The Beirut Blast:

Exploring Bottom-Up Approaches to Urban Recovery and the Reproduction of Urban Space in Contested Cities

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Introduction

The socio-spatial trajectories of the Beirut port explosion of August 4, 2020, cannot be assessed in isolation, given the entanglement of sectarian power dynamics, contentious geopolitical boundaries, and amnesiac post-war reconstruction planning practice. There were approximately 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored at the port, which, in terms of magnitude, equates to 1.1 kilotons of TNT (Valsamos et. al, 2020). This caused grave devastation; with an estimated 200 casualties, 7000 injuries, 300,000 individuals internally displaced, and the destruction of key heritage sites, commercial and residential buildings (Valsamos et. al, 2020; Landry et. al, 2020). "Nearly two million cubic metres of rubbles and about 80,000 tonnes of broken glass" were found and compost sites were damaged, forcing community-led initiatives to dispose of the debris temporarily until effective and sustainable measures can be deployed (Basbous, 2021: 6). Additionally, 'as a direct result of the explosion, an estimated 100,000 to 750,000 tonnes of contaminated materials were dispersed into the air, soil and water (Ibid: 5).' This has raised critical concerns regarding immediate disaster response as well as long-term reconstruction, hence urging practitioners to obtain valuable inputs (i.e., geospatial data, maps, and 3D models) to expand on vulnerability assessments and mitigation measures and to devise a holistic recovery framework. On a global scale, the aftermath of the blast is idiosyncratic in nature, particularly due to the vacuum caused by the capture of state institutions by warlords and private partisan interests, leaving matters at the hands of civic engagement and humanitarian initiatives (Geha et al., 2020). Resistance, as opposed to resilience, has become the focal point for activists, civil society, practitioners, and scholars in Lebanon, to move beyond the collective ethos of survivalism arising from years of living in a temporal void of the 'catastrophic present' as described by Boano (Geha et al., 2020; Boano, 2021: 41). Beirut challenges established imaginaries of infrastructures of life and inhabitation vis-a-vis the realm of city and state configurations (Basbous, 2021). It would be inadequate to presume that urban planning in Beirut is an arbitrary practice, as the materialisation of sectarian narratives through spatial practices has facilitated reproductions of the geography of war and perpetuated urban violence. As posited by Geha et. al. (2020: 360) the blast "epitomises Lebanon's endemic problems."

Whilst a year has passed since the catastrophic blast, the city echoes of trauma with rubble piled up in temporary sites, electricity cuts due to fuel shortages, food and medicine scarcity, and increasing hyperinflation as the Lebanese Lira plunged in value fifteen-fold (Chulov, 2021). State institutions have yet to implement a divisive plan to tackle both the debris that remains undisposed of, and the pre-existing crises exacerbated by the blast, as rentier practices topple social and political concerns of the country (Basbous, 2021; Chulov, 2021). Nonetheless, the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic added yet another impediment for the Lebanese to overcome. Urban geopolitical reconstruction in Beirut, as a contested city, operates in the interim indicating that apprehension is a constant due to failure in reconciling intracommunal tensions within the framework of economic development (Nagle, 2016). The erasure of the memories of war witnessed throughout *Solidere's* reconstruction plan has created what Nagle terms as an 'amnesiac city'—destructing cultural expression and diversity within Beirut's city centre (Ibid). The ebb and flow of neoliberal post-war reconstruction paralysis experienced in Lebanon following the Taif agreement, has created a sense of scepticism and distrust towards the state (Ibid). Moreover, attempts to restore the Lebanese economy to its pre-war state through market-driven policies and increased commodification widened socio-economic inequalities (Tarābulsi, 2007). The escalation of conflict in Lebanon is not merely a consequence of political corruption but also the disposition of the prospect 'the war yet to come' in planning and development with regards to Beirut's frontiers (Bou Akar, 2018; Fawaz, 2017). Dwelling practices and spatial configurations in dynamic and contested contexts, prompt planners to further delve into ontology to explore the orientations of collective life where indeterminacy and exclusion has become the default paradigm (Baono, 2020). The informality of planning practice and its legalities in Lebanon continues to cause strain between the individual and the state apparatus, shaping the politics of inhabitation (Nasr and Verdeil, 2008). Therefore, the potentials of the reconstruction and recovery process can only be comprehensive if pre-existing spatial practices are closely dissected to identify the areas and narratives that have led to such segmentation in Beirut.

The narratives fomented by the deep divides apparent in Beirut can be analysed to determine the relationality of various sects in terms of *othering* and thus, how space in Beirut is constantly reproduced (Agamben, 1998; Bou Akar; 2018). The frequency of urban violence witnessed is arguably a reiteration of the biopolitical machine described by Michel Foucault and Agamben, which normalises the notion of 'othering' along ethno-religious boundaries (Bou Akar, 2018). Political topology is a key determinant not only for where real-estate projects will be located, but also where individuals opt to dwell (Bou Akar, 2012). Accordingly, inhabitation is politicised in a manner that permeates imaginaries of spaces and planning practice through distortions of law and a perpetual state of exception (Fawaz, 2017; Agamben, 2005). Consequently, sectarian reconfigurations and expropriations of urban space have made the makeshift mode of inhabitation the norm for residents of the city. As such, the strife caused by years of structural failures has placed people at the centre of recovery discourses. The focus of the research is to explore the potential for people-led recovery in Beirut post-explosion, particularly through the nexus between urban politics and spatial ordering. In the first chapter of the research, I analyse the historical narratives and spatial practices that transformed Beirut into an enclaved city confronted by the hostile segmentation of zones and exceptions. I also address the abstractions of urban space and the attachment of new meanings to the built environment through different expressions of violence. In many ways the experience of spatial violence in Beirut is unconventional both prior to and following the port-explosion, urging the exploration of potential frameworks of civic engagement and bottom-up approaches. The patterns of production and reproduction of space in Beirut throughout outbursts of urban violence illustrate the obscurities of spatial practices in contested geographies. The dichotomies: continuity and transience, construction and destruction, order and chaos, are suffused challenging conventional epistemologies of spatial interventions. The second chapter of the research presents a synthesis of historical and current narratives with spatial practice and infrastructures of care that emerged following the blast using Karantina, Medwar and Mar Mikhael as case studies.

Figure 001: Satellite Image of Port Damage (2020) (Source: New York Times)

1 Literature Review

Contextualisation

1.1 Sectarian Divides and the Civil War (1975-1990)

Lebanon has faced a turbulent history of radical transformations with pervasive implications on collective life and spatial imaginaries, specifically in Beirut. From the Civil War of 1975, the Taif Agreement in 1989, the assassination of Rafik Hariri, to the War between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, geopolitical realities penetrated ontologies of inhabitation (Bou Akar, 2018; Nasr and Verdeil, 2008). This has challenged Beirut's urban vitality as the city became an incubator for colliding self-interests and the discontinuous planning practice, shrouding memories of war and trauma (Larkin, 2010). To coherently explore the potentials of people-led recovery interventions in response to the landscape of fragility created by the blast, it is critical to anatomise the spatiotemporal implications of sectarian divisions on the politics of inhabitation, the upsurge in urban violence and dispossessions, and subsequently, urban planning (Boano, 2021). The Civil War was a critical juncture for the materialisation of the sectarian narratives through the homogenisation of space, whereby militias were able to mobilise through the demarcation of West and East Beirut (Bou Akar, 2018; Yassin, 2011). West Beirut became primarily Muslim dominated, whereas East Beirut was primarily Christian dominated (Bou Akar, 2018). Recognising the actuality and continuity of war is integral to disengage the amnesiac reconstruction narrative that has been deeply embedded in spatial practice in Beirut witnessed following the war and frequent outbursts of urban violence from the Israeli attack in 2006, the uprisings seen in the last decade, leading up to the 2020 blast (Nagle, 2018; Boano, 2021). The *modus operandi* of neoliberal post-war reconstruction in Beirut diverged from curing that which ails: intracommunal conflict reinforced by the propagation of the notion of the 'enemy' or rather, the foreign 'other', in favour of transient localism through privatisation strategies (Nagle, 2018). This brought forth the ethical schism of planning practice apparent in Beirut, making it an enclaved city where, paradoxically, confronted by the perpetuity of war and the erasure of the memory of war throughout cycles of construction and deconstruction (Bou Akar, 2018; Nagle, 2016). As described by Bou Akar, 'when planning loses its ethical basis in socioeconomic development … it becomes little more than a tool for ordering space in the interest of those in power, devoid of the normative attributes of equity and social justice that are usually attributed to planning practice.'

