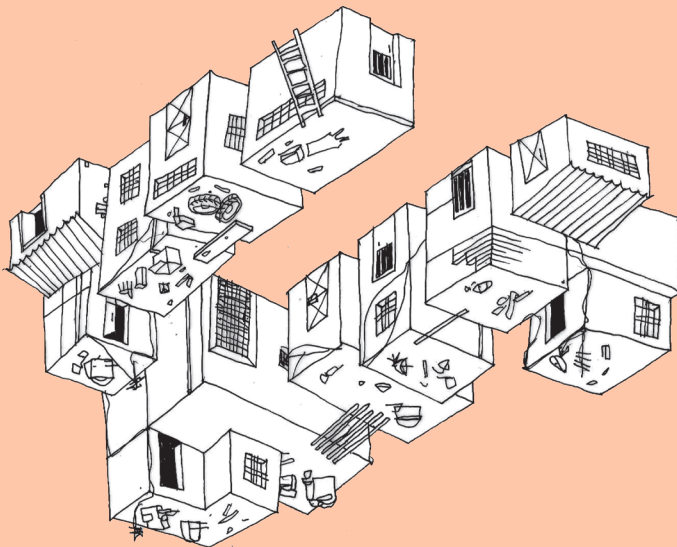


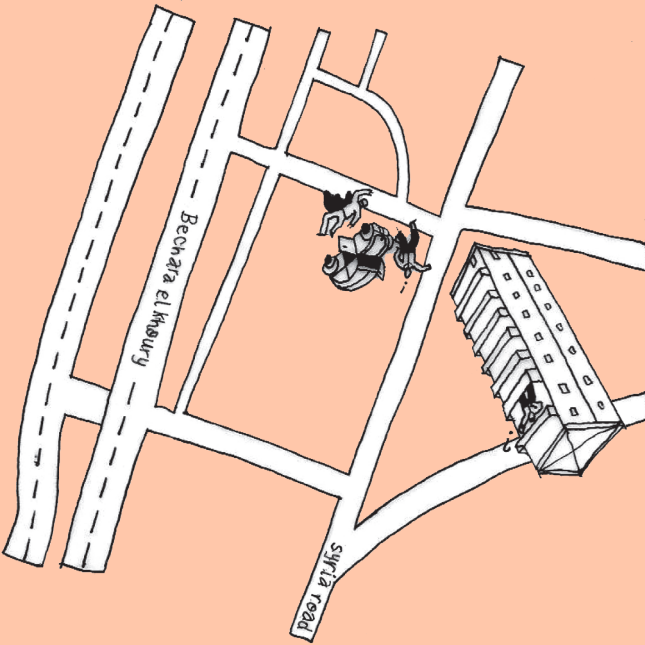
As the city's population rose in the late nineteenth century, Beirut underwent expansion and development, spilling past the old city walls towards neighbouring districts such as Zugaq Al Blat. Bachoura, and Msaybeh. Bachoura is situated on a hill, separated from the city walls by one of Beirut's oldest cemeteries, first built in 1878. It is claimed that the nearby neighbourhood of Haoud Al Wilaye is named after the construction of the Saints' Tomb (qabr al wali) and a water reservoir (haoud maa) here. In 1862, the French Hospital, was built to the north of the cemetery, and when the city limits reached the south-west corner of the hospital grounds, the neighbourhood of Al Basta was formed. The neighbourhood of Khandaq Al Ghamiq was historically Syriac, and the Syriac Catholic Church of St. George was built here in 1878.

