Exceptionalism, 1870-1975, Phd dissertation, University of Massachusetts/Amherst (2013) Maria Abunnasr, The Making of Ras Beirut: A Landscape of Memory for Varratives of

7023

TTT

4721



with the cked down The apartment black





after being born. She was tald that if she named them after

where he died. All my grandmother's children died immediately Hindiya and Misbah. The Turks took Misbah to Palestine

S, лацяезриель Кш I was bern here, 



containing multiple housing units, or added to existing old buildings and homes and constructing new blocks ways: property-owning families either demolished their I his wave of construction manifested itself in two

reighbourhood which had a steady population of students renting out surplus housing in a desirable and flourishing tended to remain in the area, and second, the appeal of First, the fact that new generations of these families and 1960s. There were two principle reasons for this. involved in the construction process during the 1950s Many of Ras Beirut's wealthier residents became personally

selling the housing units in their buildings. Instead, they of the original owners. These families had no intention of individual properties and remained jointly owned by heirs those put up during the 1950s, were not subdivided into In both cases, the majority of these buildings, especially

either lived in them themselves, or rented them.

səpetz ni zpniblind.

and workers employed in institutions nearby.

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

BEIRUT



3.2% Old rent became ownership 75 units 323 units 23% New ownershi 543 units 20.7% 19.7% Vacant **Ras Beirut** 331 buildings 2358 units

500-2013 Hayat Gebara, Mona Khechen, and Bruno Marot, Mapping New Constructions in Beirut,

district here is almost deserted." places, too: they're all gone now, and the central which used to be heaving with customers. Other Lucid hair salon, for instance, or the Araji palisserie isn't the case with all the pusinesses. The famous

operated in the souks ?!

there, especially the major

He continues: "When it got

" enires belles qode e : HeliweT JA

Before the civil war, I had a place next to Souk

Sanat Al Burj: the Ayyas and Al Tawileh souks.

moved their premises from the city centre into Ras Beirut.

the city, though it managed to retain its distinctive social,

saw much of its population displaced to other areas within

Ras Beirut suffered extensive damage during the war and

the demand for investment and development rose in the

for family disputes and intractable legal proceedings as

Collective ownership of these properties laid the ground

aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990).

cultural, and economic diversity. The war had another

effect, however. During the 1970s a large number of retailers

"The first commercial market in beinue was in

I'm eighty-rine, and I still run the store, but this pusinesses that had previously and lets of premises opened up Hamra Hourished after the war in Hamra and another in Jounieh damaged, I rented a store here explains a shopkeeper in Hamra.

kas beirut and beirut: Comparison of average family income in AP75-2005 Arrived between %05 Prior to 1975

(81U2 redmevol) 8UA to eviteritin boorthoodie

2977\$ > Wanthy income

TUAI38 2AA

published independently by Public Works Studio in cooperation with the

Interviews with residents from Ras Beirut: Housing Narratives, Pamphlet series

Detween \$467 - \$1000

1.6'86

REIRUT



Duration of residence in Ras Beirut:

both living standards and general health. ever-widening gulf between Ras Beirut's residents in be exposed to its pollution. This situation reflects an services on offer in the district and are more likely to find it difficult to access the advanced health-care and with modest financial resources. These residents In their medium-rise buildings, some of them elderly district's long-term renters and property owners live and wealthy but non-permanent residents, the residential tower blocks, with their luxury apartments opposed scenes. In the shadow of the modern Currently, the district is home to two diametrically

Who lives here?

"My husband's from Beirut, and I'm from Koura "I'm a seamstress. I don't make enough to cover the costs of an apartment in Ras Beirut. This home means in the north. We first rented this place when we so much to me, and I can't bring myself to leave it, and got married back in 1987, but eight years ago my husband passed away and the landlord refused I don't think the compensation I'd be paid would be to take the rent from me. He said, 'Your husband's enough to buy a single-room apartment these days. dead; this isn't your home.' I sorted it out with Anyone who's lived in Ras Beirut all their life would die if the help of a lawyer and went on paying the rent. they had to leave..." 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.

Monitor

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.



This series of pamphlets is associated with the Housing Monitor, an online

13.7% Old ownership



5466

had bought their apartments.

owners and former renters who

stite was home to two of its

The Azar Building on Makhoul



for exorbitant amounts, beyond the reach of all but the

some 57% of residential buildings in Ras Beirut are over forty years old (i.e. were built prior to 1975), with the greatest concentration of these older buildings in Hamra and Ain El Mreisseh. It is worth noting that property development in the area is not confined to the construction of modern buildings, but includes the conversion of older buildings into new investment opportunities, such as luxury commercial premises, hotels, and furnished apartments which are targeted at a highly specific market—including foreigners and wealthy students—and pose a threat to sustainable housing in the neighbourhood.

