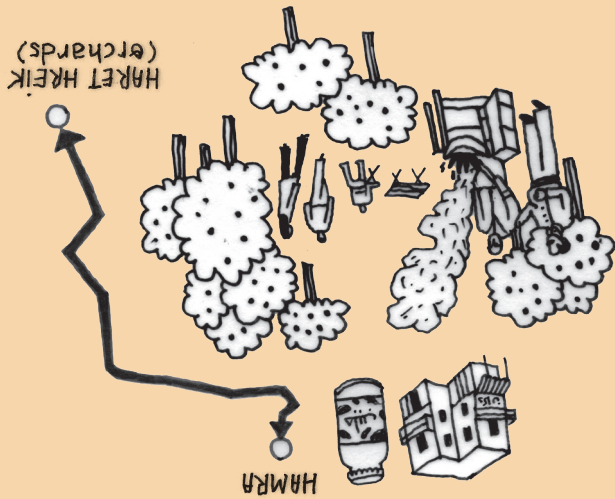
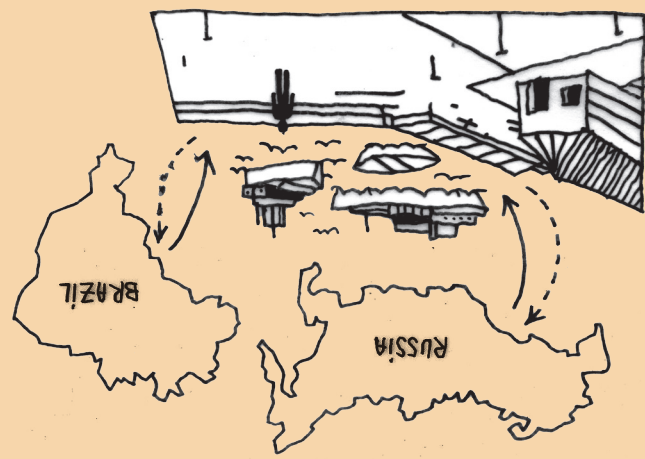


Sixty years ago:
Our orchards were lemon and limes. We'd sell them and make our money back in the same season. We used to make a lot, about 70,000 dollars in a season. And that was at the time: it would be a lot more than 70,000 today...



Over the course of the last 150 years, Ras Beirut has gone from a primarily agricultural community to a densely populated urban district. The original settlement was based around a chain of rocky promontories stretching towards the Mediterranean Sea, a topography that made it difficult to access from both shore and surrounding neighbourhoods alike. However by the mid-nineteenth century, Ras Beirut had all the trappings of a classic Beirut residential suburb—flat-roofed houses surrounded by gardens, unpaved lanes lined with pear trees—and this development process continued through the century which followed.



My grandfather had a lot of social influence—"he could make MPs and break them"—and for this day the family is a key to electoral success.
« I laid roads to and from Sidani land in this district.»
My uncle Adnan, his son, used to deal Port of Beirut: chickpeas and wheat.
most important grain trader in the matriarchal grandfather. He was the Ahmed and Adnan built an apartment block, housed their children, and rented out the rest. In that district almost no one owned buildings outright. This was after Hindiya was knocked down his share passed away. My father signed over his share to my mother, and his brothers Amir and Soba sold theirs to my maternal uncles. The apartment block was knocked down to clear way for a new building.
He told me "Go and live in the new building there's hot water there."

Its unique location, overlooking both sea and mountain, attracted the founders of the Syrian Protestant College. The original college was built in 1866 and in 1920 it was relicensed as the American University of Beirut. The founding of the college set off a wave of urban development in the area. A sprawl of villas was followed by low-rise residential blocks with gardens, and then, in the mid-twentieth century, by a series of medium-rise blocks that were used for both residential and commercial purposes.

