The Insecure City

Monroe, Kristin V.

Published by Rutgers University Press

Monroe, Kristin V.
The Insecure City: Space, Power, and Mobility in Beirut.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/45055.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/45055

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1765227
Forming a cape that extends into the sea, Beirut is situated at the geographical center of the Lebanese coast. Initially developed around its port area, the city expanded through the twentieth century in all directions: northward along the coastal plains and their neighboring mountainous areas toward the country’s second largest city of Tripoli, eastward in the direction of the Beirut-Damascus highway, which rises into the mountains, and to the south, where, by the early 1950s, villages were being transformed into suburbs by rural migrants seeking economic opportunity in the capital and, later, several Palestinian refugee camps were established. Today, about half of Lebanon’s total population—close to two million people—lives in the Greater Beirut area, which comprises the city and its suburbs. It is a densely built landscape of concrete structures, “mostly indiscriminate mid-rise and high-rise buildings that cast their shadows on the remaining vestiges of villas or low-rise houses of the French Mandate period” (Verdeil 2005). Buildings sit in close proximity to one another with narrow setbacks from the street; commercial shops and services are on their ground floors.

In many neighborhoods, towers of otherwise indistinctive apartment blocks express the individuality of their occupants through a particular architectural feature: the balcony. Beirutis speak about a kind of *ilfeh* (familiarity or intimacy) that characterizes the city’s urban culture. The apartment balcony, situated on the border between the public space of the street and the private realm of the domestic sphere, is a site where this intimacy is cultivated. From balconies, which are used year-round, neighbors converse with one another, families’ socks and undergarments are hung
FIGURE 1.1. Map of Beirut in Lebanon and the region. (Map by Richard Gilbreath. Adapted from map by Andrew Alfred-Duggan, ITMB Publishing.)
out on clotheslines to dry in view of passersby, and residents shout down requests for grocery items to be carried upstairs by workers in shops below. Walking through the city or sitting at the open window of a public bus as it crawls through traffic, the streetside observer encounters these household scenes. In this way, the balconies help to produce an urban street culture that is caught up in the sights, sounds, and even smells of everyday domestic life, from the yells of children calling down to their friends in the street and the aromas of lunchtime meals wafting out from kitchens to the sounds of the television news and glimpses of residents tending to their hanging gardens, oases of green amid a dense city colored concrete gray.

Moving through Beirut, one also observes its “half-commercial, half-industrial” character (Adnan 1982, 9). The sight of tower cranes putting up high-end residences in and adjacent to the city’s historic and geographic core, the downtown area, gives evidence of the fact that the commercial traffic in land is one of the most important sources of private wealth in Lebanon. In the east, just past the picturesque neighborhood of Ashrafieh
and its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French-style architecture is Bourj Hammoud, an area that was founded by survivors of the Armenian Genocide and that expanded mostly during the 1930s, where scenes of manufacturing and light industry—from furniture and shoes to mechanical parts and mattresses—emerge. From there, one approaches the junction for the coastal highway heading north at Karantina, where the air is thick with the putrid smells emanating from both the city’s waste-treatment plant and one of the country’s largest slaughterhouses. The coastal highway, one of the most congested traffic corridors in the country, is used daily by commuters living in the northern suburbs. These suburbs rise upward from the coastal plain to the storied Lebanese mountainside.

Moving north and east from the beaches of Beirut, through congestion and industry, to the foot of the Mount Lebanon range is thus a route across the city’s diverse physical landscape, one that brings to mind a favorite aphorism often repeated to foreign visitors: “Only in Lebanon can you go to the beach and ski in the same day.” To travel along this route in Beirut is also to move across different territories, areas of the city that are identified with particular sectarian and political groups that have been and continue to be adversaries.

In this chapter, I approach Beirut’s physical landscape as a code whose deciphering may be undertaken through the study of its “ordinary but diagnostic features” (Meinig 1979, 6). Two processes, modes of privatization nourished by a laissez-faire market-led model of urban development and political sectarian conflict, have been the key power geometries (Massey 1994) shaping the city’s space in the modern era. I consider these power geometries—by which I refer to the ways in which spatial arrangements, access, and mobility reflect hierarchies of power and control—in this and the following chapter. Here, I provide a historically informed overview of Beirut’s built, physical, and transport environment that reveals the city’s unplanned, informal, and privatized character.

