

AMERICANUNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

CONSOLIDATING SOCIO-SPATIAL PRACTICES IN A
MILITARIZED PUBLIC SPACE: THE CASE OF ABU NUWAS
STREET IN BAGHDAD

by
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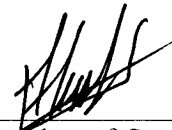
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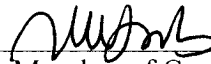
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Consolidating Socio-Spatial Practices in a Militarized Public Space: The Case of Abu Nuwas Street in Baghdad.

Post-invasion Baghdad has undergone excessive processes of militarization of its urban spaces altering the pre-war way of life. As the power relations between the two main constituencies of the city, Sunni and Shia, have also been transformed along sectarian lines, security measures have assumed sectarian expressions. Abu Nuwas Street is one of the few remaining open public spaces along the Tigris with a symbolic significance for Baghdadis. At the same time, the street is the location of facilities with significant political visibility and, thus, potential targets for terrorist attacks. Also, the Green Zone (the walled and heavily secured state quarter) is just across the river. The street, therefore, has witnessed excessive deployment of security measures since its “reopening” and “renovation” in 2007 as a result of the “surge” military strategy under the then commanding general of the occupation forces David Petraeus. This thesis attempts to understand how the effects of militarization in the open public spaces of Abu Nuwas Street have affected socio-spatial practices of street users. My work involves the documentation of an important public space in a city rarely has it been explored in the fields of urban studies, urban planning, and political geography. Although, my hypothesis states, much socio-spatial practices are reduced, seeds of a vibrant and diverse public space can be found in the parks. I put forward a manifesto with planning recommendations to consolidate the currently existing diversity of socio-spatial practices in the parks’ public space.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	xi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Studying Abu Nuwas Street as a Militarized Public Space.....	1
1.2. Conceptual Framework.....	2
1.3. Methods	3
1.4. Thesis Structure	5
2. ILUCIDATING THE LITERATURE: MILITARIZATION’S ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH.....	7
2.1. On Security and the City	7
2.2. On Public Space in Militarized Context	8
2.3. On Public Space	12
3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT SITUATION.....	15
3.1. Beginnings (1920s-1930s through 1968)	15

3.1.1. The Emergence of a Neighborhood: The Construction of the Street.....	17
3.1.2. Abu Nuwas Street and al-Rashid Street	20
3.1.3. The (Forced) Emigration of the Baghdadi Jewry.....	22
3.2. The Street under Ba’athist Rule (1968-2003)	24
3.2.1. Pinnacle Years (1970s).....	25
3.2.2. New Major Constructions along the Street	28
3.2.3. Decline (Late 1970s through 1990s)	30
3.3. Invasion, Occupation, and Civil Strife (2003-2007)	32
3.3.1. Abu Nuwas Street, The Green Zone, and Escalating Violence	33
3.3.2. Abu Nuwas Street and the Civil Strife	34
3.3.3. Sectarian Signs on the Street.....	36
3.4. The Reopening and “Redevelopment” of Abu Nuwas Street and Parks, and Proposed “Investment Projects” (2007-2014)	37
4. THE STREET TODAY: SOCIAL AND SPATIAL PRACTICES.....	44
4.1. The First Section: The Northern Section of Abu Nuwas street.....	49
4.1.1. The Park-Side Segment of the Section.....	49
4.1.2. The Segment of the Section across the Park	52
4.1.3. The Large Park	59
4.1.4. The Two Restaurants, the Swimming Pools, and the Soccer Fields	65
4.2. The Second Section: The Southern Section of Abu Nuwas street	71
4.2.1. The Riverside Segment of the Section	72
4.2.2. The Other Segment of the Street	78
4.3. The Third and Fourth Sections: The Abu Nuwas Neighborhood and al-Sa’doun Street	83
4.3.1. Connection between al-Sa’doun Street and Abu Nuwas Street.....	87
4.3.2. Al-Sa’doun Street’s Squares	88
4.3.3. Land Uses along al-Sa’doun Street	90

4.4. The Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Sections: Bab al-Sharqi, Karrada-Abu Nuwas Residential Area, and Karrada Dakhil Street	90
5. ABU NUWAS: RESTRICTIONS AND PRACTICES.....	96
5.1. Security Mechanisms.....	96
5.1.1. Geography and Patterns	96
5.1.2. Access and Mobility.....	100
5.1.3. Nuances and Negotiations.....	103
5.2. Sectarian Signs	105
5.2.1. Territory Marking and Identity Claims	105
5.2.2. Exclusion and Segregation.....	108
5.2.3. Nuances and Negotiations.....	109
5.3. Spatial Practices.....	112
5.3.1. Uses and Users	112
5.3.2. Diversity	121
5.3.3. Contestations	123
6. RE-IMAGINING ABU NUWAS	125
6.1. Governance Analysis.....	125
6.2. Advocating for Abu Nuwas: Proposed Institutional Governance Scenario	128
7. CONCLUSION.....	134
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	137
Appendix.....	140

1. DATA COLLECTION GUIDE

2. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE IN ABU NUWAS STREET
3. GUIDED CONVERSATIONS AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Expansion of Built-up Area in Baghdad (Pre-1920 until Present).....	16
2. Map of Baghdad drawn in 1929 by the Public Works Department in Baghdad....	19
3. Map of Baghdad in 1936-1938 drawn by Ahmad Susa	19
4. Bus Map of Baghdad in 1961	20
5. Abu Nuwas Street in the 1950s.....	22
6. Abu Nuwas Street in the 1960s	24
7. Abu Nuwas Street in the 1970s from the northern end of the al-Jumhuriya Bridge.....	26
8. Boat terminal in the southern part of Abu Nuwas Street	27
9. Abu Nuwas Street at night in the 1970s.....	28
10. Tourist Map of Baghdad in 1977	29
11. "Iraqis enjoying the gardens and restaurants of Abu Nuwas Street"	39
12. Location of the Proposed Investment Projects.....	42
13. Location of Abu Nuwas Street, and its Parks in Relation to Baghdad's Municipalities	46
14. Study Area Sections and Street Network	47
15. General Land Use Map of Abu Nuwas Street and the Adjacent Areas	48
16. Landmarks in the Northern Section of Abu Nuwas Street.....	49
17. (Left) the sidewalk in front of the park; (right) a stair connecting the sidewalk to the park.....	50
18. Emergency Police Regiment walled zone in the park-side segment of the street..	51
19. Children playing soccer close to a playground inside the park.....	52
20. "I Love Iraq" the graffiti in red and pink reads.....	53

21. Fenced site with barbed wire on top of the fence and a big piece of fabric with a Shia religious phrase inscribed on it (“ <i>haihat minna al-thulla</i> ” which can be translated to “we do not descend into humility”).....	54
22. Former residential building currently occupied by Burj Babel (an NGO)	56
23. A liquor store	56
24. A carpentry workshop where the products are stacked on the sidewalk of one of Abu Nuwas Neighborhood's street perpendicular on Abu Nuwas Street	57
25. Abandoned ground-floor shops of one of the buildings with construction waste on the sidewalk in front of it	58
26. Closed-off ground-floor shops in one of the buildings along this section of the street	58
27. A family walking on the central street inside the large park one Friday afternoon	61
28. A couple walking on one of the pathways of the large park.....	63
29. Two boys studying while sitting on the swings in one of the grass areas where other boys were playing soccer	63
30. Children playing in the playground while their parents are watching them	64
31. A cart selling Iraqi lablabi (chickpeas in a flavored sauce), and renting hookahs.	64
32. A stall where a group of young men (not shown in the picture) were sitting	65
33. A Humvee and soldiers on the road linking the car parking to the restaurant and the swimming pools	66
34. The men’s section separated by a mirror partition from the "family wing”	67
35. The outdoor section of the restaurant near the car parking.....	67
36. The platform in front of the restaurant’s hall where the carps are cooked	68
37. The large swimming pool and the sitting area	69
38. Religious markers hung on the fence separating the soccer fields and the park....	70
39. Landmarks in the Southern Section of Abu Nuwas Street.....	71
40. The entrance of the al-Iraq Casino	73
41. The Shahrazad and Shahrayar statue and a police car parked under a shed	74

42. One men posing by the statue while his friend photographing him.....	74
43. The entrance of the small park	76
44. An old couple walking on the central pathway of the small section of the park ...	76
45. The riverside sidewalk between the small park and the 14th of July Bridge.....	77
46. A man washing his car in one of the aforementioned wide sidewalks in front of the solar-powered buildings	78
47. A solar-powered residential building in Abu Nuwas Street where two women and a kid walking in front of it.....	79
48. A man washing his car which is parked in front of his residence.....	80
49. A traditional house is fenced and barbed wire is used as well.....	80
50. A store selling water-pumping equipment. Note how the products are exhibited on the sidewalk appropriating it.....	81
51. Closed-off ground-floor shops marked with a banner with a Shia inscription	81
52. A watchtower behind the wall of the SCIRI's main office	82
53. A large poster of the SCIRI's leaders hung south of the organization's complex ..	82
54. A police Humvee parked close to a solar-powered building	83
55. The main street of the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood	84
56. A traditional café in the neighborhood	85
57. A traditional building with an electric generator serving the neighborhood	85
58. Ground-floor shops closed-off with bricks. Note the dilapidated condition of the old traditional buildings	86
59. A hotel in the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood.....	86
60. One of the streets in the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood connecting al-Sa'doun Street to Abu Nuwas Street	87
61. A street connecting al-Sa'doun Street to Abu Nuwas Street in the area where the walled Palestine Hotel is located	88
62. An American military vehicle pulling down Saddam Hussein's statue in al- Firdaus Square.....	89

63. Al-Firdaus Square on al-Sa'doun Street	89
64. Kahramana Square	90
65. Al-Tahrir Square in Baghdad	91
66. The southern part of al-Rashid Street that is connected to Abu Nuwas Street	92
67. The first area of the Karrada-Abu Nuwas residential section where streets are linear, linking Abu Nuwas Street to Karrada Dakhil Street.....	93
68. Saint Raphael Catholic Church close to the Institut français.....	93
69. Ground-floor shops in Karrada Dakhil Street	95
70. Security Measures in Abu Nuwas Street and the Adjacent Areas	98
71. The Ministry of Communication guarded by security guards, a watchtower, CCTV camera, and blast walls.....	100
72. Banners hung on the fence of a squatted residence in the southern section of the street with inscriptions saying “ <i>ya hussein</i> ”	106
73. An army checkpoint controlling access to the 14th of July Bridge leading to the Green Zone.....	107
74. Respondents’ Places of Residence (Weekday)	111
75. Respondents’ Places of Residence (Weekend)	112
76. Spatial Practices in Abu Nuwas Street and its Parks	113
77. Abu Nuwas Street’s and Parks’ Users	114
78. A group of young males eating and smoking hookah on the grass area of the small park	116
79. A couple walking and holding hands on the grass area of the large park.....	117
80. Young men playing soccer in one of the soccer fields adjacent to the large park	119
81. Two young men sitting on a motorcycle watching others playing soccer on one of the many grass areas of the park of Abu Nuwas	119
82. Closed-Off Streets.....	129

To my parents and Mona Abou Shakra

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Following the formation of the modern Iraqi state in 1921 under the British occupation, Baghdad underwent many urban transformations mostly closely associated to the nation-state-building process. The new state-planned neighborhoods outside the old walls of Baghdad were inhabited by people with similar socio-economic backgrounds irrespective of religious or sectarian affiliation. During those times, Abu Nuwas Street, named after a classical Arab poet famous for his profligacy, became a main leisurely destination for the emerging middle and upper classes. Ever since, the street was associated with enjoyment, and became a key symbol of the “golden days” of Baghdadi cultural life during the 1950s-1970s era. Such perceptions have endured despite the gradual decline the street went through during the policing practices of the Ba’athist regime in the late 1970s, until the post-US invasion years when it became a street “for the security forces”, as expressed by an Iraqi ⁽¹⁾.

1.1. Studying Abu Nuwas Street as a Militarized Public Space

Post-invasion Baghdad is commonly portrayed in the media and in the literature as a city of walls replete with soldiers, checkpoints and other physical security measures. This dramatic image of the city is certainly true but there are also other socio-spatial realities related to how ordinary people live their quotidian, everyday life in the public

¹ “شارع ابو نؤاس يتحول من شارع للعشاق الى شارع للقوات الامنية” *Shakwmakw* March 12 2014. Accessed at www.shakwmakw.com on June 30 2014.

spaces of the city. The literature on security measures in other cities around the world also reflects a similar decay with little attention to dwellers' daily negotiations of these security measures, and to the everyday tactics they deploy to craft spaces they practice and experience.

Most of the literature on security and its impacts on public space focuses on Western cities, and especially on city centers after 9/11. In Middle Eastern cities, despite dire conflicts and heavy security measures, in addition to the deleterious urban impacts of neoliberalism, many city spaces are still vibrant with a variety of socio-spatial practices (Bayat, 1997; 2012; Harb, 2013). My thesis builds on these observations and seeks to investigate Abu Nuwas street's socio-spatial practices that have certainly become constrained by extreme security measures, but have also managed to continue, and sometimes to flourish, in the nearby parks. I want to document and critically investigate these socio-spatial practices, and underscore their importance for public life in Baghdad. I also want to explore how to consolidate and enhance them. More specifically, I examine how the security measures in the open public spaces of Abu Nuwas street have affected the socio-spatial practices of city dwellers? I argue that, although socio-spatial practices have been largely reduced along the street, seeds of a vibrant and diverse public space are located in the adjacent parks which the Mayoralty of Baghdad should protect and enhance.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

The concepts I use for my analysis build on two strands in the urban studies and planning literature. First, I rely on the literature on "militarization" and "securitization",

mostly centered on Western cities (Graham, 2004; 2011; 2012; Marcuse, 2006; Davis, 1990; Nemeth and Hollander, 2010; Nemeth, 2010; and Savitch, 2008; Molotch and McClain, 2003; Low, 2006; Flusty, 1997), but also on some Middle Eastern cities (Fawaz et al., 2012; Monroe, 2010; Damluji, 2010; and Zangana, 2010). Militarization reduces access public space badly needed in cities which are rapidly becoming privatized and gentrified by neoliberal urbanism. Security measures also especially undermine access and mobility of marginalized groups in cities. Second, I draw on the literature on social, spatial practices and public space (Lefebvre, 1991; de Certeau, 1984; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Bayat, 1997; 2012; Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht, 2009), which underscores how, despite heavy constraints, people still find ways, resorting to tactics, to appropriate and negotiate access to space, capitalizing on the “cracks” of the political and moral order. Understanding public space accordingly enables urban planners to act as advocacy planners (Davidoff, 1965; Hardwood, 2003), and identify the opportunities in militarized public spaces, and try to consolidate them in their urban planning recommendations and proposed urban interventions.

1.3. Methods

I conducted fieldwork during two fieldtrips I made to Baghdad in January 2014 (2 weeks) and June 2014 (11 days). The fieldwork included participant observation in Abu Nuwas street, and the surrounding streets and neighborhoods. I went to the street daily, and at different times of the day, during week-ends, in winter and summer, collecting detailed information about people and socio-spatial practices according to a specific guide (see Appendix 1). During this time, I also collected extensive visual data for

mapping, either through note-taking or photographs. I administered a small survey with street users (n=40) (see Appendix 2), recoding basic information about their socio-economic profiles and their place of residence. Fieldwork also included conducting guided conversations with 4 resource persons, and two semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3).

During my site visits, I observed how people used the space distinctively and documented practices, activities, land uses, building typologies, patterns and types of security measures. I observed the age groups of people, their gender, their dress codes, etc. I took notes, clandestinely photographed and recorded videos ⁽²⁾, and drew sketches and maps.

I participated in many activities, such as eating in the restaurants, buying from the stalls in the large park, sitting on the parks' benches, and walking the street. I had several conversations during the times I spent on the street which helped me better grasp the street's features and character.

In addition, I used available data as one of my data-collection tools, identifying public reports, relevant newspaper articles, YouTube videos, blogs, memoirs, and others to understand the history of the street and write the historical description of the case-study profile. I also relied on stories from acquaintances who lived through the heydays of the street and the city in the 1960s and 1970s and later.

Data collection was limited by time and security conditions. Several people said they would speak to me but did not come back to me during the little time I spent in the

² As even if permission was granted by the responsible authority to conduct my fieldwork, it would have been not possible to record and photograph a setting with such a heavy security presence. Such a restriction was a constant hurdle I and my classmates went through when doing fieldwork in Baghdad for class assignments at the University of Baghdad.

city. I wanted to collect data on ownership patterns along Abu Nuwas street but that required much more investment and investigation which I could not undertake. Also, in June 2014, as I was in Baghdad ISIS was taking over Mosul and I had to shorten my stay.

1.4. Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured into four main sections. After this introduction, chapter two discusses the history of the street and the changing practices of city dwellers. It closes with a presentation of the current planning stakeholders and the legal framework within which they operate, highlighting the projects they envision for the neighborhood. The third chapter examines the urban geography of the street, its parks, and the surrounding areas in addition to mapping the existing socio-spatial practices of the users. The fourth chapter synthesizes the conceptual framework used to problematize public space in Abu Nuwas Street in relation to security and socio-spatial segregation. The fifth chapter analyzes my key findings, namely how militarization has appropriated the public space of the street and reduced access and mobility, and how sectarianism has exacerbated people's marking of public space to the detriment of Sunni residents, and in ways to enhance sectarian segregation in the city. The chapter also underscores that these constraining security and sectarian impacts are not hegemonic, and people's usage of public space persists in spite of their limiting effects. I thus show how the public space of the parks incorporates multiple spatial practices by a variety of users, and how several moral contestations and spatial negotiations take place. The thesis closes with planning recommendations which propose an institutional governance scenario through which the

observed socio-spatial practices can be maintained and enhanced, and the security and sectarian restrictions on Abu Nuwas street could be reasonably addressed.

CHAPTER 2

ELUCIDATING THE LITERATURE: MILITARIZATION'S ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

2.1. On Security and the City

The nexus between security and cities has been studied by scholars who acknowledge the proliferation of military ideas, policies, mechanisms, and rhetoric into the urban life of cities in a time when “humankind has become predominantly urban species” (Graham, 2011). Graham discusses the “military urbanism” characterized by representing the city and its public and private spaces along with their users as a source of threat and target. The term “militarization” is used to describe such a process which “targets everyday urban sites, circulations and populations” (Graham, 2012). The term “securitization” is also used to denote how “potentially any issue in society” is dealt with as a security issue (Røyrvik, 2010 drawing on Waever, 1995). In my thesis, I will define “securitization” as the process of securing an urban site to reduce related economic and political risks. It is also the process of securing urban sites for the interest of political, religious, and military stakeholders. On the other hand, “militarization” implies the process of deploying *excessive* security measures in the everyday life of city dwellers on the pretext of securing an interest. Therefore, the “militarization” process includes the “securitization” process of an urban site but, simultaneously, entails the excessive deployment of visible security measures. In my thesis, I choose to use the term “militarization” of/in Abu Nuwas Street where the “securitization” process is accompanied by excessive deployment of security measures.

The impacts of security on cities is often the result of “anti-terrorism” measures in a post-9/11 world, although such impacts have well been present in cities of the global North and South before 9/11 as a result of “anti-crime” measures (Graham, 2004; 2012). Discussions of militarization in both contexts usually distinguish between two aspects, physical features and policies. Davis (1990) talks about barricading the streets in some areas in Los Angeles and Caldeira (2000) discusses armed guards who secure residential, commercial, financial, and leisure enclaves in Sao Paulo. Both link such physical presence of security to policies against crime, targeting mainly the poor, such as the “war on drugs” in the case of Los Angeles. Nemeth and Hollander (2010) list a number of physical security measures in New York City after the 9/11 attack such as gates, moats, barriers among others. Graham (2004) and Warren (2004) show how anti-terror policies are put to work by some states to legalize such presence of security measures. One example is the Homeland Defense policy in the USA enacted after 9/11 and which gave a legal framework to the deployment of security measures in American cities.

4.2. On Public Space in Militarized Context

In such militarized contexts, public space shrinks. Savitch (2008: 133) discusses the shrinkage of urban space brought by security impositions, even if surveillance is “as unobtrusive as possible,” in cities that should be an “open, diverse, and tolerant environment”. The physical loss of public space has been studied also by Nemeth (2010) who calculates and compares it in New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco concluding that “security zones” have become a permanent land use. Davis describes the physical loss of urban space in L.A. due to the “war on drugs” as a “repression in space

and movement". He declares the "destruction of public space" as a result of securing the "outside-in" city where the activities of the well-off and middle class take place inside enclaves. Such an urban configuration, he says, results in the deterioration of the pedestrian life of the street which are turned into "traffic sewers", and of public parks which are turned into "receptacles" of the urban poor such as the homeless.

Accessibility, as well, is a major concern in relation to security. Benton-Short (2007) discusses how "hypersecurity" in the National Mall in Washington D.C. may impede, or make inconvenient, public access necessary for everyday practices as well as collective gatherings. Also, issues of accessibility are complex as Nemeth and Hollander (2010) assert, "most open and accessible spaces are not always the most successful ones". Staeheli and Mitchell (2008) also concur that access is not a simple matter of an open or closed space. Rather, it is about how someone enters a space even if not physically barred from it and is conditioned by feelings of receptivity, welcome, comfort, or by the lack of these feelings.

In addition to accessibility, mobility is constrained in a militarized city. Monroe (2011) discusses how mobility, in the city of Beirut, is "circumscribed through installations of barriers, blockades, checkpoints and the rerouting of traffic flow" mainly to protect the political elites from a "criminalized and differentiated public." She concludes that "[t]he encounters with and navigations of security" in relation to "inequalities in [spatial] access and mobility produce uneven citizenship". However, she underscores, spatial access and mobility do involve "spatial and social negotiation" (Monroe, 2011). As such, Fawaz et al. (2012) emphasize that mobility in Beirut is reduced for particular groups due to the security systems across the city. These systems

don't report to the same authority, i.e. the state, nor do they agree on what constitutes a threat. Movement of city dwellers, therefore, is modified in relation to certain areas and neighborhoods in the city that are considered receptive or not with regard to class, gender, nationality, and religion/sect.

In Baghdad, security measures restrict physical, social, and economic mobility of residents, and, thus, limit the places of job and commerce to be within neighborhoods (Damluji, 2010). This post-war reality was the result of the US occupation policies which caused sectarian-based spatial segregation in addition to the sectarian political system. Most prewar mixed neighborhoods in the city became after the 2003 invasion homogeneously Sunni or Shia surrounded by concrete walls and controlled by checkpoints. Therefore, Damluji argues, potentials for postwar reconciliation are diminished.

Zangana (2010) argues that the walling of Baghdad by the occupation authority altered the prewar way of life and impacted the movement of male and female city dwellers "to force populace stay at home and not risking crossing the walls . . ." Women, especially, suffer from walling the city neighborhoods as they are vulnerable to "humiliation, abuses and sexual harassment" at entry and exit points. Both authors refer to the perception of the walls by the residents as an imposed measure by the occupiers, locally naming them "Bremer walls" or "occupation walls".

Another line in this literature points out that militarization shrinks political life public spaces may foster. Warren (2004) discusses how militarization of urban space affects governance by undermining "political control over a city by its residents", and the ability of localities to provide the public space necessary for citizens to express political

voice. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that minor attention has been given in the literature to understand the negotiations undertaken by citizens contesting militarization processes. Marcuse (2004; 2006) explains that the war on terrorism is leading towards the downgrading of the quality of urban life as in the loss of, or restrictions on, the public use of space, including political dissent. Furthermore, the quality of urban life is downgraded by the divergence of public spending away from the public towards private security service firms (Marcuse, 2004; Molotch and McClain, 2003).

Studies on the impacts of security on public spaces sometimes draw from the literature on the “privatization” of public space which is concerned with the study of the provision of destinations for the public by private agents and the consequences such provision entails. Low (2006) points out how public spaces in New York City are redesigned and opened for the public with intensive surveillance and policing under the management of private agents such as corporations. Flusty (1997) speaks of public spaces such as parks and libraries which were lost due to shrinking tax revenues and user fees leading to their closure. Thus, they are replaced by privately owned and administered spaces of consumption and “aggregation”- most commonly, malls- where access is governed by the ability to purchase, and where private security ensures predictability, regularity, and orderliness of users and their behavior to ensure the “flow of commerce” (Flusty, 1997). The prevalence of malls which work as a destination for the public is also increasing in cities of the Arab World. In Cairo, Abaza (2001) argues that the mall “is the place of entertainment” which replaces the already scarce open public space in Cairo. It should be noted that in my thesis I am not interested in studying the enclosed, pseudo-

public space of the mall or other similar spaces. Rather, I focus on open spaces in cities, used by diverse publics.

