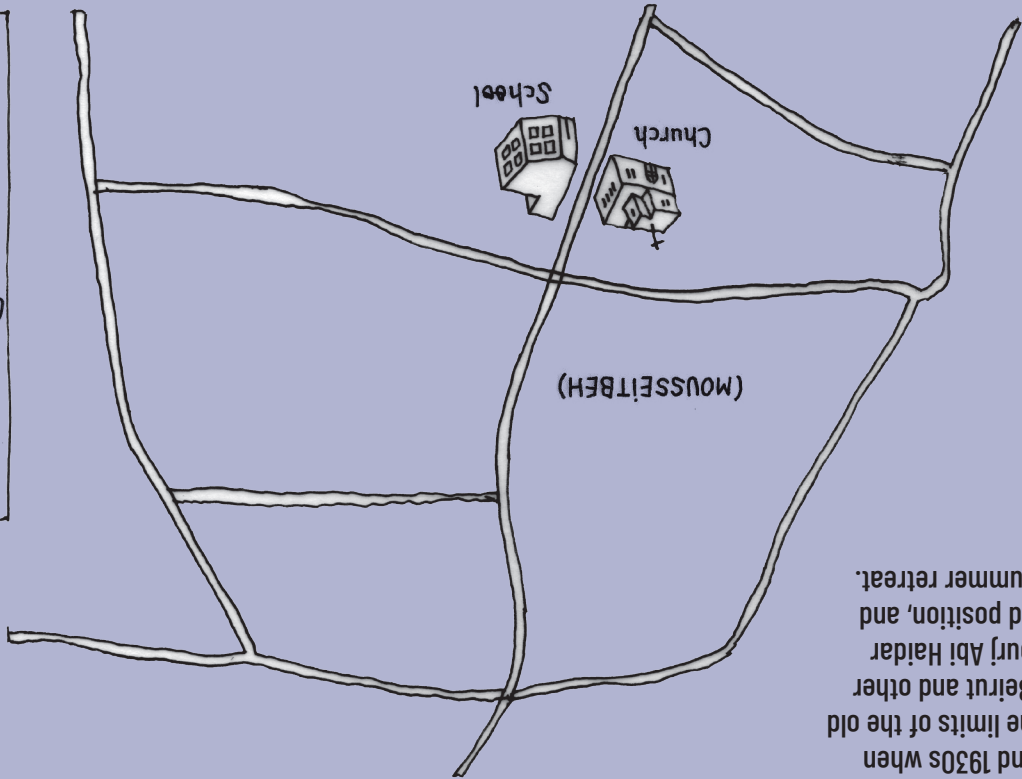


Hazlton Saghyra. A glance at Lebanon: Sects, Families, Districts, and Political Parties, a series of articles in Al Hayat newspaper. Georges Nassif writes about Lebanon, 14/7/2014

How Shia families settled in Al Laja neighbourhood in the 1960s and 1980s, a report on NOW



The area which is known as Msaytbeh today was once a rocky extension of undeveloped wild land. The name derives from mastaba, a type of raised, flat platform: a reference to its position, elevated over the rest of the city and set back from the sea. Historically, Msaytbeh was the site of a number of defensive towers, named after prominent Beirut families, including Bourj Abi Halidar, Bourj Baiham, and Bourj Salam. Over the years, the palaces and homes of Mamluk princes and their generals and officials grew up around these fortifications. Before the French Mandate authorities implemented urban planning and a road network, Msaytbeh was a large stretch of open heath, studded with cactus. Construction began in the 1920s and 1930s when families began to settle outside the limits of the old city walls. To residents from Ras Beirut and other neighbourhoods, Msaytbeh and Bourj Abi Halidar with their scattered trees, elevated position, and moderate climate, were an ideal summer retreat.

A large proportion of the first landowners and residents were Christians. Some of these families owned and ran tile factories in the city, including the Yazbek, the Boutroses, the Nassifs, and the Abou Shahias. They acquired their properties in the 1920s, when the mandate authorities gifted land to Roman Catholics in Mazra'a, and to Syrians in the area of Msaytbeh between the Yazbek Café and Jumblatt Street. In a process similar to that which saw thousands of Armenians pour into Beirut, fleeing the genocide in Cilicia, Turkish-Syriac families began to arrive in the city in the 1920s and settle in Msaytbeh, where the French authorities gave them land. They founded the Saint Severus College of Beirut, and the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul.

