GLOBAL GENTRIFICATIONS

Uneven development and displacement

Edited by Loretta Lees, Hyun Bang Shin and Ernesto López-Morales

Under contemporary capitalism the extraction of value from the built environment has escalated, working in tandem with other urban processes to lay the foundations for the exploitative processes of gentrification worldwide.

Global gentrifications: Uneven development and displacement critically assesses and tests the meaning and significance of gentrification in places outside the 'usual suspects' of the Global North. Informed by a rich array of case studies from cities in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Southern Europe, and beyond, the book (re)discovers the important generalities and geographical specificities associated with the uneven process of gentrification globally. It highlights intensifying global struggles over urban space and underlines gentrification as a growing and important battleground in the contemporary world. The book will be of value to students and academics, policy makers, planners and community organisations.

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Capital, state and conflict: the various drivers of diverse gentrification processes in Beirut, Lebanon

Marieke Krijnen and Christiaan De Beukelaer

Introduction

This chapter responds to several recent calls to extend the geographical scope of gentrification studies and to consider the potential contribution of theory-making from the Global South (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009a; McFarlane, 2010; Lees, 2012). We present two cases of gentrification in Beirut, Lebanon, and demonstrate the ways in which they differ from the existing literature on gentrification. Employing a post-colonial perspective, we argue that an account of these differences is essential if gentrification studies are to make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of uneven geographical development and social exclusion in a Southern context. Evidence from Beirut shows how and why historical and politico-economic specificities matter: the point of theory formation should not be to articulate a one-size-fits-all model that can be applied to apparent cases of gentrification anywhere in the world at any time. Indeed, the case of Beirut shows just how much gentrification processes can diverge within a single city, with different networks of capital formation and visions of the urban future reflecting Lebanon's history of confessional conflict and the various ways in which neighbourhoods and social groups are linked to regional and global circuits of capital. However – notwithstanding these differences – our case studies demonstrate that the driving forces and results of urban transformation in Beirut are much the same as elsewhere: gentrification has been instigated by a privileging of the logic of the market in housing provision and it has resulted in the displacement and exclusion of lower- and middle-income groups from central city locations. Gentrification in Beirut has been driven by transnational capital and facilitated by state interventions, including – inter alia – tax breaks for investors and the liberalisation of rental contracts.

It is hardly surprising that Beirut is sensitive to gentrification. Real estate is one of the most important sectors of the Lebanese economy. Post-civil war real estate booms have been numerous, and the sector has grown continuously during the past decade despite political turmoil and the financial crisis (which Beirut largely escaped due to considerable bank liquidity and the resources of its diaspora

population; see Habib, 2011). For the past two years, the real estate sector has slowed down and stagnated, but land and apartment prices are still high (*Daily Star*, 2013; Makarem, 2013; Sakr, 2013). On average, apartments in downtown Beirut sell from USD3,500/m^2 to USD5,000/m^2, while outside the centre, prices start at around USD3,000/m^2.[1] Investors and buyers come from the Middle East or the Lebanese diaspora (Lloyd-Jones, 2005; Halawi, 2010; Karam, 2010). Inevitably, this frenetic real estate activity has led to the rapid gentrification of many sectors of the city and consequent population displacement. Neighbourhoods that were previously characterised by low-rise 1950s' apartment buildings with shops on the ground floors are now dominated by glitzy high-rises that remain uninhabited during most of the year. A growing body of scholarship has documented the social, economic and political impact of these urban redevelopments. There is ample literature on the transformation of downtown Beirut into a luxury quarter by a private company (Makdisi, 1997; Leenders, 2003, 2004; Becherer, 2005; Summer, 2005) and other work on the effects of private urban planning agencies or the role of political parties in planning (Harb, 2001; Khayat, 2007; Fawaz, 2009a; Roy, 2009b), gated communities in Lebanon and other forms of spatial segregation (Glasze, 2003; Alaily-Mattar, 2008). Until now, however, only Ross and Jamil (2011) and Achkar (2011) have specifically researched gentrification processes in Beirut.

Besides contributing to extending the geographical scope of gentrification studies towards the Global South, our chapter points towards the influence of processes that are not typically mentioned in the literature on gentrification, such as the role of civil conflict and sectarianism (a system that ties civil status and political representation to a person's religious affiliation), the overlap between public and private spheres in Lebanon's political system (where many politicians are involved in real estate activities), and the role of diaspora capital, which is the main driver of gentrification processes in Beirut. These factors influence gentrifiers' and developers' preferences, as some prefer to invest in areas with a distinct sectarian identity while, to the contrary, others look for a more diverse space. They also influence the way in which residents resist gentrification, as political parties are usually the only viable means of negotiating compensation and strengthening sectarian allegiances. Also, religious organisations are the only actors providing affordable housing.

The complex dimensions shaping gentrification processes in Beirut lead to very different outcomes locally. While gentrification is mostly new-build, there are cases of renovation with a role for creative entrepreneurs, commercial gentrification, classic loft-living construction or large-scale urban renewal projects involving the displacement of slum dwellers and highway construction (Harb, 2001; Deboulet and Fawaz, 2011). This chapter will employ two case studies highlighting new-build and creative/commercial gentrification. We ask: what forms of gentrification can be seen in Beirut? What is the role of the state? Who is being displaced and what forms of resistance to displacement or impediments to gentrification exist? Who are the gentrifiers? What are the key points to keep in mind when developing a post-colonial perspective on gentrification processes in Beirut? What

questions can be formulated and directed 'back' to other contexts? In order to achieve these goals, we will proceed as follows: after providing a background of the Lebanese context, we discuss gentrification processes in Beirut by looking at new-build gentrification, including the role of rent controls and the displacement of residents, building laws, and the role of the state. We then look at creative and commercial gentrification, using the case study of the Mar Mikhael area. Then, we describe the gentrifiers and explain their presence, and move on to various forms of resistance and impediments to gentrification. We conclude by listing the various findings that can help us formulate a post-colonial perspective on gentrification processes in Beirut. We argue that a post-colonial perspective has to partially 'unlearn' (Spivak, 1993, cited in Lees, 2012) Western intuitions about the role of the state in gentrification, and pay attention to the dimensions mentioned earlier.