**THE RISE OF MODERN BEIRUT**

Lebanon became a province of the Ottoman Empire in 1516, but Beirut was an insignificant port town for much of the Empire’s rule. It was not until the late Ottoman period (1860–1914), when the city was made an
imperial administrative center and trading activity shifted from the interior to the coastal region along the eastern Mediterranean, that Beirut came to prominence. Along with the emergence of the French-supported silk industry in the Mount Lebanon region, which expanded the export sector and stimulated ancillary enterprises in finance, shipping, banking, and insurance, the city also developed as an outcome of administrative reforms instituted by the Ottomans to “modernize” the Empire; these reforms encouraged British and French investment in infrastructural projects in and around the city.

These investments increased the economy and attracted rural-to-urban migrants seeking not only a better livelihood but also refuge from religious violence in their villages. In the course of the nineteenth century, rural migrants transformed Beirut from a small town of six thousand people spanning a quarter of a square mile into a major seaport city with a population of one hundred twenty thousand by the century’s end (Fawaz 1983, 1). While many of these new residents in the city retained ties to the villages they left—and the building of roads that extended across the mountains and faster carriage service facilitated these connections—rural migrants to the city were, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, becoming Beirutis. They became Beirutis in a civic sense, as residents of an urban polity governed by a municipal council rather than through the charitable institutions, sectarian communities, and private property owners that collaboratively supervised villages (Abdou-Hodeib 2011, 478). But, in another sense, these rural-to-urban migrants, many of whom entered the trading milieu and constituted part of the city’s burgeoning middle class of merchants and salaried professionals, were also becoming Beirutis through their participation in new kinds of public and social practices.

During this time, the city became both “the project and object of the cosmopolitan desires of an Ottoman-Arab bourgeoisie to belong to a distinctly modern epoch” (Hanssen 2005, 14). The interest of this urban middle class in taking leisure in the public realm gave rise to cafes, theaters, balls, evening dances, clubs, public gardens, horse racing viewed from within a European-style hippodrome, and roads designed specifically for owners of automobiles. In the park squares, coffeehouses, art galleries, and theaters of turn-of-the-century Beirut, new forms of public sociality took shape that brought the people of Beirut together both by chance as well as along
class-based lines. With the appearance of these kinds of places, the removal of its medieval city walls, and its newfound status as an imperial capital, Beirut changed profoundly during the late Ottoman period; a modern city was inaugurated, one characterized by a vibrant, middle-class public sphere.

**Figure 1.3.** Cafe at a Beirut public garden during the late Ottoman period, ca. 1900–1920. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-matpc-01186.)
Allied victory in World War I brought the dissolution of the Ottoman
Empire. Following the declaration of independence in 1920 by an Arab
Congress and its provisional recognition by the Allied Powers, France
invaded Syria and, working together with the British, divided the Arab
Near East of the Ottoman Empire into a number of separate states subject
to colonial control. While the British Mandate administered Palestine (mod-
ern Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip), French mandatory control
was established over six states that divided Lebanon and Syria.

The decision to create a State of Greater Lebanon—whose borders are
those of the country today—which was separated from the states of Syria,
had several important consequences. First, it further strengthened France’s
historic alliance with Lebanon’s Christian communities, especially Maronite
Catholics, and expanded the political influence of these groups. Second,
the choice to create a Greater Lebanon in particular and French mandatory
policy more generally confirmed the financial and commercial hegemony
of Beirut over the mountain regions and the development of a pattern of
economic activity in which agriculture and industry became ever more sub-
ordinate to banking and trade. The legacy of this center-periphery mode
of development is evident today in the considerable infrastructural, health,
educational, and income disparities between the Beirut and Mount Lebanon
regions and the south, Bekaa Valley, and the north. Some have even gone
so far as to argue that Beirut not only is the capital of Lebanon but, given its
role as the country’s economic and demographic center, has come to consti-
tute a city-state. Finally, the establishment of a French-controlled Greater
Lebanon entrenched political sectarianism, an important development that
I discuss further in the following chapter. French officials ruled through
paternalistic power that distributed—and rescinded—benefits to the
“ruled” through a mediating elite. Although this elite brought Sunni, Shi’a,
Druze, and Greek Orthodox leaders into its fold, it reinforced the notion
of a sectarian-based political order. As historian Philip Mansel (2010, 300)
observeres, even municipal appointments in the government of Beirut were
apportioned according to sect, a practice that entrenched a sense of differ-
ence among residents of the city rather than integration.