As elucidated in Marianne Hirsch's concept of *postmemory*, the memory of war in many ways becomes inherited and internalised by future generations, as such, it is crucial to realise the nuances of constructions of the past (Larkin, 2010; Hirsch, 2012). The historiography of war and urban violence in Lebanon is intricate and multifaceted due to the intersection of endogenous and exogenous factors and contentions of ideological discourses. Before the Civil War, Beirut was a provincial Ottoman town and then colony of France, with a hopeful vision of independence and economic prosperity (Bou Akar, 2018). Although the influx of nationals of neighbouring countries fleeing socialist movements in their respective countries had a positive impact on Beirut as a flourishing touristic centre and the country's economy in the 1950s, growth was incongruous across other regions of the country and the rapidly changing demographics brought forth political polarities (Nasr and Verdeil, 2008; Yassin, 2011).Throughout the 1960s, Lebanon's economy became heavily reliant on foreign capital focusing on the commercial and financial sectors, as an intermediary by proximity, under the auspices of petrodollar recycling and the oil boom (Tarābulsi, 2007). In fact, the number of industrial workers had doubled in the decade preceding the civil war (Tarābulsi, 2007). However, this monopolistic laissez-faire approach adopted by Lebanon's oligarchs further aggravated social and economic disparities by increasing living costs way beyond the average earnings and drove the agricultural industry into crisis as workers were driven into debt by the commercial/financial sector(s) (Tarābulsi, 2007). The social consequences of Beirut's rapid urbanisation created a 'poverty belt' on the outskirts of the capital as described by Tarābulsi, stretching from further east to the west, as the assemblage of sectarian kinship, patronage, and emigration led to the inflation of the middle class. Essentially, the synthesis of international and regional politics with local disputes preceding civil wars years had solidified fragmentation within the urban fabric of Lebanon as evident in the emergence of spaces of exception or *dispositifs* (Bou Akar, 2018; Frost, 2015).

The mass exodus caused by the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the rise of pan-Arab Nationalism under Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, coupled with the effect of the Cold War on the Middle East, had facilitated the transformation and reterritorialization of Beirut through zoning practices which consolidated sectarian enclaves (Sune, 2011; Bou Akar, 2018; Yassin, 2011). As described by Bou Akar, the Civil War 'as it is most commonly understood today, [is] a sectarian battle among Christian, Shiite, Sunni, and Druze militias.' The intersection of regional issues, mainly the right of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to strike at Israel on Lebanese soil, and local sectarian rifts concerning power-sharing and national identity and sovereignty created polarities driven by claims to the right to the city, which was accentuated by the politicisation of Christian and Muslim groups (Sune, 2011; Yassin, 2011). Issues of identity, territoriality, and power permeated the built environment in Beirut as urban militias reproduced their own geographies within the city through different expressions of violence and resistance, i.e., combat, media, and propaganda (Fregonese, 2009). By April of 1975, Ayn al-Rummaneh, the first massacre of the war broke out between Lebanon's right wing Maronite Christian party, The Kata'ib (The Phalanges) and the leftist Muslim groups allied with the PLO under the direction of the Lebanese National Front (LNM) (Sune, 2011; Waage and Huse, 2020). Kata'ib militiamen attacked a bus transporting Palestinians through East Beirut to the camp of Tel al-Zaatar, killing 27 passengers (Waage and Huse, 2020). It was claimed that the attack had been launched by the Kata'ib in retaliation for a guerrilla attack on a church in the same neighbourhood (Fregonese, 2009). The details surrounding the Ayn al-Rummaneh remain disputed. This paved the path for Beirut's hostile transformation from a hub of Lebanese *Nahda* (cultural renaissance) to a city divided into cantons of sectarian homogeneity (Yassin, 2010; Tarābulsi, 2007). The origin of the war became difficult to discern because of the entanglement of structural issues of consociationalism dating back to the French Mandate, shifting alliances, and the escalation of miscellaneous forms of violence provoked by rhetoric of fear.
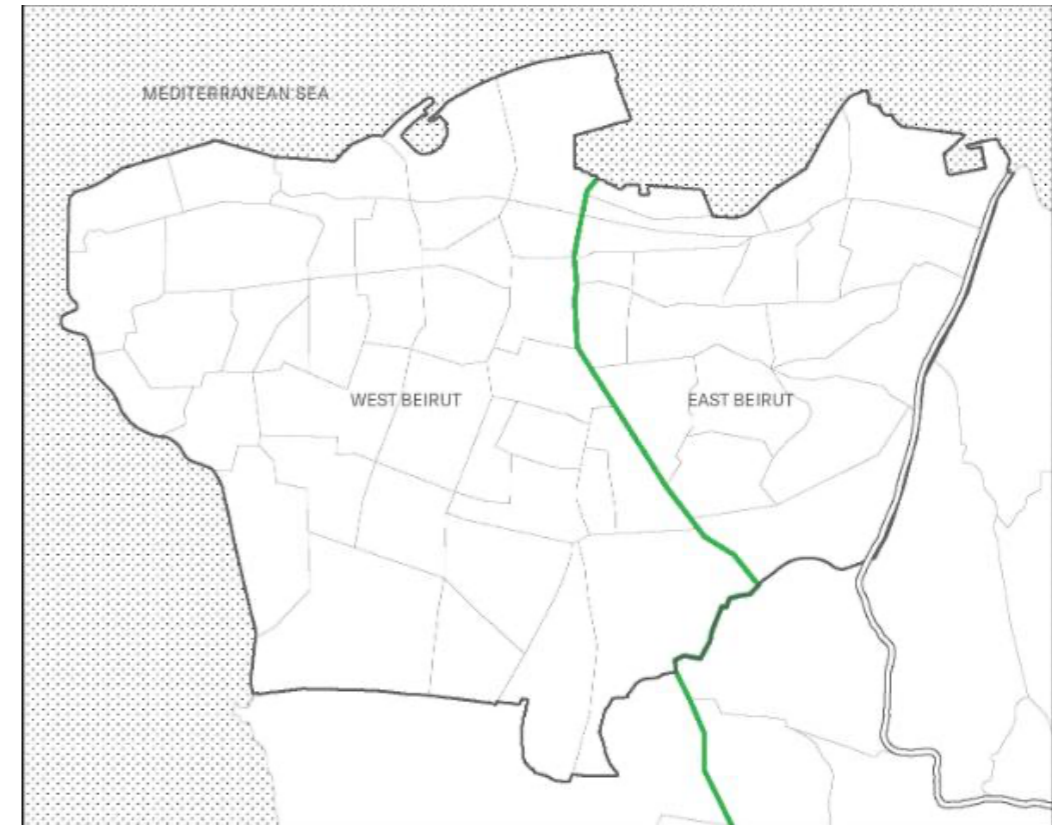

Figure 002: Demarcation "Green" Line During Civil War (Source: Bloomsbury Collection)

1.2 Urbicide and Ma'raka al-Fanadiq (The Battle of the Hotels

Image 001: Katai'ib militiamen in the Holiday Inn, Beirut (source: Don McCullin, 1976)

The Battle of the Hotels exemplifies Beirut's shift from a metropolis to a battle ground— the seaside hotels that once represented the city's affluence brought about through large petrodollar deposits in the financial sector became a military asset to reinforce militia geographies (Nayel, 2015). Lasting until March of 1976, the Battle of the Hotels reportedly 'mobilised around 25,000 fighters from both sides, resulting in more than 1,000 dead and 2,000 injured (Nayel, 2015).' Militias from South-eastern districts moved towards the centre with heavy artillery seizing different hotels as 'vantage points' to surveil rival groups and to launch attacks (Fregonese, 2009). The Holiday Inn, in particular, was one of the newer establishments, opening for business just two years prior to the war (Nayel, 2015). For the elite, the Holiday Inn signified a prosperous

developmental shift, meanwhile for the saturated middle class, it signified the incongruence of Lebanon's peripheral laissez faire economy (Nayel, 2015; Markham, 1976). It was significant during the Two-Years War due to its strategic location and elevation overlooking the city and proximity to the sea between the coastal districts Ain el-Mraiseh and Mina al-Hosn (Nayel, 2015). Essentially, the battle of the seaside hotels and specifically, the Holiday Inn, would transform the geopolitical landscape of the war as control of the green line area would lead to the defeat of either group(s) (Fregonese, 2009). The overlap of the narratives of local militias and regional actors shaped the urban fabric of Beirut through the promulgation of the notion that territorial homogeneity is only the mode of survival. Among the practices in which such narratives distorted the relationship between the civilian and the city included posters, street art, and communiqués, making it inconceivable to isolate dwelling from urban geopolitics and the ongoing war (Fregonese, 2009). The hotels used as political battlegrounds were as follows (add map and explain each one).

