

Living Beirut's Security Zones: An Investigation of the Modalities and Practice of Urban Security

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Abstract

Over the past decade, security has gained enormous attention in the urban literature, reflecting its visibly increasing presence in cities worldwide. It is now widely acknowledged that security is a structuring force for cities both historically and now. Few scholars have however looked at the implications of security on the daily practices of urban dwellers. Based on extensive fieldwork during which we developed a street by street survey of security mechanisms in Beirut (Lebanon), interviewed city dwellers, and worked with artists and local writers reflecting of "security issues", this paper describes "security" as the accumulation of a set of constructed threats that bring together a multiplicity of forms and agents of securitization, both public and private, and generate new forms of social hierarchies with unequal repercussions on city dwellers. Far from the coherent symbol of an independent sovereign, we argue that security acts in Beirut as a reflection of and a catalyst for social and political divisions. [Urban security, Beirut, everyday practices].

Beirut is ugly. There is something that is lost in the city. It is that sense of freedom that I first felt when I came here from a village of one or two thousand people where everyone knew where you are going, what you are doing, when you are eating, . . . These days, I feel that I am back in the village except that those who are harassing me, inquiring about my whereabouts and ordering me around are 100 strangers, dressed in different costumes, playing police . . . ¹

When I ride [a bike] in Beirut, it seems as if I am playing an electronic game where one is constantly facing a set of obstacles that you have to navigate: cars, pedestrians, and of course the security system. [. . .] A barrier pops here, a metal bar there, a no parking zone somewhere else. You learn the vocabulary and the grammar to figure out how to win [. . .]. Of course, there is only one life and victory is getting to your goal without having wasted half a day negotiating your passage with some security guard.²

We first became interested in security because of the daily difficulties we experiences as dwellers in a city that has been marked by increasing securitization. Securitization has

translated into constraints on our mobility and daily experiences in city spaces. Blocked streets, deviated passages, no parking zones, no photography areas, illegal parking, and other security measures imposed daily harassments, lengthened commutes, and constrained many of our daily practices. We retaliated, sometimes talking back, sometimes adjusting, and sometimes giving up but recognized that our experience as dwellers in Beirut (Lebanon) had considerably changed since 2004, when processes of securitization that had subsided since the end of the civil war in 1991 resurfaced gradually to take over the cityscape.³ In many ways, our experiences of the urban in the shadow of security corroborate the findings of other scholars who worked on these issues. However the focus of these studies, which are generally limited to cities in the West (particularly New York and London), dictated the necessity to document and expand the current discourse on security and the city and de-center its focus from the western context. We also wanted to expand questions to include the materialization of security techniques in the daily practices of various groups of urban dwellers. We believed that important insights can be gained from analyzing the deployment of security in Beirut (Lebanon) because it provides a relatively extreme case in the expansion of its security system and the levels at which it interferes with the daily practices of residents. Beirut has a fragmented, overlapping, and contested security system where the definition of what constitutes a threat is constantly negotiated and therefore changing, the monopoly of state agencies on security is openly challenged, and the boundaries between the public and private identities of public agents blurred. This is not to claim that security systems are ever coherent or unanimously recognized as protecting a common good in the contexts where they have been studied, but the level of fragmentation, privatization, and contestation observed in Beirut encouraged us to look for insights from this case study.

The experience of the urban has been profoundly transformed through the deployment of security that works as an integral element in the production of city spaces

In line with other scholars, (Staehele and Mitchell 2007), our findings indicate that the experience of the urban has been profoundly transformed through the deployment of security that works as an integral element in the production of city spaces. By untangling the complexities of security systems and analyzing critically what constitutes a “threat” to whom and how, we unravel the script of what we argue to be a complex, overlapping, and contentious set of threats or anxieties that materialize spatially in entrenching segregation and socially, by differentiating among urban dwellers along the usual lines of gender, class, race, or religious/sectarian belonging.

Our findings are based on four months (February–May 2009) of field survey during which we developed a street by street survey of security mechanisms in Beirut, interviewed city dwellers about security, and worked with artists and local writers in order to develop a reflection of these issues.⁴ Earlier investigations had been conducted about the general experience of security with a group of students enrolled at the American University of Beirut by one of the authors in Fall/Winter 2007/2008. The first outcomes of this work were published earlier in formats aiming at triggering a public debate in Beirut about the implications of security for

the City (Fawaz et al. 2009, 2011). This paper seeks to take these reflections further.

The paper begins by documenting the results of a field survey of the municipal quarters of Beirut in which we show all the visible instances and modalities of security. We then move to unravel, on the one hand, the threats to which these systems respond and, on the other hand, to look at the influence of these security mechanisms on the daily practices of several groups of urban dwellers. The paper concludes by reflecting on the ways in which the case of Beirut informs our understanding of the place and role of security mechanisms in contemporary cities.

Security of/in the City

Over the past decade, security has gained enormous attention in the urban literature, reflecting its visibly increasing presence in cities worldwide. It is now widely acknowledged that security is a structuring force for cities both historically, when walls physically sought to protect them (Virilio 2002; Graham 2011), and in the present. The nexus of security and urbanization has been explored from the perspectives of development (Beall 2007), or migration (Coleman 2007; Gilbert 2007). Scholars concur that the militarization of urban space has been normalized in everyday sites and spaces, with security threats influencing daily practices and movements of populations almost everywhere (Graham 2011). This militarization is widely described as vital by scholars in the fields of security studies. It is however decried by others (Graham 2011; Németh and Hollander 2010; Low 2006; Marcuse 2006) who perceive it to threaten the very core of what urbanization means in terms of encounters with strangers (Wirth 1938), the freedom of anonymity (Benjamin 1983), or the potential for political action (Arendt 1958; Fraser 1990) for which the city has long been celebrated.

Studies investigating the security/city nexus commonly distinguish between “crime” and “terror” threats. The first, associated with robbery, murder, rape and other forms of insecurities that attracted the thrust of research on insecurity in western cities. It materializes spatially with enclaves such as gated communities where wealthier social groups retreat from the city proper to their secured quarters (Davis 2006). Similar (real or imagined) fears have triggered the transposition of such enclaves elsewhere around the global south where Latin American (Caldeira 2000), African (Samara 2009), Middle Eastern (Kuppinger 2005; Genis 2007), and other cities now frequently display such gated communities. Much of this security relies on private agencies but public policing strategies, such as “crowding crime out”, the broken window strategy, and others are also widely discussed in this literature and adopted as methods to deter crime and maintain safety.