The northerly section of Msaytbeh is known as Aal Salam, after the family that owned the majority of properties in the area. Houses in this part of the neighbourhood were characteristically palace-like and surrounded by gardens. Residents were middle-income families whose earning members worked as clerks in the port or for the electricity and water companies. Some owned stables in the Anouti neighbourhood, close to the Salam Palace, where they reared the donkeys which were used to transport provisions and wood from the port to the Carpenters' Souk and other city markets.

In the early 1950s, many families began to leave their villages in Southern Lebanon and journey north to Beirut to work in the port, or in construction sites, or as rubbish collectors for the municipality. Residents in the neighbourhood explain that these newcomers chose Msaytbeh as their home because the houses here were built with a *dor*. A *dor* is a sand-floored ground floor divided into a number of rooms, each of which could be rented out to a family.

In 1958, the wealthier, pro-Chamoun section of the neighbourhood began to be referred to as Christian Msaytbeh: the first overt sign of internal social division to affect the neighbourhood and its residents. There were now two mutually opposed Msaytbehs—Christian and Muslim—with Café Msaytbeh as the frontline between them. To the south, towards the residence of Saeb Salam, was the café and known to all local residents, but in 2003 it was forced to close as a result of disputes between the owners from the Shatila family, and tenants from the Salam family.

Naturally, the civil war had a profound effect on the neighbourhood as tenants, able to stay close to their places of work. As a result of these developments, the population of Msaytbeh has acquired a striking diversity.

The threat of eviction and its impact on residents

Many of the historical buildings are occupied by old-rent tenants. These tenants often live under permanent threat of eviction, at the mercy of radical changes in the real-estate market. Alongside the threat of eviction and constant anxiety, tenants are unable to renovate their homes for fear that their effort and money would be wasted if they are then thrown out.

Story One: The story of this building begins with the current tenant's grandmother. More than 150 years ago, the grandmother rented the house for a single gold pound per month. The old rent contract was transferred to the current tenant, who lives on the ground floor. The owners, who are members of the Remeileh family and live on the first storey, decided to demolish the building. Four years ago, they sent the tenant a notice of eviction.

On receipt of the notice, the tenant went to the courts, and a year and a half ago, the court ruled that she should receive \$75,000 as compensation for leaving the building. To date, however, she has received no money. The owners recently renovated the first storey at a cost of \$15,000, despite their stated intention to demolish the building. The building is in dire need of repair: the daughter of the tenant has been hit by chunks falling from the ceiling, but the tenant cannot afford the cost of further repairs, especially since she is currently awaiting eviction. Speaking to one of the owners, we learned that the decision to demolish was taken and agreed upon five months

ago, and that a real-estate development company will build a vast new building on the site. The owners will receive an apartment in the new building.

When there is no threat of eviction and relations between owner and tenant are cordial, this is reflected in the condition of the building. This is the case in the following story, of a tenant who is proud of both his neighbourhood and his home, which he has never left, even during the civil war.

(Story continues on verso)

Story Two: A tenant paying old rent lives on the first storey with his family. He is a friendly man, but has never involved himself in the neighbourhood's social life. He rented the apartment from the Itani family after getting married in 1974.

