Living and Imagining City Spaces: The Case of Beirut

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Honors in Culture and Politics, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Spring 2014.
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**Introduction:**

Mohamad Khalil Harb is a graduate of Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, class of 2014. He majored in Foreign Service with a specialty in Culture and Politics, focusing on Arab Societies. Harb previously worked as the Secretary General of the Georgetown Model United Nations Program in Qatar and as the Co-director of Programing for the United Nations Children’s Fund’s International Development Conference in Washington D.C. He has undertaken various research projects focusing on the Sudan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

**Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without the academic and personal support that I have received throughout the year. I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Elizabeth Andretta, for her mentorship and guidance. Her constant critique and encouragement to pursue the best writing possible, greatly shaped the development of this research. Without her, this project would not have been possible. I am also grateful for Dr. Amira El-Zein for reading this thesis and giving her opinions on the city of Beirut. Her knowledge of the city and its dynamics has been greatly helpful for this research. I would also like to thank the academic community at Georgetown from faculty to professors, especially the Culture and Politics faculty. Through your classes in history, literature, anthropology, social theory and philosophy, you taught me to look at the world in a different way.

This work would also have not been possible without the personal support of my family and my best friend, Georges Saade. I am thankful for their constant encouragement and words of wisdom throughout the research period. I would also like to thank the interviewees of my research, who helped me nuance and give more life to my research. Finally, I would like to thank Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service in Qatar, a university that enabled me to undertake various ventures, culminating with this honors thesis. I have grown so much both personally and academically during the process of this thesis and for that, I am forever grateful.
Part 1: Framing the Research

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research and the Urbanista/Biarti Spatial Model

1.1. Introduction to the Research

“Schein und Sein,” is a baroque German proverb that literally translates to image and reality or the illusionary and the real. The dichotomy between the image and the real, the imagined and the lived, served as the initial inspiration for my project on the city of Beirut. Between the image and the reality, the notion of space unfolded and that was the crux of my research. This project has been a synchronic one, studying and capturing Beirut in a moment in time with all its contemporary complexities.

The famous American novelist and essayist, Christopher Morley, once said “all cities are mad: but the madness is gallant. All cities are beautiful, but the beauty is grim.” This is the city, a place of paradoxes, a place of beauty, a place of contradictions, evidently a space. Whether we romanticize a city, or criticize a city, we tend to forget that in the end it is a space. In particularly, it is an amalgam of spaces that are imagined, lived, contradicted and resisted. From certain spaces, the imagination of the city arises and from certain spaces, a different lived experience of the city arises.

This dichotomy of spaces is witnessed in Beirut, a city that exhibits a paradoxical relation between its image and its various spatial realities. In this research, I used Beirut and its spaces as a model and a means to an end. I probed to see how groups conceive, imagine and live city-spaces. When looking at the image of Beirut, we see one that is part of the global order of
world cities; a cosmopolitan capital that provides all that is available in international exclusivity and its accompanying lifestyles. This globalist spatiality can be lived in certain enclaves of the city, albeit limited ones. While the image exists, a different set of realities and lived experiences in Beirut and its spaces also exist. These lived experiences are different from the image and project a new, locally-oriented reality. With this in mind, I asked two central questions for this research: Is the image of Beirut the product of an affluent upper class that imagines the city-space in a certain way? Moreover, is there a different lower-income group that lives and generates a different spatial reality in the city?

Through attempting to answer these questions and through attempting to thickly describe Beirut in a moment of time, I identified a new model for studying city-space. This model is the Urbanista and the Biarti model. In this research, I will present this model and demonstrate the spatial dichotomies it generates in cities.

Throughout the research, I will be using the Urbanistas, as the main label to describe the group that imagines the city and that positions it with the global order of metropolitan cities. It is the group that is responsible for the “image” and who lives the image in their globally connected spaces. I will also be using the Biartis, as the main label to identify a locally oriented group that lives the city in a particular way. This group accords a lifestyle that is so very different from the image of Beirut and that produces a city-space of its own.

Evidently, space cannot come about on its own and it requires groups that live it and imagine it. A city is not a city without its inhabitants and through the Urbanista and the Biarti
model, we will see that what we think is a unified city, is actually a set of fragmented spaces that are lumped under one label.

1.2. Introduction to Urbanista and Biarti Model for Understanding Space

The capital of Lebanon has "much to offer the adventurous traveler." Find "exotic cuisine and cocktails" at the "most exclusive clubs in the world" in what one reader calls "the Paris of the Middle East." This city offers a "tapestry of sects, religions, and lifestyles that provide a feast for the mind of the intellectual." ¹

On October 16, 2013, Conde Nast Traveler, the high profile New York magazine, released its annual list of top 25 cities to live in, ranking Beirut as number 20¹ in a dominantly Western list. In this category, Beirut existed as a cosmopolitan city, a feast of the mind for the worldly and erudite traveler. While this occurred, more local media agencies, such as the Daily Star, drew attention to an anarchic Beirut existing in a year full of repeated explosions.² Other local media agencies, such as Alakhbar, explicitly categorized Beirut as a ‘city for the rich’³ only, critiquing the high inflation and ‘ridiculous’ real-estate market prices. The contrast between the two images of Beirut—the worldly one and the disorderly one—encapsulates the problematic of this project, a schism in the production and the spatial life of the city relative to the different groups who inhabit it. In this paradigm, two group formations exist, which I will call the Urbanistas and the Biartis. These group formations are responsible for the polarized and


opposed reports on Beirut and are the groups that drive the spatial dichotomies of cities.

Echoing the words of renowned urban sociologist Robert Park, the city is “a state of mind and a chain of costumes . . .” meaning that the Urbanistas and the Biartis normalize their relationships with the city through different forms of interaction. The Urbanistas imagine the city making it exist through its image and outward presentation, while the Biartis live the city and endow it with thought-provoking scrutiny.

*Beirut and the Social Imaginaire: The Urbanista Connection to the Global Network*

In this study of urban space and class-based group formations, I will use the term Urbanistas to label an outward looking, upper-middle class group formation, who lives in Beirut and who shares a constructed habitus of the city. This habitus is characterized by a connection to a global network of world-cities and is based on an upper-class conceptual map of Beirut consisting of the Downtown, the Zaytouna Bey Waterfront, Ashrafieh and the Verdun commercial area. In this conceptualized space, a strong hub of world-class restaurants, hotels and boutiques exists. Most of the residential facilities are a mix of gated and guarded communities and towers labeled as the “urban dream.” Lastly, in this Urbanista habitus, pictorials and advertisements are based on world brands and fashion houses reflecting a strong capitalist consumption habit.

The Urbanistas normalize their relation to Beirut through their ‘social imaginaire’ and through imagining Beirut. By imagining, I mean that the Urbanistas construct a narrative and an

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image of Beirut that is worldly, bourgeoisie, upper class and exceptional relative to the region. They present this image to the global network through media, advertisement, and word of mouth in their trips abroad. While imagination puts Beirut in the realm of the image instead of the lived experience, the Urbanistas shape their spaces in a manner to provide empirical proof of their imagined Beirut. Lastly, the Urbanistas have a smaller sub-group that shares their upper class origin, but disagrees with their representation of the city. This group, which I label as the ‘Rebelling Urbanistas,’ fights the image of Beirut through oppositional images in museums and other forms of urban activism.

*Living Beirut: A Biarti City of Manifestations and Contradictions*

In contrast to the Urbanistas, who emphasize imagining and branding the city, the Biartis present a different Beirut that is shaped by their gritty lived experiences. I use the Biarti labeling to describe a disconnected, lower-income class group formation that resides in Beirut. Unlike, the Urbanistas, the Biartis do not share a tightly confined Habitus. They live Beirut as a whole due to two main reasons. The first is that their spatial habits are not solely based on the spending of capital, allowing them to frequent areas that are not money-dependent. The second is their lack of fear of ‘other’ insecure areas of Beirut, which allows them to frequent such areas. Thus, they live all of Beirut as a space that is full of paradoxes, reactions and contradictions. They are uninterested in global representation, imagining and branding of the city and this is mainly due to their lack of interest in global connections. Beirut for the average Biarti is lived in less capitalist ways and is lived through examples of “two-dollar” coffee drunk on the corniche. At certain times, the Biartis enter the areas of the Urbanistas and practice

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spatial habits that do not conform to the Urbanista-value-system of high capitalist spending and self-presentation. Most importantly, Biarti spaces are constantly in risk of being ghettoized and polarized by the Urbanista habitus of Beirut. Interestingly enough, a ‘creative class’, the sub-group of the Urbanistas, settles in these areas protecting them from evictions and loss of land through opening art galleries, pubs and restaurants that replenish the area economically. Like the Urbanistas, the Biartis have a non-conforming sub-group. This sub-group shares the Biarti class origin, but identifies more with the Urbanista branding of Beirut due to a developed cultural capital and a desire to join the Urbanistas.

The Biartis constantly normalize their relationship to Beirut through living the city. Living is the opposite of imagining, it means that they do not uphold to one imagined space of Beirut and constantly construct and deconstruct the city through their thoughts and actions. Through daily interactions and encounters in Beirut, the Biartis have a different and changing perception of the city. Through their social mobility and their lack of an Urbanista-like group connection, the Biartis constantly set Beirut in flux and in motion. The Biartis have the ability to “penser Beirut,”7 to think of the financial limits of the city, of the increased gentrification that has pushed them to the outskirts, of their affinities to an old Beirut and their critiques of the current reconstruction of the city.

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Chapter 2: Research Framework

2.1 Research Methodology

Research Keywords:
Beirut, Biarti, capital, capitalism, center, city, class, control, consciousness, consumerism, dasein, display, downtown, experience, hegemony, illusion, image, imaginaire, isolation, Lebanon, Lived, periphery, poor, reconstruction, representation, rich, rights, socioeconomics, space, spectacle, Urban, Urbanista.

In this section, I will be introducing the organizational framework and the research methodologies I applied in this research. In particular, I will introduce the three main methodologies I used which are: 1) Application of Theories on Space, 2) Narrative Research and 3) Grounded Theory, after which, I will describe the interview process of the research and mention the research history I had prior to conducting this honors in the major thesis.

Research Methodology and Organization

1) Applying Theories on Space:
An important and integral part of this honors thesis has been the application of theories on space and analyzing them in the context of the city of Beirut. In every section, I introduce controlling spatial theories such as those by Marxist Geographist David Harvey and French Theorist Henri Lefebvre, and I analyze them in the context of the upper class group, the Urbanistas, and the lower class group, the Biartis. This led me to develop a research model based on living and imagining space in the city.
2) **Narrative Research:**

In my investigation and research of space in Beirut, I wanted to interview persons of interest in order to get a personal perspective on imagining and living space. For this reason, one of the controlling methodologies of this research thesis was ‘Narrative Research.’ Narrative research is based on open-ended interviews with persons of interest and is based on the collection of stories and lived experiences from these people. In this retelling of individual experiences, the participants shed light on their identities and their perception of themselves.\(^8\) In my model, the interviewees were perceiving themselves and retelling their life stories through the spaces of Beirut. Through their accounts and depictions of daily and spatial life in the city, they offered me plentiful data that was utilized in this research. In total, I interviewed 17 persons between December and January of 2013 and 2014. The interviews were not meant to produce a quantitative dataset on space in Beirut; rather, to nuance the research, making it more relevant to individuals and the use of space. The model of ‘Narrative Research’ also allowed me to have my own small repository of oral history on the city of Beirut through its inhabitants.

3) **Grounded Theory:**

In this research, I also used ‘Grounded Theory’ meaning that the end-results that I arrived at did not exist prior to conducting this research.\(^9\) The data assembled in this research and the analysis I performed allowed me to arrive on a new theory of using space in the city. The research allowed me to develop the Urbanista\Biarti model of using space in the city, which did

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\(^9\) Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 83.
not exist prior to my contribution to the literature. This model, which will be explained through the research, reanalyzes the city and its spaces through its use and representation by the dominant groups that inhabit it.

**Methods of Interviewing:**

1) **Interview Process**

All the interviews I conducted with the residents of Beirut were in-depth and open-ended ones that sometimes lasted around 4 hours. During the Interview, I implemented a note-taking process in order to group the data into a framework during the analysis and transcription period of the interview. During the transcription process, the names of the interviewees were changed in order to protect their identity. The people were selected based on their relevance to the research. This was done after advertising the research, getting in touch with local contacts, and sometimes simply entering certain areas and asking people if they would be interested in granting me an interview. The interviews were a mix of English and Arabic questions based on the background of the interviewee. All of them were conducted in narrative format, in which I attempted to let the interviewee tell a story. I did not ask the interviews ‘Yes or No’ type questions; rather, I asked them general questions on space in Beirut. This ranged from questions on their use of space in Beirut, their daily life in the city, the frequency of visiting certain spaces, their perception of the image of Beirut and the avoidance of certain spaces in Beirut. Some interviewees, who enjoyed the process, wanted to talk and add more about

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10 This research received Institutional Review Board approval from Georgetown University. Approval is filed under the ID number of 2013-1292.
Beirut, which was beneficial, since the model of ‘Narrative Research,’ is very inclusive, in which any data is helpful.

2) Site Selection and Interviewees:

I conducted most of the interviews at the interviewees’ households unless instructed not to by the interviewees themselves. Narrative research requires in-depth storytelling and is not a simple question and answer process; thus, the interviewees needed to be in a comfortable and a safe place in which they can freely talk and tell their stories. Placing the interviewees in urban and social spaces might have skewed the research and affected the psyche of the interviewees. Furthermore, the potential presence of numerous individuals around the interviewees might have discomforted them and prevented them from comfortably answering and retelling their stories.

The interviewees came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and from diverse enclaves of the city. I did not want to utilize interviews in order to look for one narrative of the city. Some of the interviewees were from areas of Beirut, with a homogenous population, such as Tariq Jedideh, Dahiye and Gemayzeh and some were from areas such as Verdun, Ashrafieh and Hamra that have more diversity.

3) Documenting Advertisements and Pictorials:

Another part of my research methodology was the collection of images, advertisements and pictorials from the various areas of Beirut. This was done in order to see the type of advertisements and the type of products that were being used in these spaces. The advertisements in certain spaces relate to and speak of the social background of the people
inhabiting and using these spaces. The photos are all mine and under my copyright and they will be embedded into this research based on the section they in which they fit.

**Research Experience and Positionality:**

Having grown up in Beirut for fifteen years and having lived in both diverse and homogenous areas of the city, I already possess helpful knowledge on the socio-spatial dynamics of the city. I have frequented both Biarti and Urbanista areas of the city and I have made contacts with people from various socioeconomic backgrounds and with people from various social enclaves of the city. Thus, I already had some understanding of the city, which has further developed and grown in this research. This helped me during my interactions with the interviewees, who felt comfortable in opening up and engaging in deep conversations.

Concerning research experience, this was not my first research venture, but it was the most rigorous by far. I previously worked as a research assistant for a project under the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University, the School of Foreign Service in Qatar from 2011 to 2013. This research was focused on the Darfur Peace Process and the representation of Darfur in the media. This research position trained me in the analytical skills of research, and on how to extract important information from a particular dataset. I also participated in a research project for my Certificate in Arab and Regional Studies in my junior year, which allowed me to engage in the creation of original research.

**2.2 Existing Literature and Theoretical Frameworks**

In this section, I will present the dominant theories and literature that I utilized in this research. A significant step in this research has been surveying, reading and contextualizing a
great number of books and articles. However, in this literature review, I will only present the dominant theories and authors that influenced my research. The literature-review will be thematically organized and divided into three sections. The first pertains to space and in particular an analysis of space in the city. The second part will be about the notion of the ‘imaginaire’ and the imagination of space. The third and last part will be a presentation of existing literature on Beirut and in particular on the reconstruction of space in Beirut.

The City as Space:

In order to nuance this research, I did not approach the city solely from the subject of urbanization and reconstruction; I approached it from the notion of space. Urbanization as a concept does not do the city and its inhabitants’ justice, as not all of its spaces are equally urbanized and some do not witness urbanization at all. For this reason, I wanted to study the city from its aggregate format of space. In this section, I will be focusing on two main theorists, Marxist geographer, David Harvey, and French social theorist Henri Lefebvre.

Beginning with Harvey, he is usually best known for his book *Paris Capital of Modernity*, in which he develops the spatial history of Paris and underlines the important periods, such as Haussmanization that led to the current format and shape of the capital of the French Republic. This book, while extremely influential among theorists who examine theories of urban space, will not play a big role in my thesis. Harvey’s theory, albeit a great one, suffers from a eurocentricism, making it applicable to certain cities in Europe such as Paris, London and Berlin. He argues that modern Paris is the product of a French-German architect Georges-Eugene Haussmann who remodeled Paris in the late 1800s after being commissioned by Emperor
Napoleon the Third. The expensive and mega-style of reconstruction that Haussman performed, generated a general theory of Haussmanization that certain cities undergo. In this, space is rationalized and undergoes a form of centralization. Roads are expanded and boulevards arise to facilitate both the consumerist rich and the marching army. Most importantly, the poor and dangerous classes are pushed to the periphery.\textsuperscript{11} This, Harvey argues, creates the metropolitan city in which its spaces undergo a struggle between the center and the periphery. This of course is important, but it relates to a broader enlightenment concept of the European taming of space. For this reason, I will not be depending on this book because Beirut does not witness this Haussmanized struggle between center and periphery and its spaces are much more complex and intertwined.

Perhaps the most important part of Harvey’s theories is the geographic dimension and spatial element that he adds to class struggle. Harvey argues that, in general, capitalism has a ‘spatial fix’ to it.\textsuperscript{12} By this, he means that in order for capital to thrive in cities it has to be pegged to certain spaces that ensure its financial survival and its longevity. These spaces belong to the dominant and the upper class that are able to channel capital from various parts of the world into their own spaces. They are the class who organize and command the ‘spatial fix’ of capital. This is highly fitting for my research, for it applies to the elite group, which I label as the Urbanistas, who attempt to attract capital into their specific and limited number of areas within Beirut. It is because of this capitalistic spatial fix that cities such as Beirut witness an uneven form of development, in which certain spaces that are pegged to a global system create the

\textsuperscript{11} David Harvey, \textit{Paris Capital of Modernity} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 112.

\textsuperscript{12} David Harvey, \textit{Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography} (New York: Routledge, 2001), 369.
image of a global capital, while other spaces irrelevant of global investment and capital accumulation have a different feel and structure to them.

Harvey continues his geographic and spatial approach to the city in his seminal book, *The Conditions of Post Modernity*. In this book, Harvey explicitly debunks the notion of the metropolis and follows a postmodernist approach. He argues that a metropolis is impossible to fully create and command in totality. Only bits and pieces of spaces can become metropolitan and again these are usually the spaces of capital. Again, this is highly applicable in the case of my thesis, one in which certain spaces of Beirut become the metropolitan ones due to the Urbanista control of them. Harvey further elaborates on this in *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* in what he calls the ‘extrovert nature of urbanism.’ In this, spaces become a reflection of the desires of the Urbanista, upper class, and the elite who control them.

Another major theorist on space is French social theorist and philosopher, Henri Lefebvre. Harvey himself is highly influenced by Lefebvre’s writing on space and the ‘right to the city.’ For my research, I will be focusing on Lefebvre’s categorization and study of space, in particular his understanding of ‘Utopia’ and ‘Heterotopia.’ Beginning with Utopia, it is the ideal space in the city, the space that is imagined to be the picturesque representation of the city. It is an ordered and structured space, one that is imagined to be the epitome of city-life and the representative of a perfect city. This space is part imaginative, part real and is highly shaped by the desires of certain groups. The utopian label is beneficial for my study of the spaces of the upper-class, or the Urbanistas, for they imagine an ideal Beirut through certain spaces.

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The Heterotopic space on the other hand, is a space of difference, it demarks a social space from which contrast, and paradoxes can arise.¹⁴ The difference can arise from the lifestyle of the people who use this space, or from the overall format of the space, which is highly contrasted with the utopian ideal. The very existence of this space becomes a challenge to the spatially utopian ideal of the city and becomes a form of spatial confrontation. I will be using the concept of heterotopic space to delineate the space of the lower-income class group, whom I label as the Biartis. Their heterotopic space becomes an area from which their socially different lived experience becomes a challenge to the spatial utopia. Through their pursuit of everyday life in these spaces, the Biartis creates heterotopias all over the city.

**On Imagining:**

Imagination in its simplest format has always been a strong element in the creation of narratives and discourse. The city is itself imagined as a certain space and the images of the city are usually the product of a certain group’s imagination. In this section, I will introduce the concept of the ‘imaginaire’ as used by theorist Mohammed Arkoun. Arkoun focuses on group imaginings and hegemony, particularly applying it to Islamic laws and canons. However, I will extract his notion of the ‘imaginaire’ and apply it in my case to the city of Beirut.

Like Gramsci, Bourdieu and other theorists, who have examined the power of hegemony, Mohammed Arkoun writes of the dangers of acceding to the ideas of the dominant group. When the group holds power within a society, their imaginings become accepted truths,

or dogmas. Arkoun is critical of this process because it blocks out other, imaginative, perhaps equally valid, ways of organizing power.

I choose to focus on Arkoun in particular because of his emphasis on the methodology that creates ideology and that is the ‘social imaginaire.’ Arkoun focuses on the process of creating ideology and argues that it is a product of the imagination of a certain group. Thus, ideology becomes a deliberate and conscious act of imagination. For this reason, Arkoun is important for my research that deals with a group like the Urbanistas, whose process of imagination is highly important in the creation of their Beirut.

In order to battle the dogmatic social imaginaire, Arkoun argues that people need to undertake a process of deconstruction based on thinking. In this, thinking becomes the opposite of imagining. Thinking is not an imaginative process that leads to the creation of ideology. It is an active process, involving doubting ideologies, deconstructing images and formulating critiques.

In his case, Arkoun applied his theory of the imaginaire to Islamic groups and to the current state of Islamic traditions and canons. He argued that Islamic laws and traditions as we know them now, are based on ‘urf, a set of personal beliefs and convictions. He argued that certain groups such as the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt imagined their personal beliefs to be part of Islam and dogmatized them as the real Islamic truths. The remedy for this Islamic imaginaire for him, is to concentrate on what he calls the

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‘silent Islam,’ the one in the minds of Muslim believers who are interested in thinking their religion instead of imagining and representing it.

While Arkoun’s theory might have an Islamic focus to it, I will take the notion of the imaginaire from it and apply it to cities. Through the imaginaire, I argue that the Urbansitas imagine the city of Beirut, taking their personal desires to belong in a capitalist world system of cities and infusing it into the image of city. In the process, they dogmatize this representation of the city through financial capacities and connection to the media outlets. After that, the Urbanistas reshape certain spaces of the city, such as the downtown, to make them empirical markers of the imaginaire and representation of their ‘truth.’

_on Beirut:_

Dominant spatial literature on Beirut is divided in to two parts, the first is spatial sectarianism and the second focuses on the reborn downtown. Firstly, spatial sectarianism refers to the literal study of space from the lens of a changing sectarian demographic in the city. These studies focus on the movement of sects after the civil war in Beirut and in particular focus on homogenous sectarian areas of the city. While the studies might underscore other non-sectarian spatial habits, which I will incorporate into the research, the dominant idea behind such studies remains focused on sectarian space.

Secondly, dominant studies on space in Beirut tend to solely focus on the downtown. These studies approach Beirut from the reconceived and reconstructed downtown of the city. In these studies, Beirut is spoken of with generality as a city, when the downtown is the only space that is researched and investigated.
My interest lays in the use of social space and in particular the socio-spatial dynamics and the class-based use of space. For this reason, the literature on Beirut is helpful in its offering a general framework of certain spaces of the city, but does not fully conform to my research goals.

