INTRODUCTION

AN AMERICAN IN BEIRUT

My first knowledge of Beirut came from television news about Terry Anderson, a U.S. hostage captured during the Lebanese civil and regional war by Hizbullah militants in 1985 and held in captivity for six years. Anderson grew up in a town near where I spent my childhood and local news coverage during the years of his captivity regularly featured members of his family, most especially his sister and her efforts to gain his release. Thus, my first image of Beirut was one of war. Years later, when I was a graduate student, a professor, knowing of my interest in issues of class and urban space in the Middle East, suggested I visit Beirut. After a preliminary visit in 2003, I was struck, as any visitor is, by Beirut’s vibrancy and diversity, the coexistence of so many different ways of living: peddlers with carts overloaded with seasonal produce sharing the street with global corporate retail outlets; a woman in conservative Islamic dress having coffee with a friend wearing a revealing outfit; sleek high-rise residential buildings being constructed alongside timeworn two-story houses. But I was also struck by the class and status aspects of urban public life and culture and was surprised to find that studies of class in Lebanon were relatively few as issues related to political sectarianism have long been the primary subject of scholarly inquiry. From the start, then, even as Lebanese told me “you’ll never figure out how social class works here” or “we don’t really have social class here,” I set out to explore how class and status mattered in the space of Beirut. As I describe later, my further focus on mobility, as a
particular way of using space, came from living in the city and the concerns of people I met.

A host of sad and disruptive events, which I explore more fully throughout the book, unfolded during my research, which was undertaken in three phases: October 2004 to June 2006, summer 2010, and June 2013. My first and most extended period of research coincided with the initial stages of violent political unrest that began just prior to and in the wake of the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri in early 2005. These were difficult times. Nearly every month, a political figure or journalist was assassinated by a car bomb. Other bombs exploded in commercial or industrial locations of the predominantly Christian parts of Beirut and its suburbs. Security measures and blockades sprung up near anticipated targets. Schools were closed an inordinate number of days in 2005. Apart from the optimism that existed for those allied with the anti-Syrian March 14th political coalition upon the full withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanese land in April 2005, the overall mood in the city that year was both depressed and anxious. In early 2006, intersectarian tension was on the rise, and it flared up in Beirut during the controversy over the publication of cartoons satirizing the Prophet Mohammad by a Danish newspaper. And, just a few weeks after my return to the United States in mid-June 2006, times grew far worse. In July 2006, in retaliation for Hizbullah’s capture of two Israeli soldiers, Israeli bombs began to land first in southern Lebanon and then in South Beirut and elsewhere around the country. I watched the images from the United States, from safety, and read the news and e-mail missives with apprehension. I learned that the apartment where I had lived was now a temporary refuge—opened by a friend and the new tenant—for a Palestinian family fleeing their home, which was located near Dahiya (literally “the suburb” in Arabic but used to refer to the southern suburbs of Beirut), the area under heaviest assault. By the war’s end in August 2006, immense infrastructural damage blighted the entire country, but most extensively Dahiya and southern Lebanon. Thousands of people were displaced. The Israeli Defense Force’s indiscriminate ground and air strikes, according to Human Rights Watch, resulted in the deaths of approximately 900 civilians.\footnote{2}

It would be difficult for me to measure, or to isolate, the ways in which these events shaped my research. They shaped the project completely. Closures in and of the city, which occurred following an explosion or had
to do with security measures, were the cause for the delay or cancellation of interview appointments. In the weeks following Hariri’s assassination, I was cut off from any formal or informal research activities. Lebanese were fearful about what violence would occur next, much of the nation was in mourning, and the practices of everyday life came to a halt. And then regular life would begin again, but Beirutis, I quickly learned, resumed their activities with an awareness that beneath the surface of normality lay the possibility for everything to come apart again. This kind of cycle, of violence-stop-pause-resumption, punctuated the months of 2005 and 2006 after an assassination or bombing attack occurred. Between the bombs, there existed what anthropologists Roma Chatterji and Deepak Mehta (2007) call “the recovery of the everyday.” Anxiety, born from anticipation about what might happen next, resided in this everyday. During this period in Beirut, there were moments when the agenda of research was neither a practical choice nor a compassionate one.

