

THE ARMENIAN QUARTERS IN BEIRUT

# BOURJ HAMMOUD AND KARM EL ZEITOUN

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THE ARMENIAN QUARTERS IN BEIRUT

**BOURJ HAMMOUD** AND  
**KARM EL ZEITOUN**



*I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread and water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, **see if they will not create a new Armenia.***

William Saroyan (1908-1981)

## Introduction

When the first waves of Armenian refugees arrived in Beirut in the 1920s, Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun were only a large plain and a steep hill with a few agricultural fields, some olive groves and a few small houses sprinkled over the empty landscapes. Having survived the atrocities and the suffering of the genocide on their people in their now Turkish homelands, it became necessary for them to build a new life in a surrounding that was very different from their original cities in Cilicia and other Turkish regions. The Armenians came into a context of a changing city, where the old Ottoman rule had been overthrown and the new French mandate was just a few years old. In cooperation with this new power and international support the Armenians were able to overcome the misery of the refugee camps and turn the fields of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun into vibrant parts of the city. Their tradition of craftsmanship and their gift for trading and commerce soon led to the development of a vivid economy and a variety of artisans that produced numerous specialised goods, many of them new to the Lebanese society.

Today Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun are extraordinary dense quarters with many different ways to use the initial grids that were the basis of the foundation of the two quarters, with industrial quarters, commercial souks, strong residential communities and a dynamic in their public spaces that resembles an old city center much more than an eighty years old refugee shelter. With their cultural habits, their diligence and their skilfulness the Armenians were able to establish themselves and their quarters as valuable extension to the thousands of years old and rich cultural environment of Beirut.

# THE ARMENIAN QUARTERS IN BEIRUT BOURJ HAMMOUD AND KARM EL ZEITOUN

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I. THE ARMENIAN STORY

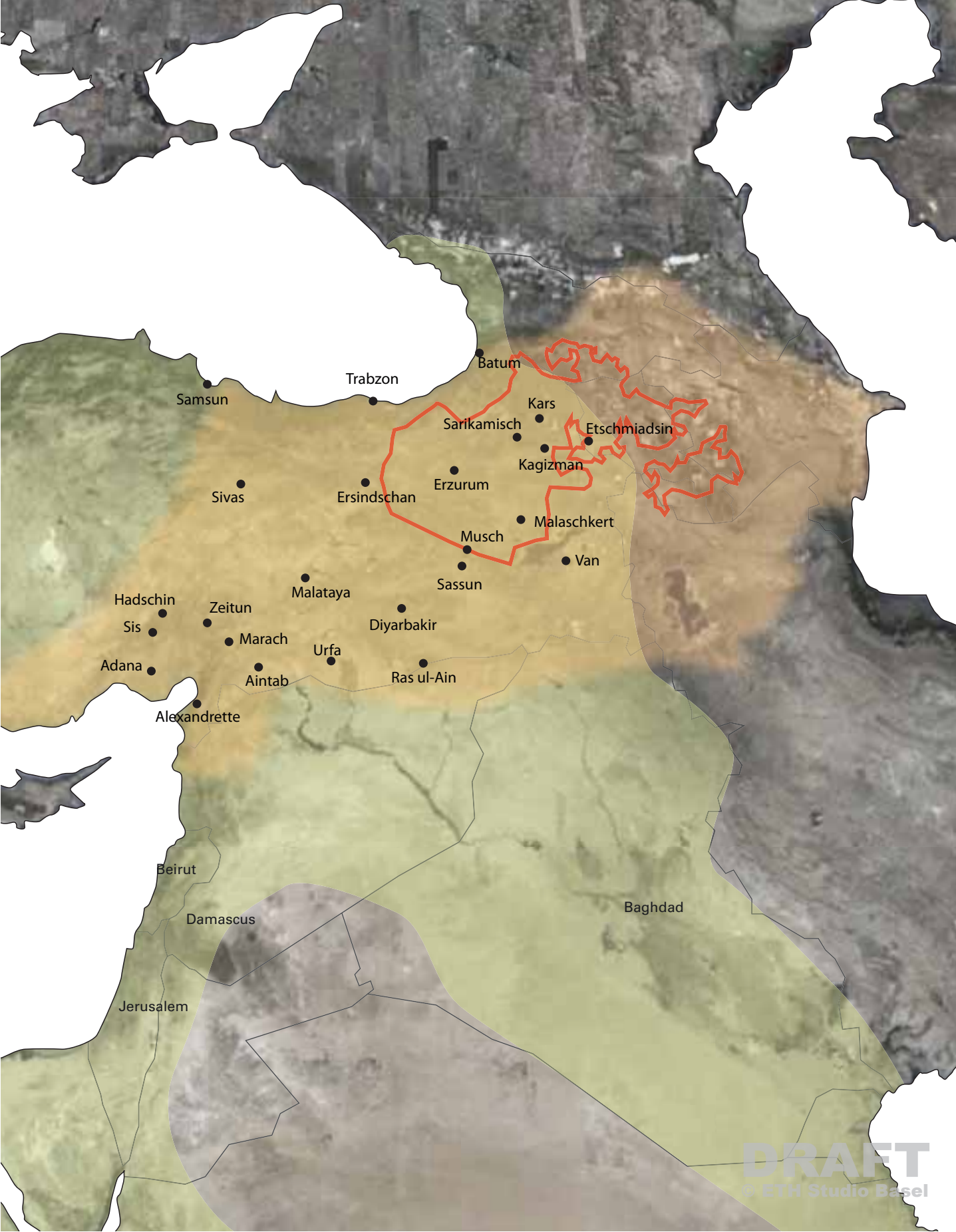


-  Ottoman Empire in the 18th century
-  Territories with major Armenian populations
-  Historic core of Armenia

## The Armenian homelands and the Ottoman Empire

The Armenians have lived in the northeastern ends of the Middle East ever since the sixth century BC, when for the first time an Armenian kingdom had been established. Having been conquered by the Byzantines and the Persians, the Armenian state was reestablished several times, until, following the 1064 occupation of Armenian territories by the Seldjuk Turks and further conquests, most of the Armenians fell under Turkish respectively Ottoman rule. The majority of the Armenians lived in their original homelands near the borders of today's Turkey, Armenia and Georgia, while another large part settled in the region of Cilicia with the cities of Adana, Sis, Marach and Alexandrette being the centers for Armenians in that area. In the early 19th century, some parts of the Armenian regions were incorporated into the Russian empire. Still most of the Armenians remained in the Ottoman Empire, being treated as second class citizens compared to the Muslim population. Nevertheless the Armenians preserved a strong feeling of their identity, especially depending on the Armenian church and their Christianity as common element.












Samsun  
Trabzon  
Batum  
Kars  
Sarikamisch  
Etschmiadsin  
Kagizman  
Erzurum  
Ersindschan  
Musch  
Malaschkert  
Van  
Sivas  
Hadschin  
Sis  
Zeitun  
Marach  
Adana  
Aintab  
Urfa  
Diyarbakir  
Ras ul-Ain  
Alexandrette

Beirut  
Damascus  
Baghdad  
Jerusalem

# The Armenians in the 19th century and the genocide of the early 20th century

Having lived mostly peacefully as one of the major Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, a series of fateful events lead to increasing oppression on the Armenian population, resulting in a complete wipe-out of the Armenians in Turkey and a huge number of refugees.

-  Borders of the Ottoman Empire
-  Territories of massacres against Armenian population
-  Places of major Armenian resistance
-  Major Armenian movements out of the Turkish areas
-  Major Armenian return movements
-  Minimal/maximal estimated number of Armenian victims in numbers of 30'000
-  French mandate in Cilicia

Ottoman Empire

19th Century: Period of decline of the Ottoman Empire. It loses territories to Russia and Great Britain and many nationalities that have been part of it become independent.



1876: Abdul Hamid II becomes Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, re-constituting Pan-Islamic ideas as state ideology.

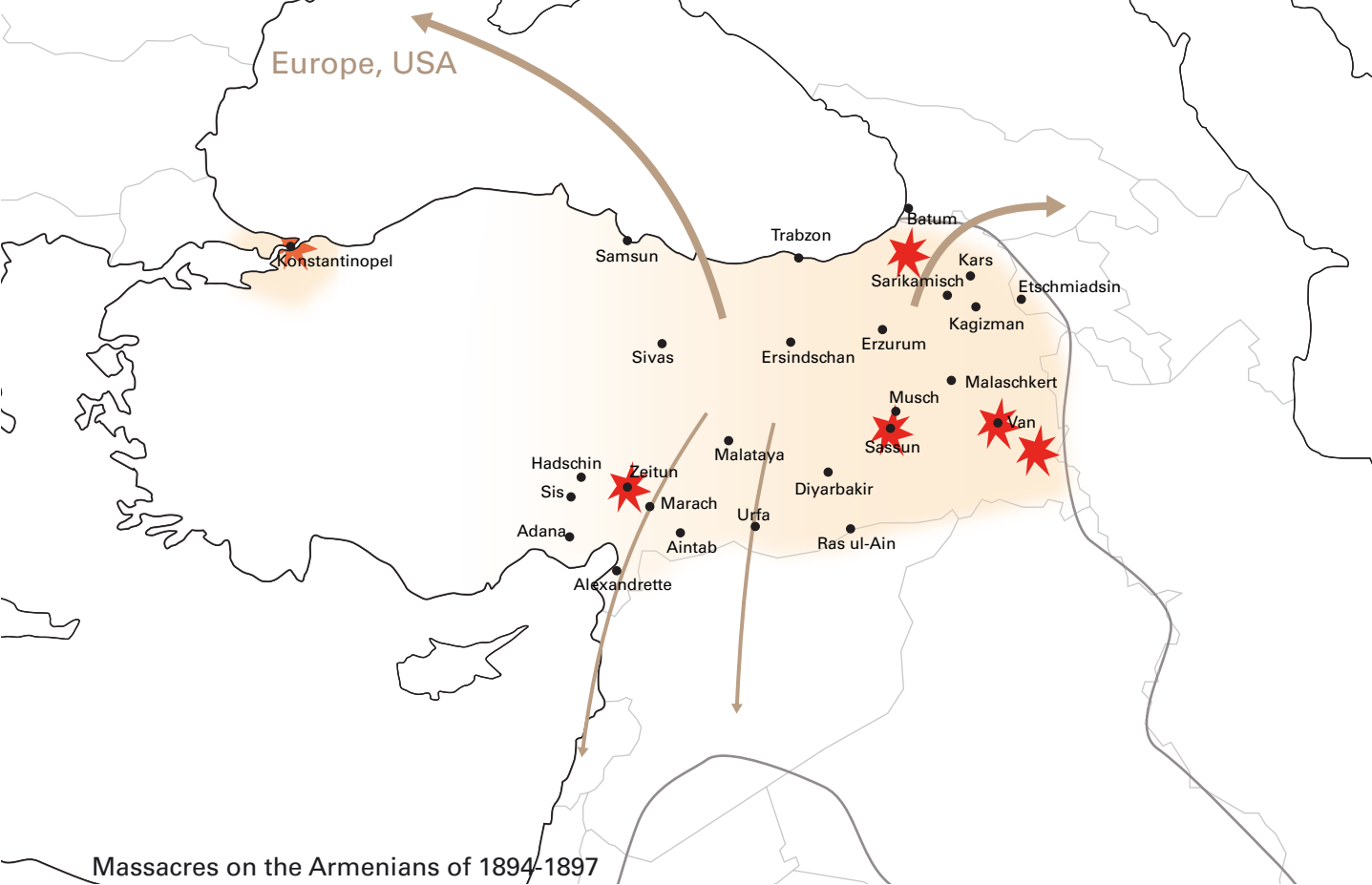
1877-1878: Russo-Turkish war with massive loss of territory for the Ottomans. It results in the Treaty of San Stefano and the Treaty of Berlin, with the Russians returning some of the conquered parts to the Ottomans.

Armenian Territories

1820s: The Russian Empire defeats the Ottomans and conquers parts of the Armenian regions in Little Asia.

Inspired by European nationalist ideas, Armenians start to claim equal rights and autonomy from the Muslim majority. This is being perceived as a major threat by the Ottoman leadership.

The Treaty of Berlin obliges the Ottomans to insure legal protections for the Christian Armenians. Even though accepting the terms, the Ottomans never fully realize the points regarding the Armenians.



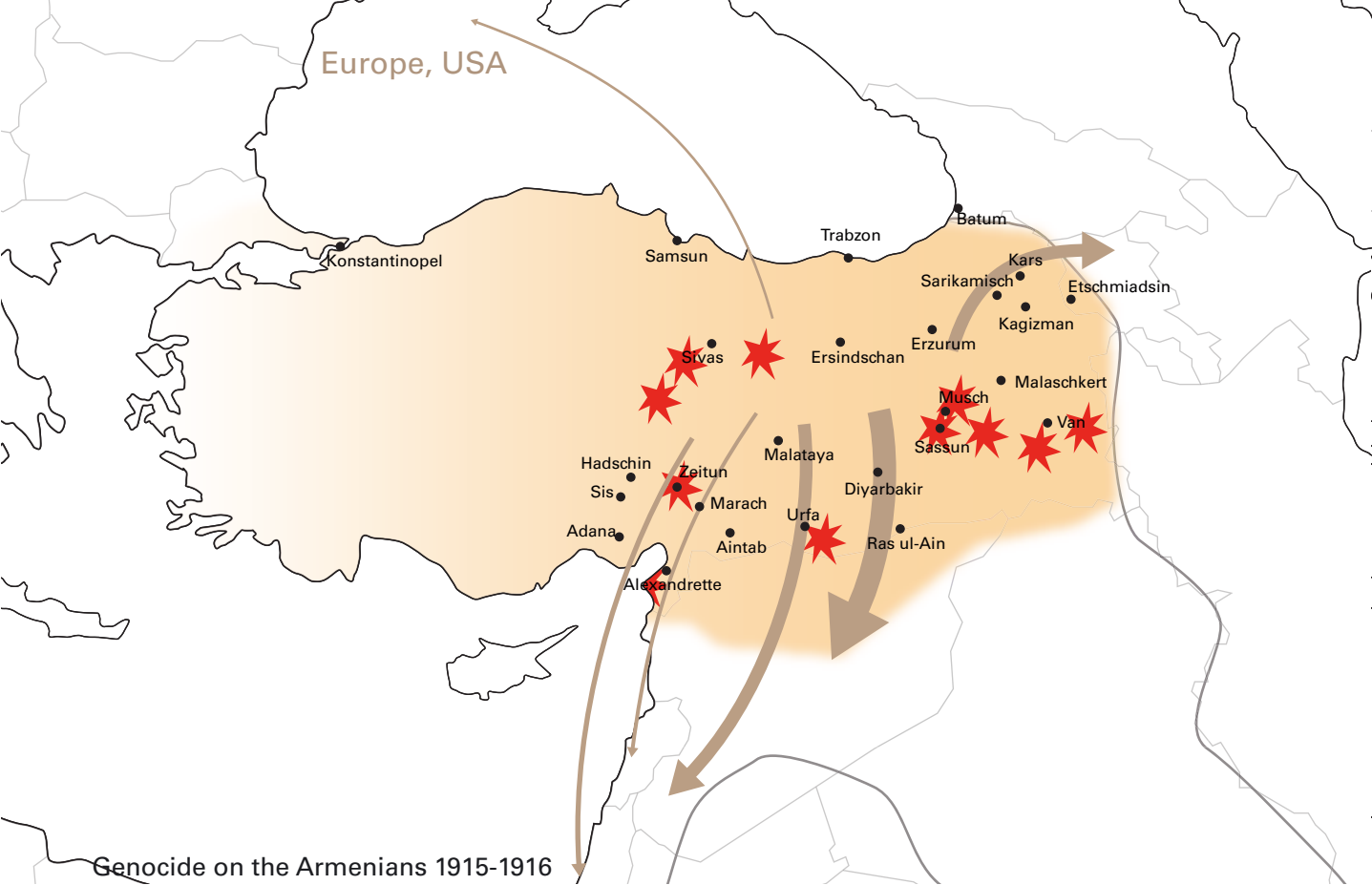
Encouraged by the continuing Russian military success, the resistance to Ottoman rule among Armenians rises. They start to demand to obtain the protections promised to them in Berlin.

1892 & 1893: Public unrest in Marsovan and Tokat, resulting in systematic programs against the Armenian population in all of Turkey.

1894: As a reaction to the uprising of the Armenians, Abdul Hamid II enforces the oppression of the Armenians. Armenians take resistance in Sasun resulting in heavy fighting with the Turkish army.

1894-1897 Hamidian Massacres: Ottoman Army units and Kurdish freelancers massacre 80'000 to 300'000 Armenians and other Christians in Istanbul and throughout Turkey. Thousands flee towards Russian Armenia, Europe and the Middle East





## Genocide on the Armenians 1915-1916

1908: Abdul Hamid II gets overthrown by Army officers that were part of the Young Turk movement and a constitutional monarchy gets installed.

The leading party of the Young Turks, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), takes power and installs an initially liberal and progressive government, later promoting nationalist Pan-Turkist ideologies.

1912-1913: The Ottoman Empire loses a big amount of territories in the Balkan wars.

1914: Beginning of World War I. The Ottoman Empire enters the war on the side of Germany and Austria. Heavy losses against Russia in the Caucasus region.

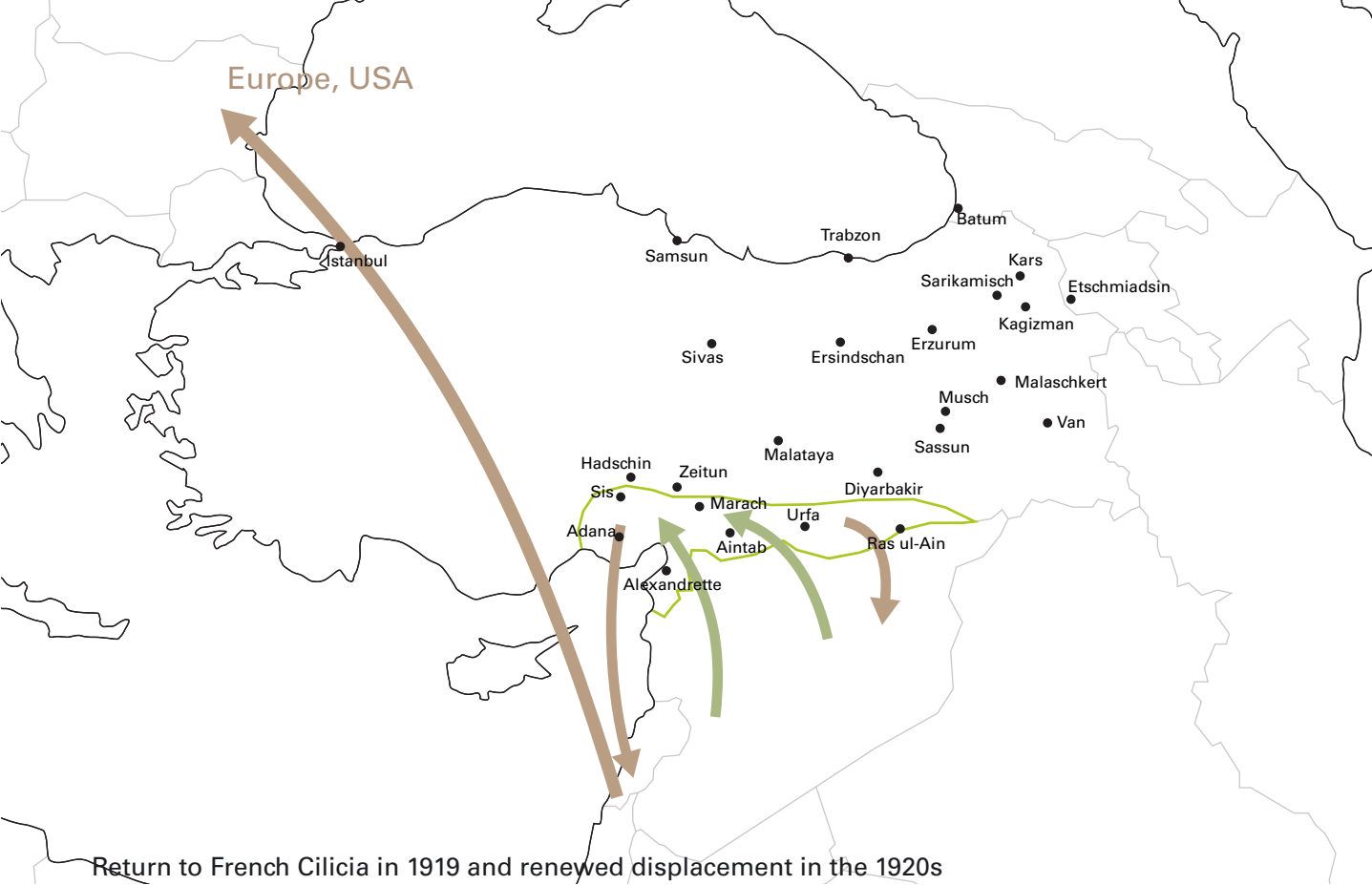
1909: Remaining followers of Abdul Hamid II commit massacres on Armenians in Adana, accusing them to have helped in overthrowing the Sultan, killing 15'000-30'000.



Armenians get accused to cooperate with the Russians in order to weaken the military strength of the Ottoman Empire. This even enforces anti-Armenian and anti-Christian tendencies in the Ottoman government.



1915-1916 Armenian genocide: Systematic removal and destruction of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire by the Turkish government. Millions get displaced, massacred in their villages or sent on death marches into concentration camps in the Syrian desert.



Return to French Cilicia in 1919 and renewed displacement in the 1920s

During World War I the CUP is led by a triumvirate consisting of Mehmet Talaat, Ismail Enver and Ahmed Jemal, all involved in ordering the genocide on Armenians.

1918: As a result of the defeat in World War I the Ottoman Empire gets dissolved. Along with Syria and the Lebanon Cilicia gets occupied by France. It immediately faces strong resistance by the local Turkish population.

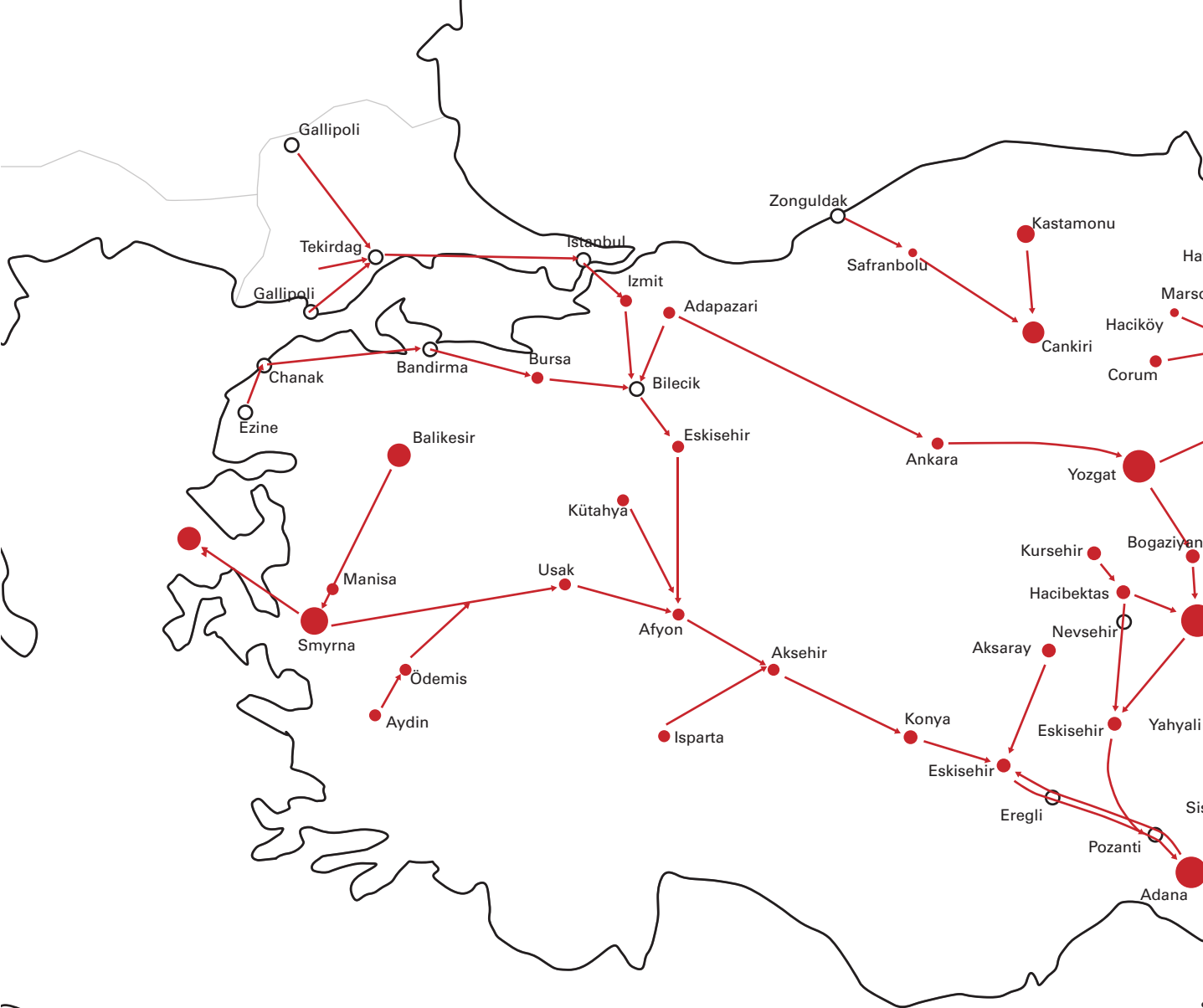
1920-22: Under constant pressure of the new Kemalist Turkey the French authorities decide to abandon Cilicia in order to focus on their mandate in Syria and the Lebanon. Cilicia gets integrated in the Turkish state.



With most of the surviving Armenian population living in precarious conditions in camps in Syria and the Middle East, about 170'000 follow the French call for a return into their hometowns in Cilicia.

Immediately after the decision to give up Cilicia, the major part of the returned Armenians leave Cilicia fearing new acts of violence after the departure of the French troops.

1920s: Facing renewed repressions by the Turkish state and populations, most of the remaining Armenians are forced to abandon Cilicia, leaving only a very small number of Armenians in the whole of Turkey.