As in France’s other colonial territories, the French administration
in Lebanon was a technocratic one that emphasized vast infrastructural
projects such as the laying out of a cross-country road network, the modern-
erization of the ports and postal service, and the creation of a telephone
network, hospitals, and sanitary services (Picard 1996, 38). In Beirut, public space was made French through commemorative practices that named streets and squares for French military figures and that erected monuments and statues in the honor of French government figures and military men and also through the design of the built environment. The city’s downtown center was a particular focal point for the mandate authorities, as it was intended to be the showpiece of French urban planning in the Levant. There, Haussmannian Paris was re-created. A symmetrical pattern of long, straight, and wide avenues took the place of the Ottoman-era labyrinthine network of narrow alleys, open-air souks (markets), and crowded quarters. Streets radiated out, in a star-shaped design, from Place de l’Etoile (Square of the Star). The construction of public buildings and residential structures also gave other parts of Beirut—like the Ashrafi eh neighborhood on the east side of the city, for example—a distinctly French character.

Through its colonial cultural policy, the mission civilisatrice (civilizing mission), the French made Beirut the center of French culture and language in Lebanon. Secular and religious schools in Beirut—including Muslim ones—many of which had been opened along with American and British missionary schools during the nineteenth century, served as an ideal staging ground for this enterprise. Efforts to cultivate French language and culture in Beirut, those that began well before the mandate era but intensified during the colonial period, have endured until the present. In today’s Beirut, not only are aspects of French culture, foods, and fashion, for example, commonplace, but also French is widely spoken and the Lebanese Arabic used by Beirutis is peppered with French words and phrases.

In the late Ottoman and French colonial periods, Beirut developed from a backwater imperial holding into a flourishing trading center with a lively middle-class public sphere. In the following sections I explore how modern Beirut has taken on an unplanned physical form characterized by state-supported processes of private investment, shrinking public space, and vehicular congestion.

LACK OF PLANNING AND INFORMALITY

Beirut’s Ottoman and French history are both evident in the city’s built environment today, as part of an eclectic architectural mix that has late
nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European styles mingling with 1960s modernism and the faux-tradition of the city’s recently redeveloped downtown. The diverse architectural styles provide evidence of the periods of the city’s growth and are but one feature of the patchwork character of the urban landscape as peddlers pushing carts loaded with seasonal produce share the street with global conglomerates like Starbucks and H&M and newly constructed high-rise luxury buildings rise up on narrow blocks, dwarfing their two- and three-story neighbors. “In Beirut, it’s anything goes,” one architect told me; “the city has just sprung up in every direction, there is no plan.” Although its development has been the object of careful and comprehensive state-sponsored planning since the mid-twentieth century, these plans for Beirut were never realized, and, as a result, the city’s physical texture is a pieced-together one.

The urban planners, architects, and engineers I spoke with in 2004–2005 about the organization and design of a city that is often described as haphazard, unplanned, and unregulated drew links between the lack of a comprehensive vision for the city and the political infighting for which Lebanese state institutions are well known. The massive development project under way in the city’s center, undertaken by the Solidere corporation, was cited by several planners and architects as an example of how the private sector has been a more efficient player than the state in planning and improving urban space. During our conversation in spring 2005, architect Robert Saliba, for instance, described how the “corporate approach to urban design has proven to be more effective in Beirut in comparison with the ineffectiveness of the traditional, governmental approach.” This privatization of urban planning and development, a process that in the Arab world has seen the state selling off publicly held lands to the highest bidder with little regard for the public interest, is understood by some, in the context of Lebanon’s fractious politics, to be a redemptive one. For example, at a public lecture in May 2005, Amira Solh, senior urban planner at Solidere, spoke about how having urban planning in the hands of the private sector is “safer” in Lebanon because sectarian and political tensions always take over in the public realm and then “everything devolves into these [political] conversations, debates and disputes and becomes stalled.”

Like Solh, architect Nabil Gholam described the private developer as being free from the polarized politics that undergird municipal governance in Beirut. “The municipality’s plans for the city,” he said during an interview
in November 2004, “are not planned at all; they’re spontaneous. Even single owners can change the city’s space. . . . Just down the street from here, there’s a small company and they just took a strip of land in front of their building and completely changed the sidewalk!”