The bombs, and the anxiety, did not stop people from living, of course. And thus, while the first period of my research showed me a Beirut in distress, it also cheered me with its warmth, its humor, and its energy. In juxtaposition to the threat posed to the public and the dejection felt by Beirutis at the return of violence and political sectarian strife to their city’s streets, scenes of everyday public sociality showed another side. This is the side of Beirut that sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984) would describe using the term *co-presence*, or face-to-face interaction. It is an aspect of Beirut’s public life that goes beyond the trope of Lebanese as resilient in the face of challenges and that counters Richard Sennett’s (1974) description of the isolating, “stale and empty” public that has come to characterize the modern, Western city. More specifically, it is the side of Beirut that includes a descending basket on its way from an upper floor of an apartment building to the market on the ground floor. An apartment dweller leans out over the veranda and calls down to the store worker a list of things needed for a recipe or meal already in progress. The items are placed in the basket, and it goes up to the veranda. Money is then put in the basket, and it is sent back down to the store. Everyone is satisfied. Moments like these, those I only observed and those that I also took part in—for instance, the paying of all my bills in person to employees from the electricity, internet, and water companies who came to the door of my apartment—are not only charming to the outsider but seem to serve as a kind of salve for Beirutis
living with the history, presence, and anticipation of conflict and divides among its people.

The stops and starts, the horrific spectacle and aftermath of bomb explosions, and the return of political sectarian strife to the public realm could be described as challenges to the conduct of research. At the same time, however, such a description would be ill-fitting in the sense that these events were experiences that came to constitute the research itself. And, often, challenges having little to do with the political crises appeared more formidable. For example, the cultural capital I possessed, initially as “a researcher from Stanford,” held sway only to a limited degree in many social and professional settings in Beirut. Another kind of capital, which is issued in the form of connections or relations to a particular person, was usually valued much more by people with whom I sought to set up meetings and interviews. Getting my foot in the door usually required being able to mention that I was in some way connected to a person whom a potential interviewee knew and trusted. Some interviews, like the one I conducted with the head of the traffic-police division, required weeks of advance effort, during which I met with people sequentially. One person would bestow on me access to the next and so forth until I had worked my way up the chain of command. This is also the process by which I secured interviews at Solidere, the corporation responsible for rebuilding the downtown area. This practice of establishing and finessing connections or favors through face-to-face interaction is also a topic I take up in the book with regard to people’s sentiments about everyday forms of corruption. “Knowing someone who knows someone” was often my only means of gaining access to professionals such as architects, engineers, academics, representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government officials. While this description may fit any number of research locales, Lebanon’s relations of patronage, which are often mobilized to circumvent state authority, heightened the necessity of being tied to and circulating through stratified networks of influence.

Outside the professional arena, with respect to my entrée into Lebanese society more generally, I encountered similar, though less tangible kinds of limitations that too shaped my research. First, through formal tutoring arrangements and informal viewing of Lebanese television programs and everyday conversations, I had to “Lebanize” the formal Arabic I had studied and spoken for years in classrooms. Second, the fact that I chose to live alone and had neither real nor fictive ties to a Lebanese family meant
that I was fairly unmoored in a society where family life is the basis of the social fabric. On Sundays, when Beirutis spend the day with their extended families and most commercial life shuts down, being out in the city was a lonely, traffic-free excursion. All of us from outside Lebanon—the foreign migrant workers, ex-pats, students, and researchers—we the familyless would encounter one another on the near-empty streets. I also found developing relationships with Beirutis from outside the middle class to be a challenge. While I have a working-class background, my level of education, the fact that I was a foreign student/researcher living outside my home country, and the way that I could afford to live as middle class in Beirut situated me squarely in a middle-class world. I took steps to try to expand this world by, for example, doing volunteer work with two different organizations working with underprivileged Lebanese youth, volunteering with an agency helping process paperwork for Sri Lankan workers trying to get home after the Asian tsunami in January 2005, and trying actively to forge research relationships with working-class residents of the city through acquaintances and contacts.