4.3. On Public Space

Iveson (2007) distinguishes two approaches in the literature to the concept of public space. The topographical approach is concerned with public space that is designated as such, and is the space which is colored on a map to be distinguished from private spaces. Such a public space includes streets, footpaths, squares, etc., and it should be open to members of the public. Here, access is vital to address the public and be part of it. The other approach is the procedural which is concerned with any space that becomes a “site of power, or common action coordinated through speech and persuasion” (Benhabib, 1992: 78) through political action and public address at a particular time. This kind of public exists across “diverse topographical locations” (Benhabib, 1992: 78 drawing on Arendt, 1958). Iveson states that both approaches recognize important dimensions of publicness, but fail to acknowledge its multi-dimensionality. The topographical approach overlooks the fact that collective interactions in relation to public interests and issues may take place across various topographical spaces whether private or public. Whereas, the procedural approach relegates the significant role of public spaces in relation to public address.

I understand public space in relation to the spatial triad of Lefebvre (1991) who conceptualizes three kinds of “social spaces”: the conceived, the perceived, and the lived. Deeb and Harb (2013) understand the *conceived* space as the planned/designed and/or managed space by religious, political, or entrepreneurial stakeholders. The location and

spatial configuration and characteristics of space underlie the *perceived* space. As space is “socially experienced by people”, it engenders “informal collective practices” and, thus, it is *lived* (Deeb and Harb, 2013: 26-27).

Public space is also a space of and for sociability (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008). Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht (2009) discuss how public interactions among different users (mainly those taking place on sidewalks), even if ephemeral or accidental, help construct and display individual identities. Also, intentional or unintentional encounters are not meaningless in the sense that they may confront established norms, challenge hierarchies, and/or alter expectations attached to a certain place. Accordingly, diversity is an ideal to strive for in such an understanding of public space. The ideal is not always found, Loukaitou and Ehrenfeucht emphasize. People sometimes want to have “pleasant” encounters with similar others as in malls. But, encounters can also be intolerant and violent.

De Certeau (1984) discusses “tactics” people use in their spatial practices, in relation to “strategies” authorities enact. This understanding links to Lefebvre’s “lived space”. More relevant to the context of the Middle East, Bayat (2012) explains how the spatial features of the neoliberal city (the “city-inside-out”) is an asset for the urban “subalterns” who operate, subsist, and live on the public spaces, i.e. the streets, in an outdoor economy as in the case of Amman, Cairo, and Tehran. Thus, public space survives even under dire conditions and people still use it.

Spatial practices in public space have a political dimension. Lefebvre argues that public space is an ideal that is never achieved but should be maintained and struggled for by appropriation and re-appropriation. De Certeau argues that the panoptic power of an

authority, or a discourse, is always eluded by the spatial practices (“tactics”) of the city dwellers structuring the conditions of social life. Bayat explains how the “city-inside-out” urbanity generates new publicness that has implication for social and political mobilization in addition to social exclusion. He also considers the “quiet encroachment” as grassroots activism which contests the authority’s control over public space and introduces “realities on the ground with which the authorities sooner or later must come to terms.” Another aspect of the politics of public space is that it is unequal as people use public space in various ways. Staeheli and Mitchell (2008) argue that conceptualizing space in this way enables us to understand the struggles over public space in relation to changing relations of gender, race, and sexuality.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT SITUATION

The chapter deals with the history of the street and the city since the street's construction at the beginning of the 1930s until the present. I focus on socio-spatial practices which are at the core of this historical investigation. I draw on various sources of information such as articles (from local and international newspapers), blogs, interviews, maps, YouTube videos, books, T.V. shows, and my personal experience as a born-and-raised resident of Baghdad until I left the city and the country in 2010. By writing this chapter I intend to stress some of the transformations the street went through over time. I organized the description into four main chronological sections. The first one covers the period from 1920s-1930s until 1968; the second covers period from 1968 until 2003 under the Ba'athist rule; the third covers the period from 2003 (the date of the US-led invasion) until 2007; and the fourth covers the period from 2007 (the year the street was reopened) until 2013.

3.1. Beginnings (1920s-1930s through 1968)

The street is located outside the old city in Rusafa (the eastern part of old Baghdad), south of one of the gates of the old city walls, *al-bab al-sharqi* (the Eastern Gate). At the time of its construction by the beginning of the 1930s, the city had already been expanding beyond its traditional limits and mainly north and south of the old city with new neighborhoods being established such as al-Wazeriya, al-Alwiya, al-Karrada al-

Sharqiya, al-Sa'doun and a few others (see Figure 1, below). This expansion took place after the establishment of the modern Iraqi state in 1921 under the British occupation authority and by the influence of militarily trained British architects such as J. M. Wilson (al-Sultani, 2000: 345). As such, the expansion was the result of strategic military planning to construct a network of facilities for the British occupying forces and of “exported urbanism” to facilitate vehicle traffic and hygiene through wide roads (Pieri forthcoming).

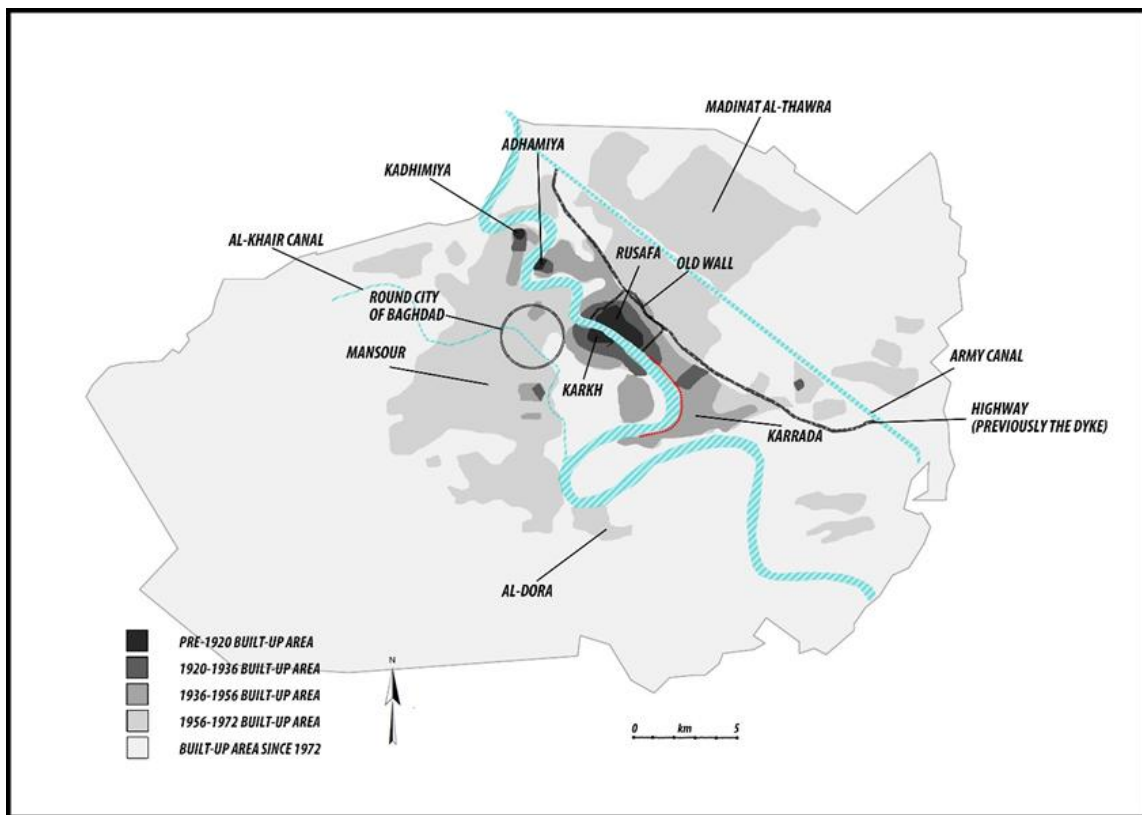


Figure 1: Expansion of Built-up Area in Baghdad (Pre-1920 until Present).³ (Abu Nuwas Street in red.)

The expansion was accompanied by new types of buildings and facilities to fulfil the demands of the nascent state and society such as airports, bridges, post offices, public

³ Author: Pieri, C. (forthcoming), infographics: the author.

administration buildings, cinemas, and others. It was also stimulated by, and clustered around, such facilities and landmarks.

New architectural designs, then, emerged and were influenced, or directly facilitated, by the practice of British architects and local architects with degrees from abroad such as Ahmad Mukhtar who, in 1936, was the first Iraqi to be appointed as the Government Architect (an official position until that time was held by British architects whose responsibility is to design public buildings and facilities for the state). It was also accompanied by new urban elements such as public gardens, green areas, and statues, new laws such as the Road and Building Law (no. 44 in 1935), and signs of street names. These signs were erected according to decision by the Mayoralty of Baghdad in 1932; Abu Nuwas Street was officially named then according to al-Sultani (2000).

3.1.1. The Emergence of a Neighborhood: The Construction of the Street

Between WWI and the construction date of the street, the area housed a number of vacation residences for the rich. East of the area, there were cultivated fields and orchards which were a favorite promenade place for the king and the bourgeoisie. In al-Sa'doun, also east of the street area, the hippodrome was established in the 20s and so was the al-Alwiya Club in 1924 as places for the British and the Iraqi bourgeoisie. In continuation to its former status as a green place for the well-off and their summer residences (al-Hassani, 1958: 108), the street was planned by the state to sustain its upper-class characteristics. Afterwards, the upper part of the street close to al-Bab al-Sharqi, al-Battaween, and al-Sa'doun areas were inhabited by residents from different

religious backgrounds (mainly Sunnis, Christians, and Jews), while the lower part close to Karrada was inhabited mainly by Shi'ites.⁴

Although the exact date of the construction of the street is not clear, the available maps from that period attest it was constructed in the 1930s and more specifically between 1930 and 1936 (see Figure 2 and 3 below). Also, an owner of one of the food stores in al-Battaween recounts that the construction of the then 4-meter wide street was finished in 1934.⁵ The street's length was less than the current length as it was increased to reach the 14th of July Bridge after the bridge was constructed in beginning of the 60s (see Figure 4, below).

⁴ The description in this paragraph drew on Caecilia Pieri's remarks for the author.

⁵ "أبو نؤاس شارع السمك يقضي الليل وحيداً حالماً بالفرح"، *Almada Newspaper* (www.almadapaper.net) May 18 2012.

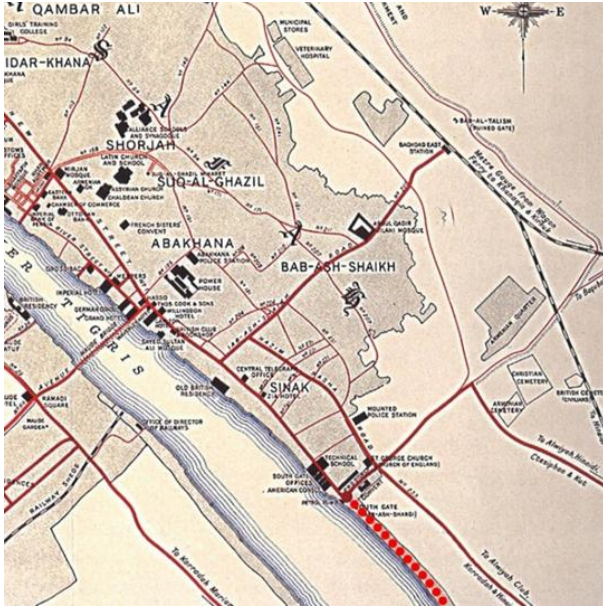


Figure 2: Map of Baghdad drawn in 1929 by the Public Works Department in Baghdad.⁶ Note the absence of Abu Nuwas Street (red dotted line) in the right bottom of the map.

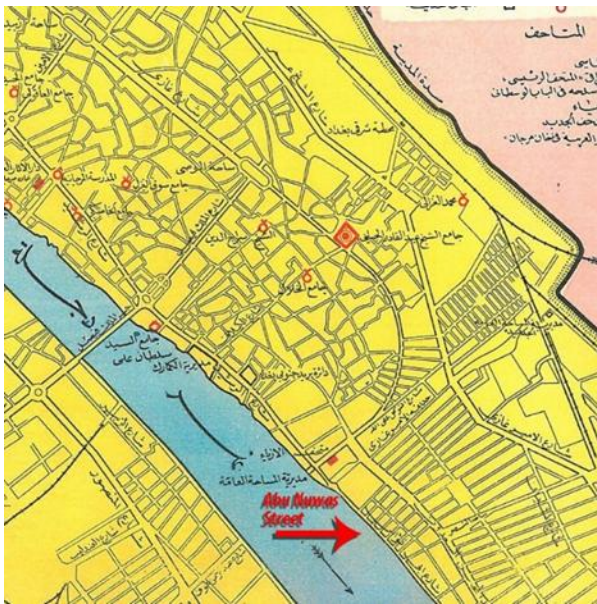


Figure 3: Map of Baghdad in 1936-1938 drawn by Ahmad Susa.⁷ Note Abu Nuwas Street (written in Arabic) in the right bottom of the map by the river (added is a red arrow pointing to it).

⁶ “Bagdad Arts Deco,” Pieri, C. (2008) p. 48.

⁷ “Atlas Baghdad,” Susa, A. (1957).

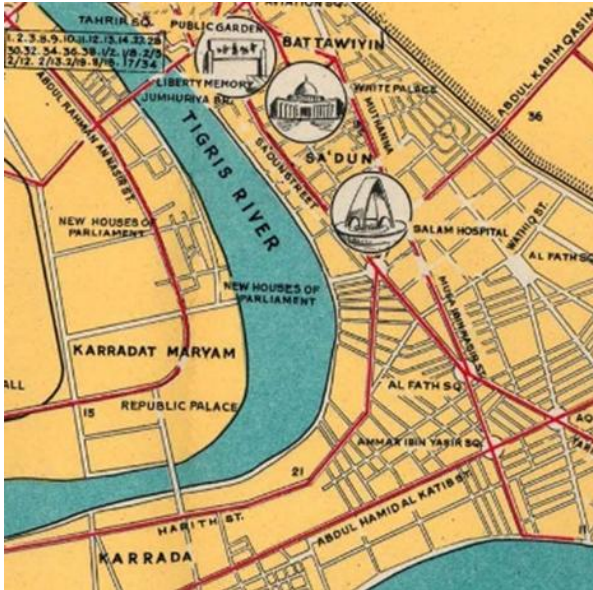


Figure 4: Bus Map of Baghdad in 1961.⁸ Note the al-Jumhuriya Bridge (north of the street) and the 14th of July Bridge (south of the street).

3.1.2. Abu Nuwas Street and al-Rashid Street

The street is also an extension of the older al-Rashid Street in terms of their physical adjacency and the activities which took place in them during this period. If the cafes of the al-Rashid Street were a haven for the intelligentsia during daytime then surely they spent their night on Abu Nuwas Street drinking and eating *masgouf*, a Baghdadi delicacy of coal-grilled carp. They spent their nights in *chirdagh* listening to music and drinking alcohol and grilling. *chirdagh* (plural *charadeegh*) is “a big tent located on the sand swathes [of the river] away from the crowds in casinos.”⁹ If the *chirdagh* was used exclusively by a small group of friends, or family members, then “casinos” were used by families at leisure, mainly for eating *masgouf*, attending an

⁸ “*Baghdad 1961; Baghdad Bus Map*,” in *Perry Castaneda Library* at the *University of Texas at Austin*. Accessed at <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iraq.html> on April 4, 2014.

⁹ “أبو نؤاس شارع السمك يقضي الليل وحيداً حالماً بالفرح،” *Almada Newspaper* May 18 2012.

entertainment show, and enjoying the river's view.¹⁰ The "casinos" of Abu Nuwas Street, unlike those used for gambling, were restaurants with occasional entertainment shows.

It is almost impossible to read an article about the street that doesn't refer to *masgouf* and alcohol. For Iraqis, and Baghdadis in particular, the street was and still is synonymous to both, especially *masgouf*. Moreover, the relaxed attitude towards alcohol in the street was commemorated by a statue of Abu Nuwas (sculptured by Ismail Fatah Al-Turk), a classical Arab poet from the 8th century after whom the street is named and who is famed for his love of wine.

During the 1950s period, the street became an essential destination for city dwellers, a one mainly for leisure. Al-Hassani's (1958: 105) description comes in handy with this regard:

"The most beautiful main street in *al-rusafa* [the eastern part of Baghdad] is Abu Nuwas Street that is located at the left curve of the Tigris and it stretches from *al-bab al-sharqi* until the end of *al-karrada al-sharqiya*. You see the street full of beautiful young women and men and you see the cafés, the parks, and the benches full of people amidst shiny gardens where all of the aforementioned overlook the Tigris which flows with its dancing waves where boats are floating on top of it along with birds while reflecting the shadows of trees making someone believe s/he is reading the book of *alf laila wa laila* or as if someone truly lives the life described in the book with all its charm, pleasure, and profligacy."

¹⁰ Ibid.



Figure 5: Abu Nuwas Street in the 1950s.

3.1.3. The (Forced) Emigration of the Baghdadi Jewry

Abu Nuwas Street was special for Jews since their major presence in Baghdad was in al-Battaween, al-Sa'doun, and al-Karrada areas, close-by to the street. In this period, a major transformation happened in the city which particularly laid its shadows on Abu Nuwas Street. The Baghdadi Jewish population was attacked during the two-day pogrom of 1941 (known as Farhud) where “more than 150 Jews were murdered . . . Some 1,500 stores and homes were looted, and 2,500 people - 15 per cent of the Jews of Baghdad – were harmed, either physically or materially” (Meir-Glitzenstein, 2004: 14).

Although, after this incident, the situation regained its normalcy for the Jewish population, the occupation of Palestine by Zionists and the 1948 war escalated their secret emigration to Israel mainly through Iran. Subsequently, the government enacted a

law in 1950 stipulating that Iraqi Jews who desire to leave the country for good would renounce their Iraqi citizenship. A year after, this law was consolidated by another to block the assets of Jews who chose to give up their citizenship. As a consequence, Baghdadi Jews were unable to sell their real estate in exchange for money, as was the case before the 1951 law, and their properties were seized by the state (Meir-Glitzstein, 2004). Gradually, the capital became empty from a once essential and significant segment of its population, the Baghdadadi Jewry.

In the side streets of Abu Nuwas Street, such circumstance that happened more than 60 years ago can still be noticed in the remaining previously Jewish properties with stonework carved by the Stars of David. Some of the Jewish emigrants expressed how they still want to come back to reclaim their confiscated homes there, “Now, 89 years old, Naim Dangoor dreams about returning to his native Baghdad and reclaiming his father's old house on the once fashionable ‘Abu Nawas’ street.”¹¹

In effect, the emigration and dispossession of the Baghdadi Jews marked a demographic transformation that entailed disappearance of particular socio-spatial practices that used to take place in the street. Marina Benjamin talks in her book, “*Last days in Babylon*,” about this:

“Everything changed on 8 April 1950. It was the last day of Passover, and in Baghdad the Jews spent the day strolling along the banks of the Tigris in celebration of the ‘Song of the Sea’, an ancient hymn . . . Thousands of people thronged the esplanade, dressed in the clothes they reserved for the Sabbath . . . It was a bittersweet moment, since no one knew how many Jews would celebrate Passover by the Tigris the following year. By nine o’clock the crowds began to thin out. But along the winding length of Abu Nuwas Street, young Jewish intellectuals and office workers lingered on,

¹¹ “Iraqi Christians put to the sword,” Adrian Blomfield. *The Telegraph* November 12 2010. Accessed at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/8128161/Iraqi-Christians-put-to-the-sword.html> on August 30 2013; “Broadcast, 11 July,” Stephen Beard. *The Scribe*, spring 2003. Accessed at <http://www.dangoor.com/issue76/articles/76072.htm> on August 30 2013.

chatting and smoking in and around the coffeehouses that looked out across the turbid river to the west bank of the city. Minutes later their idling was brought up short by a . . . [a] small bomb, hurled from a passing car . . . exploded on the pavement outside the Dar al-Beida coffee shop, shattering its windows and obscuring its frontage with billowing smoke. There were no fatalities, but four Jews were seriously injured . . .”¹²

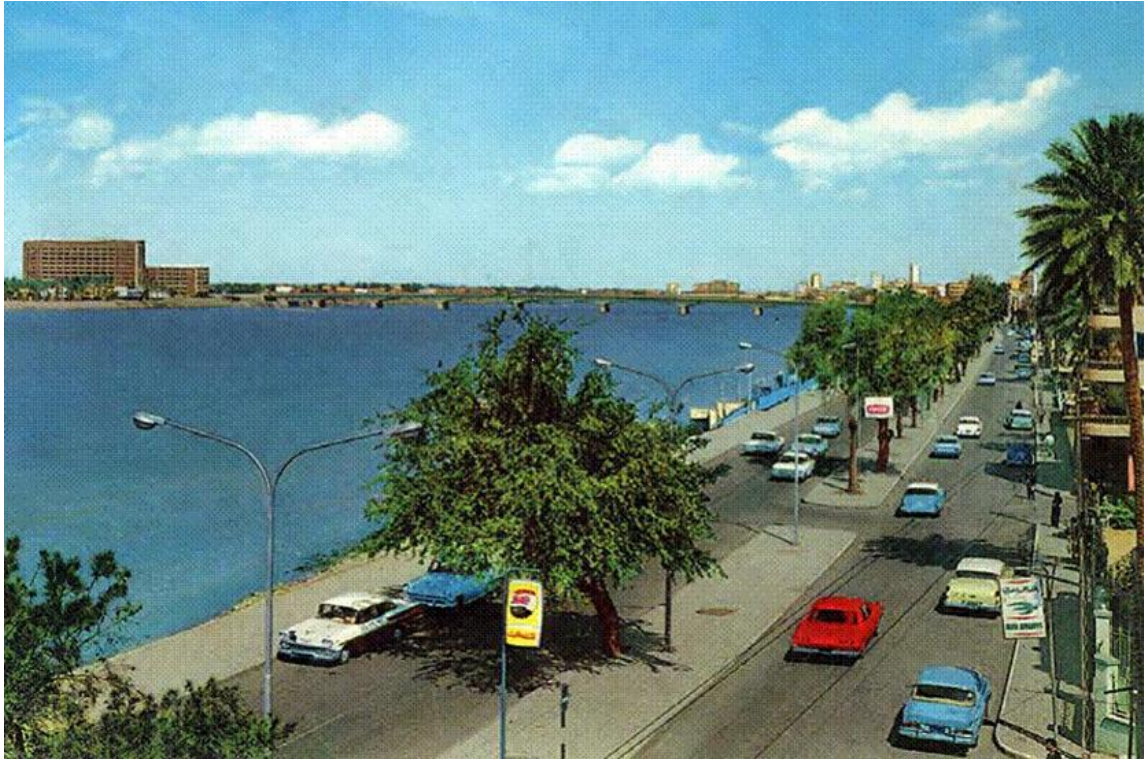


Figure 6: Abu Nuwas Street in the 1960s. Note the al-Jumhuriya Bridge in the background.

3.2. The Street under Ba’athist Rule (1968-2003)

After the 17 July Revolution coup in 1968, the state ruled by the Ba’ath Party was becoming more concerned with security. The area of the Republican Palace across Abu Nuwas Street on the other bank of the Tigris became heavily policed as the then president, Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, resided in the palace, and Saddam Hussein’s (then

¹² *Last Days in Babylon: The Story of the Jews of Baghdad*, Benjamin, M. p.193-194.

vice-president) office was in another building close to it.¹³ Thus, the bank across Abu Nuwas Street was becoming more “visible” as the regime’s quarter especially after Saddam Hussein became a president in 1979.

3.2.1 Pinnacle Years (1970s)

In spite of rising restrictions on civil liberties and political dissent after the Ba’ath Party came to power, the 1970s marks a bright juncture in the street’s life for many Baghdadis. “In the 70s of last century . . . Baghdadi families stayed until dawn in the street’s parks partying while famous singers championing for the best performance.” Even Crocker (US ambassador to Iraq from 2007 to 2009) “fondly remembers strolling [the street] during his first posting to Baghdad in the 1970s . . .”¹⁴

¹³ Ma’ad Fayad, “القصر الجمهوري العراقي.. شاهد على حياة 5 رؤساء قبل أن يتحول إلى سفارة أميركية,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* January 3 2009. Accessed at <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10994&article=501338&feature=#.U1unOfmSwYM> on April 26 2014.

¹⁴ “أبو نواس شارع السمك يقضي الليل وحيداً حالماً بالفرح,” *Almada Newspaper* May 18 2012; Ross Colvin, “Famous Baghdad street seeks to reclaim former glory,” *Reuters* September 3 2007. Accessed at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2007/09/03/iraq-street-idUKNOA32943020070903> on August 31 2013; a series of interviews conducted by the author with current and previous residents of Baghdad started from July 2013 until present.