1) Spatial Sectarianism:

Concerning the dominant literature on spatial sectarianism, I will identify two main books that present an investigative study into sectarian spaces of Beirut. The first is Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shiite South Beirut by Lara Deeb and Mona Harb, who assess the connection between piety and leisure in the Shiite South of Beirut. The second is History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut: The Case of Zokak El-Blat, this book, by the German Oriental Institute of Beirut, focuses on the transforming sectarian landscape of this historical area of Beirut and the spatial dynamics of it.

Beginning with Leisurely Islam, Harb and Deeb, present a study of the south of Beirut, the Dahyeh, a Muslim Shiite enclave of the city, which is considered the “Hezbollah Stronghold.” They study how leisure is controlled and defined in sectarian, in this case, Shia terms and how this affects the way residents interact with their city. This book pointed me in the direction of examining the meaning of leisure to different groups in Beirut. While Harb and Deeb choose to analyze leisure in sectarian terms, I will look at in sociospatial terms based on the economic and cultural background of the individuals.
Harb and Deeb divide their book to three major themes, the first being the demand for leisure in Shiite south Beirut, the second being the production of leisure and the third being the negotiation of morality in the current leisurely enclaves of the south.

In the first, Harb and Deeb argue that after the end of the Israeli Occupation of Southern Lebanon in the year 2000, the Shiite-backed Hezbollah was faced with two situations. The first being that the generation that was brought up with the jihadist mentality against the Israeli enemy, was now less preoccupied with the issue and demanded leisure, the second being the exclusion of many of the Shiite from the social and political circles of leisure in Beirut as the Urbanistas considered them to be less cultured. This created a new pursuit of leisure among the Shiite youth and a desire to simply have fun. However, spatially this needed to happen in areas that would conform to the Israeli resistance vision of Hezbollah and its moral ‘piety.’ Thus, two institutions, the ‘Luna Park’ recreational center and the ‘Al-Saha,’ restaurant opened after 2000 in the Shiite south of Beirut, ushering in a new spatial wave of leisurely cafes and fun facilities.

In the second major theme, Harb and Deeb argue that Hezbollah noticed this demand for leisure and began to regulate and control it. Hezbollah has always been involved in this creation of culture on the side, through creating museums that display the resistance’s vision,

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19 Deeb and Harb, 9.
educational facilities, sports facilities and media channels. However, now Hezbollah was directly involved in the creation of cafés. Even when the party of God did not directly own the café, they made sure that any other Shiite-owner followed a basic business plan of not providing alcohol or playing music in the restaurants. Spatial practices and spatial exceptions were created in bizarre ways. Malls such as the Beirut Mall, which opened in 2006, began to have an Islamic character while retaining some form of internationality. For instance, alcohol and pork was banned in the mall, but the supermarket would sell them in a different glass container with a separate cashier, to ensure a ‘Halal’ circulation of money for the Shiite buyers. This is a form of spatial conformity, creating an enjoyable sectarian space for the Shiite followers.

Lastly, the authors present a great section on the renegotiation of morality in the south of Beirut. While alcohol and songs are not tolerated in that part of Beirut, there are still exceptions and transgressions. For instance, they observed that cafés in the heart of the conservative south would play Fairuz, a Lebanese music icon, with just having the melodies without the lyrics. When the cafés would be at the periphery of the south, they would play more international club music, such as Buddha bar remixes because more youth frequent those cafés and they border the Christian area of Saint Therese. This even extended to news outlets, if the owner was in the heart of the South, he or she had to play the Manar channel of

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20 Deeb and Harb, Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shi’ite South Beirut, 66.

21 Deeb and Harb, 67.

22 Deeb and Harb, 142.

23 See note 20.
Hezbollah while some on the periphery played channels based on what they saw their audience favored. Thus, sectarian space in the south is constantly being renegotiated and redefined based on the audience and the degree of piety of the audience.

Overall, the book provides an excellent sectarian spatial dynamic of the south. It does not go into the spatially-based class conflict that the south is part of and for this reason it is different from the approach of my research. The book also does not delve into the lives of the Shiite who inhabit other areas of Beirut, particularly rich ones, and who might not exhibit those form of ‘piety’ that the ones in the south of Beirut have. However, I will keep this spatial dynamic of leisure in Dahyeh in mind, since I observed that in most of my interviews with the Urbanista that they refused to go to this part of Beirut.

Moving on to the second dominant literature, History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut, this research presents a spatially sectarian study of the Zokak El-Bolat area in its transformations throughout history. In this research, two main themes jump out. The first is the sectarian-spatial transformation of the area and the second is the sectarian conflict that arose from such a transformation.

Beginning with the first one, Zokak El-Bolat is a historic area of Beirut with old houses from the 1600s and with a cultural history of being the center of the Arab renaissance movement. The area was also a center for the French missionary and Jesuit schools, giving it a strong colonial history. During this time of Arab renaissance and colonial intermingling, the area was mainly of Sunni and Christian Maronite inhabitants. After the civil war, this sectarian demographics of this space changed. The Christians, during the war, started migrating to more
homogenous Christian areas such as Ashraifyeh, so did the Sunnis, with some traveling to work abroad.\textsuperscript{1} This coupled with the Shiite influx from the south changed the dynamics of the space. Currently, it has old buildings and remnants of the past mixed with Hezbollah and the Shiite-backed Amal party headquarters, making it a space for sectarian politics and the Shiite. Thus, the research institute identified a spatial change due to the changing sectarian demographics of the area.

The research identifies what the Christian Maronites and Sunnis saw as the invasion of the Shiite into their areas of Beirut.\textsuperscript{24} Many of the Christian and Sunni interviewees expressed nostalgia for their former spaces and the former dynamics of Zokak El Bolat before the Civil War and before the coming of the Shiite. While the Sunnis and the Christians saw themselves as the vanguards of culture and the upholders of intellectualism in this space, they saw the Shiites as outsiders. Thus, this created a sectarian right to this space, with the Sunnis and the Christians claiming right of control over it and othering the Shiite in the process. Overall, this book provides a general outline of the changing sectarian fabric of spaces in Beirut and conflict that can arise from such changes. However, it does not explicitly tackle the issue of class-conflict within sectarianism itself.

While not denying the sectarian nature of many of the spatial divides in Beirut, my work seeks to add another, equally important, dimension that is over-looked in these studies and that is the class-based divisions that make Urbanista and Biarti neighborhoods.

\textsuperscript{24} Hans Gebhardt, \textit{History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut: the Quarter of Zokak el-Blat} (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2005).
2) **Beirut and the issue of the Downtown:**

The spatial literature on Beirut suffers from what I call a downtown-centrism. It discusses the city as a space solely from the aspect of the downtown and repositions the entire city from that enclave of Beirut. The literature itself is a reflection of the uneven development of space in Beirut. The development of the downtown becomes the focal point of Beirut with the rest of the city spaces ignored in the process. In this section, I will introduce a major author on this topic, a Lebanese Professor at the American University of Beirut, Samir Khalaf. Khalaf is representative of the typical author who reconceives and represents Beirut through the downtown. In it, I will introduce two of his main books on the issue, *Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj and Beirut Reclaimed*.

Beginning with the first book, *Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj*, Khalaf provides a spatial transformation of Beirut through history. However, Khalaf only describes and outlines this transformation of Beirut through its downtown, categorizing the important times periods the downtown went through from Roman times, to Ottoman times and finally arriving at the period of post-war reconstruction. Khalaf sees the downtown as the historic core of the city of Beirut and for him it is the space that proves that the ‘Lebanese are accepting of global culture regardless of their sectarian belief.’\(^{25}\) Khalaf not only generalizes the downtown to be all of Beirut, but also the frequenters of this space, Urbanistas, as representative of all of the inhabitants of Beirut.

Khalaf then moves on to the process of ‘reclaiming Beirut’ through the downtown, in which he describes the contemporary urban design of Solidere. He describes the restored Foch-Allenby and Etoile French districts, the picturesque marina and the Saifi Village Quarter with its pastiche colored houses. For Khalaf, these spaces represent the city of Beirut that is always on display. Granted, these downtown spaces are ones in which both people and some parts of the city are on display; however, they are not representative of all of Beirut.

Khalaf continues to generalize the downtown to be all of Beirut in his book *Beirut Reclaimed: The Restoration of Civility*. In this, Khalaf seeks to reclaim Beirut again through the space of the downtown and positions that reconstruction company Solidere, as a restorer of civility. Khalaf’s main argument is that the destruction of the Central Business District and the downtown of Beirut led to a feeling of anarchy and loss. This space for him was the melting pot of all the individuals of the city and was the core of Beirut. In order for Beirut to be a successful city again and for it to restore a form of civility, the downtown needed to be restored and reconstructed. Khalaf is unable to see beyond the space of the downtown and ignores other spaces of the city that were damaged during the civil war. For him, Beirut as a space is dependent on the downtown.

Overall, Khalaf suffers from the same weakness as many authors currently writing on Beirut. He generalizes Beirut through only examining one part of the city, the downtown. This can be seen in other books such as *Recovering Beirut: Urban Design and Post-War*

26 Khalaf, *Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj*, 149.

Reconstruction and Beirut Reborn: The restoration and development of the central district. In my research, I seek to overcome this weakness through focusing on other spaces of the city and presenting an analysis of them. Even when I analyze the downtown, I will not take it as a space that is just representative of Beirut; rather, I will analyze it in the context of the Urbanista group that controls it.
Part 2: Urbanista Beirut

Chapter 3: The Hegemony of Imagination

In an average tourist map of Beirut that can be picked up from a museum, airport or random shops, the focal points of the city and the prime destinations are the Downtown, Ashrafieh, Zaytunay Bey and Rue Du Verdun. Many other interesting areas that can offer alternative experiences of travel are not mentioned. Such tourist maps are not necessarily representative of Beirut as a spatial whole, they are representative of an Urbanista Beirut. The Urbanistas took their conceptual map of Beirut and placed it in a tourist guide made for the foreign ‘other.’ In this tourist map, the Urbanistas provide the areas in which the ‘social imaginaire’ of Beirut can be lived. Simple items such as these set the premise for my discussion on the relationship between the Urbanistas and representation. In this section, I will argue that the Urbanistas wanted to reposition Beirut in homogeneity with other global cities of the world. In Beirut, a paradigm of uneven spatial development exists; however, the Urbanistas imagine this development in an even and uniform way that is a reflection of all of Beirut. Thus, their representation of Beirut is a deliberate, imaginative act of unforming space. In order to investigate this, I will use the theories of Marxist geographer, David Harvey who argues for a ‘geographic’ approach to the accumulation of capital and the domination of the upper class. I will also use the theories of Stuart Hall on representation, particularly on ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’ and the use of discourse, in order to demonstrate the ‘codified’ language, the Urbanistas use to generalize their Beirut, hiding the spatial inequalities at play.
3.1 The Geography of the Upper Class

David Harvey departs from the usual Marxist approach to history and literature, particularly focusing on geography, space and time. In this section, I will use two of Harvey’s central theories that are relevant to this project. The first one is the ‘geographic dimension to class struggle’\(^{28}\) and the second one is his theory on the post-modern use of urban design and reconstruction to fit the wishes of a certain class.\(^{29}\)

Beginning with his first theory, Harvey argues that the accumulation of capital has always been a geographic affair\(^{30}\), one in which redevelopment, reorganization and expansion of space is used in order to ensure the survival of capital. This generates a ‘spatial fix’ to capitalism, making it closely pegged to the potential spaces in which it will thrive. Now this presupposes the existence of an affluent class that accumulates and redistributes capital, reshaping the space of the city in the process. This is the case of the Urbanistas, an affluent class in Beirut, which shapes certain spaces of the city, connecting it to a global order, to ensure the continuous influx of capital into their areas. At the same time, this control of space creates a ‘discriminatory use of capital,’\(^{31}\) only allowing the Urbanistas to benefit from the financial inflow of these areas and depriving other communities of the city. Thus, the image of a ‘worldly’ Beirut stems from a narrow image that the Urbanistas spatially fixed in the Downtown, Verdun and Ashrafieh, the areas in which capital is supposed to flow and thrive. In


the process, all of Beirut is defined by these areas, without having the entire city share the influx of capital and the global image. This ‘globality’ of capital accumulation depends on the power of the elite class and is based on the ‘annihilation of space.’\textsuperscript{32} This annihilation is due to the constant flow of capital into these areas, making them a hub for capital instead of a physical space. The space becomes defined by the inflow of capital, instead of being defined by its physicality. This ‘globality’ is necessary to the Urbanistas because it makes it easier for capital to enter certain areas of the city as opposed to others. What this means is that the Urbanistas ‘globalize’ certain spaces of Beirut in order to ensure that a connection to a world system of capital and cosmopolitanism is ascribed to these spaces. While they might argue for a general image of Beirut, in reality they are globalizing their areas in order to ensure their financial survival. This creates an uneven development in a city that has an overarching image of ‘worldliness,’ with a significant majority of the population being deprived of the wealth that comes from this ‘worldly’ connection. In this process, the Urbanistas annihilate the notion of space in Beirut; this is not to mean the literal abolishment of spatial areas, but to indicate their ‘symbolic’ banishment from being in certain places of the city. The spaces of the Urbanista leave the confines of the city of Beirut and become spaces that are globally connected.

Harvey further elaborates on his theory of geography and space as a form of class domination and struggle in his highly acclaimed book, \textit{The Conditions of Postmodernity}. In this, Harvey departs from the modernist tendency of using urban design and large-scale reconstruction in order to create a city metropolis. Harvey argues that the general spatial

\textsuperscript{32} Harvey, \textit{Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography}, 378.
notion of a ‘metropolis is impossible to command except in bits and pieces.’ What Harvey means is that a metropolitan city is impossible to create as a spatial whole and can only be created in certain spaces of the city. This is because the metropolitan city is spatially pegged to a global system and to being relevant to money and capital, which cannot exist in all the spaces of the city. This sets the scope of the Urbanista Beirut that I am analyzing in my research. While the Urbanistas might imagine all of Beirut as a whole in terms of a global metropolis, they are only able to ‘globalize’ certain spaces of the city and make them conform to the image. The underlying reasons behind this is that the Urbanistas inhabit a very specific conceptual map of the city, in which they practice their social life; thus, there is no need to globalize all of the city and its spaces. However, they have a need to project an image of a global city in order to hide this form of uneven spatiality. In this, Harvey affirms that space should no longer be taken as an ‘autonomous’ or independent aspect of the city and to look at it as a response to the aims and aesthetics of a certain class. Ergo, certain global spaces of Beirut become an expression of a certain Urbanista class interest with all of its aesthetic dimensions. Lastly, Harvey further explains that his model of the ‘collapse of space’ is due to the internationalism that is infused into these spaces. Since the financial survival and the accumulation of capital are detrimental to the survival of these city-enclaves, space is collapsed in the process and becomes a dot in a major link of international spaces and global enclaves.


34 See note 32 above.

The hegemony of the Urbanistas is not just through their command and control of certain spaces of the city, it is also through their use of media and representation in order to define all of Beirut through these spaces. Representation and imagination serve them in two ways: 1) It hides the unequal development of Beirut and 2) It creates an image that connects them with other global cities. In the next section, I will utilize Stuart Hall’s theories to demonstrate the Urbansita creation of discourse and language in order to speak of a specific Beirut in a spatial generality.

3.2 Why they Represent Beirut? On the Urbanista Hegemonic Discourse

Stuart Hall’s theories have been central for the field of cultural studies and for the interpretation of media messages. For this section, I will be focusing on Hall’s theories on ‘language and meaning,’ and ‘encoding/decoding.’ In this, I will analyze how the Urbanistas create and understand messages on Beirut visa-vis the media.

In his theoretical essay on encoding and decoding, Hall develops a model for understanding the media and its messages. In this, Hall argues that media messages undergo a four-fold process. The first is production, where the messages are encoded based on society’s dominant beliefs and ideologies. The second is circulation, be it visual or written, which influences how the audience will absorb the message and put it to use. The third is use, a complex process of understanding the media message through decoding them. The fourth is reproduction, the action the audience takes after understanding the media message. For Hall, all of these are independent acts of production; however, they exist in the same institutional system, and have certain commonalities. For the sake of this section, I will be focusing on the
relation between the initial encoding and the decoding. Now, Hall argues that these are independent acts, but they might share certain commonalities. The encoded message is not symmetrical and identical to the decoded message.\(^{36}\) However, Hall argues that there are distortions between the encoding and the decoding and a state that he calls a ‘natural code,’ which I will explain below.

Beginning with the notion of distortions, Hall argues that sometimes between the sender and the receiver there are misunderstandings or disagreements that lead to a divergence of meaning between the encoded message and the decoded message. However, he also argues that these two acts sometimes share meanings due to stemming from the same system of ideologies and beliefs. I will argue that media messages on Beirut do not undergo these distortions between the sending media outlet and the recipient Urbanista. The coded media message on Beirut and the decoded message both stem from the same imagianire of the city. They both exist in a system of total ideologies in which Beirut is coded to be a worldly city connected to a global system of capital. For this reason, the typical Urbanista decodes and understands these media messages in a somewhat symmetrical way, without arguing against or misunderstanding the image of Beirut. However, certain distortions might exist with the outside observer reading on Beirut. For this reason, the Urbanistas make sure there is a plethora of articles on the city, in order to make it as normative as possible. We will also see that they use certain words that resonate with other Urbanistas in cities around the world in order to ensure that the decoded message is similar to the encoded one.

In the second case, Hall argues that sometimes messages reach the level of a ‘natural code.’ What Hall means is that the messages achieve a rare equivalence between the encoding and the decoding sides. This means that the message is absorbed as if it is a fact of life, when in reality it is a story that has undergone multiple layers of production. This is witnessed in the case of the Urbanistas, whose imaginaire and desire to picture Beirut in certain ways, allows them to think and decode these media messages on Beirut as a fact of life. Thus, the process between encoding the media message and decoding becomes a relatively easy one in the case of the Urbanistas, since they will perceive media messages on Beirut to be a natural account of the city. After this decoding occurs, they reproduce the reports on Beirut through their spatial practices, further adding to their belief in the message.

The second major theory by Hall is the notion of language and meaning. Now Hall argues that media representation is concerned with using language to express something meaningful and to convey a certain system of belief. This language is a constructed one that is part of the larger set of cultural practices of a certain group. Thus, what Hall means is that the language we see in the media, is the product of an actual group that shares a certain culture and ideology and who seeks to make this language a normative way of describing things. This is witnessed in the case of the Urbanistas, who utilize the media and numerous forms of representation in order to create a distinctive language on Beirut that expresses their meaning

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of the city. They do this in order to have hegemony over representation of Beirut and to make their media language of the city, the dominant way of describing it. They also use this language to ensure a successful decoding of the message. Thus, I argue that the Urbansita language of Beirut goes through a three-fold process in order to reach the level of hegemonic discourse. Firstly, they codify the system of language and words that would describe their global Beirut such as ‘worldly,’ ‘cosmopolitan,’ ‘fashionable,’ ‘5 star,’ ‘leisurely,’ ‘fancy,’ and many more. Secondly, after the descriptive language and the discourse are developed, the Urbanistas utilize media and advertisement to give an image to their language of Beirut and to represent it. Thirdly, the Urbanistas utilize social praxis through their spending habits in their spaces of Beirut. Through this language and representation, the Urbansitas achieve their aims and desires for Beirut. They collapsed Beirut as a space in the representation and made an international allure that connects them to their desired global system. They also hid the inequalities and the multiple realities at play in Beirut, situating the outside observers in a way for them to believe this worldly and wealthy narrative of Beirut as a form of truth.

Now, one might ask, is the Urbanista discourse that hegemonic? Well, according to Antonio Gramsci, hegemony presents class based interest as disinterested objective truth. Hegemony seeks to silence oppositional understandings, but Gramsci recognized that this is not entirely possible. In Beirut, the Urbansitas are able to present their vision to the outside world as objective truth. Through this, they attempt to make anything outside of their discourse of

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Beirut have less power and become less truthful. However, it will be shown in the Biarti chapter of this research, that their vision is not accepted in the Biarti controlled sections of the city.

In the next section, I will show how Harvey’s theories on class-based geography and Hall’s theories on representation come to life with the downtown of Beirut and the Franco-Lebanese company that reconstructed it. The downtown is important because it is a ‘worldly’ space in relation to the global flow of capital that the Urbanistas use to represent Beirut.

3.3 Solidere: A Brief History

Solidere cannot be discussed without mentioning its founder Rafiq Al-Hariri, a Lebanese billionaire and the previous Prime Minister of Lebanon who was assassinated in 2005. Hariri was a self-made man who went from humble beginnings in Lebanon to friend of the Saudi Royal Family and international business tycoon. Hariri’s connection with the downtown of Beirut began in 1982 when he was tasked to clear the rubble and the damage from the constant shelling during the Civil War. Through this cleaning process, Hariri thought of reconstructing and actualizing the re-imagined Urbanista Beirut, bringing it physically to life. He wanted to have the city experience a ‘comeback’ through the downtown, creating a revival of urban life. For this reason, in 1983 he did a feasibility study on the restoration and reconstruction of the commercial center of Beirut. The task of reconstructing Beirut involved hundreds of bankers, accountants, urban planners, engineers and legal experts. The project was

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ready, but the reconstruction of the downtown of Beirut did not commence until Parliament passed a legally enabling law in 1993, one year after the civil war ended.\textsuperscript{42}

The downtown was and is an area that is engrained in the collective memory of the inhabitants of Beirut and that has changed dramatically through history. The downtown, previously known as the \textit{Bourj},\textsuperscript{43} has architecture from every mega metropolitan force that controlled Beirut from the Romans, to the Ottomans and to the French. In order to reconstruct the downtown, Solidere and Hariri essentially privatized a public space of the capital. Through this reconstruction, Solidere became known for its high quality restoration and redevelopment\textsuperscript{44}, with the downtown becoming a beacon of its world-class achievements. The Solidere urban architects attempted to design and anticipate every urban activity\textsuperscript{45} in the downtown. This design aspect of the downtown is an important reason why only certain affluent and ‘global’ people are able to relate to this space. Looking back at the initial building plan presented in 1991 it can be seen that the reconstruction suffered from extreme globalism and ‘gigantism.’\textsuperscript{46} Hariri wanted to imitate the high-rise and mega-style of architecture he was witnessing around him in the Arabian Gulf and in Saudi Arabia in particular. He wanted skyscrapers, a world trade center on an artificial island in the Saint Andrew Bey and numerous

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{42} Iskandar, \textit{Rafiq Hariri and the Fate of Lebanon}, 47.
\item\textsuperscript{43} Samir Khalaf, \textit{Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj} (London: Saqi, 2006), 144.
\item\textsuperscript{44} Khalaf, \textit{Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj}, 140.
\item\textsuperscript{45} Sonia Hirt and Diane Zahm, ed., \textit{The Urban Wisdom of Jane Jacobs} (New York: Routledge, 2012), 13.
\item\textsuperscript{46} Samir Kassir, \textit{Beirut}, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 531.
\end{itemize}
expressways. Eventually, Hariri abandoned some of these geographically unrealistic plans, but succeeded in transforming the downtown into a ‘modern’ and completely pedestrian-friendly area, restoring old districts in the process such as Rues Allenby, Place de l’Etoile and Rue Ma’rad.

Solidere should be looked at in the context of the Urbanista environment it was thriving in. Solidere did not only reconstruct the downtown, it also added a physical center from which the Urbanistas connected Beirut to the global cities of the world. Hariri himself can be classified as an Urbanista as he famously stated he wanted Beirut to be the Hong Kong of the ‘Orient.’ Due to the immense destruction that hit the downtown, Hariri had a tabula rasa to work on, enabling him to imagine a new Beirut in connectedness to the rest of the world. In this, he could create a new centralized and protected space that is separated from the rest of the spaces of Beirut. With his immense wealth and the green light from the government, it was easy to actualize his imagination.