Figure 15.1: Beirut in Lebanon
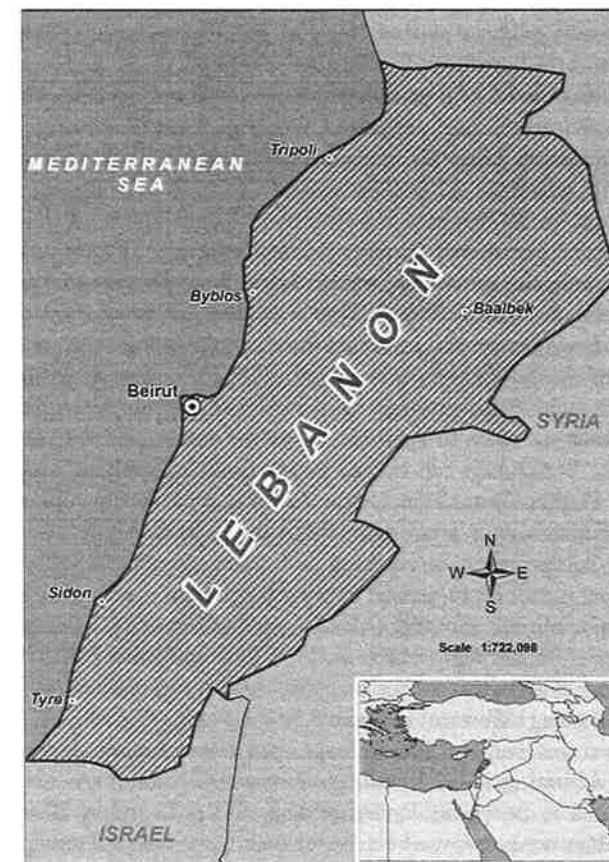
Lebanon: a background

Beirut, Lebanon's capital and largest city (see Figure 15.1), with some 2 million inhabitants,[2] hosts most of the country's administrative bodies, companies and universities. The Lebanese civil war (1975–90) divided the city into two parts: a predominantly Christian eastern section and a largely Muslim western section. Each area was exclusively controlled by militias representing the dominant groups. This demographic rearrangement prevails to date, though at a lesser extent in certain areas (Genberg, 2002).

After Lebanon gained its independence from France in 1943, a political system based on confessional power sharing and a minimalist state was tacitly accepted as the country's political model. This facilitated and promoted foreign direct investment, focusing on services and finance (Gates, 1998; Dibeh, 2005; Traboulsi, 2007; Shwayri, 2008). Hence, contrary to most Western contexts that have a history of Keynesian state interventionism and welfare provision, the state role in Lebanon has never been that of a social provider;[3] this was left to private initiatives, mostly religious authorities and political sectarian groups (Gates, 1998; Chaaban and Gebara, 2007; Hoeckel, 2007; Hilal, 2008; Fawaz, 2009b). The laissez-faire policies of post-independence Lebanon protected the interests of the dominant mercantile-bourgeoisie, who had traditionally used politics to achieve this protection (Chaaban and Gebara, 2007; Gates, 1998; Boudisseau, 2001; Traboulsi, 2007; Hourani, 2010; Krijnen and Fawaz, 2010). After the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, these fundamental characteristics of the Lebanese economy remained unaltered (Leenders, 2004; Shwayri, 2008; Hourani, 2010). Hence, historically, the interests of market actors have always taken precedence in the Lebanese political economy. This is evident in laws passed during the post-independence period that increased maximum building heights (El-Achkar, 1998) and exploitation factors, with never fulfilled promises of public housing provision (Bekdache, forthcoming). As of the 1950s, a zoning plan allocated the highest exploitation ratios to areas closest to the urban centre (Achkar, 2011; MAJAL, 2012). Developers can exceed height limits by applying for a building permit at the Higher Council for Urban Planning, a politically connected body that makes decisions on a seemingly ad hoc basis. In one case, the developer obtained a building permit by agreeing to fund roadworks (Ghodbane, 2012). Urban planning is thus characterised by a public–private overlap that is also seen in the country's political economy (Makdisi, 1997; Glasze, 2003; Leenders, 2003, 2004; Summer, 2005; Krijnen and Fawaz, 2010; Ross and Jamil, 2011).[4] As we will argue in our conclusion, this overlap provides us with some interesting questions to ask 'back' to other (Western) contexts.

Post-civil war government policies continued to protect the dominant elite's interests by facilitating trade, finance and services sectors, but this time, the reconstruction[5] was influenced by the neoliberal turn (Leenders, 2004; Makdisi, 1997). Prime Minister Hariri was keen on facilitating national and foreign investors and regaining Beirut's position as a financial centre and primary tourist destination in the Arab world, signing several free-trade agreements and launching an ambitious privatisation plan. Downtown Beirut, a devastated no-man's-land during the civil war, became a symbol of Hariri's ambitions when it was reconstructed into a centre of business for the global neoliberal elite.

Gentrification in Beirut

The classical definition of gentrification, as coined by Ruth Glass (1964), describes an influx of middle-class residents into working-class neighbourhoods. The new inhabitants renovate low-income and downgraded properties into expensive residences, displacing the original residents and changing the entire social character of the district. This definition has been expanded in recent decades to include, among others, new-build developments (Davidson and Lees, 2005, 2010), gated communities, super-gentrification and commercial and rural gentrification (see Lees et al, 2008). However, Lees et al (2008) argue that these different types of gentrification have in common a socio-economic and cultural transformation due to middle-class colonisation or recolonisation of working-class spaces: people with less power and means are displaced involuntarily from their homes by people with more power and means (see also Davidson and Lees, 2005, 2010; Slater, 2006, 2011). Following this argument, we use the definition of Lees et al (2008, p xv): gentrification is 'the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use'. Whether this happens through new construction or renovation, and whether this process is state-led or not, is related to the geography of gentrification (Lees, 2000), that is, how similar processes play out differently in different geographical contexts.