In the early twentieth century, at the outset of the French Mandate, urbanization was confined to a series of houses and villas surrounded by orchards. Older residents in the neighbourhood have many stories to tell about Khandaq Al Ghamiq Street, including memories of French soldiers stationed by the hospital being harassed by children and young men as a form of symbolic resistance against the occupation. These youths would use the neighbourhood's narrow alleys to make their escape, including Haramiye Alley on the fringes of Bachoura Cemetery. Other stories compare Khandaq Al Ghamiq with Sursock Street in the early 1950s: full of young couples walking up and down. Some residents remember Camille Chamoun passing down the street to pay his respects to local residents after the French liner Champollion was wrecked on a sandbar off the Lebanese coastline. A crew of Lebanese sailors from the Baitaji family, who lived on Khandaq Al Ghamiq Street, had saved many of the ships' passengers from drowning.

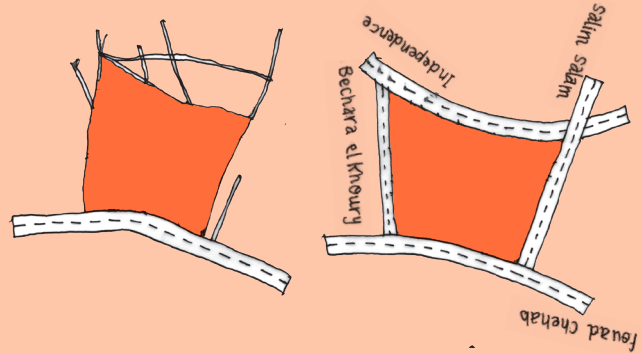


In the 1950s, coinciding with an influx of Lebanese from rural areas, a network of courts and alleys started to branch off from the main streets connecting the wealthier villas with the city. These courts consisted of single-room apartments ranged around shared courtyards, and they provided housing for workmen at the port and in the city centre. Though the Baghdadi, Mabsout, and Etr courts still have disappeared, the Matar, Hanballi, and Etr courts still stand to this day.

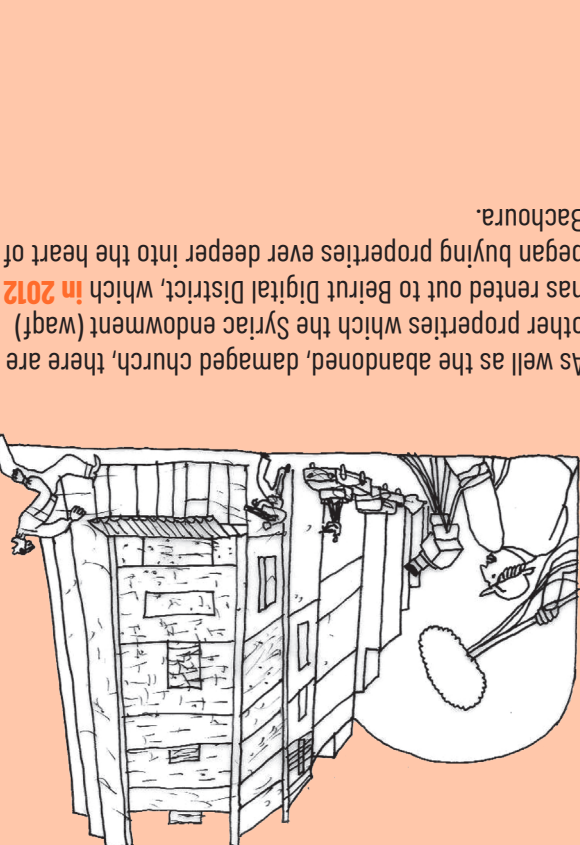
Over time, a class of Shia property-owners began to develop, buying land from Armenians and Syriacs in the 1960s.



The 1958 uprising played an important part in transforming Bachoura's diverse community into a Muslim-majority population. It is often claimed that the conflict started in Bachoura, since this was where the first demonstrations were held to protest the assassination of the journalist Nasib Al Matri, a vocal opponent of Camille Chamoun's policies. Al Matri had been elected as head of the Editors' Union in 1947, having founded The Telegraph in 1930, which by 1945 was the best-selling daily newspaper in the country. His murder was the first politically-motivated assassination of a journalist since independence.