Figure 7: Abu Nuwas Street in the 1970s from the northern end of the al-Jumhuriya Bridge.

Abdul-Kareem al-Husseini, a writer who witnessed this period, describes the street and the activities which took place in it (I paraphrase him in this paragraph and the following ones of this section).¹⁵ The riverbank along the street was planted with various kinds of trees and flowers. Casinos were located between the sidewalk and the river and they served food (*masgouf* and *mashawi* –grilled meat), hot drinks such as tea and coffee and ice cream in addition to providing board games such chess and backgammon as well as dominoes for their customers. There were many casinos with different names:

“*gardiniya, al-salam, al-baidha’, al-khadhra’, al-hamra’, al-casino al-baghdadi, zinad, al-rukn al-hadi’, alshati’ al-jamil,* and others.” Fish are grilled in places beside the

¹⁵ Abdul-Kareem al-Husseini, “محطات جميله في ذاكرة بغداد الجزء 5 / شارع ابو نواس جوهرة بغداد ورننتها,” *Al-Gardenia* October 1 2013. Accessed at <http://www.algardenia.com/2014-04-04-19-52-20/menouats/6867-2013-10-17-19-29-41.html> on April 26, 2014.

casinos. Adjacent to the river, there was a park (a strip of green areas) that had playgrounds and benches which were used by families and individuals as access is public. Getting past the casinos, towards the south, there was a terminal (established in the 1970s) where big boats provided by the tourism directorate went on river tours.

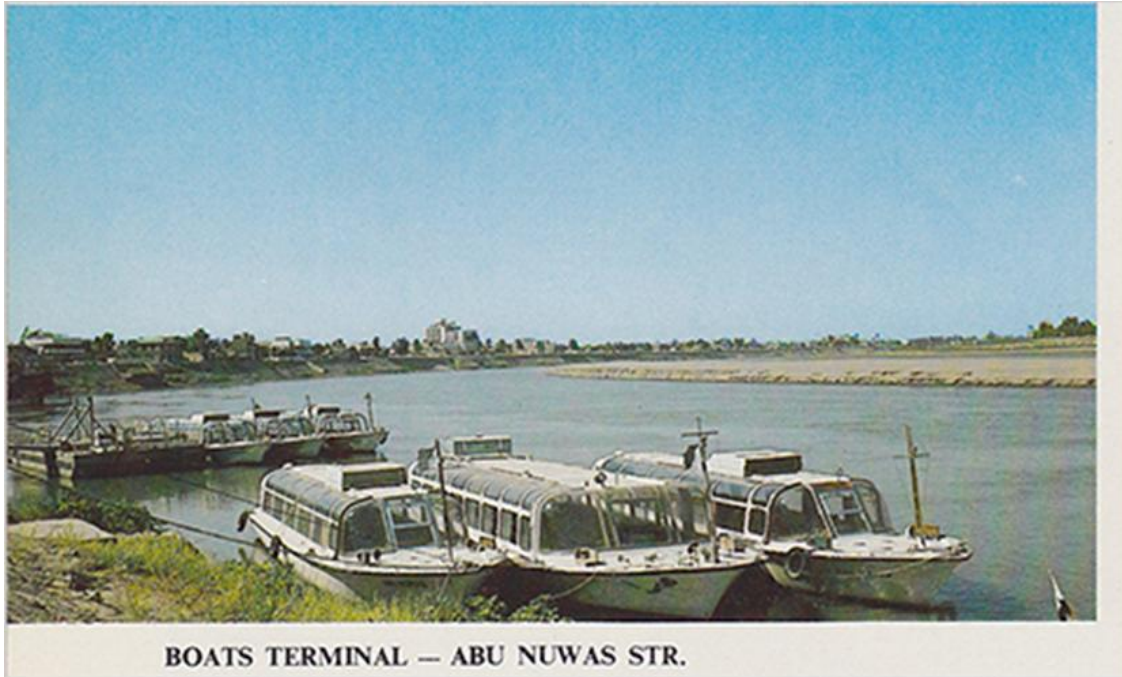


Figure 8: Boat terminal (currently not operating) in the southern part of Abu Nuwas Street.

Along the other side of the street, in front of the riverside park, various land uses were present (leisure, governmental, institutional, and residential). Leisure use included pubs and bars, restaurants, a social club for journalists, al-Alwiyah social club, and hotels such as Baghdad Hotel and al-Safeer Hotel (all serving alcohol). The governmental use included a traffic directorate, and the institutional included art galleries, the Soviet cultural center, the French cultural center, and the Iraq News Agency. This section of the street, the northern section, was a preferable location for international organizations to

rent buildings and establish their offices as it is close to the city center (al-Bab al-Sharqi), hotels, restaurants, and bars.¹⁶

The street was more active in the evening than daytime when it was used by a few couples (in the park and/or on its benches between trees), janitors, gardeners, and other municipal service workers. Families, youths, and children usually started to come to the park and casinos in late afternoons making the street alive and crowded. Some of the families or other groups of people used to come from al-Sa'doun Street after they had spent some time in its cinemas. Adult males were seen going in and coming out of the pubs and bars. Policemen and their cars were, also, present on the street.¹⁷

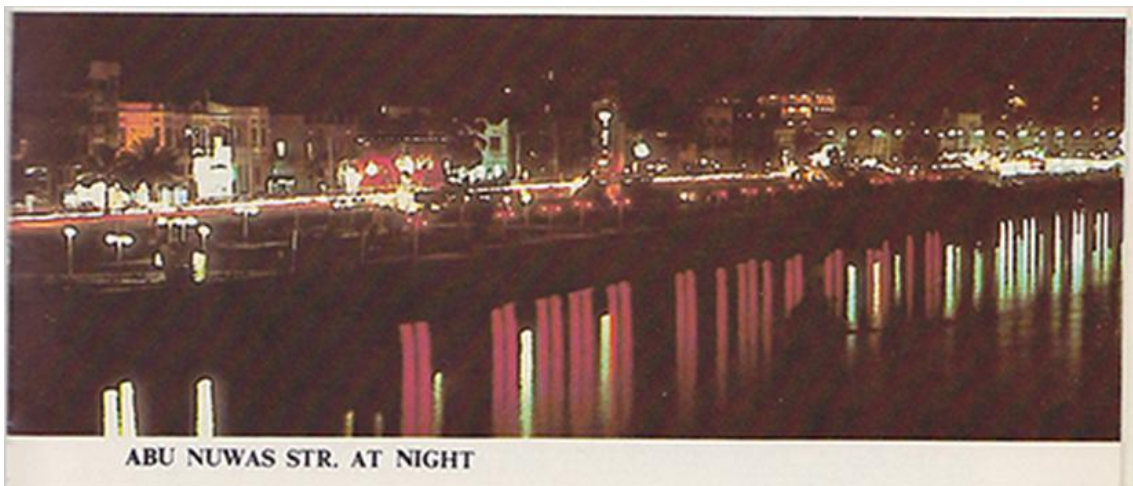


Figure 9: Abu Nuwas Street at night in the 1970s.

3.2.2. New Major Constructions along the Street

By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, major constructions were undertaken by the state across the city, including a few ones along the street. These

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

projects aim at the revivification of an Arab and Mesopotamian grandeur for the capital city under Saddam Hussein's rule (Pieri, 2008a).

Four major hotels in the city of Baghdad, thus, were being constructed whereby two of which are located in the northern part of Abu Nuwas Street. Ishtar and Palestine hotels were opened by the beginning of the 1980s and catered for tourists, journalists, Arab and foreign businessmen, and foreign state officials (see Figure 10). The luxurious hotels also accommodated events in their conference halls. After the Gulf War in 1991, and during the coverage of the 2003 war, they were a favorite place for journalists.

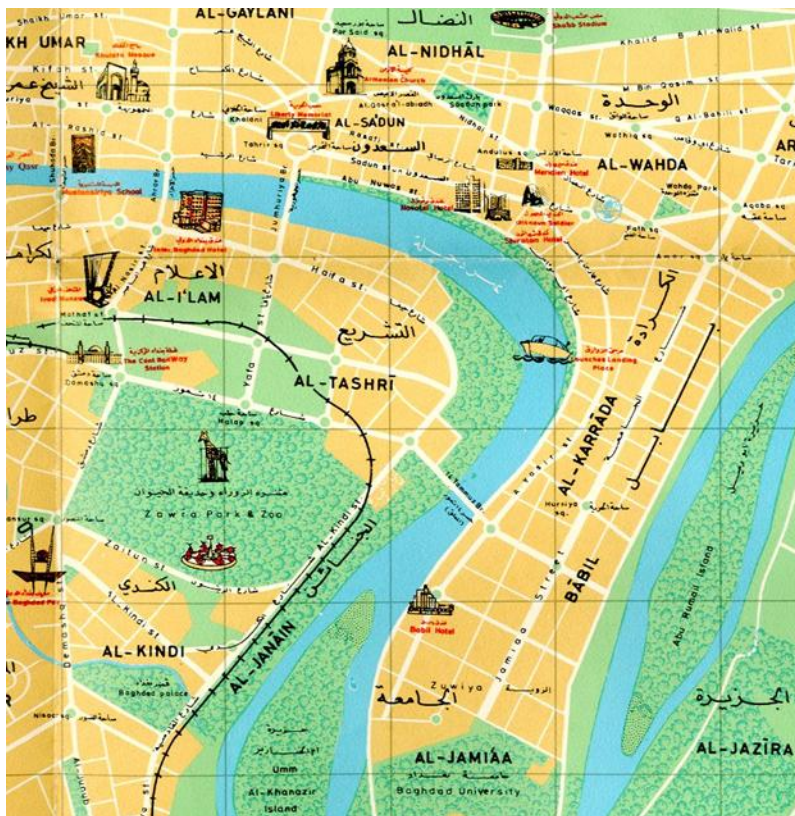


Figure 10: Tourist Map of Baghdad in 1977.¹⁸

¹⁸ This map was issued by the State Organization for Tourism in 1977. Although the two hotels were opened five years after the issue date of the map, they are drawn in the map and mentioned on its back information page.

Another major project within this construction campaign is a residential redevelopment project along the southern segment of the street. In December 1980 an Iraqi firm in collaboration with a Danish firm was commissioned “to submit a conceptual layout [for] 3km long site on the Tigris river . . . to be essentially residential, in the form of [solar-powered] low-rise and high standing town houses designed to replace dilapidated areas . . . Most of the present occupants are senior presidential palace staff.”¹⁹ By so doing, the regime’s quarter across the river was consolidating its periphery by resettling loyal occupants on Abu Nuwas Street resulting in the demolition of many modern heritage buildings dating back to the 1930s and 1940s (Caecilia forthcoming).

3.2.3 Decline (Late 1970s through 1990s)

Out of the many writings, interviews, and reflections on the street I came across, many writers and residents mark the late 1970s and 1980s as the beginning of the gradual descent of the “golden days of Abu Nuwas” due to policing practices of the state. “In 1979, I was taking my two foreign friends for a promenade along Abu Nuwas” says Mr. Albirm in an interview, “I noticed someone in civilian clothes following us so I turned around and asked him if he wanted something. He said it is his job to keep an eye on the street.” Then Mr. Albarim said “surely he was an undercover intelligence officer.” By then, the *chirdagh* was almost completely gone as a distinct form characteristic of the street in the previous period due to security restrictions by the state.²⁰ According to a

¹⁹ “Abu Nawas Development Project,” *ArchNet* (source: AKTC). Accessed at http://archnet.org/library/sites/one-site.jsp?site_id=701 on August 31 2013.

²⁰ “أيام فانتت.. أيام الجرادبيغ,” *Asharq Al-Awasat* August 14 2011. Accessed at <http://www.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&issueno=11947&article=635622#.Uh-49xunpfk> on August 29

resident of the street in the late 1970s, there was a direct presence of *mukhabarat* in one of the multi-story buildings on the street.²¹ Baida'a Kareem in an article about the street describes the transformations the street went through during this period:

“Gradually, the situation began to change in the 80s and 90s during the Saddamist regime when Abu Nuwas Street with its beautiful, wild life began to form a permanent obsession to the other bank where the settling regime was panicked by the Baghdadi atmosphere of youth circles, and discussions by students and politicians. Then came the Iraq-Iran war isolating the street from many of its devoted goers . . . a list of prohibitions then was imposed, starting with no boating zones, no floating casinos, etc., and other measures controlling practices on land (no partying) and in water (no swimming to the other bank across the street) . . . in the 90s . . . foreigners and Arabs were rarely seen . . .”²²

Ma'ad Fayad wrote in the *Asharq Al-Awsat* about an attempt to change the street's name as Saddam Hussein headed a series of conferences at the beginning of the 1980s concerned with revising the names of streets and areas in Baghdad, including Abu Nuwas Street as “Abu Nuwas is Persian and it is impossible for the most important street to bear a name of a Persian poet.” Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (a Palestinian-Iraqi intellectual and author) expressed in the conference how “Abu Nuwas Street has become a cultural reference for Baghdad, and wherever [he] may be whether in Arab or Western capitals,

2013; a series of interviews conducted by the author with current and previous residents of Baghdad started from July 2013 until present.

²¹ Anthony Shadid, “Photographic Memories of Baghdad,” the *New York Times* February 19 2010. Note the comments section below. Accessed at http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/19/photographic-memories-of-baghdad/?_r=0 on August 31 2013.

²² Baida'a Kareem “أبو نواس: تاريخ في شارع” *Aljadidah News Network*, April 19 2009. Accessed at <http://aljadidah.com/2009/04/6460/> on August 31 2013.

friends ask [him] about this street.” He further addressed Saddam Hussein that “Even if the street’s name was officially changed, people would remain calling it the original name.” The argument sounded convincing to the former president and the street preserved its name.²³

Moreover, alcohol drinking was banned in its casinos, restaurants, and hotels in 1994 as the government launched “*al-hamla al-emaniya*” (“The Faith Campaign”). As a result, although some defied the ban secretly, the street changed significantly as alcohol drinking was a main spatial practice of its users. “The street died in the 90s” Baida’a Kareem states.

3.3. Invasion, Occupation, and Civil Strife (2003-2007)

Although the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the capture of Baghdad on April 9 was a critical phase in the life of Abu Nuwas Street, the street was featured in some foreigners’ and Iraqis’ hopes for a comeback of the street. In a Time’s article of that year, Bobby Gosh recounts his foreign and Iraqi colleagues’ fantasies about the future of the street and how “a grand restaurant” would open by the river where they would “match the carp to appropriate wine.”²⁴ Dexter Filkins mentions how in July 2003 he and his colleagues lived and worked in the New York Time’s office which was a traditional house. The house was not “fortified” with “no razor wire or blast walls, no watchtowers or machine

²³ Ma’ad Fayad, “ناشطون عراقيون يقفون بوجه الجرافات من أجل وقف تدمير بغداد,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* September 27 2012. Accessed at <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=54&article=697070&issueno=12357#.UiNEXDanpfl> on September 1 2013.

²⁴ Bobby Ghosh, “Return to Baghdad: A Fish Feast on the Tigris,” *Time World* October 05 2010. Accessed at <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2023529,00.html> on September 06 2013.

guns mounted on the roof. Cars motored past our front yard on their way to the Jumhuriya Bridge a couple of miles up the road.”²⁵

2.3.1 Abu Nuwas Street, the Green Zone, and Escalating Violence

Nevertheless, such a tranquil situation never lasted long as violence escalated in the city until it directly targeted the several hotels on the street, where westerners and officials resided. For example, in October 2003, a suicide car bomb targeted Baghdad Hotel which was used by members of the Iraqi Governing Council and Americans.²⁶ After that, hotels “barricaded themselves behind blast walls and razor wire” turning themselves into “mini Green Zones . . . off-limits to ordinary Iraqis”. The segment of the street where the hotels were located was closed in the same year.²⁷ Two checkpoints guarded both ends of the closed segment. In the northern checkpoint, a wall of “about five feet high, ran from the Tigris all the way to Abu Nuwas; there was no getting past it.”²⁸

At the same time, the Ba’athist regime’s quarter became a US fortified zone famously known as the Green Zone (officially known as the International Zone). Filkins describes how the perception of the zone was transforming after 2003. He recounts his brief interaction with Hassan, an Iraqi boy who “motioned across the Tigris, toward . . .

²⁵ Dexter Filkins, “My Long War,” the *New York Times* August 24 2008. Accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/24/magazine/24filkins-t.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0 on September 06 2013.

²⁶ Ibid; Alex Berenson, “Car Bomb Kills 6 at Baghdad Hotel; at least 35 Hurt,” the *New York Times* October 13 2003. Accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/13/world/car-bomb-kills-6-at-baghdad-hotel-at-least-35-hurt.html> (on September 06 2013).

²⁷ Scott Johnson, “Lost in the Green Zone,” *United Muslims of America (UMA)* September 20 2004. Accessed at <http://www.umanet.org/cms.cfm?fuseaction=articles.viewThisArticle&articleID=35&pageID=159> (on September 06 2013).

²⁸ Dexter Filkins, “My Long War,” the *New York Times* August 24 2008.

[the] Republican Palace”. “Saadam house,” he said in English . . . Hassan motioned again across the river. “Now, Bush house.””²⁹ Moreover, the street and the riverbank along its stretch were secured in order to protect the Green Zone: “the U.S. military restricted access to the corniche, lest militants use it to mount attacks on the Green Zone . . .”³⁰ Also, the street became a potential target for mortar rounds missing their supposed destination, the Green Zone.³¹

3.3.2. Abu Nuwas Street and the Civil Strife

Baghdad was experiencing a sectarian-based, demographic transformation especially after the bombing of the Shia al-Askari Shrine in Samarra on 22 February 2006 allegedly carried out by Sunni insurgents. This major transformation was the result of the power relations and interaction between the two major constituencies in the city, Sunnis and Shiites. Sunni Arabs dominated the modern Iraqi state apparatus until 2003 whereby Shiites had been politically marginalized especially under the Ba’athist rule. It should be noted, however, that Saddam Hussein’s political power was authoritarian and not entirely determined by sectarian allegiance. Rather, it was secular and “repression assumed sectarian forms in moments of crisis” such as the repression of the Shia uprising in 1991 after the defeat and withdrawal of the former Iraqi Army from Kuwait (Gregory, 2008). Antagonism between Sunnis and Shiites is not only “cultural” but mainly “*political*

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Bobby Gosh, “Return to Baghdad; A Fish Feast on the Tigris,” *Time World* October 05 2010.

³¹ “Four wounded in mortar attack in Baghdad,” the *Jerusalem Post* May 15 2007. Accessed at <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Four-wounded-in-mortar-attack-in-Baghdad> (on September 06 2013).

conflict over the right to rule Iraq, to share its resources and to define the meaning of the nationalist project” (ibid.)

The dismantlement of the state and the security forces (the army and the police) by the American occupation authority changed the pre-2003 power relations between the Sunnis and Shiites. So did the establishment of a new political regime, constitution, and security forces based on sectarian logic. Such political regime and constitution gained legitimacy (at least on the part of Shia and Kurdish political factions) after the 2005 elections. The then Shia bloc (United Iraqi Alliance) won the majority of votes in Baghdad and the southern provinces. The Shia bloc was constituted by the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the Dawa Party, and a coalition of parties supporting the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. Also, the newly formed army and police forces became disproportionately Shia, and the Ministry of Interior was controlled by the SCIRI with many former Shia militiamen in the security forces.

Simultaneously, the predominantly Sunni insurgents were attacking the American and Iraqi state security forces, and displacing Shia residents from mainly Sunni neighborhoods in West Baghdad. In their place came Sunni residents who were also being forced out of their neighborhoods by Shia militias assisted by state forces. It was not until the bombing of the al-Askari Shrine in 2006 that civil conflict largely involved forced displacement leading to the homogenization of many neighborhoods into Sunni or Shia. By the end of 2006, the Shia militias and state security forces gained the upper hand in controlling the city, and in 2007, the city became predominantly Shia in contrast to the 1950s when it was predominantly Sunni (ibid.).

As such in 2006 the area where the street is located was turning into a Shia area after it had been mixed, Sunni, Shia, and Christian but mainly Shia.³² Meanwhile, the apartment buildings (locally known as the “solar-powered houses”) were now squatted mainly by low-income Shia families as the former occupants fled for fear of retaliation. Also, the SCIRI established its main office on the street.

3.3.3. Sectarian Signs on the Street

Flags, banners, and posters conveying Shia messages and symbols appeared in the post-2003 city. Whereas, Shia residents could not use such signs during the Ba’athist regime. These signs contain images and inscriptions related to holy figures in the Shia Islamic tradition, especially of “*ahl al-bayt*” (the holy family of the Prophet in Shi’ism). They also contain images of contemporary Shia figures such as Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr (killed by the former regime in 1980), Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr (allegedly killed also by the former regime in 1999), and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Quotes from such figures are also displayed on some signs.

Signs are extensively used across the city especially during Shia religious rituals such *ashoura*. Abu Nuwas Street, being located in a dominantly Shia area, is no exception. Many signs are displayed across the street conveying a variety of Shia messages (discussion about sectarian signs in the street is developed in “5.2. Sectarian Signs”).

³² “A New, Sectarian Map,” the *New York Times* December 23 2006. Accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2006/12/23/world/1224shiites-map-ready.html> (on December 2013); Joel Wing, “Columbia University Charts Sectarian Cleansing of Baghdad,” *Musings on Iraq* November 19 2009. Accessed at <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2009/11/blog-post.html> (on September 2013). Check the strip of Abu Nuwas Street in the *Baghdad 2006* map and how it is Shiite while the rest of the Karrada district was mixed.

3.4. The “Reopening” and “Redevelopment” of Abu Nuwas and its Park, and Proposed “Investment Projects” (2007-2014)

In 2007, violence in Baghdad decreased as a result of the Operation Imposing the Law carried out by the American and Iraqi governmental troops. This operation was undertaken under the “surge” military strategy, officially known as the New Way Forward, declared by Bush in January, 2007.³³ The “surge” has two characteristics different from the one preceding it, Operation Together Forward. The first is the considerable increase in troops (deploying extra 20,000 troops mainly in Baghdad), and the second is the incorporation of the “new counterinsurgency doctrine”. Such doctrine “defines the population as the center of gravity of military operations” (Gregory, 2008). The new doctrine aims at prioritizing cultural awareness of American soldiers in relation to the context they operate in, in contrast to the previous counterinsurgency strategy that focused on tactical issues -smart bombs, unmanned vehicles, etc. (ibid.).

As a result, the closed segment of Abu Nuwas Street was reopened in November, 2007 after it had been renovated with a fund from the US military and USAID in collaboration with the Iraqi government and Baghdad City Council. The American officer involved in the renovation project stated that it has been facilitated by the “successes” of the “surge” strategy. So did the Iraqi army commander for Baghdad, Abboud Qanbar. He said, in the reopening ceremony of the park, that “[t]he reconstruction of Abu Nawas is considered one of the bright results [of the surge]”.³⁴

³³ “President’s Address to the Nation,” *Office of the Press Secretary* January 10 2007. Accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html> on April 30, 2014.

³⁴ Bushra Juhi, “Iraqi Government Reopens Landmark Street,” *Fox News* November 24 2007. Accessed at http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2007Nov24/0,4675,IraqStreetReborn,00.html on August 27

As part of the renovation project, shop owners were granted \$2,500 by the Americans. Some riverside restaurant owners were unhappy with the amount of the microgrant saying that it is not enough to recover their businesses. One street user expressed his doubts that the reopening and the renovation will encourage people to visit the street saying that the “security situation is still risky and people are afraid to come”. Another user expressed, during the reopening ceremony -November 24, 2007- that “the street's reopening was a sign of success” of the security plan.³⁵

Several months after its reopening, the street’s park was receiving a large number of visitors: young males smoking hookah while sitting on the benches, and children playing in the playgrounds while escorted by their parents, and people eating *masgouf* at restaurants. Some users expressed their appreciation of the new reality of the street after the “tangible improvement of the situation”. Similarly, owners of restaurants in the park expressed their satisfaction with their businesses. One of them compared the security situation to that before the reopening when it was “not good”, saying that he “used to sell fish for customers to take away . . . while now, people are sitting in those restaurants to eat fish.”³⁶

2013; “Famous Baghdad street seeks to reclaim former glory,” *Reuters* 31 August 2007. Accessed at http://www.canada.com/story_print.html?id=bc019b48-1fd9-4d5c-b424-ab0a13e06b44&sponsor= on April 2, 2014.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “شارع أبو نواس يستعيد المقاهي والمطاعم,” *Al-Shorfa.com* April 1 2008. Accessed at <http://mawtani.al-shorfa.com/ar/articles/iii/features/2008/04/01/feature-03> on April 30, 2014.



