

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE URBAN RECOVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN  
POST-BLAST KARANTINA (BEIRUT)

by  
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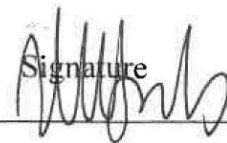


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# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Mohamad Mohamad Walid El Chamaa for Master of Urban Planning and Policy  
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Title: The Urban Recovery of Affordable Housing in post-blast Karantina (Beirut)

After the August 4, 2020 explosion devastated the Karantina area adjacent to the port, throngs of volunteers and NGOs poured in to help with relief efforts, including reconstruction of damaged housing stock. With the absence of significant involvement from the state, long-term urban recovery has proven elusive. This experience is in keeping with previous reconstruction cycles that Beirut has lived through, as in the case of post-Civil War redevelopment and in the aftermath of the July 2006 war. In these earlier cases, the state delegated its role to non-state actors and became a facilitator of activity instead. This trend has also been apparent in the post-disaster reconstruction of Karantina. As a consequence, housing stock has been affected by declining affordability and accessibility, rising rental prices, increased levels of vacancy, and continued lack of facilities and services. To confront these problems, this thesis argues that urban recovery should supersede reconstruction. In this study, urban recovery is conceived as an open-ended “holistic and multi-layered process,” one that moves past “physical and the humanitarian” interventions and instead proposes an inclusive approach that is “locally informed and socially anchored” (Al-Harithy, 2021).

This thesis approaches urban recovery through the lens of housing and begins by documenting historic housing conditions and developments to identify pre-disaster advantages and disadvantages. Historical explorations suggest that Karantina has always been a place of refuge and affordable housing in the city of all those who seek it. Moving on to post-disaster experience, the thesis identifies several threats. These may be described as follows. The disruptive actions by landlords after the port blast, such as evictions, rent hikes, and the conversion of residential units into commercial spaces, are a result of a post-disaster reality, absence of a coherent social and urban policy by the authorities as well as the ongoing economic crisis. Therefore, there is a threat of losing the social diversity and the housing affordability in Karantina that has always hosted diverse low-income groups who sought living and working in proximity to the city center. Tension between different nationalities, as well as different sectarian groups, threatens the diversity of Karantina’s housing occupancy. Additionally, there is a threat of large scale development and gentrification, which might affect the scale of low income housing stock, especially since Karantina was not protected under the building freeze imposed after the blast. Finally, the thesis makes several planning recommendations at both the neighborhood and city scale that will lead towards the urban recovery of affordable housing in post-blast Karantina.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	1
ABSTRACT.....	1
ILLUSTRATIONS.....	6
TABLES.....	8
INTRODUCTION.....	9
A. Problem definition.....	12
B. Problem Statement.....	13
C. Research Question.....	14
D. Objectives.....	14
E. Hypothesis.....	15
F. Significance .....	15
1. Data collection:.....	17
a. Primary Data.....	17
b. Secondary Data.....	18
2. Tools for data analysis.....	18
G. Thesis Outline.....	19
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
A. Beirut’s Previous Experiences with Post Disaster.....	20
B. Housing in Urban Recovery.....	22
C. Rising Unaffordability and Rent.....	24
D. Affordable Housing.....	26
E. Planning Tools.....	27
1. Rent Caps Case Studies.....	27
2. Vacancy taxes.....	29
3. Inclusionary Zoning.....	31
HISTORY OF SETTLEMENT IN KARANTINA.....	33
A. Chronology of Settlement.....	34

1. Establishment of the Lazaret.....	36
2. Expansion into Karantina and Challenges of the Quarantine.....	41
3. New settlement and land uses in Karantina.....	44
B. Housing and Settlement before 1975.....	48
1. A Diverse Community.....	52
2. Tanak Typology.....	55
3. Bricks and Mortar Typology.....	57
4. Early attempts at Settlement Erasure.....	58
C. Karantina since 1990.....	61
<b>DIAGNOSIS.....</b>	<b>66</b>
A. Demographics of Karantina.....	67
1. Religious Diversity.....	70
2. Nationality.....	74
3. Socio-economic Profile.....	79
B. Actors and Institutions.....	81
C. Forms of Tenure in Karantina.....	82
D. Affordable Housing.....	85
1. The Proportion of Rent to Income.....	86
2. Rent Adjustments.....	87
3. Access to Services.....	90
a. Education.....	91
b. Healthcare.....	94
c. Leisure Facilities.....	95
4. Vacancy Rate.....	96
<b>PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>101</b>
A. Karantina-level recommendations.....	102
1. Housing Monitor.....	102
a. Problem Overview.....	103
b. Proposed Solution.....	104
2. Zones of Special Social Interest.....	106
a. Problem Overview.....	107
b. Proposed Solution.....	108
3. Cooperatives.....	109
4. Occupation free of charge agreement.....	110
B. City-wide recommendations.....	111
1. Rent control.....	111
a. Proposed Solution.....	112
2. Vacancy taxes.....	113

a. Proposed Solution.....	114
3. Inclusionary zoning.....	116
a. Proposed Solution.....	117
C. Framework of implementation.....	118
1. Neighborhood-scale.....	119
2. City-scale.....	120
 CONCLUSION.....	 124
 APPENDIX.....	 127
A. Building Permit for Plot 1013 showing different aspects of building’s history.....	127
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 128

## ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figure

1. World Bank Assessment 2020.....	9
2. Rochfort Scott map of Beirut's Lazaret, 1841.....	37
3. A.L. Mansell. Beirut: The Ancient Berytus. 1862.....	40
4. Karantina in Julius Loytved Map, 1876.....	41
5. Quarantine with Gaz de Beyrouth, 1899.....	42
6. Slaughterhouse moved, Cressot Map, 1911.....	43
7. Aerial photo of Karantina and Mar Mikhael, 1931.....	44
8. Beach at the bottom of Karantina, 1896.....	45
9. Swimmers off the coast of the Quarantine, 1925.....	45
10. Bakalian flour mill, built in 1951.....	48
11. French Army Geographical Service Map, 1922.....	49
12. Town Plan of Beyrouth, British Army, 1941.....	50
13. Development of street networks from different eras that led to the enclaving of Karantina.....	51
14. Soviet map Karantina, 1987.....	51
15. Postcard of Armenian Tanaks, c. 1925-45.....	53
16. Tanak interior layout, 1973.....	56
17. Danger Plan, Al-Saydeh and Al-Senegal, 1933.....	58

18. B018 in 1998.....64

19. For Rent Sign displayed outside of renovated home, Al-Saydeh.....99

## TABLES

### Table

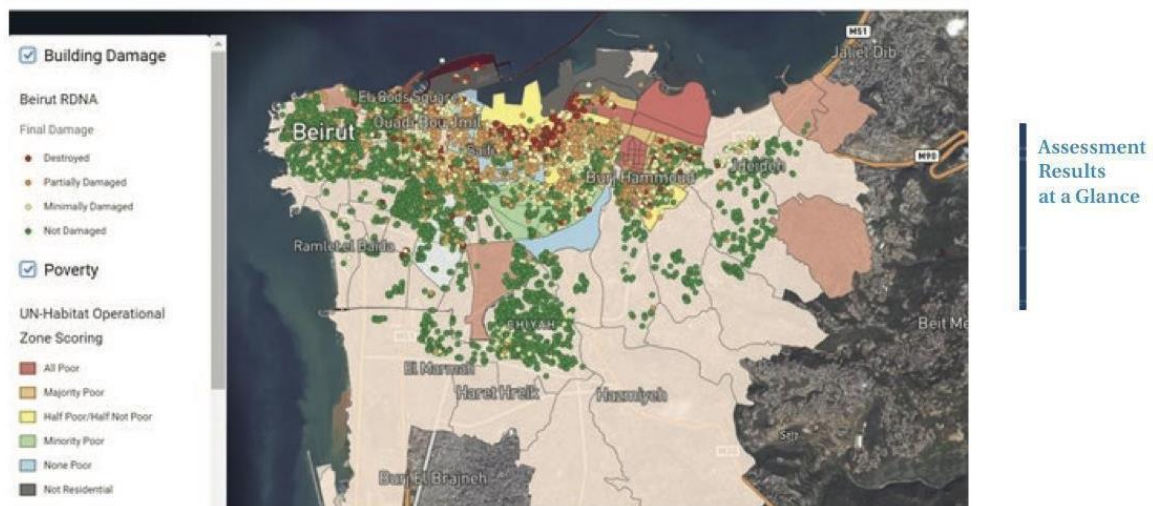
1.	Distribution of nationalities in Karantina.....	68
2.	Distribution of religions in Karantina.....	69
3.	Relationship between the religious backgrounds of the landlords and the tenants.....	73
4.	Distribution of religious confessions in Al-Saydeh.....	73
5.	Distribution of religious confessions in Al-Khodor.....	74
6.	Distribution of religious confessions in Al-Senegal.....	74
7.	Distribution of nationalities in Al-Saydeh.....	78
8.	Distribution of nationalities in Al-Khodor.....	78
9.	Distribution of nationalities in Al-Senegal.....	78
10.	Residents of Karantina and places of work.....	80
11.	Tenants paying more than 30% of income on rent.....	87
12.	Tenure per sub-neighborhood.....	88
13.	Percentage of households with access to services.....	91
14.	School attendance distribution.....	93
15.	Complaints regarding the Karantina Hospital.....	94
16.	Vacant and abandoned apartments in Karantina.....	98

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Beirut Port explosion gravely devastated a city already suffering from political instability, economic crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The blast caused widespread loss of life, structural damage, and multiple injuries. IPSOS/World Bank’s mapping showed that most of the damage was concentrated in the port’s environs (see figure 1), namely Achrafieh, Gemmayze, Mar Mikhael, Geitawi, and Karantina. The World Bank Report “Beirut: Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment”, released in 2020, estimated that damages amounted to US\$3.8-4.6 billion, and losses at US\$2.9-3.5 billion, impacting multiple sectors including health, housing, education, and commerce, etc. However, responses to the blast varied across the affected areas of the city. Absent any effective government response, volunteers (in their droves) took the lead in clearing away the rubble.

Figure 3. Damage to Housing, Education, and Health Sector – Greater Beirut Area



Ipsos Risk Analytics/World Bank (August 2020)

Figure 1: World Bank Assessment 2020

Due to their popularity as F&B and creative hubs, Mar Mikhael and Gemmayze got

the lion's share of relief efforts; less fortunate areas, which had been just as devastated, were sadly overlooked by the relief effort, these included Karantina. This area is partly of the Medawar Quarter and is enclaved from the north and west by the port and from the south by the Charles Helou Highway and the Beirut River from the East. There are three main residential clusters, one that is predominantly Christian (Al-Saydeh), and one that is predominantly Muslim (Al-Khodor), and one in-between them that is mixed (Al-Senegal). Between the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 and the blast, Karantina had maintained a mixed-use character with residential buildings standing next to nightclubs, public institutions, commercial buildings, art galleries, and some industrial complexes.

With the residents of Karantina coming from different nationalities, sects, and socio-economic backgrounds, including Lebanese and non-Lebanese, old rent, new rent tenants, migrant workers, and refugees, many found that they had to fend for themselves in the wake of the blast. One local noted that they waited for help at first, but in the end had to pull themselves and their neighbors out of the rubble. As soon as the first NGO arrived in Karantina, on August 6th, the formal relief process began. This encompassed cleaning and shoveling rubble, giving out food, and the renovation of blast-damaged homes. Although the intervention of the NGOs was much needed, pre-existing severe urban issues such as overcrowding, upscaling, vulture developers and lack of services were, in many cases, exacerbated by the explosion, and these short-term interventions did little to remedy them. Based on my observations and surveys conducted since the blast, one such pressing issue is access to housing and increasing unaffordability. Another, which I discuss later in the thesis, is the issue of old rent law tenants.

For example, one landlord outright refused to sign a release permit to allow an NGO to renovate his building because its residents were old-rent tenants. The landlord was using the blast as an excuse either to evict those old-rent tenants and get in new-rent tenants

instead, or empty the building for demolition and then benefit from the financial value of the plot—the owner acquiesced after legal intervention, however. It is not a unique case, either. The links between reconstruction scenarios and gentrification have been evidenced elsewhere, including in the case of the southern suburbs of Beirut as examined by Hourani (2015). As these scenarios suggest, there needs to be a long-term, post-disaster recovery solution so that owners cannot turn relief efforts into upscaling opportunities.

Overall, relief efforts by NGOs were directed towards renovating buildings. But because the state was largely absent there was little coordination and so considerable variation in the quality of repairs. This discoordination involved not only the planning of repairs, which resulted in noticeably different outcomes, but also the distribution of resources. Put together, these factors will prove to be challenging for the achievement of full urban recovery, particularly if certain residents are not allowed to remain. It is for these reasons that this thesis will focus on, and make recommendations for, the long-term recovery of affordable housing in Karantina.

Karantina is no stranger to spatial erasure. Between 1933 and 1975, many of the area's informal settlements were wiped away by fire leaving their Armenian, Kurdish and Lebanese Shiite residents displaced. In 1976, all of the remaining informal settlements and some formal ones, too, were erased in the civil war by the Kataeb and its allies. This not only displaced the remaining residents but also the Arab tribes who were living in more formal accommodation. Displacement remains a factor and an obstacle for inclusive housing in Karantina because of continued militarization. The plots of land that both the informal and formal settlements sat on were erased and became brownfields or hold prefabricated temporary structures such as hangars. They have not developed yet owing to zoning laws, continued militarization and ownership structure. Compared to other parts of Beirut, Karantina is one of the few areas that has continuously provided affordable housing, which

benefits a diverse group, and this is significant as it provides many low-income groups access to the city and proximity to their work.

## **A. Problem Definition**

Following the port blast, researchers from the Beirut Urban Lab's Urban Recovery track led by Dr. Howayda Al-Harithy, launched a study post-blast phase at the scale of the neighborhood and focused on Karantina. The research identified five transversal issues, towards strategic analysis and the design of a strategic framework and action plans (Al-Harithy et al, 2022). These five transversal issues were 'spatial, economic and social connectivity', 'cultural and economic vitality', 'inclusive and sustainable development', 'quality of the urban environment', and 'affordable housing and social inclusion.' The last of these serves as the focus for this thesis as one of the most urgent and immediate to respond to. However, consideration of the urban recovery of affordable housing at the neighborhood level raises several considerations, especially in a neighborhood such as Karantina, which faces a series of on-going challenges. These include pre-existing, pre-blast conditions such as low housing stock, continued displacement, and underdevelopment, as well as post-disaster (post-blast) conditions arising from proximity to the epicenter of the explosion (600 meters) and the consequent destructive impact on the built environment.

Moreover, the disruptive actions by landlords after the port blast, such as evictions, rent hikes, and the conversion of residential units into commercial spaces, have added their own dimension. These may be regarded as both the result of the post-disaster reality and the ongoing economic crisis. Additionally, there is the question of Karantina's vacancy rate. Although it currently stands at a relatively low 8%, when uninhabited abandoned units are added to the figure, this more than doubles, rising to 17%. Therefore, there is a looming threat of the loss of the social diversity and the housing affordability for which Karantina has

long been noted. The neighborhood has historically hosted low-income groups, those who sought opportunities to live and work in proximity to the city center. Tension between different nationalities, as well as different sectarian groups, threatens the diversity of Karantina's housing occupancy. Finally, there is a perceptible threat of large-scale development and gentrification. This will likely impact the availability of low income housing stock, especially since Karantina has not been protected under the post-blast building freeze imposed elsewhere in Beirut.

## **B. Problem Statement**

The provision of housing in Karantina is in a vulnerable state and there is an urgent need to safeguard the tenure of residents in the post-Blast phase. Housing insecurity threatens to displace these residents from the city. This thesis therefore tackles this question within the framework of holistic urban recovery advanced by the Beirut Urban Lab, with a particular emphasis on affordable housing. To respond to the principal challenges identified above, namely problems and conflicts over tenure, the absence of housing construction, continued militarization, and spatial segregation, the thesis will analyze issues of housing at the Karantina area level. It will further nuance this analysis by considering these issues in each of the three residential sub-neighborhoods of Karantina: Al-Saydeh, Al-Senegal, and Al-Khodor. 1. Karantina is vulnerable. 2. Karantina is a target for developers. 3. Karantina has affordable housing within the city perimeter. 4. Karantina has potential for expanding housing stock because of the availability of land.

It therefore argues that the area faces a challenging post-disaster recovery, not only because of its many historic vulnerabilities but also because of a series of exacerbating issues that have followed the August 4 blast. These issues threaten to displace the area's residents

from the city, and those not displaced will end up living in a different kind of Karantina. One in which the provision of affordable housing will have decreased.

### **C. Research Question**

How do we safeguard the provision of affordable housing in Karantina to protect insecure residents in the post-blast phase and prevent social displacement as well as increase diversity of housing typologies to attract a more diverse population?

### **D. Objectives**

The central objectives of this thesis are to identify solutions to the principal challenges which affect the availability of affordable and inclusive housing in Karantina and limit urban recovery, and to make a series of recommendations – at the neighborhood level and at the level of the city – to effect the proposed remedy. These recommendations are part of a larger Urban Recovery study which identified five transversal issues, of which housing was one of them, were made in line with the Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina. The Karantina level recommendations will focus on fixing issues related to unbuildable lots, abandoned units, and the vulnerability of informal renters and will be addressed through housing monitoring, zones of special social interest (ZEIS), as well as cooperatives and occupation free of charge agreement. At the city scale, this includes mandatory inclusionary zoning as well as rent reform and a vacancy tax. These multiscale/multi-tool proposals are aimed at the long-term recovery of affordable housing rather than short-term reconstruction. Approaching affordable housing through holistic urban recovery is necessary because previous post-disaster interventions were limited only to physical reconstruction and failed to tackle wider vulnerabilities and threats. Nor were

reconstruction efforts participatory and inclusive of residents' needs and aspirations for the future. This assessment is based not only on documented case studies in the scholarly literature but also from personal experience, as someone who was directly involved in the physical reconstruction of Karantina in the aftermath of the 2020 blast and witnessed the limitations of the model (including the absence of the state) first hand.

### **E. Hypothesis**

This thesis hypothesizes that adopting a multiscale approach, one at the neighborhood scale through, housing monitoring, zones of special social interest (ZEIS), as well as cooperatives and occupation free of charge agreement and one at the city scale, through mandatory inclusionary zoning, vacancy taxes and a rent cap, can mitigate and potentially remedy the housing insecurity caused by the blast and the financial crisis. These recommendations can help the long-term recovery of affordable housing in Karantina, as it can remedy pre-existing issues and produce a new stock of affordable housing; and increase the availability of land for development; and contain soaring rental prices in light of economic turbulence.

### **F. Significance**

The significance of Karantina as a study area is due to its long continuous history as a place of affordable housing inside the city. Additionally, as part of a larger study at the Beirut Urban Lab's urban recovery track, this thesis offers an evidence based and participatory approach to the study of Karantina as an alternative to top-down comprehensive planning that dominates reconstruction efforts in Lebanon. Two, it moves Karantina away from the

physical and metaphorical periphery and into the heart of Beirut's history and future in the post-blast recovery. This research was done in the backdrop of the Beirut Urban Lab's work on other Beirut neighborhoods affected by the blast, namely Mar Mikhael and Gemmazye, and contributes to a relational understanding between them by relinking Karantina to the city.

## **G. Methodology**

This thesis's study area consists of the Karantina area that is bounded by the port, the Charles Helou highway, and the Beirut River. Because of these edge conditions, I will not be incorporating the recovery of Mar Mikhael and Gemmazye into this study despite administratively being part of Karantina, but cut off. This thesis applies a mixed-method approach (quantitative and qualitative) to examine affordable and inclusive housing. In addition to data collected by the citizen scientists as part of larger BUL funded study (add footnote), as well as household surveys and in-depth interviews conducted with residents, this thesis has used historical maps and building permits to describe and illustrate the constant evolution of housing in the area. This thesis made additional use of my on the ground volunteer work in Karantina in the wake of the blast with a local NGO, Offre Joie for two months. In keen sense of the situation on the ground the dynamics between residents, those affected, and identifying stakeholders and pre-existing issues plaguing Karantina post-blast.

The thesis will explore how these tools can be applied in a Lebanese context on the scale of Karantina to guarantee the tenure of its residents, prevent displacement, and diversify the locality. These tools can fix the issues surrounding old rent tenants, prevent sale and demolition of buildings, develop vacant parcels of land in a way that creates an affordable stock of housing, and formalize the tenure of tenants under currently informal contracts.

## *1. Data collection*

### a. Primary Data

In context qualitative data collection, principally one-on-one interviews with residents, archival research to collect photos to pair with maps found on Levant carta. Historical geo-spatial data from archives through photographs and memoirs. Formed questions based on data analysis in relation to housing used in town hall meetings and focus groups.

The fieldwork data identified certain trends. During the qualitative phase of the research these trends were then discussed with the stakeholders: at two town hall community meetings held on April 11, 2021 and June 30, 2021, and five thematic focus groups (one per transversal issue). The focused thematic discussion on housing was held on April 29, 2021. It explored the future of housing security among the diverse residents who access housing using different modes of tenure. All of the attendees at the town hall meetings and the focus groups were from the three sub-neighborhoods; Ali Jaber, a lawyer specializing in housing disputes and related issues, was also present in order to respond to the concerns raised.

To understand housing, this thesis extracted specific answers to the questions posed in relation to the household survey. These included tenure, income, expenses, family members, place of occupation, schooling, repairs being done, injuries, illnesses, and date of moving in. The answers reinforced the quantitative data gathered during fieldwork. Additional qualitative data was gathered through one-on-one interviews with locals from each sub-neighborhood, these addressed questions about length of tenure, type of tenure, entertainment and leisure patterns, employment, education opportunities, and the impact of the Blast on their current standard of living and security of housing tenure in its wake.

## b. Secondary Data

To support analysis of the primary data, the thesis has drawn on a range of scholarly literature (including articles, monographs, and relevant dissertations) about Karantina, its historical and contemporary situation, and the development of housing in the area, in Beirut, and in Lebanon more generally. It also draws on news articles, design studios, zoning and building codes, and original blueprints for many of the buildings. Given the dynamic evolution of Karantina and each sub-neighborhood, and to illustrate what has gone on historically, the thesis also uses a series of historical maps and photographs. These include British military maps from the 19th and early 20th centuries and French aerial photos from 1931, the latter were originally intended for cadastral use. This material has been accessed through the archives of the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese University, and the digitized archives of Harvard University, the Near East Foundation, and Houshamadyan Ottoman Armenian Heritage Online Archive. Finally, where appropriate, this thesis draws on the field observations of the present researcher. These were the result of engagement in field work as well as volunteering in the post-Blast reconstruction.

## ***2. Tools for data analysis***

This thesis uses spatial analysis of factors of housing insecurity (Rent hikes, evictions, informality, and adaptive reuse) in the area to assess affordability and inclusivity. The data gathered was located and spatialized through ArcGIS to showcase the correlation between variables, including those related to rent, nationality, evictions, and demographics. The resulting maps provide a further spatial demonstration of the data gathered in the quantitative research phase and confirmation of the observed trends. Statistical data was also generated through Excel and represented and analyzed through bar graphs and pie charts.

This is the case and point in Karantina, where the residents, many still displaced from the Civil War, are unable to make decisions over their space and participate in making their space due to legal zoning barriers and continued militarization. Additionally, the specific case of Al-Khodor takes on a sectarian-class dimension where many of the Sunni residents are unable to plan their own surroundings due to the limitations of the sectarian considerations that are placed in a Christian-dominated East Beirut.

## **H. Thesis Outline**

Moving forward, Chapter Two will situate the research question in the scholarly literature, whilst chapter three will examine the history of Karantina and how its housing has evolved into the present day. It identifies the social elements of the area, how it contributes to the growth of Beirut as a whole, the different waves of displacement that populated the area and the tragedies that have led to depopulation and where it stands in the city today. The main point is to learn from its history in order to adapt that into a holistic recovery plan. Chapter Four will give a diagnosis of the contemporary housing conditions in Karantina, how they have evolved since the blast, what they looked like before, and their affordability. Based on the two previous chapters, which will have looked into past issues and contemporary disaster-related issues, and in accordance with the urban recovery model employed in this thesis, Chapter Five will assess ways by which to respond to these issues by adopting solutions found in other cities onto Karantina. This is specifically in order to see how they can promote the urban recovery of housing, and make a series of recommendations for stakeholders.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **A. Beirut's Previous Experiences with Post Disaster**

In the context of post disaster recovery, many practice-based responses are focused on physical reconstruction of homes and immediate relief of those affected. Typically, resources and efforts are placed in these directions. This is the case globally, such as in the example of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and locally as in the case of Beirut's reconstruction following the Lebanese Civil War and the subsequent reconstruction of its southern suburbs in the wake of the 2006 July War. However, these responses often neglect long-term urban recovery as well as issues existing prior to the disaster event.