Alongside these limitations, however, I also experienced a certain kind of public access. As a mixed-race African American woman, I did not stand out when walking down the street in Beirut. Before I spoke, I was assumed by Lebanese to be of North African heritage but possibly part Lebanese, as I would come to learn through countless conversations that ensued after I began speaking my non-native Arabic in taxis, stores, restaurants, offices, and the like. Blending into the landscape of the city enabled me to move around without being outwardly perceived as being from outside the Arab world. I could therefore travel without being immediately marked as a Westerner, as many other researchers and visitors from the West typically are. In parts of Dahiya, Beirut’s southern suburbs largely secured by Hizbullah, the way I look afforded me with a kind of right of entry that was often denied to other Westerners identified as such by Hizbullah security members positioned on the streets.

Another kind of access came in a different form. While I was foreign and Western, a perceived ally perhaps of the policies pursued in the region and Lebanon by the U.S. government, I did not possess a political or sectarian affiliation and my history came from elsewhere. In this sense, not being Lebanese endowed me with a certain kind of perceptual and geographic privilege to draw my own cartographies of the city and nation. As they were
not historically constituted through experiences of violence and fear, my mappings were necessarily distinct from those that might be drawn by a native of Lebanon, a survivor of the long civil and regional war, or a person whose home had been destroyed by Israeli bombs. For me, the terrain was more open. As a foreigner and outsider, I was also furnished with a look in. I was, time and again, told by Lebanese how and who the Lebanese are: that is, “all Lebanese are like X” or “the Lebanese don’t care about X,” or “X behavior is typical Lebanese.”

In addition to observing and participating in public space and in informal conversations in taxis, buses, and on the streets, I conducted interviews with a diverse group of residents of the city, including foreign workers, as well as representatives from both state and nongovernmental agencies and institutions involved with urban planning, traffic safety and enforcement, and civil society. I also gathered and analyzed historical materials from newspapers housed in the libraries of the American University of Beirut and Saint Joseph’s University, the Lebanese National Archives, the Centre d’Etudes et le Recherche sur le Moyen-Orient, and at the archives of the newspapers An-Nahar and L’Orient le Jour.

“YOU HAVE TO LOOK MORE BROADLY AT THE ISSUE OF TRAFFIC”

During a conversation I was having in 2005 with Reem, a woman in her early forties who worked as an administrator at a university in the northern Beirut suburb of Louaize, we were talking about the hassles of living in Beirut. It was the topic of traffic that set her off. “Look,” she interrupted when I began to ask her about the new traffic lights being put up in the city, “you have to look more broadly at the issue of traffic; it tells you a lot about what is happening in our society. People are stressed—this is what traffic is about; people are oppressed and we have been living in a police state since the end of the [civil] war. It’s a bad economic situation, taxes, education is expensive, food is expensive. . . . What you see on the roads? You see that people are fighting for space. They don’t have space at home, the economy is bad, and there are no forests, no parks, no places to breathe. There is only concrete. . . . Four times this week I almost got killed driving. Finally, I had a meeting in Broumanna and I took a taxi there. I was not going to drive myself.”
When Reem explained in frustration how traffic problems were linked with, as she put it, “what was happening in society,” it was one of many similar moments during my research: when people talked to each other and me about getting around Beirut, they were also expressing larger concerns about social, political, and economic life. Talk about mobility experiences, in fact, exposed some of the inequalities of the city itself. Stories told among passengers in shared service (French pronunciation) taxis—the city’s most widely used form of public transportation—on television programs, on stage, and through popular culture told of how getting around Beirut was about more than merely getting somewhere; it was about how people encountered the very formation of their civic culture in a city wounded by war and, once again, on the razor’s edge.