Although Bachoura is only five minutes' walk from the city centre, and another five minutes from Monnot Street, the four main roads that surround it (Fouad Chehab Avenue to the north, Salim Salam to the west, Bechara El Khoury to the east, and Independence to the south) keep the neighbourhood relatively isolated. For instance, prior to the construction of the Fouad Chehab ring road in the 1960s, Bachoura was a natural extension of the city centre, with residents from the neighbourhood driving their carts to and from the city marketplaces along the busy main road.



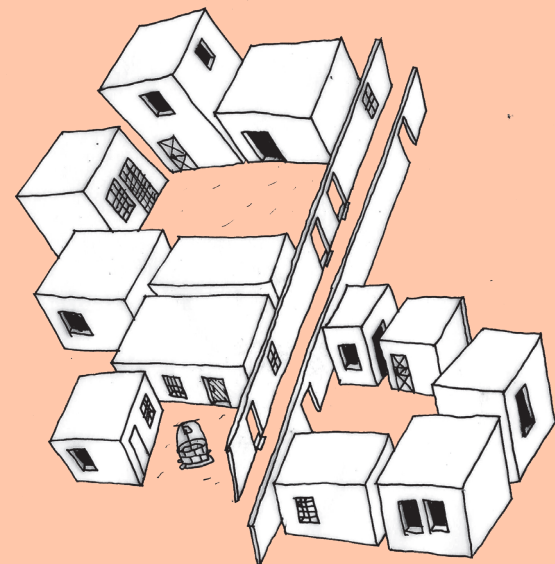
The Lebanese Civil War saw a fresh exodus of residents, and the Syriac Catholic church remained abandoned from the first days of the conflict. With the end of the war in 1990, this street—known as Syria Street, one of the streets feeding into Khandaq Al Ghamiq—was dilapidated along its length, on both sides of the bridge. The area behind the bridge became part of Solidere, while the other side remained as it was. The contrast attracted many filmmakers, who used it to portray the civil war in their films.

## Contradictory values in the morphology of Dandan Alley: Quality housing versus property investment

The alley consists of 21 one- or two-storey buildings. Neighbourhood zoning regulations allow for a built-up area of greater density than currently exists.

Umm Hassan Matar says that her house at the entrance to the street belongs to the family of her husband, who used to have a shop in Allenby Street. Some of the rooms on the Matar family property were occupied by acquaintances from their village who came to work in Beirut, but the majority were taken by members of their growing family. Today, none of her children or grandchildren live in the alley. Heirs to these properties refrain from conducting renovations. The narrow lane with its small, singly-let rooms, means that the workmen and domestic workers of various nationalities, who live here side-by-

side with old tenants and the owners, are able to find housing in the city. Khadija Shakaroun Nasser, the owner of the house at the other end of the alley, says that she used to rent it out to a Kurdish family while she lived in the neighbourhood of Hay el Sellom. She moved back here from Hay El Sellom after her house was damaged when the Ghadir River flooded, as the Kurdish family was getting ready to emigrate to Germany.

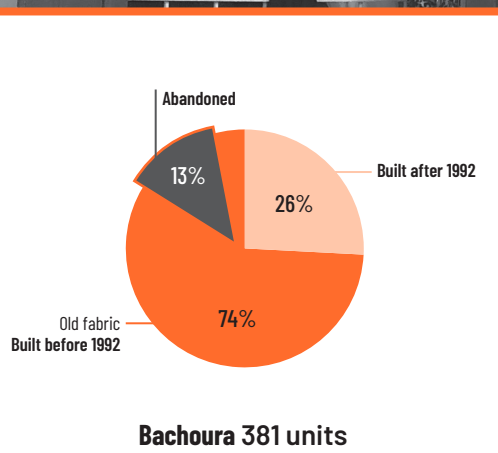


## Housing Monitor

[beirutevictions.org](http://beirutevictions.org) / [housingmonitor.org](http://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 platform which collates research, lays the groundwork for advocacy, and proposes alternative strategies with the objective of promoting the right to housing in Lebanon.



