

[28] Interview with Mona, 28-03-2019

think that the second generation knows the consequences of a war ''but the people who lived during the war are still afraid.'' He told me that everybody in Lebanon is in a ''state of fear''. I illustrated to Maroun a situation I came across. A young couple enthusiastically stated that they were so happy to live in Lebanon because everything is possible and they are never afraid as long as you are not politically active. Maroun answered seriously,

> I totally not agree! The last tension that happened was two weeks ago in the streets was between Amal and the Tayyar Watani party in a Christian area. In one second, the streets became a dangerous place for anyone. So it is very naïve to say that people in this country are not targets. Anyone can become a target at any point, any moment! […] The politicians are using this state of fear that people are in. […] Many little civil wars happened after the Amnesty law, wherein our system is constantly feeding the fear of the people from each other and it's going in all directions, you know? Everyone has someone that he should be afraid of, even if you are not into these sectarian relations directly. In 2008, when Hezbollah invaded Beirut and many surrounding villages in the mountains of Lebanon, the Shi'a fighters came into Sunni areas and Druze areas. So my village, twenty kilometers from Beirut, is in a Druze area and I found myself there with my parents, and most of the people I knew were suddenly holding arms, capable of doing anything! So even if you are not part of this sectarian actions but you find yourself at any point just inside it. Whatever or whoever you are, you will be a certain kind of target, you are always target in this state of fear, no matter what your background is.

Yet, Maroun also told me he is not really afraid for a ''real war'' to break out soon,

> I am not afraid for that, but I am constantly angry, frustrated and hopeless about Lebanon's current situation. The system is using this state of fear and anger against us […] by depriving us from our rights. We have no fixed salaries, social security, health care, housing, good public transportation, and so forth. It is just about making more money! For example, if you are walking on the sidewalk, and you just really want to walk on this sidewalk, you come across ten cars that block this sidewalk, or the construction work that is eating the street, or someone that is putting a big barrel just in the middle of the street or a café that is putting all its shit on the sidewalk. This disrespect for the public sphere, is really horrible. It makes people very tensed, very aggressive! And not only on the sidewalks, it is also how people drive. They drive in a crazy way because it is always tensed, the whole experience. People can just go and occupy public land, and that is how this country was literally sold. [29]

Also Mona referred to this state of fear and stress. ''I feel more and more to leave this country. The city is suffocating, in all different aspects of daily life. When I am walking in the city these days, there

[29] Interview with Maroun, 21-03-2018

are so many images passing by in front of my eyes, so many noises and voices, so much stress! People in Beirut have to deal with this, what comes with fear, anxiety and hatred in this city.''[30]

Most of them feel a sense of nostalgia towards earlier years, both the 'Golden Era' of Lebanon as well as the years before the assassination of Hariri and the Israel war, like Mona:

> The best years were from 2001 until 2005. The country was booming, it was going up, everything! This vibration of the country you could feel, it was rising, even in the art scene, everything was possible and we could do whatever we wanted. Ten years ago, my boyfriend and I could sit at the seaside or go to a park, we could just walk on the streets to go to the Sunday's market and there were almost no cars. I could bring foreign friends to the seaside. This is impossible now: blocks are dumped on the shore, there is more and more of that ugly construction and especially after the 2006 war, the government put these blocks and military checkpoints on every street corner. It's still there and it gives me the feeling that I am not welcome here, you know?

Mona showed me her dance performance in a small documentary about Beirut. She talked to many taxi drivers and asked them about their vision on Beirut:

> Most of them told me their frustrations about current Beirut, like, ''fuck this town, it changed so much!'' But in the end, they all say, ''I have been to many countries, but there is no country like Lebanon. It's the best country in the world.'' You see? There is a constant love-hate relationship in Lebanon. Beirut is an auto-distractive city, it gives a lot of promises, but it never, never accomplishes these promises and people keep on hoping. After each disappointment, you find new hopes. For me, it's freedom that I hope for all the time. We have the illusion that we are free in Lebanon, but we are not, especially women aren't.

This leads me to the second part of this chapter, which is about the will to talk with the former generations, just like Mona's documentary with the taxi drivers. Why does the post-war generation I talked to want to re-imagine Beirut, and how are they attempting to? I found out that the longing to remember the past is not about the actual civil war, but about the current situation.

Re-imagining Beirut

One of the first street artists I met in Beirut was Ziad 'Potatonose' (28), architect and artist, from Baabda.[31] His work is seen everywhere in Beirut, and a lot of people know him because of the buildings he painted on that were known for the Battle of the Hotels.[32] One day, we drove through Beirut to see

[30] Interview with Mona, 20-03-2018

[31] Southeast Beirut, Christian, see map in appendix.

[32] See Historical Overview

most of his work in the city. The photo above is taken from the Fouad Chehab bridge that crosses the George Haddad highway.[33] ''I have red ghosts there!'' Ziad points up towards the building, the one that is covered with a huge advertisement of a telephone brand, but I can still see some of those red ghosts. ''From a distance you feel like the building is still bleeding, but if you come closer you see that this is not blood but funny characters that spread positivity instead of bad memories.'' I told him that I found it sad that the advertisement is covering his work. ''Yes, I first was sad that you could not see it anymore, since they tried to cover these traces of war. But now I see it as a wound and a bandage: the wound will heal slower when it's not exposed to the air.'' We drove towards the sea, towards Downtown, and I saw the famous war-torn and abandoned Holiday Inn, that was known for its modern architecture but never finished because of the civil war that broke out. The Holiday Inn was used as a military base during the war and had a perfect position for militias to shoot from because of its location on the separation line. ''Here, I painted blue ghosts because it's close to the sea. They represent the people who left the country using the sea or the sky during the war.''[34]

Afterwards, we drove through Beirut back to his place in Baabda and I noticed how many war traces I suddenly saw, contrasting with all the new architecture and new paved highways. ''I hate most of the new architecture in Beirut, because it is not adapting to the local context. This is what I've seen all around me in post-war reconstructed cities. But as an architect I would like to build something that fits the city's history.'' We drove back to his place and on the way he pointed to two of his favorite buildings, one by architect Bernard Khoury, which is in the form of a hand grenade. The other one was the *Beit Beirut* museum. ''This mansion was located on the green line, but the architect choose to reconstruct in a way where you could still see that it was severely damaged during the war.''

When Ziad and I arrived back at his place, I asked him why he likes the war traces that much. ''Because people are passing by those war traces, and they don't look at it. For me, those traces are not physical traces, they don't represent just a hole in the wall. It is more the reflection of the current situation in Lebanon.'' He told me what also Mona, Maroun and George also told me a month later,

> We are still living the traces of the war. The politicians today are the same war leaders back then. You can see it everywhere, from the bad infrastructure to the way people drive. It is crazy, we are still living – it is not okay – we are still living the traces of war. The reactions of my work were dispersed, some people were with some people were against, either because they don't want to be reminded of the war and want a clean, modern, Downtown kind of city, or because they consider Holiday Inn as a monument itself. And I like this because it creates a debate, you know. If you see the comments on Facebook when I did the Holiday Inn, for

[33] The same place that I described in the vignette of my introduction

[34] Informal conversation with Ziad, 10-02-2018

example, some of them were really aggressive like they really hated what I did. They even created a [Facebook] page called ''Stop Potatonose!'' But others were happy what I did. And *akid* [indeed], it is nice to create a debate around something that I made! Nobody was talking about the Holiday Inn before I painted it. It was forgotten, but now I am bringing life to these ruins.

This memory work of Ziad also connects the concept of ghosts and haunting to Lefebvre's demand for urban participatory democracy in the urban realm. Indeed, the ''right to represent the past [...] can be considered a right to the city and is intricately tied to the processes of democratization'' (Till 2012, 8). Ziad is representing the past, and by re-imagining and re-creating a city like Beirut, he is re-appropriating segregated space ''through diverting its normalized uses'' which is consonant with Lefebvre's call for groups to ''take up residence in and re-imagine places that have been programmed for the service of capitalism and inequality. Such re-programming can include reinserting memory into amnesiac spaces.'' (Till 2012 in Nagle 2017, 158)

Image 1.1. Building next to the Fouad Chehab bridge

- Photo on the left taken in 2016 by Ziad, photo on the right from own archive (2018)

Re-creating Beirut

After a thirty-minute ride in heavy traffic, the servees drops us in front of an old yellow building in the busy Spearstreet in Hamra. Colorful posters of art performances and theater plays are stuck on a wall in front of it. On top of the wall, big black letters are written: ''Imagination helps art rid reality of its tricks''. Two young boys are pulling full trash bags out of the garbage bins in front of the wall, and throwing it toward each other. They laugh, but it makes me feel a bit nauseous. ''Do you think this is the Zico house?'' my friend asks me. We decide to follow a young man and woman who are entering the building, they both look a bit artistic, wearing black. The building reminds me of the abandoned Pink House next to the former lighthouse, that I secretly entered with Nour a few days earlier: both in the same 1930's architectural style with high ceilings, big living rooms and colorful windows. The type of buildings in Beirut that gives me feelings of nostalgia, leaving me the space to imagine how Beirut must have looked like in the 'Golden Era'. We walk up the three stairs until we arrive at the rooftop. Around hundred people are sitting on plastic chairs facing a black curtain, with a cajoon[35] and a clothes rack in front of it, over which colored scarves are trapped. The audience consists of younger and older people, all of them are chatting and laughing, which gives me a comfortable feeling. A young man with a moustache comes to us to ask for our names, and I tell him that I am a friend of Farez and we are here for the Playback performance[36]. ''Ah, you are the Dutch girls? Yes, I call Lara, she will be translating the performance for you tonight!''.

Once we sit down, a man comes out from behind the curtain and starts to play the cajoon. We hear people singing a song in Arabic, from behind the curtain. After a few seconds, the five singers, including Farez, come up too and when the song ends, the audience applauds. Lara tells us that the theater players were singing a traditional Lebanese song and are now announcing this Friday's performance wherein women are going to talk about the memories of the civil war. Another actor asks a question to the audience: ''For tonight, is there somebody who wants to start with sharing a story or an event that happened to him or her this week?''. Silence. Then, a guy stands up and walks towards the front. Lana translates: ''He comes from Syria and he used to be an actor in a Playback theater in Damascus as well, but he had to flee. He misses his family and friends back in Syria a lot, but since he attends the Playback plays in Lebanon, he feels a lot better. It is like Playback in Beirut is giving back his feeling of home.'' The actors are one by one taking a colored scarf and the musician starts to play

[35] A cajoon is a wooden box-shaped percussion instrument

[36] Playback is a form of improvisational theatre, existing worldwide, in which the audience tells (life)stories and watch them enacted by the actors.

his cajoon again. The actors dance with the scarves, to play back the story that the guy just told. After a minute the music stops and the actors are placing their hands on their hearts, followed by pointing towards the guy, out of respect.

Different other stories are being told: about religion and atheism, about making new friends on a new school, about moving to another neighborhood, about fears for exams, and about the upcoming elections. All told by older and younger people, with different backgrounds. and played back by the actors.

After the break, Farez is finished with acting and sits next to me. Different people from the audience share that they are often disappointed in this country but are feeling a sense of hope around them, now the elections are approaching. ''Everyone should make change happen.'' Now its Farez himself who shares a story:

> *But they are scared to change themselves even though that is what's needed! I never felt like I belonged to a place or person and I always felt alone with the fact that I am the only one that wants to change. But since I started doing social work and became part of this social theater group this feeling changed. It gave me the opportunity to work in all the regions of Lebanon and I interact with everyone. If we all work on the same agenda, it will work better and we can leave our ego behind. I am part of this wave of change that is occurring in Lebanon.*

The actors give their answer on his story with another performance. The music starts and one of the actors starts to play with a green scarf, making circles with it in the air. He then takes other scarfs from the rack, one by one, and his dancing becomes more chaotic. Suddenly he stops, drops the scarf on the floor and says: ''I feel alone but I can change the world!!'' He takes the white scarf, the other actors are laughing and saying, that is not possible!'' He continues to dance: ''We can do this together!''[37] *Applause.*

When I talked to him earlier that month, Farez (26), born in Russia and working in ICT in Downtown, told me about this improvisational theater that serves as an open space for people to feel safe to share their stories, no matter what themes or subjects, ''We try to find a solution to a certain problem, to raise awareness and seek for social change. We are targeting the suppressed and oppressed through an interactive way (…) People from all different backgrounds and ages are attending the plays, and it is always donation based so you pay whatever you think is fair.''

''I consider Playback as a public space that comes close to the ideal of a public space: where everybody can feel welcome to interact with each other in a playful manner, no matter what your

[37] Notes taken at 14-03-2018

background is.''[38] Farez thinks that public spaces are really important, but you have to feel welcome there.

