

**(Un)Public Space:
The Lebanese Baher as a Liminal Arena
for Wider Societal Contestations**



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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
List of Figures and Tables	4
Abstract	5
Acknowledgements	6
1 The Production of (Un)Public Space.....	7
1.1 Introduction.....	7
1.2 Exploring the Production of Lebanese (Un)Public Space via the Baher.....	9
1.3 The Production of (Un)Public Space.....	15
1.3.1 The Production of Space: weaving together ‘perceived’, ‘conceived’ and ‘lived’ space.....	15
1.3.2 The Public Sphere: a socio-spatial process linking ‘Public’ and ‘Space’.....	18
1.3.3 (Un)Public Space: between normative ideals and manifested realities.....	21
1.4 Research Aims & Questions	25
1.5 Structure of the Thesis.....	27
2 Exploring Lebanese (Un)Public Spaces as Prisms for Wider Societal Transformations.....	32
2.1 Introduction.....	32
2.2 Spatialising Lebanon’s Wider Societal Transformations.....	33
2.2.1 The Closure of Horsh Al Sanawbar (a.k.a. Horsh Beirut).....	38
2.2.2 Solidere’s Reconstruction of Downtown Beirut.....	40
2.3 Historicising the Lebanese Baher’s Privatisation	43
2.4 Conclusion	50
3 Liminality, a Conceptual Framing for Exploring the Production of the Baher.....	53
3.1 Introduction.....	53
3.2 Liminality’s Conceptual Evolution.....	54
3.3 Geographic Engagements with Liminality.....	60
3.4 The Beach: A Quintessential Liminal Space.....	65
3.5 Conclusion	71
4 Exploring the Baherscape Through a Qualitative Collective Case Study Approach	74
4.1 Introduction.....	74
4.2 Research Design: A Qualitative Collective Case Study Approach.....	74
4.2.1 Beirut: Ramlet El Bayda and Dalieh.....	78
4.2.2 Tehoum: Pierre & Friends, Loco Beach (f.k.a. Bonita Bay), White Beach, and Oasis.....	79
4.2.3 Tyre: Tyre Coast Nature Reserve.....	80
4.3 Deploying the Baherscape as a Conceptual Framework	80
4.4 Research Methods and Data Analysis.....	85
4.4.1 Interviews.....	85
4.4.2 (Auto)Ethnography	87
4.4.3 Questionnaires.....	89

4.4.4 Secondary Data Sources	91
4.5 Ethical Considerations and Positionality.....	93
5 (Un)public space I: Baher governance, from master plan to governmental programme	96
5.1. Introduction.....	96
5.2 Unpacking ‘Government’ Decision-Making via ‘Governance’ Power-Dynamics.....	98
5.3 The National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory: between stated ambitions and on-the-ground ‘stubborn realities’	102
5.4 Governance in the shadow: a hybrid melange of liminality and neoliberal ideology.....	107
5.5 The National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public: Environmental (in)justice?”	116
5.6 Conclusion	127
6 (Un)public space II: Weaving private beaches, via in/out groups and ‘snagged threads’	130
6.1 Introduction.....	130
6.2 Reconciling identity politics and liminality as conceptual approaches	132
6.3 ‘Common thread’ and ‘Other’: narratives, imaginations, and politics of representation.....	136
6.3.1 The ‘common thread’: archetypes of Tehoum’s private beachgoers.....	138
6.3.2 The ‘other’: working-class public beachgoers as ‘conservative’ and ‘nawar’	142
6.4 Separating ‘common thread’ from ‘other’ via exclusionary policies and practices:.....	146
6.5 ‘Snagged threads’: beachgoers betwixt and between ‘common thread’ and ‘other’	150
6.6 Conclusion	158
7 (Un)public space III: “The Baher is Mine”, (re)claiming the baher as an arena for social and political action	160
7.1 Introduction.....	160
7.2 Reconciling the ‘Right to the City’ and Liminality as conceptual approaches	161
7.3 Valuing the baher as a medium for convivial encounter	167
7.4 The ‘right to the baher’: framing modalities of resistance as liminal thresholds.....	173
7.4.1 Public Engagements: sowing the seeds of an alternative ‘urban life’	176
7.4.2 Spatial Occupations: reaping the seeds that have been sown.....	184
7.5 Tyre Cost Nature Reserve (TCNR): A bastion for the ‘right to the baher’?.....	194
7.6 Conclusion	201
8 Producing the Lebanese Baher Through Baherscape Contestations.....	203
8.1 Introduction.....	203
8.2 Key Findings & Contributions to Geographic Literature	204
8.2.1 Governance and a Space’s Liminal Context, a Synergetic Relationship	206
8.2.2 ‘Snagged Threads’: Revisiting Identity Politics via Liminal Gateway Experiences.....	210
8.2.3 Modalities of Resistance as Liminal Thresholds for Claiming the ‘Right to the Baher’.....	214
8.3 Avenues for Future Research.....	218
8.4 Conclusion	221
References.....	224
Appendices	257
Appendix I: List of interviews [partially anonymised and pseudonymised].....	257
Appendix II: List of Conferences & Events.....	258

Appendix III: List of governmental & civil society reports and presentations.....	259
Appendix IV: Questionnaire example (Tehoum - English)	260
Appendix V: Questionnaire example (Dalieh Protest - English).....	262

List of Figures and Tables

List of Figures

	Pg.
1 My sister and I at Riviera Hotel and Beach Lounge in Beirut circa 1995	7
2 Horsh Beirut	32
3 Stop Solidere' sign on St. George's Bay Hotel	43
4 Field locations	77
5 The baherscape revisited	84
6 Aerial view of Ramlet El Bayda	96
7 Dilapidated structures, Ramlet El Bayda	117
8 Ramlet El Bayda sewage	117
9 Crowds preparing for Job's Wed in Ramlet El Bayda	121
10 'Loco beach' aerial view	130
11 Pop-up lounge and bar at 'White Beach'	151
12 Domestic worker and children at 'White Beach'	156
13 Protester sign "we want a baher in Baalbek"	164
14 Movies on the Move, film screening in Ramlet el Bayda	171
15 Beirut Seashore: Through People's Eyes' volunteer orientation	177
16 The Baher is Mine	180
17 Protesters dancing during the 'Zaffet El Rayyes' demonstration	186
18 Protestors stand-off with internal security forces at Ramlet El Bayda	187
19 Protestor punched in the face during Ramlet El Bayda demonstration	187
20 The baher is ours	188
21 Beaches for everyone & Eat the rich	188
22 Young men cliff diving in Dalieh	189
23 Dalieh fence	191
24 Activists tearing down Dalieh's fence	192
25 TCNR aerial view	196
26 Crumbled structures in Rashidieh refugee camp	198
27 Children playing Rashidieh refugee camp	199
28 Seaside cemetery at Rashidieh refugee camp	199

List of Tables

	Pg.
1 Research questions mapped to empirical chapters	27
2 Research questions mapped to empirical chap, field locations & sites	78

Abstract

This thesis primarily deals with the production of (un)public space within the context of the Lebanese baher. Baher (بحر) is an Arabic term that specifically denotes the sea, but also colloquially refers to the coast, the beach, and the public maritime domain. I deploy the prefix (un) in conjunction with 'public' in order to convey how spatial articulations of power relations render the baher – along with its users – 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1969) public/private designations, legal/illegal implications, and inclusionary/exclusionary practices. In seeking to understand the production of the baher, I examine the processes, outcomes, and subsequent effects of this socio-spatial production. By forging a dialogue between the theory of the 'production of space' (Lefebvre, 1991) and 'liminality' as a concept (van Genneep, 1960), I explore the baher as a social space in perpetual (re)production, with its socio-temporal and spatial transformations (Thomassen, 2015) being informed by an interplay of its 'perceived', 'conceived', and 'lived' elements. I engage with the baherscape, or rather landscape of the baher, as an arena for power-related contestations, a site of both oppression and resistance, where different stakeholders meet, negotiate their various interests, and attempt to pursue their respective agendas. In doing so, I ask: How is the baher (re)produced? Who is (re)producing it, for whom, and for what purpose(s)? What can the (re)production of the baher tell us about prevailing constellations of power in Lebanon? In order to address these questions, I deploy a collective case study approach via a triangulation of mixed qualitative methods, with particular emphasis on interviews, (auto)ethnography, and discourse analysis of secondary data. This is achieved across three interconnected empirical chapters, each focusing on a key dimension of (re)production: first, the Lebanese government, with its associated baher governance; second, private beach actors (i.e. administrators and beachgoers), with their identity inspired exclusionary policies and practices; third, civil society groups calling for the 'right to the baher'. I leverage the 'baherscape' as a connecting thread that weaves together empirical chapters, and co-produces this research's understanding of the production of the baher as an (un)public space. I conclude that baher contestations comprise thresholds that: (re)draw the boundary between public/private, legal/illegal, and inclusion/exclusion; (re)shape a space's liminal potential as either a conduit for *communitas* or a platform for othering; and ultimately (re)define urban dwellers' relationship with the city. Public spaces – like the baher – and their users are thus in dynamic transformation, perpetually (re)produced by and subsequently (re)reproducing society, with resulting processes and configurations denoting shifting ideological articulations of what 'public space' is, and which 'public(s)' it caters to.

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To my readers, the baher is ours (البحر لنا).

1 | The Production of (Un)Public Space

1.1 Introduction

Mom, can we please go to the baher¹ today? I held my breath waiting for an answer. I could tell my mother was undertaking a familiar routine of mental gymnastics, trying to gauge whether she could afford to take my siblings and I. Despite growing-up in an upper-middle class family, a day at the baher always necessitated financial introspection, for it was a costly activity – at least in the manner in which my family opted to consume the experience, namely through private beach resorts and venues. Looking back, I realise how my fondest memories were linked to these spaces. My father taught me how to swim at the Riviera Hotel and Beach Lounge (see figure 1). I bought my first fishing rod whilst summering at the Holiday Beach Resort, however the only thing I had managed to catch was accidentally getting my hook stuck in my friend's hand. The feeling of getting the wind knocked-out of my lungs upon entering Summerland Hotel's ice-cold pool. How my imagination would roam wild as soon as I swam in Bonita bay's turquoise sea. Half-believing that I could breathe underwater, communicate with the sea life, and eventually transform into a merman – undoubtedly a long-lost family secret, or so I convinced myself. As I grew older, my baher experiences reflected the changing stages of my life. I attended my school's after-Prom event at Pangea beach resort, where I had my first social drinking experience. I spent my weekends partying at Sporting beach club, where some of my romances bloomed. I would frequent the American University of Beirut's private beach strip for a quick tan in-between classes. My friends and I would often travel south to Jiyye's sandy beaches, with Lazy B being a favourite of ours given its relatively more affordable entrance fees – a lighter burden on our allowances. Interestingly, this was the only version of the baher that I had really known.... until I had commenced this research.



Figure 1. My sister and I at Riviera Hotel circa 1995 **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine

¹ Baher is an Arabic term that specifically denotes the sea, but also colloquially refers to the coast, the beach, and the public maritime domain.

This research primarily deals with the production of (un)public space within the context of the Lebanese baher. I deploy the prefix ‘(un)’ in conjunction with ‘public’ in order to convey how spatial articulations of power relations render the baher – and its users – in a liminal state, ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner, 1967) public/private designations, legal/illegal implications, and inclusionary/exclusionary practices. In seeking to understand the production of the baher, I examine the processes, outcomes, and subsequent effects of this socio-spatial production. As recounted in my opening vignette, I deem the baher to be a social space, with my related experiences being informed through the site’s material dimensions and socio-economic and political considerations. Upon reflection, it is apparent how my relationship with the baher was that of privilege, for I could afford to secure entrance to gated, neatly manicured, well-serviced, though exorbitantly expensive landscapes of consumption (i.e. private beach venues). As a result, my narrative is far from representative of others’ baher experiences, for multiple – and often times contrasting – realities unfold within this (un)public space, and it is precisely such diverse experiences that this thesis documents and analyses.

According to Luger (2023), human geographers have historically emphasised four key themes whilst engaging with public space. First, public spaces are socially produced. Second, the demarcation line separating public and private is complex, blurry, and hybrid. Third, public spaces are not a monolith, for they assume numerous forms and functions, especially when viewed through various global contexts. Finally, public spaces are uneven, for they are rife with contradiction, comprising sites of both oppression and radical emancipation. Accordingly, I explore the Lebanese baher through each of these themes, with particular attention paid to how public spaces – like the baher – are socially produced as (un)public. To facilitate my analysis, I have coined the baherscape (see chapter 4), or rather the landscape of the baher, as a conceptual framework guiding this research. I deem the baherscape as an arena for power-related contestations, a site of both oppression and resistance, where different stakeholders meet,

negotiate their various interests, and attempt to pursue their respective agendas. Through the baherscape, I focus on liminal processes of socio-spatial and temporal transformation (Thomassen, 2015) that (re)draw the demarcation line between public and private, and subsequently (re)shape the baher's form and function. In doing so, I examine various manifestations of Lebanese baher spaces, and detail their respective lived beachgoer experiences.

In this introductory chapter, I first ground the discussion within the research's chosen locale, the Lebanese baher, and elaborate on my decision to focus on this specific type of (un)public space. I then uncover this thesis' theoretical foundations, by bringing together Lefebvre's (1991) 'production of space' (i.e. space as socially produced) with Habermas' (1989) 'public sphere' (i.e. a socio-spatial process and site linking 'public' and 'space'). By doing so, I explore various interpretations of (un)public spaces, with emphasis on decoupling normative ideals from manifested realities. From here, I unpack this research's aims, with particular attention being paid to converting broad inquiries into targeted research questions, each of which is subsequently mapped to a respective empirical chapter. I conclude this chapter by detailing the structure of this thesis, and expanding on its co-constitutive chapters.

1.2 Exploring the Production of Lebanese (Un)Public Space via the Baher

Public space is in crisis (Sorkin, 1992), with Habibi and colleagues arguing this is especially evident in the Middle East, as “the evolution of public spaces and the usage of these spaces by citizens, more than in any other areas of the world, is related to socio-political and economic transformation” (2021, p. 13). In Lebanon's case, a dual threat of neoliberal urban development and political sectarian conflict (Monroe, 2016). A 2016 UN-Habitat report concluded that although public spaces – here defined as land devoted to parks, squares and other public spaces – typically comprise 12% of European cities' surface areas, this figure dwindles down to 2% when examining

Middle Eastern urban centres (Azzali et al., 2021), with Beirut being particularly short-changed at 0.5% (The Economist, 2016). According to Nazzal and Chinder (2018), Beirut's limited public spaces – consisting of 49 public gardens and squares, as well as a fragmented coastline – are often inaccessible and/or under threat of privatisation. Naamani and Simpson (2021) remark how the city's largest park (i.e. Horsh Beirut) has only been recently (re)opened to the public following the civil war, though certain access restrictions still persist; its downtown spaces have been sanitised, conceived for a spending public, and are thus rarely frequented by the average citizen; and its coastline is dotted by private beach resorts, with the capital's last remaining public sandy beach (i.e. Ramlet El Bayda) being partly-encroached and extremely polluted. Even Martyr's Square, a previously significant socio-political and economic spatial node, which had been renamed after the struggle for independence occurring on its soil, now lies virtually empty after being converted into a parking lot following the end of the Lebanese civil war (Fouani, 2021).

However, Lebanon has not always been characterised by a dearth of public space. The medieval, walled port city of Beirut held geometrically irregular squares and crossroads, *sabas* in Arabic, which at times served as marketplaces (a.k.a. *souqs*) (Davie, 1999 & 2001). Public spaces were known to be highly connected to religious institutions, with mosques and churches – along with their vicinities – acting as gathering places (Rabbat, 2012, Öztürk, 2006). The first wave of transformation occurred during the Ottoman empire, given how “existing pluri-functional public spaces did not lend themselves to representing Ottoman power, which necessitated “conceiving” new spaces... [that] reflected Ottoman power in its design, military parades, and demonstrations” (Davie, 2001, p. 31; as cited in Mady, 2022, p. 119). The second wave of transformation took place during the French protectorate, in an effort to modernise oriental cities (Fawaz, 2014). This included reshaping Beirut's identity by renaming its streets (Keilo, 2020), as well as reconfiguring its spatial layout in a manner that mirrors the European built urban environment. The latter included the mushrooming of cafes and theatres, the moulding of Beirut's Place de l'Etoile after its

Parisian name sake, and even endowing Horsh Beirut with features of French royal parks (i.e. gated and fenced) (Naamani and Simpson, 2021).

The third wave of transformation came into effect as a result of the Lebanese sectarian civil war (1975 – 1990). Security concerns sealed-off public spaces, transforming them into buffer zones between the various warring factions. Ironically, this period coincided with the highest share of urban green space in the city's modern history, largely driven by growing vegetation along the 'green-line', a no man's land dividing East (i.e. Christian controlled) and West (i.e. Muslim controlled) Beirut (Sinno, 2020). As a result, social experiences migrated from historically central nodes (e.g. Martyrs' Square) towards multiple "lived" communal spaces scattered across sectarian areas, with citizens growing accustomed to frequenting private spaces due to their relative safety (Mady, 2022). The fourth wave of transformation was largely neoliberal inspired, with skyrocketing real-estate prices and the need for post-war reconstruction, facilitating the legislation of private interests at the expense of public and communal spaces (Nazzal and Chinder, 2018). The final wave of transformation is ongoing, and is shaped by political action, where citizens are reclaiming public spaces as a means of exercising their respective revolutionary demands (Sinno, 2020; Mady, 2022; Polesello, 2021). These include 2005's Cedar Revolution protesting Syrian troop presence, 2015's You Stink protests decrying the garbage crisis gripping the nation, and 2019's October revolution protesting a range of urban liveability concerns.

Lefebvre (1991) affirms that every society produces its own space, with Lebanese (un)public spaces being perpetually (re)produced over time in accordance to wider societal contestations, each made apparent through associated socio-spatial ramifications. With this in mind, I claim public space constitutes an ideal vantage point for examining prevailing constellations of power. In fact, exploring the production of Lebanese (un)public space, via related processes and outcomes, yields valuable insight into competing ideological articulations of what 'public space' is, and which

‘public(s)’ it caters to. However, different types of public spaces may be ‘conceived’, ‘perceived’, and ‘lived’ (Lefebvre, 1991) in a manner that is specific to the space’s context. After all, can we argue that a public beach is shaped by the exact same forces and experiences as a park, square or street? As such, and in order to facilitate a more focused and productive discussion, I narrow the scope of analysis to the production of a particular type of (un)public space: the baher.

Baher (بحر) is an Arabic term that specifically denotes the sea, but also colloquially refers to the coast, the beach, and the public maritime domain. Conceptually, baher is closely connected to the English term ‘near shore’, as it designates a space between land and sea, neither fully terrestrial nor aquatic – rather a transition from one to the other. I purposefully chose to deploy the Arabic term ‘baher’ in this research, rather than its English equivalent ‘shore’ (translated as *shatt* in Arabic), given its cultural and linguistic significance. When Lebanese express a desire to go swimming, visit the beach, fish along the coast, walk along the corniche, etc.; they do so in reference to the baher and not the shore. This research deems the baher as public, regardless of whether the space in question is publicly and/or privately owned and administered, due to presiding legal and social considerations. Legally, decree No. 144 (issued in 1925) categorises the Public Maritime Domain, defined to include the furthest high-water point on the coast and sand/pebble/rocky beaches, as inalienable. It is considered to be public property, and cannot be sold or owned over time. As a result, every baher space encompasses within it – at least in part – a public strip (i.e. the public maritime domain), with access being assured to every Lebanese citizen per Environment Law No. 444 (i.e. issued in 2002). Socially, the baher – even in cases of private beach venues – is conceived, perceived and lived as a space for public use. However, interpretations of whom this ‘public’ ought-to-be may differ from one space to another, with related spatial manifestations and social implications revealing situated power dynamics. My decision to focus on the baher, rather than other types of public spaces (e.g. the park, the square), rests on three guiding factors: its link to

Lebanese national identity; its importance as one of the last few remaining public spaces still in use; and its relatively underexplored status within existing scholarly literature.

First, the baher is inherently linked to the Lebanese national identity, with numerous cultural examples reinforcing its connection with the Lebanese ‘mode de vie’ (i.e. way of life). As a case in point, popularised images of the baher and the nation’s Phoenician sea-trading heritage have historically been represented on the country’s banknotes. The beach, seashore, and coastline are recurrent themes in Lebanese music, with the national anthem affirming that “Lebanon’s baher and land are the dual jewels of the east”, as well as other popular songs depicting life on the Corniche (a popular Beirut sea-side walk)². Moreover, the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism strategically valorises the nation’s baher in its representation of Lebanon: ‘Mediterranean-lapped coast’, ‘The lovely Lebanese coast’, ‘Its temperate climate... encourages people to head to the beach’ (Ministry of Tourism, 2015). As such, these images invite tourists to embrace the baher as a prominent pillar of the Lebanese experience. Spiritual and cultural practices have also been known to prominently occur throughout the nation’s baher. These include the annual ‘Nowruz’ festival where Kurdish families congregate for celebrations and picnics in the ‘Dalieh of Raouche’ (i.e. a site adjacent to Beirut’s pigeon rocks landmark), and the ‘Orba’at Ayyub’ (Job’s Wednesday) tradition where Beirutis immerse themselves in the waters off the ‘Ramlet el Bayda’ beach (see chapter 5) – with Job being a prophet in the Abrahamic religions.