1962

In addition to the above, Ras Beirut has seen the emergence of another practice designed to exploit the demand for housing. Apartments are subdivided into rooms and rented out to a number of different individuals with the aim of increasing profit with little

regard for living standards.

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,

placed this reputation under threat. Property prices in

though increasingly rapid changes to the city's fabric have

the area are some of the most expensive in Beirut, and its

proximity to the sea means that apartments here are sold

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.

As we get to know the streets and

and social environment, we pose

questions about heritage and the

The Another City Series sees local

displacement of communities.

alleys whose residents have witnessed

significant changes in the architectural

housing policies which have led to the

**Ras Beirut** 

century which followed. and this development process continued through the py gardens, unpaved lanes lined with pear treesresidential suburb—flat-roofed houses surrounded kas Beirut had all the trappings of a classic Beirut alike. However by the mid-nineteenth century, from both shore and surrounding neighbourhoods Sea, a topography that made it difficult to access promontories stretching towards the Mediterranean settlement was based around a chain of rocky to a densely populated urban district. The original has gone from a primarily agricultural community Over the course of the last J50 years, Ras Beirut



:obe sieah haris

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

Beirut Neighbourhood Initiative (2014) s This Gentrification? Unpublished concept paper, The American University of Mona Khechen, An Inquiry Into Current Urban Change Processes in Ras Beirut:

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

Port of Beirut: chickpeas and wheal. most important grain trader in the maternal grandfather. He was the en sew jacking in nemdertaber

with customers and suppliers around the world. My uncle Adnan, his son, used to deal 

4.35interio ~ I leid reads to and from Sideni lend in

the family is a key to electoral success. could make MPs and break them - and to this day an grantfarter had a lot of social influence - "he



Press (torthcoming) Neighborhood: Health and Well-Being in Ras Beirut, Beirut: American University of Beirut A. Kaddour, C. Myntti, N. Salti, S. Abdulrahim, L. Wick, and H. Zurayk, The Profile of a

University of Beirut (2012) AUB Housing Task Force Subcommittee, Housing Study Recommendations, American

there's hat water there.

he told me of sm blot of

sold theirs to my moternal uncles

to my mother, and his brothers with and

the rest. In that district almost no one owned

block, housed their children, and rented out

nomtrede ne thind nentry has bomen My mether Jehan and her brothers

avil bluew years, clemine

Jeijej

Police

Hbeish

1111

50467 aul

Heuse of my paternal grandparents

Sidani Street

mas don here

my father Deib

sman s'ibilens

neved house

ng grandfather

RAS BEIRUT

(س بيروت

evibrings outright. This was after Hindiya

the new building.

pis old house

My grandfather

went back to live in

# 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.

### SADAT STREET

-Built in the 1950s -Seven-storey building (six storeys plus ground floor) -Thirty-two housing units

BETWEEN SIDANI AND MAKDISI - Building constructed in 1952 - Five-storey building (four storeys plus ground floor) - Twelve housing units (of varying sizes)





BETWEEN MAKDISI AND HAMRA

Housing complex in the courty ard style from the 1920s and 1930s Small properties owned by the Itani family The houses were designed with open spaces and additional rooms for rent.

TYPES OF TEMPORARY

ACCOMMODATION

63 buildinas

THE EVOLUTION OF

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS

63 building

Converted

urnished

) vears o

# Dormification

The growing phenomenon of temporary housing in older buildings

Within the area delineated on the map the proportion of buildings providing temporary Student housing has risen to accommodation 19%. This process of transformation follows a dynamic dictated by the cycles of the academic year and student life.

However, this housing model does not only target university students, particularly when it comes to less costly temporary accommodation. In the last ten years, an increasing number of single rooms in these buildings have been converted Transfer o ownership into independent housing units for

vulnerable groups who are new unable to meet the costs

of renting entire apartments. The dormification of these properties is an opportunity for investors to operate them over the short term and with minimal responsibility, as they are able to evict these tenants at will, thus guaranteeing an income stream that lasts until the property is sold or demolished.

In addition to the subdivision of apartments, the phenomenon of temporary housing has spread through Beirut in another, less common, form: the demolition of residential buildings designed for permanent, long-term occupation, to be replaced by hotels, furnished apartments, and student accommodation.

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.

