

## INTRODUCTION

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One late August afternoon, in the thick humidity of the Beirut summer, I was on one of the many private buses moving at a snail's pace across the traffic-clogged streets between the west of the city, where I was visiting the library at Haigazian University, and Bourj Hammoud, just east of Beirut's municipal boundary. Since the 1930s most of Bourj Hammoud's social and political infrastructure and educational institutions have been dominated by the Armenian population that was settled in Lebanon in the wake of the genocide in former Ottoman lands (present-day Turkey). Haigazian University was one of the few Armenian cultural institutions in the western part of the city after the end of the 1975–90 Lebanese civil war, in which violence and ethnic cleansing had transformed many Beirut neighborhoods.

We were barely moving. At this rate, it would take over an hour to reach my destination. The bus stopped at the large intersection in the middle of the city where it routinely does—either to change drivers or for the driver to have a short break. The driver jumped out and walked across the street to urinate against a wall. A woman sitting a few rows behind grew impatient with the wait and burst out: “Wayn al dawleh? Shufu hayda Lubnan!” (Where is the state? Look, this is Lebanon!).

I had heard this phrase before often—during rolling electricity cuts or intense traffic jams—but not to scold someone for inappropriate behavior. Friends explained to me later that such use of *wayn al dawleh* was not unusual. In Beirut in 2011 it had come to express anger or humor or a hopeless appeal for efficient service provision or for accountability when that service was nowhere to be found. *Wayn al dawleh* is not the only phrase deployed in everyday life through which Lebanese express the longing for dependable infrastructure and anger at a government that seems unable,

or unwilling, to provide it. In quite a different context, for example, the seven-year-old son of a friend of mine jumped up after hearing the familiar switch-off of the hum of the private electricity generator and said, “Ijit al dawleh!” (The state is here!), meaning that the national electricity grid was providing power again. That moment shaped the temporality of household life in neighborhoods like Bourj Hammoud, where government electricity was on for only eight to fifteen hours a day. Washing machines begin their work, air conditioners groan to life, and elevators resume their way up and down the heights of residential buildings. In each apartment of each building on each street in neighborhoods like Bourj Hammoud, people negotiate these multiple flows of electricity on a daily basis. State agencies like *Electricité du Liban* are but one player in this flow of services providing the infrastructure of daily life in the household. For many people in such neighborhoods, this means paying for a subscription to a generator owned by a local patron who provides electricity for that particular block. While generator owners have a reputation for comprising an unscrupulous and ruthless “mafia” that monopolizes electricity provision in much of the country, in some contexts, generator owners have described having to pay local patrons linked to sectarian political parties for permission to operate (“Lights” 2015; Mohsen 2012). These systems pump power through wires as equal players with state utilities and kick in when the national grid supply cuts out.

As much as each household has successfully patched together platforms for the provision of essential infrastructure for family life, the frustration with the lack of “someone” in charge of it all and the failure of the state to provide these services as public goods is expressed through the utterances of daily life. Another often-repeated query in Lebanon, “Meen al-mas’oul?” (Who is in charge/responsible?), is used to locate whomever is “supposed” to be in charge in a particular context to manage resources or maintain infrastructures. In its literal translation, it is a call to locate power or responsibility, a frustration that, in 2015, was expressed as a revolt against inefficient garbage collection but quickly spread to a broader critique of state infrastructures.<sup>1</sup> The unfortunate case of the driver lacking a proper place to take a restroom break raised the ire of the passenger who thought that this was yet another example of a wayward public and moral order of behavior in Lebanon and the inability to locate anyone or any governing body to “take responsibility” for the broken infrastructure and perception of disorder.<sup>2</sup> “Who is in charge” is a constant refrain. Where does power reside, and in which actors—a “failed” state, a sectarian political party, a distant nation, or another state linked to a Lebanese sectarian political faction? What is organizing the flows of people, money, and things through urban streets, mediated at different levels of accountability with the family, sectarian institutions, and the state?

The notion of the “failed state” is pervasive. It is often held to be accountable for the lack of security and for crumbling infrastructure. The common explanation is that this failed state, moreover, is entwined in the patronage networks of more powerful states, such as Syria, Saudi Arabia, France, the United States, and Iran. In the context of Lebanon, however, the very notion of state sovereignty can be understood only in the regional political context of networks of external patrons “because this patronage provided the strongest guarantee for the [Lebanese] elites to maintain their positions of power” (Picard 2002, 180). External patronage provides the support for Lebanese political actors to remain in power, and thus state sovereignty can be understood only within context of these relationships (Picard 2002, 179). International discourses about the benefits of a powerful, centralized sovereign state have led to projects “aimed at reinforcing Lebanon’s ‘weak’ domestic sovereignty against ‘extremist elements’” (Fregonese 2012, 655). Many European and American organizations involved in the reconstruction effort after the 2006 war in Lebanon, for example, tend to favor “good governance” programs alongside traditional infrastructure-building or relief work. At least in the immediate postconflict state, “rebuilding and reforming the state was regarded as a cure-all intervention.” (Hamieh and Mac Ginty 2010, 112) In Lebanon, however, many nonstate or parastate actors are involved at every level of governance as well as in the provision of public services, infrastructures, and urban planning projects, and the line between political parties and militias is especially thin in times of violence as “both state actors and nonstate militias performed sovereignty practices increasingly resembling each other, and coconstituting each other through Beirut’s physical environment” (Fregonese 2012, 655).<sup>3</sup>

The concept of jurisdiction, literally the speaking of the law but in this case the ability to enact authority, is helpful in thinking about the entangled practices of state and nonstate actors, organizations, and institutions. The overlap of actors, of the jurisdictions they activate and legitimate through the cultivation of powerful networks of patronage, is not only spatial or territorial but also temporal, based very much on timing and context (Valverde 2009). The activation of jurisdiction is a continuous unfolding that is much more contingent than it is often imagined to be and, in the case of urban planning in Lebanon, involves processes as complex and diverse as transnational charities, European municipalities, neighborhood political clubs, and diasporic remittances and return migrations. These negotiations and contestations produce the built urban environment—both its material infrastructures and its sectarian geographies.<sup>4</sup> While the case of Lebanon appears exceptional, it actually allows us to shed light on the multiple forces at play in most places in the world today in ways that go beyond the dichotomies of “state” and “nongovernmental organizations” (Elyachar 2003). I approach the study of these forces, institutions, and actors through an analysis of the provision

of infrastructure, a public good of the nation-state in the postcolonial context, and of the creation and reproduction of sectarian geographies in Beirut and its environs. The popular Lebanese saying “Where is the state?” both points to what Paul Kockelman (2010) identifies as agency, in terms of which of these forces can be held accountable for action and for failure, while at the same time accurately captures the multiplicity of forces at play. When one asks, “Who is in charge?,” the answer of who or what maintains infrastructure or order is not always obvious. I reorient the latter into the question that guides my analysis: what are the ways in which overlapping jurisdictions negotiated between various actors produce what we have come to understand as sectarian spaces and publics?

## SECTARIANISM AS DYNAMIC PROCESS

This book is a reexamination of sectarianism as a process, as opposed to an essentialized or primordial identity, through a focus on the urban infrastructures and services provided and managed, in part, by institutions affiliated with sectarian parties and religious organizations, as well as municipalities and transnational organizations. I build on the careful work of scholars who situate the production of sectarianism in Lebanon as a modern social and political phenomenon that is dynamic and processual (Joseph 2008; U. Makdisi 2000; Weiss 2010). Part of the difficulty of thinking through sectarianism as a concept in Lebanon is that the same term refers to multiple things. Sectarianism can, for example, refer to Lebanon’s institutionalized confessional governance system in which the sect is posited as the key register of citizenship and includes a quota system of parliamentary representation based on sect, as well as fifteen personal status courts corresponding to its eighteen officially recognized religious sects. Sectarianism is also “a way of being in the world that depends upon a set of cultural markers and social practices” (Weiss 2010, 13) that have shifted and changed over time.<sup>5</sup> While sectarian identity is an important means of differentiation in Lebanon, it cannot be collapsed onto religion or theology (Joseph 2008). In fact, understandings of sectarian community and sectarian identity are linked in critical ways to gender, class, and geography (Deeb and Harb 2013). But sectarianism in Lebanon is not an ancient system bubbling up to disrupt modernity imposed on a reluctant Middle East. Rather, the logic of sectarianism is a form of modernization. It is the legacy of a nineteenth-century modernization project in Mt. Lebanon that “privileged the religious community rather than elite status as the basis for any project of modernization, citizenship and civilization” (U. Makdisi 2000, 7). Sectarianism, the meaning of sect, and the sectarian community, both in terms of the modern institutions of

governance and in everyday geographies of the city, are all concepts that have shifted over time, particularly since the civil war era of 1975–90.