> *"During the war, this symbolism was also joined by the value of the Holiday Inn as a fortification whose seizing was important to hit the morale of the enemy. The moral defeat was on two sides: on the morale of the enemy and on the capitalist, bourgeois system which we associated with the opposing party. (National Movement former fighter, 15/11/2005)." (Fregonese, 2009: 315)*

For eight consecutive months the LNM, PLO, and Kata'ib fought until in March of 1976, the Holiday Inn was besieged by the LNM and associated parties forcing the Kata'ib out of the 'last isolationist pocket standing [in] the city centre' (Tarābulsi, 2007; Fregonese, 2009). The LNM, Nasserites, and members of Socialist movements used mortar explosions, allowing for incursion into the hotel, battling up the floors reaching to the rooftop shooting over a dozen Kata'ib, and throwing those who resisted off the building, in fact one individual threw himself from the top (Tarābulsi, 2007; Markham, 2009).

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Prior to Ta'if, Christian hegemony aggravated the cleavages of Lebanese society which contributed to the *de facto* segregation of Beirut into cantons of sectarian homogeneity (Tarābulsi, 2007). To rectify the asymmetry of the six-to-five Christian to Muslim ratio, Ta'if adapted a five-to-five ratio, transferring executive power to cabinet, hence broadening the scope of prerogative powers of the prime minister (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). With regards to the executive, specifically the roles of president, prime ministers, and legislative speaker, only Maronites, Sunnis, and Shi'ites may occupy such positions (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). As for parliamentary seats, electoral law operationalises set quotas of seats depending on district demography (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). Syrian tutelage during the transitory phase following the war per the provisioning of the Ta'if agreement was initially opposed by interim Prime Minister, Michel Aoun, but following his exile the plan saw fruition (Tarābulsi, 2007; Nagle and Clancy, 2019). Although Syrian presence facilitated the disbanding of militias, the disarming of remaining Palestinians in Lebanon, and the integration of many militiamen into the army, it concurrently created a rift between those in favour of and those opposed to Syrian patronage (Nagle and Clancy, 2019).Ta'if also failed to sufficiently address the emergence of Hezbollah, in fact the agreement permitted the organisation to maintain its military apparatus by virtue of its position as armed resistance in opposition of Israel(Tarābulsi, 2007; Nagle and Clancy, 2019). As such, Hezbollah continued to have a strong presence in Lebanon, in pursuit of its own geopolitical aspirations with the help of backing from Iran (Nagle and Clancy, 2019).

Therefore, the revision of power-sharing was not immune from the self-interest of regional and local actors, as polarisation over tutelage led to the formation of the cross-cleavages of March 8 (pro-Syrian presence) and March 14 (anti-Syrian presence) alliances, respectively, in 2005 (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). The former mainly comprised of Shi'ite bloc groups including Hezbollah and Amal and the Christian majority, whereas the latter mainly comprised of the parliamentary majority, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the Sunnis, and the Christian Kata'ib

and Lebanese Forces (LF) (Geha, 2019). Moreover, with regards to state building and planning practice following the war the institutionalisation of the Ta'if agreement did not prevent the perpetuation of political clientelism and old patterns of corruption. As argued by Nagle and Clancy (2019:5), "for power-sharing to thrive a degree of stateness is required." The continuation of patronage and corruption from the top of the political chain permeated social and economic relations (Geha, 2019). The process of post war urban reconstruction is an intricate practice that requires clarity as to "what should be rebuilt in its past form to what should be rethought as new (Boano and Rokem, 2018)." Rather than address the past holistically, the Lebanese parliament passed Law No. 84/91 pardoning war participants, hence creating a state of temporal paralysis through collective amnesia (Nagle and Clancy, 2019; Boano and Rokem, 2018). The obscuring of the memory of war was institutionalised, permeating the economy, the educational system, as well as planning practice (Boano and Rokem, 2018). This set the tone for a culture of impunity and unaccountability towards violence and crime (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). Moreover, the administrative networks formulated under the auspices of the post war neoliberal reconstruction fostered a dysfunctional mode of power-sharing whereby socio-economic mobility is tied to the sectarian elite (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). Consequently, failure to establish a just and stable political order entrenched discontinuity in planning practice and the politics of inhabitation in Beirut.

The annexation of the Holiday Inn was and remains a confrontation of the banality of violence in Beirut, as vast destruction of the urban fabric of the city obscured the connection of life and inhabitation to the built environment (Fregonese, 2009). Nonetheless, this exposed the vulnerability of the built environment emerging in conflict eroding normative material and symbolic understandings of space. The building currently stands derelict with bullet holes piercing through its walls amid another crisis post-blast. Following *Ma'raka al-Fanadiq,* the Kata'ib had eradicated Tel al-Za'atar and LNM forces retaliated by launching attacks on the villages Chekka and Hamat, the number of casualties remain disputed ranging from 3,000 to 4,000 in the former and roughly around 200 civilians in the latter (Sune, 2011).
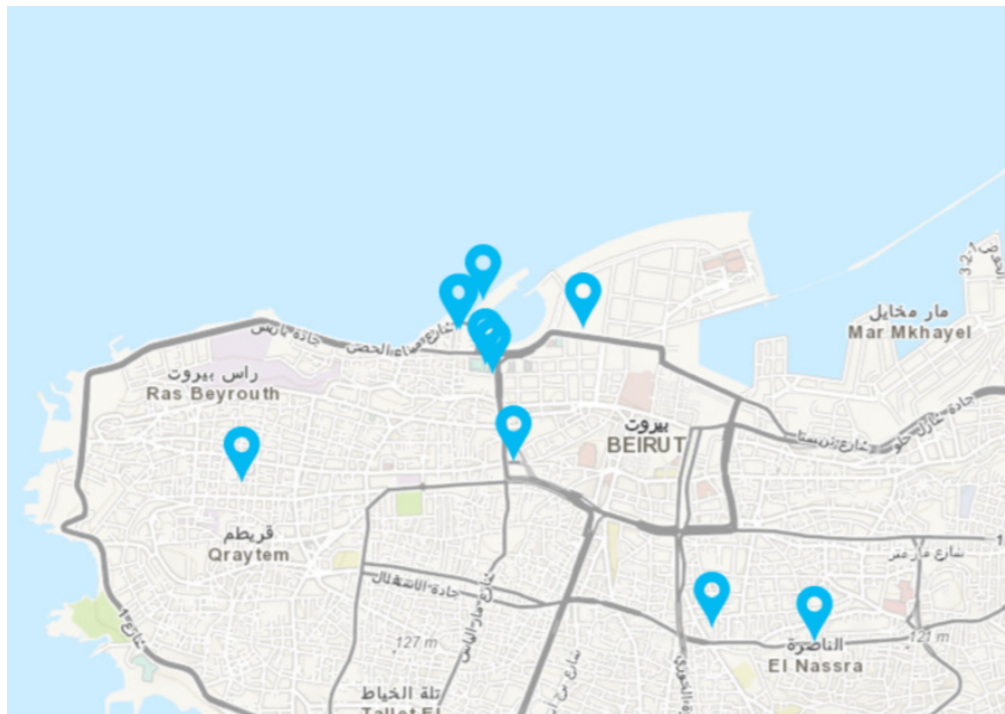

Figure 003: Map of Hotels Involved in Battle of Hotels (elaborated by author, data: Malek Sadi)

1.3 Revisiting Consociationalism: The Ta'if Agreement

Post-war reconstruction in contested cities like Beirut, require a closer analysis of urban ontologies and the memory narratives as they determine the course of planning practice as well the forms of articulation of spatial practices between the individual and the city (Boano and Rokem, 2018). The individual experiences the city in a relational matter not only in relation to *the other*, but wherein the politics of inhabitation transform to reflect a history of war. As aforementioned regarding the built environment, the meanings attached to urban spaces are confronted by the pervasive nature of war and the suffusion of life and death in urban spaces (Larkin, 2010). Whilst the Ta'if agreement in 1989 marked the end of the civil war, it did not prevent the mutation of the logic of war in Lebanon. It is estimated that the civil war 'led to approximately 170,000 deaths and 500,000 serious injuries' in total (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). The agreement was signed in Saudi Arabia and brokered by Syria (amongst other members of the international community), initiating reforms for the reconstruction of the country and its reintegration in the Arab world (Bou Akar, 2018; Tarābulsi, 2007). Ta'if institutionalised various provisions including the dynamics of sectarianism through power sharing, the rights of evicted Lebanese civilians, and the unity of Lebanese soil (Nagle and Clancy, 2019; Geha, 2019). Lebanon's model of political consociationalism (*al-taifiyya al-siyasiyya*) dating back to *Mutassarifya* (power-sharing) during Ottoman rule, reinforced in the 1926 Constitution and the National Pact, enacts the distribution of power according to demography to ensure coexistence and adequate representation of the 18 recognised sects in the country (Tarābulsi, 2007). This political system necessitates parity of representation in parliament among the sects, which subsequently, accords the use of veto power in the Council of Ministers (Geha, 2019). Sectarianism, in essence, is not the cause of the Lebanese civil war, however, 'power-sharing… can be seen as generating path-dependent dynamics that have institutionalized sectarian identity as the bedrock of state and society relations (Nagle and Clancy, 2019).'