**Taking a Walk along the Boulevards of the Downtown:**

Through this imagination, the downtown became a panoramic enclave of Beirut, a feast for the eyes. Perhaps the most famous quarter of this city center is the “Nijmeh Square.” The Square is actually a circular and centralized space, which hosts the famous Hamidiyeh Clock

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47 See note 45.

48 Kassir, Beirut, 527.


50 Scott A. Bollens, *City and Soul in Divided Societies* (London: Routledge, 2012), 181.
Tower in its middle. The tower is surrounded with buildings with intricate facades and storefronts, a historical church and the Lebanese parliament. Walking up north from this tower, you cross sushi parlors, expensive local restaurants and Italian eateries, until you eventually arrive at a bustling driving zone. To the left of this driving zone, you get a view of Roman ruins and of the Saint George Maronite Cathedral standing next to the blue-domed Ottoman-style Mohamad Al-Amine Mosque. Walking further up, you arrive at an area in which the imagined urban life is mixed with corporate and political life, delineating a certain space of the city. In this space, the Grand Serail Governmental Palace and international buildings for the United Nations and the World Bank exist with the international boutiques and shops.

Walking down south from the Clock Tower, you arrive at grand Parisian-style boulevards filled with shops such as Dior, Chanel, Marc Jacobs and others, offering the latest in fashion and international exclusivity. These shops represent Harvey’s theory on the control of space in order to reorganize it as a reflection of private will. Adjacent to this area is the Beirut Souks, a contemporary open-air shopping market that is supposed to resemble traditional Greco-Roman markets. The Souk also caters to a wealthy clientele, hosting fashion houses from Massimo Dutti to Tommy Hilfiger. The Souk occasionally has open-air art exhibits that have become synonymous with the notion of the world-class city. In the Souk, you can enjoy a mix of

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'modern' and 'antiquarian' activities through having ice cream at the Haagen-Dazs café while staring at Roman ruins.

Perhaps one of the most historically important squares of the downtown is the Martyrs’ Square, the former heart of the city-center. The square holds a monument of idealized and renaissance-esque bronze martyrs carrying a torch. High-rises and hotels such as ‘Le Grey’ popped up next to the monument, dwarfing and overshadowing it. Behind the Martyrs’ Square is an area called Saifi Village, a residential space stacked with pastiche and warm-colored houses with ‘artisan quarters’ tucked in between.

Lastly, the downtown was recently extended to the sea through the Zaytouna Bey Waterfront Project. In this area, after being inspected by security, you can enjoy a stroll along the port with a view of the yachts in front of you, with a series of towers, such as the Four Seasons Hotel, surrounding you. The port is filled with expensive international restaurants such as ‘Signor Sassi’ that cater to cities such as ‘Geneva, London, Dubai and Beirut’ and expensive local retail shops.

This reconstruction and salvaging of downtown Beirut from wreckage came at a price, particularly a financial one. Suddenly the area transformed from a pre-civil war melting pot of classes into an upper class and luxurious enclave of Beirut. The area became full of global five star restaurants, hotels and nightclubs, allowing a certain clientele of Lebanese and foreigners to enjoy the space. In this sense contemporary urban design, which is supposed to bring people
together in cities\textsuperscript{54}, created a segregated space. The downtown became the first physical and empirical marker of the Urbanista imaginaire, through creating a space for the upper class to live the global, communal network of capitalism. Ergo, Hariri through the licensing of these hotels and boutiques in the downtown was able to retain some elements of his globalism.

In addition to the creation of a physical space for the Urbanistas to thrive, the Urbanistas, along with Solidere, would present their outward push of Beirut through the media and advertising to the global elite. In the next section, I will analyze how the Urbanista vision of Beirut prevailed with through the use of discourse and media. Media in the case of the Urbanistas is a form of hegemony, meaning it is a form of control and a form ensuring that their Beirut triumphs while subordinating other narratives.

3.4 Media and Connection to Western Media Outlets

On the 17\textsuperscript{th} of February, a video titled “Being Happy in Beirut” went viral on social media outlets. A mini-spectacle, the video, displayed Urbanista-like Lebanese and foreign expats, mainly youth, partaking in joyful activities such as dancing in nightclubs, jumping around squares and enjoying life along city boulevards. The various activities of the video had a common bond; they were all shot in downtown Beirut.\textsuperscript{55} The video put the Urbanistas and their Beirut on display, everyone was happy and for a couple of minutes life in Beirut seemed wonderful. In the same day, a bomb went off in southern Beirut killing four people in the

\textsuperscript{54} Samir Khalaf, \textit{Beirut Reclaimed: Reflections on Urban Design and the Restoration of Civility} (Beirut: Dar An-Nahar, 1993), 132.

\textsuperscript{55} “Happy in Beirut,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxu3w5U6fSI.
In one day, two extreme and different images of Beirut existed in two completely different areas. This would leave the outside observer in a sense of wonderment, and bafflement, asking how such extremely polarized activities can exist in the confines of a small city like Beirut. In the Urbanista model of Beirut, this makes perfect sense. Southern Beirut is completely outside the conceptual map of the Urbanistas and is of no relevance to them. The south is not a place where an Urbanista would be ‘happy’ and is not a space in which Urbanistas thrive. For them, the south of Beirut is not part of the imagined Beirut and is not part of their narrative.

**Imagined Beirut in the Articles**

“These New York Times authors who write on Beirut are parachuted in to expensive places of the capital and experience a very specific version of it. Parachuting is what we call in the media industry in Lebanon, the bringing of an author from abroad to spend two to three days in Beirut, experiencing the most expensive restaurants, the French districts and the best hotels. After that they go back and write articles such as Beirut is Back, or Beirut: the Paris of the Middle East.”

This Urbanista representation of Beirut is not new and has found quite the popularity within western media outlets. In 1998, *Travel and Leisure* magazine released its article “[a]ll [e]yes on Beirut,” talking about the revival of the city and the return of bars, hotels and fancy

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restaurants. This article talked about Beirut as a Mediterranean city with a ‘cosmopolitan’ ease and with the ‘promise of new worlds.’ With the use of word such as ‘promise,’ ‘new world,’ and cosmopolitanism, the Urbanista discourse of the imagined Beirut is realized. This imagined Beirut is linked to high-end materialism, attaching a strong importance to being able to possess\textsuperscript{59} and buy in the city. This materialism manifests through the bars, hotels and international restaurants. Beirut was coming back from wartime destruction and was ready for tourists and outsiders in its ‘party dress.’ This Beirut would be connected to the world, through its capitalist enclaves and its leisurely spaces. Leisurely spaces are spaces that are based on the non-productive consumption of time.\textsuperscript{60} A space in which fun and relaxation is expected. The article discussed the massive Solidere reconstruction of downtown as an unavoidable evil as they were the only ones ‘preserving buildings.’ However, the timing of the article is important, it shows the beginning of the Urbanista social imaginaire shortly after the end of the war and only halfway through the reconstruction of the downtown. The fact that downtown Beirut was still not fully reconstructed and not fully developed again, indicates the importance of imagination for the Urbanistas. Beirut existed in the realm of the outward image and not the lived experience.

The hegemony of this imaginaire is obvious; articles emphasizing the greatness of Beirut and its splendor kept accelerating and increasing. After the assassination of Hariri in 2005, Beirut became a hub of instability with constant bombings and assassinations taking place.


\textsuperscript{60} Thorstein Veblen, \textit{The Theory of the Leisure Class} (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1998), 43.
However, Beirut at the same time enjoyed its share of international display being in the ranks of top ten world cities, while retaining its local disorder. In 2006, *Travel and Leisure* ranked Beirut as the 9th best city in the world and in 2009 the famous *Lonely Planet* travel magazine and largest travel guide book publisher in the world, put Beirut on its top ten world cities because of its ‘contemporary and lively image.’

This listing goes another step further with rankings such as those by the *New York Times* that placed Beirut as the number one city to visit in the world for the year 2009. In this ranking, the *New York Times* exclaimed that a détente kept the violence in place in Beirut, which was ‘poised to reclaim its title as the Paris of the Middle East.’ It did not matter if violence was temporarily curbed beneath the surface, as long as the glamour of a Parisian-esque city was showcased. It was a fancy Beirut, which had global hotels from London such as Le Grey, luxurious ones like the Four Seasons, and international restaurants transforming “its culinary scene.” The highlight of this listing was the Souk el Tayeb farmer’s market, a “gastropolitical awakening” in the heart of downtown Beirut. Hardly, a gastropolitical awakening, the Souk el Tayeb was a Lebanese rendition of your average western farmer’s market, taking the local blends and the ‘traditions’ of the mountains and polishing them for the affluent Urbanistas and the tourists.

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The *New York Times* was not alone in emphasizing Beirut’s glamour and ignoring other violent realities. *The Guardian* confidently reported in 2010 “Beirut is back and it’s beautiful.” This article admitted that from 2005 onward the city had its share of unstable violence, but hoped and sensed that the dawn of a ‘new Beirut’ was coming back. Beirut was pinned with labels that are familiar to the western and the American tourists, calling it the “Elizabeth Taylor” of the Middle East. Nevertheless, this article like many others focuses on the downtown, the Mediterranean charm and glitzy lifestyle of its inhabitants.

This manner of representing Beirut does not solely exist in the media and can be lived in certain enclaves of the city, in which the Urbanista lifestyle becomes that which is represented. In the next section, I will introduce my interview with Alexandra, one of the Urbanistas, who displays a life very similar to that described in the media outlets. Alexandra’s interview represents the social life and the lifestyle accompanied with the Urbanista spaces.

### 3.5 The Urbanistas: Alexandra and Michel

*Living the Imaginaire: The Case of Alexandra*

“*Copla is one of the best Restaurants in Downtown Beirut.*”

In my interview with Alexandra, Urbanista Beirut, the represented and the imagined, comes to life in her lived conceptual map. Alexandra presents the third and final step of the

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Urbanista hegemony, which is social praxis of discourse. She is a twenty-three year old female coming of age in Beirut, who comes from an upper-class background. She speaks with a refined accent and resides in the upper-middle class and intellectual quarter of Beirut known as Hamra. She was born in Germany, where she lived for five years, until moving back to Lebanon. She is enlisted in university and is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in graphic design.

Before discussing Alexandra’s bespoken image of Beirut, it must be noted that in the interview process I became the global link through which Alexandra displayed Beirut. My relationship with her becomes a receptive one of the Beirut she displayed. Alexandra’s first take on Beirut is that it is the heart of Lebanon; a city that has all requirements of life and to which everyone comes to. For Alexandra, Beirut is the only inhabitable space in Lebanon, she “belongs to Beirut and it is her city.” Thus, she begins the interview with a clear sense of ownership over the city and a strong emotional affinity to it.

1) Framing Alexandra’s Conceptual Map:

Alexandra defined her conceptual map of Beirut as that of Hamra, Verdun, Downtown and Ashrafieh. All of these areas represent the upper-class enclaves of the city and most importantly the enclaves in which the ‘imaginaire’ can be lived. The areas with their international restaurants, boutiques, artisan bakeries and hip pubs, allow for the imaginaire of Beirut to be materialized and to flourish. Alexandra enjoys the rise of new projects such as the Zaytouna Bey Waterfront project and labels them as ‘successful projects’ in the city. This enjoyment is not simply a form of extending her leisurely spaces; it is also about expanding the scope of the areas in which the ‘imaginaire’ of Beirut can be lived.
2) **An Urbanista Lifestyle:**

In Beirut, Alexandra has an obvious social mobility espousing a lifestyle that is a mix of going to university, frequenting the gym, dining out, occasional drinks at the pub and hanging out with friends. This indicates a leisurely mobility that is based on time-enjoyment and on the spending of money. Alexandra enjoys frequenting the Beirut Souks and the Downtown because they are ‘modern’ areas in which the restaurants and the nightlife are appealing. I asked her since nightlife is so popular in Beirut why does she prefer the downtown, in particular? She answered affirming that the people in this part of Beirut are more presentable, the design of the places is better and security is better relative to other areas. Through her lifestyle, Alexandra reveals to us three important markers of the Urbanistas: 1) Being on display, Alexandra observes the people frequenting these areas from their clothes, to the food, to social behavior and accent. In return, she also becomes on display in these areas, knowing fellow Urbanistas will be watching. 2) Feeling ‘secure’ from the ‘other,’ through having gated communities and security guards watching over the Urbanista premises. 3) Space as a marker of identity, focusing on the whole notion of the ‘modern’ and hip designs of the places the Urbansitas frequent, which are a reflection of their own spatial ‘self.’

For Alexandra, this leisurely social mobility does not stop during times of conflict. When asked about the continuation of normalcy after bombs in Beirut, she responds casually that people in Beirut are used to explosions and life in terms of enjoyment goes on. She exclaims that especially in the downtown, life always has to go on because certain people have offices there, work there and have their lives attached there. For Alexandra, the continuation of life during conflict was pegged with the notion of “enjoyment,” not with the notion of resilience or
survival during conflict. Lebanese sociologist Samir Khalaf, identifies this notion of fun during conflict and exclaims that in a constantly turbulent political climate like that in Beirut, the youth find that they cannot wait until it ‘calms down’ for them to have fun. It indicates that social mobility for the Urbanistas during conflict continues especially in terms of leisure and ‘having a good time.’ Ergo, the completely bespoken lifestyle of the ‘imaginaire’ is based on fun, frivolous enjoyment and the spending of capital.

3) Avoiding the ‘other’ Beirut:

Alexandra lives and enjoys certain parts of Beirut, but she also avoids and rejects other parts of the city. In particular, she would not go to ‘Dahiye (a Shiite enclave in the suburbs of Beirut that was previously associated with poverty), Tariq Jdideh (a Sunni enclave of Beirut that is usually associated with hosting lower-income residents) and similar areas such as Sabra and Ouzai (extreme lower-income areas, or ‘ghettos’, that have migrant and Palestinian refugee camps in them). The reasons Alexandra does not go to these areas are extremism, sectarianism and lack of safety. These are areas where leisure cannot thrive and cannot spatially exist. In particular, she says the areas are limited to having one conservative ‘sectarian’ group that prevents the rise of nightclubs and the ‘quintessential’ Beiruti facilities. Looking at this ‘other’ map of Beirut, Alexandra avoids the poorer and the lower-income areas of the city. In particular, she tends to avoid the Muslim parts of the city that tend to be on the poor side of the spectrum. This is not to ascribe a sectarian bias to Alexandra, who is Muslim herself, but it is to affirm the importance of money in her conception of Beirut. Alexandra labels the

‘sectarianism’ of the Biartis in this group as a preventative reason for the lack of nightclubs and leisure facilities. However, facilities such as these would not thrive there regardless of the sectarian identity, due to the lack of constantly flowing capital that can sustain them.

4) **Beirut Comes to Life through Alexandra:**

For Alexandra, Beirut is an international city, it might deceive you with its small size, but ‘it has everything.’ It has all the ‘necessities’ of an international life from global shopping, to nice restaurants and five-star venues. From the beginning, Alexandra frames the Urbanista model of the international city through materialism and the ability to spend. In this international Urbanista city, Alexandra throws the usual hotel labels that the western media outlets do such as “Le Grey,” the “Four Seasons,” and the “Phoenicia.” In her case, she affirms that places such as these made the city beautiful. This of course is a form of aesthetic internationalism that is based on branding and of marking a distinctive and tasteful space. However, this notion of city beauty is specifically relevant to the global link. The city became beautiful through its connection to the international aesthetic cosmopolitan scene. All of these hotels function from the downtown, but in Alexandra’s imaginaire they beautified all of Beirut, even though they are not accessible to all of its residents.

In this Beirut of grandeur, Alexandra affirms that the nightclub scene is one of the best in the world and the tourists can “attest to that.” This indicates a strong connection between the tourists, who are physical representatives of the global link and the Urbanistas who frequent the same scene. It was important for Alexandra to have a confirmation from the tourists of the worldly scene of nightclubs in Beirut, in order for her ‘imaginaire’ to be
strengthened and for Beirut to thrive as a global city. She gives a summary of the best nightclubs in the city, from the “White Bar,” “Sky Bar,” “Pier 7,” and some others. All of these nightclubs are exclusive, sometimes requiring three months’ reservation ahead of time and spending can range from a minimum of one thousand dollars and above. Alexandra seemed to put a lot of emphasis on the nightclub and pub culture as part of the Urbanista lifestyle. This emphasis on nightclubs can be for many reasons; one of them is Alexandra’s age. In urban areas around the world, young Urbanistas tend to perceive and experience nightclubs as a rite of passage to a new form of adulthood.67 Another reason would be the allure and enchantment of urban nightlife in which the presented self can be mixed with anonymity and mystification. The imagery of an expensive urban nightclub creates the allure of fabulous “dudes” and “divas” sipping cocktails and creating a fantasy world.68 However, this only plays a minimal role, as Alexandra is presenting a liberal self that is in contrast with a conservative self that could be labeled as part of the lower class. It is apparent that in Beirut, the Urbanistas associate western liberalism with dress, lifestyle and mannerisms, more than it is associated with thoughts and ideologies. Thus, through me as the global link, Alexandra wants to present herself as part of a movement of aesthetic western liberalism, based on clubbing and attire.

I wanted to question Alexandra’s imaginaire and to see if she would confront it through her answers. I asked her if the cosmopolitan image of Beirut was exaggerated or unreal in some parts and she said no. Alexandra explained that if Beirut was not a global city than the international brands and the hotels would not come. For Alexandra this was not an ‘imaginaire’


68 Grazian, On the make: the hustle of urban nightlife, 5.
it was a reality, one that could not be denied. However, when asked about the Conde Nast ranking of Beirut as the 20th best world city, Alexandra revealed a contradiction. While she defines Beirut as a world city, she says that the ranking only applies to the center of Beirut and areas like Hamra, while the previous poor areas she mentioned do not hold to those rankings. This indicates a realization on her part that not all of Beirut is the same; however, her outward representation of Beirut remains uniform and monotonous. This indicates a sense of territoriality within globalism, she wants ‘her’ areas to be the Conde Nast ones on the local level, but on the global level, she wants to display Beirut as one city.

Alexandra’s Beirut is tightly inscribed, but for her it is sufficient. An important observation of the Urbanista Beirut she presents is that it is a leisurely one. In the contemporary urban experience, a world of leisure and a search for everyday happiness comes out of the realm of everyday life.69 This leisurely urban experience is highly influenced by the spending and the constant circulation of capital. In this urban experience, money is everywhere, but in no specific place.70 The experience of money and spending of capital is not city-specific and not bound to a specific locale; it is part of the worldly and the capitalist experience of cities. This strongly manifests with Alexandra, who labels Beirut as worldly and as an international city because certain parts of it present her with leisure and facilities of enjoyment. She defines the Urbanista city through this lens indicating the ability to spend money and providing a general lifestyle of the global Urbanista that can be lived in any city that

70 Harvey, Consciousness and the Urban Experience, 3.
provides the facilities. Alexandra allowed us to see that the conceptualized and imagined space that connects Beirut to the world is capitalist, leisurely and bourgeoisie.

**Michel: A tale of Money in Beirut**

My interview with Michel did not last long. However, he is one of the Urbanistas I am including in this section, due to his explicit opinions on money and life in Beirut. Michel is a 21-year-old man, who is studying at the Lebanese American University of Beirut. He is also a business owner, owning a cell phone shop and operating a money-loaning venture on the side. He is the archetypal laissez-faire man whose lifestyle switches between the spending of money and the making of money.

1) Michel and Beirut:

Michel is passionate about Beirut and explicitly says that he loves it. His conceptual map is like that of Alexandra, based on the expensive places of the capital. However, Michel is very explicit in his description of certain spaces of Beirut. He says that the downtown is the heart of Beirut from the Zaytouna Bey Marina to the Souks; however, he also says that the Dahyeh, the South of Beirut, is the space that put Beirut on the international blacklist of dangerous cities. He has an awareness of another spatial reality to Beirut; however, he sees it as an abomination and a cause of trouble. This space for Michel causes an interruption to the worldly description of Beirut and is a problematic.

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2) Beirut and money:

I asked Michel if he thinks Beirut is a city that depends on money. He said well that depends on the class, if you are from the rich, then yes, if you are from the other class, then not necessarily. He is aware of the financial dynamic of the Urbanistas in Beirut, but he does not see a problem with it. He told me, listen, Beirut by real estate is the most expensive city in the Arab world and that makes us global. For Michel, the global is the inflated, the expensive and that which a specific class can buy. He said real estate is the driver of success in Beirut, you have apartments in bad areas that sell at 400 thousand dollars a piece and others in upper class areas that sell at 20 to 30 million dollars each. For Michel, these incredibly high prices were normal to him and they are what make Beirut exceptional.

It is for these very reasons that Michel is completely in support of the Solidere reconstruction of Beirut. He does not mind if Solidere’s reconstruction increases and inflates rent, as long as it brings an element of globalism and internationalism to it. Clearly, Michel is in line with the Solidere vision for the downtown because he is able to afford the internationalism that it brings. He enjoys its Uruguay street pubs, its fancy restaurants and its Todd’s Boutiques.

These leisurely worlds of Alexandra and Michel are not just lived in their spaces; they are also represented in pictorials and advertisements in the Urbanista-enclaves of the city. In the next section, I will analyze and display the cultural commodification of the Urbanista-lifestyle and show how the advertisement-environment is aware of their consumption habits.
By commodification, I mean the production of goods that are tailored towards a specific cultural group\textsuperscript{72} like the Urbanistas.

\textbf{3.6 Cultural Commodification: The Production of Urbanista Life}

In this last section, I will discuss the cultural commodification of the Urbanistas and their lifestyle. The Urbanistas create a ‘culture industry,’ akin to that described by the famous German theorist, Theodor Adorno. Adorno argues that culture undergoes a process of production similar to that of industrial production.\textsuperscript{73} The creation and reproduction of popular culture becomes a way of ensuring mass consumption. It is a way of creating psychological needs among people that can only be met through capitalism. For this section, I will use Adorno’s notion of real life being indistinguishable from the movie, the entrainment industry and the media advertisement. This is witnessed in the case of the Urbanistas, who commodify a lifestyle in the images and the media that they mimic in real life. Their lifestyle becomes a cultural product that is both represented and lived. In this section, I will present two ways through which the Urbanistas do this. The first is through internal advertisements around the city of Beirut and the second is through fashion design with renowned Lebanese designer Elie Saab.

Beginning with internal advertisements, the Urbanistas do not just use outward advertisement to achieve their purposes; they also control the pictorial and advertising industry

\textsuperscript{72} John R. Short, \textit{Global Dimensions: Space, Place and the Contemporary World} (London: Reaktion, 2001), 170.

within their spaces. I will argue that this achieves three goals for the Urbanista. The first one is cultural commodifying and representing their lifestyle through images and billboards. The second one is ensuring further flow of capital within their enclaves, reminding the affluent consumer to buy from certain industries. This ascribes to a global and capitalist lifestyle of consumption in which certain “accessories” of life such as plastic surgery become necessities. The third one is to display their ‘Beirut,’ to the outside observer and visitor, in order to perpetuate the idea of a worldly Beirut within their spaces.

**The Urbanista Lifestyle in Images**

Beginning with the first reason, the Urbanistas want to make sure their lifestyle is on display to the public. These pictorials are in a way a reflection of them and their ability to afford a more expensive lifestyle. The Urbanistas spread these pictorials in their conceptual map of Beirut. This lifestyle is a mixture of attending expensive concerts (photo 1), going to ‘Brazilian Plastic Surgery’ clinics (photo 2), hair-transplant clinics for men (photo 3) and to exclusive hair salons (photo 4). This eclectic lifestyle paints the image of a leisurely social life that is being lived within these spaces.