Second, despite current private encroachments dotting the baher (see chapters 3 and 6), it is one of the last few remaining public spaces still in use. As mentioned earlier, Lebanon has a dearth of green spaces (i.e. less than 13% of the nation’s territory), with Beirut encompassing 0.8m² of green space per capita – i.e. far below the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation of 9m²

² For example, Taroub’s ‘A’l Cornishe’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yc23IzltuKk>

per capita (Nazzal and Chinder, 2018). Moreover, as noted above, a number of squares (e.g. Martyr's square) have been converted to parking lots, with other historical nodes sanitized, re-conceived as spaces for consumption, and thus relatively unused by the average citizen (e.g. Downtown). Contrastingly, the baher persists as a key space for congregation for Lebanese, tourists, and other residents alike (e.g. refugees). A recent survey of public space usage in Beirut has confirmed the relative importance of the baher, with almost a third of respondents expressing a preference for the 'sea waterfront', as opposed to 17% for parks, and 2.5% for squares (Mady, 2022). Furthermore, Nazzal and Chinder have noted how the corniche "hosts around 30,000 users weekly from different age groups and social and educational backgrounds, performing a range of different social and sports activities... The Corniche remains today one of the most successful public spaces in the city" (2018, p. 122).

Third, the existing literature on public spaces in Lebanon is overwhelmingly focused on Beirut, with particular attention being paid to one preeminent example: the post-war planning and redevelopment of the city's central district by Solidère (Yunis, 2012; Leclair-Paquet, 2013; Schmid, 2002) (see chapter 2). This is emphasised by recent academic interest around revolutionary movements within downtown's spaces: Martyr's square, the Egg, and Samir Kassir garden (Sinno, 2020; Fouani, 2021; Naamani and Simpson, 2021). As such, there exists little scholarly engagement with public spaces outside this central locale, particularly in what concerns coastal spaces beyond the corniche. The selection of the baher as a prism of analysis thus addresses several key gaps in the literature, both geographically and conceptually. By doing so, I seek to generate a novel perspective into the production of (un)public space, particularly in relation to the baher's unique socio-spatial liminal character (see chapter 3).

In order to explore the production of (un)public space through my chosen empirical prism of the Lebanese baher, I must first ground the discussion within a theoretical lens that facilitates my

forthcoming analysis. This is achieved by bringing together Lefebvre's (1991) 'production of space' (i.e. space as socially produced) with Habermas' (1989) 'public sphere' (i.e. a socio-spatial process and site linking 'public' and 'space'). By doing so, I uncover multiple interpretations of (un)public spaces, with emphasis on decoupling stated normative ideals from manifested realities. This conceptual framing will subsequently enable me to focus this research's aims and questions, with emphasis on bringing into dialogue this thesis' theoretical and empirical components.

1.3 The Production of (Un)Public Space

Space is not an empty container, for it is inseparable from prevailing socio-political and economic considerations. Accordingly, "humans create the space in which they make their lives; it is a project shaped by interests of classes, experts, the grassroots, and other contending forces" (Molotch 1993, 887; as cited in Krichker, 2021, p. 1232). Hubbard and colleagues (2004) claim that there are no neutral or innocent spaces, while Soja (1989) frames the 'spatial' and the 'social' as co-constitutive, with power relations being imbued within spatial practice(s). Space is thus not only produced through social processes, but it also moulds resulting social practices (Castree, 2004). This implies a dialectical understanding of space as both a product and a producer, with Soja coining this as a "socio-spatial dialectic" (1989, p.78). Space is fundamentally social, for it is weaved through an intricate web of competing social relations. This is particularly the case with regards to areas designated as public space, and this section details how this type of space is socially produced. This is achieved by paying particular attention to competing articulations of what 'public space' is, which 'public(s)' it caters to, and how related understandings may differ depending on when, where and whom is posing these questions.

1.3.1 The Production of Space: weaving together 'perceived', 'conceived' and 'lived' space

In his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre argues that space is socially produced. He claims that although every society produces its spaces, not all individuals are equally included within this process of production. Lefebvre demonstrates how in post-war France, what had previously been a “fluid meshing of work, play, community association, and family reproduction spaces... [have since been replaced by] a functionally segregated network of office blocks, high-speed transit corridors, and nucleated apartments” (Gulick, 1998, p.141). This transformation positions space as a product of capitalism, with it subsequently promoting social relationships that reinforce the capitalist mode of production. Lefebvre’s (1991) conceptualisation of the production of space bridges the gap between physical space, mental space (i.e. abstractions of space) and social space (Peetz and Raymen, 2023). As Elden (2007) explains:

“Space is produced in two ways: as a social formation (mode of production), and as a mental construction (conception)... There is an opposition established between our conception of space – abstract, mental and geometric – and our perception of space – concrete, material and physical. The latter takes as its initial point of departure the body, which Lefebvre saw as the site of resistance within the discourse of Power in space... Space is a mental and material construct. This provides us with a third term between the poles of conception and perception, the notion of the lived... This gives us a conceptual triad: spatial practice; representations of space; and spaces of representation. Space is viewed in three ways, as perceived, conceived and lived.” (2007, p. 109-110)

The first mode, perceived space, describes space in its physical form. Salama (2021) frames this as a pragmatically physical space, where movement occurs, where interactions take place, where networks develop, where flows of information and investment materialise, and where conceived and lived space are construed. The second mode, conceived space, frames it as a mental construct, as imagined or viewed. Here space can be defined via its semiotic abstraction, and unpacked as a representation for wider socio-economic and political power dynamics - e.g. spaces designated on maps. Space in this mode is conceived by built environment professionals and decision makers, who aim to impose their respective planning visions and ideologies onto society. Related spatial decisions are thus tactical, strategic, and authoritative; with Lefebvre likening it to “modernist, top-

down, land zoning, and car-oriented planning” (Madi, 2022, p.117). The final mode, lived space, is produced and shaped through users’ everyday practices. There is a palpable tension between how a space has been produced thus far, via the other two modes, and how individuals decide to behave within it and/or appropriate it. This in turn feeds back into the overall production of the space, by weaving all three elements (i.e. perceived, conceived and lived) together. Although elements of this triad can be assessed individually, it is by highlighting their interconnectedness that the production of space gains significance. As such, Liu and Fan proclaim it an integrative and heuristic tool, with all three dimensions simultaneously present: “if specific space can be perceived, then its semiotic abstraction, including architectural discourse and dissemination of architectural ideas, can be conceived as a medium through which inhabitants can interact in that space (lived space)” (2022, para. 23).

Although lived space may be shaped by how a space is conceived and perceived, people’s experiences may in turn either resist or further crystallise the previous two modes. To Lefebvre, “there is a politics of space because space is political” (Lefebvre, 1973, p. 59; as cited in Elden, 2007, p. 107), with space in capitalist societies being synonymous with class struggle and power relations (Lefebvre, 1991). As such, “spaces and places are not fixed but are in a constant state of transition as a result of continuous, dialectical struggles of power and resistance among and between a diversity of stakeholders” (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006, p. 764). Space may thus constitute a place for domination, where exploitative capitalist social relations materialise, or a site of revolutionary utopian potential, which can be unlocked through the subversion of socio-spatial processes of alienation (Busquet, 2012). Lefebvre’s reflections on urbanism uses space as a prism for exploring the capitalist mode of production, with space being framed as both a political product and an instrument for change – i.e. a platform to appropriate the city (Lefebvre, 1968). According to Li and colleagues (2022), Lefebvre viewed public space as the physical nexus between human life and the urban experience, thus positioning it as the quintessential lived space where the ‘right

to the city' could be exercised by urban denizens. By engaging with Lefebvre's 'production of space', this research explores the production of the baher as a social space, with emphasis on examining how it is perceived, conceived and lived as an (un)public space – i.e. straddling an ambiguous and hybrid classification, between public and private, with its resulting socio-spatial manifestations being indicative of power relations imbued within the space.

1.3.2 The Public Sphere: a socio-spatial process linking 'Public' and 'Space'

In order to unpack the production of (un)public space, we must first ground our discussion within the concept of the public sphere. Habermas (1989) theorised the public sphere as being shaped by public discourse, or rather a process where individuals co-create the 'public' by engaging one-another in rational discussion. Here, citizens exchange ideas – often times critical of the state – in a manner that shapes public opinion and nurtures a sense of solidarity between participants. Goodman (1992) frames it as a mediating ground between the private life of individuals and their public roles as citizens. As a result, the public sphere may be understood as abstract and discursive in nature, with its constitutive elements (e.g. the exchange of ideas, social practices, the media, public institutions, etc.) coming together to shape the 'public' and public opinion (Low and Smith, 2013). This concept was further developed by Fraser (1990), a political philosopher who diverged from Habermas' unitary understanding of public sphere, to instead argue for a definition that is multiple and more complex in nature. As a result, she developed the concept of 'subaltern counter-public spheres', where members of subordinate social groups create 'alternative publics' by 'carving out' separate spheres of discourse that better fit their identities, interests and needs. Accordingly, Luger argues "counter-publics form toward a more just society" (2023, p. 312).

To Habermas (1989), the spatial context in which the public sphere is formulated is of key importance. He points to European coffee houses and salons as sites where writing, reading and

discussion occurred, and which enable the public sphere to be subsequently formulated. Gulick (1998) explains that the public sphere is both a site and a process, and although they may be analytically separable, they can only be fully comprehensible in relation to one another. Light and Smith elaborate on this by using the public square as a lens of analysis:

“The people assembled in the square become a public once they are able to debate among themselves and respond to the pronouncements of the state with rational protests and formal petitions... the public square is a metonymy of the people talking among themselves and, perhaps more importantly, talking back to the state” (1998, p.2)

In this example, the public sphere’s site and process are co-constitutive and inseparable. Physical presence within the square enables participants to not only be seen, but more importantly implicates them in democratic public discourse and debate. This is why Smith and Low stipulate that “an understanding of public space is an imperative for understanding the public sphere” (2013, p.6). In fact, Azzali and colleagues. (2021) argue that the relationship between public sphere and public space is not unidirectional, but rather both of these dimensions influence one-other and are co-dependent. This is in line with Lefebvre’s understanding of social space, with public sphere and public space being socially produced, both as a product of social relations, but also in turn socialising their respective participants.

Habermas (1989) analysed the evolution of the public sphere as the structural conditions that form it develop over time, with particular attention being paid to the increasing dominance of private interest through capitalism, as well as the advent of new modes of communications and technological innovations. The evolution of the public sphere implicated a similar evolution in its spatiality, with Habibi and colleagues (2021) exploring this transition through four archetypal cities. The first city is characterised by organically produced public spaces (e.g. bazaars), where people meet, trade, and exchange ideas. The second city is the outcome of the first wave of modernity, the renaissance, and is defined by an abstract conceptualization of space. Emerging conceptions

of urban design led “ancient, organic and harmonious urban fabrics [to be] replaced by regular and geometrical patterned squares, buildings and purposely created perspectives... therefore, the differences in geographical, cultural, territorial features of the living place and public spaces are largely ignored” (Habibi et al, 2021, p. 15). The third city, which is formed following the industrial revolution, sees public space as increasingly produced by “outside political authorities and architects” (ibid.) through a perpetual cycle of demolition and renovation. The public sphere, and by implication public space, are dominated by private interests seeking to reproduce their respective modes of production. The fourth city emerged as a consequence of the contemporary dual forces of neoliberalism and the information revolution. Here, “public spaces are the product of Neoliberalism which are occasionally conquered by the citizenry. However, the social movements first come together in the virtual public spaces such as social media to then manifest themselves in the real public spaces” (Habibi et al, 2021, p. 16). Despite the rising domination of capital interests within the public sphere, as well as its gradual transition from physical space into to the virtual realm, recent social movements have re-emphasised the centrality of urban public spaces as sites for political action and ideological struggle. David Harvey best encapsulates this by affirming: “what Tahrir Square showed to the world was an obvious truth: that it is bodies on the street and in the squares, not the babble of sentiments on Twitter or Facebook, that really matter” (Harvey, 2012, p. 162).

By forging a dialogue between Lefebvre’s (1991) ‘production of space’ (i.e. space as socially produced) and Habermas’ (1989) ‘public sphere’ (i.e. a socio-spatial process and site linking ‘public’ and ‘space’), I engage with public space as both a site and process of social production. Accordingly, I deem public space to be in continuous (re)production, with its transformation informed by a dynamic interplay of its perceived, conceived, and lived elements. This is best demonstrated by Habibi and colleagues’ (2021) four archetypal cities, as well as Lebanon’s evolving public spaces across various historical phases: Ottoman, French mandate, Civil War, Neoliberal

reconstruction, and Civil Society activism. As such, in seeking to understand the production of the baher as an (un)public space, I examine the processes, outcomes, and subsequent effects of this socio-spatial production. Through this analysis, I uncover how the baher, despite its legal (i.e. via the public maritime domain) and social (i.e. in terms of use use) designation as public, is subsequently relegated to a grey area – i.e. betwixt and between public/private classification, legal/illegal implications, and inclusionary/exclusionary practices.

1.3.3 (Un)Public Space: between normative ideals and manifested realities

Public spaces are considered to have “enormous potential” (Azzali et al, 2021, p. 1) for they are purported to serve a social, political, economic, environmental, aesthetic, and associative (i.e. linking together different urban areas) function (Bodnar, 2015; Nazzal and Chinder, 2018; Azzali et al, 2021). As a social space, it is framed as a “meeting place” (Rydin, 2011, p. 112) where encounters with difference nurture connectivity and conviviality among participants, and ultimately result in the production of the thicker sociability of a cohesive community. This is particularly relevant with respect to diverse and/or divided locales, given how public spaces are deployed as instruments in the “management of coexistence” (Healy, 2006, p. 111) that strengthen equality, inclusiveness and shared experiences (Sinno, 2020). As a political space, public spaces are viewed as facilitators for democracy (Rabbat, 2012), for they enable individuals from all backgrounds and walks of life to gather, express themselves, participate in public discourse, and shape – in part – the future trajectory of society (Bodnar, 2015; Fouani, 2021).

Despite proclamations on the function and utility of these spaces, scholars have been hard pressed to advance an all-encompassing definition of public space, with Mitchell even attesting: “just what public space is - and who has the right to it - is rarely clear, and certainly cannot be established in the abstract” (2003, p. 5). Luger argues no single definition of public space exists, for “it means

different things to different people, and it is used for many, often contradictory, purposes: joy and love; labour and profit; activism and revolution; control and violence; performance and play” (2023, p. 312). Public space’s two co-constitutive elements, ‘public’ and ‘space’, are perpetually (re)produced via shifting contestations, thus yielding highly differentiated results across various contexts (Smith and Low, 2013). With this in mind, I explore competing understandings of ‘public space’, with particular attention being paid to geographic contributions, and how situated realities (i.e. what public space is in practice) may differ from normative ideals (i.e. what it ought-to-be).

Public space has been primarily examined through the prism of property rights, with some arguing that it is equivalent to state ownership of public property (Gulick, 1998), whilst others define it as the negative – or rather left-over – space generated by carving-out the private realm (Layard, 2015). Here, Smith and Low attest that “it is impossible to conceive of public space today outside the social generalization of private space and its full development as a product of modern capitalist society” (2013, p.4). However, defining public space through a public/private dichotomy may be ill-suited (Blomley, 2005), especially given the increasingly difficult task of delineating this boundary within modern socio-political and economic systems (Madanipour, 2003; Kohn, 2004). In fact, Kilian (1997) argues engagement with public space should move beyond a simplistic public/private binary, for no such clean-cut separation exists. Instead, ‘public’ and ‘private’ should be understood as power relations that manifest within space, with both of these elements existing in every space. This is particularly relevant when discussing ‘privately owned public space’ (POPS), with ‘privately’ designating the legal ownership of the property, whilst ‘public’ denotes the lived space as inhabited by individuals. Here, private property owners are incentivised to incorporate spaces for public use (e.g. plazas, arcades) within their developments, normally through government sanctioned zoning programmes that reward them with regulatory concessions (e.g. floor area bonuses) (Kayden, 2000). That being said, some debate whether this arrangement can

be truly labelled as a public space, with a number of scholars opting to qualify it as ‘quasi/pseudo-public space’ instead (Gray and Gray, 1999; Banerjee, 2001; Button, 2003; Wang, 2019).

Some scholars have chosen to deemphasise property rights (Worpole and Knox, 2008), to instead focus on access and inclusivity as defining features of public space (Koch and Latham, 2012). Within this vein, accessibility is viewed as a measure of ‘publicness’, with particular attention being paid to a space’s ability to host multiple uses and publics (Young, 1986, 1990, 2000; Capron, 2003). Safeguarding difference and promoting conviviality are thus understood as nurturing equality and citizenship within public space, especially whilst ensuring these spaces are free of intimidation techniques from hegemonic institutions (Painter et al., 1995). However, spaces perceived as public often entail significant barriers to entry (Lownsbrough et al., 2007), with geographers tending to explore this through the ‘purification of space’ (Sibley, 1998) from undesirable individuals, groups and practices (Goheen, 1998; Low and Smith, 2006). Law (2002) elaborates on exclusionary tactics aimed at migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong’s Sunday gathering spaces. While, Mitchell (1995) describes how the University of California attempted to exclude certain visitors from People’s Park in Berkeley, with the exception of students and professionals. This showcases how the ‘public’ is often ‘classed’, ‘sexed’, and ‘racialised’ in order to promote a certain image of acceptable users and practices. An important dimension of exclusionary policies and practices is behaviour control, which is primarily achieved through the criminalisation of behaviour that is threatening to the socio-political and economic interests of dominant groups (Caldeira, 2000). Davis (1992), an urban theorist and historian, describes how homelessness is expunged from public space through the use of sprinklers, and bench designs that dissuade their use for sleeping. This showcases how public spaces may be conceived by planners with a pre-defined ‘public’ in mind, thus resulting in ‘perceived’ material design implications, that impact the ‘lived’ experiences of certain users (i.e. the homeless as an undesirable ‘public’).

Geographers have also examined the transformation of public space by leveraging gentrification as a lens of analysis, particularly in terms of its use as a strategy to defend class privilege (Smith, 1996). Van Deusen (2003) remarks how hot-dog vendors have been legislated out of Clinton Square in Syracuse New York, as they were seen to attract the ‘wrong kind of public’ through the sale of a poorly-perceived product. In contrast, up-market cafes thrive in gentrified public spaces, as they offer a higher-end consumption opportunity aimed at more affluent individuals (Zukin, 1995). In this respect, the economic value of public spaces, as spaces for consumerist activity, overshadows their significance as political and social sites for expressing and encountering difference (Collins et al., 2009). Accordingly, Bodnar stipulates that “with the advent of shopping malls and their spread, the balance between the social and political function of public space has shifted to the advantage of the former” (2015, p. 2097). Capitalist social relations are thus inducing an increasing wave of commercialization and privatisation that is structurally altering the public domain (Vasudevan, et al. 2008, Bodnar, 2015; Wang, 2019). Davis famously warned that Los Angeles was “mov[ing] to extinguish its last real public spaces, with all of their democratic intoxications, risks, and undeodorized odors” (2012, p. 180). Clearly, Davis believes that this prevailing neoliberal (re)ordering hollows-out public space, with resulting manifestations diverging from what these spaces ought-to-be, away from a ‘real public space’. However, all is not lost, for recent political movements have renewed confidence in public space retaining its critical political function (Vigneswaran et al., 2017).

Public space entails conceptual complexity, largely stemming from how observed realities on-the-ground are vastly different from idealised discourses (Houssay-Holzschuch and Thébault, 2017). Scholarly engagement with public space transcends simple property rights, for ‘lived’ experience may be decoupled from legal ownership (Li et al., 2022), with the ‘public’ manifesting in both publicly and privately-owned spaces. Furthermore, the provision of access does not necessarily guarantee ‘publicness’ (Iveson, 2007), for spaces are produced thorough power relations and

ideological contestations, with exclusionary tactics and behaviour control being common place within public space. This space is thus ripe with contradiction, since it is as much a site of repression and inequality, as it is an arena for political emancipation and communal identity (Luger, 2023). Deutsch (1996) notes that public space's significance does not stem from a theoretical harmony, but rather as an arena for contestation, where associated struggles bring forward competing social and political processes. There seems to be an intricate balancing act between public space's constitutive elements, be it legally through property rights and legislation, socially through access and usage, politically through democratic processes of participation and representation, and economically through the value derived from the space – to name a few. As a result, a space is not public as *fait accompli*, instead it is socially produced as public through the interplay of these co-constitutive elements – i.e. allowing the space to be conceived, perceived and/or lived as public. Accordingly, Qian affirms “publicness is not an inherent quality of space, but an oeuvre borne out of labours and agencies” (2020, p.79). Public space is thus in flux, oscillating between assembly and disassembly, continuously being (re)produced by and subsequently (re)producing society, with resulting configurations varying across socio-spatial contexts. Accordingly, I examine the Lebanese baher a contested space, relegated to a limbo-like state; betwixt and between normative ideals of what it ‘ought to be’ and manifested realities of what it ‘actually is’; with associated public/private designations, legal/illegal implications, and inclusionary/exclusionary practices. Through the baherscape, I explore varying manifestations of the baher and its users as (un)public, with particular attention paid to socio-spatial and temporal processes of liminal transformation emanating from this (re)production.

1.4 Research Aims & Questions

In seeking to understand the production of (un)public space through the lens of the Lebanese baher, I focus attention on the process, outcomes, and subsequent effects of this socio-spatial

production. Accordingly, I deploy the baherscape as a prism of analysis (see chapter 4), and engage with it as an arena for power-related contestations, a site of both oppression and resistance, where different stakeholders meet, negotiate their various interests, and attempt to pursue their respective agendas. As a result, the space and its users – or rather public(s) – are implicated in a liminal process of socio-spatial and temporal transformation (see chapters 5, 6, 7). Through the baherscape I forge a dialogue between the ‘production of space’ as a theory, and ‘liminality’ as a concept (see chapter 3); and inquire to what extent does this theoretical and conceptual marriage generate a novel perspective and/or additional insight into the production of (un)public space?