During the large-scale reconstruction efforts in Beirut following the civil war, a market-based approach was taken in the form of a privately owned company called Solidere. In the aftermath of the 2006 War, a second approach emerged in the form of Wa'd, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) controlled by Hezboallah. These contrasting approaches are discussed by Marwan Ghandour and Mona Fawaz in their 2010 article, "Spatial Erasure: Reconstruction Projects in Beirut." They argue that whereas Solidere and Wa'd had different methods and approaches, their interventions consolidated the processes of post-disaster reconstruction to the exclusion of those affected by the event. Overall, this consolidation/exclusion contributed to spatial erasure: in the case of Solidere through the displacement of residents and demolition of neighborhoods in downtown Beirut, and in the case of Wa'd by disregarding pre-existing problems with informality in the area.

The examples of Solidere and Wa'd have also been examined by Najib Hourani in "People or profit? Two post-conflict reconstructions in Beirut" (2015). He adds that the Wa'd intervention led to the upscaling of the area. This in turn raised housing prices and rental

costs to the detriment of the pre-existing community. He further notes that no laws or ordinances were passed to offset this predicament. Both of these case studies therefore point to the absence of the Lebanese state as a principal actor on the ground. The state's role has been reduced to that of a facilitator for non-state actors in the processes of planning and implementation of reconstruction; this was once again evident in the aftermath of the August 4, 2020 Beirut Blast.

As previous experience has been focused on reconstruction, which has particular detrimental outcomes, recent scholarship has instead focused on “urban recovery.” A concept which, as proposed by Howayda Al-Harithy in “Reconceptualizing Urban Recovery in the Age of Protected Displacement” (2021), invokes a “holistic and multi-layered process,” one that moves past “physical and the humanitarian” interventions and instead proposes “a more inclusive and multidisciplinary approach.” According to Al-Harithy, urban recovery was originally synonymous with reconstruction, having only physical aspects not socio-spatial ones. She argues instead for a holistic approach; that urban recovery in fact also encompasses socio-spatial aspects and so should be regarded as “an open-ended participatory process that is locally informed and socially anchored.” This reconceptualization concludes that urban recovery is “an inclusive social process that is shaped by pre and post-process conditions.”

One of the most useful processes within urban recovery, as identified by Graham Owen in his case study of post-Katrina New Orleans, “City of Risk: Organization and Individualization in the Urban Recovery of New Orleans” (2014), is that of the historical layering of development. According to Owen, urban recovery is not only about the reconstruction of physical infrastructure and form but also the rounded reconstruction of social lives. Therefore, one must undertake to map how these elements have come about, and how they have been shaped by and reinforced the social dynamics of the city. This mapping, he suggests, must be undertaken with reference to the past.

What can be derived from all the literature cited is that since urban recovery comprises both pre-existing issues and those brought about by the disaster event, and that therefore a historical understanding is necessary to identify prior issues so that they may be integrated into a plan for holistic urban recovery. These plans should include those primary factors which are key to protecting the social fabric of Karantina, such as affordable housing, alongside related sub-issues such as rent, vacancy, and inclusive zoning.<sup>1</sup>

### **B. Housing in Urban Recovery**

Following the August 4 2020 Blast, traditional reconstruction activities swept into affected areas of Beirut. Although appreciated by residents, these efforts were absent any state-based intervention. The delegation of the state's role to private entities could potentially lead to negative scenarios such as displacement and gentrification, as noted in earlier reconstruction efforts (Ghandour and Fawaz, 2010; Hourani, 2015). However, within a framework of holistic urban recovery the emphasis is on maintaining provision of affordable housing, on long-term recovery rather than short-term reconstruction. This can be achieved, as argued in the present thesis, through different modalities and involves using planning tools, such as mandatory inclusionary zoning, rent reform, regulation, and vacancy taxes, that are not yet in use in Lebanon, and which can be adapted from international comparators for use in the local context.

After the end of the Civil War, Beirut underwent rapid changes as diaspora capital poured in and a building bubble ensued propleed in part by reconstruction efforts. By 1998, this situation had stagnated and so the Central Bank of Lebanon introduced a new housing scheme intended to bail out the banks by offering subsidized housing loans (Fawaz, Salamé,

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<sup>1</sup> For more on holistic urban recovery and discussion of each of the five transversal issues see: Al-Harithy et al *An Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina* (2022).

and Serhan, 2017). These loans turned the state from a potential provider of housing (in Lebanon there are rare exceptions to public housing, specifically in Sour, Saida, Mina with some plans proposed for the suburbs of Beirut but were not executed) to a facilitator or broker, such as is the norm in other neo-liberalized countries (Aalbers, 2017; Aalbers et al., 2020). This was one of the factors that led to the financialization of Lebanese housing stocks. In this context property, including land, has lost its social value and there exists, as Harvey (1982) suggests, “that kind of land ownership that treats the land as a pure financial asset.” The drive to accumulate ever more land has led to the destruction of low-density homes, much of which had heritage value and housed low-income dwellers. The passing of the 2004 building law, legislation, which was drafted largely by developers, for developers, and created a new construction drive (Fawaz and Krijnen, 2010), exacerbated this situation further.

The financialization and commodification of housing has changed the urban fabric of Beirut, with many historical and archeological sites being turned into spaces for speculation that only serve investment purposes. In short, housing has lost its social function as a form of shelter and a human right provided to every citizen as per the Lebanese Constitution (Fawaz, Salamé, and Serhan, 2017). This situation continues to be made worse by the fact that Lebanon’s diaspora pours money into real estate: on the one hand this leads to gentrification (Krijnen, 2018) and on the other to an increase in the vacancy rate since many homes bought by the diaspora are rarely lived in. Oftentimes, they are left empty because the tax code in Lebanon exempts vacant units. Prior to the blast, then, housing in Beirut was characterized by rising unaffordability and high vacancy rates

### **C. Rising Unaffordability and Rent**

Rent in Lebanon is characterized by two different legal forms of tenure: the old rent and the new rent laws. Additionally, there are informal rental and rent-pooling agreements (whereby several individuals or families rent one property), which add a third dimension. This situation has been exacerbated by the twin effects of the Lebanese financial crisis, which began in 2019, and the port blast in 2020.

In Lebanon, a loose legal framework regulates residential rents. According to Fawaz and Zaatari (2022), residential rents are treated as part of the Law of Contracts and Obligations as well as the amendments that pertain to it. Therefore, there are two different conditions under which tenants live under. One that accounts for leases that were signed before 1992 that enjoy low rent and high protections against evictions. In this thesis they are referred to as “old rent” tenants. In 1992, an amendment was passed to the Contract and Obligation law, which changed the conditions of residential rent. This meant that any rental contract signed after the passing of the law would not have any protections that pertained to ones signed before 1992. Moreover, rental tenure would be shortened to either one or three-year leases and no protections against evictions were added. In this thesis, these tenants are referred to as “new rent” tenants.

In effect, this created two classes of tenants. It also created two classes of landlords, ones who are housing residents (old rent) at their expense and beyond their means, effectively performing the role of the state, and ones who have the right to raise rent and condition the residency of tenants (new rent) at their whim. In both cases, the state is absent in performing its role as a guarantor of housing. There were ways in which old rent tenants could be evicted and one of them was by the owner of the building issuing a demolition order. In this case, tenants would have to be compensated. Hisham Achkar (2018) notes that tenants that did not pursue legal arbitration in the matter received lower compensations than those that did, as

there were no legal definitions for how much compensation was to be paid. In many cases, landlords did not follow with the demolition order and then just rented out the vacant units to new rent tenants or sold the entire property to developers.

The term “affordability” is typically defined in economic terms and is measured by the amount of household income spent on a given item, in this case on housing. According to Stone, Burke and Ralston (2011) housing affordability depends on consideration of three elements: to whom it is affordable, the standard of affordability, and for how long it is to be regarded as affordable. Thus, they suggest, affordability is an interaction between income, housing costs, and additional needs (as determined by household size). However, as Perera and Lee (2021) argue, the income-cost ratio must also be set in the context of available services and amenities, the prevailing vacancy rate, adaptive reuse of space, and other relational lenses such as “transportation costs, neighborhood quality...and housing density.” Therefore, this expands on the traditional definition of affordability by including some of these additional factors.

There is no affordable housing policy in Lebanon. Rather it has been and continues to be reflected through piecemeal solutions such as rent control, subsidized loans, and a single social housing project. These in turn exist in the context of a developer-oriented political economy, wherein “the concept of a sovereign state is shifting from positing the state as a provider of basic rights to casting the state as an enabler of the market” (Bekdache, 2015). This is significant because as Beirut has been reconstructed and redeveloped since the end of the Civil War, with an emphasis on diaspora capital and foreign investment, many of those who work in the city now “cannot afford to live or even shop there” (Ashkar, 2018, p.135-136). Consequently, lower income tenants (and would-be tenants) have been driven to the suburbs, with an environmentally-detrimental urban sprawl occurring as a result (Hiba Bou Akar, 2018, Daher 2020, Abou Ibrahim, 2021). This sprawl introduces an additional

consideration: sectarian enclaving. As Hiba Bou Akar (2018) notes, Hezbollah, for example, “coordinates a network of affiliated or sympathetic property developers who are deeply involved in Beirut’s real estate markets,”(p.27) and who have the ability to buy and develop land.

Overall, the consequences of this combination of non-state actors, foreign investor-led development, and urban sprawl, has, as Bou Akar (2018) concludes, led to a “patchwork of ‘planned’ spaces that provide low-cost housing.” She adds, “overlapping industrial and residential zones, towns where highways are never finished, and playgrounds and other amenities are planned but never built where streets fail to align or were abolished after buildings they were intended to serve were built, where ruins remain because the land they occupy is valued for its role in ongoing conflicts, and where luxury overlooks destitution” (p.183). But Karantina is different. Somehow, despite all the changes undergone in Beirut over the past thirty years, the affordable nature of the area’s housing has been maintained. Owing to its transient nature and political indecision as to what to do with the area, which led to a freeze on development, the area is in a unique position—but is threatened.

#### **D. Affordable Housing**

This thesis measures affordability of housing through a series of localized indicators including income, vacancy rate, and residents’ access to services. Traditionally, a 30% rent to income ratio is used to measure the affordability of housing, following the United States’ Department of Housing and Urban Development. This means that all rents in addition to expenditure above 30% of household income can be regarded as unaffordable. This figure has previously been applied in the Lebanese context by the Central Bank of Lebanon when determining the maximum amount of monthly installments of subsidized housing loans.

However, recent studies (e.g. Esruq-Labin, 2014) have determined that the affordability of rent cannot only be limited to a percentage of a household's income and that it also applies to factors such as level of local development and access to services. In the case of the latter, this is because their absence places additional costs on residents, who have to go elsewhere to get them. Therefore, this expanded measurement can be expressed as affordability being equal to rent-to-income ratio added to the value of Karantina's amenities.

The vacancy rate is utilized as an indicator of affordability because the supply and demand of housing affects rent prices. A decrease in the stock of units from the housing market drives up demand and thus prices (Beirut Urban Lab, 2019). In Lebanon, the decrease in housing stock is related to tax exemptions that encourage vacancy, thus restricting supply. Tools to ameliorate this situation will be the focus of the next chapter. Increased availability of units can lower demand and prices. Indeed, rent hikes and evictions in Karantina since the port blast suggest a causal relation, one that was enabled and exacerbated by pre-blast conditions. There is historical precedent for this, as discussed in chapter 3, such as when Lebanese-Armenians moved out of Karantina and relocated to Soviet Armenia in the 1940s. As a result, a stock of affordable housing was released in the area and quickly picked up by Shi'a Lebanese migrants from south Lebanon (Hovannisian, 1974).

## **E. Planning Tools**

### ***1. Rent Caps Case Studies***

Prior to the introduction of its rent reforms, the city of Berlin had been reeling for years from speculative practices, which made rent highly unaffordable in the city. This makes for a useful case study comparator for Beirut, a city, which faces similar housing challenges. In 2019, the municipal government in Berlin responded to uncontrollable rent increases by

capping rent increases to no more than 1.3% per year. Additionally, the city issued guidelines for how much property owners could charge tenants per square meter, ranging between 3-10 Euros, based on the specifications of their property. The specifications taken into consideration included the age of the building, its amenities, its typology, and its location. What made this law different from earlier attempts – and more strident – was that it did not create two classes of tenants/landlords, this was because the law was applied not only to leases signed after the passing of the law, but also retroactively. Effectively, this meant that rents were decreased across the board: according to Pekka Sagner and Michael Voigtländer (2022), Berlin rents fell on average by 10%.

A similar law was introduced in 2020 in the Spanish region of Catalonia. It applied to Barcelona and the region's other cities with populations over 20,000, and limited the rental price of units on five year leases for new contracts and renewals, but not pre-existing ones. The Catalan regulations provided for both a 'nominal' rent cap and a 'growth' rent cap linking new (or renewed) rental prices to those paid under previous tenancy agreements. Moreover, as in Berlin, price ceilings took into account the specification characteristics of units. According to Jofre-Monseny, Martínez-Mazza, and Segú (2022, p. 10), the new regulations "reduced average rents paid by about 6%." Whilst this figure is lower than that for Berlin in the short term, the expectation of Jofre-Monseny, Martínez-Mazza, and Segú (2022) is that "the previous rent [will] be binding more often than the nominal cap" and will lead to longer-term decreases.

Comparable reduction in rents in Berlin and Catalonia following the introduction of new regulations has produced values in the range of 5-10%. However, it appears that there were differences in terms of supply of housing. In Berlin, for example, as Sagner and Voigtländer (2022) suggest, the regulations led to a drop in the supply of the housing stock as many property owners were unwilling to put their units on the market with such conditions.

The rental market in Berlin thus appeared to shrink as a consequence of the rental cap. In Catalonia, by contrast, Jofre-Monseny, Martínez-Mazza, and Segú (2022) conclude that the “price drop did not lead to a reduction in the supply of housing units to the rental market.” In fact, their results “suggest that rent control policies can be effective in reducing rental prices and do not necessarily shrink the rental market.” The differences between the Berlin and Catalan examples therefore suggest that if the right balance is struck between a rent cap and progressive price increases, supply of housing is not necessarily harmed in the long term.

## *2. Vacancy taxes*

In their 2018 review of the literature on vacancy rates, Carolin Fritzsche and Lars Vandrei observe that “abundant vacancies are perceived as highly problematic by most housing experts [because] they represent the unused capital of owners, implying a deficient allocation of economic resources.” Homes that are left off the market directly impacts the supply and demand curve: in short, creating supply shortages and raising prices through increased demand. Moreover, they suggest that vacant housing stock is “usually less adequately maintained” a situation which can lead to “external effects” including the “stigmatism of whole neighborhoods” as a result of vandalism, crime, economic deprivation and lack of available services.

In the context of Lebanon, and more specifically Beirut, scholars have identified that vacancies arise due to a number of localized factors. These include, as Fawaz and Zaatari (2020) note, the commodification of housing, where property (i.e. housing and land) is developed or held for investment purposes only, a large market presence for the diaspora who are not themselves owner-occupiers, as well as tax incentives. “The law,” they add, “implicitly exempts any empty unit from the payment of municipal taxes” and this encourages property owners to keep their units vacant. As Fritzsche and Vandrei (2018)

argue, owners and investors balance the pros and cons of selling versus renting, evaluating income generation from poor rents against costs incurred from keeping properties vacant or undeveloped. In the case of Beirut, the costs of vacancy are minimal so units are kept off the market, they remain empty, and prices are unchanged.

Recent efforts by the Beirut Urban Lab have resulted in the compilation of a dataset on buildings constructed between 1996 and 2018. This was used to calculate vacancy rates in the city of Beirut (Fawaz and Zaatari, 2020). According to this research, 23% of the housing stock - or in excess of 7,000 apartments - from this period of development was vacant. 65.2% of these properties remain unsold by the developer and are thus vacant, with the remaining 34.7% having been sold but still kept vacant by their new owners. Such figures are significantly higher than the “natural rate” of vacancy identified by McCartney (2010) of around 7%. Theoretically, the “actual rate” (i.e. in Beirut some 23%) should result in a reduction of prices and a return to the market equilibrium, the “natural rate”. However, as Fawaz and Zaatari (2020) conclude of Beirut’s circumstances where “the social value of land as home and/or workplace has been compromised” prices have not fallen but instead have become “inaccessible to wide sections of society.” This economic inaccessibility rooted in a high vacancy rate, in turn, has had wider social consequences, particularly relating to what Henri Lefebvre (1968) called the “right to the city.” This he defined as having two components: first “the right to participate in the conception, design and implementation of the production of urban spaces” and second “the right to appropriate...urban space, and produce them in the ways that would meet the needs of urban inhabitants” (p.831).

For Fawaz (2009), this definition differs from those employed by contemporary urban researchers, who have followed the work Hernando de Soto (2000). The latter use the term to “support the entitlement of informal settlement dwellers to access public services regardless of violations of property rights or urban rules and building codes and/or to ‘regularize

settlements” (p.831) in order to be integrated into the market. In other words, the latter implies conformity while the former entails non-conformity. In her case study, “Neoliberal Urbanity and the Right to the City: A View from Beirut's Periphery,” Fawaz details how, in the periphery of Beirut, developers have usurped control of construction from amateur contractors, thus making housing unaffordable to many of the original residents. New developments, in short, favor new residential groups.

### ***3. Inclusionary Zoning***

The concept of inclusive or inclusionary zoning was coined in the United States in the 1960s (Porter, 2004). It was devised as a means of combating exclusionary zoning processes, such as single family houses or redlining, and a decline in government support for affordable housing. The principles have since developed into a set of policy initiatives to “require or incentivize [provision of] some below-market-rate housing units in new housing developments” (Hamilton, 2021). There are two types of inclusionary zoning: mandatory and voluntary. The former, which is increasingly favored by governments, has proven to be more successful, globally, as it “often provide[s] the developer with density bonuses” (Lerman, 2006). In his study of mandatory inclusive zoning, Lerman suggests that there are three principal benefits over voluntary schemes. First, the number of affordable housing units built; second, alleviation of “social problems” through integration of the community; third, the creation of mixed-income neighborhoods.

However, Lerman (2006) and Porter (2004) also suggest that there is a “major drawback” when implementing mandatory inclusionary zoning schemes, namely that “states must have enforcement mechanisms, such as financial sanctions, to address any failure to comply.” Moreover, Lerman notes, “because the burden of the program will fall on developers, they are likely to oppose any such mandatory program.” These difficulties can be

observed in Lebanon, where some voluntary incentives have been given to developers such as building a double wall and increasing the total built up in exchange for it, or turning a building into a co-op and getting tax incentives for it. These have not been very successful as they have not been implemented frequently and further suggest that mandatory schemes would be difficult to establish.

Incentive-based development is prevalent in Lebanon, by contrast, encouraged by the 2004 building law and the Investment Development Authority (IDAL). In the case of Beirut's property market, where the building drive is geared towards luxury developments, these incentives include exemptions from urban and zoning regulations for buildings built on lots larger than 4000 sqm, as well as exemptions from permitting fees and property registration (Fawaz and Krijnen, 2010). This by itself creates unaffordability because more money is spent on the building. However no value is provided in return for the incentives, either in terms of public space arising from setback ratios or affordable housing created or, as Mona Harb notes in her 2018 study, "Youth in Lebanon: Policy Narratives, Attitudes, and Forms of Mobilization," the wider liveability of the urban environment.

## CHAPTER III

### HISTORY OF SETTLEMENT IN KARANTINA

What is today known as Karantina was once a much larger part of the city. The area is a product of historically unfolding socio-spatial processes, resulting from the factors discussed in this chapter. Paradoxically, Karantina owes its existence and on-going fragility principally to the growth of the Port of Beirut. First, the development of the port led to the establishment of the first settlement in the area and attracted the earliest residents. Second, the later port expansion and subsequent encirclement—from the south via the railroad, which was used to haul freight to and from the port, and to the north and west from the sea and port terminals—led to isolation. However, a series of secondary drivers of settlement and residence are also evident. This includes the creation of the slaughterhouse and associated industrial development, and migration into the Karantina area as a direct consequence of external events. These include the Armenian genocide, the First and Second World Wars, European outmigration in the 1930s, the Nakba, and enveloping events of which the Civil War is the most significant. My focus in this chapter is on these factors as they relate to settlement patterns in and the built fabric of Karantina, rather than on their personal and demographic consequences. This approach can be distinguished from some of the existing literature, which has stressed these factors as they relate to Karantina’s development as “a place for Beirut’s unsavory” (Issa, 2015).

This chapter, then, is not a history of Karantina, per se, but of how it was created, settled, and has continued to change morphologically over time. What follows explores the evolution of this space, notably the settlements that once made up the area and their subsequent erasure, the changing patterns of in-migration, and questions of inclusivity and affordability. This is in order to understand why Karantina has always been a place of refuge,

on the one hand, and why its special characteristics, which are both historical and contemporary, should be preserved in the aftermath of the 2020 Blast. The first section of the chapter provides an overview of the chronology of development from the 1830s until the 1970s. The second moves to profile Karantina and its settlements before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975, with an emphasis on this period as a ‘peak’ of inclusivity, diversity and affordability. This section of the chapter necessarily ends with the erasure and displacement of the Muslim sections of the area’s community. The final part of the chapter details the period following the conclusion of the Civil War. It focuses on the return of the Muslim population in the 1990s alongside continued militarization of the area, the arrival of Syrian refugees following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the construction of the new port terminal, the ‘thickening’ of the Charles Helou Highway which has exacerbated the isolation and enclaving of the area, and more recent negative impacts linked to the financial crisis and the Blast. However, as is also discussed, these circumstances have enabled the continuing affordability of the area, as well as its marginalization.

#### **A. Chronology of Settlement**

Before the 1830s, what was to become Karantina was not an area of settlement: in this period, there were no residential clusters outside of Beirut’s city walls. The Khodor Mosque, however, did exist within Karantina’s historical boundaries. Legend claims that this is the location where Saint George slew the dragon. According to Marlene Kanaan (2008), this myth was popularized in the 15th century by Mamluk historian Saleh Ben Yehya in his book, *Tareekh Beirout*. Ben Yehya narrates that in the 6th century, the dragon lived inside the cove of the Beirut River. One day, this dragon kidnapped the daughter of the Roman governor of the city. In response to prayers, St George appeared and slew the dragon, after which he washed his hands in the river. To commemorate the act, the governor built a chapel where the

dragon was killed. (Ben Yehya, 1908: 10). St Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great is said to have given the chapel a white marble cylinder on her way to Palestine. People with rheumatism would touch the marble cylinder in hopes of cure—thereby turning the chapel into a site of pilgrimage. As the British bishop, Richard Pococke, wrote whilst passing through Beirut in the 18th century:

In this mosque I saw an extraordinary ceremony performed on one of the Turks that was with me; sitting down on the ground, the religious person, who had care of the mosque, took a piece of a small marble pillar, in which, they say, there is an extraordinary vertue against all sorts of pains, and rolled it on the back of the Turk for a considerable time. (Pococke, 1745: 91)

When the crusaders arrived from Europe in the 12th century, they built a new church on the remains of the older chapel. This structure included a crypt, a dome, a new chapel, and a monastery. The crusader church was Greek Orthodox until 1570, when the Maronites began to share in its use. Then, in 1661, owing to the Christians' inability to pay taxes (dhim), the church was expropriated by the Ottoman Governor of Saida, Ali Basha, who converted it into a mosque and renamed it after Nabi Khodor, the companion of Moses in Ibn Kathir's *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* (Stories of the Prophets).<sup>2</sup> The chapel's walls were retrofitted as a minaret to accommodate this new role. Although the area was to become a strong example of Islamic culture (Hodgson, 1974), it was also a site of shared socio-spatial encounters between Muslims and Christians—something distinct from an Orientalist discourse of Muslims stealing churches. In fact, despite its conversion, of faith and of purpose, the mosque retained a striking continuity with its Christian past: Khodor is the Muslim translation of St George (Kanaan, 2008). Moreover, the mosque continued to be sacred to Christians, who would visit

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<sup>2</sup> According to Conde, there was a back and forth transfer of the building's use. During the Mamluk period, the church was converted into a mosque, it was then converted back into a church by Amir Fakraddin then back to a mosque during the Ottoman period, then back to a church by a Druze Emir Melhem.

for the water well, which they believed had healing powers because it was supplied from the river in which the saint had washed his hands. Visiting Christians would throw pebbles into the river to make wishes, a custom, which lasted into the 1920s. Eventually, the Muslims adopted the same reverence for the well and its healing powers.

