The Insecure City

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I heard the first bomb go off on October 1, 2004. I had arrived just weeks before to begin research and was staying at a residential hotel when I heard the blast—a blast I thought was coming from one of the many construction sites near the downtown waterfront area. It was in fact the explosion of Marwan Hamadeh’s car on a sunny Friday morning. He was being driven along the seaside road in Ain el Mreisse, a central neighborhood adjacent to downtown, when a bomb ripped through the front of the vehicle. His driver, Sgt. Ghazi Abu Karroum, was killed instantly and Hamadeh and his bodyguard survived with injuries. Like other political figures with ties to prominent Lebanese sectarian-identified kin groups, Hamadeh, the outgoing minister of economy and trade and future minister of telecommunications, had cycled through a number of powerful government positions during his career. In the months prior to this attempt on his life, Hamadeh had been vocal in his opposition to the Syrian regime’s efforts to amend the Lebanese constitution in order to extend the Lebanese presidential term and, in so doing, lengthen the presidency of Emile Lahoud. Lahoud was thought by many to be a Lebanese figurehead for the Syrian regime.

The attempt to assassinate Hamadeh marked the return of violence to the streets of Beirut more than thirteen years after the end of the civil war. This return was announced by the horrific spectacle of exploding bombs that killed political figures and journalists when they entered their cars and turned the ignition key, or, later, when they were driving or being driven in the city. After the bombs went off, various kinds of security configurations
would be set up throughout the city, but particularly near the homes, workplaces, and leisure areas of political VIPs. As a result of this intensification of security to protect political figures and public buildings, the city became increasingly militarized, and getting around involved particular kinds of spatial and social negotiation. As elsewhere in the world, processes of securing the city involved the reconfiguration and management of everyday mobility in public space. Efforts to organize and control movement in Beirut produced, as they have in the post-9/11 United States, for example, certain types of insecurity engendered by fear but also, importantly, by the conditions of security themselves. During the 2004–2006 period, amid the series of bombings in Beirut, most of which were targeted assassinations, mobility was regulated by a security apparatus comprised of both privately hired security personnel and the state’s police and armed forces, who created lines of defense intended to protect particular people and places from harm. Residences, luxury hotels, offices, and governmental structures in which an overlapping group of class and political elites lived, worked, and played were the main sites of securitization.

One type of use of public space in particular was understood to be most suspect and to pose the greatest threat to forces of security: driving. During this time, as during the protracted civil and regional war (1975–1990), the vehicular bomb was the signature means of violence: in almost all cases, individuals were killed or injured while driving, being driven, or passing by cars. With every car imagined as a possible bomb, “the rules of the road changed” (Packer 2006, 379).

In this chapter, I explore how processes of securitization shaped daily experiences of getting around Beirut during the 2004–2006 period. Security measures transformed not just the city’s built environment but also the mobility practices of its residents, as motor vehicles and, in some sites, pedestrians were deemed a potential threat to a select group of people, namely political figures, while they were at home, work, leisure, or in transit themselves. Focusing on the ways in which mobility was circumscribed through the setting up of barriers, blockades, and checkpoints and the rerouting of traffic flow, I explore how security installations adopted mainly by and for the power holders created conditions of unevenness in the urban landscape. In seeking to effect order in and around certain urban spaces, security made getting around the city disorderly. My study of security builds on explorations of how security is spatialized in the urban
environment. Scholars have investigated a diverse range of topics that highlight the importance of urban space as a locus, medium, and tool of security strategies: the global ascendance of gated and privately secured forms of residence; the role of surveillance in the fragmentation of the urban environment and the rise of private security forces; and the emergence of vigilante groups that provide extrastate security to protect citizens from crime and violence.3

The fact that security is oftentimes a joint private and state enterprise in Beirut, a phenomenon that has been referred to as “multiagency policing” or “plural policing,” is not unique.4 However, the Beirut case appears distinctive because of the extent to which the city’s “securocracy”5 spatially represents Lebanon’s multiple sovereignties of state and nonstate actors—or what geographer Sara Fregonese (2012) refers to as a “hybrid” sovereignty—rather than one coherent state sovereignty. In other words, the multiple secured areas around which city residents have to navigate, where privately employed bodyguards, domestic police forces, and national army soldiers work alongside one another, exemplify not just one of the means by which public space is increasingly being privatized, a topic I discuss in chapter 1, but also the blurring of the lines between the state and the nonstate that are an important part of the makeup of Lebanon’s physical landscape.

THE ZIG-ZAG AND OTHER ASSORTED BARRIERS

On an evening in February 2006, one year after Hariri’s assassination, I sat in a taxi heading from Verdun, a neighborhood in central Beirut, as the driver slowly weaved back and forth in a zig-zag motion around a series of metal barriers. Set up for a distance of about 20 or 30 meters, the barriers were a temporary and sudden obstacle to be overcome by drivers. To keep from crashing into them, the taxi driver had to adopt a back-and-forth motion, turning the steering wheel to the left and then to the right. When I asked the driver why the barriers were there, in this section of the road only, he said it was because of security, and he pointed out that we were driving past a police station.