## AL BACHOURA

### الباشورة

#### Another City Series: Housing Narratives

سلسلة «نحن التراث»  
مرويات عن السكن

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.

Anyone who wants to see a living representation of the stages through which Beirut has passed, should head to Bachoura. Of all the city's neighbourhoods, it is the closest to a picture of historical Beirut, and its mixed architectural heritage is a record of the city's formation. There are old houses owned by wealthy families, and ancient courts with narrow alleys branching off from the main streets. Bachoura is a neighbourhood that throngs with life, its history having allowed for the development of unique social relationships. Children play safely up and down its cramped alleys, and old men sit together out on the pavement, talking and passing the time.

Commerce in Bachoura remains vibrant, as witnessed by numerous small shops and outlets for professional tradesmen, including carpenters' workshops, antiques shops, car mechanics, small printshops, and stamp factories on the fringes of Bachoura Cemetery. Markets in the neighbourhood include the Carpenters' Souk, the

Metalworkers' Souk, the Antiques Souk, and the Glass Souk.

However because of its unique location, Bachoura has become the focus of real-estate speculation, the pressure of which is most evident in the radical architectural changes that have taken place over the years. The expansion of companies such as Beirut Digital District is one example of the processes that threaten the neighbourhood's diverse social and architectural fabric.



# AL BACHOURA

## الباشورة

Approximately 15% of Bachoura's old buildings are empty:

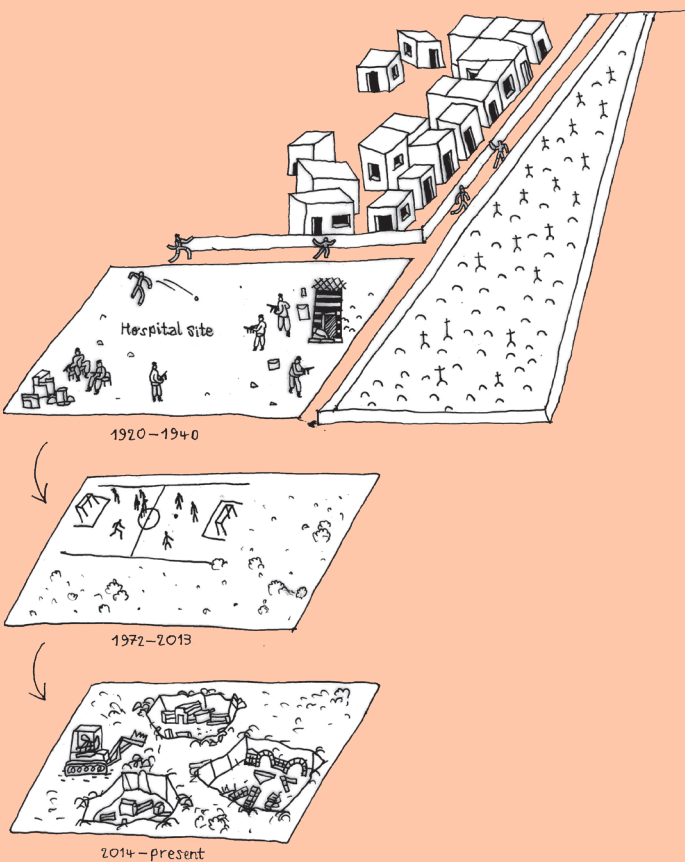
30 abandoned buildings  
92 historically listed buildings  
8 buildings are both abandoned and historically listed

Until the year 2000, a large proportion of these abandoned buildings were occupied by people displaced during the civil war.

### Public spaces in Bachoura

Aside from the alleys themselves, officially designated public spaces are few and far between. On the southern boundary of the neighbourhood by Independence Avenue, there are two municipal gardens: Lower Basta Garden and the slightly larger Al Arees Garden. In 2001, the Beirut Public Library opened its doors in Bachoura.