In the 1950s, the mosque experienced a decline in popularity as a site of pilgrimage and reverence, however, when the Sheikh got rid of the marble cylinder. It has been in the possession of Dar Al-Fatwa ever since. The water well itself was paved over to make way for a playground for the al-Khodor primary school built next door: it was feared that children would accidentally fall in. Likewise, in this period, the mosque was enclosed by the railway and eventually by the highway (Gibson, 1971). Neither the church nor the mosque served to anchor a settlement, however. Their function was as sites of pilgrimage and worship. This was changed only with the arrival of Mahmoud Nehme Bey as Governor of Beirut. Appointed during Ibrahim Pasha's tenure as the regent of Syria, Nehme Bey used his expertise as an engineer and previous experience modernizing Alexandria to reorder Beirut using French systems of urban planning and best-practice. He tore down the city walls, named all the streets, refurbished the Khans, established councils, expanded the port with new warehouses, and, most significantly for the present thesis, in 1835 built a lazaret in what is today Karantina (Hanssen, 2005).

### ***1. Establishment of the Lazaret***

The Lazaret's primary purpose was to quarantine those coming into the city and region from abroad (in a general sense). This was aimed at stemming the spread of cholera, which had plagued Beirut since the early 1820s. The location chosen for the facility lay on the outskirts of the city limits, north-west of the Beirut River on the St George Bay (see figure 2)—the northernmost tip of Beirut. This was a safe distance away from the main

residential areas of the city and allowed for passengers to be swiftly ferried there. Early accounts from travelers paint a vivid portrait of what it was like to be quarantined in the Lazaret. In 1839, Australian politician Arthur Holroyd detailed the measures travelers had to take when entering or exiting Beirut. Military vessels had to quarantine for fourteen days, merchant vessels for twenty-one days. Those entering by land had to stay for seven days. Imported goods were quarantined separately. A cordon sanitaire complemented the Lazaret in the Pines (Horsh Beirut). Despite these apparently strict rules, Holroyd complained that they were not equally enforced, that they could be skirted easily with bribes or connections, and that healthy passengers were mixed in with the sick, thus making the quarantine process a self-defeating one (Holroyd 1839, 5-8).



Figure 2. British Expeditionary Force Rochfort Scott Map, 1841 of Beirut's Lazaret. Levant Carta, Humanities Research Center.

The Lazaret gave Karantina its first settlement and its first transient population. The facility itself was composed of four sandstone buildings fenced in and surrounded by flora

and fauna. Those who could afford it were quarantined in rooms within the permanent structures, those who could not afford the fees had to pitch tents in the facility's grounds. Although residents were not allowed to leave the area during their quarantine-isolation, as British lawyer Charles G. Addison noted in a travel log written in 1838, they were able to swim in the sea (Addison, 1838). After leaving the facility, Addison described the landscape of what would become Karantina. It was, he said, a space of 'luxuriant hedges of the cactus or Indian fig' and all 'shaded by trees of peculiar foliage'(Addison: 8). This shows that Beirut had not yet fully expanded beyond the historic city walls, extra-muro. The 1841 British naval expedition map corroborates Addison's observations and shows an emerging street network. There was the Tripoli road (today's Armenia Street) and the road leading to the Lazaret; together with the Beirut River to the east, these began to shape the boundaries of what we might call "greater Karantina." Secondary roads shaped the settlement pattern, too, with homes facing the streets or otherwise clustering around them. Aside from the quarantine facility and the homes lining the newly paved roads, however, the area remained largely uninhabited.

After Nehme Bey's intervention in the 1830s, Beirut grew from a secondary city into a cosmopolitan port city of the Ottoman Empire, similar to Alexandria and Smarnyia (Mansel, 2012). There had already been a diverse community in Beirut - with Muslims, Christians, and Jews living side by side - but growth brought new residents from across the region. The number of foreign firms increased, which brought an influx of European merchants and missionaries from France and the United States, who set about establishing new schools. The destruction of the medieval walls opened the city limits and the wealthiest individuals began migrating to the surrounding areas into newly constructed villas (2010, page 151). These included Christian merchant families who moved eastward in the 1840s and built homes on the cliffs of Karantina (Kassir, 114) and took root on the coastal road leading

to the Lazaret. One of these families was the Medawwar's, a Greek Catholic merchant family made rich by the rise of Beirut as a trade center (Marozzi, 2019). Because of these villas, Kassir adds that, after the 1860s, many parts of Beirut began to be associated with certain families and were named after them, including Sursock Street, the Sioufi sector, and Medawwar, which encompassed all of Greater Karantina (Kassir 138).

The piecemeal growth of residential settlement in Karantina, which followed the creation of the Lazarette, continued through the middle of the nineteenth century. Beirut's new status as a significant trading port saw fresh demand for locally produced materials, such as silk made from cocoons on mulberry trees. In the 1850s, the nearby Mulberry plantations encouraged migrants to settle in the environs of Karantina to farm, harvest, and process the silk crops so that they could be exported to France (Massabni, 1977). The Lazaret (and its associated quarantine regulations) was the main driver of this international connectivity since it diverted maritime traffic away from the ports of Tripoli, Acre, and Saida, which did not have the facilities to comply with quarantine regulations (Hanssen, 2005, p.118-9; Abou-Hodeib, 2007, p.231). Alongside economic settlement, there was soon to be refugee settlement as well, which together caused a considerable increase in the local population. In 1860, a Maronite peasant revolt in Keserwan ignited a revolt in the Chouf, ultimately resulting in a full-blown civil war (Laila Fawaz, 1994; Ussama Makdisi, 2000). The conflict caused many living in the mountains to flee to Beirut. Refugees were accommodated in Karantina, where many died of dysentery (Luc Chantre, 2016).

According to Jens Hanssen, the refugee influx into Beirut and the city's extra-muro urbanization made residential space scarcer, with housing increasingly constructed near the Lazarette. This explains the sporadic presence of buildings in Karantina evident on the Mansell Map (Figure 3) and the first appearance of the Mar Mikhael Church. This expansion caused alarm amongst the region's Ottoman governors because of the dangers of residential

areas being so near potential disease. In 1876, the Beirut City Council requested the relocation of the Lazarette to the Tripoli Islands, in order that the land could be used for residential purposes. This request was met with rejection by the governors, however, but the council continued to appeal for relocation for several years thereafter (Hanssen, 2005: 119). From the late-1870s, this eastward ‘spillover’ from the old city began a new period of consolidation in Karantina. Buildings began to spring up in what is today Al-Saydeh (Figure 4) and by the 1870s, there were enough people living in this area to prompt the need for additional parochial infrastructure. It was to meet this demand that the Saydat Al Najat Church was built—the sub-neighborhood was nevertheless considered an extension of Mar Mikhael and even today is administratively part of that parish, despite not having been physically connected since the construction of the Charles Helou Highway in 1958.



Figure 3 A.L. Mansell. Beirut: The Ancient Berytus. 1862. Map. The National Archives, Kew



Figure 4 Karantina in Julius Lojtvod Map, 1876. AUB Archives.

## 2. *Expansion into Karantina and Challenges of the Quarantine*

To support the growth of the Port of Beirut, plans were developed to industrialize Karantina alongside the appeals to relocate the Lazarette. The first proposals were presented in 1876: the castles and the lighthouse would be removed to make way for a new basin on reclaimed land. This included new warehouses in the environs of the quarantine facility, which would have connected it to the port via a freight train on the railroad. Hence the red shading on the Lytovid map. This proposal was not realized until 1890, however, under the Garte Plan. This same railroad would later denote the southern boundary of Karantina and form the basis of the future highway. More than a decade later, Beirut's first electricity company Gaz de Beyrouth, set up operations (Hanssen, 2005, p.97) behind the Lazaret (Figure 5). By 1889, the company supplied fuel to hundreds of gas lanterns across the city. Being close to the port made it an ideal location from which to dispense gas, and it would later play a role in the establishment of the tramway. The Mansell map shows a

slaughterhouse on the north-west corner of Karantina. Put together, the gas company, the Lazaret and the slaughterhouse showcased the vital role Karantina was now playing as an engine of Beirut's economy: the three institutions fed, lit, and shielded the city from potential harm. They also anchored new residential clusters.



Figure 5. Quarantine with Gaz de Beyrouth in the background. 1899. From the Oppenheim Collection.

According to Bourgey and Pharès (1973, p.125) Arab tribes who came from the Arabian Peninsula in the 1850s and settled on the near eastern coast from Acre to Beirut practiced cattle herding “at the gates of Beirut.” For these tribes, animal husbandry was a social-spatial practice that the Beirut City Council decided to take advantage of. Accordingly, a slaughterhouse was installed in the southwest part of Karantina, (Figure 3) in the early 1860s. As indicated by the Cressot map of 1911, the slaughterhouse was moved to the northeast of Karantina, where it became a driver of residential settlement (Figure 6). Some of the Arab tribes settled in scattered houses around the silk plantations, as seen on the 1876 Løytved map, whilst the rest lived in tents (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973). This process was interrupted during the First World War because of the trade embargo that Britain and France

imposed on the Ottoman Empire. This embargo led to famine as Lebanon was heavily reliant on food imports because its agriculture was geared towards mulberry mono-crops for silk (Pitts, 2016). After the Ottoman defeat, the British, followed by the French, moved their forces into Lebanon (Hakim, 2012) and took over the Port of Beirut and its quarantine. After the British left in 1920, the French began expanding the port to add a second basin and an enlarged terminal to add more warehouses to the port to fend off competition from British controlled Alexandria (Chantre, 2016).



Figure 6. Karantina slaughterhouse moved, Cressot Map, 1911. Levant Carta, Humanities Research Center.

Thus, it was not until the early 1930s, as shown in contemporary aerial photography (Figure 7), that the slaughterhouse began to anchor bricks and mortar homes, thus forming the modern footprint of the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood—the name is taken from the eponymous mosque. Twenty cement buildings were constructed at this time (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973), whose ground floor functions were intended initially as storefronts, but in fact housed cattle. The floors above housed the families of the Arab tribes. Most of the typologies were single apartment walk-ups built on small parcels of land. There was also a greater

Khodor area consisting of 130 informal dwellings, or Tankes, made up of wooden planks and covered with a corrugated roof, 88 dwellings made of concrete and sheet metal, and finally 81 formal buildings built of concrete.



Figure 7. Aerial photo of Karantina and Mar Mikhael, 1931. Courtesy of Sandra Frem.

### ***3. New settlement and land uses in Karantina***

The French expansion of the port and the refurbishment of the quarantine would give Karantina a new lease of life, albeit with some compromises. The area's access to the sea had led to the establishment of leisure resorts under the cliffs (Kassir, 219) (Figure 8 and 9). Karantina's cliffs also had one of the first beach resorts in Lebanon, La Grande Bleue, which was turned into a boating spot when the marinas in Minet al-Hosn opened (Kassir, 308). Unfortunately, this leisure zone was closed when the beach was expropriated to make way for the new basin of the port of Beirut in the 1930s.



Figure 8. Beach at the bottom of Karantina 1896. Samir Kassir.



Figure 9. Men and women swimming off the coast of the Quarantine in 1925. Arab Image Foundation.

More positively, Karantina became an important stopping point for those wishing to perform Hajj. A regulation established in 1928 mandated that pilgrims be tested and

vaccinated at one of several designated areas before traveling on to Mecca (Chantre, 2016). One of those centers was in the newly refurbished Quarantine facility in Beirut—the French also required anyone going on Hajj from their colonies had to travel first through Beirut and hoped that this would attract pilgrims from British-controlled territories, notably Alexandria and Basra, too. Most of the latter, however, sought more conventional land routes. In addition, French ocean liners would get exclusive rights to transport passengers through the Suez Canal by rerouting traffic through Beirut. This had as much to do with politics, as with health. When the rule of the Hijaz passed to the Saudis, the French saw an opportunity to make new regional allies. One way of influencing them was by monopolizing Hajj traffic, a vast source of income at the time.

The 1928 regulations only began to be taken seriously, however, when a cholera outbreak in Basra made would-be tourists and pilgrims see the benefit of making the detour to Beirut to quarantine and vaccinate before carrying on their journey. Whilst in Karantina, passengers with any prior diseases would need initially to be isolated.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, they could busy themselves with the stores and restaurants that had opened inside the Lazarette, or the park built inside the facility. The French also built a mosque to serve the quarantined population and to avoid mixing with the general population.<sup>4</sup> After that, they would be issued with a vaccine passport certifying that it was safe for them to travel and would leave Beirut by ship to Jeddah through the Suez Canal. This process helped to popularize Beirut as a tourist destination before Lebanon's so-called Golden Age after the Second World War—albeit Beirut's direct role in Hajj was short-lived because the Iraqis opened a land route to

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<sup>3</sup> This intervention successfully stemmed from further cholera outbreaks. In one year, the quarantine facility conducted 10,000 stool tests and 150 vaccinations. Additionally, the French mandate had people coming to France from their colonies stop in Beirut to get tested before continuing.

<sup>4</sup> The mosque was demolished during the Civil War but was rebuilt during the 1990s. Known as the Khalid Bin Walid Mosque, it was heavily damaged by the 2020 Blast.

Saudi Arabia in 1935. This overshadowed the sea route and caused Beirut to lose out on Iraqi, Iranian and Indian pilgrims (Chantre, 2016).

Finally, in the 1950s, the Lazaret was converted into the Ibrahim Najjar Karantina Public Hospital, named for Lebanon's first surgeon (Buheiry, 1981).<sup>5</sup> First-generation Armenians who had settled in the area established businesses in this period, too, notably the Babikian Flour Mill founded in 1951 (Figure 10). A new slaughterhouse was built in 1961 on the site of the previous one. The proximity of the slaughterhouse in Karantina encouraged the establishment of complementary industries beyond the Beirut River, including leather tanneries, a bone processing factory, and a vitamin supplement manufacturer who used the blood of the murdered animals (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973). A service sector evolved around these industries, too, consisting of almost three hundred stores. Most of these were concentrated along the road to the slaughterhouse, although some spread elsewhere (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973). In the early 1970s, on the eve of the Civil War, Karantina was a bustling area of the city with industry, commerce, established residential zones, and community facilities including churches and mosques. Their development had been driven by the port and the lazarette-quarantine, with secondary factors including the slaughterhouse and successive waves of refugees. These factors gave Greater Karantina and its sub-neighborhoods their distinctive character.

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<sup>5</sup> A new Karantina Hospital was built next to the Old in 2000. The Old Hospital is now a military barracks.



Figure 10. Bakalian flour mill built in 1951 by an Armenian refugee who arrived in Beirut. From Houshamadyan Archives.

## **B. Housing and Settlement before 1975**

Permanent settlement prior to 1975 reflected Karantina’s development after the 1830s and resulted in a diverse range of housing typologies. These may be broadly characterized as *tanak* housing, on the one hand, and bricks and mortar, on the other. Both typologies were constructed in an area gradually being cut off from the rest of the city of Beirut, and from the sea, by a series of infrastructural projects—projects designed to accommodate the ever-expanding port. Since the port did not exist in a vacuum, these expansions affected everything in its vicinity, including Karantina. The result was a process of enclaving and commensurate pressures on and competition for space. A useful example of the process, and its several stages, relates to the Charles Helou Highway. The first stage was the railroad built in the 1890s to transport freight to and from the then recently expanded port. According to one longtime resident, Elias Chayeb, the boundary between Al-Saydeh and Mar Mikhael was called “the train because the railroad ran through it. Then they built the highway and it became harder for us to cross.”

Although, as the 1941 British army map shows, the railroad did not cut between Karantina and Mar Mikhael, since it went north of Armenia Street, a road was built between the train station and the warehouses, which themselves would later become the municipal lots (Figure 11). This formed one part of the highway's eventual outline and provided a physical sense of the demarcation. The second part was the result of the road carved between Karantina and the Nur Hajin camp, which was in place by 1941 (Figure 12). All that was missing was a direct road linking the two other streets with the rest of Beirut. This was made possible with the construction of the second port terminal, which reclaimed sufficient land (on what was the Remeil sector) to make possible the laying out of a new stretch of road (Figure 12). This coincided with government plans to do away with light rail and to prioritize the car, with major road building projects envisaged instead. Some residual space remained from the buildings demolished during the construction of the highway (Figure 13)..

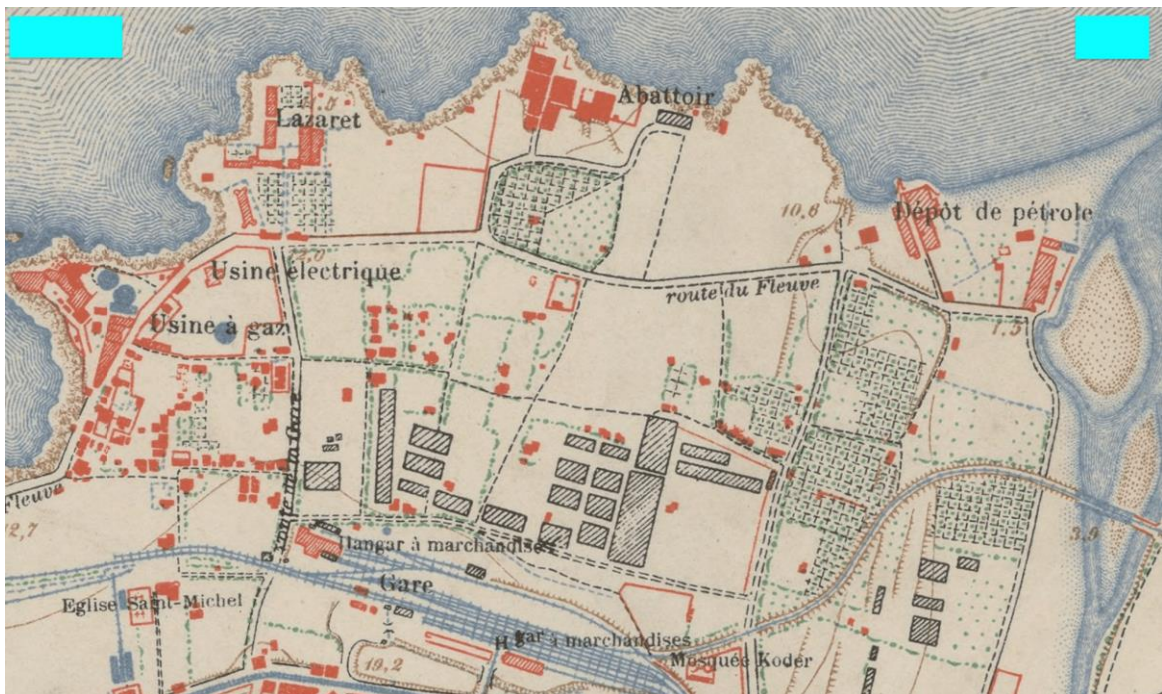


Figure 11. Karantina in French Army Geographical Service Map, 1922. Service géographique de l'Armée (Paris).



Figure 12. Town Plan of Beyrouth by the British Army, 1941. Army. Royal Engineers. Field Survey Company. The second illustration of the enclaving process is the cutting off of Karantina’s historic links to the sea. Elias Chayeb lamented what happened. “Whenever we went swimming,” he said, “it was just a stone's throw away around the cliff. Then the port blocked our access to the sea.” In the late 1960s, land reclamation works started on the third terminal to the west of Karantina. By 1976, another terminal was built to the north of the slaughterhouse (Figure 14) with additional land reclamation to the northeast. The river road was laid out causing further clearing of a *tanaks* cluster and had the effect of (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973). These developments, together with the construction of the highway and the wide road built along the western bank of the Beirut River, caused a rupture in the urban fabric, formed hard edges and segregated Karantina.



Figure 13. Aerial image of Karantina, circa 1931. Overlaid with development of street network compiled from different eras that led to the enclaving of Karantina.



Figure 14. Karantina in Soviet map of Beirut, 1987. Trove Archive.

### *1. A Diverse Community*

As noted above, the area has played a significant role as a zone of settlement for refugees, whether from conflicts in the Chouf in the 1860s, for example, or in Armenia during the First World War and in its aftermath. In 1920, the French resettled Armenians fleeing Cilicia in Beirut, and space was needed, temporarily, to isolate this new population and to vet them for disease prior to mixing with the city's general population. The existing Lazarette, which was refurbished by adding two pavilions, showers, separate rooms for the sick and cured, and electricity, thereby increasing its capacity to 3,000, was chosen for this quarantining process (Chantre, 2016). After their period of isolation, the Armenians were moved into a resettlement camp, which was located where the Al-Senegal sub-neighborhood is today: next to the tented settlements of the Arab tribes (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973). The resettlement camp stretched to the eastern side of Karantina, next to the river.

The French Mandatory authorities distributed food and medical aid to the Armenian refugees living in the camp and facilitated their permanent integration into the region's population in 1926. This was done by encouraging the refugees to convert their tents into wooden shacks with metal roofs, colloquially known as tanak (Figure 15). This building typology predominated around the resettlement camp, establishing a typological precedent which lasted until the tanaks were wiped out in 1976, during the Karantina massacre (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973)—this is discussed further below. Each tanak was built on its own parcel of land, according to a grid pattern. This, too, established a precedent and a land parceling characterisation which continues to influence how the area looks. Eventually, tanak settlements spread all over Great Karantina: from next to the slaughterhouse on the area's eastern edge, to near Mar Mikhael on the western border, where Electricite Du Liban is today (Figure 7).



Figure 15. Postcard of Armenian Tanaks in Karantina, Circa 1925-45. Vahan H. Ouzounian. AUB Archives.

The number of Armenians living in Greater Karantina grew markedly in the early 1920s, from 10,500 in 1922 to 14,600 by 1925, before falling away after the Second World War—by 1971, there were only 188 Armenians left in Karantina. The second date was when the area's population peaked, chiefly because of the limited amount of space available and the mobility of the residents (Bourjy and Pharès, 1973), as well as an influx of other groups of refugees including Kurds from the Syrian hinterland. Kurds continued to arrive until the 1960s, with an estimated 4,000 Kurds living in Karantina by 1973 (Bourgey and Pharès 1973: 115), however their legal status was precarious because, unlike the Armenians, they were not given Lebanese citizenship ostensibly to preserve sectarian balance (Meho, 2002). This lack of citizenship made the Kurds susceptible to police brutality, unemployment, and poverty, forcing them to take low-paying jobs. Precarity also explains why most Kurds living in Karantina were daily port workers, vendors, or collectors of scrap metal at the nearby garbage dump, metal which they used to build or repair their *tanaks* (Massabni, 1977).

A second wave of in-migrants followed the Second World War, adding to the diversity of Karantina's population. During the 1948 Nakba, more than 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes. Many of the displaced fled to Lebanon, settling in different refugee camps and in the Lazarette. Those who moved to Karantina—680 people or 5.3% of the total population of Karantina by 1971 (Massabni, 1977)—were originally from Acre, and were supported by UNRWA and the Fatah Movement. Despite their relatively small number, the Palestinians played a substantial role due to their organizations' political influence. Finally, Syrian workers came to Karantina at the end of the 1950s. This was during the agrarian reforms of the Baathist Party, which left many in Syria unemployed and prompted them to work in Lebanon as construction workers. It was estimated in 1971 that of the 300,000 Syrian seasonal workers crossing into Lebanon annually, 3,988 lived in Karantina, most of them men from Aleppo or Hauran. Living as many as 6 or 7 to a house (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973), the men understandably left their families at home in Syria (Massabni, 1977).

The arrival of Palestinians and Syrians was mirrored by the departure of the Armenians, partly to live in the surrounding neighborhoods of Burj Hammoud, Karm El Zeitoun, and Mar Mikhael, where they swapped their *tanak* houses for bricks and mortar homes built by Armenian charitable organizations. Many of those who left rented out their *tanques* to those new groups settling in Karantina (Massabni, 1977). A second reason for the dwindling of the Armenian population in Karantina was that in 1946, Joseph Stalin offered to repatriate many of the Armenians who had been displaced during the First World War. By 1948, 32,238 Armenians from Syria and Lebanon, 1,669 from Egypt, 1,250 from Palestine, and 856 from Iraq had migrated, temporarily, to Karantina before boarding ships to the Soviet Union (Laycock, 2017) Many Lebanese-Armenians renounced their Lebanese citizenship and sold all their property to raise funds to start their new lives abroad (Ibid, 2017). There were several reasons why Lebanese Armenians chose to accept the invitation.