Barriers set up in a zig-zag pattern were among the types of security installations suddenly and temporarily erected in response to a sense of
heightened vulnerability surrounding particular places and people. In spring 2005, as I described in the previous chapter, a pattern seemed to be forming amid the spate of bombings that followed the killing of former prime minister Hariri: predominantly Christian parts of Beirut were repeatedly the site of bomb blasts, and high-profile journalists and political figures associated with the anti-Syrian March 14th alliance were targets for assassination. As a result of the emerging pattern of attacks, security was thus built up throughout the city at locations that bore affiliation—actual or perceived—with the politics of the March 14th group.

On Good Friday in March 2005, for example, a few blocks from my apartment building in Koreitem, I came upon yellow police tape surrounding a Catholic church. Extending for about 30 meters along the sidewalk directly in front of and across from the church, the tape, and the soldiers with machine guns positioned adjacent to it, obliged pedestrians to walk for a ways in the street. Like other security installations, this one around the church was many-layered: the yellow police tape, though made of flimsy plastic, clearly demarcated areas of restricted access, and this cordon off of public space was buttressed by armed soldiers with machine guns at the ready. This security set-up was in position only for the duration of the Easter weekend, a time when the perceived threat of attacks on Christian-associated sites in any part of the city was intensified given the symbolic value of the holiday and the large numbers of attendees at church services.

Yellow police tape also appeared in spring 2005 to cordon off the front of the luxury seaside Mövenpick hotel. At the hotel, the rich and powerful both worked—it was regularly the site of meetings of political dignitaries as well as the meeting place for U.N. investigators looking into Hariri’s death—and played, as it was equipped with one indoor and three outdoor swimming pools and several tennis courts, among other amenities. Because of its use by political elites, both domestic and foreign, the hotel was considered a potential target for violence. The barrier created by the yellow police tape went over the sidewalk and extended into the busy seaside boulevard that passes by the hotel. Thus, in going around the barrier, pedestrians had to leave the sidewalk as they approached the hotel and walk in the street alongside speeding cars. The tape was not a temporary fixture, as the one bordering the church had been; it remained for more than a year. A staff of armed security guards near the hotel’s vehicle entryway formed a second line of defense, just behind the yellow police tape, and their presence
ensured that walkers accepted the limitation imposed by the barrier by exiting the sidewalk and continuing in the street.

Security installations differed not only in their material composition but also in their temporal and spatial dimensions. While some formations of security, like the metal barriers set up in a zig-zag pattern and the deployment of soldiers at the church on Easter weekend, were enacted on a short-term basis and could be easily dismantled, other formations were semi-permanent and became more fixed into the built fabric of the city; they overlaid public space with a political gravity, as Ochs (2011) remarks about the context of everyday security in Israel. Because parked cars were the most frequent vessels for bombs, the prevention of vehicular parking was a chief aim of security efforts, and barriers to parking appeared in various forms. Steel bars soldered together into what resembled enormous and fearsome toy jacks were set up along the roadside adjacent to a building that housed the offices of the Future Movement, the party led by the Hariri family and a leading member of the March 14th alliance. What looked like painted concrete shark fins fixed onto the street provided another type of barrier that restricted parking alongside edifices. In the downtown area that was home to both high-end retail stores as well as the parliamentary offices parking regulations that had gone unenforced were suddenly given attention, according to Elie Helou, a transportation project manager for the state-affiliated Council for Development and Reconstruction. He described how “what often looks like traffic enforcement is actually security. . . . Before February 14 [the date of former prime minister Hariri’s assassination], there was lots of parking on that main street downtown, Bank Street. And now the police are sweeping the street and enforcing the no-parking rules on that street, but this is because of security issues, not because of an interest in managing the traffic situation overall.” In this way, security became an integral, even prioritized, aspect of broader urban planning processes that shaped how the city’s public space would be used and managed.

Still other security formations might be best described as neither temporary nor permanent but, rather, itinerant. A regular sight in public life are caravans of security personnel accompanying political VIPs en route for business or pleasure. These caravans use vehicular and verbal means to suddenly storm and clear streets in order to allow for their breakneck and unhindered passage. In their harnessing of mobility itself as an instrument of power, these vehicular convoys demonstrate both the portability of and
the impromptu aspects of security. Typically consisting of black SUVs with blacked-out windows that often bear no license plates, the convoys are only sometimes led by a police vehicle with flashing lights or a siren. More often, they appear without warning to take over the field of drivers. Thundering past motorists frantically trying to get out of their way, the convoys activate
state power and its roving security project in public space through their mode of mobility but also, in their towering height, bulk, and “unmarked-ness,” these vehicles go beyond the bounds of the state to represent a more generalized form of elite untouchability.