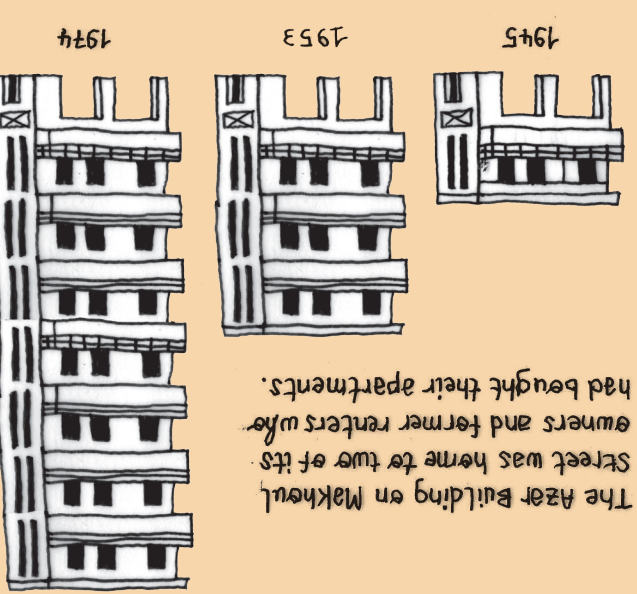
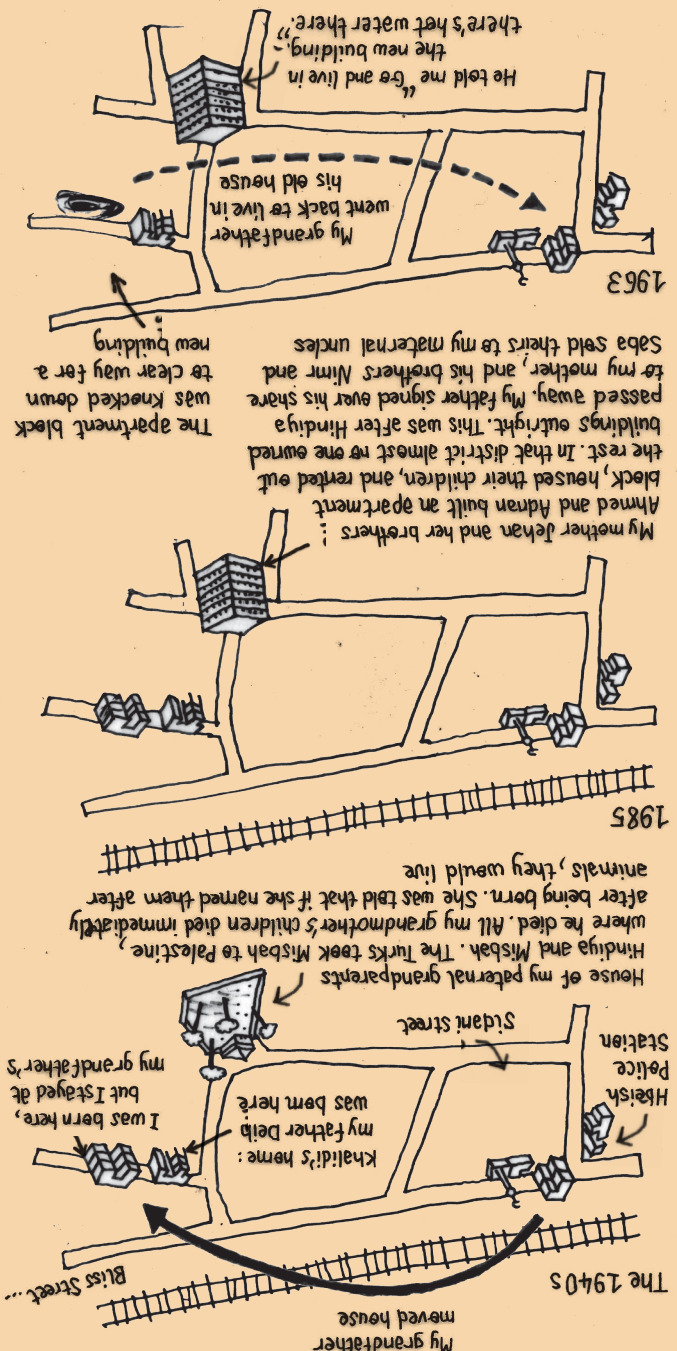
As we get to know the streets and alleys whose residents have witnessed significant changes in the architectural and social environment, we pose questions about heritage and the housing policies which have led to the displacement of communities.

The Another City Series sees local history through the lens of its community's stories, an approach which gives us space to reconsider both dominant models of urban development and the policies which shape the housing market.

Ras Beirut does not refer to a single district, but rather a broad geographical area incorporating the districts of Hamra, Ain El Mreisseh, Raouché, and Verdun. Each of these districts (manaatiq) is divided further into a number of neighbourhoods (ahyaa). This pamphlet focuses on Hamra, providing data on property ownership and housing in the neighbourhoods within the area demarcated by Hamra and Bliss streets, which run east-west, and the north-south thoroughfares of Abdel Aziz Street and Sadat Street.

Ras Beirut is known for its social and cultural diversity, though increasingly rapid changes to the city's fabric have placed this reputation under threat. Property prices in the area are some of the most expensive in Beirut, and its proximity to the sea means that apartments here are sold for exorbitant amounts, beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest 7% of the population.