Through stories and practices of daily life, this book examines how people’s movements through a city are profoundly shaped by the insecurity of their lives. In 2004, fifteen years after the end of a protracted war in Lebanon (1975–1990), bombs reappeared in Beirut. In September 2004, the Lebanese parliament voted to amend the constitution to allow for an extension of the presidential term. This amendment kept the pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud in power for several more years and was a move thought to be orchestrated by the Syrian regime. To protest Lahoud’s term extension, government ministers, including the prime minister, Hariri, resigned. One of these ministers survived an assassination attempt by car bomb in October 2004, and a few months later, on February 14, 2005, Hariri and twenty-one others in his motorcade were killed in a massive car-bomb explosion along a seaside road. A climate of assumed Syrian culpability for Hariri’s death ensued, and tensions boiled over as Lebanese took to the streets demanding the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanese territory and an end to Syrian involvement in Lebanese affairs. In the months after Hariri’s assassination, two broad political coalitions, named after the dates of their mass protests in downtown Beirut, emerged: the March 8th group (a coalition of parties with both Shi’i Muslim and Christian affiliation) was aligned with the Syrian regime; the March 14th alliance (a group of parties with mainly Sunni Muslim and Christian affiliation backed by the United States and its regional allies) took an anti-Syrian-government stance. In the months to come, these political camps would become the two central political actors in what is referred to as the post-Hariri era in Lebanon.
Since these events, amid the changing course of Lebanese politics, residents have once more had to map out lives amid a contentious, often violent, political-economic landscape. In this book, I explore how experiences of moving through Beirut are characterized by a precariousness wrought not only by the anticipation of violence but also by the workings of class, political, and state power. In keeping with urban anthropology’s long-standing attention to the relationship between urban space and social inequality, I examine how understandings and practices of spatial mobility in the city do more than simply reflect social differences; they are also a means through which an uneven and insecure urban citizenship is produced as dimensions of hierarchy and power shape people’s access to and experiences of urban space.

I arrived in Beirut in fall 2004. I expected to learn about the class dimensions of postwar reconstruction processes. But soon, after the first bomb targeting a political figure exploded, I realized that I was witnessing a renewal of violence that would challenge the notion of Lebanon as having moved past war altogether. From late 2004 to early 2006, what I found was not a long-term sustained war. But it was not peace either. It was something else, a place reorganized into divided parts by the resurgence of political sectarianism and the threat of bombs, a time of frustration and disaffection with the state, the economy, and the political order.

In July 2006, a month-long full-scale war between Hizbullah and Israel broke out following Hizbullah’s capture of two Israeli soldiers near the border. In 2010, and again in 2013, I returned to Beirut to examine how stories about and practices of urban mobility captured the meanings of everyday life in this insecure city. I watched Beirutis of diverse backgrounds and perspectives move through the city and listened to their talk about what their journeys revealed to them and what these journeys revealed about Lebanon. These observations and stories form the book’s ethnographic core.

The Insecure City

Many studies have pointed out how the organization of urban space in Beirut is part and parcel of the exercise of power and hierarchy. In her ethnography Reconstructing Beirut: Memory and Space in a Postwar City (2010), Aseel Sawalha looks at how ordinary residents there have been displaced by the city’s post–civil war reconstruction. She highlights how the city has been rebuilt in ways that exclude poor and working people and the increasing
takeover of urban space by political and economic elites. Like Sawalha in her concern with the spatial relations of power, Lucia Volk (2010) investigates Beirut’s and Lebanon’s many public memorials and shows how they express elite political authority in public spaces and the long-standing politics of cross-sectarian community solidarity. Sune Haugbolle (2010) also considers space and memory as he examines debates around the cultural production of memories about the civil and regional war in the years between 1990 and 2005 and shows how the war was at one and the same time represented and rendered invisible in Beirut’s public spaces. Lara Deeb and Mona Harb (2013), in their study of how pious young Shi’i Muslims navigate leisure opportunities amid Beirut’s sectarian and class hierarchies, look closely at the relationship between space and morality by examining how leisure sites such as cafes, gyms, and weddings shape young people’s social behavior and practices. Scholarship about Beirut’s geography has also been concerned with the role urban infrastructure and planning policies have played in producing spatial and social inequalities (Fawaz 2009b, 2009c) and the impact of conflict on urban life and politics (Fregonese 2009, 2012). All this impressive scholarly work offers incisive and multifaceted analyses of the spatial and social relations of power in Beirut, but it does not address the experiences of insecurity and security that were crucial aspects of everyday life during the time of my ethnographic research, when bombs were going off and the threat of political violence intersected with broader anxieties about living in uncertain and unprotected times.