> I was raised in Russia, where I use to play in public parks with all my friends. [Here in Beirut,] Solidere's projects create a state, a feeling of inferiority if you want, because I don't feel like I really belong to that place. It is not made for me, as a person. I prefer to go to Sanaya park[39], where more poor people are coming. But it is dirty there: you can see that people in Lebanon don't respect public spaces, unfortunately. I belong more to Tripoli[40], which is a very popular city, it is a city for the people! The exclusivity there is very low. [However,] with my friends I try to claim these official public spaces in Downtown, by just sitting there and chatting, trying to make it look less high-class, since we are all middleclass persons who can only afford a little ice-cream! [*laughs*]

Concluding thoughts: the right to the city by (re)creating life in the ruins

To conclude this chapter, I would like to pay attention to the concept of ruins in the literature. Ruins created by capitalism and the devastating consequences of modernity (Bauman 2011) have often been used as causes why people would turn to places that allow them to escape the mundane world.[41] Instead of following other scholars that have analyzed the dreams of modernization and capitalism, cultural anthropologist Anna Tsing argues for a different, more optimistic angle in her book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015). In this book, she offers a profound insight about the global state which is afflicted by alienation of men and nature caused by capitalism and modernization. "We do not have choices other than looking for life in this ruin" (2015, 6). Through the lens of the Matsutake mushroom Tsing shows how even in these dreadful times, people, animals, and plants find manners to adapt and subsequently empower themselves in alternative ways. This is what I think that the people in this chapter are trying to do: bringing life to 'real' ruins - even if they are covered by capitalistic purposes - and thereby adapting in order to empower themselves and others by creating, or highlighting, a monument into the public to remember the war and to create a discourse about Lebanon's current situation.

It is often in these spaces that they represent the past by reflecting on the current problems they are facing and by reimagining a city where they invite their audience for a discussion on current issues related to the civil war. Nour, Nassim and Ziad are doing this by making murals on private and

[38] Interview Farez, 09-03-2018

[39] A public park located in Hamra

[40] City in the north of Lebanon

[41] See, for example Mackay 2001, Bennett 2012, Roeland 2012, Kirby 2013 and Laycock 2015

public buildings and on walls next to the highways that connect all of the segregated neighborhoods. Farez' theater group performs in places like Zico house, an artist residency and cultural house where people can just walk in and attend performances. The documentaries and movies of Mona, George and Nadine are often screened for free in cultural houses. Within these privatively owned open spaces they create new democratic spaces and ''re-appropriate'' segregated space, through diverting its normalized uses (Lefebvre in Till 2012). Maroun does this too, with a performance he did last year on the Corniche seashore, a Solidere project next to Downtown, with a big megaphone in his hand. Through the megaphone he asked passers-by how they wish to see their sea, and their city. Hereby he tried to create a dialogue wherein he invited people to reimagine the privatized urban spaces and makes them aware of their right to the city.

However, after three months of fieldwork I find it hard to conclude that this dialogue is really done throughout the whole society. I know that via social media the street artists find ways to communicate and reflect about their work, but I feel that most of them stay within their artistic, often educated, bubble wherein political issues such as sectarianism don't matter. It is an open question as to whether these ''memory makers'' have succeeded in breaking the silence on a national level, argued sociologist Sune Haugbolle (2012) in his paper about reconciliation through activism in Lebanon. ''The challenge is not so much to break with amnesia, but to accommodate existing peace, reconciliation and memory initiatives – in art, culture and civil society – with the political and social powerbrokers in the country'' (Haugbolle 2012, 2). It is to this accommodation with the political and social powerbrokers that this thesis turns to now.

٢ A MOMENT OF INTERRUPTION

Chapter 2: A moment of interruption

> Why don't we have the right to make art in the public spaces like graffiti on the walls, while the politicians can put their billboards with empty words and big ugly photoshopped faces in any street they want? – Nassim[42]

''Pssst, tshk tshk.'' The smell of paint, sound of spraying and the shaking of cans. ''Yalla! Okay!''. Arabic words. Nassim on the left, facing the wall. He raises his right hand, holding a black spray can, making a big black circle on the wall. 'Psssst'. His brother in the middle, holding an orange can, spraying a big orange circle of the same size. 'Psssst'. Their friend Hassan is doing the same with purple. 'Psssht'. They are holding a paper with a picture of their own faces in their left hands, looking at it every other second, and looking up to the wall accordingly. A car with military officers approaches, beeping a couple of times, and when they are close to us, the driver puts his head out of the window and looks at me weirdly. I feel a bit rebellious by being a girl that is sitting on a dirty sidewalk next to a big road, writing in a notebook besides three guys that are spraying on a public wall.

Every hundred meters there are red billboards with an Arabic text in white, above the image of a cedar tree in the middle of the billboard. ''It's the Lebanese Forces party, those billboards, the Maronite party,'' Nassim explains to me,

> *They are in the government since eight years and are really corrupt since the beginning. The texts on the billboards all say hypocritical things; they are promoting themselves as an anti-corruption party, but they are the mafia themselves! That is why we are making this piece on the wall, to make fun of this bullshit. We are going to portray ourselves like the politicians do: a huge photo of our faces and texts with false promises. But what we are going to do, is to use colors that is not related to any existing political party so we will stay neutral.*

I ask him which political party he will vote for. ''I don't believe that these elections will change anything. I wish I could vote in Beirut for an independent civil society party, but I am registered in the south, in the village of my parents, where there is only one political party where everyone votes for.[43] The leaders of the political parties led the war and will stay being the leaders of our government in the future.'' Hassan joins our conversation. I joke whether he is going to vote for himself. Hassan laughs, ''I will fill in a blank paper in the village where I am from, because it won't make any sense to vote there[44] and in

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[42] Notes taken on 10-04-20018

[43] Hezbollah or Amal (Shi'a parties)

[44] From the southern mountains of Lebanon

general I don't think these elections will change anything.'' I ask him what will change Lebanon's current situation, ''I hope my art will!''

When they are almost finished, I ask Nassim if I can also paint next to their wall. ''We have to leave now but I will find you another wall.'' I don't understand why he wanted to go somewhere else if we are standing in front of an empty wall just right there. ''We don't want people to see us, I will explain it to you later.'' I am surprised, because a lot of people already saw them, even the military and a police officer. Nassim's brother quickly writes down, ''انتخبنا ولا يهمّك... تنرجع نحبّ إمّك'' and Nassim tells me what the ironic text means: ''Vote us and we will [make] love [to] your mothers again!'', because all those politicians keep on giving our mothers so many false promises. [45] [46]

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الخارجية تتّهم مفوّضية اللاجئين بالسعي إلى توطين النازحين السوريّين في لبنان

افتتاحية النهار

مروان اسكندر

استهداف تجميع الدولارات

حرب الروايات "الكيميائيّة" من الغوطة إلى سولزبري

Image 2.1. The mural of BROS on the frontpage of the An-Nahar newspaper,

[45] Informal conversations with Hassan and Nassim, 10-04-2018

[46] The following days, their mural was seen in three national newspapers, and used as the front page photo of the An-Nahar newspaper, see image 2.1.

published on 20-04-2018, with an explanation about the voting system and a statement about the mural: ''some graffiti artists making fun of the elections'' - Photo of the newspaper from own archive

In the former chapter I showed how the young urban activists in Beirut are trying to provide the Lebanese citizens alternative models for civic commentary regarding memories about the civil war. In this chapter I will show that with their art, they express a ''counterdiscourse to the sectarian propaganda'' by creating a city space where it is ''possible to voice internal critiques'' (Sinno 2017, 81). As seen in the vignette above, they are against the billboard's statements that ''only say hypocritical things,'' such as being against corruption. With their art, they ''make fun of this'' and are trying to ''change the system.'' Their art can be seen as an alternative to the Lebanese electoral system that does not allow its citizens to vote on parties they feel connected to.

Just like the former chapter, this chapter also deals with the tendency of the post-war generation to search for places where there is no political tension noticeable or are consciously avoiding it and therefore stay within their bubbles (Harb 2015). Nassim asked me to come with them to observe them painting this mural, but he did not want to tell me anything about it until they almost finished it. I was surprised when I saw them painting themselves as politicians, because Nassim always said that they did not want to make any political art work. Most of the other street artists I met told me the same, as if they always wanted to avoid this topic: ''I am not into politics.'' ''I will try to be as careful as I can; I am talking about Lebanon in the future where I will not name any politician!''[47] As seen in the former chapter, they associate 'political' and 'politics' with sectarianism, corruption and the 'war lords that are leading the country,' distrusting the political system in general. Hereby, they often referred to the artwork of another graffiti friend whose work almost always got erased (by municipality and authorities) because ''his work was obviously too political'' (see image 2.4).[48]

The mural of Nassim and his *crew* in the vignette above is literally political since it is reflecting on the current national elections. However, what I find interesting in this situation is how there was a constant negotiation going on with how their artwork could be interpreted – not only with this work, but with all the work that the young street artists in Beirut made. They are trying to use colors that are not affiliated to any political party,[49] they choose to paint symbols and illustrations that refer (in this case) to the lack of agency and to corruption, they lie to the police and they leave quickly once they wrote down the 'critical' text (despite many car passengers have seen them painting the wall).

[47] Interview with theater- and filmmaker George, 01-03-2018, amongst others

[48] Ziad and Nassim, amongst others

[49] Which is hard, since there are 22 different political parties that were running for the upcoming elections

In this chapter I show the ways in which their spatial practices are political and often linked to the current politics in Lebanon, because the phenomena and issues that occur in their daily lives are the inspiration behind their work. They consciously deal with the interpretation of their work by the audience. Even when their work is not directly linked to sectarianism or to the upcoming elections, it has the power to be controversial and critical, ''causing authorities to question whether or not it should be allowed to flourish on the streets'' (Sinno 2017, 93). Besides, as Lefebvre argued, ''desires tied to urban pasts, presents, and futures are *inherently political* because they inform how individuals make and justify their decisions and actions.'' (Lefebvre in Till 2012, 4, own emphasis)

Lebanon's political landscape

To illustrate the complexity of the Lebanese electoral system: it is based on a new law that was passed in June 2017 and that took ''two Presidents, four Prime Ministers, five cabinets and at least twenty different possible draft electoral laws'' in order to agree upon this law (Muhanna 2017).[50] Lebanon had its last national elections in 2009, which means that it is the first time for most of the post-war generation to vote. However, as seen in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, more than three-quarters of Beirut's youth is not allowed to vote for the candidates they support (like the independent parties that are only located in one of Beirut's district) because they are not registered in the capital.[51] Voting and becoming a candidate is only allowed in one's ancestral home village, and since it is hard become registered in Beirut, there is no choice but to vote on candidates they do not feel related to, or to not vote at all. Important to note is that the current political parties are formed during the civil war, so their status is often linked to their historical conflicts and distrust. Besides, the current political milieu is not encouraging open political debate. This is why it is sensitive for most of the young Beirutis to talk about politics.

Hope for any political change is primarily focused on the independent civil society parties. ''I

[50] Lebanon's electoral system is based on the proportional representation for all of the country's official religious sects. The 128 seats are split evenly between Christians and Muslims, and the main offices of President, Prime Minister, and Speaker of Parliament are reserved for Maronite Christians, Sunnis, and Shiites, respectively, and are divided into fifteen electoral districts around Lebanon's five main regions (see map in Appendix). The 917 candidates have to form lists that comply with the seat allocation to electoral constituencies, as well as the confessional and religious distribution of these seats (An-Nahar 2017). At stake was not only the problem of how to share power among the traditional representatives of Lebanon's religious communities but also how to facilitate the emergence of nonsectarian political parties, a core demand of Lebanon's increasingly activist civil society[50]. Especially since the You-Stink movement, these civil-society groups have railed against the propensity of the political élite to pass power down through the generations and keep reformists at bay[50] (Muhanna in The New Yorker 2017).

[51] The population in Beirut (more than 2 million inhabitants) is around four times larger than the electorate, (around 470,000 inhabitants)

am not as scared anymore since I know about the influence that Beirut Madinati[52] had.'' I interviewed Mona in March, when I could already see the streets changing: political posters were stuck on shops, walls and windows and commercial advertisements on the billboards were replaced with political campaigns. ''I wish you can understand Arabic, so you can just watch the videos of the candidates and campaigns because they are epic, I mean, so iconic and heroic! They keep on promising that change is going to come. There's one that's stating: ''enough sectarianism, enough religion, let's say yes for qualities, capacities, and whatever!'' but all these people can actually only exist counting on these favors they do to people. If you are, for example, a Maronite, and you want to get a job, you just go to the head of the Maronite communities. So no matter what your capacities are! If people don't do that, they don't exist.'' ''Perhaps the new independent parties can change this. Believe me, if they [the politicians] stop giving money or jobs, the system will break. People are forced. I believe, and my parents do too, that the system is like this. This is why they don't vote anymore, my parents.''[53]

The corruption prior to the elections was a topic amongst the activists and passersby during the Bike-to-Work event (that I helped organizing with the cycling promotion group in April). ''I receive many phone calls of people offering me lots of things if I would vote on that or that party. This morning, I was offered an expensive pair of shoes!''[54] ''Those politicians have taken the money from the poor and now with the elections they are giving it back to them. But, on one condition: only when they will vote for their party.'' Nour told me angry, ''It is disgusting, those politicians are going to the poor neighborhoods and stand on a chair with a huge packet of dollars in their hands, screaming: ''who is going to vote for me? You? And you?'' And then they throw the money to all the people that promise to vote for them.''[55]

Reactions of Beirut's youth on the political posters

Two weeks before the elections I did a little election tour with Nassim on his scooter through Beirut and its surrounding neighborhoods[56]. I took photos of the billboards and posters while he tried to translate as much of the texts as possible and giving me some background information of the political parties as much as he was familiar of. First of all, it was often clear that each area had their own dominant parties, because of the frequency and size of the posters. ''You can only recognize the big

[52] A group of activists of the YouStink-movement decided to run for the Beirut municipal elections in 2016 under the name 'Beirut Madinati' ('Beirut, my city'), however backed by Hariri, but won these elections and therefore created hope amongst a lot of (young) activists for the national elections this year.