During the last decade, insecurities generated by crime have been largely superseded in the urban literature (but not necessarily in reality) by the threats of “terror,” attacks commonly defined to target civilians for the sake of a larger political message (Beall 2007; Borell 2008). This

terminology is generally associated with the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City, which are described as unprecedented (Coaffee 2004), a turning point in the history of security/space in the West (Sorkin 2004; Marcuse 2006; Németh 2010; Németh and Hollander 2010; Graham 2011). A handful of scholars have also sought to extend the argument to the global south, showing that such terror attacks are also occurring in cities such as Karachi, Mumbai, Nairobi, Bogota or Beirut (Beall 2007; Borell 2008). Urban terror, it has been shown, has important symbolic dimensions, notably in terms of deliberately targeting what is urban (read: modern or developed) in the opponent's lifestyle. To denote this symbolic dimension, the term "urbicide" has been used to evoke the killing of sites of civilization or denying civility to one's opponents (Coward 2004; Graham 2004; Beall 2007). Insecurity triggered by terror attacks materializes spatially with a variety of measures in the form of no-go areas, regular security screening in public venues, limitations on the use and possible practices in open spaces such as roadblocks (Németh and Hollander 2010). These vary from large scale enclaves, such as the City of London's ring of steel (Coaffee 2004) or areas surrounding sports venues (Klauser 2011) to diffuse, scattered elements. Many of the strategies used are borrowed from military strategies, encouraging urban theorists to describe a militarization of the city and its everyday spaces (Coaffee 2004; Graham 2011).

Scholars have approached the question of security in relation to "terror" from a variety of angles. At a global scale, important questions have been raised on cross-national securitization, especially about the impacts of the United States' global strategies to secure resources and curtail so-called global terrorism (Cowen and Smith 2009; Morissey 2011). At a micro-scale, others have looked at the influence of the terror threat on the daily lives of city dwellers, how it transforms their experiences of the city, and the extent to which security can restore practices and help residents deal with potential signs of danger that they detect in their daily activities (Borell 2008). Two sets of questions have however dominated the literature on the terror security/city nexus. The first looks at how security can best be achieved, what mechanisms and designs should be adopted in the organization of the city, and what role should private and public actors play in the process. Scholars working in this area have specifically questioned the merits of urban planners and designers, for example, in contributing to the securitization of the city, comparing the multiplicity of methods that they have at their disposal such as crowding crime out, real-time policing, target hardening, and others (Molotch and McClain 2003).

The second question looks at the impact of the security apparatus on the city, both from the perspective of urban practices and economic development. Some scholars have reflected on how growing security concerns intersect with individual civil liberties (Lyon 2003) and people's daily practices in the city. Building on a widely accepted consensus among urban designers about the centrality of public spaces in fostering democratic practices (Madanipour 2003) by encouraging, for example,

interactions among strangers (Young 1990), these scholars have expressed concerns about the ways in which policing counters the public nature of these spaces and reduces their potential for fostering democracy. Vulnerable groups often avoid policed public spaces because of the harassment with which they generally associate policing. Policing also deters political practices in public spaces, especially those expressing dissent (Staeheli and Mitchell 2007; Németh and Hollander 2010; Graham 2011). Other scholars have looked at how security affects economic activities and more generally development. Coaffee (2004) argues that the need to restore trust in London as a global financial hub was the main impetus behind the imposition of the so-called ring of steel, an intensive security zone protected through a combination of visible barriers and CCTV surveillance. Samara (2009) notes that the security mechanisms deployed in Cape Town reflect the need to protect recent neoliberal investments. Samara shows that security sometimes contradicts and trumps the potentialities of development, as it rises to impose its own logic on the city. Scholars studying the rise of security struggle with the intersection of these forces, often accepting the impetus for security but reflecting on the possibility for instituting safety without jeopardizing civil liberties, the potentialities of the city, or economic interests. In western contexts, searches for transparent security mechanisms have begun to occupy planners, instilling the possibility of “securitized” yet free flowing spaces (Molotch and McClain 2003). Echoing the concerns of scholars regarding the transformation of public spaces in light of rising security concerns, we begin by documenting the security systems that are visibly deployed in the city.

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A network of conflicting “threats” and “securities”

In this section, we outline security as a visible architecture that we documented in the city and outline the “threats” that justify the deployment of these systems (See Fig. 1).

(1) *Securities.* For the past two decades, Beirut has been crisscrossed with a variety of security mechanisms that occupy most of its public spaces (map 1). The city’s dwellers have been considerably affected by constraints that limit their everyday practices by reducing their mobility (Monroe 2011) and their access and use of various forms of public spaces. Mechanisms have been deployed for surveillance, constraining and limiting activities, at times blocking activities altogether. These mechanisms are ubiquitous in the city. Because most security systems consider deterrence to be an important aspect of their operation, efforts are seldom deployed to conceal their presence. Armored vehicles and tanks, fortified walls, sand bags, barbed wire, metal barriers, concrete blocks, and manned booths are likely to be regular features of the daily commutes of most city dwellers. This is evidenced in map 1, which documents the security systems within the municipal quarters of Beirut, reflecting the results of a street by street survey conducted between February and May 2009 (Fawaz et al. 2010).⁵

VISIBLE SECURITY MECHANISMS IN MUNICIPAL BEIRUT
 Survey conducted between February and July 2008, revised in September 2010