Sectarian distribution of deputies since Ta'if

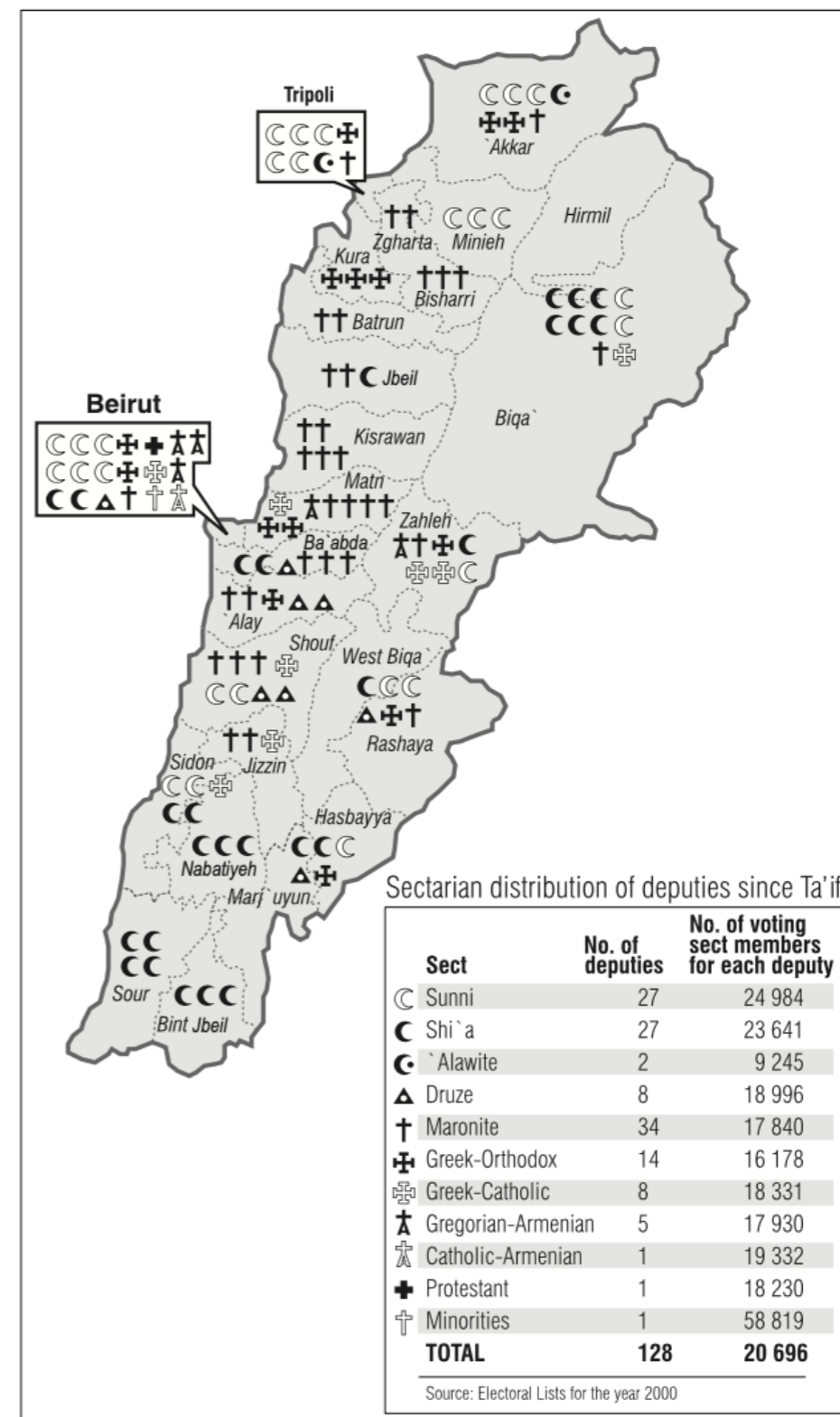| Sect	No. of deputies	No. of voting sect members for each deputy
ℂ Sunni	27	24 984
☪ Shi`a	27	23 641
☪• `Alawite	2	9 245
△ Druze	8	18 996
† Maronite	34	17 840
✛ Greek-Orthodox	14	16 178
⛪ Greek-Catholic	8	18 331
ⵣ Gregorian-Armenian	5	17 930
ⵣ Catholic-Armenian	1	19 332
✚ Protestant	1	18 230
ⴕ Minorities	1	58 819
TOTAL	**128**	**20 696**

Source: Electoral Lists for the year 2000

Figure 004: Sectarian Distribution After Ta'if (Source: Tarābulsi, 2007)

1.4 Temporal Paralysis: Post-war Amnesia and Solidere

In 1994 a joint stock company, *Solidere*, under the direction of prime minister Rafik Hariri was set to draft an urban masterplan to reconstruct the areas damaged by the war in Beirut and create what was known as Beirut Central District (Nagle, 2016; Boano and Rokem, 2018). Under the lee of National Law 117 of 1991, Solidere was granted 'special powers of compulsory purchase and regulatory authority' allowing the company to function on the borderline between public and private spheres as 'planner, developer, and manager of the city centre' (Nagle, 2016; Boano and Rokem, 2018). The narrative marketed by Hariri and supporters was that the company would transform Beirut into a blossoming global city comparable to Hong Kong and reunite the nation through its capital (Schmid, 2006; Nagle, 2016). The turmoil of the war had weakened the state severely, making Solidere the only viable option capable of attaining revenue (Nagle, 2016; Schmid, 2006). The name of the company is both an acronym, and 'a play on the French word for solidarity', which proved quite illusory in that it bred a circular ecology of waste by seeking profit out of the rubble through neoliberal market urbanism without adequately addressing the broader social dynamics of post war memory (El Hibri, 2021, Basbous, 2021). In fact, Solidere failed to incentivise reconciliation following the war, reinstating a level of inequality comparable to pre-war days (El Hibri, 2021; Nagle, 2016). Whilst the company proclaimed it would restore the urban vitality of the city, the preliminary phase of the masterplan involved the several demolitions including the traditional souq to make way for 'homogenous' large-scale real estate projects (Nagle, 2016). However, this vision of homogeneity was inconsistent in practice, in the sense that an integral feature of the implementation of the masterplan was the deterritorialization of space (Nagle, 2016). As described by Schmid "a larger problem with regard to public–private partnerships is the profit-orientation, and the exclusion and integration of particular protagonists and interests (Schmid, 2006)." Much of the discontent surround Solidere's post war reconstruction framework prior to its implementation concerned the lack of transparency and inclusion of the people's concerns, and scepticism towards the efficacy of the destruction-for-reconstruction formula in fostering a cohesive sense of national identity (Nagle, 2016; El Hibri, 2021).

Often certain approaches to reconstruction may perpetuate war through creating "new structures that enhance the predominance of a certain group lead to a reshaping of the symbolic landscape (Boano and Rokem, 2018: 23)." Reconstruction through the suppression of the memory of war constitutes another form of violence, rather than violence directed against a specific group, it targets the past (Ibid). The first year the fighting stopped post Ta'if was marked by a fluctuation in constructions activity with a series of demolitions set in motion (Nasr and Verdeil, 2008). The economic downturn that occurred following such large-scale projects in the mid-1999s indicated that the government had embarked on a path to reconstruction hastily, attributing exogenous factors for its recession (Ibid). Between 1999 and 2004 the country was severely in debt 'by a spiralling level of ... 165% of the GDP in 2003' and the realms of public and private interests started becoming indistinguishable (Ibid: 1132). The pioneers and supporters of *Solidere* held the view that the reconstruction of the city centre would entice 'a civil consciousness and unified national identity', however the masterplan only yield proximity rather than connectivity amongst the major Muslim/Christian divides wherein zoning had not changed drastically (Nagle, 2002: 723; Nasr and Verdeil, 2008). Additionally, although the state did tread heavily on infrastructure-led neoliberal urbanism during this period, the energy landscape of the city was failing with an increase in power outages (Abi Ghanem, 2017). The inefficacy of national electricity provider Électricité du Liban (EDL), gave leeway to informal services to manoeuvre their way into the economy selling a capped amount of electricity during power outages on a monthly basis (Ibid). The *tabula rasa* planning model of reconstruction simultaneously decentralised and exhausted public institutions, which were already burdened by the calamities of the war (Alkazei and Mastubara, 2021). Contrary to the harmonious imagery of the masterplan, the reconstructions launched were exclusionary as only the 'affluent clientele' fraction of society could afford to enjoy the new atmosphere (Ibid: 274).