Moving on to the second reason, the Urbanistas constantly reorganize these ads in order to ensure a constant flow of capital into the consumer industries. Many of the ads tend to promote Oliver Ross watches (photo 5), Bvlgari diamonds (photo 6), international sushi lounges (photo 7) and expensive residence facilities and gated communities (photo 8). These ads indicate a strong capitalist consumer culture and most importantly the ability to afford expensive goods. The ad represents the desired Urbanista object, giving it a form that can be
bought. The constant reshuffling of the ads, reminds the Urbanistas of the variety of luxury goods and restaurants they have access to.

Lastly, the ads and pictorials are there in order to ensure that the worldly image of Beirut is preserved within the spaces. The ads have international fashion houses such as Coach New York displayed (photo 9), exclusive jewelry stores (photo 10), Givenchy labels (photo 11) and many more. These ads paint the ‘culture’ of the Urbanista and brand it as that of the city of Beirut. They are on billboards, road-walks and numerous places. The gaze of the outside observer then associates these ads with the general ‘culture’ of the city of Beirut.

**Designing the Global Urbanista Dress: The Case of Elie Saab**

Elie Saab has become one of many Lebanese fashion favorites around the world. His international boutique is in the heart of Urbanista Beirut, the downtown. He has a gigantic and glass-transparent fashion house, in which you can sometimes see him creating his next major design. Socialites, affluent Lebanese Urbanistas, and people who want to be seen wearing his signature dresses frequent him. Saab shot to fame in 2002, when he became known as the designer who dressed the famous American actress Halley Berry in her iconic Oscar Red Carpet dress. Ever since then, Saab has become a fashion favorite for Hollywood celebrities, royal families and the designer of popular American Urbanista-type TV shows such as Gossip Girl.

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However, he is still known as the presenter of the dress of elegant Lebanese women and the creator of the Urbanista dress.

In this process, Saab turned the imaginative into a dressed reality. The Urbanista lifestyle was extended from the realm of the affluent Beiruti global to the realm of the Hollywood elite. Through this, the Urbanistas are able to align themselves with a new and powerful class and are able to see themselves in line with the Hollywood elite. Through buying and wearing his dresses, a new bond is created. Secondly, the dresses become an archetype Urbanista product. The Hollywood elite are now wearing dresses by an Urbanista and dresses that are the product of the elite of Beirut. This extends the products of the Urbanista to the global realm and further pushes their Beirut outward.

3.7 Photo Gallery: Urbansita Advertisements

Photo 1
Chapter 4: Criticize and Deconstruct: The Rise of the Rebelling Urbansitas

‘This is authentic,” while this is ‘inauthentic’. ‘This is genuine,’ while this is clearly ‘fake!’

In our contemporary experience of describing culture, design, art and even cities, words such as ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’ have been exhaustively codified. The quest for the ‘authentic’ has become such an important emotional and contemporary experience that holds strong linguistic value and that has become inseparable from our assessment of the genuineness of ‘things.’ The question of the authentic plays an important part in my overall thesis, a research that is studying a class struggle between an Urbanista group and Biarti group over the representation of the city. In this section specifically, I will identify a struggle over ‘authenticity’ within the Urbanista class itself and this is mainly due to the rise of a group, which I will label as the ‘rebelling Urbanistas.’ This group attacks the image of Beirut and accuses of it being ‘inauthentic,’ claiming that it betrays the ‘actual’ image of Beirut.

The main flaw in this descriptive debate is that, it avoids the question, which criteria can we use to measure authenticity? The whole notion of authentic is based on the experience of the observer, which is determined by the social class, background and system that this observer is part of. The use of the word authentic indicates that there is an eternal world system of taxonomies to which we refer back to when labeling the ‘original’ and the ‘unoriginal,’ and I do not support this premise. It is for these very reasons that I will be presenting ‘authenticity’ throughout this section as a subjective construct of a certain group. A variety of theorists have tackled the issue of the authentic and I will particularly focus on two major theorists, Regina
Bendix and Bella Dicks. Bendix and Dicks argue against the idea of an objective authenticity and instead present the concept as a negotiated construction. Their theories are important for my study of the ‘authentic’ as a claim that conflicting groups use to defend their Beirut and attack other ‘Beiruts.’

4.1 Framing the ‘Authentic’

Why must we frame the ‘authentic’? In particular, why is authenticity so important? It is important because arguments over authenticity are integral for groups such as the Urbanistas and the ‘rebelling Urbanistas,’ who are fighting over the representation of Beirut. For these groups, the question “[w]ho has the authority to speak for a group’s identity or authenticity?” becomes important. The ‘authentic’ city becomes a reflection of them and becomes a reflection of their spatial self. In particular, notions of spatial authenticity mirror struggles over identity, and in particular, whose identity prevails.

Recent postmodern studies in the field of anthropology and cultural studies have debunked the essentializing myth of authenticity that makes it seem as if it has a physical existence. In my research on group authenticity vis-à-vis the image of the city, I will use Regina Bendix’s argument of authenticity as a construct. Her theory manifests itself in three major aspects: 1) authenticity and emotions, 2) authenticity and legitimacy, and 3) authenticity and representation. Bendix exhibits three main and strong causalities to authenticity and that will be shown in my interviews with the ‘rebelling Urbanistas.’ Unlike, the Urbanistas, who describe

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Beirut in a very calm and nonchalant way, assuming that their image is the only reality out there, the rebelling Urbanistas do not. They tend to exhibit Bendix’s three traits on authenticity very strongly and this is mainly due to the lack of influence of their representation in the foreign press and in local physical manifestations in Beirut itself. In what follows, I will explain and contextualize Bendix’s three main points.

Firstly, Bendix exclaims that contemporary societies have pegged the notion of authenticity with sincerity. The search for the authentic has fundamentally become an ‘emotional’ and ‘moral quest.’ This emotional aspect for the quest of authenticity explains the unstoppable use of the word in describing and assessing issues. In the case of cities, the emotional experience of laying an authentic design for the city becomes part of the identity of the group constructing it. A hegemonic group such as the Urbanistas, which has the power of representing Beirut, will be emotionally satisfied if the image of Beirut follows their definition of ‘authentic’ and if it describes their experiences. Another group like the rebelling Urbanistas, will attack the image of Beirut, describing it as ‘inauthentic’ and seeing it as a betrayal of their group identity because it does not follow the characteristics they ascribe to authenticity. Both assumptions about authenticity will stem from the relation between the representation of the city and the group; thus, such assumptions are always subjective. In its core, the emotional drive in the description of the authentic indicates a strong relationship between the spatial identity of the group and the image of the city. This drive increases when the hegemonic groups, such as the Urbanistas, use power to silence alternative voices.

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Secondly, the institutionalization of ‘authenticity’ is a form of seeking legitimacy. When groups label something as authentic, they are seeking to legitimize their experience of it. The need for authenticity becomes the need for the creation of consent. Their gaze and their vision of the city becomes the legitimate one through which the space of the city constructs and manifests itself in the image. Ergo, claiming something to be authentic becomes a legalizing and hegemonic factor, giving legitimacy to the groups that control the label.

Thirdly, Bendix argues that in the contemporary climate of scientism and empiricism, authenticity needs to be measured and seen. For this reason, authenticity required a material form of representation. Of course, this can be deceptive, for a captivating image can become synonymous with a form of authentic truth. When authenticity, which is a construct, becomes represented and is given a certain material form, it creates the façade of a normative experience or of a quintessential image of a city. This goes back to the whole notion of legitimacy, when a group like the Urbanistas wants to authenticate their Beirut they want to give a material form of representation to the outside audience. However, this audience is an outsider to the city and absorbs such representation as an ‘authentic’ one. We already established in the previous section on the Urbanistas that images are an important part of encoded media messages through which the Urbanistas want to connect Beirut to the world system. Thus, the Urbanistas have a more powerful representation if the image has an ‘authentic’ appeal to it.

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80 Bendix, 25.

81 Bendix, 46.
Therefore, when a group such as the ‘rebelling Urbanistas’ criticize the image of Beirut as inauthentic, they are criticizing the ‘imaginaire’ and the product of the Urbanistas. Through using words such as, ‘inauthentic’ they themselves essentialize the Beirut they are describing, forgetting that it is the representation and the product of a certain group. This renders the debate couched in terms of authenticity instead of having a debate on the space and the use of space in Beirut. This group-element to authenticity leads me to Bella Dicks’ theories on authenticity, ‘visitability’ and the display of the city and its culture.

In her book, *Culture on Display*, Dicks identifies what she labels as ‘cultural particularism.’ Cultural particularism is a form of constructing a cultural claim that becomes important for the identity of the group. In this construction, cultural meanings are written into landscapes, roads, and streets of the city, a process in which objects and spaces of everyday life become part of the ‘authentic’ culture of the group. This will be strongly exhibited in my interviews with the rebelling Urbanistas who identify places and locales such as bookstores, heritage zones and arts as ‘authentic’ city spaces that should be represented. Dicks’ theory is important because she is identifying a notion of ‘place-based’ identity, in which the spatial practices and literal spaces of belonging to a certain group are important to that group’s sense of identity.

Dicks identifies the representative element that is becoming important for ‘authenticity’. More and more culture in urban design is being represented and is being equated with group

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83 Dicks, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability*, 17.

84 Dicks, 71.
identity. This would mean that with a group like the rebelling Urbanistas, urban design is not necessarily betraying Beirut as much as it is betraying their constructed Beirut and their own group identity. It is this particular recovery of the authentic that the interviewees I talked to exhibit, demonstrating a wish to represent Beirut in a more ‘authentic’ way, but more importantly to retrieve the Beirut they believe is authentic. Of course, what will be retrieved is the experience of their own intellectual class; however, it is framed through discourse as a retrieval of the entire city of Beirut.

In addition to the discussion of the struggle over the control and the representation of the ‘authentic,’ the debate over aesthetics is equally important. Through criticizing the image and attacking the façade, groups such as the rebelling Urbanistas engage in a debate over aesthetics. In what follows, I will define the aesthetic and introduce the theories of French philosopher Jacques Rancier who frames the aesthetic through a discourse of power and representation.

4.2 The Aesthetic Dilemma

The aesthetic is the façade; it is the exterior appearance that is related to beauty and intricacy. The aesthetic shapes and influences the gaze of the observers and allows them to decide what is beautiful. I chose to concentrate on the dilemma of aesthetics because it is the outward appearance of the city of Beirut that is being debated by the rebelling Urbanistas. The Urbanistas find the aesthetics of Beirut to be beautiful, but the rebelling Urbanistas criticize it and find it to be distasteful. Rancier focuses on the aesthetic and debates it as a form of finding ‘truth’ through imagery.
In his book, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancier outlines a general framework for understanding aesthetics. In this section, I will be explaining his notion of ‘politics’ and ‘the distribution of the sensible.’ By politics, Rancier does not necessarily mean government or a defined political system; rather, he means any system of power that delineates and decides what the sensible is. In this section, I will be explaining his notion of ‘politics’ and ‘the distribution of the sensible.’ By politics, Rancier does not necessarily mean government or a defined political system; rather, he means any system of power that delineates and decides what the sensible is. 

For instance, following Rancier’s definition, the Urbanistas form a type of political system because they distribute their knowledge of Beirut through their aesthetics, which are media messages and urban design and pictorials in their spaces.

Rancier sees the aesthetic as a construct and positions it with the background of the observer. We already established that the aesthetics is that which we can see and is usually associated with beauty. Rancier argues that there is a preexisting system of laws, beliefs and systems that enable the aesthetics to be made and seen, to be understood and spoken of and to be distributed. Thus, Rancier is arguing about the conditions of perceiving the aesthetics and understanding them. For him, a façade, an aesthetic, and that which can be seen does not exist just like that. Its perception depends on the background of the observer and the system in which it is being distributed. This is why Rancier’s contribution is important for the debate on authenticity and aesthetics between the Urbanistas and the rebelling ones. The Urbanistas understand and accept the image of Beirut and the spatial aesthetics it presents because their background aligns them with the dimensions of these aesthetics. Their desire to be part of the worldly city makes them see a tower on the marina of the downtown as a healthy aesthetic and as an authentic one. For the rebelling ones, their background is different and it leads them to

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pereceive the same aesthetics in a different way. For them, the same tower at the marina becomes untruthful and as Rancier points out an ‘object of fallacy.’ Even though the image of the tower is being distributed within the same system, its reception and its aesthetic dimension depends on the background of the recipient.

In the next section, I will introduce the background that enables and makes the rebelling Urbanistas to have a different say and critique the aesthetics of Beirut. In it, I will describe them as ‘Rebelling Organic Intellectuals’ and discuss the change they undergo.

4.3 The Rebell ing Urbanistas as Rebelling Organic Intellectuals

What enables the rebelling Urbanistas to produce such criticism on the representative model of Beirut? To answer this, I will utilize Antonio Gramsci’s theory of ‘organic intellectuals’ and Marxist critic Raymond Williams’ notion of hegemony as a dynamic process in order to explain the actions of these rebelling Urbanistas. In his Prison Notes, Gramsci introduces the concept of the ‘organic intellectuals’ arguing that they are real and vanguard intellectuals who are ‘organically’ condensed within their hegemonic social class and become an integral part of it.87 This is not a separate class of intellectuals; they are existent within a particular social class itself. In this section, I will argue that the rebelling Urbanistas represent a cast of ‘organic intellectuals’ who live the hegemony of their class in a different way and who do not accept completely the habits of their class. Their social and economic capital allowed these intellectuals to reach a certain position in society and develop the dialectics of criticism;

however, they do not adhere to the hegemony of their class. Williams argues that hegemony is not static and that it is not monolithic, meaning it cannot be reduced to a totalizing ‘world-view.’88 Williams affirms that the hegemonic process is always alert and responsive to alternatives and opposed realities that might question its dominance. He asserts that in addition to a dominant hegemony, there are emergent and oppositional hegemonies. Applying his model means that a class such as the Urbanistas cannot have its hegemony lived at every individual level and alternatives always arise. These alternatives arise with the rebelling Urbanistas who rebel against their class’ representation of Beirut, which is only one form of hegemony, and challenge it.

4.4 Interviews with the Rebellng Urbanistas

Farah: the Conservative Urban Architect

“If your downtown is shaped according to the gaze of the foreigner, then what else is left for you.”

From the very first opening lines of Farah’s interview,89 I could tell that she belonged to the rebelling Urbanista group. Farah is an important architect in Beirut who comes from an upper-middle class background and who works in the city conservationist scene, fighting against the demolition of heritage buildings from the 1700s and the 1800s. For Farah, the issue

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of authenticity in Beirut is extremely important and is one of the main reasons she rebels against the Urbanista clan.

1) Framing Farah’s Conceptual Map:

Unlike the Urbanistas, Farah’s conceptual map is not restricted to the affluent and bourgeoisie areas of the city. This is not because she lacks the financial capital to frequent these areas; it is because she finds all of Beirut and its spaces equally interesting. She lives in Ein el Mrayse, a historical area near the sea in Beirut, which is a mix of urban and heritage buildings. Her conceptual map is that of Al-Rawda café on the corniche, an old family-run business with proximity to the sea, and Ashrafieh and Gemayze because they are one of the few areas of Beirut that still have buildings with old architecture. In this conceptual map of Beirut, Farah has a very simple lifestyle that does not conform to the Urbanista lifestyle of dropping names of restaurants and leisure facilities. This indicates a non-capitalist approach to urban space that is not confined to the spending of money in order to assert belonging to the city.

2) Deconstructing the Image of Beirut and describing her Beirut:

In the course of the interview, I asked Farah for her opinion on the image and media representation of Beirut and the paradigm of the worldly city. She confidently asserted that the urban image of Beirut is purely commercial and purely consumer-driven. An image is devoted to making money in a city “where everything that sells works.” In Beirut in order for the image to sell, everything needs to be exaggerated, and “beautiful girls need to be put everywhere.” She exclaims that she has never seen a city that is into selling itself as much as Beirut. While
Farah speaks about Beirut, she is actually attacking the Urbanista model of representing Beirut that is inflated, consumerist, and capitalist, a model that I identified in an earlier section of this research. Farah laughed and exclaimed that her friend told her Lebanon, and in particular Beirut, is like a ‘country club,’ a place in which you buy and assert privilege and where you are allowed to destroy and create havoc through money.

Farah sees Beirut as a different city, one that holds very personal meanings for her. She loves Beirut because of its proximity to the sea, because of the organic structure of the old city, the old alleyways of areas like Gemayze and Zukak Al-Bulat and the way the old houses interact with the public spaces. This ‘essence’ she says in Beirut, makes her want to preserve the city she likes and enjoys.

Farah seems to have a lived experience with Beirut, being in proximity with the city as a space; however, she is not completely detached from the notion of representation. When continuing to speak about the advertising of Beirut, she asks why the heritage sites and the old buildings are not being advertised in the media. This indicates that the ‘authentic’ criterion for Farah is tied to the past. While such buildings do not play a role in the Urbanista capitalist imagining of Beirut, this affirmation on part of Farah indicates a small inclination to represent. In particular, if it were up to her she would like to represent Hamra in the media, instead of the usual downtown. Hamra has always been the historical hub of intellectual and cosmopolitan public life in Beirut, especially due to the presence of universities such as the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University in its parameters.\(^{90}\) This indicates a

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\(^{90}\) Steven Seldman, “Streets of Beirut: Self and the Encounter with ‘the Other,’” *Heinrich Boll Stiftung Middle East*, 2.
desire for Farah to represent the stronghold of the intellectual class, or the rebelling Urbanistas. She wants her Beirut to be on display as well, indicating dissatisfaction with the hegemony of the Urbanistas and their representation.

3) Critiquing Solidere and the Urbanista Imaginings within the City:

Not to my surprise, when I asked Farah about the reconstruction of Beirut, particularly the reconstruction of the downtown, she expressed extreme dismay. Farah said that current Urban Planners are destroying the soul of Beirut, demolishing all of its old heritage buildings and creating crammed spaces. She affirms that the ‘spirit of the city’ cannot be retrieved and that these Urban planners, who think highly of themselves, are ruining the city. She described these planners as corrupt individuals who manipulate laws to build towers and who strike alliances with politicians.

When she describes the Urbanista reconstruction of the downtown by the Solidere, Farah says that it is a disaster. While she accredits Solidere for creating new infrastructure, fire escapes, and green spaces, she criticizes them for recreating aesthetics and names without considering the sociospatial habits of the people who inhabited the space. Through saying this Farah is indicating that Solidere used architecture to create an optical dimension instead of creating a tactical one.\(^{91}\) Meaning their emphasis was the image-oriented experience of the downtown and the way it could be seen, instead of focusing on the lived experience of the downtown. She said if Solidere had allowed the original inhabitants to return after the war, they would have allowed it to remain as a melting pot of classes and as a melting pot of history.

and community. She says that Beirut’s downtown, unlike other downtowns in the world, is new and oriented towards a new consumerist generation. This goes against the Urbanista model of a worldly downtown in connectedness to the rest of the world; for Farah, in order for a downtown to be worldly it needs to be historic and fully preserved. Farah is criticizing what urban expert, John R. Short, calls “international blandscape sameness.”

This refers to the phenomena of designing spaces in citites in a globalized way and in a way, which emulates world cities. It leads to the loss of creativity and to the ‘sameness’ of city architecture and design. For Farah, the solution would be the emphasis on heritage and tradition, which would add the element of ‘originality.’

Farah continues to describe how Solidere recreated aesthetics and names void of essence. She begins with the Martyrs Square, which she says was the heart of the country, in which all the busses coming from across Lebanon stopped. For her, Solidere through expanding and rebuilding this space, ignored historical memory and landmarks and destroyed the concept of an urban square in the process. The square’s memory is that of a public sphere, a place of negotiation and revolutions. This square would conform to Jurgen Habermas’ notion of the bourgeoisie public space’ in which there is a reasoned critique of the state. It was always a site of revolutions and independence movements. For Farah the greatness of the square is being eliminated through the massive constructions around it. Three towers and various Urbanista-style hotels now surround the square, which was the heart of Beirut. To her, the

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92 Dicks, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability*, 81.

square will never be the heart of Beirut again because it lost its ‘heritage authenticity,’ due to being mixed with capitalist and globalized spaces.

After the Martyrs Square, she emphasizes that Solidere has no understanding of the concept of the Souk, the commercial market. She says that they just take the name ‘Souk’ and apply it without taking into regards the dynamics of the place. For instance, they created the Beirut Souks, using the old names such as ‘Souk Tawileh’ and gave it abstract shopping facilities. For Farah, this is ‘very kitsch and superficial.’ Farah clearly knows the spatial and class history of the downtown, citing that there used to be a famous juice and cocktail conveyor called the ‘Eintableh,’ which had a beautiful fountain in the Souk. She said Solidere destroyed the fountain and gave ‘Eintableh’ a stand seven blocks down. For her, this is a perfect example of appropriating space without taking into consideration its history. She says the modern souk became a consumerist one, in which you are being watched all the time and in which you are assessed all the time. The fact that she criticizes the ‘on display’ element to the souk is an indirect acknowledgement on Farah’s part that there is a socio-spatial element to the modern souk and is not completely void. However, this socio-spatial element is class-based and belongs to the Urbanista-value system.

4) The rise of Urbanista Gated Communities:

Farah identifies the phenomena of gated communities that are increasing in Beirut, which she finds an abnormality. She said that Beirut is a city of balconies and open space, through exposure to the sun 9 months a year, ‘our architecture was always an open one.’ Now she says there are gated communities like Saifi Village and District S and security guards in
numerous places, which was not the case before. She says even balconies are being glazed to prevent interaction with the public space, indicating a sense of escapism from the public realm. Farah is identifying the Urbanista phenomena of exclusivity, hiding away in their own spaces. This clearly indicates that if Beirut for the Urbanistas were really, as they represented it, they would not feel the need to retreat to gated communities and secure premises. Farah identifies how the Urbanista lived experience of Beirut is a mixture of escapism and fear of the ‘other,’ indicating a reality much different from the ideal one in the image. These gated communities relate to Dicks’ notion of ‘ordered spaces that talk to us,’ meaning that the Urbansitas are escaping into constructed spaces that are ordered and formatted according to their value system. These gated communities are self-contained, regulated and privatized environments that comfort the Urbanistas. Their gaze is comfortable in what it sees in these spaces and their mind is at ease knowing they will only be interacting with ‘one of their own.’

Farah shared with me a brief story that revealed the extreme exclusivity and separation of these gated communities. She said on the thirty third day of the Lebanese-Israeli war in 2006, a rocket hit a compound in Dahiyeh, a lower-class Shiite enclave of southern Beirut and people ran away into buses to leave the area. The bus had reached the Saifi Village residential enclave of the downtown, but was not allowed to disembark. She says this was a case of dire human need, but Solidere did not care. This indicates the class-based approach to need for the

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94 Dicks, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability*, 17.

Urbanistas. Saifi village is branded as a space for a certain clientele and even in the extreme cases of need; people who do not fit that clientele are not welcome.

5) **Farah’s ‘Authentic Beirut:’**

Summing up the interview, the notion of authentic for Farah is clearly based on her educational conventions and her personal need to preserve heritage. The authentic for Farah becomes heritage and old buildings with arches. Lebanese author, Aseel Sawalha, has identified through her research a positive correlation between the increase in the nouveau-riche class and the number of non-governmental organizations seeking to preserve heritage sites. This is witnessed with Farah who is taking part in a project called “The Museum for the Memory of Beirut,” which is housed in an old and traditional house she saved from being demolished by Solidere. For Farah, buildings such as these would create the architectural ‘visitability’ that would make the place inviting and that would make her feel included. While this indicates both a criticism and a divergence from an Urbanista model of Beirut, it is not simply an authentic truth. This is but one narrative of authenticity based on the background of the person formalizing it.