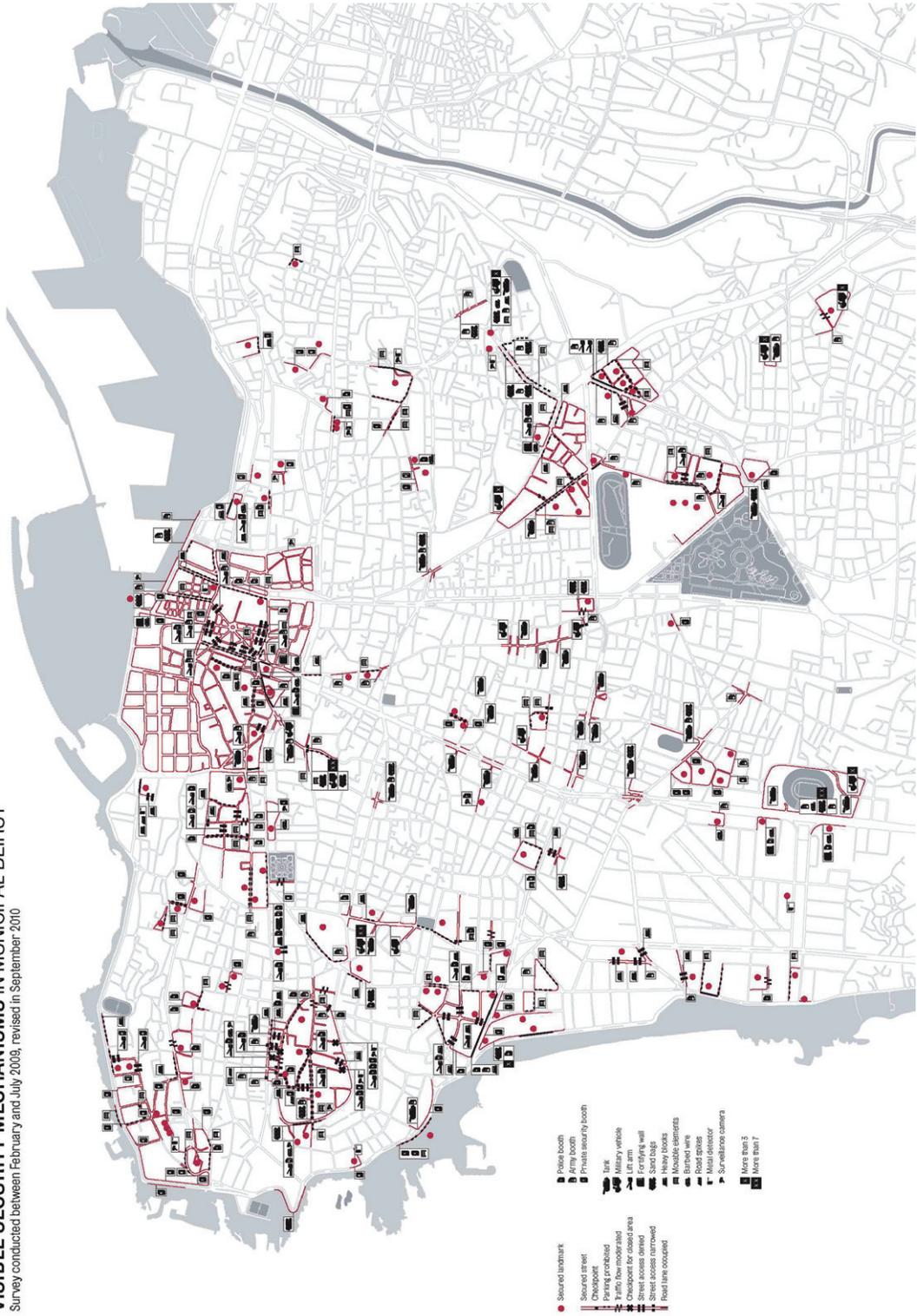


Figure 1. Visible Security Mechanism in Municipal Beirut. Map by authors.

If security systems are ubiquitous in the city, their intensity varies considerably from one area to another, as reflected by both the density of security mechanisms shown on the map and the type of elements that are deployed (e.g. the use of tanks or regular army jeeps, the use of sand bags, barbed wire, or concrete blocks). Looking more closely, our mapping points to four “hot spots” where neighborhoods have been turned into fortified enclaves (map 1).⁶ In these “hot spots,” one can observe an imposing architecture of concrete walls, booths, military tanks, sand bags, concrete and plastic cones and blocks, and barbed wire as well as the more subtle surveillance cameras and metal detectors. In several of these areas, residents are required to register and their cars are tagged with permits that identify them to the security system. “Hot spots” are manned by both public and private guards and the distinction between the two is often tricky (see below). This architecture translates into severe restrictions imposed on the practices of city dwellers, including blocked off main streets, diverted traffic, pedestrian and vehicular profiling, searches, and prohibitions on parking and photography. These measures eventually materialize as powerful disincentives for people to visit these areas. Businesses and commercial activities have died in these zones. Outside these hot-spots, security is often more diffuse and “relaxed.” Similar types of restrictions nonetheless abound, sporadically restricting passage, preventing parking and photography, imposing profiling, blocking mobile phone signals, and slowing down vehicular traffic. This deployment also relies on the display of armed men and vehicles.

Within an area, security deployment is dynamic. It responds to a pre-determined night/day schedule as well as to the estimated level of threat at a particular time. Thus, security deployment in hot spots intensifies at night when the closed-off perimeter expands, streets with restricted activities in the day are blocked, and intense profiling is conducted. Security deployment also responds to the level of perceived threat associated with local and regional tensions. For instance, international escalations (e.g. Israel and Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iran) lead to heightened tensions among Lebanese allies, exacerbate the sense of threat, and translate in increased securitization of political headquarters or private residences.

Lest we confuse our western readers, it is important to quickly explain that this level of threat is not publicly “announced” in the news, in the form of the yellow, orange, and red alerts that Americans have become accustomed to. It is rather deciphered by security personnel and regular dwellers from the daily tenor of the news, the intensity and vocabulary of political debates of local and regional news commentators and politicians. Urbanites also deduce the intensity of the threat from the deployment of security, which, when intensified, alerts dwellers that “something” is happening. This is the exceptional “over-deployment” or *istinfar* that constitutes an important indicator for detecting possible disruptions and deciding on one’s daily schedule and feasible whereabouts. More seasoned locals decipher more than the simple intensity of the security deployment. By identifying which elements are used,

how they are positioned, and what kind of restrictions they impose, city users know whether they are in the location of potential street clashes or trespassing on the security zone of a politician.