To achieve this, I deploy two interconnected sets of research questions that explore the baherscape at varying scales. The first focuses on specific baherscape elements (i.e. micro-scaled dynamics), or rather the manner in which various stakeholders (re)shape the baherscape in accordance to their respective interests and agendas. The second engages with the baherscape more broadly (i.e. macro-scaled dynamics), and examines how competing articulations of the baher converge together to co-constitute its production as an (un)public space.

I engage with the first set of research questions (i.e. the baherscape’s mirco-scaled dynamics) across empirical chapters, which each chapter focusing on a key dimension of (re)production: first, the Lebanese government, with its associated baher governance; second, private beach actors (i.e. administrators and beachgoers), with their related identity inspired exclusionary policies and practices; and third, civil society groups calling for the ‘right to the baher’. Accordingly, I explore the production of the baher as an (un)public space across three takes (i.e. governance, identity politics, and the ‘right to the baher’), with liminality comprising a connecting conceptual thread that weaves together my empirical chapters.

#	Research Questions	Empirical Chapter
1	In what way, and for what purpose(s), is the Lebanese government ordering the nation's baher?	5 (Un)public space I: Baher governance, from master plan to governmental programme
2	Private beach venues are 'public' to whom?	6 (Un)public space II: Weaving private beaches, via in/out groups and 'snagged threads'
3	What is the 'right to the baher'? How, by who, and for whom is it being claimed?	7 (Un)public space III: "The Baher is Mine", (re)claiming the baher as an arena for social & political action

Table #1: First set of research questions mapped to empirical chapters

Although the above research questions will be addressed individually, it is only by bringing related discussions into dialogue – as I endeavour to do in the concluding chapter – that one gains deeper insight into the production of the baher as an (un)public space. Through this endeavour, I engage with my second set of research questions (i.e. the baherscape's marco-scaled dynamics) and inquire: How is the baher (re)produced? Who is (re)producing it, for whom, and for what purpose? What can the (re)production of the baher tell us about prevailing constellations of power in Lebanon?

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters, inclusive of this introduction. The following chapter (Chapter 2, 'Exploring Lebanese (Un)Public Spaces as Prisms for Wider Societal Transformations') elaborates on the context enveloping the Lebanese baher specifically, and the nation's public spaces more generally. I achieve this by providing a brief overview of Lebanon's demographic, socio-economic and political dynamics, and subsequent residential patterns underpinning the complex and contested framing for the nation's public space. I initially focus on two notable examples beyond the Lebanese baher (i.e. Horsh Al Sanawbar park, and Downtown Beirut), with emphasis on transferable dynamics that are present within the baher. I then pivot

attention to this thesis' scope of research, and contextualise how the baher was made to be (un)public. I conclude this chapter by unpacking key themes that cut-across these sections, and which subsequently inform the foundations for discussions and analysis throughout upcoming empirical chapters.

Chapter 3, 'Liminality, a Conceptual Framing for Exploring the Production of the Baher' encompasses a review of literature dealing with 'liminality', from its anthropological roots, to its contemporary labelling as a 'master concept' (Horvath et al., 2015) that enables the exploration of a range of socio-spatial and temporal transformations. I examine the baher as a quintessential liminal space, whether through its sense of timelessness, the subversion of prevailing discourses and normative societal structures via transgressive beachgoer behaviour, the fostering of convivial community-generating experiences, or even as a literal threshold between land and sea. Accordingly, I deploy liminality as a conceptual thread that cuts-across this research's empirical chapters, and position it as an ideal vantage point for examining the production of the baher. With this in mind, this chapter asks: What is liminality? How has this concept evolved over time? How have geographers engaged with it? How does it extend to the baher? Through these questions, I establish the foundations for addressing this research's broader aims, and subsequently forge a dialogue between literature on the production of space and liminality in upcoming chapters.

The following chapter explores the methodological foundations for this research. I do this by detailing how my research design was informed by a collective case study approach. I first ground the discussion within case study academic literature, and subsequently elaborate on how this was put into practice through three field locations: Beirut, Tyre and Tehoum. Next, I focus on the baherscape, this thesis' analytical framework for unpacking the production of the baher. I discuss how it not only constituted an anchor throughout this research's varying stages, but was also progressively focused and honed as data collection and analysis were undertaken. I then expand on my employed methods, best exemplified as a triangulation of mixed qualitative approaches,

with a particular emphasis on interviews, (auto)ethnography, and discourse analysis of secondary data sources. Finally, I close with a discussion on ethical considerations, with attention paid to how my positionality both shaped and was shaped by my fieldwork experiences, and how this subsequently relegated me to a liminal state – i.e. ‘betwixt and between’ academic and beachgoer.

Chapter 5, ‘(Un)public space I: baher governance, from master plan to governmental programme’ is the first of three empirical chapters. I critically assess the Lebanese government’s role within the baherscape, by unpacking its influence over the production of the baher. I do this by asking: In what way, and for what purpose(s), is the Lebanese government ordering the nation’s baher? I explore how presiding governance renders the baher (un)public, by examining the disconnect between stated governmental ambitions and on-the-ground ‘stubborn realities’. I deploy liminality as a conceptual tool for unpacking the governance of public spaces, given how governments are tasked with drawing the boundary between multiple concurrent binaries: legal versus illegal, public (interest) vs private (rights), and deliberately ordered vs. haphazardly neglected. I examine how the baher’s resulting spatial manifestations lay ‘betwixt and between’ such designations, with their respective boundaries often-times blurred. In doing so, I seek to understand the synergetic relationship between baher governance and the space’s liminal context by inquiring: to what degree is baher governance shaped by the space’s liminal context? Can a space’s presiding governance structurally alter the baher’s liminal character? Empirically, I engage with baher governance across two scales: nationally, via a discourse analysis of the ‘National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory’; and more situatedly, by turning attention to Ramlet El Bayda beach – the pilot project for the ‘National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public’.

Chapter 6, ‘(Un)public space II: weaving private beaches, via in/out groups and ‘snagged threads’” critically assesses the role of private beach actors (i.e. administrators and beachgoers) within the baherscape, by unpacking their influence over the production of the baher. I do this by asking: Private beach venues are ‘public’ to whom? I explore how the baher is rendered (un)public by

examining the nexus between identity politics, as informed by competing interpretations of ‘acceptable public’, as well as related exclusionary territorial practices. I do this by focusing on liminal threshold experiences where/when an individual’s belonging is negotiated, a designation of in/out-group is formulated, and constructions of a specific ‘public’ are underway. Empirically, I focus on Tehoum’s private beach venues across three interconnected takes: first how narratives and imaginations of private beach actors contribute to formulations of in/out-groups; second how politics of representation inform exclusionary practices along the Lebanese baher; and third, triangulating the above information via an exploration of liminal beachgoer experiences, with an emphasis on how this theoretical reframing results in more granular and nuanced understandings.

The final empirical chapter, ‘(Un)public spaces III: “The Baher is Mine”, (re)claiming the baher as an arena for social and political action’ examines Lebanese civil society’s role within the baherscape, by unpacking its influence over the production of the baher. I do this by asking: What is the ‘right to the baher’? How, by who, and for whom is it being claimed? I explore the baher as an arena for social and political action, where civil society efforts challenge presiding neoliberal policies and exclusionary practices. I do this by engaging with the ‘right to the baher’ specifically, and the ‘right to the city’ more generally, with an emphasis on how the ‘right to the city’ extends to the baher. I examine civil society’s modalities of resistance as liminal thresholds, where baher articulations for the ‘right to the city’ emerge, and an alternative ‘urban’ is prefiguratively advanced. Empirically, this chapter focuses on three case studies: Ramlet El Bayda, with Lancaster Eden Bay Hotel’s partial encroachment of the beach; the Dalieh of Raouche, a previously shared open space that has been fenced-off by real estate developers; and Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (TCNR), often cited by Lebanese civil society as a model for the baher’s use and development. I ask whether the ‘right to the baher’ within TCNR extends to all beachgoers, paying particular attention to the liminal experiences of Palestinian refugees within the Rashidieh camp.

The concluding chapter revisits this research's aims and questions, by elaborating on key theoretical arguments brought forward across the three empirical chapters, and subsequently detailing this thesis' contribution to geographic scholarship. By bringing together empirical and theoretical components of this research into dialogue, I explore the baherscape as a liminal arena for wider societal contestations, resulting in associated socio-spatial transformations, with resulting processes and outcomes guiding the (re)production of the baher into an (un)public space. Finally, this chapter acknowledges existing gaps that may not have been addressed through this thesis, and which may inform areas for future academic exploration.

2 | Exploring Lebanese (Un)Public Spaces as Prisms for Wider Societal Transformations

2.1 Introduction

In 2011, at the age of twenty-one, I decided to look up Beirut, Lebanon on Google Maps (see figure 2). Being born and raised in this city, I associated memories that I held with features depicted on the map: long walks on the curving corniche, outings in the Hamra and Gemayzeh areas, and feeling enveloped within a concrete existence – represented by a dominance of grey on the map. It was then that I spotted an oddity that I could not make sense of: a large triangular patch of green located in Beirut's southern edge. What was it? Why was that place void of any memories that I had of the city? I turned to my friends for answers but it was to no avail. When asking my parents, they explained: “that's Horsh Al Sanawbar, Tarek! It's the biggest park in Beirut”. After further questioning, I discovered that the Horsh was closed-off in 1995 (The Daily Star, 2015), a few years after the end of the civil war, with the public no longer having unrestricted access. Soon after learning about the park, I started noticing calls for reclaiming public spaces around the city: graffiti, news articles, and protests. News about the opening of a new private beach resort, the worsening health and safety conditions in Lebanon's few public gardens, or a scandal where certain groups (e.g. Syrian refugees) were not allowed to access a public space. It was then that I began to realise that I had been conditioned into frequenting certain spaces and avoiding others. This led me to perceive my hometown differently, not as a consistently inviting space, but as a city permeated by ‘no-go zones’ and spaces I perceived as unfit for the ‘public’.



Figure 2. Horsh Beirut. **Source:** Google Maps

In this chapter, I draw on both secondary sources and interviews undertaken for this research to elaborate on the context enveloping the Lebanese baher specifically, and the nation's public spaces more generally. This is achieved across three interconnected takes: first, by providing a brief overview of Lebanon's demographics, socio-economic and political dynamics and subsequent residential patterns that underpin the complex and contested national framing of public space. I initially focus on two notable examples beyond the Lebanese baher (i.e. Horsh Al Sanawbar, and Downtown Beirut), with emphasis on detailing prevailing dynamics that are also present within the baher. Second, I pivot attention to this thesis' scope of research, and contextualise how the baher was made to become (un)public. I conclude this chapter by unpacking key themes that cut-across these sections, and which will subsequently inform the foundations for discussions and analysis throughout upcoming empirical chapters. It must be noted that related insights have been drawn from interviews conducted throughout my fieldwork, along with information gathered across academic articles and other secondary data sources (e.g. governmental reports, news articles).

2.2 Spatialising Lebanon's Wider Societal Transformations

Lebanon is a small eastern-Mediterranean country, roughly 10,452km² in area. Its shoreline, about 225km in length, is dotted by the nation's major cities: Beirut (the capital), Tripoli, Byblos, Sidon and Tyr; with nearly 60% of the population residing along the coast (Diplomatic Service of the European Union, 2020). The population, around 5,592,631 as of 2021 (World Bank, 2023), is highly urbanised with roughly 90% living in cities, and largely monolithic in ethnicity – i.e. 95% Arab, 4% Armenian, and 1% other (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023). Lebanon holds a notable refugee population, with the country hosting the “largest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometre in the world” (UNHCR, 2021). Around 1.5 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2021) and

479,000 Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2023) reside in the country. The latter has been predominantly present since the ‘Nakba’ in 1948, while the former was displaced due to the relatively more recent Syrian civil war (i.e. 2011 onwards). Tensions between Lebanese hosting communities and refugees are palpable, with numerous municipalities adopting curfews and restrictions on Syrian residents (Human Rights Watch, 2014), while Palestinians are barred from working in as many as 39 professions, and are unable to own property (UNRWA, 2023). Both communities, similarly to all other nationalities, are mostly ineligible for naturalization regardless of how many years they may reside in the country, given how their integration would impact Lebanon’s delicate sectarian balance. Furthermore, Lebanon hosts a sizeable migrant domestic worker population, around 250,000, whom originate from mostly Ethiopia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (United Nations, 2021). These workers operate within the ‘kafala system’, a sponsorship system likened to modern-day slavery, that binds workers to their employers with exploitative conditions, as well as restrictions on rights and freedoms being observed (United Nations, 2021, and Cholewinski, 2023). It is thus evident, considering these heterogenic identity groupings, that speaking of public space in Lebanon entails a nuanced understanding of multiple ‘publics’ that may be present within these spaces – i.e. with added emphasis on exploring respective ownership, accessibility, and usage dynamics.

There are eighteen officially recognized religious sects in Lebanon. Muslims constitute 67.8% of the population, mostly composed of Sunnis and Shia’s (i.e. each making up 32% of the population) and Druze (i.e. 4.5%), though some members of the Druze community would classify themselves as a separate religion. Christians form around 32.4% of the population, with Maronite Catholic being the largest group (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023). It must be noted, however, that figures are estimates given how the last officially conducted government population census was in 1932 (Maktabi, 1999), with it informing the foundations for political representation within Lebanon’s confessional system. Confessionalism, the mechanism through which political and institutional

power is proportionally distributed among religious communities, was established in post-independent Lebanon. The 'National Pact' ensured an 'equal' division of power between Muslims and Christians through the allocation of different political posts along religious lines. Accordingly, the Presidency was reserved to a Maronite Christian, the Prime Ministership to a Sunni Muslim, and Speaker of Parliament to a Shia Muslim. This rather static power-sharing arrangement "confines decision-making, undemocratically, to often private negotiations between a small elite of representatives from each community. It institutionalises and strengthens the ethno-national divisions at the heart of [presiding sectarian sensitivities]. It maintains even increases polarization..." (Anderson, 2010, 23). In essence, every Lebanese person belongs to their confession, and every confession belongs to its religious and political leaders. As a result, one can expect this fractured political balancing act to permeate across multiple scales (i.e. be it local and/or national), with this thesis examining how Lebanon's political system may translate onto public spaces generally, and shape the production of the baher specifically.

Lebanon is a nation mired in war, political turmoil and economic instability for most of the past five decades. This is partly due to heightened tensions stemming from its complex social structures, which encompass a multitude of different and often rival factions. There exists an intricate balancing act between the different religious, economic, social, and political cohorts, which essentially keeps the country teetering on the brink of an exasperated and protracted conflict (Choueiri, 2007). The Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) resulted in over 150,000 casualties (Wood, 2012). After the war ended in 1990, the Lebanese Government adopted a general amnesty, rather than hold war criminals accountable for their atrocities (Haugbolle, 2010). Larkin notes "post-Ta'if recovery was forged as a 'state sponsored amnesia', where structural forgetting was encouraged through the culmination of a general war amnesty in 1991, media censorship laws [...] and the complete absence of criminal tribunals, compensation schemes, or truth and reconciliation committees" (Larkin, 2010, p. 617-618). This is further evidenced through the Ministry of

education's national history curriculum, which fails to include mentions of events following Lebanon's independence (i.e. including the civil war) within lessons and text books. This historical myopia (Makdisi, 1997) implicates Lebanese consuming varying and often-times contradictory narratives of the war, namely that of their confessional group as relayed by their respective families and religious institutions. "These youth, ranging between 15-22 years old, are a generation without personal recollection of the conflict but with vicarious memories passed on by their parents, communities and localities" (Larkin, 2010, 4). As a result, sectarian communities tend to blame each other for the atrocities that took place during the civil war. This reinforces an air of enmity, best described as an 'us' versus 'them' mentality, which separates the various confessional groups and promotes deep-seated divisions within the population.

The memory of the civil war lingers on and the old separation lines segregating previously warring factions still persist. Even today, Beirutis categorise their city's neighbourhoods according to their geographical location in East (Christian)/West (Muslim) Beirut, or even the predominant sect that inhabits them – i.e. 'Shi'ite Dahieh' or 'Sunni Tarik Al Jdeedeh'. Although civil war era militia checkpoints and road barriers no longer exist, they have been replaced with virtual borders demarcated by political posters, confessional graffiti, ambient sound (e.g. a Mosque's call for prayer vs. Church bells), and even residents' clothing and accessories (e.g. veils vs. cross necklaces). Khalaf proclaims this to be a "dynamic kaleidoscope of changing social and identity markers: 'no-go areas', 'confrontation points' and 'places/spaces of belonging and exclusion'; a 'geography of fear' sustained not by artificial barriers but by 'the psychology of dread, hostile bonding and ideologies of enmity'" (Khalaf, 2006, p. 122). Lebanon's geographic sectarian segregation manifests through enclaves developed around the residences/headquarters of political leaders/parties, and reinforced by the presence of each sect's respective militia and guardians (Kastrissianakis, 2012). This residential settlement pattern was exacerbated during the civil war, as the nation was engulfed by conflict, and individuals sought safety and protection within zones and

neighbourhoods controlled by their sect's militia. Kastrissianakis (2012) affirms Beirutis perceive their territories as shelters of cohesiveness and security that portray political might and mediate relations to other groups.

The country's shifting residential patterns – mostly as a result of the civil war, but more recently due to a competitive housing market (Ghanem, 2022) – implicated the emergence socio-economic enclaves with associated new centralities and peripheries (Mady, 2022). Bou Aoun (2020) frames post-war urban planning policies as ignoring public spaces and communal centres, and instead prioritising speculative property development focused on driving related housing prices. This in turn instigated a shift in population behaviour, with private consumerist spaces (e.g. malls, restaurants, cafes) progressively replacing traditional public spaces as centres for convergence, especially given the relatively safer environments they afford (Nazzal and Chinder, 2018). Kabbani (1998) points to “new physical boundaries, such as avenues, streets, and spaces, contrary to their role as elements of the public realm, acquire a strategic importance as buffers and borders preventing people from interacting” (1998, 242). As a result of the country's fragmentation, inhabitants have been dissuaded from frequenting most public spaces, and instead preferring to limit themselves to communal spaces within their proximity (Yaakoub, 2010). This effectively led most public spaces to be perceived as being located within Muslim populated areas or Christian dominated enclaves, Hezbollah or Hariri (a former Prime Minister) territory (Ghaddar, 2007), or even catering exclusively to rich residents/tourists (Schellen, 2014) or marginalised communities (Chehayeb and Bitar, 2019). The evolution of Lebanon's public spaces, along with the relationship binding them to their users, has very much been shaped by wider socio-economic and political transformations occurring within the country. Although I will elaborate on how this translates to this thesis' chosen scope of the baher, I will first situate the discussion within two other notable public space examples (i.e. Horsh Beirut and Downtown), with the latter being generally the most

discussed Lebanese case study within existing academic literature (Yunis, 2012; Leclair-Paquet, 2013; Schmid, 2002; Sinno, 2020; Fouani, 2021; Naamani and Simpson, 2021).

In an interview conducted with Rami Saab, Managing Director at TWIG – a collaborative design studio behind ‘Beitut Beity’ (see chapter 7), a user generated digital advocacy platform and tool, which enables Beirutis to activate, document and create public spaces in the city – he described how: “Post-civil war, we end up with Horsh Beirut and Downtown, both on the green line. Horsh Beirut remained closed, and Downtown was cut out, got a new population, new everything. Two huge nodes of activity were extinguished/turned off” [Interview, 08/08/2018]. Mr. Saab points to a prevailing trend where Lebanon’s public spaces have been neutralised/sanitised over time, and demonstrates this by citing the closure of Beirut’s largest park (i.e. Horsh Beirut), as well as the structural altering of Downtown’s character. With this in mind, I initially focus on these two notable public space examples, with emphasis on detailing transferable dynamics that can be observed along the baher. Through this, I demonstrate how the baher, although distinct in terms of form and character (i.e. vis-à-vis parks and squares), is plagued by a similar threat facing public spaces generally – i.e. encroachment and a hollowing out of their convivial function.

2.2.1 The Closure of Horsh Al Sanawbar (a.k.a. Horsh Beirut)

Horsh Al Sanawbar, meaning pine forest in Arabic, is Beirut’s largest park. It comprised part of the civil war’s ‘Green Line’, an imaginary civil war era demarcation boundary separating Beirut into two distinct segments: Muslim dominated West-Beirut, and Christian controlled East-Beirut. This imagined border was later transformed into a material one, when the government closed off the majority of the park in the early 1990s. The closed section, also known as the ‘garden’, encompassed the overwhelming majority of the Horsh’s green space – approximately three-quarters of its total surface area (Shayya, 2010). The Horsh’s closure implicated its use as a

separation barrier between different sectarian communities residing on each side of the triangular park: The Christian Badaro neighbourhood to the East; the Sunni neighbourhoods of Qasqas and Tareeq Al-Jdideh, along with the remnants of the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, to the West; and the predominantly Shi'ite suburbs of Ghbeireh and Shiyah to the South. Activists calling for the park's re-opening criticised the government's decision to use the public space as a 'buffer zone', rather than bolster its potential as a platform for reconciliation (Kheireddine, 2013).

A number of reasons were cited for the park's closure, including: protecting the fledgling trees from abuse, maintenance related issues, as well as Eng. Bilal Hamad – the then President of the Municipal Council – proclaiming during a 2012 Nahnoo conference that I attended: “we fear, if we opened the Horsh, that it will become a hub of ‘shisha’, barbeques and picnics like the other parts of Lebanon” [Public Debate “Opening Horsh Beirut To The Public”, 08/02/2012]. Interestingly, the Horsh was renovated via a partnership between the municipality of Beirut and Île-de-France, with the park modelled after European – specifically French – public spaces. The President of the Municipality's testimony points to a dynamic where quintessential Lebanese practices (e.g. shisha, barbeques and picnics) had been labelled as ‘unwanted’, with the more Euro-centric behaviour being envisaged for the park's prospective visitors. This is further crystallised through anecdotal evidence of foreign nationals, typically ‘western white’ visitors, accessing the park by presenting their passports to gatekeepers – all while Lebanese were still barred from entering (Battah, 2015). George Arbid, Professor of Architecture at the American University of Beirut, points to a dynamic where Beirut's public spaces are not being designed in a manner that organically stems from their intended users' behaviour; rather, their design is imposed onto or forced upon the population, which entails a predefined set of acceptable practices [Interview, 03/01/2013]. It must be noted, however, that mounting activist pressure yielded dividend, with the park partially opening in 2015 (i.e. once a week on Saturdays) after almost twenty-two years of closure (LBC News, 2015), and later fully reopening to visitors on a daily basis.