Hence, this book aims to contribute to these studies of Beirut’s landscape and those focused on other cities in the Arab world by addressing the relationship between urban space and the meanings and experiences of security and insecurity that emerge from people’s movements through the streets. By focusing on a wounded city shaped by its history and ongoing experience of conflict,” this book is part of a growing body of anthropological work exploring “how ethnographic subjects contend with matters of security and insecurity as they attempt to forge a life in a complex, conflictive, and often violent and dangerous social and political-economic milieu” (Goldstein 2010, 489). Like this scholarship, my book moves beyond traditionalist approaches to security that focus primarily on how it is fashioned at the level of policy and strategy-making in government and military domains and toward a consideration of the lived encounter with security states and insecurity and, in this case, how these are reflected in movement in and around Beirut.
To analyze the situation at this level, I focus on three dimensions of insecurity. First, I examine the kinds of insecurities that surround everyday life in zones of conflict. In Beirut, as elsewhere in the Lebanon-Syria-Israel-Palestine region, this context of conflict is the outcome of a fractious political climate whose tenor is shaped by the broader field of regional geopolitics and its array of transnational actors. The periodic ebbs and flows of tension that characterize these zones of conflict require residents to stay on guard, always ready to adjust their present lives and daily course of activity, as well as to manage their fears about the future possibility of a protracted and full-scale war, in response to heightened tensions or signs of an oncoming crisis. In getting around the city, Beirut’s residents, in other words, are always aware that just beneath the surface of a normal day is the possibility for a violent disruption of everyday life that could last hours, a week, months, or more.

Second, I provide a picture of how the project of security can create insecurity in the pursuit of various goals, from the protection of certain people and the enactment of justice to the enforcement of boundaries that keep out “unwanted” or “undesirable” populations. In the case of Beirut, I explore this problem by looking at the following paradox: In Beirut, the intensification of security by the state for “the few”—an overlapping group of class and political elites—through the installation of checkpoints and barriers and the rerouting of traffic in ways that close off not just street blocks but whole neighborhoods, requires the deployment of certain kinds of spatial and social practices on the part of “the many,” whose lives, as a result, become disorderly, and, in this way, less secure. For instance, following former prime minister Hariri’s assassination in February 2005, traffic on a key artery was changed from two-way to one-way as part of the fortification of security around the Hariri palace in Koreitem, my neighborhood in West Beirut.

Third, a sense of vulnerability that is both physical and existential is contained in my use of the terms insecurity and unsafety. Feelings of social and psychic unsafety that emerge in people’s talk about being mobile in Beirut lead to blaming the state for being ineffective, corrupt, and forcing citizens to fend for themselves. These sentiments about not being taken care of by the state are of a piece with the kinds of insecurities anthropologists have described as a feature of the global human condition in the contemporary era, which is marked by neoliberal polices and governance involving the
reduction of social safety nets and increased privatization, open markets, and deregulation. This is an era of downward socioeconomic mobility and anxious citizens who, feeling under threat and unprotected by the state, often move to take responsibility for their own security. In using the term *unsafety*, I mean to convey a notion of insecurity or threat that includes but does not hinge on the possibility of bodily harm or injury, as the term *danger* often does.