(2) Threats. Let us acknowledge first that the deployed security mechanisms cannot claim or even pretend to protect city dwellers from the two main threats that the majority of them face. The first is the threat of a regional war, echoing the 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon, during which air and sea attacks flattened entire neighborhoods and villages, displaced millions of people, killed thousands, and permanently crippled others. The only “defense” from these attacks is rapid population movements which, when possible, can save human lives but not material goods. The second are the threats incurred by the increasing economic vulnerabilities to which urbanites here and elsewhere are exposed (Wacquant 2008; Marcuse 2006; Beall 2007). They include rising shelter insecurities associated with intensive land speculation, the reduction of public security budgets, the lack of environmental policies to reduce increasing rates of pollution, and the absence of a public security net. Beirut’s security mechanisms, in line with what Marcuse (2006) has distinguished from actual “safety,” respond to the constructed and perceived threats that face particular political and economic interests and powerful social groups who are able to mobilize and leverage a visible security presence. By disentangling the findings of the field survey of visible security mechanisms that are presented in Map 1, we were able to distinguish at least three types of threats. Our knowledge of the local context, our previous research in Beirut, and the interviews we conducted encouraged us to add two other threats which are protected through less visible and hard to map but nonetheless very present security mechanisms. We outline them below before showing how they influence practices and movements in the city:

1. Threats to political figures and public buildings: Undeniably the most extensive and visibly blunt mechanism in Beirut, the protection of political figures gained momentum in Lebanon between 2004 and 2006 when a series of car bombs targeted the convoys of a number of figures. The most notable of these cases was the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in February 2005.⁷ This form of security includes the protection of public buildings, in line with New York (Németh and Hollander 2010) or London, (Coaffee 2004) where ministries, parliaments, and central public agencies have turned their vicinities into security quarters with blocked streets, limited access passages, parking and photography restriction, surveillance cameras, and security booths equipped with metal detectors. It also includes the protection of foreign embassies and private residences of political figures, and those who can afford enough clout to close off a street, reserve a number of parking spots, or post a number of guards to question those passing by. Its most severe instances are the four “hot spots” described in the previous section.

The protection of these locations is generally secured by public agents (police force) but important figures often combine policemen

with private security agents. An additional layer of “privatization” is secured through the selection of policemen assigned to a politician according to their “loyalty” to this person. In fact, some of these policemen are believed to have in been integrated in the public armed forces directly from the private militias that operated under the leadership of those political figures during the civil war (1975–1990). The “threatening public” to be profiled and/or stopped is hence dependent on the profiling criteria of these security actors which is generally tainted by sectarian, national, and class stereotypes.

2. Threat of Riots: Another threat is posed by inter-communal riots that generally occur at the intersection of different politico-religious territories. The first territorial divisions in Beirut were harshly delimited during the civil war. Twenty years after the end of the war, the boundaries between what constituted during the war East (Christian) and West (largely Muslim) Beirut have weakened but they remain inscribed in the minds of many urbanites, especially when it comes to serious decisions such as choosing a place to dwell (Genberg 2002; Yassin 2010). Since then, and owing to local and regional divisions, new boundaries have been created among urban dwellers, especially among supporters of the March 14 (largely Muslim Sunni and their Christian allies) and March 8 (largely Muslim Shiite and their Christian allies) groups. While the Muslim religious groups continue to live in mostly mixed Shiite/Sunni neighborhoods, panoplies of sectarian markers such as flags, emblems, graffiti, and posters are used to demarcate the territory of a group against so-called outsiders and to re-affirm the supposed allegiance of insiders (Morrissey and Gaffikin 2006). Over the past decade, disruptions have recurrently occurred with street riots of mostly opposing Muslim Shiite and Muslim Sunni youth.

Securitization against riots is implemented through army tanks and personnel, posted in so-called hot points of the city where they act to prevent young men from antagonistic political orientations to engage in street fights. Unlike the private security of politicians, army personnel rarely interrupt vehicular or pedestrian circulation. Communal and/or public areas have, however, at times permanently, been blocked off.⁸ The presence of soldiers reduces the range of possible street practices whereby, for example, youth groupings are discouraged (and disbanded, when they happen).

3. Threat of Sectarian Neighborhood Attacks: If riot control is perceived as the force preventing street clashes, others—specifically those participating in those clashes—have also organized themselves to “protect” their neighborhoods. Security in this category consists of neighborhood committees, local residents (mostly male) who appoint themselves as the protectors of their neighborhood, reconstructed generally as a sectarian territory. Such sectarian territories are not sharply delineated, although their boundaries become clearer when street fights erupt.

The presence of neighborhood committees is mostly marked by “observation” stations, a cluster of chairs at street corners often

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garnered by the traditional water pipe (*arguileh*) that men smoke while passing the time and chatting.⁹ In times of tensions, following fiery political speeches, young men are seen patrolling neighborhoods until late at night or organizing night watches with scheduled shifts. In several areas, youth groups also circulate in motorcades and cars, chanting and hailing their leaders, provoking sometimes other youth groups to engage them in street fights. These groups mostly carry sticks and other basic defense tools but they have also occasionally resorted to light weapons. Outside moments of tension, these neighborhood committees display a diffuse presence, questioning, for example, those perceived to be “outsiders” about their whereabouts in the neighborhood.

4. Threats to “Development”: Another layer of visible security seeks to protect important consumer points, bank offices, and similar buildings deemed important for the national economy. In line with Németh and Hollander’s findings in New York (2010), we observed that restrictions and private security are imposed around high-end residential buildings, luxurious malls and hotels, and banks. Threats in this category are closely associated with the above-described threats of terrorism. Their deployment was indeed intensified following the car bomb explosions, and in an effort to encourage consumerism and re-instill the compromised sense of safety among shoppers (Borell 2008). It is however clear that “development security” also acts against the threat of petty crime. It supports and perhaps justifies the process of screening out undesirable visitors, such as those not wearing proper attire. Narratives about screenings on the basis of dress codes (e.g. shorts, flip flops), looks (e.g. beard, veil), and others abound in the discourses of city users, notably about Beirut Downtown, and suggest that security personnel are suspicious of more than would-be-terrorists. We found that high-end malls were “protected” by private security that included bag searches at main entrances and metal detectors screening cars. Upscale hotels installed similar forms of security, particularly those known to host political meetings and/or politicians. The Phoenicia Hotel blocked an entire lane of the highway that circles the building and prevents parking all around its block. Similarly, fearing its connections to the British government’s unpopular positions on regional foreign policies, the British HSBC bank installed security booths in front of its offices throughout the city and screens all visitors.