Figure 11: “Iraqis enjoying the gardens and restaurants of Abu Nuwas Street.”³⁷

In November 2012, the Mayoralty of Baghdad launched a “redevelopment project” of Abu Nuwas which entailed the demolition of “some restaurants and cafés whose contracts have expired” and building, instead, “new stalls, restaurants, and cafés.” The project also aims at constructing “a service and tourist [riverside] street and another for bicycles in the middle of the gardens and establish stalls to rent bicycles.”³⁸ This project is perceived by the mayoralty to be part of the preparations for “Baghdad, the Capital of Arab Culture 2013” event.

There were protestations against the project by activists led by Shirouk Abayachi (an activist opposing the government of Nouri al-Maliki) who mobilized against

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Alhurra-Iraq, “جدل حول تأهيل شارع ابو نواس في بغداد,” *YouTube* September 20, 2012. Accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGbgD6i2QXo> on April 2, 2014.

bulldozing trees to make space for the two service streets inside the park. Others expressed their concerns as such a project will shrink the green areas in the park.³⁹

The two service streets inside the park were implemented.⁴⁰ However, the bicycle stalls were not. The riverside service street has been appropriated by security booths and soldiers who have been deployed to secure the Green Zone lest it is attacked from the Abu Nuwas riverbank.⁴¹ During the implementation of the project, restaurants inside the park were demolished as they “were used in a wrong way” according to an official of the mayoralty. He also said that new restaurants will be built.⁴² One of the restaurants in the northern section of the park was perceived to house “improper activities” such as drinking alcohol and, thus, the mayoralty demolished it.⁴³ The former tenants who were promised priority in future bids over the new restaurants, addressed their dissatisfaction with the development project.⁴⁴

In the first half of 2014, the Mayoralty of Baghdad, through its Investment Committee, designated 5 locations for investment in the riverside part of the street (see Figure 12, below). The first is a floating restaurant in the northern part of the large park close to the al-Jumhuriya Bridge. The second is a 2-storey car parking in place of the

³⁹ Ma'ad Fayad, “ناشطون عراقيون يقفون بوجه الجرافات من أجل وقف تدمير بغداد,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* September 27 2012.

⁴⁰ It should be noted, however, that the streets are not for public vehicular access. Rather, they are service roads used by garbage-collecting trucks and military vehicles. Also, park users walk on them especially the one in the middle.

⁴¹ Majid, Firas, “!المالكي يغتال (ابو نواس),” *Ur News*. Accessed <http://www.uragency.net/public/419-2014-02-12-19-06-29.html> on May 1, 2014.

⁴² Alhurra-Iraq, “بغداد تأهيل شارع ابو نواس يثير حفيظة اصحاب مطاعم السمك المسكوف,” *YouTube* May 4, 2012. Accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZjVmsZnbRI> on April 2, 2014.

⁴³ Interview conducted by the author with the owner of a carpentry workshop in the northern part of the street (January, 2014).

⁴⁴ Alhurra-Iraq, “بغداد تأهيل شارع ابو نواس يثير حفيظة اصحاب مطاعم السمك المسكوف,” *YouTube* May 4, 2012.

currently existing car parking in the large park. The third and the fourth are restaurants/hotels ⁽⁴⁵⁾ on the locations of the al-Karrada municipality's building and the Casino al-Iraq café/restaurant. Construction work has already begun in the location of the al-Karrada municipality. The fifth investment project is a hotel on the current site of the small park, "next to the statue of Shahrazad and Shahrayar" as an employee at the Directorate of Designs of the mayoralty told me. These projects are planned in a top-down fashion. The employees of the Directorate of Design declared that "such projects are decided upon in the Investment Committee" and the directorate is only "responsible of technical issues" and "general planning recommendations" that require the approval of the mayor.

⁴⁵ In the official document I reviewed in June, 2014 at the Directorate of Designs of the Mayoralty of Baghdad, the two investment projects were titled "restaurants". However, in the construction site of the former municipality building, the advertisement banner on the construction fence indicates that the project is a hotel.

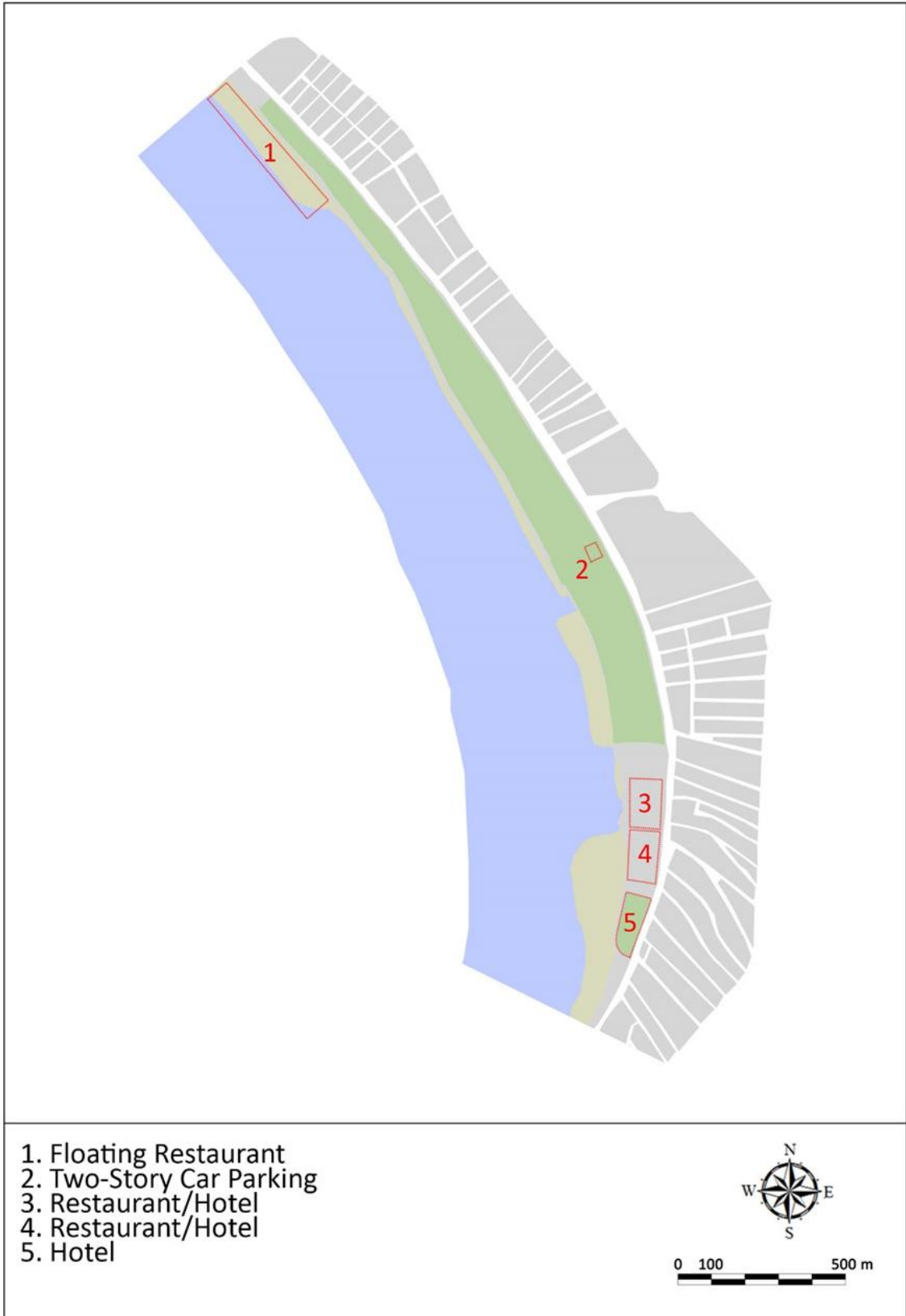


Figure 12: Location of the Proposed Investment Projects.

In this chapter, I have described the political and social context the street lived through whereby one aspect about the street has persisted throughout the transformations it witnessed. Celebration of the street as one emblematic of the Baghdadi cultural life is still strongly present in the dwellers' perception. But this perception has made Abu Nuwas a "contested window", as Pieri argues.⁴⁶ In other words, the street's significant visibility has also made it subject to projects imposed by the state attempting to reclaim its space through new physical configurations. It should be noted that these projects (i.e. the construction campaign in the late 1970s as well as the recently proposed "investment projects") are negligent to the existing potentialities present in the modern heritage buildings located along Abu Nuwas and in the adjacent areas. These buildings are important to the collective memory of city dwellers linking its current reality to a celebrated past.

⁴⁶ Conversation with Caecilia Pieri on September 10, 2014.

CHAPTER 4

THE STREET TODAY: SOCIAL AND SPATIAL PRACTICES

This chapter is the result of a twelve-day-long observation and fieldwork conducted on Abu Nuwas Street in Baghdad in January, 2014. I visited the street and the surrounding areas mainly during daytime but also in the evening. The observation focuses on urban, material aspects such as street width and scale, building heights, building facades, architectural typology, building condition, infrastructure (poles, benches, etc.), and land use; and social and spatial aspects such as users' profiles, (men, women, old, young, kids, couples, families, singles, foreigners, etc.), and spatial practices (i.e. walking, eating, sitting, flirting, etc.). The observation also considered other open spaces (streets, squares, etc.) beyond the street and how the street is connected or not to them. The observations are documented through fieldwork photographs, sketches, and maps.

I organized the study area into seven sections. The observation does not include the area across the river from Abu Nuwas Street (famously known as the Green Zone) due to limited access. This area is surrounded by blast walls and is heavily guarded since vital governmental facilities such as the Presidential Palace, and foreign embassies such the US Embassy are located there. Another inaccessible area which also is not included in the observation is the street located south of the 14th of July Bridge. The street is also officially called Abu Nuwas and was the extension of Abu Nuwas Street discussed in this study. However, the street has been disconnected from Abu Nuwas Street since the 14th

of July Bridge was closed off and annexed to the Green Zone shortly after 2003 and so has been the intersection connecting both streets until this day.

In the first two sections I describe the 4.7 km-long street from its northern edge (the al-Jumhuriya Bridge) until its southern edge (the 14th of July Bridge). Then, in the third section, I describe the “Abu Nuwas Neighborhood” located along the north segment of the street. The fourth section is the al-Sa'doun Street located east of the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood. Both streets, Abu Nuwas and al-Sa'doun, end in the north in the Bab al-Sharqi area, which is the fifth section, and both surround the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood. The sixth section is a mainly residential area between Abu Nuwas Street and Karrada Dakhil Street, and the seventh is Karrada Dakhil Street. I put a map (Figure 14, below) of the sections in the chapter to easily follow up with the location of each section. I also put a map (Figure 15, below) of the most found land uses in each section.

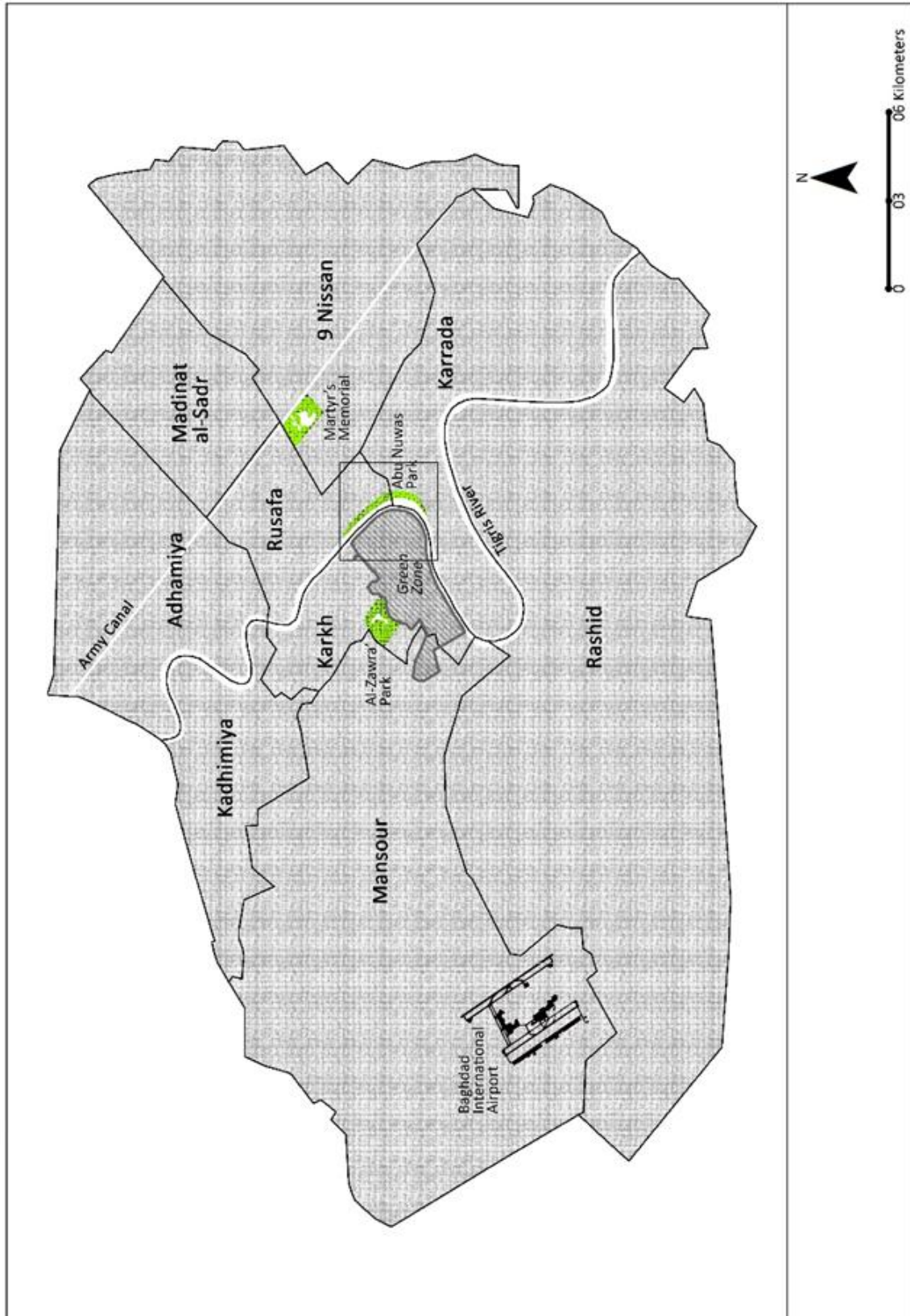


Figure 13: Location of Abu Nuwas Street, and its Parks in Relation to Baghdad's Municipalities.



Figure 14: Study Area Sections and Street Network.

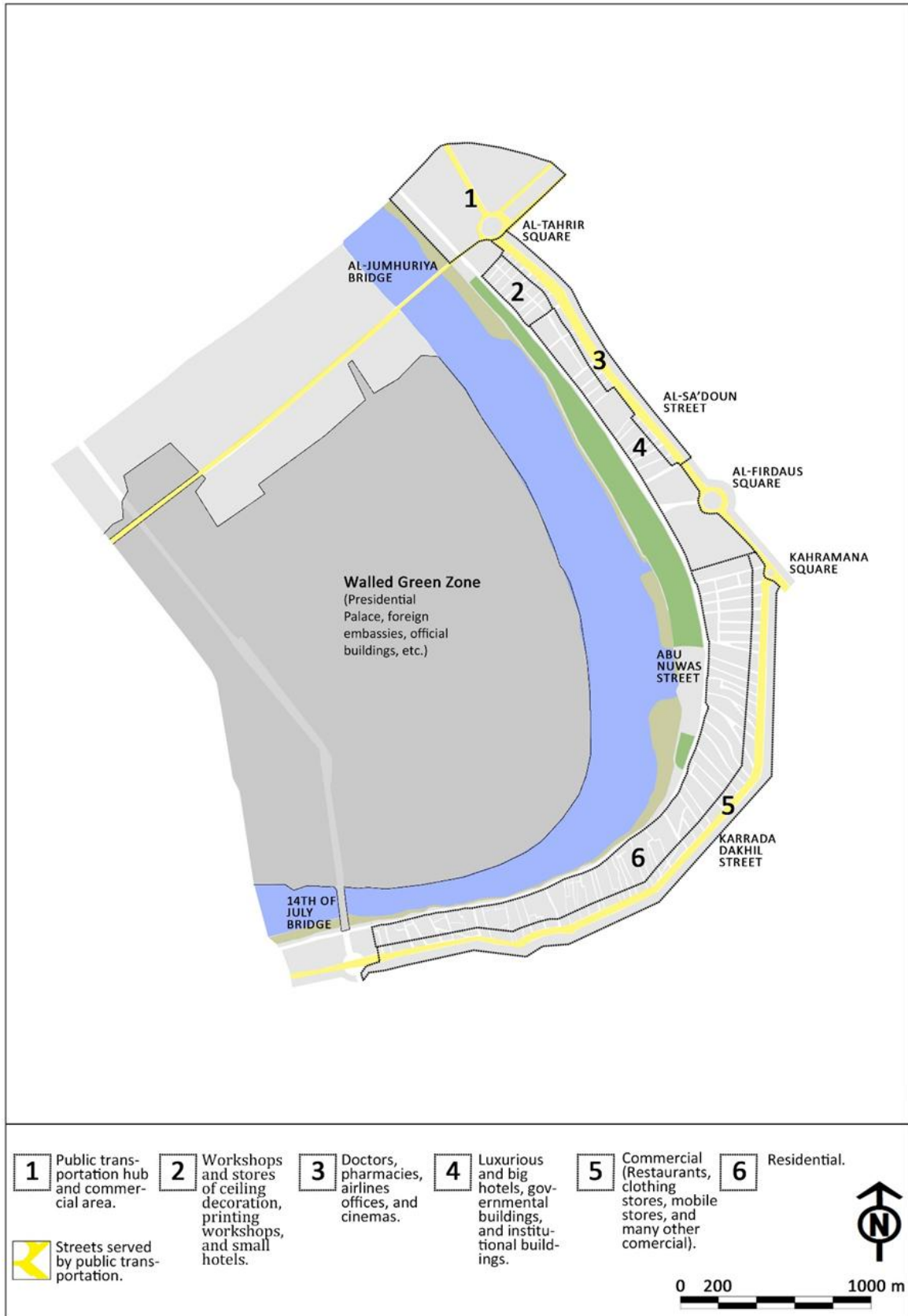


Figure 15: General Land Use Map of Abu Nuwas Street and the Adjacent Areas.

4.1. The First Section: The Northern Section of Abu Nuwas Street

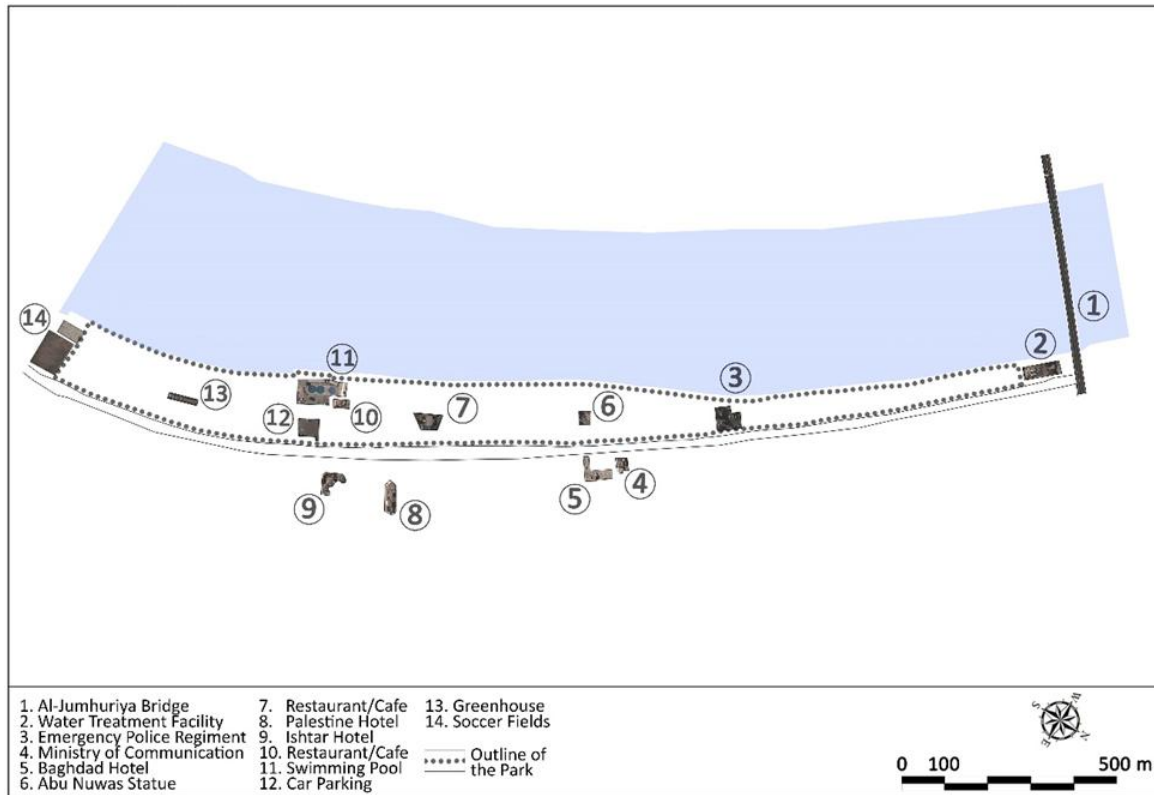


Figure 16: Landmarks in the Northern Section of Abu Nuwas Street.

4.1.1. The Park-Side Segment of the Section

The pedestrian activity, that is in general low, is more active in the sidewalk in front of the large park. In general, the street looks desolate except from vehicular activity that is highly active (taxis, private cars, and military and police vehicles -no buses and other public transportation pass through the street). The sidewalk in front of the large park has a width of approximately four meters. There are no benches or chairs; only light poles, traffic signs, and electricity (maybe broadband) cabinets. One can access the park through badly designed stairs since the level of the sidewalk, and the street, is higher than the level of the park (the difference in the level is 0.80-1.20 meters).



Figure 17: (Left) The sidewalk in front of the park; (right) a stair connecting the sidewalk to the park.

The edge between the sidewalk and the park is walled by a 0.50-meter wall that is used as a bench by some users. A group of five males (18-22 years old) were seen walking on the sidewalk one afternoon and one of them was taking a photograph of another who was sitting on the wall facing the street while the park and the river in the background. I was walking on the same segment of the sidewalk and so decided to rest and sat on the short wall of the park. After minutes, an army soldier came to me from inside the park and told me it is forbidden to sit there. I told him I was resting from a walk so he left. One evening, I saw an adult male wearing a sport uniform and jogging on this part of the sidewalk.

For security reasons, it is forbidden to park vehicles along this segment. For those who come by car, they use the car parking inside the park. Others use taxis since there are no buses or other public transportation passing through the street. There is a police SUV parking on the sidewalk, and blocking pedestrian flow.⁴⁷ Also, in the northern part of the segment, there is an Emergency Police Regiment walled zone located inside the park with policemen guarding it only from the street's side.



Figure 18: Emergency Police Regiment walled zone in the park-side segment of the street.

Noticeable of the park from the street are the children playing soccer inside it. This spatial practice is present throughout the week (however, more present during

⁴⁷ I observed the police SUV to be parked in the same location on all days of my fieldwork.

weekends than on weekdays). Children, teenagers, and young and mid-aged men use the grass areas of the park to play soccer.



Figure 19: Children playing soccer close to a playground inside the park.

4.1.2. The segment of the section across the park

Along the other side of the street in front of the large park, there are gated facilities. Baghdad Hotel, Palestine Hotel and Ishtar Hotel are walled as well as the Ministry of Communication. Sometimes watchtowers are used as another security measure as in the walls of the ministry, and Palestine and Ishtar hotels. When there is a gate in the walls, security guards stand by it as in the case of the ministry. Moreover, the walls of the ministry and the hotels (Palestine, Ishtar, and Baghdad) are blast walls and in

some cases barbed wire is used on top of them as in Baghdad Hotel. Interestingly, Al-Safeer Hotel which, like the hotels mentioned above, is a luxurious one is not walled. Nevertheless, there is a security booth near the parking entrance which is controlled by an entry movable barrier. There is another unidentified walled facility in the same area with a watchtower and a gate in the walls. Also, the *institut français* building is walled and the walls are painted with Mesopotamian figures. There is a security guard by the entrance leading to the parking of the institute. Also, graffiti can be seen on a small segment of the walls of Palestine and Ishtar hotels. Close to that graffiti, a car towing service's phone number is written on different places of the walls.



Figure 20: "I Love Iraq" the graffiti in red and pink reads. Those graffiti are the only ones found on the wall.

In addition to the walled facilities described above, there are the fenced sites. The difference between the two is that the former is usually a governmental facility or a hotel

where officials and journalists stay and are usually guarded by governmental security forces, while the latter is not a governmental facility and guarded by less intensive measures such as CCTV cameras as in Mama Ayser School, or not guarded at all.