The vast majority of new construction in Ras Beirut and Ain El Mreisseh is built over the rubble of older residential blocks and houses whose inhabitants have either moved out or been evicted, before being demolished. That said,



Many of Ras Beirut's wealthier residents became personally involved in the construction process during the 1950s and 1960s. There were two principle reasons for this. First, the fact that new generations of these families tended to remain in the area, and second, the appeal of renting out surplus housing in a desirable and flourishing neighbourhood which had a steady population of students and workers employed in institutions nearby.
This wave of construction manifested itself in two ways: property-owning families either demolished their old buildings and homes and constructing new blocks containing multiple housing units, or added to existing In both cases, the majority of these buildings, especially those put up during the 1950s, were not subdivided into individual properties and remained jointly owned by heirs of the original owners. These families had no intention of selling the housing units in their buildings. Instead, they either lived in them themselves, or rented them.
The Azer Building on Mekhoul Street was home to two of its owners and former renters who had bought their apartments.
1945
1953
1974

"The first commercial market in Beirut was in Sanat Al Bury: the Ayyas and Al Tawileh souks. Before the civil war, I had a place next to Souk Al Tawileh: a shop called Corna. He continues: "When it got damaged, I rented a store here in Hamra and another in Jounieh. and lots of premises opened up there, especially the major businesses that had previously operated in the souks."
"I'm eighty-nine, and I still run the store, but this isn't the case with all the businesses. The famous Lucid hair salon, for instance, or the Hraj patisserie which used to be heaving with customers. Other places, too: they're all gone now, and the central district here is almost deserted."

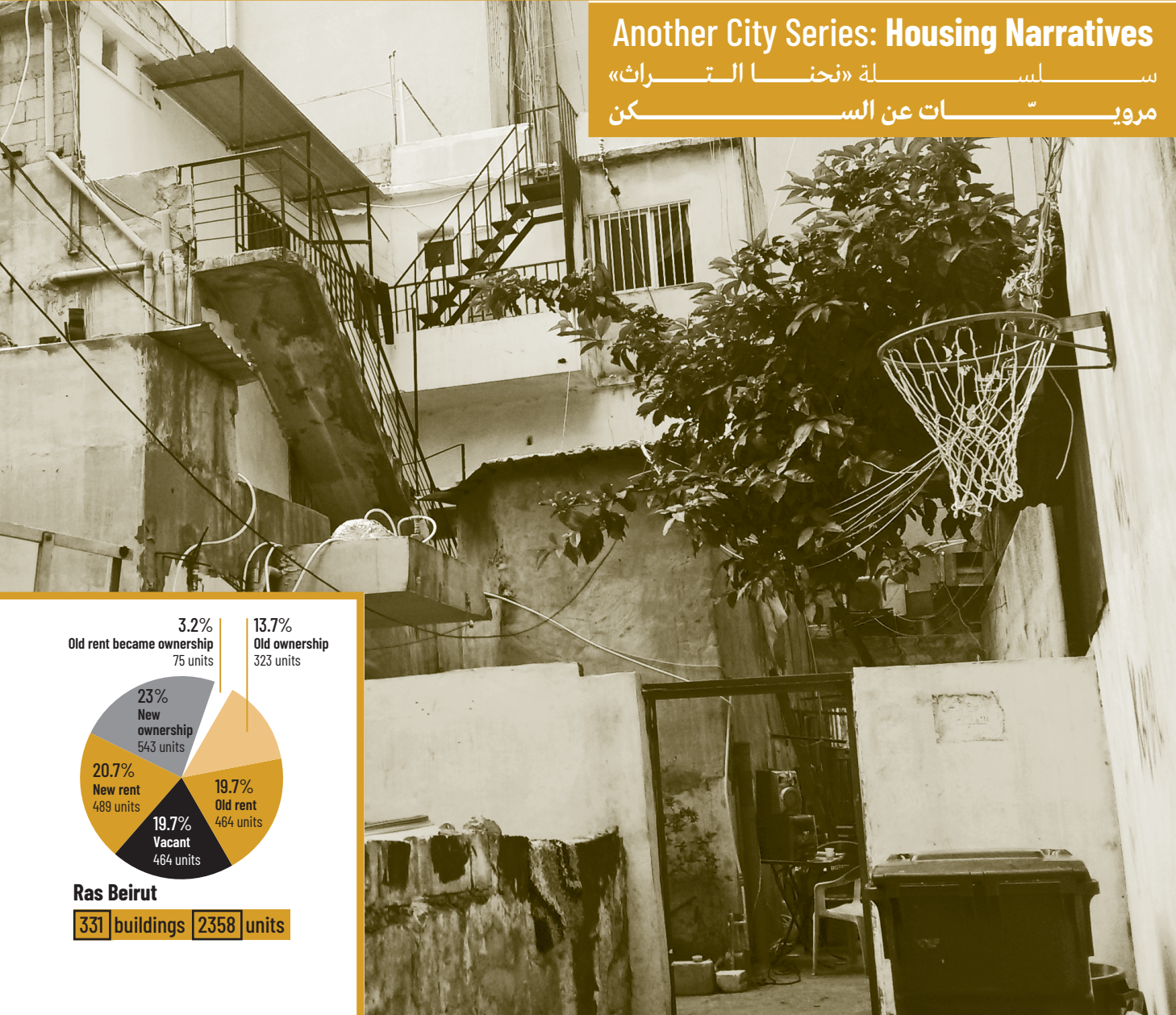
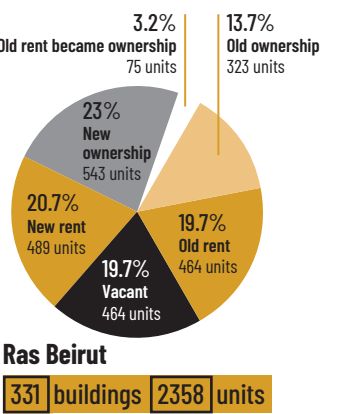
Collective ownership of these properties laid the ground for family disputes and intractable legal proceedings as the demand for investment and development rose in the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Ras Beirut suffered extensive damage during the war and saw much of its population displaced to other areas within the city, though it managed to retain its distinctive social, cultural, and economic diversity. The war had another effect, however. During the 1970s a large number of retailers moved their premises from the city centre into Ras Beirut.