Relative number of Armenians massacred



Deportation control center



Deportation stations



Deportation concentration and annihilation centers



Areas of greater or lesser Armenian resistance



Deportation routes



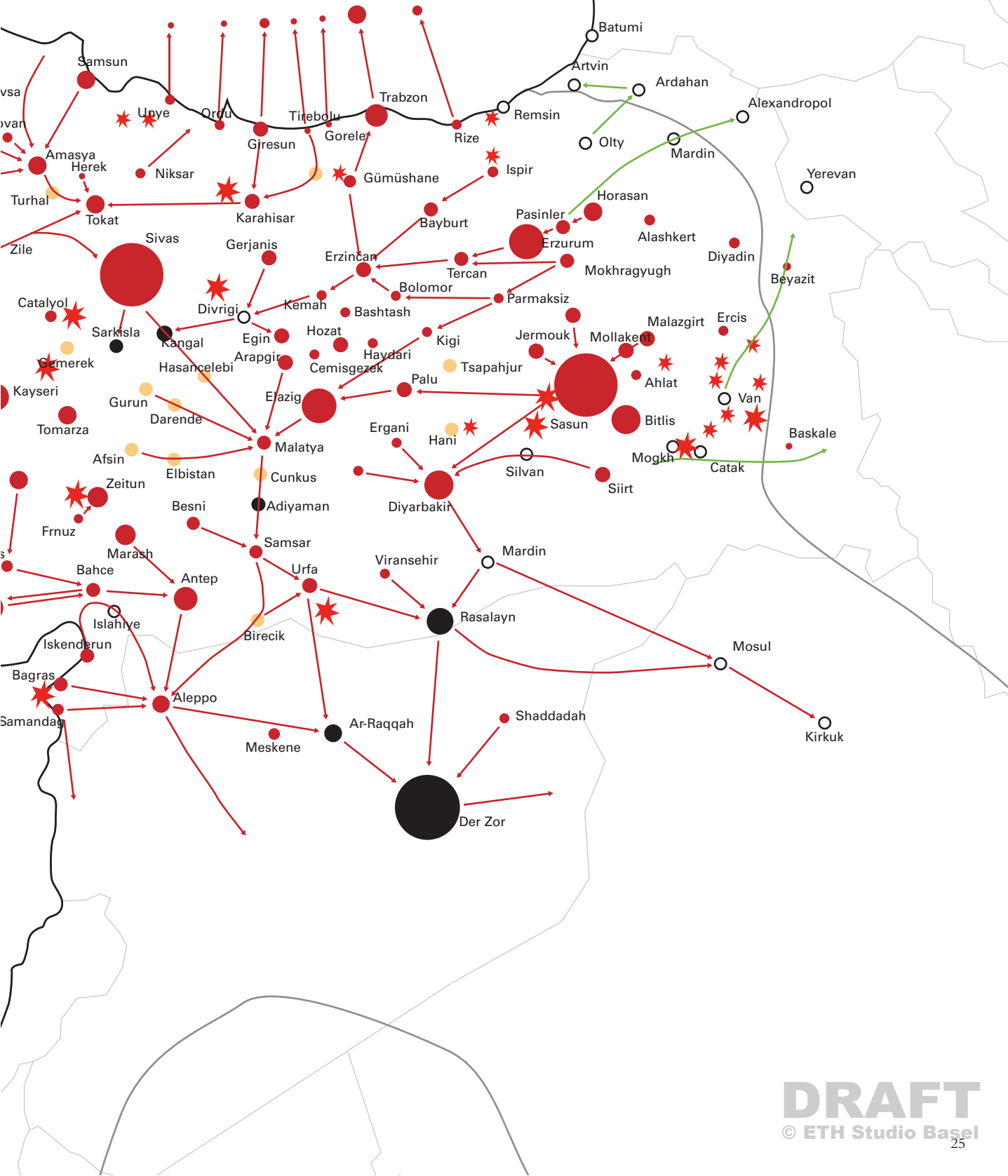
Armenians escape routes

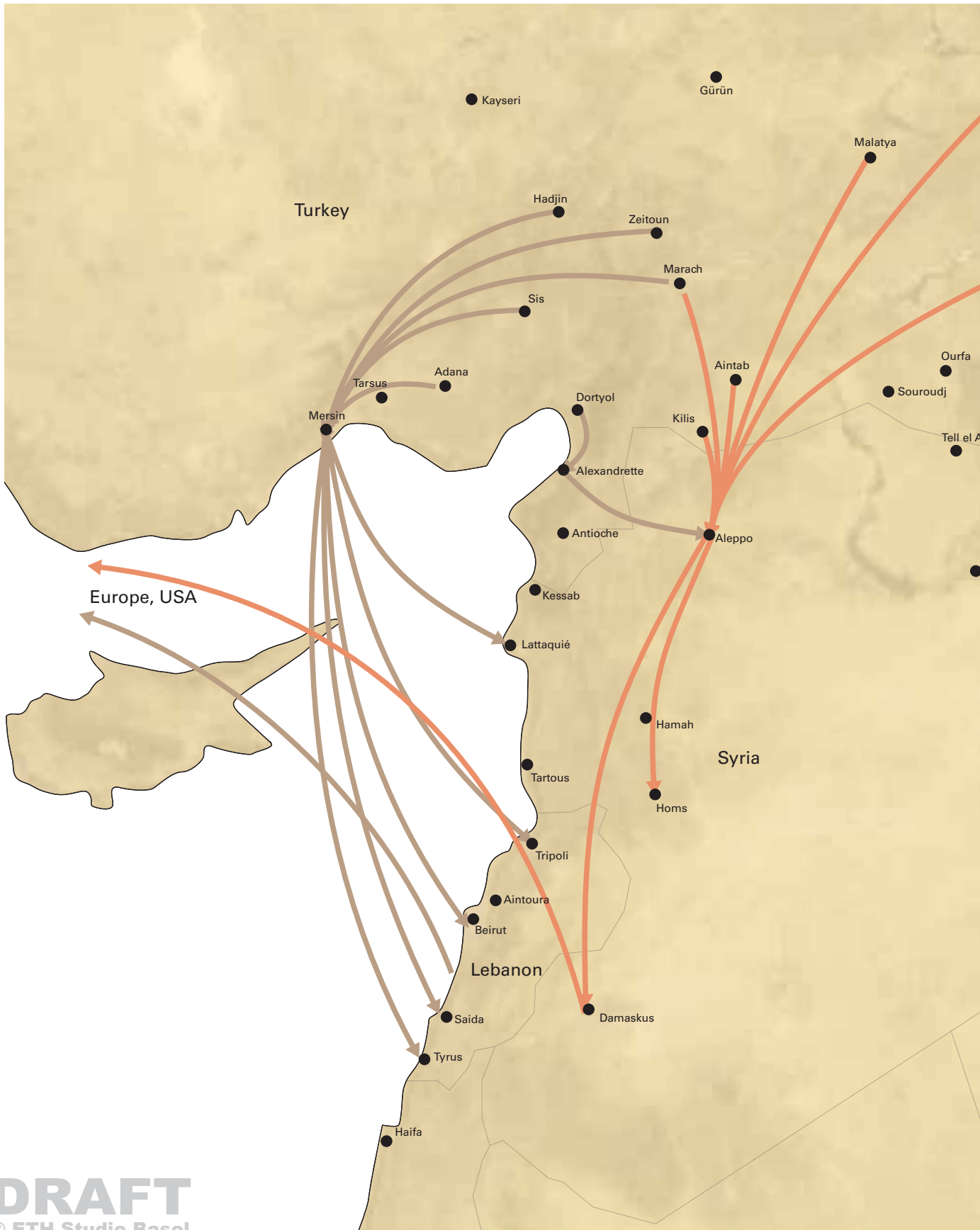


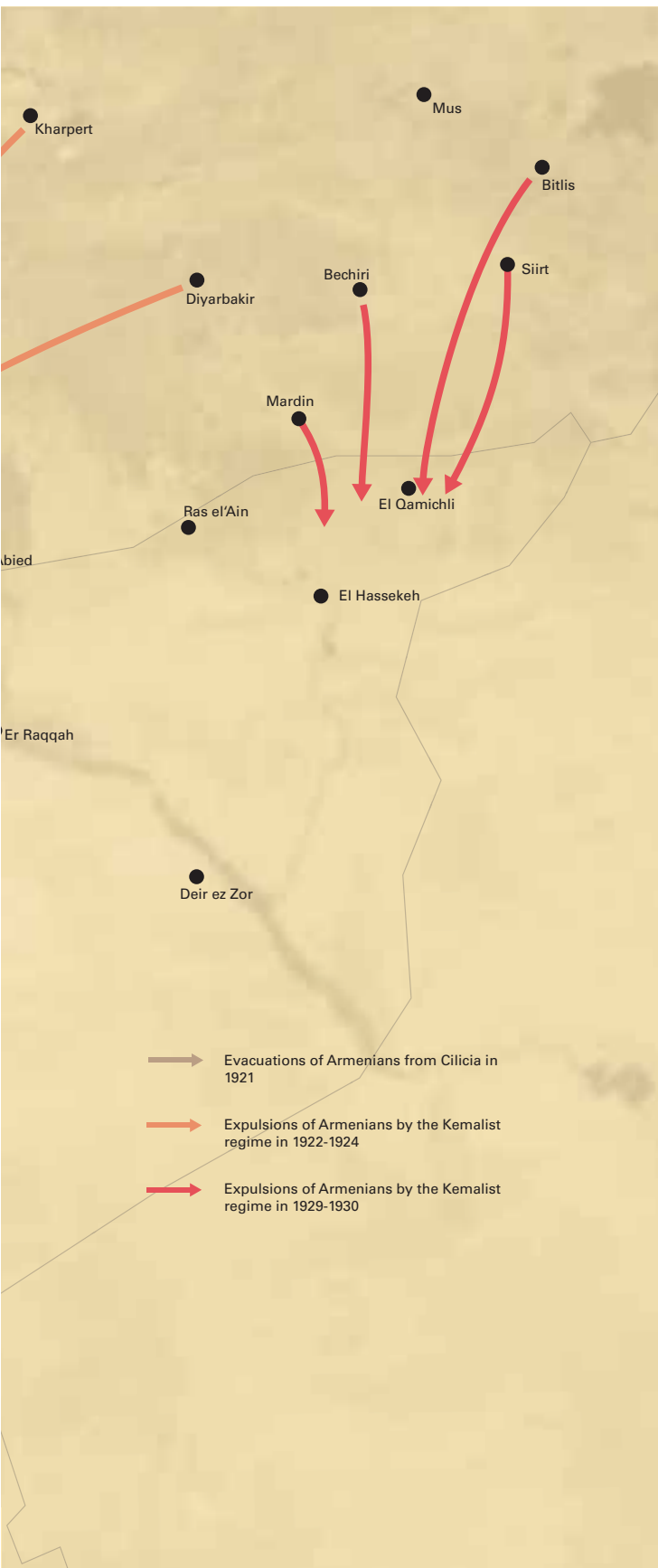
Other cities



# Genocide on the Armenians 1915-1916







## Armenian refugee movements in the 1920s

The hope of the surviving Armenians of being able to reestablish themselves in their homeland in an Armenian Cilicia under French protection came to an instant end with the Ankara agreement of 1921, where all of Cilicia was given back to the new Kemalist Turkish state. Fearing renewed atrocities by the Turks, most of the Armenians decided to leave their homes again. Helped by the French authorities, the populations of Cilicia emigrated, most of them settling down in Lebanon and Syria. Later many continued towards European and American countries, joining the big Armenian diaspora in those regions.

Throughout the 1920s, the Armenians that had decided to stay, were victims of repeated encroachments and were finally expelled almost completely until 1930.



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III. REFUGEE CITY  
OVERVIEW  
ACTORS AND THEIR INTERESTS  
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ARMENIANS IN BEIRUT  
GROWTH PATTERN  
ARCHITECTURAL REMAINS



## The establishment of the Armenian refugees in Beirut in the 1920s and 1930s: An Overview

After they had to leave their homes for a second time, many Cilician Armenians sought for a place to settle in neighbouring countries like Syria or the Lebanon. Beirut was one of the most important places of refuge and throughout the 1920s and the 1930s Armenians from other places kept moving to Beirut in order to concentrate in one place and so be able to remain as one people with an own Armenian identity.

The newly arrived refugees lived for almost ten years in two major camps in North Beirut, facing miserable conditions. In the late 1920s a major effort was started by the Armenians, the French Mandate and the League of Nations to find a permanent solution for the Armenians in Beirut, resulting in the establishment of new Armenian quarters in the Achrafiye Hills and in Bourj Hammoud.





Gulabachène 1930s

Trad 1930s

Nor Sis 1930s

Paréchène 1930s

Karm El Zeitoun (Gebaili) 1927

Parcelle 603 1927

Nor Marach 1930

Les Pavillons blancs 1927

Les Pentes 1930

Terrain Khalil Badaoui 1930

Camp Sandjak 1939

Nor Hadjin 1930

Camp Qarantina 1924

Grand Camp Saint-Michel 1921-1933

Cilicia and other formerly Armenian parts of Turkey

Armenian refugee camps in Beirut









Visit of members of the French Mandate authorities to the Armenian refugee camps



direct financial support



support with construction materials



financial support based on loan agreements

## The establishment of the definitive Armenian quarters in Beirut: Actors and their interests

Five years after the arrival of the first refugees to the Camps of Saint-Michel and Qarantina and after it became clear, that both the return to their homelands in Turkey and the move to Soviet Armenia were not an option anymore, various parties began to search for possibilities how to settle the Armenians permanently in Beirut. It was clear that they couldn't stay in the camps, since those bidonville-like settlements were way overcrowded, the sanitary conditions miserable and since the quarters occupied valuable land.

During the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s the different actors with different interests came together and achieved the construction of completely new areas for the Armenians to stay.



## French Mandate in Lebanon

The French Mandate that governed Lebanon from 1920-1943 had various reasons to advocate a solution for a permanent settling of the Armenians in Beirut. Due to the bad conditions in the camps unrest was a constant threat to the stability of those quarters. They wanted to get rid of the bidonvilles-like places right at the entrance to Beirut that occupied valuable land near the port.

Further they saw the Armenians as a helpful strategic instrument for their government in Lebanon. Since they had been naturalized following the treaty of Lausanne, they became a significant factor for local elections, mostly being in favor of the French candidates because of the help they had received by Mandate authorities. In the difficult religious balance in Lebanon the French also valued the increase of the Christian population caused by the moving in of the Armenians.



## The League of Nations

The precursor of today's United Nations had been founded in 1919 as a reaction to World War I. The question of the Armenian refugees was one of the first tasks of the newly founded refugee office, later to be called the Nansen International Office for Refugees. The Nansen Office and the Office for Work were invited by French high commissioner Henri de Jouvenel to participate in the solution for the settling of the Armenian refugees.

After the cooperation with the Soviet ruled Armenia had failed because of ideological differences, the LoN changed their strategy from resettling the Armenians into the Soviet Union towards a permanent settling in the places they already were.



## Armenian Diaspora Organizations

Already before the genocide of 1915 and 1916 the Armenians had a large diaspora all over the world, many living in European or American countries. Many Armenians became wealthy members of the western societies. Being aware of the problems the Armenians faced in their homelands, many founded organizations in order to help them, one of the most important examples being the Armenian General Benevolent Union AGBU. Shocked by the events of 1915 many were ready to donate large sums in order to ease the difficulties of the refugees.



## Armenian associations in Beirut

Shortly after their arrival in Lebanon, the Armenians started to get organized mostly in terms of the towns and regions of their origin. These associations, led by Armenian notables and exponents of the Armenian church, were more powerful in the first decades than the actual political parties. By 1930 they had become the primary factor to lead and organize the Armenians in Beirut.

Qarantina Camps along the Northern coast of Beirut



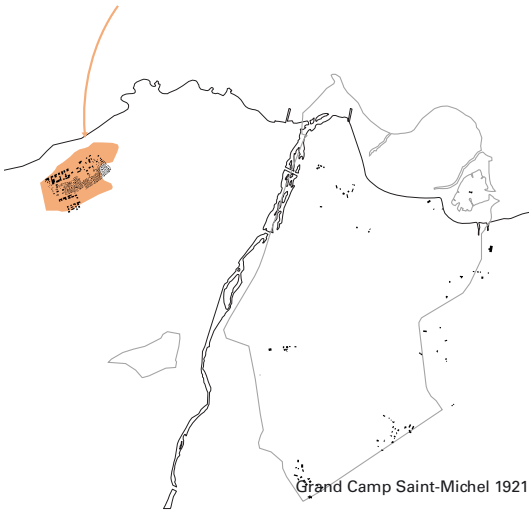
Armenian church in Qarantina



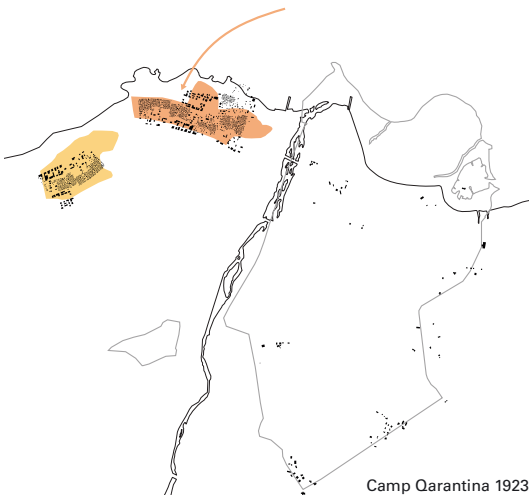
Dwellings inside the camps



Construction of the "Pavillons blanches"

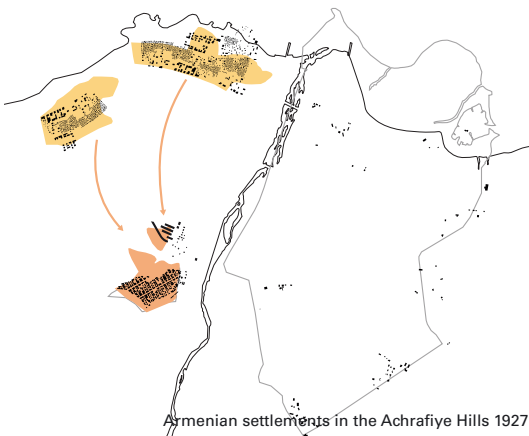


1921: The first refugees from Cilicia arrive in Beirut. The majority of them gets located in the **Grand Camp Saint-Michel** near the Beirut port. It continues to grow over the following years, with more and more refugees arriving. Most of the dwellings consist of tents or other temporary structures. The overcrowded state in the camp leads to very severe living conditions with regular outbreaks of diseases including cases of the plague and Malaria and widespread poverty.



1923: The number of Armenians in Beirut keeps rising with more and more refugees from Cilicia but also places in Syria and Lebanon arriving in Beirut. To the east of the existing camp at the port a new camp is established called **Qarantina Camp**. The people in the camps get organized by their place of origin into associations, the most influential being the ones from Marach, Adana, Sis or Hadjin.

1924: As a consequence of the Treaty of Lausanne, consisting of the recognition of the new Turkish state and its borders and thus the definitive handover of the Armenian territories to Turkey, the Armenians in Beirut get granted Lebanese citizenship by the French mandate authorities. With that step the question of a longterm solution for the housing problem starts to be of increased urgency.



1927: The League of Nations Nansen Office for refugees together with the French mandate sets out a program to build quarters for the Armenians from the Camps. The first attempts are set in the Achrafiye hills, namely in the area later to be called **Les Pavillons Blanches** housing mostly Armenians working as artisans or people whose state of health doesn't allow them to stay in the Camps anymore. This model of direct intervention soon proves to be too costly to be applied in a larger scale.



Les Pavillons blanches



Karm El Zeitoun in the 1930s



View towards Bourj Hammoud from the 1920s



Bourj Hammoud 1930

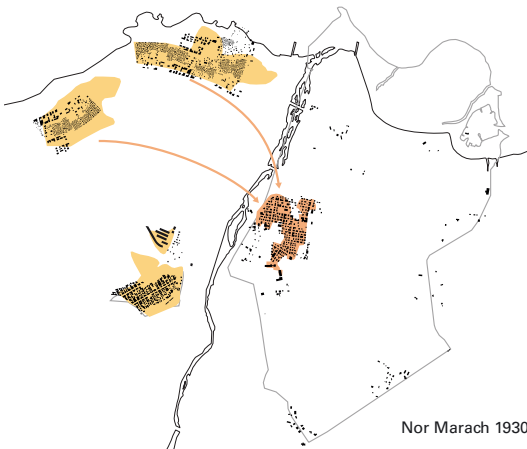


Late 1920s: After the strategy applied to the first settlements has shown not to be a sustainable model for a majority of the Armenians, the committee of the Nansen office and the Mandate changes the model for the rest of the settlements on the Achrafiye hills, **Karm El Zeitoun (Ghebaili), Parcelle 603 and Plot 533**. In contrast to the approach chosen to construct Les Pavillons Blanches where the committee paid for the acquisition of the land, planned the road network and the parcelling and helped in constructing the houses, the planners rely on the Armenians - most of whom had already found a place to work in Beirut or in small workshops in the camps - to pay a part of the money needed to buy the plot. The remaining difference is lent to the applicant. The plot thereby remains as a property of the committee until the refugee pays them back the full amount of the lent money (usually happening within 3-7 years). Additionally the committee provides construction materials for the refugees and makes them build their houses themselves.



Karm El Zeitoun (bellow) and Les Pavillons Blanches in the 1930s

1929: Even though the moving of some of the Armenian refugees to the Achrafiye hills has been successful, the biggest part of the refugees still lives in the camps in Qarantina, showing that the actions taken by the League of Nations and the French mandate are not suitable alone to solve the problem of the refugees. The global economic crisis of 1929 and the following years have another fatal impact on the efforts of the committee, making the collection of funds in the Western countries even more difficult. In order to continue the establishment of proper quarters for all Armenians in Beirut, two more actors have to come into play. On one side the numerous Armenian organisations in Europe and America, that had mostly followed the goal to send all the exiled Armenians to the Soviet Armenia, change their strategies following the ones of the League of Nations and start to support the projects in Lebanon and Syria. Even more important is the commitment of the various Armenian associations in Beirut that start to collect money and buy land in order to distribute it to the people from their homelands, making it possible for a far bigger part of the population of the camps to move out from their precarious living conditions.



Nor Marach 1930



Nor Adana 1930s



Gulabachène 1930s



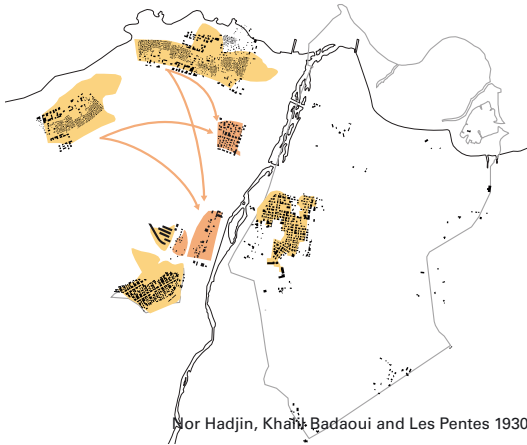
Nor Marach 1930s



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Karm El Zeitoun, Les Pavillons Blanches and Bourj Hammoud in the late 1930s

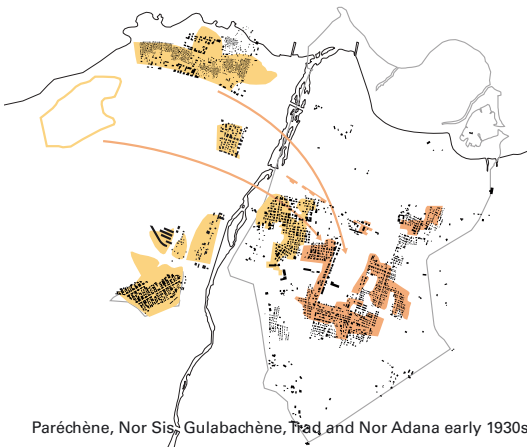




Nor Hadjin, Khalil Badaoui and Les Pentes 1930



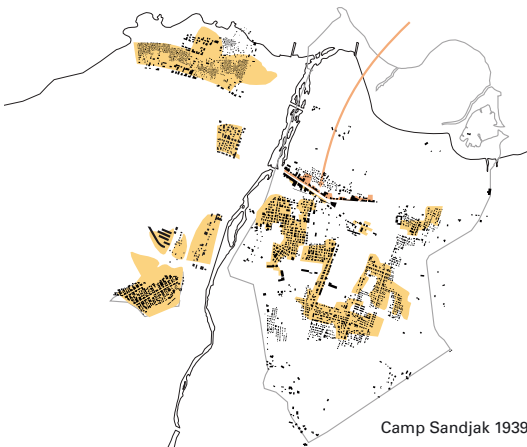
1930: The first of the associations to become active in order to buy land is the one of the small town of Marach. The association collects money from its members and uses it to buy - brokered by the committee - a piece of land in Bourj Hammoud, a swamp on the eastern side of the Beirut river - and calls it Nor Marach (New Marach). The area gets planned and parcelled as a dense grid by an Armenian architect and, helped by the loans from the Nansen office and Armenian organisations, gets distributed to the members of the Marach association. The construction of the dwellings is done by the refugees themselves with material financed by loans from the Nansen office. As a result, most of the families end up owning their own plot and being able to construct and improve their own houses on their piece of land.



Paréchène, Nor Sis, Gulabachène, Trad and Nor Adana early 1930s



Early 1930s: Following the example of Nor Marach, the other major Armenian associations repeat the model of collectively bought land and the distribution of small plots to the families. According to those associations, new centers appear on both river sides, the biggest part of them being located in Bourj Hammoud on the Eastern side of the river. In a big fire most of camp Saint-Michel burns down and Qarantina also starts to quickly get emptied of its Armenian population, most of them moving to the new quarters in Achrafiye and Bourj Hammoud. Within the first half of the 1930s, on the Western side of Beirut river **Nor Hadjin**, the **Khalil Badaoui Terrain** and **Les Pentes** are established, while in Bourj Hammoud the beginnings of **Nor Adana**, **Nor Sis**, **Trad**, **Gulabachène**, **Paréchène**, **Ekbès** and **Norachène** get constructed.



Camp Sandjak 1939

1939: Following the handover of the Alexandrette region to the Turkish republic, many Armenians that have lived there under the French rule leave, some of them settling in Bourj Hammoud. Unlike the other new Armenian settlements, the Sandjak area is much more alike of the Camps in Qarantina and forms an unplanned and informal belt to the north of the regular quarters. This camp exists until today with varying populations, until 2009 the demolition started to make place for a new mixed development.

1940-Today: Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun keep on growing in population, becoming very dense and lively quarters with the emerging of commerces and crafts. After the Armenians other immigrant groups move into the quarters. In the Lebanese Civil war of 1975-1990 Bourj Hammoud remains a relatively safe island, due to the neutrality of the Armenians and the formation of their own communal militias that keep the fighting parties mostly out of their quarters. The result is another migration wave mostly by Armenians from the fighting areas. The commercial sector benefits largely from the war with the movement of many businesses, particularly the gold crafts, from Beirut to Bourj Hammoud.