Keeping this in mind, we now look at gentrification processes in Beirut. Who is driving these processes? Why do they take their particular shape? How do they relate to processes of gentrification in other contexts? Who are the gentrifiers? Who is being displaced and what is the role of the state?

New-build gentrification in Beirut

Gentrification in Beirut is usually new-build and involves direct displacement. Historical preservation as a means of preventing devalorisation and, hence, a cause of gentrification (Lees et al, 2008) is rare: money is made by demolition. This can be explained by huge rent gaps (Smith, 1987). Stringent rent controls for contracts signed before July 1992 and increasingly high maintenance/renovation costs of older buildings mean that landlords get little to no return from buildings with these tenants, while they are usually located in coveted central city locations. Moreover, high exploitation ratios via zoning and building laws, coupled with a sufficient demand, mean that enormous profits can be made by demolishing older, three-to-six-floor buildings and replacing them with 20- to 40-storey high-rises, especially given the relatively low costs of construction and abundance of cheap labour power provided by Syrian migrant workers. The role of conflict in widening

rent gaps has been pointed out by Ross and Jamil (2011): developers buy cheaply in times of political turmoil and cash in once peace 'breaks' out (provided enough demand exists), leaving Beirutis with the bitter false choice of either living through conflict in affordable housing while facing possible displacement through war, or facing displacement through real estate development when their buildings are bought by developers in times of peace. Developers are willing to pay large sums of money for these buildings, vacant or not. The role of rent controls, the process of eviction and production of supply, the different forms of displacement, and the role of building regulations will be explained and illustrated in the following.

Rent controls

In theory, rent controls can limit processes of gentrification (Ley and Dobson, 2008). In Beirut, in a context of escalating apartment prices, making them unaffordable to even middle-class Beirutis (see later), rent control is one of the few reasons that low- and middle-income dwellers have managed to retain homes in central city locations. All in all, 40,000 families in Beirut alone are estimated to benefit from rent controls, despite lack of census data on who and where they are.[6] Tenants pay rents based on pre-war rates, only slightly corrected for inflation. This means that a building can yield as little as USD120 a year for a landlord (Cochrane, 2012; Fisk, 2012) at a time when in real market value, the rent of that building can rise above USD100,000. Landlords have formed a committee that has been lobbying for a new rental law to replace the temporary law introduced for pre-July 1992 rental contracts that has, until now, been extended every four years, with new rent law drafts rejected by landlords and tenants alike. When a building collapsed in January 2012, killing 27 people, the landlord committee was quick to blame the old rent law. Other causes for the collapse, such as a nearby construction site and the addition of floors, were dismissed. Another law proposal was drafted, involving a gradual transition to higher rent, compensation and eviction to state-provided housing with a rent-to-own scheme (Cochrane, 2012). If and how this law will be implemented is unclear but, clearly, any proposal regards displacement as inevitable.

Displacement

A landlord wanting to evict for new construction risks a lengthy battle in court. To avoid this, many landlords sell their buildings to developers who negotiate with tenants and pay them a higher compensation than they would receive in court (Bekdache, forthcoming). Sometimes, residents themselves track down multiple heirs of small plots and sell them together to a developer (Ghodbane, 2012). Landlords also resort to the tagging of buildings, warning of a possible collapse and obtaining a notice from the municipality for eviction and cutting off services (Bekdache, forthcoming).

These winkling practices (bribery and harassment practices to evict tenants; see Lees et al, 2008) have resulted in successful evictions in most cases. In the 1970s, leftist parties protected the interests of the tenants, but they are a lot smaller today and are suppressed by the neoliberal consensus that was formed under Hariri (Makdisi, 1997). A committee to protect tenant rights exists, but it has yet to succeed in preventing evictions or securing alternative housing. Instead, one by one, buildings with old-rent tenants are vacated and demolished. Besides direct displacement, displacement pressure (Marcuse, 1985) is an issue as well (as we will see later): neighbourhoods change beyond recognition, shops close, social networks fall apart and living in a half-empty building in disrepair would pressure most people into looking for alternative housing.

Most tenants who were not protected by old rent contracts have faced direct displacement through enormous rent increases (Lee, 2009). As low-cost housing disappears, and other apartments face rent increases, exclusionary displacement (Marcuse, 1985; Davidson and Lees, 2010) follows because the Lebanese who might otherwise have wished to live in these areas can no longer afford to do so. Displacees usually have no other choice than to move to the periphery of the city, into politically segregated neighbourhoods that first emerged during mass displacement during the civil war. Most rent-controlled clusters, however, were among some of the last remaining diverse sections in the city (Bekdache, forthcoming). This points to another dimension of gentrification processes in Beirut, namely, the role of sectarianism and civil conflict. The next section elaborates upon these dimensions with a case study of Zokak el-Blat.

New-build gentrification: the case of Zokak el-Blat

The case of Zokak el-Blat illustrates processes of new-build gentrification. Located south-west of downtown Beirut, this area was one of the first to develop outside Beirut's city walls, urbanised by a merchant elite that owned businesses in the city centre (Mollenhauer, 2005). They later moved out to suburbs while workers from the nearby port moved in. The 1975–90 civil war led to the relocation of most Christian and Sunni elite families of the neighbourhood to other areas. They were replaced by a large, mainly Shi'ite, refugee population from the South, often squatting in the abandoned mansions or renting apartments in newly built 10–12-storey apartment buildings. With them came militias that ensured their protection and provided social services (Hanssen, 2005; MAJAL, 2012). Post-civil war reconstruction and road extensions involved the destruction of many buildings in the area's northern part and the eviction of squatters through a post-civil war state programme[7] involving compensations used to buy apartments in the area. New construction activities have built buildings up to 12 stories high in the area, more than five per year on average between 1991 and 2003. The proximity of the high-end downtown area has increased the attractiveness of the neighbouring Patriarchate sector and hence driven up prices. Most owners on the eastern side

of Zokak el-Blat are Shi'ites who have invested capital in the area (Bodenstein, 2005; Hanssen, 2005).