"I'm a seamstress. I don't make enough to cover the costs of an apartment in Ras Beirut. This home means so much to me, and I can't bring myself to leave it, and I don't think the compensation I'd be paid would be enough to buy a single-room apartment these days. Anyone who's lived in Ras Beirut all their life would die if they had to leave..."

This series of pamphlets is associated with the Housing Monitor, an online platform which collates research, lays the groundwork for advocacy, and proposes alternative strategies with the objective of promoting the right to housing in Lebanon.

beirutevictions.org / housingmonitor.org

The Housing Monitor seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of housing in the country, recognising that housing is more than just shelter, and encompasses social networks and access to other resources available in the local environment. In response to studies of residential patterns and changes in land ownership, in particular the alarming number of evictions and vacant units and buildings in Beirut's residential neighbourhoods, not to mention the difficulty residents have in getting access to affordable and appropriate accommodation, the Housing Monitor was launched with the purpose of advancing a reading of these phenomena as symptoms of wider systemic processes at work in the city, and to transform individual initiatives to fight for housing rights into an issue of public interest.



RAS BEIRUT

رأس بيروت
سلسلة
مرويات عن السكن
Another City Series: Housing Narratives

Published by Public Works (2019)
Based on the research project
«Mapping Beirut Through its Tenants' Stories» 2015–2019

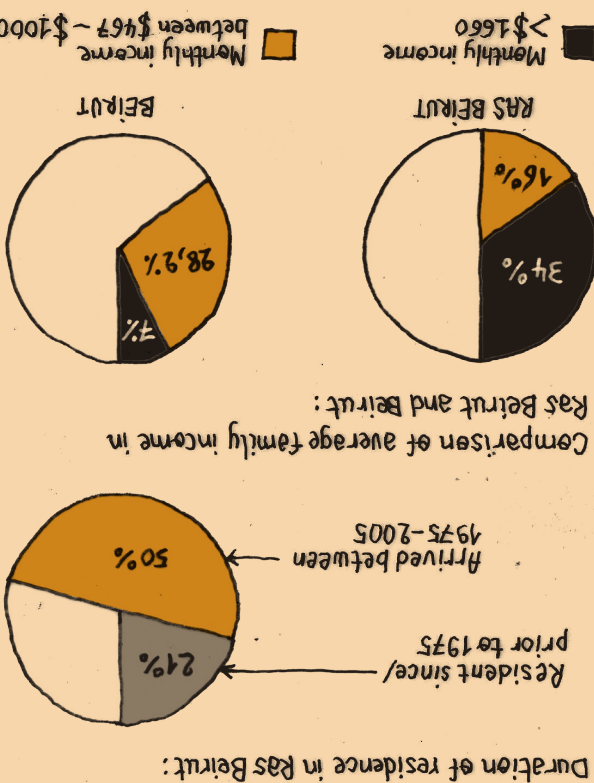
HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
BEIRUT
Middle East

Who lives here?

"My husband's from Beirut, and I'm from Koura in the north. We first rented this place when we got married back in 1987, but eight years ago my husband passed away and the landlord refused to take the rent from me. He said, 'Your husband's dead; this isn't your home.' I sorted it out with the help of a lawyer and went on paying the rent. It has gone up over time. Now I pay a million Lebanese Pounds per year, instead of 500,000. The municipality has a record of everything.