1925: The camps in Saint-Michel and  
Qarantina





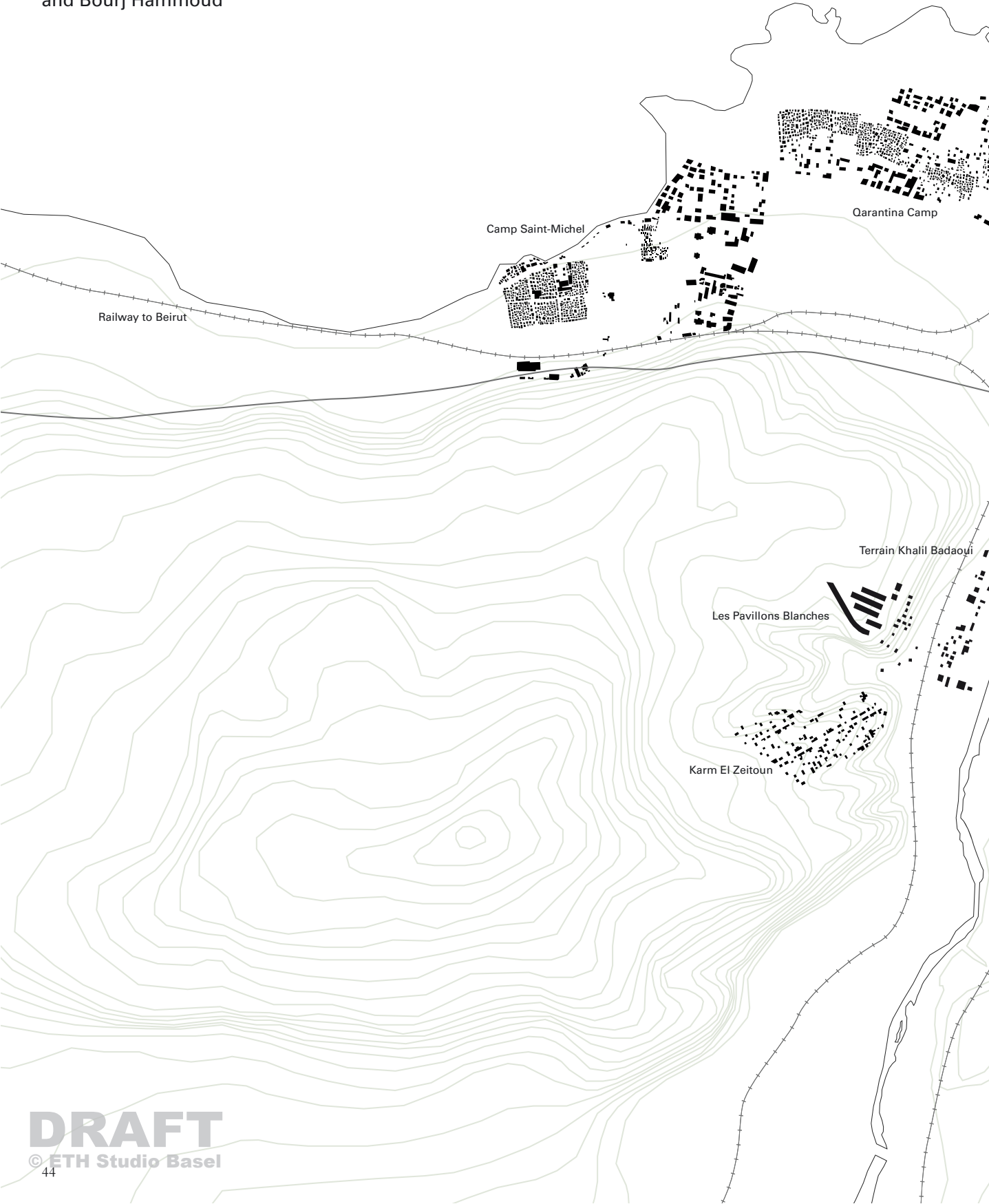
Tripoli Railway

Tripoli Road

Damascus Road

Tramway

1931: The foundations of Karm El Zeitoun and Bourj Hammoud





Nor Hadjin

Tripoli Railway

Tripoli Road

Nor Marach

Damascus Road

Tramway

# 1945: Expansions of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun







The first Armenian church in Bourj Hammoud in the Nor Marach region, forming the focal point of the urban development

## Growth pattern of the Bourj Hammoud quarters

Having been established as a collective effort of the people of the single Armenian associations, the settlements in Bourj Hammoud started from several cores, each one representing the people from the Cilician regions that belonged to the respective association. The principal strategy in establishing the new quarters was similar for all of them. After the buying of the land, the area was organised by a grid of streets with small plots of 50-150sqm in between them. The origin of the grid was usually a church and a school, pointing out the importance that was given to these two institutions as helpers in the preserving of the Armenian identity. The construction of those institutional buildings was paid and accomplished by the Armenians themselves. In the years following the establishment of the quarters in Bourj Hammoud, the single grids start-

ed to expand in different directions and eventually grew together with the grids of the other quarters. Parallel to the lateral growth, the buildings on the plots, that in the beginning usually only occupied a quarter of the parcel and consisted only of a small onestorey pavillon, started to get upgraded or replaced by newer, bigger houses with several storeys and a bigger footprint occupying a major part of the plot. Thus the growth of Bourj Hammoud consisted in both a lateral expansion and a strong densification. Not having the possibility to grow on the edges, Karm El Zeitoun and other settlements on the Achrafiye hills also grew in density but remained limited through the lack of space in their surroundings.





Nor Marach

Nor Adana

Paréchène

Trad

Gulabachène

Nor Sis



## Expansion and densification

In the time after the first settlements in Beirut, the new quarters grew quickly and attracted more and more Armenians from Lebanon and other countries. During the major growth phase between 1930 and 1960 the quarters of Bourj Hammoud expanded and filled up the empty fields in between them, slowly merging into a continuous network of street blocks and becoming one single big city quarter. Meanwhile Karm Zeitoun didn't have the possibility to expand its area since it was strongly enclosed due to the steep topography of the Achrafiye Hills and remained a very small entity. Both Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun went through a process of strong densification. The inhabitants started to expand their single storey houses and filled up the empty spaces of their plots. Thus the single huts turned into three- or four storey high mostly closed blocks forming a dense urban street space.



**Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun 1945**  
 (Source: Bourj-Hammoud Brief City Profil, Diran Harmandayan)



**Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun 1957**  
 (Source: Beyrouth Est, Ministère des Travaux Publics et des Transports)



**Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun 1974**  
 (Source: Beyrouth et Banlieue, Bureau G.I.Stephan)





### Bourj Hammoud from Achrafiye 1935

The various centers of settlement are clearly distinguishable with empty spaces of agricultural land in between them. The houses have mostly one or two floors. The buildings are perceived as freestanding bodies with empty space in between them.



### Bourj Hammoud from Achrafiye 1970

After the dynamic construction period of 1940-1960 the single buildings have grown together into a single dense urban fabric. The houses have different heights ranging from two to seven floors. The river between Beirut and Bourj Hammoud has been canalized.



### Bourj Hammoud from Achrafiye 2009

The urban fabric has been further extended and densified. On the edges of Bourj Hammoud new highrise buildings are appearing, while the center remains at a height of two to seven or eight storeys.





A house in Nor Marach in the 1930s, built as a timber construction similar to the houses in Armenia



### Remains of Armenian architecture in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

Even though the Armenians usually used what they were able to get in order to construct their houses, usually using stone, brick and concrete, there were also some examples where elements that were used in Turkish Armenia have been transferred to their new homes in Beirut. While most of those early buildings have been replaced by newer ones, there are still some remains that show elements from Armenian architecture, for example wooden constructions or ornaments, both not at all typical for traditional Lebanese architecture.



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IV. KARM EL ZEITOUN AND BOURJ HAMMOUD  
LOCATION  
PHYSICAL GRAIN  
TRAFFIC  
BORDERS  
TOPOGRAPHY  
TYPOLOGY





RECORD Shoes

VIVARO

COLLECTION

VIVARO  
COLLECTION

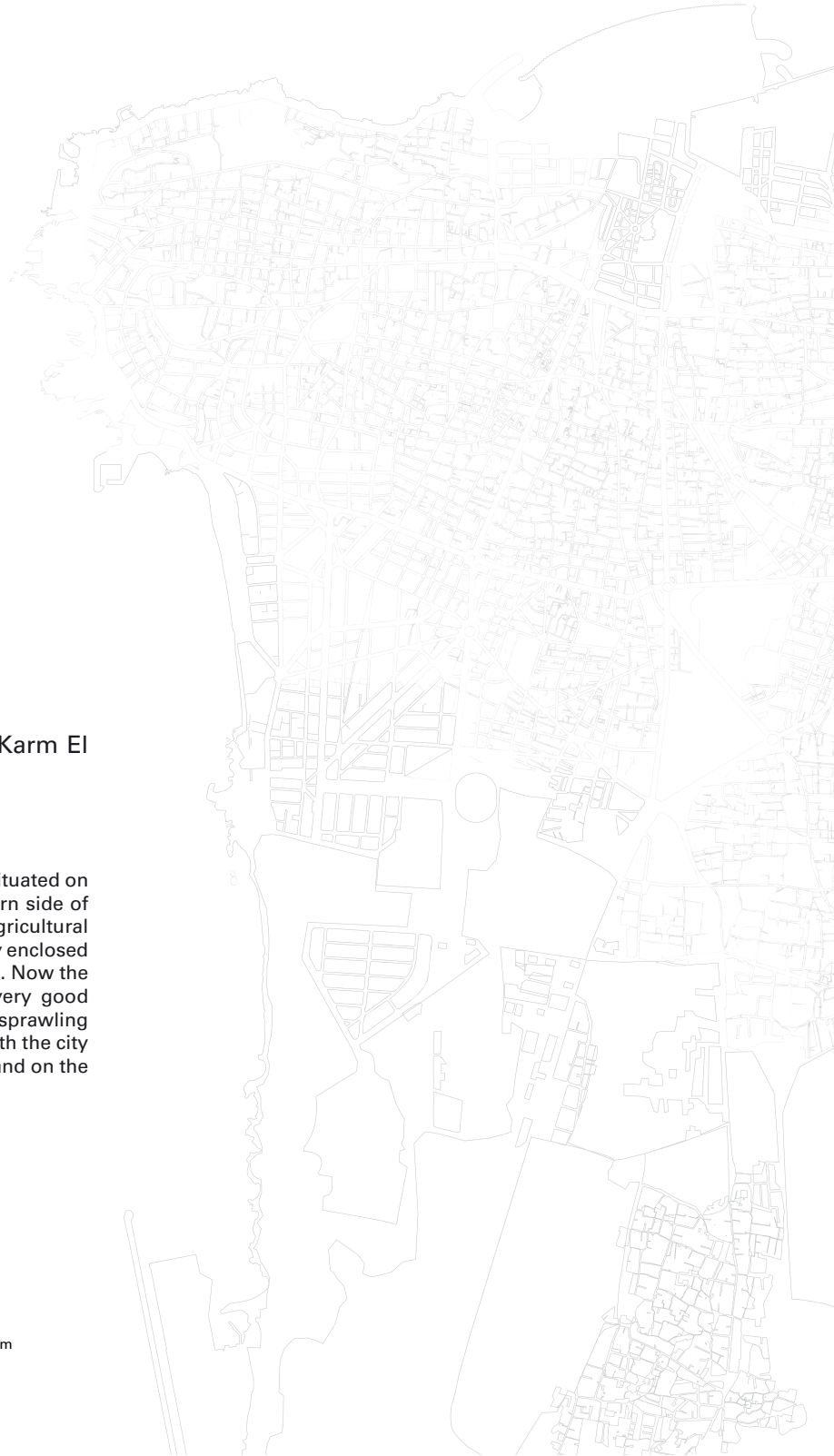


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## Location of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun in relation to Beirut

Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun are situated on both sides of the Beirut river, on the eastern side of Beirut City. While they were built on empty agricultural land in the 1930s, today they are completely enclosed by parts of the northeastern Beirut suburbs. Now the two quarters are considered to be in a very good central position, compared to most of the sprawling urban areas of Beirut, well connected to both the city center and the agglomerations in the hills and on the northern coastline.





Karm El Zeitoun

Bourj Hammoud







## The physical grain of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

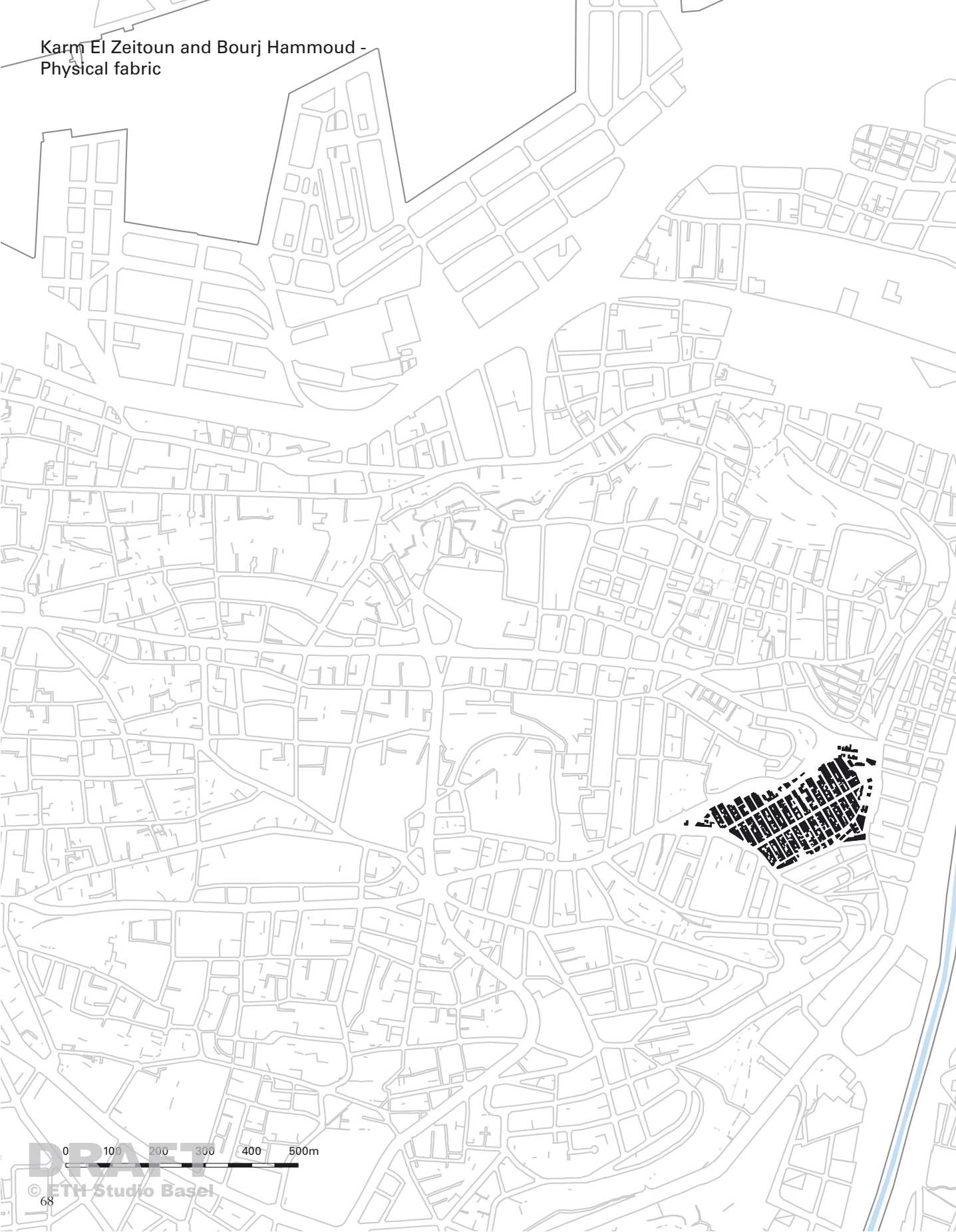
Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun consist of a variety of different spatial settings. The core of the two quarters is formed by a dense grid of medium sized buildings with very small footprints of usually not more than 100sqm. This small scale of the buildings and the independent development of the houses leads to a very diverse and unhomogenous spectrum of Architectures. Nevertheless the strongly reglemented positioning of the single buildings in the regular grid of the streets where most of the facades run directly along the street line gives the quarters still a certain uniformity in its physical layout. This central grid gets interrupted in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun by various infrastructural or large scale architectural elements. They either form an abrupt cut through the urban fabric or are accumulated along the edges of the two quarters.





**DRAFT**  
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Karm El Zeitoun and Bourj Hammoud -  
Physical fabric



0 100 200 300 400 500m

**DRAFT**  
© ETH Studio Basel



## Traffic infrastructures and street pattern in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

Due to their position at the edge of Beirut, Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun get traversed or bordered by a number of main traffic routes, the most important ones being the coastal highway in the north of Bourj Hammoud, the Mirna Chalouhi Boulevard in the South, the Yerevan Flyover through Bourj Hammoud and the Emil Lahoud Boulevard running through the middle of Karm El Zeitoun and Bourj Hammoud. While those infrastructures guarantee an excellent connection to Beirut and the surrounding agglomerations, they also form barriers that divide the urban parts of the area.

The main traffic arteries lead into a finer system of smaller streets, that serve a fine grid of small and narrow streets, having only little vehicular traffic or even remaining exclusively pedestrian.





**BREAKING NOSE**



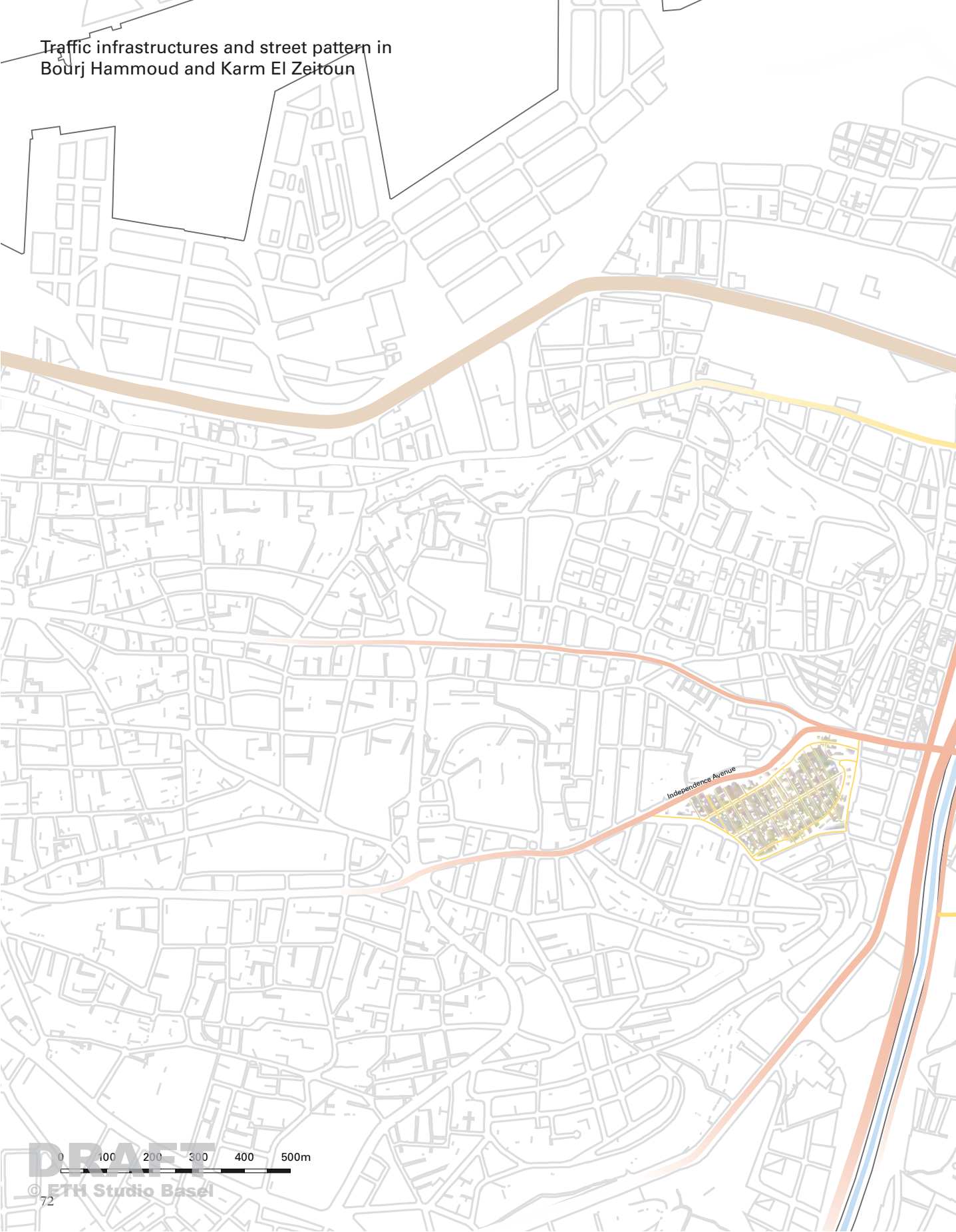
**ANNO FREEMWAY**  
Ass



Season's Greetings  
Air Care Service  
FREEMWAY

**IPT**  
**IP**

Traffic infrastructures and street pattern in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun







Pierre Camyway Highway  
Enil Liboud Boulevard

Sea Side Road

Dora Highway

Armenia Street

Mar Youssef Street

Al Sokh Street

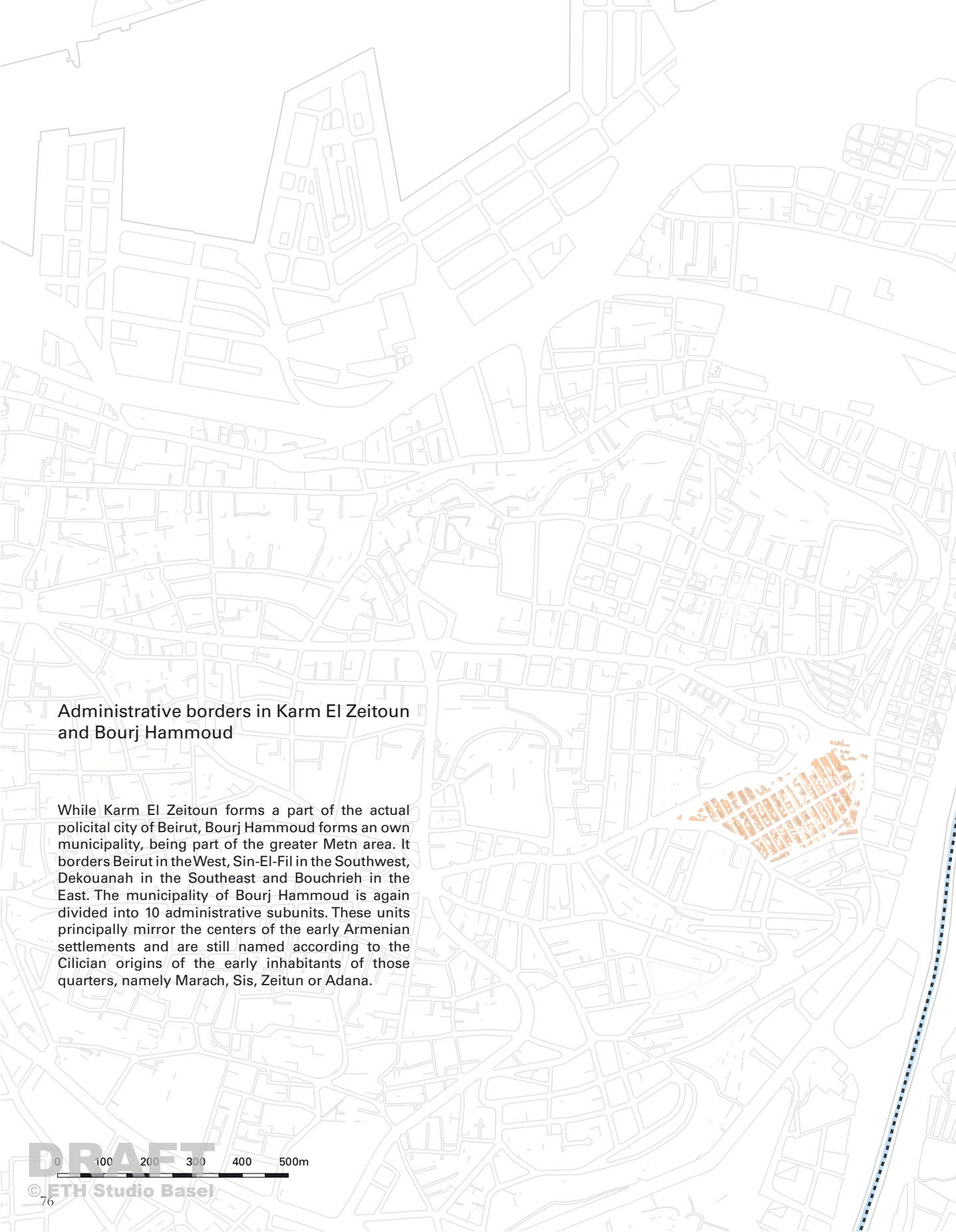
Yarvan Flyover

Old Saint Anthony Street

Mirna Chaloun Boulevard

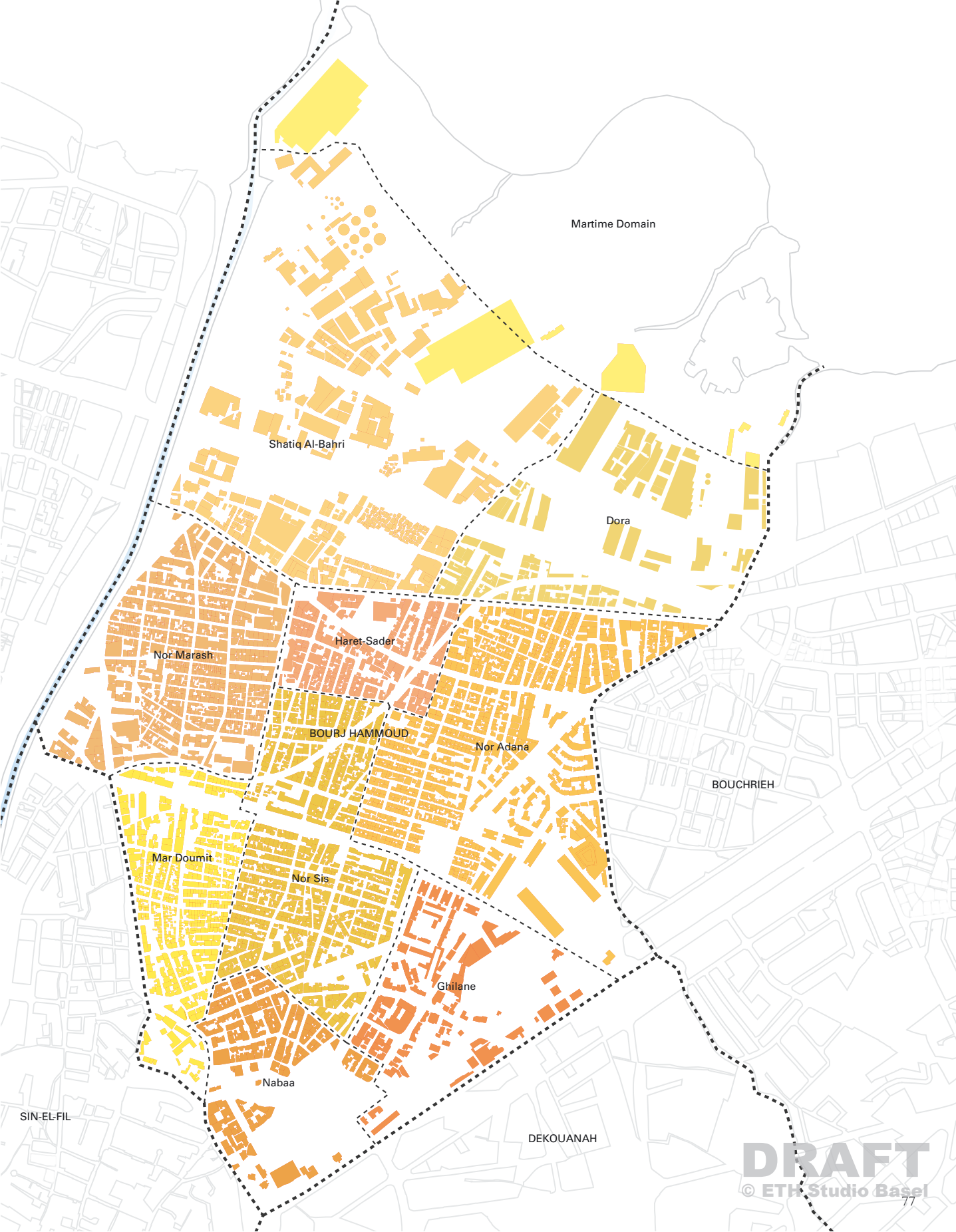






## Administrative borders in Karm El Zeitoun and Bourj Hammoud

While Karm El Zeitoun forms a part of the actual municipal city of Beirut, Bourj Hammoud forms an own municipality, being part of the greater Metn area. It borders Beirut in the West, Sin-EI-Fil in the Southwest, Dekouanah in the Southeast and Bouchrieh in the East. The municipality of Bourj Hammoud is again divided into 10 administrative subunits. These units principally mirror the centers of the early Armenian settlements and are still named according to the Cilician origins of the early inhabitants of those quarters, namely Marach, Sis, Zeitoun or Adana.