[53] Interview Mona, 20-03-2018

[54] Woman, 25-04-2018

[55] Informal conversation with Nour, 25-04-2018

[56] See Appendix for the route

parties because of the size of their posters: the bigger the poster, the more money that party has. The small independent parties don't have the money for this so their posters are often small and aside of the road, not in the main sight (see image 2.2).'' Often, Nassim did not refer to the name of the party but to the politician: ''this is the party of…''. Besides, members of the cycling advocacy group sent me photos and texts of posters they found interesting and often funny. ''The politicians are trying to be as creative as they can, and are playing with words all the time''[57] Hammad, member the cycling group, said. ''Most of the dictionary is already owned by a political party!'' Nassim joked, ''Tayyar al-Mustaqbal means future and *amal* means hope. This party is called ''Amin'' which means honest, Nassim said during our tour, ''of course, they are not honest at all!''[58]

Image 2.2. On main road from Downtown towards Shi'a neighborhoods in the south

(Photo from own archive, 23-04-2018)

The photo above is good example of all the different posters, taken in a southern neighborhood on the highway towards the airport. The small, independent and less rich parties are recognizable at the size and positioning of the posters: small and hidden and therefore often unreadable for citizens that drive on the highway. Nassim commented on the bigger poster with the red text on the left: ''this is one of the 'Lebanon is worthy' party, it states; 'An honest, promising man!' and is sponsored by a rich guy to

[57] Informal conversation with Hammad, 12-03-2018

[58] Notes, 10-04-2018

kiss the politician's ass!'' The other one: 'we are with you, because our heads are up!' but the poster is tilted, so their heads are down!''[59] Nassim laughed.

This briefly illustrates how Lebanon's youth perceives the political posters that are a dominant part of the 'spatial narrative' in public space (Awad 2017): they often make fun of it or, as Nassim sometimes does, even use some small posters as a canvas to paint on. Yet, he does not paint on the posters of the more 'powerful' politicians; when I pointed towards a big one of prime minister's Saad Hariri's 'Future' party, Nassim explained, ''if I paint over this one, I will end up in jail!'' (see image 2.3). I asked him what will happen to the posters after the elections, Nassim said that they will stay until the next elections, ''nobody dares to tear them down!''. [60]

Image 2.3. Poster of PM Hariri (Future Party) making a heart shape with his hand in southern neighborhood - photo from own archive (23-04-2018)

A war of colors?

Erasing/reclaiming

When Nassim and I drove to Hamra (see Figure 1), he showed me a white wall where a piece of him was erased by the municipality. Nassim asked me, frustrated: ''Why don't we have the right to make art in the public spaces like graffiti on the walls, while the politicians can put their billboards with empty

[59] Informal conversation with Nassim, 23-04-2018

[60] Informal conversation with Nassim, 10-04-2018

words and big ugly photoshopped faces in any street they want?''[61] Nassim's question reflects the notion of the-right to the city: who has the power and legitimacy to ''captivate'' the city's public and occupy its public space? (Sinno 2017). Graffiti in Lebanon is not officially illegal, so when you have a permission (of the owner of the building or of the municipality) street artists can often get away with it. However, the Lebanese street artists are constantly conscious about what is allowed to be painted on the streets. Both Ziad and Nassim found it 'normal' that the work of their graffiti friend Mahmoud (see image 2.4) was erased by the municipality because it was ''too political'', meaning that his work was critical about the politicians, the police or the system in general. There is this constant battle of claiming- and reclaiming the streets, even if their work is not, in their eyes, political. The cycling advocacy group to reclaim the streets from the cars by cycling and installing bicycle parking lots and temporary cycle lanes on sidewalks and streets, but people often did not respect these cycle lanes and just parked on it. Their murals with images of cyclists were sometimes painted over by other graffiti artists or painted white by the municipality. This also happened to Nassim and his crew: ''One of our best murals was painted over by this graffiti writer that was sponsored by Lipton Ice Tea''[62]. And as seen in the former chapter, Ziad's art was also covered by commercial advertisements.

[61] Informal conversation with Nassim, 23-04-2018

[62] See further in this chapter

Image 2.4. Mahmoud's piece that got erased by the municipality
- Photo from own archive (20-03-2018)

Ornaphobia

Photographs, arrangement of colors and paintings all tell us something about where we are, hint at the power dynamics, and make us feel foreign or at home. Images are not just objects, but communicative devices in a narrative. They give figurative shape to abstract meanings and give substance to stereotypes and social representations (Lonchuk & Rosa, 2011). Cultural geographer Nadine Sinno argued in her paper 'A War Of Colors' (2017) about the reclamation of Beirut's public spaces through street art, that political messages are being erased on walls by the municipality even though it was not sectarian nor illegal but also not 'just' decorative or innocent: ''it has the power to be controversial and critical, causing authorities to question whether or not it should be allowed to flourish on the streets of Beirut, particularly at times when political slogans are being erased. This incident also speaks to the power of these artifacts to generate 'ornaphobia' (anxiety of ornament) as much as appreciation'' (Sinno 2017, 93). Cultural anthropologist Rafael till states in his book *Ornament and Order* (2016) that ''through tattooing walls, graffiti frees them from architecture and turns them once again into living, social matter; it turns each tag, each poster, each mural, each marking in the city into a material substantiation of an individual, a personhood revivifying a physical space, an

animative relationship set in an indefinite process of consummation. The decorative nature of ornament, the 'what' of the image, can thus be seen to be as powerful as it is pollutive, to have an ability to attack and repel in quite equal measure. It can be seen to trap and captivate its recipients, to draw them into their world irrespective of their desires'' (Schacter 2016, 34). The ornaments are able to tap into the anxiety, individually and collectively (Sinno 2017)

The daily encounters of this 'ornaphobia' were seen in the work of the cycling promotion group and Nassim with his crew. Most of the cycling group's murals are illustrated with bicycles and cyclists, with a background of colorful patterns. In February 2017, the activists were painting a pink mural with hexagon shaped figures in Ain Mreisseh[63], a culturally mixed neighborhood in Beirut where a lot of traffic passes through. A group of men who were sitting in front of a coffee shop across the street approached them to ask why they were painting the Star of David.[64]. ''They were the ones that painted a sign of Amal[65] next to our painting and they did not want us to paint over their sign.'' Nour illustrated the situation, ''they said that if we did not want to change the hexagon figure, they were going cover it with their own paint. We just wanted to make a nice mural and did not think directly about the meaning behind the forms.'' ''Especially in the Islam these forms are seen everywhere in mosques and mosaics.'' Aziz (30), born in Syria and co-founder of the cycling organization told me, ''It is kind of the same as the swastika, many different cultures around the world used it as a spiritual symbol of divinity and prosperity, but people nowadays can only think of Hitler and Nazis when they see the shape.'' The activists therefore decided to change the form a little bit (see image 2.5). ''I am personally against the state of Israel, but I am not against Judaism,'' Aziz told me later, ''I can understand that since the war with Israel, these are sensitive subjects for the people in Lebanon. But you know, the problem is that they don't see the difference between Zionists and being Jewish.''[66]

[63] See Figure 1

[64] Most of the Jewish population in Lebanon fled the country during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and with the rise of Hezbollah.

[65] The Amal Movement is a political party associated with Lebanon's Shi'a community

[66] Informal conversation with Nour and Haasim, 21-04-2018?

Image 2.5. The cyclists' mural in Ain Mreisseh, Beirut
- Photo taken by Nour (25-02-2017)

Colorphobia

Another form of 'ornaphobia' is encountered by the street artists when it comes to colors. As already seen in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. They are trying to use colors that are not affiliated to a political party. One day, Nassim and I drove through Bourj Hammoud[67], also referred to as the Armenian city of Lebanon. In this area, Nassim wants ''to make art for the poor, since they cannot afford to go to a museum''. Nassim told me that when he started doing graffiti, he was often being asked by passers-by if he is affiliated to the political party of the color he was using for his *piece*. ''For example, most of my pieces in Bourj Hammoud I made in green. It happened to me so often that people here came to me, really angry, to ask if I was affiliated to the Amal militia. Me and my crew don't want people to think that we are doing this for a certain party. Some graffiti artists are doing this, I don't know them personally, but most of the time they only paint for companies' commercials. For example, like that one for Lipton Ice Tea, where they painted over our piece at the roundabout of Ashrafieh and used the colors of Lipton in their work. They did not write anything down like ''sponsored by Lipton'' but they consciously used green, yellow and red: the colors of the brand. And a while later, I saw the mural in their commercial, you see!''[68] Nassim was obviously frustrated about the political meaning

[67] See Figure 1: the neighborhood on the east side of the Beirut river.

[68] Informal conversation with Nassim, 01-04-2018

behind colors. ''Red, for example, is my favorite color. I become so angry that Lebanese Forces[69] think that they *can own* the red color! I mean, for you Anna, red does not mean Lebanese Forces, does it? You are from Holland, and red for you is less political!''[70]

Another example of the interpretation of colors in their work is the one where Nassim painted his own head and another graffiti friend painted a lion (see image 2.6). Nassim told me that people came to ask him whether he was supporting the LGBTQ-groups in Beirut, since one of their organizations painted that wall (you could still read ''stereotypes'' in the colored background), ''I did not know beforehand that the colored wall I used was painted by this LGBT activist and that the colors were representing them. Now it looks like I am supporting the gay community here, which I am not.''[71]

Image 2.6. Nassim's mural painted in 2017, in Gemmeyze, Beirut
- Photo taken by Nassim (20-20-2017)

[69] Christian party (former name was Lebanese Front, a right-wing Christian Militia during the Civil War)

[70] Informal conversation with Nassim, 28-04-2018

[71] Informal conversation with Nassim, 15-03-2018

Symbolophobia

> Symbols could be seen in monuments, historical buildings, politicians' billboards, graffiti and street art, or ruins of destructed structures. They are all symbols that shape the public space by preserving certain memories while intentionally concealing others - Awad (2017, 234).

Besides the political and socio-cultural meanings behind ornaments and colors that the young street artists are constantly conscious about, symbols take another important political role in their work. For example, as seen in the vignette in the beginning of this chapter, the BROS crew used different symbols to communicate towards the audience: a puppet, a stack of banknotes, an aureole and a crown. Interesting to note here is that they use all of these symbolic representations that are adapted from international graffiti artists and used in the local context. The puppet painted by Hassan was to show that ''the politicians are using us as puppets, and manipulating the masses''.[72] As cultural geographer Sinno about the use of puppets in street art puts it: ''a puppet-like life, void of agency and freedom of expression, is not worth living'' (Sinno 2017, 94). The stack of banknotes refers to the corruption of the politicians.[73] These symbols represent ''the failure of Lebanese politicians to translate their (empty) promises into actions because they are too busy pursuing their own interests. Using humorous street art, [they] publicly transmit a seriously disturbing message regarding the city's dysfunctional leaders and its increasingly dystopian reality'' (Sinno 2017, 89). The other two symbols, the aureole and the crown, refer to 'being king', meaning something is really good. These symbols and the words[74] used by Nassim and his graffiti friends are coming from the international graffiti vocabulary and therefore are more directed towards other graffiti writers, locally and internationally, to show their position in the graffiti world.

Cultural psychologist Sarah Awad argued that ''symbols in the urban environment are intentionally produced and modified to regulate a community's collective memory. Our urban environment is filled with symbols in the form of images, text, and structures that embody certain narratives about the past. Once those symbols are introduced into the city space they take a life span of their own in a continuous process of reproduction and reconstruction by different social actors. Symbols are understood here as signs embodying multiple meanings, carrying a face and an underlying sentimental value that gives the symbol its stability and effectiveness'' (Awad 2017, 234). As historian

[72] Informal conversation with Hassan, 10-04-2018

[73] Informal conversation with Nassim's brother, 10-04-2018

[74] Nassim used many international graffiti terms, such as 'burner', we are 'bombing' the city!, 'heaven spot', etc.

William Mitchell argues, ''Images are not just a particular kind of sign, but something like an actor on the historical stage, they are endowed with a unique status that feeds into the stories we tell ourselves'' (Mitchell 1984, 504). As discussed at length in Schacter's (2016) book *Ornament and Order*, ''the way both producers and consumers understand these images, the metaphors used as well as the reactions prompted, consistently return to notions of agency, to the living quality of these supposedly inanimate objects […] And it is this agency which thus necessitates the fear that surrounds it, that necessitates its removal […] For all these reasons then, ornament, as Wigley has argued (1988), has always been 'conceived of as potentially dangerous, potentially chaotic', something which must be made 'servile to structure precisely because [it] lies in the dangerous realm of representation and can mislead us, take us away from the natural presence of harmony and order'' (Schacter 2016, 40).

It is the potential of danger and chaos behind the artists' work with colors, symbols, words and ornaments and declares the often used ''I am not political'' statements. The next paragraph shows how Ziad uses a form of *wasta* to enter the well-known 'ghost tower' Bourj el Murr, owned by Solidere. ''Instead of voting, I will enter the building and make something colorful into the ruins''.

Bourj el Hawa, tower of the wind: ''anti-capitalistic'' art

Four days before the elections, Ziad got the permission for his art work in the abandoned war-torn Bourj el Murr tower.[75] ''Since it is quiet now during the elections, and everybody is busy with their campaigns and paying off the poor, nobody will care about me going into this building.''[76] The night that I left Beirut, Ziad brought me to the airport with a huge smile. In the back of his car, he showed me the folded colorful clothes that he just picked up at a sewing workshop and told me, full of excitement, that he received the permission to enter the building. The last time, when he painted the Holiday Inn[77], he asked a friend to be on the lookout so that he could pay the police off to leave. ''Now, I will do it officially!'' he told me the other day. ''The building is owned by Solidere,[78] but with a permission of the police I can pass by the military and enter the building. Many artists applied for a project on the tower, but all their applications were rejected by Solidere. I will not ask Solidere,

[75] As explained in the introduction, the Bourj el Murr used to be the icon of modernism in Lebanon, but the building was never finished because of its strategic location during the civil war.