The fenced sites are either unbuilt or built; used or abandoned. In some cases, the use of the site cannot be identified because it is not visible from the street. The fence can be high or short, built with bricks or other materials such as iron bars. Hung on some fences are flags or banners which communicate Shia religious symbols and messages.



Figure 21: Fenced site with barbed wire on top of the fence and a big piece of fabric with a Shia religious phrase inscribed on it (“*haihat minna al-thulla*” which can be translated to “we do not descend into humility”).

Along this segment, there are commercial, light industrial, leisure, residential, governmental, empty, parking, institutional, educational, and offices uses:

- The commercial uses include liquor stores, stalls, a tailor workshop, a sports equipment store, and an ice cream shop;
- light industrial uses include a carpentry workshop, an aluminum workshop, and a facelift workshop;
- the leisure include hotels, restaurants/cafés, a few nightclubs, and a social club for the Union of Iraqi Journalists;
- the residential uses are comprised by either single family houses or apartments;
- the governmental uses include the Ministry of Communication and a traffic directorate;
- abandoned uses include houses and unbuilt lands;
- the institutional include NGOs and a news agency;
- and the educational uses include Mama Ayser school and al-Akeeda High School for Girls; and offices uses include a travel and tourism company.



Figure 22: Former residential building currently occupied by Burj Babel (an NGO).⁴⁸



Figure 23A liquor store (note that liquor stores in Baghdad are forbidden to open on Fridays as it is an Islamic holy day. When I was walking in the street one Friday no liquor store was seen open).

⁴⁸ Burj Babel is a "non-governmental organization focusing on media culture and development via implementing training and exhibitions" as mentioned on their official Facebook page. It is prevalent in Baghdad that houses are rented for non-residential uses, mainly for firms and institutions.



Figure 24: A carpentry workshop where the products are stacked on the sidewalk of one of Abu Nuwas Neighborhood's street perpendicular on Abu Nuwas Street.

Many ground-floor shops in this segment are closed, seemingly abandoned. Some shops are not only closed, but the openings are closed-off with bricks. I was told that the owners live abroad and are not willing to rent them. Another noticeable reality is the deteriorated state of a lot of the buildings as well as the unorganized practices such as the disposal of construction waste in some areas in this segment of the street.



Figure 25: Abandoned ground-floor shops of one of the buildings with construction waste on the sidewalk in front of it.



Figure 26: Closed-off ground-floor shops in one of the buildings along this section of the street.

In the areas where the walls are located, pedestrian activity is almost nonexistent. What's left of the sidewalks is thin (not more than half a meter) as the walls surround much of them. Moreover, in the area of the commercial and leisure uses, pedestrian activity is also scant as compared to the adjacent Abu Nuwas Neighborhood. It should be noted that I have not seen women walking along this segment, but I encountered a young women inside one of the restaurants/cafés.

4.1.3. The Large Park

The park in this section can be accessed from the sidewalk through stairs, from the car parking, and from the soccer fields located by its southern end. It is mainly constituted of green areas (grass, trees, palms, hedges, etc.). Benches, shades, swings, and playgrounds are found in different locations across the park. Stalls open throughout the day selling balloons, cotton candy, soft drinks, etc., and renting hookah. There is also the statue of the poet Abu Nuwas on a platform. In addition, there are two internal streets (one in the middle of the park and the other close to the riverbank), and pedestrian pathways (mostly curved). The internal streets are used exclusively by security and service vehicles. Along the riverbank close to the riverside street, barbed wire and security booths line the area. Soldiers are always present preventing users from going downriver.

The northern part of this section is most of the time used by men of different age groups (mainly drinking alcohol which they purchase from the nearby liquor stores). Gardeners employed by the municipality are also present in this part of the park, and army soldiers are always present standing close to the security booths. I asked two

soldiers if I could go downriver. I was told it is not allowed to do so. In the same northern part, I saw a gardener lying on his back under a tree. Gardeners in this section were fixing the plants, walking, or chatting with each other.

Going south, close to the restaurants and the parking, you begin to see more people in the park. Couples of males and females come on weekdays. They seem to be university students from the way they are dressed and from their age (it was the school season). Males and females are casually dressed (males: pants, shirts, and jackets; females: skirts, shirts, and jackets). All of the young women I saw were wearing the *hijab*. Couples were sitting on benches or walking hand-in-hand, and a few others standing under trees and talking.

A group of 4 children (8-12 years) were also present in this area of the park on weekdays. Teenagers, too, were present playing soccer on the grass. Under one of the shaded seating close to the soccer fields, a group of what seems to be professional footballers were having a discussion with their coach. During weekends (Fridays and Saturdays), families go to the park to walk and/or eat while sitting on the grass usually under trees. Some women were seen wearing the traditional Iraqi *abaya*. One family was sitting on the grass while the father (wearing the *dishdasha*) was preparing coal for grilling the meat the mother was preparing. Children play in the playgrounds close to their parents who usually stand and watch them playing. Older couples of males and females are also found mostly during weekends. They seem to be married or engaged. Groups of young men sit on grass while eating and smoking hookah which they rented from a nearby stall inside the park.

No females were seen in this section of the park unless they are accompanied by males (husband, son, father, boyfriend, or fiancé) except in a few cases where they were playing with, or supervising their children in the playgrounds. Moreover, I did not encounter any foreigners.



Figure 27: A family walking on the central street inside the large park one Friday afternoon.

One Friday, while soldiers –about 100 meters separating each two of them- were standing on the sidewalk in front of the park, the large park was full of people, mainly teenagers and young men playing soccer on the grass. A few groups of young men were jogging on the central internal street. Two school boys were seen sitting on the swings and studying/reading close to a group of other boys playing soccer. Two boys were

sitting on a motorcycle parked on a pathway while watching others playing soccer. A group of around 8 young men were playing loud Iraqi popular music on tambourines, singing and dancing while the food is on the rug covering the grass, which they use to sit on. The stalls were open. Two of them are located by the central internal street. One stall has a poster with Shia signs hung on it. A group of young men (18-22 years old) were gathered in front of the stall, chatting with each other.

Families and couples were also present in the park on this day. Families were sitting, walking, while the kids were nearby on the swings and in the playgrounds. They were also using the central internal street mainly for a walk. It should be noted that families were mainly present in the area between the car parking and the southern end of the park.⁴⁹ A few couples were seen walking on the pathways. A group of young girls came to the soccer fields south of the large section of the park and asked where the WC is. A young male who was watching the match told them they can use the WC of the soccer field.

⁴⁹ This is area of the large park is the one families and couples use most of the time according to my observations during the two phases of the fieldwork.



Figure 28: A couple walking on one of the pathways of the large park.

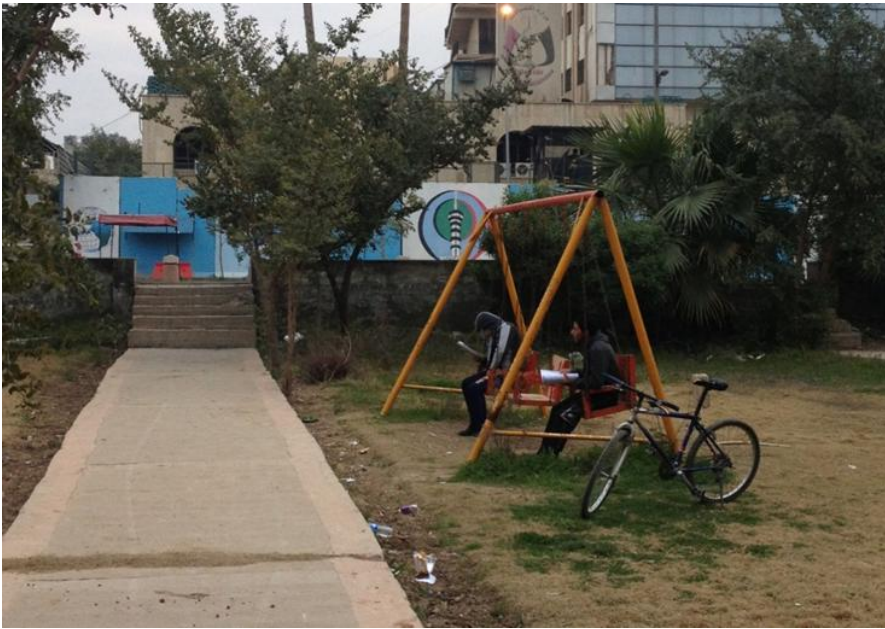


Figure 29: Two boys studying while sitting on the swings in one of the grass areas where other boys were playing soccer (the Ministry of Communication in the background).



Figure 30: Children playing in the playground while their parents are watching them.



Figure 31: A cart selling Iraqi *lablabi* (chickpeas in a flavored sauce), and renting hookahs.



Figure 32: A stall where a group of young men (not shown in the picture) were sitting. The stall rents hookahs as well.

4.1.4. The two restaurants, the swimming pools, and the soccer fields

Indoor activity in the park takes place in the two restaurants. The first one is located near the car parking where it operates as an entry landmark especially for those coming to the restaurant/café. There is an army Humvee⁽⁵⁰⁾ parking between the restaurant and the car parking where soldiers are standing beside the military vehicle (they do search passersby). There is an outdoor space by the entrance where a cistern of fish (carps) is located. There is also a round platform where the coal is placed in the middle and the carps are arranged around it for grilling.

Inside, there are two rooms, one for males and the other is mixed (called "family wing"). The two are separated by a mirror-partition wall. The view to the river is enabled

⁵⁰ Humvee is a military vehicle produced by the American manufacturer AM General. It is the main combatant vehicle of the American army during the occupation of Iraq, and it is also the main military vehicle of the post-2003 Iraqi army.

by a big window (through which the barbed wire lining the riverbank is also visible). In the same restaurant, there is an outdoor, mixed-gender section surrounded by plants.

The second restaurant is located north of the first one with almost the same configuration: a fish cistern and a grilling platform by the entrance of the restaurant where the outdoor space is located; and an indoor hall where the section of families is separated from the section of males by a mirror partition wall.



Figure 33: A Humvee and soldiers on the road linking the car parking to the restaurant and the swimming pools.



Figure 34: The men's section separated by a mirror partition from the "family wing".



Figure 35: The outdoor section of the restaurant near the car parking. Unlike the indoor hall, this section is mixed-gender.



Figure 36: The platform in front of the restaurant's hall where the carps are cooked.

Adjacent to the restaurant, there are two outdoor swimming pools (not filled with water as it was the winter season during my field visits) which can be accessed from the car parking and the restaurant. The swimming pools are surrounded by a furnished sitting area which separated from the internal riverside street by a fence. Access to the riverside street from the swimming pools is prohibited. I went on the riverside street reaching what seemed to be a small dock. A soldier standing on the street far away from me, and talking to a group of other soldiers in the Humvee shouted "what you are doing?" I told him "the river!" He waved his hand pointing away from the river so I went back to the swimming pools.



Figure 37: The large swimming pool and the sitting area. The river is on the right.

The soccer fields are located adjacent to the southern end of the large park and can be accessed from the park and from Abu Nuwas Street through a gate. They are used by the local soccer team of al-Karrada, and by other users who can reserve them. The soccer fields are the only available facilities for the local soccer teams in the neighborhood of al-Karrada. A mini market is located beside the fields where there are also benches and a public WC.

This part of the street is always full of soccer plays throughout the week except in the evening. You can find different age groups ranging from children to men in their late 30s. There is almost a complete absence of females in this part of the street. Hung on top of the fence separating the fields from the park is a flag with and an inscription that reads “*ya hussein*”, a clear Shia label. Also, there are two posters, inscribed with Shia religious phrases, hung on the same fence, and visible from within the park. The grass area of the

park close to the soccer fields is full of soccer players (usually teenagers) especially during weekends.



Figure 38: Religious markers hung on the fence separating the soccer fields and the park. The photo is taken from the park.

4.2. The Second Section: The Southern Section of Abu Nuwas Street

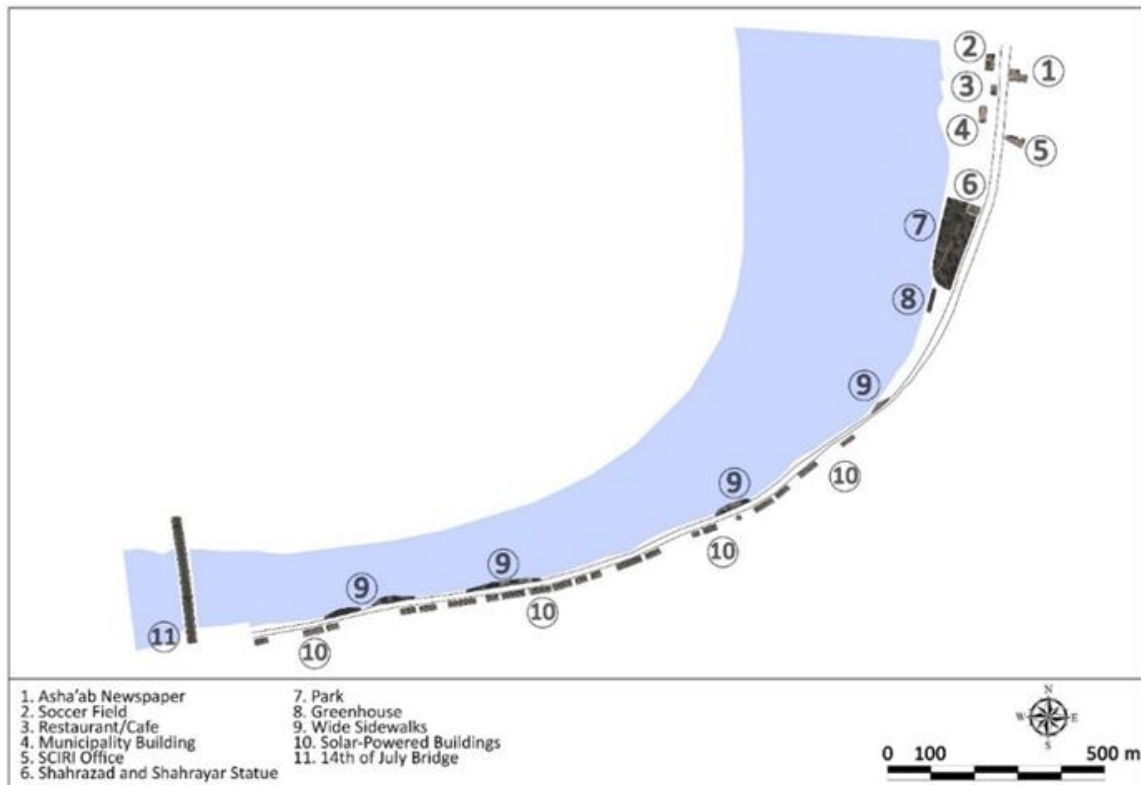


Figure 39: Landmarks in the Southern Section of Abu Nuwas Street

This section of the street begins (in the north) from the soccer fields and ends (in the south) at the military checkpoint before the 14th of July Bridge that controls the entrance to the Green Zone through the bridge (Figure 39, above). The street's part between the soccer fields and the solar-powered buildings has various land uses while the part along the solar-powered buildings until the checkpoint is mainly residential. By the beginning of the latter part, the width of the street begins to decrease. The street has two lanes -separated by a planted curb- for vehicular access but as the street's width decreases, it becomes one roadway for two-way vehicular circulation.

4.2.1. The riverside segment of the section

Along this segment, a number of facilities are located: the municipality building of al-Karrada and its car parking, a restaurant/café, a soccer field, Shahrazad and Shahrayar statue, the small park, a plastic greenhouse, and a few buildings that belong to the municipality. Although most of this segment is comprised by a riverside sidewalk, the pedestrian activity on it is very low, even in front of the small park. Here also, the vehicular activity dominates the pedestrian, even more than in the northern section of the street. The sidewalk's width in this segment is less than that in the northern section, and it begins to decrease as the street's width decreases.

The buildings and the soccer field in this segment separate the large park from the small one. The restaurant/café has the same configuration as those in the park. However, it is more male-dominated. In the evening, it is more of a café where adult males sit, smoke hookah, play dominoes, and chat while drinking soft and hot drinks, mainly, tea. Over its entrance from the street, there is a flag, with an inscription related to Shi'ism. The restaurant/café and the soccer field are the most active areas. In front of the soccer fields, there is a stall selling soft drinks, cigarettes, and other goods. In some occasions, as it is everywhere in the street, the security presence in this area becomes intense where the number of soldiers exceeds the number of pedestrians.



Figure 40: The entrance of the "al-Iraq Casino". Note the religious flag, with “*ya hussein*”, hovering over the entrance.

Walking past the buildings, to the south, one encounters the statue of Shahrazad and Shahrayar adjacent to the small park. There is a police car parked beside the statue with two soldiers sitting in the car or standing close to it. I encountered two men who wanted to take photos with the statue, and so they asked the soldiers for permission which they got. Another small group of Iraqi and foreigner old men parked their car in front of the statue and also asked the soldiers for permission to take photos with the statue. By the other end of the statue, there is a security booth with a soldier inside.



Figure 41: The Shahrazad and Shahrayar statue and a police car parked under a shed.



Figure 42: One men posing by the statue while his friend photographing him.

Adjacent to the statue is the small park that can be accessed from the statue's platform via a stair, and from an entrance at the other end of the park where a cart selling *lablabi* is located. A few soldiers are stationed next to the entrance (they usually do not search those entering the park). Posters with Shia signs are hung on the park's fence beside the entrance. Unlike the big park, this one cannot be accessed from the sidewalk because there are no stairs and because part of it is fenced.

The park is a grass area with a central pathway, benches, trees, two playgrounds, and a stage. The stage was used during public events held in the park.

In the winter, the park is empty from people most of the time during the week. I only encountered a few cases where people used the park: a group of young men were sitting on the grass in a circle while eating; a mother playing with her son in the playground; and an old couple walking inside it. Whereas, in the summer, the park gets crowded with people (mainly families, and young men in group). The spatial practices taking place in this park are similar to those in the large one except soccer play and alcohol drinking. Also, young couples are less found. Also, it is not allowed to go by the river as there are soldiers in security booths preventing people from going there. Barbed wire also separates the park from the river.

South of the park, and adjacent to it, there is a fenced open piece of land where there are two plastic greenhouses and a building. By the river, there are security booths.

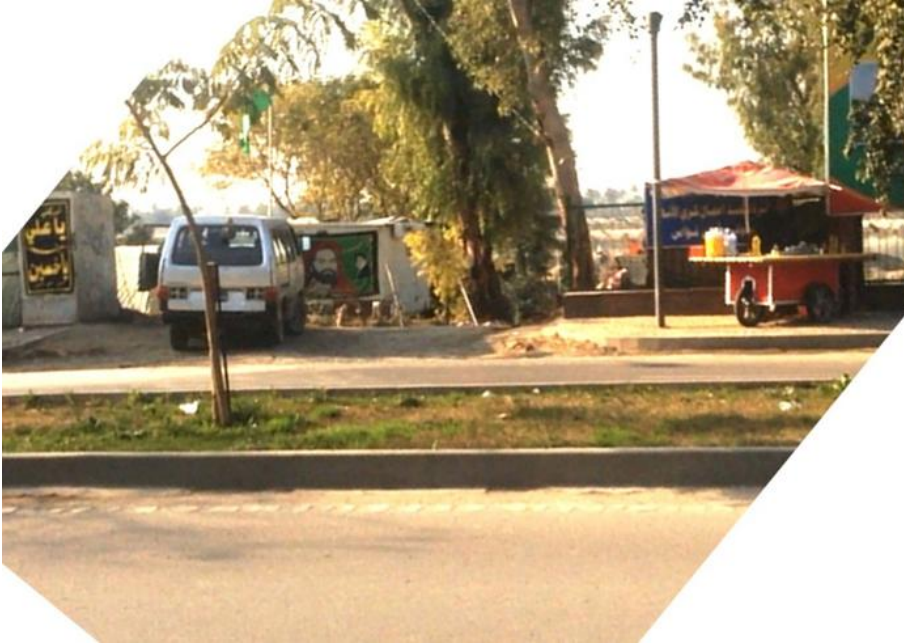


Figure 43: The entrance of the small park. Note the lablabi cart (on the right) and the posters (in the center behind the car and on the left where a soldier is also standing but not obvious in the photo).



Figure 44: An old couple walking on the central pathway of the small section of the park. The playground is on the right (not obvious in the picture).

The rest of this segment includes a thin sidewalk where pedestrian flow is interrupted in some locations by a tree or a lighting pole. The sidewalk's width gets larger in some locations, but does not have furniture. In some of the wide sections of the sidewalk, there are electricity cabinets and/or advertisement posters. On one of those wide sidewalks in front of the solar-powered buildings, there was a man washing a car while another man was watching his daughter who was playing.

The security presence along this segment is significant as, in addition to the soldiers, there are security booths behind the fence throughout the street until the military checkpoint at its southern end. By the checkpoint, there is a number of posters with Shia inscriptions and images.

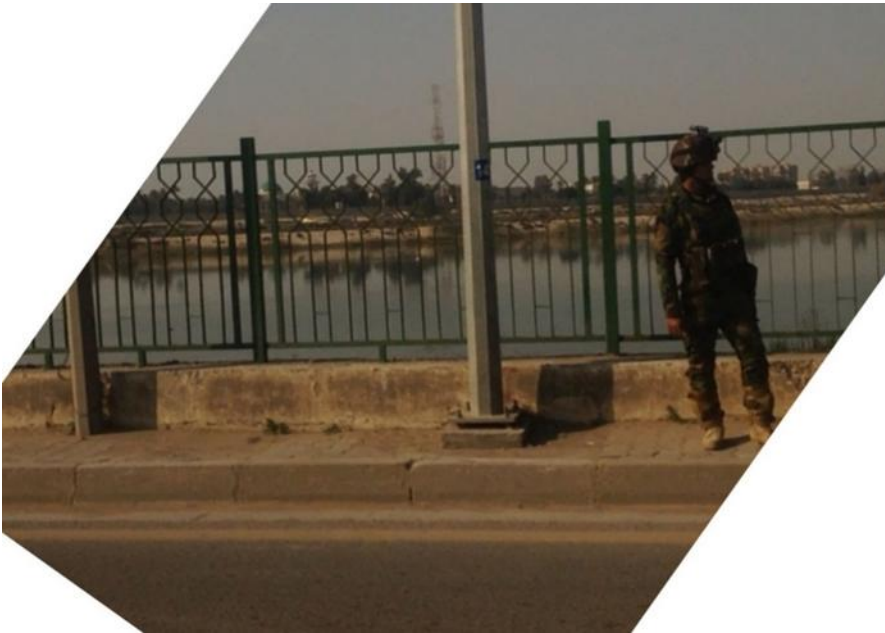


Figure 45: The riverside sidewalk between the small park and the 14th of July Bridge. Note the lighting pole, the fence, and the soldier. Also, the Green Zone is in the background across the river.



Figure 46: A man washing his car in one of the aforementioned wide sidewalks in front of the solar-powered buildings. Note the garbage on the floor behind the car.

4.2.2 The other segment of the street

This segment gets more residential as we go towards the bridge until we reach the solar-powered buildings where it is almost only residential. Along this segment, there are residential buildings, firms, two hotels, political facilities, fenced empty lands, one store for water-pumping equipment, car parking, and one Shia mosque. The buildings include various architectural typologies, the most reoccurring one being the detached/semi-detached fenced house prevalent in Baghdad. Another distinctive typology is that of the solar-powered residential buildings. There are a few traditional buildings that seem to have a heritage significance. One of them have the famous Iraqi *shanasheel* but they are in a deteriorated state.

There is a vendor selling “benzene” stored in cans. A man was washing a car parked on the street in front of one of the solar-powered buildings. There is also a number of closed-off ground-floor shops of a few buildings. There are banners, flags, and posters

(all with Shia signs) as in other areas in the street. One poster is that of Ammar al-Hakim, the leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which is a Shia political organization with an armed militia called Badr Organization seen by some Iraqis as responsible of abducting, mutilating, and killing Iraqis during the civil strife. Another poster, but this time is not related to Shi'ism, is that of Mohammed al-Rubeiy, a member in the Baghdad Provincial Council and one of the influential figures in al-Karrada.

As for the security measures in this segment, they are found in the SCIRI main office, the newspaper building of the Iraqi Communist Party, and a few other locations secured by a police Humvee and a security booth. There are examples where the physical security features are co-present with signs with Shia messages as in the cases of the SCIRI's walls and watchtower and the checkpoint in the southern end of the street.



Figure 47: A solar-powered residential building in Abu Nuwas Street where two women and a kid walking in front of it. Note the flag with Shia inscriptions hung on the door of the building, and the deteriorated state of the building.