This form of security is organized mostly through private security firms although in some instances, public security is added. Given its interest in encouraging consumerism by reducing the psychological sense of “threat,” this security differs from the three listed above as it relies on relatively discreet mechanisms, such as concrete blocks, surveillance cameras, and light metal detectors.¹⁰ The impetus for discretion in fact sets this form of security in tension with others, as more visible mechanisms of securitization are seen as threatening to consumption, which should instill safety, but not deter consumers.

5. Threat to “Resistance Security”: A final layer of security consists of the protection of the military resistance against Israel (namely Hezbollah’s security). Largely invisible in the municipal boundaries of the city and relatively concealed in its suburbs, this security is organized, coordinated, and controlled directly by Hezbollah. The lack of visible markers discouraged us from developing a mapping of this area, in line with what we did in Municipal Beirut. It is however known that Beirut, its suburbs, and other regions hosting members of the resistance for either military operations or training are subdivided in security quarters with varying levels of intensity. It is also known that as the seat of Hezbollah’s political and service headquarter and the dwelling space of most of its cadres and popular base, the southern suburbs are the core zone of this protection system (Harb 2010). There, restrictions on grouping, photography, mapping, taking notes, and other “suspicious” practices are tightly organized through networks of neighborhood dwellers who report “suspicious” activities, and through moving patrols (in cars and on foot), hidden cameras, and other means (Wege 2008).

This outline of threats shows that what looks as a homogenous landscape of security supports an overlapping set of threats that work at times together, but also often in tension. Thus, in the vicinities of upscale hotels and malls as well as in zones of urban renewal (notably Beirut Downtown), the threats of political assassinations and the protection of economic interests overlap. Screening occurs simultaneously to protect politicians and to push away those whose looks are deemed “undesirable.” Yet, the logic of security mechanisms which generates traffic jams, imposes harassments and delays at the entrances of malls and other businesses, acts as a disincentive for people to conduct their regular practices, including shopping. Here the logic of security contradicts the development logic (see Samara (2009) on South Africa). It also contradicts other logics and interests in the city, particularly those of commuters.

Practicing security

It is worth recalling that the timing of interviews (whether they occur immediately after security threats) and a respondent’s positioning vis-à-vis the threats they face (whether they feel targeted as a group or not) influences how they will experience security deployments. Thus, analyzing the reactions of a group of middle-income dwellers in neighborhoods where explosions had occurred in preceding weeks, Borell (2008) found respondents to be highly concerned about security threats, altering their daily practices by reducing movements and modifying routings. The responses he collected hence described security deployment as “legitimate” and “necessary.” In the absence of such immediate threats, Monroe (2011) found most city users negotiating the hassle of security rather than praising its protection. Since we conducted our interviews at least two years after the last explosion, our findings corroborate with Mon-

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roe's: urbanites complained how security modified their daily practices, rather than dwelling on a possible "threat".

In order to understand how users live the securitization of the city, we documented the cases of 43 respondents who were either interviewed or asked to self-report and document how they perceived and interacted with security. The sample included 29 students enrolled in an urban theory seminar during Fall 2007/2008 at the American University of Beirut who were given these questions as part of a course assignment. The sample was then extended to include a wider group of social agents, women and men, younger and older, Lebanese, low-income foreign migrant workers, and Palestinian refugees. We inquired about their perceptions of security mechanisms in relation to two aspects of their daily practice: their access in/movement around their residence and their mobility in the city. Respondents were asked whether they perceived security mechanisms around their homes to be "legitimate," whether they felt "safer" because of their presence, and how they modified their urban trajectories in relation to the presence of security in particular areas. Our findings reflected the mapping we had conducted. Of the 43 respondents, 37 were able to describe a clear security deployment around their residences that included blocking the building's internal staircases, security agents posted in front of buildings and screening visitors, streets blocked with no possibility for visitors to drive through, cameras directed at homes because of their proximity to prominent figures, and restrictions on passage and parking. All respondents described modified trajectories, negotiations with security actors, and routine delays. They provided a strong criticism of the deployment of security, albeit nuanced by the recognition that some "threats" may be more legitimate than others.

What influenced how security was experienced by respondents? Our findings indicate that in Beirut, the perception of security is solidly tainted by one's own political orientation which, in turn, affects the respondent's assessment of the threat and his/her judgment of whether security is justified or not. Thus the divergent positions of three neighborhood dwellers in a residential area known to be secured by neighborhood committees (threat 3): two of the dwellers described their areas as "barricaded," and "threatened" and argued that neighborhood youths were acting in self-defense to protect themselves from outsiders who had already wrecked havoc in their area. They recognized that this protection imposed additional constraints on their movements. The third dismissed these "threats" as constructed by the "sectarian feelings" of residents and their committees. He felt mostly "threatened" by the neighborhood committees. Similarly, two respondents from different religious groups reflected opposing positions about the protection imposed on the former Prime Minister's gravesite. One complained about the closing-off of a main public square while the other described a sense of "safety and homeliness" that she felt when visiting the same location, oblivious to the presence of security guards.

In Lebanon, political orientation is often based on sectarian religious belief. Even when it is not, security personnel are likely to assess threat

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on this basis. Being asked for one's papers is hence often the prelude for either a welcoming note or a harsh dismissal, especially when names (as they increasingly do) reflect belonging to a religious sect. More visible signs of religiosity, such as crosses, veils (and how they are worn), or whether a man has long hair or not, whether he/she is tattooed, or wears flip-flops, can often be interpreted as indicators of a political position and used to identify the "outsider" as friend or foe. Foreigners often escape these sectarian security readings, since they do not report to the same identifiers. Yet they are not immune to these circumstances and that they also modify their movements and practices according to whether they consider themselves in a friendly neighborhood or not. Veiled female migrant workers, for example, admitted avoiding the eastern (predominantly Christian) section of town. An observant Christian migrant worker stated that she preferred to live in the eastern section of town because of the prevalence of churches, which she deemed important. A young (Sunni) Syrian construction worker preferred to live in areas supportive of Hezbollah where he felt more welcome. He notes that he avoided jobs in the (Christian) neighborhood of Achrafiyyeh.