2.2.2 Solidere's Reconstruction of Downtown Beirut

Downtown Beirut is another notable example of public space transformation, particularly in reference to post-war reconstruction efforts embracing a neoliberal agenda (Bou Aoun 2020), cementing wartime destruction, and ultimately hallowing processes of healing (Ghandour and Fawwaz, 2010). Downtown's redevelopment was Rafik Hariri's, the Prime Minister at the time, flagship project. Two years before Hariri came to office, the head of Hariri's Saudi Oger group (i.e. a private construction company in Saudi Arabia) was appointed to lead the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) (Battah, 2014) – the preeminent authority tasked with rebuilding Lebanon. Once in office, Hariri founded Solidere³ in 1992, a “strange public-private hybrid” (Wainwright, 2015, n.p.) in charge of the development and reconstruction of the Beirut Central District (i.e. Downtown area). Solidere was incorporated and listed on the stock exchange in 1994, with Hariri being the largest shareholder (Stewart, 1996; Makdisi, 1997). The company's takeover of Downtown was facilitated through a decree signed by the then Finance Minister Fouad Siniora, who had previously been a chairman of ‘Group Méditerranée’ (i.e. owned by the Hariri family) (Battah, 2014). As a result, the area's landowners and tenants were made to forcibly cede ownership to Solidere, in exchange for shares in the company (i.e. rather than cash), with compensations believed to be well below true value (Wainwright, 2015). Jessica Chemali, Director of Programmes at Nahnoo – a youth-led non-governmental organization advocating for sustainable access, use and management of Lebanon's public spaces – contextualises Downtown's redevelopment:

“Downtown Beirut was one of the most diverse places, in terms of religion... There used to be all levels of economic classes, from poor to rich. When Solidere was given Downtown, it evicted more than 100 thousand previous owners, it emptied downtown from everyone. We don't have any diversity anymore. It reconstructed Downtown as a ‘high class’ area where most people don't go. People can't afford to go there, even parking [is expensive]! Public squares are now closed. Nejme square is only accessible

³ Solidere is a French acronym for Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction de Beyrouth

after crossing a checkpoint... There has been a theft of public spaces. A theft at the level of the government, where a private company was given Downtown Beirut and emptied its inhabitants. Maybe after 15 years of war, people couldn't galvanize enough political strength to stop it. We were given the promise that this [project] will save us economically, since we were destroyed and everything was in ruins... this will let Lebanon flourish." [Interview, 16/09/2015]

Ms. Chemali points to a dynamic where Beirut's downtown was hollowed of its diverse network of inhabitants (e.g. economic classes, religions), and instead being made to cater to an upper-class predefined public. Ghandour and Fawwaz frame this process as "a reduction of the significance of spatial production to economic profit maximization, prioritized over other social dimensions of the old city core, such as its religious and class mixity" (Ghandour and Fawwaz, 2010, p.2). Downtown's spatial dislocation from the rest of the city was enabled through the eviction of its residents, the subsequent neoliberal redevelopment favouring high-end consumerist spaces, the closure of its public spaces (i.e. Nejme Square), as well as the sanitisation and neutralisation of its historic cultural spaces (e.g. Martyr's square being made into a car park). Although Solidere's Beirut Central District boasts immaculately refurbished streets lined with upscale stores (e.g. Rolex, Hermes) and recently renovated buildings targeting wealthy Gulf investors, the area is eerily devoid of life (Wainwright, 2015). As van Pinxteren summarises, "Solidere has become an overarching symbol for the destruction of the national history through construction" (van Pinxteren, 2012, n.p.). However, there do exist periodic takeovers of Downtown, normally in conjunction with political resistance and action, which reassert the publicness of its spaces. This is chiefly exemplified via the 2005 Cedar revolution, and more recently by the October 17 revolution. The latter was marked by the re-appropriation of Downtown's previously gentrified public spaces (Lakrouf, 2020), which had been mostly inaccessible to the population (Sinno, 2021). In fact, the 'ring' intersection was the centre stage for protest activities, the 'egg' (i.e. an abandoned cinema) was used for public discourse and dialogue, while martyr's square was dotted with protestor tents that occupied the space. Bou Aoun proclaims "public spaces have emerged not only as a physical

and spatial entity in which the events occur but also as a key political component in the production, continuation, and fuelling of the revolution” (2020, n.p.).

Interestingly, Solidere’s reach stretches onto the baher via its ‘waterfront district’, with 73 hectares of reclaimed land, and boasting ‘Zaitunay Bay’ as its crown jewel – an upscale marina dotted with restaurants, shopping boutiques, and ‘Le Yacht Club’. The latter brands itself as “the premier seaside destination for luxury living and recreation in Lebanon, catering exclusively to the region's cultural and social elite” (Le Yacht Club, 2023). When venturing into the marina, one is confronted by a large banner that reads: “Stop Solidere”, with an added note explaining “this renowned tourist attraction remains a witness to a war that has destroyed it, and a victim of abuse that is targeting it” (see figure 3). The banner was erected by Fadi Al Khouri, the owner of the historic Saint George’s Bay Hotel, who claims he has been repeatedly denied a renovation work permit due to his refusal to sell the property to Solidere (Battah, 2014; Wainwright, 2015). Solidere's original mandate had been initially intended to end in 2019, however this date has been extended, for now, until 2029 (Barrington, 2017).



Figure 3. ‘Stop Solidere’ sign on St. George’s Bay Hotel. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine

By citing the Horsh Al Sanawbar and Solidere examples, I set the context for understanding the production of the baher, with an effort to detail transferable dynamics observed across Lebanon's public spaces. Here, I focus on three key themes brought forward through the discussion. First, government intervention significantly influences the production of public spaces, and is often times marked by political corruption (see chapter 5). This is best evidenced by citing its decision to close-off Horsh Beirut in the 1990s; the redevelopment of Downtown by Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (i.e. Solidere's largest shareholder), as facilitated by politicians previously affiliated with his private sector dealings; or even the denial of Saint George's Bay renovation permit, following the owner's refusal to sell the property to Solidere. Second, Lebanon's public spaces tend to cater to a predefined 'public', often times bolstered by a neoliberal agenda that favours a site's exchange value over its use value (see chapter 6). This is made apparent by Beirut municipality regulating 'unwanted' working-class Lebanese practices (e.g. shisha, barbeques and picnics), in favour of more Euro-centric behaviour for the park's prospective visitors. Beirut's downtown being hollowed of its diverse network of inhabitants (e.g. economic classes, religions), to instead cater to upper-class clientele (e.g. Gulf investors). Moreover, Zaituna bay's 'Le Yacht Club' labeling itself as "catering exclusively to the region's cultural and social elite" (Le Yacht Club, 2023). Third, activist pressure has been noted to structurally alter the role and function of public spaces, thus partly shaping their subsequent (re)production (see chapter 7). This is best illustrated by the Horsh's recent re-opening, as well as Downtown's takeover by periodic revolutionary movements. These three themes will subsequently be fleshed-out in the following section, as well as throughout upcoming empirical chapters.

2.3 Historicising the Lebanese Baher's Privatisation

The Lebanese economy is heavily service oriented, with around 94% of GDP being connected to the service industry in 2021; this includes one of the nation's main economic drivers: the tourism

sector (O'Neill, 2024). This sector is largely influenced by the country's natural topography, including its Mediterranean coastline; with it becoming increasingly synonymous with and dominated by private beach resorts and venues. In fact, the first beach club in the Middle East (i.e. the Saint-George's Bay Yacht Motor Club, whose renovation permit was denied after refusing to sell the property to Solidere) was established in Beirut in 1936 (Nader, 2018). Since then, the baher has witnessed an accelerated and frenzied pattern of development, especially during the Lebanese civil war, where developers leveraged the relative absence of state oversight in order to carry-out their respective projects (Hall, 2018). An estimated 300 private beach resorts and venues have now mushroomed along the Lebanese coast (Nader, 2018). Jina Talj, a marine ecologist and environmental activist, problematises "we don't know exactly the length of our coastline. We say it's between 210 and 240 km, because every day we have a new reclamation that's widening the coastline" [Interview, 31/07/2018]. To this end, Ms. Talj stipulates that land reclamation is not only changing the physical character of Lebanon's coastline, but ultimately leads towards environmentally damaging habitat destruction. Numerous international examples, from the French Riviera to a number of Greek islands, are also characterised by the presence of private beaches; however, what differentiates Lebanon from them is the lack of adequate public beach alternatives (see chapter 5 & 7), which are normally meant to counterbalance the negative effects stemming from privatisation. This is best evidence by citing *Executive* magazine's⁴ investigation into public beaches in Lebanon:

"While Lebanon has an abundance of private beach clubs and resorts, ask most Lebanese to name a public beach they would gladly visit – without being harassed by security guards from private beach resorts demanding they leave their "property," or tripping over garbage – and they will be hard pressed to come up with an answer besides the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve" (Rahhal, 2018, n.p.)

⁴ Executive is a monthly English language business magazine published in Beirut, Lebanon. It is considered as one of the most prominent news institutions focusing on financial and economic issues across the MENA region

There thus exists a dual threat facing the Lebanese baher: first, ongoing privatisation, where private beach administrators assert their respective claims and ownership over their respective spaces (see chapter 6). Second, the mismanagement of the nation's remaining public beaches, which are characterised by unhygienic and derelict conditions (see chapter 5). A 2012 report by the Directorate General of Land and Maritime Transport highlighted the existence of 1,141 cases of baher encroachments (i.e. an avg. 5.18 intrusions per kilometre), of which 73 were licensed by the government, while the remaining 1,068 were deemed to be transgressions. Encroachment refers to an instance where a property owner violates the property rights of others, including the public, by building on or seizing part/all of their land. Transgressors included a large number of politicians, capital holders, real-estate developers and religious institutions alike (see chapter 5). The report also affirms that only around 18% (i.e. 40km out of 225km) of the Lebanese baher remains open to the public (Bou Aoun, 2018). Interestingly, a ministry worker affirmed that small violators get punished and have their encroachments forcibly removed, while large violators act with impunity (LBC News, 2014).

Legally speaking, there are three types of land ownership in Lebanon: private, public and *awkaf*. Private land and property may be owned individually or collectively and must be registered to ensure the full protection of state law. Public land is comprised of two categories: state public property and state private property. The former concerns property that is destined by nature for public use; this includes seashores, roads, parks, etc. State private property, on the other hand, concerns land that is not destined by its nature for public use, such as military bases. Public land can either belong to the state, represented by the Ministry of Finance, or to municipalities. Finally, *awkaf* is understood as religious endowment land. This includes land that has been entrusted to a religious organization, often for a specific social purpose (eg. school), or more generally for charitable purposes (UNHCR & UN-Habitat, 2014: 20). Lebanon's coastline is both privately, publicly and *awkaf* owned, depending on the specific plot of land in question. All types of land

ownership have to abide by the same zoning codes affecting seafront properties, though the degree of prohibition on construction differs from one zone to another. Several laws, decrees, and planning guidelines have been put in place in order to dictate how seafront properties are to be managed and developed (Dictaphone Group, 2013; Bou Aoun, 2018; Nahnoo, 2022); however, there exists flagrant contradictions within baher legislation, with certain laws advocating for uninterrupted access, whilst others facilitating the space's privatisation.

- Decree⁵ No. 144 (issued in 1925) categorises the Public Maritime Domain, which is defined to include the furthest high-water point on the coast and sand/pebble/rocky beaches, as inalienable. It cannot be sold or owned over time. Any land use granted by the state is by law temporary, revocable, chargeable, and should be undertaken only in exceptional cases.
- Beirut Master Plan (issued in 1954) strictly prohibits construction along the coast within the city's zones 9 and 10.
- Decree No. 4810 (issued in 1966) amended the law pertaining to the Public Maritime Domain. It enables a private plot's exploitation on condition that the government approves the nature of the proposed project, and that it is situated within tourism and industrial zones. License seekers should own a property neighbouring the maritime public domain they wish to occupy, with the intended area for land use being at best twice as big as the private adjacent property. However, related activity should not hinder shoreline continuity and must respect the integrity of the coast, with spaces needing to be kept open for the public.
- Decree No. 4811 (issued in 1966) divides Beirut's zone 10 into six sub-sections. It now allows for construction in certain sections, with building now only prohibited in sections 3, 5, as well as on parts of the coast situated in section 6.
- Decree No. 1300 (issued in 1978) amends certain provisions in decree No. 4810, namely by allowing the occupancy of the public maritime domain and territorial waters by license seekers who do not own any adjacent private plots.
- Decree No. 3543 (issued in 1980) amends certain provisions in decree No. 4810, namely by allowing legal occupancy on the entirety of the coast, and not only in zones classified as touristic or industrial.
- Decree No. 4918 (issued in 1982) amends certain provisions in decree No. 4811, namely by obligating license seekers to dedicate 25% of their intended occupancy for public use (i.e. as a public space).
- Legislative decree No. 144 (issued in 1983) aims to settle encroachment violations affecting the public maritime domains [despite settlement being proposed, it was never implemented].

⁵ Legislative powers are granted to the Lebanese Government for a determined period of time in order to allow it to issue a decree. A decree has the same weight as a text of law issued by/from the legislative branch.

- Decree No. 169 (issued in 1989) amends certain provisions in decree No. 4811, namely by waving the need for license seekers to dedicate 25% of their intended occupancy area for public use [this was not published in the official gazette].
- Law⁶ No. 402 (issued in 1995) allows for the doubling of the exploitation factor for all plots with a surface area above 20,000 m². [This law was set in place in order to encourage post-war reconstruction, and incentivise private investments. Although Law No. 402 was meant to be temporary, lasting for a 5-year period, it is continuously being renewed by politicians]
- Environment Law No. 444 (issued in 2002) establishes free and open access to the seashore as a right of every Lebanese citizen. It prohibits any land use that restricts access to the coastline, and reinforces the need to protect the space from pollution that may compromise its recreational value, marine life, and water quality.

After reviewing the above timeline, one may evidently become perplexed at the baher's legislative inconsistencies, with earlier decrees and master plans vying to protect the integrity of the coast, whilst later regulations facilitated private sector investments, whereas recent laws sought to reemphasise the public nature of the baher. Clearly there is a demonstrable lack of alignment for the baher's use and development, be it temporally (i.e. in terms of shifting priorities throughout the years), or even across various governmental factions enacting these legislations (e.g. municipalities, ministries, the parliament, etc.). In order to better unpack the evolution of the baher's legal framework, I first contextualise it within wider socio-economic and political transformations occurring within Lebanon. In fact, baher legislation is a mere symptom of wider societal dynamics, with resulting manifestations being spatialised along the country's coastline. To elucidate this, I examine four distinct eras within Lebanon's history: the French mandate, the early Lebanese republic, the civil war, and post-war reconstruction; with a concerted effort to detail their related impact on the baher's production.

Pre-French mandate, certain spaces were deemed as masha'a – an Arabic term denoting communal land use, most closely related to the 'commons' or rather shared spaces. Mona Fawwaz, Professor in Urban Studies and Planning at the American University of Beirut, explains:

⁶ The source of the Law is the Legislative branch

“...masha’a, a word that is very difficult to use because it has 70 meanings. It is the shared common of the town. It belongs to the town, and you are part of the town, so it also belongs to you” [Interview, 22/09/2015]. However, the French mandate brought efforts to undertake a national land registry, with masha’a not being a permissible ownership designation. To this end, Abir Saksouk-Sasso, a member of the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, asserts: “[the French] started giving away seaside plots to families of influence and money, so that the latter will support them and the mandate” [Interview, 13/09/2015]. As a result, historically owned masha’a and family lands were transformed into private plots and attributed individual ownership (Dictaphone Group, 2013). That being said, public maritime domain protections were also put in place, with Decree no. 144 being the pre-eminent example.

The establishment of the early Lebanese republic brought with it the nation’s first master plans, along with their associated zoning codes (Saksouk-Sasso and Bekdache, 2015). For example, Beirut’s 1954 master plan deemed zone 10 non aedificandi (Latin for ‘non-construction’), inclusive of privately-owned seaside plots. Tanya El Khoury, Dictaphone Group co-founder, explains “there were a lot of lands on the sea that were owned by families... [privatisation] was not a problem. You could have private land, but follow certain zoning regulations that state how you cannot close access to the sea” [Interview, 30/09/2015]. However, this period was also characterised by a migration of Lebanon’s economic hub, away from the mountains and towards the coast. This is best evidenced by a strategic pivot of the nation’s economic policy towards the service industry, with seaside tourism being a notable pillar. In fact, the development of the baher as a place for bourgeois leisure in Beirut has been traced to the mid-twentieth century (Hazbun, 2010; Khalili, 2016). Ms. Saksouk-Sasso elaborates: “...Beirut started being promoted as a main international sea-side tourism destination. In the 60s numerous laws were established, which somehow contradicted early 1920s laws, but with the aim of encouraging investment along the coast” [Interview, 13/09/2015]. As such, legislative amendments in the 1960s facilitated private

sector investment within the baher, with decree no. 4811 hollowing out Beirut master plan zoning laws, and enabling building in certain sections of Beirut's zone 10.

The chaotic environment of the Lebanese civil war (i.e. between 1975 and 1990) initiated a period of widespread encroachment and governmental mismanagement (Dictaphone Group, 2013). Ms. Saksouk-Sasso affirms:

“Nine years after the passing of these [1960s] laws the civil war erupted in Lebanon. This is a phase of total illegality. Political parties/militias started making their money from the coast, because they have the power to control spaces, build on them, make resorts, and have people pay to get access. The beach resort became an economic activity for militias in the war... People got divided into areas, and a person that used to live in Dawra and used to go to Dalieh stopped going” [Interview, 13/09/2015]

Ms. Saksouk-Sasso's testimony points to a state of lawlessness, where political parties and militias took over the baher and deployed it as an economic engine. Moreover, beachgoers' relationships with certain spaces were severed given shifting residential patterns and hindered mobility stemming from security concerns. Finally, the civil war's chaos enabled a mushrooming of legislation, 'exceptional' decrees and political exemptions that accelerated encroachments across the nation's baher. This is best evidenced by Mövenpick Hotel's Beirut zone 10 plot purchase and construction (Dictaphone Group, 2013).

The final era within the baher's privatisation is Lebanon's post-war reconstruction, which commenced in 1990 and describes the present environment enveloping the nation. Lebanon's redevelopment was guided by a neoliberal ideology where “so-called traditional Lebanese laissez-faire is an actively present public actor reshaping the national regulatory framework by creating new agencies, passing new regulations, and enabling private actors to take charge of the planning of the city” (Krijnen and Fawaz, 2010, p. 124). This implicated a de facto legalisation of pre-war and civil-war baher encroachments, mirroring Lebanon's wider political inability to address war-

time infringements. Furthermore, legislation, such as Law no. 402, seemed to favour large-scale real-estate developers; with special privileges being bestowed to owners of sizeable baher plots (e.g. doubling the exploitation factor). This indicates a tendency to shape legislation in favour of capital holders, with political and economic elites being one in the same in Lebanon. In fact, a 1997 report,⁷ commissioned by the World Bank and the Lebanese Government, found that 81% of the sea front property between Jounieh bay and Beirut International Airport, approximately 51 kilometres in length, was owned by capital holders – some of whom hold political office (The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, n.d.).

2.4 Conclusion

Lebanon is a (post)conflict nation with a highly fractured population, be it along sectarian, national, and/or economic lines. Its political system of choice, confessionalism, perpetuates a static power-sharing arrangement, that crystallises religious divisions and societal fragmentation. This culminated in a fifteen-year civil war (1975 – 1990), with over 150,000 casualties. Unfortunately, reconciliation has never been truly achieved, largely to a state-led policy of amnesia, with war criminals transitioning themselves into the country's post-war ruling political class. Lebanon's turbulent history implicated shifting residential patterns, with mixed neighbourhoods being replaced by monolithic sectarian enclaves. The nation's resulting divisions manifest themselves through a variety of platforms, of which public space constitutes an important and revealing example. In fact, inhabitants have been dissuaded from frequenting most public spaces as a result of the country's fragmentation, often opting instead to limit themselves to communal spaces within their relative vicinity. Moreover, public spaces straddling the boundaries of different communities became 'buffer zones' along existing lines of separation. Horsh Al Snawbar is a

⁷ The report was undertaken by ECODIT, an international advisory office, and the French Institut d'Aménagement Urbain de la Région d'Ile de France (IAURIF). See: <http://www.ecodit.com/ProjectDetails/?contId=5337>

pertinent example, with Beirut's largest park closed-off for twenty years following the end of the civil war. Furthermore, post-war urban planning policies prioritised speculative property development across public spaces. Downtown Beirut is a notable case study for neoliberal redevelopment and reconstruction, with observable themes including: the eviction of residents, the valorisation of high-end consumerist spaces, the closure of public spaces (e.g. Nejme Square), as well as the sanitisation and neutralisation of historic cultural spaces (e.g. Martyr's Square). All of which was facilitated via an entanglement of political and economic interests.