Two political actors prevail in the area: (1) Hezbollah, a major party in Parliament, with a primarily Shi'ite constituency and famous for leading the resistance against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon (1978–2000); and (2) Haraket Amal, a predominantly Shi'ite party sprung from Imam Moussa Sadr's 'Movement of the dispossessed' in the 1970s. The presence of these actors might influence choices of investors; indeed, our informants have told us that especially in the inner areas, developers are mostly local Shi'ites and buyers mostly Muslim. On the highways surrounding the area, however, not all developers are local Shi'ites.

Zokak el-Blat is facing intensive real estate development. Cadastral data show an increase in sales transactions[8] and empty lots have disappeared rapidly (MAJAL, 2012). Most projects cluster around the area bordering the Fuad Chehab and airport roads, offering a view of the sea and downtown: 'It is as if they built it for us to look at', one developer stated.[9] A developer usually acquires several lots, merges them, demolishes existing structures and constructs a high-rise. From 2000 to 2011, 30 buildings were demolished, and buildings from that time period now occupy 9% of the area. A survey of several projects under construction revealed that they average 12 floors, with apartments generally larger than 200m[2] (MAJAL, 2012). Real estate brochures for the area do not promote the neighbourhood itself, but its proximity to major thoroughfares and shopping districts. This matches the tendency of developers to construct buildings on the fringes of the quarter. Apartments are built for sale, and around half of them are bought for personal, permanent use. Prices ranged from USD1,300/m^2 to USD4,000/m^2 in 2011 (MAJAL, 2012).

One large-scale development is the Jamil Agha/Binadar project, consisting of three 14-floor towers (see Figure 15.2). According to a Binadar representative, the 210–250m^2 apartments sell for an average of USD3,200/m^2 and target middle-class buyers, with 80% being foreigners or Lebanese expatriates, mostly well-off families living and working in Qatar or Dubai, proving that most buyers are non-residents. Most apartments sold rapidly, attesting to high demand, while some were retained to make a higher profit later. Initially, one tower was planned, but due to high demand, three were built.[10] According to cadastral records, three lots (610, 611 and 1014) were bought in 1994[11] and merged to create the large parcel.

We will now explicate the role of the state and building laws in the processes of new-build gentrification mentioned earlier, showing how changes in institutional and legal frameworks have assisted developers and can be explained through looking at the Lebanese political economy.

Building laws and the role of the state

Today, the previously mentioned real estate booms have led to a construction frenzy, as the Lebanese government seeks to facilitate real estate developers in line with neoliberal governance, prioritising capital over social reproduction (Smith,

Figure 15.2: Binadar Highland, La Citadelle and Solitaire towers

Note: Photograph taken by Marieke Krijnen in 2010.

2002). Measures include the lifting of restrictions on (foreign) investments and foreign property-ownership, delegating planning tasks to private actors, exempting investors from certain taxes or registration fees, and providing exceptions and exemptions applicable to large-scale projects and hotels (for an overview, see Krijnen, 2010; Krijnen and Fawaz, 2010). The Building Law was revised in 2004 to include extra built-up areas and increase the maximum building height, in some cases allowing for the doubling of the exploitation ratio (Achkar, 2011). Most empirical studies emphasise a strong role for the state in creating conditions conducive to gentrification processes (see Lees and Ley, 2008). However, as explained earlier, the distinction between state and market interests is not very easy to make. In fact, many politicians are involved in real estate and banking (Hourani, 2010; Achkar, 2011). Another example is the fact that developers have personally helped draft the new 2004 Building Law that increased exploitation ratios (Krijnen and Fawaz, 2010). When looking at the role of the state in gentrification processes in Lebanon, this is something any researcher should keep in mind.

The role of the state: the example of heritage buildings

The state ordered several studies on heritage buildings in the peri-central areas of Beirut, but the vast majority have been demolished (sometimes in fear of being listed) or remain unprotected. Landlords lobbied to get their buildings off the list,

stating in one letter: 'we also ask you to preserve the wealth of a large portion of the middle class by releasing all the buildings on the list' (quoted in Bekdache, forthcoming). From over 1,000 buildings classified in 1995, only about 270 remain protected (MAJAL, 2012; Bekdache, forthcoming). There are no subsidies for renovation, and illegal demolitions are frequent. A draft law to better protect buildings has been under study since 2007 (including the right for owners to sell their land development rights) but has so far not been voted on because of political conflict (Byrns, 2011; MAJAL, 2012). Any attempts at curbing Beirut's real estate development or preserving what remains of the city's architectural heritage are met with fierce resistance on the part of developers (Fielding-Smith, 2010). Developers interviewed have complained about the difficulties of getting a demolition permit, but also made clear that with the right connections, anything is possible.[12] In Zokak el-Blat, from 94 heritage buildings identified in 1995, only 26 are officially protected, and from those, only 14% are in a good state (MAJAL, 2012). With a state unable and unwilling to curb exploitation ratios, old buildings and their tenants become an obstacle to profit accumulation. The overlap between public and private interests becomes visible in the state's failed attempts at heritage preservation. Unlike other cases (see, eg, Lees, 2003), obtaining landmark status represents an obstacle to, not incentive for, gentrification.

Creative and commercial gentrification in Beirut

The past decade has seen a considerable interest in creative cities as a way forward to revitalise (often European) urban centres that struggled to find ways to cope with changing post-industrial realities. This idea also gained some attention in Beirut, particularly through a British Council-sponsored report:

> This is a call, an invitation to work together for a better future for Lebanon, a call to put in place a structure that will plan and prepare for the release of Lebanon's economic and creative potential. The importance of creativity and content in any present-day economy presents to Lebanon unique opportunities for growth, development and stability. Grasping these opportunities can transform all our futures. (Hill, 2008, p 15)

This call is far from exceptional, as many places have been trying to *do a Florida thing* (McGuigan, 2009), referring to the optimistic advocacy for creative city strategies by Richard Florida (2002, 2005).