According to Laycock (2009), after World War II, there was much political uncertainty in the community as the French were planning to leave Lebanon. Additionally, employment factors played into the decision-making because of the 12,600 who registered for resettlement in 1946, 90% were destitute.

The release of a stock of affordable housing in Burj Hammoud and Karantina onto the market, which was quickly grabbed up by Shiites migrating from the South of Lebanon (Hovannisian, 1974), also added to the relative dwindling of the Armenian presence in Karantina. The Shiites brought a new community into Karantina and served, in the long term, as a pull factor in addition to the new jobs being created in the Beirut Port and tertiary sector and the lack of opportunities in the agrarian sector in the South. By the mid-1970s, the Shiite community in Karantina numbered 3,713, or 29.4% of the area's total population (Bourgey and Phares, 1973, p.115; Massabni, 1977).

## ***2. Tanak Typology***

The *tanak* was modeled after a Hawch with each home, one or two rooms spread over between one and four floors, opening directly into an interior courtyard (Figure 16). A 1971 survey found that 43% of the buildings in this typology were constructed of wood and metal alone, 29% mixed materials, and 28% bricks and mortar (Bourgey and Phares, 1973). In terms of essential services, whereas 70% of homes had electricity (Massabni, 1977), most had an inadequate water supply – just 30% had potable water. The area had virtually no sewage system or garbage disposal system either. The settlement's "streets," which mostly comprised informal, unpaved dirt roads, were measured to be between 0.7 m and 2 m wide (Bourgey and Phares, 1973).

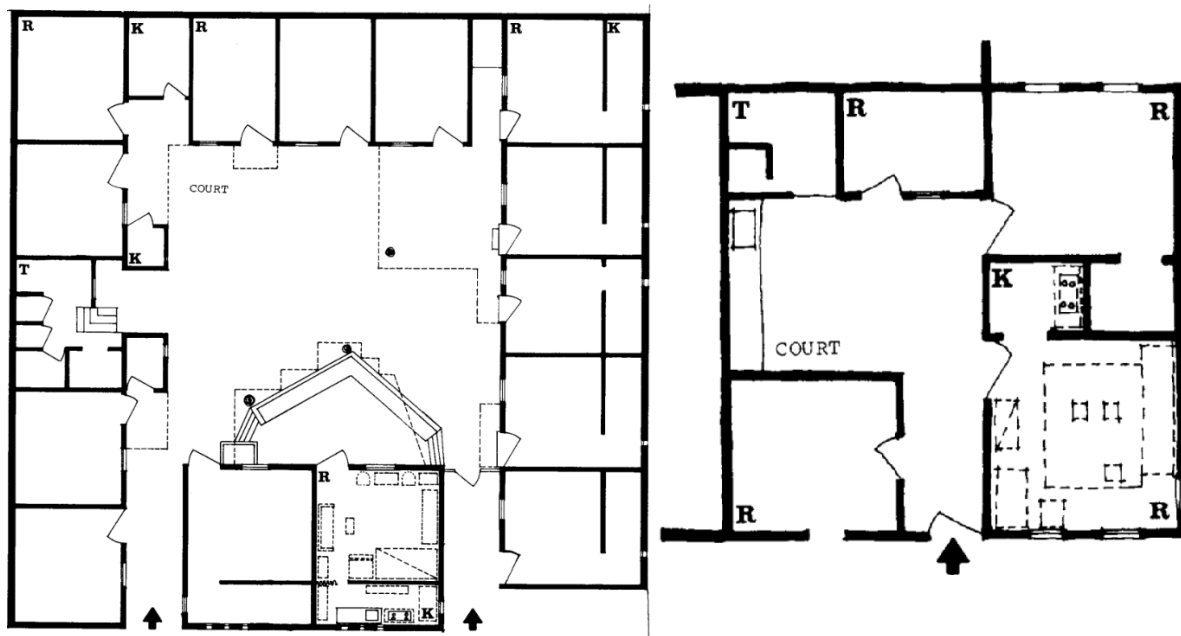


Figure 16. Tanak interior layout, 1973. Survey by Omar Take. MIT Thesis, 1974.

According to Omar Take (1974), the oldest *tanak* settlements, which began to be constructed in the mid-1920s, spilled over the eastern edge of Karantina in the 1950s, from the Khodor sector into the then primarily industrial Jisr sector (into the area today occupied by B018 and Forum de Beyrouth). This new location, covering just eight hectares in extent, became the densest settlement in Karantina: the more than 12,000 residents living here by the 1970s included Palestinians, Kurds, and Shia (Take, 1974). The settlement was built both on public land as well as private land, which is still owned by the Maronite Wakf (Massabni, 1977). Part of the land had previously been a cement factory and had been enclaved by the tramway line built in 1907. This transport infrastructure made the area attractive to low-skilled workers and to industrial development, including the municipal garbage dump constructed in the 1930s.

*Tanak* housing was popular because of its affordability. In 1965, *The Daily Star* reported that renting a *tanak* cost 20 Lebanese Lira a month. Given multiple layers of informality these claims were not verifiable, however, which made it easier for landowners and developers to renege and say that their property was being squatted. Nevertheless, the

*tanak* typology suited landowners because they were not obliged to compensate informal tenants if they decided to sell the plot. They could also evict at a whim.

### 3. *Bricks and Mortar Typology*

Although a major part of the housing in pre-Civil War consisted of the *tanak* typology, Karantina did possess a number of bricks and mortar buildings. These had increased over time, and some are present in the area today, albeit with additions and alterations. The oldest cluster of the bricks and mortar typology is to be found in the Al-Saydeh sub-neighborhood. Many of these buildings can be found on maps from the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Figure 4 and 11), which suggests that they were built initially in a single period. In the aftermath of the 2020 Blast, however, much of the plaster was removed during the clean-up and renovation process, this uncovered the historical layering of the buildings. The lower floors were built from sandstone and many of the top floors made of bricks and mortar—as later additions. Given concrete was first used in Lebanon in the 1920s (Saliba, 1998), this suggests that a lot of the vertical density of this typology did not exist until after the First World War. At least some of the bricks and mortar buildings in the original cluster, then, were adapted and layered upwards, morphing into their current form. A 1948 building permit provided by one building owner corroborates this hypothesis (Appendix 1), whereby a part of the original structure was knocked down to make way for a modern extension of the building. Whereas both the first and second floors of the original structure were made of sandstone, showing that they were likely to have been built before 1920, all four floors of the extension were built of concrete, and so were built after 1920, a date confirmed by the 1948 permit.

This typology is also evident in the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood. According to an aerial photograph taken in 1931, twenty residential buildings near the slaughterhouse were constructed of cement in the 1920s. Their ground floors, originally planned for storefronts,

housed cattle; the floors above housed families from the Arab tribes. There were also tanak typologies in the area used as stables (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973). Looking at the 1933 cadastral map of Beirut (Figure 17), which was based on the 1931 aerial photography, it is apparent that additional buildings in Al-Saydeh had also started to appear as in-fills. Further formal buildings appeared as new roads were carved out.



Figure 17. Danger Plan, Saydeh and Senegal, 1933. Levant Carta, Humanities Research Center.

#### ***4. Early attempts at Settlement Erasure***

Serious questions around Karantina's housing mark the period before the Civil War, beginning in the 1930s and peaking in the 1960s. The production of housing in Lebanon at that time was characterized by private financing from Arab or bank capital and thus was not in the purview of the state. Moreover, building laws encouraged developers to build luxury homes: almost 60% of homes built in 1970 were of this character, for instance. The February 1951 law exempted owners of luxury buildings from rent control which meant they could increase the rent whenever the lease was up. Non-luxury homes did not qualify for these rights, so developers were disinclined to build them. This caused a supply and demand

problem, as there was an affordable housing shortage. Since the minimum wage was very low and 79% of people lived under 3,600 LL (2.24-3 LL to 1 USD at the time) annually, residents could not escape the slums because neither the market nor the state was going to rehome them. At the same time, the idea of social housing never took off because landowners were not open to the idea of selling their land for this purpose because they could make more money from luxury developments that they could rent out without rent control. Moreover, because of land speculation, the price of these plots was so high that government expropriation would not cover it in any way. It was estimated that the land was worth around 2,400,000 LL in 1961 (Massabni, 1977). This explains why attempts to rehouse slum dwellers failed.

In 1959, the government did put in place a plan to rehouse Karantina's *tanak* dwellers. The aim was for 5000 housing units via a public-private partnership partly financed by the state and private capital. The project would have cost 42 million LL and would be recouped from residents over 20 years, with repayments not exceeding 20% of an individual family's annual household income. However, this project was not carried out. A second rehousing attempt was made in the 1960s. This proposed the construction of 2500 housing units at the cost of 13 million LL. However it too was never realized. In both schemes, funding came up short. In the second scheme, questions also arose over the distribution and allocation of homes and the basis for relocating inhabitants: by confession, by ethnic groupings, or occupation? Where to locate the buildings? Additionally, questions arose over the location of the housing units, build them in the suburbs or rebuild on the same site of the slums?

Alongside the failure of government rehousing efforts, countless fires broke out in the Karantina *tanak*. These were in two waves: in the early 1930s and again in the 1960s— notably in 1961, 1963, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969, and 1970 – destroying numerous informal dwellings in both periods. In 1933, a fire burned down 600 *tanak* homes forcing most

families from the settlement to relocate to the district of Bourj Hammoud, on the eastern bank of the Beirut River (Bourgey and Pharès, 1973: 126). According to a *Palestine Post* article (February 14, 1933), the fire originally broke out at a bakery in the camp on January 30, which quickly affected the area. The newspaper reported that prior to the fire camp dwellers had received eviction notices but could not afford to move out. In the aftermath of the blaze, 3,000 Armenian refugees were left homeless. They were temporarily rehoused in the quarantine station. The French authorities estimated that it would take 250 homes to be built to rehome those displaced by the fire—Armenian philanthropist, Calouste Gulbenkian, eventually donated the finance with local Muslim, Christian, and Jewish donors pitching in as well.

On January 17, 1963 (*L’Orient*) a large fire raged through Karantina and destroyed between 450 and 500 *tanaks*. The fire was attributed to a short circuit (*L’Orient*, January 23, 1963). In the aftermath of the blaze, a report was commissioned to study the rehousing of the displaced residents. The council of ministers decided to allocate a grant of 1000 lira per family which would allow the rebuilding of their *tanak* on the same site. Questions were raised over whether it was necessary to rebuild them since there were plans to rehouse all informal dwellers in social housing in the suburbs. Commentators noted that “in any case there’s a master urban plan for the Karantina district providing for the construction of streets on the site of the current slum. The least we can do is to oblige the dwellers to respect the alignment of the streets.” The 1965 fire left a further 2545 people homeless and 728 *tanaks* were destroyed, displacing 572 families overall. This raised fresh questions over relocating and rehousing the residents. Those made homeless were temporarily rehoused in the factories of the Régie cigarette company (*The Daily Star*, 3 March 1965).

Pierre Gemayel, the then Minister of Public Works, proposed that popular dwellings be built in the suburbs of Beirut (Baabda, Mkalles, Arayya) at the cost of 8 million pounds to

be paid back in installments of 25 LBP a month for 15 years. Several newspaper editors echoed the sentiment, including Kamal Mroue of *Al-Hayat*, and viewed the destructive fire as an opportunity to resettle and rehouse in government-built social housing. Damage was estimated at 500,000 Lebanese Pounds and affected Armenians, Shia, and Kurds alike (*The Daily Star*, March 3rd, 1965). The Head of the Reconstruction Department, Rafic Baraj, said that the typical cost of a *tanke* in Karantina was about 250 pounds and that the popular dwellings would cost not more than 6000 pounds to build (*Daily Star*, March 6th, 1965). *Tanke* residents expressed angst at being relocated because of the fire, however (*The Daily Star*, March 7th, 1965).

### **C. Karantina since 1990**

When the Civil War broke out in 1975, Beirut was polarized with East and West Beirut evolving out of the many checkpoints set up by the local militias. Given how diverse Karantina was it became a flashpoint for conflict. As one of the many strongholds of the Fateh movement led by Yasser Arafat, Karantina proved to be a blind spot for nearby but predominantly Phalangeist Achrafieh. Having access to the port was a strategic aim for the Christian militias so as to not be cut off from the outside, all the more imperative since the airport was in West Beirut. Moreover, right wing militia leaders were afraid of being encircled by the poverty belt, which consisted of informal settlements (Tal el Zaatar, Karantina, Nabaa) and some of the country's poorest residents. The latter could potentially be recruited to fight against the right wing militias themselves. Therefore, the militia leaders formed a military strategy to get rid of these camps for fear of being blockaded by them.

In January 1976, members of the Kataeb Militia put the Tal El Zaatar Palestinian Refugee Camp under siege in the suburbs of East Beirut. This was followed by a further siege

in Karantina, which was then home to Palestinians, Kurds, Shiites, Sunnis, and Syrians. On January 18, the siege broke and houses were set on fire with people in them, and then bulldozed once the flames were extinguished. The male inhabitants were rounded up and shot summarily by firing squad. Survivors were forced to watch and were then exiled either to Jnah or Khaldeh. Overall, Palestinians, Kurds, Armenians, and Lebanese were killed in the massacre. The justification for this ‘clearing’ was given in an interview with Thames TV, a British television company. Dany Chamon, a militia leader who was one of the perpetrators of the massacre, claimed there that people were squatting illegally and “now we have a chance to use the land.”

This action would trigger another forced displacement in Damour, where the PLO displaced and massacred Christians in Damour; many had to flee by boat to Jounieh and East Beirut. The surviving buildings in Karantina would in turn be occupied either by the Christian militias or by displaced Christians from the Mountains. The militias behind the Karantina massacre then converted the Karantina Hospital into their military headquarters, known as *Majles Al Harbi*. Meanwhile, the Beirut Slaughterhouse was converted into their torture facility. In 1987, the Lebanese Forces militia greenlit the transport of toxic waste to parts of the country that they controlled. Around 2000 barrels of toxic waste were buried in Karantina next to the Beirut River. The waste was uncovered only in 1995. The area had been East Beirut’s dumping ground already, in the same way that the Normandie landfill was in West Beirut. In 1991, the East Beirut landfill was converted into the final basin of the Port of Beirut, while in West Beirut the landfill was turned into the Beirut waterfront.

After the end of the Civil War in 1990, Karantina remained the military headquarters of the Lebanese Forces. By 1992, there had been a concerted effort to reclaim the area from the Lebanese Forces as part of a wider campaign to demilitarize Beirut. Despite the exit of

the Lebanese Forces, the area continues to face a heavy military presence, with the Lebanese Army's first artillery regiment and the third intervention regiment both being established and stationed there full-time. Some residents of the Khodor area, for example, have complained that the Lebanese Army still occupies land that was taken from them by the Lebanese Forces decades earlier. At a town hall meeting in 2021, a Karantina resident expressed frustration over his inability to develop his own property:

“Until now I cannot enter my neighborhood nor do anything inside because the Lebanese Army is residing in it. I appreciate the army, but this is a Lebanese area, and we should not be avoided from it and prevented from getting our properties back. We are displaced inside our country, and this issue is being dismissed under the fact that these are small properties.”<sup>6</sup>

Another resident added to these frustrations by saying “The army is appropriating the undeveloped lands owned by people. This is our army, and we know it is a security issue so we cannot say anything.” In fact, many of the original residents of Karantina have been unable to return due to the on-going militarization of the sub-neighborhood, or were otherwise unable to rebuild their homes either because of restrictive zoning regulations or because of development limbo related to the failed Linor project. For instance, the lots that housed many of the pre-Civil War *tanak* became brown fields during the war, and then in the 1990s storage warehouses were built on top of them for the benefit of the port. Overall, land use changed drastically.

As a result of on-going military occupation of Karantina, the government has found workarounds to various problems such as building a new wing for the hospital and a new slaughterhouse. They have failed to respond to housing needs, however. This imbalance between workarounds on some issues and none on others served, for the most part, as Karantina's reconstruction experience during the thirty years separating peace in 1990 and

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<sup>6</sup> First Town Hall Meeting in the Karantina Park with residents, organized by BUL and UNDP (2021- April- 11).

the August 4 blast of 2020. In the years prior to the blast, new aspects were beginning to become apparent in Karantina, such as the accommodation of the arts, design and leisure industries in mixed-use spaces—an echo of the cafes on Rue Abattoirs in the 1960s (The Daily Star, 1965). These innovations had their downsides, however. The opening of B018 and Forum de Beyrouth in 1998, for example, on the site of the *Tanak* settlements, which subsequently became the site of mass graves from the 1976 massacre, was a form of spatial erasure, particularly of unwanted and uncomfortable aspects of the recent past.

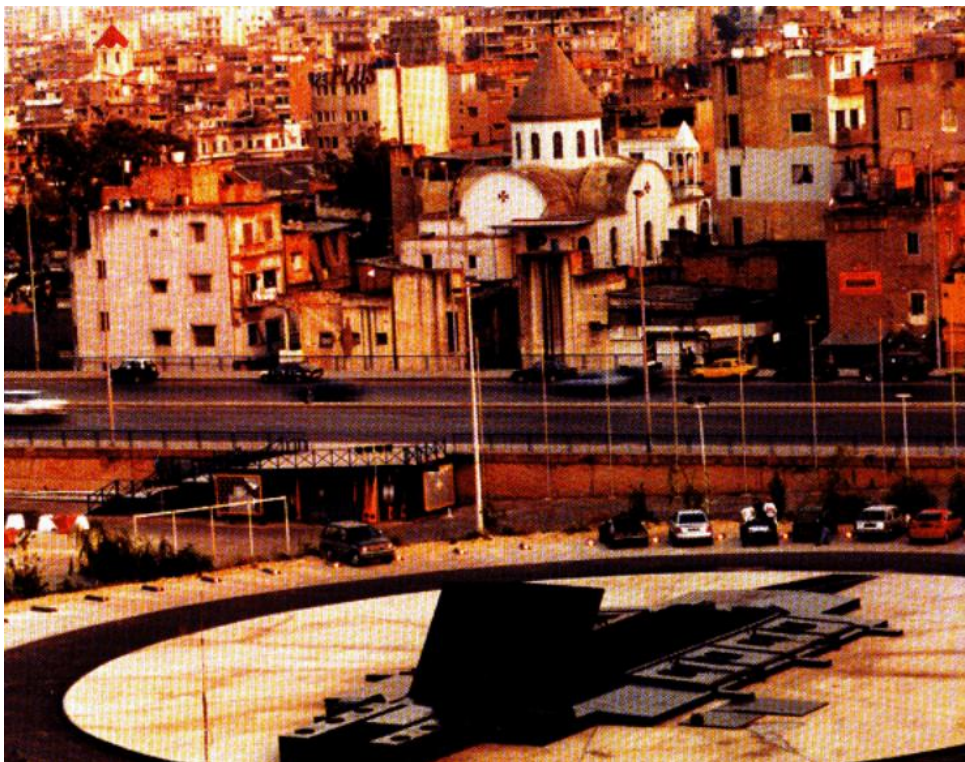


Figure 18. B018 in 1998 built on top of the massacre camps. Land owned by the Maronite church, leased by the club owner. Wallpaper\* Magazine, 1999.

There is one continuity of the area, which is the affordability of Karantina housing and its role as a place of refuge. However, this is all being threatened by the compounding effects of the 2019 Lebanese economic crisis and the devastating 2020 Aug. 4 blast, which have overlaid the several pre-existing issues mentioned in this chapter. In the aftermath of the blast, Karantina once again faces the prospect of reconstruction rather than holistic urban

recovery. It is to the diagnosis of these post-disaster challenges that we turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### DIAGNOSIS

On August 5 2020, the day after the blast, no one knew precisely who was living in Karantina and there was little available data. This is largely because there has not been a formal census undertaken in Lebanon since 1932. Diagnosing the affordability of housing in relation to the demographic profile of Karantina, the relative income of the population and its diversity, as one example, is therefore extremely difficult. One can get an inkling from the anxieties, tensions felt, and expressed by residents, but not much in the way of quantifiable evidence. Additionally planning responses could have been formulated without taking into account the conditions and needs of the people as well as their aspirations. So to get a better understanding of the post-Blast context, the Beirut Urban Lab's Urban Recovery track trained citizen-scientists from the area to undertake full-scale household surveys as well as a survey of buildings and businesses. These surveys created the census-like data sets of population, income, gender, religious background, ethnicity, and so on, necessary to begin effective post-disaster planning responses. What was found was that Karantina, despite the relative affordability of its housing compared to the rest of Beirut, faced a series of local challenges including rising rents, evictions, and quasi-sectarian divisions. This quantitative and qualitative data provides the basis for what follows.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter assesses the affordability of housing in Karantina in the post-disaster phase and contextualizes its findings in relation to those historical trends identified in chapter three, namely the civil war, massacres, and state neglect, and those which have emerged as a consequence of the blast and the wider economic crisis. It will be made apparent that access

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<sup>7</sup> For more on holistic urban recovery and discussion of each of the five transversal issues see: Al-Harithy et al *An Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina* (2022).

to housing is defined by several determinants including social capital, informality of tenure, artificial unaffordability, displacement, and currency devaluation. It also finds that on the surface Karantina has a diverse population, and relatively affordable housing. However, with burdens such as low income and high unemployment rates, and series of 'hidden' costs (which weigh heavily on household resources), and a general lack of amenities the area is increasingly unaffordable to its current residents.

### **A. Demographics of Karantina**

With a population of 2460 residents in an area of 61.5 ha, Karantina is less dense than Municipal Beirut, with 40 people/ha compared to 207 people/ha (Council for Development and Reconstruction) at the city level. The sample pool of survey data consists of 1980 residents, half of whom were Lebanese (Table 1). As noted elsewhere in this thesis, Karantina is composed of three sub-neighborhoods: Al-Saydeh, Al Khodor, and Al-Senegal. In terms of nationality, as is discussed below, Al-Saydeh and Al-Senegal were found to be predominantly Lebanese whereas Syrians represented the largest nationality in Al-Khodor owing to its status as a host community for refugees. In terms of the religious makeup of Karantina, there are 1576 Muslims compared with 404 Christians (Table 2). Ages range between a few months to 107 years old, with the average age being 30. Again, as is discussed in more detail below, these statistics varied according to sub-neighborhood. Al-Saydeh is predominantly Christian and Al-Khodor predominantly Muslim, whilst Al-Senegal is more heterogeneous albeit with Muslims forming an overall majority at 56%. In terms of age profile, only Al-Saydeh showed a spread, whereas Al-Senegal and Al-Khodor tended to skew towards the younger age groups.