[76] Phone call with Ziad, 20-05-2018

[77] Just like the Bourj el Murr tower, the Holiday Inn also has a strictly guarded Lebanese army base on the first few floors, see Historical Overview.

[78] As already explained earlier in this thesis, Solidere is a private real estate company owned by Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri (head of the (Sunni) Future Movement Party)

because they will never say yes. I will ask for an official permission at the police and my farther will sign it, since he is in the head of the Ministry of National Defense.''[79]

In two days, Ziad completed his art work together with two assistants (see image 2.7). Ziad decorated the all the empty windows of the thirty-four-story building with the colored clothes so that it would look like curtains, blowing in the wind. Within a few hours after finishing the work, a lot of Lebanese media called Ziad for an interview[80]. On Instagram, many people reacted positively: ''We were so happy when we were facing this, finally some colors and movement and life and a start for new memories!'', ''I have always hated this building because it is the saddest piece of concrete in Beirut. Now I can look up and smile.'', ''You brought a haunted building back to life and gave us hope'', ''You did an amazing job transforming something dark and sad into something colorful. You added life to it.'' and **''**Literally named 'tower of bitterness', revamping it with splashes of color is a genius move. Let this be forever!''[81]

Unfortunately, Ziad had to remove the curtains because of Solidere's threats to sue him. Again, a lot of people reacted online on his work. One that stuck in my mind was:

> It's a shame they block this opportunity to make Beirut smile again. Such a positive vibe to a great, but difficult city. Finally a great artist had this great idea to look forward, to bring positive change which makes so many people happy and smile. Why is Solidere blocking such a great opportunity? Narrowmindedness and keeping the power doesn't bring the country any further. Art will survive!

Ziad was really proud and positive about this project, even though it did not last long. He told me a month later, ''Now I am an *art*ivist, because I make anti-capitalistic art and I am the only one who changed one of Solidere's buildings without their permission.''

[79] Informal conversation with Ziad, 10-02-2018

[80] See, for example: http://www.ctbuh.org/News/GlobalTallNews/tabid/4810/Article/6091/language/en-US/view.aspx; https://www.the961.com/arts-culture/artist-removed-curtains-from-burj-al-murr; http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/May-31/451443-curtains-close-on-tower-art-after-pressure.ashx

[81] Reactions to Ziad's photos of the 'Burj el Hawa' on Instagram, 14-05-2018

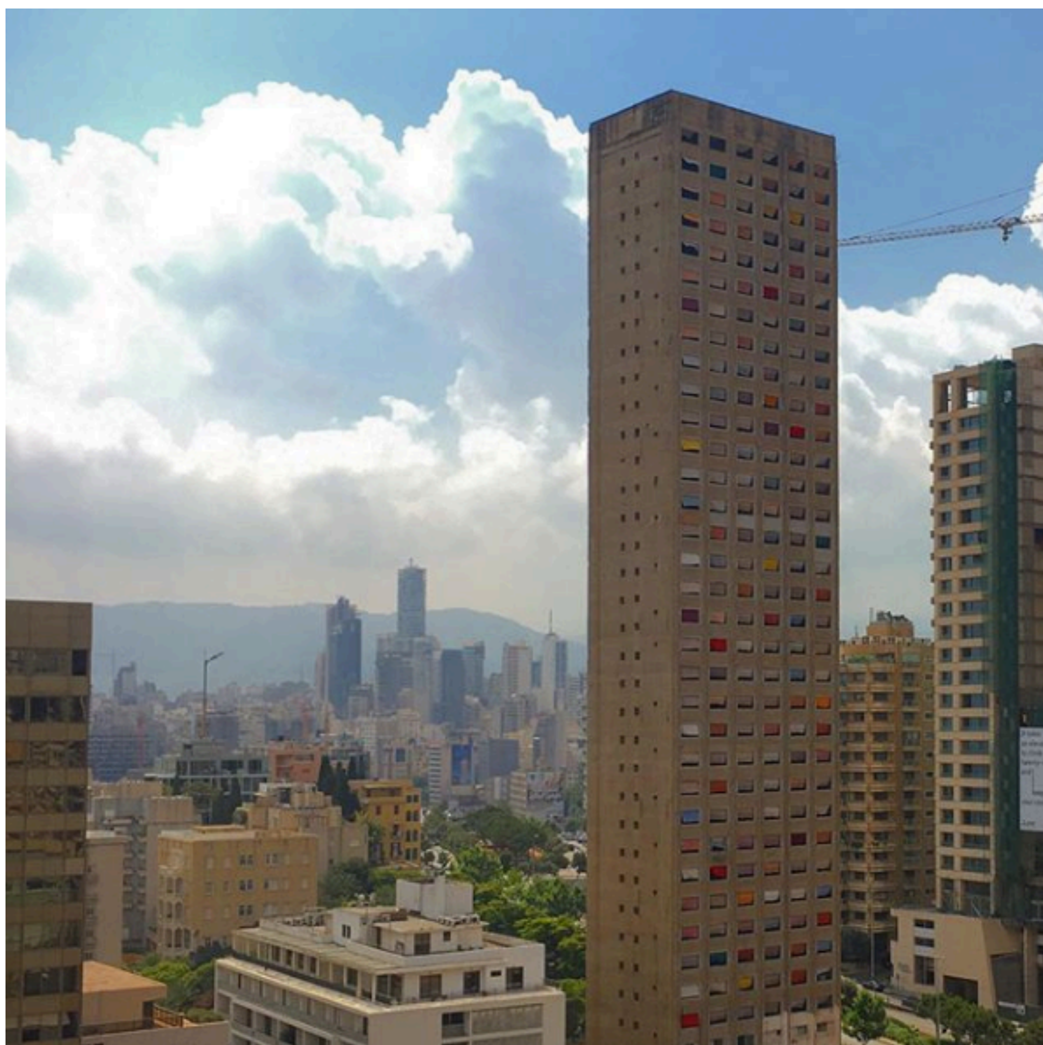

Image 2.7. ''Bourj el Hawa'' [Tower of the Wind, the name of the project]
- Photo taken by Ziad (14-05-2018)

Concluding thoughts: avoiding politics?

This chapter described how part of the post-war generation perceives and reacted on the national elections in Lebanon. Through the conscious choice of colors, ornaments, symbols and words, they work through all the three moments of Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad, and are able to create an urban environment that is not affiliated with the political and elitists landscape that excludes most of Beirut's youth from making the city. By painting over political posters and walls next to highways and by making 'anti-capitalistic' art, they translate the *lived space* of inhabitants of Beirut and showed that friction can occur when using space differently than imagined and designed by the *conceived* representation of space.[82] Instead of voting, they are using art to express their rights to the city of the *lived space.*

[82] As already explained earlier in this thesis, Lefebvre (1974) distinguishes three main moments of action in the production of space: : *representation of space, spatial practice* and *spaces of representation,* that are also referred to as 'the spatial

Even though most of Lebanon's post-war generation state they are 'not into politics,' their spatial practices demonstrate how politics can also be about the way people can present information and translate it in both ways: by not only talking the language of the academics and policy makers, but also to the people 'on the ground,' the *lived space* (by Arab words and images for example). In 'Space, politics and the political,' (2005) urbanist and human geographer Mustafa Dikeç examines the relation between space and politics by looking at the French philosopher Jacques Ranciere's conceptualizations of the notions of 'the police', the 'political' and 'politics'. Instead of only focusing on the presence of power relations in, and multiplicity of interests of, a space[83], Dikeç argues the following,

> Space becomes political in that it becomes the polemical place where a wrong can be addressed and equality can be demonstrated. It becomes an integral element of the interruption of the 'natural' (or, better yet, naturalized) order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no part in that order. The political, in this account, is signaled by this encounter as a *moment of interruption*, and not by the mere presence of power relations and competing interests (Dikeç 2005, 172, own emphasis).

The political, in this account, is thus signaled by this encounter in the moment of interruption of the 'naturalized' order: the one dictated by the neoliberal planning strategies of real estate companies - like Solidere - or the one dominated by the politicians. By (re)claiming the public spaces in Beirut, from painting on walls and political posters to creating temporary cycle lanes, the young artists produced political spaces with symbols and practices that are not affiliated to existing political parties and that could challenge the existing representation of space (Gunning and Baron 2014).

However, the dominant political and elitist discourse limits their artistic expressions when attempting to 'stay neutral.' Questionable is whether they really cross sectarian borders or tend primarily to avoid them (since their spatial practices reflect a location bias and their art avoid certain ornaments, colors and symbols). ''We know about our location bias and that we have to change our

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triad' of the *conceived, perceived* and lived. 'Representation of space' tends towards a system of verbal and intellectually worked out signs, and provides a concrete 'guideline for how thought can become action' (Lefebvre 1991, 165; Harvey 2001, 203). This space is often dominated by political rulers and economic interests (Larkin 2010). The second moment of action is the 'spatial practice', which refers to the everyday routines and experiences by the ones that are perceiving the space. The specific spatial performance of every individual citizen can only be empirically evaluated. The last one, 'spaces of representation' (also referred to as 'representational space') can be seen as the directly lived space. Through its associated images and symbols, it has a more symbolic value given by the people inhabiting the space and represents their ideals, desires and imagination (Lefebvre 1991 in Collins and Nisbet 2010)

[83] For more on the debates in the literature about what renders space political, see for example:

street art sometimes. Just by virtue of the nature of Lebanon’s political system and the intertwining of political and business interests, we face the difficulties of functioning when you are nonsectarian.’’[84] Just as Maroun’s platform project in the next chapter, who uses the support of the politicians, Nour and Nassim are also sometimes reaching out politicians and business interests to support them, ‘’We use street art to overcome discrimination’’ Nour told me, ‘’but we realize that we probably have to involve politicians and business interests in order to reach out to a broader part of our society even if we don’t agree with their politics. That is the difficult reality of being nonsectarian in a country like Lebanon.’’

Besides, while being against the hypocrisy of the dominant political and elitist discourse – linking politics to sectarianism, corruption and ‘the war lords that are leading the country’, they often have to use *wasta* in order to get permission for their work (Ziad’s father is the head of the Ministry of National Defense and Nassim sometimes has pay off the police). Being nonpolitical or nonsectarian is therefore hard to accomplish:

> We hate the government but we cannot live without it. We hate the sects and parties, but we cannot survive without it. If we are against everything, we won’t get any job.[85]

The next chapter is a case study wherein this tension is noticeable of on the one hand, trying to be nonpolitical but on the other, often only being able to survive or a succeed a public initiative when involving politicians or excluding the elite. I reflect on the young Beiruti’so tendency to create a safe and comfortable space for themselves on the stairs of the neighborhood Mar Mikhael.

[84] Interview with Nour, 22-02-2019

[85] Interview with Nassim, 25-05-2018

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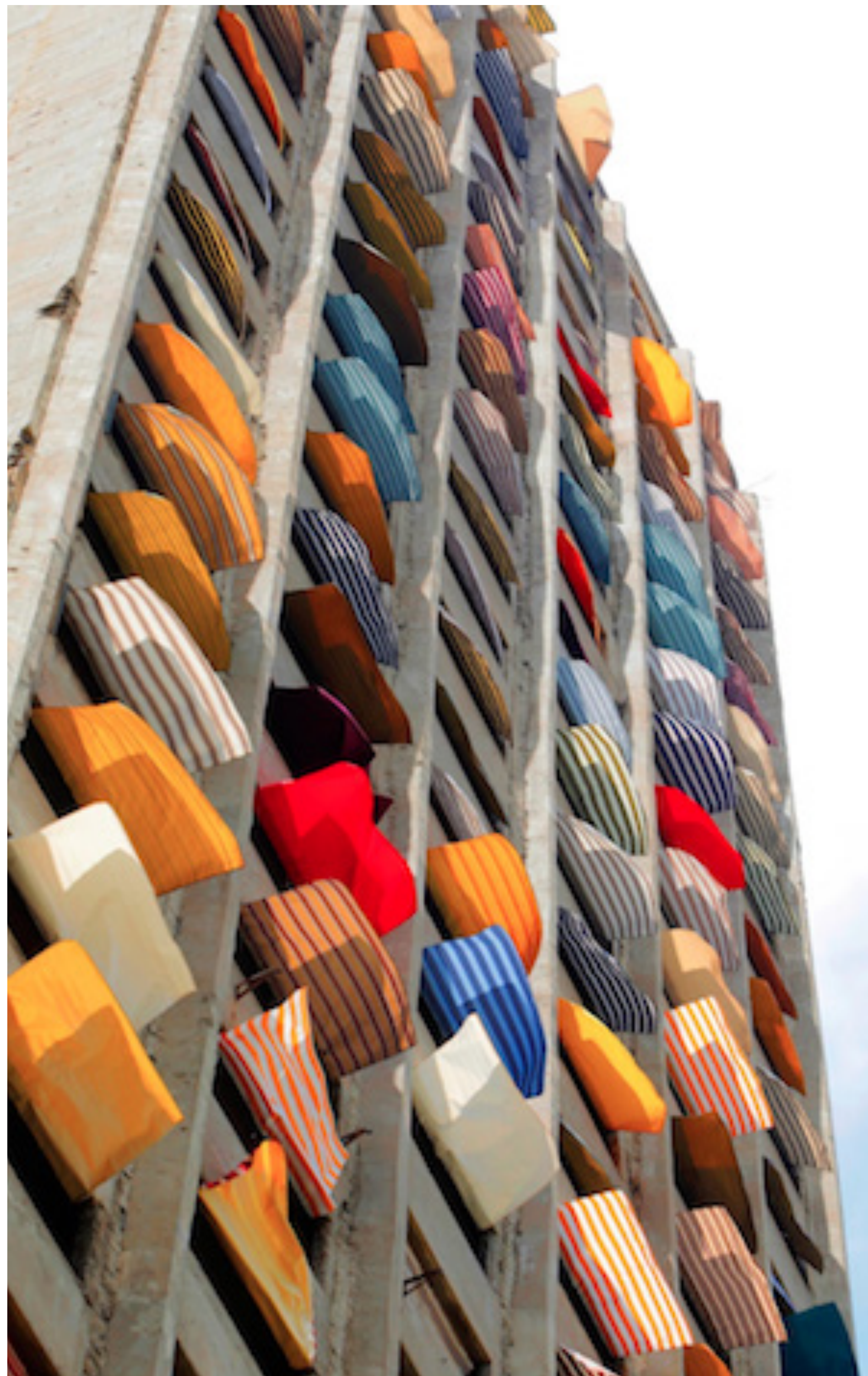
I BELONG TO MAR MIKHAEL, BECAUSE ITS COLORFUL