"After the old landlord died and the new rent law was passed, the new owner gave us the option of being evicted or paying rent according to the new rent law: fourteen million Lebanese Pounds a year, in other words. I could never get that kind of money. I had a lawyer sort it out in court.

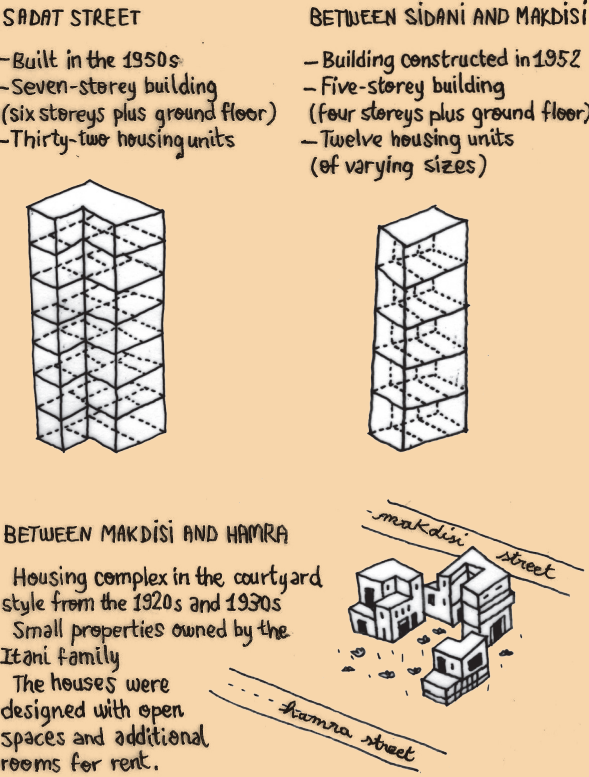
"The landlord wants to subdivide the building again and turn the apartments here into dorms for students, same as all the other buildings in Ras Beirut. All the building's residents are leaving. The landlord gave a sum of money to one family to make them leave. Another family emigrated to America, and after the landlord won the court case against them, he rented out the apartment for investment purposes. Even the nightclub in the building is the subject of legal proceedings, but it's still operating despite the death of the man who rented it.



RAS BEIRUT

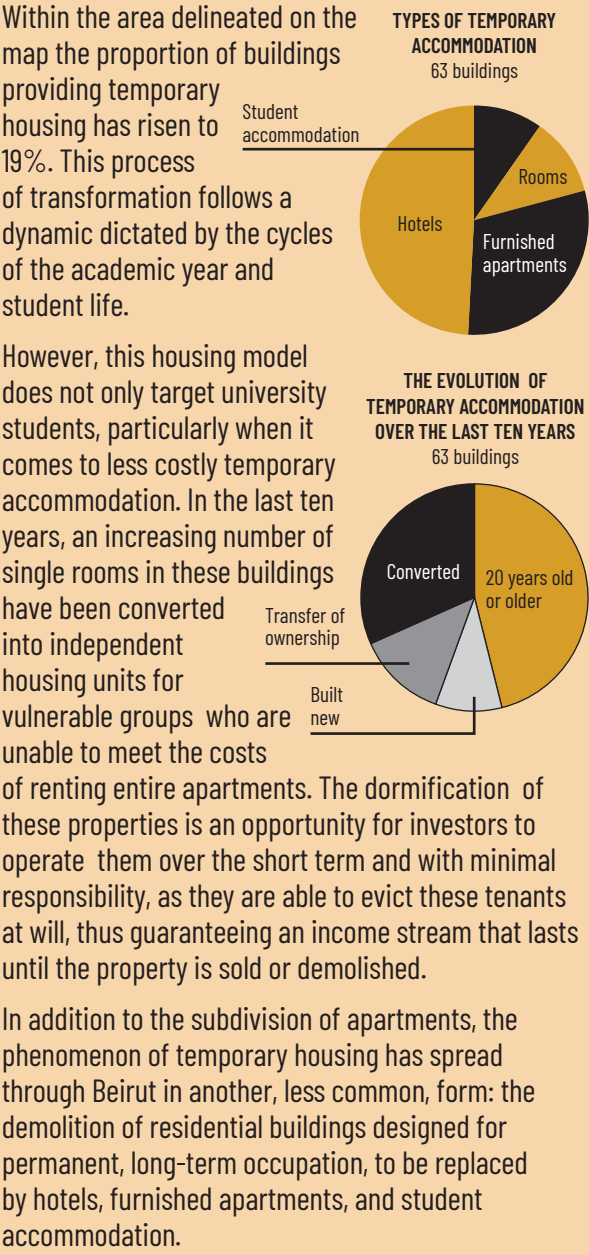
Specifications of new buildings Built prior to 1992

Characterised by housing units that vary in layout and size. This variety of apartment types has guaranteed a level of social diversity both within the building and within the neighborhood as a whole.