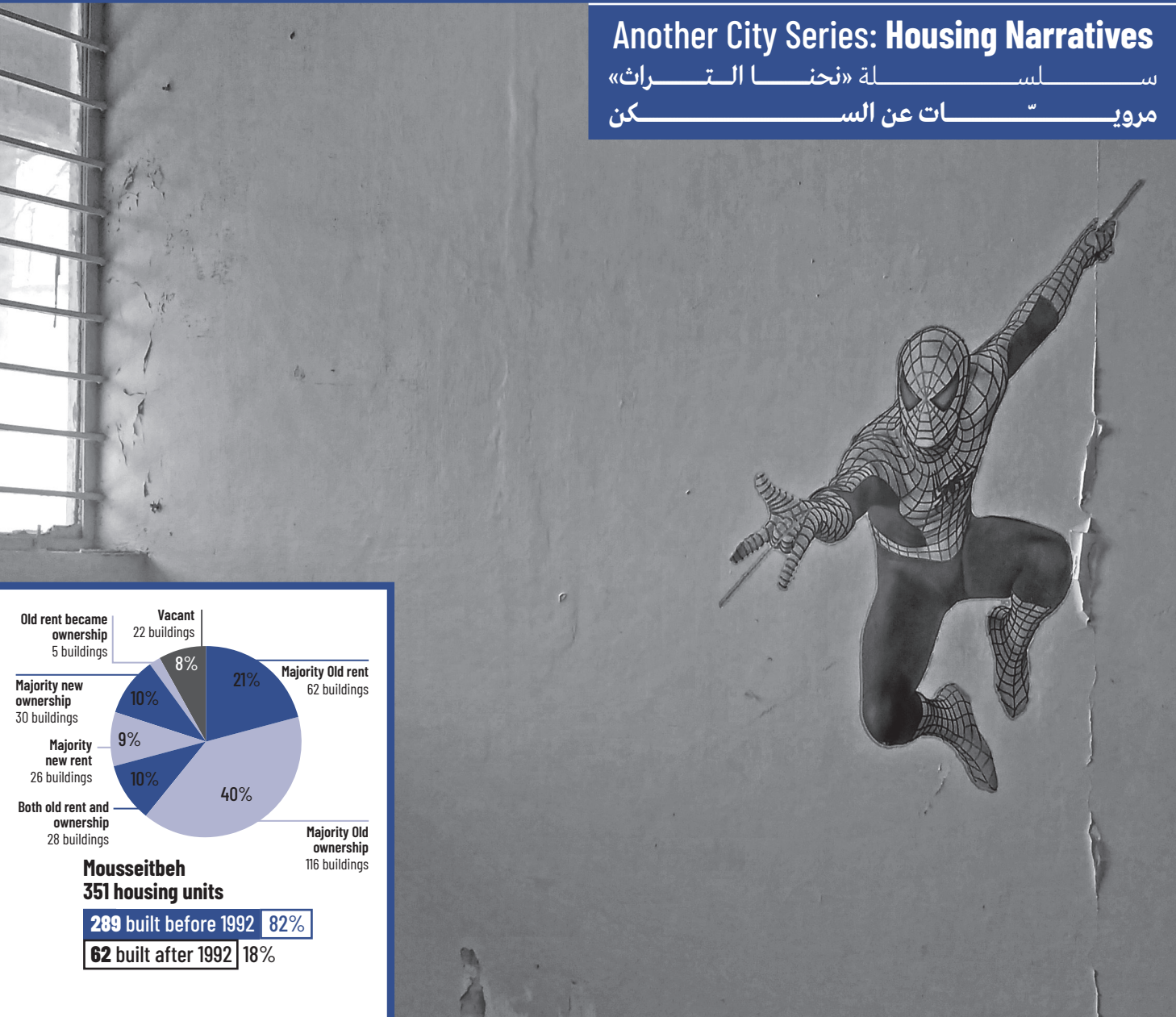
Housing Monitor

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.

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Based on the research project
«Mapping Beirut Through its Tenants' Stories» 2015–2019
HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
BEIRUT
Middle East



MOUSSEITBEH

المصيطبة

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.

The neighbourhood of Msaytbeh has been through several waves of eviction and demolition in the recent past. The first of these was in 1972, when the state decided to lay Salim Salam Road and other road networks, and compensation was paid to evicted families in the area where the road was due to run. In 1982 the road was widened and a tunnel was dug, which had a further negative impact on the neighbourhood: many houses were demolished and Mazra'a was cut off from Msaytbeh. Residents attempted, with little success, to establish crossings over the road to reconnect the two sides.

When the civil war came to an end, many of the old-rent-paying tenants were asked to leave their homes in exchange for compensation. At that time, these payments were a considerable sum, sufficient to buy an apartment outside Beirut without need for a bank loan. It is said that Muslim residents went to Aramoun and Chhim in the Iklim area, while the Christians moved to Ain El Remmaneh, Mansourieh, and Ain Saadeh.