Chapter 3: ''I belong to Mar Mikhael, because it's colorful''[86]

Public art projects grace many Beirut neighborhoods. Here, a positive message climbs the stairs in Gemmayzeh, near Gouraud Street. People from all different backgrounds mix on Gouraud for the vibrant nightlife.
Tim Fitzsimons/NPR

Image 3.1. Facebook promotion of Mar Mikhael's stairs[87]

''In Beirut, you don't feel like you have the right to the whole city. You only have the right to a certain neighborhood. We cannot travel freely in a psychological way, it constrains us because of the intergenerational trauma and the division in religions and neighborhoods. We always feel a class difference; between the rich and poor people,'' Farez said to me just before I left Lebanon. ''I am from Dahieh, but I don't belong there. I belong to Hamra or Mar Mikhael, because it is colorful. Not only the walls, but also the people.''[88] This final chapter is about belonging to one specific neighborhood in Beirut: Mar Mikhael. Many street children, villagers and Syrian refugees I talked to referred to this area. With the cycling advocacy group, we painted a mural together with Syrian street children in

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[86] Issa, April 2018

[87] On their Facebook they say, ''This hub is for those who are from or live or like Achrafieh, , for all they are planning on moving to Ashrafieh, are coming for dinner... or for travelers wishing to get the most of their trip''. See: Facebook.com/AshrafiehStairs

[88] Informal conversation with Issa, 03-04-2018

Tripoli[89] and they told us that they were so happy that they now have made something that looked like the stairs in Mar Mikhael. A local shopkeeper in the Bdedoun village came to me to thank us for another mural we made there: ''Merci, merci, now our village looks like Mar Mikhael!'' [90] It is also the area where most of the young artists and activists in Beirut come to meet each other in bars and cafes and where most of their street art is made; Nassim and his crew's graffiti is seen here, a couple of the cycling group's colorful bicycles are painted on the houses on the main street *Armenia Street,* and Ziad's doodles are coloring the war traces in the older mansions and bridges of the neighborhood. With these young artists, I also attended events and talks that were organized in cafes in and around this area, discussing subjects ranging from cultural heritage, soft mobility and gentrification to sustainable design and fair trade fishing.

Mar Mikhael is also known as the party area of Beirut. ''Here we don't think, we just make art and the youth likes it when they are going out.''[91] ''When people are drunk and try to forget about the past and not think about tomorrow, I show them my art.''[92] I argue that Mar Mikhael can be seen as a safe 'public' space for most of the young urban activists, because they are amongst other artists and foreigners (working for international NGOs) and almost no political or sectarian tension is noticeable. I could not notice as much about the upcoming elections as in other areas**:** almost no political posters or billboards were seen in and around Armenia Street, and people from all different religious background would meet each other here. There are no road blocks nor military checkpoints[93] in this area, even though the EU office and the police office toward Gemmeyze[94] are close by.

However, during my stay, I found out that Mar Mikhael was already hit by Beirut's gentrification wave: a lot of construction was going on, the land prices were rising rapidly, and new fancy cafes with valet parking were claiming the sidewalks, attracting ''the same fancy people that would go to Downtown.''[95] I noticed that the young artists already found alternative ways to meet each other in the public ''away from the asphalt,''[96] ''the cars that eat the street''[97] and ''high heeled

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89 Northern city in Lebanon, near Syrian border

90 Together with members of the cycling advocacy group, we painted a wall for a 'reconciliation project' with a primarily school where children came to from two villages that fought each other during the civil war (Sunni Muslim against Maronite Christian)

91 Informal conversation with Nassim, 22-04-2018

92 Informal conversation with Ziad, 21-02-2018

93 See introduction

94 Adjunct neighborhood, see map in appendix

95 Informal conversation with Nour, 25-04-2018

96 Interview with Jawi, 12-04-2018

97 During the Bike to Work day, 25-04-2018

society,''[98] by meeting each other on the stairs that connect Armenia Street with Mar Mikhael's upper neighborhoods. ''We see this as an alternative public space'' someone said to me when I was having coffee in one of the cafes on the stairs called Sole Insight, ''you can order one coffee and sit here all day if you want.''[99] I argue that these stairs can be considered to be a 'replacement' of Beirut's shrinking public spaces, where Beirut's youth can meet regardless one's political and religious preferences. By showing the voices of the initiators of two public art projects in Mar Mikhael, I demonstrate how these young Beirutis come up for their ''rights to appropriate the city, to inhabit and creatively shape the urban environments in which we live'' (Mitchell 2011, 17). I also demonstrate how they feel most at home amongst other artists in a cosmopolitan area with global influences.

At one of the free film screenings in Dar el Nimer,[100] I watched the film *Submarine*, about a girl who decides to stay in Lebanon while everybody leaves the country because of the pollution and garbage crisis. The film resonates the Lebanese activists' view on the current situation. In an interview with the filmmaker by activist and blogger Joey Ayoub, they discuss:

> When we organized 'You Stink' we had to meet up in some houses or some cafes because simply occupying a square, like in Tahrir Square in Egypt, Gezi Park in Turkey, Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain, or Homs Square in Syria, is just not feasible**.** There literally isn't enough space even in Martyrs' Square for proper mobilization. [We nowadays] need to create private 'safe spaces' in absence of public ones.[101]

This final chapter is about creating this private 'safe space' on the one hand, but attracting gentrification on the other. ''When a city wants to gentrify, it first sends its artists.'' The interview with the café owners who see the 'stairs away from the asphalt' as an alternative public space where artists and foreigners can exchange cultures. They referred to countries like Nepal and cities in Europe, when imagining an 'ideal' public space.

''You have to feel accepted'': Belonging to an artistic, cosmopolitan, nonsectarian place

Mar Mikhael is considered one of Beirut's most distinctive neighborhoods, with low-rise buildings of no more than five stories, most of them characterized by different architectural styles. Out of the approximately 20,000 inhabitants, Mar Mikhael's residents are primarily elderly, long-time renters of whom some belong to a still-visible Armenian community, but the amount of young newcomers is

[98] Interview with Jawi, 12-04-2018

[99] Informal conversation with man, 03/02/2018

[100] Art gallery that screens 'independent' movies and documentaries on Tuesdays

[101] Interview by activist and blogger Joey Ayoub with filmmaker .. 2018

growing.[102] With all the street art, local shops, bars and art galleries and a lot of foreigners walking and cycling there, Mar Mikhael gave me a mixed feeling of being in the Middle East as well as being in Europe. This was something that attracted and created by the owners of cafes in Mar Mikhael and Gemmeyze. ''I was not allowed to play on the streets during the civil war, my parents were afraid of all the public spaces'', the owner of one of the cafes on Mar Mikhael's stairs told me, ''when I was older, I had the opportunity to travel to Europe and Nepal. And so when I came back to Lebanon, I had the opportunity to create a small Nepal, a small Europe, here on the stairs in Mar Mikhael.''[103] Another café owner told me the same, ''I want to bring the world here, at Sole Insight!''[104]

The neighborhood is known for its artistic vibe, attracting Lebanese and international artists. An Iranian artist who had an exhibition in one of the galleries in Armenia Street told me that here he could be more free than anywhere else in the Middle East, especially because his art was about gender and sexuality issues. Also Nassim moved to Beirut because he cannot be an artist in his village in the south. ''Here, it does not matter which religion you have, you are mixed with a diverse group of the society, and the people here are more open-minded then the village where I am from. Most of them are lower working class, the youth is conservative and afraid, and they don't understand I earn money with art. But here I can be an artist, no matter who you are talking to, rich or poor. It is always good to say that I am an artist.''[105]

Besides comparing to the differences between the capital and the rural areas in Lebanon, youth often compared Mar Mikhael with other neighborhoods in Beirut, like the high-class Downtown, or the more conservative Dahieh in the south. ''I met a guy, a communist, from Dahieh, a neighborhood that used to be a communist area. He told me that he felt constrained and bullied by the new inhabitants, which were primarily Hezbollah. I now see him often in Mar Mikhael, because in Dahieh, he does not feel any freedom of expression anymore. In Dahieh, there is this political tension all the time. Many buildings there are built without balconies in fear of snipers, still. And in Downtown, there is military presence and road blocks, which gives you the sense of unsafety, of being boxed in, you see?''[106] ''When you are with a group of more than five people, you are refused entry in Downtown

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[102] Mar Mikhael is home to a large population of adults over the age of 55 (47.7% of the population), a high proportion of renters compared to the national average (51.8% - a majority of whom pay old rents - compared to 29% nationwide) and a highly rooted population, with 51.4% having lived in the neighborhood for 30 years or more. A smaller population of single adults compared to the national average (30.2% compared to 56%) (Buccianti-Barakat and Hariri 2015).

[103] Informal conversation with Michel, owner of the Grand Meshmosh Hotel, located on the St Nicholas Stairs in Gemmeyze.

[104] Jawi, interview

[105] Interview with Nassim, 28-2-2018

[106] Interview Nassim, 25-04-2018

and organizing something on Martyr's square is not allowed. The government is trying to isolate certain people from certain places and restricting activists to come together.'' [107]

This is different in Mar Mikhael, according to most of the young activists and artists. ''I think that the politicians yet don't care about areas like Hamra and Mar Mikhael. When I came to Mar Mikhael when I was seventeen, the politicians were clearly not interested in this area. They didn't fix the roads, didn't fix the walls, it was all in poor condition most of the time, so we painted everywhere!''[108] ''Now, the only political thing you notice in Mar Mikhael is the election asphalt. Because of the elections in May you can see that the streets are suddenly being paved by the politicians who had to be responsible for this neighborhood. They want people to vote for them again and therefore paved the roads last minute.''[109]

Gentrification wave: ''The cars and bars eat the streets''

While Mar Mikhael is still a more 'poor' neighborhood and a hub for artists, and therefore different than its surrounding gentrified areas Downtown, Monot and Gemmeyze, whose original identity is changed by the gentrification 'wave' (for map, see appendix I); young artists moved to these neighborhoods because of the cheap apartments and transformed it into livable and beautiful areas.[110] Yet, these areas attracted tourists and more wealthy people, often Lebanese diaspora and people from the Gulf countries, and subsequently real-estate companies. This caused increased land prices and rents, and evicted old residents from their houses, in search for a cheaper living (Gerbal et al. 2016). Mona used to be one of them, ''I lived in so many neighborhoods in Beirut, Christian or Muslim, it did not really matter.[111] But now I cannot afford to live in Beirut anymore, I don't earn enough money as a dancer. I earn a bit extra with my second hand shop near the Geitawi stairs, but I it takes me more than an hour to get there by bus every day.''[112] Likewise, Issa has to work five days a week as a bartender in Mar Mikhael to be able to live by himself in Hamra.[113] ''That means I cannot go to university anymore. But I don't want to live at my parents' place in Dahieh, where I am from, but I don't feel like I belong there. I cannot do whatever I want. I belong to Hamra and Mar Mikhael, so I

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[107] Informal conversation with Bob, 25-04-2018

[108] Informal conversation with Nassim, 10-02-2018

[109] Informal conversation with Ayoub, 25-04-2018

[110] For example, Monot was heavily damaged during the war (lying just a few meters away from the former demarcation line) and lost a substantial portion of its original population, leaving the neighborhood with a large supply of cheap apartments.

[111] See chapter 1

[112] Interview with Mona, 20-03-2018

[113] Another trending neighborhood, see map in appendix

have to do it this way.''[114]

Around 2006, the gentrification wave spread towards Mar Mikhael, and its human scale and the general urban fabric of Mar Mikhael are threatened by this gentrification, specifically through the construction of several new high-rise apartments, as well as an increase in rents.[115] The few shared, public spaces, like the streets, sidewalks, stairs, and small public gardens, are often used as terraces and valet parking for private bars and restaurants or build upon by new constructions, leaving little room for residents to walk, particularly at night (Gerbal et al. 2016).