Theories of security and insecurity have helped us understand the ways in which contemporary human life is besieged by a whole host of challenges and fears, from imminent ecological or financial disaster to the avoidance of toxins and crime, that make the management of risk and insecurity a central feature of our lives. While the generalizability of the concept of insecurity is useful insofar as it directs our attention to the significance of various social, environmental, and political phenomena, my ethnography shows how different kinds of insecurity converge in everyday experience. By considering how unsafety for Beirut’s residents is engendered by various kinds of threats, from the dangers of political instability to the risks posed by reckless drivers and the moral and civic injuries of elite corruption, I highlight the tensions created by and the links among various forms of insecurity.

By engaging a notion of insecurity that attends to the ways in which people are rendered vulnerable, not only physically but also in a political, economic, and ontological sense, I am providing a multifaceted analysis of what insecurity means for residents of Beirut. Not only the possibility of political violence threatens Beirut’s ordinary residents but also economic and class dynamics that make life precarious for ordinary folk amid weakened structures of social and economic support and rising inequality. In this way, my account shows how the insecurities of urban and public life in Beirut are both an outcome of Lebanon’s contentious geopolitical milieu and part of a broader global experience of downward socioeconomic mobility and common anxieties that characterizes the human condition in the early twenty-first century. Thus, although many of the experiences I describe in this book that relate to the militarized and precarious urban setting in which Beirutis live may seem quite distant from life elsewhere, in places in the rest of the world where there is peace and wars are not fought, for example, many other issues that people described to me are increasingly relevant: living with an intensified police and security presence, finding it ever more difficult to make ends meet, and coping with stress about the lack of a social safety net.
Mobility and Urban Space

My investigation of the meanings of security and insecurity in Beirut took place in the streets of the city. Being mobile in an urban environment, I propose, is a window into the everyday experience of civic life and citizenship and sheds light on how class, politics, and state power are spatialized in a place and time fraught with conflict and uncertainty. In many parts of the Middle East, conditions of insecurity that are an outcome of political violence, the practices of the security state, and the militarization of everyday life shape people's everyday mobility experiences. In Palestine, for example, daily practices of getting from here to there are a physical and psychological trial that entails enduring myriad checkpoints and often temporary and erratically placed road closures. Moreover, the spatial regimes of control enacted by the Israeli government in occupied Palestine in the name of security are also a feature of state power elsewhere in the region and across the globe. In this book, I explore how, in an increasingly militarized post-2004 Beirut, moving through public space has entailed encounters with constellations of security that discipline and surveil, encounters experienced especially by members of disenfranchised populations that are understood as “other” or criminal. The sudden and variable character of these security formations requires residents to find ways to manage their daily course of activity in response to the appearance or news of a roadblock, checkpoint, or military installation set up in the wake of but also in anticipation of what is deemed a security threat.

Moreover, as sociologist Jack Katz (1999) has shown, experiences of mobility are fleeting, quotidian dramas laden with raw, emotional power. When people move through Beirut, they are experiencing the intersection of citizen and state, of the more and the less privileged, and, in general, the city’s politically polarized geography. The ability to pass through and around security blockades, for instance, often has to do with an individual’s class presentation, which emerges from visible markers of class such as clothing, hairstyle, grooming, and means of transportation, along with behavioral disposition and accent or language.

For these reasons, I found that talk about mobility was an important way for Beirut’s residents to convey sentiments about civic interaction and public life. When, for example, Beirutis inveighed against high-status showoffs who drove mithl ma bidhun (however they pleased) with no regard for others on the road or when they cited the state’s lack of enforcement
of traffic rules as a threat to public safety, they registered concerns about
the workings of the civic order that were not only manifest in the context
of traffic but that undergirded society more generally. The stories they
told about getting around Beirut also positioned people as members of an urban
community in a city marked by both present-day violence and that of the
remembered past. The way that Beirutis engaged matters of mobility to talk
about society, the nation, and politics therefore tells us something about
urban life in a site of conflict and how relations of social inequality are
engendered through spatial movement.