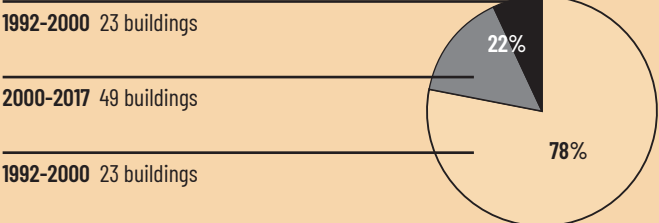
Dormification*

The growing phenomenon of temporary housing in older buildings



* Dormification refers to the division of buildings or individual apartments into rooms/bedsits for rent over the short-term to an increased number of tenants. In Lebanon, where housing standards remain unregulated, the dormification process has led to unfit living conditions. These rooms are generally tenanted by the most vulnerable groups in society in the absence of other housing choices in the city

Real Estate Investment Following 1992



Statistics on the ownership of 127 properties:

Fifty-four properties are owned by twenty major investors without any historical links to the area.

Thirteen families with longstanding ownership have invested in their properties, either by setting up private development companies or in partnership with property developers, with ownership of the apartments divided between landlord and developer. Historically established families benefit from the current legal framework to demolish buildings and densify the built fabric.

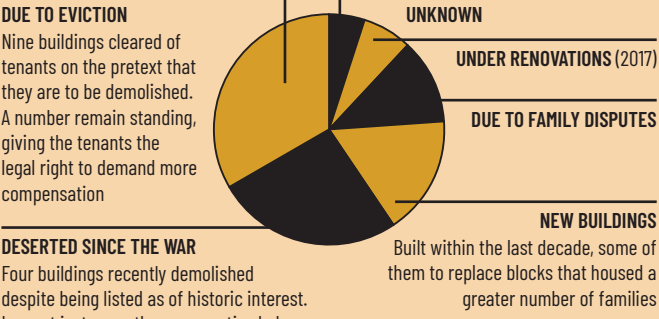
Foreign investors, particularly from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have owned plots and real-estate projects since the 1960s.

With the rise in property values, and in light of urban and financial policies that promote apartment ownership, maximizing densification in zoned areas produces huge returns.

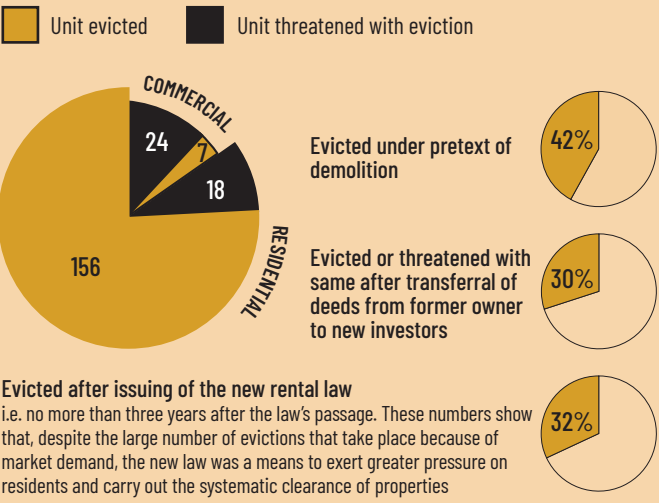
Housing projects in the area have overridden guidelines for permitted building heights after obtaining exemptions from the High Council for Urban Planning, on the grounds that such major projects help the tourism and real-estate sectors.

Despite this, a number of new buildings are either entirely vacant or remain uncompleted. This class of building provide stark evidence of the gulf between the nature of new apartments being put up for sale or rent, and the actual needs of those who want to live in Ras Beirut.