Sectarianism as a mode of political power and social organization emerges alongside many different sets of infrastructural and institutional investments. However, infrastructure is not a representation, a static diagram of the underlying logics of sectarianism. Rather, infrastructures are the channels through which the activity or process of sectarianism is produced in specific instances as opposed to other modes of differentiation (Elyachar 2010; Larkin 2008; Maurer 2013). Infrastructure is not only what makes things move through space; rather, it is what creates and recreates the spaces through which circulation happens (Larkin 2013; Povinelli 2011). The infrastructures I discuss here do not merely represent the action of sectarian belonging but create and shape the subjects who can circulate through them.<sup>6</sup> Who or what gets to count as part of the sectarian community? We know that sectarian identity is not essential—that is, it is not an inborn quality of the person in question. Rather, membership in the sectarian community is relational: it is a node in a relational field. Here it can be helpful to draw on recent theorizations of “channel” and “infrastructure” (Elyachar 2010; Kockelman 2010). Specifically, what gets to count as an exteriority to a channel, a person excluded from the community, is a matter of position or perspective. Because channels and infrastructures, things like electricity cables or telephone wires, are designed against noise and interruption, the channel is also, in a sense “defined by its capacity to fail,” leaving it open to change and recalibration (Kockelman 2010, 409). Just as channels and infrastructures serve to create spaces of connection and conjoined action, they also serve to differentiate, subtract, or reroute people and things.<sup>7</sup>

Infrastructure is a policy imperative in much of the world, both in “advanced” countries facing crumbling infrastructures and in the global South as a symbol of failures of the postcolonial era. It has become an important topic among scholars in the past twenty years. For my interlocutors in Lebanon, infrastructure and service provision were topics of daily debate and concern and were directly interwoven with an apparently totally different topic, the notion of a sectarian community. I conducted much of my research in the municipality of Bourj Hammoud to the east of Beirut. There I explored the production and reproduction of “sectarian community” both through the proliferation of sectarian organizations that provide infrastructures and services like medical care and education as well as through urban-planning strategies and urban infrastructure projects at the municipality. One of my aims in writing an ethnography of infrastructures and services that connect and disconnect people is to contribute to the critique of sectarian identity as ancient and unchanging (Abu Rish 2015b; Joseph 1975, 2008; U. Makdisi 2000). As the notion of sectarianism is often used as explanation for conflict throughout the region, it is critical to think about the construction of

sectarianism in Lebanon as it relates to other contexts, such as Syria and even Iraq.<sup>8</sup> By approaching the networks of sectarianism as something made and remade in the built environment and through people's daily interactions, producing sectarian community becomes an ongoing, changing process rather than a timeless category.<sup>9</sup>

Sectarian belonging, I show through my fieldwork in Bourj Hammoud, is constructed and recalibrated on a daily basis. Sectarianism and sectarian community only appear to be primordial and immutable. They are actually nothing of the kind, which we can see best when we study sectarianism together with—rather than apart from—the materiality of urban infrastructures, things like electricity generators and parking lots, and the channels produced through institutions and essential services. Begoña Aretxaga (1997, 24), writing about Belfast in Northern Ireland, compellingly argues that “place . . . is both the product of relations of power and the material through which such relations are culturally articulated, challenged and re-produced.” Likewise, in Lebanon, the relationship between infrastructures in urban spaces and sectarianism is dialogic—many urban infrastructures and services are produced by sectarian political and religious organizations at the same time that they are the channels through which sectarian belonging and exclusion are experienced, produced, and recalibrated. Indeed, it is the very networks of infrastructures, institutions, and services that reproduce particular notions of sectarian belonging and community, as seen in my own ethnographic research as well as in the work of Suad Joseph (1975, 1983, 1994a, 1994b, 1996, 1999), Judith Harik (1993), Elizabeth Picard (2000, 2002), Nizar Hamzeh (2001), Mona Harb (2007, 2010), Catherine Le Thomas (2010), Bruno Lefort (2011), Paul Kingston (2013), Isabelle Rivoal (2014), and Melanie Cammett (2014).

In her prescient study of Bourj Hammoud at the cusp of the Lebanese civil war, Suad Joseph (1975) showed how sectarian institutions served as mediators of state resources. This politicized sectarian identity: individuals mobilized ethnoreligious sectarian affiliations in order to obtain resources and services from political parties and religious institutions in the early 1970s. People came to feel more and more part of a sect whose institutions cultivate sectarian identity.<sup>10</sup> Nearly forty years after Joseph's seminal research, similar kinds of sectarian organizations in Bourj Hammoud, and many other sect-affiliated institutions in Lebanon, are firmly integrated into a system of service provision in which sectarian political parties and religious institutions maintain affiliated clinics, schools, and charities. During the Lebanese civil war of 1975–90, the city was divided into zones dominated by oppositional factions. In the context of the breakdown of the state, sect-affiliated parties and militias were more active in the maintenance of basic services and infrastructures, including things like garbage collection (Davie 1991) but also telephone, postal, and electricity services (Migliorino 2008).<sup>11</sup> After the

war, many sectarian militias and parties that had assumed responsibility for these services created formalized social welfare institutions (Cammett 2014). While many see the provision of services through social welfare institutions in the context of Lebanon as something specifically Islamic, this is certainly not the case. Organizations affiliated with sectarian religious institutions and political parties have long served as important distribution hubs for state resources (Joseph 1975). Today, international organizations also work with these same sectarian religious institutions and political parties.<sup>12</sup> The irony is that the same international organizations that are trying to combat the so-called weak state and increase good governance integrate into a fragmented order of service and infrastructure provision that is sectarian in nature.<sup>13</sup> While much of this happens through an ideology of localism or “the community,” in the context of Lebanon “community” is translated as “sect.”

Sectarian community is, most obviously, produced through the mobilization of ethnoreligious identities. But those identities do not exist in the abstract or in isolation. They are linked to class, gender, and geography. Even sets of documentation like informal property *rukhsas*, or permits, and the pressures of real estate speculation in greater Beirut that always affect the everydayness of sectarian identity are factors that shape individuals’ access to services and profoundly influence the built environment while rendering sectarian community irreducible to ethnoreligious identity alone.<sup>14</sup> While people do often intentionally mobilize sectarian identities to create connections and to access services, they also come to feel and understand themselves as part of a community through the pathways and channels created by these services as well as the materiality of urban space.

Everyday sectarianism is about the ways that identity shapes interactions in everyday life, but it is a dynamic identity that itself is necessarily shaped by the political-sectarian structures, discourses, and practices of Lebanese state institutions and local municipal governments. Sectarianism, however, is also about the discourses and practices of nongovernmental sect-affiliated organizations in Lebanon, such as charities, schools, and religious institutions, that have developed and changed over time. Notions of sectarian community are produced not only through engaging with sectarian institutions but also through the day-to-day exercise of “being” within the material landscape those institutions produce, even within neighborhoods that are demographically diverse. The process is deeply dialogic—the very materiality of the city, its urban infrastructures and spaces, clinics and schools, also produce and reproduce sectarian publics through processes that are not limited to the actions of political parties or the Lebanese confessional state alone but are worked out through various negotiations, some of them transnational in scale. This book explores this dialogical loop between the production of infrastructures by a wide range of sectarian political parties, state institutions, and transnational actors and the ways in which the materiality of these

infrastructures and services—things like bridges and roads, clinic waiting rooms, informal housing, and the networks and neighborhood spaces they create and divide—profoundly shape changing notions of what sectarian “community” means and how one comes to belong to it or be excluded from it.