Today, some of Msaytbeh's old quarters are threatened with evictions and total demolition, such as the Ablaa, Sofoh, Basha, and Furn alleys. These alleys are very old residential clusters, which for different reasons have managed to escape demolition, but their old-rent-paying tenants are being subjected to many pressures and face the threat of eviction.



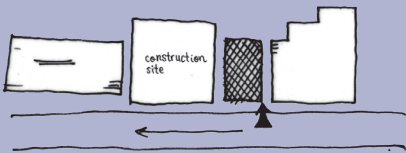
Msaytbeh
1962
1983

(Continued)

Story Two: From the very beginning the tenant has had a good relationship with the owner. The elderly man grew deeply attached to his home, voluntarily looking after the place with the care of someone who knows they will never leave. Because he regards the building as his home, and a part of his own history, he asked the owner to let the second storey to his daughter. The owner was happy to oblige.

During the Israeli assault on Beirut in 1988, many families moved away from the area, but the tenant was one of those who refused to leave their homes. He talks about the cowardice of the Israeli army and how afraid their soldiers were of entering people's homes. He is proud of the strength of character he and wife showed in the face of the enemy.

Over the years, he has made several improvements to his home, such as planting the passage leading to the building with various shrubs and bushes. The passage affords him a kind of privacy, as he prefers to keep his distance from his neighbours. He closes the wooden front door of his home and the gate at the end of the passageway that leads directly onto the main road, keeping himself isolated at all times. The old man is proud of the bushes and shrubs, and of his relationship with the owner who gave him permission to plant them, because in his view they are far prettier than a lifeless, blank wall.



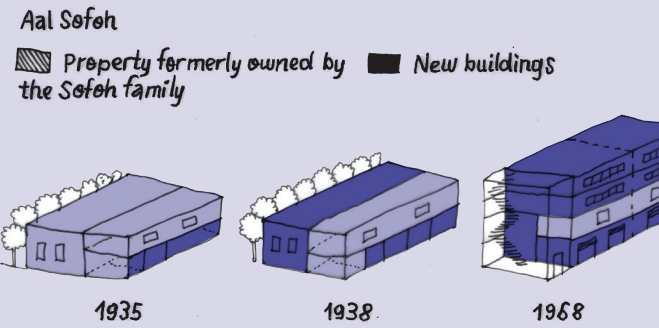
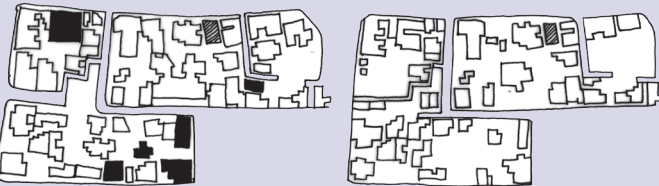
History of a single building in Aal Safah

Al Hajj Abdel Ghani Jammal talks about his history with the neighbourhood and this property. He was born and raised here, and today he is sitting in his grocer's shop on the ground floor of the building. His story begins in 1935, when his father returned from Palestine carrying two gold Palestinian pounds (approximately 50 Pounds Sterling) and settled in the historic Al Jammal neighbourhood inside the old city walls. When he got married he decided to move outside the walls, to have some independence from his family, despite their warnings that he would be going to live with "the jackals".

Jammal Sr. bought this plot from a member of the Al Sofoh family. It contained a house, a shop, and a garden. The father added a second storey to the six-metre-high ground floor, containing a two-bedroom apartment where he lived with his wife, then divided up the ground floor into three sections. Two of these he rented out, and the third he used to house his plumbing business. Two of his sisters occupied the house behind the shop building.

In 1938, after his two sisters had married and moved out, the father let the house for 50 Lebanese Pounds a month to Said Haidar and his wife and seven children. Haidar was originally from Aaramta, a village in South Lebanon, and moved to Msaytbeh from a court in Zuqaq Al Blatt some forty years ago, where he lived with many members of his family. His daughter still lives in the house, paying her father's old rent.