The transformation of Lebanon's public spaces is particularly evident when examining the baher, with abovementioned sectarian sensitivities, national divisions, civil-war era lawlessness, and neoliberal planning policies spilling onto the space. As a result, Lebanon's baher is marked by pervasive privatisation and encroachment, with only a fifth of the coast being truly open to the public; as well as unhygienic and derelict conditions plaguing the few remaining public beaches. Upon examining the legal framework enveloping the baher, one concludes a discernible contradiction between existing laws, decree, and planning initiatives. This contradiction further cements the baher's (un)public designation, with private/public demarcation lines being progressively redrawn in a manner that reflects the evolution of wider societal dynamics. That being said, public space transformations have been proven to be bidirectional in nature, with activism playing a major role in the Horsh's reopening, the shaping of public discourse against Solidere (e.g. 'Stop Solidere' sign erected on St George's Bay Hotel), and the reclaiming of Beirut's Downtown during the October 17 revolution.

The abovementioned themes will be critically dissected across this thesis' upcoming empirical chapters. I explore how the baher is rendered (un)public through three interconnected takes: first, by examining presiding baher governance, with an emphasis on the disconnect between stated governmental ambitions and on-the-ground 'stubborn realities'; second, by examining the nexus

between identity politics, as informed by competing interpretations of ‘acceptable public’, as well as related identity inspired exclusionary territorial practices within Lebanon’s private beach venues; and third, I explore the baher as an arena for social and political action, where civil society efforts are calling for the ‘right to the baher’. In order to achieve this, I will first ground the discussion within academic literature on liminality, which constitutes a connecting conceptual thread that weaves together my empirical chapters.

3 | Liminality, a Conceptual Framing for Exploring the Production of the Baher

3.1 Introduction

This research primarily deals with the production of (un)public space within the context of the Lebanese baher. As I set out in the previous chapter, the Lebanese baher specifically, Lebanese public spaces more generally, and Lebanon – as a (post)conflict nation – are in perpetual transformation, relegated to a limbo-like state in-between contrasting designations, with a clear hybrid and ambiguous character. As a result, I deploy liminality as a conceptual lens for exploring the production of the baher as an (un)public space. It must be noted, however, that liminality is a concept and not a theory (Wood, 2015). In fact, liminality is often deployed by geographers as an added layer of analysis to existing theory (e.g. the production of space), since it generates additional nuance by focusing on: periods of transformation; practices of innovation and creativity; and states of ambivalence, as noted by contradictory possibilities (McConnell, 2017). Lefebvre’s production of space triad has been noted as “the most widely applied framework for scholars who investigate liminal space as socially constructed and subjectively experienced” (Liu and Fan, 2022, n.p.). By viewing liminal experiences through a space’s physical (i.e. perceived), mental (i.e. conceived), and social (i.e. lived) dimensions, space is thereby transformed from a passive medium, to instead becoming an active component within the liminal process. By drawing attention to states of ambiguity that lie “betwixt and between all the recognised fixed points in space-time of structural classification” (Turner, 1967, p. 97), liminality comprises an ideal vantage point into the production of the baher as (un)public space. Accordingly, I leverage liminality to unpack how the baher straddles public and private designations, along with the wide-ranging political and social possibilities emanating from this oscillating fluidity.

‘Liminality’ is linguistically attributed to two-word origins: limen and limes. ‘Limen’ signifies a “stone placed at the threshold of a door that physically had to be mounted to cross from one space

to the other” (Szakolczai 2015, p.23), while ‘limes’ denotes a frontier and/or boundary, which originally referred to the Roman empire’s northern border – i.e. separating the civilised world and the barbarian ‘other’ (Balduk, 2008). Liminality was first coined in 1909 by French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, but is today experiencing a revival (Thomassen, 2012). Over the past century, the concept has expanded to an ever-increasing number of disciplines (Banfield, 2022), and has even transcended the confines of academia as “both popular culture and the social sciences have, in recent years, been entranced with the concept of liminality, with it being invoked to describe situations from natural disasters to transgender identities, cyborgs to airports and hotels” (McConnell, 2017, p. 141). Some have even labelled it a ‘master concept’ (Horvath et al., 2015) that explores a range of socio-spatial and temporal transformations, be it past or present.

With this in mind, this chapter establishes the foundations for addressing this research’s broader aims, and subsequently forges a dialogue between literature on the production of space and liminality in upcoming chapters. In order to achieve this, I first unpack liminality’s conceptual evolution, beginning with its anthropological roots, and how the concept has widened over time as it gained popularity across social science disciplines. I then examine geographic engagements with liminality, and uncover varied approaches by tourism and political geography scholars. Finally, I demonstrate liminality’s relevance to the baher, by framing the beach as quintessential liminal space.

3.2 Liminality’s Conceptual Evolution

Liminality first emerged within anthropology, through Arnold van Gennep’s pivotal work ‘*Les rites de passage*’ (1909). In his study of rites of passage, or rather ceremonial acts connected to different phases of life (e.g. birth, puberty), van Gennep remarked how individuals undergoing these rites transition from one social status to another. This transformation is tripartite in nature, with the

phases including: rites of separation, transition rites (i.e. liminality), and rites of incorporation (van Gennep, 1960). The first phase occurs when the initiate, or rather the individual undergoing the rite, is separated and stripped from their previous social identity. This is then followed by a middle stage, a liminal period, where the initiate is neither the identity that they previously held, nor the identity that they will become, but also both at the same time. They are “living in an in-between state of indeterminacy and ambiguity at the interstices of social structure where identity is destabilised and open to reconfiguration in novel and potentially revolutionary ways” (Banfield, 2022, p.611). The final phase is that of reaggregation, where the initiate is re-assimilated into society with their new status, and elevated “to a higher plane, fed by their personal journey and the liminal encounter” (Bristow and Jenkins, 2020). To van Gennep, liminality encapsulates four key elements (Balduk, 2008): it is irreversible, for an initiate cannot revert back to boyhood after becoming a man; it is temporary, or rather the liminal period is meant to end following the completion of the rite; it is not a choice, for these rites are normally forced upon individuals by the wider community; and finally “the passage from one social position to another is identified with a territorial passage, such as the entrance into a village or a house, the movement from one room to another, or the crossing of streets and squares” (van Gennep, 1960, p. 192). This territorial passage incorporates both of liminality’s linguistic origins, for it entails crossing a threshold (i.e. limen) that is deemed as a neutral territory – i.e. a frontier or boundary (i.e. limes). Accordingly, in the chapters that follow I examine the extent to which van Gennep’s stated four elements (i.e. irreversible, temporary, involuntary, and territorially negotiated) are upheld through liminal experiences along the Lebanese baher, with emphasis on discerning examples that may diverge from this framework and thus widen our understanding of liminality.

Liminality did not receive significant scholarly attention until *Les rites de passage* was translated into English in 1960. Victor Turner, a British anthropologist, stumbled upon the book in the summer of 1963. According to Thomassen, Turner was himself in an in-between liminal state: “having

resigned from Manchester and sold his house, but still waiting for his US visa, which was delayed because of his refusal to undertake armed military service during the Second World War” (2012, p. 23). Turner went on to develop the notion of liminality throughout the 1960s, where he framed it as a ‘place of habitation’ that is “neither here nor there, betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). He viewed ‘liminal personae’ as ambiguous and evading classification. During the liminal period, these ‘threshold people’ do not belong to the society that they were previously part of, and may thus be subsequently be kept at arm’s length, be it literally and/or metaphorically, and subsequently othered (Mason, 2020). This endows them with revolutionary potential to undermine societal norms, and engenders a bifurcation of reality into a normative structure and liminal anti-structure (Langman and Cangemi, 2003). For Turner, liminality can be both positive and negative, as “it is linked to “death, darkness, invisibility and lowliness, but also to sacredness and comradeship” (Turner, 1969, p. 95-96, as cited in Balduk, 2008, p.7). He frames it as a unifying shared experience, as “the liminal group is a community of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions” (Turner, 1967, p. 100- 101). Importantly, Turner argues that the liminal experiences of the Ndembu people, his ethnographic context of study, can hold parallels to modern societies. Turner frames Christian pilgrimage as a liminal experience, where pilgrims remove themselves from mundane daily structures, thus fostering within them a sense of equality and *communitas*⁸ (Turner and Turner, 1978). Moreover, Turner posits that liminal experiences have largely been replaced by liminoid moments in more industrialized and consumerist societies, which predominantly appear through art and leisure activities (Turner, 1982 and 1983). Liminoid experiences are “optional and do not involve a resolution of a personal crisis or a change of status. The liminoid is a break from normality, a playful as-if experience, but loses the key feature of liminality: transition” (Thomassen, 2015, p.28). Accordingly, my research will examine the extent

⁸ *Communitas* is a state of heightened solidarity emanating from liminal experiences, and is defined by equality and an unshackling from society’s normative structures

to which Turner's claim, of liminality being replaced by liminoid moments in more industrialized and consumerist societies, holds true within the case of the Lebanese baher. Given how Turner's work has been critiqued as apolitical in scope and limited in scale (McConnell, 2017), my research explores how the baher's politically charged context may reframe our understanding of liminality as a socio-spatial process in modernity.

Bjørn Thomassen (2012, 2015), a Danish anthropologist and social scientist, has cautioned against simply following Turner. Instead, he has sought to translate the concept across a range of modern processes. To Thomassen (2015), liminality constitutes a prism for exploring socio-political and cultural transformations. Interestingly, Thomassen (2012) deemed liminality to be a socio-temporal and spatial process, that acts on all three elements across various scales. Socially, liminality may implicate three different types of subjects: single individuals, social groups (e.g. minorities), or even whole societies (Thomassen, 2009). Temporally, liminality may manifest during moments (e.g. sudden events), periods (e.g. weeks, months, or possibly years), or epochs (e.g. decades, generations, arguably even centuries). Spatially, liminality may materialise in specific places (e.g. acute thresholds, like the doorway to a house), areas (e.g. hospitals, border zones between two nations), or even larger regions. By building on Thomassen's work, I deploy his tripartite framework in an effort to examine the production of the baher as an (un)public space, with particular attention paid to associated socio-temporal and spatial processes of transformation – i.e. affecting both the space and its users. Moreover, Thomassen (2012) widens liminality's scope beyond socio-cultural and religious dimensions (e.g. puberty, divorce, monkhood), to also incorporate political (e.g. wars, revolutions, invasions), environmental (e.g. natural disasters), and even bacterial (e.g. the plague) elements.

Liminality has thus undergone a significant evolution over the past century, away from its van Gennep-ian roots, to instead denote a socio-temporal and spatial process of transformation across

a myriad of ever-increasing experiences. This begs the question: how was liminality rendered so malleable, with scholarship vastly expanding its scope, definition, and usage over the years? This evolution coincided with an academic paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism; which comprises a useful framing for this research, especially given my chosen constructivist methodological approach (see chapter 4). Liminality was first conceived in 1909, at a time when the prevailing belief was that the world is knowable, with overarching truths and meaning being attainable (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). Modernism implies that society and life can be rationalised, with related segments and phases being neatly categorised. Liminality, which initially referred to a state of in-betweenness during a rite of passage, thus comprised a category in itself. That being said, postmodernism forgoes the notion of absolute truth, and instead places more weight on its varying interpretations (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). As such, categories are rendered open to interpretation, with “several authors argu[ing] that life has become more and more complex and fragmented, with overlapping phases, daily routines and roles – or categories; together, this makes it hard to determine where or when a social role, phase or other ‘category’ really is... and what this in-between-ness consists of” (Balduk, 2008, p.4). This mushrooming of interpretations around life’s multiple stages and phases, has subsequently led liminality to be deployed across an ever-growing set of experiences. Preston-Whyte (2004) notes how liminality has been deployed across a widening range of cultural and social contexts. He draws a parallel with the increasing fragmentation of temporal markers, as “each event is experienced differently in accordance with social and cultural demands or by the imagination of individuals. For example, while some may be conditioned to the choice of midnight as a boundary between days, for others dusk may be a more meaningful borderline time to relax and contemplate this transition” (Preston-Whyte, 2004, p. 350). Accordingly, I vie to unpack liminality’s varying interpretations along the Lebanese baher, from quasi-sacred cultural practices (e.g. Job’s Wednesday, see chapter 5), to identity politics-inspired othering experiences within private beaches (see chapter 6), to modalities of resistance that sow the seeds for political revolution (see chapter 7). Through this engagement, I explore

liminality within the baher across various takes, with derived knowledge subsequently facilitating a more holistic understanding of how the baher is produced as an (un)public space.

Furthermore, liminality's growing popularity across the social sciences (Meethan, 2012), has in turn implicated a reshaping of its scope, in a manner that better serves the needs of the various disciplines. Engagement with liminality now spans a wide array of fields and topics, including: gender studies, via an exploration into transgender identities (Wilson, 2002); organisational studies, through an examination of management consulting (Sturdy et al. 2006) and gossip (Liu and Fan, 2022); health studies, with breastfeeding deemed a liminal act (Mahon-Daly and Andrews 2003); international relations, with Palestinian refugees walking a tight rope between international law and global politics (Mason, 2020); architecture and urban planning, as Beirut's Sunday market is positioned as an in-between zone bridging multiple socio-political entities (Mady, 2022); tourism studies, with hotels playing host to carnivalesque and transgressive behaviours (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006), while airports imbue passengers with a sense of *communitas* (Huang et al., 2018). Liminality has little to do nowadays with its original formulation, and is increasingly becoming an umbrella term (Banfield, 2022) denoting general states of ambiguity, often associated with experiences of transition or transformation (Meethan, 2012). Accordingly, I define liminality as a process of socio-temporal and spatial transformation (Thomassen, 2015), in which a "person, place, or thing" (McConnell and Dittmer, 2018, p. 142) straddle(s) a threshold between different states of being. Through this, I engage with liminality as a 'process' rather than a 'phase' (van Gennep, 1960), and emphasise the need for flexibility when engaging with its varying scales (Thomassen, 2012) – i.e. be it brief when viewed at the micro-level (e.g. individuals, moments, specific places), or a more protracted and gradual transformation when expanding our frame of analysis (e.g. groups/societies, periods/epochs, areas/regions).

3.3 Geographic Engagements with Liminality

Liminality is inherently a spatial process, with van Gennep even dedicating a chapter to ‘territorial passage’, where geographic transitions are imbedded within socio-cultural transformations. The liminal period is instigated by confronting a physical boundary that must be crossed (Thomassen, 2012), with van Gennep remarking “a rite of spatial passage has become a rite of spiritual passage” (1960: 22). Engagement with liminality is underpinned by spatiality (Bristow and Jenkins, 2020), with Andrews and Roberts (2012) claiming that without its spatio-temporal links, liminality becomes a catch-all phrase to explain the unexplainable. Moreover, Banfield (2022) proposes that liminality may also encompass multiple spatialities, which can be nested, staggered, scattered and/or mobile. However, despite this evident spatial connotation, scholarship has often overlooked liminality’s spatial dimension (McConnell, 2017), and instead privileged its temporal dimension (Thomassen, 2012; Bristow and Jenkins, 2020; and Trimbach, 2022). As a result, “concern has been articulated about the need to engage more rigorously with space, attending to liminality’s inherent spatial qualities, the spatial dynamics that underpin it, and the material and symbolic geographies that surround it and are afforded by it” (Banfield, 2022, p. 610). This is precisely the gap that geographers – inclusive this research – have targeted, with related scholarship contributing to liminality through an intrinsically spatial lens (Shortt, 2015).

Liminality first gained importance in human geography through Rob Shields’ pioneering works: ‘The system of pleasure’ (1990) and ‘Places on the margin’ (1991). Shields explores places characterised by the blurring of societal orderings and the loss of social bearings, and examines them as “the setting for a life-changing transition” (Shields, 1990, p. 48). He was inspired by Turner’s work on Christian pilgrimage, where liminal experiences commence with the withdrawal from the territories of everyday life (Turner and Turner, 1978), and uses a similar vantage point in his study of spatially and socially marginal places – namely Brighton’s seashore. Shields argues

liminality offers a poignant basis to understand moments of in-between-ness where loss of social classifications occurs, and illustrates this through the quasi-religious/spiritual act of bathing in the sea, the mixing of social classes during holidays, and a ‘carnavalesque’ atmosphere where loss of inhibitions occurs. Here, liminality is produced through the mixing of classes, and the emergence of practices and beliefs defying normative societal structures – i.e. “a mark of resistant bodies which at least temporarily escape or exceed moral propriety” (Shields, 1991, p. 94). Shields emphasises liminality’s spatial dimension, and highlights how “spatial movement concretises the transition from the routinised schedules of workdays to the less routinised, cyclical temporality of annual holidays” (Shields. 1991, p. 86; as cited in Azaryahu, 2005). Although Shields’ writings mark an important step for geographic engagement with liminality, his conceptual take largely focuses on experiences related to loss of social classification. However, this research inquires whether other forms of liminal transformations exist, which diverge from the carnivalesque emancipation of Brighton’s beach, to instead shackle implicated personae with society’s oppressive normative structures. This reframing allows us to interrogate liminality as a bidirectional transformational process, with both liberation and subjugation being possible experiences, depending on the specific ‘micro-scaled dynamics’ (McConnell and Dittmer, 2018) that instigate this liminal transformation.

Tourism geography scholars have built on Shields’ foundational work, and deployed liminality as a prism for analysing socio-spatial and temporal processes within tourism experiences, places, and landscapes (Bristow and Jenkins, 2020). Liminality constitutes a poignant conceptual framing for tourism, given how tourists temporarily leave their normal routines, and travel across space and time in search of novel destinations and experiences. Meethan (2012) frames tourism destinations as places of in-betweenness, where ludic behaviour overturns the established routines of daily life. Tourists exude a sense of anonymity, which enables them to “subvert social norm, challenge convention and seek adventures” (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006, p. 762). These liminal experiences

are synonymous with “a wide range of social practices and radical behaviours that are often socially condemned at home and that otherwise would be suppressed” (Monterrubio, 2013, p. 150). Tourism may thus suspend socio-cultural norms, and nurture a resulting sense of escape, ambiguity, transformation and freedom (Trimbach, 2022). Pritchard and Morgan (2006) argue hotels are “shaped by the same discourses of anonymity, romance and adventure” (2006, p. 764) as Shields’ liminal seaside. Hotels host transgressive behaviours that echo Brighton’s reckless enjoyment, where “guests can ‘disappear’ and where the normal social conventions can be challenged and flouted” (ibid.). As a result, liminality offers a “theoretical premise to more fully understand how tourism can be used to transform the tourist” (Bristow and Jenkins, 2020, p. 227).

Tourism geographers’ engagement with liminality is particularly relevant for this research, given how its empirical scope (i.e. the Lebanese baher) comprises a tourism landscape par excellence. However, my research builds on tourism geography scholarship by adopting a different starting point though my engagement with liminality along Lebanese beaches. Existing scholarship often deploys anonymity as a lens of analysis, however I ask what would happen should we explore liminal experiences through the prism of encounter? Here, liminality is less connected with transgressive voyeuristic tourism experiences, and more linked to instances where beachgoer(s) identities – be it individual or communal – are being discerned, constructed and negotiated. As a result, I examine the extent to which liminal experiences stemming from encounter entail a transformative process that may either generate conviviality and/or othering – again depending on the specific ‘micro-scaled dynamics’ (McConnell and Dittmer, 2018) that instigate this liminal transformation.

Liminal experiences across tourism geography scholarship are characterised by their temporary, voluntary and often times repetitive nature. These experiences are temporary, given how tourists are bound to eventually return home. After all, vacations and mountaineering expeditions must

end at some point. They are voluntary, since participants often seek out these experiences out of their own volition (e.g. a sexually-charged hotel affair). And they are repetitive, given how participants may seek to undergo these liminal experiences on multiple separate trips. It is thus evident that liminality's original formulation has been expanded, given how two of the stated three elements juxtapose traditional rite of passage experiences – i.e. which tend to be involuntary (i.e. socially-imposed) and singular in nature, with participants permanently changed (e.g. transitioning from a boy to a man). However, not all geographic engagements with liminality have abided by the abovementioned interpretations, with political geographic explorations tending to instead frame liminal experiences as protracted and overwhelmingly involuntary. Unlike tourism geography, political geography scholarship has widened the scale of analysis away from the individual (e.g. the tourist), towards social groups (e.g. refugees, in Ramadan, 2013) and even countries (e.g. Turkey, in Yanik, 2011). Given the scope of this research, both tourism geography and political geography approaches to liminality are of relevance, especially since the Lebanese baher is both a tourism destination (see chapter 6), as well as a highly politically charged site (see chapters 5 & 7). As a result, I aim to explore the breadth of liminal experiences (i.e. temporary/protracted, (in)voluntary, and repetitive/one-off) occurring within this context, with derived insights co-constituting this research's understanding on the production of the baher as an (un)public space.

When reviewing political geographers' engagement with liminality, one is able to discern a common thread cutting across related scholarship, the notion of coming to terms with prevailing power structures, with the struggle for recognition and exclusion – as opposed to the anthropological dynamic of 'liminal seclusion' – being key features. McConnell explores the liminal political subjectivities and spatialities of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, and asks "who is, and who should be, a legitimate actor in international politics" (2017, p. 139) by examining diplomatic efforts straddling the threshold of political recognition. McConnell and

Dittmer (2018) focus on the liminal politics of British Overseas Territories, with an emphasis on the transformative potential of trigger events redirecting the OT's state of political being; as demonstrated by the 1982 Argentinian invasion of the Falklands, and the 1997 volcanic eruption on Montserrat. Moreover, OT representatives have been noted to leverage their liminal status to their benefit, given how it endows them with a certain degree of diplomatic creativity and entrepreneurship. Building on McConnell and Dittmer's (2018) work, I leverage the concept of trigger events, and examine how it translates onto the baher. Accordingly, this research explores liminal experiences across various scales along the baher, thus positioning them as trigger events that redraw the boundary between public/private, inclusion/exclusion, in/out-group, (non)belonging, (il)legal, etc. In doing so, these liminal triggers shape the production of the baher as an (un)public space.