This lack of planning and standardization is also linked with the problems in the traffic infrastructure. In a summer 2010 meeting with planners at Majal, an urban planning institute, one staff member explained to me that the municipal government is well known for its complete lack of planning: “The municipality comes to us for technical assistance, but they always come when it is too late. Once an area of the city has a problem—like now with Gemmayzeh, they are aware that it is too crowded, no service [taxis] will go through there, no buses are able to get through—that is when they come and try to find a solution. But there is no planning ahead.” Similarly, in our conversation in spring 2005, transportation engineer Youssef Fawaz described how there is no set pattern of design or implementation for infrastructural elements like speed bumps and parking bollards. He continued, “These things should be standard, but there’s no big picture. There are no specs [specifications]; there are all different sizes, shapes, and colors. I know a group of residents who were just able to install their own bollards on their street; . . . the municipality agreed that they can make them whatever shape and size they want!”

Drivers and pedestrians experience this lack of planning and standardization in their everyday mobility. The fact that setbacks are not regulated (building owners can build any distance away from the main road and from the edge of the sidewalk) produces inconsistent streetscapes. Curbs and manhole-cover heights are variable and so, to avoid stumbling while on foot or damaging a vehicle while driving, a certain vigilance when getting around is required. Cars block sidewalks and force pedestrians to walk in the street, and landmarks are used to navigate the city and to give directions because of the lack of standardized names for streets, the absence of numbered street addresses, and the inadequate signage. Another example is a service road that runs parallel to and offers an alternative to travel along the often-congested coastal highway. Traffic changes direction during different times of day along this road, but these times are neither posted nor standardized. In short, drivers cannot plan ahead to take the alternative road but instead must cross over to it to find out which way traffic is flowing.
This kind of unpredictability is also a feature of public transit. In neighborhoods with narrow one-way roads, drivers behind buses become incensed, laying on their horns, waving their hands, and leaning out of their car windows to shout for the buses to move. The fact that there are no fixed bus stops—an inherent aspect of the bus’s informality—is a benefit to the bus passenger, who can board and disembark anywhere along the bus route rather than worry about having to reach and wait at a “formal” and marked bus stop. But, for other vehicles on the road driving behind the bus, the lack of fixed stops—and the absence of lanes where buses could move out from the flow of traffic—is a nuisance.

Various other kinds of ad hoc practices constitute the city’s physical, transport, and built environment. As part of the process of informalizing state structures in the contemporary era, urban development in cities across the globe has increasingly moved away from state legislation and public deliberation toward behind-closed-doors agreements arbitrated between state and private actors. In Beirut, the expansion of informal decision making and the allowance for exceptions to the law with regard to the built environment since the turn of the new century have brought about a relaxation of the state’s regulations regarding maximum building height, construction permits, and the acquisition of property by non-Lebanese.

This state-supported process of planning by informality has freed up more and more of the city’s space for high-end—and high-rise—real estate aimed primarily at buyers from the Gulf Arab and Lebanese expatiate communities. These are short-term, typically summer, residents; Rahif Fayad, an architect and cultural critic, described them in our interview in spring 2006 as having “no stake in our society.” Housing production is not only an arena for profit making, however, but also an opportunity to expand and affirm political constituencies. In the wake of the summer 2006 war with Israel, for instance, Hizbullah’s rebuilding of the Haret-Hreik neighborhood in the southern suburbs vis-à-vis its newly established private development agency, Wa’ad, demonstrated the central role that nonstate actors play in shaping the physical and political geography of Beirut, particularly at a time when national sovereignties and political identities are increasingly contested.

Informal settlements that developed along the city’s periphery beginning in the 1940s are another feature of Beirut’s landscape. Built in violation of urban and building regulations (Fawaz 2009b), these settlements became
home to rural migrants from poor (predominantly Shi‘i Muslim) parts of the country who acquired land, built housing, and accessed services in less desirable and undeveloped areas of the city. Residents in these areas, however, now find themselves increasingly displaced because of increased land prices and the territorial expansion of urban-development projects. Informal housing and infrastructure are also in plain view at some of the city’s construction sites where mainly Syrian laborers are employed. Some of these laborers live where they work, setting up semi-permanent encampments just beyond the construction façade in parts of unfinished structures. Signs of residence, like laundry hanging over the construction walls to dry, are a common sight at these incomplete buildings. The tangles of power wires that haphazardly drape over street blocks throughout Beirut, to give another example, are suggestive of residents’ practices of informal energy hawking by hooking into power lines and by meter pirating.37