There are a variety of ways in which creative industries discourse is used around the world, as Cunningham (2009, p 376) describes: it can be 'thought of as a Rorschach blot, being invested in for varying reasons and with varying emphases and outcomes'. In the case of Beirut, for example, state and non-state actors supporting the emerging creative industries in Lebanon argue that it would facilitate a transition to, or at least a more significant role for, the so-called

knowledge economy, and transfer resources and investments from real estate development and financial services to this sector, so that young, highly educated people that are currently leaving the country would be inclined to stay and the Lebanese diaspora would be inclined to return (Hill, 2008). It seems unlikely, however, that this bottom-up strategy will help combat social stratification and sectarian segregation in the city. In Beirut, the creative city discourse also exists alongside the ongoing structural problems of uneven development and ignores potential gentrification and, hence, displacement effects. The 'Creativity Fix' (Peck, 2007) is as equally unlikely to provide a structural solution to the social issues in Beirut as it is elsewhere. The main difference, however, is how this 'fix' made its way into urban practice.

Contrary to the literature on creative gentrification, the Lebanese state has not formulated any policies at the local level to assist creative entrepreneurs or facilitate gentrification. This recently changed with the introduction of the Beirut Digital District in the quarter of Bachoura, a poor area south of downtown. Backed by the Ministry of Telecommunications, it intends to turn Lebanon into a digital hub by facilitating the clustering of companies and shops, sparking justified fears of displacement among local residents (Whiting, 2012).

Most instances of creative gentrification, however, have not benefited directly from any state support (although the state has intervened generally to facilitate real estate development). The initiative to transform Beirut into a creative city was proposed, developed and supported by local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The two primary actors are the local branch of GAIA Heritage, an international NGO founded by a Lebanese-French economist that seeks to promote the preservation of cultural heritage and the arts while activating their economic potentials, and the local branch of the British Council, who has a programme of advancing and supporting creative economies worldwide (Hill, 2008; Zouain et al, 2011). Their plan is to create an interactive database and map of creative activity in Lebanon to allow 'creatives' to cooperate. This tool will support the nascent industry and fill the gap that local authorities left. So far, these tools have not materialised, but the clustering of creative industries is present, helped by family members and, in some cases, the British Council by facilitating access to finance. As Peck (2005) points out, Richard Florida's most celebrated creative cities are actually not a product of government intervention. Moreover, the case of the Mar Mikhael neighbourhood in the following illustrates how the very diversity that made the area attractive is threatened by gentrification. It also provides us with a different form of gentrification from what we have seen in Zokak el-Blat, where the construction of new high-rises has remained unaccompanied by commercial changes.

Gentrification in Mar Mikhael and the 'creatives' dimension

Mar Mikhael is a mixed residential/commercial area where many villas from the 1930s survive, alongside more recent structures. Until 2008, it was generally

described as a sleepy quarter, not fully recovered from the closure of the railroad in 1976 and the civil war. After the Armenian genocide in 1915, many refugees settled in the district. The character of the area remains distinctly Armenian today (Ashkarian, 2012; Zouain et al, 2011). Most inhabitants are tenants on old rental contracts.

Mar Mikhael started transforming around 2008, as nightlife from the bordering Gemmayzeh district spilled over (Lee, 2009). Restaurants, pubs, boutiques and art galleries opened one after another. The lower prices of land attracted many property investors and developers, who viewed the area as the next place to be and sold it as such on their projects' websites and in brochures. Property and rental prices have risen rapidly, tripling in some cases (Lee, 2009; Sherwood, 2010; Chardon, 2011; Zouain et al, 2011; Ashkarian, 2012). A few 'pioneers' bought empty lots or old houses, followed by larger real estate developers, who bought several lots at the same time, merged them and demolished existing structures in order to build as high as possible. Because many tenants live on old rental contracts, owners are willing to sell their properties to developers, who convince tenants to leave upon compensation (Salem, 2010).

The 'revival' of Mar Mikhael was accelerated by the settlement of young creative entrepreneurs in the neighbourhood. A survey of creatives carried out by Zouain et al (2011)[13] shows that there were two waves of creative entrepreneurs entering the neighbourhood: the first attracted by the area's low prices and village-like characteristics around 2008; and the second attracted by the area's developing cultural and creative industries around 2010/11. They consist of designers, architects and art and information technology (IT) professionals. Their clients hail mostly from outside Mar Mikhael, are 25 to 40 years old and are well-off.

The transformation of Mar Mikhael has had far-reaching effects for the area's existing commercial establishments. A recent survey by Ashkarian (2012) revealed that 12 original shops have closed over the past three to four years and inhabitants are worried about the changing character of the district and their precarious social situation. They face a form of sociocultural displacement (Davidson and Lees, 2005). Other Lebanese-Armenians take this seriously as well, as the following quote illustrates:

> 'How do we know that gentrification is "destroying" Mar Mikhael? Well, today, when our march for the 98th commemoration of the Armenian genocide passed through Mar Mikhael, shops owned by Lebanese-Armenians were closed, shops that have been owned by Lebanese who have been living with the Lebanese-Armenians for a long time in Mar Mikhael were also closed. However, many of the new trendy places do not seem to care: Chez Sophie and 3enab for example: shame on you! As a journalist from Al-akhbar once put it: "Mar Mikhael fi intizar el Barabera"[14] ... well ... they are already here!' (Kevork Baboyan, 24 April 2013)

The influx of creative entrepreneurs, bars and restaurants has been visualised in the map shown in Figure 15.3, comparing two surveys undertaken by Marieke Krijnen (MK) in 2011 and 2013. It also shows real estate projects.