Despite of deflation construction continued and even though there were claimed successes to *Solidere's* reconstruction framework such as Beirut Souks, Foch-Allenby, and Place de l'Etoile, Alkazei and Mastubara (2021) argue that they represented a decline in urban vitality through results obtained via field survey. Shortly after, in 2005 prime minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated and the Cedar Revolution, two events which juxtaposed one another as the former indicated the re-emergence of arbitrary forms of violence whereas the latter was a series of peaceful cross-sectarian protests calling for the cessation of Syrian involvement in Lebanese affairs and to get retribution for Hariri (Larkin, 2010). Naeff (2020: 65) offers a contemporary spatio-temporal analysis comparing between the shrine of Rafik Hariri and the nightclub B018 on the 'cyclical rebirth that eclipses Beirut's temporal present' through the abstraction of life and death. This follows from an old narrative on how Beirut has experienced several waves of destruction and rose from the ashes by which the 'suspended now' or 'catastrophic now' is given meaning, accepting the notion of rebirth as a transition between the past and the future (Ibid: 66). Naeff (2020) draws parallels between both sites as urban insights on practice and narratives in the context of the perpetuity of violence. Rafik Hariri's burial is located on Martyr's Square, as opposed to his hometown, adjacent to the great al-Amin Mosque, thus giving the tomb a 'religious character' separated from the security detail that was with him the day of the assassination (Ibid: 68). The tomb is therefore politicised through a 'discourse of regenerative sacrifice' and retribution, which prolongs patterns of violence (Ibid: 71). On the other hand, the nightclub B018, located in Karantina; the district that encompassed the Quarantine in 1834 and subsequently, the first Armenian camp in Beirut grapples with the post-war amnesia through a peculiar design (Ibid). Naeff (2020: 72) describes the design as "a bunker-like structure, situated three- and-a-half metres underground. Upon entering the club, the visitor descends into a vestibule, which is separated from the club by a wall punctuated by 'sniper windows' through which the clubbing clientele can be observed." Both sites engage with the volatility of urban life in Beirut in contrasting ways, Hariri's tomb penetrates future discourses of reprisal

narratives whereas B016 seeks to dissociate from these discourses and 'its street level façade (Ibid: 74).'

1.5 The State: Wayna al-Dawla?

Wayna al-Dawla? Or 'where is the state?' is a phrase often reiterated by the Lebanese public in the face of strife and vulnerability where the state has failed to uphold its duties towards its citizens (Nagle and Clancy, 2019: 5). This phrase tends to resurface due to the friction between formality and informality of planning practice and the law through which the state advantages the sectarian elite (Ibid; Baumann and Kanafani, 2020). Although the Lebanese state does not conform to the Weberian conception of statehood due to the lack of autonomy over violence, its exercises violence through paradigms of inclusion and exclusion (Baumann and Kanafani, 2020). This narrative finds relevance in various accounts in Lebanon dating from the civil war and the failure to reaffirm the consociationalism 'pie-sharing' formula within the scope of neoliberal urban recovery. The absence of the state is felt specifically in relation to the political economy of sectarianism which commodifies the public realm through clientelism and patronage networks (Nagle and Clancy, 2019). Social welfare services have become dependent on such networks (Ibid). Rentier seeking practices have led to infrastructural disintegration, e.g., electric power cuts and mismanagement of waste (Ibid; Basbous, 2021). In fact, "waste and rubble have fuelled the reconfiguration of the Greater Beirut coastline through land reclamation projects that were designed as early as the 1950s (Basbous, 2021: 1)." As described by Basbous (2021: 1) and mentioned previously the circularity of 'ecology of profit, toxicity and waste' has entrenched cycles of destruction in building and rebuilding Beirut. The state has conferred upon itself the legality to enable such practices as seen with the legal endorsement of *Solidere.* Similarly, the general amnesty law was exemplary of this state of exception, which begs the question: *wayn al-dawla?*

Following the blast, civilians have mobilised in absence accountability for the negligence that was exposed on August 4th of last year and the frail structure of public service provisions, resisting this *modus operandi* of the Lebanese state.

Framework of Analysis

To explore the potential of people-centred intervention as a catalyst for a wider urban recovery framework, I shall address the challenges of modern urbanism in contexts of fragility with reference to the works of Henri Lefebvre and Gorgio Agamben. Lefebvre's analyses on the individual, social space, and the right to the city, in tandem with Agamben's reflections on biopolitics and the state of exception, are apposite in understanding the impact of structural violence on recovery narratives and spatial practices in Beirut. Over the course of the past year, various initiatives emerged to redress the damage caused by the blast, from ad hoc local groups to established NGOs. The banality of violence in Beirut has rendered survivalism and resistance as the primordial modes of living. As the blast has prompted civilians to formulate infrastructures of care, in absence of a system of checks and balances appropriated by executive and legislative corruption and clientelism, the reproductions of social life in Beirut are obscured. Within the pie-sharing formula that is embedded in consociationalism, conceptions of power play a crucial role in the spatio-temporal experiences of dwelling in Beirut as a city that has retained volatile reproductions of urbanity (Bou Akar, 2018). Lebanon's complex history coupled with the magnitude of the blast has created a novel reality for Beirut, calling for a closer look into the ontology of inhabitation in a contested space and the relationality of collective life in a context of intricate ethno-religious narratives (Geha et. al 2020). The overarching framework of the research engages with the collective ethos of the 'catastrophic present' experienced by the people in Beirut through three distinct levels of analysis. The first, the individual-level, addresses the ways in which the individual makes sense of, and experiences space, in relation to other individuals through the lens of collective life. The second, the individual-to-state, concerns the interaction between the individual and the spatiality of the state,

and hence the interrelation of power and the abstraction space. The final layer, the biopolitical, addresses the *dispositif* or apparatus and the spaces of exception, specifically concerning the ambiguity of bare life and the state of indifference.

Following a post-structuralist strand of thinking, Lefebvre is renowned for his dialectic deconstruction of the interaction of social factors and relationality with spatial practices. The main postulation of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* is that humans are social beings and therefore, they produce their own life, through attaching meanings to their environment and the spaces they inhabit (Butler, 2012). According to Hegelian phenomenology, nature produces the human and the human thus, by way of activity, i.e., labour, experience, and struggle, produces and reproduces perceptions of the self and the world (Lefebvre and Nicholson, 2000). Delving into this circularity of the production of space and spatial practice, Lefebvre propose a conceptual triad, also described as the 'three moments of space'— the '*perceived-conceived-lived*' (Lefebvre and Nicholson, 2000). Spatial practice, or rather, daily interactions with one's society, constitutes the *perceived,* representations of space, which relates order and signs, or codes used to navigate space (these are produced by those in power, planners, architects, etc.) constitute the *conceived*, and lastly, representational spaces, 'embody complex symbolism' to make space understandable by the individual, and constitute the *lived* (Butler, 2012; Lefebvre and Nicholson, 2000). Building on this triad, Lefebvre argues that the abstraction of space occurs through the dialectic intersection between materiality and representation as "space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction (Lefebvre and Nicholson, 2000)." Urban space is rendered readable through spatial science, i.e., cartography and geography, creating an illusion of transparency as the logic of visualisation tends to reduce the depth of socio-political realities (Butler, 2012). In the context of Beirut, the urban geopolitical implications of the civil war distorted the representational boundaries of the city transforming peripheries into frontiers as described by Bou Akar (Bou Akar, 2018).

In the context of neo-capitalist societies, Lefebvre suggests that contradictions exist within the different domains of reproduction (i.e., the biological, labour power, and social relations) (Lefebvre and Nicholson, 2000). Institutional power, or rather, hegemony through logico-mathematical rationalisation reduces space as a homogeneous entity conflating transparency and opacity (Butler, 2012).
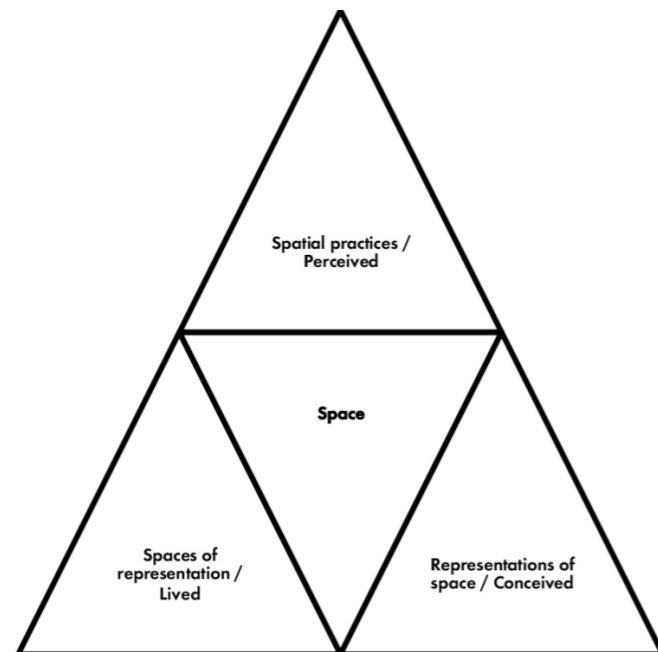