In this way, a range of actors and processes come together to produce Beirut’s informal urbanization. There are the private power holders who informalize modes of urban development by using their influence to bend state regulations to their will—for example, by bringing about legislative changes regarding maximum building height and construction-permit procedures. There are also the ordinary and underserved users of the city who establish housing and hook into infrastructural services through illegal and informal means. And, through its rebuilding of the Haret-Hreik neighborhood, Hizbullah has employed informal channels, such as word-of-mouth communication to residents about reconstruction procedures and options (Fawaz 2009a, 326–327), to enhance its authority as a private urban planner and developer, thereby consolidating its territorial base in and claims to parts of the city in the process.

AUTOMOBILITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

The hegemony of the private automobile is another dimension of privatization in Beirut’s built and physical landscape. Beirut’s public tramway lines, which first appeared in the early twentieth century, were dismantled in the mid-1960s to allow the ever-increasing number of automobiles greater freedom of movement. The disappearance of the tramway in the 1960s was followed, later in the 1980s, by the demise of rail transport, which had aided in
the shipping of freight from the port of Beirut. These changes in the transport scene only intensified vehicular congestion in a city that had already been described, in 1963, as having “a very acute traffic problem caused by the increase in the number of cars and the small number of new streets” (Riachi 1963, 111). Once championed as a boon to the country’s tourism sector, cars were, by the 1960s, thought to detract from the pleasures of visiting Beirut so much that the special Tourist Brigade of traffic policemen charged with fining drivers for the misuse of their horns was formed. This was a time many consider to be Beirut’s golden age, when the city attained the moniker “Paris of the Middle East.” Beirut became in the 1960s not only a fashionable destination for European and American jetsetters and a city of pleasure for those seeking the sun and nightlife but also the literary, publishing, and entertainment capital of the Arab world. As the end point of the Trans Arabian oil pipeline, the city had begun to benefit from its links with the newly oil-rich Gulf. But it was also an increasingly congested city, one whose population doubled between 1955 and 1965. By 1973, the bus played only a minor role in getting people around, as most daily journeys in the city were completed in passenger cars. By the 1970s, then, Beirut had developed an urban culture dependent on cars.

When I spoke with people about the roots of the city’s traffic problem, they often commented, “there are too many cars” and “there is not enough good public transportation.” The Ministry of Public Works and Transport estimates that about three million daily motorized trips occur in the Greater Beirut area with trip mode split among private cars (68 percent), shared service taxis and private taxis (15 percent), minibuses (11 percent), and buses (6 percent). Complaints I heard about buses in particular always had to do with their low frequencies, slow and variable and unreliable travel times, and poor geographic coverage, as a traffic-policy report also found (Aoun et al. 2013, 53). Maya, a young woman in her early twenties, told me that when she took the bus from near her home in the northern suburbs to her high school in Ashrafieh, she did not mind that it took so long. “I would just bring my books with me and study the whole way, so it wasn’t so bad. But it was so slow, I can see why no one wants to take the bus!”

Congestion not only is produced by Beirutis’ reliance on passenger cars but is also an outcome of the city’s narrow roads and lack of underground parking. In summer 2013, in a sign that the traffic had only worsened since my last stage of research in 2010, service drivers often refused to take me
as a passenger when my destination was in an area where they anticipated heavy traffic. Or, they would ask me to pay *service-ayn*—a double fare. To get where I needed to go, I often told service drivers a destination that was close to where I was going but on the periphery of a very high-density corridor—*awal Hamra* (at the beginning of the Hamra neighborhood) instead of just Hamra, for instance—so that the driver would agree to take me. The city’s vertical expansion, through the development of high-rise towers, has only exacerbated the problem by increasing the number of city residents (with cars) per unit area of land and reducing the number of vacant lots that can be used for parking. Although a new law mandates that new buildings provide underground parking for their residents, it is doubtful, as architect and urban planner Gregoire Serof conveyed in our interview in 2010, that this law is being strictly enforced. Congestion caused by irregular modes of on-street parking—double and even triple parking are common—further reduce road space and hinder vehicular movement. According to the Ministry of the Environment, in 2001 the average vehicle speed in Greater Beirut was around 20 kph (12 mph), and free-flow travel time was typically doubled or tripled because of delays (Aoun et al. 2013, 53).