The shrinking of public spaces in Mar Mikhael was noticeable in daily encounters with my interlocutors. One day when Nour and I tried to find a place to park our bicycles, a young man came to us to say that we were not allowed to park it on the sidewalk, because it was for a café's valet parking. ''You see, the cars and cafes are eating the streets'' Nour said, she was shocked, ''Gentrification is spreading! (…) My mum stood here the other day and pointed towards the new restaurant in that new building next to the Vendome Stairs in Mar Mikhael. She was surprised and said to us, 'look what a beautiful building!' So I took a photo with my mum standing in front of this new built restaurant: 'my mum embracing gentrification!' Since you arrived here in Beirut, Anna, there are suddenly so many new large rising towers and complexes replacing the beautiful old mansions in this neighborhood. They just popped out of the ground, in only three months!''[116] ''This means that a lot of our art is destroyed too, every week the municipality or new café owners are painting over it. But I don't really care, I just paint over it again.''[117] ''I know that our murals are attracting tourists too, so I want to focus less on street art now and focus more on events like Bike-to-Work.''[118]

Initiating a public platform: ''We don't want our project to be political''

Given the fact that most of Beirut's residents don't have the right to vote in their districts, since they are registered in their native village,[119] they have no democratic say in changing Beirut's urban fabric. Besides, public initiatives to change the urban fabric just like creating new public spaces or reusing the unused train station are difficult to get permission for, since Beirut's state administration is fragmented

[114] Informal conversation with Issa, 21-03-2019

[115] In 2014, the New Rent Law was passed that calls for a gradual liberalization of old rent contracts, as well as the creation of a compensation fund, and two tenant-vacating scenarios, both of which would involve compensation (Gerbal et al., 2016).

[116] Informal conversation with Farez, 02-04-2018

[117] Informal conversation with Nassim, 21-04-2018. 2018

[118] Informal conversation with Nour, 03-03-2018, 2018

[119] See chapter 1

among numerous actors and regulatory bodies.[120] Projects proposed by the municipality therefore face many obstacles due to this inefficient administration.[121] Overall, it seems as if political fragmentation and conflicts of interest among stakeholders make the implementation of any project unlikely. How else could public initiatives be implemented in a neighborhood like Mar Mikhael, besides "corrupt[ing] the ministers"? (Gerbal et al. 2016, 15). However, I came in contact with Nour's cousin, Maroun, who found ways to use the upcoming elections to initiate a neighborhood art project.

Maroun's public art platform

In the summer of 2017, Maroun (26), architect from a village in the north of Beirut,[122] together with Daphne (25), French architecture student and Ayoub (31), DJ and artist from Aley,[123] came up with the idea to create a space for everyone, they told me, to:

> make art and play music, outside and for free, because that is one of the most important things that Beirut is missing. Mar Mikhael is a place where we all feel like we are living, *yanneh,* every one of us sees each other here almost every day. *Bas* (but) still, we don't want the residents to think that we are the outsiders who just transform their neighborhood without their consent. I know that the neighborhood gets gentrified. I know some young people having trendy jobs in design and at NGOs, but also older people who live there since forever. We want all of them to be part of it.

Ayoub found a small platform on a railroad crossing near Mar Mikhael's former (now unused) train station. ''This time we wanted to do it differently than before, when we just claimed the Ashrafieh bridge without permission,'' Maroun told me. ''We wanted to do it legally by first informing the municipality about our plans. We are advised to hand in the proposal before the elections, because then the parties would do their best to work on it in order to get more votes.''

Just as I described in the former chapter, Maroun also told me many times that he did not want his ''project to be political.'' It all started when a man approached Ayoub because of the music he was a DJ in a bar in Mar Mikhael and they started to talk about our art project.

[120] For instance, the authorization to demolish a classified building comes from the Director General of Antiquities, the Superior Council of Urbanism awards building permits for large projects (of 3,000 sq. meters or more), and noise regulation is tackled by the local police.

[121] The train station of Mar Mikhael serves as one example. The train station is the property of the Ministry of Public Transport, yet so far it has launched no projects for its redevelopment.

[122] Village inhabitants are primarily Christian

[123] Village on the southeast side of Beirut, primarily Druze.

> He was really enthusiastic and appeared to be an architect too and a kind of personal advisor for Nicholas Sehnaoui, deputy from the Michel Aoun party. The orange party, you know?[124] Well, he gave Ayoub the phone number of Nicholas Sahneini and told him that part of their party's election program is focused on public space in Beirut One.[125] It was such a coincidence, all of this. So we met up with Nicholas and he said that he wanted to help in this. But we made him clear that we did not want this project to be political. The party would claim that our project is their project, of their party! Everybody would think we are part of their political party, no way! He understood this and gave us the phone number of Nadim Gemayel, of the Kataeb party,[126] the dark blue color. It is the son of the prime-minister Bashir Gemayel who was assassinated in 1982. He was very different from Nicholas, who was the type of politician that constantly says ''Time is money!'' He told us his party is also working on street art kind of projects, so this was perfect for us.''[127]

I saw Maroun again in Amsterdam, a month after the Lebanese elections. Maroun told me that they started to bring life into their project (see photos in appendix II). ''Friends joined us with cleaning the platform and even the municipality helped us taking the garbage away! We made flyers to spread throughout the neighborhood, stating 'come and join us! We want to create a small public project in your neighborhood!'. ''My idea now is that we will create a nice and humble place on the stairs of Mar Mikhael, just like Sole Insight on the stairs.''[128]

The stairs as an alternative public space

The stairs that Maroun referred to are the eight major stairs (see appendix I for a map, and appendix III for photos) that connect Mar Mikhael with its conjunct upper neighborhoods (some of them used to continue towards the seashore). The alleyways were arbitrarily built by local residents to connect their houses with the train station, most of them even date back to the Ottoman era. I walked these stairs every day since I lived in Geitawi, southeast of Mar Mikhael, passing through Lebanon's different (but primarily Christian) communities who are sitting outside in shared gardens, drinking coffee or smoking argileh. Just as the relatively new highways connect the different neighborhoods for cars, the old stairs still connect most of Beirut's neighborhoods for pedestrians. It feels like here is a part of Beirut that is unchanged since Lebanon's 'Golden Era' and many personal memories are shared by

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[124] The Free Patriotic Movement, is officially a secular party but most of the people refer to it as a Maronite party. However, the party support base includes a minority of Shi'a since they ally with Hezbollah for the upcoming elections.

[125] Beirut 1 is the district where Mar Mikhael and Ashrafieh are part of, see appendix chapter 2.

[126] It is the Lebanese Phalanges party, originally a Maronite nationalist youth movement.

[127] Interview with Maroun, 29-03-2018

[128] Informal conversation with Maroun, 08-06-2018

residents. Unlike the recent destruction of a lot of Mar Mikhael's old heritage houses, the stairs are owned by local residents that refuse to sell the stairs to real estate companies. ''It's perhaps the perfect symbol to the changing fabric of the city'', tour guide and student at the ALBA university wrote on tourist blog about Lebanon, ''these stairs are a testimony of what the city was, our shared memory that's at risk of being forgotten.''[129]

I interviewed Khaled (42), initiator of a Lebanese NGO who organizes advocacy campaigns that promote public space and protect cultural heritage in Lebanon. Every week, Khaled walks a part of Beirut's stairs with a group of Lebanese and foreign people to let them experience the ambiances of the different neighborhoods in Beirut. ''It's nice to show people our city through these public, or *yanneh,* accessible stairs, to cross all the neighborhoods we have in Beirut[130]. We have to talk and meet each other in public space, and our city needs these cultural bridges for social inclusion (…) *Akid,* walking the stairs is good for my health!'' he laughs, ''but I am studying psychology and know the importance of communication with each other in the public, it is really good for our society's psychological health!''[131] Also Nour told me the same motivation behind the cycling initiatives: ''by bike, you are more likely to come in contact with all the different people that characterize the Lebanese society, you are there in the open air and people laugh and want to talk to you. When I am in a car, this is just not possible. I want to break that barrier!''[132] The importance of communication and seeing each other in the public was also the reason behind the art projects on the Vendome Stairs in Mar Mikhael that are organized every summer by Jawi (30). Jawi is the owner of one of the cafes on the Vendome Stairs, called Sole Insight. It is a café where many Lebanese artists and activists meet each other, for preparations like the Bike-to-Work event and the You-Stink protests. ''Before and after the You Stink demonstrations, we came together in Mar Mikhael, in cafés like Sole Insight, to discuss what was needed and process what just happened.''[133] I interviewed Jawi on the stairs.

Jawi's Sole Insight

I just stand still with a smile.
Watching their anger, their suicide,
blaming me to be the burden of their lives,
the burden of their size,

[129] See https://www.lebtivity.com/event/tour-discover-the-mar-mikhael-stairs and http://www.lebanontraveler.com/en/magazine/lebanon-traveler-stepping-through-the-eras/

[130] There are many other stairs in Beirut, also in the Northern and Western part of the capital

[131] Interview Khaled, 09-03-2018

[132] Informal conversation with Nour, 14-04-2018

[133] Informal conversation with Mahmoud, activist, 03-04-2018

blaming me to be the only confusion of the ground.
The only opium of their world.
And I, I just stand still with a smile.
Why they run? Like heroes, like victims!
Starving for freedom, like revolution of stones,
rolling over me.
Innocent and white, tight and white!
Running for the kill, for the glory of their faith.
And I, I just stand still with a smile.

Jawi looks at me and Issa after finishing his poem and smiles, ''Would you guys like a cardamom coffee? My mum just brought some fresh cardamom from the market!'' He walks into the café where can see the shelves full of art and philosophy books and traditional Arabic jazz records. Around me, the people on the wooden stools are reading magazines and books, talking to each other in English, French, Arabic and Spanish. A man with a big moustache and small round glasses on the tip of his nose, is looking intensively at the painting he is making. Inside the café, songs of Fairuz are played through the speakers. Sole Insight is a bit of a hippy place, I realize, run by bearded intellectuals. The setting gives me a vibrant feeling, as if I am abroad and home at the same time. Next to Sole Insight, there is another restaurant with a totally other vibe. It is 'cleaner', with a big television screen above the entrance, broadcasting a football match. All the tables are the same, and I notice that at Sole Insight it is always crowded, while there is nobody at the neighbor's terrace. Suddenly the music stops; electricity cut, but people around me don't seem to notice. They continue their conversations and readings. I feel and hear the wind, the parasols on the terrace flutter. I can hear the constant noise of traffic and construction from down below on Armenia Street. A school bell rings. Two boys are coming up, speaking in Hindi. One is wearing a green jacket, the other one a black and white striped blouse 'tshkk tsssh', opening a Pepsi Cola. An old guy with a green cap, slowly comes down from the stairs, step by step, looking around him, I hear his heavy shoes every time he takes another step higher up. He holds a wooden prayer chain in is hand and looks to his left, towards me. I smile to him and nod my head. He waits two seconds and nods his head too.

'In the summer, I am just a smiling clown!'' Jawi gives us some warm coffee. ''I go to the streets to provoke new reactions about life and values in this society, by just smiling to people on the streets. Especially in traffic; in traffic you see a thousand people and I just watch them. It is good to observe all their reactions while sitting in a car or bus. Most of the time the drivers are angry, but sometimes they do unpredictable things. I study them for my future theatre plays and try to catch things of the

Lebanese daily life that I can benefit from by writing down all the different reactions of people on the streets. This is how I started the Sole Insight café and the art on the stairs.'' Jawi tells me that he choose to start a café with art projects here, on the Vendome Stairs, because it is here where he grew up, where he feels home, and where he thinks that an ideal public space can be created: through ''exchanging culture'' and ''promoting art instead of politics.''

> Here, I try to attract people with different interests and make them wonder. They are surprised, when there is electricity, when there is a free parking spot, when there is free art! The public space is a like a stage where you see all possible things; you see grocery man, taxi driver, political leader, business man, weddings, conflicts, fireworks! *Yanneh,* I don't only mean park and stairs, also asphalt. The space where I cannot get into it is the outside, the public space. Public space is all what is accessible. I mean the garbage, the pavement, the light post! I can make the light post aesthetic, but make you wonder! Provoke wonder! Even these new buildings and new paved stairs can be beautiful.

Due to the construction of a new apartment block, the colors of Vendome Stairs are gone, ''to clear the sight for the new inhabitants.'' I ask Jawi what he has seen changing, since he was born in one of the houses on the stairs:

> I remember going to the cinema, but they destroyed it. We always played here, but now the Lebanese children are sitting inside, behind their phones and play stations. Only Syrian children still play here on the stairs. My parents wanted to live in a house away from the asphalt, but the asphalt color is now brought here. We buried the jungle under tons of asphalt and we call it home […] This is why so many Lebanese people want to leave this country; because of capitalism, because of our corrupt government, because of all the garbage everywhere, but I don't want to leave. I bring the world here, at Sole Insight, my little escape, where artists and foreigners exchange culture. Lebanese have a bad name, they are all involved in political stuff. It already starts when we are young. Teenagers are always searching for an image of identification, especially in Lebanon it is all about politics [which means] about religion, about hating other communities. Kids listen to those political songs, buying flags of political parties.

''We all did!'' Issa[134], who sits in front of me, agrees, ''I was one of them!''. ''You see?'' Jawi continues seriously, ''Teenagers especially are sensitive for things outside. Politics should be beautiful, about art and culture. So let's create a space of art as a public space to change that image!'' Jawi laughs enthusiastically. It all started when Jawi ran a café at the AUB.