Figure 005: Lefebvre's Conceptual Triad (Source: Alfaro)

As such, humans tend to categorise space in ways which dichotomised our understanding of the world through the attribution of certain values or norms, this is exemplar in the distinction between urban and rural under neoliberal production of *homo economicus* (the 'rational' economic man). This abstraction of space becomes more complex in the context of divided cities whereby urban space is confronted with the opposition of hegemony and resistance (Veron, 2016). The regulation and direction of space is intrinsically tied to power relations within city-centric and state-centric modalities of governance—however, contemporary urbanism patterns have indicated a change in the political climate (Butler, 2012). This brings us to the second level of analysis, the

individual to state, in the context of the neoliberal city-centric world order. It is critical to note that for Lefebvre, the violence of abstraction is also exhibited in the formalism and reductionism of the law which allows for the fragmentation of space [e.g., Law no. 117 giving force to *Solidere's* reconstruction plan] (Butler, 2012). Nonetheless, space is the 'product and the producers', as it lays down a particular order proscribing the way the individual navigates through and resides within specific parameters [in relation to border practice] (Butler, 2012; Lefebvre and Goonewardena, 2008). Accordingly, there is 'not one social space' but an 'unlimited multiplicity 'or uncountable set of social spaces which we refer to generically as 'social space', therefore 'the worldwide does not abolish the local' (Lefebvre and Nicholson, 2000). Reflecting on the alienating implications of increased commodification of capitalism, Lefebvre articulated the notion of 'the right to the city' the 'transformed and renewed right to urban life' (Lefebvre, 1968). This right is not limited to the inhabitation of urban spaces, but also the right 'to participate in a city as an "oeuvre", an ongoing work of creation, production and negotiation' (Nagle, 2016: 157). Lefebvre suggests that there can never be absolute dominance of abstract space as the logic of visualisation and linguistics does not dissolve alternative productions of space, termed 'differential space (Butler, 2012).' Differential space *de jure* allows for expression of heterogeneity and social differences through collective participation (Ibid).

In contested cities like Beirut, Lefebvre's conception of the '*right to the city*' is challenged by nonconventional manifestations of sovereignty and the state of exception. In his engagement with the Foucauldian hypothesis on biopower, Agamben suggests that the *dispositif*, or apparatus, operates in a manner through which the individual is transformed and submerged as both an object and subject of power relations (Agamben, 1998; Frost, 2019). Agamben (1998) posits that manifestations of sovereign power in modern society are intrinsically exclusionary as they institutionalise means to orient, order, and determine the behaviours of human beings.

The ontological and epistemic constitutions of dwelling under the reign of the biopolitical power of the *dispositif* thus result in tension between the individual and the dispositif as the latter reserves the right 'to make live' or 'to let die' over the former (Agamben, 1998; Agamben, 1999). In *Homo Sacer,* Agamben (1998) engages with the Aristotelian inception of the *polis* and the forms of life, namely the dichotomies of the *zoē* and the *bios*, which underpin his propositions on the *dispositif.* The *zoē* refers to 'bare life' or 'the simple fact of living common to all living beings' whereas the *bios* refers to 'political life' or rather, 'qualified life' (Frost, 2019: 156). The *zoē* and *bios* are not discordant, on the contrary, political life is 'defined in a negative functional relation' with bare life (Frost, 2019: 156). Moreover, sovereignty is not defined strictly within the parameters of the law for Agamben but also the ability to 'suspend the law' (Agamben, 1998; Ek, 2006: 365). The pervasive *nomos* (law or ordinance) of modern politics follows a camp spatiality through binaries of inclusion and exclusion, such as 'us and them', friend-enemy-type rhetoric (Ek, 2006). The spatio-temporal indistinction of the camp is the archetype of the state of exception according to Agamben, wherein the zoē when subjected to the violence of sovereign power, creates 'naked life' representing a threshold of indifference of the *homo sacer* (Ek, 2006; Giaccaria et al., 2011).

Overall, *campscapes* today have moulded to take various contemporary typographical and typological forms as the violence of cities does not necessarily depend on citizenship. The structure of the *Ban* and its epistemology is left deliberately ambiguous whether through informality or legality, hence decentralising the urban subject. In Beirut, the narratives that fomented sectarian enclaves during the civil war took form as a Ban creating a myriad of zones of indistinction across the city that enabled exception as a form of planning practice. Following the war, the state's suppression of post-war memory made reconstructive efforts exclusionary through the production of an urban space devoid of human connection. Consequently, the 'urban subject' in Beirut lives in a survivalist mode demarcated by a camp-like city configuration. The public good is an area of abstruseness in Lebanon as the government's

adoption of economic liberalism has facilitated the degeneration of the collective good in a manner which privileges a faction of society (Nagle, 2016). Concurrent with the state of exception in Lebanon, is lack of sovereignty as the government has disregarded administrative function, by which the country is on the brink of state failure. The Lebanese state reserves the coercive rights of the *dispositif* while simultaneously weakening its own internal structure through negligence in maintaining a certain degree of inhabitability. On the basis thereof the analytical framework chosen serves to highlight the ways in which anthropocentrism has necessitated the constant making and remaking of the urban to respond to distinctive forms of dwelling to reconcile the tensions between resistance and *a priori* presumptions of economic rationality (Escobar, 2019). The notion of the urban commons has gained traction in recent years, as it provides an analytical lens that engages with the right to the city, moving beyond commodification of common pool resources to respond to the challenges of modern urban spaces (Bienkjok et al., 2015). The pluralism of dwelling has signalled an ontological turn in urban politics, highlighting the importance of inclusion and participatory processes.

> *"The current crisis is a crisis of the heteropatriarchal, colonial, and capitalist occidental modes of dwelling that have eroded the systemic mode of living based on radical interdependence. New modes of dwelling can be imagined and designed by incorporating relational modes of living into urban landscapes, within an open and broad communal conception." (Escobar, 2019: 133)*

2 Methodology

The methodology of the research comprises of both discourse analysis and urban analysis, in order to reconcile the prevailing narratives and spatial practices following the blast with the onto-epistemic experiences of dwelling in Beirut, specifically. The discourses analysed are obtained from a combination of ethnographic works, research, policy briefs, articles, and autophotography post-blast, conducted by Lebanese scholars, researchers and activists. I also highlight briefly the role of social media. Firstly, I will identify the overarching themes predominant in local discourses on the urban recovery of Beirut amongst local urban planners, architects, and scholars. Seeing as the individual has been situated at the centre of discussion on urban reconstruction and planning practice in Lebanon, the local discourses explore prospective challenges and gaps to participatory interventions. I will then discuss the emergent infrastructures of care of the past year. The inputs that civilians and local initiatives obtain are an integral component to the wider framework of recovery as they provide a roadmap for catalytic measures to resist and transcend the temporal paralysis of the banality of urban violence. Three case studies, in particular, are of relevance to the research— Karantina and the adjacent area Medawar, and Mar Mikhael, as nodes of civic engagement. They are of relevance as various initiatives have mobilised in these areas, specifically Karantina, as civilians are being trained as a part of a bottom-up holistic recovery approach (Beirut Urban Lab, 2021). Using ethnographic literature and autophotography pertaining to these three areas, I synthesise the narratives surrounding urban recovery with spatial analysis using data inputs put together by the American University in Beirut's (AUB) Urban Lab collaborative research space led by the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture. Some of the narratives addressed predate the blast in order to provide a retrospective analysis of the social infrastructure and the contentions of planning practice in areas affected.

2.1 Thematic Analysis: Urban Recovery Discourse

Distrust

Referring to the discourses on stateness and *wayna al-dawla*, it is quite blatant that civilians no longer were willing to live in resilience, "we want to live" narrate Geha et al. (2020: 359). As posited by Naeff (2020) the conception or myth of rebirth of Beirut has rendered resilience as a survivalist mode of inhabitation through which the people are excluded through inclusion. This is exemplified in the following quote from Geha et al (2020: 360): "for so long, the phoenix rising from the ashes was about Beirut's resilience and how we, the people, could endure so much pain and suffering. But resilience, for engineers, is a building that sustains despite it being broken or shaken to the core." Distrust of the government and state institutions has reached its plight following the blast as there has been no transparency as to how the tonnes of stored ammonium nitrate went up in flames or why it was stored there for so long (Chulov, 2021).Nora Boustany, a lecturer at AUB, describes that "There was a wealth, a largesse and an ostentatious living that was brought to Beirut," on previous local reconstruction frameworks (Ibid). "This rubbed off on his circle. The accommodation was to let this happen to keep the peace. They all kept their snout in the trough. They partitioned off aid and money from the big funds, and they just kept stealing. There was so much money for institution-building and barely any of it went there", she added (Ibid). As evident a panel discussion between academics Carmen Geha, Mona Fawaz, and journalist Luna Safwan, 'The New Arab Webinar Series: Aftermath of the Beirut Explosion', the partisan allegiances of state actors from top-to-bottom have created a gap between the people and the government. For that reason, in addition to scepticism in regards to where financial aid is actually going, people do not trust that the government will exercise impartiality and operate as a functional administrative (Chulov, 2021).