In 1955, Abdel Ghani Jammal's father passed away, and his children let his shop and a neighbouring shop to the same tenant for 30 Lebanese Pounds a month. By 1964, the children had amassed a sum of 5,000 Lebanese Pounds from their various rents (30 Lebanese Pounds from the first two shops, 20 LP from a third shop, and 50 LP from the house) and from the money they earned working in Bhamdoun every summer. They then asked an architect to look into the feasibility of adding further storeys to the property. They eventually decided to build two storeys, but taxes on the property exhausted all their savings and they were unable to begin construction.



1 Aal Ablaa

Prior to the construction of Salim Salam Road t in 1972, this neighbourhood was the home of the Ablaa family and extended on both sides of the road. Today, the family lives on the eastern side of Salim Salam and rents the homes here to tenants and shops paying old rent. There is an abandoned building and a new building belonging to the family, which was built in 2006, leading to the demolition of two buildings. Old tenants here are currently being threatened with eviction.

* Property containing a beautiful old house built in 1890. The house comprises two unoccupied storeys and a ground floor divided into four shops paying old rent. The owner is trying to evict the shops in order to demolish the building.

* A beautiful old building, also built in 1890, consisting of a ground floor occupied by a family paying old rent, and a first storey inhabited by old-time owners. The ground floor has recently been sold and the new owner is attempting to evict the tenant.

2 Aal Mehyou

The cluster contains buildings that are tenanted under old rent and owned by the Mehyou family. There is a road planned to run between the buildings. In order to facilitate the plan, the state has offered a sum of \$30,000 to homeowners in exchange for taking ownership of the passage. However the owners have refused. The passage is currently blocked with stone barriers to prevent cars from entering. Before Lija Street was constructed, the road running past these properties was the site of a vegetable market.

* Property containing one empty building consisting of a ground floor and two upper storeys. Threatened with demolition.

* Property containing one empty building consisting of a ground floor and two upper storeys.

They began saving again, and in 1967 Abdel Ghani had managed to amass a sum of 5,000 LP from his ice-cream business alone. The siblings' combined savings now stood at 12,000 LP, and they immediately began construction on the two storeys, spending 8,000 LP on building work, and borrowing another 5,000 LP for painting and finishing. The storeys contained two apartments each and had a combined area of 186 square metres.

They gave one apartment to their mother and rented out the remaining three for 200 LP, 150 LP, and 150 LP per month. They also found a new tenant for the three shops, who paid 50 LP a month.

In 1972, Abdel Ghani got married and decided to relocate away from his siblings. He rented an apartment in Bir Al Abed for 100 LP a month. In 1973 he was conscripted, and his wife and child moved back to the family home in Msaytbeh, while he kept up rent payments on the apartment in Bir Al Abed.

When he went to work in Saudi Arabia in 1976, he sent a sum of money back to his family so that they could build an extra two apartments to house his sisters. When these sisters got married in the 1980s, the family let the apartments without contracts. This allowed them to evict the tenants in exchange for compensation when the free contract system was established, paying \$500 per shop and \$1,000 per apartment.

In the 1990s Abdel Ghani returned from Saudi Arabia to his home in Bir Al Abed, then some years later, as political tensions rose (They told me: you're 110 and we're 220!, by analogy to incompatible electric currents) he returned to Msaytbeh, though he continued to pay his old rent in Bir Al Abed and would visit the apartment from time to time. The owner was unable to evict him because he would avoid coming to the area. My apartment was in the "security zone", an area controlled by Hezbollah, he says.

By 2005, Abdel Ghani had evicted the tenants in one of his shops and turned it into a grocer's. The other shop he rented out to a new tenant. During the conflict in 2006, the building in Bir Al Abed was destroyed and Abdel Ghani received compensation from Hezbollah for the loss of his furniture, though not for the apartment.

Today, the two apartments which were evicted in the 1990s still stand empty, but Abdel Ghani refuses to rent them out, to prevent his brother getting the rent, even though a settlement was reached concerning these apartments in 1992. The other apartments still pay old rent.

* Property on the other side of Salim Salam Road containing the Mehyou family residence, a listed building which is currently empty and has been seized by the bank. The building is undergoing renovation. Enquiries about the property are met with the answer: Not for sale.