Another strong determinant of the perception of security is gender, whose effects are undeniably strong, even if not necessarily uniform. The fact that security personnel are exclusively male dictates the necessity for a gendered analysis of urban public spaces (Ghannam 2002, 2011). Many women associate security with safety against personnel threats. Two single female respondents of different age groups conceded that while they may constitute a hassle, the security mechanisms around their houses provided them with additional "safety" as single women, returning home alone in the evening. One respondent, a foreign student, explained that she had deliberately looked for housing within zones closed off for the security of politicians, thinking that she would be safer living on her own. Another recognized her ambivalence vis-à-vis security, feeling at times "safer" and at other "claustrophobic." Such sense of safety engendered by closing off the streets is shared by the mother of two young children who benefits indirectly from street closures and the presence of security guards as they open additional space for her children to play. Thus, the quarters around the former prime minister's residence, one of four hot spots in the city, is used by children for biking and/or playing football in a city where open spaces are scarce. Similarly, the headquarters of Hezbollah prior to their destruction in 2006 by the Israeli bombardments of Beirut's suburbs were described by many local children as a play area. The presence of groups of men in the streets can however also limit women's movements. Two female students reported that the presence of the young security men near their houses had considerably constrained their movements. In a conservative neighborhood, fathers were reluctant to see their daughters walk in front of a crowd of men to leave/come in the buildings and now preferred to have them escorted, especially in the evenings. Here security intersects with other forms of social securitization that stem from local representations and practices of respectability attached to gender and mobility (Ghannam 2011). They

nonetheless reflect clearly how security, as described here in terms of a network of constraints, can intersect to reduce the mobility of particular groups.

Class and/or one's precarious status in the city also constitute strong determinants of the experience of security. Migrant workers reported taking longer routes to avoid checkpoints, changing sidewalks when walking in the presence of police, stepping out of a car if the driver chose to go through a "high protection area" where they could be asked about their papers, even if their status was legal. They described repeated harassment and daily laborers conceded that they avoided working in certain areas seen as security "zones." One respondent who lives in an suburban area where security had been severely increased complained about the difficulty residents were facing to hire the daily laborers for garden and maintenance work at affordable prices. A Palestinian refugee, described her anxiety about her seventeen-year-old son whose every movement in the city, she felt, was depicted as a threat. In contrast, Monroe (2011) describes an upper class female driving an expensive car who speaks back at security men when she needs to cross a blocked road and is regularly granted rapid access. Our own experiences as upper middle class urbanites is one in which we repeatedly speak back to security men and, even if not granted access, loudly complain about their presence. In that sense, security dictates varying levels of restrictions and reactions between those who feel entitled to speak back and those who cannot, those who have to avoid certain roads to avoid exposure and those who do not.

In some cases, however, this situation has been reversed, especially when politicians have established residence in upper income neighborhoods and imposed their security system on those who traditionally felt the need to protect themselves. This was most poignantly the case for the residents of Rabieh, an upscale suburban neighborhood which until 2005 had relied on private security guards and watch dogs for protection. When a prominent politician established residence in the neighborhood, dwellers soon fired their watchmen. Not only did they see their own security system largely superseded by the large security apparatus that was established, but they soon became themselves the "potential" threat. Dwellers had to tag their cars in order to acquire parking and passage permits, to register with a local security, and to respond to patrols about their whereabouts or visitors (Al Rahi 2009).

It is clear that a certain "normalization" of security has occurred in the perception of many city dwellers who see security elements as part of the daily hassles they deal with. One contributor to the Beirut Security and the City Dwellers publication we launched last year (May 2011), for example, explained that she uses tanks as landmarks that help orient her in the city. She had suspended the associations of violence and restrictions normally associated with those elements given that they did not directly interfere with her movements (Mikdashi 2011). To others, notably those who can be constructed as "suspicious" such as migrant workers and/or low-income refugees, the presence of this security remains

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consistently associated with potential harassment and hence hurdles to be avoided when circulating in the city.

This is not to say that urban dwellers are passive recipients of a mechanism in which they do not play a role. People may agree and wholeheartedly participate in strengthening a security system. This is clear in the impromptu interpellations, informal harassments, and other forms that both the security of Hezbollah and the neighborhood committee securities are built on. City dwellers have also acquired a certain competence to minimize disruptions when they are navigating the system. Two young males who commute by bicycle described alternative, security-free routes and outlined a set of measures they take to avoid the scrutiny of the security personnel: carrying smaller back-packs and using only transparent bags, not wearing flip-flops or shorts, shaving, etc. A driver noted that he slowed down and lowered the volume of his radio when he passed by the security checkpoint he had to cross daily. What one wears, where and how one looks, how one responds and what kind of sense of entitlement one can deploy, or when one opts to speak back or not, are part of the competences of city dwellers that we detected in the numerous stories we collected, largely echoing our own experiences of Beirut. Some respondents deployed subversive strategies, such as the young woman who laughingly responded: "I enjoy the display of these virile males all over the city. It's pleasant to look at. I know they objectify me but I also do the same to them . . . I don't think of security as a heavy burden at all."

Discussion

The findings above substantiate our hypothesis that security has become a reality to reckon with in today's cities. More specifically, our findings confirm the hypothesis that the architecture of security is an integral element of the city that works to entrench socio-spatial divisions and shapes the daily experiences of dwellers along gender, class, race, and religious/sectarian social hierarchies that social scientists have shown to structure other aspects of the urban experience (Ghannam 2011). There remain specificities to this case that are important to reflect on because they provide valuable insights to the effects of security and the dimensions it can take in contexts where national sovereignty is heavily contested, where social agents play a central role in the organization, management and contestation of security, and in the absence of the structures of accountability that control, to a large extent, the operations of the private security regimes described in the literature. One of the most striking aspects of the security deployment in Beirut is that it is largely unaffected by its implications on daily practices, so that the logic of its deployment has taken over other organizational logics in the city. The most important among those is the tension that exists between, on the one hand, economic interests that require a sense of normalcy in the city, with the fluidity and mobility that are prerequisites for the success of consumerism, and, on the other hand, the logic of protection for political

Perhaps the most important question that is raised by this study addresses the place of the state in the security systems that are deployed in Beirut

figures whose power and interests trump even economic needs. One can also contrast the logic of security to the logic of everyday life in the city when school children are subjected to daily searches near the headquarters of the French Embassy and the National Security, or when streets can be blocked for hours if a convoy is to pass by. In the absence of a public arbiter who can defend a “common good” that may be embodied by the health of the economy or good circulation in the city, those who can leverage the most muscled argument win, poignantly showing not only the expected disregard for a common good but actually the absence of a claim forwarded in the name of a “common good” that justifies the deployment of security.