The largest piece of public land in the area is the grounds of the French Hospital overlooking the city centre. Youth from the neighbourhood turned the unused land into a football field in 1972. This space attracted a number of visitors from nearby neighborhoods until 2013, when the investors who had bought the plots in 2006 decided to raze the ground in preparation for a real-estate development project. The discovery of archaeological remains pushed the Antiquities Department to halt work. The excavation works have been left untouched e, with the archaeological remains exposed.



### The alley facing the football stadium

Residents in this alley feel vulnerable to eviction after the sale of the large property on which the football stadium once stood, in addition to a number of properties facing the stadium. One man who has rented here since 1983 says that he has been fighting the eviction along with other members of the community, but that he still feels threatened.

There are about 20 plots of land in the alley that have been purchased by one of three property companies: Alia, Bachoura Property, and Platinum Development . Seven of these contain inhabited buildings, and four are historically listed.

The alley is also home to a beautiful old house surrounded by a garden, located on the property previously owned by the Hanbali brothers. The two brothers have passed away leaving no heirs, and the house has been occupied by a tenant since 1979. The tenant takes care of the house and pays all the municipal fees. The property also contains a distinctive inner court, the Hanbali Court.

### The courts

Most of the residents in the courts pay old rent. If the new rent law was applied to these residents, it would have catastrophic consequences, because the courts are not contained within buildings. Rather, they extend between them, covering parts of each plot of land. The average size of a court is approximately 100 metres squared, even though the actual home itself may be just a single room.

### Haramiye Alley

Haramiye Alley runs parallel to the edge of the cemetery in Khandaq Al Ghamiq. A long pedestrian passage, it is two metres wide and branches off into three courts: Matar Court, Hanbali Court, and Eitr Court.

The alleygot its name in the 1950s, when haramiye (thieves) would use it to hide after committing robberies in Beirut's commercial center. They would run into the alley then jump over the stone wall into the Bachoura Cemetery, where the civil guard would be unwilling to pursue them.

### Matar Court

An old area that can be reached through alleys branching off from Khandaq Al Ghamiq Street. It is separated from Bachoura Cemetery by Haramiye Alley. Matar Court consists of a single plot containing a number of single rooms situated around an inner courtyard. Residents are a mix of old and new tenants.

### Eitr Court

This court is established on a single plot of land and includes 41 inhabited rooms. Living conditions in the court have deteriorated. A resident here, Samira, describes how living in a single room means she has to keep a gas stove in the bedroom, while the bathrooms are shared by all the court's residents. There are rumours that the court has been sold, but Samira will fight any attempt to evict her from her home.

### Kurdish Court

The Kurdish Court was demolished years ago. It was a camp for Kurds who ran the vegetable market in a neighbouring district, which was also demolished.

### Mabsout Court

According to local residents, this court stood on a plot bought by Abdallah Berri, who demolished the court in 2013. Berri also bought the property facing the court and demolished the building that stood there.

### Saad Street

**1** A plot bought by Mahdi Naanou, owner of Naanou Newspaper Distributors. Bought in the 1990s, it still contains a single abandoned building. The lower storeys are occupied by a printing press, and the remaining apartments are rented out by room at a rate of \$200 per month, mostly to Syrian families.

**2** A plot owned by Walid Jumblatt, formerly a headquarters of the Progressive Socialist Party. The ground floor is occupied by Madame Tohmeh and her husband, both of them in their seventies. Three generations of their family have lived here.

**3** Subdivided building. A development company wanted to buy the property, which was occupied by a number of tenant families. One old tenant, who had bought his home from the original owner fifty years ago, assisted the other residents in resisting eviction and negotiating the sale of their homes at a fair rate: up to \$50,000 per apartment.