> I had a business where I made money, but the students were so political and the only thing that the people around me wanted was to make more money. I did not feel like I belonged to

[134] From Dahieh, a primarely Shi'a neighborhood (see chapter 1 for Issa's background)

that society, I did not even write poetry anymore. For years later, in 2008, I started the domain of psychology and started a masters in philosophy of art in 2011. One day, me and my girlfriend where sitting here on the stairs, near our house, and she pointed towards a shop and asked: ''why not making a place of art and poetry here, put all your books and enjoy it with everyone?''. So that's what I did! I opened a café in that shop and decided to name it after the title of my thesis I was writing, 'Sole Insight', about art in the *quotidien*, the everyday life in public space.

Since then, Jawi created an open gallery on the Vendome Stairs around the same time that other stairs in Mar Mikhael were colored by local NGOs. Every summer, Jawi hosts forty local and international artists to come and paint.

> The idea is that we have around twenty-four stands with paintings on the stairs, and that the art is not for sale. I want to put the art outside of the private, outside the closed environments like galleries.'' Besides, Jawi organizes a festival every September, called: ''Us, the Moon and the Neighbors'', together with a local street theater group. They turn the stairs, including the balconies and rooftops of their neighbors into an open stage where dancers, musicians and theater artists perform. ''So many different people attended the festival, from all ages and backgrounds.''[135]. I have the permission of the municipality, because we don't sell anything of the art and the festival is for free. I had to promise the municipality, no nudity, no politics. And I did not want graffiti, because that already exists on the streets.

The majority of the audience were friends of the artists. ''But my main target was everyday passengers that did not stop at Sole Insight, because at Sole Insight there are mainly Europeans and artists. One day, a group of construction workers passed by and they were shocked as if they just hit a wall!'' Jawi laughs and continues enthusiastically, ''it was so good to let a construction worker stop at an art piece! Many passers-by asked whether the artists were Lebanese. When I told them some of them were Syrian, they were surprised, because the Lebanese only know the Syrian workers, a negative stereotype if you ask me. They often don't know the intellectuals and artists from Syria.''

At the end of our conversation I started to ask myself to what extent he really wants to surprise 'the others'. ''I almost never see those, what you call, 'high-heeled society' here at Sole. You said you want to include whole society in art?'' I ask him. ''Yes in art, but not in Sole Insight. Sole is my little escape, where I travel to Europe. I don't want to go abroad, I found a way to bring the world here at Sole Insight! I only feel that I'm in Lebanon when I have to go to the market. Then there is the chaos of Lebanon.''

[135] See Appendix IX for photos

Concluding thoughts: feeling safe amongst global trends?

I discovered that the privately owned stairs in Beirut can be seen as an open space that are used by the young generation to ''break Lebanon's barriers'' and as a ''cultural bridge for social inclusion, to talk and meet each other in public space.'' I have shown how they construct and negotiate feelings of belonging through actively using and (re)shaping this part of the city with artistic practices and including thereby tourists, neighbors and passers-by. The neighborhood initiatives of Maroun and Jawi are coming close to the ideal of a vibrant, interactive public space[136]: they involve local residents, attract people with different interest and try to make them wonder by challenging people's prejudices, according them. Through art installations, they are attempting to give the next generation another image of identification.

By using the stairs as an open urban space whose ''legal categorization as public is not met or is ambiguous'', they claim their and others' rights to the city by ''stipulating the right to meetings and gatherings (…) providing a forum for exchange, interaction and of collective being'' (Iveson 2011, Harb 2013, Lefebvre 1970 in Zieleniec 2017, 9). I think that both the projects are a beautiful example of Lefebvre's call for citizens to appropriate the city's open spaces and have a stake in its process of spatial production by claiming it as a right. In ''the Right to Write the City'', sociologist Andrezj Zieleniec (2017, 10) writes, ''to live in an open, creative, democratic space of a truly inclusive urban society is one which encourages playful expression and communication, artistic and aesthetic interventions in, on and through urban space. It was activities and events that take place in the street that for Lefebvre was of crucial importance.'' (Zieleniec 2016, 9, 10).

A little escape: belonging to a foreign neighborhood?

The notion of 'belonging' is hard to describe as it often feels natural to our sense of being. "Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home.'" (Yuval-Davies 2011, 10) Logically, whether someone feels at home at a place, can be influenced by many aspects (Hage 1997). According to Lefebvre, it is not so much the physical space itself, but rather *what the space represents*, that determines whether residents feel that they belong there (Lefebvre 1974). For the young Beiruti's in this thesis, the space they feel the most comfortable in is the space that *represents* global influences and foreign ambiances. In reimagining Beirut by creating a safe space on the stairs, they are (again) distancing themselves from the current way of politics and city making, creating a 'nonpolitical' space that does *not represent* the whole Lebanese society, outside of ''the chaos of Lebanon''.

The fact that their models are coming from elsewhere, with nostalgia towards Beirut's pre-war situation, is because those are the ones that gives them hope in reimagining Beirut: it represents

[136] See introduction (Poposki 2011, Nagle 2017, Bernard 2014 and Mitchell 2003).

models that are at least better than the current dominant way of city-making (like Solidere). However, as seen in this chapter, the owners of the cafes on the stairs are attracting foreigners and creating a ''little escape.'' Critically, I have not met a lot of youth from the southern, more conservative, in the cafes on the stairs. Questionable therefore is what kind of impact they have on changing the current rehabilitation models and society, especially because they cannot stop the gentrification wave – which they themselves are part of as well.

استنتاجات CONCLUSION

Conclusion

''Hey miss! Would you like to capture Lebanon?'' Three boys of about twelve years old approach me and point towards my camera that hangs around my shoulder. It is my last day in Beirut and I walk through Armenia Street, passing by the murals of my Lebanese friends, to indeed capture my last images of Lebanon. I give the camera to my friend to take a photo of me and the three boys. They giggle. I ask them what their names are. ''My name is Joey'' the tallest one answers, ''and they are Mohammad and Mohammad, they are Muslim!'' He puts his arms around his two friends as they continue, laughing.

This image pops up every time when I think about Beirut, a snapshot of Lebanon's youth: knowing each other's religious backgrounds, but nevertheless coming together in public, here in Mar Mikhael. With my research I have tried to understand how Beirut's post-war generation responds to the political struggles to belong to the rehabilitated city, in the three months prior to the national elections. I showed how street art is used as an instrument to express their rights to the city and to collectively re-appropriate the urban space and thus articulate themselves as being an urban citizen. Unlike Solidere's failed (and fake?) attempt to ''provide a familiar and comforting physical environment, one that reinforces the citizens of belonging'' and *''an image, a memory, a place that honors tradition,''* (Solidere 1994: vol. I, original emphasis, in Hourani 2011, 148) I demonstrated the young activists and artists' endeavors to create this environment, bringing back the colors and memories of the past in the *tabula rasa*, attempting to change the status quo of a fragmented, segregated city where only the elite have the right to.

Alternative public spaces to foster social inclusion

In search for an open space which is coming close to the ideal of a public space, they found different spatial practices on privately owned land to replace the city's shrinking public spaces. The promoting of cycling and the organizing of art performances on Beirut's stairs gives citizens the opportunity to cross the neighborhoods of Beirut and the diverse Lebanese society in the open air, which is like a ''cultural bridge for social inclusion.'' Just as seen in other (Arab) cities around the world, they express ideas against the neoliberal and often corrupt way of top-down city making, seeing gentrification as something for the country's elite – a group that they do not want to be associated with, nor spend time with.

Global trends in re-imagination: Appadurai's scapes

How and for whom has this group of Lebanon's post-war generation created different social *image* than from that put forward by the politicians and the capitalist class state apparatus (Harvey 2008,

941, own emphasis)? Most of the Lebanese youth in this thesis are artists and intellectuals who are often foreign-educated and have the ability to travel, bringing certain global ideas back to their own homes about how people should claim space in cities: the local cycling NGO often takes cycling advocacy groups in other cities in the Arab and Western world as their examples, the graffiti artists are using Japanese anime or Disney like images, café owners on Mar Mikhael's stairs literally aspire to ''create a small Europe''. Analyzing the use of street art in the Lebanese context and the influences of global street art practices and styles, has to take into consideration the complexity of global interactions that anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes as having a ''complex, transgressive and disjunctive order'' (Appadurai 2000, 32) as globalization implies fluid and irregular flows of people, technologies, finance, media and ideas. These flows, as seen in this case of Beirut, leave their traces on urban interventions, giving them a cosmopolitan dimension through the cultural mélange of local and global elements (Nicoarea 2012).

In line with notions of Benedict Anderson's *imagined communities,* Appadurai (re)developed the concept of social imaginary of cultural activity that is central to all forms of agency and composed of five 'scapes' of global cultural flows. Street art is comprised in these flows as a part of what Appadurai calls 'mediascape', being a fluid means of information production and distribution, often brought forward by human motion (diaspora, tourists, refugees, etc.): the 'ethnoscape'. Mediascapes tend to be image-centered, narrative-based account of strips of reality […] transformed into a series of elements out of which scripts can be formed of *imagined lives,* their own as well as those of others living in other places […] helping to constitute narratives of the 'other' and proto-narratives of *possible lives* (Appadurai 1990, 301, own emphasis). As seen in this thesis, the group of young Beirutis re-imagines their city by often idealizing other cosmopolitan cities, and the ones that have traveled are bringing back foreign ideas about art, public space and social mobility. The cycling promotion group's idealistic images of bicycles, the mural with Nassim and his crew's faces as politicians or Farez' Playback Theater, can be considered as 'ideoscapes'. Ideoscapes are also concatenations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and, in this case of Beirut's artists and activists, the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it. They are composed of ideas, terms and images including the terms 'rights' (to the city), 'freedom' (of expression, to talk about the war) and 'democracy' that are used all over the world, applying them to their local contexts (Appadurai 1990, 300). These global flows of ideas are giving the young Beiruti's hope in changing their current situation.

However, questionable is to what extent their provocation can be successful in their country. First of all, the Playback theater, the group of graffiti artists, the cycling activists and the cafes and art festivals on Mar Mikhael's stairs are all part of creating a safe and comfortable space for themselves,

amongst other middle and upper class people, often in areas where no political tension is noticeable and ''where each other's religious backgrounds are not an issue at all.''[137] Most of the young artists insisted to be nonpolitical, nonsectarian and did not want to be amongst the elite nor wanted (or were able) to artistically express themselves in southern areas like Dahieh. This brings me to Shirlow's view[138] on the production of space: wherein people constantly mark out space as 'safe' and 'unsafe' to certain people at particular times (Shirlow 2012). Some graffiti artists I spoke to said that they only 'tagged' neighborhoods like Mar Mikhael and Hamra because it was ''like their second home'' (since their university was around the corner so they felt safe to tag there). Yet, in the southern suburbs I haven't seen any street art and even almost no political posters (especially not in and around the camps) because of the police and Hezbollah and Amal militia's dominancy.[139] Critically, probably a lot of Beirut's post-war generation (like in the south) would not attend the Playback theater, watch the free screenings of my interlocutors' documentaries in the cultural houses, have drinks on the stairs in Mar Mikhael or feel attracted to be part of the art projects.

This brings me to the 'successfulness' of their projects: to what extent do they reach the broader audience – the one that is outside of the bubble of people that agrees with their ideas. According to Nour:

> We have a lot of 'well educated' people who oppose the idea of cycling or find it foreign, and a lot of 'local' people could also oppose our ideas but they agree. To overcome discrimination, we reached people through street art. Of course there is a location bias, since we paint more in the areas we know best, but we are trying to reconnect people with what their cities were before car domination. Our ideas are based on public space and urban living in the oriental world and on how Lebanon used to be before the war; more shared spaces like streets and public gardens as a place for commerce and political gatherings. Bicycles were a very big part of urban movement in many places apart from the Western world before car domination, especially in East Asia and Egypt and the Levant.

Nassim reminded me of the 'hybridity' of Lebanon's culture, one that ''always had been occupied and therefore influenced by many other cultures, whether it was Ottoman, Arab, French, and so forth. (…) Our language is a mix, everything else is, and especially now due to the internet, we can see this being

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[137] See chapter 1

[138] Based on fieldwork in Belfast, Shirlow tried to understand the reproduction of ethno-sectarianism in Northern Ireland and discovered how the people created mental maps that informed them about risk, victimhood and danger. He argues that the perpetuation of ethno-sectarian conflicts reminds us that cultural 'homogenization' and mass consumption, that links between ethno-sectarian separation and fear, remain central to the logic and explanation of violent enactment and cultural polarization.

[139] Informal conversation with Issa and Nassim.

reflected in our graffiti too: we use a mix of the Latin and Arab alphabet, a mix of Middle Eastern, Western and Asian figures, you see?''[140] Both Nour and Nassim told me that their work is not a ''copy-paste'' kind of situation, they are consciously try to adapt it to their 'local' context in order to make ''people connect to how Lebanon used to be''[141].

Limitations and future research

Since this research is based on only three months of fieldwork, it gives only an idea of a small subgroup of Lebanon's post-war generation. Further research is needed in order to understand to what extent their ideas of urbanism resonate with the other part of the post-war generation and Lebanon's broader society and to understand better what it means that their models are coming from elsewhere. With my anthropological research I observed the young Beiruti's tendency to collectively remember the civil war, but further research has to be done in order to understand to what degree this will ''rework and renegotiate within present contexts, discursive spheres, and everyday encounters'' by the broader society (Larkin 2010, 618). Furthermore, with regard to the young activists' tendency to create a safe space on privately owned land, more in-depth research is preferable to comprehend to what extent these artists and intellectuals have created a ''rescued'' area that becomes a more artistic ghetto within a fragmented city.