As a result, perhaps the most important question that is raised by this case study addresses the place of the state in the security systems that are deployed in Beirut. There remain in the documentation and analysis of “security” in New York, London, or Paris coherent, coordinated, and large-scale operative security systems that rest in the hands of a “state.” This is particularly the case with the security deployment vis-à-vis so-called terrorist attacks from which emerges the representation of a unified public authority who is increasingly adding to its portfolio of population management the necessity to identify, classify, and control populations that should be assessed for the potential threat that some odd actors can pose on other citizens. In other words, urban researchers are giving us a bio-political reading of the nature of state activities that now incorporate security and use it as a sift to determine who can aspire to become a citizen and who cannot (Ball and Webster 2003; Lyon 2003; Coaffee 2005; Marcuse 2006; Graham 2011). Throughout these contexts, security practices are consistently conducted in the name of a common good, the protection of civilian populations from external threats often associated with Islamic international terrorism. Graham (2011) argues that state power seeks to target asymmetric non-state forces and movements to the point where contemporary warfare becomes effectively coterminous with the space of civil society itself. These depictions clearly make state authorities the center of observation and control, leading a number of scholars to raise concerns about the strengthening of a “big brother” (Thomas et al. 2002; Lyon 2003) and to question the impact of state encroachments on civil liberties when such restrictions are imposed (Coaffee 2005; Marcuse 2006). The main conclusion is for the necessity to construct historical and contemporary studies of security that assess the position and role of state authorities at their center (Graham 2011).

In contrast, our case study indicates that Beirut is subjected to overlapping, sometimes conflicting security systems that neither report to the same authorities nor concur on their identification of what constitutes a threat. This can happen across security systems, for example between the security of Hezbollah that perceives right-wing politicians allied to “a foreign (United States) agenda” as potential threats while conversely, politicians allied with the March 14 movement perceive the Hezbollah security system and its allies as “the threat.”¹¹ Each of these security

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systems represents a contending claim over the sovereignty of the country. Each claims an element of the “public” through connections to and integration within state security apparatus, without ever fully submitting to a public authority. In fact, one quickly recognizes that not much is “public” in the “public security” mechanisms of Beirut. Thus, security agents in the public sector are generally appointed on the basis of sectarian/political affiliations and are assigned to the protection of particular figures, depending on this affiliation. Furthermore, private security companies often display associations to political parties. Several of these “companies” emerged as “militias in disguise” in May 2008, when street fights erupted between private security companies deployed to protect particular politicians, members of Hezbollah security, and others over who controls Beirut’s streets. Finally, private citizen groups participate in organizing neighborhood security, especially in moments of political tensions (threat 3 above). They complement through their practices the large scale fortifications of individual politicians with securitized neighborhoods whose protected identity serve to glorify their allegiance to a specific political authority. In sum, securitization may be the reflection of the fragmentation of a political system and society that are increasingly compartmentalizing the respective city into territories each securitized by its own system.

The homogeneous landscape of security protected by the same devices (road blocks, metal barriers, barbed wires, etc.) and methods (banned and restricted uses, surveillance) can be deciphered by seasoned city users as the tool to compartmentalize Beirut. Backing their reading of security by territorial markers such as posters, flags, attire, accent, or language, city dwellers interpret security as the sign of the city’s divisions and deduce the “threats” to which they could be exposed. These readings inform the individual sense of safety, and hence the decision to enter a neighborhood, depending on how one predicts one’s presence will be received. In other words, a “threat” in Beirut is dynamically changing as one moves across the fragmented urban landscape. Depending on one’s individual identity, as it is mapped in the local religious sectarian and national landscape of divisions, one changes position from possible victim to potential terrorist just by changing neighborhoods. Thus, many city dwellers choose not to visit the city’s southern suburbs where they feel they may be seen as undesirable by the Hezbollah security that controls the area. Others choose not to go by areas where politicians, especially the former Prime Minister, reside because they fear they will be questioned and/or harassed.

Two main points emerge from these contrasting representations of the role of the state in contemporary security deployment. First, our findings question the image of the coherent security system presented in the literature. Could it be that Beirut presents only a more extreme case of the fragmentation, divisions, and radically different experience of security that exist elsewhere? After all, the Anglophone policing literature is rife with examples of private security (Caldeira 2001; Davis 2008), community policing, and other forms of privatizing the practice of

policing (Bay and Shealing 1996). These systems construct particular definitions of what constitutes a threat (Loader 2000). They selectively target particular social groups, and silence particular practices in public spaces, specifically those of minorities that the mainstream culture associates with so-called terrorist groups (Hagopian 2004). There is ample evidence that class, race, and religious biases abound in the practices of both public and private security systems in the United States, England, or France (Dikeç 2007). Our findings, therefore, encourage us to think about refracting our findings back to those of other scholars and looking for cracks in the depictions of coherent body politics, for contending claims of what is an acceptable level of safety and security, and for the divergent experiences of security—particularly those of minorities.