**Naila: A critique of a ‘Nouveau Riche’ Urbanista Beirut**

“*Beirut is becoming a place of prostitution because of the people and their lower cultural capital.*”

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96 Aseel Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut: Memory and Space in a Postwar Arab City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 93.
Naila is a woman in her fifties who occupies a prominent role in society and who used to hold an important office in the Ministry of Tourism.\(^9\) She is currently retired and resides between Beirut and Broumana, an expensive weekend getaway in the mountains of Lebanon. She graduated from the University of Saint Joseph, a French Jesuit school that was known for its elite education.

I interviewed Naila at her place of residence, a residential branch of the Verdun commercial area, which usually resides in the Urbanista conceptual map. It was a beautiful apartment with an immense book collection of a woman who is clearly well-read. She talked to me about appearing in books such as *Nisaa’ Beirut* (the prominent women of Beirut) and her personal acquaintances with Lebanese intellectuals and prominent authors. She is one of the few people I interviewed who insisted on knowing the full-scope of my research, indicating a strong interest in knowing what she was getting involved in.

Unlike most interviewees, Naila did not provide me with a conceptual map as she feels that she is losing Beirut and that it is slowly fading. However, the case of Naila was helpful because she provides a description of Beirut before and after the war and how her socio-spatial life changed after reconstruction.

1) **Beirut then and now with Naila: The Old Rich and the New Urbanista Rich**

Naila exclaimed that Beirut used to be the place and stronghold of culture in the Arab world with its Arab Book Exhibit and numerous plays being held there. She indicates a sense

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of Beiruti exceptionalism relative to the cities of the Arab world. Now she sees that Beirut has become an imitation of western culture, with the west becoming the magnet to which we are attracted. She says the consumption of western culture is based on consumerism. She confidently said there is a ‘new rich’ class that wants sex, drugs, and leisure and debauched culture, which is not the ‘true’ Beirut. Before if you wanted such hedonistic activities you would go to Maamltein, a red-light district of brothels, but the new rich wants all of Beirut to be like that. She said this betrays the ‘original image’ of Beirut and its inhabitants, for it was “never this pornographic and illicit.”

She exclaims there are very few people who still consume the ‘good’ ideological and theoretical contributions of the West and one of them is her husband. She exclaims how her husband regularly frequents the famous Antoine Library in Beirut, to buy books, something that few people still do. Naila here is commenting on the Urbanista imitation of the West that we previously saw with Alexandra, one that is based on a lifestyle of dress, clubbing and going to international restaurants. She is also expressing a form of urban symbolism in city spaces that is based on behavior. In this, activities and rituals become an important symbol of urban life in the city.98 For Naila, these behavioral urban symbols are going to the library, shopping at a bookstore, and watching a play at the theater among other activities.

Naila is clearly criticizing the Urbanista model of living Beirut in certain spaces, categorizing it as a hedonistic one that is consumer-driven and that is based on sexual desires. In her differentiation between ‘new rich’ and ‘old rich,’ to which she belongs, I was

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reminded of C. Wright Mills’ essay on *The Power Elite*. Mills argues that the ‘old rich’ wanted to distinguish themselves from the lower-caste of society through pedigree and societal honor. It is not enough to have financial wealth; you need to have the honorific stance and history that comes along with it. Naila is clearly identifying with the old elite that experienced Beirut in a different way and her critique of the new Beirut is a critique of the Urbanista ‘nouveau riche,’ who are inhabiting it. This indicates that the Urbanistas are mainly formed of youth and a new post-war rich that diverged from the old-class of the city affluent.

Through this distinction between old rich and new rich, Naila reveals an important issue on the use of urban spaces in Beirut. It is not solely about having money and an abundance of capital in order to be an Urbanista and enjoy places like the downtown, it is ascribing to the whole lifestyle of it. It is about living the ‘imaginaire’ within the spaces and branding yourself as part of Urbanista Beirut, an act that the old rich refuse to do.

2) **Naila and the Downtown: Past Love and Present Hate**

I asked her if she had a favorite place like her husband and the bookstore and she said she used to have a favorite place, the downtown, while putting her hand on her heart, but now she no longer does. She says she has no care for the downtown now and she actually has not visited in a year. She remembers going there with her parents and going there as a teenager and having ice cream at ‘Automatique,’ which she emotionally says Solidere did not bring back. Naila mentioned the ‘Automatique’ ice cream parlor multiple times in her interview and every time she did, she smiled. She exhibited this Freudian mental retrieval of

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space. Sigmund Freud argued that mental capacities could preserve through memory a space that is physically destroyed, in order to generate some form of relief. With Naila, she still preserves many of the spaces of the downtown in her mind, such as the ice cream parlor, which no longer physically exists.

If Naila were to visit the downtown she would avoid the Beirut Souks, the consumerist Urbanista enclave and she would only go to the Foch Allenby district, which Solidere successfully restored. However, she exclaims that it was restored without essence. Naila said the ruins are unfortunately gone in the downtown and nothing is really left. She admits that Hariri was able to rebuild the area and remove the wolves and the dogs that haunted it after the war; nevertheless, Hariri made them pay the price she said. She continues to talk about the Zaytouna Bey, the waterfront enclave of the downtown, indicating that it is a place for ‘the rich rich’ and not the Beirutis. In this, Naila ascribes a Beiruti identity to the ‘old rich,’ making the Urbanistas, like Alexandra, who love and frequent the Zaytouna Bey as unoriginal Beiruti citizens.

Naila, like Farah, critiques the rise of gated communities in downtown initiated by the Saifi Village model of the downtown. She affirms that there is no need for compounds in Beirut, which is something that belongs in the Gulf cities. She explains that in the Gulf that the tourists cannot live the lifestyle they desire, so they resort to compounds to live like they choose. In Beirut, on the other hand, known for its liberties, the foreigners can live like the Lebanese citizens with an ease. This again shows that Naila espouses to this notion of

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Beirut being exceptional relative to other Arab cities. She also ascribes a foreign quality to the gated communities, indicating that Urbanistas who would live in them are like foreigners and are not abiding by the true ‘Beiruti’ lifestyle.

3) On the Image of Contemporary Beirut:

When asked about the current image of Beirut, Naila exclaimed that they are promoting it and defining it in a way “to all look like the downtown.” Her critique of the representation is particularly interesting, since she used to work at the Ministry of Tourism, a ministry that brands the nation and its capital. She is knowledgeable of the strength of the Urbanista imaginaire that is centralized around the downtown. For her, the problem is that Beirut is being promoted for shopping and leisure, while the cultural aspects of Beirut, such as theaters and literary societies, are not being promoted. Naila affirms that the current way Beirut is being promoted betrays its ‘actual image,’ giving it a superficial and materialistic identity. Beirut through the media is no longer the place you come and experience difference.

4) The Authentic for Naila:

For Naila, the notion of authentic in Beirut lies in the spending of capital. If it is spent on cultural and literary activities, you become an original Beiruti. If you are wealthy like the Urbanistas, but choose to spend your capital in restaurants and leisure facilities, you are an unoriginal Beiruti. The authentic is that which is conditioned by cultural capital and by the sociospatial experience of life in the city.
Stephan the Artist: A different Beirut

While visiting the Beirut Art Center (BAC), a contemporary exhibit of modern arts focusing on Lebanese and Arab artists, I met Stephan 101 one of the curators of the museum. He was an eccentric individual with a calm demeanor. He had just come from India where he was attending a festival of arts. I was immediately struck by the fact that he went to India, because it is rare to hear of a Lebanese traveler going there. Usually, the destination is somewhere in Europe, maybe France or London, occasionally New York. This set the tone of my interview, indicating to me that I am not interviewing a conventional Urbanista who is connected to the usual list of metropolitan cities.

Stephan is in his twenties, an artist and a curator, at an art center located at the periphery of Beirut. The BAC was a fun place, located at the complete outskirts of Beirut in an area on the lower socioeconomic end of the spectrum and that is plastered with graffiti. It has the usual ‘flexible’ 102 space of modern art museums in which space is laid out in order to enhance the experience of the observer. An unusual place for an artistic scene; the location is itself a declaration of opposition to the Urbanista norm in Beirut and signaled a desire to situate the arts in a new and different place.

1) Framing Stephan’s conceptual map:

When asked about his conceptual map, Stephan responded that he frequents Hamra, the intellectual enclave of Beirut, Mar Mikhael, a hippy bohemian area of Beirut, the Korniche, the

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seaside boardwalk, and Ein el Mrayseh, a seaport area. Stephan had quite a diverse conceptual map and was not restricted to the upper-class areas; he almost did not go to them at all.

Stephan is clearly a rebelling ‘organic intellectual,’ who lives a different spatial life in Beirut. He is an artist, who is not condensed by his social class and who is not absorbed by the world of the bourgeoisie. He is more of the anti-establishment type of person, confined to his world of the arts and the individualistic experience of Beirut. Stephan

Stephan was the only one from the rebelling Urbanistas to give a negative critique of Hamra. While he still likes it, he says it is going more towards a decadent culture and is becoming associated with the extreme ideological left, due to the presence of the Pan-Syrian Nationalist party.

2) In Beirut, who is an artist?

Stephan indicated that the post-civil-war art scene in Lebanon touches a very small segment of Lebanese society. He said that in Lebanon there are mainly 3,000 artists and people interested in the arts, residing in Beirut. He gave me the name of artists and professors from Lebanese universities who would be helpful for my research and who would give good insight into the art scene in Beirut. Stephan is clearly talking about a small and tight-knit community in Beirut that has a certain shared vision of the city. However, while this community is engaged in the arts, they do not seem to be interested in representing Beirut to others. Nevertheless, the BAC museum itself, and Stephan as a representative of the museum, are characteristic of a different Beirut, one that diverges from the Urbanista model. It seemed versatile, dynamic and nonconformist.
3) Critique of Urban Design and the Image of Beirut:

Like all the rebelling Urbanistas, his critique of urban design in Beirut began as a critique of Solidere and its reconstruction of the downtown. Stephan argues that in Beirut there is no factual study of infrastructure and beneficial urban design; rather, design is used in a way to confine and to lock the city. In particular, he finds the downtown to be a kitschy place, alienated from the rest of Beirut. He sees the urban design of Solidere as a façade and ‘aesthetically as empty carton boxes.’ It is a tourist place that is the ‘best of capitalism’ and to which he has no connection. Solidere for him is on display and has no real connection with the arts. He does not see any ‘genuine’ art scene there. He is disappointed that urban design is not being used in a healthy and artistic way that benefits society.

Expanding on the image of Beirut, Stephan is one of the few interviewees to directly tackle the issue of bombs. He says that multiple explosions are affecting the image of Beirut, indicating a security concern for him. He is saying that this sense of insecurity is also affecting the art scene, making it focused on violence. For him, the image is mainly a political and tourist one and does not play any role in his life. It is an image that is the product of the ‘nouveau riche’ and betrays the people who are average and who are becoming walking victims of explosions.

4) The Authentic for Stephan:

Stephan follows a form of aesthetic differentiation in order to determine what is authentic. It is clearly based on geography in the city and intellectual bias. If an art scene
were to be located in the downtown, an area that he finds to be kitsch, he will label it as ‘inauthentic.’ If it resides more in his conceptual map of Beirut, it will be ‘original.’

This intellectual rebellion witnessed in the interviews culminates with Lebanese graffiti artist Yazan Halawani. Halawani is a rebelling Urbanista who is using the aesthetics of graffiti and street art in order to represent immediately a different Beirut, one that he believes in. In the last part of this section, I will analyze Halawani’s work in the context of ‘authenticity’ and the rebelling Urbanistas.

4.5 Yazan Halawani: Artivism on Beirut Streets

Yazan Halawani is a 20-year-old student at the American University of Beirut (AUB) who has become actively engaged in the graffiti and street art scene in Beirut. He is particularly interested in Arabic calligraphy, urban culture, and the city of Beirut. As such, he represents a more nuanced and more personal approach to street art as a specific form of expression. By virtue of being within the realms of the AUB, Halawani belongs to the Urbanista class; however, he is a rebelling one.

Halawani is very important for the discussion on the rebelling Urbanistas because he embodies Bendix’s three thresholds of authenticity. He has the emotional trigger that drives him to engage in this movement, transforming Beirut onto his canvas. Secondly, he uses art as a form of legitimacy in order to get the message of ‘his’ Beirut across. Thirdly, he gives imagery and representation to his ideas and to his debates on the authentic. The rebelling Urbanistas we saw in the interviews, give a descriptive imagery to ‘their’ Beirut, presenting it through their
words and their criticism. Halawani on the other hand takes on an activist role, controlling the aesthetics and utilizing them in order to convey and represent ‘his’ Beirut.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Halawani’s art is its location. Halawani tends to paint most of his graffiti within the Urbansita conceptual map. He has paintings in the commercial Verdun area, on the outskirts of the downtown, and on the walls of the affluent Bliss Street outside of the AUB. While this might appear as a form of conformity with one’s own class, or one’s own area, it is more than that. Halawani is critiquing the Urbanista class he is rebelling against and he is doing it through imagery. Halawani is also adding a new aesthetic dimension to Beirut and a new discourse, in localities in which the aesthetics and the image speak of an Urbanista Beirut. Halawani has released his criticism of the elite in multiple news articles; in one of his interviews, Halawani exclaimed that his earlier work had a western-dimension to it and he felt that he was duplicating the graffiti art of the west in Beirut.103 He said he started using Arabic calligraphy in his art to give it identity and most recently, he started using portraiture of Arab cultural icons because of his dislike of the increasingly globalized culture in Lebanon.

While not all of the ‘culture’ of Beirut is globalized, Halawani is actually attacking the culture of the Urbanista of which he was initially partaking in, especially in his art. Seeing that the Urbanista paradigm of the city is based on globalized spaces, globalized identities and the connection to the bourgeoisie world of capitalism, Halawani chooses to fight that. Thus, he uses imagery and street art in order to localize ‘culture’ in Beirut and give it a more ‘original’ feel.

However, Halawani’s actions are conditioned by his rebelling class and he tacitly admitted how his artistic conception of the ‘original’ transformed from a western to a more locally, Arab-oriented viewpoint. This further adds to the argument on ‘authenticity’ as a construct and as a dimension that is subject to change. In another article, Halawani exclaims that he enjoys graffiti art because it is not ‘elitist’ and anyone can interpret it. He explains that you do not have to be part of the elite or have a degree in art history to understand it and that is why he sees graffiti art as ‘democratic’ and for ‘everyone.’104 Clearly, Halawani is attacking the elitist and class-based model of the Urbanista Beirut and is attempting to use his art in order to create the image of a more egalitarian Beirut.

Homeless Portraiture: A Biarti Homage

This notion of egalitarian and inclusive art strongly manifests itself in Halawani’s graffiti piece called “Ali Abdullah.” While Halawani has drawn numerous graffiti paintings in Beirut that can be analyzed in this research, I choose to focus on this particular one because of its relation to the other main group in Beirut, the Biartis.

The title “Ali Abdullah” refers to a homeless man who used to live on streets of Bliss outside of the AUB and who became part of the identity of that street. Abdullah lived and experienced Bliss St. in a way that completely goes against its globalized image of a high-end and a consumerist Beirut. Abdullah’s lived experience categorizes him as a Biarti, as someone whose life experience auto-deconstructs the image of Beirut. On January 8 around 2 p.m., Abdullah was found dead outside of the gates of the AUB. He died from malnutrition that was

104 “Yazan Halawani is Painting Our City,” https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/features/yazan-halwani-is-painting-our-city.
accelerated by a severe cold that hit the city of Beirut. Abdullah died, but the Biarti lifestyle he was living did not die with him. Halawani immortalized his portrait on the walls of Bliss and gave it a ‘Biarti’ form of place marker, using aesthetics to create a paradox in a street that is branded as ‘Urbanista’ and as ‘global.’

In the image (shown below), we see the face of Ali Abdullah with his iconic cigarette staring at you. His face is drawn with such intricate detail that one would think it was a photo of Abdullah hanging on a wall. This place-based identity has obvious aesthetic characteristics to it. Firstly, Abdullah’s face is drawn with such emotions that one feels a sense of guilt or bizarre confusion looking it. It is also drawn in a large proportion in order to create a bigger impact with the viewer. In this, Halawani is following a form of art activism in which he creates proximity and emotions with the viewer. Secondly, Abdullah’s face is surrounded with a halo of Arabic calligraphy, branding him as part of the Arabic and local culture of Beirut that Halawani speaks off and ascribes to. The calligraphy is drawn with such intricacy and detail that it creates an aesthetic appeal to it. In this, Halawani is embedding a form of locality into his meaning of being a citizen of Beirut. Thirdly, Halawani writes in Arabic the sentence ‘Ghadan Yawman Afdal,’ which translates to ‘tomorrow is a better day.’ This is a subtle, yet powerful message that is about hope for change and confidence in the coming of such a change.


Halawani transformed a space in the Urbanista enclave from a normal wall with no identity to it, to a ‘Biarti’ branded portrait. Aesthetically, one aspect of this space is being used in a different way that does not conform to the Urbanista vision. The portrait is intriguing because it invokes the fact that some inhabitants of this space were not living it based on the Urbanista value-system. Ergo, Halawani engages in a strong form of activism, he understands the importance of representation for the Urbanista class and he fights this representation in his own unique way. In the process, he changes the spatial dynamics of the place and the overall image that is generally associated with it.

Part 3: Biarti Beirut

Chapter 5: Living the City

“For me, being out of Beirut, is like a fish being out of water.” This statement emotionally uttered by Lara, while she sipped her Turkish coffee in her living room, sets the premise for this section. This is an example of a passionate love for the city that stems out of the lived experience of Beirut. Here, I will be introducing you to a completely differently lived Beirut, one that is far away from the Urbanista image and all that it entails. I will walk you through two prime Biarti areas of the city, Tariq Jdideh and Mar Mikhael and then discuss the lives of the people who frequent or inhabit similar areas through the interviews.

While this Beirut is part of the lower socioeconomic life of the city, I will not be looking at it as a completely disenfranchised and weakened Beirut. In this section in particular, I will argue that the Biartis practice their counter-hegemony through living Beirut in a non-capitalist, non-spectacular way, a way that does not conform to the Urbansita image of Beirut. Through their lived experience, the Biartis automatically challenge the image of Beirut and provide a counter-argument to it. Thus, the Biartis exhibit their own form of counter-hegemony that is experienced more than represented. In order to support my argument, I will be using the theories of David Harvey and Raymond Williams, who speak of the “right to the city” and the “lived experience.” Beginning with Harvey, I will argue that the Biartis, through their use of

language, demonstrate this conceptualized theory of the ‘right to the city.’ They are not exhibiting a revolt or an organized social movement; however, they are using a language of social rights. Moving on to Williams, I will use his model of ‘dynamic hegemony’ and ‘lived experience’ to argue that hegemony is lived and constantly debated at every level, and the Biartis exhibit their ‘lived’ counter-hegemonic experience of Beirut in conscious opposition to that of the Urbanistas.

5.1 ‘Is the Right to the City the Pursuit of a Chimera?’

This is a question Marxist geographer, David Harvey, asks in his book, Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution. Harvey’s book is an analysis and debate on the “right to the city,” a slogan that French philosopher, Henri Lefebvre, coined in his book Le Droit a La Ville. In what follows, I will define Harvey’s basic theory on the right to the city and show how this right is already somewhat exhibited with the Biartis. Secondly, I will argue that the Biartis form their own ‘heterotopian’ space, which produces their socially different life in the city.

Beginning with the notion of ‘right to the city,’ Harvey exclaims that the right to the city “is not just access to resources, it is the right to change the city according to our heart’s desires.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, this right is about control and about extending the ability to physically change the city according to the needs and the desires of the people. The right to change the city so far falls with the group that is in control of capital and the group that has the financial wealth to undertake large urbanization projects. In the case of Beirut, this group is the Urbanistas, who like Hariri and Solidere, change urban spaces of the city according to their imagined desires in

¹⁰⁹ David Harvey, Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution (London: Verso, 2013), 23.
order to attract capital and investment into their areas. Harvey would want to extend this right to other communal groups who lack the financial wealth to change the city, but understand their city and their needs in it.

I will argue that this right is already extended to the Biartis through their critique of Beirut and through having a completely different lived experience in Beirut. The Biartis still lack the financial capital to undergo large-scale urbanization projects to change the city of Beirut according to their desires. However, through their use of language in the interviews they narrativize the image of a completely differently lived Beirut, one in which the ‘imaginaire’ of the Urbanistas disappears. Through this language, the Biartis change Beirut by the use of criticism and thinking. In the interviews, the Biartis use criticism as a way to comment on the upper-class image of Beirut and in order to critique the elite themselves and their approach to Beirut. The reason I chose the word ‘thinking’ as part of the lived experience of the city is that the Biartis have multiple interactions with the city of Beirut; thus, they think the city and its multiple layers, instead of imagining a one ‘global’ and a wonderful Beirut.

In the interviews, Beirut becomes non-capitalist, it loses its display factor, and it becomes disconnected from the Urbanista global network, becoming local and inward-focused. Through this process, Beirut is changed from a homogenous and uniform Urbanista image into a diverse and ever-changing Biarti one. This Biarti Beirut is a ‘heterotopia,’ a space of difference. In his preface, Harvey mentions Lefebvre’s important theory on heterotopic space, exclaiming that it delineates a social space in which “something different”¹¹⁰ is possible. This something different is not a conscious plan; rather, it is a natural act that arises out of people

¹¹⁰ Harvey, Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution, XVII.
seeking meaning in their everyday life. Through this, people create heterotopic spaces all over the city, creating difference in the process. In order to understand this better, I will go back to Lefebvre’s original definition of a heterotopic space. This definition lies in a series of classification that Lefebvre’s says exist in the city. Firstly, there is the isotopia, an analogous space that can be quantified and resembled. Secondly, there is utopia, an imagined and an ideal place. Thirdly, there is heterotopia, a “contrasted space,”\(^\text{111}\) which concerns us for this research. This is a space in the city, in which contradiction exists and in which difference arises. Using the word ‘contradiction’ would mean that this space is contrasted with a more ideal and ordered one: the utopia. Thus, the heterotopic is not just a place of social difference, it is also a space in which the overall idealized image of the city is challenged and broken down. In Beirut, the Biarti model becomes the heterotopic space in which the Urbanista image of Beirut is debunked and contradicted. Through their social difference and through their diverse social practices, the Biartis construct various heterotopic spaces around Beirut, and in doing so they create a different city.

From these heterotopic spaces, the counter-hegemony of the lived experience arises. In the next section, I will present Williams’ theory on fluid hegemony and lived experience. In it, I will argue that the Biartis represent Williams’ model and that their lived experience accords a form of counter-hegemony that can be counteracted with that of the Urbanistas.

5.2 Can Experiences of Life be Hegemonic? Living the Counter-Hegemonic Experience

Yes, and that manifests itself in the case of the Biartis. It is easy for us to lump and label any poor group in the city as a disenfranchised and weakened one, a group that is painted in a sad and depressing image. The main flaw with that is that we are indirectly agreeing to, in the case of my research, the Urbanista model of living the city in which the only way for happiness and enjoying the city is through the spending of capital and enjoying a spectacular life. For this very reason, I chose to label the lived experiences of the Biartis as a counter-hegemonic one, in which strength and power arise from their practice of everyday life in Beirut.