Many of these residents often perform a vital function for the economy of Beirut. This

is because the relative affordability of housing has traditionally enabled a ready workforce for industry, making it essential to the functioning of the city’s economy. Indeed, the port, especially as it undergoes reconstruction of its own, cannot survive without this supply of daily workers, and these daily workers continue to need the affordable housing of Karantina in turn. However, in absolute terms the area is a low-income one especially when compared with its immediate surroundings. At the time of the survey in 2021, it was found that household income in Karantina ranged from 1,200,000 to 50,000,000 Lebanese Pounds per annum with an average being 14,086,972 Lebanese Pounds.<sup>8</sup>

### Nationality in Karantina

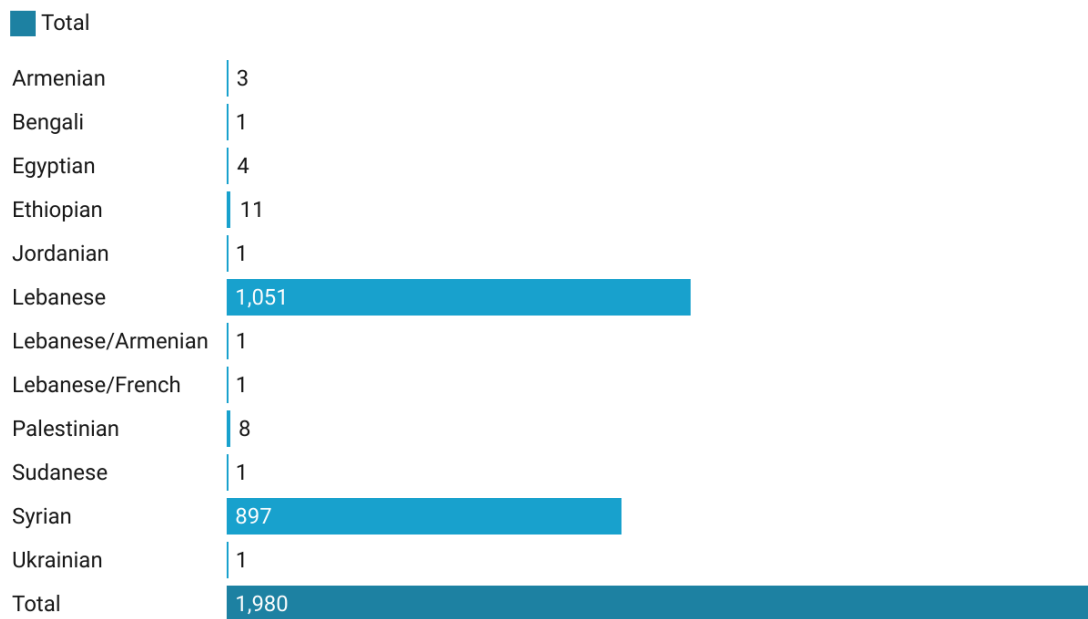


Table 1: Distribution of nationalities in Karantina. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

<sup>8</sup> The US dollar rate at the time of collecting the data was 1 USD = 12,000 LBP

## Religion in Karantina

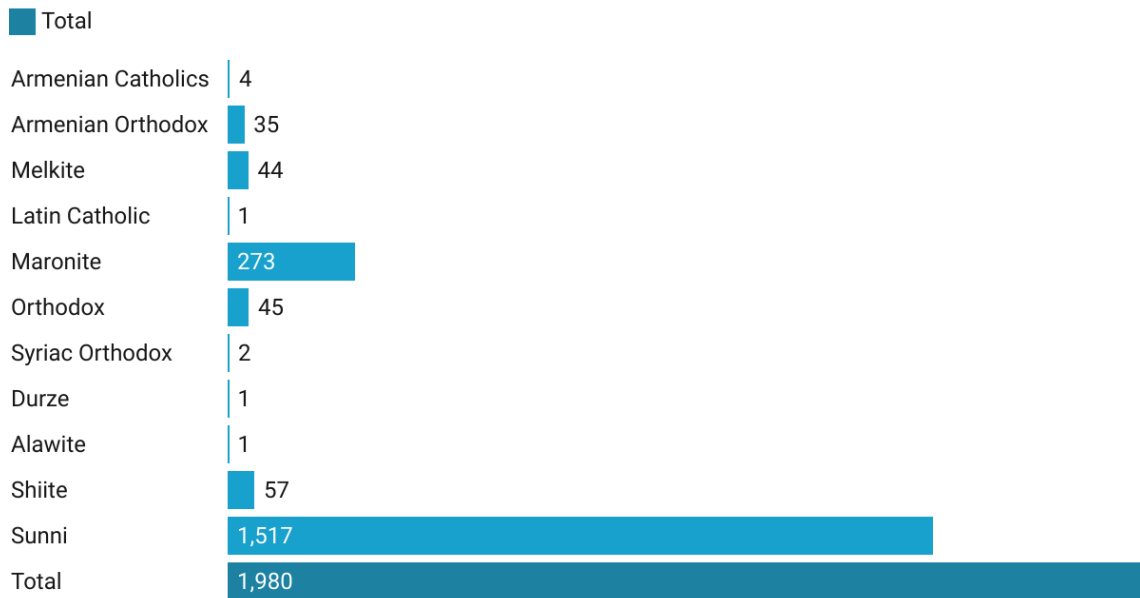


Table 2: The distribution of religious affiliations in Karantina. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al, 2022).

Low income and relative affordability must also be seen in the context of absent infrastructure, which entails a number of hidden costs for Karantina’s residents—these will be discussed in more detail below. For instance: as there is no school in the district, children have to commute everyday out of their neighborhood to access their education. Moreover, Karantina’s cut-off and marginalized geography means that all residents have to commute frequently for work or to access basic resources that are not available to them within walking distance. Indeed, residents expressed concerns to the citizen scientists over the lack of transportation found in and out of Karantina due to the area’s enclaving, which in turn impacts upon their socio-economic position. Many working-age residents complained that their commute was very hard due to the transit gaps and the lack of coverage overall. One resident said, “We are suffering to reach out for our work.” Adding that “we must walk all the way out to get transportation. There was a bus stop in the area before, and it should be

reclaimed.”<sup>9</sup> The ongoing enclaving of Karantina negatively affects the relative affordability in the area due to the hidden costs found in living there. These conditions will be examined first through details from the survey data relating to religious diversity, nationality, and socio-economic profile, before moving on to examine forms of tenure and affordability of housing.

### *1. Religious Diversity*

Data collected by the Beirut Urban Lab shows that almost every religious sect is present in Karantina. In terms of Christians, they made up 404 persons coming from 7 different denominations. As for Muslims, they accounted for 1,576 persons representing 4 different denominations of Islam (Table 2). However, in terms of voter representation, on the level of the Medawar district which Karantina makes up the majority of, the most omnipresent religious group is Armenian Orthodox at 54.2%, followed by Sunnis at 15.9%. This shows the enduring legacy of the Armenians of Karantina who have mostly moved out of the area. In Karantina, religious groups are divided among sub-neighborhood lines. The data showed that Al-Saydeh is a majority Christian (see table 4), while Al-Khodor (see table 5) is predominantly Muslim, and Al-Senegal (see table 6) is a mix of the two religious communities. This shows that religious groups tend to aggregate in clusters, aside from Al-Senegal which is new and rapidly changing with no time for networks to develop.

Data also shows that home ownership is mainly the result of inheritance from previous generations and not new purchases. Additionally, landlords were more likely than not to rent out to co-religionists. In the Al-Saydeh sub-neighborhood, 64.6% of those surveyed renting from Christian landlords were Christian. This reinforced the Christian character Al-Saydeh,

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<sup>9</sup> First Town Hall Meeting in the Karantina Park with residents, organized by BUL and UNDP (2021- April- 11).

in addition to affiliation with the church as the Maronite Wakf is the largest landowner and landlord in the area. All Maronite Wakf homes were rented out to Lebanese Christians. Conversely, in the Al-Khodor area, data showed that members of the Arab tribe were the most predominant landlords in the sub-neighborhood. And this was reflected in the background of their tenants, 97% of which were Muslim with a majority of that pool being from the Arab tribe. Only a mere 3% were Christian (Table 3). This has to do with kinship that is explored later in this chapter. As for Al-Senegal, a mixity was shown in religious composition in terms of landlord to tenant with the equivalent rate being 45% for Christian landlords, and 50% for Muslim landlords.

This data indicates that the strongest links are religious, but when it comes to Al-Khodor, they are not so much religions based as they are kin-based, specifically the Arab tribe who have inhabited this land for over 100 years. Therefore, kinship factors into religious diversity and impacts access to housing. Although most of the tenants are Muslim, there is a disparity between the ways in which Arab tribe members (all Lebanese) access housing and the way Syrians do in Al-Khodor. For example, although overcrowding was a common feature in Al-Khodor, the data collected by the Beirut Urban Lab showed that 68 Arab households were single family households, (which together make up 80% of the Muslim Lebanese tenants). This compared with 64 Syrian households that share a home with one family or more. In this context, the Arab households received preferential treatment in terms of tenancy. Additionally, kinship played a role in how free tenancy was negotiated in the sample of houses that were housed for free. In Al-Khodor, 8 of the 11 households housed for free were from the Arab tribe. This contrasted with the three Syrian households who received housing for free in exchange for working as concierges.

During the housing focus group, the role of kinship and accessing was illustrated by one resident, R.A., who has still to return to her home after being displaced during the Civil War.

Her home is still standing on the eastern edge of Al-Khodor but she cannot return because “the army still occupies my house after taking it over from the Lebanese forces.” Currently, she resides as a tenant in a home owned by her paternal aunt and pays an affordable rate of 700,000 Lebanese Pounds a month. She added, were it not for her familial relations, “there would be no way for me to live in the area,”<sup>10</sup> as her aunt would not evict her because this would be embarrassing for her in front of the Arab tribe. This example illustrates the role of social capital employed through kinship in accessing housing in Karantina and the way it staves off eviction. It also explains the concentration of low rent in Al-Khodor.

Additionally, kinship plays a role in how evictions are handled. At the same housing focus group, K.S. explained how after the explosion, the rent on his store in Al-Khodor was raised and that if he did not pay the increase, he would be evicted. He left and was not compensated for it. When asked why he did so and did not pursue his rights where only a court order can evict him, he said that it was because she was a member of the Arab tribe, and that he did not want to cause any trouble with a member of his own community. Therefore, kinship (and a sense of kinship) also facilitates smooth transitions all for the sake of keeping peace among the tribe.

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<sup>10</sup> Focus Group Discussion on Housing with residents at UNDP office in Al-Saydeh, organized by BUL and UNDP (2021- April- 29)

S-N	Landlord	Tenants				Total
		Leb. Christian	Leb. Muslim	Syrian	Migrants	
Al-Saydeh	Wakf	5	0	0	0	68
	Christian	42	6	11	3	
	Muslim	0	1	0	0	
Al-Senegal	Wakf	5	0	0	0	50
	Christian	16	8	11	0	
	Muslim	2	5	3	0	
Al-Khodor	Wakf	0	0	0	0	254
	Christian	2	4	16	3	
	Muslim	7	85	137	0	
<b>Total</b>		<b>79</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>372</b>

Table 3. Relationship between the religious backgrounds of the landlords and the tenants. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

**Religions in Al-Saydeh**

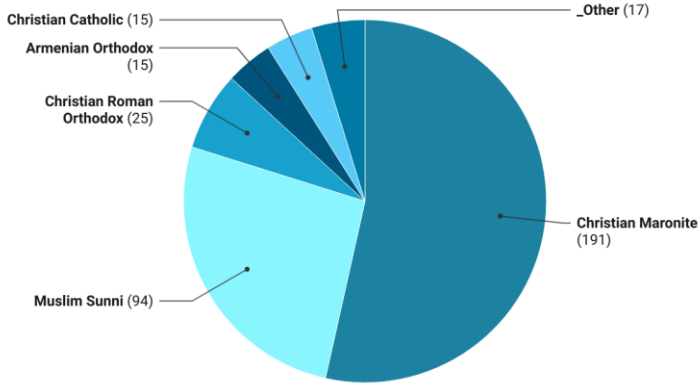


Table 4: The distribution of religious confessions in Al-Saydeh. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

### Religions in Al-Khodor

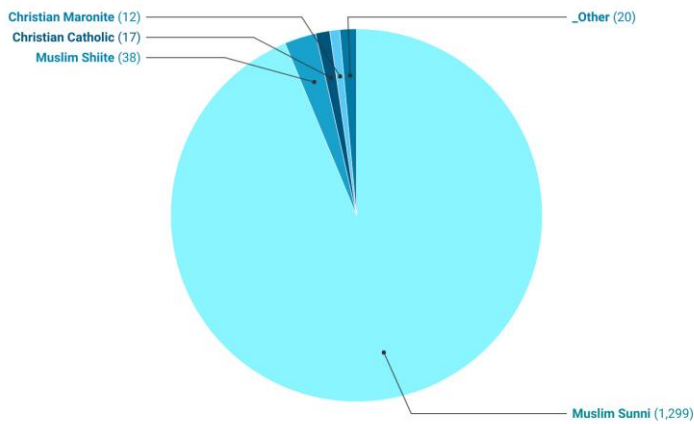


Table 5: The distribution of religious confessions in Al-Khodor. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

### Religions in Al-Senegal

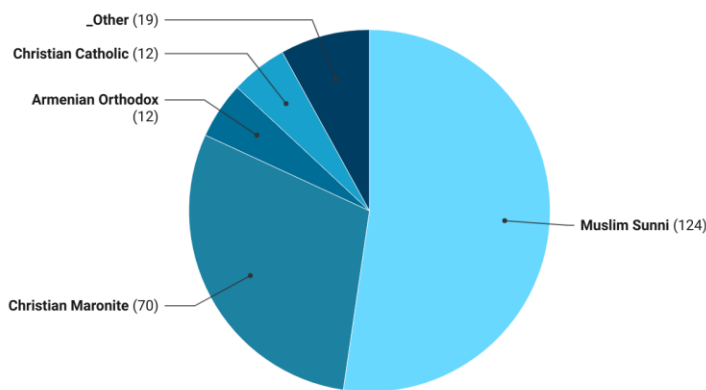


Table 6: The distribution of religious confessions in Al-Senegal. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

## 2. Nationality

Karantina is diverse in terms of nationality. Surveys conducted by the Beirut Urban Lab show that the largest national group in the area is Lebanese (53%), Syrians (45%), with the remaining minorities being Ethiopians, Sudanese and Palestinians (Table 1). One large contributor to this diversity is informality in accessing housing. However, in some cases it has contributed to tensions. Additionally, as in the case of religion, national groups tend to cluster in their own areas. For example, Syrians tend to live in Al-Khodor (Table 8) while Lebanese live in all three sub-neighborhoods, and the remaining populations are sprinkled

across (see tables 7-9). Despite this diversity, before the Civil War the area was much more diverse, hosting communities such as Kurds, Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese, and Armenians. However, this all changed during the Civil War when the *tanak* typology was wiped out from the area which these people mostly inhabited. After the end of the Civil War, these informal settlements were not rebuilt and there was a shift to informal modes of tenure. This has helped bring in a new population to the area, Syrians fleeing the Civil War in Syria; 183 of the 545 surveyed households moved to Karantina in the past 10 years, equivalent to 33.5% of the surveyed houses, 145 of these households, or around 80% of newcomers, came from Syria after the war.

Therefore, Karantina has maintained its role as a node for transient communities. Most of the Syrian households accessed housing informally meaning they did not sign a formal lease contract. As stated earlier, the highest rate of informal new rent was in the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood: 234 households did not have a formal lease, compared to only 11 that did. These big numbers were not present in other sub-neighborhoods. Such informality is actually a positive thing because it helps downtrodden groups to access housing in cases where they cannot. As Mona Fawaz (2017) argues, informality can be inclusive if it creates “opportunities for a minority to enjoy political accommodations and conditions not granted to the rest of the population.” Because of this informality, rent pooling is enabled for the most vulnerable groups with the least resources. Data collected by the Beirut Urban Lab showed that rent pooling was more notable among Syrians than Lebanese were. There was a clear discrepancy between nationalities that had to share a house with other families and those that did not. For example, in the Al-Saydeh neighborhood, 35.7% of Syrians households reported sharing a house with at least one other family. In Al-Khodor this figure was higher again at 41.8% and higher still in Al-Senegal at 57.1%.

However, this was not the case for Lebanese residents. Data showed that only 2.3% of them were sharing homes with one family or more in Al-Saydeh, and 6.4% in Al-Senegal and 11.2% in Al-Khodor. Several factors explaining why the largest proportion of rent poolers is Syrian. First, rent pooling divides up the burden of rent among several families, as multi-family households can afford higher rents compared to single family households. Second, landlords prefer rent poolers compared to single family households as they can raise rent much higher and it would only have a marginal difference on the rent poolers, compared to when one family is charged. This also shows that landlords are willing to exploit the vulnerabilities of Syrians who do not have any alternatives but to pay the extra fees. This has led to a new modality of housing that has allowed Syrians to access housing. However, there are negative externalities resulting from this, most notably in terms of overcrowding.

According to Lebanon's Central Administration of Statistics, the median liveable space is 30 sqm per person (Yacoub and Badre, 2011). But as per the affordable housing law of 1965, 15 sqm is a more reasonable measure. When assessing this on the level of Karantina, specifically the 113 homes that have more than one family per household, 99 of those homes (88%) offer less than 30 sqm benchmark per person, with available space varying from 2.5 to 27 sqm per person. Thereby meeting the minimum definition of overcrowding.<sup>11</sup> When the 15 sqm is accounted for, this number goes down to 81 households being overcrowded.

This situation was most acute in the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood, which was the densest of the three sub-neighborhoods and hosts 82 of the 113 households that have one

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<sup>11</sup> With 8 people per home and the average size of the home being 87 sqm it is apparent that this standard is not being met.

family or more in them.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the largest national group of rent poolers in the sample were Syrians comprising 74 of the 113 households.

This situation has created some tensions with the older residents of the area and in some cases hostility. During the housing focus group, one resident of Al-Senegal said: “us Muslims and Christians love each other, but then there’s the Syrians.”<sup>13</sup> Another Lebanese resident complained that landlords were “bringing in Syrians.”<sup>14</sup> Much of this hostility was exacerbated by landlords, an old rent resident of Al-Senegal said that her landlord was exerting pressure and making living conditions untenable in order to evict her and her family. She said his primary motive was to drive her away in order to rent out her apartment to a group of Syrians, something he had already done in a different apartment above her. Syrians are not the only national group facing this kind of hostility. An Ethiopian woman living in Al-Saydeh said, “I’m afraid the madam is going to kick me out of the house because I am Ethiopian and she is taking advantage of the fact that I do not have a rental contract even though I asked her multiple times for one.”<sup>15</sup> Such feelings were echoed by another Ethiopian lady who explained that she and her roommates could not get a lease from her landlord in Al-Senegal: “They’re really taking advantage of the fact that we are not Lebanese to try to get us to move.”<sup>16</sup> As stated earlier, landlords prefer not to issue leases in order to have more room to maneuver when it comes to rent hikes and evictions. However, a legal expert who spoke to residents at the housing focus group said that tenants without contracts can fight off eviction in courts if residency can be proven through utility bills or proof of residency from a Mokhtar.

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<sup>12</sup> Senegal (9) and Saydeh (8)

<sup>13</sup> Reference as above.

<sup>14</sup> Reference as above.

<sup>15</sup> C.B.,(2020- October)

<sup>16</sup> Z.A.,(2020- October)

### The distribution of nationalities in Al-Saydeh

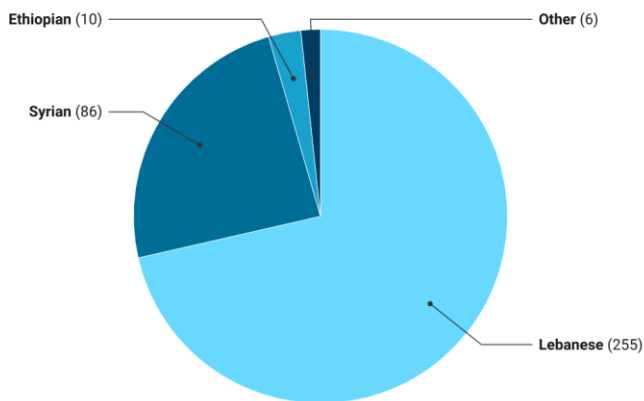


Table 7: The distribution of nationalities in Al-Saydeh per household. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

### The distribution of nationalities in Al-Khodor

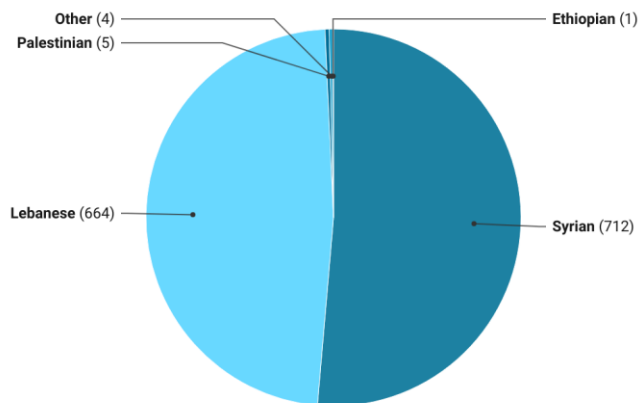


Table 8: The distribution of nationalities in Al-Khodor per household. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

### The distribution of nationalities in Al-Senegal

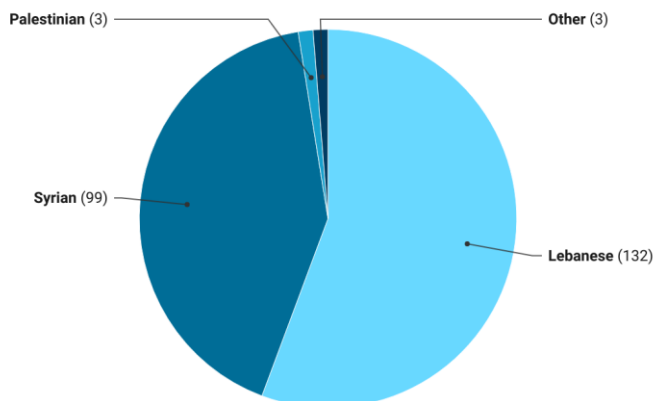


Table 9: The distribution of nationalities in Al-Senegal per household. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

### 3. *Socio-economic Profile*

As stated earlier in this chapter, Karantina is home to lower-income residents. Compared to neighboring areas, there is a huge discrepancy. For example, the average monthly income in Mar Mikhael, measured around the same time period, is 3,936,350 or 47,236,200 annually (Pietrostefani et al, 2022). Therefore, figures from Karantina equated to approximately 28% that of Mar Mikhael. This is a reflection of Karantina's wider economic circumstances with regards to employment opportunities available. Data collected by the Beirut Urban Lab found that of the 300 residents who currently have a job, 28.6% of them work in Karantina itself and 13% at the Port of Beirut, making a total of 41.6%. Additionally, of the 258 workers who are currently unemployed and living in the area, 36.8% of them once worked in Karantina and 14.3% at the Port of Beirut (Table 10). Therefore, compared to commuting from the suburbs, Karantina's proximity to the rest of the city makes it a strategic location for low-income workers to live in.

However, Karantina does not have a lot of diversity with regards to income.<sup>17</sup> Data showed that 95% of the households in the area earned less than 2,000,000 Lebanese Pounds per month, with the range being between 120,000 and 5,000,000. Overall, the monthly average income at the time of data collection was 1,065,385 Lebanese Pounds or 12,784,620 annually. This varied statistically from one sub-neighborhood to the other. In the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood, the monthly average income is 899,999 Lebanese Pounds. While in Al-Saydeh, the average is much higher at 1,480,808 a month. And in Al-Senegal where income levels are closest to the Karantina average, the figure is 1,178,750 per month.

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<sup>17</sup> Data was collected in early 2021 when the average conversion rate for 1 US dollar was 12,000 Lebanese pounds.

## Where Employed and Unemployed Work(ed)

	Employed	Unemployed
Karantina	86	95
Port	39	37
Mar Mikhael	17	23
Dawra	7	0
Burj Hammoud	7	0
Rest of Beirut	179	103

Table 10: Where the residents of Karantina worked (or currently work). Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al, 2022).

Reasons behind this lack of income diversity are due to the lack of development inside Karantina which has prevented different socio-economic groups from migrating into the area. There are several reasons behind the lack of new building developments and the building of new typologies despite the availability of parcels of lands. They include restrictive zoning policies (Zones 3 and 7).<sup>18</sup> The regulations stipulate a required setback of 4.5-10 meters, a minimum lot size of 100 to 120 sqm, and an exploitation ratio of 60% (Zone 3) to 70% (Zone 7). In the context of Beirut, Soha Mneimneh (2019) has noted in terms of development, those with connections to Municipal officials are more likely to have better facilities. The apparent consequences of this access were stressed by a resident at the community meeting, who said that, “you are talking about the development of the area, but how could it develop if we are not able to build on my own and my parents’ property...A building permit here costs 3-4 times the price of an apartment outside the area. This is unacceptable.”<sup>19</sup> Despite perceptions, there is no obvious evidence that development is "limited" to those who have connections, however.

<sup>18</sup> According to the answers to the questionnaires, 7 out of the 8 landowners in Al-Khodor were unable to build. Reasons preventing access include militarization (9), multiple heirs (6), restrictive building code (1), the former two combined (4), all three together (1), willing to rent land (1), and willing to sell (1).

<sup>19</sup> Reference as above.