People as Agents of Change

One of the key themes in post-blast literature is the important role of civilians in the urban recovery framework. People are being thought of as agents of changed as described by Fawaz in the webinar on the aftermath of the blast. The centrality of people-centred interventions has gained traction in the past decade as the nature of conflict and violence progresses. The UN Habitat Global on Human Settlements (2003: 4) suggest that 'people-centred policies can harness public energy for basic reconstruction efforts, engage citizens in awareness raising, and leverage citizens' cultural memories, values, and attributes.' Given the makeshift mode of inhabitation apparent in Beirut, people have endured years of the banality of violence. Post war memory plays a significant role in shaping the Lebanese youth's socio-spatial experience of dwelling in Beirut. As defined by Larkin (2010: 618): "postmemory is perhaps best defined as a residual type of memory, a recollection of an event not personally experienced but socially felt, a traumatic rupture that indelibly scars a nation, religious group, community, or family." Seeing as the blast represents another traumatic rupture, the course that urban recovery will follow cannot be rooted in suppression and temporal paralysis. Fawaz and Geha posits that it is crucial that the recovery framework move beyond reconstruction, or rather rebuilding what's been damaged, to action at the collective level "where residents feel like stakeholders." There is a dire need for competent individuals to coordinate and cooperate to create a humanitarian network for the people by the people. Days after the blast, people, still grieving, took matters into their own hand went to the streets cleaning up debris prompting them to form infrastructures of care. On social media, specifically twitter the follow hashtags were trending #BeirutBlast #OurHomesAreOpen #wewillnotforget #بيوتنا_مفتوحة# #عهد_الذل# #انفجار_بيروت# انفجار_مرفأ_بيروت. *Beyoutna maftouha,* in particular, was a means to connect displaced individuals with residents willing to take people in.

Reconceptualization of Beirut

In reflection on the abstraction of urban geopolitics and the role of practice in defining urban space, Ahmad Gharbieh (2021) engages with the different digital visualisation tools that have shaped the perception and dwelling in different areas of Beirut. Although geographical boundaries are, by default, reductionist and unyielding towards 'ubiquitous politics realities', mapmaking is an interesting tool of analysis in that it provides leeway for contention of such rigidity (Ibid). Digital visualisation tools and GIS have had a prominent role in the social and political mobilisation in Beirut concerning recovery and rehabilitation. Soon after the blast, the Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED) base map was released and accessible to the public as a "unified reference between very different types of actors, it needed to adhere to the most common of cadastral denominators from parcel number to the boundaries of administrative districts in order to play its interfacing role effectively (Gharbieh 2021: 6)." By contesting and reconceptualising the boundaries of the city the socio-spatial realities are better understood, and the limitations of cartographic convention can be identified in reference to ontological dimension of the politics of inhabitation. Dwelling practices are intricate and operate beyond the firm boundaries of the *a priori* assumptions of geography and cartography. The materiality of these assumptions can provide useful insights into the role of urban planning in producing peripheries and contested geographies (Bou Akar, 2012). Alternatively, as described by Gharbieh (2021:6) "using maps embedded with hard-line boundaries does not mean that we cannot make maps that contest them." Reconceptualising border as polymorphic is essential to grasping the complex spatio-temporalities of contested cities like Beirut.

2.2 Case Study I: Karantina

Figure 006: Satellite Illustration of The Proximity of Karantina to the Blast
(elaborated by author)

One of the districts heavily affected by the rapid urbanisation of Beirut, is Karantina (Aoud and Kaloustian, 2021). Moreover, Karantina was most heavily impacted by the devastating effects of the port explosion due its proximity, making it the first case study for bottom-up interventions in the recovery process (Ibid). Historically, Karantina was set as a quarantine zone in the 1800s for potential diseases as sea travellers arriving from the Beirut port (Tarābulsi, 2007; Aoud and Kaloustian, 2021). Although closely tied to the port, development in Karantina has been incongruous making it one of Beirut's most impoverished areas. Karantina later transformed into a shantytown built over fail structures, housing the underprivileged Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian refugees amongst other displaced groups (Tarābulsi, 2007). Aoud and Kaloustian (2021: 5) break down the typo-morphology of Karantina in synthesis with the social development of the area throughout its dynamic history. The urban fabric is analysed under the 8 following categorisations, 1) vacant parcels, 2) Mixed

fabrics vis-à-vis industrialism, 3) 'semi-detached individual residential fabric', 4) decayed/damaged buildings, 5) heritage parcels, 6) 'poor social classes', 7) isolation from surroundings, and lastly 8) identity (Aoud and Kaloustian, 2021: 5). The purpose of this dissection is to identify the critical challenges that face development and urban planning in Karantina post-blast. Karantina holds a considerable amount of vacant land some of which were industrial facilities, others were refugee camps, there are also several unbuilt plots of land (Ibid). One of the key issues identified by Aoud and Kaloustian (2021) is that Karantina is isolated from other districts, which not only affects the area in spatial terms but also in concern with community building and identity. Through enhancing Karantina's connectedness with other districts, specifically Mar Mikhael, resources can be better utilised to cater for the urban common. The reactivation of the vacant parcels of Karantina can yield sustainable and inclusive results, therefore the initiatives working on site through participatory processes can inform the wider recovery framework of Beirut. Catalytic Action, the Relief Centre, and UCL's Development Planning as well as The Institute for Global Prosperity have partnered with one another to research the ways residents can take an active part in the introduction of interventions in Karantina (Catalytic Action, 2021). Additionally in partnership with UNICEF Lebanon, the Beirut Urban Lab has launched a 'citizen scientists' training programme to immerse citizens into the research and data collection processes for greater inclusivity and proper representation of the needs of the community (Ibid).

Image 002: Citizen Scientist Training Programme at AUB (Source: Beirut Urban Lab, photo by Ali El Ghaddar)

Image 003: Interviews with a Resident of Karantina For Citizen Scientist (Source: Beirut Urban Lab, photo by Ali El Ghaddar)
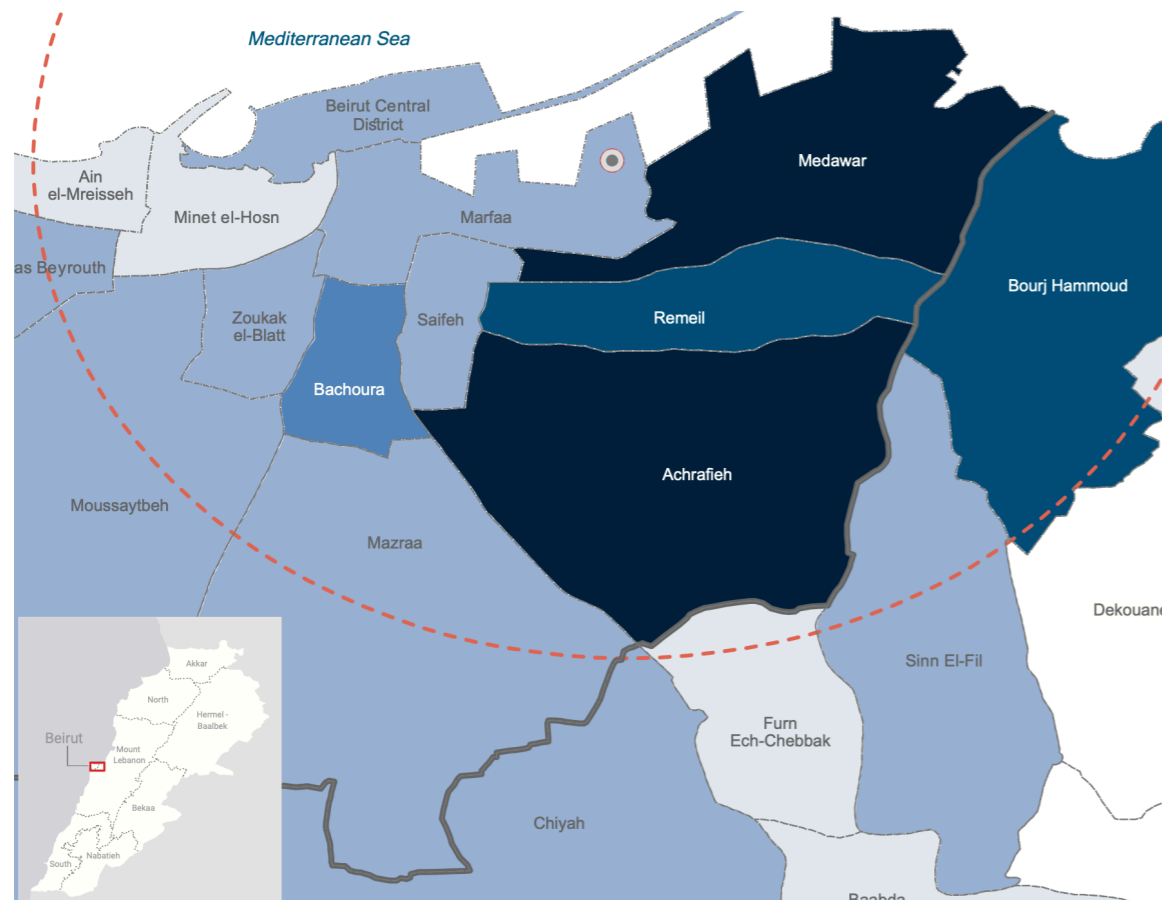
2.3 Case Study II: Medawer