Williams presents a new approach to Gramscian hegemony, initially arguing that Gramsci himself did not argue for hegemony to be a totalizing and abstract system of thought. For Williams, hegemony is a ‘lived social process’ and goes beyond ideology. What he means by that is that we should not look at hegemony as just a form of ideology, or just an imagined set of beliefs that is in the power of the upper class or a dominating class. The dominant class might produce a form of hegemony, but this hegemony when it slips into other classes, is being reinterpreted and lived in a different way. In my case, we already established in previous chapters that the Urbanistas accord a representational hegemony in which they control and push the image of Beirut. However, they do not have total control over the representation of the city of Beirut. This is where the Biartis come in; they present a different, socially-lived

counter-hegemony through their everyday practices in the city. Their hegemony does not lie in an image or a certain imagined ideology of Beirut; it lies in their everyday purchases of goods, in their spatial practices in the city, and in their overall lived experience in Beirut.

Secondly, Williams argues that hegemony, even if it is ‘dominant’, is never really exclusive or total. In complex societies, such as that in Beirut, the dominant hegemony is both accepted and contested, as it is absorbed and reinterpreted by subordinate groups. In that case, hegemony is fluid; it is subject to negotiation and debate, getting transformed in the process. This is the case of the Biartis, who in their interviews reinterpret the notion of Beirut as a global city, and who argue that Beirut exhibits a very different system of life and everyday practice. They make hegemony fluid through arguing for a different Beirut than the one that exists in the realm of the abstract image. This is an incorporative process, one in which various groups in society are granted some form of power.

Williams’ model of hegemony proves important for my research because I am not looking at the Urbanistas and the Biartis as a dominant group versus a subjugated group. I am looking at them as two dynamic groups that interact and oppose each other and who present their own forms of hegemony in the city. In the next section, I will walk you through two important Biarti areas, Tariq Jdideh and Mar Mikhael in which the lived experience and the heterotopic spaces arise.

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113 Williams, “Marxism and Literature,” 113.
5.3 Tariq Jdideh: Biarti Stronghold

Tariq Jdidehviii is an important area in the Biarti model of Beirut and is representative of the ‘heteretopic’ space from which difference arises and from where new spatial practices are lived. In this area, the Biartis represent a new lived experience in Beirut, one that is far away from the Urbanista model of the city, but that is quite energetic and lively.

This area can be its own city; it has a longevity of around 40 years and boasts around a quarter of a million inhabitants. It was historically a mixed area between Christians and Sunnis, but is now a predominantly Sunni area. In what follows, I will take you through a walk I did multiple times in this part of the city, displaying its highlights and its diversity.

Before crossing the highway to enter this enclave of Beirut, you will notice a sidewalk that is filled with goods displayed on the street. One shop has clothes hanging from the ceiling and suitcases being sold in front of it, while another shop has a plethora of Victorian-esque paintings laid out on the sidewalk and on the inside. These shops indicate that you are entering a new Beirut, one in which space and goods are not ordered to put emphasis on the ‘refined’ and ‘global’ taste.

The area has a very gritty and bustling feeling to it; the roads intersect each other creating a cluttered environment. It is equally busy in terms of pedestrians and cars; it is not like the downtown where you feel a sense of emptiness surrounding the area. This indicates a strong lived experience and a strong form of social life in the area. It is both a place of residence and a place of social life, amalgamating a strong city experience. The area fits American
sociologist, Elijah Anderson’s, notion of ‘public life.’

This space is very public and is a place where the individuals see each other, but it is not the display and cosmopolitan type of public. It is public because it makes its inhabitants comfortable and gives them a sense of spatial belonging.

Once you enter the area, to your right you will see the Beirut Arab University, a famous university that was founded in the 1960s with a strong connection to the Arab League. The university boasts important alumnus, ironically one of them is Rafiq Al-Hariri, one of the prime Urbanistas, and the current Prime Minister of the State of Qatar, Abdullah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al Thani. The presence of this university in the area indicates a strong educational culture; however, a more local and inward one, in which Beirut is positioned as part of the Arab World, counter to the Urbanista globally-positioned and Western one. Walking straight from the university, you see multiple pastry and sweets shops lined up and named after the families who own them (Al-Daaouq Sweets, Al-Aker Sweets). These shops cater to more local and traditional tastes, focusing more on Lebanese and Arab desserts, instead of cakes and the French-style patisserie. In front of the university is the famous National Stadium, built by the French in 1936. It is a stadium in which important football games between rival Biarti teams such as ‘Nijmeh’ and ‘Ansar’ are held and in which the Francophone Olympics were held. This stadium plays an important role in the Biarti conceptualization of Beirut, for many of the youth go to this stadium to watch games and end up at a restaurant or cocktail parlor after.

Social life is thriving in this area and in a strong way. The Biartis shopping and walking along the streets are many and are always busy. This is not a form of high-end and capitalist shopping that you would see in a typical Urbanista area, it is much more local. You have a mixture of shops, from clothing stores, to “1 Dollar” stores, to sports outlets. However, all of these shops are locally owned and no international retail brand has opened in this area. You can choose to go to a supermarket, or you can buy lemons or fruits off one of the old men pushing a wooden cart with fruits displayed on it. It seemed like a ‘quintessential’ Biarti environment, in which Beirut from the groceries, to clothing to the restaurants was vividly lived in a different way. You can walk in any street and still find a restaurant to sit at and you will see Biartis putting a chair on some sidewalk and smoking a Shisha. It seemed that the two most popular hangout spots in the area were the ‘Abu Ali and the Four Chickens’ restaurants, offering grilled and roasted chicken and ‘El Huwari’ Juice Parlor, in which you can get the local favorite fruit cocktail or the ice-cream blended drink.

Perhaps the most striking visual element to this area is the use of advertisement and pictorials. In this area, you do not have a strong consumerist and display factor exhibited in the pictorials and advertisements. You might have some billboards with advertisements of toothpaste and biscuits, but I argue that advertising in this area is used as a form of simple expression and communication. You will see simple and printed papers hung on trees, pasted on walls announcing that ‘Abu Ali’ has a new bakery or has a new selection at his Furun (a very local way of saying oven, to refer to a bakery). You will also see local advertisements for pilgrimage campaigns to Mecca indicating again a locally-oriented Islamic and Arab feel to the area. Perhaps most striking is the use of cloth, which has words and statements painted on it
with brushes. This cloth is hung from one balcony of a building to another and has Arabic written on it. Sometimes it might have congratulations for the son or daughter of a family for passing the baccalaureate exams, other times it is announcing the opening of new shops using funny phrases such as “Did you hear? Abu Ahmad just opened a new shop around the corner.” In addition, when it is the Islamic Eid, the cloth is used to greet the residents of this area on this holiday. These advertisements show a community that is talking to each other through simple forms of expression. There is no display factor to it, but there is also no desire to be on display. These are not advertisements that are reproduced digitally from one area to another; they are made by families and their children, and are locally bound to the area.

This area is one of many Biarti areas that have their own flare and their own ‘heterotopic’ difference that makes them special. In the next section, I will be discussing another area called “Mar Mikhael,” an area that shows how Biarti areas in Beirut are diverse and differ from one to another.

5.4 Mar Mikhael: Biarti Bohemianism

Mar Mikhael is an area of Beirut that is full of villas and houses from the 1800s and the 1930s in particular. Like Tariq Jdideh, it has always had a mix of commercial and residential social life within its enclave. The area has a strong Armenian character to it, as many Armenians and refugees settled there after the Turkish genocide of 1915. This makes it a diverse area full of quirks and different styles of architecture and with a diverse residential clientele. The

area has always been known for its multi-sectarian identity, attracting groups of young people who want to be in non-aligned areas.

**Walking Through Mar Mikhael:**

Solidere, the Urbanista-style company that reconstructed the downtown, wanted to acquire Mar Mikhael and transform it in the process. It would have been a prime extension for the Urbanista enclave, as it would have had a mix of churches from the 1500s and historical sites that would have worked for tourism. Solidere was not able to commandeerr the land and did not renovate it; however, they renovated its façade.

Before you enter Mar Mikhael you see two picturesque old Lebanese houses that stand at its entry. With their warm colors, brick roofs and pine trees, the houses create the allure of a picturesque residential area. The house on the right side has an international artisan bakery on its ground floor, the famous and expensive Fauchon patisserie. The house on the left side has another famous international and French eatery, Chez Paul. Since Solidere only acquired the façade, they made sure that the gaze of the tourist or the Urbanista when it meets this area, only sees an internationalized and an ordered Beirut. After you cross these two houses, you enter a narrow, one-way street area with cobbled stone pavements. Suddenly, you are transitioned from an Urbanista-like area with grand Parisian boulevards in which your eyes can map out all the details, to a cluttered and medieval-style area that has shops stacked on every corner. You can go in the old alley on the left and stumble into a small garden with a Lebanese boutique next to it. Alternatively, to your right, you will find numerous medieval style Churches
and small grocery shops lined up next to each other. Most of the shops have old men or women operating them, indicating longevity.

The area has a strong bohemian character to it, with numerous art galleries and small locally-owned bars with their tables on the sidewalk catering to a small number of people. While you walk, you cross old and big staircases, a rare site in Beirut. Some of the staircases are colored and painted; others such as the ‘Saint Nicholas Stairs’ have a historical and local fame to them. While you cross these staircases, you pass ‘Rmel 392,’ an art gallery that displays local artists who are not famous and who cannot afford to display their work in galleries.

The area has a plethora of locally-owned restaurants, but does not have any international franchises. You can have the traditional ‘sage’ bread at the famous ‘Tonino’ or you can enjoy some nice baked items at the ‘Bar Tartine bakery.’ There are restaurants and pubs that cater to every taste and age. A famous pub, where most people just stand at the sidewalk, is called “Radio Beirut.” This one caters to a youthful clientele, another restaurant called ‘Enab,’ which offers local culinary delights, caters to a more family-oriented crowd. Next to it is an independent pop-up shop called, “Plan Beirut,” the shop is created in order to sell handmade goods and art from local artists and to promote the city of Beirut. They have a big repository of photos depicting old Beirut, and Beirut during the civil war and have numerous artifacts inspired by Lebanese singers and heritage.
Now, some authors have argued that this area might be susceptible to gentrification, arguing that a creative middle-class has settled in the area transforming it in the process.\textsuperscript{116} While it is true that outsiders own some of the restaurants, they own land that was not being used or was empty. Hence, they did not take the space away from local residents; therefore, the settling of this creative class should not be perceived in a negative way, as it is indicative that Biarti Beirut offers an escapism from the sometimes-forced internationalism of the Urbanista one. The allure and the ‘independent’ feeling of this area, with its old houses, diverse restaurants and medieval pavements, is the best representation of a lively and attractive Biarti Beirut, which can also bring in outsiders. In order to show this liveliness for outsiders, I will introduce my interview with Sasha, someone from the intellectual class who identifies with the Biarti narrative of Beirut.

5.5 The Biartis through Interviews

\textit{Sasha: Biarti by Choice}

\textit{“I do not think Mar Mikhael is completely gentrified. Every Saturday you see the old inhabitants of the area standing side by side with the youthful bar owners protesting against the entry of big corporations and against the demolition of historical houses.”}\textsuperscript{117}

Sasha represents a person who chooses to identify as a Biarti and who finds the ‘lived’ experience of Beirut as a vivid one that is constantly changing through her daily experiences.


\textsuperscript{117} Sasha. Interview by author. Beirut, December 31, 2013.
Sasha was born and raised in Lebanon. Until she was five, she lived in the northern part of the country, in an area called Kfer Hbeb. She has little recollections of life in Lebanon, as she migrated to Virginia in the United States, where she spent most of her life. She went on to study in Washington D.C. and after graduating chose to move to Beirut to get the experience, she ‘never got.’ She works for a locally-owned newspaper called ‘Now Lebanon’ and has been living in the city for around a year and a half now.

1) Framing Sasha’s Conceptual Map:

Before I introduce Sasha’s conceptual map of Beirut, I should point out that she survives on a salary of 800 dollars a month, this salary relative to the highly inflated and expensive lifestyle of Beirut, cannot enable her to be an Urbanista. While it is easy to label anyone who comes from the Lebanese diaspora as affluent, Sasha is not. In addition, Sasha is not interested in being an Urbanista, which we will see throughout the interview. Sasha told me she likes the Biarti form of life in Beirut because of the sense of chaos that is endearing. She contrasted it with her life back in Washington, arguing that there is something sterile about the metros and bus systems working too perfectly and preventing interaction. For her, in Beirut you learn how to function as a raw human being, asking people for help, arguing for prices at some shops and just living.

Sasha gave me the most lived conceptual map of Beirut; it is Mar Mikhael (where she lives), Hamra and Dahyeh. For her, this map consists of her points of reference, indicating that these are the most important geopolitical focal points of Beirut. I argue that her conceptual
map is the liveliest because Sasha included Dahyeh in it (the Hezbollah stronghold), indicating that she has no fear of going there and she does not categorize it as a separate space of Beirut.

In this map of Beirut, Sasha has a flexible routine of going to the office, waking up at 9 am and walking to get a ‘service’ (a local way of referring to the taxis you pick up on the road) in order to get to work. The service costs around 1 dollar or 2 dollars for a ride in Beirut and is the epitome of the Biarti form of transport. While you ride the service, you will be riding with strangers, as the taxi picks up several people and takes them to various locations. This form of transport is a lively one and is a very Beirut form of one, indicating openness of interaction and continually changing daily experience through this form of transport. While most Urbanistas want to use their wealth to have privacy in their expensive cars and isolate themselves, the Biartis have an adventure everyday with public transport. Sasha loves this adventure, she exclaimed that while most of the rich stigmatize the service and tell her not to ride it alone as a girl, she finds it very good. For her, the service driver’s mood always sets the mood of the day and indicates to you how life is going on in Beirut today. She laughingly told me that every now and then she argues with the driver of the ‘service’ from the window telling him, that she always goes to her work location for one dollar and that he is ripping her off. She exclaimed that usually when she walks away, the driver concedes.

Apart from going to work, Sasha told me she generally does not like staying at home. She is always going out, almost every night, especially in Mar Mikhael because there is just so much to do. She finds life in the city easy going, you do not need to plan, display yourself and
look for big outings, and she just randomly meets a friend at a bar or stumbles onto another one at a café.

Sasha lives a fun and simple life in Beirut, based on walking, based on taking random taxis, exploring new cafes and other activities. She told me she just enjoys being lost in the city, every area with its various alleys and intersections make you discover something new every day. From one street to another, there is always a new shop, a new restaurant and a new person with a story.

2) On Urbanista Beirut:

Sasha has the developed cultural capital to frequent Urbanista areas such as the Downtown, Verdun, and Zaytona Bey, but she chooses not to. These areas do not mean anything to her because this is not where she ‘lives’ Beirut. This might seem ironic to the Urbanistas because Sasha is already in the global link by virtue of having lived in Washington D.C.; however, for her it makes sense. She finds those areas to be fake and do not provide her with the city experience she enjoys. She told me the souk is not somewhere she would feel at home. She might take some tourists there, but she does not generally like its scene. In her opinion, the downtown of Beirut is not meant for Lebanese people, it is meant for the Gulf tourists who have more wealth. Since the Gulf tourists are not coming anymore, that area is slowly dying.

She described to me an eerie moment, one that really disturbed her. She mentioned that one day she went to the Beirut Souks after an explosion had just went off in the area and people were still shopping, Christmas music was playing and everyone was shopping. The
Urbansitas were not disturbed as long as their spatial and capitalist habits were not broken. For her this did not come as a surprise as she senses that in Beirut the sense of resilience after conflict is becoming increasingly unhealthy. She compared it to the Boston Marathon bombing saying that in America a marathon bombing only killing two people shut down the entire country and instilled complete shock. In Beirut that does not happen because there is this dangerous sense of being desensitized to the bomb, eliminating any shock factor.

For Sasha this was a life in Beirut that she did not want to be part of, it annoyed her and perplexed her at the same time.

3) On the Image of Beirut:

Sasha indicates that the promotion of Beirut as a worldly capital is a deliberate one. Since she works in journalism, she has seen many foreign journalists from the New York Times and other famous agencies getting ‘parachuted’ into Beirut and only taken to the Urbanista areas. These journalists spend 48 hours and only experience ‘French Districts,’ experiencing the best of food and clothing. After that, they go back and write the article that usually goes along the lines of ‘Beirut: Paris of the Middle East.’

The main issue Sasha has with the image is that it projects a cosmopolitan Beirut, when in reality the people do not have this sense of acceptance. Clearly, Sasha espouses a cosmopolitanism that is similar to French theorist, Jacques Derrida’s definition of cosmopolitanism as that of acceptance and forgiveness.\(^{118}\) For her, this cosmopolitanism is not seen in the Urbanista areas. While they might be worldly in the image, the areas are polished

and cleared of the poor because the rich do not want to be in proximity with them. Globalism for her is not just the image and the buildings, it should be a sense of social trust, a sense of inter-sectarian cooperation and a sense of inter-class cooperation.

For Sasha, it is the image that drives the reconstruction of Beirut in this Urbanista manner, and it is leading to the rise of further walls of separation. She said that ‘poverty is licking people in the face right now’ and the way Beirut is being redesigned is only adding to the existing socioeconomic divisions.

I ended up asking Sasha, despite everything, do you still find Beirut to be global? She said yes, but only in the sense that that there are different groups of people from various backgrounds coming together in the city. However, if you compare Beirut to Paris, London or Istanbul it does not hold, it is somewhere in the middle. She knows it is not any like any other Arab city, but it is still not Milan or Berlin, and it does not need to be. Clearly, Sasha has a Biarti model of being global. It is not based on high-end shopping or skyscrapers, it is based on difference and interacting with different people.

**Samar: Creating Difference in Beirut**

“If you take me out of Beirut, I feel like I cannot breathe.”

My interview with Samar lasted around 4 hours, as she had a lot to say on Beirut. Samar loves Beirut and cannot imagine living outside the city. She struggles in Beirut and financially she is on the poorer side of the spectrum; however, she still enjoys and loves the city. She is of

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Palestinian descent, but identifies as a Lebanese citizen. She has been living in Beirut for around 35 years and hopes to continue living in her city.

Samar lives in an upper-class Urbanista area called Rouche, a famous area by the beach where the average apartment costs 5 million dollars. This is a utopian space that projects the life of an Urbanista Beirut; however, Samar’s lifestyle is different and this creates a heterotopic space. Samar is on an old form of rent, which enables her to stay in this area. Her property owner is using numerous ways to evict her, but she keeps trying to fight it. Samar’s life creates a crisis of representation in the area. While Rouche creates the image of a beach-life haven, in which you enjoy magnificent views from the skyscrapers, Samar enjoys the same view from her humble home. Instead of living in one of the Urbanista buildings, or going down to one of the fancy restaurants, Samar puts a pot of Turkish coffee on her balcony, smokes a cigarette and enjoys the view. She gazes at Beirut and does not conform to the Urbanista way of looking at Beirut. If people come over, she invites them to the balcony to share this space over some Shisha, fruits or juice. From the comfort of her balcony, she recreates the social life present in the restaurant and gets the same indulgence from the city.

Samar told me when she is bored, she yells to her neighbor living in the building in front of her, or she yells to the woman who works at the ‘mini-market’ on the ground floor of her building, asking her to come up. Samar told me that even though she lives in Rouche, she does not buy her necessities there. She leaves the area to buy groceries, to buy clothes and other stuff she needs. Samar creates difference through leaving, bringing in goods from Biarti areas and then using them in these Urbanista enclaves.
1) **Biarti Physical Mobility:**

In the Biarti model of Beirut, you are not confined to three or four areas in which you practice certain habits, for you visit most of Beirut. Physical mobility is strong with the Biartis because it is not based on money and because they do not exhibit a strong fear of the ‘other’ in the city. Their familiarity with the neighborhoods of Beirut instills them with a general feeling of security in the city.\(^\text{120}\) This allows them to move freely among different spaces of the city.

Samar embodies this diversity of the lived experience; she could not give me a concise conceptual map. She told me she goes to Manara (the lighthouse) for cups of coffee, she goes to Talt el Khayat to visit friends, to Sa’yet Al Janzeer to visit family and to Jiyyeh to get and buy goods in bulk. Living Beirut for Samar is not based on plans; it is based on when her sister gives her a call, on when her friend invites her over for coffee and when she needs to buy clothes and items for herself or her children. Overall, social visits are very important for Samar indicating a strong communal bond in the Biarti areas based on visiting each other’s house. Samar enjoys her life in Beirut, even if it is centralized in households, because she has a new story to share every day. Although Samar is a homemaker, she also works on the side in people’s houses to get extra money. She works as a hairdresser and manicurist, working for various clients in their houses. Through this, Samar enters a new world every day, full of laughs and mini stories shared with people and constant surprises. For Samar, an attempt to make extra money and survive in an expensive city like Beirut, turns into a story and turns into an intimate experience.

Lastly, Samar understands that the Urbanista areas of Beirut are not welcome for people like her, but she still goes every now and then. She says:

I know the place [Beirut Souk], is designed to psychologically make the poor feel uncomfortable, but it is still my right as a Lebanese citizen to go. She joked, saying if I go; it does not mean I buy anything because a cup of coffee costs more than the groceries I buy in bulk. I just go and walk around for a bit and leave. In general, I do not feel the need to go to areas such as the downtown.

Lara: A Different Beirut

Lara is a woman thirty-seven years of age who was born and raised in Beirut. Like Samar, Lara has lived in an expensive area all her life on an old form of rent, the area is called Verdun. Lara has a strong affinity to Beirut, indicating to me that if “she lives outside of Beirut, [her] soul will go away.” Her husband lives in Kuwait, where she also had a residence-permit; however, he does not make enough money for her to move there. She joked saying despite her love for Beirut, at least Kuwait has 24/7 running electricity and water.

1) Framing Lara’s Conceptual Map:

Lara’s conceptual map is between Hamra, Mar Elyas and Verdun. Her conceptual map is upper-middle class and is not associated with poverty. Lara goes to these areas; however, she practices non-Urbanista habits of life. She visits families; she goes to cheaper grocery shops and goes to hangouts at friends’ houses. She laughingly told me life in Beirut is always an adventure, you hunt every day for the cheapest of products and the goods you can afford.
Lara does admit that she feels like she does not belong in the high-end expensive areas such as the Downtown and Zaytouna Bey. She says that she cannot afford the lifestyle that goes along with those areas and she does not really like it. She exclaimed that if she will go there, she would feel depressed because everyone will be richer. Lara said she could not see the lifestyle in those areas and then go back home to see homeless Syrian refugees sleeping on the streets and trying to find blankets to cover from the cold. Lara showed how multiple lived realities are existing together in Beirut, indicating while the downtown might be as ideal as the image, the rest of the areas exhibit different forms of life.

She ended her conceptual map by saying Beirut is still her city, you cannot just feel hopeless and you need to work with your people, your acquaintances and your family.

2) Lara’s Right to the City:

In her interview, Lara expresses a right to the city of Beirut, talking about what the city lacks and what its citizens need. Lara told me she knows the upper class in Beirut is concerned with the image and with nice buildings, but she said the city needs much more than that. Lara begins by explaining that there is a growing lack of comfort in Beirut, where people always feel agitated and scared. She continued to say that it is ludicrous that there are still power cuts. This is all worsened in an environment of no security and a general feeling of paranoia, not knowing what tomorrow will bring in terms of explosions.

Lara indicated that there is still no adequate healthcare system to protect the poor. She said she has been getting medicated at the pharmacy for many of her illnesses because she cannot afford to go to the doctor. She exclaimed that she cannot sleep and that she is resorting to
taking pills from the pharmacy. The stress of life and the lack of medical care have left Lara sleep deprived and struggling with anxiety.