Martime Domain

Shatiq Al-Bahri

Dora

Nor Marash

Haret-Sader

BOURJ HAMMOUD

Nor Adana

BOUCHRIEH

Mar Doumit

Nor Sis

Ghilane

Nabaa

SIN-EL-FIL

DEKOUANAH

**DRAFT**  
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## Physical borders of Karm El Zeitoun and Bourj Hammoud

Whereas Bourj Hammoud forms an own municipality and Karm El Zeitoun is a part of Beirut administrative region, both quarters share the characteristic of being enclosed by very strong physical borders. In Karm El Zeitoun the busy Independence Avenue forms an almost impenetrable barrier in the north, while the steep slopes form natural borders in the east and the south, allowing only access from the Achrafiye quarters in the west.

Bourj Hammoud is separated from Karm El Zeitoun by the Beirut River and has equally strong border situations with a busy street in the south and the coast in the north, while the transitions to Sin-El-Fil and Bouchrieh remain relatively fluent.

Apart of the outer borders there are also major boundaries inside of Bourj Hammoud, especially along the main motorways but also through hardly accessible areas in the industrial parts and in the southern underdeveloped spaces.











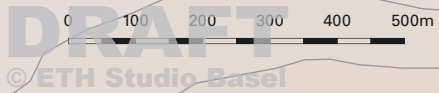
## The hills of Karm El Zeitoun and the plain of Bourj Hammoud

Karm El Zeitoun has been constructed on top of an eastern extension of the Achrafiyeh hills in a position with a distinctive topography. The slope descends on three sides from the centre of Karm El Zeitoun with a very steep descent to the north and to the south, where it rises again towards other quarters of Beirut. Bourj Hammoud on the other hand lies in an almost completely flat plain, that is mostly around, at parts even below sea level. The canalized Beirut River leads into the sea to the northwestern end of Bourj Hammoud. The naturally covered former waste dump at the coast of Bourj Hammoud forms an artificial inaccessible hill to the north of the quarter.





Topography







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## The urban typologies of Bourj Hammoud

In terms of size, function and arrangement one can identify five different categories of urban typologies. The oldest and most common typology is the dense grid of small three to five levels high constructions that evolved out of the early pavillons of the first settlers. While in Karm El Zeitoun this remains the only notable category, another four developed in Bourj Hammoud, the first and smallest being the unordered and equally dense collection of one- to two-storied huts. This typology dates back to the camps in the 1930s and today is only present in the Sandjak Camp and will disappear after its demolition. The third typology has been established with the construction of the social housing blocks in the 1960s and consists of long seven to ten levels high blocks that are arranged to form homogenous urban blocks. The fourth typology can predominantly be found in the industrial parts to the north and south of Bourj Hammoud, containing large scale detached buildings of different heights. The fifth typology is mostly present in the business area of Bourj Hammoud to the north of Armenia Street with large scale buildings and some highrise developments but can also be found in the form of schools and institutions that are weaved into the spatial structure of the grid.



Dense regular grid network  
 Narrow enclosed streets  
 Buildings aligned as closed blocks  
 3-6 floors



Dense irregular network  
 Very narrow enclosed streets  
 Buildings detached with very small gaps  
 1-2 floors



Dense regular network  
 Medium scaled enclosed streets  
 Buildings aligned as blocks  
 7-10 floors



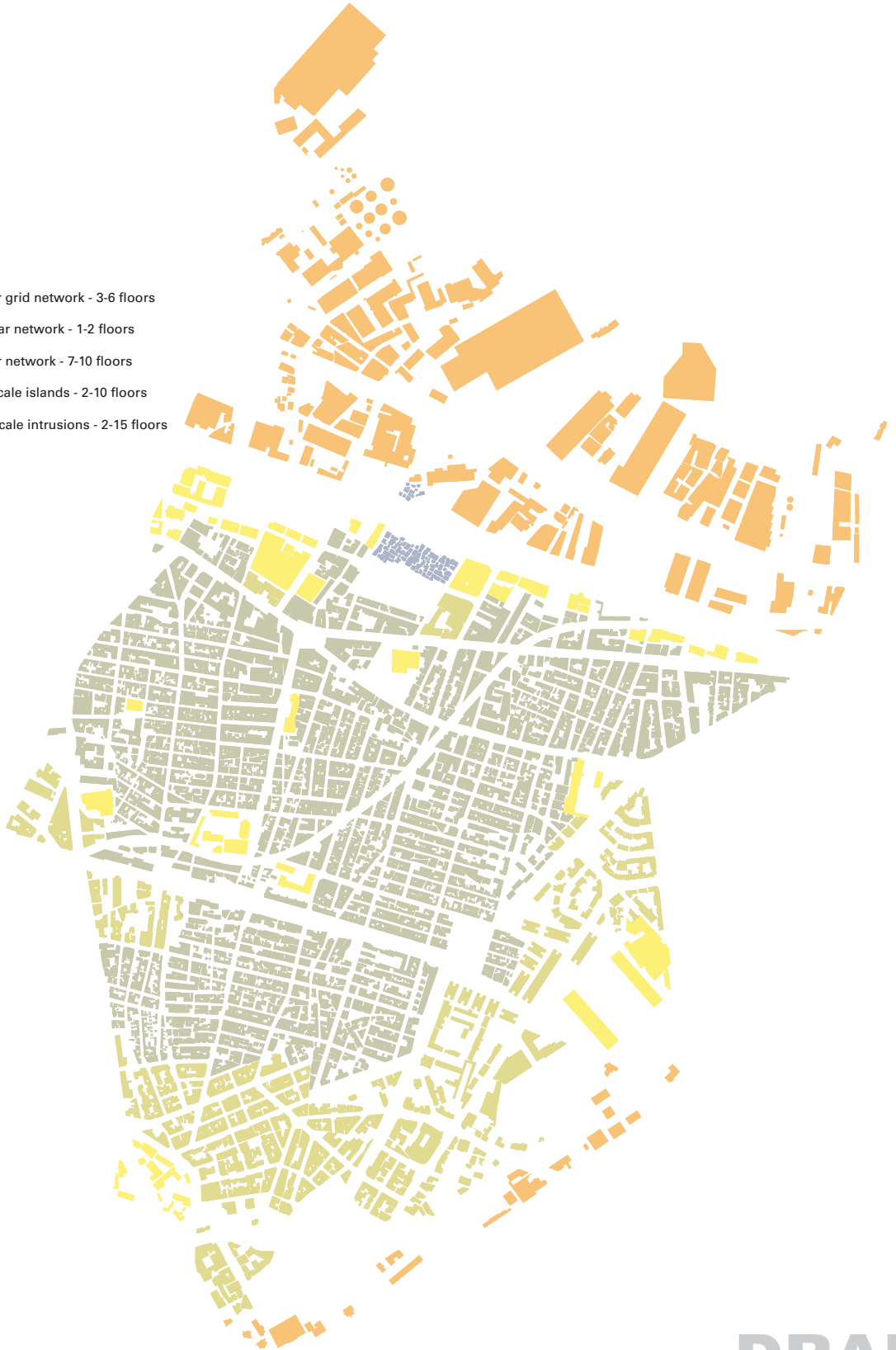
Loose large scale islands  
 Big open streets  
 Single detached buildings  
 2-10 floors



Dense large scale intrusions  
 Big enclosed streets  
 Partly detached buildings  
 2-15 floors



- Dense regular grid network - 3-6 floors
- Dense irregular network - 1-2 floors
- Dense regular network - 7-10 floors
- Loose large scale islands - 2-10 floors
- Dense large scale intrusions - 2-15 floors





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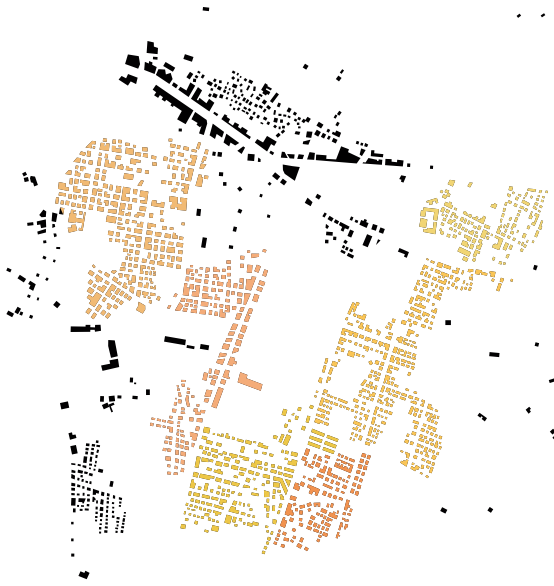


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V. THE ARMENIAN GRIDS  
GRID CITY VS. HILLTOWN  
THE GRID IN KARM EL ZEITOUN  
THE GRID IN BOURJ HAMMOUD



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The development of the Bourj Hammoud grids till 2009

## The grid and its functions in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

In both Karm El Zeitoun and Bourj Hammoud the planning of the quarters has been laid out as a regular grid of long rectangular blocks as a very efficient way to arrange a large number of small plots. Even though they appear to be very similar in plan they developed into completely different quarters due to the very different topographical circumstances, the different locations and the different size of the neighbourhoods. The merging of the different grids in Bourj Hammoud into one big urban structure and the resulting size of the quarter has made it a city of its own with very specific ways of using the grid for different activities, while in Karm El Zeitoun the topography turned some of the streets into stairs, making them a unique social interaction space and thus leading to the development of a strong community at the residents of the area.

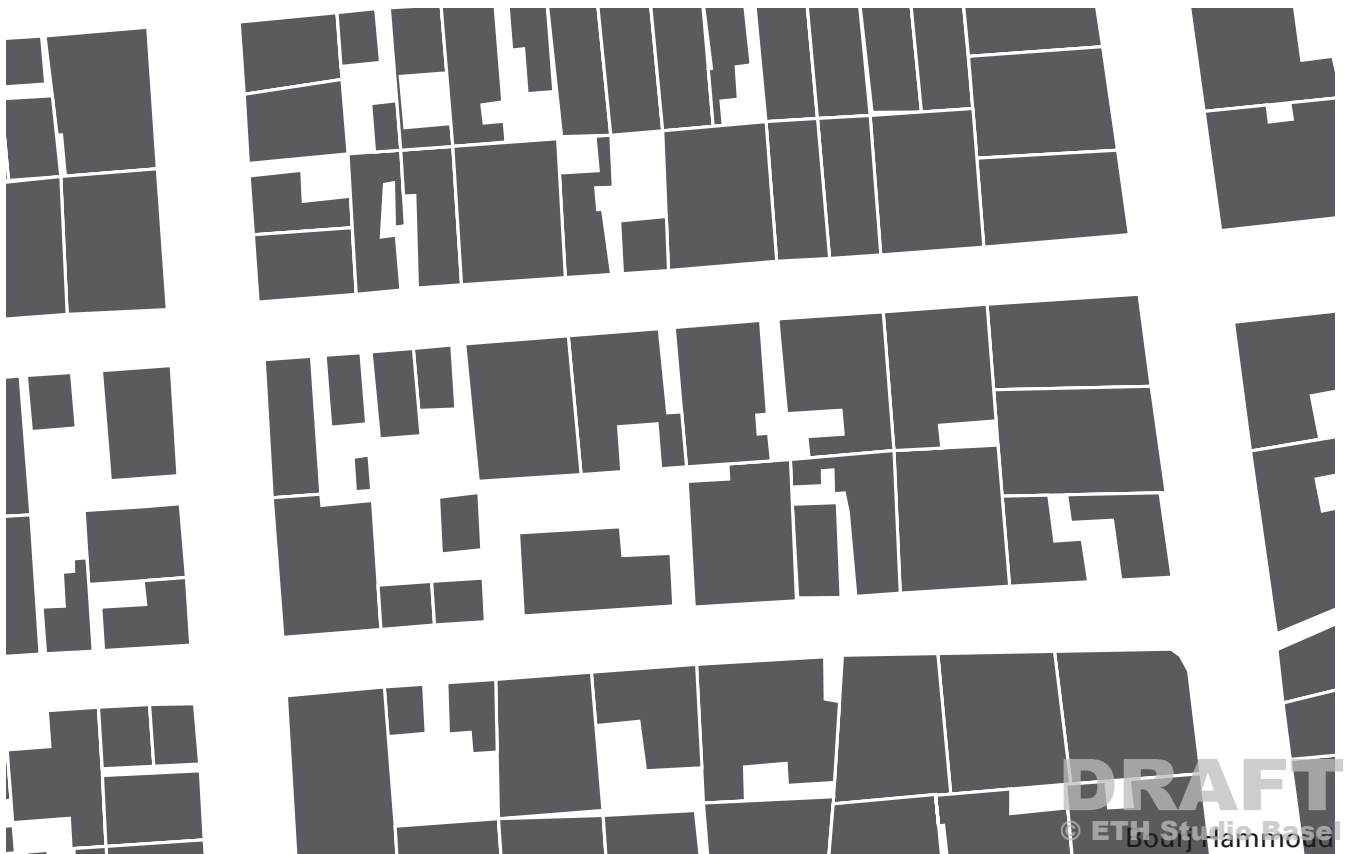


The development of the Karm El Zeitoun grid till 2009





Karm El Zeitoun





## The stairs of Karm El Zeitoun

The application of a completely regular rectangular grid in Karm El Zeitoun without reshaping it in order to follow the steep topography had the effect that a major part of the streets became so steep they had to be developed as stairs. This together with the privacy evoked by the seclusiveness of the quarter led to the formation of a culture of adapting the street- and stairspace as main space of social interaction, leading to the formation of semiprivate spaces as interface between the inside of the homes and the streetspace.







Block „Ghassan“

Block „Jesper“



**Block "Jesper"**

**2 shops**

1 grocery store, 1 butcher

**0 workshops**

**40 apartments**

Around 200 residents, different nationalities

**Block "Ghassan"**

**1 shop**

1 vegetable seller

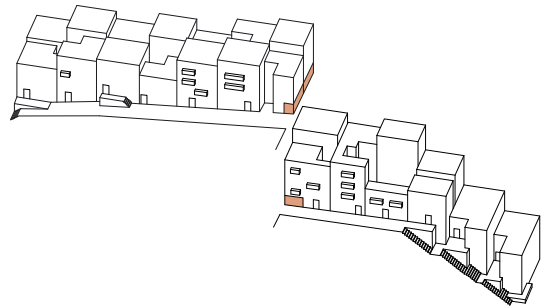
**1 workshop**

1 hairdresser

**25 apartments**

Around 100 residents, mostly Armenian or Lebanese





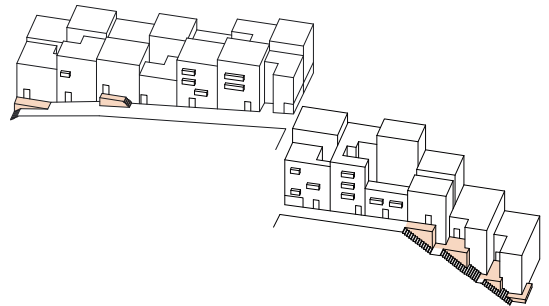
## Phenomena in the grid of Karm El Zeitoun

### Rue Ararat as single economical backbone

Running on top of the Karm El Zeitoun hill the Ararat Street forms the only road in Karm El Zeitoun that has a predominantly plain topographical layout. Thus it becomes the spine for the circulation in Karm El Zeitoun and at the same time the only place for economical activities in the whole area. Far from being a real commercial street, the shops and services in the major street of Karm El Zeitoun are mostly laid out for local customers and needs, offering haircuts, groceries or vegetables. The concentration of public functions on the main street leaves the rest of the Karm El Zeitoun grid as secluded niches allowing for the development of semiprivate usage patterns and making them an important place for the evolution of social life in Karm El Zeitoun.





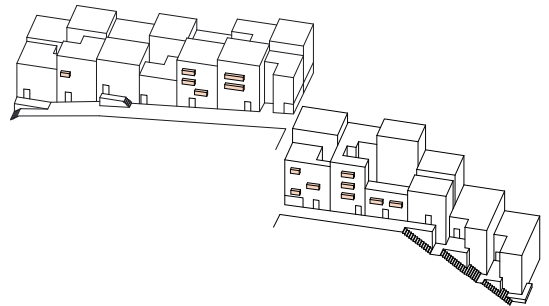


## The stairs as a social catalyst

The transformation of the streets into stairs changed the character of the public space. Making them inevitably not accessible for vehicles the stairs became a major living space for themselves, a fact that is even enforced by the architectural layout of the stairs that features a variety of situations that form ideal environments for leisure. Thus they receive an increased value as place for different social activities and so become a major trigger in the development of a community in the Neighbourhood of Karm El Zeitoun.



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## The balconies as social communication platforms

Due to the narrowness of the streets and the resulting closeness of the blocks the visual and acoustic contacts to the neighbours are done in a very direct and immediate way. Especially on weekends the balconies become an important extension of the homes, making the communication from balcony to balcony another important factor in the enforcement of the sense of neighbourhood in Karm El Zeitoun.



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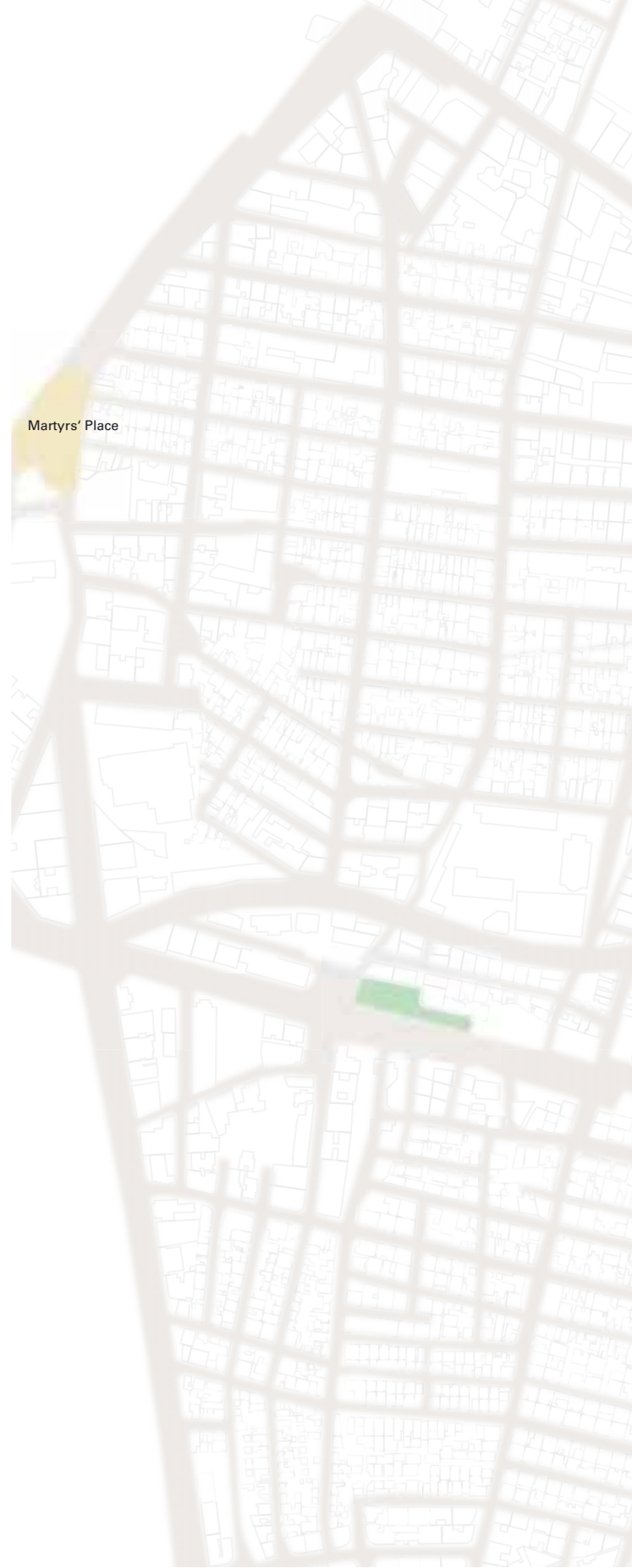


## The streets of Bourj Hammoud

The layout as a continuous consistent grid has led to a very homogeneous physical structure of the street space in Bourj Hammoud. Nevertheless, in terms of their use pattern and activities, most of the quarters have developed their very own characters, giving the regular grid a big variety of atmospheres.



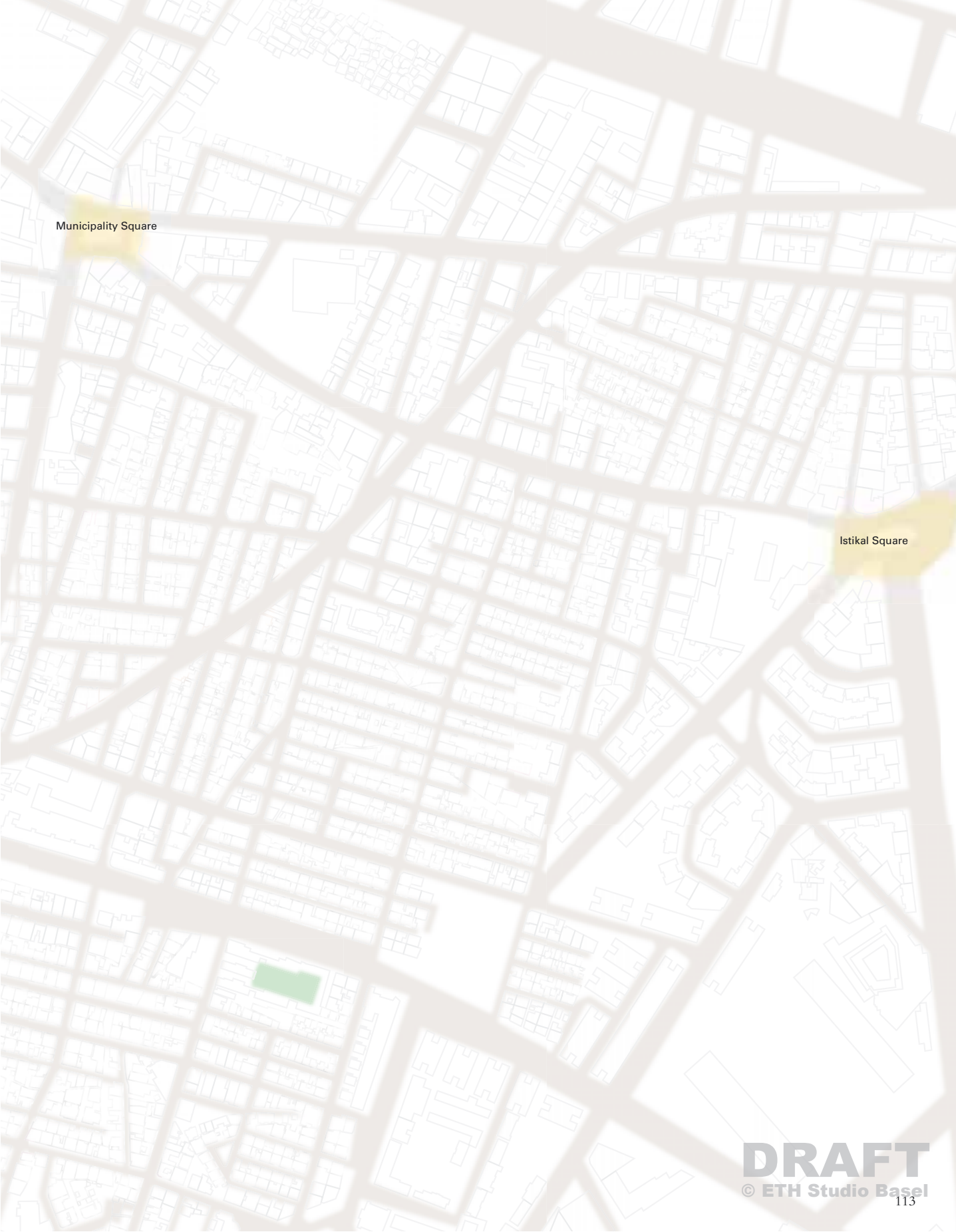




## The grid as the major public space in Bourj Hammoud

Due to its development as a very dense grid, Bourj Hammoud has never had the place for large public squares or green parks like they can be found in many traditional cities. The few public squares are usually not much more than traffic nodes with a green island in the middle without a proper public use. Thus the activities in Bourj Hammoud developed in the dense street grid. The grid gets the main area for work, leisure or representation, making the street space of Bourj Hammoud a very vividly populated public realm. The identities of these spaces are strongly influenced by the functions of the enclosing buildings, forming different urban entities in the different areas of Bourj Hammoud.





Municipality Square

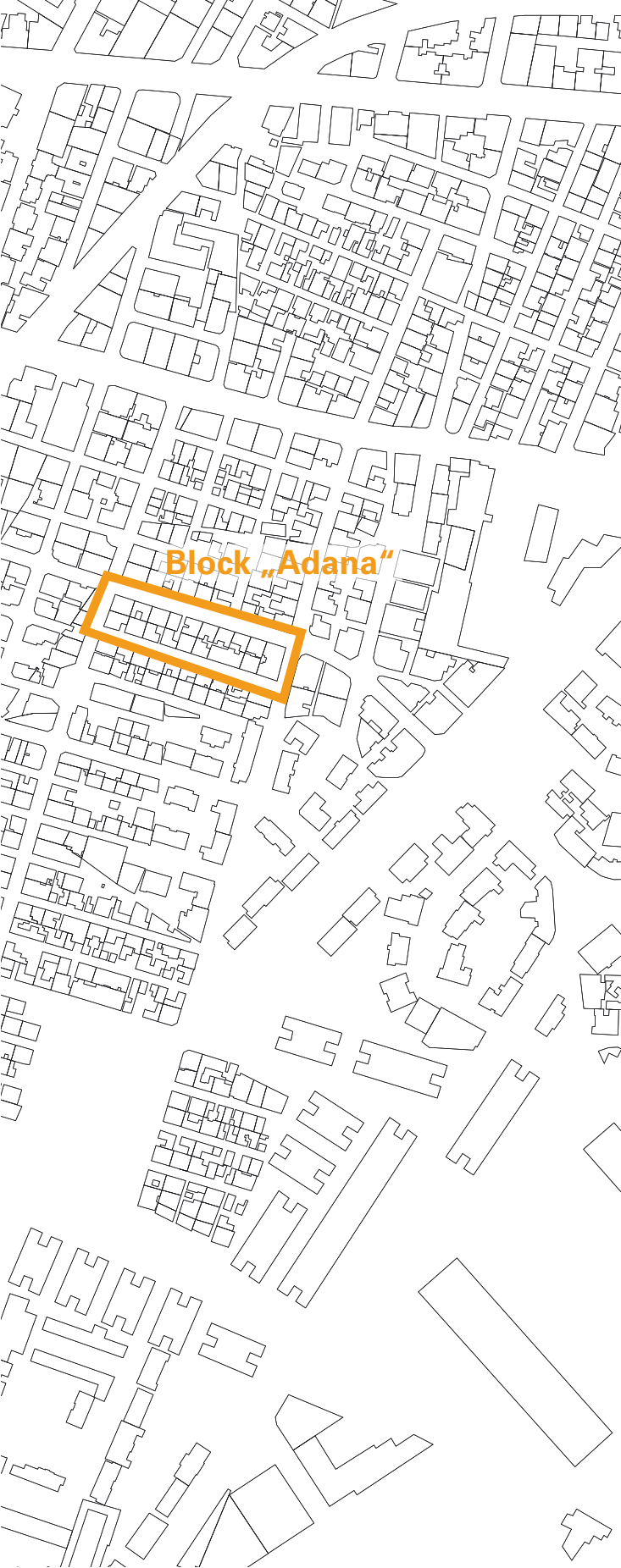
Istikal Square

Block „Marach“



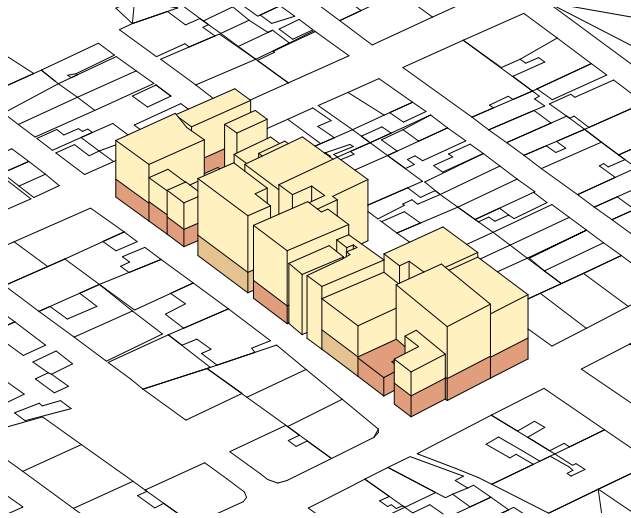
Block „Sis“





### The city block and the grid - case studies from Bourj Hammoud

Depending on their location in the city grid of Bourj Hammoud, the physically similar blocks have very different social and functional attributes. The blocks vary both in the proportional distribution of the functions and the character of the functions themselves. There is obviously a difference between the specificities of the single parts of the city, in terms of the population, the identity and the activities.