3 Al Laja and its surrounds

New rents in the area are approximately \$450 per month.

When Lija Street was built, the vegetable market on the main road moved into the heart of the neighbourhood. Many of the neighbouring properties, which were built between 1954 and 1971, are owned by the Itani family and house a mix of owners and tenants paying old rent.

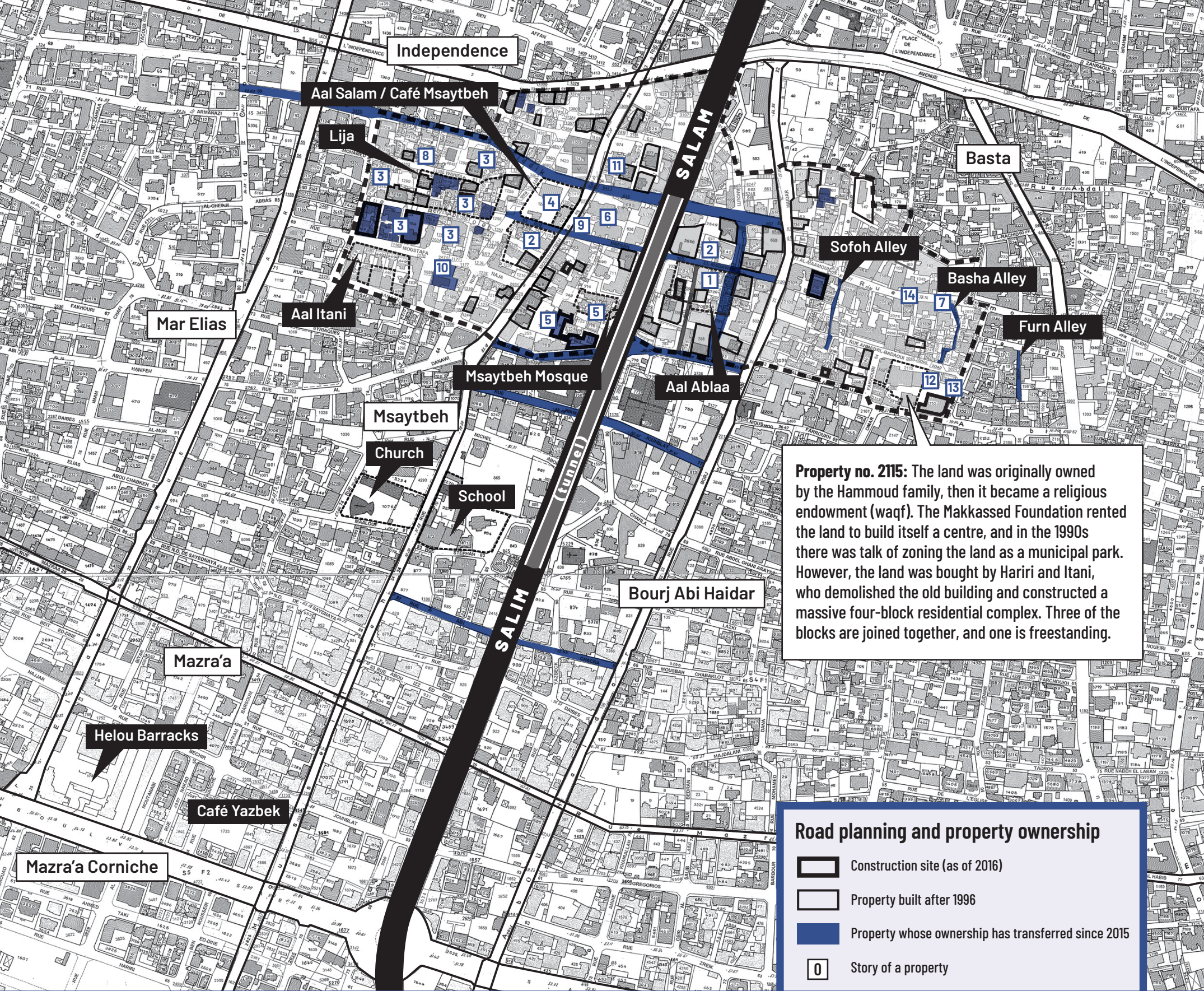
During the course of this survey, sales of properties and inhabited residential buildings were observed.