Once, on the highway just outside of Beirut, men in vehicles that were part of a convoy moving at breakneck speed leaned out of the windows of their SUVs gesturing and yelling at the driver of the car in which I was traveling. They appeared incensed that she had not moved from their path fast enough, although their cars had surged from behind at such a rapid speed that there had been little time to react at all. A second later, a car hastening to move off to the side as the convoy came upon it crashed into the highway barrier. We caught just a glimpse, but as the convoy continued on, we were able to see that while the front of the car was badly damaged, the driver was thankfully unhurt.

The crash illustrated the ways in which vehicular behavior on the part of agents of the state and its proxies produced spatial—and uneven—risks in the public environment. While acting to secure public space to allow for the swift and unconstrained movement of the powerful, the convoys and the “extrahard exoskeletons” (Miller 2007) of their SUVs create physical dangers for other drivers on the road. At the same time, by making the movement of ordinary users of the street disorderly and secondary to that of the VIPs and their need for a secured and mobile buffer zone, the convoys engender a kind of class injury through the means of automobility. As a floating form of security that glides over the city, the convoys are part of the broader private takeover of public space that has characterized Beirut’s urban development in the rebuilding era following the protracted civil and regional war. Unlike the barriers, which prevent mobility by stopping, halting, and prohibiting, vehicular convoys place mobility at the service of security in order to allow elites to live a cocooned existence that takes them, by means of protective SUV capsules, from one secured urban space to another.

PRIVATE-PUBLIC SECURITY

While the manipulation of the urban built environment as a means of regulating mobility and as a technique of crime prevention is not a new
phenomenon, scholars of urban space have tracked its intensification around the globe in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. One area of this scholarship examines how middle-class fears about and perceptions of the violence and crime that dwell in urban areas have given rise to new forms for securing domestic and residential realms. By fortifying their residences and neighborhoods with features such as surveillance technologies, gates, walls, and floodlights, property owners seek to create a community that “includes protecting children and keeping out crime and others while at the same time controlling the environment and the quality of services” (Low 2004, 230).

These mechanisms of homegrown security also mark certain public spaces—the streets that border or run through residential areas, for instance—as the province not only of the homeowners and their guests but of a raced and classed set of “insiders” who do not arouse suspicion. “Outsiders” are unwelcome and are often subject to scrutiny or worse. Secured spaces, intended to protect their denizens, thus operate with a racial, class, and gender logic that works from ideas about who belongs and who does not, who is threatening and who is not. In parts of the suburban United States, for example, private home and commercial-property owners seeking to protect and secure their surroundings and assets work in collaboration with community policing and neighborhood-watch groups to report suspicious activity to law-enforcement agencies. Security is enforced, on the basis of this logic, with sometimes deadly consequences, as armed residents aim to weed out threatening “others” from their terrain.

In Beirut, this kind of residential and neighborhood-based security, which draws on and collaborates with state-level policing agencies, was also in evidence. Although during the 2004–2006 period security installations surrounded the sites of work, leisure, and residence of high-profile individuals and thereby represented modes of privatized security being mapped onto a public landscape used by all, these individuals were protected by privately hired security guards as well as by members of the state’s police and armed forces. What is important about this fact, that security was an endeavor that joined together staffs of private bodyguards with state forces of policemen and soldiers, is the ways in which it made visible in the city’s space the blurred lines between state and privatized provisions of security. The intersections of public and private security, themselves rooted in the overlaps between Lebanon’s class and political elites, brought into sharp
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relief the kinds of challenges to notions of the common good that inhere in Beirut’s civic space. In other words, the activities of the ordinary citizen in urban life were in a precarious position vis-à-vis the public-private configurations of security that transformed the rules and routes of spatial movement. These enactments of state and class power, moreover, through their imbrication of public and private security, engendered a particular politics of social and spatial exclusion.

SECURITY PROFILING

Nearly all residents engaged in modes of spatial and social negotiation in order to navigate the barriers and blockades that regulated the vehicular and pedestrian movement of most—while at the same time making openings for the movement of a select group of others—but dimensions of inequality shaped the dynamics of these negotiations as certain kinds of residents were subject to a heightened degree of scrutiny as they moved through the city.

During the period of political crisis and violence in 2004–2006, opposition to the Syrian administration and the presence of its army in Lebanon, a long-standing sentiment that had endured since the time of the long war at the onset of the Syrian occupation, reached fever pitch as a result of widely held beliefs that Syria was behind Hariri’s assassination. This opposition to the Syrian regime, which constituted the basis of the platform of the March 14th alliance, spilled over into attacks on Syrians themselves. As a visible underclass linked with what some Lebanese understood to be an enemy state Syrian workers constituted a socially vulnerable—and visible—group moving through public space. Constrained as potentially threatening in an anxious political climate, as well as powerless, they were uniquely regulated by security forces.