## Block Marach

### 18 shops

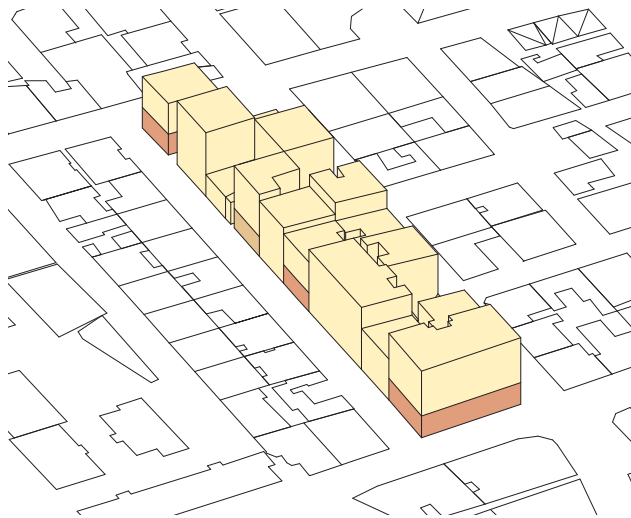
6 fashion stores, 2 shops for spices, 3 mobile phone shops, 1 pharmacy, 2 jewellery shops, 3 lingerie shops, 1 grocery shop

### 7 workshops

2 shoemakers, 1 leather stitcher, 1 sculptor, 1 jeweller, 2 sewers

### 60 apartments

Around 200 residents, mostly Armenians



## Block Adana

### 7 shops

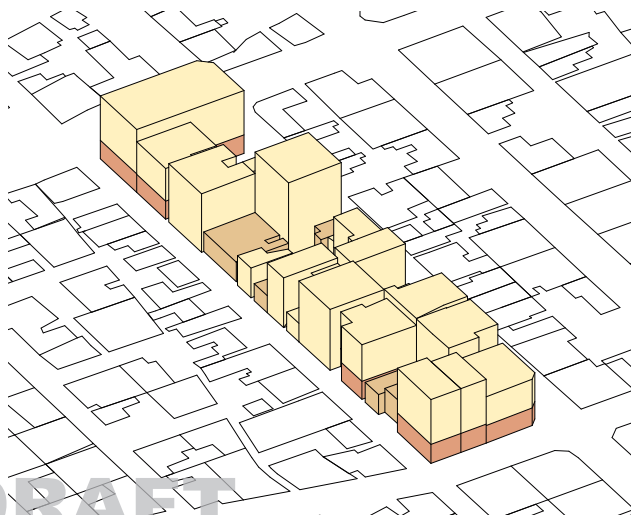
3 grocery stores, 1 vegetable sellers, 1 furniture sellers, 1 kebab restaurant, 1 butchery

### 3 workshops

2 hairdressers, 1 computer repairer

### 80 apartments

Around 400 residents, mostly Armenians



## Block Sis

### 11 shops

2 grocery stores, 1 kebab restaurant, 2 fashion stores, 2 toy shops, 2 tool shops, 1 car part store, 1 store for used furniture

### 6 workshops

1 hairdresser, 3 car mechanics, 1 bicycle mechanic, 1 carpenter

### 70 apartments

Around 400 residents, different nationalities

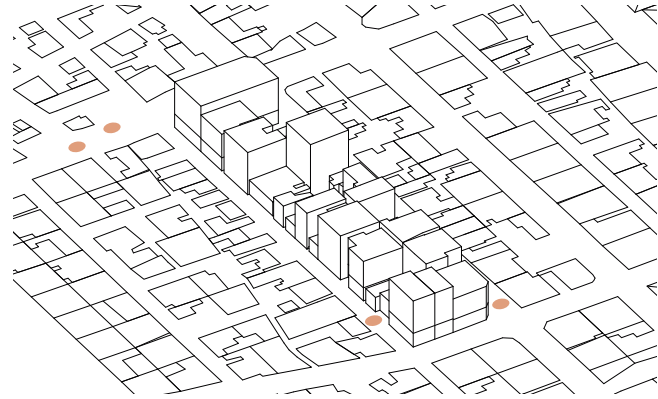
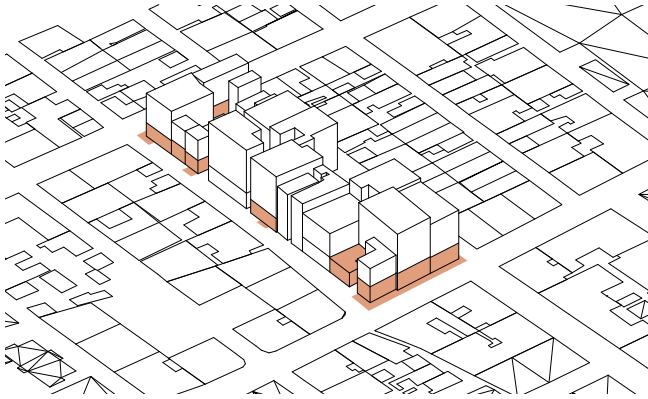


MAKIPROS KOLYDUMJIAN  
ALL KINDS OF LAUNDRY FOR SHOES BAGS BELTS & CLOTHES

Kevin  
ՀԱՅԿԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏԱԿԱՆ ԿՈՄԻՏԵ

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## The activities in the streets of the Bourj Hammoud grid

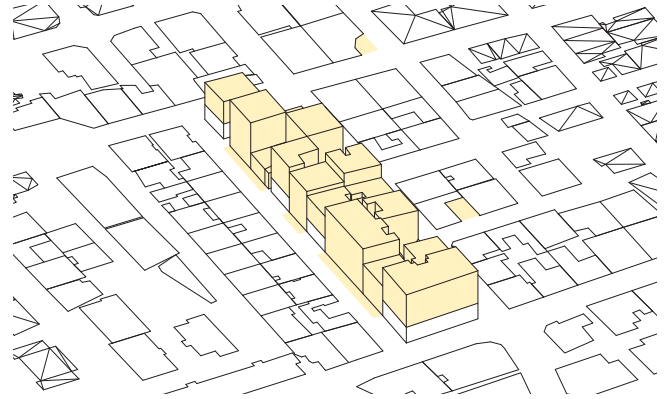
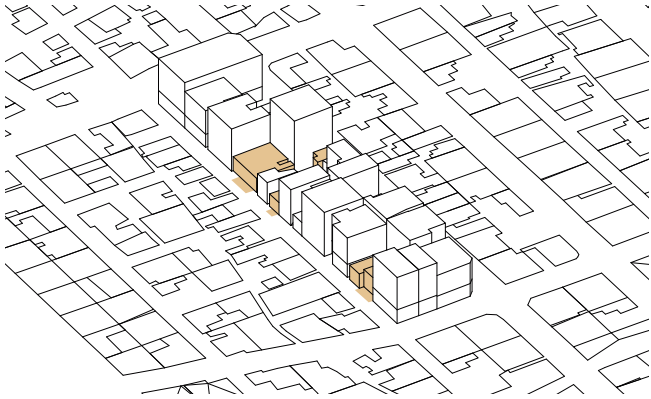


### The grid as place of commerce

The streetspace in Bourj Hammoud is the main backbone for all the shops in the area, since they are all directly accessed over one of the streets in the grid of Bourj Hammoud. In order to expand their shop space and to attract stronger attention, many stores extend their inside space to the outside and offer their goods directly in the street space. This exposition of products in the public enhances in the commercial areas the feeling to be in an area that is very similar to a Middle Eastern souk. The shops become a part of the public space and the public space penetrates into the inside of the shops.

### The grid as place of informal trading

In addition to the formal shops there is also a big variety of mobile traders in Bourj Hammoud. The tradesmen sell their products preferably near the main vehicular and pedestrian traffic nodes inside the grid. The highest density of these traders can be observed in the space below the Yerevan Flyover, where farmers sell their vegetables and the fishermen from the harbour in the north of Bourj Hammoud sell their fish and oysters. The mobile salesmen also execute another function in becoming the main shopping opportunity in residential areas where there are no local grocery stores to buy the goods of daily life.



### The grid as place of work

Since many crafts that people work on in Bourj Hammoud require a lot of space and good circulation, many inhabitants execute parts of their works in the street space, be it the repairing of cars or the painting and varnishing of carpentry. Especially in the southern parts and around the edges of the quarter the streets become bustling and busy places of activities.

### The grid as place of leisure

Because of the lack of public parks or squares the few green spots and the pavements of the residential areas become the main meeting places for the local population. While the interior spaces are often too small or in a bad condition, the public pavements become the favored places to meet and spend some time with other inhabitants. Being the main location for social interaction, the grid becomes an instrument to enforce the sense of community of neighbourhood.







Grid mall



Grid grocerer





Grid garden









الحديثة المنطق  
التسجيل سفره الروضة غوم النوي  
عربي. فرنسي. انكليزي كيرتر  
المتقل مومن الاقامه السب. الجمع  
طريق من الليل. هاتف محطة التويل ٥٥  
١٧١.١٩٠ - ٣٢٢٥٦٩٣. بوي



**DRAFT**  
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## The programming of the grid - A comparison

The specificity that characterizes a certain street of the grid in Bourj Hammoud depends largely on the functions in the adjoining blocks. The shops, services and housing units of the buildings programme the life in the grid. The following comparison will show how two physically very similar streets, the Arax Street in Nor Marach and the Nadi Massis Street in the Nor Adana and Trad region, get a completely different functionality in the network of Bourj Hammoud. While the Nadi Massis is the central street of a residential area, featuring a medium density of shops and services that address mostly the local population, the Arax street forms one of the main trading spines of Bourj Hammoud with a dense alignment of commerces for people that come from all over Beirut and its region and beyond, thus enforcing a busy and vibrant street life.









Arax Street

Ecole Saint Mesrob



**Nadi Massis Street**

- Jeweller
- Body art
- Café
- Perfumery
- Electronics
- Computer retail
- Grocery store
- Sunglasses
- Hairdresser
- Beauty shop
- Music store
- Fisherman shop
- Café
- Household goods
- Grocery store
- Cell phone cards
- Cell phones
- Bedclothes
- Shoes
- Club Massis
- Curtains
- Cell Phones
- Decoration articles
- Textile-decoration
- Café
- Clothes
- Lottery
- Backpacks
- Internet Café
- Common Items
- Carpets
- Accessories
- Motorbike accessories
- Hairdresser
- Textiles
- Fruits & vegetables
- Toys & accessories
- Motorbike accessories
- Motorbike service
- Locks & bulbs
- Lady's fashion
- Snack store
- Jewellery
- Clothes
- Takeaway
- Car Regals
- Cell phones
- Tablecloths
- Grocery store
- Giggernitts
- Meat products
- Curtains
- Hairdresser
- Lady's hairdresser
- Toys
- Flowers
- Barbershop
- Textiles
- Carpets
- DVDs
- Café
- Grocery store
- Grocery store
- Barbershop
- Café
- Computers
- Electronical accessories
- Electronical accessories
- Car service
- Common Items
- Pharmacy
- Takeaway
- Tools
- Butchery
- Car service
- Car/audio service
- Car accessories
- DVDs & CDs
- Carpentry
- Spicery

Arax Street



Shoe & leather care

Lady's fashion

Magazines

Lingerie

Socks & clothes

Lady's fashion

Lady's fashion

Lady's accessories



Cosmetics

Lady's fashion

Lady's fashion

Lady's fashion

Curtains

Lady's fashion



Lady's shoes

Children's fashion

Fashion accessories

Men's fashion

Shoes

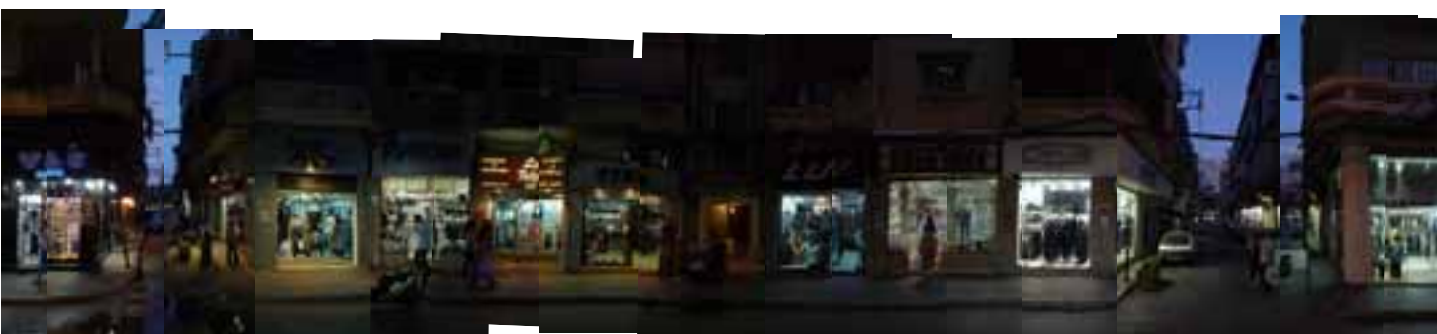
Jewellery



Decorative textiles Belts Ribbons Clothes Jewellery Fashion accessories Lady's shoes Fashion accessories



Lady's shoes Textiles Children's fashion Wedding dresses Lady's shoes Bedclothes Lady's fashion



Shoes & bags Lady's fashion Lady's shoes Lingerie Firlefanz Lady's fashion Lady's shoes Lady's fashion Lady's fashion



Lingerie

Jewellery

Baby's lingerie

Girl's fashion

Lady's shoes

Clothes



Shoes

Ginggernillis

Lady's fashion

Lady's fashion

Shoes

Lady's fashion



Ecole Saint Mesrob

Youth's accessories

Lady's fashion

Lingerie

Lady's fashion

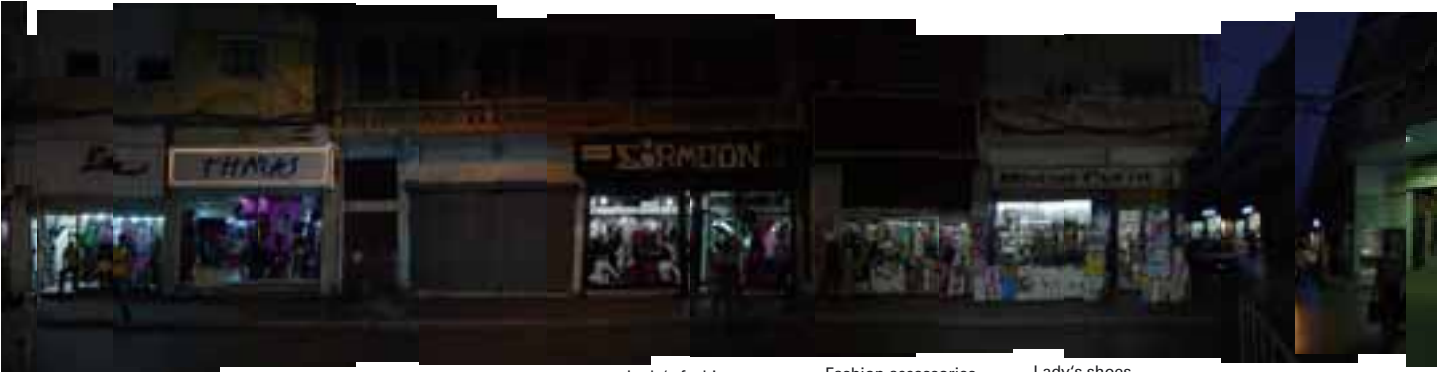
Lady's shoes & bags

Lady's fashion

Lady's shoes & bags



Children's shoes    Lady's shoes & bags  
Lady's shoes & bags    Lady's shoes & bags    Lady's fashion    Lady's shoes & bags    Jewellery    Shoes



Youth's fashion    Lady's fashion    Lady's fashion    Fashion accessories    Lady's shoes



Lady's fashion    Textiles    Lady's Shoes & bags    Shoes & bags



Locks & bulbs

Motorbike service

Motorbike accessories



Textiles

Ha



Backpacks





Toys & accessories



Fruits & vegetables



irdresser



Motorbike accessories



Accessories



Carpets

Common items



Lottery



Clothes



Café





Textile decoration

Decoration articles

Cell Phones

Curtains



Grocery store

Household goods



Beauty shop

Hairdresser

Sunglasses

Grocery store

Computer retail

Elec



Club Massis



Shoes



Bedclothes



Cell phones



Cell phone cards



Café



Fisherman shop

Music store



Electronics

Perfumery

Café



Body art



Jeweller



VI. POPULATION  
MIGRATIONS AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF THE ARMENIANS  
RELIGIONS IN BOURJ HAMMOUD AND KARM EL ZEITOUN  
SYMBOLICAL MARKING OF THE GRID  
MORE SUBHEADING





## The people of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

After their beginning as cities of refuge for the Armenians from Turkey, Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun have faced numerous other immigration waves into the quarters and also emigrations towards places in the Lebanon and abroad. The reasons for this were the numerous historic events in Lebanon and the world since the 1930s, the most important one being definitely the Lebanese Civil War, where Bourj Hammoud was a relatively peaceful island and became a place of refuge for many Armenian and Lebanese Christians, while most of the Muslim population left Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun, only to return after the end of the fighting in 1990.

All these migration movements have left their traces in the social composition of the population, their nationalities and religions. Today, while still most of the people in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun remain Christian Armenians, there is a broad variety of people with various origins and cultures. Since some of them are concentrated in certain parts of the quarters, they leave distinctive traces in the setup of the street grids of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun.



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# Migration movements in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

## 1930s-today

Actors: Armenians from Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun  
 Destination: Europe and America  
 Trigger: Better economic prospects

## 1940s

Actors: Armenians from Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun  
 Destination: Soviet Armenia  
 Trigger: Stalins call for immigration of Armenians in order to reinstall the population in the Caucasus region

## 1940s-1975

Actors: Shia Muslims from Southern Lebanon  
 Destination: Nabaa and Southern Bourj Hammoud  
 Trigger: Israeli invasion of South Lebanon, availability of empty homes after emigration of Armenians.

## 1975

Actors: Shia Muslims from Nabaa and Bourj Hammoud  
 Destination: West Beirut, Lebanon  
 Trigger: Lebanese Civil War, escape from Christian dominated eastern parts of Beirut

## 1975-1990

Actors: Armenians from Beirut  
 Destination: Bourj Hammoud, mostly Nor Marach  
 Trigger: Lebanese Civil War, Bourj Hammoud as relatively peaceful area

## 1975-today

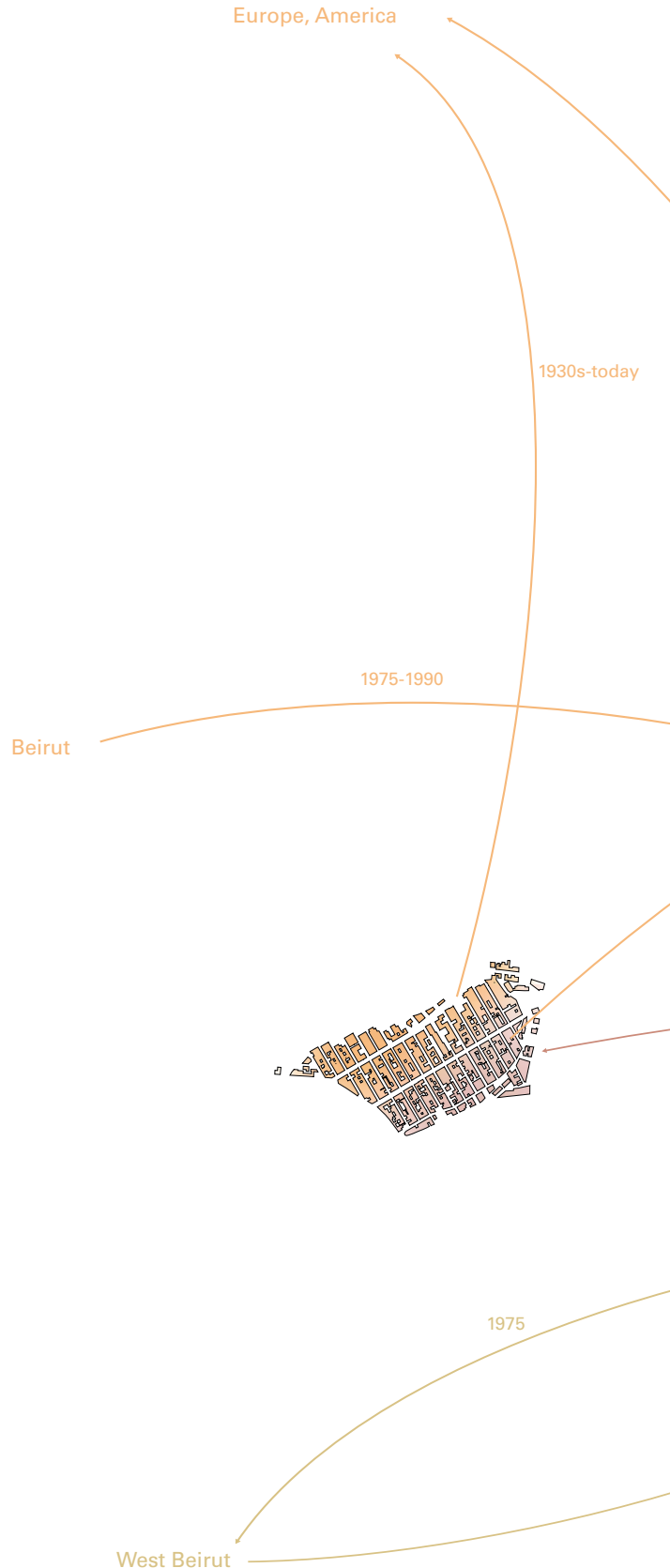
Actors: Armenians from Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun  
 Destination: Eastern suburbs of Beirut (Antelias, Jounieh)  
 Trigger: Lebanese Civil War, bad state of housing sector in Bourj Hammoud

## 1990-today

Actors: Shia Muslims from Lebanon  
 Destination: Nabaa and Southern Bourj Hammoud  
 Trigger: End of Lebanese Civil War, return to the previous homes

## 1990s-today

Actors: Farmers from Lebanon, Syrians, Iraqis, Africans (Somalians, Ethiopians), Asians (Philippinos, Sri Lankans)  
 Destination: Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun  
 Trigger: Economic prospects, work







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## The Religions in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

The various migrations have led to the appearing of a variety of religions in Bourj Hammoud. All these religious directions have left their traces. As a result, Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun feature a broad variety of churches and mosques.



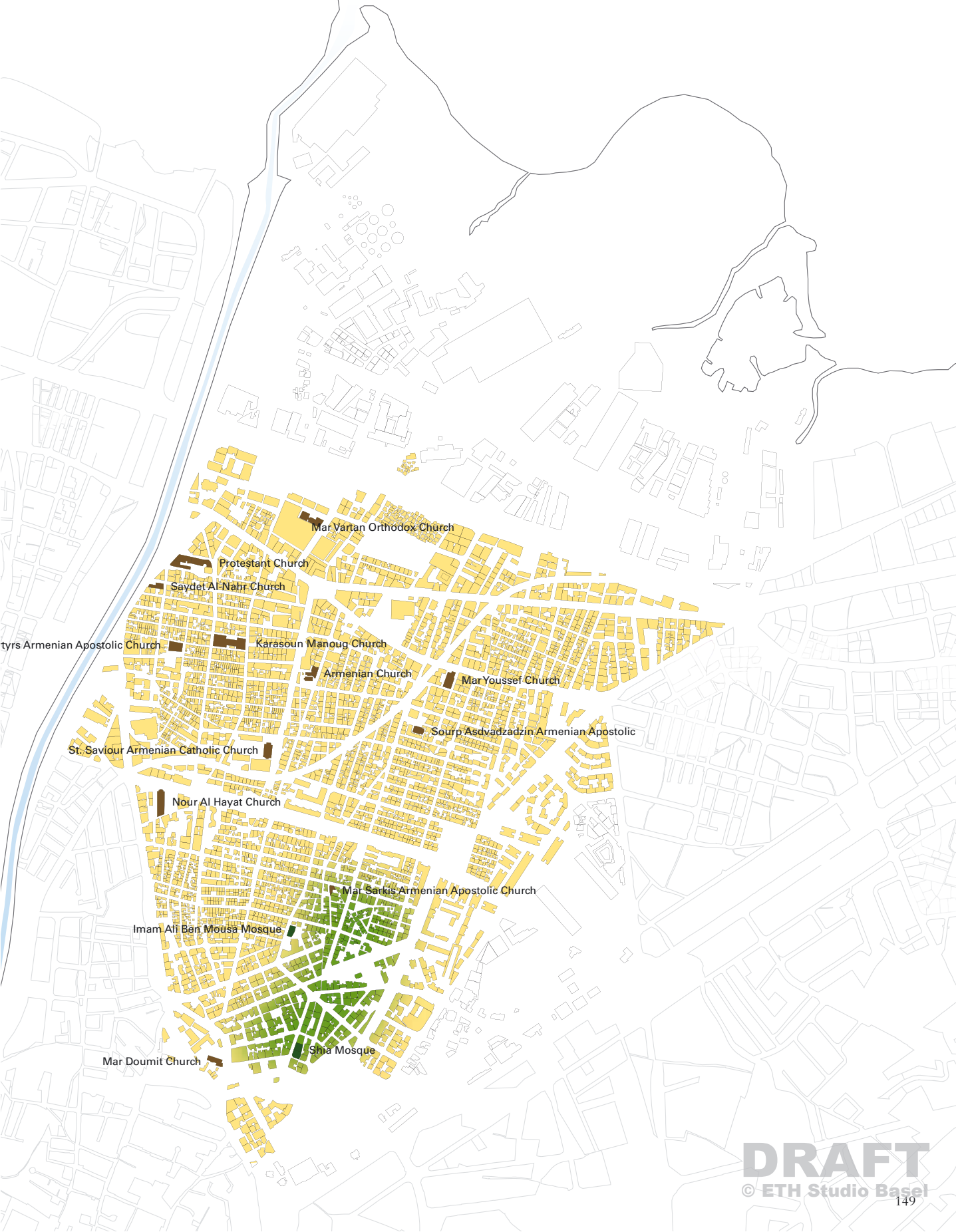


- Christian: Armenian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Maronite
- Churches
- Muslim: Shia
- Mosques

## Religions, churches and mosques in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

While the north of Bourj Hammoud around the Nor Marach and Nor Adana areas as well as the northwestern edge of Karm El Zeitoun remained mostly Armenian quarters with a mostly Armenian Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant Christian population, the south of Bourj Hammoud and the southeast of Karm El Zeitoun have a much bigger population mixture. While the majority of them still consists of Christians, either Maronite Lebanese or from foreign countries, the migrations from southern Lebanon have left a big and growing Shiite group that settles mostly in the area of Nabaa and Nor Sis.