# 1 A case of dormification

In 1927 there was an 894-squaremetre property where the Al-Issai Building stands today, which consisted of a single-storey stone nouse with an adjoining plot of land. This house was the property of the Sidani family up until 1955, when they sold it to the Mousalli family. A year later, the new owners combined it with the neighbouring plot, giving the property a total area of 966 square metres. Three years after that, the current building was put up, and then in 1960 the deeds were transferred to Al-Issai, a Saudi-Arabian family. The seven-storey building is divided into two sections: north and south. It contains three office premises, a shop, six rental apartments which fall under the old rent law, and eight

of the apartments are rented out under the new rent law, and the maiority of them are subdivided into single-room units for students and labourers. There are a total of 32 housing units, including both rooms

the building's dilapidated condition.

the Al-Issai Building are almost completely unoccupied. The first of these is the Farah complex, built in the 1950s and put up for sale a decade ago, where some apartments are occupied by tenants governed by the old rent law. The second is the Hayat Towers, a pair of towers that have remained completely vacant since they were erected in

# Investors, evictions, and vacancies

#### A few examples –

# 2 Shayboub Tower

Built in 2013, with 22 residential storeys. The first 18 storeys house two apartments each. The apartments are occupied as follows: three apartments by the building's owners, 16 under new ownership, eight rented, and **nine vacant**. The last two floors consist of a pair of duplex apartments, the first owned by the Shayboub family, the other under new ownership. The first floor is the offices of an engineering firm. Formerly, Dr. Mechalani owned three storevs in the building. He lived on one, his daughter and her family on another, and the third was rented out by foreign students at the American University of Beirut and diplomats. When the civil war broke out, political parties moved their offices into the third floor and the family relocated. Following Dr. Mechalani's death,

his son-in-law Shayboub started construction of the tower.

# 3 B-Central

Currently under construction, with six basement levels for commercial premises and 23 residential storevs. On the site of the historical Bavt Khalidi, later the Khalidi Hospital The Bayt Khalidi was a two-storey villa, built in 1927, and listed as a protected site of historical interest. The property was bought by **Bahii** Abou Hamze, director of property development firm Development-H who combined four adjoining plots and demolished the hospital to lay the ground for B-Central.



576

604



Evicted after issuing of the new rental law i.e. no more than three years after the law's passage. These numbers show  $\frac{32\%}{32\%}$ that, despite the large number of evictions that take place because of market demand, the new law was a means to exert greater pressure on residents and carry out the systematic clearance of properties

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.

# 6 Bassam Asaad

Director of property development company BA United (Holding) -Bassam Asaad set up two construction workshops in Hamra Street, where he also owns three commercial buildings, all built between 2009 and 2010, which house international brand stores and luxury office premises

# 6 IKON 394

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

# 6 Vermelho

Currently under construction (for the past four years), with 16 residential storeys (two apartments to a storey) and four basement levels.

#### Amer, Aseel, and Khaled Ghandou

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.

vacant apartments. The remainder

The new rents are managed by the office of the current attorneygeneral, and residents complain of

Today, a year on from the death of the former owner, ownership of the deeds is shared between his heirs. The tenant of a clothing store in the huilding claims that the new owners intend to sell the building and demolish it.

The two buildings either side of

the late-1990s, due to the absence of necessary legal documents

which he bought in stages between 1987 and the mid-1990s 1866 Court & Suites Hotel: Built in 2013, with 20 residential storeys, four commercial storeys, and seven basement levels. He also owns buildings that date back to the 1930s:

> 4 A two-storey building that is scheduled for demolition and has been vacant for three years.

It is rumoured that construction has

been halted due to the death of a

construction worker and financial

Tahseen Khayat owns seven properties

4 Tahseen Khayat

difficulties

Khayat purchased the deeds from Sami Khouri and converted the building into offices. A bank occupied the first floor until 2000

4 Another two-storey building, also vacant

This building was a residential block prior to Khayat purchasing it and turning it into a commercial premises.

**4** A four-storey building, entirely **vacant** apart from a single floor rented out by the Malik Bookstore under old rent.

# 5 Ziad Dalal

Owner of the Nestlé franchise in the Middle East — he has restored five buildings (with one still under restoration) and converted them into furnished apartments for rent or hotels, and has built a new residential block of furnished apartments.

5 He owns a residential block entirely comprised of old-rent apartments, which Tahseen Khayat unsuccessfully attempted to buy from him.



**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

# 10 Vacant building

tower blocks.

Baltaji Building

Built during the 1960s, with seve storeys containing eight shops and 23 office premises.

Owned by the Ghanim family, it was purchased by two investors, Adhami and Rehhal, seven years ago.

**11** A building containing a restaurant on the ground floor with the **remaining storeys** vacant. Built during the 1940s with a ground floor and three residential storeys. Owned by the Armenian Tatarian family and sold in 2000 to an investor from the Chouman family.

#### 12 Eviction of residents and the Antoury Market from the

Built in the 1960s, with a ground floor and five residential storeys. From 2016 onwards, all residents

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 Yaqhy 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 storevs 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 tenantand the



#### **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.

20 A ten-storey building which has remained completely unoccupied since it was built in 2015. Currently for sale or rent.



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

 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 Beirul 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 Talih 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 ainder of tenants i 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.