Lara then indicated some worries about her children and providing adequate education for them. She said in Beirut, if you want a good education, you need to be rich because if you are poor, you end up in the government system, which is disastrous. Lara told me that she always ends up paying high fees for private tutors because the educational system at school is just that bad. She proceeded to talk to me about her son, who is now in his first year of college and who works as a bellhop at a nearby hotel in order to support himself. She laughingly told me that her son came to her one day telling her he was shocked to see their neighbors checking into the hotel for a small ‘getaway.’ She told me he could not comprehend why people would take hotel vacations in their own city. Lara’s story of her son indicates that for him Beirut is not a world of leisure and is not a world of fancy vacations at a hotel. Despite working at a hotel that is a focal point for Urbanistas, he still lived Beirut in a different way and is baffled by the Urbanista ways.

3) **A Sectarian Beirut:**

Lara seemed to have a stronger awareness of sectarianism in Beirut and in Lebanon as a whole. The Urbanistas, in their interviews shy away from discussing the issue of sectarianism, almost denying its existence, while presenting an ideal image of Beirut. In Lara’s Beirut, a more local and inward one, sectarianism is mentioned. Lara decided to do another follow up on my conceptual map question telling me that the real conceptual map of Beirut is a sectarian and racist one. She said Beirut is three areas, Verdun (the Sunni upper-class enclave), Ashrafieh (the Christian upper-class enclave), and Dahiyeh (Hezbollah stronghold that transformed from
lower-class to upper-class). In this map she says, the Sunnis are hurt the most. She said unlike the other sects, the Sunnis are not allowed to have a building or a gun license. Lara said that the Gulf countries help the Christians, while Iran helps the Shia and the Sunnis are left with nothing. Lara seemed to hold a grudge against the Shia in particular, claiming that they used to be house cleaners and now are billionaires in Beirut. She said that the Shia ultimately want to remove the Sunnis from Beirut and to take full control.

Lara’s mention of sectarianism indicates a differently lived Beirut. It shows that sectarianism is a lived phenomenon with some of the poorer segments of society. It is very different from the idealized image of upper-class coexistence. For the Urbanistas, sectarianism is not an issue as long as wealth and capital is being spread between them. The Biartis on the other hand, due to their lack of financial wealth, are sometimes susceptible to falling into an otherized, sectarian identity.

4) Challenging the Image of Beirut:

Lara blames the current image of Beirut on Hariri, the billionaire behind Solidere and one of the prime Urbanistas. Lara said that Hariri wanted Beirut to become a nightclub capital and he angered the ‘Biartis’ in the process and impoverished them. Beirut for him was for the spectacle and for fun. Lara exclaimed that the process Hariri laid out is still indirectly going on after his death. Ultimately, all of this occurred in order for him and his group to attain money. Lara challenges the image of Beirut as a ‘given’ and indicates an awareness that this image is being constructed to bring in money.
For Lara, Beirut is not a global city and she sees that the media exaggerates it. She said the bourgeoisie go and give their idea of Beirut to papers and magazines such as *Conde Nast* and that their rankings of Beirut are not a reflection of reality. This image is for the rich only and is solely for entertainment. Lara passionately said that the “existence of poverty is in itself proof that Beirut has everything and is not just the image.” Lara is not only practicing her hegemony through her lived experience, but also through affirming that Beirut has multiple realities at play.

She concludes by saying that Beirut is class-based and from the looks of it, it will remain class-based. In this city, the multimillionaire and the beggar coexist and both have a different perception of what is Beirut. For Lara, the Biarti is ‘living in poverty, but is still smiling and happy at the end of the day.’

### 5.6 Creating Biarti Space in Urbanista Areas:

In this chapter, we saw the importance of Biarti physical mobility as part of the counter-hegemonic process. At certain times, this mobility extended to the Urbanista areas, in which the Biartis go in and enact Lefebvre’s notion of the heterotopic space. In this section, I will present a non-participant observation I documented at the Saifi Village Enclave of the downtown, in which three elderly Biarti individuals entered and practiced different spatial habits.

It was the 31st of December, 2013, the day of New Year’s Eve, an event that is extremely important for the citizens of Beirut, especially the Urbanistas who ensure the night is a spectacle. I decided to go down to the Saifi Village Enclave of the downtown of Beirut to
perform some non-participant observation. The Saifi Village is one of the glamorous areas of the downtown and is also a residential area. The Saifi is known for its warm and pastel colored houses, its cobblestone streets and its lavish areas. They say that all of the apartments in this area are sold out, but walking in its quarters feels empty, as if it is almost deserted. This is most likely because the apartments are owned by wealthy, Lebanese expats in the diaspora or citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council who occasionally vacation in these premises.

I entered the ‘quartier d’art,’ an artists and artisan quarter with fancy art shops next to each other, but with no one walking around. I walked around for a bit and decided to sit at a public bench. Now, the downtown in its essence is still a public space, but we already saw that its privatization by the Solidere turned it into an upper-class enclave. Thus, the whole notion of enjoying the day at a public bench is not very welcome.

I was in the middle of an artisan and picturesque square in which the space was so ordered and calm. In front of me was the only bustling and busy area of the square and it was a restaurant boutique called ‘Balima’. Balima, was a fancy restaurant that mixes ‘oriental’ and French cuisines, while having an exotic name in the process. It was pricey with the average meal costing around 50 dollars, a high amount for food in Beirut. It was one of those whimsical cafes; with lanterns coming down from everywhere, chandeliers hanging in random locations and an ornate chrome Christmas tree standing in its middle. Everyone at the restaurant looked like they were going to a fashion show and not just out for a casual lunch. Clearly coming to this restaurant was an experience in which you prepare yourself in terms of clothes and behavior. At one table in front of me, a girl was arguing with three men at her table, insisting that she pay
the bill for everyone. At another table, a group was speaking in English about their recent trip to New York, and another table had European-looking tourists having lunch. Those who were engaged in conversation were poised and refined letting out a quiet laugh every now and then. Other tables were dead silent, with people just eating and using their phones without looking at each other. A BMW type car suddenly came in and the valet rushed to park it, a couple emerged with their grandchildren and entered the restaurant. The kids were also dressed in designer clothes for such an occasional lunch. After they sat down, the couple sent their grandkids with the maid to play with their scooters in the small square.

After around half an hour passed, the people at the restaurant started staring at me. It was obvious that they did not like the fact that I was sitting at a bench in the same space as them. Even though it was a public space, they probably were baffled about why I would not follow the Urbanista norm and enter the restaurant like them. Clearly, I made them feel uncomfortable through enjoying the same space without paying for it. This spatial dynamic was further interrupted with the entry of three elderly people, who sat at the bench next to me. The individuals were wearing worn-out clothes and somewhat torn shoes, indicating humble backgrounds. The entire restaurant looked at them, for why were such people sitting in a space like this? They were not dressed for display, their clothes did not conform to the style expected in this space and they clearly could not afford it. These were obviously Biartis, who were extremely comfortable with sitting in any space of the city, even the Urbanista ones.

The people at the restaurant, despite being annoyed, tried to ignore them. Every now and then, they would stare at them, but the elderly Biartis would not stare back. The Urbanistas
could not commodify and turn these Biartis into a spectacle they enjoyed, as their existence was not controlled and it indicated the presence of a different Beirut. They were having a good time. The two women were eating biscuits and the man was busy sorting through his notebook. After a while, this notebook turned out to be a book of poetry and the man started reciting this poetry aloud to the two women. They were amused and one of them held his hand in the process. This was an intimate experience for them and they really integrated themselves into this space. They created such an extreme heterotopia in a space that was expected to be an Urbanista utopia. They localized the space around them and infused it with their own Biarti spatial practices. The element of globalism in the space decreased and a form of Biarti city-space was created.

I kept observing the Biartis, I noticed they were all wearing crosses, indicating a Christian background. With their age, it could be that they were once residents of Saifi Village, before reconstruction, when it was a Christian enclave of the downtown. Almost all of the original tenants were evicted or willingly left and these individuals might have a place-based identity and historical memory attached to this place. Their recitation of poetry, and comfort with the surrounding, indicates a form of spatial routine they engage in. Through their lived experiences, a living form of space is created\textsuperscript{121} and it is that of a Biarti space. Hence, even in the most Urbanista type and expensive spaces of Beirut, some Biartis are still able to recreate their own form of social and spatial life.

\textsuperscript{121} Lewis Mumford, \textit{The Culture of Cities} (New York: Brace and Company, 1938), 406.
Chapter 6: The Urbanista Hopefuls

“Nightlife in Beirut is much better than New York and Western Europe in general. I recently visited China and the nightlife there also does not compare to Beirut.” This statement with its focus on internationality and clubbing as a form of leisure might appear as the saying of an Urbanista residing in Beirut, but it is actually that of a ‘hopeful.’ In this section, I will be introducing the ‘Urbanista Hopefuls,’ a group who lives in the Biarti part of Beirut and shares the same Biarti socioeconomic status, but chooses to identify as an Urbanista. I call them hopefuls because they want to be part of the Urbanista group and in order to do that, they start describing Beirut in an Urbanista and globally-oriented manner. The people in this group either have a developed cultural capital, or live outside of Beirut somewhere in an Urbanista focal point, or sometimes both. I will be analyzing this group through the lens of French social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu argued that in any social class, certain persons would follow an individual trajectory versus the collective trajectory. This will set the premise for my discussion on the ‘Hopefuls’ and in order to support this, I will introduce one of the main ‘hopefuls’ I interviewed, Jad. Jad represents this group with its ability to transcend their Biarti ‘belonging’ and ensure their transition into the Urbanista clan.

6.1 Individual Trajectory versus Collective Trajectory

In his groundbreaking, book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu outlines the mobility of social classes, their taste for goods and their relation to the space around them. In this section, I will be using two of Bourdieu’s main theories, the first

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being the relationship between individual trajectory and collective trajectory, and the second is ‘cultural capital.’

Beginning with his first theory, Bourdieu argues for the notion of an individual trajectory versus a collective trajectory. The collective trajectory is the usual one that is followed by the members of a socio-economic class. It is the trajectory that relates to the initial capital they had and their projected stance in society. The individual trajectory is when a person, who shares the same initial capital of his or her class, deviates from the projected future of that class and follows his or her own path. Bourdieu argues for this distinction by explaining that we cannot always assume that members of a given class are always ‘destined’ to follow the same trajectory of their class. Even though they are conditioned by the position of their class, they can acquire a ‘social trajectory’ influenced by education, culture and other social habits. This trajectory eventually leads them to a different path. This education and culture is not the normative Biarti one, it is different. We will see that in Jad’s case, he comes from a Biarti background in which his parents do not want to settle for public education or rely on it. These type of parents exhibit a sometimes typical saying you hear in Beirut, ‘I am not eating, so I can put you in the best school possible.’ These Biarti parents save up and sometimes deprive themselves, in order to ensure their children get the best private education in Beirut. Now, this Biarti desire to develop their children’s education turns some of these kids into a new generation of Urbanista hopefuls. In these schools, they develop a new educational capital and

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they are exposed to a different type of culture that changes them. This, like in the case of Jad, leads to a divergence from the Biarti past and a desire to join the Urbanista group in Beirut.

Bourdieu’s theory is useful in this sense because it allows social classes to be nuanced, which is one of the purposes of this research. Even when social classes seem essentialized and ‘destined’ to arrive at the same future, there are always exceptions. Applying this to the “Urbanista Hopefuls,” their initial collective trajectory is defined by their Biarti class habitus. Thus, their socioeconomic class and their initial financial capital defines them in a specific place in the city and ‘destines’ them to arrive at that place. However, certain Bairtis witness a difference in their social trajectory, influenced by cultural and educational factors, that leads them to transform into “Urbanista Hopefuls.” In this, they still have not attained the financial capital of an Urbanista, but they have the mannerisms and the discourse of one. This difference in social trajectory would not occur without the Hopefuls having a different ‘cultural capital,’ which I will discuss next.

The cultural capital is one of Bourdieu’s main theories and is a form of social assets that can ensure social mobility in non-financial and non-economic terms.\textsuperscript{124} The assets that form this capital range from education, to dress, to language, to knowledge and to social assets that ensure upward ascendance in society. This form of capital is strong and can facilitate the move of a person towards an upward individual trajectory that is different from the collective one. Armed with this form of capital, a person can ensure acceptance within higher socioeconomic circles that usually require some form of financial capital. It can also lead to mingling with social circles and networking that can eventually enable the person of a lower-socioeconomic status

\textsuperscript{124} Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste}, 5.
to increase his or her financial capital. This is extremely evident with the “Urbanista Hopefuls” and it allows them to follow an individualized trajectory. Their cultural capital is education, Urbanista “knowledge” of Beirut, the ability to display themselves and discourse. The “hopefuls” use their cultural capital in a way to ensure their ascendancy into the realm of the Urbanistas and to ensure a class upgrade. Through their description of Beirut, and their display of Beirut, the “hopefuls” use their cultural capital as a tool to eventually join the upper class. This will be seen with Jad, an “Urbanista Hopeful,” who I will introduce in the next section. Jad exhibits a strong cultural and education capital that enables him to follow an individual trajectory that is different from his collective-Biarti one.

6.2 Jad: Urbanista Dialectics of Beirut

I interviewed Jad at a café and he had a lot of interesting things to say on the city of Beirut. Jad comes from Tariq Jdideh, the prime area of the Biartis, but he does not identify or act as a Biarti. While Jad might not be affluent, he clearly has a developed cultural and educational capital. While his parents are not rich, they ensured that he went to a good private school that offered him a competitive education. He is currently on a scholarship to pursue undergraduate education in Washington D.C.; thus, for the Urbanistas he is already in the global link. Jad is the best example of the transformative effect cultural capital and its educational connotations has on certain Biartis. He informed me that his dad is Palestinian and that his mom is Lebanese, but he identifies as a Lebanese citizen, particularly a ‘citizen of Beirut.’ He does not hold any form of citizenship and he blames it on the ‘patriarchal Lebanese system.’ He lived in Beirut until he was 18 and he informed me that he comes from a Sunni
background. However, he stressed to me that he has Christians in the family and seemed keen on indicating a sense of diversity in his background.

Before I continue describing my conversation with Jad, I should point out that like the Urbanistas, he seemed to be looking at me as a global link to describe Beirut and to position himself with regards to the city. Jad describes Beirut through Urbanista discourse, using words such as ‘global,’ and ‘high end,’ he clearly has a vision for the city and a social vision for himself later on.

1) Jad’s Conceptual Map: An Urbanista One

Whilst Jad might live in the Biarti stronghold of Beirut, his conceptual map is that of an Urbanista one. He does not have the immense financial capital to enjoy fully these Urbanista areas, but he has the developed cultural capital and personality to blend in fairly well in these areas.

Jad goes to Hamra, Gemayzeh, Downtown, Rouche, Achrafieh and Bliss Street. For him these areas are nice because they offer a sense of globalism, they are hybrid, multicultural, intersectarian and religiously diverse. These areas clearly paint the picture of an ideal Beirut for Jad. In particular, he likes these areas because he can find a bar in a 10-minute walk from a mosque or a church, indicating a desire for Jad for the materialist and the religious to coexist in Beirut. He sees that it is education and openness that bring people together in these areas and allows them to be accepting of other cultures. However, his use of ‘culture’ is a bit ambiguous as these areas all exhibit an Urbanista form of culture in Beirut and they do not necessarily have expatriates or immigrant communities who come from different cultural backgrounds. I asked
Jad if he sees that socioeconomics plays into belonging into those areas? He said that to some extent, it did play a role, in a sense that you need to be rich, but now it is fading and the poor are getting more chances.

He believes that the presence of universities such as the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University in these areas, help the poor ‘transform’ and allow the previous ‘sectarian’ individuals to become more open. He says that he has seen such transformations take place. It seems that Jad speaks of the ‘poor’ or the Biartis from a distant perspective, indicating that he is already feeling a belonging to a different class and essentializes the lower class in one group in ‘need’ of transformation.

I asked him if he avoids any areas in Beirut, he said he avoids the Dahyeh (the Hezbollah stronghold) and the Palestinian refugee camps, although he is of Palestinian descent. He mainly avoids them due to a feeling of insecurity in these areas, which is unusual for a Biarti. However, these areas do not offer Jad the Urbanista image of Beirut and the spatial life that could be in the city. Moreover, the Palestinian camps, if he happens to visit them, would mean he is identifying with the lower caste of society, which would harm his chances of joining the Urbanistas.

2) Jad’s Beirut: An Idealistic and Picturesque One

Jad describes Beirut with such idealism, wanting to paint it in a very positive light. Like an Urbanista, Jad describes this ideal Beirut from the spaces of the downtown. He told me he loves the downtown and the expensive Beirut Souks areas because it symbolizes the ‘will of the Lebanese’ to rebuild after conflict and damage (referencing the Lebanese Civil War). For him it
is a modern and open space that all the ‘Lebanese are welcome in’ and that encapsulates the best image of Beirut possible. He references design a lot, indicating the importance of appearance and the representation to him.

He told me that downtown is very special because you see a Christmas tree in front of a mosque and you see a veiled woman taking a photo behind such a tree. For him, this can only be seen in Beirut and in no other city, indicating a strong sense of exceptionalism. It is obvious that the downtown provides Jad with the image of an inter-confessional and a religiously coexistent Beirut that he cannot find in his homogenous, dominantly Sunni Biarti area.

I asked him don’t you think the reconstruction of Beirut alienated some people or made it harder to make it fully accessible as a ‘public space?’ He replied saying that he is completely for the reconstruction of Beirut, indicating his approval of Solidere. He said I know some of the poor might say they had property in the area, or that Solidere took it away from them, but the property did not have the same value back then and the people neglected it. Jad sounded like he was an employee for Solidere, blaming the poor for complaining. He is completely alienated from the collective trajectory of his class and following his individual one that will eventually lead him to the Urbanistas.

For Jad, these Urbansita areas provide him a with different Beirut. In these areas, there is no ‘east west divide’ and there is no fear of the religious ‘other.’ Jad’s emphasis on religion indicates that he really wants to come out of his area of religious homogeneity to live in areas such as the Urbanista ones. He says that religious intolerance is stronger in certain residential
areas, while the downtown and the rest provide a sense of global living that is ‘emblematic’ of Beirut.

3) Constructing the Image of Beirut to Ensure Class Mobility

For Jad, he uses Beirut as a modus operandi to join the Urbanista class. Through his discourse and upper-class description of the city, he wants to indicate his belonging to the Urbanista class and his shared affinities with them.

Like an Urbanista, he emphasized the club scene in Beirut, indicating its ranking as one of the best in the world and comparing it to the West. He says that from his travels he knows that it is better than the west, and his friends tell him that as well. It is important to Jad for Beirut to top western cities in its clubbing scene in order to prove its stance in the global link of world cities he desires. He said the best nightclubs are the “Skybar,” “White” and “One,” all the premier and expensive nightclubs of the city. I asked him why he likes those ones in particular? He said because people of diverse backgrounds come to seek leisure and have fun times. This a very typical Urbanista narrative, in which leisure, quintessentializes the Urban experience.

Apart from clubs, Jad indicated that Beirut always has tons of international concerts, especially in the summer. He said that bands like Mackelmore, djs like Tiesto and rappers such as 50cent all came and still come to Beirut. These are mainly lead entertainers from western nations and their coming to Beirut, indicates modernity and globalism. He told me some might find the presence of such performers to be odd in an Arab city, but for ‘us’ this comes naturally. The ‘us’ here is the Urbanistas and that is why he advocates for exceptionalism and framing globalism as a natural order of things.
I proceeded to ask him if he genuinely considers Beirut to be a global city? He said how do you define global. For Jad, there is no need to have international expatriates to make Beirut a global city. He exclaimed that people in Beirut are “qualified internally,” so there is no need for expatriates. Beirut is global and modern because of its restaurants, its clubs, its brands and sophistication. The global for him is the same consumerist and capitalist narrative that we saw with the Urbanistas. Beirut is an early adopter of western modernity for Jad and that always makes it global.

I followed up asking him about the Conde Nast ranking. He exclaimed that he is not sure if Beirut is the 20th best city to live in because of the “deteriorating political situation,” but he definitely wants to come back and live here one day. The downside of Beirut, and the one that could make it less global for him, is the politics. The political situation, Jad indicates leads to the constant anarchy and violence. However, he wanted to point out that in Beirut and Lebanon things occur at a macro level, saying that there is no sense of personal danger in the city. He said, here it is not like Latin American, where you will feel in danger of being mugged or attacked for being rich. Of course, this is another way for him to align himself with the upper class, indicating the perils of the rich in certain cities.
Part 4: Urbanista Meets Biarti

Chapter 7: Two Beiruts Colliding

What happens if an Urbanista meets a Biarti in Beirut? Of course, the two groups always cross paths; no matter how isolated some of them might be in their areas. In the previous section, we saw the Biartis, the Urbanistas and their sub-groups in their own areas, living and imagining Beirut according to their own ways. In this section, we will see the interactions between the two groups and the ways their two Beiruts collide. Interaction can range from a neutral exchange, to a more aggressive display of power and resistance. Here, I will offer two examples of Urbanista\Biarti interactions on two opposite ends of the spectrum. In the first, the Urbanistas seek to tame the threat of an alternative Biarti Beirut by incorporating ‘colorful,’ consumable and non-threatening aspects of the Biarit cultural life into a commodified Urbansita vision. This taming occurs at the Urbansita Enclave of the Beirut Souks, in which the Biarti ‘culture’ is commodified and displayed on Urbansita terms. The second one is a form of static Biarti resistance against the Urbanistas within the confines of the downtown. In this, I will offer a reinterpretation of the Iran-backed Party of God, Hezbollah’s protest in downtown Beirut from 2006 to 2008, arguing that it was a short-term way of reclaiming a part of the city that otherized them. In order to support and offer a theoretical framework to these two events, I will be using Bella Dicks’ theory on “Being ourselves for others,” in which she describes how groups of individuals put on a show for others in exchange for money and some form of
benefit. I will also be using James C. Scott theories on “Public Transcript” and “Hidden Transcript” to demonstrate the form of indirect resistance the Biartis engage in.

7.1 Being Ourselves for Others: Constructing and Living Group Identities

Dicks’ theory is remarkable and really problematizes the notion of an ‘authentic’ display of group identity by examining ways in which a group performs its identity for a paying other. I will outline three main points of Dicks’ theory that are useful for the understanding of Biarti\Urbanista interactions in Beirut. The first is ‘consuming the authentic other,’ the second is ‘the lack of interaction through display’ and the third is the ‘politics of performance.’

Beginning with the first point, just as tourists consume the cultures of certain groups in cities, local affluent groups can consume the culture of ‘others’ in the city. This is driven by the appeal of having an ‘authentic’ self, presented for the consumption of the other.¹²⁵ The group has to be itself for the “other,” dominant group, in order for them to enjoy it. This is, as Raymond Williams calls it, a “process of incorporation.”¹²⁶ In this process, the dominant culture absorbs the counter-hegemonic culture in order to contain the threat of an alternative and new normative vision. This is witnessed with the Urbanistas, who out of desire to incorporate counter-hegemonic groups and to entertain themselves, absorb and create a certain Biarti ‘culture’ to be represented in the Souk. In this sense, the Biarti group becomes acceptable because it is tamed and is being displayed according to the gaze of the Urbanistas. Through this,

¹²⁵ Bella Dicks, Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability (Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2003), 57.

the Biarti group identity becomes exotically acceptable and fetishized, transforming into one of the many products that the Urbanistas buy and consume.

In the process of commodifying and consuming this group identity, the dominant group is able to enjoy their time without according any form of strong interaction or communication with the displayed other. Dicks argues that just visibly observing groups being faithful to certain historical reconstructions and buying into their ‘culture,’ allows for a form of gratification and enjoyment without bringing on the burden of actually getting to know these groups and communicating with them. It is a form of surface-based communication, in which seeing becomes a form of communication, but it is as far as it can go. This of course is observed with the Urbanistas and we will see this in the case of the Farmer’s Market. The Urbanistas want to commodify and consume the culture of the Biartis without having to actually interact and communicate with them. Consuming from them through display allows the Biartis to exist through a capitalist and spectacle-based relationship that is non-threatening to the Urbanistas. However, if the Urbanistas actually converse, communicate and get to know the Biartis it would be an indirect proclamation on their part that another group with another reality actually exists in Beirut, which would disrupt their ‘imaginaire.’ This of course is considered threatening and the Urbanistas do not allow it to occur.