In sum, geographic scholarship has widened liminality's scope from its anthropological roots, with focus shifting from traditional rites of passages, to instead explore a range of ambiguous experiences, varying physical and metaphorical thresholds, as well as different 'in-between' subjects (Banfield, 2022). There is clearly a lack of consolidation in terms of geographic approaches to liminality, with tourism geographers framing this process as temporary, voluntary, and at times repeated; whilst political geographers position it as more protracted and externally-imposed. Despite this, some commonalities may be identified, including: a focus on uncertainty and indeterminacy; an effort to overcome binary thinking; associations forged between liminality, ambiguity, and hybridity; an emphasis on liminality's creative potential; as well as a clear spatial emphasis (Banfield, 2022). Liminality's unique focus on transformative thresholds sheds light on three hitherto neglected dynamics (McConnell 2017), including: periods of transformation; practices of innovation and creativity; and states of ambivalence, as noted by contradictory possibilities (e.g. marginalization and/or emancipation) and associated unease. However, whilst an increasing number of geographers are drawn to liminality, geographic engagement still lags behind

other cognate fields, such as international relations, anthropology, sociology with calls being made for geographers to engage more productively with it, reinvigorate related analytical attention, and attend further to its often-overlooked spatial dimensions. These are key gaps I hope to address through this research, especially given my decision to situate the discussion within the empirical context of the baher – i.e. a quintessential liminal space, and threshold between land and sea.

3.4 The Beach: A Quintessential Liminal Space

“Coasts are both littoral and liminal. Littoral means of or on the shore - especially a seashore, brushed by the tides... But they are also liminal, in-between and both land and sea, bathed by both tides and ‘run-off’, sculpted by forces of wind and waves that intersect and play upon the consequences of plate tectonics and bulldozers. Their boundaries are often vague, shifting, and contested. If not feared or tabooed, they do pose cultural, political, and survival challenges and opportunities... [they are] frontiers, places which are subject to phases of discovery and intensive exploitation and overexploitation. They are or have been places of refuge and opportunity as well... They are on the threshold, and we are led to ask, who owns them and what futures can we imagine and create for them?” (McCay, 2008, p.8)

Coasts (i.e. inclusive of beaches) are conventionally understood as quintessentially liminal spaces, with this being nicely summarised by anthropologist Bonnie McCay. The coast is an “anomalous category between sea and land, and further between nature and culture” (Azaryahu, 2005, p.120). It is a threshold joining together marine and terrestrial ecosystems, cosmic [via the moon’s influence on the tides] and earthly forces, neither fully landscape nor entirely seascape (Trimbach, 2022). It is a space where “normal social conventions need not apply” (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006, p. 764), with transformational, escapist, transitional, and creative qualities (Meethan 2012; Thomassen 2012; Leyshon 2018). It is “a perfect example of marginal, in-between spaces, zones of liminality that hold a fascination for many that few other landscape forms do” (Meethan 2012, p. 70). So much so, beaches and the nearshore have been framed as liminal across a number of academic disciplines, including: geography (Shields, 1990 and 1991; Preston-Whyte, 2004; Azaryahu, 2005; Ford and Brown, 2006; Trimbach, 2022), anthropology (McCay, 2008,

Thomassen 2012), sociology (Meethan 2012), tourism studies (Andrews, 2012; Monterrubio, 2013), history (Corbin, 1994; Walton, 2000; Booth, 2012), cultural studies (Dobson, 2007), art (Coldicutt, 2014), and even literature via Alex Garland's (1997) novel *The Beach*, where the protagonist seeks a utopian island corner of Thailand.

The beach encapsulates both origins of the word 'liminality': *limen* and *limes*. *Limen*, signifying 'threshold', accurately describes it as a gateway between land and sea, where nature is increasingly shaped by human settlement and associated exploitation. *Limes*, on the other hand, denotes a boundary or frontier, stemming from the Roman empire's northern border; with the coast acting as a "national boundary that mark[s] 'us' off from 'them'" (Meethan, 2012, p.70) – be it in the case of the UK, as Meethan theorises, or other international examples. As such, the beach's liminality emerges from both its material conditions and social significance, with a discernible parallel and interplay between both of these dimensions. I first explore how existing literature focuses on a beach's physical setting, and the manner in which this imbues the space with an innate liminal character. I then examine its liminal social arena, where beachgoer practices may be characterised as ludic, transgressive, spiritual, and at times contested. Finally, I unpack the relationship between these two dimensions, as "it is not possible to disaggregate the physical space which tourists [and other beachgoers] encounter, from the array of meaningful and dynamic practices and connections through which individuals interpret those spaces" (Thurnell-Read, 2012, p. 803).

The beach's liminal character has been linked to its physical setting as an interface 'betwixt and between' land and sea. This threshold is dynamic in nature, and "subject to a daily and seasonal rhythm of tidal movements. At low tides the beach changes and extends, another world is revealed, while at times of high tide the beach may disappear completely" (Meethan, 2012, p.70). Carson (1937) paints this perpetual motion, where lunar forces redraw the boundary separating aquatic and terrestrial realms, as a never-ending conflict for possession. Andrews (2012) notes the shifting

waves often result in material alterations to the beach itself, with debris either deposited or washed away, or even erosion of adjacent land over time. This in turn implicates the beach as being in liminal transition, where its physical setting is repeatedly reshaped and reworked by the forces of nature – be it through the tides, or more sporadically through violent tsunamis. The beach is thus in constant flux, a “zone of uncertainty that resonates with the sound of everchanging seas, a setting that is, by turns, calm, tranquil, and soothing or agitated, unruly, and frightening” (Preston-Whyte, 2004, p. 349).

This research examines the extent to which the beach is socially constructed (Monterrubio, 2013) through processes and practices that define who may use the space, as well as the type of behaviour deemed acceptable. In fact, transgressive and ludic beachgoer behaviour, defying normative societal structures, has been noted as generating liminal experiences that result in a sense of escape, freedom and emancipation. Shields (1990, 1991) notes this through his analysis of Brighton’s seaside, which evolved over time from a fishing village, to ultimately become a site of carnivalesque enjoyment that subverts dominant discourses. Moreover, the beach may also comprise a venue where inhibitions are shed, where often marginalised sexual identities and practices are articulated, where societal constraints may be momentarily unshackled. Obrador-Pons (2007) admits that beaches comprise one of the few examples in society where nakedness is so accepted. Within this vein, nudist and homoerotic acts transform the beach into “a liminal place as it turns into an unregulated space where a wide range of social practices and radical behaviours - socially condemned at home and commonly suppressed - take place” (Monterrubio, 2013, p. 151). In his seminal work, Preston-Whyte frames beaches as a cultural space that not only host difference and hybridity, but also foster “heightened sensibilities that are temporary, personal and elusive – in short, liminal spaces” (2004, p. 349). He illustrates this through four beach archetypes: the social beach, the spiritual beach, the surfing beach, and the nudist beach. To him, the beach comprises “a space where the stress of normal working lives is temporarily suspended, cultures merge,

egalitarianism flourishes, and bonds of friendship are forged” (ibid.). The beach is framed, mostly through publicly accessible examples, as an arena for community building and socialisation, where hierarchal differences are forgone, even if momentarily, as beachgoers convivially inhabit the same stretch of sand. Preston-Whyte (2004) clarifies that attention is overwhelmingly drawn to the positive aspects of liminal beach spaces, since it is precisely these features that attract beachgoers to these sites. This is also illustrated by citing Dobson’s (2007) writing on Mauritius’ public beaches, which bridge divides between the island’s multi-ethnic communities and tourist population. To Dobson, beaches comprise platforms “where multiple layers of articulations and negotiations of identity and a sense of place – by locals and tourists alike – are breached, crossed, interlinked and un-linked, where identity, tolerance and cosmopolitanism are ebbing, weaving, swaying in constant processes of liminality” (2007, p. 4).

My research builds on Preston-Whyte’s and Dobson’s writings by asking to what extent ‘positive aspects of liminal beach spaces’ lead to convivial practices along the Lebanese baher? That being said, the baher may also be as dividing as it is unifying. Burdsey (2017) demonstrates this segregating nature of beaches by exploring social and relational liminality, with minority racial or ethnic groups across English seaside communities being relegated to the margins. With this in mind, my research expands on the notion of ‘dividing’ liminal experiences, by engaging with transformational processes marked by exclusion and othering, and which subsequently unravel Lebanon’s communal fabric. As such, I aim to address two key gaps in the literature: first, a lack of scholarly engagement with ‘negative’ aspects of liminal beach spaces. Second, existing scholarship’s predominant focuses on publicly accessible beaches, with this research making a cognizant effort to focus on both public and private beach along across Lebanon’s baher. By doing so, this research asks what new insights can be derived by widening focus to these often-neglected and overlooked dimensions?

Having elaborated on liminality within beaches as emanating from both its material conditions, as well as the social experiences within the space, I now consider the relationship between these dimensions. In fact, scholarship has detailed this across three interconnected takes. First, by examining the impact of the beach's material conditions on beachgoer experiences, or rather: how does the beach shape beachgoer liminality? Second, by exploring human activity as directly affecting the beach's physical setting, or rather: how are humans inducing a liminal transformation of the space itself? Third, by drawing parallels between the beach's physical and social liminality, with emphasis on how these dimensions mirror one other. My research engages with all three takes; however, I endeavour to move beyond simply drawing a parallel between a beach's physical and social liminality, and instead explore the extent to which a direct link can be established between a space's liminal physical setting, and how this may in turn inform subsequent social liminal experiences occurring within it.

The beach's material conditions have been noted to directly affect beachgoers' liminal experiences, as the latter straddle the boundary between life and death, recreation and hazard, enjoyment and fear, based on the ever-shifting physical setting. Meethan affirms that: "every summer I hear reports of holidaymakers being rescued from the sea... In the winter a combination of high tides and high winds can quickly turn a benign environment into a dangerous and chaotic one" (2012, p. 70). This was unfortunately made apparent during my fieldwork, where I was very much disturbed to hear about the drowning of a young beachgoer at Ramlet El Bayda beach, after being carried-away by rip currents on the morning of Tuesday the 10th of July 2018. Diametrically opposed to this sense of life-threatening danger, is the belief that the baher's material conditions implicate the physical heightening of our corporeal senses through coenaesthesia (Coldicutt, 2014), as "the simple act of stepping onto the sand may be accompanied by a feeling of upliftment, a frisson of awareness, and a holistic sensation in which action and consciousness are merged at the moment of crossing into what we can call a liminal space" (Preston-Whyte, 2004, p. 349).

Czikszentmihalyi (1974) terms this experience “flow”, with it being “a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present and future.” (Czikszentmihalyi, 1974; as cited in Turner, 1982, p. 56). This “flow” transports beachgoers to a limbo-like liminal state, where the vastness of the sea and the endless expanse of the sand foster a sense of being suspended in time, a quasi-escape from the daily grind of life. This is precisely why Lencek and Bosker (1999, p. xix) proclaim: “nature’s most potent antidepressant, the beach moves us with the power of a drug, the rhythm of its tides and shifting margins reorienting our sense of space and time, its aphrodisiacal cocktail of sun and water firing our slumbering hedonism”.

Human activity has also been known to instigate a liminal transformation of the beach, with socio-political and economic decisions resulting in associated material implications. Trimbach admits “while change is an inherent aspect of [liminal] landscapes, shorelines are facing increasing human-driven pressures and change, notably coastal population growth, development, shoreline infrastructure, and climate change impacts (e.g., sea level rise)” (2022, p. 2032). Even seemingly benign and commonplace shoreline infrastructure, such as seawalls, have been noted to result in the loss of marine habitat, and long-term coastal erosion (Gittman et al. 2015). As such, Keegan (2020, n.p.) affirms “the world’s coastlines are turning to concrete, at a huge cost to wildlife and the climate”. As a result, the coast is undergoing a liminal transformation, away from a natural landscape, and increasingly toward a man-made built environment.

Finally, scholars have also drawn parallels between the baher’s physical and social liminality, though this has largely been limited to how these dimensions mirror one another, rather than illustrating a direct causal relationship between them – i.e. a gap that I aim to address. Coldicutt (2014) cites the example of the annual schoolies ritual, a contemporary rite of passage where

Australian students submerge themselves into the sea at the end of an academic school year. He connects the unpredictable conditions located within the littoral, with the social dynamics of this cultural performance: “if the beach is described in terms of its ever-changing conditions; where calm and tranquil can turn wild and unpredictable... it is possible to presume emotional parallels experienced by many teenagers during the liminal time of pre-adulthood” (Coldicutt, 2014, p. 2). Moreover, McCay (2008) describes how the coast’s shifting material conditions, echo changing ownership claims over the space – both of which are in liminal transition, as beach sites are materially altered, and associated ownership claims are (re)negotiated. To demonstrate this, McCay notes the example of insurance companies in the United States, who have widened the ‘coastal area’ – i.e. normally a zone with uninsurable risk and danger – from 1000 feet to one mile in certain cases (Fleishman 2007, as cited in McCay, 2008). This in turn shifts the burden away from the private sector towards the public domain. Moreover, McCay cites the example of New Jersey’s coastal zone, which can either extend towards the first road inland in heavily industrialized area, or at times reach twenty-four miles inland in some instances. Coastal property rights are thus in constant flux, mirroring the ebb and flow of the waves. Accordingly, what strikes me most from Coldicutt and McCay’s work is the need for scholars to be attuned to the intricate reverberations of liminal transformations, which often occur across various scales – be it spatial, social, temporal, emotional, legal, political, etc. Liminality, in this view, can almost be equated to a symphony’s song, with various parts of the orchestra moving in sync, albeit by producing their very own distinct ‘liminal’ sounds.

3.5 Conclusion

Liminality has seen a progressive conceptual widening from its original anthropological roots. van Gennep (1960) first conceived it as a middle stage during a rite of passage, where initiates are neither the identity that they previously held, nor the identity that they will become, but also both

at the same time. Turner (1967) developed the notion to become a place of habitation, extending it beyond its original ethnographic tribal context, and establishing connections with modern consumerist and industrial societies. Thomassen (2012, 2015) broadened liminality's conceptual engagement even further, and positioned it as a socio-temporal and spatial process that acts on all three elements across various scales. Through this, liminality's scope transcended socio-cultural and religious contexts, to also serve as a prism of analysis for other forms of transformation – be it political, environmental, etc. As a result of its ever-increasing malleability, liminality has gained popularity across a range of social sciences disciplines, to even become labelled as a 'master concept' (Horvath et al., 2015). Accordingly, liminality garnered the interest of geographers, who emphasised its often overlooked spatial dimension(s). Two geographic schools of thought have emerged, with tourism geographers framing liminality as temporary, voluntary and even repetitive; whilst political geographic explorations examined it as overwhelmingly protracted and involuntary.

The beach – and by extension the baher – constitutes a quintessential liminal space, whether it is through its sense of timelessness, the subversion of prevailing discourses and normative societal structures via transgressive beachgoer behaviour, the fostering of convivial community-generating experiences, or even as a literal threshold between land and sea (Meethan 2012; Thomassen 2012; Andrews, 2012; Trimbach, 2022). By viewing liminal experiences through the baher's physical (i.e. perceived), mental (i.e. conceived), and social (i.e. lived) dimensions, this space is transformed from a passive medium, to instead becoming an active component within the liminal process. In forging a dialogue between the 'production of space' as a theory, and liminality as a concept, I aim to generate a richer and more nuanced understanding of socio-cultural, political, economic, and environmental transformations occurring within the baher. With this in mind, I explore the breadth of liminal experiences (i.e. be it temporary/protracted, (in)voluntary, and repetitive/one-off) occurring within the baher, with derived insights informing of its production as an (un)public space. That being said, "the discussion on beaches as liminal spaces needs to be deepened. The

dominance of a Western perspective... coupled with a paucity of empirical exploration of the nature of the symbolism of these threshold spaces, needs to be addressed” (Preston-Whyte, 2004, p. 356). Accordingly, by situating discussion within the Lebanese baher, and emphasising liminality’s multiple articulations within this space, this research addresses a needed gap within existing scholarship. Having established this thesis’ theoretical foundations through a review of liminality literature, I now move onto outlining this research’s chosen methodological approach, and through this forge a dialogue between conceptual and empirical components across remaining chapters.

4 | Exploring the Baherscape Through a Qualitative Collective Case Study Approach

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the methodological foundations for this research. I do this by detailing how my research design was informed by a collective case study approach and employed a range of qualitative research methods. Accordingly, I first ground the discussion within case study academic literature, and subsequently elaborate on how this was put into practice through three field locations. Each location provides a specific lens for examining the Lebanese baher, and when brought together they co-produce a better understanding of the wider societal dynamics occurring within and beyond the baher. Following this, I focus on the baherscape, this thesis' conceptual framework. I discuss the existence of a synergetic dynamic, where this framework not only constitutes an anchor for my research throughout its varying stages, but was also progressively focused and honed as fieldwork data collection and analysis were undertaken. I then discuss the methods I employed, best exemplified as a triangulation of mixed qualitative approaches, with a particular emphasis on interviews, (auto)ethnography, and discourse analysis of secondary data sources. Finally, I close with a discussion on ethical considerations, with particular attention being paid to how my positionality both shaped and was shaped by my fieldwork experiences, and how this subsequently relegated me to a liminal state, 'betwixt and between' academic and beachgoer.

4.2 Research Design: A Qualitative Collective Case Study Approach

Case study research is an increasingly popular qualitative approach across a range of academic disciplines (Thomas, 2011). According to Cresswell, it “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information . . . and reports a case description and case themes” (2013, p. 97). It unpacks a case's complexity (Stake, 1995), by uncovering what is common

and/or particular about this unit of analysis (i.e. the case), with in-depth engagement with its enveloping context (e.g. physical setting, historical framing, socio-political and economic considerations, etc.) (Stake, 1998). Yin (2003) positions case study research as best befitting “how” and “why” questions, with an emphasis on uncovering the contextual conditions behind the phenomenon under examination – especially if the boundaries separating the context from the phenomenon are unclear. There exist two main camps within qualitative case study research: Robert Yin’s (2003) post-positivist school of thought, and Robert Stake’s (1995) social constructivist approach. My chosen case study framing, along with the associated methods of data collection and analysis, aligns more with the latter.

Constructivists advance truth as relative and deeply rooted in an individual’s perspective and experience. To them, reality is socially constructed (Searle, 1995), with case studies subsequently focusing on meanings that emerge through partnerships between researchers and participants (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). Accordingly, participants are empowered to share their stories, which inform their views of reality, and by association their respective experiences and actions (Baxter and Jack, 2008). This is normally relayed by the researcher through vignettes and thick description; ultimately in an effort to evoke within the reader a sense of vicarious experience, as if they had visited the case at the time of research. As a result, knowledge is socially constructed across multiple touchpoints: firstly, through participants’ narratives; secondly through the researcher’s personal interaction with the case; and finally, through the reader’s engagement with its findings (Stake, 1995). Stake positions qualitative case study researchers as interpreters of truth(s), or rather gatherers of varying interpretations, with “multiple perspectives or views of the case that need to be represented, but there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view” (1995, p. 108).

The case (i.e. the unit of analysis for qualitative case study research) encapsulates a phenomenon within a bounded context (Miles and Huberman, 1994). According to Stake (1995), three main

types of cases exist: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. As Baxter and Jack argue, researchers opt for an intrinsic case “when the intent is to better understand the case... because in all its particularity and ordinariness the case itself is of interest” (2008, p. 548). Instrumental cases, on the other hand, widen the frame of analysis beyond a particular situation, with focus shifting towards a wider issue(s) or phenomenon(s) – often times in an effort to refine theory (Hyett et al., 2014). The case, in this approach, is of secondary interest relative to the object of pursuit; it is a medium for exploration that facilitates a scholar’s understanding of a wider theme of interest. Stake best elaborates on this distinction by stating: “for intrinsic case study, case is dominant; the case is of highest importance. For instrumental case study, issue is dominant; we start and end with issues” (1995, p. 16). A collective, within case study research, refers to multiple or nested instrumental cases – i.e. normally observed in unison, parallel or sequentially to one another (Stake, 1995, 1998). Although each case represents a single specific inquiry, collective cases are studied holistically, with an emphasis on examining their respective similarities and differences.

In this vein, I deploy a qualitative collective case study approach across three field locations (see figure 4), with each providing a unique lens for examining the Lebanese baher, and when brought together will co-produce a better understanding of wider societal dynamics occurring within the space specifically and beyond more broadly. The Lebanese capital of Beirut comprises the first field location, and encapsulates two case studies within it: Ramlet El Bayda and Dalieh. Ramlet El Bayda encompasses the city’s last remaining sandy public beach, whilst Dalieh comprises the site adjacent to one of the nation’s natural landmarks: Pigeon Rocks. Both of these sites were under threat of privatisation at the onset of this research in 2014. The second field location is Tehoum’s beach strip in the North of Lebanon, with its series of privately-run beach venues catering to both locals and tourists alike. The final location is the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve in the South of Lebanon, which is often lauded as the only successful example of a public beach in the country (Rahhal, 2018). Site selection was conducted in an effort to facilitate a holistic – or as holistic as

possible – undertaking of the research, with related criteria including: type of baher (i.e. sandy or rocky), location (i.e. urban vs rural setting), cultural and historical significance, type of administration (i.e. privately-run venue vs publicly administered), amenities and services offered, and most importantly the breadth and depth of beachgoer identities (e.g. religion, economic class, nationality, gender, etc.). Two logistical constraints guided the selection process: first and foremost, the associated costs of entering a space, since I could not afford to recurrently pay the exorbitant \$50 entrance fee charged by certain private venues. Second, the site's proximity to Beirut, given how I intended to regularly commute to these locations; which essentially ruled-out relatively distant sites beyond Tripoli in the North and Tyre to the South.