Lebanon makes visible a broader pattern in which access to infrastructures is part of the way people begin to imagine themselves as part of a public. The public I describe is bound together through everyday practices of procuring housing, electricity, medical services and favors, such that infrastructures are “learned as part of membership” (Star 1999, 381). Sometimes these forms of membership are understood in terms of belonging to a sectarian community. The Lebanese political system has institutionalized the sect as a dominant category of citizenship and “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Sect is also formed through the navigation of services and urban infrastructures stretching across overlapping jurisdictions inside Lebanon and across national boundaries. These quotidian processes involve sociotechnical arrangements of people and things that are inseparable from what some might call society (Latour 1993). Those infrastructures often fail; failure, in turn, is significant, meaningful, and constitutive of fragmented publics. Electricity does not flow evenly through one set of cables. Rather, low-wattage and thus unreliable electricity is pushed through cables from sources both formal and informal. Bridges and roads shape and divide spaces into zones familiar or unknown—and thus dangerous.<sup>15</sup> Also powering the circulation of people are things as vastly different as credit, electricity, and medical care in Bourj Hammoud are people—or rather communicative channels formed as an outcome of their social practices through ongoing favors, gossip, and visits (Elyachar 2010). Through the negotiation of these networks, urban dwellers form contingent relationships that create affective bonds between them, rather than a distant-seeming nation-state (Simone 2004). These networks, even when mobilized without any direct reference to politics, are political (Singerman 1995) because they contain within them a latent potential for direct mobilization (Elyachar 2014).

If tangled wires of electrical power from multiple sources through distinct channels depend on the unseen phatic labor of electricity’s users, those channels are wired into apparently far away and antisectarian international organizations and technocratic organizations for reconstruction (Elyachar 2010). If, as I have argued, infrastructure helps create and reproduce sect, it emanates from no one institution or force—be it a party, religion, or cultural proclivity. It becomes clear, then, that sectarianism does not emanate from either the state or parastate organizations or political parties. It is problematic to take these scales of governance or institutions for granted as distinct, or one as somehow more powerful than another, particularly since there is so much entanglement between political actors who operate simultaneously in multiple scales and institutional spaces. I find that jurisdiction is a helpful

analytic language with which to talk about the various entangled powers that engineer urban landscapes, property regimes, and social and physical infrastructures that help reproduce sectarian publics.<sup>16</sup> I focus on the materiality of infrastructure and the provision of services like medical care and education to ground my analysis in the ways that sectarianism and the making of sectarian community involve multiple overlapping jurisdictions that connect and disconnect people and things.<sup>17</sup>

Infrastructure and sectarian communities are reproduced in the present. Yet without a historical perspective none of this makes sense. For this, we need institutional and infrastructural histories. And here we need to turn most directly back to the aftermath of the 1915 Armenian genocide in former Ottoman lands, to the time when French Mandate officials eventually resettled many Armenian refugees in Lebanon. That is also when a number of Armenian-affiliated social service institutions in Lebanon were founded as relief organizations, many by Europeans and Americans but also wealthy Armenian Americans. It is also when Bourj Hammoud began its transformation from a sparsely populated agricultural periphery of Beirut to a densely populated residential and workshop area, built through the negotiations of French Mandate officials, Armenian town associations, and Lebanese elites to house the displaced Ottoman Armenians. It is important to emphasize how these organizations as well as the transnational Armenian political parties and religious institutions fit into the unfolding political dynamics in Lebanon at the time. For one thing, this meant adapting to, and helping to coconstitute, the emerging confessional system of the Lebanese government (Nalbantian 2013). Such a process of adaptation is organizational, bureaucratic, and material. It is not merely a mode of representation overlaid upon a preexisting confessional “community,” or “sect.” Armenian refugees were, in a sense, reconfigured as members of “sects” in order to be legible within emerging juridico-legal categories in the Lebanese political sectarian system. Recent scholarship has emphasized the institutional, infrastructural, and spatial aspects of the Armenian process of becoming part of the sectarian system in Lebanon (Migliorino 2008; Nalbantian 2011, 2013). These same scholars help us situate the processes through which the “Armenian community” as it is understood today was produced through the negotiations of various actors, not somehow transported intact from former Ottoman lands to Lebanon.

Just as producing the sect is a process negotiated through various actors, the institutionalization of the political sectarian system in Lebanon was worked out through various encounters between British, French, and Ottoman officials as well as Lebanese elites and nonelites (U. Makdisi 2000; Thompson 2000). Brian Larkin (2008, 6) writes that “at any one point urban space is made up of the historical layering of networks connected by infrastructures.” In Bourj Hammoud, these infrastructural layers are deeply

connected to the negotiations of French and Ottoman officials in the twilight of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the mass displacements of refugees throughout the twentieth century and beyond. As a concept worked on and through various moments of crisis and entanglement from the neighborhood block to the Sublime Porte, the concept of sectarianism itself has a history, and it is to this history that I turn first.

## INSTITUTIONALIZING SECTARIANISM, ENGINEERING THE URBAN

### THE ROOTS OF “SECTARIANISM” FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO THE FRENCH MANDATE

Discourses about sectarianism and ethnic conflict as inevitable are nothing new in Lebanon. They go back much further than the conflicts of the last several decades. Historian Ussama Makdisi (1996, 26) argues that while sectarianism in Lebanon is often posited as a violent trace of a premodern past, it is “a nationalist creation that dates no further back than the beginnings of the modern era.” In *The Culture of Sectarianism* (2000), Makdisi contextualizes the discourses about the inevitability of sectarian conflict in Lebanon by focusing on what many historians consider to be the first large-scale sectarian conflict between Maronite Christians and Druze in Mt. Lebanon, in 1860, during a time of somewhat detached Ottoman rule. Before 1860 the region was dominated by crosscutting alliances between leading quasi-feudal families of different sects. Makdisi argues, however, that this was not an idyllic time without violence. Rather, “violence existed in pre-1860 Ottoman Lebanese society, but it consisted primarily of elite violence deployed to reaffirm a rigid, status-based social order defined as the rule of knowledge over ignorance,” and status was not stratified according to religious identity (29). Historian Leila Fawaz (1995, 17) also writes that the Mt. Lebanon region was characterized by “a network of alliances among its leading Druze and Maronite [Christian] families based on a chain of clan loyalties that cut across sectarian lines and took precedence over loyalty to village, district, or church.” A number of factors were involved in severing the ties between Druze and Christian notables and families who traditionally ruled the Mt. Lebanon area jointly, rather than as representatives of their religious “communities” (U. Makdisi 1996; L. Fawaz 1995). First, alignments and patron-client relationships were radically altered by Egyptian occupation (under Muhammad Ali), European intervention, and subsequent defeat by the Ottomans. Second, changing policies within the Ottoman Empire, as well as pressures from European (in Lebanon, mainly

French but also British) missionaries, military actors, and merchants, created conditions where sectarian identity emerged as an important category of rule and a way in which to appeal for rights. Finally, the favored status of Maronite Christians, who reaped the profits of French investment in the silk industry in the early part of the nineteenth century, increased tensions in the lead-up to 1860 (L. Fawaz 1995).

Ussama Makdisi (2000) demonstrates how Ottoman and French officials actively constructed an interpretation of the events as an inevitable outburst of primordial ethnic hatred and ongoing violence between Christians and Druze. Both Ottoman and French officials used the idea of sectarian animosity as innate to Mt. Lebanon as justification for political and spatial governance reforms over the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. One of the results of the violence leading up to the events of 1860 was the production of “sectarian geographies” in Mt. Lebanon; Maronites and Druze no longer felt that their security and safety in so-called mixed areas of Mt. Lebanon were guaranteed. This moment of insecurity was not only seized on by the French seeking to intervene but also echoed in certain Lebanese sectarian discourses later on in the twentieth century.