“Even if I am nizami [law-abiding], I get pulled over by the police,” one Syrian laborer who worked delivering fast food by motor scooter told me. Even though in possession of updated driver’s licenses and properly maintained vehicles, Syrian delivery workers I spoke with described being detained at roadsides, at police stations, and having their vehicles frequently seized. One restaurant worker thought that Syrian delivery drivers on motor scooters were most suspect because he had heard rumors that
“they [security forces] think that it might be a scooter loaded with explosives that is setting off some of the bombs.” “But they’re not sure,” he added. While the mobility of Syrian workers was subject to an increased level of scrutiny by the security apparatus even prior to Hariri’s assassination because of their status as a disenfranchised population, the political tone and precariousness of the post-Hariri period exacerbated their vulnerability. Indeed, the bodies of the workers were profiled by Lebanese security services in ways that bore similarities with U.S. security agencies’ profiling of African Americans, Middle Easterners, and South Asians engaged in practices of mobility. As part of the U.S. vernacular, tongue-in-cheek expressions like “driving while black” and “flying while Arab or Muslim” (in the post-9/11 era) reference the policing that is generated by these profiling practices. These kinds of practices, like those the Syrian workers encountered, are initiated by suspicion of certain raced and classed bodies. In this way, while the order implemented by security in Beirut disrupted mobility for many, it often rendered others, like the Syrian workers on motor scooters, immobile.

In techniques of securitization, risk is anticipated not only on the basis of ideas about race, gender, class but also through biometric technologies of profiling that purport to identify and detect likely, future, offenders through, for example, reading and analyzing minute aspects of the body such as facial expressions that betray criminal intent. Studies of the global regime of mobility that consider technologies of security in the post-9/11 era highlight the use of biopolitics, which examines and interprets bodily gestures in seeking to surveil, to assess the risk presented by, and to manage the movement of individuals. These programs of behavioral profiling, unlike the zig-zag barrier or steel blockade, bear a futurist temporality that creates what geographer Ben Anderson calls “geographies of anticipatory action” (2010). By acting upon individuals “on the basis of behavioural potentialities rather than on the basis of how they have actually acted” (Bell 2006, 160), these technologies of security bear a distinctively preemptive character.

In Beirut, security also acts on the basis of behavioral potentialities, but in a way that makes central social standing as opposed to affective and bodily gestures. For example, the barriers that require the zig-zag movement are often set up this way in order to slow cars and allow guards to take a longer, more substantive look at a vehicle’s occupants. Suspicious drivers are told to pull over and thus enter a second, verbal and more discerning,
stage of inspection. Though the criteria for and assessment of who and when someone is deemed suspicious is contextual, it draws significantly on the inextricably linked dimensions of social status and potential criminality rather than on the kinds of technologically sophisticated forms of spatial surveillance employed in many other sites around the world.

In Beirut’s public space, a labor force of armed guards typically measured people’s behavioral potentialities. Members of security, whom I observed to be exclusively male, seemed to identify and detect the level of threat posed by an individual or group according to both broad and localized notions of social hierarchy and identification that ranked and sorted persons by making use of various sensorial registers including the visual discernment, verbal communication, and mental determination of characteristics such as class, gender, age, and religious and national background. Arabic accents, the wearing of religiously identified clothing such as the headscarf, and one’s status as a Western foreigner are all features of the complex matrix that is the basis for the calculation of threat level. Indeed, as Fawaz, Harb, and Gharbieh observe about threat detection in Beirut, even the wearing of plastic shoes like flip-flops, which are thought by many Lebanese to be inferior-status footwear appropriate only for the interior of the home, might give security personnel enough reason to conduct a more thorough going-over (2012, 182).

Sara, a mother of two in her thirties, related to me how, in her verbal interactions with members of Beirut’s security forces while driving (a Volkswagen), she always tells them that she is in a rush and “needs to get through” (if there is a barrier or blockade) in order to pick up her children at their friends’ home. She recalled how this tactic of emphasizing her role as a mother trying to reach her child often proves successful at getting around the constraints security might otherwise place on her mobility. Sara’s identity as a woman, a mother, and upper income (driving a stylish German car) is recognized by the localized regime of mobility administered by the security forces as one that is entitled to greater freedom of movement. In this sense, amid an urban social space structured by patriarchy, understandings of gender and class come together to create a kind of mobility of entitlement whereby the upper-class mother is configured as both powerful and, in a certain sense, powerless by the first line of security. In negotiating for access, Sara was able to draw on a form of power that stems from her elevated class position and, at the same time, gendered notions of women
and mothers as unthreatening and in need of male guidance and protection. Her access to urban space stands in stark contrast to the experiences of the Syrian worker on the motor scooter, who held low status in Beirut society and was deemed possibly threatening by certain political groups. His movement was circumscribed by security. This inequality in access produced a stratified mobility whereby movement through the city by some urban residents, like the upper-income woman in transit to pick up her child, was less suspect and more unrestrained than that of others—the male foreign laborer, for instance.