Figure 4. Field locations: Beirut (Ramlet El Bayda & Dalieh), Tehoum (namely Pierre & Friends, Loco beach [f.k.a. Bonita Bay], White beach and Oasis), Tyre (TCNR). **Source:** Google Maps

In order to articulate the rationale behind my choice of cases, I detail the context and specificities characterising each of my three field locations in Table 2. I have strategically selected my case studies to address the needs of my research questions, with each field site being best suited to explore a specific dimension pertaining to the baher's production as an (un)public space. Accordingly, I map below research questions to their respective empirical chapters and field site(s), and supplement this with a description of each case study.

#	Research Question	Empirical Chapter	Field Location & Site(s)
1	In what way, and for what purpose(s), is the Lebanese government ordering the nation's baher?	5 (Un)public space I: Baher governance, from master plan to governmental programme	Beirut (Ramlet El Bayda & Dalieh)
2	Private beach venues are 'public' to whom?	6 (Un)public space II: Weaving private beaches, via in/out groups and 'snagged threads'	Tehoum (Pierre & Friends, Loco beach, White beach, Oasis)
3	What is the 'right to the baher'? How, by who, and for whom is it being claimed?	7 (Un)public space III: "The Baher is Mine", (re)claiming the baher as an arena for social & political action	Beirut (Ramlet El Bayda & Dalieh) & Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (incl. Rashidieh Refugee Camp)

Table #2: Research questions mapped to empirical chapters and field locations & sites

4.2.1 Beirut: Ramlet El Bayda and Dalieh

Ramlet El Bayda, Beirut's last remaining sandy beach strip, is sandwiched between two five-star beach resorts: Mövenpick to the north, and Eden Bay to the south. The site is comprised of two predominant physical features: a raised corniche that slants down from the north side, stretching along the length of the beach, and then sloping back up to south; and the sandy beach strip, whose width spans between the corniche on one side, and the Mediterranean Sea on the other. The site, predominantly frequented by working-class populations (i.e. most notably Lebanese and Syrian refugees residing in and around Beirut), encompasses the location for the government's pilot project 'The National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public'. Moreover, Ramlet El Bayda was once considered an integral part of Beiruti society, with families flocking from different

quarters of the city to not only swim in the beach, but also performing culturally significant traditions such as Job's Wednesday (see chapter 5). At the time of site selection, Ramlet el Bayda had also been in the news, given how some owners of its private plots threatened the site's gentrification (Wehbe, 2014) (see chapter 7). As a result, exploring this field site enabled me to critically assess the Lebanese Government's role within the baherscape, and unpack its influence over the production of the baher. I do this by focusing on the manner in which baher governance shapes the use and development of the site, especially in terms of safeguarding the capital's last remaining sandy beach. Ramlet El Bayda also constitutes an avenue for exploring working class identities within public beaches, and how related identity politics may inform resulting baherscape practices. Furthermore, this research also examined – to a lesser extent – the Dalieh of Raouche, an adjacent site to the Ramlet El Bayda beach, which is at the centre of a contentious struggle between real-estate developers – and by proxy the Hariri political dynasty – as well as Lebanese civil society, namely the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche (see chapters 5 and 7).

4.2.2 Tehoum: Pierre & Friends, Loco Beach (f.k.a. Bonita Bay), White Beach, and Oasis

Tehoum encompasses a rocky/pebble beach strip located within a rural Christian Greek Orthodox area. The site attracts both locals – be it from adjacent areas, or driving-up from Beirut – and foreign tourists alike. This is largely due to its relative proximity to the historic and culturally influential cities of Byblos and Batroun, as well as its reputation of having clean and beautiful waters. This stretch of baher is divided into distinct zones, each managed by a separate private venue: Pierre and Friends, Loco Beach (f.k.a. Bonita Bay), White Beach, and Oasis. Access to these venues is normally attained through a financial transaction (i.e. entrance fees, or the purchase of food and beverages), with beach administrators enforcing a prescribed set of rules and regulations within their respective venues. This field site was thus selected as a platform for exploring the role of private beach actors (i.e. administrators and beachgoers) within the baherscape, with an

emphasis on unpacking their subsequent influence over the production of the baher. Through this site I examine the nexus between identity politics, as informed by competing interpretations of ‘acceptable public’, as well as related exclusionary territorial practices (see chapter 6).

4.2.3 Tyre: Tyre Coast Nature Reserve

The Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (TCNR), covers an area of 3.8km², and is located within the southern city of Tyre. Tyre’s inhabitants consist of a Shi’a majority, a sizeable Christian minority, as well as a Sunni Palestinian Refugee presence. TCNR has four zones (TCNR Brochure, n.d.): first, a tourism zone characterised by a long sandy beach accommodates around 3,000 tourists on weekends (TCNR Management Plan, n.d., p. 33), and hosts 59 temporary kiosks offering food, drinks and recreational activities during the summer. Second, a conservation zone that comprises an important sanctuary for birds, endangered sea turtles, bats and other wildlife (TCNR, 2020). Third, an agricultural and archaeological zone, including the Phoenician springs of Ras El-Ain. Fourth, the Rashidieh camp, which accommodates more than 31,478 registered Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2015). TCNR is thus a space for environmental conservation, via its natural reserve; for recreation and leisure, via its tourism zone; for habitation, via its refugee camp; and for economic activity, via its 59 regulated kiosks. This baher strip, often cited as the only successful example of a public beach in Lebanon (Rahhal, 2018), tends to form the basis for civil society calls towards the ‘right to the baher’. As such, this site, along with the countermovement against Eden Bay hotel’s encroachment on Ramlet El Bayda, are used to examine Lebanese civil society’s role within the baherscape, and how this in turn informs the production of the baher. I ask whether the ‘right to the baher’ within TCNR extends to all beachgoers, paying particular attention to the liminal experiences of Palestinian refugees within the Rashidieh camp (see chapter 7).

4.3 Deploying the Baherscape as a Conceptual Framework

Both Stake and Yin mention the need for conceptual frameworks within qualitative case study approaches, but fall short from describing them in detail (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Miles and Huberman (1994), on the other hand, affirm how conceptual frameworks play an integral role by: first, scoping who is to be included and excluded from the research; second, establishing existing relationships across the study, be it in terms of empirical and/or theoretical connections; and finally, serving as an anchor for the research throughout data collection, analysis, and writing. It must be noted, however, that such a framework transcends a mere conceptual skeleton for the study; instead, it is an undertaking that is recurrently and progressively developed and updated, especially as the relationships between varying constructs are made apparent through data collection and analysis. Although Stake (1995) does not fully advance a proposal for qualitative case study conceptual frameworks, he does argue for flexibility that allows researchers to undertake major changes as the study progresses. This is in line with Parlett and Hamilton's (1972) notion of 'progressive focusing', which acknowledges that "the transition from stage to stage, as the investigation unfolds, occurs as the problem areas become progressively clarified and redefined" (cited in Stake, 1998, p. 22). As a result, it is only until the final draft of the conceptual framework is produced, that all noted relevant themes that have been uncovered throughout the research are made apparent.

I conceived the baherscape, or rather the landscape of the baher, as a conceptual framework guiding this research throughout its varying stages. The baherscape is co-constituted by four elements: the baher space (i.e. physical space); the beachgoer (i.e. the space's users); the baher administrator (i.e. stakeholders laying claim onto the baher via their ordering and management of the space); as well as the context enveloping the baher (e.g. legal considerations and political decisions affecting the space). To expand on each element: the baher space is best described as the physical space of the baher. This includes attributes such as the typology of the beach (sandy vs. rocky), the site's geographic location and surroundings, as well as its physical character (e.g.

environmental setting, fauna and flora, cleanliness). The beachgoer comprises the site's user groups, as formulated by both 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' – or rather who is included and/or excluded from the space. The manner in which beachgoers appropriate the space through their respective narratives, imaginations, behavioural patterns and lived experiences. The beach administrator, or better understood as the owners and/or managers of the baher site, with their respective policies and practices. These include the vision and strategy guiding the space's ordering, the rules and regulations subsequently imposed onto beachgoers, and the narratives and imaginaries of the site's administrators. It must be noted that baher administrators can range from public institutions, to private investors, or even civil society groups placed in charge of a space. Finally, the context enveloping the space, including legal considerations (i.e. laws and judicial rulings) that delineate a site's publicness, as well as political decisions (e.g. urban planning guidelines) that inform how a space ought to be ordered.

The baherscape encompasses my attempt at translating Lefebvre's spatial triad (1991) onto the Lebanese baher, with the baher space equating 'perceived' space; the baher administrator (i.e. via their respective visions and ordering of the baher) and context implicating 'conceived' space; while beachgoer experiences indicate 'lived space'. Through the baherscape I forge a dialogue between the 'production of space' as a theory, and 'liminality' as a concept; and inquire to what extent does this theoretical and conceptual marriage generate a novel perspective and/or additional nuance into the production of (un)public space? Here, I focus on liminal processes of socio-spatial and temporal transformation (Thomassen, 2015) that (re)draw the demarcation line between public and private, and subsequently (re)shape the baher's form and function. In doing so, I examine various manifestations of Lebanese baher spaces, and detail their respective lived beachgoer experiences. As a result, I deem the baherscape as an arena for power-related contestations, a site of both oppression and resistance, where different stakeholders meet, negotiate their various interests, and attempt to pursue their respective agendas. I understand the baherscape to be

dynamic in nature, mirroring the ebb and flows of the waves, and perpetually evolving in accordance to the changing parameters of its elements.

My aims, questions and methods have been formulated to examine each of its elements, with emphasis on the relationship(s) connecting them, and how this in turn informs their respective influence over the production of the baher. As such, I untangle the complex web that is the baherscape through three empirical chapters, each anchored around one (or more) of this research's field sites: first, the Lebanese government, with its associated baher governance within Beirut's Ramlet El Bayda and Dalieh; second, private beach actors, with their related exclusionary policies and practices across Tehoum's beach venues; and third, civil society groups calling for the 'right to the baher', as observed across Ramlet El Bayda and TCNR. These separate lenses of analysis converge to co-constitute baherscape dynamics, with the conceptual framework gaining more colour and nuance as this research progressed.

In line with Stake's (1995) calls for flexibility, and Parlett and Hamilton's (1972) notion of 'progressive focusing', the baherscape framework was repeatedly honed throughout data collection and analysis. This is best evidenced by its transition from mere components, as described above, to an elaboration of how these elements manifest across each field site, with particular attention paid to their intersection with this research's empirical and theoretical observations (see figure 5). Instead of speaking of baher space, beachgoers, baher administrator, and the baher context separately; I revised my articulation of the baherscape by ensuring all four elements speak to one-another – albeit in varying ways across each of the three field locations. This is undertaken in a manner that unpacks the production of the baher by asking: why is the baher produced as it is (i.e. rationale behind the site's production)? How is the baher being produced (i.e. activities and initiatives that translate this rationale onto the baher itself)? What are the outcomes from this (re)production? It must be noted that figure 5 does not convey baherscape dynamics in their

totality, for more nuance will be added across upcoming empirical chapters. Moreover, other baherscape findings may potentially be reached should we widen the scope of analysis beyond this research's chosen case studies.

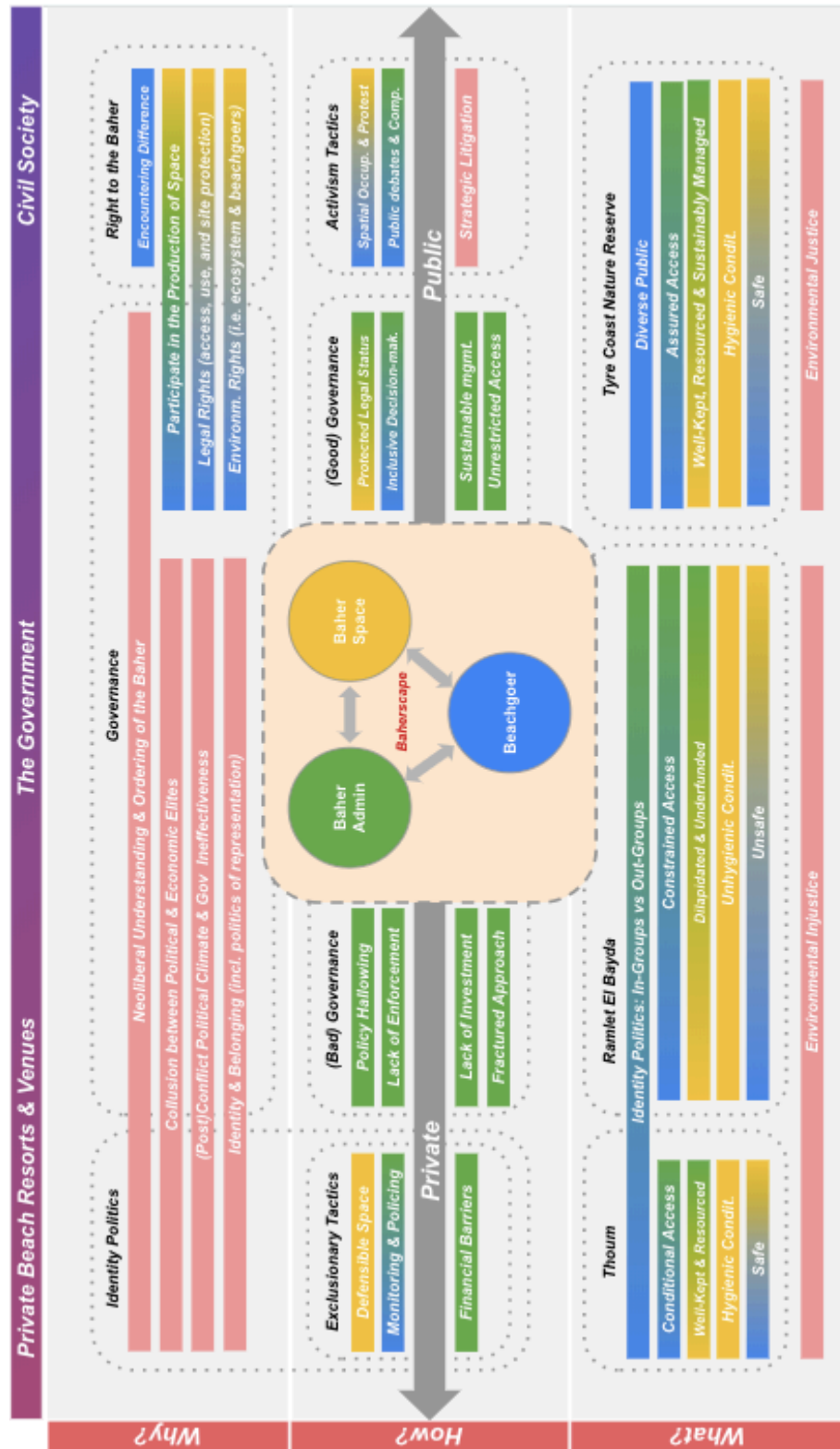


Figure 5. The baherscape revisited [components are colour coded]. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine

4.4 Research Methods and Data Analysis

In my pursuit to explore the baherscape, I have deployed a number of qualitative approaches, with emphasis on interviews, (auto)ethnography, and discourse analysis of secondary data sources. Beachgoer questionnaires were used as a supporting method for primary data collection, with resulting information subsequently used to hone and refine abovementioned methodological approaches. Baxter and Jack (2008) affirm a proclivity for utilising a range of data sources within a qualitative case study approach, given how this promotes a variety of lenses within the analysis, with multiple facets of the phenomenon being subsequently explored. They liken this to a puzzle, where different components are pieced together to inform a co-constitutive understanding of a wider phenomenon. To facilitate the collection of these ‘puzzle pieces’, my fieldwork was spread over a three-year period between 2015 until 2018, the bulk of which was conducted between July 2015 and October 2016, with an additional two-month stint undertaken during July/August 2018⁹. The additional stint enabled me to capture any temporal evolution of baher-related dynamics during my time away from my research.

4.4.1 Interviews

Interviews form the primary data collection method. Thirty-eight interviews were conducted (see appendix I), with the objective of targeting a wide spectrum of concerned stakeholders. These included fourteen in-depth beachgoer interviews (i.e. separate from daily conversations and ‘hanging out’ whilst visiting filed sites). Of these, twelve were one on one interviews, while two were focus groups with Tehoum and Tyre patrons. Beachgoers (i.e. six men and thirteen women) spanned all three field sites, encompassed a range of economic and religious backgrounds, with

⁹This was due to my suspension of student status between 2016-2018, as a result of my need to undertake paid work

ages ranging from eighteen to mid-fifties. I conducted five interviews targeting politics and public policy representatives, including Beirut and Tyre Municipalities, the Directorate General for Urban Planning, and UN-Habitat. Three interviews targeted academics from a multidisciplinary focus across urban planning, sociology, and policy centred research. Five interviews were held with beach administrators, including venue managers/owners, as well as the syndicate of seaside resort operators. Finally, eleven civil society interviews were held with ten separate organisations and activist groups. I refrained from conducting further interviews following data saturation, where it became apparent that the majority of key themes had been uncovered. Unfortunately, I was unable to secure interviews with a number of political elites, including the Governor of Beirut, the President of Beirut Municipality, and the Director General of Land and Maritime Transport. This was due to political sensitivities with the topic at hand, as well as my fieldwork overlapping with a period of political turmoil – namely the ‘You Stink’ protest movement of 2015, as well as the events leading up to the 2019 October revolution. As a result, I deployed secondary data sources to incorporate these stakeholders’ perspectives, through conferences and public discussions that I either attended in person, or accessed via online recordings on YouTube and Facebook (see appendix II).

A semi-structured interview approach facilitated conformity between interviews, thus enabling comparative analysis of the data. I had initially adopted a purposive sampling technique when targeting relevant stakeholders, which was followed by snowball sampling in order to reach a wider set of participants. These stakeholders were contacted through personal networks when available, as to ensure a higher response rate, or via email/phone when needed. A copy of the participant information sheet was provided in advance, with a consent form shared and explained before commencing the interview. Signatures or oral consent were mandatory prerequisites for carrying out research activities. Interviews took place across various locations, including field sites, offices of interviewees, cafés, restaurants, other spontaneous locations (e.g. my car, a mechanic shop), and

one over the phone¹⁰. These discussions lasted between thirty minutes to one hour and a half, with Arabic and English being the primary spoken languages, although French was also sporadically used in certain instances. Conversations were recorded, unless otherwise specified by participants, which facilitated subsequent transcription and data analysis (i.e. I transcribed interviews by translating all discussion into English).

Data analysis consisted of several iterative stages, undertaken both throughout the fieldwork period, as well as following the conclusion of each stint. Interview recordings were first stored on my mobile phone, and then later transferred to my laptop at the conclusion of each week. The resulting file would be subsequently labelled, categorised and stored within the relevant folder, with related information (e.g. name, date, recording length, etc.) manually logged. Following this, interview recordings were transcribed in batches, after which I would read and annotate the transcripts. Thematic analysis was then used to distil the related information into key (sub)themes, with connections subsequently established across the transcribed document(s) – be it within a single document, or across the range of interviews. This qualitative analysis approach was deployed as a means of combing through the data set, in order to uncover, analyse and report on repeated patterns and meanings (Braun and Clarke 2006). I strategically deployed this approach to elucidate important themes, unpack how they relate to one-another, and as a result generate new insights pertaining to the dynamics within the baherscape.

4.4.2 (Auto)Ethnography

I leveraged (auto)ethnography as a supplementary method that both complements and partially shapes conducted interviews, with related insights allowing me to better grasp themes across field

¹⁰ This was due to a conflict in my travel schedule, given how this interview (i.e. with a representative of the Tyre municipality) took place a day before my departure back to the United Kingdom

sites and user groups. Ethnography, both a process and an outcome (Agar, 1980), elaborates on how individuals and groups comprehend and experience their environments (Cresswell, 2013). It is deemed as being instrumental in gaining perspective into issues of power, behaviour, and dynamics within a group (Harris, 1968). Geography has employed ethnographic approaches when analysing spatial practices, given its relevance to place making and connection to social spaces (Till, 2009). Ethnography incorporates the perceptions and views of both the researcher and the participants in order to produce an ethnographic portrait as an end result. These portraits present the reader with relatable and empirically grounded accounts of place-based experiences, perceptions, and imaginaries. I utilise an ethnographic approach to both understand, as well as portray, the perspectives of different stakeholders (including myself) within the baherscape. As such, ethnography within this research included three inter-connected dimensions: observation, participant observation, as well as (auto)ethnography – or rather ethnographic knowledge derived through personal experiences and associated reflections. All of these were recorded through the use of a field diary that incorporates three mediums of documentation: written notes, audio recordings, as well as photographs I had taken during these experiences. Both thematic and narrative analysis were leveraged as approaches pertaining to this method, with the former focusing on uncovering key themes noted throughout ethnographic experiences, whilst the latter aims to unpack associated narratives of the observed beachgoer social groups – namely related to each of this research's field sites, with the aim of how users/groups construct views of themselves and the 'other' (see chapters 5 and 6).

Observation, in this context, consisted of my distanced analysis of the beach's material composition as well as the human activity within it. Participant observation primarily included a more implicated and involved analysis through 'hang outs' with individuals and groups. These 'hang outs' allowed me to gain a deeper insight into beachgoers' everyday life, power dynamics, participants' representations/imaginaries (incl. the way in which they view themselves and

others), as well as other dimensions that may have been organically brought-up. Another type of participant observation emerged during my volunteering with the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche (CCPDR) and Nahnoo (see chapters 5 and 7), two civil-society groups vying to safeguard the Dalieh of Raouche and Ramlet El Bayda respectively from ongoing privatisation. It must be noted that I embraced overt participant observation where participants were informed of my background and motives from the onset. Finally, it became apparent that (auto)ethnography would comprise a central component for my research, given how my navigation of conflicting interests and claims within the baher resulted in a myriad of personal experiences marked by accentuated emotions – be it as a beachgoer and/or volunteer. This includes being coerced by internal security forces across two separate occasions, once during a press conference denouncing Dalieh’s privatisation, and the other whilst documenting the forcible round-up of child hawkers in Ramlet el Bayda. Another notable event took place in Tehoum where I was pressured into paying entrance to an adjacent private venue, despite attending a kiosk on the beach strip advertising “free beach”. Finally, a rush of mixed emotions came during my first venture into the Rashidieh Palestinian refugee camp, where I was given insight into a people kept at arm’s length from the rest of the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve.