**4** Six-storey building, with five small apartments per floor. The seventh floor is a rooftop apartment. The property is owned by Khalil Al Jaroudi and was built to be a hotel, but never used as one. Houses 36 tenants paying old rent.

**5** Plot owned by a member of the Alkawi family, contains a two-storey building. Its westerly neighbour is a plot owned by a member of the Mneimneh family, which contains a historically listed building. The first storey was evicted with the consent of the tenants, but the ground floor is still tenanted by a carpenter, who followed his father into the trade. The carpenter lost his case contesting the eviction on the grounds that he had changed the intended use of the unit. However he continues to use the space as its legal guardian: the historically listed building next door means it cannot be demolished.

### The cemetery

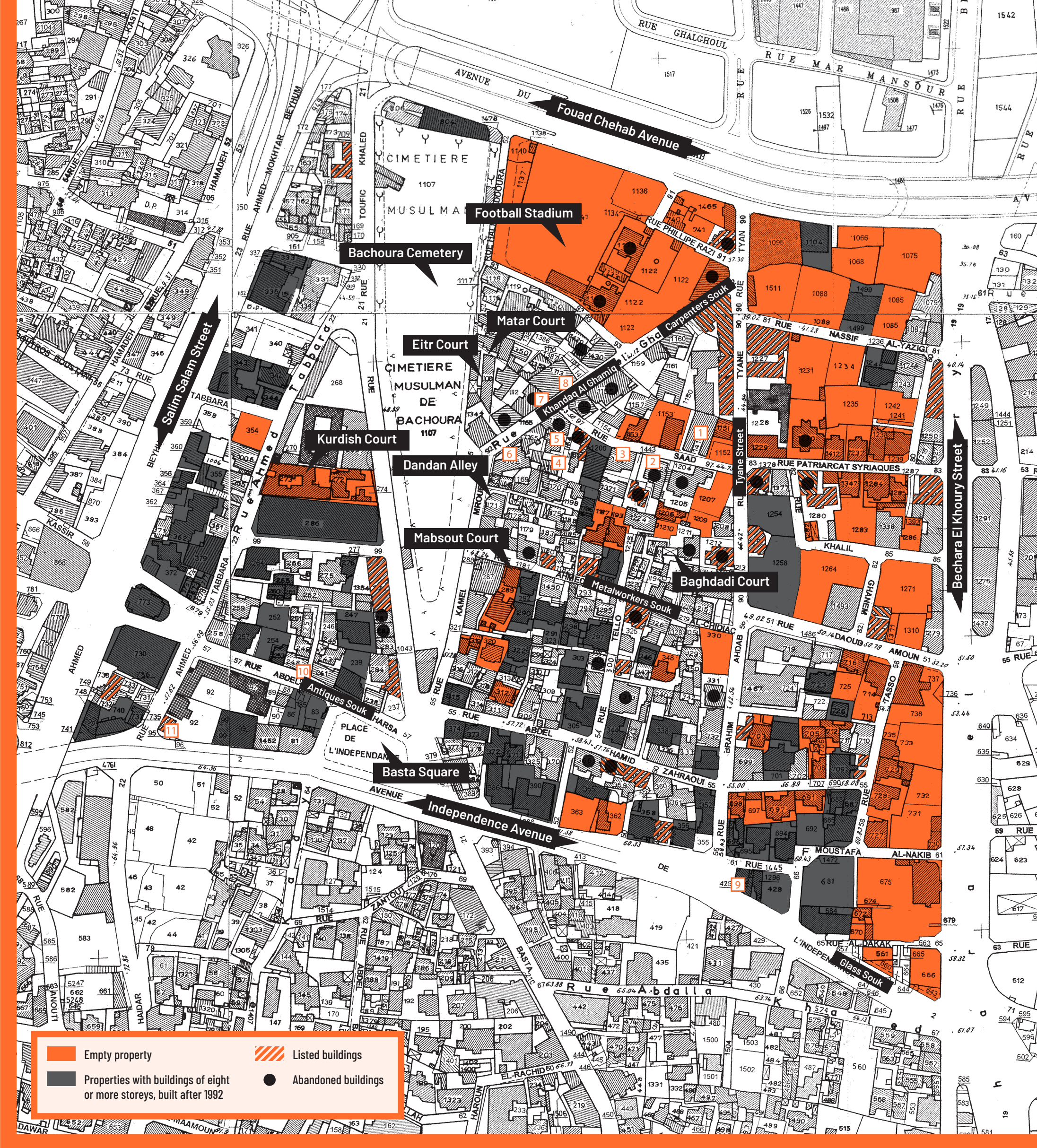
*It isolates us from the chaos of the city and gives us a sense of safety and privacy. No one can build here, it guarantees that we will be able to see the sky until the end of our lives.*