**Navigating Security: Tactics, Strategies, and Competence**

In Beirut’s realms of security, social class, national origin, and gender are important facets of the complex social matrix upon which decisions about spatial access are made. However, these features of social identity are not the only factors that go into determining to whom spatial access should or should not be ceded. One’s ability to negotiate with security forces can also shape the outcome of one’s experience in and around a secure area. The security encounter, like other interactions in Beirut’s public life, might be navigated through familiarity or by successfully mobilizing one’s social capital through perceived, proclaimed, or demonstrable affiliation with well-placed individuals, often kin members, or institutions.

Once, while riding as a passenger in Maya’s car while she ran errands around the city, she entered a parking lot that sat across from the building housing a prominent NGO. She had picked up and dropped off documents at this building many times, and the men who staffed the parking-lot security gate knew her, she said. This time, the security guard chatted with her and told her that although he was supposed to check under her car—using the wheeled search mirror he was holding—he was not going to bother her with this check, and he gave her clearance to go ahead and park.

Reminiscent of Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective of urban public life as an arena in which individuals present their “familiar” and “connected” selves (Hannerz 1980), Maya’s mode of gaining spatial access in a city characterized by various forms of security highlights the significance of face-to-face interactions in Beirut’s urban environment and challenges
assumptions about cities as spaces with high levels of both anonymity and anomie. Moreover, the cultivation of the “familiar” and “connected” self highlights the harnessing of certain sets of skills and tactics that residents use in getting around the city. If, as anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1980) notes, we conceive of the “city as theater,” the security encounter is a scene through which residents as actors display, or hope to display, a kind of “user competence” (Fawaz, Gharbieh, and Harb 2009, 2) that enables them to navigate past social and material security barriers. The privileged, in possession of a greater level of user competence, often, but not always, find a means of access.

In February 2006, I escorted a group of students, who happened to all be women, from a colleague’s anthropology course at the American University of Beirut (AUB) onto the busy commercial street adjacent to the university to participate in a classroom exercise about taking fieldnotes. The university’s picturesque and gated campus, replete with red-tiled roofed buildings boasting Mediterranean views, is an oasis of green amid the concrete of Beirut. With its English-language curriculum and costly tuition, AUB enrolls students primarily from privileged backgrounds.

It was a rainy morning, and although we had planned to focus on completing the classroom exercise, matters of security prevailed. We exited the campus, heading past one of the several entrances around the campus’s perimeter staffed by guards, and stood under the awning of a restaurant to take notes. This section of the street was dotted with soldiers, and in front of them cars moved along the one-way corridor zigzagging back and forth between a corral of metal barricades. The then-prime minister, Fouad Senioura, lived in an apartment building on this block. Passing along in front of his building was a meandering, vehicular caravan overseen by a group of soldiers. A minute or so after the students began taking notes, a soldier came to ask us what we were doing. The students took the lead, responding that they were from the university and were doing an assignment for class. The soldier left, and we continued observing and writing. A few minutes later, another soldier, this one more imperious, approached our group. “Could you move?” he asked rhetorically. Flustered, we made the collective decision to find another location to complete the exercise. In their fieldnotes, the students wrote about what happened. One wrote: “What I was thinking about during this conversation [with the soldier] is that, are we a kind of threat to them? Are we a threat to security? Aren’t the
streets for the public? After this experience with the soldier, I felt uncomfortable to stay there; we were violating the rules of the public space that is now part of several private spaces: the restaurant and Senioura’s property.”

Other students also commented that the soldiers’ telling us to move demonstrated the insidious expansion of the private at the expense of the public. Their notes voiced not only resentment about this takeover of public space but also uneasiness about having their freedom of movement curtailed by the soldiers, in particular, I surmised, because they were unaccustomed to being viewed or treated as threatening in public space. One student, for instance, spoke in her write-up about how the stares of both the soldiers and passersby made her feel as if she was doing something wrong. “Were we a threat?” she wrote, “I hope not. I don’t want to get arrested just for writing notes.”

I shared the students’ sentiments insofar as I too found the encounter both surprising and unsettling. Having come and gone from the university on a regular basis, I was, as I am sure the students were, aware of the increased security along the block where Senioura lived, but I presumed, mistakenly, that our behavior on the street would be perceived as harmless. What is more, I thought that our association with the university, a province of the privileged, would grant us access to the street that others might not be permitted. I thought this association furnished us with the social capital that would enable us to move freely in the public-cum-privatized space, as the one student summed it up, that this block of the street had become.

But security encounters are variable and, as such, one can predict neither the course of action of an encounter nor its outcome. For example, it might have been our act of writing notes that bothered the soldiers, just as the taking of photos on a public street near a blockade—or even the carrying of a camera—might incite a confrontation with security personnel. But we also might have tried to negotiate with the soldiers by claiming that we had permission from the university administration to conduct a classroom exercise and to record information there on the street. This claim of authorization from high-ranking authorities, a demonstration of our competence as users of Beirut’s urban space, could have thrown off the soldiers and entrenched our position. However, in the context of security, mobility and access are contingent on a myriad of factors including, but not limited to, the moods and whims of the soldiers and guards, the time of day, and the prevailing scale and dimensions of political tension. In Beirut, there are no
state-issued red or yellow alerts indicating the level of threat, “but the ebbs and flows of political crisis, which in turn shape security measures, play a key role in the management and regulation of spatial movement.