Another resident agreed, stating that “people who own a one-two-story building cannot build extra floors for their sons or themselves. This is our property that we inherited from our parents, yet we cannot make use of them; we are not talking here about common land.” He classified these properties as being of two types: “unused lands and built-up properties composed of two-three floors.” He added that “we are not able to get a building license because it becomes too costly; the terms constitute building a 25 square-meters garage among a list of other demands. This means an apartment would cost 200-300 million Lebanese Pounds which no one can afford!”<sup>20</sup>

## **B. Actors and Institutions**

Several state and non-state actors and institutions carry varying degrees of influence within Karantina, as well as size and resources, which all can be considered stakeholders. These include: the army, which has two separate bases within the area and continues to occupy public and private property, resulting in on-going militarization. They also include political parties, notably Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces, but their influence was not as strong on the ground. Those with strong influence and resources in Karantina are the NGOs, which have contributed heavily to the process of blast recovery of Karantina in the wake of the blast, for example through home repairs and public space rehabilitation projects, as well as solar street lighting. This includes Offre Joie and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which have rebuilt most of the homes in the area. Other non-state actors have helped enhance public spaces. UNDP created a traffic study and solar lighting in the area as well as reopening the school. Catalytic Action built recreational facilities on residual space and repaired the park. The Beirut Urban Lab installed urban furniture, built sidewalks, a community center, and formed a neighborhood committee. And there are other NGOs that play a role in the day-to-

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<sup>20</sup> Reference as above.

day lives of the neighborhood's residents, such as Borderless. Finally, although not very active, landholders have material strength in the area. The major landholders include the municipality of Beirut, which contributed land for many interventions including a school and a community center – on what was formerly the grounds of the train station at the interface of the Charles Helou Highway – and the Maronite Waqf. The latter owns not only vacant lots but also housing units, which are rented out to co-religionists. Likewise, the Arab tribe is prominent in the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood, where kinship is important in accessing housing, however they lack the same financial resources as the others.

Attitudes towards the many actors and institutions present in Karantina vary significantly. According to the household surveys, the residents of Karantina showed little confidence in the municipality (346 households expressed no confidence), the governor of Beirut (323 households expressed no confidence), political parties (365 households expressed no confidence) and religious groups (328 households expressed no confidence). However, around 41.8% of the households (228) expressed some form of confidence in the army. This is itself a challenge to sustainable urban recovery because, despite the continued militarization of the area, demilitarization is a necessary step towards the use of vacant properties and lots, thereby securing additional housing. Moreover, to ensure sustainability and broad stakeholder participation, it will be necessary to navigate and, at times, ameliorate existing sentiments towards state and non-state actors.

### **C. Forms of Tenure in Karantina**

Housing tenure in Karantina as a whole is predominantly rent based. Only 22.4% of households are homeowners, and 4.8% (26 households) are hosted for free. While the remaining 73% of households are renters. They are broken down as follows: 78 households

are 'old rent,' 71 are 'new rent' with formal leases, and 248 are 'new rent' tenants but lack formal lease agreements. When divided up into sub-neighborhoods the data shows certain realities. In the Al-Saydeh sub-neighborhood, the most common form of tenure is 'old rent.' By contrast, 'new rent' tenants predominate Al-Khodor and Al-Saydeh. However, there are certain nuances, in the former sub-neighborhood the most common form of tenure is informal 'new rent' (Table 12) This is because the second largest population in the area is Syrians who arrived after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. However, in Al-Senegal, most of the 'new rent' tenants had a formal lease.

As can be seen from this characterization, there is no single framework which regulates housing rent in Lebanon, rather it is part of the law of contracts and obligations, and pertaining amendments. As a result of various different crises and a lack of serious housing policy initiatives, two types of tenants exist, whose tenure is governed differently. The first type being tenants whose rent contracts were signed before 1992 that enjoy very low rent and protections against evictions. In this thesis, they are referred to as "old rent" tenants. According to Mona Khechen (2015) their tenure is under "a strict rent control that has neither accounted for the progressive devaluation of the Lebanese currency in the 1980s-1990s period nor prices of inflation" (Khechen, 2015, p. 14).

After the Lebanese Civil War ended, a new amendment to the Contract and Obligation law was passed in 1992. The law lacked any formula to regulate the value of rent and did not determine how much rent increases would be. It also removed protections against eviction and limited lease periods to either one or three years. This effectively created a new class of tenants who are at the mercy of the market and the landlord. In this thesis, they are referred to as "New rent" tenants. New rent tenants also encompass those without a formal lease contract. There are many reasons why their tenure is not formalized: landlords want room to maneuver rent hikes and evictions without any legal hurdles, they would also claim

the unit as vacant thus benefiting from tax exemptions on property taxes and municipal taxes. However, informality facilitates in some cases access to housing to vulnerable groups who would rather stay under the legal radar.

In that same year, Parliament passed a law extending the favorable conditions of all rent contracts signed before 1992 for five years, after which rent prices would be stabilized. However, this did not materialize as more extensions were added over the next 20 years. The reason for these favorable conditions is due to the fact that between 1932 and 1992, successive laws passed in Lebanon had also extended the duration of rental contracts and stabilized rent prices which were not then subject to change (Beirut Urban Lab, 2022). These were meant as stop-gap solutions to ongoing crises prevailing in the country, ranging from the devaluation of the Lebanese pound in the 1930s to the start of the second World War, civil strife in the country, and the Lebanese Civil War. In practice, they meant that the value of rental prices shrank in real terms due to inflation and hyperinflation. Only slight adjustments were made to the rent prices that did not account for the major hyperinflation that Lebanon witnessed over a long period of crisis.<sup>21</sup> Because of this, many of the buildings that house old rent tenants are in disrepair because they lack self-generating funds for upkeep and revenue for landlords.

In 2014 and in 2017, new hurdles emerged. The Lebanese Parliament passed laws that would gradually upend the tenure of old rent tenants. It stated all contracts signed before 1992 would face gradual rent increases over a 9-year period after which all contracts would be stabilized to market prices. This meant that by 2026, all protections would be removed and that old rent tenants would face an astronomical rise in the price of rent. According to Hisham Achkar (2018) many property owners were pushing for the revocation of the rent

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<sup>21</sup> Multiple prolonged crises deterred any meaningful adjustments.

control for years and the catalyst that let it happen was the collapse of an old rent building in Achrafieh which put the debate back in the forefront. Additionally, Bruno Marot (2018), the draft of the 2014 rent law was the brainchild of bankers, specifically the Raphael family that owns Banque Libano Francais who hoped to clear more space for future development projects. This is in addition to the long-term mobilization of property owners. The idea, Marot suggests, was that once the tenants are evicted, buildings would be demolished and the parcel of land that it sits on would either be the site of a new development, or the parcel would be pooled with others in order to build a high-rise and benefit from the exemptions and perks the 2004 building law afforded it.

In all cases, the state effectively abdicated its role as a guarantor of housing. On the one hand, it legally obligates landlords of old rent tenants to house people at their own expense; on the other it leaves new rent tenants at the mercy of the landlord and market dynamics while also delegating all disputes to the judicial system. In essence it treats this issue as a personal matter and not as a housing policy issue. Moreover, due to strong protections against eviction, landlords cannot easily reclaim their property. In some cases, they have resorted to legal loopholes such as filing a demolition permit in order to evict tenants but then not going through with the demolition. This results in recovery of the housing unit.

#### **D. Affordable Housing**

As stated in the literature review, this thesis measures affordability of housing through a series of localized indicators including income, vacancy rate, and residents' access to services.

### ***1. The Proportion of Rent to Income***

Rent is relatively low in Karantina compared with other areas in the city of Beirut. For example, at the time of survey collection, areas near Karantina such as Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael charged rents of \$500 and \$800 respectively (McCarthy, 2021). However, data gathered by the Beirut Urban Lab also showed that most of the residents paid more than 30% of their income in rent and home expenses. This is because a majority of residents are low income with the average income in Karantina at the time of the surveys being 827,645 Lebanese Pounds.<sup>22</sup> Many of the residents who paid 30% or less of their income in rent were on old rent leases, meaning that the value was not adjusted for inflation or hyper-inflation, this was largely the case in Al-Saydeh (27 out of 35 units). Or they share a home with multiple families as was the case in Al-Khodor, discussed in further detail below. Moreover, unaffordability is set to spike by 2026 when rent is liberalized to market rates on old rent tenants, affecting 78 households in Karantina. Therefore, Karantina is growing less affordable to its current residents when these factors are applied, despite having lower rent than in neighboring areas.<sup>23</sup>

When looking into how income to rent ratio is distributed across the three sub-neighborhoods, an uneven distribution is noted between the three. As is shown in table 11, in the Al-Saydeh sub-neighborhood 58% of households surveyed paid more than 30% of their income in rent, while in Al-Senegal and Al-Khodor this was much higher at 83% and 92% respectively.<sup>24</sup> Despite this high percentage of rent to income ratio, the lowest paid rent in real-terms were in fact in Al-Khodor, reflecting its status as a host community for refugees with rents mostly denominated in Lebanese pounds. This also suggests the level of socio-

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<sup>22</sup> Lira Rate was around 12,000 to USD at the time.

<sup>23</sup> The NRC has noted that much of its aid goes to support cash for rent in Karantina, so this could skew the rent to income ratio.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that this data was gathered before fuel and diesel subsidies were lifted in August of 2021 the price of electricity generators rose astronomically.

economic status of the residents of the sub-neighborhoods, as it is a host community with limited access to dollars. However, some parts of Al-Khodor do attract higher rents due to the attractive use they have of the park and their location on a less busy street compared to those that are cramped that attract lesser rents. The highest rents in Karantina are found in Al-Saydeh. Much of the homes there are rented out in dollars while also having the largest portion of rent-controlled homes. As for Al-Senegal, it has a mixture of these trends that reflect the ‘in between’ character of the sub-neighborhood.

## Rent to Income Ratio

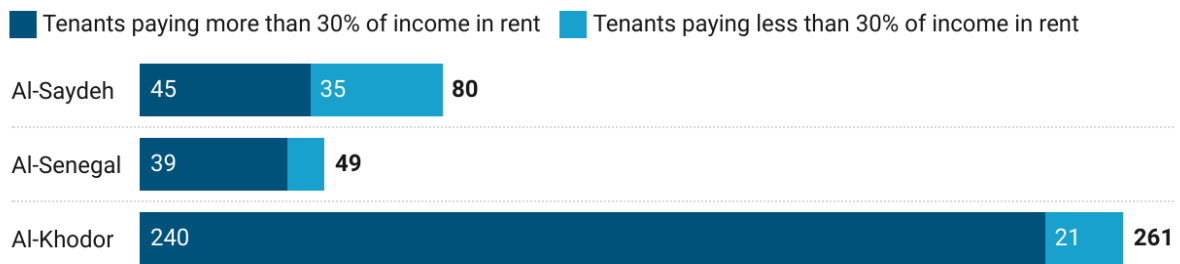


Table 11: Number of tenants paying more than 30% of their income in rent. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al, 2022).

## 2. Rent Adjustments

In the wake of the Beirut blast and in the midst of reparations and renovations, many residents expressed concern that Karantina could grow unaffordable to its residents as repairs would attract higher rents and even evictions. This was a common concern among many of the residents interviewed, as landlords would take advantage of the upscaling. One longtime old rent resident questioned, “What’s going to happen to us once everything is fixed up,” and added that “I’m sure the landlords are going to take advantage of the new conditions of the homes.”<sup>25</sup> Based on the fieldwork, it was noted that 14.1% of tenants in Al-Saydeh either received a rent increase or were threatened by it. While 11.7% of the tenants either received

<sup>25</sup> J.N., (2020-November)

an eviction suit or eviction threats. Such dangers were also evident in Al-Senegal where 23.5% of the tenants either received a rent increase or were threatened by it. While 7.8% of the tenants received an eviction threat. As for Al-Khodor, 9.9% of the tenants either received a rent increase or were threatened by it. While 6.1% of the residents received an eviction suit or eviction threats. The numbers varied considerably in terms of rental tenure, with it being more likely to happen to new rent than old rent residents because of the protections the latter arrangements provided the tenants and because many rental arrangements under new rent laws are informal.

### Types of Tenure in Karantina

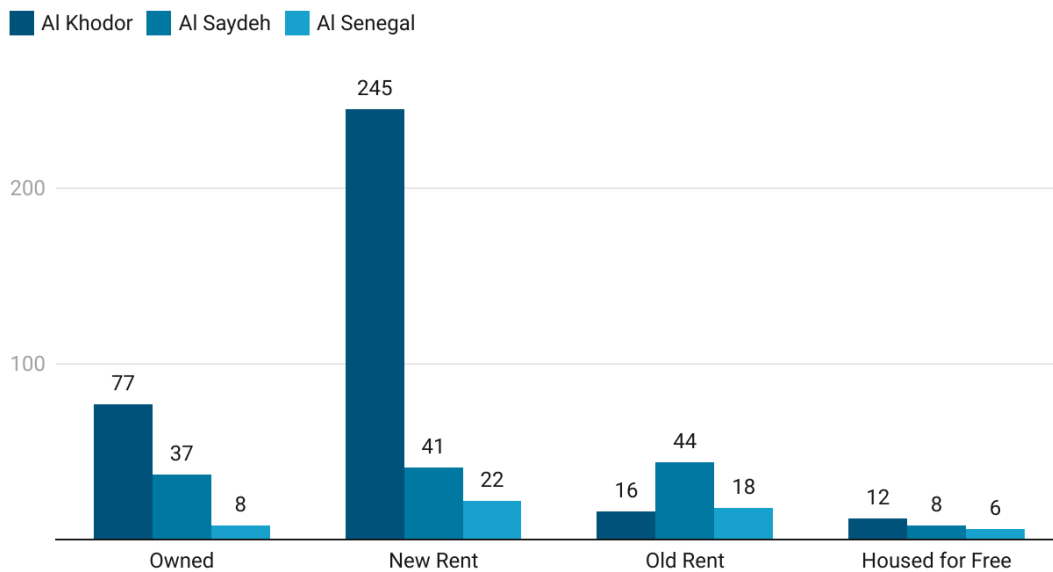


Table 12: Breakdown of tenure per sub-neighbourhood. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

The reasons behind the rent hikes and evictions can be explained through several factors. One factor being repairs made to homes in the wake of the Beirut blast. For example, in Al-Saydeh, 10 out of 12 homes that received a rent increase, or a threat of rental increase, were either fully repaired or undergoing some form of renovation. In Al-Senegal, it was also evident in 10 of the 12 homes that were in the process of being fixed, and in Al-Khodor, in 21 of the 27 homes. This also seemed to be a factor in the rising rates of eviction. For example,

in Al-Saydeh 80% of households who received eviction suits or threats were undergoing repairs of some kind, this also applied to 100% of the cases in Al-Senegal, but only 31.2% of the cases in Al-Khodor. Therefore, it is evident that landlords in Al-Saydeh and Al-Senegal are profiteering off of the kind work of NGOs who selflessly helped rebuild the area. This also shows that the reconstruction of Karantina did not necessarily protect the social fabric of the area or the tenure of its residents, despite some pledges that NGOs made landlords sign not to raise rent or evict residents. Despite these efforts, the state needs to interfere with policy-minded solutions that can help alleviate these issues.

During the community meetings held by the Beirut Urban Lab held, many residents expressed the need for government intervention to prevent post-blast displacement. One resident said, “Owners of buildings received substitutes for renovating their houses.” He added that “They are not threatening us as tenants to be evacuated now; however, we are afraid that when they are done with their renovations, they might kick us out of the apartments. We want a law that protects the disadvantaged tenant in the area, that when the landlord has received more than 100,000 US dollars to renovate his property, the tenant should be secured in it.”<sup>26</sup>

A correlation between nationality of the tenants and rent increases was noted in geo-referenced maps created by the Beirut Urban Lab and published in *Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina* (Al-Harithy et al. 2022). For instance, in Al-Khodor where 24 of the 25 households that received a rent hike were Syrian. Additionally, of the 16 residents that faced eviction suits or threats in the sub-neighborhood, 15 of them were Syrian. As for Al-Senegal, 4 of the 14 Syrian new rent tenants got hike threats, of which, 1 faced an eviction suit. Finally, in Al-Saydeh 3 of the 14 Syrian new rent tenants got hike threats, and 2 faced eviction threats, 1 faced a rent hike, and 1 faced an eviction suit. The reason for this

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<sup>26</sup> First Town Hall Meeting in the Karantina Park with residents, organized by BUL and UNDP (2021-April- 11).

correlation is due to the vulnerable status of Syrians in Lebanon. Moreover, the informality of tenure plays a role as well as many tenants lack formal leases, so landlords have considerable room for maneuver. For example, in Al-Khodor, the 23 cases mentioned are all under an informal agreement. This was also evident in the 16 Syrian tenants who faced eviction suits/threats in that sub-neighborhood.

### *3. Access to Services*

During the Beirut Urban Lab's first community meeting in the Karantina Park, many residents discussed how the lack of amenities in the area aggravated their livability. One resident said: "the area misses everything, we need cultural, developmental, healthcare, and environmental projects." These issues were investigated in this chapter, with emphasis on level of healthcare, level of services, public and shared space, and schools to measure whether or not residents are getting value for the low rent they pay in the area. In terms of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, all three sub-neighborhoods meet the most basic level of needs: food, water, shelter, and electricity.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, when it comes to potable water, there is a considerable improvement compared to the early 1970s when only 25% of Karantina residents had access to this (Bourgey and Phares, 1973). However, when it comes to the higher level of needs on the hierarchy—such as safety and security, transportation, internet, healthcare, education, and facilities for leisure—these have proven harder for residents to access. The level of services across the three sub-neighborhoods are illustrated in table 13 below. Here, we consider education, healthcare, and facilities for leisure.

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<sup>27</sup> Provision relies on a dual system with government provision supplemented by a backup generator.

Service	Sub-Neighborhood					
	Saydeh		Senegal		Khodor	
Electricite Du Liban (EDL)	128	98.46%	66	100.00%	346	98.86%
Water	127	97.69%	60	90.91%	317	90.57%
Unofficial EDL hook up	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	3	0.86%
Electricity subscription	122	93.85%	48	72.73%	146	41.71%
generators	3	2.31%	4	6.06%	12	3.43%
Private water subscription	4	3.08%	2	3.03%	4	1.14%
parking	9	6.92%	4	6.06%	8	2.29%
Internet Connection	107	82.31%	47	71.21%	262	74.86%
Total Respondents	130		66		350	

Table 13: The percentage of households with access to services and the percentage of sub-neighborhood population. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

#### a. Education

In Karantina, the absence of schools contributes to the poor standard of living and makes Karantina less affordable to its residents. At the first town-hall meeting in the park, one resident voiced these concerns saying: “we want an English education school. We can’t afford school buses for outer areas and the schools here are closed, even the French ones.

This is to us the most important issue, more important than roads.”<sup>28</sup> Historically, before the Lebanese Civil War started, Karantina was home to three schools that provided 2,097 students with an education.<sup>29</sup> However, some of them were closed during the Civil War while the last remaining one was shut in 2014. This in total has affected 169 households with school-aged children (Al-Saydeh 14, Al-Senegal 20, Al-Khodor 135).

Instead, parents have to send their children to the surrounding areas for their schooling. Areas near Karantina attract the largest proportion of school-aged children such as Achrafieh and Burj Hammoud. However, parents also send their kids to further away places such as Ras Al-Nabaa owing to the presence of two public schools there. In all cases, this involves having to use transport vehicles to and from Karantina, thus incurring costs. One Syrian resident decried the lack of affordability of having to commute to reach school: “The nearest school to us is in Achrafieh, and our children are passing the main street to reach it. Some people can afford bus transportation for their children, but not all of us can.”<sup>30</sup> This adds to the argument that hidden costs must be factored when assessing the affordability of housing.

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<sup>28</sup> First Town Hall Meeting, (2021-April- 11).

<sup>29</sup> In 1972, 68.43% of boys attended school compared with 50% of girls. This has vastly improved over the past 50 years, particularly in relation to girls’ access to education (Bourjy and Phares, 1973).

<sup>30</sup> First Town Hall Meeting, (2021- April- 11).

## Where Households send their Children to School

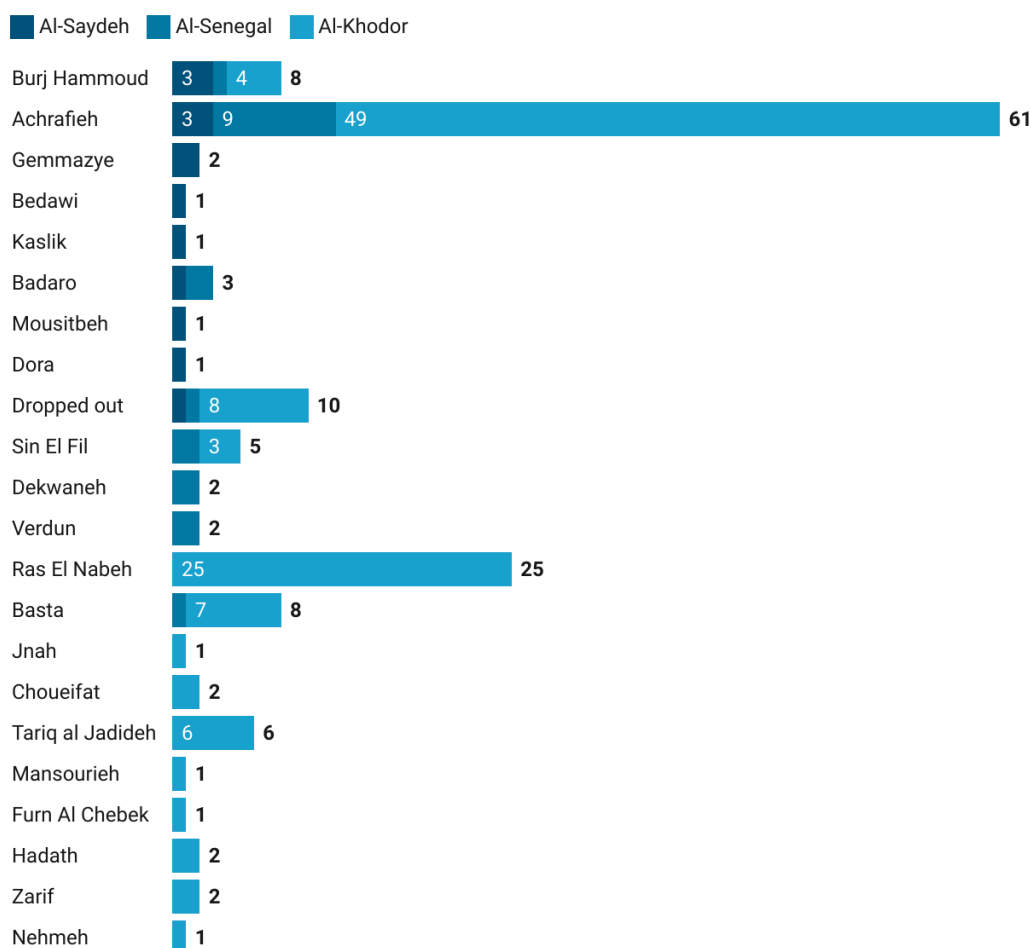


Table 14: The distribution of areas where children in Karantina attend school. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

Aside from the lack of schools in the area, there are no third spaces for after-school activities or community learning. These frustrations were echoed in the town hall meeting as well when one resident said that educational reinforcement was lacking “not everyone is able to learn online. We need institutes that offer academic aid, especially that many of the children need after-school lessons. Some parents are depending on private teachers in some courses, but they cannot afford English language lessons. No one has a good command of the English language that helps them in their future work.”<sup>31</sup> One resident of Al-Khodor added to these qualms saying that there are no spaces for his children to study: “I wish we had libraries

<sup>31</sup> First Town Hall Meeting, (2021- April- 11).

in the area”, he said, “My children are studying on their phones in their bedrooms because we can’t afford computers. I wish there was an area with a computer lab or something.”<sup>32</sup>

b. Healthcare

Healthcare is another important service that is lacking in Karantina despite the presence of a public hospital. Most residents who were surveyed said that they do not access it and have major complaints about the way they were treated there (Table 15). Additionally, some residents added that they are not given employment preferences there. Whereas, before the civil war, the locals were given jobs at public institutions in Karantina such as the hospital, the slaughterhouse, and the municipal garbage dump.