* Plot containing two buildings. The first building has two storeys: the first is empty and the second is occupied by a family paying old rent. The other building is occupied by old owners. The building is threatened with demolition to make way for road planning.

* Plot containing a building consisting of a ground floor occupied by an elderly man paying old rent, and two storeys occupied by old owners. The property has been sold and there is an ongoing court case to evict the tenant. The new owner wants to demolish the building.

* Plot containing two buildings. The building to the front of the property has a ground floor occupied by a tenant paying old rent and the first storey is empty. The building to the rear is a house with a ground floor with stone archways, occupied by a group of workmen. The property has been sold with the intention of demolishing it and putting up a new building.

* Plot containing a single-storey building at the front of the property, and a two-storey building to the rear. The buildings are home to a total of seven families, three of them paying old rent and four paying new rent. Recently, the property has been sold and the new owner wants to evict the tenants and demolish the buildings.



Property no. 2115: The land was originally owned by the Hammoud family, then it became a religious endowment (waqf). The Makkassed Foundation rented the land to build itself a centre, and in the 1990s there was talk of zoning the land as a municipal park. However, the land was bought by Hariri and Itani, who demolished the old building and constructed a massive four-block residential complex. Three of the blocks are joined together, and one is freestanding.

Road planning and property ownership

- Construction site (as of 2016)
- Property built after 1996
- Property whose ownership has transferred since 2015
- 0 Story of a property

storey building, then built a residential block of eleven storeys with three apartments per storey. Because he was building in the early 1990s, he was bankrupted by the collapse of the Lebanese Pound. To save himself, he handed out pledges of sale for every apartment, each to multiple buyers. When he had collected sufficient down payments, he took the money and fled. The new owners entered into negotiations with one another and distributed ownership of the property. The effects of this crisis are evident on the facade of the building, which remains unfinished and unpainted.

8 Tenants of the building were evicted because it was threatening to collapse. The building has eight storeys and houses 22 families, most of them new owners, with some tenants paying new rent. It was built in 2000, but the authorities ruled that it posed a danger to its occupants, and the municipality ordered that: "The occupants of all apartments in the building should be given immediate social assistance to allow them to find shelter, in light of the building's deterioration. Consequently, the building should be cleared with immediate effect."

The Ministry of Culture and historical buildings

9 A beautiful old building owned by Baiham and Dabbous, consisting of two empty storeys and a ground floor that houses three shops paying old rent and four shops owned by their occupants. The owners began demolition of part of the building, but the Ministry of Culture stopped the process because the building is historically listed. The ministry then undertook its restoration.

10 A plot consisting of two buildings: the first a large, subdivided structure, and the second a historically listed

building on the street corner. This second building has a ground floor and a first storey, both made up of rooms surrounding a large dar. The covered roof is connected to the two floors by means of an internal staircase. In 2013 ownership of this building passed into the hands of Farida Abou Sraj, and it remains occupied by tenants paying old rent. **The Ministry of Culture is currently evaluating a request by the new owners to demolish this unique building.**

11 A plot owned by the Kreidieh family, who also own other plots in the immediate vicinity. The property contains a vacant two-storey building **awaiting a demolition permit from the Ministry of Culture.**

The demolition of old buildings and real-estate speculation:

12 Plot previously owned by the Zantout family, which had a palace on these grounds. In the 1990s the property was sold and the palace demolished to make way for a residential building.

13 Plot previously owned by the Sardouk family who also owned a single-storey building on the property. This typology is known as the Dar Arabi. In the early 1990s, a member of the Yassine family bought the plot and demolished the Dar to build a residential building.

14 A plot containing an old, empty, single-storey building which is threatened with demolition. Previously owned by the Barmadi family, who lived in the building. About four years ago the property was sold and the owner evicted the tenants before selling it on to the current owner, who wants to demolish the building. The building has stood empty since the evictions. There are rumours that a plan exists to widen the alley, which would destroy part of the building.

The greatest threats to the character of the neighbourhood and its residents are planned road networks and changes in property ownership.

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