Moreover, what is particularly interesting about the nature of Beirut’s installations of security during the 2004–2006 period is the way in which they demonstrate the hegemony of party politics over the interests of the public or common good. As urban studies scholars Fawaz, Harb, and Gharbieh note (2012, 188), security deployments in Beirut show not only disregard for the common good, as the comings and goings of a select group of influential individuals curtail and alter the movement of the majority of the city’s residents in various ways, “but actually the absence of a claim forwarded in the name of a ‘common good’ to justify these deployments.” In fact, it would seem that the securitization of key political figures and efforts to maintain their unhindered mobility through the city to home, work, and leisure outweigh not only the public interest but also what Michel Foucault understood to be the key aspect of the city’s spatial order: making possible, guaranteeing, and ensuring the circulation of people, goods, and money (2007, 29). The clout of those whom security surrounds is such that their circulation across “archipelagos of privilege and power” (Graham 2010, 96) is given priority over the routinized activities of public and commercial life. The workings of security, in this way, have an exclusionary effect in the urban environment.

ENCLAVIZATION

Security reconfigured mobility in Beirut in both the short term, as weaving back and forth between barriers was suddenly required, and also in more lasting ways, as residents had to find new routes from home to work or from school to home because of road closures and the rerouting of traffic flow in areas near VIP residences.

Among the most heavily fortified spaces in Beirut after February 2005 was that surrounding the home of former prime minister Hariri, a palatial block-long structure in the west Beirut neighborhood of Koreitem. Following Hariri’s assassination, the street passing in front of the home was turned into a one-way thoroughfare with checkpoints at both ends; security was later intensified, and vehicular access was denied entirely. Here,
both personnel employed by the Hariri family and Lebanese armed forces managed security.

The order enforced by the security near the Hariri palace, and elsewhere in the city, created a kind of disorder for many residents, especially drivers. On many of the occasions when I met with Maya, a professional whose workplace was adjacent to the Hariri palace, or rode as a passenger in her car, she complained about how the street’s being changed to a one-way route added time and stress to her commute. In fact, not only was traffic flow on the main thoroughfare that passed by the palace disrupted, but also circulation along the smaller, connecting streets was managed by guards and signs announcing that the streets were closed except to those who needed to conduct business at the palace. Also, sections of a busy road down from and parallel to the one in front of the Hariri palace were lined with yellow police tape that read “police line” in English and displayed numerous “no parking” signs.

Maya’s everyday driving patterns were caught up in the development of security enclaves throughout Beirut. Similar processes of enclavization have shaped the everyday lives of residents in other cities in the Middle East. In Cairo, for example, exurban gated communities have been expanded, as have urban elite consumer practices that involve patterns of travel from one type of guarded space to another, a phenomenon geographer Stephen Graham has termed “passage point urbanism” (2010). Elsewhere in the world, fear of crime has led middle- and upper-class residents, in São Paulo for example, to fortify their residences and neighborhoods, employ private security forces, and seek out modes of urban mobility that enable them to pass over, in some cases quite literally through the use of helicopters, the urban streetscape and the likelihood of interaction with its lowest-status denizens (Caldeira 2000). These kinds of classed processes of spatial and social segregation link up with the broader global phenomenon of establishing secure, private, separately administrated, and “globally networked” territories within parts of nations (Ferguson 2005).

Navigations of the territories of security in Beirut took place in a public space already configured by relations of power wherein certain bodies are subject to increased scrutiny and regulation. In processes of securing Beirut, these inequalities of spatial access and mobility were produced in concert with forms of symbolic domination experienced by all. For example, following his assassination, photo billboards of Hariri were put up
downtown, in West Beirut, and along major highway corridors surrounding the city. His oversize image, draped from verandas of buildings facing one another, hung over the center of narrow streets in neighborhoods affiliated with his political party and its supporters. A graphic production company with whom Maya dealt for her work told her of the huge profits they had made printing Hariri posters. It was a continuous source of revenue, they said, because the poster images were replaced with new ones every few months. Other Hariri displays appeared in electronic form; a digital scoreboard adjacent to his downtown burial site and another near the studios of the television network his family owned kept a running count of the number of days since his death. As a political technology visually representing and memorializing Hariri’s power and surveilling public life, these pictorial and numeric displays constituted territories of security in their own right.