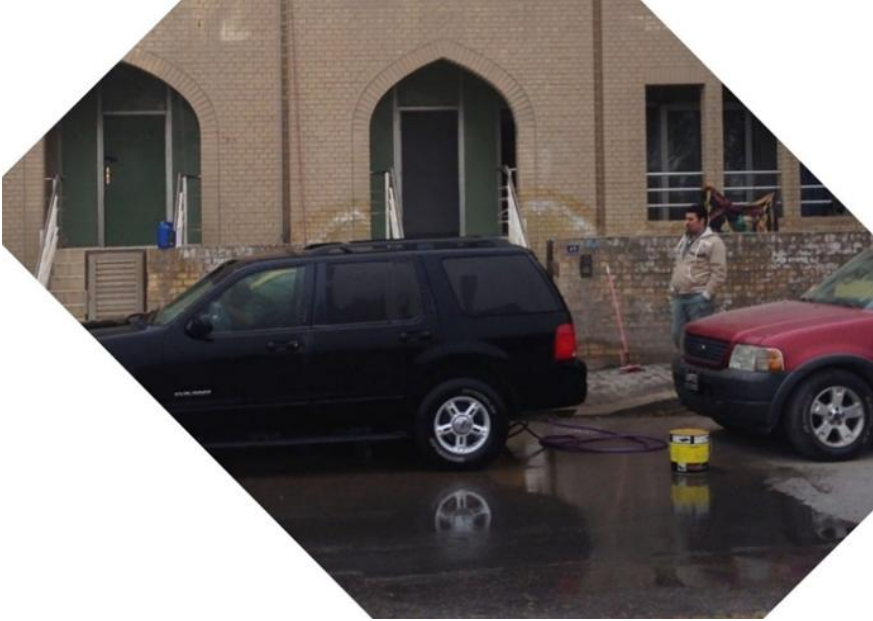


Figure 48: A man washing his car which is parked in front of his residence.



Figure 49: A traditional house is fenced and barbed wire is used as well.



Figure 50: A store selling water-pumping equipment. Note how the products are exhibited on the sidewalk appropriating it.



Figure 51: Closed-off ground-floor shops marked with a banner with a Shia inscription.



Figure 52: A watchtower behind the wall of the SCIRI's main office.



Figure 53: A large poster of the SCIRI's leaders hung south of the organization's complex.



Figure 54: A police Humvee parked close to a solar-powered building. Also, there is a security booth behind the vehicle. Note that, in addition to the Iraqi flag, there is a flag with Shia inscriptions hung on top of the vehicle.

4.3. The Third and Fourth Sections: The Abu Nuwas Neighborhood and al-Sa'doun Street

The Abu Nuwas Neighborhood is very active economically during daytime with a larger number of open ground-floor shops. The main commercial activity comes from ceiling decoration workshops and stores that are mainly located along the central street of the neighborhood. There are also a number of printing and publishing companies, mini markets, vegetable shops, a few hotels, one traditional café, and other uses. The sidewalks in this neighborhood are used for exhibiting the products especially of the ceiling decoration shops. In some cases, the decoration tiles are attached to the exterior buildings' walls for exhibition. Cars park on the street in front of sidewalks leaving an almost enough space for passing vehicles. Street users are almost always men of different age groups. During fieldwork, I did not encounter women walking in the neighborhood.

A very distinctive aspect of this neighborhood is the considerable number of traditional buildings with *shanasheel* (a type of cantilevered element containing windows overlooking an alley or a street; it is ubiquitously found in traditional Baghdadi houses). Also, there are a number of closed ground-floor shops whereby some of them are closed-off with bricks. The neighborhood is characterized by the dilapidated condition of the buildings which is easily noticed once you are in it.



Figure 55: The main street of the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood (connected from the east to Abu Nuwas Street and from the west to al-Sa'doun Street).



Figure 56: A traditional café in the neighborhood. Note the couches that are a trademark of such cafés especially those of the al-Rashid Street.



Figure 57: A traditional building with an electric generator serving the neighborhood. The generator occupies the ground floor of the building.



Figure 58: Ground-floor shops closed-off with bricks. Note the dilapidated condition of the old traditional buildings.



Figure 59: A hotel in the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood. Note the woman standing on the balcony and looking down at the street. She is the only woman I encountered in this neighborhood.

4.3.1. Connection between al-Sa'doun Street and Abu Nuwas Street

Al-Sa'doun Street is parallel to Abu Nuwas Street. Between both streets, there are three distinct areas: the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood, an area that contains the high-end hotels (Ishtar, Palestine, Baghdad, and al-Safeer), and another area between Ishtar Hotel and Kahramana Square. In the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood, there is a considerable number of accessible streets although some of them are closed-off due to security reasons. Al-Sa'doun Street is also connected to Abu Nuwas Street through a wide street where Palestine Hotel is located.



Figure 60: One of the streets in the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood connecting al-Sa'doun Street to Abu Nuwas Street.



Figure 61: A street connecting al-Sa'doun Street to Abu Nuwas Street in the area where the walled Palestine Hotel (on the right) is located.

4.3.2. Al-Sa'doun Street's Squares

There are three squares on al-Sa'doun Street. I will talk about al-Tahrir Square in the next (fifth) section. Al-Firdaus Square has some importance in the memory of many as it was the site where Saddam Hussein's statue was debased by the American soldiers on the day Baghdad was captured. There are a number of important facilities located around the square such as Ishtar and Palestine hotels, al-Firdaus Mosque, and al-Alwiyah Club, “the social club for Iraq's top elite _ or what is left of it”⁽⁵¹⁾. Kahramana Square is an important landmark in the city where a famous sculpture (also called Kahramana) created by the Iraqi sculptor Mohammed Ghani Hikmat in 1970s is located in the middle

⁵¹ Kratovac, Katarina, “Iraq Sees Marriage Boom Due To Less Violence,” *The World Post* April 21 2009. Accessed at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/21/iraq-sees-marriage-boom-d_n_189646.html May 2, 2014.

of the square.⁵² The square separates between al-Sa'doun Street and Karrada Dakhil Street.



Figure 62: An American military vehicle pulling down Saddam Hussein's statue in al-Firdaus Square. This scene was widely circulated in Arab and Western media.



Figure 63: Al-Firdaus Square on al-Sa'doun Street.

⁵² Schmidt, Michael, "Mohammed Ghani Hikmat, Iraqi Sculptor, Dies at 82," *The New York Times* September 21 2011. Accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/21/arts/design/mohammed-ghani-hikmat-iraqi-sculptor-dies-at-82.html?_r=0 on May 2, 2014.



Figure 64: Kahramana Square.

4.3.3. Land Uses along al-Sa'doun Street

There are two main commercial uses along the street: the first is the offices of international airlines and private flight-reservation offices (street is considered the main area in the city where such offices are located); and the second is medical clinics and pharmacies. There are other uses which include cinemas, medical equipment stores, hotels, and restaurants among others. Recently, a considerable number of bars and nightclubs have opened. The pedestrian activity is relatively high and also is the vehicular. Furthermore, the street is well serviced by public transportation in the form of buses and Kia vans unlike Abu Nuwas Street.

4.4. The Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Sections: Bab al-Sharqi, Karrada-Abu Nuwas Residential Area, and Karrada Dakhil Street

The immediate area north of Abu Nuwas Street is Bab al-Sharqi which is more or less the city center acting as a central hub for public transportation (buses and Kia vans). The pedestrian activity is also very active in this area. The al-Tahrir Square receives the

traffic coming from the western part of the city across the river through al-Jumhuriya Bridge which is accessible in contrast with the 14th of July Bridge. The square has another function as a place for political and civil protests. In 2011, during the Arab Spring, protests took place in the square, more specifically, in front of the al-Hurriya Monument (a monument designed by the Iraqi sculptor Jawad Salim and the Iraqi Architect Rifat Chadirji after the coup of 1958). In one of the protests, al-Jumhuriya Bridge was closed with blast walls and security troops surrounded the area.

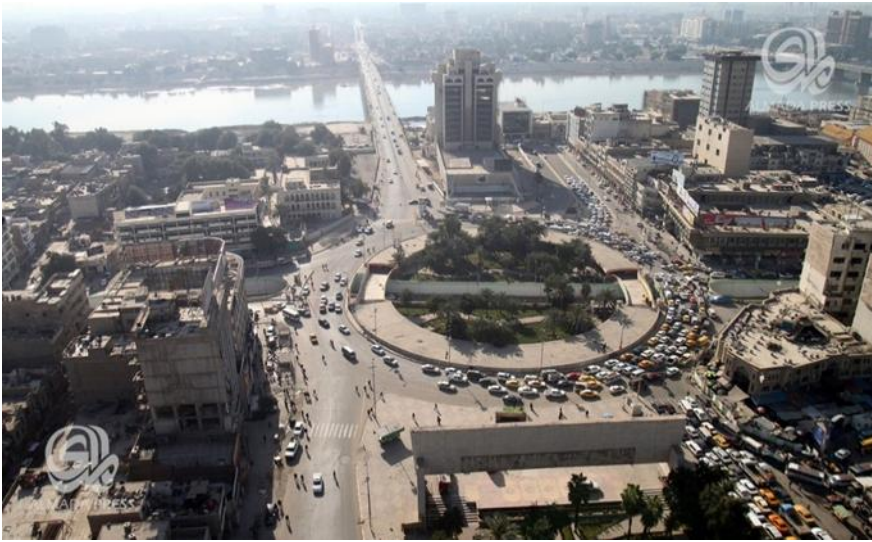


Figure 65: Al-Tahrir Square in Baghdad.

The southern part of al-Rashid Street is connected to Abu Nuwas in the area of Bab al-Sharqi. In this part of al-Rashid Street, there are clothes stores, an event venue, a car parking, a coffee shop, a bank, an abandoned building (for sale), and a governmental walled building among others.



Figure 66: The southern part of al-Rashid Street that is connected to Abu Nuwas Street.

With regard to the fifth section, Karrada-Abu Nuwas Residential Area, there are two distinct areas. The first begins at the intersection where the *Institut français* is located until the solar-powered buildings; and the second begins from the solar-powered buildings until the 14th of July Bridge. In the first, there are houses and buildings on large tracts of land as compared to those found in the second area. Also, the streets in the first are wider, and they directly link Karrada Dakhil Street to Abu Nuwas, while in the second the link mainly happens through mazy, narrow streets. Moreover, the first area is not solely residential while the second is mainly residential.

Close to the *Institut français*, there are two churches with distinctive architectural style, a monastery, a Christian school, and the al-Rahibat Hospital (a Christian hospital). In the same area, there are another hospital and a number of medical clinics, all located in one street.



Figure 67: The first area of the Karrada-Abu Nuwas residential section where streets are linear, linking Abu Nuwas Street to Karrada Dakhil Street.



Figure 68: Saint Raphael Catholic Church close to the *institut français*.

The seventh section of the street of al-Karrada Dakhil. The street begins from Kahramana Square in the north to the 14th of July Bridge's square (closed except the tunnel) in the south. This street might be the most active commercial street in the city, and is an area with an extensive variety of uses: clothing stores, restaurants, cafés, ice cream shops, supermarkets, a few small malls, stationary stores, mobile stores, banks, hospitals, medical clinics, pharmacies, car parking, Shia mosques/Hussainiyas and others. Most of the buildings in the street are multi-storey buildings with ground-floor shops that open most time of the day (some of them stay until late hours in the evening).

The pedestrian and vehicular activity is high. The street is well serviced with public transportation (buses and Kia vans) and taxis which move with relatively low speeds due to traffic congestion. Unlike al-Sa'doun Street which is more of a city-scale avenue, Karrada Dakhil Street has a smaller scale where it is not uncommon to encounter a lot of the residents from the adjacent areas. Many side streets linking Abu Nuwas Street to this one are inaccessible due to security measures.



Figure 69: Ground-floor shops in Karrada Dakhil Street.

CHAPTER 5

ABU NUWAS: RESTRICTIONS AND PRACTICES

5.1. Security Mechanisms

5.1.1. Geography and Patterns

The street is rife with physical security measures such as checkpoints, concrete walls, watchtowers, iron gates, security vehicles, security booths, barbed wire, and movable bars. An Emergency Police Regiment is also located in the northern part of the street. The street includes a significant number of security personnel who are usually stationed inside or nearby various physical features: checkpoints, security vehicles, security booths, gates, and watchtowers. They are comprised of army soldiers, policemen, and, occasionally, private security guards (for instance, in the case of al-Safeer Hotel). Soldiers are mostly stationed along the riverside part of the street, including the parks, facing the Green Zone while policemen are present in many locations across the street except the parks.

In general, the security measures along the street. They intensify at its both ends which are controlled by checkpoints, and around following facilities: the water-treatment facility, the police station, the ministry building, Palestine and Ishtar hotels, the traffic directorate, the SCIRI complex, and the IIACSS office⁽⁵³⁾. They are also intense on the parks' perimeters, and close to the large park's car parking. Along the streets of al-Sa'doun and al-Karrada Dakhil, security measures are visible mainly around Baghdad,

⁵³ IIACSS, according to its website, is a research company that conducts public opinion surveys in Iraq for local and international clients (www.iiacss.org).

Ishtar, and Palestine hotels, al-Alwiya Club, the banks, the Hussainiya, the post office, and the entrance to the Green Zone in the southern part of al-Karrada Dakhil Street (see Figure 70, below).

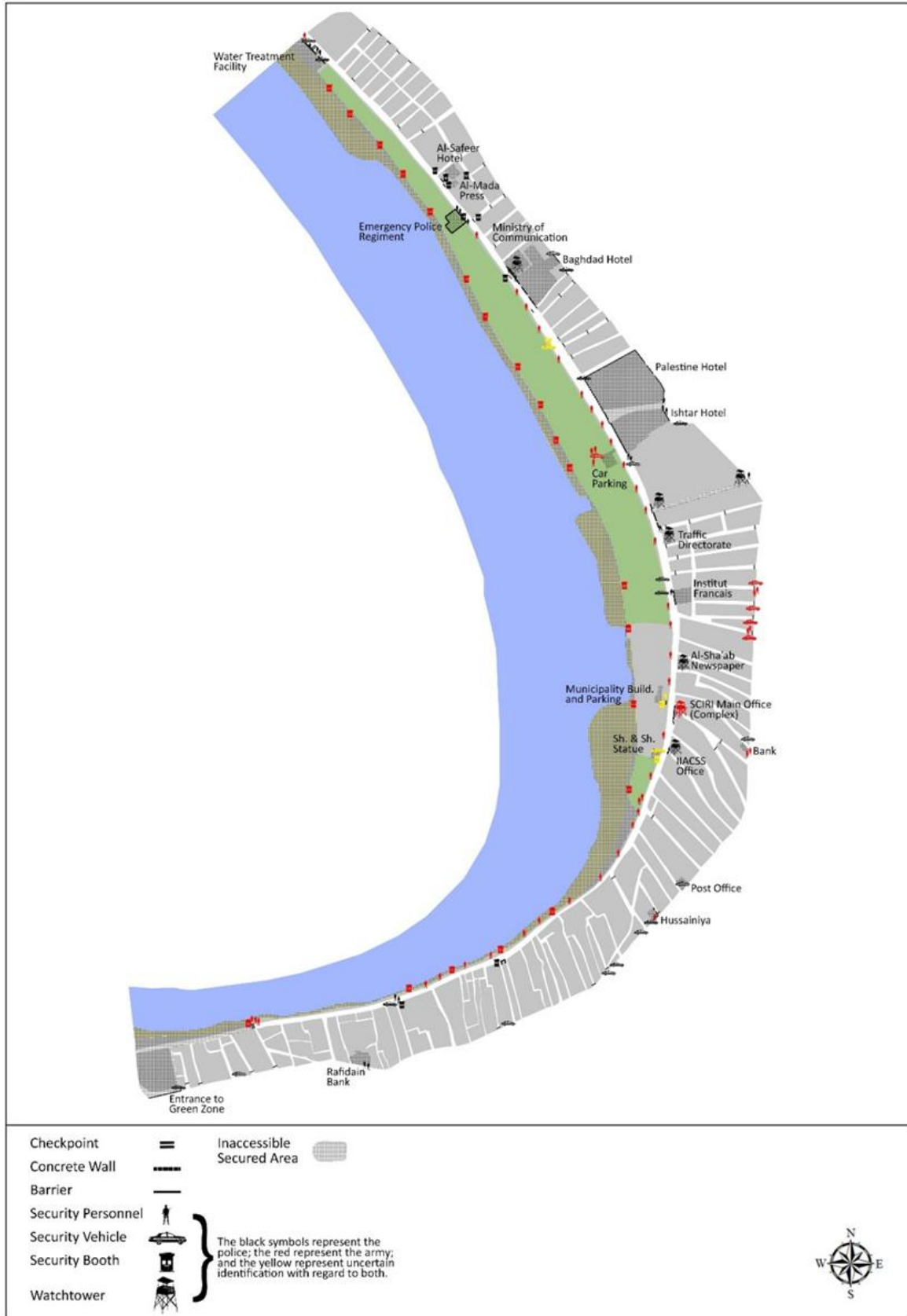


Figure 70: Security Measures in Abu Nuwas Street and the Adjacent Areas.

The security measures on Abu Nuwas Street are intense and multiple. People on the street feel a constant sense of surveillance from the regular presence of the physical security features and guards throughout the area. Two of the survey respondents specifically perceived an “excessiveness” of “concrete walls” and “security stations” respectively. A woman stopped visiting the parks with her family due to what she describes as a “horrifying deployment of military troops”.⁵⁴

One of the direct impacts of such intense security deployment, as Savitch (2008) and Nemeth (2010) discuss, is physical loss of public space. In Abu Nuwas Street, whole areas are taken away from the public and appropriated by fixed security apparatuses such as blast walls. One case in point is the large stretch of the sidewalk in front of the ministry and Baghdad Hotel which is surrounded by blast walls and overlooked by watchtowers. Another is found in the northern part of the large park where the walled police station occupies around 3,500 square meters. This appropriation creates a spatial divide between the northern and southern parts of the large park. Moreover, the riverbank inside the parks is demarcated with barbed wire and manned security booths further separating it from the rest of the parks’ areas. Along the riverside segment of the street, security booths also line the bank of the river but an iron fence is used to separate the bank from the sidewalk instead of barbed wire.⁵⁵

Physical loss of public space also happens when mobile security features, such as security vehicles or light barriers, are permanently or temporally stationed within the

⁵⁴ “شارع ابو نواس يتحول من شارع للعشاق الى شارع للقوات الامنية”, *Shakwmakw* March 12 2014. Accessed at www.shakwmakw.com on June 30 2014.

⁵⁵ Also, in some instances, there are infrastructure (i.e. light poles, generators, and electricity cabinets) and merchandise (as in the case of the carpentry workshop and water-pumping store) placed on the sidewalks of the street contributing to more physical loss of space. In some other cases, stalls appropriate the sidewalks or construction waste is left on it.

street's public space. For example, two security vehicles always park on the sidewalk adjacent to the large park taking over public space and cutting-off pedestrian flow on the sidewalk. Whereas, the security vehicle which used to park on the platform of the Shahrazad and Shahrayar Statue, no longer parks there.



Figure 71: The Ministry of Communication guarded by security guards, a watchtower, CCTV camera (above the soldier looking-up) and blast walls. Note how the sidewalk is surrounded by walls and taken away from the public.

5.1.2. Access and Mobility

On the street of Abu Nuwas, access is unequally affected by the security measures ranging from public areas which are completely open to those which are completely inaccessible. Access to both parks is not monitored by security checks. Anyone can easily

enter the large park through the stairs connecting it to the sidewalk without being searched or questioned by the soldiers who might be standing a few meters away from the stairs. The small park has a gate where a few soldiers are deployed, but they usually do not search those entering it. Visitors coming to the small park can also enter through a stair connecting it to the platform of the statue of Shahrazad and Shahrayar, and from the sidewalk where there is no fence. Whereas, the area along the river inside both parks is inaccessible and surveillance there is tight, making the riverside street inside the large park rather empty from users. Also, accessing the parks for collective purposes is not allowed unless a security permit is granted. With regard to the side streets connecting Abu Nuwas Street to al-Sa'doun and al-Karrada Dakhil streets, many streets are inaccessible and closed-off either by blast walls or, mostly, by barriers such as movable bars, barbed wire, or construction waste. On some streets, security guards control such barriers only allowing access to vehicles of those living or working there, but pedestrians can enter.

Security restrictions on access, then, undermine the qualities of the street's public space. The street, being one of the main public spaces in the city where city dwellers can potentially access the river, is deprived of one of its historically main characteristics, that is, direct access to the river. Additionally, vehicle and pedestrian access to the street is reduced by the closing-off of many side streets. Moreover, security measures on the street affect accessibility in relation to how, as Staeheli and Mitchell (2007) argue, someone enters a space regardless of physical barriers. This is because access is conditioned by feelings of receptivity, welcome, and/or comfort, or by the lack of these feelings. Thus, heavily securitized, yet publicly accessible, areas are usually empty from users. The

riverside street inside the large park is empty from pedestrians. In fact, two respondents from the survey perceived it to be closed-off although it is not.

Mobility is as well affected by the security measures as accessibility. Mobility of city dwellers –that is, moving through the city on foot as pedestrians or in vehicles as drivers or passengers- has greatly been altered since the 2003 invasion. It has been made extremely inconvenient due to car-by-car searches at checkpoints, streets' blockade by fixed or movable barriers, frequent traffic re-routing, and prohibitions on parking and photographing.

Abu Nuwas Street, like many streets in Baghdad, has witnessed all of the aforementioned security procedures. In the survey, 17% of the respondents pointed out the closing-off of streets as a dislike. A woman expressed her dislike with regard to “the presence of checkpoints” as soldiers “are not helpful towards people and children”. Also, users' options in using the street's public space have been limited. Users walking or jogging along the street do not use the street's side where the secured facilities, such as the ministry, are located.⁵⁶ They are not allowed to park their cars on the street. Photographing is done in locations away from the secured facilities and beyond the sight of the security personnel who perceive it as threatening. In addition, the police used to prevent those drinking alcohol in the large park.

Furthermore, women's mobility in post-invasion Baghdad is vulnerable (Zangana, 2010). Potential harassment of women, especially younger ones, by security personnel undermines their movement in the city which is already exacerbated by social norms that assign females a restricted geography. A young, unmarried woman is usually escorted by

⁵⁶ I was walking by the walled ministry while using my cell phone when one of the security personnel told me to move away and walk on the other side of the street. Also, I was sitting on the short wall of the large park when a soldier came to me and asked about what I was doing.

a man or an older woman when in the street's parks. While a married young woman is usually accompanied by her husband and/or children. Nevertheless, harassments may take place even if such accompaniment is provided.⁵⁷

5.1.3. Nuances and Negotiations

There is a differentiation between the street and the parks with regard to the intensity of security measures. The street suffers the detrimental impacts of securitization in the ways described above, while the parks remain open to a large extent with the exception of their riverbanks. The security personnel do not perceive the parks as a threat as long as they secure the perimeters, especially the riverbank facing the Green Zone. Therefore, there is limited control over the parks by the security measures (this discussion is developed more in “5.3.2. Diversity” in this chapter).

The security measures are faced with tactics acted out by users, and security personnel as well. As Hunt (2003) stresses, tactics “are simple ways of constructing alternatives” within the otherwise inescapable strategic impositions. They include the everyday negotiations street users employ in their various practices. Simultaneously, users tactically make use of the “chance offerings” or “cracks”, as de Certeau (1984) puts it, which come about in the surveillance apparatuses in certain junctures. The persons taking photographs by the statue of Shahrazad and Shahrayar successfully negotiated their right to do so with the guards deployed beside it. The soldier who asked me why I was sitting on the large park's wall left me when I told him I was resting from a long walk. Events' organizers resort to their personal connections to get the security permits

⁵⁷ “شارع ابو نواس يتحول من شارع للعشاق الى شارع للقوات الامنية” *Shakwmakw* March 12 2014. Accessed at www.shakwmakw.com on June 30 2014.

(see “5.3.1. Uses and Users” in this chapter). Movable barriers such as barbed wire and other light objects used to close-off streets are sometimes moved away by street users when unattended by security guards. Also, occasional harassment of young women by security personnel has not made them disappear from the parks’ public space. They are still present as mothers with their children, wives with their husbands, girlfriends with their boyfriends, and so on.

But someone’s leverage in such negotiations depends on considerations related to his/her status, gender, age, and sect (this last one will be discussed in “5.2.3. Nuances and Negotiations” below). A man with his family in a car may not be searched and may be given a relatively easy access at checkpoints as compared to a group of young men. The presence of women is, thus, twofold. On the one hand, young women may be harassed, but, on the other, when they accompany males, their mobility in public space is rendered more convenient.

Tactics also relate to Bayat’s (2012) notion of the “quiet encroachment” as they might make the authority accept, or turn a blind eye with regard to, the presence of unexpected and/or unwanted practices. Alcohol drinking pursued when the police stopped interfering. Men drink alcohol in the park in spite of inconveniences by the police, while the army soldiers stationing close to them do not interfere as it is outside their jurisdiction.