One can read in the various security systems in Beirut a reflection of the fragmented body politic of the city, contending claims of sovereignty, or the multiple sovereignties that make up Lebanese politics

Second, our findings show that there is a qualitative difference between the security systems in Beirut and those described in the literature, which is reflected in the difficulty to speak of a public security system in Beirut. In fact, one can read in the various security systems that are deployed in Beirut a reflection of the fragmented body politic of the city, the contending claims of sovereignty or, should we say, the multiple, hybrid sovereignties that make up the Lebanese political scene. The alignment of these claims and their respective security systems with the sectarian groups that historically formed the parties of the Lebanese civil war as well as emerging social/sectarian divisions indicate that security is also embodying national divisions, providing a militarized dimension and a territorial materialization to these divisions. Securitization consolidates the fragmentation that is reminiscent of the civil war rather than a national mobilization against an external threat. One expects that the impacts of securitization in Beirut would parallel those of other social contexts rife with histories of social/civil conflicts, which are entrenched and intensified by security deployment. The cases of Baghdad, Kabul, and Kosovo come to mind. Although we do not possess a systematic documentation of the security deployment in these places, anecdotal references in the press point to the importance of drawing parallels across these contexts.

This leads to perhaps the most alarming observation about impacts of the security deployment: security deployment is transforming the landscape of the city and its practices. Contending threats and security mechanisms are building territories, entrenching enclaves, and solidifying divisions in the city. They are threatening the commons, the public spaces, which scholars have defined as the symbolic and actual fulcrum of civility where strangers meet on the limits/borders between zones. These spaces are generally reconstructed in the security era as spaces of dangerous intersections, potential locations for street fighting among contending groups. As a result, they are securitized by army tanks and army personnel that limit social practices in those areas to “passage” rather than meeting. This is reflected in the examples of users’ practices recounted above. It is also evidenced in the map, in several instances where we see clusters of tanks in communal spaces. In this process, the political role of public space is rendered dysfunctional as all groupings are

suspiciously evaluated as potential rioters and disbanded. The prospects for political action are hence curtailed, well in line with the predictions of Staeheli and Mitchell (2007) about the impact of security on the potentials for urban political action. The parallel with ongoing changes in the Middle East in the Spring/Summer of 2011 are evident. In Cairo, for instance, the ongoing struggle over the control of Tahrir Square has symbolically marked who controls the city since the January 2011 revolution. Similarly, it is by the force of tank shells, and by occupying and blocking central squares that the Syrian government is currently looking to curtail dissent in Hama and other cities. As for the Bahraini government, it chose to bulldoze the main square where popular protests had occurred, erasing one of the main symbols of Manama, Pearl Square and its central arches.

Conclusion

By extending the research on urban security to Beirut, we have provided in this paper new evidence of the materialization of securitization in urban space. More specifically, we have shown the materialization of security as a catalyst of social and political divisions in the Beiruti context. We demonstrated that like capital, security has become one more form in which existing social hierarchies are consolidated and/or challenged and new ones imposed. An individual's political position and/or sympathy for a particular political group, her gender, age, class, religion or nationality converge to construct the same security deployment in unequal frames, with one being threatening and the other protective. The actual experience of security and how it affects one's practices differs considerably from one person to another, depending on their position in social hierarchies that determine whether they will be constructed as a possible threat by a security group, rendering some groups more vulnerable than others. These forces eventually reconstruct people's geographies of the city, paralleling the visible architecture of security with another divided geography in which city dwellers self-select themselves as able to move in particular neighborhoods, depending on how their presence will be interpreted and scrutinized. This takes us back to important questions regarding citizenship, entitlement, and more generally the right to the city . . . But this is the subject of a future research.

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Notes

¹Remarks of a 70-year-old woman who moved to Beirut from her native village in South Lebanon in the 1960s.

²Comments made by a young cyclist.

³Even when they subsided, security mechanisms never entirely disappeared. Security processes associated with the private protection of malls and private residences increased during the 1990s.

⁴Fieldwork was done with the help of two assistants, Nadine Bekdache and Nancy Hamad. Nadine Bekdache also managed and helped conceptualize the Arabic version of the *Beirut Security* publication (Fawaz et al. 2011).

⁵For legibility, the map only documents the most intrusive types of security mechanisms. It is however reasonable to assume that not a single street in the city, secondary or main, doesn't have some form of securitization.

⁶The four spots outlined in Map 1 correspond to the following landmarks: (i) the former residence of the former Prime Minister Hariri that acts as the headquarter for his political coalition, (ii) the city center which houses a large group of business and governmental agencies including the national parliament, the seat of the Prime Minister, some foreign embassies, and the regional headquarters of the United Nations, (iii) the cluster of public buildings housing the headquarters of National Security, a central police station, the Military hospital, and the French Embassy on the Old Damascus Road, and (iv) the private residence of the Head of national Parliament, the national legislative power, also considered to be the head of a main national political coalition opposed to the Prime Minister's.

⁷The first of these incidents dates back to October 2004, when Marwan Hamadeh, a former Minister and a vocal critic of the Syrian influence over national decision making in Lebanon was targeted by a road bomb that he survived. In February 2005, and along with former Prime Minister Hariri, the Minister of Finance, Bassel Fleihan and several bodyguards were killed in a massive road bomb. Hariri's assassination was a turning point in Lebanon's political life. It triggered an important political movement, now known as March 14, which is generally credited for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, to the formation of an opposing coalition spearheaded by Hezbollah (the March 8 coalition).

⁸In the main square of Tareek el-Jadida (the Sunni, pro-March 14 neighborhood par excellence), tanks have blocked the main area where Mawled (traditional religious) ceremonies and other celebrations were traditionally held. At the time of the survey, the square was occupied by a tank and all celebrations had been cancelled for "fear of riots."

⁹In his thesis for the Department of Architecture and Design in June 2009, Marwan Kaabour presented a critique of these neighborhood patrols. He pointed to the role of the water pipe.

¹⁰Many of the latter are widely known to be ineffective and only used for their supposedly positive psychological effects of instilling a "sense of safety" rather than the actual implementation of a protection plan. The dowsing rod for instance, a fake device which claimed to detect bombs and other explosive materials at a distance, was shown by a BBC investigation to be a fraud. See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/inquiry-into-sale-of-fake-bomb-detectors-expanded-1994769.html>

¹¹These mutual accusations exploded eventually in accusations leveraged against Hezbollah for the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri through the international tribunal that was largely funded and authorized by the anti-Hezbollah forces in the Lebanese government and their international allies. Whether Hezbollah was involved or not in the crime is not the issue here. The evidently political nature of the trial betrays either way the seriousness of the mutual accusations that politicians from both camps display.

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