Security enclavization was also a feature of the neighborhood where the speaker of the house of parliament, Nabih Berri, one of the top three men in Lebanon’s political system, resided. In Ain-al-Tiné, just west of Verdun, on the street where Berri lives, security spilled out into the lives of residents and passersby. Hania, a woman in her forties, lives with her family in a building down and across the street from Berri’s residence. It was early 2006 when Hania told me how Berri’s security had recently reduced the height of the speed bumps that were staggered along the street. After being installed in order to slow vehicle traffic from one end of the street to the other and thereby enhance surveillance capabilities, Berri’s neighbors complained that the bumps were too high and caused damage to their cars. But soon, another type of barrier to mobility appeared: a blockade staffed by soldiers was situated at one end of the street. The other end of the street remained open, but midway up the street a gentler barricade stood: a low chain strung between two metal posts blocked cars from passing through.

Walking along this street, one closed to public vehicular traffic, created an intimate encounter with this barricade. Amid this intimacy, a consequence of the slower pace and bodily aspects of pedestrian mobility, the many layers of security were made evident. I met Hania at her building several times, and each time I approached the chain, because there were no sidewalks on her street, I thought about the ways in which the barrier might be breached: I could easily unhook the chain from the metal post or, more simply, step over it, for instance. But the chain represented only the first layer of security, as armed soldiers stood watch on the side of the street,
often taking shelter from the sun by standing or sitting in a wooden sentry box. A cognitive and bodily awareness of this second layer of security made me automatically pause just in front of the chain and look over to receive a signal from the soldier(s) that I was permitted to proceed. Then, and only then, would I step over the chain. If I was not signaled and approved of from a distance, this seemingly penetrable barrier became even more cumbersome. Verbal communication added another layer to barriers, one of social negotiation and the increased possibility that the right of access would be denied.

For example, on one occasion, after passing the checkpoint at the opening of Hania’s street, I sat on a ledge outside her building to wait for her. A soldier stationed in front of Berri’s residence walked over and asked me why I was sitting there and whom I knew in the building. I gave him Hania’s name. In an act that suggested the improvisatory, even arbitrary, nature of security, he proceeded to quiz me: “What is her family name?” “What floor does she live on?” It seemed that he knew all the residents in the building, even the floors on which they lived, and that I would be given permission to remain sitting there only if I could prove that I was indeed Hania’s acquaintance. I erred a bit, giving Hania’s parents’ family name as I was unable to recall her married name, but the soldier was satisfied with my answers. He relaxed and began to make affable conversation.

At checkpoints and blockades not only social interactions but the material forms of the barriers themselves were unpredictable and required tools of negotiation. The changing and multilayered nature of the material barriers that manifested on Hania’s street, for instance, exemplified the shape-shifting nature of security installations in Beirut: secured areas were increasingly and suddenly fortified as barriers took on harder, more permanent forms, bollards and no parking zones were erected overnight, and streets were unexpectedly closed off or were reconfigured, without warning, from two- to one-way traffic. In this way, processes of securitization made daily mobility a challenging and uncertain affair. “It’s annoying,” Hania said of the impediments that lined her street, but “it’s better to have all of this than not to have it I guess. . . . Although it’s interesting, because no one was killed in his house. All of them have been killed a-tareeq [on the road].” Indeed, those assassinated had all lost their lives in their cars.

In 2006, friends visiting the home of Karine, a twenty-one-year old college student, would encounter a checkpoint on arriving at her street.
Karine’s street in the upmarket northern Beirut suburb of Rabieh was home to the residence of General Michel Aoun, a key figure during the Lebanese civil and regional war who reappeared on the political stage in spring 2005 after returning from living in exile in France. Security forces protecting Aoun’s residence, which Karine thought consisted of both privately hired guards and state soldiers, issued visitor parking passes to households along the street for their guests. “I always tell my friends to call me when they get close to my house so that I can come out and give them a parking pass,” Karine explained. What happens if you park your car on the street without a parking pass? I asked her. “They will tow your car,” she replied.

Along Aoun’s street, two distinct, yet intersecting, types of enclavization were at work. One type of enclave, as I discussed earlier, was established by mechanisms of security seeking to protect Aoun and his family from harm. Though not an officeholder, Aoun’s personage generated processes of securitization that altered the mobility practices of his neighbors and their guests. However, the security enclave was enmeshed with another, that of the affluent. Situated en route to the mountains but only a twenty-minute drive from Beirut, Rabieh is an exclusive neighborhood of luxury hillside villas. In a sense, we can conceive of this intersection of enclaves as more than merely another example of the overlapping of social and physical geographies of class and political elites in Beirut. The intersection of enclaves changed things, if only a bit: wealthy residents accustomed to exercising their own forms of security and surveillance in the interest of maintaining not just safety but exclusivity found themselves subject to the scrutiny of bodyguards and soldiers. This change demonstrates not that the mobility of all residents was equally regulated and disciplined by Beirut’s installations of security in the 2004–2006 period but rather the extent to which, in different ways and to different degrees, security shaped everyday spatial life for residents from many walks of life.