Figure 15.3: Influx of real estate projects and venues between 2011 and 2013
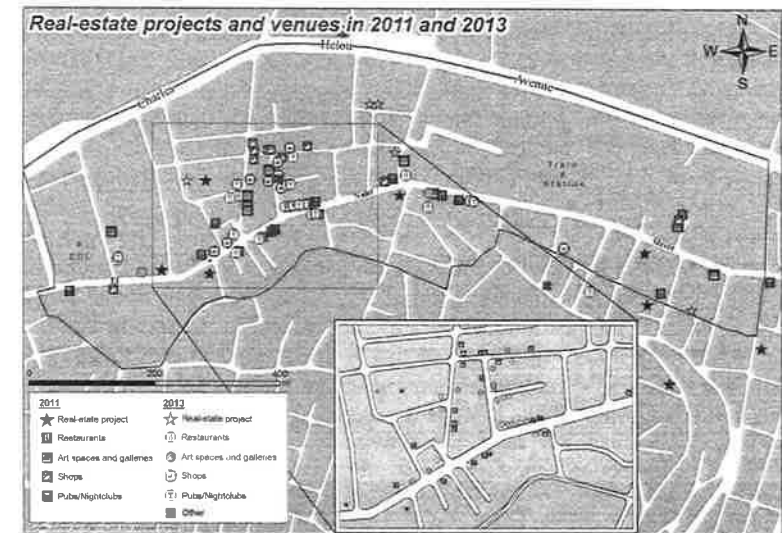
The first large-scale real estate project in Mar Mikhael was the AYA tower (see Figure 15.4), by HAR Properties, one of whose founders and major shareholders is the son of the former Prime Minister Rafik el-Hariri, Fahed el-Hariri. Forbes estimated his inherited fortune at USD1.4 billion in 2010.[15] Activists of the local Save Beirut Heritage (SBH) group have accused Hariri of using political pressure to obtain demolition permits, something that HAR Properties vehemently denies (Sikimic, 2011).

HAR Properties bought several lots in September 2009 and merged them in the same month.[16] Construction started in spring 2010 and involved the demolition of an old cinema plus a few old houses. According to one of the partners in HAR Properties, the intention was to preserve the existing structures. Finally, they decided against it because the cost was too high and the structure would not allow the required 25 parking spaces. Instead, they created 'a thin tall building that cannot be seen from anywhere.... The idea was to not have a big impact.'[17] The demolition was not without controversy, and SBH protested.[18] Although the developer proposed a solution to preserve heritage, the project itself has merely preserved a building facade because the minister of culture ordered them to do so.[19]

Salem (2010) reports that eight tenants remained in the old buildings and were paid a total of USD900,000 to leave. HAR Properties stated: 'the building belonged to eight brothers and sisters, they don't get the rent, it's the old system'.[20] This illustrates yet another case of the rent gaps created by rent controls.

The project is marketed on HAR Properties' website (available at: www.har-properties.com) as low-cost housing in a once-forgotten neighbourhood full of architectural charm. About 70% of the planned apartments have been sold at the time of writing. According to HAR Properties, prices start at USD3,000/m^2 and rise to USD4,200/m^2 for higher floors, allowing people to buy a property from USD500,000 to around USD1.2 million.[21] Facilities include a gym and a swimming pool. The developer is adamant that he does not sell to speculators (Salem, 2010, p 2): clients are '100% Lebanese, but about half of them are living abroad, in Europe, Dubai, Qatar'. The smaller apartments go to people actually living in Lebanon.

Another project is 'Bobo', by the Zardman company, a residential-commercial building with luxury apartments starting at USD3,300/m^2, ranging from 200m^2 to 350m^2, with a 425m^2 penthouse and 108m^2 roof garden. The project incorporates the facade of an older building and has been completely sold. Initially, the company wanted to demolish the entire structure, but was only given a permit after preserving the building as a whole, according to SBH. The then-minister

Figure 15.4: AYA

Note: Copyright HAR Properties.

of culture pressured them into the preservation.[22] While these cases may point to a change in state policy regarding heritage preservation, we have to point out that this minister has since been replaced, and his successor does not display an interest in heritage preservation.

The name 'Bobo' clearly plays with the area's 'hip' and creative image, as '*Bobo*' stands for 'bohemian-bourgeois', the francophone equivalent of '*hipster*'. The project was launched in February 2011 and sold out in 27 minutes: 'Bobo project is the new luxurious, residential estate; located in the new hotspot of Beirut, Mar Mikhael, combining a luxurious lifestyle with a non-stop lifestyle.'[23] This shows how the creative city discourse subliminally permeates the urban imaginary and that it fuels further gentrification of the neighbourhood. The next section will explore the demand for these and other new buildings.

Who are the gentrifiers?

Real estate developers refer to their buyers mostly as 'Lebanese middle class'. It is safe to say, however, that the vast majority of what is usually considered the middle class by politicians and residents (self-employed persons, teachers, doctors) cannot afford housing in Beirut unless assisted in some ways. If we try to define the middle class in Lebanon by relying on income data, we see that 50% of households in Lebanon live on less than USD6,500 a year. When real estate developers refer to their buyers as 'middle class', then, they usually refer to expatriate Lebanese that are employed abroad and can hence afford to buy. Most of these people buy for their children or are assisted by family, according to a real estate consultant,[24] who said that he had just sold a USD800,000 apartment to a Lebanese dentist living in France. Developers in Zokak el-Blat have also stated that most demand comes from Lebanese expatriates, while hardly any developer claims to have sold to foreigners. They claim their clients work mostly in white-collar professions and are university-educated. They buy the apartment for themselves and their family (MAJAL, 2012).

Keeping in mind the role of family support and expatriate Lebanese, we can distinguish two groups of gentrifiers. On the one hand, we see creative entrepreneurs who set up shop in Mar Mikhael, as described earlier. They include (fashion) designers, art professionals, owners of 'concept' stores and restaurants. There are likely some emancipatory effects of the gentrification (Lees, 2000). Many shop-owners are women, and there is a feminist cafe. Developers have noted that some clients prefer Mar Mikhael because of its allegedly non-sectarian character (even though it is distinctly Armenian, but perhaps that is viewed as more neutral). Indeed, political flagging, omnipresent in Zokak el-Blat, is mostly absent, except for Armenian banners calling for the recognition of the genocide by Turkey.