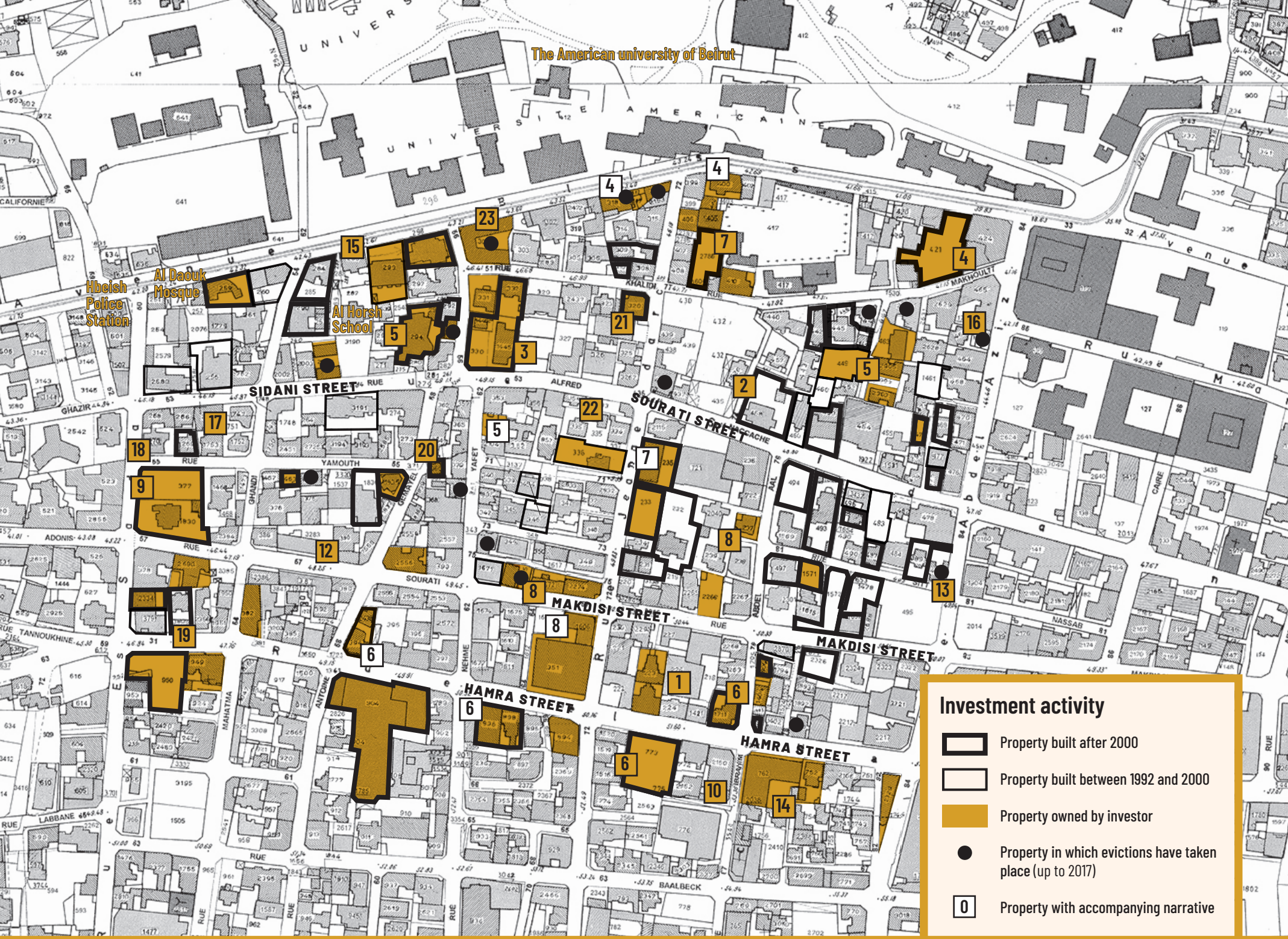
42 buildings entirely vacant with the exception of some whose ground floors are occupied by commercial premises.



205 evictions in 27 buildings



The proportion of vacant buildings and apartments in Ras Beirut is the highest compared with other neighborhoods in the city. Twenty percent of the housing units we surveyed in the district were vacant. There are a number of reasons for this, including the impact of the civil war, the disparity between supply and demand, and the systematic eviction of old tenants.



8 Single-storey building housing a commercial space under old rent. There has been an ongoing legal dispute over this property for the past ten years.

8 Ground floor plus three storeys, built in the 1930s. El Hajj intends to demolish it and reinvest in the property once he has evicted the residents on the ground, first, and third storeys.

9 Saudi investor
Purchased five properties, three of which are completely vacant. The investor is attempting to buy a property and the two neighbouring buildings, but one of the heirs is refusing to sell. According to local residents, the buildings will be completely demolished to make way either for a large mall or residential tower blocks.

6 Vermelho
Currently under construction, with 13 residential storeys (three apartments to a storey).

7 Amer, Aseel, and Khaled Ghandour
The Ghandours have recently put up two new buildings: The first, built in 2017, with 14 storeys of furnished apartments, each rented out for approximately \$2,500 per month, and a ground floor for commercial premises.

7 The second, built 2010, with eight residential storeys and a commercial ground floor. 21 apartments remain unsold. It is rumoured that these vacancies have caused Amer Ghandour financial difficulties, forcing him to reduce the scale of his investments in and around Hamra.