Mar Vartan Orthodox Church

Protestant Church

Saydet Al-Nahr Church

tyrs Armenian Apostolic Church

Karasoun Manoug Church

Armenian Church

Mar Youssef Church

Sourp Asdvadzadzin Armenian Apostolic

St. Saviour Armenian Catholic Church

Nour Al Hayat Church

Mar Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church

Imam Ali Ben Mousa Mosque

Shia Mosque

Mar Doumit Church





The symbolic occupation of the grid in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

The grid as place for political advertisement

The various strong political and social parties that are active in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun use the streetspace of the grids as space to propagate their views and ideas, be it religious beliefs, party propaganda like the posters for the Amal leaders in Naba and the Dashnak party flags in the Armenian parts or billboards commenting the treaty of Turkey and Armenia of 2009 in Switzerland.

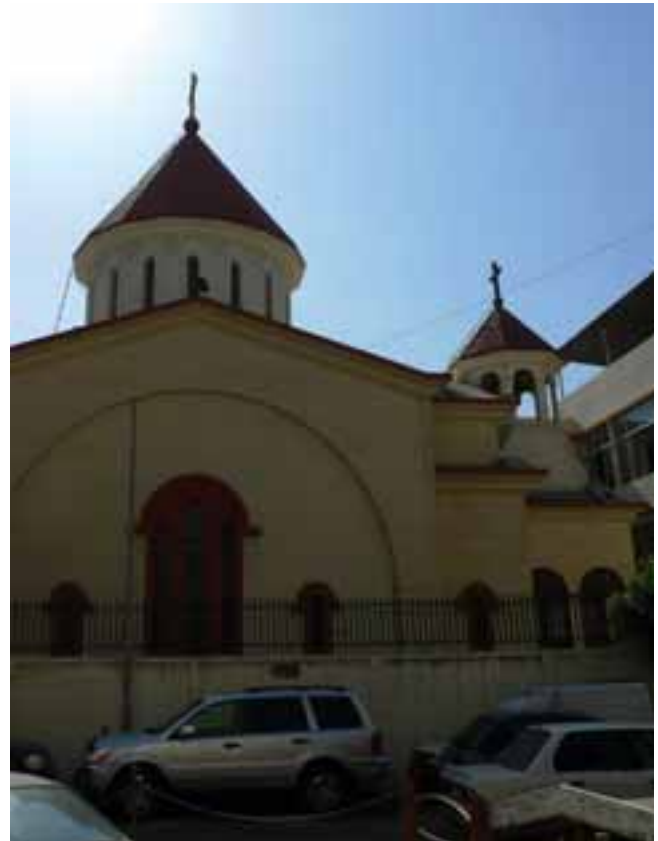


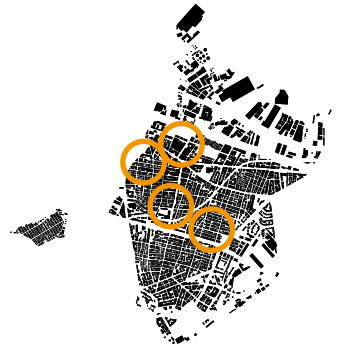




## The symbolic marking of the grid

Especially in the southern parts of Bourj Hammoud where the different religions and nationalities clash together some of the social groups gather in a specific street or quarter. In all of Bourj Hammoud, but particularly in those areas the according parts get clearly marked with symbolic elements in the street space ranging from crosses that hang in between the facades to Armenian, Lebanese and Hisbollah-flags or small shrines in the street corners. Thus the uniform grid gets another layer of differentiation with borders that are not physical, but form psychological partitions. The symbolisms give these boundaries a material form and make them readable in the urban layout.





The architecture of the churches as reminiscences of Armenian identity

Especially as a reaction to the emigration of many Armenians from Bourj Hammoud and the immigration of other ethnic and religious groups the remaining Armenians started to try to preserve their cultural identity in Bourj Hammoud with architectural means. This can be noticed in the recovery of Armenian architectural styles, especially in the construction of churches. While most of the first Armenian churches in Beirut were built in modern or local styles, today the planners of the new churches emulate Armenian style elements and typologies, for example the style of the central tower and dome. This principle is applied even in the renovations of existing modernist churches that get extended with Armenian styled additions.



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الطبيب  
مركز  
مركز



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VII. HOUSING  
THE GRID AS A HOME  
DENSITY  
CASE STUDIES  
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES  
SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS








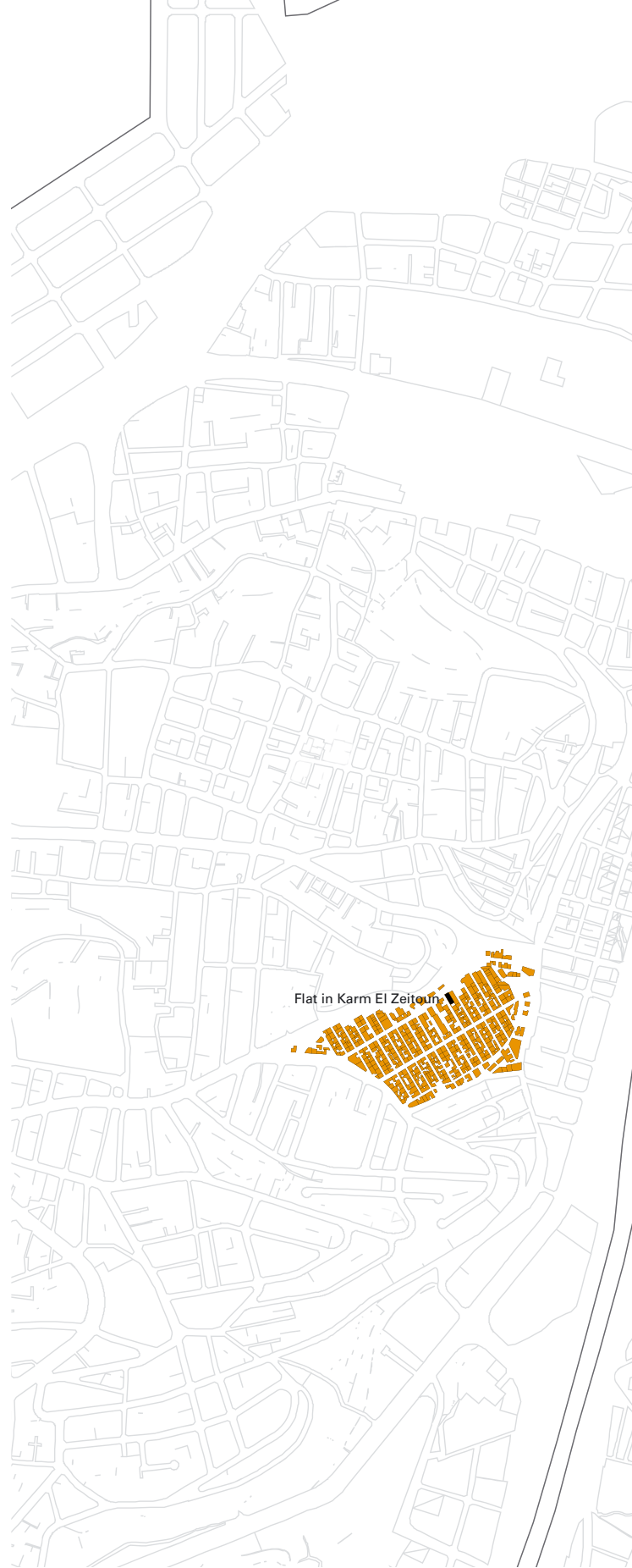
## The grid as a home

Since the residential population fluctuated in the last decades due to the historic events, it's not possible to give an exact number of residents in Bourj Hammoud. Estimations vary from 75'000 to 150'000 inhabitants. They primarily belong to the middle and lower income groups, including many single foreign workers employed in Bourj Hammoud.

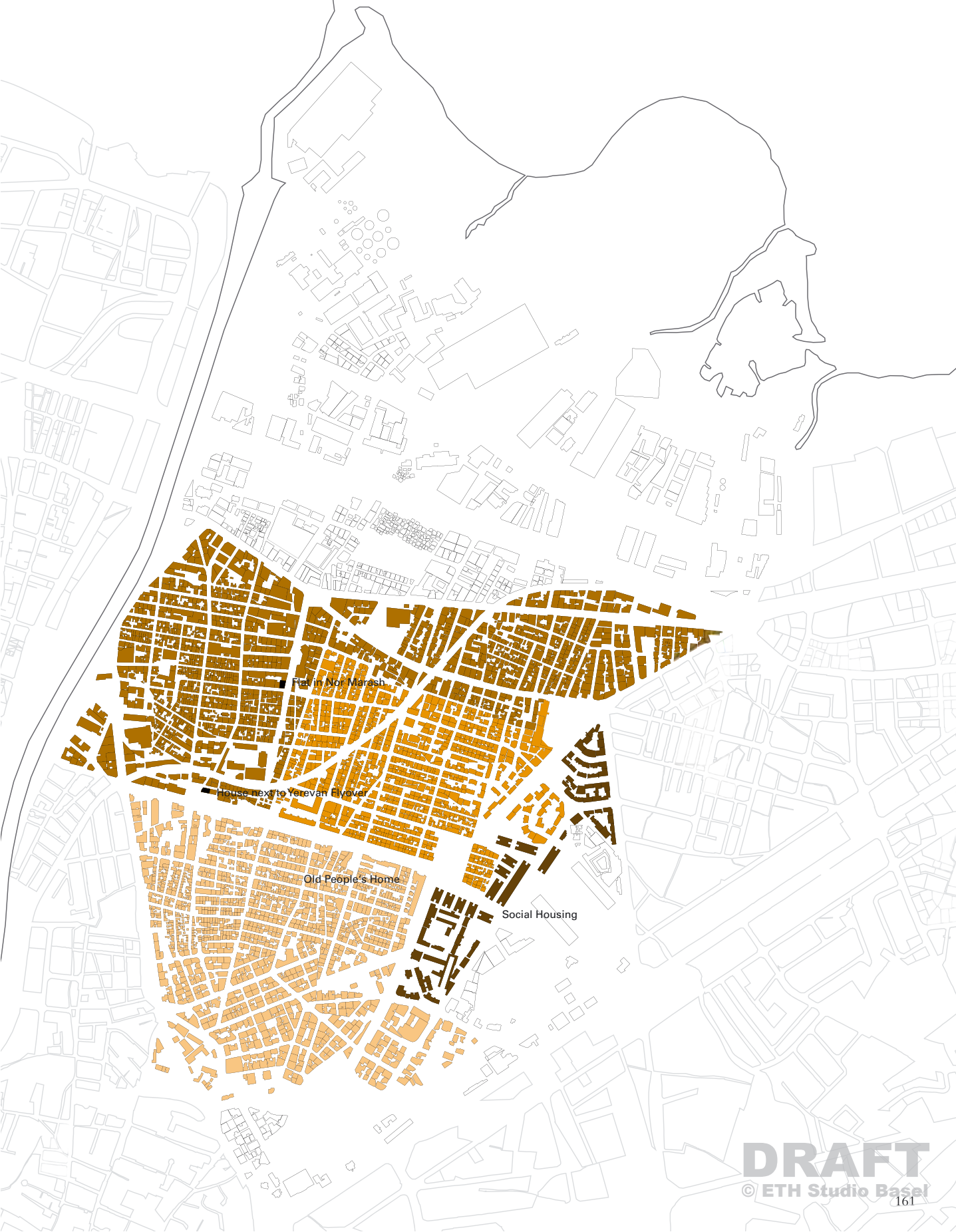
Although the housing area spreads over all the grid parts of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun, there are parts with more or less explicit residential function. The areas of Nor-Adana and Trad in Bourj Hammoud and the whole of Karm El Zeitoun are quarters where the housing is the dominant function, while Nor Marach has some housing but the public space of the grid is mostly formed by commercial activities. In the south of Bourj Hammoud commercially and residentially shaped streets are mixed.

The average household size in both Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun is 3.8, a number that is below the national average of non-Armenian households. Almost half of all residents possess their own flats. The average size of the apartments measures approximately 80 square metres.

-  Bigger scale housing
-  Housing mixed with distinctive commercial
-  Housing with some neighbourhood services
-  Housing mixed with some commercial manufacturing activity
-  Case studies







Flat in Nor Marash

House next to Yerevan Elevator

Old People's Home

Social Housing

## Density and size

With the enormous amount of over 60'000 inhabitants per square kilometer, Bourj Hammoud is one of the most dense living areas not only in the Lebanon but in the whole of the Middle East. Karm El Zeitoun has a very high density as well, only being surpassed by Bourj Hammoud in the international comparison.

The reasons for this extraordinary high density lie in the very small size and dense arrangement of the plots and thus the buildings, a system that has its origin in the past as a refugee settlement in the early 20th century. The other reason is that both quarters house relatively low income groups, that naturally occupy much smaller flats and live in bigger families or groups.

Bourj Hammoud, LBN: 62'500/km<sup>2</sup>

Cairo, EGY: 37'136/km<sup>2</sup>

Mumbai, IND: 31'807/km<sup>2</sup>

Manhattan (New York), USA: 27'476/km<sup>2</sup>

Beirut, LBN: 20'065/km<sup>2</sup>

Damascus, SYR: 15'270/km<sup>2</sup>

Macao, CHN: 13'853/km<sup>2</sup>

Jakarta, IDN: 12'965/km<sup>2</sup>

Lagos, NGA: 9'498/km<sup>2</sup>

Sao Paulo, BRA: 7'148/km<sup>2</sup>

Tokyo, JPN: 5'847/km<sup>2</sup>

Mexico City, MEX: 5'818/km<sup>2</sup>

London, GBR: 4'758/km<sup>2</sup>

Zurich, CHE: 3'930/km<sup>2</sup>



### Kleinbasel

7,78 square kilometres  
51'895 inhabitants  
6'670 inhabitants per square kilometre



### Beirut

85 square kilometres  
1'700'000 inhabitants  
20'000 inhabitants per square kilometre



### Bourj Hammoud

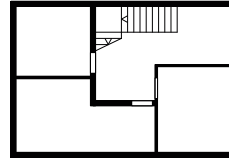
2,4 square kilometres  
150'000 estimated inhabitants  
62'500 inhabitants per square kilometre



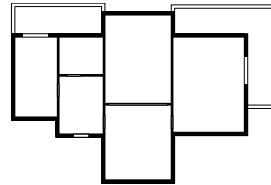
### Karm El Zeitoun

0.046 square kilometres  
2'000 estimated inhabitants  
43'478 inhabitants per square kilometre





House near Yerevan Highway  
6 inhabitants (mostly immigrants)  
Low income  
Approx. 70 sqm



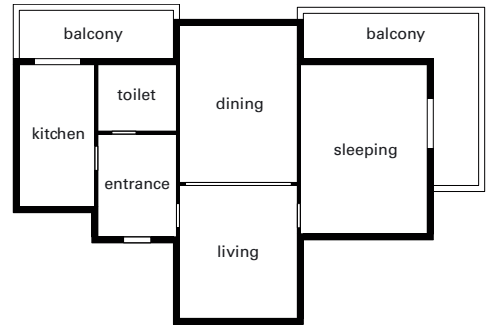
Flat in Nor Marach  
2 inhabitants (brothers, Armenian)  
Lower middle class  
Approx. 55 sqm



Flat in Karm El Zeitoun  
4 inhabitants (one family, Lebanese)  
Middle class  
Approx. 60 sqm

### Case studies - Three homes in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

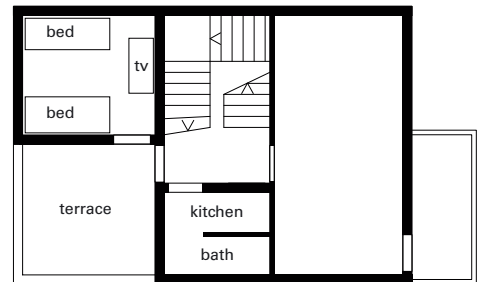
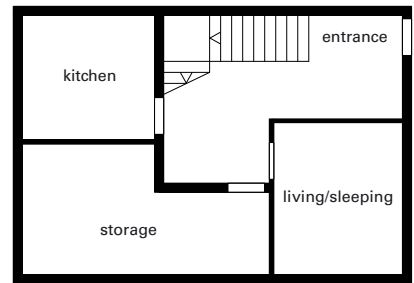
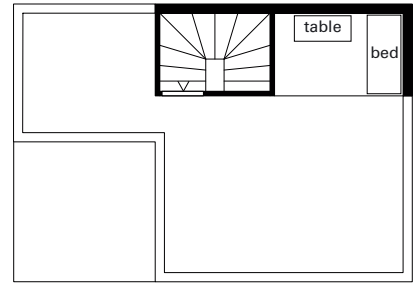
While they don't reach the diversity of the Bourj Hammoud economies, the homes in the two Armenian quarters also range - though usually relatively similar from outside - from deprived homes for poor immigrants where a big number of people from different nationalities live up to a decent middle class living with many accessories of the modern Western lifestyle.



### Flat in Nor Marsh

Four parties, spread over three floors, live in this narrow building, built in the late 30's in the south of Nor Marsh, nowadays right next to the Yerevan Flyover.

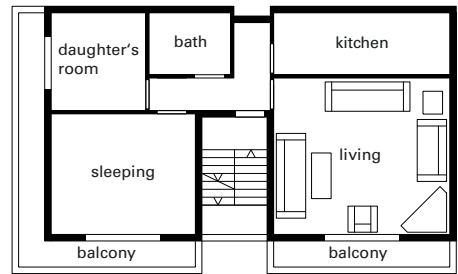
A woman lives on the ground floor, two Kurdish men and two Armenian women share the second floor and one Syrian man completes the house with his dwelling on the rooftop.



### House next to Yerevan Flyover

Four parties, spread over three floors, live in this narrow building, built in the late 30's in the south of Nor Marash, nowadays right next to the Yerevan Flyover.

A woman lives on the ground floor, two Kurdish men and two Armenian women share the second floor and one Syrian man has his dwelling on the rooftop completes the house.



## Flat in Karm El Zeitoun

Ghassan Numeir, describing himself as somewhat like the boss of Karm El Zeitoun, owns this quite respectable flat since the 40's and lives there with his wife, his two grown-up children (a bank employee and a nurse) and his dog Jesper.

While the daughter has a room for herself, the son sleeps on the couch in the considerably big living room.

Since investors are buying parcels in Karm El Zeitoun step by step, Ghassan, even though praising the advantages of the community in Karm El Zeitoun, considers selling his flat when they offer him a price double as high as it is by now.





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## Social Housing

While most of the dwellings are owned by their inhabitants themselves, there are also some public housing facilities, one of them being social housing that has been built for the inhabitants of the former Sandjak camps in the north of Bourj Hammoud. They form large blocks, mainly located to the south and the east of Bourj Hammoud, forming a completely different scale and grain than the regular housing in the grid.



## Old People's Home

The other public form of dwellings are the old peoples houses next to the Yerevan Flyover. While they offer a decent habitat for the senior citizens of Bourj Hammoud with one of the few big green spaces in the area, they have been heavily affected by the construction of the highway that runs right next to some of the windows of the rooms.



## Environmental issues in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

Next to the generally bad image of the quarter, the emissions from the various crafts and the general deterioration of the housing infrastructure, the environmental issues caused by neighbouring facilities are one of the main reasons that most people that improve their economic conditions leave Bourj Hammoud and settle down in the suburbs of Beirut.

There are no serious attempts to address the big environmental issues like the strong pollution of the Beirut River, the smells from the Qarantina slaughterhouse and the terrific conditions around the former waste dump near the coast of Bourj Hammoud. Furthermore the disrespect for the existing structure is shown with the construction of the big highway that cuts through the middle of Bourj Hammoud since 2000 or the ongoing destruction of the remains of the Sandjak camps, a place where, among immigrants from neighbouring countries, still a few artisans and fishermen have been running their stores. Another massive blow to the ecological and urbanistic condition of Bourj Hammoud might be happening in a few years if the planned water sewage plant, where the wastewater of 50 surrounding municipalities would be treated, gets realized, occupying almost half of Bourj Hammoud's coastline.





Sewage plant for 50 municipalities planned

Former Waste Dump







Qarantina Slaughterhouse

Sandjak Demolition ongoing

Beirut River

Yerevan Flyover 1995-2000

Industrial developments

-  Schools
-  Public institutions
-  Health and social services
-  Clubs and leisure
-  Children's Parks and nursery
-  Sports

## Schools and institutions in Bourj Hammoud

The density of the population in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun reflects in the high number of schools and other institutions in the area.

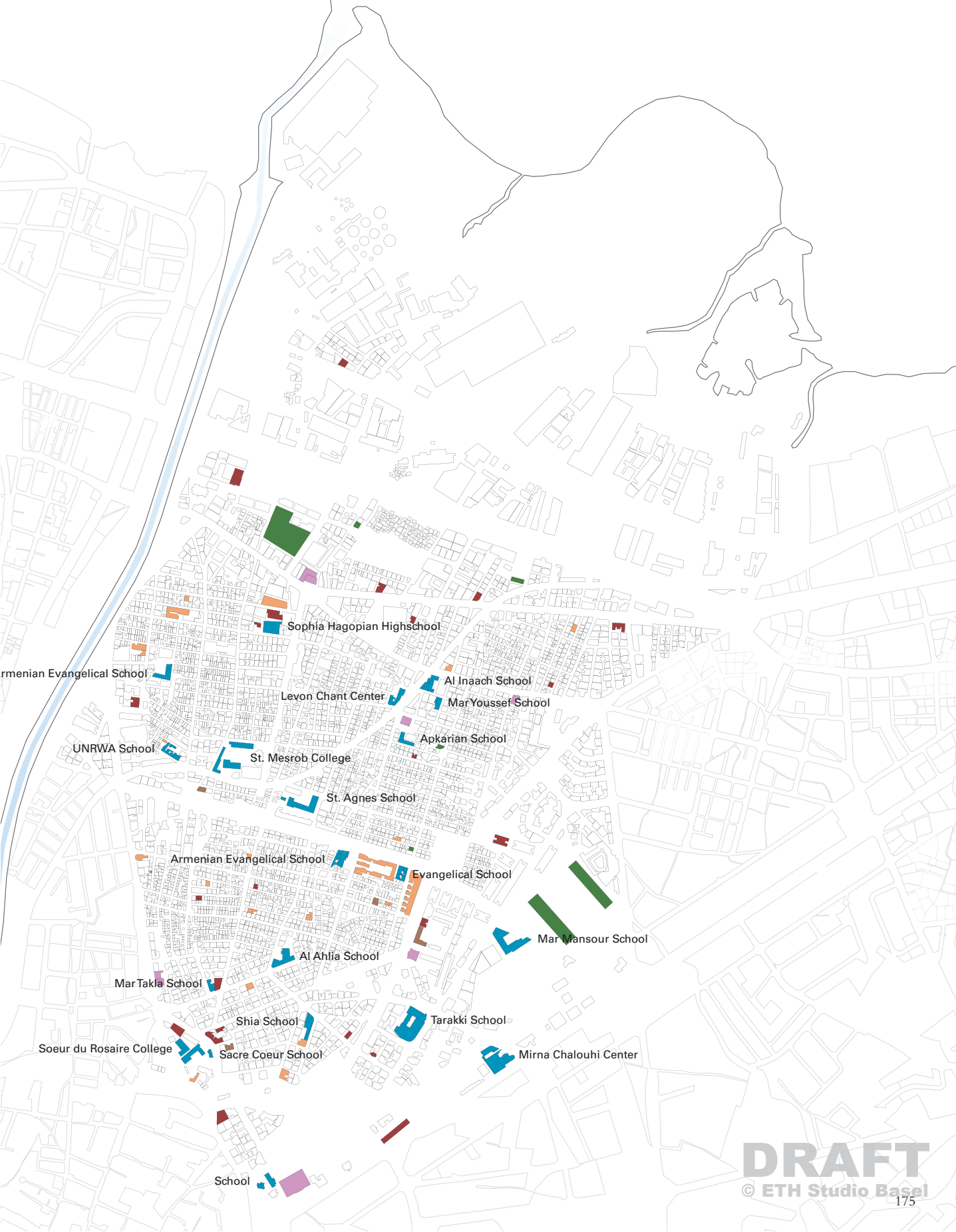
9'373 students are distributed in Bourj Hammoud, of which 6'891 go to private schools and 1'308 to technical schools. The remaining 1'174 students attend one of the three public schools.

The private schools are usually subsidized or supported by various local or international associations or by the municipality. Few students from peripheral regions attend Bourj Hammoud's private schools, while a substantial number of local children go to schools outside.

While at the age of 15, 80% of the kids are enrolled in school, this rate drops under 50% at the 16 to 18 years, since children are often compelled to join the workforce after the age of 15, mainly for financial reasons.

There is a need to increase the efficiency of the schools or more schoolbuildings need to be built in order to provide better choice of whether someone wants an academic or technical formation, considering the socio-economical character of the district.