This book is about how the everyday spatial mobility that all people
experience shapes and is shaped by local hierarchies of class and status. In
my account, I show how ways of moving through the physical space of the
city, from standing in the streets and hailing a ride in a shared taxi to navigat-
ing various kinds of security barriers as a pedestrian, are streetside interac-
tions between the various kinds of people caught up, as anthropologist Lila
Abu-Lughod would put it, “in [the] intersecting and conflicting structures
of power” that span Beirut (1990, 42). In this way, my ethnography builds
on studies of mobility that use the movement of people in urban spaces as a
site of inquiry into power relations and is a departure from anthropology’s
long-standing focus on human movement across transnational borders.
When anthropologists look at running urban errands by car (Jain 2002)
or at motorbikes as unexpected agents of globalization (Truitt 2008) or at
the affective experiences of taxi drivers and day trippers (Notar 2012a) or at
how public transit is a mechanism of racial and class segregation (Czeglédy
2004), they are also looking into the implications of automobility for social
life. Building on geographical, sociological, and historical studies of auto-
mobility, these ethnographic studies of spatial movement have shown us
how mobility practices and narratives order social stratification and frame
civic possibilities.

Feminist thought has also transformed our understandings of space
and place in similar ways. Feminist scholars have described how social and
economic patterns of gender inequality are expressed in the organization
of the cultural landscape at various scales—from domestic architecture to
the boundaries between urban communities—and how these spatial pat-
terns not only reflect but also reinforce differences of gender, class, and
race. In Middle Eastern cities, their research has focused primarily on
how gender is used to divide and define public and private spheres and on
the ways in which women access and move through gendered spaces by using, for example, practices of veiling and consumption. The domain of gender is underexplored in urban studies of Beirut and clearly deserves a separate study. While issues of gender are treated in the book, I envision undertaking a future project about masculinity and public space that will allow me to expand on my investigation of the militarization and securitization of the city and build on emerging scholarship of masculinity in the Middle East.

Citizens and the State in Lebanon

In the book, I use the term urban citizenship, by which I refer to belonging to an urban community, a belonging that I think of as being rooted more in a shared recognition of a city’s ways of life and culture rather than in rights and responsibilities. I therefore conceive of the city as a locus of citizenship in the sense that urban residents feel a sense of membership in and identification with cities as a polity apart from—though often overlapping with—that of the nation-state. In my ethnography, I highlight how classed and politicized notions of belonging to an urban community are formed through mobility experiences. In so doing, I aim to bring into focus the “tumult of citizenship” that anthropologists James Holston and Arjun Appadurai (1996, 188) describe. In this formulation the city constitutes neither the background nor the foreground for struggles among different groups but, as Reem’s words previously in this chapter suggest, the battleground itself, through which individuals and groups define their identity, stake their claims, wage their battles, and articulate rights, obligations, and principles (Isin 2002, 283–284).

Social and cultural histories of Lebanon have understood citizenship largely through a focus on the growth of the country’s sectarian-based political structure, which apportioned power along sectarian lines to groups of political leaders (zu'ama). This literature describes how the dominant class, comprised of a coalition of families from various religious sects, is buttressed by patron-client arrangements that require the loyalty and affiliation of Lebanon’s citizens. These kinds of political dynamics, and their intensification during and in the wake of Lebanon’s war (1975–1990), have thereby made political sectarianism a kind of subnationalism that is primary in the making of Lebanese citizens. In my account, I draw on this understanding of Lebanese citizenship as being rooted in the country’s political sectarian
framework but also go beyond it by showing how class, status, and everyday relations with the state critically shape what it means to be an urban citizen of Beirut.