8 Rida Al Hajj — Director of the Moustache Group.
This company purchases properties from older families and its portfolio includes the company building, M Suites 1 & 2 (furnished apartments), and rental properties.

of the building with the exception of those on the first storey have been evicted, including members of the Antoury family, who lived in the building and ran Antoury Market, which had operated on the ground floor for 45 years before it was evicted by court order.

Larisse, the owner of the shop fought the eviction and took the case to the court of appeal. The family even organised a protest against the eviction and the lack of adequate compensation in front of the building. For more on the story see, *Antoury Family victims of court's indifference to their home and livelihood* by Zeinab Yaghy in Al Safir (May 13, 2014)

13 Al Bayt Al Ahmar: The Red House
So-called by residents of Ras Beirut due to its red-painted doors and window frames. One of the older buildings in the neighbourhood, it was built in 1915 and has stood firm against the changes taking place around it. It consists of a ground floor that houses three stores and a residential apartment, and a first floor with a single apartment.

The building became a matter of public interest when, in September 2015, the owner Abdullah Zubair and his son requested that the courts order the eviction of the old tenant—an architect by the name of Samir Zubair, who had been born in the building—to clear the way for demolition. The courts granted the eviction order, but the ministry of culture intervened to prevent the demolition. The culture minister's order was then countermanded by the upper house of parliament, but in August 2016 the governor of Beirut issued an order in his capacity of chief of police to stop ongoing work at the Red House, such as raising tiles and removing windows. Though the tenant has been evicted, work at the Red House remains suspended.

14 Eldorado Cinema
An eight-storey building from the 1960s, formerly a cinema.

Two years ago the heirs of the original owners sold the property to the owners of the Eldorado, a commercial center that had been renting the ground floor and basement levels of the building. The new owners are currently attempting to evict the remaining rented businesses: approximately 15 stores. Another 40 office units and shops in the building are vacant.

15 Restaurant Socrates
A four-storey building from the 1940s. Scheduled for demolition and completely vacant.



16 A seven-storey building that was renovated for conversion into furnished flats. Previous tenants paying the old rents have all been evicted. Previously owned by the Daouk family and sold to the Azar family. The ground floor still houses two stores under the old rent law.

17 A sandstone building whose top two storeys have been vacant since ownership was transferred. Built in the 1960s, with a commercially rented ground floor

and two residential storeys. The ground floor consists of four commercial units under old rents. The previous owners, members of the Arnaout family, lived in the top two storeys, but in 2016 they moved to a building on a neighbouring property which is jointly owned by the Arnaout and Habri families.



18 An almost completely vacant, historically-listed building. Built in 1800 and consisting of a residential ground floor with four floors above it. The building is owned by Idriss Daouk. The ground floor is occupied by an old tenant and the upper storeys are empty.



19 A building built on the site of a former school. Built in 2015, with ten residential storeys (one apartment per storey). Four apartments remain vacant.



21 Vacant building of 14 storeys. For sale.



22 The demolition of four buildings, including a historically-listed property, and land-pooling in September 2017.

The properties are owned by the Arman family and prior to the demolition of their buildings were occupied as follows:

- A property consisting of two historically-listed buildings, built in approximately 1850. The first of these comprised a ground floor and three further storeys, and the second was a villa.
- A property consisting of a single-storey commercial premises, formerly the Palladium, and historically listed.
- A property consisting of a single structure built in 1850, with a ground floor and three storeys above, all of them vacant. The ground floor was divided into two units: the first used as an office by a mukhtar, the second vacant.



14 Eviction of the Edison Building

Built in 1959, with seven storeys and 59 apartments, the Edison Building could have provided an important housing resource for the whole of Ras Beirut. The building has four corners. Two of the corners contain apartments consisting of two bedrooms, a living room, and a dining room, another corner has apartments of a single bedroom, a living room, and a dining room, and those in the middle are studios (i.e. a single room with a bathroom and kitchen).

The building is located on Bliss Street, famous for being home to the Edison Cinema, which closed its doors in the 1990s. It was purchased by the current owner, Imad Taher, an investor who was joint owner of a new building close to the mosque in Bliss Street in partnership with the Talhi family.

Taher evicted the residents of the Edison Building and compensated them with the intention of demolishing it and rebuilding. The building contained 52 apartments and five commercial premises under old rent, with the remainder of tenants renting under the new law; mainly students at the American University of Beirut from the North and South of Lebanon and the Bekaa. Eviction orders began to be issued in 2009 and continued until 2015. By 2016 there were approximately 15 families still living in the building, many of them elderly. The last tenants to leave the building were the elderly owner of a luggage store and an Armenian photographer who worked at AUB. Famous former residents of the building include the artist Hussein Madi and Raymond Eddé.