Armenian Evangelical School

UNRWA School

Sophia Hagopian Highschool

Levon Chant Center

Al Inaach School

Mar Youssef School

Apkarian School

St. Mesrob College

St. Agnes School

Armenian Evangelical School

Evangelical School

Mar Mansour School

Al Anlia School

Mar Takla School

Shia School

Tarakki School

Soeur du Rosaire College

Sacre Coeur School

Mirna Chalouhi Center

School



ՍՐԲՈՒՄԻ ԱՎԵՐԱ ՎԱՐՈՅԻՐԱՆ

ECOLE St. ANNE



قاعة اوهانيس بوغوصيان  
ՕԿՈՒՆԻ ԳՐԱԴԱՆ ԲՈՑԻՍՊՈՒԿ  
THEATRE OHANNES BOGHOSIAN



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VIII. ECONOMY  
THE COMMERCIAL GRID  
THE ARTISANS OF NOR MARASH  
THE INDUSTRIAL QUARTER IN BOURJ HAMMOUD  
REGIONAL AND GLOBAL RELEVANCE



## The commercial grid of Bourj Hammoud

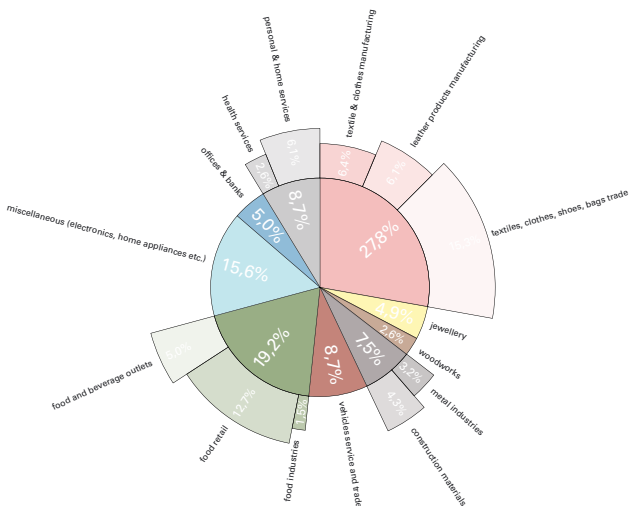
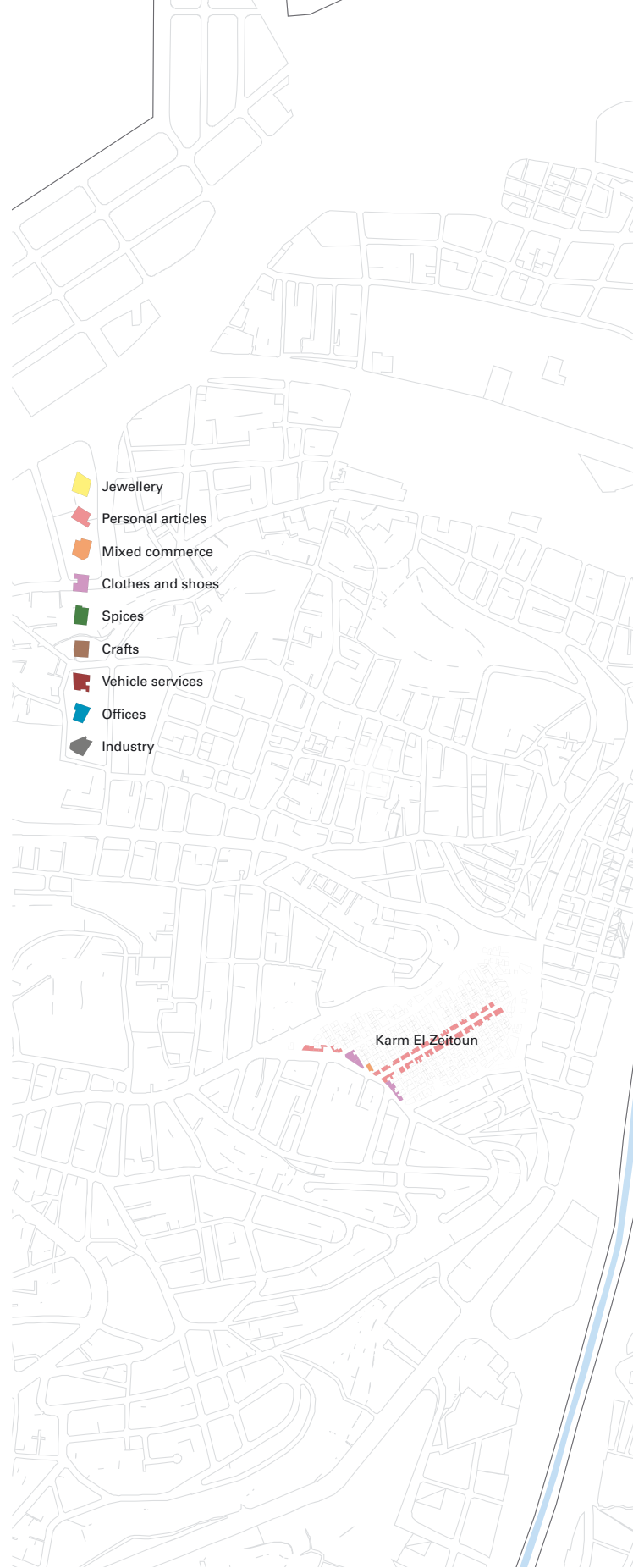
Whereas not a favoured residential neighbourhood, Bourj Hammoud is extremely popular for its diverse commercial character.

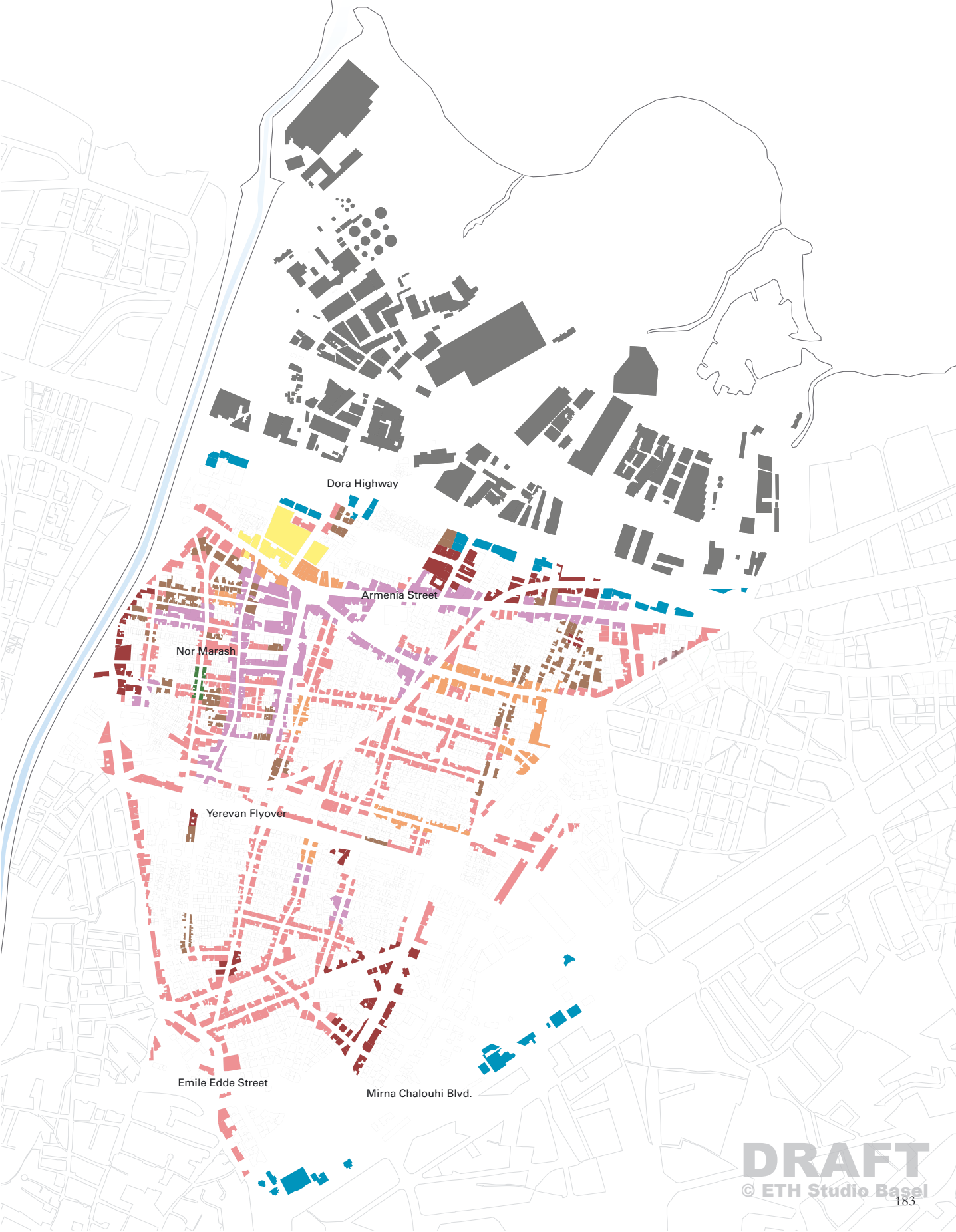
It's well-known far beyond Beirut or the borders of the Lebanon, that one can find almost everything one wants in Bourj Hammoud, particularly in the „Souk“, the neighbourhood of Nor Marach.

Depending on their location and their neighbouring condition, the different parts of the urban fabric have completely different economic functionalities. Nor Marach, favored by the position right next to the main connection to the city, the Armenia Street, is the center of the economical activities in Bourj Hammoud, featuring a big number of commercial shops, artisans and manufacturing units. Karm El Zeitoun and Nor Adana focus mostly on local needs, while the southern parts of Bourj Hammoud have a very mixed economy of lower manufactures and cheap commerces. Outside of the grid lies the business center of Bourj Hammoud north of Armenia Street and the industrial quarter at the coastline, being one of the biggest industry areas of the Beirut agglomeration.

Attracted by the intense commercial activities, several banks and money servicing facilities established around the main infrastructure arteries like the Dora Highway and the Armenia Street.

Most enterprises in Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun are small or medium sized, with less than 5 persons employed or run by an individual owner. Hence the average enterprise has a shop area of rarely more than 25 square metres.





Dora Highway

Armenia Street

Nor Marash

Yerevan Flyover

Emile Edde Street

Mirna Chalouhi Blvd.

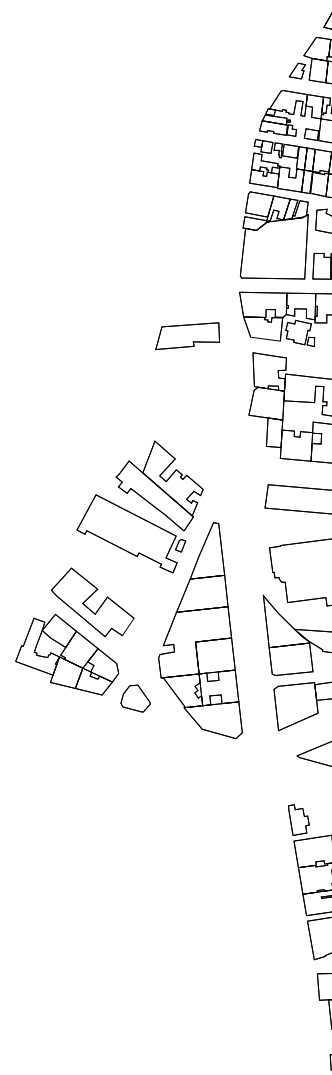












## The Artisans of Nor Marach

Crucial element of Bourj Hammoud's commercial character is the huge number of different artisans that offer a diverse range of products and services.

These artisans are mostly Armenians that inherited and preserved abilities and techniques over generations and thereby are specialists in their specific handicraft. Often, young Armenians drop out of school and engage as simple workers. Therefore, the workforce number in Bourj Hammoud is quite high compared to the Lebanese one (52% against 33%).

Almost three quarters of this working force are artisans and other laborers in handicraft manufacturing.

On the next few pages, some of those artisans will be introduced.



Shoemaker Kurdjian

Antiquarian Deravigian

Sculptor Ashod

Bag designer Masserian

Shoemaker Argmanian

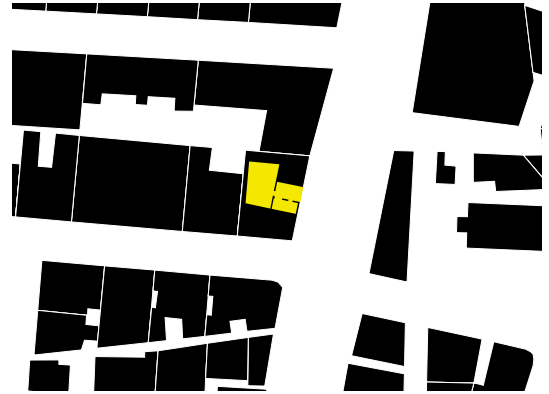
Jewelry maker Argmanian

Sculptor Avesian

Gold resoverer Kalachian

Cabinetmaker Tohmé

Photographer Karabyadjan



## Garo Aprahamjian

Location: Father Aress Street

Craft: Shoemaker

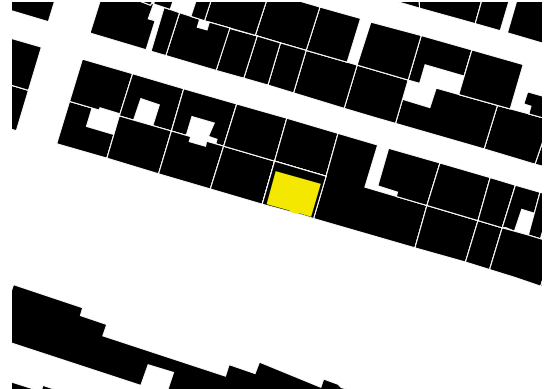
Workshop size: Approx. 150sqm

Employees: 9

Customers: Companies from the Arab world

After his grandfather once was the first to own a sewing machine in Jarablos and started to make shoes, the family of Garo Aprahamjian moved to the Lebanon, step by step expanded their production and became a major producer of high quality shoes in Beirut.

Being the third generation of the family business, the family and their nine employees produce men's footwear in the ground floor in the back of their small shop in Bourj Hammoud, but nevertheless sell their products to shops all over the arab market all the way till Afghanistan.



## Roger Joseph Tohmé

Location: Masaken Khoury Aress Street

Craft: Cabinetmaker

Workshop size: Approx. 100sqm

Employees: 5

Customers: Private persons and interior architects from all over the world

Originally from Syria, Roger's father established this carpentry 25 years ago. It is located right under the Yerevan Flyover today. Roger Joseph Tohmé designs furniture with oriental mosaic ornaments, considering customer's wishes if demanded or providing an individual style for every client.

A couple of employees create the furniture, usually made by order by customers from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria. By launching a showroom and a website, Roger intends to expand his workshop.

Today, the traditional craft is being improved with modern techniques, as for example Photoshop and CAD programmes are used as a designing tool.



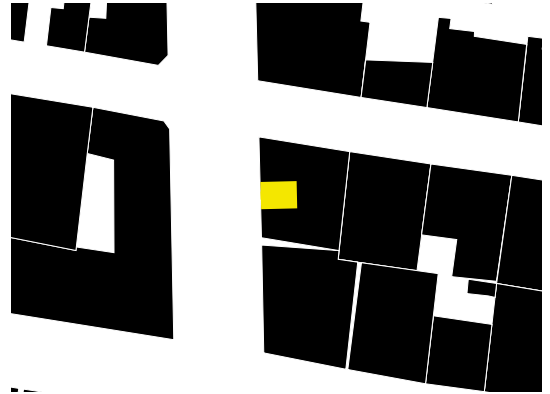


## Hampik Dertavidian

Location: Marach Street  
 Craft: Antiquarian  
 Workshop size: Approx. 10sqm  
 Employees: 0  
 Customers: Private persons from all over the world

Not really an antiquarian, Hampik Dertavidian actually adapts designs from antiques. Out of a large range of different materials like wood, chalk or ivory, he recreates jugs, sculptures, small figures and amulets, to name only a few.

Known for the high quality of his replicas, he receives orders from international customers from the Middle East till Argentina.



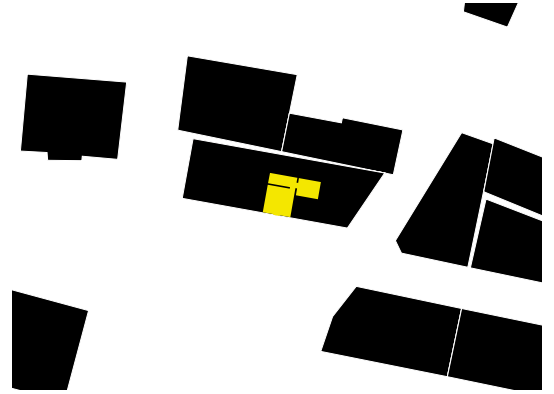
## Ashod

Location: Marach Street  
 Craft: Sculptor  
 Workshop size: Approx. 8sqm  
 Employees: 0  
 Customers: Private persons from the Middle East

Making sculptures primarily out of wood and stone, Ashods customers usually bring him a photo of the motif they want him to manufacture. He basically transforms a 2D photo into a three-dimensional sculpture.

He also designs and creates buttons, although the button business rather seems to be a kind of a hobby and doesn't run as good as the sculptures.





## Christopher Kalachian

Location: Al Sikeh Street  
 Craft: Gold recovery  
 Workshop size: Approx. 70sqm  
 Employees: 1  
 Customers: Jewellers from Bourj Hammoud

Together with his father and brother, Christopher Kalachian runs this family establishment in the south of Nor Marach. He recovers gold and other metals from the dust jewellers collect when they clean their workplaces. The time and amount of his work is indirectly linked to the gold market, as the jeweller's activity depends on it. The availability of services like the one Christopher is offering is a major advantage for the jeweller workshops, leading to the formation of clusters of the same craft that are keen to profit from the proximity of supporting productions. The oven reaches a maximum temperature of 2'000° C.



## Diran H. Messerian

Location: Guiligua Street  
 Craft: Bag designer  
 Workshop size: Approx. 50sqm  
 Employees: 0  
 Customers: Private persons and shops from all over the world

Designing fancy bags out of leather, Diran Messerians customers are from Beirut, the whole Lebanon as well as from the Gulf States and the U.S. West Coast, mainly Los Angeles, California, where a big Armenian community exists.







## Kevork Karaboyadjian

Location: Lebanese mountains

Craft: Photography

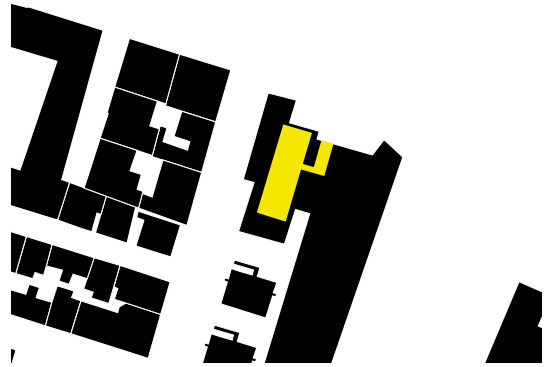
Workshop size: No

Employees: 0

Customers: No

Carrying his camera always with him, Kevork Karaboyadjian photographs all kinds of things that resemble him to something, for example a paprika that looks like a sad face or a rock with the form of a lion.

He already had three exhibitions accompanied by catalogues, whose profits go to the Cahl Armenian Old People's Home, of which he's the president.



## Vartan Avessian

Location: Al Sikeh Street

Craft: Sculptor

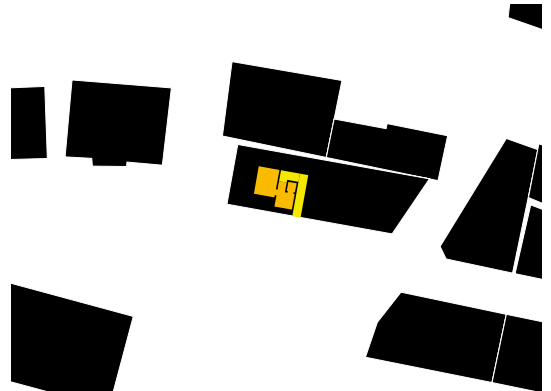
Workshop size: Approx. 50sqm

Employees: 0

Customers: Mostly Armenians from other countries

As one of only a handful sculptors specialized in portraits in the Lebanon, Vartan Avessians work is appreciated in the whole of the Middle East.

In his studio, located in a basement, he creates busts, decorative objects and many other things on demand out of bronze, stone and wood.





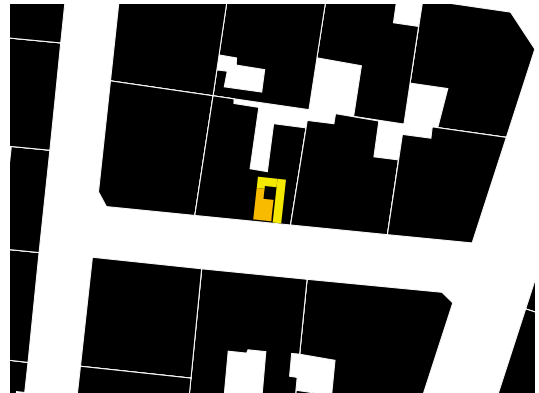
## Harout Shekerdjian

Location: Near Guiligua Street  
Craft: Jeweller, designer & goldsmith  
Workshop size: Approx. 30sqm  
Employees: 0  
Customers: International jewellery dealers and companies



Designing and fabricating individualized jewellery, Harout Shekerdjian sells his designs to customers via dealers as well as to major specialized companies like Cartier. This way he is able to sell his exclusive pieces all over the world, one of his brooches even making it as a exhibit to the BaselWorld jewellery fair.

Harout describes the Lebanese style of his creations as somewhat between European and Arabic and yet unique.



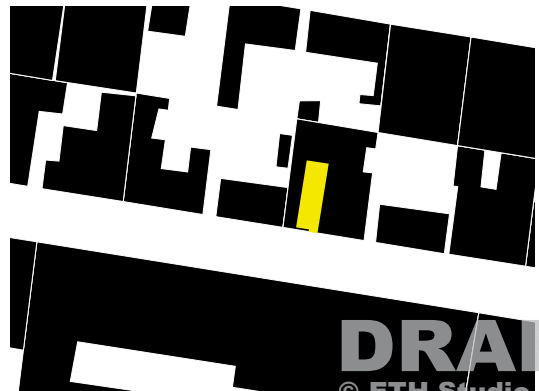
## Garabed Kudjanian

Location: Near Marach Street  
Craft: Shoemaker  
Workshop size: Approx. 20sqm  
Employees: 0  
Customers: Local and international private persons



Also known as „Dr. Shoe“, Garabed Kudjanian fabricates and repairs all kinds of shoes. If someone has deformed or ill feet or for example wants to appear taller without anyone noticing the trick, he knows the answer.

The specialization to this sort of personalized footwear makes him unique in the whole region, his customers coming from beyond the borders of Lebanon, even including an Emir from Saudi Arabia and other customers from the Gulf states.











## The industry of Bourj Hammoud

Bourj Hammoud's industry is located in the north between the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea and the Dora Highway as a sort of border to the main city. Beside some newly built warehouses and galleries, the area is mostly containing metal industry, mechanical engineering (vehicle services) and tanneries as well as some still not recovered buildings destroyed in the civil war.

There are ecological issues since special treatment and disposal of industrial wastes do not exist. Liquid wastes are mainly mixed with domestic wastewater to be discharged into the sea.

The Bourj Hammoud Harbour, right next to the huge waste dump that has been covered with a soil layer, is a quite important working place for many local (meaning Bourj Hammoud) fishermen with a capacity of 650 boats.

## Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun's economic relation to Beirut

Bourj Hammoud forms an important part of the economic structure of Beirut. Especially the numerous shops and crafts make Bourj Hammoud one of the main shopping area in the greater Beirut areas. The character that is completely different to the new malls that are being constructed all over Beirut make Bourj Hammoud a very distinctive area for shopping that is one of the last areas in the Lebanon that resembles the traditional middle-eastern souk with the clustering of specialized economies and local, small commerces that offer individualized goods in small and narrow public streets. Due to the proximity to the main connection roads to Beirut this applies especially for the Nor Marach area that is well known for the broad variety of goods in all over Beirut.

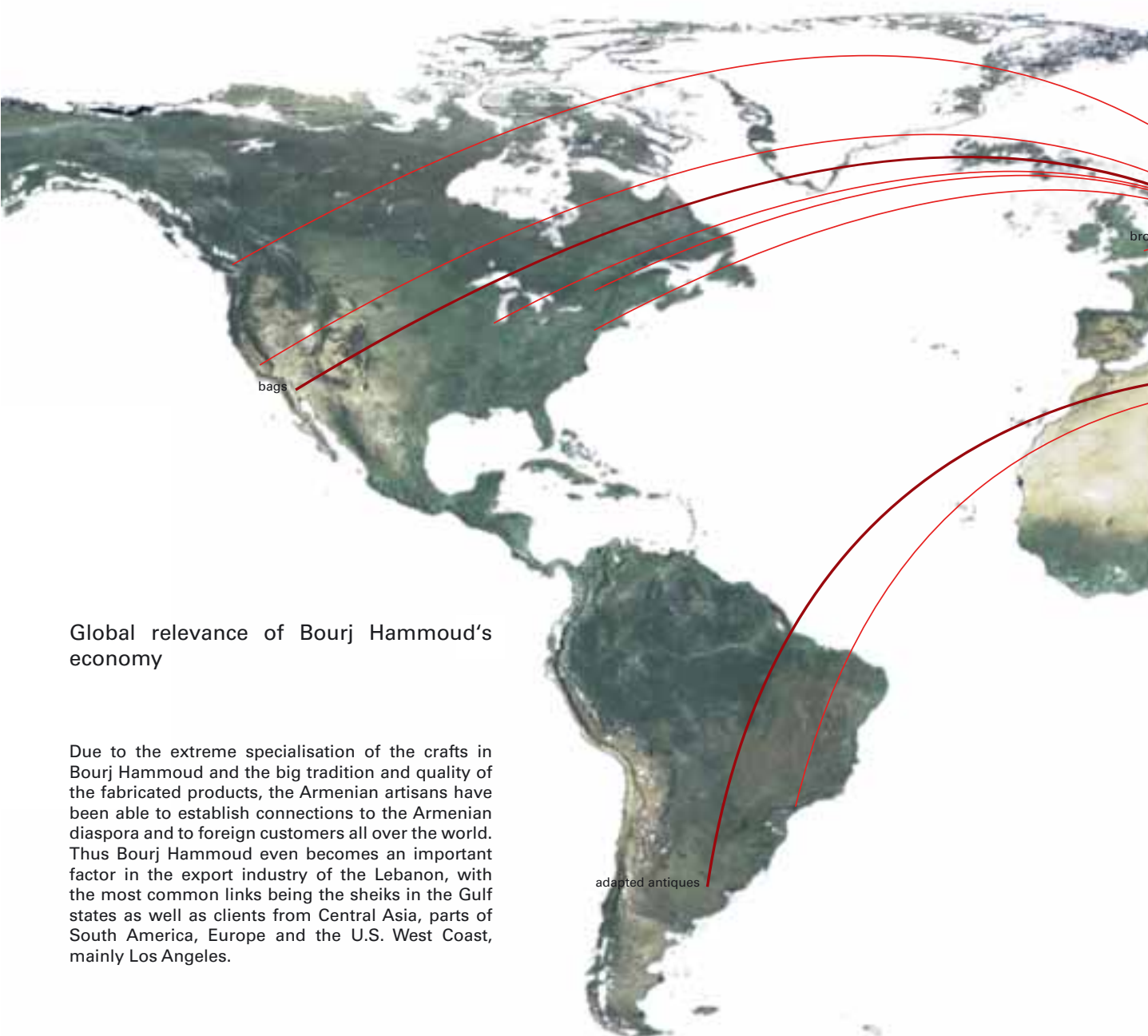
Further the industrial area in the north of Bourj Hammoud is one of the major places for heavy industries in the whole Beirut region, hosting a variety of big enterprises from Lebanon.

As well as being workplaces of their own, Karm El Zeitoun and Bourj Hammoud also form containers for a big part of Beirut's workingforce, being very dense, close and well connected living quarters for all the more or less unskilled workers that are needed in the construction sites and workshops of Beirut.