Lees et al (2008) describe how many initial gentrifiers are interested in preserving the social diversity of the area they live in. In Mar Mikhael, this mostly takes the form of preserving old buildings. The self-proclaimed non-profit Karaj-media lab (founded by two expatriate Lebanese designers/artists in 2010) states:

Karaj is located in a historic Lebanese house in Mar Mikhayel, a neighborhood that is home to young arts and non-profit organizations, galleries and emerging designers. Amidst rapid gentrification and rampant real estate crimes, Karaj takes a pro-active stance in support of architectural and cultural preservation.[25]

Indeed, most new bars and restaurants are located on the ground floors of Mandate-era buildings (1920–43).

According to developers and brokers, most buyers are Lebanese working abroad who only reside in their apartments in summer, buy it for their children or as an investment, or rent it out. Hence, the majority of buyers do not actually move into their apartments right away. That the vast majority of gentrifiers do not actually live in Lebanon most of the year means that they do not have the same influence on changing landscapes of consumption as elsewhere (Slater, 2011). These establishments exist in other, commercial areas of the city, such as Hamra, Verdun, Achrafieh and, of course, Mar Mikhael, but in Zokak el-Blat, they have remained absent. It is probable that gentrifiers use facilities in other areas, but if they lived in Beirut permanently, it is likely that consumer spaces would flourish in the neighbourhood itself.

Apart from the distinction between creative entrepreneurs and residents, the main difference between gentrifiers is sectarian, according to experts: Muslims will buy in predominantly Muslim areas in West Beirut; Christians in the East. Mar Mikhael is an exception, attracting a diverse, hip clientele consisting of singles or young couples, and with less families because of the large amount of restaurants and bars. The apartments are generally smaller as well, making them attractive to rent out to foreigners, with whom Mar Mikhael is very popular. Within Zokak el-Blat, the towers overlooking downtown attract more upmarket buyers, while the inner neighbourhoods cater to lower market segments (a difference of USD1,000/m^2), and most buyers are families. This is another proof of the immense diversity that exists within gentrification processes in Beirut. However, focusing solely on gentrifiers' preferences provides neither a complete picture nor explanation of gentrification. It is important to also talk about the people who are the victims of gentrification processes, the displaced (Slater, 2006), and discuss their resistance tactics and other factors that may impede gentrification processes.

Resistance to displacement, impediments to gentrification

Some 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000) are created when social movements mobilise against gentrification. This has become more of a challenge recently as many community activists are displaced (Lees et al, 2008, p 248), but it is exceedingly difficult in Lebanon, where civil society activists concerned with social justice hardly escape sectarian politics, and where few people can afford to miss a day at work. At a meeting concerned with resisting gentrification processes in Beirut,

one girl exclaimed: "The only way to occupy a building and resist displacement is if you have your own militia!"[26]

Deboulet and Fawaz (2011) mention a successful effort at resisting displacement by highway projects in the southern suburbs of Beirut that involved political parties negotiating on behalf of the residents, coupled with protests. The fact that these mobilisations take place through political parties, which are usually closely linked to people's sectarian affiliation, serves to strengthen sectarian religious identities, even though not all residents support those parties. They are, however, dependent on them for information and a share in negotiated compensations because the Lebanese political system does not provide any other means of participation (Fawaz, 2009b; Deboulet and Fawaz, 2011). In Zokak el-Blat, some squatters probably enjoy political protection and are, hence, difficult to evict. Bodenstein (2005) mentions that during the war, militias protected buildings squatted by Kurds and Palestinians from demolition. Their role is ambiguous: in the case of informal settlements in Beirut, political parties such as Amal and Hezbollah have played a role in either facilitating or resisting processes of displacement (Harb, 2001; Fawaz and Peillen, 2003). In Mar Mikhael, there is no overlapping structure to organise collectively on the local level, a fact that encourages clientelism when people try to resist displacement (Ashkarian, 2012). Hence, resistance opportunities are limited in Lebanon.

The provision of affordable housing can impede gentrification (Ley and Dobson, 2008). In Lebanon, this is mostly done by religious organisations, which own large tracts of land to use in the interests of their constituencies. Hezbollah, the Maronite Church (Lebanon's biggest landowner) and the Syriac Patriarchate have all provided affordable housing (Brundiers and Odermatt, 2002; Ghodbane, 2012), even their role is ambiguous though here as well: in one case, ostensibly affordable housing turned out to be a luxury project with large profits (Bekdache, forthcoming). Rent controls do not necessarily prevent displacement either, as we have seen earlier.

Organisations that intend to preserve heritage such as SBH, and the state's heritage protection efforts themselves, solely look at the built environment and disregard the social fabric of neighbourhoods (Bekdache, forthcoming). They generally side with the landlords. If they get their way, buildings might be preserved, but tenants will be displaced since they advocate for the abolition of rent controls. As potential for resistance is limited, and actors that can prevent displacement have ambiguous roles – spaces of hope are hard to find in Lebanon.

Conclusion: a post-colonial perspective on researching gentrification in Beirut

Most processes of gentrification described earlier follow the same logic as gentrification processes elsewhere: they can be explained via the rent-gap thesis, coupled with sufficient demand. Yet, in the Lebanese case specifically, and probably many other countries in the Global South, it is important to think about the role

of the diaspora. As Smith (2002) has pointed out, global capital is reaching down into local neighbourhoods. While keeping in mind that the global is always locally embedded, and hence the local–global dichotomy should be treated with suspicion (Tsing, 2005), we do see a crucial role for transnational capital investment and (expatriate) demand. The place-making projects associated with gentrification deploy the global–local dichotomy in ways that make them legible to capital: Mar Mikhael's 'local authenticity'; Beirut's place as a global hub on the crossroads between East and West; and so forth (see also Parker, 2008).