The traffic of private cars not only contributes to the feeling, as one respondent put it, “that there is no place to breathe” but is also a key feature of Beirut’s privatized urbanism. Together with the takeover of public space by cars and state disinvestment in public transportation, there is a lack of free and open public spaces—playgrounds, sanitary public beaches, designated sports areas—that enhances the everyday experience of congestion in the city. Residents use the Corniche, a five-kilometer seaside boardwalk, like a park. In the cooler morning hours, when the air is clearer before the onset of traffic, it is a pathway for fitness walkers and joggers. On warm evenings, the Corniche becomes crowded with leisurely amblers of all generations, with others perching along the promenade with their argilehs (water tobacco pipes) and deck chairs in a circle. But parks in the sense of green areas that offer trees, distance from traffic, and safe play areas for children are scarce.

The largest green space, a lush landscape of pine trees known as the Horsh (forest), has never fully reopened to the public since its restoration after the protracted civil and regional war that ended in 1990. While a nascent movement to enhance existing gardens and green spaces led by NGOs and private foundations is pressuring the state to build new
the city in fact looks like it perhaps will become less, rather than more, green in the near future: in June 2013, the municipal government announced plans to demolish—and later replace parts of—a park known as the Jesuit Garden in Geitawai, a neighborhood of winding, narrow lanes on the eastern side of the city, in order to build a parking garage. Vigorous
protests against the project ensued and, as of this writing, have led to its delay as the municipality undertakes an environmental impact study it says will be reviewed before a decision is made about moving forward.

The state’s emphasis on establishing more parking rather than parks and its leaving the creation of a more efficient bus system at the bottom of the list of priorities shape not just the urban landscape but also how people live. Air and noise as well as environmental degradation threaten residents’ health and quality of life. The cityscape’s consumption by the car also threatens civic life, as a decline in parks and public spaces reduces opportunities for different groups of people to come into contact with one another. As was the case in the 1960s, when the tramway was eliminated, state agencies in Lebanon today continue to support transformations of Beirut’s built and physical environment, like the construction of multilevel parking garages and new highways, to accommodate the private car.

“THE GROWTH MACHINE”

“In The City, this center of all prostitutions, there is a lot of money and a lot of construction that will never be finished. Cement has mixed with the earth, and little by little has smothered most of the trees. If not all” (Adnan 1982, 9). Though written more than three decades ago, Etel Adnan’s description of Beirut in her civil war novel, Sitt Marie Rose, is still apt, for the city exists in an enduring state of construction. New buildings go up everywhere, soaring taller and taller in the quest to offer their residents unblocked sea and mountain views. Some new buildings fill in the city’s few vacant spaces while others take over lots where now-demolished older buildings and homes once stood. Tower cranes are a fixture of the city’s skyline as processes of state-supported privatized and market-let urban development “grow the city” in pursuit of real estate investment and value. Led by both private and public actors, the city’s growth has materialized through unplanned and informal means and has produced an urban physical landscape in which the hegemony of the car has gone unchallenged. In continuing to choose highways and parking garages over the preservation of the city’s historical social fabric, the planners of Beirut, in the words of Lebanese architect Hashim Sarkis (2014), “reveal an outdated understanding of the contemporary city,” in which the municipal administration aligns
itself with the developers in opposition to local citizens.\textsuperscript{50} While the city’s growth in high-end real estate and highways is almost always portrayed by power holders as beneficial to everyone, the uneven distribution of this growth has reinforced inequalities between central Beirut and its outlying areas and, moreover, has positioned affordable housing, public transportation, and free public spaces as low urban-development priorities for both the municipal and national governments. In these ways, the state has acted neither as a regulator of Beirut’s physical landscape nor as a public benefactor, and it has diminished ordinary people’s right to access the city in the process.\textsuperscript{51}

As is clear from the discussion above, the physical space of modern Beirut has been significantly shaped by modes of privatization involving deregulated and informal building practices, the diminishment of public lands, and the dominance of the automobile. As one of the city’s key power geometries for organizing spatial access and mobility, these modes of privatization reflect hierarchies of power and control and have created a city congested with traffic and beset by ongoing construction projects, a city in which residents say it is increasingly difficult to find space to breathe and room to move. Political sectarian conflict has also played a central role in shaping the way that Beirutis experience urban space. This conflict is the focus of the next chapter.