The violence led to structural reforms as well. Ottoman, French, and British military personnel and consular officials pushed the Sublime Porte to adopt a new form of governance for the Mt. Lebanon area in the wake of the massacres (U. Makdisi 2000). In June 1861 the Ottoman government, along with France, Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia, adopted the *Règlement Organique*, which granted the Mt. Lebanon area semiautonomous status and established the *mutasarrifiyya* to replace the previously existing *Kaymakamates*, which had divided Mt. Lebanon into two parts, governed by two “mayors.” The *mutasarrifiyya* would be ruled by a Christian *mutasarrif* (a kind of regional governor) appointed by the Sublime Porte (L. Fawaz 1995; Kanaan 2005; U. Makdisi 2000). At the same time, it is a notable moment in that it created a “‘Lebanese’ identity” with a “legal definition and was associated with a ‘modern’ system of administration” for the first time (Kanaan 2005, 77).

Emerging social and class divisions were reinforced through urban infrastructures as the Ottomans and the French competed in their attempts to cultivate influence over Beirut.<sup>18</sup> The construction of the port, tramway, and rail infrastructure created new divisions in space, rerouting people away “from their customary work and place in the city,” and consolidated the power of ruling elites of different sects (Hanssen 2005, 266). By 1903 urban riots in Beirut broke out, which, as they were managed and contained by patron-client relationships, “often turned sectarian through the very act of crisis management” through these channels (Hanssen 2005, 266). Meanwhile, French infrastructural projects were changing the everyday

lives of Beirut dwellers. As France's investment in the urban center came to rival the Ottomans', these projects can also be interpreted as a contest for influence. Despite these increased French infrastructural investments, Hanssen argues that Beirut's upgraded status as a provincial capital city in 1888 lies in the attempt to keep an increasingly contested region under Ottoman sovereignty. With a semiautonomous and unruly Mt. Lebanon nearby, the granting of the previously marginal town of Beirut the status of a provincial capital within the empire was regarded as an effective mode of governance, both to pacify sectarian violence and to maintain sovereignty over Beirut and Mt. Lebanon.

The next important formal transformation of the status of Lebanon occurred after World War I, with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. In 1918, as part of the overall Mandate arrangement, the League of Nations divided the region between French and British Mandates. Lebanon was allocated, along with the rest of "Greater Syria," to the French. The goal of the Mandate was to move along territories that were not fully "backward" like colonies and yet not civilized enough for independence into conditions of civilizational development appropriate for independence.<sup>19</sup> By 1920 France took another step toward the creation of Lebanon as a state when it established the borders of the *État du Grand Liban*, or Greater Lebanon, as a distinct territory with autonomy from the much larger "Greater Syria," though both remained under French Mandate (Longrigg 1958; Salibi 1965). It was not until 1943 that Lebanon became an independent state.

Along with Lebanese elites, French Mandate administrators created the civil and political institutions of governance that produced the modern Lebanese confessional system (Thompson 2000). The political system produced during this era, and underscored by the National Pact of 1943,<sup>20</sup> justifies its allocation of proportional representation using data from the 1932 census (the last one conducted in Lebanon), which shows Maronite Christians as the majority sect, with Sunni Muslims, Shi'a Muslims, and Druze as second, third, and fourth most populous sects (Picard 2002).<sup>21</sup> While there are eighteen other officially recognized sects (Greek Orthodox, for example), the convention follows that a Maronite Christian must be president, a Sunni Muslim must be prime minister, and a Shi'a Muslim must be Speaker of Parliament.<sup>22</sup> The political sectarian system was in many ways a product of the aforementioned post-1860 French, British, and Ottoman understandings of Mt. Lebanon, whereby sectarian alliances were posited as primordial and essential to the functioning of Lebanese society (U. Makdisi 2000). During and immediately after the French Mandate period, the number of officially incorporated municipalities (Arabic, *baladiyes*; French, *municipalités*) in Lebanon began to grow as French urban designs, particularly for highway infrastructure, continued to be implemented as late as the 1960s.

In addition to enacting a sectarian quota system for political representation in government offices, Lebanon's confessional system requires that laws of personal status are decided through fifteen religious courts corresponding to the eighteen recognized sects in Lebanon.<sup>23</sup> All marriages performed in Lebanon, for example, must be registered with one of the religious courts. The only option for a mixed-sect couple where neither one wants to convert to another religion is to perform a "civil marriage" in another country, usually nearby Cyprus. Couples married under the auspices of one of the recognized religious courts can seek a legal divorce only through the same court, barring religious conversion.<sup>24</sup> The rules and laws vary between courts.

Many of my Lebanese interlocutors attribute the emergence of sectarian tension in Lebanon to "foreign meddling" and "elite corruption" starting with the influence of the French in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historical accounts, however, muddle this easy dichotomy between "foreign" influence and local actors. The shaping of Lebanese politics during the Mandate period and immediately after was also not a uniquely elite endeavor but rather a process worked out through a number of quotidian institutions and practices (Thompson 2000). Critical to understanding the development of Lebanese politics and juridical system are issues related to gender hierarchies, shifting patron-client relationships, and transnational migration and return migration, increasing the circulation of remittances and different notions of modernity (Khater 2001; Thompson 2000). In Lebanon, citizenship is inherited only through a male relative—one's father or one's husband. A woman can give citizenship neither to a child born to a non-Lebanese father nor to her non-Lebanese husband. Historian Elizabeth Thompson (2000) traces how such laws were drafted in negotiations between elites and French Mandate officials in transition to Lebanese independence. She argues that patriarchal elites essentially sacrificed women's demands for equal political participation and citizenship in the new nation-state; these compromises were justified in terms of sacrificing women's full rights of citizenship for alliances with religious authorities and patriarchal elites and ruling families.<sup>25</sup>

The making of sectarianism, and the imagining of sectarian communities, was and is a process worked out through the institutions of the Lebanese state, as well as the numerous social, juridical, religious, and cultural institutions of particular sects (Weiss 2010). It is a process that is ongoing and dynamic. In Lebanon, both governmental and sectarian institutions are entangled and coconstitutive of the Lebanese nation-state in ways that offset questions of sovereignty to one of jurisdiction. From the start of the modern Lebanese state, "sect" was coconstituted with modern state institutions. To be more specific, the powers of sectarian political factions are entangled with state institutions, particularly in terms of the urban governance of Beirut and other municipalities.<sup>26</sup> This last point is particularly critical when thinking about a municipality like Bourj Hammoud, which was transformed from an

agricultural periphery into a densely populated suburb with the assistance of French Mandate officials in order to permanently resettle Armenian refugees from the genocide in former Ottoman lands. Armenian sects in Lebanon did not spontaneously emerge from the Armenian refugee community. Nor are those sects merely another node in the transnational Armenian diaspora, which is by no means monolithic. Rather, I argue, the Armenian sects were coproduced by French Mandate officials, Armenian political parties and town associations, and the newly formed confessional state, as well as the nexus of space, urban infrastructure building, and networks of social service organizations, schools, and churches within the municipal district of Bourj Hammoud.