Given the global nature of the political agenda that shapes the current urban processes, with social movements coming up for their rights to the city in cities all over the world, this ethnography does as well contribute to the understanding of the neoliberal city concepts as a model as a model that has been applied worldwide. The theoretical insights that emerge from this thesis can be used to inspire the understanding of urban space in Beirut and in other (postwar) cities of the Middle East and beyond. I would encourage to explore hereby the open spaces that are not only officially recognized as 'public' (Iveson 2011, Harb 2015). This will allow us to discuss the development direction of our cities and to offer solution to address growing inequalities.

''Before I die, I want Lebanon to…''

Just as the words written on the bridge of my introduction, these initiatives reveal the emerge of new young voices actively concerned about their rights to the city. Whether it is because of mere beautification strategies or because of circulating a critical understanding of a public space, and even though they are against politics but are using *wasta* in order to get permission, they are able to initiate at least a debate about the importance of an open urban space and the remembrance of the war to

[140] Informal conversation with Nassim, 26-02-2019

[141] Informal conversation with Nour, 22-02-2019

reflect on Lebanon’s current situation. I hope that their transcending (and perhaps nonsectarian) attempts continue to promote the importance of social cohesion in deep-seated segregated Lebanon amongst the country’s new generation.

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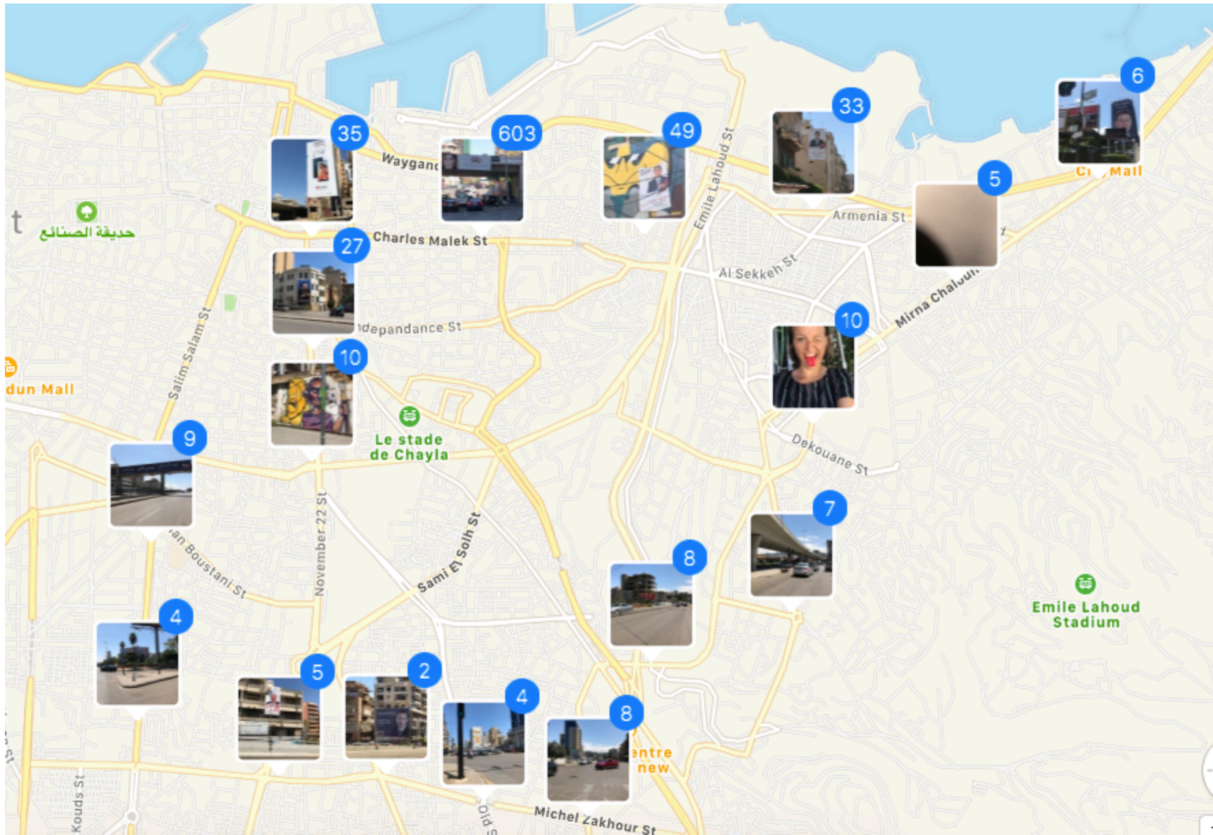
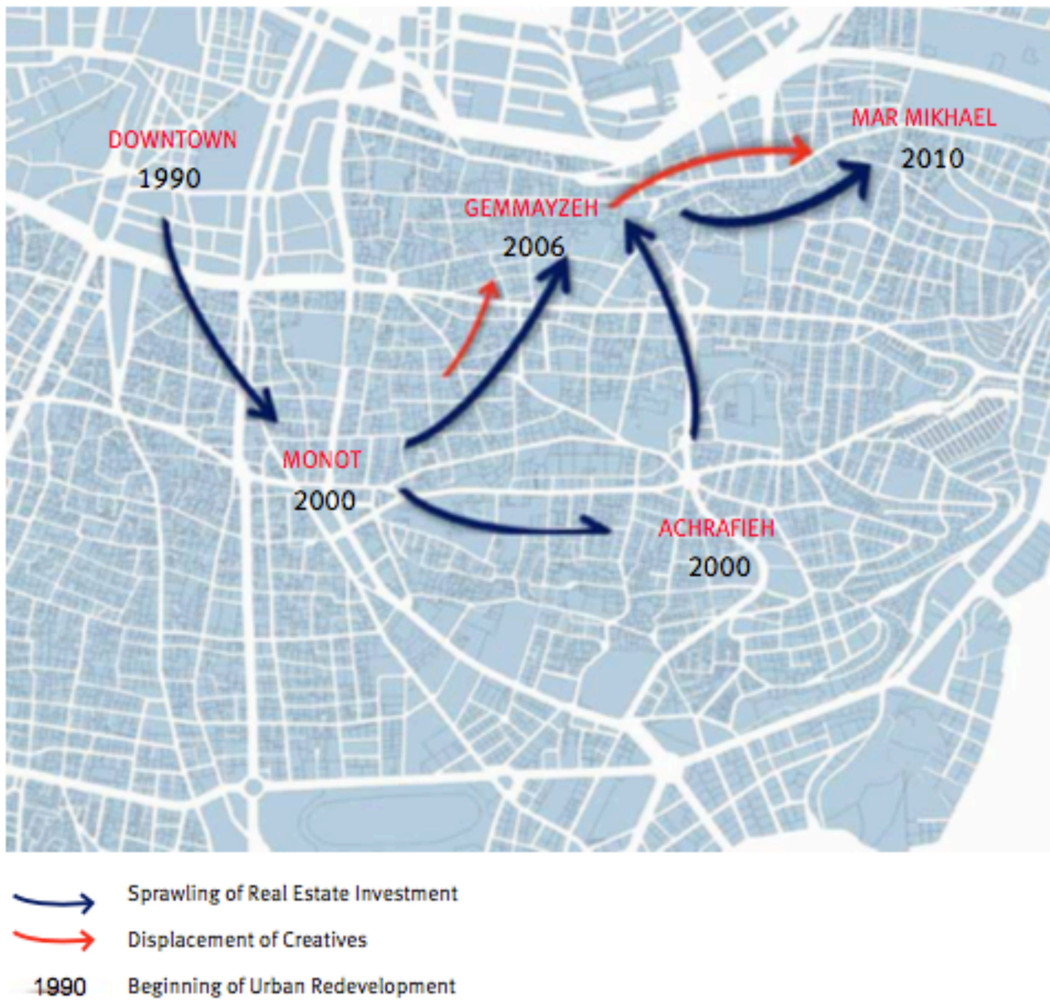
Appendix I: Maps



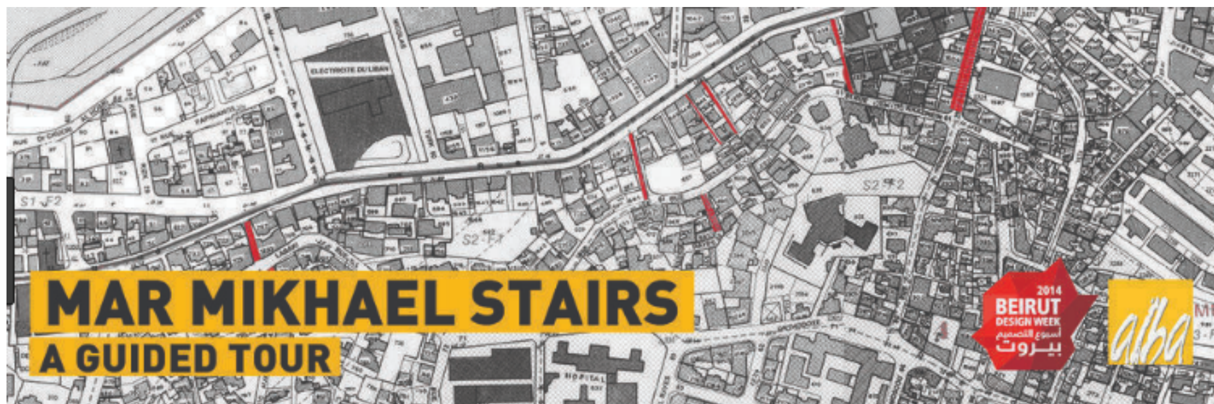
Map of the 'election tour' (Chapter 2)

Figure 2

Urban Change Trajectories from Downtown to Mar Mikhael



Map of the gentrification wave (Chapter 3)[142]



Map of the stairs in Mar Mikhael (Chapter 3)[143]

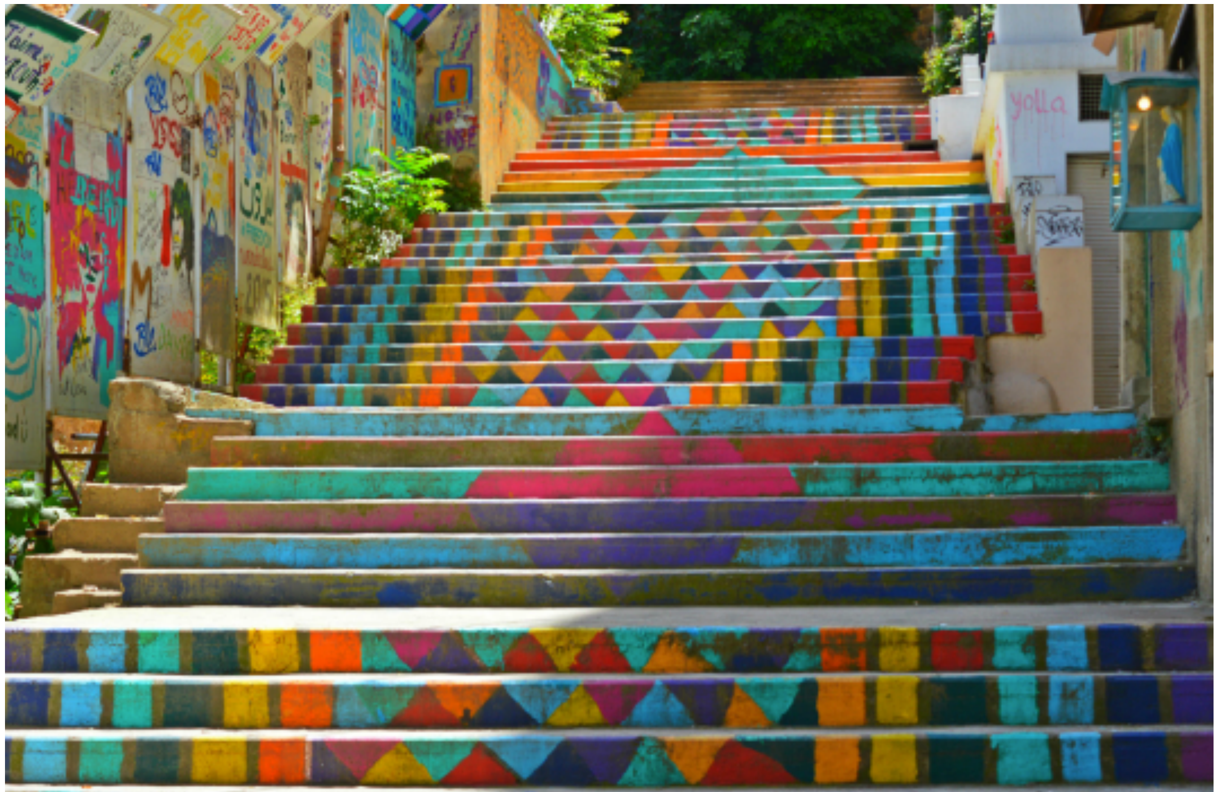
[142] Gerbal, Hrycaj, Lavoipierre and Potasiak, 2016

[143] Jhjoz.com

Appendix II: Platform Maroun (before the cleaning)

Appendix III: Photos of Mar Mikhael's different stairs[144]

144 Source: different tourists-orientated websites, promoting Mar Mikhael


yolla

Appendix IV: The Vendome Stairs and Sole Insight[145]

[145] Photos from own archive