According to Maya, who had to reorder her route to work as a result of a security blockade near the Hariri palace, exercising control over traffic was an important way of inscribing power in the urban landscape, especially for the political elite. She complained, for example, that the Hariri family did not reopen the seaside road, a major traffic artery, near the site of the explosion that killed Hariri after the one-year anniversary of his assassination: “I mean, they could have reopened the road as part of the commemoration of his death in February 2006,” she said. “I don’t understand why they couldn’t
have done that, instead of just leaving it closed down and creating such a bad traffic situation for everyone, even after a year has passed. They decide for all of us how we are going to live in this city!” Here, Maya regarded mobility for all as coming under the control of a select few—Hariri’s family members, to be precise. Her comment about how things worked in the city, about how the influence of the billionaire Hariri family extended even into the realm of traffic and road closures, resonated with everyday casual remarks I heard about how the “country is run by a few people.” In this way, while the kinds of security assemblages that took shape in the 2004–2006 period could be viewed as an exceptional state of being, for many ordinary residents they represented business-as-usual politics writ large on the public landscape: the interests of the ruling class, to modify the classic line from Marx, were the ruling relations of space and society in Beirut, especially in the era following the long civil and regional war. Or as Nathalie, a university student, put it, “All the leaders have turned their neighborhoods into a thakanat [barracks]—you’re going somewhere and then you find that a certain street is blocked and you can’t think of a different route right away, . . . This is how it is; we’re just forced to adapt.”

SECURITY FOR WHOM?

In 2007, during the question-and-answer period following my research presentation at a workshop, a Lebanese woman criticized my analysis of experiences of security in Beirut. “You don’t emphasize enough how security makes people feel safe,” she said. She was right. I had not emphasized feelings of safety that security installations may have fostered for some residents. Thinking that I might have overlooked these sentiments about feeling safe and protected as a result of the security measures enacted in the 2004–2006 period, I went through my research data again.

During the 2004–2006 time frame, violence took the form mainly of a series of assassinations of political figures and journalists and several bomb explosions in largely uninhabited sites in predominantly Christian areas of Beirut. Later, in summer 2006, a conflict between Hizbullah and Israel escalated into full-scale war, and, in spring 2008, the deterioration of the domestic political situation brought the looming possibility of a return to civil war. Amid these two later contexts of crisis, the material formations
of security in Beirut continued to surround high-profile locations, but the reach of violence expanded significantly.

But in my fieldnotes and interview transcripts from the 2004–2006 period, on which this chapter focuses, I found that residents expressed frustration, ambivalence, and weariness about the installations of security that took hold in the city rather than feelings of being protected by them. Nada, a young mother who lived in an apartment in Ain el Mreisse, only blocks away from the site of the explosions that took Hariri’s life and from which Hamadeh narrowly escaped with his, spoke pointedly about politics, and security, in these terms: “The whole situation is very depressing. Everyone I know is depressed, when I call my friends we’ll say that we feel tired, and we won’t really say it, we won’t say that we’re depressed. But the political situation is making us depressed. So when you ask about security, all I can say is that it is for the big deal makers who decide the fate of the Lebanese. They will decide to either keep peace or to make war, and they... Well, most of them have dual nationality—so if a real war does break out, they’ll be the first to leave the country.”

For Nada, mechanisms of security not only did not make her feel protected but were emblematic of the oligarchic dimensions of the Lebanese political system, in which a group of elites dominate the realms of government and play games of politics whose greatest risks—including the threat of full-scale war—are born by the majority citizen population. In fact, the security surrounding these “deal makers,” as Nada referred to them, exists in stark juxtaposition to the precariousness of lives lived by most Lebanese, who must contend with the outcomes of political and economic crises fashioned by the power holders. In this sense, the insecurity wrought by formations of security during the 2004–2006 period represented broader, and enduring, experiences of and sentiments about feeling unprotected by an unstable and corrupt political system in a region rife with conflict.

THE INEQUALITY OF SECURITY

The havoc of insecurity and the differentiated experiences of mobility produced by processes of securitization during this time in Beirut recalled life during the protracted civil and regional war in ways both semiotic and material. It was not just the spectacle and destruction of the car bomb that
brought back the war but also the fact that residents’ mobility practices were once again regulated by armed forces, barriers, and closures, that territorial enclaves took shape, and that party loyalists-cum-foot soldiers working for the power holders of the political sectarian structure set up encampments throughout the city. And thus, while the order proffered by security was for the few, it created a kind of disorder for the many.

The establishment of security enclaves surrounding the residences of these individuals reconfigured the urban landscape in ways that entrenched its uneven geographies of power. As a result of these processes of enclavization, residents experienced forms of insecurity as they found themselves caught up in shifting and multilayered forms of security. After all, the mobility of the targets of security—important persons who move from place to place—meant that security formations too were mobile and thereby territorialized not only specific parts of the city but the city as a whole. Residents in the city, getting around by car and on foot, were enmeshed in disciplinary arrangements produced by material and social mechanisms of security. These mechanisms of security, operated by private nonstate and state actors working in concert, created an exclusionary urban landscape and expanded the privatization of the public realm.