### A NEW ARMENIA IN LEBANON: BUILDING BOURJ HAMMOUD

Most Armenians came to Lebanon as refugees. They were displaced from Ottoman territories during the systematic massacres and deportations of 1915–19 known as the Armenian genocide.<sup>27</sup> Lebanese Armenian sects were created from a group of refugees from different towns and villages, of different religious backgrounds, who spoke different languages ranging from Turkish to specific local or village dialects like *hajineren*, the local dialect of the town of Hadjin, to Western Armenian. As such, the creation of Lebanese Armenian sectarian identity (as both an administrative legal category and a felt identity) is quite specific to Lebanon and its confessional system.<sup>28</sup> Before the arrival of the Ottoman Armenian refugees, today's Bourj Hammoud consisted of agricultural fields. Its urbanization was a direct outcome of the displacement of the surviving Ottoman Armenians. The urban form and networks of Bourj Hammoud are a direct legacy of the genocide—likewise its networks of aid, mainly from European and American missionaries, who founded the social educational and medical service institutions that still exist in the neighborhood and elsewhere in Lebanon today. Bourj Hammoud soon became the center of the new Lebanese Armenian social and cultural world.<sup>29</sup> It was full of theaters, publishing houses, churches, and schools, all established by refugees and their supporting NGOs, churches, and diasporic organizations. The Bourj Hammoud municipality has long been dominated by Armenian sectarian political organizations (Joseph 1975; Nalbantian 2011). We cannot understand how this is so if we ignore the extent to which the Lebanese Armenian sect and the urbanization of Bourj Hammoud were coproduced in the aftermath of genocide.

While under Ottoman rule, Armenians in what is now modern-day Turkey lived as a minority in the *millet* system that governed non-Muslim communities, though, as historian Nicola Migliorino (2008) argues, the system evolved through a long and ongoing process in which the meaning of

these categories changed over time. Under this system, the patriarchs of the Apostolic Church (like their Greek Orthodox and non-Muslim counterparts) were also the main political representatives of all Armenians, regardless of their religion, in Istanbul. Though the vast majority of Armenians in Anatolia and Cilicia were subsistence farmers, shepherds, and peasants, those from the larger and well-developed towns like Adana could also be merchants, teachers, doctors, and a myriad of other professions (Miller and Miller 1993).

During the genocide of 1915–19, Armenians were sent on death marches into the deserts of Syria and Iraq (Akçam 2007, 2012; Kevorkian 2011; Suny 2015).<sup>30</sup> Survivors eventually settled in a number of countries in the Middle East, including Lebanon, but many ended up migrating to Europe or North America. Many Armenians in Lebanon are from Cilicia, a region in southwestern Turkey. Those that survived deportation found themselves in refugee camps, mainly in Syria, without permanent quarters and hoping to return to their villages and towns. In 1919, in an attempt to bolster their territorial interests in the Middle East, the French repatriated Armenians to Cilicia in order to create an autonomous region sympathetic to Europe and also to thwart the Kemalist nationalist aspirations to create a Turkish state out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire (Tachjian 2004). After more than a year of military resistance from Turkish forces in Cilicia, however, France took a more conciliatory approach. In October 1921 the Treaty of Ankara assured France's withdrawal from Cilicia in exchange for Turkey's acceptance of French control over Greater Syria.

By 1922 French administrators withdrawing from Cilicia evacuated Armenian refugees who had been resettled there. Estimates vary, but between sixty thousand and eighty thousand Armenians were made refugees for a second time (Mandel 2003; Migliorino 2008; Sanjian 2001). Many of them were brought to Lebanon and found themselves on the shores of Karantina, a patch of land near the port in East Beirut that was designated as a quarantine area (Fawaz and Peillen 2003). In Karantina, the refugees lived in makeshift shacks (Meymariyan and Gomidas Institute 2004). With the help of the French Mandate government, many Armenian refugees were able to leave the camp and settle in East Beirut or Bourj Hammoud within a few years.<sup>31</sup> For Armenians, becoming Lebanese citizens meant more than just legal rights to own property and work. They are officially recognized within the framework of sects with full political rights of participation in government (Migliorino 2008). By the 1930s much of the then-agricultural district of Bourj Hammoud had been purchased by Armenian town associations that collected resources and regrouped Armenian residents of former Ottoman towns in Lebanon (Migliorino 2008; Fawaz and Peillen 2003). These town associations subdivided plots for sale to individual association members and their families, effectively creating distinct neighborhoods that bore the name of the town of origin (Migliorino 2008; Schahgaldian 1979).<sup>32</sup> Both

Armenians and non-Armenians still refer to their neighborhoods by these names. Marash or Nor Marash (New Marash) in the northwestern corner of Bourj Hammoud was the first neighborhood to be built by what is still the largest and most powerful of the Armenian town associations, Marash. As Keith Watenpaugh (2015, 619) argues, the building of new neighborhoods for Armenians in Aleppo and Beirut was part of a project of “moving the refugees into modern urban society as members of what French policy makers identified as the respectable lower-middle class.” The relationship between notions of modernity, class, and religious identity in a burgeoning Lebanese confessional governance system as well as French interests in the region came together in urban development projects like Bourj Hammoud. The Armenian presence in Lebanon is a critical aspect of the relationship between urban infrastructure and the development of sectarian geographies under the French Mandate and beyond.

Town associations, also known as compatriotic unions, played a crucial role in marshaling resources and establishing the Armenian community in Lebanon in those early years.<sup>33</sup> Among the early obstacles for Armenian genocide survivors in Beirut was the great degree of linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity in their communities. Many Armenians spoke Turkish or a number of village dialects, not Western Armenian, which is the standardized modern dialect taught in Armenian schools in Lebanon today.<sup>34</sup> There were also differences of background in terms of rural versus urban populations, as well as religion. The three Armenian religious groups in Lebanon are the Armenian Evangelical Church, an outgrowth of European and American Protestant missionary activities in the former Ottoman Empire, the Armenian Catholic Church, and the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Apostolic Church is the most powerful and represents the majority “sect” within the Armenian community.<sup>35</sup> Thus, despite attempts to consolidate an Armenian national consciousness and to promote an ethnic rather than local identity, many in Lebanon continued to organize themselves according to village and regional ties.<sup>36</sup> None of the Armenian political parties nor the church apparatus was able to consolidate a unified Armenian bloc during the first elections in 1934, and many of the refugees remained apathetic about participation in Lebanese politics (Migliorino 2008). This, however, would change in ways that are intertwined with the production of Armenian social and political geographies in Beirut and Bourj Hammoud, which I will explain in the following section.

The project of “Armenianization,” teaching Western Armenian (not Turkish or other village dialects) to the new generation of children born in Beirut while self-consciously constructing space according to village and town associations that hoped to keep their residents in close proximity, became critical in a unique way in Lebanon. Under the Lebanese confessional system, every sect must have a corresponding politico-religious apparatus

for issues of personal status as well as to elect representatives to serve in the Lebanese Parliament, where seats are based on confessional demographics. In the case of the Armenians, there is a complicated overlay of the remnants of the *millet* system to the Lebanese sectarian system that makes it appear much more seamless than it is. Recent scholarship critiques the notion that Armenians represent a kind of exception or are somehow peripheral to the Lebanese confessional system by showing how their institutions and apparatuses co-emerged with the Lebanese independent state in the 1940s and 1950s (Nalbantian 2013). As Max Weiss (2010, 25) writes, “Each sectarian community in Lebanon has become sectarian in its own particular way as a result of specific sets of discursive, institutional and material transformations.” The making of the Lebanese Armenian sect from a group of displaced people from elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire in the 1920s and 1930s can tell us something about the production of sectarianism in Lebanon as a political, spatial, and urban project.

Though the cultivation of Armenian national identity was a deliberate project, community leaders at the time portrayed the development of Bourj Hammoud as a reconstruction effort whereby the Armenian community was simply resurrected in a new location (Migliorino 2008). This discourse has continued into the present day. While Western Armenian is the language of daily life among Armenians in Bourj Hammoud, most people under sixty are also fluent in Arabic, as they seek work outside of the neighborhood, learn to read and write Arabic in Armenian schools, and watch Arabic-language television programs. Still, the density of Armenian institutions, the sound of the Armenian language being spoken, Armenian music echoing through the narrow streets, and the presence of Armenian script on signs and posters helps to create the special sense of Bourj Hammoud as an Armenian space, unique in the greater Beirut area. It is precisely this proximity and density of Armenian institutions that helps create the sense of an Armenian public sphere among my interlocutors.