**Complaints towards Karantina Hospital**

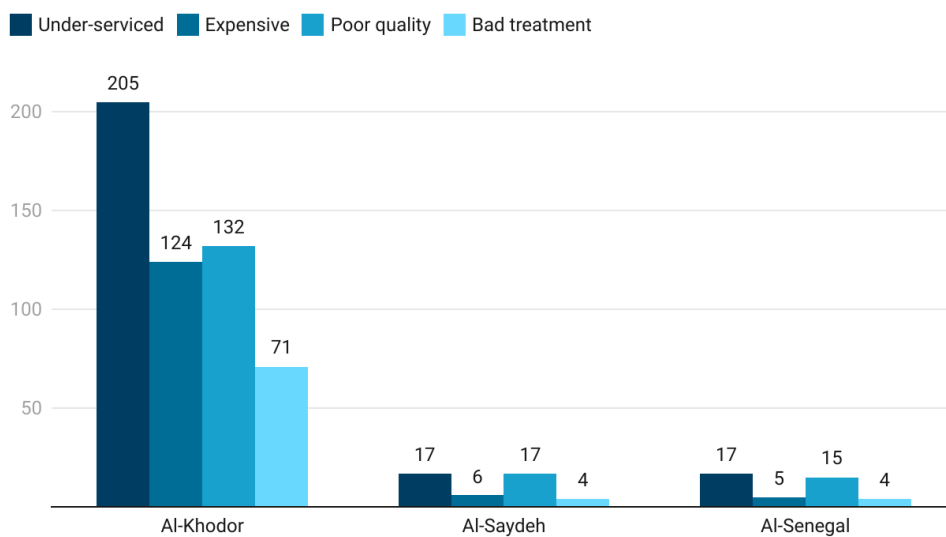


Table 15: The main complaint that the residents had was regarding the Karantina Hospital. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

<sup>32</sup> First Town Hall Meeting, (2021- April- 11).

c. Leisure Facilities

Because much of the living conditions in Karantina are cramped and overcrowded, children have an increased need to seek recreational activity and play outside the home. According to data collected, 41% of households said their children play in Karantina compared to the 1.2% who said they seek leisure outside of it. However, safe and green environments for this are limited in Karantina. Data showed that about half of Karantina's residents are displeased with the quality of leisure spaces in Karantina with around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them not using the facilities at all. Despite the presence of a lush park with the necessary equipment for play such as jungle gyms, slides, and swings, as with other parks in Beirut, access to it is limited. The park closes at 3 PM just as children are leaving school. Additionally, it has been observed that Syrian children are barred from the park during opening hours. During the period that the park is closed, it was also observed that children snuck in by climbing the light poles and jumping over the fence. Unfortunately, the parking lot next to the park accommodated the children more than the park itself. The children play on its hard asphalt surface daily until nighttime.

Additionally, due to the presence of the port, residents cannot access the sea despite its short distance away from Karantina. As discussed in chapter 3, in the past, before the port engulfed Karantina, residents would regularly swim in the sea freely. One resident, EC, said that, before the port's encroachment in the 1960s, the sea was just "a stone's throw away around the cliff." He added that he used to "walk to the beach from my house. It was here, I used to hike down the hill and I would reach it immediately."<sup>33</sup> This concern was also shared during the town hall meeting as one resident said: "We have a beach next to us, and it is a

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<sup>33</sup> E.C., (2020-October)

very comfortable place that we can use; however, we are not able to benefit from it because it is closed by the public authorities.”<sup>34</sup>

Shared space is a common fixture in the social-spatial practice of Karantina’s residents who congregate outside on the sidewalks and put up chairs and tables to drink coffee or play checkers were observed throughout the area's geography during the early days of research. Part of the sidewalk infrastructure is in disrepair, very narrow, or non-existent at all in some instances. Furthermore, the port rears its ugly head again, further negatively affecting public and shared space in Karantina, as trucks loading goods to and from the port cut through Karantina to skirt traffic. This not only clogs the very narrow streets of Karantina but also endangers the children who play in them. During the townhall meeting, one resident said that the “trucks working for the port are passing in the area causing traffic jam[s]. We are not able to get a taxi to our work in the morning.”<sup>35</sup> In terms of traffic regulation, this goes against traffic laws as trucks are only permitted to drive on two lane roads.

#### ***4. Vacancy Rate***

The vacancy rate plays an important role in the affordability of housing in the city. In municipal Beirut, the vacancy rate was measured at 23% for buildings built after 1995.<sup>36</sup> This is three times higher than it should be, with research indicating that a healthy vacancy rate should be closer to 7% (McCartney, 2010). Much of the vacant apartments in Beirut are upmarket and in good condition, and do not constitute affordable housing stock. The factors behind this high vacancy are due to tax purposes. If a property owner leaves their unit vacant, they are entitled to tax exemptions from property taxes under Article 15 of the 1962 Built

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<sup>34</sup> First Town Hall Meeting, (2021- April-11).

<sup>35</sup> First Town Hall Meeting, (2021- April- 11).

<sup>36</sup> Fawaz, Mona, and Zaatari, Abir. “Property Tax: No More Vacancy Exemptions.” ”LCPS July, 2020. <https://lcps-lebanon.org/featuredArticle.php?id=319>

Property Tax Law, and municipal taxes under Article 3 from the Municipal Rental Value Fee. Moreover, the absence of a vacancy tax that penalizes vacant apartments through a fine of the percentage of a value of the home further encourages property owners to leave their properties off the market. Thus, the presence of these incentives and the absence of disincentives keeps the supply of units of homes artificially low, thereby skewing the supply and demand curve.

Such a scenario may not directly apply to Karantina as many of the buildings are vacant due to the dilapidated condition they are in. This is a result of the fallout after the Beirut blast as well as years and years of neglect on part of the property owners. According to data collected by the Beirut Urban Lab, 75 of the 932 units in Karantina are vacant. This stock is in a habitable condition, meaning that there is an 8% vacancy rate. However, 89 units of the total stock are in buildings that are in a dilapidated condition.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of this portion (67/89) are located in the Al-Saydeh sub-neighborhood, which has some of the most dated housing stock in the area. Which was in the close proximity of warehouse 12 in the port of Beirut. The remaining degraded buildings are in the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood. Despite the vacancy rate being slightly higher than the 7% benchmark considered to be healthy, if the abandoned and dilapidated buildings were repaired, they would unleash a new stock of unaffordable houses in Karantina, thus lowering the rate further.

## Vacant and Abandoned units vs Total units

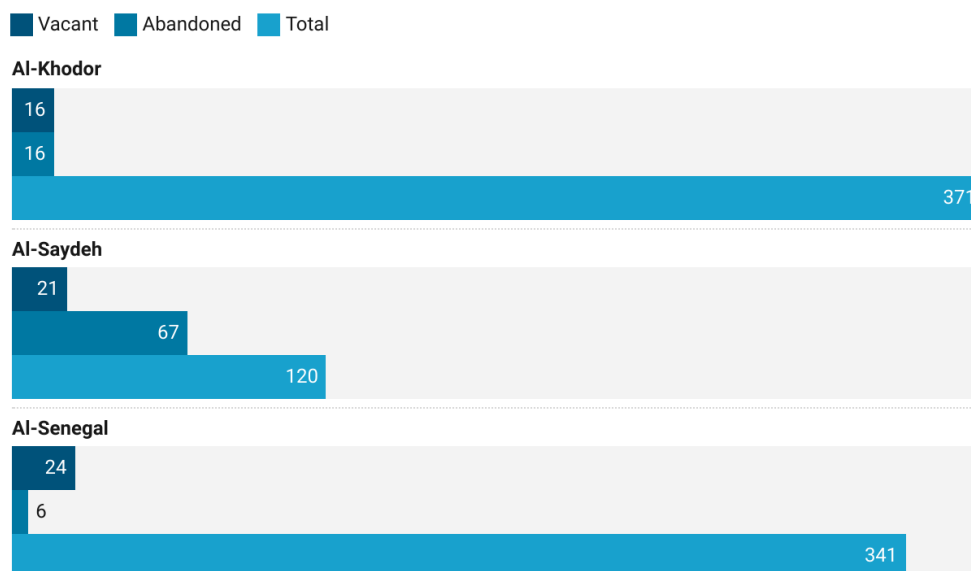


Table 16: Number of vacant and abandoned apartments across Karantina. Source: Beirut Urban Lab - Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina (Al-Harithy et al 2022).

Another apparent trend that could increase the vacancy rate in Karantina is that landlords are increasingly more reluctant to rent their units for residential use and are instead looking for commercial tenants. One landlord, E.C., said that he was less likely to rent out his apartments because “rent these for 700 thousand before the crisis but now 700 thousand will get you nothing.” He added that “People can’t afford a higher price so I may just leave it empty or rent it out to an NGO.”<sup>37</sup> A month after confessing this, a sign appeared outside of his freshly painted apartment building, written on it “for rent, office space available.”

This case is one among many residential units being converted for office space. A GIS map published in the *Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina* (Al-Harithy et al. 2022) shows that this is mainly happening in the Al-Saydeh sub-neighborhood with 9 buildings having their ground floor land use changed to commercial from residential. As for the Al-Senegal sub-neighborhood, this trend was notable in six buildings, whose ground floor land use changed to commercial from residential. Of the six, two of them had also witnessed this trend on their upper floors. Finally, in the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood, this trend was

<sup>37</sup> E.C., (2020-October)

witnessed in five buildings whose ground floor land use was changed from residential to commercial, two of which additionally had their upper floors converted as well. As discussed in the case of E.C., property owners are resorting to this action because businesses and NGOs can pay in US dollars which since the start of the financial crisis in Lebanon, have been in scarce amounts. However, this in the long run affects the housing security of Karantina as a whole. Additionally, this can be worsened because of the building freeze placed over Karantina in 1956 and that was only lifted in 2006. However, the proposed Linord project which was never implemented but is still on hold, places building restrictions on construction over the vacant lots in the Al-Khodor sub-neighborhood (Al-Harithy et al, 2022). This further reduces the stock of housing thus raising demand.



Figure 19. For rent sign displayed outside of renovated home targeting businesses in Al-Saydeh. Photo by Mohamad El Chamaa, November, 2022.

Throughout this chapter, it will have been apparent that the state has abrogated its responsibilities towards the provision of affordable housing, leaving the market to be governed by landlords, developers, and only occasionally tenants. To ameliorate this situation, which is the result of historical and contemporary factors and exacerbated by the post-disaster context,

and to promote urban recovery of affordable housing in Karantina this thesis will next make a series of recommendations. These are discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed in Chapter 3, Karantina's housing conditions have been shaped by a series of preexisting historical circumstances, including civil war displacement, continued militarization, enclaving, and continued recognition as a place of affordable refuge. Additionally, as diagnosed in Chapter 4, housing conditions have been affected by the disaster event considered in this thesis, namely the August 4 Blast. The effects of the disaster on housing include increased rent hikes, rising evictions, as well as reduced housing stock. Both of these historic and contemporary situations have coalesced in the context of the Lebanese financial crisis which has added its own dimensions, and which will contextualize the discussion and the recommendations which follow.

This chapter offers a twin set of recommendations, first at the neighborhood-level with a concentrated focus on Karantina and second at a city-wide level, both designed in response to the problems raised in chapters three and four, and all with a view to enabling an urban recovery of housing in post-blast Karantina. At the neighborhood-level, these recommendations propose a housing monitor for the area be introduced as a mechanism for promoting a bottom-up approach and zones of special social interest (ZEIS), as well as cooperatives and occupation free of charge agreement. At the city-wide level, the recommendations are grouped around three key interventions: vacancy taxes, inclusionary zoning, and the introduction of a cap on the rate of rent increase. In effect, such recommendations are a model of state-guided urban recovery.

Put together the proposals made in this chapter will require administrative work on the part of the central and local governments as well as the post-blast actors and communities and residents who make Karantina their home. This will enable the introduction of long-term

solutions contributing to urban recovery of affordable housing not only in Karantina but also elsewhere within the city. It will also enable Beirut to move beyond the reconstruction paradigm of the 1990s and 2000s, which remains rooted in private enterprise and the work of NGOs.

## **A. Karantina-level recommendations**

### ***1. Housing monitor***

Safeguarding the tenancy of the most vulnerable residents can be achieved through the creation of a housing monitor. The only other known example of this in Lebanon belongs to the NGO Public Works. Their housing monitor keeps track of evictions and rent hikes and does supply some legal advice, but is unable to enforce informal agreements. The proposed housing monitor would keep track of formal and informal agreements between tenants and landlords and be equipped with legal experts to mediate. It would additionally document cases of overcrowding, evictions and hikes, and try to mitigate them. It could be the institutional layer for the residents to fall back on.

In order to establish a housing monitor, legal experts are needed to adjudicate and keep track of paperwork. Though it is costly to hire a lawyer, the Beirut Bar Association (BBA) has previously offered volunteer lawyers for difficult cases such as prisoners who have not had due process served to them as well as the Beirut blast probe. Involving the BBA would help to cover the legal aspects of the housing monitor. The proposed neighborhood committee advanced in the *Urban Recovery Strategy for Kantaina* (Al-Harithy et al, 2022) would have a key stake and the municipality would also add an institutional layer. This will help recover the relationship between the residents and public authorities, and rebuild trust in local governance.

### a. Problem Overview

Compared to surrounding neighborhoods, Karantina has cheaper rent. However, the increases in rent inside the area, along with high rates of unemployment and a lack of public services, threaten to displace the resident population. As stated in Chapter 4, of the 545 households the lab surveyed in Karantina, 73% are tenants. The breakdown of this figure is as follows: 78 households are old rent living under prices unadjusted for hyperinflation, 71 are new rent who have a formal lease contract. The remaining 248 of the households are new rent tenants with informal lease agreements.

All tenants are susceptible to certain vulnerabilities. New rent tenants with formal leases can either lease for one or three years. Their rent increases are not determined by a specific formula. The state does not mediate between both parties, nor does it consider prior residency as giving them protection against eviction. Given the ongoing devaluation of the Lebanese lira against the US dollar many are witnessing price hikes beyond their means, and have little protection against predatory increases. The other group of tenants who are under formal contracts are old rent tenants. Though they may not be affected by the devaluation yet; under the 2017 rent law, this group's rent is set to be adjusted to market prices by 2026. For those who cannot afford it, this change could mean that many residents will be left homeless. The remaining tenants do not have a formal lease contract that regulates their tenancy. Landlords prefer not to issue a lease because it gives them more maneuver to increase rent and evict tenants, additionally they are not obligated to pay property or municipal taxes, as vacant apartments are exempt from these levies. Moreover, there are some tenants who prefer to not have a lease due to the precarity of their own legal status.

Although this informality has allowed vulnerable populations to access housing, a lack of oversight has left room for abuse. In the wake of the blast, for example, rent and evictions were more prominent amongst those residents and households without contracts.

Furthermore, this informality encourages rent pooling, which has led to overcrowding. Of the 113 homes that have more than one family per household in Karantina, 88% of them are considered overcrowded. This circumstance has arisen because landlords prefer rent pooling their units: they can charge more than single family units. There have been instances of single-family households being threatened with eviction to make way for rent poolers. This is increasing tensions within the community. It was also documented in Karantina that tenants with informal agreements were more likely to be given rent hikes or evictions, especially after the blast. Many tenants are unaware that they have legal rights against eviction, however. They can fight off eviction by providing proof of tenure through utilities and payment of rent receipts. Unfortunately, there is no system to keep track of all the informal rental agreements inside Karantina. In the case of formal (notarized) contracts, where a landlord has decided to evict a tenant, a complaint must be filed with the municipality. They would then ask the police to come with an order to evict the tenant.

Overall, neither formal nor informal tenants are aware of legal protections they have against eviction: in short, they cannot be evicted without a court order. This lack of knowledge shows that there is a need for an advocate (or housing monitor) to raise awareness around housing rights in Lebanon and to provide legal counseling to housing insecure residents.

#### b. Proposed Solution

This thesis proposes the creation of an informal registry modeled after the one in the Palestinian camps. It would keep track of rental agreements and rent prices. An informal tenure registry will ensure protection for the most vulnerable residents, those who do not have access to formal mechanisms. In Lebanon this is mostly used in Palestinian camps to

safeguard property norms: Palestinian residents are not allowed to own property and because buildings inside the camps are considered unpermitted, they are not registered in the land registry. The informal system is managed by a popular committee, which is composed of all the political factions in the camp. The registry keeps track of ownership of units within the camp; ensuring the right of residence, and a smooth transition of property transfer. Additionally it tracks purchases and inheritances, as well as the construction of additional units. The registry is the cornerstone of the informal property market in the camps and preserves residents' rights. Such a framework is useful in Karantina, where informality is also a major part of tenure arrangements (Ezzedine, 2019).

Whereas Palestinian camps use this mechanism to register sales, in Karantina the proposal is that it would be used to register informal and formal rental agreements. By collecting such information the monitor would keep track of all rents being paid and advise residents on what prices they should pay based on this information. The tenant would have a reference point upon which to base their decision. This registry can be formed in collaboration with key community members - locals and notables who want to stabilize the neighborhood - as well as with the housing monitor discussed above which will be partly-managed by volunteer lawyers. It would house the utility bills and receipts of rent payments that can be used to maintain tenancy for informal rentals in a legal court; this action plan proposes that this documentary evidence be compiled in the informal registry.

The proposed housing monitor and tenure registry can achieve the following outcomes. Arbitrate disputes between landlords and tenants. Preserve the rights of the informal tenants in the absence of a formal mechanism. Preserve the tenant's right to reside and landlords would be made aware of the legal implications and what their responsibilities are to their tenants. Create more transparency on how much is paid in rent through comparative data so that rent is not raised astronomically. Provide open data on what is being

paid in the area, helping the tenants leverage comparable units when negotiating the rent price.

## *2. Zones of Special Social Interest*

Zones of special social interest, or ZEIS concept originated in Brazil with its new constitution in 1987 which specified that land had a social value. From this amendment, the concept of ZEIS was touted as a possible solution to Brazil's housing problems. Throughout the 20th century, many urban dwellers, lacking adequate assistance from the state, tried to house themselves by seeking self-help housing which consisted of squatting on vacant parcels of land owned by the richest Brazilians. This was outside social housing policy programs and was considered illegal as it violated property rights. However, the 1987 constitution prioritized "the right to housing over the right to property" meaning that favela dwellers had an opportunity to lay claim to where they live as well as continue living there, whereas before this amendment, especially in the 1970s, forcible evictions were commonplace (Donavan, 2007).

This change in housing policy legally recognized and protected these standard and widespread squatting practices. ZEIS is implemented through a plan for the special zones of social purpose (PREZEIS). This facilitates the regularization of favelas as well as their joint administration. Today in Brazil, there exist around 66 ZEIS zones with 600,000 people living in them. What ZEIS does is offer up the land for housing, and what the PREZEIS does is it determines the zoning and building codes as well as administrative make-up.

### a. Problem Overview

As stated in the diagnosis chapter, Karantina is one of the few places in Beirut where affordable housing is available. Unlike other areas, it also has many vacant parcels of land that have not been developed yet. Much of these once housed *Tanak* settlements until they were destroyed in the Civil War.

For a city to be a service hub or a competitive agglomeration in the age of neoliberalism, a positive environment is needed. This includes the right infrastructure such as electricity, internet, transit systems, educational hubs that produce the workers that run these sectors, and the most important and probably the most overlooked is affordable housing. Report after report contends that for cities to remain competitive, you need to maintain affordable housing so that you can retain the right workers working in your sectors.

In Beirut, we have none of this in any widespread or substantial way. However, there are clusters that allow for affordable housing for workers, this includes mostly areas that have grown out of informality such as Ouzai, Hay El Sellom, Burj El Barajneh. There are also areas that are affordable by design; Karm El Zeitoun, for example, whose small parcellation did not allow for giant skyscrapers to pop up, that's why there are mostly small three-story houses, which has created an affordable stock of housing for the city's poorest residents. This is true of Karantina as well, where its land parcels only allowed for small houses to be built, and infrastructural edges such as the Charles Helou highway cut it off from the rest of the city, preventing excessive large-scale property development. Both Karantina and Karm El Zeitoun owe this exception to the historical presence of Armenian refugees whose tents, and later *tanaks*, served as the parcel outline.

However, with the Beirut Blast and the recession, this zone of affordability is threatened. This is partly because of the upscaling that took place after the explosion and because putting the area under study has enabled predatory buyers to use this ordinance, and

the devaluation of the lira, to leverage a cheaper price against vulnerable landowners. This has encouraged landlords to evict their current tenants, marketing their apartments now to more upscale residents. In the absence of market forces (i.e., preventive policies that guard against uncontrolled rent hikes such as rent caps, or preventing the collateralization of land) and the presence of zoning laws, upgrading and renovation, which is what Karantina is now going through.

#### b. Proposed Solution

Having a zone of special interest would mean that these large parcels of land would mean that they would serve a social purpose that benefits the city as whole. This means unbundling them from the market by setting conditions on selling or bequeathing them and collateralizing them. This would also mean a new zoning and building code would govern construction and land use over them. This should help remove the building restrictions enforced by the Linord project.

By declaring specific plots of lands as zones of special social interest, in the same vein that Brazil does, land urban regulations prevailing over these plots would be lifted with relation to density setbacks and land use. This would mean that the 70% exploitation rate and minimum lot size of 100 sqm would be removed. It also would mean that commercial businesses would not have the right to build on top of these parcels of land, making way for affordable housing only. In the wake of the blast, the Mercedes dealership was allowed to build a detailing building for customers. This does not contribute to the social surroundings of Karantina or take into mind its pressing conditions such as lack of public space and lack of affordable housing. The same can be said about the Unit Hotel that was built in 2010. On the one hand, it destroyed a heritage building that was there before it that was made of the Hawsh typology, as well as BO18 and Forum de Beyrouth, on the other these later buildings were themselves built over

the remains of Tanak housing units destroyed during the Civil War. Moreover, this would decrease the parcels of land to below market rate, thus making them affordable. Of course this would have to be part of a parcel to demilitarize the zone in order to secure land for housing.

In the wake of the blast, the government put affected areas under study meaning that planning ordinances as well as market-related transactions such as buying and selling were halted. So from the perspective of the social value of land, the government should recognize that certain lots have social value and rezone it in a way that is familiar with the ZEIS framework. Although it is different from how it is used in Brazil, where it is mostly used to protect squatting rights. Because of the vulnerability of the residents of Karantina due to pre and post disaster conditions as well as the ongoing financial crisis, it is important to protect their tenure.

### ***3. Cooperatives***

A complementary recommendation involves the introduction of a cooperative framework. This tool is preferential to market-based solutions that leave both parties at the mercy of land speculators and developers. On the one hand, the coop framework affords a new stock of affordable housing and on the other hand, it offers owners of unbuildable lots a mechanism to pool their land in a way that side-steps problems created from multiple heirs and keeps their property away from speculators. Legally speaking, there is incentive enough to establish coops - article 58 of the coop law decrees multiple tax incentives for coops, including exemptions from municipal taxes, utility taxes, etc. (First Draft A Cooperative for Professionals in Lebanon, 2012).

Each heir would be given the equivalent of their ownership in shares in the coop. Legally, although a cooperative “requires at least 10 persons for incorporation”(A Cooperative for Professionals in Lebanon, 2012), The assets of the coop would be the lots. This would side

step other absent heirs and so this would make it easier to pool the lots. After which and in coordination with the inclusionary zoning regulations that is proposed in this thesis, can help spur the construction of affordable housing. These terms would feature heavily in the bylaws of the coop that are drafted by members for the coop to receive recognition from the Ministry of Agriculture.

The General Assembly of the coop will be composed of all shareholders as per article 20 of the coop law whereby “each member has only one vote regardless of the amount invested/number of shares she/he owns in the co-op”(Ibid). It will guarantee, from a participatory planning perspective, that some members will not be more equal to others concerning what they bring to the coop. What further strengthens equality is that the law states that members “democratically control the capital of their co-operative”(Ibid). Coops do not have to pay municipal taxes or taxes on the profits their assets make, and are exempt from real estate taxes (A Cooperative for Professionals in Lebanon, 2012).

#### ***4. Occupation free of charge agreement***

As stated in the diagnosis chapter, Karantina has 89 units that are in a dilapidated condition and are abandoned; this raises the vacancy rate to 17%. The vacancy tax proposed on a city scale would be unfair to the owners of these units and would force them to sell; therefore, it is proposed that an occupation free of charge agreement be reached with NGOs that are able to fix these units - Offre Joie or NRC. These NGOs have rebuilt much of the housing stock in the area already, they have done so not only free of charge but also without attached conditions except that they do not evict tenants for a year. This thesis proposes that these NGOs leverage their skills and resources in order to get the owners to commit, legally, to renting out their units at a below market rate for a five year period. The allocation of these

new affordable units and their tenants would be managed by the NGOs because they have the necessary skills and resources.

## **B. City-wide recommendations**

### ***1. Rent control***

At present, rent costs are increasingly on the rise, a situation which is leading to rising unaffordability of housing and limiting post-disaster urban recovery in Karantina. One corrective mechanism implemented by European city and regional governments, such as Berlin and Catalonia, is a rent cap. These caps have taken different forms and have lasted for different periods. Although contested by landlords and property agents, caps have had the broad effect of limiting rent rises in their respective areas and, in some cases, even deflating prices. This has leveled the playing field in those contexts, especially for tenants.