### Dandan Alley, known as Matar Alley

A pedestrian passageway containing properties owned by the Matar, Nasouli, Bahlouan, Nasser, Qaranout, families and others, consisting of single rooms and houses built round open courts. There are a total of 13 one- and two-storey buildings in the alley, the majority built during the 1940s and 1950s. The majority are in need of renovation, maintenance work, or buttressing. The residents are a mix of old tenants, old owners, and new tenants of various nationalities. Residents are currently facing offers to purchase their properties as according the zoning regulations that apply to the neighbourhood, the areas currently built on the plots can be doubled. However, the morphology of the neighbourhood would mean that any construction on one plot in the alley would affect all the neighbouring buildings.

### The road leading to Khadaq Al Ghamiq

**6** The Dammar Building: The space on the ground floor is a shop owned by Ali Haidar. Thirty-five years ago, it was the workshop of an Arab carpenter. Ali has lived on the fifth storey of the same building for fifty-five years. There is no elevator in the building and Ali explains that his apartment has become too big to live in by himself. His children have all bought homes in the neighbourhood, but Ali wants to return to his village. However, he fears losing his source of income. The current owners of the property are the female heirs of the original owner, and live in France. The mother is Armenian and they have relatives in Jounieh. Ali says they intend to sell the property.



**7** The Eitr Building: The owner sent municipal eviction notices to tenants on the grounds that the building was structurally unsound, but tenants rejected the reason given, particularly as the owner continues to rent out empty apartments to Syrian refugees when the original tenants died or went overseas, taking advantage of the newcomers' circumstances to occupy a single apartment with up to four families at a time. This additional density of residents alarms tenants, who say: How can a building that's scheduled to be demolished because it's unsafe have its apartments rented out again?

**8** Before the mosque: Two buildings on a single plot. One of the residents, who had rented his apartment since 1979, bought his home in 1993 for \$50,000 after negotiating with the owner, who had offered him \$45,000 to vacate the

property. These negotiations were with Cherri and Attwi, the two new owners who had recently bought the property from Baltaji and who then proceeded to reach settlements with the tenants.

### Working and living in Bachoura:

**9** A sweet shop owned by a man in his seventies who lives in Bachoura. The man pays old rent and lives in an apartment of 100 square metres with his wife and son. He pays 500,000 Lebanese Pounds a month in rent and for the past 25 years the landlord has been pressuring him to vacate the property, but is unwilling to pay him compensation.

**10** Shop owned by a man in his sixties. He lives in Bachoura with his wife and two children, paying old rent for a house

of four bedrooms and a living room. Monthly rent is 646,000 Lebanese Pounds. In 2004, the building was sold without his knowledge.

### Antiques Souk:

**11** The ground floor is rented out to commercial shops from the antiques market. First and second storeys have been empty since the owner obtained permission to demolish the building and build again, however he passed away before he could begin. His heirs have maintained the building and renovated the shops on the ground floor. The shops are rented out according to investment contracts at \$650 per month. Formerly, rents were worth 50 Lebanese Pounds.