### BOURJ HAMMOUD: THE MAKING OF AN ARMENIAN “PUBLIC SPHERE”

Located just east of the Beirut River, which marks the boundary of the municipality of Beirut, Bourj Hammoud is a densely populated, mixed residential, commercial, and workshop district that is one of the oldest popular neighborhoods in the eastern part of greater Beirut. An estimated ninety thousand people live in the municipal district that comprises about 2.4 square kilometers (0.9 square mile).<sup>37</sup> Unlike many of the neighborhoods across the river in Beirut, Bourj Hammoud has a bustling shopping district for inexpensive goods, as well as workshops that produce shoes, jewelry, and clothing. It also has historically had some of the lowest rents for a neighborhood so close to



**Figure I.1.** Rooftop view of Bourj Hammoud. Photo by Rosy Kuftedjian.



**Figure I.2.** The Beirut River dividing Bourj Hammoud from the municipality of Beirut. Photo by author.

the Beirut districts of Ashrafiyeh and downtown. For many in Beirut, Bourj Hammoud is known as the “Armenian quarter.” For some of my Armenian interlocutors, it is a special place in Lebanon where one can feel enmeshed in a world not quite like that outside the neighborhood. Hratch, a young Armenian man in his twenties, told me: “As a child growing up there, I used to think I was living in Armenia, not Lebanon . . . everything around me referenced ‘Armenian’ culture rather than a ‘Lebanese’ culture, from street signs to shop names, everything was in Armenian.” Suzy, an Armenian woman in her thirties who grew up across the river in nearby Beirut, expressed how it was a place where she felt a deep sense of belonging: “It is very special to me, every time I walk there on the streets I feel secure. It’s weird, but it’s true. I feel familiar. As if I’m in my house.”

Indeed, the space of the city is dense with Armenian schools, clinics, and businesses, and many signs are written in Armenian script. The flags of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Tashnag political party hang over many streets, and anti-Turkish graffiti is omnipresent on its walls. However, the stereotype of Bourj Hammoud as a monolithic Armenian district is misleading, as the city is quite demographically diverse. It is not uncommon to find flags for the Lebanese Forces (a right-wing political party affiliated with the Maronite Christian sect) as well as flags for Amal (a political party affiliated with the Shi‘a Muslim sect) on certain streets in the municipality. In the early years after its initial urbanization in the 1920s and 1930s, Bourj Hammoud’s population was mainly Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Maronite. During the 1940s, however, many Armenians in Lebanon “repatriated” to Soviet Armenia, a process known in Armenian as *Nerkakht* (Nalbantian 2013).<sup>38</sup> Still, Bourj Hammoud remained the center of Armenian life in Lebanon, with its theaters, newspapers, cinemas, as well as workshops and artisanal ateliers. It was and still is known for its abundance of shoe and clothing manufacturers, automobile garages, locksmiths, and hardware stores. French refugee policy during the Mandate period in what would later become Syria and Lebanon focused on providing Armenians with skilled apprenticeships, sources of credit for private enterprises, and property in order to settle them permanently while maintaining “their linkage with the French state” (Watenpaugh 2004, 619). Many skills and trades are passed down from family members and through apprenticeship systems that are still functioning, particularly for trades like jewelry making. On many occasions during my research, I met second- and third-generation shoemakers, jewelers, and tailors.

During the 1950s Lebanese migrants from rural areas, mainly Shi‘a Muslims, moved to Bourj Hammoud. The district was attractive because it had the advantage of affordable housing and proximity to jobs in nearby industrial zones and service work in Beirut. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, further waves of migrants, mainly Shi‘a and Palestinians, fleeing violence



**Figure I.3.** A mixed residential and business area in Bourj Hammoud. Photo by Rosy Kuftedjian.

in the South also moved to Bourj Hammoud. It became one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the metropolitan Beirut area but also gained the reputation of being part of the so-called poverty belt that ringed Beirut as migrants fleeing violence and seeking better economic conditions moved to the city (Fawaz and Peillen 2003; Traboulsi 2007). The southern part of Bourj Hammoud, Naba'a (which means "spring" and was named for a water source that was once there), became the most densely populated area as new, taller apartment buildings were constructed to accommodate the influx of new residents.

Despite the diversity of residents, the Armenian Tashnag Party dominates the Bourj Hammoud municipality through its formal and informal institutions of governance, infrastructure provision, and security (Joseph 1975). Tashnag (short for Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagsutian, or the Armenian Revolutionary Federation), Hnchag (Sotsial Temograd Hnchagian Goosagtsootiun, or the Social Democrat Hnchagian Party), and Ramgavar (Ramgavar Azadagan Goosagtsootiun, or the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party), the three primary transnational Armenian political parties active in Lebanon today, were all founded in the nineteenth century and were, in different ways, committed to Armenian nationalism and independence from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>39</sup> After a protracted political battle that exploded, at



**Figure I.4.** The Naba'a neighborhood of Bourj Hammoud. Photo by author.

times, into assassinations and street clashes that reached their zenith when the parties were on opposing sides of the Lebanese civil conflict in 1958, Tashnag emerged as the dominant Armenian political party in Lebanon, specifically within the Armenian Apostolic Church institutions, schools, and the municipality of Bourj Hammoud (Migliorino 2008; Nalbantian 2011; Suny 1993).<sup>40</sup> While it is also a transnational Armenian cultural organization that organizes sporting events and scouting clubs for youths, in Lebanon it remains the most powerful Armenian political party. The Tashnag Party has led most of the schools, businesses, NGOs and municipality governance in Bourj Hammoud since the 1970s (Joseph 1975). While residents of other sects or ethnicities always populated the area, and intersectarian marriages were not uncommon, one of the impacts of Tashnag control was that Armenians received preferential access to social services and even municipality projects, such as public housing (Joseph 1975).<sup>41</sup> By 1976 many of the Shi'a and Palestinian residents of the area would be either "ethnically cleansed" or forced to leave the area by right-wing Christian militias using violent tactics (Sankari 2005). Some Shi'as in Bourj Hammoud were able to reclaim property after the war. While there is a Shi'a community in Bourj Hammoud today, it is a much smaller population than was there in the 1970s.

Today Tashnag maintains a strong presence in Bourj Hammoud, not only because it dominates the municipality leadership and the Armenian Apostolic Church's religious, educational, and legal apparatuses but also through a number of Tashnag-affiliated *agoumps* or "political clubs." Each neighborhood in Bourj Hammoud has its own corresponding agoump,

which acts as a meeting place for various Tashnag activities, including the women's charitable auxiliary, young adult clubs, and men's committees. The agoump can also serve as an information hub, informal police station, and security office, maintaining order and taking care of neighborhood disputes. The agoumps are kept open throughout the night, with men taking shifts keeping watch, a legacy of the civil war years. The securitization of the city and the block-by-block fighting and domination of space during the civil war of 1975–90 left an enduring impact on Bourj Hammoud and much of the greater Beirut area.

### THE CIVIL WAR OF 1975–90 AND AFTER: MILITARIZING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Just as the conflicts of 1860 were oversimplified through interpretation as sectarian conflict staged between “Christian” and “Muslim” factions, the conflicts leading to the civil war were much more complex and irreducible to forms of primordial ethnic hatred or “irrational” religious conflicts. Various scholars have suggested different theories as to why the civil war, starting in 1975, stretched on through various foreign invasions and inversions of loyalties until 1990. Some have noted the divisive power of “increasingly fundamental divisions of class, wealth, political ideology, and patterns of consumption—divisions which all manifested themselves locally” (Gilsenan 1996, xv). Others have cited that the primary conflict was between differing ideas of nationalism and national identity—one faction favoring a pan-Arabist identity for Lebanon<sup>42</sup> and the other favoring a primarily Maronite Christian-endorsed Lebanese exceptionalism that had ultimately evolved into right-wing groups like the Kataib (Salibi 1988).<sup>43</sup> Still others have emphasized the conflict over Palestinian presence in Lebanon as a major factor leading to the war (Hudson 1977; Khalidi 1983), while some posit that the conflict needs to be contextualized within class-based revolts against decades of political disenfranchisement and the diversion of all capital and resources to Beirut at the expense of most of the rural population (Diab 1999; Traboulsi 2007). Finally, some have pointed to the role of clientelism through the institutions of *zu'ama*, or village and regional notables (Hourani 1981).