The way in which rent is currently structured and ‘controlled’ in Lebanon - that is, via the old rent and new rent laws and additional systems of informality - creates conditions favorable to some tenants at the expense of landlords, and vice versa. Overall, this structure leaves limited security over tenure for most. Furthermore, there exists the situation in which landlords prefer rent payments in dollars, this is seen as protection against hyperinflation. However, this method of paying rent is rather unusual and unfair to tenants because in most countries payment of rent is accepted (even expected) in the local currency. According to article 319 of the penal code, a landlord cannot refuse payment in the local currency. Additionally, article 192 of the law of money and credit states that if a bill is charged in dollars, it can be paid at the official rate of 1,500 Lira to 1 US dollar if it is deposited with a notary public. The current financial crisis prevents many from accessing their money at the banks, which have illegally set restrictions on the withdrawal of funds.

In Karantina as a whole, surveys conducted by the Beirut Urban Lab in 2021 found that rents were still mostly paid in Lebanese pounds. As the value of the Lebanese Lira has continued to depreciate against the US Dollar, however, this has left many residents with increasingly insecure housing tenure. Legal protections for tenants are clearly needed alongside a rent cap mechanism similar to that introduced in Berlin in 2020; these initiatives would serve to modernize Lebanon's rental system and create conditions that are more equitable for tenants.

#### a. Proposed Solution

The Berlin-style rent cap system usefully contains mechanisms for both a price ceiling and a progressive scale for rental increases, a duality, which can be applied to the situation in Beirut. Rent price ceilings have traditionally placed specified limits on how much a landlord can charge for their units, however this does not always take into consideration the condition, typology and location of a housing unit. This thesis therefore proposes a cap on the rate of increase with guidelines set according to local circumstances. This would limit steep annual rent rises. The current Lebanese laws associated with residential rent lack a proper mechanism to determine by how much rent can be increased. This leaves decisions dictated by the dynamics of the market and the whims of the landlord, with the supply and demand of housing in Beirut affected by a vacancy rate of 23%. Instead of treating the issue as a matter of public housing policy, the state has chosen to consider this a private matter delegating to the judicial branch the responsibility for arbitrating rent rises and the legality of evictions.

This thesis therefore recommends that the laws concerning rent in Lebanon be revised to include a price cap on the rate of rent increase. This should be done in order to prevent mass displacement of tenants from areas such as Karantina through, for example, eviction and rent hikes. This revision of the law will also help those living under old rent conditions to

transition to the modern system via an adjustment, which protects their existing tenure. Additionally, it should be done as part of an effort to increase housing stock in Karantina, a stock that is inclusive of a diverse range of social and income groups. The municipality of Beirut needs to be empowered through a law in parliament granting it additional powers to enforce a Berlin-style rent cap. By enabling the municipality to enforce these caps through parliamentary legislation, the residency of the existing population of Karantina can be protected. This means that they would retain access to housing amid the financial crisis and the long adjustment of rent that has been taking place over several decades.

There is historical precedent in Lebanon for rent caps and reduction, however this was undertaken at the central government level. Between 1948 and 1954, successive Lebanese governments issued rent caps under three different exceptional laws, stipulating that increases be no more than 5-10% and even reductions of 20-25% depending on the age of the building. However, municipalities have historically had very limited powers and are unable to take rent control measures as per the 1977 Municipal Law. According to Mona Harb and Sami Attalah (2015), municipalities are constrained by the administrative hierarchy imposed by the Interior Ministry. Decisions they take can be overruled either by *qaimaqam* or the governor and finally, the Minister of Interior. This leaves municipalities only with the ability to implement the decisions of others. If the Beirut Municipality was granted powers to set rent caps, this would not only help to control the price system but also it would encourage locals to request help and reinvigorate trust in public institutions. Furthermore, this would help formalize informal practices in accessing housing, which would make tenure more secure.

## ***2. Vacancy taxes***

As a means to combat high vacancy rates, city governments around the world have introduced a vacancy tax that penalizes property owners for leaving their units off the market. Typically, homes are considered vacant if they are not inhabited for more than 6 months.

Such a policy tool is yet to be found in the Middle East, however, with one small exception in Jerusalem in occupied Palestine. Vacancy taxes can take different forms ranging from a percentage of the property's value to a flat fee, alternatively the rate can be up-scaled according to the income of a household (O'Callaghan et al., 2018).

The logic behind a vacancy tax is to make a vacant home unaffordable to leave empty, thereby forcing owners to lower their asking price and increasing the stock of housing on the market which overall balances the supply and demand curve. In some cases, cities are introducing vacancy taxes on short-term rental homes in an effort to combat housing scarcity caused by AirBnB, thus forcing landlords to put their houses up for rent to long-term tenants. Rents are high because of a lack of vacancy tax, which encourages owners to keep their apartments off the market and reduces housing supply.

#### a. Proposed Solution

This thesis makes two recommendations in relation to vacant properties. The first is to revoke the existing tax exemptions, which encourage property owners to keep their units empty. The second is to introduce legislation to empower the municipality of Beirut to impose a progressive vacancy tax, a tax to be based upon landlords' household income and the relative value of their vacant property. Taxation models created in France (Segu, 2020) and Lebanon (Shibani 2021) suggest that introducing a vacancy tax increases the number of units available in the housing market. Indeed, it can be "an efficient tool to reintroduce housing units that [have] been unused for a long time" (Segu, 2020).

In Beirut, property is taxed under the Built Property Tax Law of 1962 and the Municipal Rental Value Fee. Article 15 of the Property Tax Law and Article 3 of the Municipal Fee, however, exempt property owners from these taxes if they leave their units vacant. This means that there is no incentive for landlords to lower the price to find tenants if

they do not meet their revenue expectations - vacant properties are, for them, a better alternative. In short, prolonged vacancy gives property owners better bargaining terms when demanding rent because decreased stock artificially increases scarcity. There are additional negative externalities associated with these tax exemptions. For example, they encourage homeowners to misreport the homes that they live in as vacant to avoid paying taxes, in Municipal Beirut this has resulted in a reported vacancy 'rate' of 50%.

By taxing vacancy, the municipality would be in a position to penalize property owners who hoard housing units and so induce them to rent them out at a fair market value to avoid paying the levy. The taxes would also increase the leverage of tenants when negotiating leases, as well as giving them leverage to extend their leases against evictions. Furthermore, a holistic understanding of vacant property in this context would include land. Vacancy taxes can therefore be used to incentivize the development of empty plots, potentially adding to the availability of housing.

Vacancy resonates in Karantina in a number of ways. First, although there is currently only 8% vacancy, which is much smaller than the Beirut average, this rate is set to grow as the post-disaster trend to convert residential units into business accelerates. Landlords are doing this in order to attract businesses to the area that can afford dollar-dominated rent. Additionally, around 7% of housing stock is abandoned because buildings are in a dilapidated condition. These abandoned buildings are not classed as vacant, however repairing them through a Build-Operate-Transfer agreement with an NGO could help introduce a new class of affordable units to the area. Moreover, there are several empty plots of land that are yet to be developed. One of these once housed *Tanak* but these were destroyed and removed during the Karantina massacre of 1976 in the midst of the Lebanese Civil War. Since then, the plots have been turned into brown fields that have only been utilized as temporary spaces such as for storage warehouses. Another was home to blocks of brick and mortar houses that were

also destroyed. Given that these were built on small parcels of land, zoning regulations restrict reconstruction and encourage vacancy. Therefore, they would need to be pooled together to create a larger development.

Lebanon's current taxation framework creates a housing shortage, but also limits potential revenues for the state and the Municipality. In the latter case, this is because the only other taxes that can be collected are building permit fees. This is a further example of the limited powers that are granted to municipalities by the central government (Harb and Attalah, 2015) and makes municipalities less inclined to prevent demolitions of existing buildings because they need the revenue stream from new developments. If left to continue, this construction trend could dwindle the existing housing stock and lead to increases in rent through ever-larger discrepancies between supply and demand. Alternatively, it could incentivize vacancies, either of land or of existing units, since landlords and developers would not wish to pay the fees. This is the wrong approach for public authorities and residents alike. What is needed is the approach proposed here, namely the repeal of Article 15 of the Property Tax Law and Article 3 of the Municipal Rental Value Fee and the introduction of a municipal vacancy tax.

### ***3. Inclusionary zoning***

Lebanon faces on-going challenges concerning the urban recovery of housing, not least because of the widespread growth of 'exclusionary zoning.' This growth is rooted not only in policy failures which favor developers and landlords but also in planning/spatial practices which can lead to the creation of relatively exclusive areas within the city. As shown in chapters three and four, these areas include gentrified districts such as Mar Mikhael, those affected by long-term sectarian divisions, and those which are marked by the consequences of displacement and enclaving. The rising unaffordability of housing is

therefore a direct consequence of these zoning and building patterns which, although incentive-based, is aimed at attracting foreign capital-investment and not allow for the construction of affordable housing. On the contrary, it encourages the opposite to happen. Developers are given incentives to construct according to parameters favorable to their financial interests – parameters, which lead to displacement and exclusion - and are not required to give anything in return.

In North America and Europe, policymakers and urban planners have devised ways in which the private sector can get involved in the provision of affordable housing. Traditionally, planning discourse around affordable housing had to do with the construction of social housing in suburbs. However, these developments led to enclaving, urban sprawl, and ultimately the concentration of poverty and other forms of social deprivation and segregation. Therefore, in order to create mixed-income neighborhoods, policymakers, planners and community activists proposed the creation of ‘inclusionary zones’ within cities, rather than outside of them. This concept can be usefully applied to the holistic urban recovery of post-blast Karantina because the area lacks diversity - particularly in terms of earnings since much of the population is at the lower end of the income scale - and thus may be regarded as a social and physical enclave.

#### a. Proposed Solution

To overcome the negative impact of exclusionary zoning on the urban recovery of housing, this thesis proposes empowering the municipality to set up inclusionary zones with defined parameters of affordability and inclusivity. In other words, all new builds will be compelled by the municipality to set aside a percentage of the development for the provision of affordable housing. This is a form of land-use planning. Under this new ordinance, the

municipality will be in a position either to mandate developers to build affordable housing on its behalf or to incentivize the construction of affordable housing through density bonuses. The latter might include permitting developers to increase construction density, for instance additional floors in an apartment block, in return for the provision of some affordable units therein. Both outcomes (mandatory and voluntary) have benefits and drawbacks.

Lerman (2006) suggests that one significant drawback of mandatory inclusionary zoning schemes is that “states must have enforcement mechanisms, such as financial sanctions, to address any failure to comply.” He also warns that developers are likely to resist efforts to compel construction of affordable housing units because “the burden of the program” falls on their shoulders. Conversely, voluntary, incentive-based schemes returns power to developers who are likely to try to escape their commitments and not build affordable housing units. In Lebanon, voluntary incentives for affordable housing have been around since 1972 and increased twice: in 1977 and 1982. For example, to encourage the development of housing cooperatives, article 58 of the co-op law decrees multiple tax incentives, including exemptions from municipal taxes, utility taxes, etc (First Draft A Cooperative for Professionals in Lebanon, 2012). However, these incentives have not spurred an increase in housing cooperatives. Therefore, despite the challenges of an enforcement regime as identified by Lerman (2006), the mandatory principle is the most useful one for Karantina.

### **C. Framework of implementation**

Broader implementation of the recommendations will also require a governance framework bringing together existing and potential stakeholders and those with supervisory and monitoring responsibilities. For this to be done, it is important to look at ways in which

neighborhood and city-scale interventions can be implemented and through which stakeholders and institutions.

### *1. Neighborhood-scale*

This can be briefly illustrated using a governance scenario based upon the housing monitor recommendation, which is intended to arbitrate disputes for existing stakeholders. In order to establish the housing monitor and to ensure its day-to-day operation, there needs to be buy-in from stakeholders in Karantina. This includes the committee, the community representatives, tenants, landlords, the on-the-ground NGOs - NRC, Borderless, and Offre Joie - and the Beirut Bar Association. The latter is necessary to provide a staff of volunteer lawyers. The housing monitor can also benefit from the neighborhood committee set up by the Beirut Urban Lab as a means to get local buy-in over the proposal and create a sense of ownership over it. In this context, the stakeholders will engage with the housing monitor, which in turn will be overseen by the municipality should disputes arise.

As stated in the case of the Occupation Free of Charge Agreement, NGOs involved in housing repairs such as Offre Joie and NRC should spearhead efforts to repair these vacant, dilapidated units on the condition that they be leased at below market rates. This, of course, would require legal arbitration and notarized agreements on the part of property owners. In terms of cooperatives, this would involve the Ministry of Agriculture, which oversees cooperatives, but there need to be leaders that oversee the creation of these cooperatives to and to encourage the small lot owners to take on this option by showing them the benefits they stand to gain.

As for ZEIS, the only means to convert these plots to zones of special social interest, this would require the Director General of Urbanism to step in and designate them as such. In

the wake of the blast, the government put affected areas under study meaning that planning ordinances as well as market-related transactions such as buying and selling were halted. When an area is under study, all possibilities are open such as rezoning and changing land use. Although Karantina was not put under study, using the conditions that these planning offers, this thesis proposes that in addition to rezoning, the social value of land be recognized in Karantina in the same way that ZEIS does. Under this, certain plots of land can be tagged as being important to areas social needs, in particular housing. Consequently, property rights such as the right to sell, bequeath, or collateralize, would be unbundled. In other words, developers cannot do what they want with the property. And in this way, these properties would be protected from developers and real estate interests that do not go in line with the social value of land.

## *2. City-scale*

In terms of the city-scale interventions, in order to have mandatory inclusionary zoning, first incentives given to developers to build luxury condominiums need to be taken away (e.g., ad hoc planning for lots over 4000 sqm). This will at least help ease the pressure being placed that increases the speculation of the land and treats housing as a commodity instead of a form of shelter. Laws should not be made so easy that developers can have so much leeway and so much incentive without giving anything in return that benefits the surroundings (e.g. public space from setbacks, affordable housing set aside.) Second of all, the Parliament needs to empower the Beirut Municipality through a special law that allows it to set mandatory inclusion zoning in specific areas and specific strategic lots.

If the Beirut Municipality and the DGU are empowered to impose incentives such as tax breaks and density bonuses, this would encourage developers to build affordable housing

at below market rates. The incentives come in the form of an increase to the total built up area. In construction, how much a developer can build in a parcel of land has to do with a number of factors. This includes the zoning of the area, land use, and the size of the lot. The overall built up area is the accumulated total amount of square meters that can be built on a lot. This also has to do with how much of a lot can be used to build on. In Karantina, it ranges between 60-70% exploitation ratio. The density bonuses should come in the form of adjustments to these stringent guidelines, relaxing them by increasing surface exploitation or adding to the amount of sqm you can build would constitute a bonus as illustrated in the scenario above. It would allow the developer to build additional units which would offset the cost of including affordable housing in the development. Other incentives such as exemption from property registration fees and permitting fees. However, this would affect the Municipality of Beirut's coffers, which it needs to fund public expenditures.

Reforming the rent law requires a push from Parliament to repeal the 2014 and subsequent 2017 rent laws and replace them with a more progressive one. Already, Legal Agenda has touted that the 2017 law is unlawful, as subsidies were not set aside for old renters through a special account held by the Finance Ministry. Legal experts have argued that this is the cause for the constitutional council of Lebanon to revoke this law as the full stipulations of it were not met, but no such action has been taken. Additionally, the lack of legal awareness by many old rent tenants empowered landlords to create an atmosphere of fear to get them evicted before the 9 year period with very low compensations. So there is a legal precursor to overrule those laws. Moreover, the current laws associated with rent do not protect tenants against evictions, nor does it recognize their previous residency as a condition for them to stay. In many cases, either they have to pay the steep increase once they renew or be evicted. Parliament would have to pass a new law on rent in line with the Barcelona and

Berlin ones illustrated in the chapter, ones that prioritize tenure security and protect against exorbitant rent increases.

Previous rent caps imposed involved capping how much a landlord can charge meaning no more than a specific amount. However, this thesis recommends that a cap be introduced on how much a landlord can increase the rent by, which would limit the steep annual increases. Moreover, it aims to set guidelines on what is the right amount to charge for a property based on its conditions, typologies, and location. It would also help old rent landlords restore the value of their properties as funds would be generated for preservation and would ward off speculators from purchasing these properties. Finally, it would bring affordable housing to a wide range of socio-economic demographics.

Moreover, introducing a vacancy tax would be a market based solution for mitigating the prices of rental units in Beirut as this would increase the supply of housing units on the market thus decreasing demand. Currently, supply is artificially restricted because so many units are off the market. Because of the tax, landlords would be forced to put their units on the market even if the rent doesn't suit them. Conversely, if they pay vacancy taxes, it means a new source of income for the Beirut Municipality on top of the income stemming from the suspension on the exemptions that vacant units get on property taxes and municipal taxes. Such a move also requires the Ministry of Finance to remove tax incentives that encourage vacancy. However, this does prove challenging as the most recent attempt to impose a vacancy tax was stifled by Parliament's budget and finance committee. In 2022, attempts were made to tax vacant properties at half the rate of occupied units. However, the Parliament's budget and finance committee, chaired by Ibrahim Kanaan of the Free Patriotic Movement and composed of MPs from Hezbollah, Amal, Progressive Socialist Party, and Lebanese Forces decided against the measure and left it out of the budget.

The relationship between the proposed recommendations and the many stakeholders present in Karantina will need to be negotiated, of course. For example, ending army occupation of lots and of private properties to secure additional space for housing. Given the largely positive attitude of residents towards the Lebanese Army, as noted earlier in this thesis, this is not a scenario, which will first require a change in perception. Instead what it will require is an incentive for demilitarization, such as the cutting of costs, and governance of the outcomes.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In the wake of the August 4 2020 Blast, huge sympathy from around the world poured into Beirut, with donors pledging to contribute funds to rebuild and reconstruct damaged areas of the city. More than two years later, it is apparent that both Karantina and the city itself have a long way to go. Despite the best efforts of NGOs such as Norwegian Refugee Council and Offer Joie who volunteered their services and did all they could to rebuild, in the absence of the state, socially just policies, and participatory practice, holistic urban recovery has yet to be realized. Moreover, long-term political turmoil affecting Lebanon as well as corruption has prevented meaningful change from taking place. In fact, since the 2006 July War, it has become common practice for the state to pursue a laissez faire policy in post-disaster work leaving it up to international and local NGOs to pick up the pieces, sometimes added with the help of municipalities. But without sweeping powers, there is only so much the municipalities can do.

This thesis has shown that Karantina has always been a hub for affordable housing and a home for the downtrodden and for refugees. It has acknowledged that Karantina remains much cheaper than the surrounding areas of Beirut and this in turn represents an opportunity for the creation of new housing stock, new inhabitants, new economic possibilities, and new forms of diversity and inclusion. In other words, if better services were implemented more people would flock to the area and potentially increase the availability of housing stock through the encouragement of development. But, this thesis has also shown that Karantina has been subject to a number of threats which challenge continued affordability. In fact, affordability for the current residents of Karantina is undermined

because of both pre-existing conditions and those caused by the explosion and the financial crisis.

Finally, this thesis has tackled the question of reconstruction of affordable housing versus urban recovery of affordable housing, following the definition of the latter as “an open-ended “holistic and multi-layered process,” one that moves past “physical and the humanitarian” interventions and instead proposes an inclusive approach that is “locally informed and socially anchored” (Al-Harithy, 2021). In researching this thesis, I drew upon surveys, town halls, and discussions, as well as two months of volunteering in the area as an aid worker. This provided qualitative as well as quantitative data rooted in the local population and revealed the needs, wants, and desires of Karantina. But in proposing recommendations which involve not only the local population, e.g. the housing monitor, but also the municipality and parliament, namely inclusive zoning, vacancy taxes and rent controls, I have shown the importance of social anchoring, too. In other words, that lived experience and historical context should be taken into account, alongside the immediate need for rebuilding. Together these affirm the value and validity of the inclusive, urban recovery approach to post-disaster events such as the August 4 blast.

Housing, as has been shown in Al-Harithy et al (2022), is only one aspect of this approach, there is a broader need for a holistic, multilayered urban recovery framework which includes spatial, economic and social connectivity, cultural and economic vitality, the quality of the urban environment, and inclusive and sustainable development. However, for housing, the aspiration amongst Karantina’s residents is, in the end, a simple one: for affordable housing that continues to be affordable for them, not merely in relative terms. “I hope for safe homes,” remarked one interviewee, homes that “meet [our] economic and social needs.”<sup>38</sup> The point was echoed by another contributor in the post-blast survey, who said, “I

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<sup>38</sup> A.Y.A.I, (2021-February-13), (WaelAl-Saeed-Interviewer)

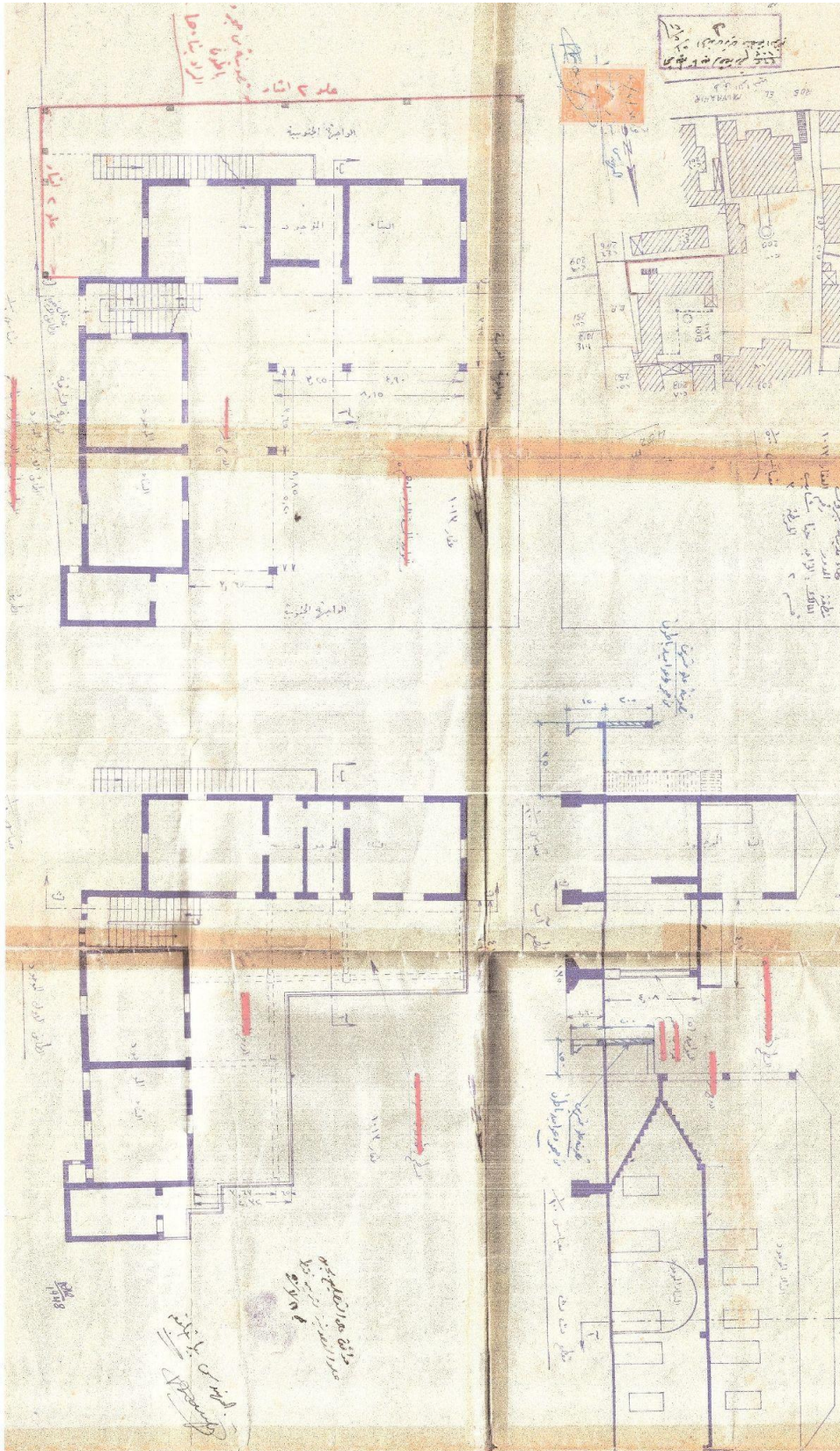
want Karantina to be better developed and open to the neighboring areas.” Above all, they said, they wanted Karantina to be “at its best.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> J.A.A, (2020-December-12), (HassanAliAswad-Interviewer)

# APPENDIX

## A. Building Permit for Plot 1013 showing different aspects of building's history



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