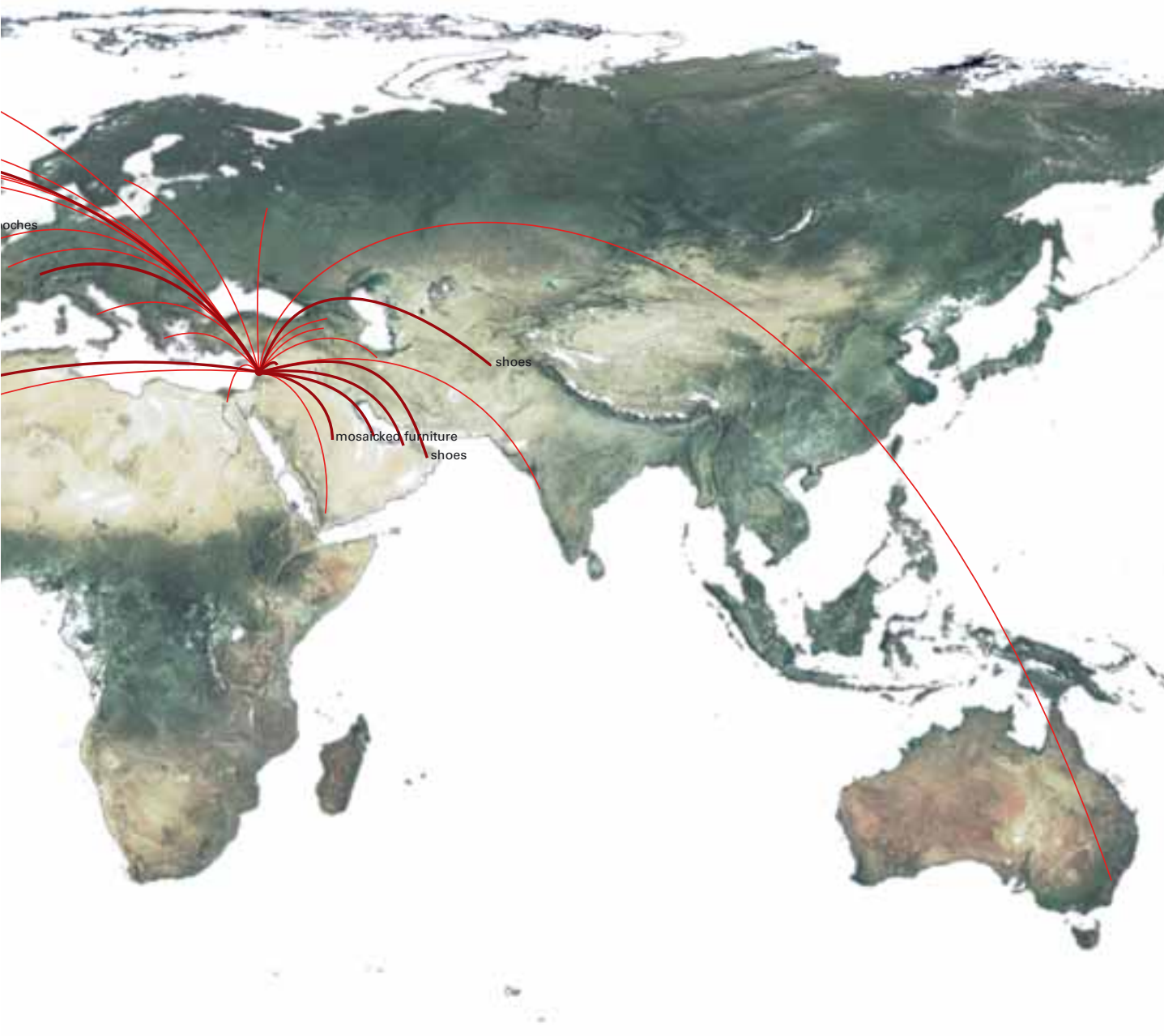






### Global relevance of Bourj Hammoud's economy

Due to the extreme specialisation of the crafts in Bourj Hammoud and the big tradition and quality of the fabricated products, the Armenian artisans have been able to establish connections to the Armenian diaspora and to foreign customers all over the world. Thus Bourj Hammoud even becomes an important factor in the export industry of the Lebanon, with the most common links being the sheiks in the Gulf states as well as clients from Central Asia, parts of South America, Europe and the U.S. West Coast, mainly Los Angeles.



shoes

shoes


mosaicked furniture  
shoes

shoes

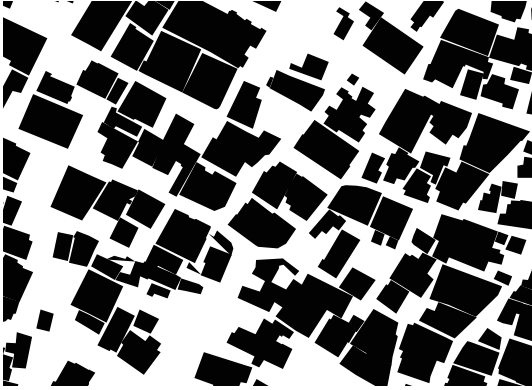








## IX. Conclusion



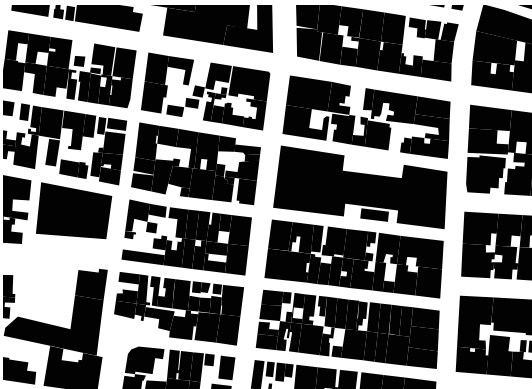
### Camp Bourj El Barjaneh

Mostly Palestinian, some Syrians, Iraqis  
Inhabitants with refugee status  
Temporary settling in Beirut  
Politically unstable  
No planed urban layout  
No landownership, informal construction  
2-3 storeyed brick and concrete buildings



### Camp Shatila

Mostly Palestinian  
Inhabitants with refugee status  
Temporary settling in Beirut  
Politically unstable  
No planed urban layout  
No landownership, informal construction  
Provisory tentlike dwellings



### Bourj Hammoud

Mostly Armenian, some Lebanese Shia, Syrians, Asian  
Inhabitants mostly with Lebanese citizenship  
Permanent settling in Beirut  
Politically relative stable  
Urban layout out of different grids  
Mostly legally owned plots or rent. Some informal constructions  
3-6 storeyed brick and concrete buildings



### Karm El Zeitoun

Mostly Armenian, some Syrians, Philipinos  
Inhabitants mostly with Lebanese citizenship  
Permanent settling in Beirut  
Politically relative stable  
Urban layout as grid applied on a steep topography  
Mostly legally owned plots or rent. Some informal constructions  
3-4 storeyed brick and concrete buildings





## Armenian and Palestinian refugees in Beirut

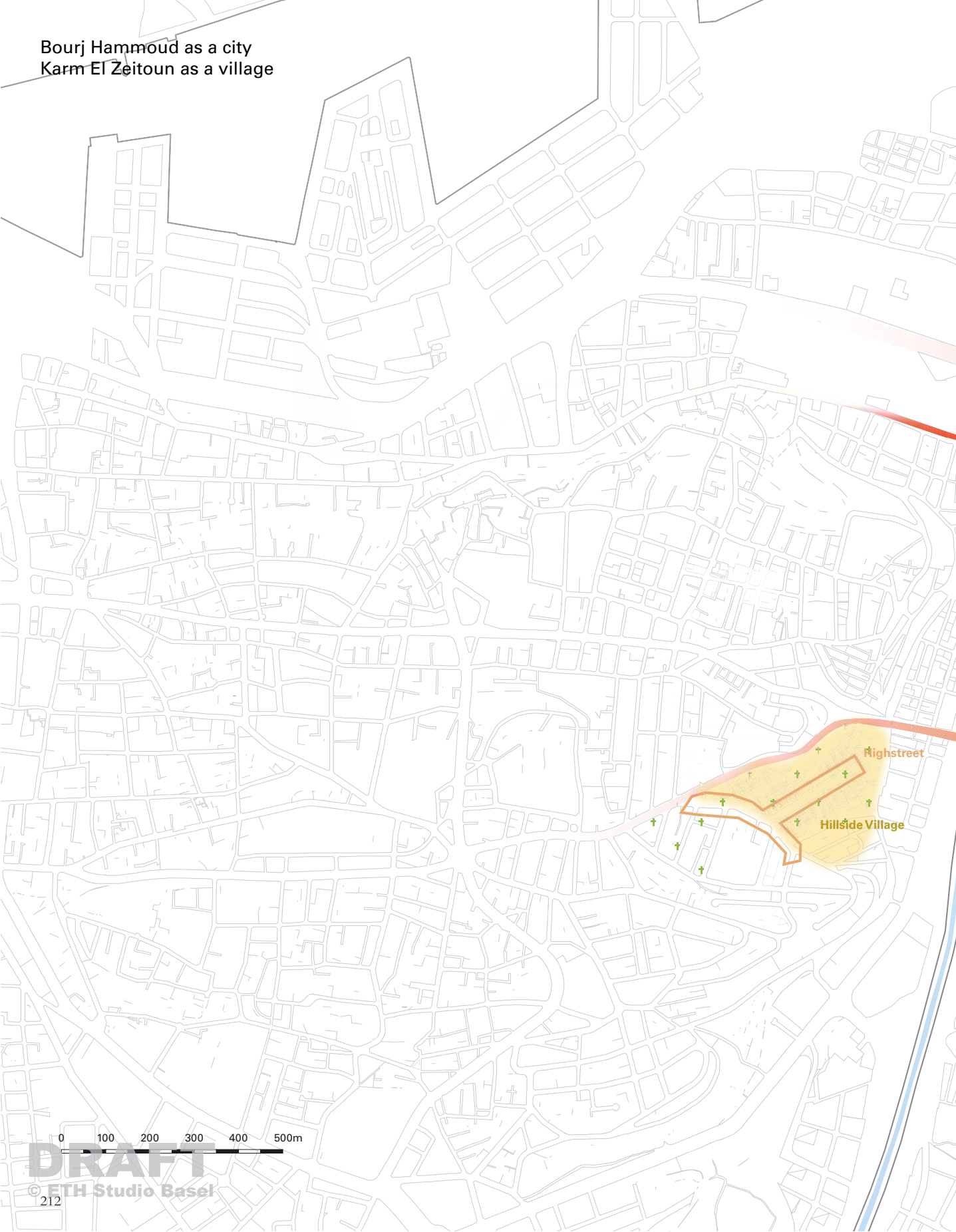
When comparing the Armenian quarters of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun with the Palestinian camps of Shatila and Bourj El Baraineh in Southern Beirut, one gets a good image of how successful the establishment of the Armenians in Beirut has been. Unlike the Palestinians, the Armenians didn't profit of many of the advantages that made Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun the unique places they are. Unlike the Armenians they were never accepted as permanent residents of Beirut and thus there were no efforts made by any authorities to provide for longterm living areas. Also the Palestinians themselves never lost their hope for a return to Israeli-occupied Palestine and thus didn't push the formation of permanent quarters in Beirut. The comparison shows that the foundation of the settlements for the Armenians is a result that has not at any rate been necessary and that could have had a completely different outcome if the conditions would have been others.



The quarters of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun are the result of very specific historical, social, political and economical conditions in the moment of their formation and their development throughout the 20th century. The successful foundation of quarters for the Armenian refugees and their development into decent living quarters wouldn't have been possible without the goodwill and the initiative of various parties, including the French Mandate, that had an interest in a permanent establishment of the Armenians as a Christian ally in their government and were thus ready to provide them with decent living quarters, further the local Lebanese population that appreciated the Armenians as working force and absorbed their cultural habits, the international community lead by the newly founded League of Nations that was keen to prove its ability to solve the refugee problem, the help of the big Armenian diaspora all over the world and the old Armenian population in Beirut and last but not least the organisations of the Armenian refugees themselves that helped to concentrate the efforts of the Armenian individuals and achieve a common effort in order to improve their situation from refugees to regular inhabitants of Beirut. This unique combination of actors lead to very strong communities, that were even able to withstand the fighting in the Civil War in Beirut. The Armenians established an own armed militia that kept the other parties outside of Bourj Hammoud, but were able to stay neutral in the conflict outside their quarters. In the end, being again a peaceful refuge in the middle of violent events, Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun did even profit when many tradesmen and artisans moved from wartorn Beirut. Influenced by all this circumstances, today the two places form vibrant, dense and very specific quarters that do not resemble a refugee camp anymore but instead became part of the greater Beirut urban agglomeration with a big local, regional and even global importance, having own economies, characteristics and identities that nevertheless still draw their own specificities out of their past as places of refuge. The establishment of the Armenian quarters in Beirut is a model for the successful integration of refugees, a model with very unique historical, social, political and economical conditions that has no equivalent in the numerous refugee shelters in the Middle East.

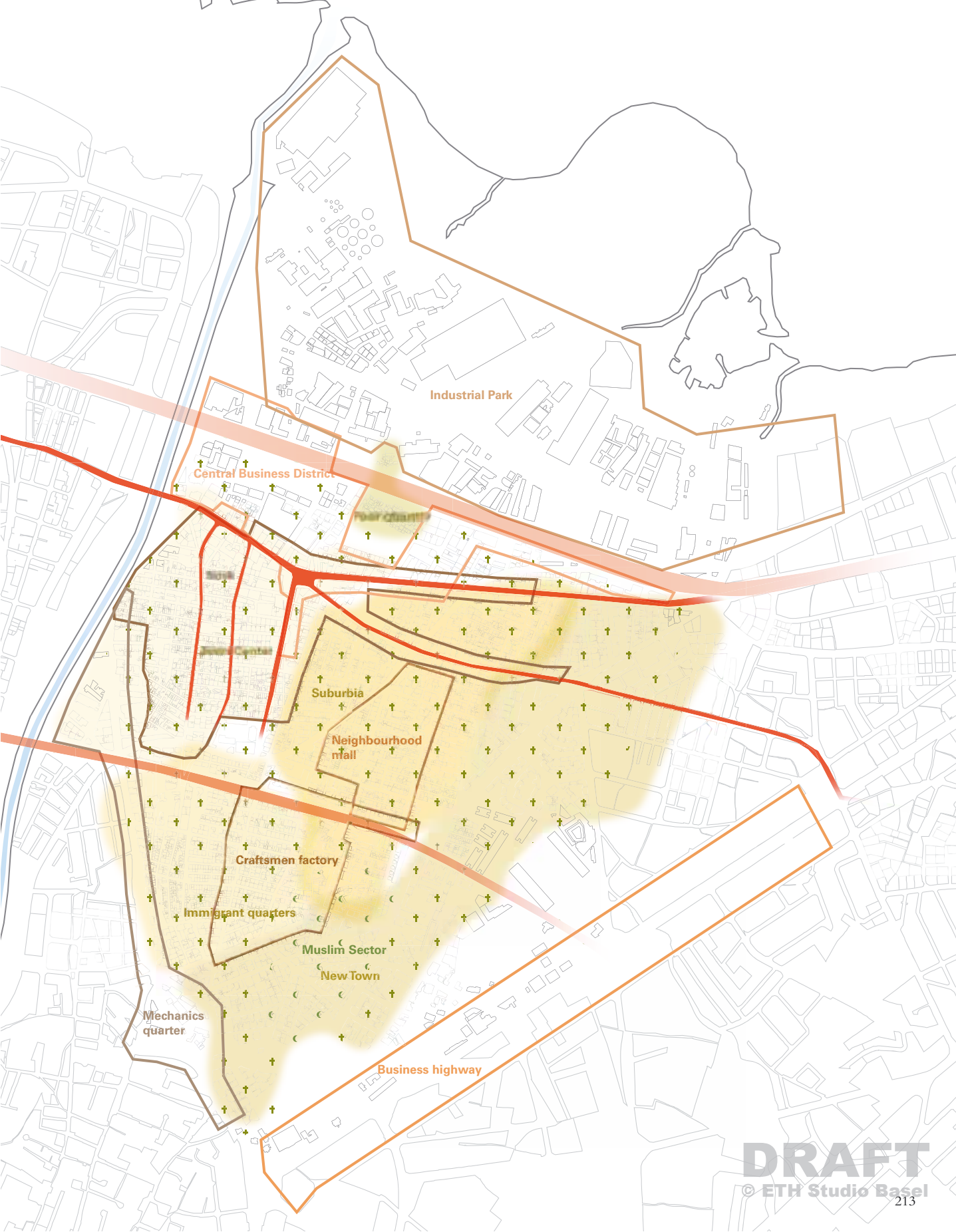


Bourj Hammoud as a city  
Karm El Zeitoun as a village



0 100 200 300 400 500m

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Industrial Park

Central Business District

Suburbia

Neighbourhood mall

Craftsmen factory

Immigrant quarters

Muslim Sector

New Town

Mechanics quarter

Business highway

## The city of Bourj Hammoud

At first sight the majority of Bourj Hammoud consists of a single homogenous network of narrow streets that are enclosed by medium height buildings, a network that has even been described as a labyrinth evoking images of traditional Arabian Medinas.

In contrast to those ancient cities Bourj Hammoud has been laid out as a regular grid when it was founded in the 1930s. Until today the grid is very clearly visible in the structure of the urban plan. The uniformity of the grid and the similarity in the physical form of the quarters of the grid could lead to the expectation that Bourj Hammoud forms an evenly distributed mix of uses.

However the opposite is true. The combination of a planned regular layout, the different contexts of the various sectors and the mostly autonomous irregular occupation of the grid by the mostly Armenian residents has led to the evolution of a large variety of quarters that differ in the way they are used, their identities, their population and typologies. Bourj Hammoud evolved from a refugee camp into a city of its own, with an extraordinary vibrant commercial center, residential parts, industries, institutions and an own municipal government.

The urban plan has proved to be so strong that it was able to absorb all the different needs, creating a composition of different economical, residential and demographic zones. Thus it is not the physical fabric of Bourj Hammoud that forms the various quarters of this specific kind of city but the programming of this regular fabric. These programmatic borders change depending on what category of the urban scheme is regarded, making Bourj Hammoud an extraordinary complex system of overlaid functional and social entities.

The result of this complexity and richness in the urban system is an extremely dense city of only a few square kilometers, with a human scale in its streets, a very vibrant street life, a huge variety of communities and identities, a diverse range of sold goods and services, a huge number of products with a high quality and numerous particular cultural and social institutions.



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## The village of Karm El Zeitoun

Being surrounded by steep slopes and highways, Karm El Zeitoun has developed into a community that in the way it works is much more akin to a village in the countryside than to a quarter inside the city borders of Beirut. The application of an unchanged grid plan onto a steep hill has led to very specific conditions in the relation of the houses to the street space and the relation of one house to the other. At many points the streets become stairs, thus becoming themselves one of the main social interaction spaces, as such enforcing the solidarity between the inhabitants. The result is a social environment where everybody knows each other and is ready to support others and the whole community. This strong social solidarity has even been able to absorb a big number of immigrants in the last decades without losing the sense of being a common collective that has often been able to defend itself from threats from the outside, be it during the civil war or developers that try to convert Karm El Zeitoun into a part of the gentrified east of Beirut. While Bourj Hammoud has developed into an actual city, Karm El Zeitoun has turned into some kind of suburban village in the middle of the dense town of Beirut.

## Outlook - The future of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun

***Bourj Hammoud is a slum*** (R. Saliba, American University of Beirut)



The eminent qualities that Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun have as extraordinarily vibrant economic centers and homes for some 150'000 people remain mostly unrecognized both at the Beirut government authorities and most Beirut inhabitants. While many people in Beirut have never heard of Karm El Zeitoun, Bourj Hammoud is known for its shopping possibilities, but has the image of a miserable low-level housing district with very low living standard.

Many current developments are therefore ignoring the existing conditions and replace them instead with projects that are similar to those who stand in all of Beirut's northern suburbs.

Nevertheless the urban system of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun might be able to resist these developments. Earlier attempts to implement large scale developments into the urban layout have proved to be largely unsuccessful. The biggest one, the Harboyan Center, has completely failed as the shopping center it was intended and is today a large empty interior space. The Harboyan and other projects like the AFHIL center have proven that the usage pattern of Bourj Hammoud to have all the public functions on street level is so strong that any other model like the shops in the upper floors of the AFHIL Center and the stores inside the courtyard of the Harboyan Center have proven not to be functional and today form mostly vacant spaces.

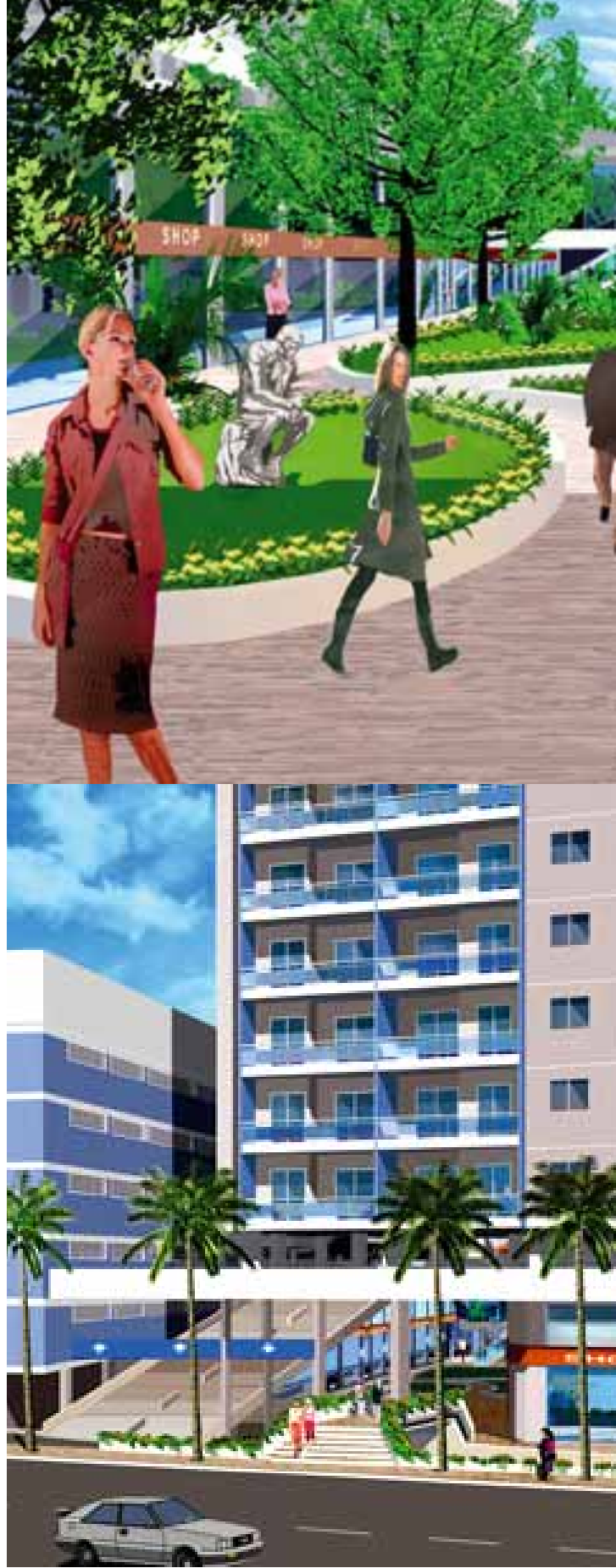
A model for Bourj Hammoud?





## Sandjak? - Saint Jacques!

On the site of the remains of the Sandjak Camp currently the municipality of Bourj Hammoud is developing a project for a mixed-use upper-middleclass residential and commercial center with a big shopping mall part. The project neglects the urban specificities of Bourj Hammoud where the street is an eminently important element of urban life. Instead an internal courtyard is established as the center for the shopping experience being completely excluded from the existing street network. With the demolition of the Sandjak camp a part of the city that has been a well connected place for working and living is taken away and instead a project is implemented, that adapts to the expectations for suburban Beirut and resembles the developments that happen all along the coast of the Lebanon. Hardly any of the inhabitants of the Sandjak Camp will be able to afford a flat in the new highrise towers. Instead the project aims to address people that have nothing to do with Bourj Hammoud and primarily appreciate the proximity to Beirut city.





SAINT JACQUE PLAZA  
VAZKEN CHEKIJIAN  
ARCHITECT



SAINT JACQUE PLAZA  
IGR.1 - HAMMOUD  
VAZKEN CHEKIJIAN

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## Risking a forecast

We believe that the enormous economical dynamic and importance of Bourj Hammoud with a regional and even global range, it's extremely specialised range of artisans that rely on the proximity of other specialised workshops and the wide range of commercial activities together with the very small scale of land property relations will preserve the basic structure of the dense grid with closed blocks as the main urban organisation factors. Especially with the destruction of the old center of Beirut during the civil war and the substitution of the former Beirut souks with a shopping mall that only keeps the word souk in its name but instead features international brands and works like a generic western shopping mall, the souklike way of functioning of the Nor Marach-region in Bourj Hammoud gets increased significance as Beiruts remaining traditional place for small scale commerce and local economy. New intrusions into this system will keep failing, as long as they do not adapt to the way the urban activities in Bourj Hammoud work.

Whereas the future for the economical sector of Bourj Hammoud seems not to be endangered, the question of the housing is more unclear.

In Nor Marach and the areas near the main commercial arteries of Bourj Hammoud there has been a trend in the last year that more and more houses were abandoned or in a very bad state. If the deteriorating of the state of the buildings and the apartments keeps on happening, those quarters might loose their mixed-use character and instead turn into completely commercialized districts.

The bad image of the quarter as very low-level area and the environmental issues caused by the different factors in the surroundings have lead to a growing degradation of the housing sector in Bourj Hammoud, what has even been enforced by the lack of restauration efforts and a new building law that makes new constructions on plots smaller then 200sqm almost impossible. This made big parts of the original population to move out as soon as they could afford to and settle in suburbs like Antelias or Jounieh. If the decline of living conditions continues in the next years, Bourj Hammoud could loose its Armenian character and instead become a quarter for immigrants from the

neighbouring countries of the Middle East and even from far eastern Asia, a process that is already happening in Nabaa and parts of the other southern sectors.

There needs to be made a common effort by the Armenian community in Bourj Hammoud together with the authorities of the Greater Beirut Area in order to trigger a reversal of these trends and establish a new and better image of Bourj Hammoud that values its urban qualities and profits from the existing benefits, like the combination of proximity to the city, the economic dynamics and the human scale of its urban spaces.

As for Karm El Zeitoun, the strong sense of community is a valuable factor in keeping the character and the features of their village in the city. This community has proven to be so strong that it has not been weakened even though by now half of the population is not Armenian anymore. This sense of a collective society and the difficulty to find a plot of land that is big enough has so far kept developers from planning projects in Karm El Zeitoun. If the upgrading of the surrounding quarters of Achrafiyeh continues, it remains to be seen whether the neighbourhood of Karm El Zeitoun will be able to withstand the economic pressure of the urbanistic development in its context and concentrate it in a way that allows for a respectful and sustainable enhancement to the existing fabric..

The immense specific qualities of Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun are so strong that they should not just be abandoned or left to decay without taking care of them. Neither should they be handed over to the forces of gentrification, a phenomenon that is already happening on the western side of the Beirut river in Gemayze and Ashrafieh and that would radically change the delicate social and economic system that is the core of the specific urbanity in the quarters. After the establishment of their quarters in the 1930s and the defense of them during the civil war, the Armenians in Beirut will have to undertake another great corporate effort if they want to keep Bourj Hammoud and Karm El Zeitoun as their new Lebanese Armenia it is today.



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## MAPS:

1945 Beyrouth Est, Ministère des Travaux Publics et des Transports, Beirut

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1974 Beyrouth et Banlieue, Bureau G.I.Stephan, Beirut

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