Lastly, dominant groups are not the only ones who have power in this form of interaction and role-play. Groups such as the Biartis also have agency in this relationship, even if they are acting out an identity for others. Dicks argues that groups that go on display for
others do not mind doing so in order to attain a surplus of money.\textsuperscript{127} It is a form of ‘political performance,’ in which the ‘authentic’ group displays itself for the entertainment of others and benefits from it in the process. In the case of the Biartis, they have two forms of power in this theatrical process of display. Their first power is that they attain money through mocking and entertaining the Urbanistas and fabricating a constructed identity for them. Secondly, they also otherize the Urbanistas assuming they are naïve and ill-informed of other groups in the city, giving them a tabula rasa to display themselves in whichever way they like. James C. Scott discusses this form of indirect agency that the Biartis and the ‘other’ groups have in his book, \textit{Weapons of the Weak}. In the next section, I will outline how the Biartis use Scott’s theory of Public Transcript and Hidden Transcript.

Scott distances himself from a Gramscian definition of hegemony in the sense that he does not see subordinate groups completely accepting a dominant hegemony. He argues that the subordinate groups have an inside and outside discourse that he calls “public transcript” and “hidden transcript.”\textsuperscript{128} The public transcript is the language that the Biartis use in their conversations and displays for the Urbanistas in their consumption areas, such as the Souk. The public transcript is itself commodified because it is a language that facilitates consumption and a language that makes the Urbanistas feel at ease and unthreatened by another dominant group with their own normative presence in Beirut. The counter-hegemonic group also has another form of communication and expression and that is the hidden transcript. The hidden

\textsuperscript{127} Dicks, \textit{Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability}, 61.

transcript is their actual thoughts, expressions, critiques, and mockery that they do not display to the dominant group. The Biartis, as we will see in the Souk, have this form of hidden transcript in which they actually express their lived moment in Beirut and their mockery of the Urbanistas. The hidden transcript is threatening and is indicative of power and resistance; thus, it is not publicly expressed when the Urbanista\Biarti relation is based on consumption and interaction.

All of these points come to life in the next section on the Farmer’s Market in Beirut Souks. This section outlines how the Biartis construct an identity that is both appealing and non-threatening to the Urbanistas and are paid in the process. This is non-threatening because the Biartis are doing this according to the Urbanista-value system; thus, they can exist in the city on the Urbansitas’ terms without really existing as a different or dominant group in Beirut.

7.2 Provincializing themselves for Others: The Biartis in the Imagined Farmer’s Market

The Farmer’s Market has become a much-awaited event for the Urbanistas in Beirut. A professor at the Lebanese American University of Beirut began this movement in order to promote organic living, especially within the affluent classes of Beirut, as they are the only ones who could afford it. The market is ironic because the whole notion of organic living, which is itself imported from the west, is not highly applicable in Beirut. The average supermarket in Beirut will sell ‘organic’ goods, as everything is brought down from the farms in the mountain and agrarian areas of the country. However, this market creates the ambiance of the ‘organic’ and the ambiance of the farmer producing these goods within the market. The founder called it
“Souk el Tayeb” a whimsical way of saying the “market of that which tastes good,” in order to add some local appeal and allure to it.

The market unfolds in one of the most expensive areas of Beirut, the Beirut Souks enclave of the downtown. The Souks, a hyper-modernized shopping area that is supposed to recreate ‘traditional’ Roman and Mediterranean ways of shopping is a prime location for the Urbanistas. In order to arrive at the farmer’s market, you cross the downtown area from the Clock Tower, enter the Souk and walk straight down all the expensive shops such as Aishti and Armani, until you arrive at a peasant-like market. The rationale of the market’s location makes sense. Firstly, it can ensure financial stability and growth through attracting various Urbanistas on their daily shopping habits, allowing for a break in their routine through a different form of spending. Secondly, once a week, the market brings a local and fetishized feel to an area that has become too modern or too global. It is an acceptable form of locality because it is constructed and is limited to a once-a-week occurrence. The whole location of the market itself is consumed and is commodified by the Urbanistas.

At first glance, the market is clearly ordered for the gaze of the Urbanistas. All of the tables are assembled symmetrically and next to each other and they all share the same plaid-looking cloths in order to create ‘ordered difference.’ All of the tables lie under various umbrellas and all of them share the exact same width and length in order to guarantee a fair shopping experience and a fair form of consumption. The market was a mappable space within the heart of the urban experience.
The dominant people present in the market were Urbanistas and European tourists. The tourists were consuming what they thought was a local form of culture and the Urbanistas became like the tourists, they became so estranged from a ‘local’ form of culture that they came to the market intrigued by it and fetishizing it. Everyone was extremely well dressed for such a market experience, from Chanel handbags, full make up and high heels. The men were mostly in fancy blazers and expensive forms of attire that looked like they were heading to a night-out. The market was clearly one of the Urbanista-experiences in which you are there to see and be seen. It became one of the prominent hangout places, where you come to enjoy your time, consume ‘local’ culture and absorb it. I would see Urbanistas waving to each other and coming and kissing each other on the cheeks while greeting, which indicates that the same people have made coming to this market a regular occurrence. I would hear men and women running around saying, “let us try this,” “oh look at this stand” and “wow, that women’s cooking smells amazing.” You could even drop your children off at the arts and crafts part of the market, in order to ensure a fun and adult shopping experience. It was an affair, a spectacle, in which all your sensations were heightened. It was an enchanted and wonderful place, as Dicks’ points out, a “scenographic tableaux,” in which the dullness of everyday Urbanista life is broken through ‘local’ enjoyment.

The Biartis were dressed up in peasant-like attire, recreating the scene of the mountains inside of Beirut. Some of them did come from the North or from the South but the majority was actually living in Beirut. However, in order to ensure an Urbanista consumption of their goods, they constructed a peasant-like identity. In this, Guy Debord’s Society of the Spectacle came to life in the middle of the market, in which the Urbanistas reduced the Biartis to a mere form of
representation they chose. This was part of the affair of the market, situating the local with the global, the peasants with the urban rich. Instead of the Urbanistas going to the south of Lebanon to have a rugged culinary experience, the Biartis recreated it for them from the comforts of the Souk. It was a polished experience in which a local culture could be consumed and enjoyed. Perhaps the most amusing juxtaposition of local and global ‘cultures,’ was the position of the restaurant in front of the souk. The restaurant was called “The Metropolitan Eatery,” a global restaurant in which many of the Urbanistas sipped their morning coffee or ate their cakes. Some even bought goods from the Souk, ordered coffee at the restaurant and enjoyed the show. From the comforts of the global, rose the spectacle of the ‘local’ and it was an enjoyable display. In this, the Biartis were tamed and existed in a non-threatening way for the Urbanistas. They were living Beirut based on the Urbanista imagination and they were living it on their terms. They did not exist in this place as a separate group with their multiple lived realities in Beirut and as such, they did not bother the Urbanistas.

Why were the Urbansitas watching or shopping in this Souk? Well, it had everything. Firstly, the stands selling groceries displayed it in a beautiful and ordered way; it was not your average cluttered vegetables and groceries in a box. They were refined for the people buying them. Of course, the price of the groceries rose extremely in comparison to the average price in Beirut, but it did not matter because it was part of the experience. Other shops were selling organic soaps infused with saffron, ginger, cedar seeds and ‘essences of the mountains.’ The seller takes you on a journey on how the soap came out, making the shopping experience a

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thrilling one. Other shops had local “fatayer,” spinach-filled pastries, meat-stuffed dough and other delicacies. Some shops had artisanal wooden furniture for the home and some shopkeepers yelled “come try our exquisite freshly-squeezed berry juice.” Most of the shops had items you will find in your everyday shopping experience in Beirut, but they were ‘localized,’ made organic in Beirut with the whole ‘Biarti’ ambience to them, which ensured consumption.

As Dicks pointed out, interaction in these premises is kept at a minimal and in a way to enjoy the display without communicating. Most of the people would go to the stands, look at the items and try not to interact with the shop keeper. Some others were willing to sit down on a chair while the lady dressed in local garments made the traditional Sage bread and told them how the “ingredients came down from the mountains.” Others simply did not know what these local ingredients such as “Kishik,” were and would ask the baker what it was, intrigued by what it was made out of. This is the closest they got to communication because the exchange of words was based on the consumption of culture and fascination. Thus, the idea that an Urbanista is communicating with a Biarti living in Beirut is not there.

Of course, the Biartis had some form of agency in this, particularly a financial one. They were not necessarily using this area of Beirut in Biarti terms, but they were deceiving the Urbanistas in their own enclaves. I asked the woman making ‘traditional’ bread what she benefits out of doing this, she told me “well I only pay 50 dollars for this stand and I get a lot of profit in return.” Thus, as Dicks point out, this voluntary, performance is beneficial and is not just weak; it brings the Biartis profit and wealth from within the Urbanista areas. The woman,
with her laughs, clearly knew that she was playing around with these people and was amused by their confusion and was making money in the process. This woman, as Scott points out was using both a “public transcript” and a “hidden transcript.” With the Urbanistas, she was describing the thyme, spices and the saffron that went into making this dough pastry, exoticizing the effort to make this local culinary cuisine. With myself because I asked her about her actual life, she used a hidden transcript, telling me that she’s making money in the process and she does not care if she dresses up to amuse the Urbanistas. Within the confines of the same space, two transcripts and two ways of discussing Beirut arose, depending on the person she was interacting with.

Overall, the market was an experience. It conformed to the leisurely urban experience of spending, but it was localized in order to break routine and bring about enjoyment. In the process, the ‘local’ is constructed and consumed and the disparity between the two Beiruts intensifies in the process.

The market showed a taming relationship, one in which there was no strong collision. This intensifies in the next section, where I will discuss Hezbollah engaging in a form of Biarti resistance in the downtown of Beirut.

7.3 Hezbollah and Urban Resistance: Creating Biarti Space in the downtown

Before introducing the Hezbollah event, I will point out a theory by famous French Jesuit theorist Michel De Certeau. De Certeau in his, Practice of Everyday Life, distinguishes between
what he calls “strategy” and “tactics.” He argues that strategy is associated with dominant power hierarchies, the ones that undergo the mega-planning in the city and design the current layout of the city from the skyscrapers to the boulevards. Institutions and structures of power use strategies, in which they implement their visions for the city and for everyday life. These are long-term plans that are designed as a reflection of the power of the institution. These plans describe the city as a unified whole and give it its current image and design.

At the same time, individuals who are not at the top of the power structure, engage in short-term tactical plans. These plans occur in ways that are against, or of no relevance to, the power structure of the “strategy.” The tactical plan can range from a different way of living the planned space of the city, to a form of short-term and active resistance against the strategic powers. This is the case of Hezbollah’s sit-in in the downtown of Beirut. The downtown is the product of the reconstruction company, Solidere’s, strategic plan to unify and make Beirut an Urbanista whole from this enclave. In this downtown, the space is designed to be used in accordance to the planned strategy. However, Hezbollah in this space engages in a short-term tactic, in which the party disrupts this place, its plan and its overall layout. This is a tactical and organized resistance against the power structures of this space. With these tactical measures, Hezbollah sought to temporarily change the urban meaning of the space.

On the second of December, 2006, Hezbollah, the Shiite-backed pro-Iran and pro-Syria party in Lebanon, launched a massive sit-in in the downtown enclave of Beirut. The party, an


important power-player in the country, was launching a protest against what they saw as a US-
backed government under then Prime Minister, Fouad El Sanioura. The sit-in with its on and off
format, lasted until 2008, when the Lebanese parties signed a new peace and dialogue
agreement in Doha, Qatar labeled as the ‘Doha accords.’

Understandably, the usual analysis of this event goes solely on political lines, looking at
it as one of many protests that occur in the Martyrs’ Square, the only square of political
negotiation in the city. Of course, there is a strong political element to this event, with an Iran-
backed party protesting pro-western governments located in Beirut and protesting a specific
government that accuses it of assassinating the former Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri. However,
we would be amiss to look solely at Hezbollah from the political standpoint, and I will offer my
interpretation for the following reasons. Firstly, Hezbollah is a party that heavily relies on its
social platform. It has entered the everyday life of its followers, especially the socioeconomic
aspects. Secondly, the party has created another form of city life for its followers in their
suburban Dahyeh enclave, in which they have a Biarti space. This is the area in which they
became isolated when Urbanistas otherized them and rejected them from living in their parts
of Beirut. Thirdly, the Prime Minister, Fouad El Sanioura, who Hezbollah was protesting against,
is part of the affluent Sunni elite, and was a close companion of Rafiq Al-Hariri. El Sanioura
could easily be labeled as an Urbanista. Fourthly, the behavior of Hezbollah’s followers in this
area of Beirut was clearly a way of expressing a critique of the Urbanistas power structures and
their plan of living Beirut. Ergo, due to these important reasons, I will look at the event as a
form of Biarti resistance, one in which a temporary and tactical plan was made to create a Biarti
platform from the heart of Urbanista Beirut.
Before describing the event, we should remind ourselves how the usual Urbanista life goes on in this part of the downtown. The average Urbansita imagines and lives this place as a global platform, in which they eat at Couqley, shop behind the Blue-domed mosque at the upscale Nancy store and then take a walk along the square, possibly ending up at one of the rooftop bars in the premise. With the coming of Hezbollah and its followers into the area, that all changed and the Urbanista social life was put on hold for almost a year and a half.

Firstly, the followers barricaded the area and set up tents, transforming the global downtown into a localized lived space. There were even portable latrines in order to facilitate longevity and the necessities of everyday life. It was turned from a place of the affluent for leisure into a temporary home for the Hezbollah-type Biarti. The Hezbollah members then began to disrupt the ‘ordered’ and calm sense that is created in these spaces, making it cluttered and carnival-like, with screams, music, and chants. This added a new feel to an area that is designed to be classy, controlled and timid. Thirdly, new rituals that define the space, albeit temporarily were introduced. The usual rituals in this space of the downtown are global capitalist ones of consumption and display, conforming to a life of a spectacle. In the case of Hezbollah, they performed localized rituals such as prayers on the pavement and provided food trucks with vendors supplying sandwiches and drinks. Suddenly, the area, then empty of Urbansitas, went from a normative of dining out at Le Grey to a normative of eating food from a truck and returning to a tent. Increasingly, the followers engaged in activities that usually would not be tolerated on the premises, lounging on the sidewalk under the sun, smoking the water-pipe on the streets, and playing the ‘Derbakeh’ (an Arab-equivalent of a drum set).
Ergo, Hezbollah engaged in an active tactical resistance against the Urbanistas and the downtown. Particularly, the party brought their own form of public life, albeit a disordered one, to this space. In its essence, the downtown is a public space; however, its privatization by the Solidere and its reconstruction made it an Urbanista space. Hezbollah seized this as a chance to recreate their vision of a form of Biarti life in this space, reminding people that this is a public space and can be used by anyone. Of course, Hezbollah was aided by the fact that it is a heavily armed-party that could actually put up a violent form of resistance if it wanted to. Nevertheless, the party engaged in a very interesting form of social resistance that focused on creating the local in the heartland of the globalized urban life.
Part 5: Conclusions and Sources

Chapter 8: Conclusions

The aim of this research was not to provide an exhaustive and historical study of the city of Beirut. This research has been a study of Beirut at a moment in time, approaching it from a synchronically oriented standpoint. In its essence, this project has been a spatially analytical one, focusing on the imagining of space, the creation of space and the lived experience of space in the city. Through this, I set out to provide a general model for space in the city, through using the capital of Lebanon, Beirut, as a case study. In this concluding section, I will provide the major points that have arisen from this research. After that, I will provide implications and questions that arise from my spatial model of studying cities and further research that can be done to answer them.

The Biarti & Urbanista Model for Studying Space:

The most important contribution of this research is the Biarti and Urbanista model for studying and conceiving space in the city. In a globalized world, we assume that the citizens of certain cities are part of the global culture of fashioned identities and share the same traits. This research and this model showed that certain cities such as Beirut exhibit dichotomous and different groups that inhabit the cities in different ways.

The Urbanista model provided an explanation and a labeling of the groups that imagine their city to be part of the global order, reconceiving and representing space in the process.
This group is the one that seeks to be part of the global order and the main driver of the notion of world cities. This would allow us to think of the chain of global cities that are connected through the usual label of ‘Geneva, London, Dubai and New York’ as a chain of Urbanistas. Instead of assuming every city is globalized in its totality, this model allowed us to see that part of the city, the Urbanista one, becomes globalized and becomes representative of the world order.

The Biarti model on the other hand allowed us to label and analyze a group that looked inward and that lived the city more locally. This group lives the city in a different way and distances itself from the capitalist and global consumerist pattern that becomes sine qua non of the world city. They inhabit the city in an equally lively manner, albeit a much different one. They add a different element to the city, a local one, complicating its fabric. This group becomes the one from which social rights movements can arise, as they do not share the privileges and the inflow of capital that comes with the globalization of space. Due to this lack of inflow, the Biarti group in cities is preoccupied with living and thinking of what living entails. This means criticizing the city, thinking of gentrification, expressing worries about being pushed out from the city center, and reflecting on the prospects of their group in the city.

**Cities of Hegemony; Cities of Counter-Hegemony:**

This model of studying cities allowed us to reassess power dynamics and the notion of hegemony in the city. We tend to assume that hegemony lies with the upper class or the Urbansitas, as their command of money and restructuring of space, allows total control. This
research on the other hand showed that hegemony in the city is fluid and manifests in different ways.

In the case of the Urbanistas, their hegemony lay in the control of representation of the city, painting it in a specific worldly narrative that allowed for its global consumption with their counterparts around the world. Spatially, their hegemony extended to their ability to command and restructure certain enclaves of the city in order to make them a reflection of the image. Thus, spaces of the city that exhibit international boutiques, exclusive restaurants and designer pictorials and advertisements, are Urbanista places that came about after deliberate and structured effort.

The Biartis on the other hand, accorded a form of counter-hegemony through their lived experience. The locally lived experience became a way to debunk the image of the city and provide an alternative narrative and a different daily reality. Through their non-globalist habits and their enjoyment of simple city pleasures, such as coffee on the Corniche, or social visits at their friends’ houses, the Biartis provided a strong counter-hegemonic bloc. Their lived experience allowed them to have a greater social mobility as they did not live the city in narrow spaces that are solely a reflection of the image. At certain times, this counter-hegemony extended to the Urbanista spaces, in which the Biartis enter and practice their own lifestyle, creating heterotopic spaces of difference in these enclaves.

Ergo, through this model, power was restructured, repositioned, and reanalyzed from the perspective of the various groups.
The Dichotomies of Space:

Through using the Urbanista and the Biarti model of imagining and living space in the city, we came to a closer understanding of the dichotomies of space in the city. Throughout this research, we saw that people can live differently in various and diverse parts of Beirut without necessarily overlapping or feeling that they are contradicting each other. It was even more striking in the case of Beirut, a city with a homogenous population, that shares the same history, language and national background, yet who has groups living different narratives of the city.

With space, two separate appearances of Beirut came about and the city exists in a duality. This is not to say that the two groups do not interact or meet, for we saw in the section on interactions that their meetings could range from pacification to resistance. However, this research complicated the study of the city, presenting the various decentralized and fragmented models of space through its inhabitants. To the rich Urbanista, Alexandra, the city meant boutiques and international restaurants. To graffitist Yazan Halawani, the city was a canvas to paint with thoughts. To Lara, the Biarti, the city was a space of everyday adventures on a hunt for the cheapest goods. Clearly, what we assume is the city as a static object, turned out to be an amalgamation of spaces that are differently conceived, reshaped and lived.

Now some might ask how does the middle class fit in this model? Well, I studied the Urbansitas and the Biartis because they produced the most dichotomous and different spaces. This was not meant to set the city and its spaces in a binary. Rather, my research was an investigation intended at discovering the reasons behind spatial differences in Beirut and the
reasons behind the dichotomy between imagined and lived spaces of the city. Hence, this led us to the Urbanistas and the Biartis, who happen to be at different ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. In addition, the middle class has been historically migrating out of Beirut and Lebanon as a whole and their study would have had to extend to the diaspora, which was not the focus of this research.

Thus, this research showed that the city does not convey the same spatial meaning to all its inhabitants and the contemporary notion of urban life that we assume is synonymous with city dwellers is a group-specific lifestyle.

**Further Research:**

This research, like many others, can be further expanded and taken in different directions. Through providing a general model for understanding cities, the research can be deemed helpful for different areas. One can start looking at the recent changing demographics of the residents of Beirut due to the influx of Syrian refugees. Would these refugees count as Biartis, with the lived experience being extended to them? Alternatively, would they witness an othering and rejection, problematizing an already complex group dynamic in the city? Only further research and investigation can answer these questions.

Another question to look at is the potential Biarti invasion of Urbanista spaces. For now, the Urbanistas are able to isolate themselves in their city-spaces. However, how long will that be feasible? With a significant Biarti majority and a narrow Urbanista control of spaces in the

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city, will this fragmentary city model sustain itself? Will the Urbanistas pursue further policies in order to prevent Biarti resettlement into their lands?

    Of course, the last question could be part of a great question on social rights. Would the Biartis ever espouse an organized civil movement, expressing a right to their city? Would they mobilize and start demanding more financial and social rights within the capital?

    If this movement of social rights in the city were to actualize, how would urban architects reconceive urbanization projects? If the city exists in many forms and strong dualities, how can this be reflected in contemporary urban design? It could be that we see communal urbanization extended to the various communities that inhabit cities, consulting them on how they would like to represent ‘their’ city.

    Lastly, will the Biarti and Urbanista groups become increasingly polarized? Will the Urbansitas become like foreigners in their own city, commodifying and consuming Biarti culture as a ‘local’ form of city life and incorporating it in their own ways?

    All of these questions require separate research on their own and they are all implications that can arise from this model of studying cities. This thesis showed the complexity of cities like Beirut, indicating that such research is only one of many that can be undertaken to study it.
Chapter 9: Sources Used

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While Bourdieu specifically uses the word Habitus to refer to a system of lifestyles, social constructions, ideologies, values and expectations, I will also be using it to refer to a conceptually demarcated space for the Urbanistas in which this encompassing system thrives.

A conceptual map is not just a place of residence. It is also the way the residents of Beirut, spatially conceptualize their city and categorize it based on favorite or most important spaces. I retrieved various conceptual maps from my interviewees during the research process.

The Lebanese Civil War lasted from 1975 to 1990.

Many Lebanese citizens residing in Beirut usually tend to label the proximity of the church to the mosque, which Hariri built, as a sign of post-war sectarian coexistence in Beirut.

The Souk is located in the Beirut Souks enclave of the downtown and is only open on Saturday mornings. I will be discussing a non-participant observation I performed at this Souk, in a different chapter on interaction between the Urbanistas and the Biartis.

An Urbanista would not usually be seen at a place like Al-Rawda café as it is becoming associated with lower-income classes and it does not offer the ‘worldly’ and capitalist appeal of an Urbanista space.

The researcher mentioned these hotels in the previous section, among them the most prominent is “Le Grey.”

The name of the area in Arabic literally translated to ‘New Road.’
In his book, *The City and the Grassroots*, Spanish Sociologist Emanuel Castell claims that one of the most important struggles in cities is that over urban meaning. Urban meaning is the economic, religious and social culture that a group identifies or pegs to a certain city.