Spatializing the State

During summer 2013, in the context of a deteriorating domestic security situation because of the spillover from the Syrian civil war, billboards throughout Beirut aimed to send a comforting message about the state’s interest in taking care of citizens. The billboards pictured five members of the national police agency, the Internal Security Forces (ISF). The billboard’s message was “May you be well and in good health every year,” an Arabic sentiment expressed on holidays and special occasions and, below, “Making the nation and the citizens content.” With its kind message of well-being and smiling visages of police officers, the billboard cannily personalized and made accessible the state’s security apparatus by foregrounding its workforce. This was a strikingly different political sensibility than those expressed by the banners, posters, and images that were draped throughout

FIGURE 1.1. Internal Security Forces billboard: “Making the nation and the citizens content.” (Photo by author.)
the city endorsing political figures and parties in a way that makes a kind of “state for all” secondary to party politics. As citizens moved through Beirut, the billboard seemed to remind them that the state was working to protect and serve ordinary people.

Yet the idea conveyed by the billboard, of a competent state concerned with the protection of all citizens, was one very much in question. Although mechanisms of state security were visible on the streets, people I spoke with during the time of my research generally associated these with the protection of VIPs rather than ordinary citizens. And, in the context of the so-called chaos on the roads, the state was often described as failing to ensure the safety of citizens by allowing dangerous mobility practices to go unchecked. In short, the prevailing understanding of the state I encountered was one that emphasized its shortcomings.

To build on studies of the state that aim to break down notions of the state as a coherent and rational monolith that sits “above society,” I am looking here at the spatial dimensions of state power that appear in everyday scenes of getting around the city streets. In so doing, I move beyond the interpretations, prevalent in political science and policy studies, of the Lebanese state as weak or failed, by showing that instead of being a unitary entity that is categorically weak or strong, state power is contingent on various kinds of social relations that are worked out, quite literally, on the ground, in the public fray between citizens and representatives of the state.

As a point of regional comparison, the character of the Lebanese state was also debated and discussed by the news media amid the uprisings in the Arab world in spring 2011. While Lebanon’s fractious politics often make headlines, in this case it was the country’s absence of political activity that drew attention. Why have there been no sweeping changes in Lebanon? the press asked. As Deeb and Harb write, “Not only is there no dictator against whom to revolt; divisions among Lebanon’s political communities have been so deeply established over the course of the nation-state’s modern history so as to preclude the stuff of united televised protests, most of the time” (2013, 33). Part of the story this book tells, however, is about the sense of frustration, disaffection, and disenfranchisement that emerge from Lebanon’s flawed democratic, multiparty system, in which power is shared among a small group of leaders and families who claim affiliation with particular sectarian and ideological communities.
STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In chapter 1, I provide a historically informed overview of Beirut’s built, physical, and transport environment that reveals the city’s unplanned, informal, and privatized character and sets the stage for my ethnography of mobility through the city. Chapter 2 presents a picture of how historical experiences of war and conflict have shaped the city’s space. I turn next, in chapter 3, to an ethnographic exploration of how this history, in relation to contemporary political sectarian violence and tensions, shapes residents’ understandings of and movement through the city.

In the next three chapters, I show how people spatially negotiate the city in relation to social class, politics, and state power. Chapter 4 takes up the ways in which security practices and installations seek to enact a kind of spatial order in the city. This order—adopted mainly by and for an intersecting group of political and class elites—creates conditions of insecurity in the daily lives of ordinary residents. While chapter 4 focuses on the establishment of order in the streets of the city, chapter 5 focuses on how disorderly traffic is understood through an ethnographic investigation of talk about the “chaos” of getting around the city and about how, on the one hand, talk of a chaotic mobility unites different kinds of Lebanese under a political imaginary about citizens coping with a “developing” nation and corrupt government, while, on the other hand, hierarchical distinctions among citizen-drivers are engendered by this same discourse. In chapter 6, I focus on a particular type of encounter with political and state power in public space: interactions between traffic police and drivers. By looking closely at the work of the traffic police as a site of everyday state formation, I consider how the state is constituted and understood from the perspective of both citizens and street-level bureaucrats, who, despite, but also as a result of, their discord, share common ground in their sense of insecurity and disappointment with the state; this perception is conveyed through the oft-used expression ma fi dowla (there is no state). The Conclusion summarizes the key findings of the book by emphasizing the role of mobility in the public enactment of class, political, and state power.