Anyone researching gentrification should keep in mind that there are big differences within one and the same urban region. As we have shown, Mar Mikhael experienced rampant changes in its commercial establishments; Zokak el-Blat did not (MAJAL, 2012). We have also seen, as Butler and Robson (2001) noted, that different areas attract different types of gentrifiers. Moreover, Mar Mikhael has seen the rehabilitation of some older structures and the preservation of facades. In Zokak el-Blat, this is entirely absent, apart from some renovated mansions that house schools (MAJAL, 2012). Furthermore, we should not forget gentrifiers' sectarian preferences. All these complex dynamics come together and influence the shape of gentrification processes in specific areas.

The role of war and conflict in processes of displacement and creating rent gaps is important. Permanent displacement of different sectarian groups into more homogeneously populated neighbourhoods and regions, as explained earlier, has reinforced sectarian divisions in the country, while the role of political parties in negotiating compensation has done the same for some groups. These displacements 'free up' space for profitable reinvestment, which is another spatial fix after a crisis (Lees et al, 2008). We argue that it is not only the financial crises of capitalism, but also the crises of conflict and war, that should be taken into account in providing the opportunity for spatial fixes. As we have shown, conflict can become part of a speculator's game and widen rent gaps (Ross and Jamil, 2011).

This leads towards our final point, namely, that a post-colonial perspective should look beyond the 'usual suspects'. Anyone who wants to perform a discourse analysis using policy documents will have a hard time in Lebanon, since these are hardly produced. Instead, state involvement is merged with non-state actors' practices. Scholars should keep this in mind when researching gentrification processes in any context. This goes for resistance to gentrification as well: political parties in Lebanon are an important factor in processes of displacement, and we need to look beyond social movements based on location or class alone and pay attention to the dynamics of sectarianism, political connections and clientelism to investigate how these complex interactions shape the contemporary city in the Global South.

The research presented here has sought to clarify the different ways in which processes of gentrification in Beirut unfold, and how they are influenced by context-specific factors. We hope that our work will raise questions on similar dimensions of gentrification taking place in their context of research, hence bringing more 'Southern' experiences into scholarship and using these findings to question how we view the process in the dominant literature about the West

(drawing on Roy [2009a] and Robinson [2006]; Lees [2014] makes a similar observation).

Notes

[1] To compare: prices in the most important city centers in Europe include USD24,900/m² (United Kingdom), USD19,150/m² (France), USD6,000/m² (Netherlands) and USD4,000/m² (Germany). For the US, it is USD13,377/m²; for the Middle East, Beirut is only preceded by Israel (USD8,258/m²) and Abu Dhabi (USD4,010/m²). See: http://www.globalpropertyguide.com (accessed 26 June 2013).

[2] There is a distinction between the area of Beirut City proper and the Greater Beirut or Beirut Metropolitan Area. The latter counts the suburbs as part of the city, and is the scale from which the estimate of 2 million has been derived.

[3] Except for a short period of state interventionism in the 1960s following a severe civil conflict. This period saw the introduction of some forms of social security and large investments in infrastructure.

[4] One extreme example is the case of a minister passing a temporary decree allowing the building of his project in the mountains near Beirut and cancelling it after the building permit was passed. Another is the project of a major developer (MENA Capital) to destroy an old garden whose architect (Ziad Akl) is on the Higher Council for Urban Planning, and hence on the committee deciding to approve it. He is also the head of the Urban Planning Department at ALBA University training a new generation of city builders.

[5] Reconstruction was initiated in 1992 with the National Emergency Reconstruction Plan (NERP), developed by the Council for Reconstruction and Development (CDR) into the long-term Horizon 2000 plan (Dibeh, 2005). The reconstruction of downtown Beirut was a private enterprise, executed by a private company called Solidere, which was created in 1994 by the Hariri government.

[6] The last census in Lebanon took place in 1932 and has not been repeated for political reasons related to the distribution of government posts and parliament seats based on sectarian affiliation.

[7] Which was confined to war displacees and has not been used for other operations involving the displacement of dwellers, such as highway construction. The Ministry of Displaced People is in charge of a 'return programme' for people displaced by war (Fawaz and Peillen, 2003) and negotiating on their behalf.

[8] In 2005, 1,339 sales were registered, of which 64 were to foreigners, 25 were lot mergers and 15 demolitions took place. In 2011, 1,870 sales were concluded, of which 65 were to foreigners, 32 were mergers and 14 demolitions took place.

[9] Interview by Marieke Krijnen for MAJAL, 30 September 2010.

[10] Interview with Binadar representative, conducted by MK for MAJAL, 28 September 2010.

[11] Three cadastral records were analysed by MAJAL in autumn 2010.

[12] Interview with developer 2, carried out by MK for MAJAL, 27 September 2010.

[13] In Mar Mikhael, 35 creative entrepreneurs were identified, of which 26 completed a questionnaire. Of these, 22 were actual 'creators', while four were exhibitors of creative work and six provided services to the creators and exhibitors, including restaurants.

[14] 'Mar Mikhael: waiting for the barbarians.'

[15] See: www.forbes.com/lists/2010/10/billionaires-2010_Fahd-Hariri_F5B7.html (accessed 2 January 2013).

[16] As evidenced by a cadastral record requested by MK on 15 December 2011.

[17] Interview conducted by MK, 13 December 2011.

[18] See: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/Sep/27/Hundreds-march-in-support-of-Beiruts-historic-architecture.ashx

[19] According to an interview by MK with one of the partners of HAR Properties, the developer of AYA, 13 December 2011. In the original renders of the project, no such preservation can be seen.

[20] Interview conducted by MK, 13 December 2011.

[21] Interview conducted by MK, 13 December 2011.

[22] See the debate on the Skyscraper City forums. Available at: http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=83830747andhighlight=save+beirut+heritage+bobo#post83830747 (accessed 21 December 2012).

[23] From Zardman's Facebook page. Available at: www.facebook.com/zardman

[24] Personal communication, June 2013. This space has been forced to close due to rent increases.

[25] Quote from: www.karajbeirut.org

[26] Meeting organised by MK and a friend, April 2010, t-marbouta cafe, Beirut.

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