During the war, various factions fought in urban streets, drawing boundaries, ethnically cleansing neighborhoods, and setting up checkpoints to limit mobility and movement (Hanf 1994; Fisk 2002; J. Makdisi 1990). Many of my interlocutors in Lebanon have stories about themselves or someone they know panicking when they reached an unexpected checkpoint manned by a militia belonging to the “other” side. At the time, Lebanese ID cards listed sect as well as name and other identifiers. Militias would use the cards to identify and kidnap, torture, or kill members of “enemy” sects who were

caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. All urban mobility was under the control of various factions, with losses and gains of territory the primary means with which to measure power. The war did not merely take place within the space of Beirut. Rather, it was a conflict over space itself. While the Lebanese state was technically still in existence throughout the war, it no longer managed the territories under the domination of different warring political groups within the disintegrating city of Beirut (Sarkis 1993). For the most part citizens were left to negotiate with the militias in control of various parts of the country. Access to services and a relative degree of safety were provided by an array of armed factions that had different degrees of organization and competence to provide these services and maintain basic infrastructure (Davie 1991; Khalaf and Houry 1993).

Mobility was often restricted during the war. Even when people *could* physically travel to other parts of the city, they often were unable to owing to fears for their own security. Familiar spaces of the city soon became strange and alienating. Separate spheres of residences and consumption were developed (Khalaf 1993). For example, Jounieh, a neighboring town northeast of Beirut, became the center of consumption and leisure activities for middle- and upper-class Christians living on the east side of the city. After the war, some displaced people returned to neighborhoods like Bourj Hammoud. For the most part, however, the war's segregation had a lasting impact on spatial divisions in the city.

The demographic makeup of Bourj Hammoud was radically altered during the early years of the war. After the ethnic cleansing of Naba'a by the right-wing Christian Phalange militia, properties abandoned by displaced Shi'a and some Palestinians were squatted in by Maronite refugees from other parts of Lebanon but also some Armenians. One interlocutor described Bourj Hammoud at the time as a city "surrounded by people fighting each other," with left-wing and pro-Palestinian militias on one side and right-wing Christian militias on the other. Armenian men, and some women, guarded the parameters of the neighborhood with guns.

While state services and infrastructures began to break down, the various Armenian political and religious organizations, NGOs, social service centers, and medical clinics formed a committee called the Azkayin Khorhourt, or National Council, to organize utilities and services as well as provide aid to Armenian residents of Bourj Hammoud (Migliorino 2008). By the 1980s many Armenian organizations located outside of Bourj Hammoud had relocated there. The *arachnortaran*, or prelacy, of the Armenian Apostolic Church relocated to Bourj Hammoud from the historic grounds in the formerly elite Ottoman-era neighborhood of Zokak el-Blatt, and currently maintains both spaces (Papovka 2014). Many of downtown Beirut's Armenian-owned jewelry stores and workshops also eventually relocated to Bourj Hammoud. The *arachnortaran*'s move to Bourj Hammoud further

consolidated the spatial nexus of Armenian organizations. Because of the limits to mobility during the war and the growing sectarian divisions of space, Bourj Hammoud went from an Armenian public sphere to a kind of fortress. The Armenian concentration gave Armenian residents a sense of safety, and the highly organized coordination of services across various organizations, whether Tashnag-affiliated, Apostolic, Catholic, or Protestant, provided a vital network for survival.

After the war, many of Bourj Hammoud's displaced residents, mainly Shi'a, were able to regain ownership of their buildings.<sup>44</sup> While many of them did not personally return, they provided a means of migration for non-Armenian renters from their villages, towns, or kinship networks. Thus some Shi'a Muslims have returned to Bourj Hammoud. Many of the apartments in Naba'a are rented to foreign migrant workers, mostly Kurdish and Syrians, and, increasingly, refugees fleeing conflict in Syria.<sup>45</sup> Bourj Hammoud remains a highly diverse district but also one with its own spatial divisions and boundaries. Sectarian political actors throughout Lebanon regard such divisions in space as sites of potential flashpoints and attempt to engineer space in order to maximize security or prepare for the next war (Bou Akar 2012; Fawaz, Harb, and Gharbieh 2012). In this book I argue that these spatial divisions are not wholly fixed, not clearly demarcated, and shaped through the networks of services and materiality of infrastructures that people navigate in their everyday lives. The categories of insider/outsider are much more fluid than they appear when approaching Beirut from the static image of a map.

## BEYOND THE MAP: BELONGING IN/AND THE CITY

The vast majority of Beirut's streets have no names and its buildings no addresses. Navigating through new and unknown neighborhoods is a profoundly social experience, drawing on the help of passersby on the street, actively looking around for buildings or streets resembling the directions that someone verbally related. It is rarely a solitary endeavor, as one cannot simply use a street atlas to find anything. Most people navigate using landmarks like churches, banks, or schools. Sometimes buildings are known by a particular name, and one must constantly ask people in the general vicinity of the building where it is.

Early in my fieldwork I tried to use the *Zawarib* street atlas to find a school in Bourj Hammoud.<sup>46</sup> I showed the atlas to one of my interlocutors who grew up in Bourj Hammoud and had spent her entire life navigating its streets. Still, she could not pinpoint where we were on the map I showed her. She tried for a moment to do so and then told me it was a waste of

time to use a map; she could just explain how to get there. She proceeded to give me complicated directions involving where to turn left or right using the color and size of particular buildings and the presence of shops and schools to guide me. Through this incident I began to understand why an unfamiliar residential area would be particularly intimidating to navigate for the uninitiated. Walking through Bourj Hammoud and knowing its streets was a deeply embodied, social experience for those who grew up there and was definitely part of the shaping of their social identities.<sup>47</sup>

Many of my interlocutors had a sense of belonging to a neighborhood and an intimate familiarity with one part of the greater Beirut area streets that was linked to a sense of belonging and identity that did not always map neatly onto sectarian identity alone.<sup>48</sup> For example, while Bourj Hammoud was an important hub for Armenian political, social, medical, cultural, and educational organizations and institutions, its residents were mainly working-class artisans, shoemakers, tailors, or mechanics. Wealthier, professional Armenians tend to reside in more upscale suburbs to the northeast, even if they do work in Bourj Hammoud. These differences will be explored further in later chapters, but I mention them here to make the case that space and place matter, and that there are important differences between the Armenians who identify as being from Bourj Hammoud and those who seek to distance themselves from its reputation as a “low-class,” insular Armenian “ghetto.” These differences, in turn, have ramifications in terms of access to Armenian-run services, recourse to legal rights to property, as well as radically different experiences of navigating urban infrastructures in general. Belonging to a sectarian community is not a priori to other differences of access in terms of class, notions of gender propriety, and normative sexuality.

Urban planners and municipality actors in Bourj Hammoud are certainly aware of the power of the density of Armenian organizations and institutions that create and reproduce a sense of an Armenian public sphere. The “city” has long been viewed as a particular kind of spatial-temporal nexus, connected to notions of modernity, processes of capitalist production, and the instantiation of the power of the nation-state (Harvey 1985; Lefebvre 1991; Mumford 1968; Park and Burgess 1925), as well as a material to be manipulated and engineered in order to achieve a hygienic, ordered, and modern society (Holston 1989; Le Corbusier 1929; Rabinow 1989). The desire to maintain the Armenian dominance of Bourj Hammoud is important to understanding what informs municipality actors in their infrastructure improvement projects.

Popular discourses promote the idea that sects must have separate social networks in order to maintain “security” because they are assumed to be in conflict with one another from the beginning. However, it is important to be attentive to the fact that these networks can rapidly generate identifications if not identities, and they might be more contingent than people think.