Also, the security personnel may use the space in a way not related to their responsibilities while on duty. A soldier or a policeman flirts with female passersby, converses with a street vendor whom he may be ordered to displace in the future, or talks on the phone for a long time. Such an understanding is important to point out the human

dimension of those responsible on enacting security which is not clear in the literature on militarization of public space.

5.2. Sectarian Signs

5.2.1. Territory Marking and Identity Claims

Sectarian markers have been used, since the toppling of the Ba'athist regime in 2003, mainly by Shia residents and political organizations making them a common urban feature of post-invasion Baghdad. They are mostly flags and banners which are placed on light poles along main and secondary streets, and residential, commercial, and –even– governmental building façades. On Abu Nuwas Street, many markers are present. They intensify along the southern, residential segment of the street where many Shia squatters are found, and where a Shia mosque is located. Residents hang banners and/or flags mainly on their residences' fences and/or balconies. In addition, the Shia *waqf* office, the association of local soccer teams of al-Karrada, and the main office of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) are responsible of hanging a few markers. Furthermore, such markers are usually put on security features such as checkpoints, blast walls, vehicles, and watchtowers.⁵⁸

The vast majority of flags and banners contains inscriptions and images about the third Shia Imam, al-Hussein, honoring him and his martyrdom. Phrases like “*ya hussein*” or sayings by the Imam like “*hayhat minna al-thulla*” (meaning, “We reject humiliation”) are amongst the most brought-up inscriptions. Portraits of the martyr Imam are drawn in a distinctive style same as those of other Imams such as his father, Imam Ali. The other

⁵⁸ Such a phenomenon is present across the city and not exclusive to Abu Nuwas Street. Usually, Shia security personnel put flags and banners without objection from their superiors. Nevertheless, further research is needed with this regard.

few banners and flags contain inscriptions about other Shia holy figures such as Imam Ali and his wife (the Prophet's daughter, Fatima), and al-Abbas (Imam Ali's son who also martyred with his elder brother, al-Hussein, in Karbala). Images of contemporary prominent Shia figures are also displayed on a few banners. An image of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr (Muqtada al-Sadr's father) who was killed allegedly by the Ba'athist regime in 1999 is displayed on a banner by the gate of the small park. Also, an image of the current leader of the SCIRI, Ammar al-Hakim, is displayed along with the previous leaders of the Shia political organization on a big billboard close to the main office.



Figure 72: Banners hung on the fence of a squatted residence in the southern section of the street with inscriptions saying “*ya hussein*”. Another hung on the building's façade over the entranceway inscribed with “*ya abbas*”.



Figure 73: An army checkpoint controlling access to the 14th of July Bridge leading to the Green Zone. Note the banners behind the soldiers (with an inscription saying “*nour ‘ayni ya hussein*” meaning “you’re the light of my eyes, Hussein”), and the flag hung on top of the booth.

Banners and flags publicly display expressions related to Shi’ism (mostly, martyrdom of Imam al-Hussein and the members of his family in Karbala) which were not allowed during the Ba’athist regime. They work as markers that claim territory, and as a display of power along sectarian lines. With this regard, they are part of a network of similar markers impregnating the adjacent area of al-Karrada. Territory markers, Genberg (2002) points out, do not necessarily act as barriers that prevent persons who belong to the “other” from coming in. However, on Abu Nuwas Street, these sectarian markers dominate and exclude other markers. For example, the Sunni tenant and cook of a *masgouf* restaurant was informed by the SCIRI security members to remove the

restaurant's billboard which claimed the name of the Sunni al-Obaidi tribe to whom the tenant belongs. The restaurant ultimately shut down.⁵⁹

In addition, extensive use of sectarian markers contrasts the perception many city dwellers hold about the street as a space devoid of sectarian references. This perception comes from narratives about how the street used to be in its heydays whereby sectarian and religious expressions are not part of them.

5.2.2. Exclusion and Segregation

The spatial re-ordering of the landscape of post-invasion Baghdad along sectarian lines has impacted navigation in public space by its users (Damluji, 2010). Restrictions on mobility take on a sectarian dimension; although, less intense than what took place during the civil strife. Residents of the Sunni neighborhoods, such as al-Adhamiya and al-Ghazaliya, feel unjust treatment by the government as their neighborhoods are still walled in a dominantly Shia city.⁶⁰ (While the walls surrounding the Shia neighborhood of Sadr City were lifted in 2011).⁶¹ Getting in and out of the walled Sunni neighborhoods through checkpoints controlled by dominantly Shia personnel entails inconvenience and intimidation⁽⁶²⁾ making such neighborhoods an undesirable location to live in.⁶³ During

⁵⁹ An interview conducted by the author with a security guard on Abu Nuwas Street in July, 2013.

⁶⁰ Rubin, Alissa and Nordland, Rod, "Shiite Violence Traps Baghdad's Sunnis, Haunted by a Grim Past," *The New York Times* June 25 2014. Accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/26/world/middleeast/shiite-violence-traps-sunnis-in-baghdad.html?_r=0 on 30 June 2014.

⁶¹ Healy, Jack, "Baghdad Neighborhood Celebrates as a Wall Is Taken Away," *The New York Times* March 06 2011. Accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/world/middleeast/07baghdad.html> on August 26 2014.

⁶² Crain, Charles, "Behind the Baghdad Wall," *Time* May 09 2007. Accessed at <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1618898,00.html> on 30 June 2014.

Shia rituals (i.e. during the Mourning of Muharram, and the Day of Ashura) and heightened political and security situations, restrictions get tighter.

The impacts of the aforementioned segregation on Sunni residents' presence in public space need in-depth research which is beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, it can be said that city dwellers unequally navigate through the security measures based on their sectarian backgrounds: in general, Sunnis have less leverage than Shi'ites.

5.2.3. Nuances and Negotiations

Name, tribe name, accent, place of birth, and attire of a person contribute to his/her navigation and negotiation through public space. A place of birth -written on someone's ID- mostly inhabited by one sect or another affect, for the worse or better, his/her movement.⁶⁴ A woman wearing the *hijab* in a certain way related to Shi'ism may become more convenient in public space than someone who does not wear it or who wears it in other ways. A person with a Shia name and/or last/tribe name may be more confident in negotiating a better movement through the security measures than someone with a clearly Sunni name (such as Omar) and/or last/tribe name. It should be noted, however, that such differentiations are not always straightforward. Sunni and Shia can be members of the same tribe, and, thus, judging someone's sect from his/her tribe name is not always accurate. Also, many first names are shared among persons from both sects.

⁶³ A taxi driver told me that "no one buys a residence in Sunni neighborhoods nowadays" pointing out that living there is inconvenient due to the high security measures in place.

⁶⁴ A friend of mine whose national ID shows the holy Shia city of Karbala as the place of birth told me that he usually passes through checkpoints very conveniently after the security guards look through his ID, saying "pray for us".

Apart from that, the survey findings show us that respondents came to the street's parks not only from the dominantly Shia neighborhoods but also from dominantly Sunni ones. They also came from Sunni-Shia mixed neighborhoods. 50% of the respondents are residents of dominantly Shia areas ⁽⁶⁵⁾; 20% are residents of mixed areas ⁽⁶⁶⁾; and 15% are residents of dominantly Sunni areas ⁽⁶⁷⁾ (see Figure 74 and 75, below). Moreover, respondents are also residents of distant neighborhoods in addition to nearby and adjacent ones. A significant percentage of respondents are residents of the adjacent area of al-Karrada (weekday: 12.5%; weekend: 10%). During the weekend, respondents came from more distant neighborhoods. Therefore, the parks worked as a city-scale destination for respondents living in neighborhoods dominantly inhabited by Sunnis, Shias, or both.

⁶⁵ Abu Nuwas Street, al-Karrada, Hai al-Wahda, Baghdad al-Jadida, al-Za'faraniya, Hai al-Benok, al-Sha'ab, Hai al-Amil, and al-Baya'.

⁶⁶ Al-Jadriya, Bab al-Mu'adham, al-Rashid Street, Zayona, al-Salhiya, Karradat Mariam, al-Mansour, and al-Saidiya.

⁶⁷ Al-Adhamiya, Hai al-Khadra', Hai al-Jami'a, and al-Yarmouk.

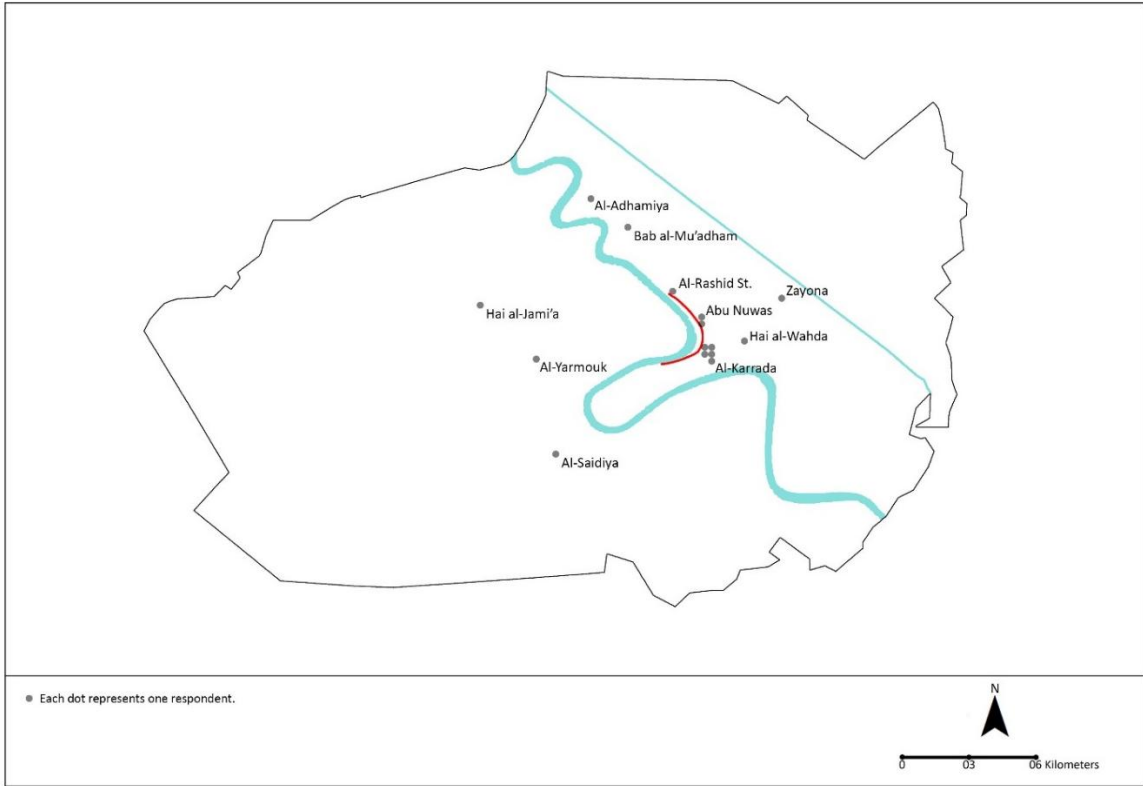


Figure 74: Respondents' Places of Residence (Weekday).

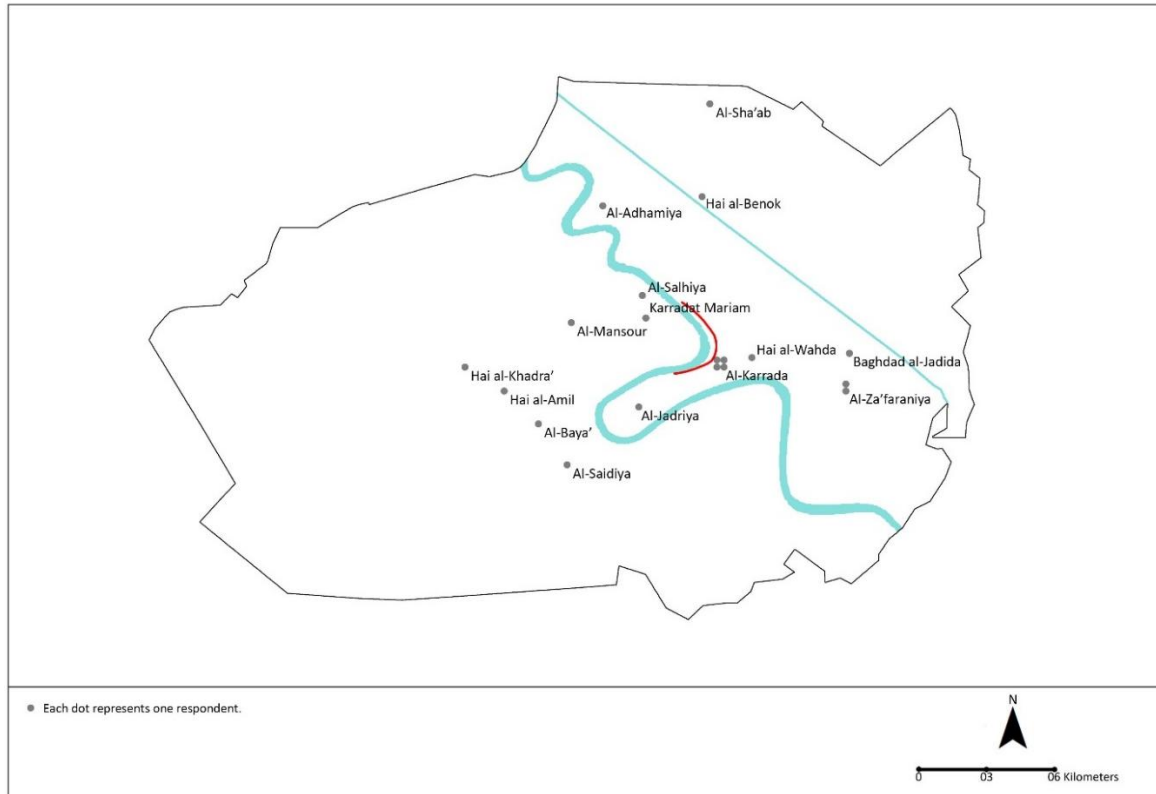


Figure 75: Respondents' Places of Residence (Weekend).

5.3. Spatial Practices

5.3.1. Uses and users

The open public space of Abu Nuwas Street is used in various ways by various groups of people despite the security and sectarian impediments discussed above. I group the various spatial practices in seven categories: leisure, intimacy behaviors, sports, public events, alcohol drinking, car washing, and street vending (see Figure 76 and 77, below).



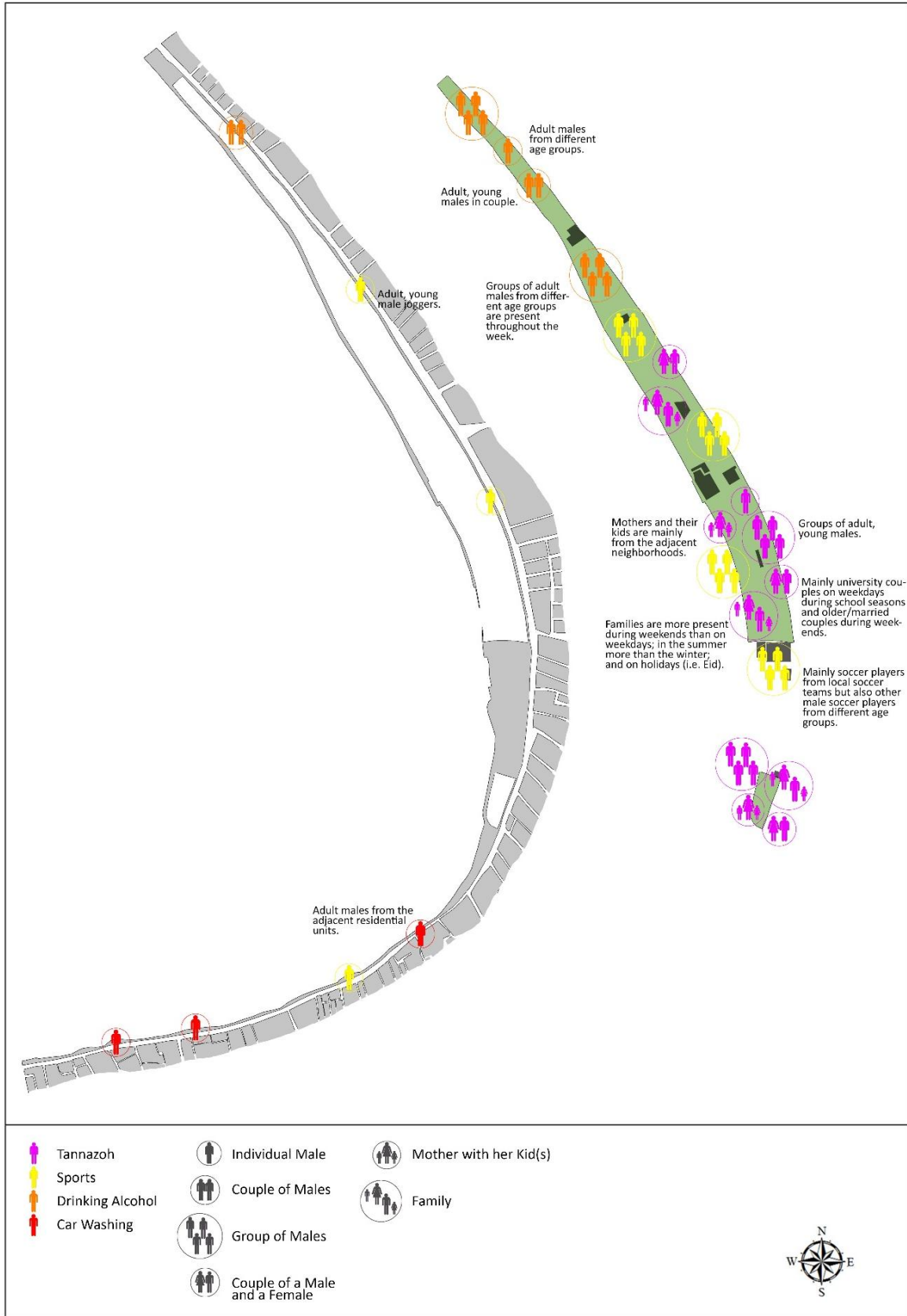


Figure 77: Abu Nuwas Street's and Parks' Users.

Leisure (Arabic: *tannazuh*) refers to picnicking, recreation, and/or promenading in the open air. It includes eating, walking, sitting, taking photographs, playing in the playgrounds, smoking hookah, listening/playing music, and dancing. This spatial practice is mainly exercised by families, couples, single men (individually and in group) in the southern part of the large park and in the small park. Leisure practices are generally more frequent during weekends with more families using the parks, while couples are more found during weekdays. They also occur more during the summer, and the holidays such as Eid al-Fitr.

Intimacy behaviors occur in the southern part of the large park during daytime. Couples are found sitting on the benches (usually those covered by trees), or walking on the parks' pathways and grass while hand-in-hand and close to each other. I also observed a couple kissing while sitting beside each other on the grass one late afternoon. Most of the couples are university students who are mostly found during school season. But other older couples are also found especially during weekends and the summer.

Sports includes playing and exercising for soccer as well as jogging. People practicing sports are 15-35 year-old men. Soccer play occurs in the soccer fields⁽⁶⁸⁾ adjacent to the large park, and across the large park except the area north of the statue of Abu Nuwas. The soccer fields are used by the 28 local soccer teams in al-Karrada for tournaments and exercising. As Abu Ali who was involved in setting up the fields said, "the soccer fields are a landmark". Abu Ali and four other people manage the schedule of matches and the maintenance of the fields. He is the only member who is an employee of

⁶⁸ The soccer fields were established shortly after the fall of Baghdad in 2003. After that, they received funds from the Baghdad Provincial Council and IRD (International Relief & Development: www.ird.org) to improve the sports facilities. As a result, changing rooms were constructed and soccer-field lighting was installed (interview with the manager of the soccer fields, Abu Ali, in June, 2014).

the Baghdad Provincial Council, while the others are volunteers. In addition to the local soccer teams, people can use the soccer fields by reserving them through Abu Ali. The Iraqi Communist Party organized –in January, 2014- a 30-day tournament with 64 teams from different areas in Baghdad. This sports event marked the 80th anniversary of the party.⁶⁹



Figure 78: A group of young males eating and smoking hookah on the grass area of the small park.

⁶⁹ Al-Mas'oudi, Farhan, “عرس كروي بهيج احتضنته ملاعب ابي نواس,” *Iraqi Communist Party* January 2 2014. Accessed on July 7, 2014 at <http://www.iraqicp.com/index.php/sections/variety/9906-2014-01-20-20-14-41>.



Figure 79: A couple walking and holding hands on the grass area of the large park.

Soccer play on the grass areas of the large park is used by smaller groups of men (mainly youth), while the small park is not used for soccer as the plantation supervisor prevents it.⁷⁰ He expressed that soccer play damages the grass areas which, then, require constant maintenance. The supervisor would also like to prevent soccer from taking place on the grass of the large park, but he seemed unable to control its use given its large size and the small number of his crew. Jogging takes place along the street's riverside sidewalk, and on the internal streets of the large park. Many of the joggers are soccer players.

The street's small park is collectively used by various groups for public events. One of the most noteworthy is "*ana Iraqi, ana aqra*" ("I am Iraqi; I read") in addition to "*eid hob al-iraq*" ("the Iraqi Valentine's Day"), "*mahrajan al-alwan*" ("Colors

⁷⁰ Interview with the field supervisor of parks plantation, who is an employee at the al-Karrada Municipality, in June, 2014.

Festival”), and the Iraqi World Peace Day.⁷¹ The “*ana Iraqi ana aqra*” event and the Iraqi World Peace Day were initiated by young activists through Facebook pages. The events, then, were funded by Coca-Cola and Pepsi and held on the park. The activists of the World Peace Day set up a stage which can still be found. They lobbied the local authority to keep it there after the event, via one of its members’ relative, who is an influential figure in the al-Karrada Municipality and a member of the Baghdad Provincial Council. All such events required security permits from the Baghdad Operation Command headed by the Prime Minister which were not easily granted to the organizers, who often resorted to personal connections to get them.⁷²

⁷¹ Mustafa, Mohammad, “مشروع أنا عراقي أنا اقرأ .. من الفضاء الافتراضي الى العالم الواقعي”, *Modern Discussion* (www.ahewar.org) July 17 2013; Al-Khafaji, Usama, “ناشطون ينظمون احتفالية في حدائق ابو نواس بمناسبة عيد حب”, *Alsumaria* (www.alsumaria.tv) February 11 2014; “صور مهرجان الألوان في شارع ابو نواس”, *Shakwmakw* (www.shakwmakw.com) March 20 2014; Alassadi, Maitham, “حدائق ابو نواس جمعية الامل تنظم فعاليات فنية بمناسبة يوم ”السلام العالمي”, *YouTube* (www.youtube.com) September 21 2012.

⁷² An employee of Tareeq Asha’ab Newspaper recounted in an interview in June, 2014 how the permit was issued the night before the event day leaving the organizers with little time to prepare the small park for the event which was held successfully.



Figure 80: Young men playing soccer in one of the soccer fields adjacent to the large park.



Figure 81: Two young men sitting on a motorcycle watching others playing soccer on one of the many grass areas of the park of Abu Nuwas.

With regard to alcohol drinking, this spatial practice takes place in the large park in two locations depending on time: during daytime, users often go to the area between the statue of Abu Nuwas and the northern end of the park, while they use the whole park in the evening. Men of different age groups are there, individually, or in group, sitting on benches, on the grass, on the swings, and on the park's short wall, drinking alcohol hidden inside black plastic bags. They purchase the alcohol from the liquor stores across the park in the street's northern segment.

Street vending and car washing are the other spatial practices found on Abu Nuwas Street. Most stalls are present in the southern part of the large park selling soft drinks, sweets, and cigarettes, and renting hookahs, while another two are found in front of the soccer fields. By the entrance of the small park, there used to be a cart selling *lablabi*, later replaced by another selling fresh juice. Occasionally, a vendor selling "benzene" passes by in the southern section of the street. The stalls cater for the various park users as well as the security personnel. Children buy cotton candy, soccer players buy water, young men rent hookahs, and so on.

In front of the squatted residential buildings in the southern section of the street, a few men are usually found washing their cars, mostly in late afternoons. Cars park in front of the buildings or on the wide sections of the riverside sidewalk. Such practices are prevalent in other low to middle income residential areas in the capital, including the al-Karrada area adjacent to Abu Nuwas Street.