Figure 007: Map Outlining Medawer Area and Blast Impact (Source: UN OCHA, 2020)

Medawer encompasses the wider area surrounding Karantina, thus the impact of the blast was severely felt. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Nabad, UNICEF, Nusaned and URDA are some of the key actors involved in the recovery process of the area (UN OCHA, 2020). Medawer was one of the areas in Beirut to experience development at a later stage, along with Rmeil (Zgheib, Abou Hamad, Raad, 2020). It remained an agricultural area until major transport infrastructure developments were made following the French mandate, these included the creation of the railway and the expansion of the Beirut port (Ibid). Following the Ta'if agreement the area experienced rapid urbanisation and transformed into an arts and leisure cluster

(Ibid). One of the main incentives driving the urban sprawl in Medawer was low rental prices however, by 2006 Medawer be ame densified and the sense of urban identity it exuded was affected by gentrification (Ibid). Moreover, housing prices were upscaled, subsequently displacing those households that could no longer afford the increasing rent prices. Market privatisation and privatised urbanity that characterised the 2000s in Beirut, lead to the proliferation of tall buildings and the peculiarity of urban identity in Medawer (Ibid). Nonetheless, creative businesses that gave the area a particular charm were economically vulnerable. As such, it is essential that the recovery process consider the importance of reviving the social fabric and sense of place of the area.

Image 005: Flat Damaged by Blast in Medawer (source: Lynn Malas, Nusaned)

Image 004: Flat Damaged by Blast in Medawer (source: Lynn Malas, Nusaned)

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Image 006: Façade of Damaged Building in Medawer Area

2.4 Case Study III: Mar Mikhael

Figure 008: Map of Proximity of Mar Mikhayel to Blast Site
(generated via ArcGS)

Mar Mikhael is one of the areas of Beirut that has undergone gentrification after the civil war (Zgheib, Abou Hamad, Raad, 2020). Fawaz, Krijnen and El Samad (2018) in their analysis of gentrification and ownership patterns in Mar Mikhael, recount the story of an antique shop owner, Michel, who is forced to leave his childhood home in Mar Michael which is then sold to a real estate developer due to loopholes concerning shares and ownership exasperated by quarrel between his grandfather's partner and his family. Michel is one of many residents of Mar Mikhael who have been forced to leave the neighbourhood they have dwelled in their whole life. Consequentially, the legality of ownership of a parcel of land "materializes in the right to exclude or include others from a land parcel, not merely a relation between an individual and the parcel itself (Fawaz, Krijnen and El Samad, 2018: 361)." This understanding of property ownership facilitates the acquisition of land through social and institutional processes of gentrification (Ibid, 361). The gentrification process that succeeded the civil war allowed for speculations and constructions to take place transforming the urban fabric of Beirut and the dwelling practices that preceded the war (Zgheib, Abou Hamad, Raad, 2020). According to Zgheib, Abou Hamad, Raad (2020: 12) this process f

followed a certain set of stages, starting with low land prices, then in leisure and activities making the area more attractive hence increasing demand and increasing land prices. Real estate developers and investors seize this opportunity by exploiting conflicts between new and old resident over property ownership and transform the morphology of the area by demolitions and tower-building (Ibid, 12). As housing becomes unaffordable resident are displaced, comparable to case of Medawar. In the context of gentrified areas post-disaster, housing dynamics are further aggravated. The defectiveness of the legalities of housing policies poses a critical impediment to long-term reconciliation unless cooperative efforts ensue to ensure transparency and inclusivity. The following images have been taken by members of Nusaned assessing damage in Mar Mikhael:

Discussion and Recommendations

With reference to Agamben's conception of biopower and the *dispositif* the frailty of the Lebanese state makes it's a striking case of indistinction. Although Beirut has harboured settlements throughout and after the civil war is not an overall camp *per se* by conventional configurations of the camp, it is arguably a manifestation of the metamorphosis of makeshift living. For Beirut to transcend beyond this temporal suffusion, civilians must be at the centre of the overall urban recovery framework. Its long history of deeply ingrained divides has permeated dwelling practices through continuous reiteration of discontinuity by the negligence and corruption of state institutions. The blast induced the emergence of networks and infrastructures of care, which can be enshrined in spatial practices if collaborative efforts are developed. As phrased by Hobart and Kneese (2020:1) "care has reentered the zeitgeist." The maintenance of a paradigm of care and inclusivity can provide a chance to disconnect the narrative of perpetual war and urban violence from the ontology of inhabitation in Beirut. By fortifying infrastructures of care the city's urban spaces can be depoliticised, in the sense that the state of indeterminacy and indistinction caused by the banality of violence can be eroded through the reproduction of relationality between individuals and between the individual and the state.The main limitation of the research is the novelty of the blast and the lack of transparency from the state institutions, hence limiting the information that can be obtained concerning the urban grain of Beirut as of now. Having synthesized the narratives of the past and present using a wide range of sources, it is evident that there is a consensus on the following recommendations to devise a holistic people-centred recovery framework:

- Collaboration between different initiatives to maximise efficiency of interventions

- Compilation of input values to assess damages

- Use of digital tools such as GIS to realise the challenges of existing spatiality

- Interviews and effective communication between residents and initiatives

- The formation of a panel of competent individuals to coordinate potential interventions

- Centrality of residents as agents of change and stakeholders

- Moving beyond the discourses of reconstruction in favour of recovery

- Realisation of the notion of the urban commons

- Promotion of place based development avoiding abstraction of the city

- Recognising the narratives that shape the underpinnings of the right to the city

Conclusions

As aforementioned, the blast cannot simply be addressed as a crisis due to the spill-over effects of a long history of transgressions against the individual through the perpetuation of the state of exception and the metamorphosis of the nature of war. Considering the relationality of inhabitation, the lack of coherent peace building efforts in relation to intracommunal tensions has rendered temporal indeterminacy the norm. The blast exasperated the structural issues that had fuelled the people's frustration throughout the years as apparent through waves of social upheaval. It is crucial to understand the planning does not equate socio-economic improvement that addresses urban inequalities. Ideally, that would be the case, however, pragmatically, planning is a phenomenon to be engaged with and dissected through assessment of the practices carried out and the outcomes these practices yield (Bou Akar, 2018: 148). This is the dark underbelly of planning practice—space is politicised and therefore, its political isolation from planning practice and development is a rarity. As described by Serbian architect Bogdan Bogdanović, urbicide is "the intentional attack on the human and the inert fabric of the city with the intent of destroying the civic values embodied within it (Fregonese, 2009; Bevan, 2005)." The monopoly on violence exercised by the state apparatus, elaborated by Weber, disintegrated in Lebanon, and Beirut became a cell for distinct reproductions of the urban expressed by the contending militias under the guise of necessity and fear (Yassin, 2010; Fregonese, 2009). The fear of extermination and eviction served as a pretence for political leaders of different factions— the *mafhoum* (norm) became the inevitability of death, not only of the individual but also the city (Yassin, 2010; Fregonese, 2009).

For that reason, the streets of Beirut became militarised through checkpoints, patrols, and zones to create 'safe' and homogenised urban spaces (Seidman, 2012). As the country was facing an economic debacle through corruption, heavy reliance of foreign capital, and decreases in state revenue from cycles of destruction, the militias came to form their respective apparatuses providing wage for their members (Tarābulsi, 2007). The geopolitical imaginaries of the militias were not arbitrary nor hollow practices, instead they present 'complex material and epistemological battles for the affirmation' concerning national identity and of representations of the city (Fregonese, 2009). The state's blurring of informality and legality has and continues to contribute to the deep divisions of planning practice. In order to progress beyond the survivalist inhabitation, it is crucial that civic engagement occur in a cooperative manner to facilitate long-term change and provoke new imaginaries of urbanity.

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