A closer look at the human/material networks that form the infrastructures that power Bourj Hammoud helps to unravel the notion that sectarian space and identity are rigid and unchanging. The city is “an ordering of uncertainty and as a political arena full of potentialities” (Amin and Thrift 2002, 5). It is with this spirit that I argue that the possibility for all kinds of alliances and collaborations exists, even as many of them are threatened with foreclosure by certain sectarian political institutions.

## METHODOLOGIES AND VISUAL COLLABORATIONS

Infrastructures are not a static diagram of relations between individuals or sectarian political formations, nor are they merely conduits through which sectarianism flows. Rather, the materiality of what these infrastructures are and what they mean to the subjects who navigate and experience them in everyday life are critical to the project of producing sectarian community. Just as a child excitedly shouts “*Jit al dawleh!*” (The state is here!) when electricity from the national grid starts to flow, the breakdown of infrastructures is that which “makes them more visible, calling into being governments’ failed promises to their people as specters that haunt contemporary collapse” (Larkin 2008, 245). In Lebanon, the perception of breakdown and failure as well as “success” hinges on the apprehension of infrastructures and the attribution of their function to a state, a political party, or a sectarian community, with much overlap between the three. Infrastructures are “conceptually unruly” because of their duality as objects that serve the purpose of circulating other things, or “matter that enable the movement of other matter” (Larkin 2013, 329). The visibility of infrastructures themselves, their histories and the ways in which they are made visible or invisible at particular times, not merely an analysis of the resources that circulate within them, is critical to unpacking the histories that make and remake the ongoing process of producing sectarian community.

It is this attention to visibility and sensorial experience of the city that informed my approach to fieldwork. I spent months videotaping Bourj Hammoud with the help of several of my interlocutors. While I had initially approached my filmmaking practice as observational, filming became a much more dynamic process.<sup>49</sup> My camera served as an important site of collaboration, a staging ground for eliciting memories and rethinking the mundane infrastructures of everyday life together.<sup>50</sup> One particular example illustrative of this collaborative process occurred early on in my fieldwork. I was filming in Nor Marash, a neighborhood within Bourj Hammoud where I conducted much of my research. As I focused my lens on the tangled wires hanging from the walls, a woman in her seventies whom I had spoken with on a few occasions peeked her head out of a doorway and asked

me, amusedly, why I was filming a wall. When I told her I was filming the electricity cables, we eventually started talking about *ishtirak*, the system through which individuals can purchase electricity from private generator owners. She then recalled the days before *ishtirak* existed, before the civil war of 1975–90. This was a conversation I rarely had, as the decades of war and its aftermath had completely normalized the presence of two or more sources of electricity for most people in Lebanon—the national grid, the *ishtirak*, and, for some who lacked the resources for their own subscriptions and could elude getting cited for doing so, the sharing of electricity between two apartments. In this and many other incidents, the camera was a catalyst for conversations about the material and tacit infrastructures of the city, evoking memories and helping to make visible that which had become mundane in my interlocutors' attempts to familiarize me with the neighborhood. My interlocutor's memories about the days before one had to navigate multiple sources of electricity helped me visualize the most elusive questions about power, networks of patronage and flows of knowledge, and how all these are inseparable from the materiality of the built environment and the processes through which urban infrastructures are produced.

Aside from extensive filming in the streets and alleys of Bourj Hammoud with the help of several of my interlocutors, I conducted more traditional participant observation and interviews. I refer to my interlocutors using



**Figure I.5.** A tangle of electricity cables, a common sight in Bourj Hammoud and in many urban areas in Lebanon. Photo by Rosy Kuftedjian.

pseudonyms, and I have altered incidental details of interlocutors' lives to maintain their anonymity. Most of the fieldwork leading to this book was conducted between 2008 and 2011. I conducted participant observation and interviews in and nearby Bourj Hammoud in nonprofit organizations and NGOs that are affiliated with Armenian religious or diasporic groups, agoumps, the arachnortaran, the offices of the municipality, the regional property deed office, three low-income housing projects, the informal Armenian areas of Sanjak and Arakadz, workshops, retail stores, homes and apartments, as well as Armenian newspapers, printing presses, and organizations outside of Bourj Hammoud proper. I also conducted research at the libraries of Haigazian University, the American University of Beirut, and the Institut français du Proche-Orient. Some of my most important insights, however, came from informal conversations and observations from friends who spent all their lives in Bourj Hammoud and from introductions to their wider network of friends and kin. Through the electricity cuts and the water shortages, I learned how people manage to piece together the fragmented infrastructures through the activation of human relationships, producing the dynamic network of Bourj Hammoud.

## MAP OF THE BOOK

This book navigates the human and material infrastructures and services that produce a sense of belonging, sometimes sectarian, in and through the urban district of Bourj Hammoud. To unpack popular discourses about sectarianism and conflict in the wake of the past ten years of significant geopolitical regional shifts, I begin in chapter 1 with a closer examination of a new “sectarian conflict” emerging along the fault lines in space in Bourj Hammoud. This conflict led to the mass eviction of Syrian Kurds from certain parts of the municipal district. In the chapter, I trace how violence is often interpreted as a reemerging sectarian conflict that is both entrenched and inevitable immediately after it begins.

The next three chapters focus on various municipal technologies, non-profits, and lending institutions to show that the sectarian “community” is not a naturalized social category that is simply represented by these institutions. Rather, it is a networked system with differential access to those claiming “Armenianness” through various means not narrowly limited to religious-ethnic identity. In chapter 2, I focus on the permanently temporary housing regimes of two Armenian refugee camps in order to examine the various technologies that municipality and political actors use to mobilize notions of belonging to the “community” through informal property. These processes are deeply related to specific urban histories and class associations

with particular neighborhoods as well as sets of documentation and other legal technologies. Chapter 3 focuses on the role of notions of gendered propriety in differentiating access to Armenian women's organizations in Bourj Hammoud, which has important ramifications in accessing services and resources as well as understandings of belonging to the Armenian community. Chapter 4 compares an officially licensed credit facility to informal women's rotating credit associations. How might official credit institutions foreclose the possibility of crosscutting patterns of lending outside of sect-affiliated channels?

Chapter 5 jumps beyond the neighborhood scale to a city-to-city collaboration between Bourj Hammoud and a foreign municipality as a means of challenging Lebanese state infrastructure projects. I analyze the ways in which the overlapping jurisdictions of power go far beyond the fragmented infrastructures of the neighborhood block to transnational circulations of expertise and resources. In doing so, I demonstrate how the popular notion that Lebanon's infrastructural *and* conflict-oriented problems could be solved through a strong centralized state *or* through the ideology of decentralization completely ignores the way that municipal governance works through overlapping jurisdictions. While Lebanese centralized state-sponsored infrastructure projects have had a destructive impact on environmental and social conditions in Bourj Hammoud, municipality-endorsed initiatives have often been equally destructive. Chapter 5 navigates the delicate balancing act made by one urban planning expert as she tries to draw in outside experts through city-to-city collaborations to block some of the more damaging projects.

As I learned throughout my fieldwork, unexpected consequences are often just as important to the unfolding of these various projects as the intentions of their architects. The Syrian conflict, which was just beginning during the course of my fieldwork, has now escalated into a full-scale war, displacing at least one million Syrians to Lebanon. In my conclusion, I describe the ways in which many displaced Syrians in Lebanon have had to navigate the existing networks of services and aid in order to receive vital relief. As major international organizations use sect-affiliated clinics and social service centers as distribution hubs for various forms of aid and assistance for refugees, it is even more critical to think about the ways in which these institutions function within the political space of Lebanon. As the term "sectarian conflict" is presented by way of explanation for conflicts in Syria and Iraq, it is important to think about how that concept is produced, how it circulates, and what it means in different contexts. At a certain point, approaching something as always already sectarian and creating the infrastructures, institutions, and channels to accommodate it are part of the way in which it gets produced as inevitable in the first place. It is my hope that with more careful scholarship, we can demonstrate that even the most entrenched-seeming identity categories are constructed through far more contingent networks than we realize.