5.3.2. *Diversity*

The spatial practices discussed above mostly take place in the parks; whereas, the street is devoid of them. Therefore, the linear space of the street is no longer a destination, but the parks are. The public space of the parks, thus, encompasses diverse socio-spatial practices of leisure, sports, collective purposes, alcohol drinking, and intimacy behaviors by diverse users of various age groups, and from different areas in the city (Map 2 and 3 above). Nevertheless, there are usually less women in the parks than men. This unequal presence resembles a similar trend in open public spaces in the city except commercial streets catering for a female clientele.⁷³

Limited control over the parks in addition to the parks' physicality facilitates the diversity of socio-spatial practices. In Abu Nuwas Street, there is an absence of park management in that there is not an authorized management entity (such as the committee in the soccer fields) that tells users not to do this and that. Also, as the parks are not fenced, there are no guards who open and close them at certain times as in the case of smaller, usually fenced, parks. Also, security measures have unequal repercussions on the spatial practices. The security personnel interfere with practices perceived to be threatening such as photographing a public building or parking a car in a no-parking area, while they do not interfere with others perceived to be normal such as leisure and sports practices. Other spatial practices such as alcohol drinking and intimacy behaviors are not

⁷³ There is usually a significant number of women on the nearby al-Karrada Dakhil Street where many clothing and jewelry stores are located.

prevented. Rather, they are undertaken “inconveniently” due to occasional harassment by the security guards.⁷⁴

Concerning the parks’ physicality, the grass areas accommodate a diverse range of practices such as public events, sitting, eating, playing soccer, walking, etc. The presence of swings, playgrounds, statues, benches, and shades also enables such diversity (Whyte, 2001).⁷⁵ Whereas the street’s sidewalks including the ones adjacent to the parks lack street furniture (except the short wall of the large park which is used as a bench). The street also experiences heavy security deployment that appropriates public space with impacts on access and mobility as described in the first section of this chapter.

Moreover, there are multiple perceptions with regard to the street’s public space. Respondents perceived it to be one for “relaxation”, “forgetting the bitter past”, and “enjoying the greenery” and “calmness”. But simultaneously, perceptions involve the “excessive presence of security stations”, and the “closing-off of streets”. Thinking of the street’s public space as one with diverse perceptions directs our attention to the manifold reality the literature on militarization in relation to public space usually obfuscates. The security measures indeed undermine, and sometimes eliminate, usage of public space as discussed in the first two sections of this chapter. But, as our case also shows, they have limited control over users’ spatial practices and perceptions. The river, being symbolic of the street, is a useful example. Although the river is made physically inaccessible by the

⁷⁴ Al-Rassam, Sabah, “متنزه ابو نواس لوحه عراقية خالصة”, *Modern Discussion* June 23 2013. Accessed at <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=365511> on July 8 2014.

⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the parks suffer a lack of shades and benches according to 10% of the respondents.

security measures, its adjacency to the street, the smell of its water, and the visual connectivity still affect the perceived space of the street.⁷⁶

5.3.3. *Contestations*

The diverse socio-spatial practices are self-regulated to a large extent, due to the lack of management. As such, there is relative freedom with regard to displaying a range of practices and identities, sometimes contesting prevailing social and moral norms, such as alcohol drinking or intimacy displays. Both practices contest the religious image conveyed through the many sectarian markers across the street.

Alcohol drinking also contests the perception of the park as one for leisure use. The park is perceived, as 20% of the respondents expressed, as one for “the phenomenon of alcohol drinking” and “the gathering of the youth addicted to alcohol”. This stigmatization is consolidated due to the presence of an increasing number of liquor stores, nightclubs, and bars in the northern section of the street and along al-Sa’doun Street.⁷⁷ It should be noted that the demolition of the restaurants in the large park undertaken by the Mayoralty of Baghdad in 2012⁽⁷⁸⁾ was not successful in eliminating alcohol drinking. It is now done in the open air, and is cheaper than going to the nearby bars and nightclubs. Consequently, although the area where alcohol drinking occurs

⁷⁶ 20% of the respondents referred to the river as something they “like” in the street.

⁷⁷ During the second phase of my fieldwork in June, 2014, I noticed an increase in the number of liquor stores and bars in the northern part of the street and along al-Sa’doun Street respectively. Also, 7.5% of the respondents referred to the presence of nightclubs and bars as a dislike.

⁷⁸ “تاهيل شارع ابو نواس واثارة السلبية على ارزاق العراقيين”, *YouTube* (www.youtube.com) January 22 2012; interview conducted by the author with the owner of a carpentry workshop in the northern part of Abu Nuwas Street (January, 2014).

inside the large park is not physically separated from that where families and couples are found, they are functioning as two separate zones.

There is a generational tension underlying the perception of “dissatisfactory” practices (75% of the respondents who expressed their dislike with this regard are 30 years old or older). The youth are seen by older users as “bad and annoying” who “cause discomfort for the families”; harass women; drink alcohol; and play soccer on the grass areas disturbing other users nearby. Therefore, the presence of users of diverse age groups entails a perceived discordance between the youth and the older users.

With regard to public events, these collective happenings challenge widespread perceptions about Baghdad mainly related to violence and war, and circulated through the media and daily news. Activists who organized these events strove to display another aspect of Iraqi life related to expressions of culture, peace, love, and –simply- having fun. As these expressions do not involve sectarian and religious ones, they implicitly counter the political sectarianism and religious extremism ingrained in the reality of post-invasion Iraq. It should be noted that the public space of the parks is different from that of the nearby al-Tahrir Square. The latter is a space of significant political visibility, of the kind political protests aspire to occupy. Whereas, the parks’ public space is one of delight and enjoyment (of the “golden era” of the 70s). It is also a showcase for the city, where foreign visitors are recommended to visit.⁷⁹ Therefore, holding such events provides another kind of visibility, a one towards the outside.

⁷⁹ This aspect applies more when the street was in its heydays, it is very present in the city dwellers’ accounts notwithstanding.

CHAPTER 6

RE-IMAGINING ABU NUWAS

6.1. Governance Analysis

In this section, I identify a number of stakeholders who are influential with regards to Abu Nuwas Street. I categorize them into individuals, groups, and organizations (formal and informal). I will start by the formal organizations, and will show the legal framework within which they interact.

The Mayoralty of Baghdad (أمانة بغداد) is a governmental body that is concerned with providing services for the city dwellers. It is legally related to the Cabinet and consists of 14 elected municipal councils who choose their presidents.

Abu Nuwas Street is located within two municipalities, the Municipality of the Rusafa Center and the Municipality of al-Karrada. Each municipality consists of Neighborhood Councils (مجالس حي). The mayor has three deputies responsible for municipal, technical, and management affairs. There are three directorates related to the deputy of technical affairs that have a stake in relation to planning issues, the Directorate of Design (دائرة التصميم), the Directorate of Projects (دائرة المشاريع), and the Directorate of Plantations and Parks (دائرة المشاتل و المتنزهات).

In addition to the mayoralty, there is the Baghdad Provincial Council, and the associated Baghdad Services Committee (هيئة خدمات بغداد) -which is the “right hand of Baghdad Provincial Council” as it supervises the Mayoralty of Baghdad and coordinates with municipal directorates and councils. It also follows the implementation of projects

undertaken by the relevant directorates of the mayoralty. The Baghdad Services Committee has eight committees, each one corresponding to one directorate in the mayoralty. For example, the Design Committee supervises projects assigned to the Directorate of Design.⁸⁰ There is also the Security Committee of Baghdad Provincial Council. One of the committee's responsibilities is receiving residents' complaints with regard to security and sectarian violations.

Yet, there is another formal unit in charge of security not only along the street but across the city. Baghdad Operation Command was formed by a decision from the Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki being the commander-in-chief, in 2007. The BOC is run by a military person and is constituted of two commands, the Rusafa Operation Command (responsible of eastern Baghdad) and al-Karkh Operation Command (responsible of west Baghdad). The "declared goal of establishing such commands is to coordinate the security exertion between the federal security units and directorates including the army, the police, the *al-mukhabarat*, and national security." However, in reality the command brings together the police, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior, with the forces of the army under a united command.⁸¹ There is a collaboration between the BOC and the Mayoralty of Baghdad as the latter seeks the help of the former to impose planning regulations and decisions to stop and remove unregistered parking, shops, houses, etc. Also, such collaboration enables the mayoralty to coordinate with the BOC

⁸⁰ Official website of the Mayoralty of Baghdad. Accessed at <http://www.amanatbaghdad.gov.iq/> on April 29, 2014; the official website of Baghdad Provincial Council. Accessed at <http://www.baghdadpc.gov.iq/ar/index.php> on April 29, 2014; the law of "النظام الداخلي الموحد للمجالس البلدية و المحلية" "في محافظة بغداد". Accessed at Iraqi Local Governance Law Library (<http://www.iraq-lg-law.org/>) on April 29, 2014.

⁸¹ A dilemma arises, for example, when someone sues a member of the police in the civil courts, s/he cannot do so as the police operate under the army command and military personnel have their own courts and laws (see Al-Iraqi, Chalang Pasha, "أين الخلل، قيادة القوات،" *Voice of Iraq* November 06 2012. Accessed at <http://www.sotaliraq.com/mobile-item.php?id=120593#axzz2BpaK6H1j> on April 29, 2014).

the removal of blast walls from some locations, as the removal of “more than 4800 concrete walls from the streets of al-Karrada.”⁸²

There are additional political and religious organizations that are also involved in Abu Nuwas. These include the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which is predominantly Shia political organization which has an armed militia (army soldiers who formerly were members of the organization guard its main office on the street). Other organizations who have a stake in the street are political parties that organize their events in the street’s park area such as the Iraqi Communist Party and the Democratic Civil Movement.⁸³

There are also groups of activists that arrange events in the small park.⁸⁴

Key resource persons include Muhammad al-Rubaei (who is influential and involved in planning issues in the street area as a member of Baghdad Municipal Council and a former member of the Municipality of al-Karrada). There is also Na’im Ab’oub (the Mayor of Baghdad). The mayor holds close ties with the former Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, and this might explain the coordination between the mayoralty and the BOC. In opposition to this bloc, stands Shirouk Abayachi, an activist (and a current member of the Parliament) and an opposing politician of the government who protested the bulldozing of trees in the park during the 2012 redevelopment project undertaken by the mayoralty.

⁸² Ahmad, Dalia, “الأمانة: رفع 5 آلاف كتلة كونكريتية من شوارع الكرادة,” *Azzaman* April 28, 2013.

⁸³ Salam, Ali, “الاف من رفاق الحزب و انصاره يواصلون الاحتفال على حدائق "ابو نواس" مساء,” *Iraqi Communist Party* March 29 2014. Accessed at <http://www.iraqicp.com/index.php/party/from-p/12749-2014-03-29-20-47-43> on April 29, 2014.

⁸⁴ Al-Jaffal, Omar, “Iraqi Literacy Drive a Response to Extremism,” *Al-Monitor* September 28 2013. Accessed at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/iraq-reading-initiative-baghdad.html> on April 29, 2014; al-Khafaji, Usama, “ناشطون ينظمون احتفالية في حدائق ابو نواس بمناسبة عيد الحب,” *Alsumaria News* March 11 2014.

6.2. Advocating for Abu Nuwas: Proposed Institutional Governance Scenario

The planning intervention I propose for Abu Nuwas is built on an institutional governance scenario that prioritizes the public realm and the everyday users of the street. I build on the approaches advocated by advocacy planners (Davidoff, 1965; Hardwood, 2003) who view the planner as giving voice to the community, and enabling their interests through mediating with public authorities.

The main objectives of my intervention are listed below. Under each, I have advised a set of planning strategies that aim to meet the objective:

1. To improve access and mobility to Abu Nuwas street and to the parks, from the nearby main streets of al-Karrada Dakhil and al-Sa'doun while maintaining the security concerns of existing authorities. This objective is achieved by providing way-finding signage, and through the reopening of closed-off side streets. Way-finding signage facilitates access to the street and to the parks, while the reopening of selected closed-off streets close to Kahramana Square (see Figure 82) improves access to them from al-Karrada Dakhil Street encouraging families shopping in the commercial street to visit the parks.
2. To re-assess sectarian markings in the street in ways to reduce discrimination and exclusion. A sustained effort is required to achieve this objective via campaigns and events held in the parks and the soccer fields to raise awareness about tolerance and coexistence, and by liaising with the responsible authorities to address sectarian-based violations.
3. To consolidate and enhance diversity in the public realm (streets and parks), especially in terms of gender. This objective is achieved by:

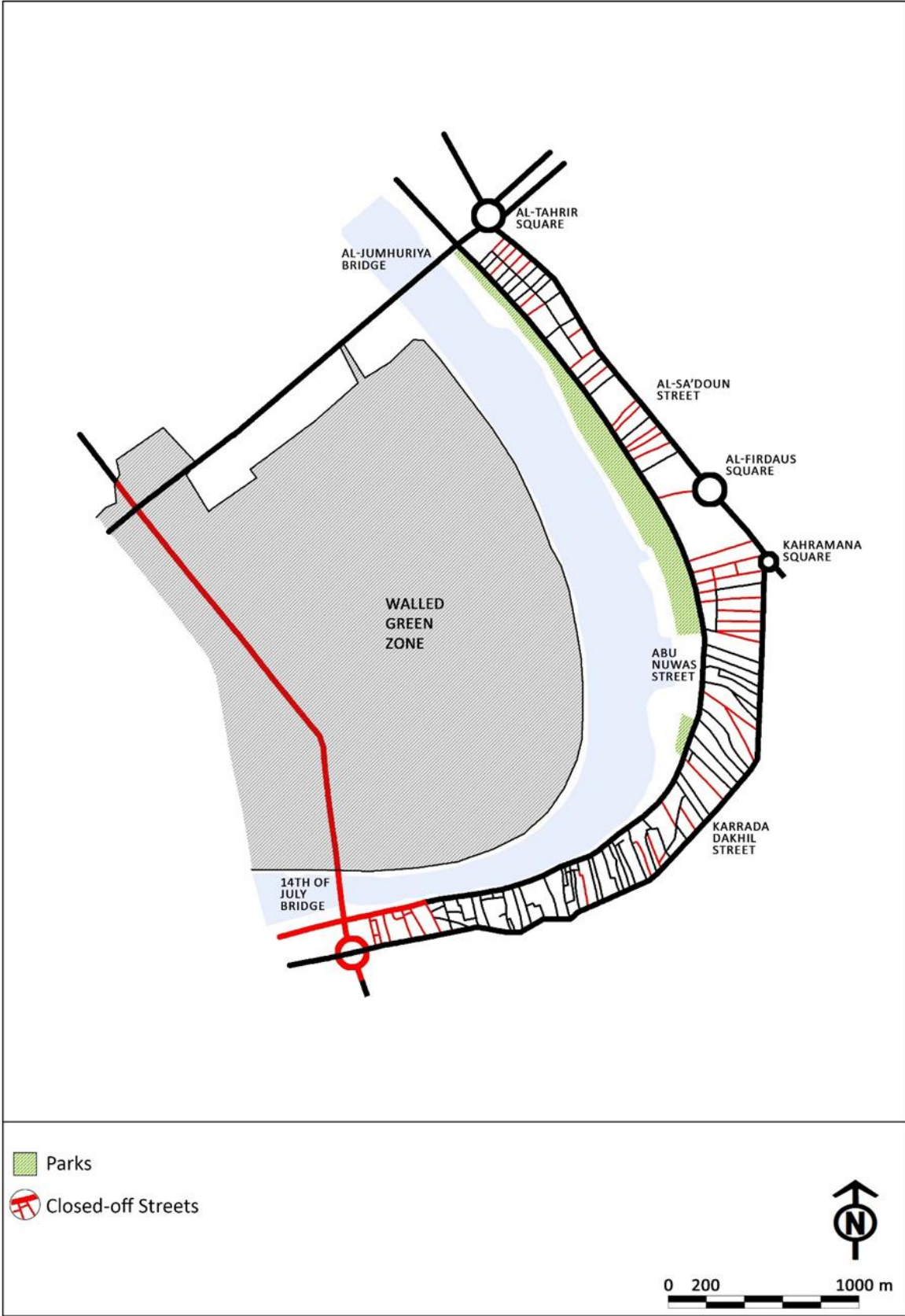


Figure 82: Closed-Off Streets.

- Elaborating guidelines complementary to those produced by the Directorate of Design of the mayoralty which recommends that no more than 10% of the parks' area should be built, structures have to be one-storey height, and the urban furniture of the parks need to be upgraded and maintained.
 - Providing lighting in the southern part of the large park, while the northern part is to be kept with dim lighting lest it interrupt the practice of alcohol drinking.
 - Providing urban furniture along the riverside sidewalks, including the ones adjacent to the parks to increase chances for spatial appropriation and, hence, extend the socio-spatial practices found in the parks into the street.
 - Opening a segment of the inaccessible riverbank while maintaining a security presence.
 - Establishing a Facebook page that documents and debates public space issues, and that encourages the use of space through events and activities.
4. To rehabilitate and adaptively re-use the modern heritage buildings located along the street and in the adjacent neighborhoods. Currently, most of these buildings are dilapidated, abandoned or used for light industry (such as those in the northern part of the street and the adjacent Abu Nuwas Neighborhoods). Iraqi expatriates, who do not seem to be returning to the city, own most of these buildings.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Conversation with C. Pieri, September 10, 2014.

Accordingly, I suggest that the mayoralty takes charge of the physical rehabilitation of these buildings, and adaptively re-uses them for leisure and tourism purposes. They could become remarkable boutique hotels, restaurants and cafés, thus replacing the hotel projects on the riverside that would destroy the ecology and landscape of the open spaces.

The planning strategies discussed above will be piloted by three groups of stakeholders which I propose to establish as follows:

1. Professional Committee: This committee will be established within the Mayoralty of Baghdad and will include professional architects, urban planners, experts, and university professors involved in the planning of the street and the parks.

Membership would be thus is restricted to those with know-how regarding the legal and physical planning tools. The committee's main objective is to protect and enhance the existing openness of the riverside part of the street with focus on the parks. It also aims to protect the modern heritage buildings located on Abu Nuwas Street. The committee will build good working relationship with planning authorities and negotiate with them ways to implement the proposed planning strategies. The committee is also responsible for fundraising.

2. Civil Coalition: This second group brings together non-sectarian groups and individuals, NGOs and activists. It aims to mobilize city dwellers, in general, and civil rights activists, in particular, for promoting the right to the city, and for contesting planning decisions that threaten the public realm. Their main tools of intervention are social media, awareness raising, campaigns, public events, networking, lobbying, and mobilization.

3. Neighborhood Committee: This unit is constituted by the dwellers of the street and the adjacent residential areas: the Abu Nuwas Neighborhood and al-Karrada. Local soccer teams and shop owners are also potential members of this committee. The main objective is to create a sense of community in the neighborhood encouraging social interaction and exchange between different groups, and to incite communication about daily urban issues related to the neighborhood, such as security threats, gender harassment, and sectarian tensions and discrimination. The committee liaises with the Security Committee of the Baghdad Provincial Council seeking remedial actions. The committee also works on the awareness campaigns and events in the parks and soccer fields.

As an urban planner, I foresee my role as an enabler of the creation of these institutions which I envision as ranging from formal (Planning Committee) to less formal (Civil Coalition, and Neighborhood Committee). I would operate as a mediator amongst the three groups, seeking to forge strong interdependent links between them. The three institutions meet regularly to discuss objectives and the strategies addressing them, and to familiarize all the members with the main responsibilities as well as the strengths and limitations with regard to each institution. Collaboration is needed to overcome limitations facing one institution by capitalizing on the strengths of the other. For example, activists from the Civil Coalition help, through their personal connections, the Neighborhood Committee get the security permits to hold events in the parks. Also, the NGOs in the Civil Coalition help in the fundraising necessary to implement the guidelines recommended by the Professional Committee.

Furthermore, the three institutions can help mobilize the dwellers and other concerned citizens and activists to lobby against the planning decisions currently single-handedly undertaken by the mayoralty in a top-down fashion. Here, the role of the Professional Committee is particularly important as it mediates between the mayoralty and the dwellers who are, therefore, given more voice in the planning process.

Transparency is also facilitated as the Planning Committee helps involving dwellers and other concerned citizens in the planning projects.⁸⁶ Therefore, the Civil Coalition can further disseminate planning proposals and initiate public debates and community consultations. Moreover, as Davidoff (1965) points out, advocate planners aid, and simultaneously challenge, state planning agencies by offering alternatives to the plans they propose. With this regard, the Planning Committee develops alternatives to proposals that may endanger the existing public space, and presents them to the mayoralty.

⁸⁶ I contacted two activists involved in the organization of events in the small park asking them whether they have heard about the “investment projects”, both said “no”.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined how the socio-spatial practices in the open public space of Abu Nuwas Street have been affected by the heavy security measures that have been put in place shortly after the fall of Baghdad in 2003. It also partially investigated how an urban planning approach can help in the making of more diverse public spaces in militarized contexts. In my analysis, I drew on both the literature on militarization and on public space.

I traced the history of the street, concluding that although the leisurely socio-spatial practices that occurred in the street during the 1950s-1970s era are no longer found today, dwellers' perceptions about the street are still very much linked to the "golden" era. Today, the street's linear public space is replete with intensive security measures taking it over and, thus, undermining dwellers' socio-spatial practices. The parks, on the other hand, are a destination for a diverse group of people using its different public spaces. Thus, a multiplicity of socio-spatial practices can be found there, although restrictions set by the security measures are constraining, especially to practices perceived to be immoral, such as alcohol-drinking. Yet, people negotiate with the security personnel their right to use space, while the security personnel themselves use space in ways not related to their duties. Gender, name, tribe/last name, and attire of a person affect someone's negotiations with the security personnel.

In Abu Nuwas, the sectarian marking of space using signs is very strong. Given issues of access and security, as well as time constraints, I was not able in this thesis to investigate how people's perceptions of the sectarian-based security measures affect spatial navigations and mobility choices. This should be further investigated in future research. In addition, future studies analyzing security mechanisms in urban space need to include the analysis of security personnel's behaviors and ideas. My findings would have been more enriched if I had interviewed the security personnel in Abu Nuwas. I would have understood better how they perceive security threats, and how they perceive users of the street and the parks. In addition, the institutional governance scenario proposed in this work can be further elaborated were I able to conduct in-depth interviews with the stakeholders, which was prevented by security.

One of the possible research questions to take up further regards informal security mechanisms and relates to how the residents of the neighborhoods adjacent to Abu Nuwas Street, and elsewhere in the city, "police" urban space themselves especially regarding the mobility of strangers. It would be interesting to understand better how dwellers internalize this need to police and secure their space. The macro scale of the political economy dynamics is also important to investigate further, and to complement with the micro analysis of the everyday socio-spatial practices. The contestations I documented regarding morality and sectarianism should be related to the conceptions and planning projects of the state. Thus, the "investment projects", I discussed, need to be further examined in relation to whether they materialize the state's need to control the practices in the parks' public space (and hence reduce contestations), and/or whether they are driven by economic interest.

The thesis main contribution lies perhaps in the spatial and visual documentation of an urban neighborhood in Baghdad, a quite under-researched city of the Arab world. It also provides a preliminary urban analysis of this neighborhood with regard to spatial practices under dire security conditions.

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APPENDIX 1

Data Collection Guide

Date:

Time:

Session:

- Practices and Their Location:
- Gender Estimation:
- Activities:
- Land Uses and Their Location:
- Building Typologies and Their Location:
- Patterns and Types of Security Measures and Their Location:

APPENDIX 2

Survey Questionnaire in Abu Nuwas Street

أستبيان حول الشارع الواصل بين جسر الجمهورية و الجسر المعلق

العمر:
مكان الإقامة (مكان السكن):
التحصيل العلمي:
العمل و مكان العمل:
الجنس:
الحالة الاجتماعية (اعزب او متزوج):

- ماذا تسمي الشارع؟
- كيف تأتي الى الشارع (تكسي، باص، مشيا، او أي وسيلة أخرى)؟
- ما هو سبب قدومك الى الشارع (في حالة وجود اكثر من سبب اذكرهم رجاءا)؟
- ما هو الشيء (او الأشياء) الذي يعجبك في الشارع؟
- الى أين تذهب في الشارع (في حالة وجود اكثر من مكان اذكرهم رجاءا)؟
- ما هي حدود الشارع برأيك (أين يبدأ و اين ينتهي)؟
- ما هو الشيء (او الأشياء) الذي لا يعجبك بالشارع؟

APPENDIX 3

Guided Conversations and Semi-Structured Interviews

4 persons participated in a guided conversation as follows:

- Abu Maryam: Owner of a carpentry workshop in the northern part of Abu Nuwas Street.
- Abu Ali: Employee of the Baghdad Provincial Council responsible on managing the soccer fields located on Abu Nuwas Street.
- Supervisor of plantations responsible of the part of Abu Nuwas Street within the jurisdiction of al-Karrada Municipality.
- Architect of the Directorate of Designs of the Mayoralty of Baghdad.

2 persons participated in a semi-structured interview:

- Ali: Employee at Tareeq Asha'ab Newspaper (the newspaper of the Iraqi Communist Party) and former soldier of the Iraqi army.
- Caeser: Organizer of the Iraqi World Peace Day event since 2013.