4.4.3 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were originally intended to encompass a quantitative dimension for this research, but were later repositioned – following their pilot in the summer of 2015 – as a supporting method for exploratory preliminary data collection, with the purpose of honing and refining other qualitative approaches. The rationale for this pivot rested on finding initial responses constrained in their value, due to two main challenges: first, their limited scope – given their fleeting timeline and written nature – would often encourage short and unelaborated responses by participants. Second, beachgoers tended to be inconvenienced by the questionnaire process, given how their

predominant focus was to unwind and relax within this leisure-oriented space. As a result, this method was repurposed, and deployed as a means to unpack new themes and areas of investigation, which would subsequently be reflected in my choice of interviewees, the selection of discussion topics, and the tailoring of related questions. Questionnaires constituted a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions (see appendices IV and V), as to guarantee a uniform understanding of certain identity markers, while also enabling users to express a wide array of narratives and opinions. Two versions were available, one in Arabic with the other in English, as to ensure catering to different linguistic preferences.

Collecting questionnaires primarily relied on a purposive sampling technique, which enabled me to incorporate minority user groups (e.g. non-Lebanese beachgoers). The reasoning for this is due to these groups potentially being excluded should a random sampling technique be employed, given the higher probability of selecting a dominant user group participant. As such, purposive sampling enabled the targeting of a diverse set of participants, which would lead to a more holistic understanding of baher-related narratives, representations, and user groups. I undertook the following steps while engaging prospective participants: I would first approach each participant and introduce myself. I would then explain the background of the research, hand them an information sheet and a consent form, and ask whether they would like to participate. It must be noted, however, that some respondents (Syrian refugees, and Lebanese attending a protest at the beach site) provided oral consent but refused to share written consent out of fear that their identities would be leaked to Lebanese authorities. In case consent was granted, the participant would subsequently be handed a pen and a questionnaire to fill out – however I later adapted the associated data collection process, given how response rates would dramatically increase should respondents be offered the option to participate orally, whilst I transcribe their answers. After the completion of the questionnaire, I would collect relevant items, inquire whether participants would have any final questions, and then thank them for their participation. Thematic analysis of collected

questionnaires would be undertaken each fortnight, with results subsequently guiding future directions within remaining qualitative methods. For example, respondents in Ramel El Bayda highlighted sewage as a top of mind concern, which then informed the basis of exploration across upcoming stakeholder interviews and ‘hanging out’. Another example would be Tehoum beachgoers flagging “papaz” (i.e. people who show-off) as a type of person they tend to avoid within the space, which subsequently opened-up examination into in-groups who may still be ‘othered’.

4.4.4 Secondary Data Sources

Adding to the abovementioned primary data sources, I utilised a range of secondary data sources to explore governmental and civil society baherscape discourses. These include newspaper articles, social media posts, statements made within conferences & events (see appendix II), as well as governmental and civil society reports – readily available in the public domain and can be accessed online (see appendix III). To elaborate further, I attended 10 conferences and events in person (i.e. in my capacity as an academic researcher, but also more personally as a beachgoer), while 8 others were accessed online. The events I attended were open to the public, chief among them four public debates organised by Nahnoo¹¹, which hosted key governmental (e.g. Beirut Governor, Director general of Land and Maritime Transport) and civil society stakeholders; a World Monuments Fund press conference in Dalieh, organised by the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche; as well as two political protests connected to the You Stink movement of 2015. These events were also leveraged as networking opportunities, in order to open future avenues for interviews. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis was used to analyse power dynamics and subjectivities pertaining to the baherscape, with emphasis on unpacking the relationship between

¹¹ Nahnoo is a youth-led non-governmental organization advocating for sustainable access, use and management of Lebanon’s public spaces

the language-in-use (i.e. as conveyed through secondary data sources) and socio-economic and political practices emerging along the baher. Lees (2004) explains how there are two main schools of discourse analysis, with the first stemming from a Marxist tradition of political economy and ideology critique, whilst the second is linked to post-structural theory and the work of Michel Foucault.

The first school of thought regarding discourse analysis positions it as a “tool for uncovering certain hegemonic ways of thinking and talking about how things should be done that serve certain vested interests” (Lees, 2004, p. 102). This implies a Gramscian understanding, where discourse is viewed as a hegemonic instrument; with van Dijk (1997) framing it as synonymous with ideology, given how it encapsulates vested interests and power, and facilitates the subjugation of the dominated. This approach has been embraced in policy centred research (Newman, 1996; Mossberger and Stoker, 1997), particularly through urban governance literature on ‘discourse coalitions’, with policy debate rhetoric – i.e. narratives, issue framings, and storylines – elaborating on both the actors involved, as well as the relationship(s) between them. Stated more simply, discourse analysis enables an examination what is being said (i.e. the discourse), and subsequently unpack whom is on what side of an issue/topic (Lees, 2004). Here, Raydin elaborates how language shapes the policy process through a number of ways: “it can define the object of policy attention; it can promote particular policy agendas; it can shape the nature of communication between actors... it can cement coalitions or differences between actors; and it can be diversionary, resulting in a form of symbolic politics” (1998, p. 178).

The second school of thought, more dominant in critical human geography, primarily diverges from the first by refuting a key theoretical premise: actors’ pre-constituted identity (Lees, 2004). This revised approach views discourse as transcending reflections and/or (mis)representations of reality; instead, it implicates a process that both shapes identity, and subsequently creates ‘regimes

of truth' (Foucault, 1980) – be it the construction of problems, or the generation of related solutions. This stems from Foucault's work (1977), where discourse cuts across – or rather is generated by bringing together – language, power and knowledge. Moreover, Stenson and Watt (1999) argue that discourse can be made apparent by focusing on both what is being said (e.g. preferred narratives, objects of concern, agendas for action), as well as what is not – more aptly phrased as “absent agendas, agents, objects of concerns and counter-narratives, which are mobilised out of the discursive picture” (Stenson and Watt, 1999, p. 192).

Although these two schools of thought emerge from differing theoretical starting points, they have long been intertwined in practice, with academics often deploying them as co-constitutive approaches to engaging with discourse (Lees, 2004). This is best evidenced by citing Edward Said's work on Orientalism (1978), which brings together post-structuralist and Gramscian approaches, all while clearly acknowledging the tension derived from this undertaking. Within this vein, my research untangles the complex web of governance shaping the baherscape, particularly in what concerns the conflicting and contrasting discourses advanced by varying factions of the Lebanese government (see chapter 5) – i.e. as cited in conference proceedings, official governmental reports, and other secondary data sources.

4.5 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

A series of ethical considerations have been incorporated into this research, including: properly explaining the research's aims and objectives to participants, gaining explicit consent before using any data that has been shared, and upholding the confidentiality of participants. I used a mix of anonymisation and pseudonymisation to safeguard the identity of research participants, with the deployed method being mapped to their specific background. For example, I leveraged anonymisation in what concerns beachgoer data, by referring to participants through a numbered

system (e.g. Beachgoer #1) or via the associated field location (e.g. Thaum beachgoer). Doing so ensures that there are no possible means for identifying individuals. Alternatively, I pseudonymised beach administrator and governmental representative data, to mitigate the chance of political repercussions on participants. This entailed referring to participants by their relative positions (e.g. representative of the Syndicate of Seaside Resort Operators, representative of the Directorate General of Urban Planning). In what concerns civil society representatives (i.e. activists and academics alike), I decided to convey their names and respective organisations given how their identities were already granularly documented in the public domain. Moreover, considerable caution was taken in order to prevent any leakage of information, with emphasis on safeguarding fieldnotes, and abiding by data storage and management procedures, particularly relating to interview recordings and written data analysis.

Being male, economically privileged, a Lebanese citizen, a member of the Druze faith, along with other identity markers has shaped the socially constructed knowledge produced via my interaction with research participants across field sites. This is due to me being perceived as an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ in varying contexts. For example, even though I am an ‘insider’ in the Lebanese sense, I am deemed an ‘outsider’ from a Tyrian’s (Tyre resident) perspective. Being a Lebanese ‘insider’ had its advantages, namely enabling me to understand subtle and understated social, religious, political and economic nuances that riddled my interactions. Moreover, it facilitated my undertaking of this research, given how I already had an existing personal and professional network on the ground. However, my membership to the aforementioned communities also acted as a stumbling block, for it dictated and shaped power dynamics between myself and certain research participants and user groups. For instance, my attempts to engage with female beachgoers were often interrupted by the emergence of their male guardian (e.g. a male relative), specifically within the working-class and conservative Ramlet El Bayda field site. As such, I made the utmost effort to positively shape my ‘outsider’ status by representing myself as a ‘naïve’ research student whom

has lived abroad and is affiliated with a foreign university. Another way of overcoming such obstacles was to adopt ‘passing’ as tool in subverting any flagrant differences that would hinder the free exchange of honest ideas and feelings.

Certain differences could not be overcome despite my best efforts at ‘passing’ or attempting to fit-in. One such example is my intentional decision of not swimming within Ramlet El Bayda beach, largely due to health and safety concerns related to the site’s sewage polluted waters (see chapter 5). As such, and no matter how much I attempted to ‘hang-out’ with participants, my interactions were always limited to the sand itself – undoubtedly a stumbling block to fully understanding beachgoers’ lived experiences within the field site. My uncomfortable ethical experiences linked to environmental injustice within the baher (e.g. pollution concerns, beachgoer access restrictions), along with my volunteerism with civil society groups calling for the “right to the baher” (see chapter 7), have indubitably left a mark on me both personally and academically. I often found myself in a liminal state, ‘betwixt and between’ academic and beachgoer, with the former concerned with his scholarly inquiry, whilst the latter aims to safeguard the Lebanese baher from further encroachment. In some way, by bridging both these dimensions, I hope that this research positively contributes to shaping the baherscape. I do this by weaving together multiple truths and voices along the baher, and contributing to wider academic knowledge regarding the right to (public) spaces specifically, and ‘urban’ conviviality more broadly.

5 | (Un)public space I: Baher governance, from master plan to governmental programme

5.1. Introduction

I grew up in Beirut, Lebanon after the end of the civil war. I developed a connection with the baher through habitual interactions that have been shaped by varying experiences. I would often stare out of my classroom window at the therapeutic movement of the waves. I learnt to swim in Riviera, one of the city's private venues. I habitually ran along the corniche, which served the dual purpose of exercising, as well as people watching. However, one of the things that struck me as a child, was being driven next to the Ramlet El Bayda beach (see figure 6), looking at the golden sand, and wondering why my family never visited this site? I would implore my mother to park the car and let me play, but my pleas would be met with: "this place isn't for us... It's very dirty. I'll take you somewhere better". I grew up with the understanding that Ramlet El Bayda was not for me. So much so, that the very first time I stepped onto the site was during fieldwork for this thesis. I had been a resident of Beirut my entire life, but the city's last remaining sandy beach had been foreign to me until 2015.



Figure 6. Aerial view of Ramlet El Bayda. **Source:** Google maps

In this chapter, I critically assess the Lebanese government's role within the baherscape, by unpacking its influence over the production of the baher. I do this by asking: In what way, and for what purpose(s), is the Lebanese government ordering the nation's baher? I explore to what extent baher governance renders the space (un)public, with particular attention paid to the disconnect between stated governmental ambitions and on-the-ground 'stubborn realities' (Yiftachel, 2006). I deploy liminality as a conceptual tool for unpacking the governance of public spaces, given how governments are tasked with drawing the boundary between multiple concurrent binaries: legal versus illegal, public (interest) versus private (rights), and deliberately ordered versus haphazardly neglected. I examine how the baher's resulting spatial manifestations lies 'betwixt and between' such designations, with their respective boundaries often-times blurred. In doing so, I seek to understand the synergetic relationship between governance and a space's liminal context. I thus inquire: to what degree is baher governance shaped by the space's liminal context? Can a space's presiding governance structurally alter the baher's liminal character?

The Lebanese government is comprised of a plurality of entities (i.e. ministries, directorates, municipalities, etc.), with each assuming a particular mandate within the baher. Given the large number of stakeholders operating at different scales (i.e. local, national, and international), it is not uncommon to witness competing sets of priorities, initiatives, and interests. As such, I do not claim to represent the full spectrum of governmental narratives that may be encompassed within the baherscape. Instead, a concerted effort is made to incorporate views pertaining to key public institutions and projects within the Lebanese baher. In order to achieve this, I first establish this chapter's theoretical framing by situating the discussion within governance literature. I follow this with a discourse analysis of the 'National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory', through which I will assess the government's stated aims and objectives pertaining to the use and development of the nation's baher. I then expand on this discussion by unpacking how a set of structural governance pitfalls, linked to Lebanon's political liminal context and the baher's physical

liminal setting, may lead the government to deviate from its master plan ambitions. Ramlet El Bayda, the pilot project within the ‘National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public’, is subsequently examined as a case study for how the government’s baher aspirations translate – in practice – to implemented programmes. As such, I conclude the chapter by exploring how governmental mismanagement and its ensuing environmental injustice implications – be it intentional or incidental – may alter a public space’s liminal character, by diminishing its *communitas* potential, and instead bolstering difference and othering.

5.2 Unpacking ‘Government’ Decision-Making via ‘Governance’ Power-Dynamics

Given this chapter’s focus on baher governance, I first engage with discussions around the ‘private/public’ divide, as well as the governments’ role in demarcating these spheres. The distinction between public/private moves beyond simple definitions, towards ideological acts of ordering spaces for preconceived political, economic, and social purposes. This divide is understood as a dichotomy in which society’s components can be ordered into one of two mutually exclusive spheres, with the extension of one leading to an inverse reduction of the other. In fact, “the liberal distinction between the private sphere of economic activity and the public sphere of government action is today the most commonly invoked private/public distinction” (Collins, 2009, p. 439). The state and the market are thus depicted as being in opposition, with privately owned property being dominated by private interests, and publicly owned property catering to the ‘public’. Collins (2009) notes that the political choice of where demarcation lines are drawn-up, raises questions on whose behalf governments are intervening (e.g. private rights versus public interest). Within this vein, Boyer (1996) suggests that the ‘public’ has become a negative concept, of what remains after private rights and interests take hold of spaces. Goheen (1998) asserts that “the modern city offers an increasingly inhospitable environment for the widespread enjoyment and use of public space; it is a place where private interests increasingly successfully compete

against the public interest” (p.481). This, in turn, disenfranchises marginalised groups within arenas skewed towards private rights via asymmetric power structures (Boyer, 1993; Zukin, 1991; Sorkin, 1992; Davis, 1990).

Given the interconnectedness between public and private spheres, especially in connection with government activity, academics have embraced ‘governance’ as a lens for examining their relationship. Scholarly engagement with ‘governance’ accelerated in the 1980/90s, following a shift in the way Western societies were governed as a result of rising neoliberalism. This ideology, which initially implicated a ‘rolling back’ the state, ultimately sought new forms of governing by involving non-state actors (e.g. private and voluntary sectors) in decisions and arrangements (Goodwin, 2009). This new governing style blurred the boundary between public and private (Stroker 1998), with governance discussions subsequently problematising the nexus behind this transformation. As such, speaking of ‘government’ pertains to the formal socio-economic and political institutions and structures of the state; whereas ‘governance’ broadens focus to the distribution of power and responsibilities between state and non-state actors – with an emphasis on their relationship (Jessop, 1995). Raco asserts that “governance draws attention to those interests that have the ‘power’ to make decisions about policy and how processes of decision-making operate” (2009, p.622). To translate this to the empirical context of this research, I deploy ‘government’ in connection to specific state entities (i.e. ministries, directorates, municipalities, etc.), whilst ‘baher governance’ denotes forces guiding the government in its production of the baher – i.e. inclusive of power dynamics across state (i.e. government) and non-state (i.e. private and voluntary sectors) actors alike.

Various social science disciplines have grappled with the concept of governance. While economists focused on market dynamics, especially in connection to state intervention and private activity; sociologists opted to incorporate an individual and subjective focus, as informed by Foucault’s

writings on governmentality (Burchell et al., 1991). Discussions of governance, especially within international relations, revolved around good/bad governance and their related practices. Good governance is considered to be: “participatory, transparent and accountable... assures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of resources” (UNDP, in Raco, 2009, p.624). Raco (2009) expands on this by affirming that ‘good governance’ encompasses inclusive decision making, and subsequently exclusionary and discriminatory policies would be viewed as indicative of ‘bad governance’. Conceptualisations of good/bad governance were employed to describe state management that adheres to macro-economic principles recommended by institutions coming out of Bretton Woods, like the World Bank (Masson-Vincent, 2008). However, mentions of good/bad implicate moral connotations. Good/bad in relation to what and whom? Moreover, the ability to define what constitutes good/bad is an exercise of power in itself (Williams, 2009), not to mention a Western imperialist condition.

Geographers have largely dealt with governance by examining its nuances through differentiated processes across various places and spaces (Raco, 2016; Saey and Dostál, 2002; John, 2001; Dostál and Saey, 2000; Harvey, 1989). These have been conducted at different scales, and focused on a variety of stakeholders (e.g. local and planning authorities, development organisations, financial institutions, real estate developers) in their attempt to shape spaces through respective interventions (Flowerdew, 2017). Space is thus understood as being inseparable from governance, with projects envisioning environmental and spatial causalities (Huxley, 2006), and programmes materialising through plans that deploy spatial techniques (Huxley, 2008). Geographers have thus focused on neoliberal policies and practices, and how they disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, for example the working class (Brand, 2007; May et al., 2005). Raco (2003), for instance, points to how the devolution of UK national state powers to Scotland led business

communities to actively mobilise in an effort to reshape the policy terrain in their favour. Huxley (2008) also points to the fragmented nature of state institutions and policies within the neoliberal state, as well as the often-contradictory impacts of governmental programmes and projects. Another important avenue that geographers have turned to in their engagement with governance, is framing the discussion around environmental (in)justice, particularly concerning the disenfranchisement of marginalised populations.

Environmental justice is understood as all people, no matter their background (i.e. gender, race, religion, class, sexual orientation, etc.), having an equal right to access clean, healthy and safe environments (Byrne, 2013). Holifield (2001) uncovered numerous governance factors that may lead to environmental injustice, including: planning practices, asymmetric law enforcement, intentional targeting of vulnerable groups, market factors, and real-estate dynamic. Lehtinen (2009) asserts that working-class populations, along with ethno-racial minorities, tend to be systematically targeted to host hazardous land uses. This is due, among other things, to these groups lacking the ability to galvanise political support. For example, Dahmann and colleagues (2010) concluded that poor access to park and recreation facilities among communities of colour in Southern California, have led the development of relatively increased health concerns within these groups. Additionally, Colten (2002) undertook an overview of Jim Crow laws within the American South, and how they led communities of colour to reside in flood-prone areas of New Orleans, as well as influenced drainage and sewage infrastructure patterns.

Finally, public spaces have also constituted an important platform for examining governance, given how they are shaped by a variety of stakeholders, with their subsequent manifestations being indicative of the relationship linking public institutions with private and non-governmental sectors (Madanipour, 2010). In fact, Zamanifarda and colleagues admit how “the motivations and agendas of the three main groups of stakeholders of public spaces, the state, the public, and the private are

distinctive and more often contradictory. There are also intra-group conflicts between these stakeholders...” (2018, p. 155). Accordingly, a growing body of multi-disciplinary research vies to unpack processes shaping public space, with particular attention being paid to competing articulations of their definitions, users’ rights, constructed narratives and expectations, and their respective delivery and management (Amin, 2008; Carmona, 2015, Stevens, 2009). Having established this chapter’s understanding of governance, I pivot attention to exploring how this concept translates onto this research’s empirical lens: the Lebanese baher. As such, I first focus on a discourse analysis of the ‘National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory’, which will be used to assess the government’s stated aims and objectives for the baher.

5.3 The National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory: between stated ambitions and on-the-ground ‘stubborn realities’

The ‘National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory’ (hereinafter ‘master plan’) is my starting point for this discussion given how this document constitutes “the basis for urban planning policy... and also serves as a guideline for all stakeholders participating in national and land use development” (Council for Development and Reconstruction, 2005, p.7). Master plans are understood as systems of spatial regulations, with “planning texts and practice focused on the technical provision of services and facilities, increasingly calculated through standardized measures of minimum requirements and spatial distributions – for light, air, street layout, open space, schools, hospitals, shops, and so on” (Huxley and Inch, 2020, p. 88). Through this, master plans mitigate regional inequalities and bolster more even development by guiding “all locational decision-making, public and private” (Soja, 2009, p. 335). The ‘National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory’ was drafted in 2005 and enacted by Decree No. 2366 dated 20 June 2009. The Council for Development and Reconstruction (hereinafter CDR), which authored the master plan, was established two years after the start of the Lebanese civil war through Decree No. 5

dated 31st January 1977. The government at the time found it necessary to create a new public institution tasked with the reconstruction of Lebanon. The fact that CDR, a governmental body born as a product of the Lebanese civil war, was behind the 2005 master plan, is a clear indication that the country's planning policies and national strategy are still very much formulated as a by-product of this protracted conflict. Moreover, the four-year window between the master plan's conception (i.e. 2005) and adoption (i.e. 2009) is a strong indication of the bureaucratic and divisive governance landscape within the country.

The master plan is comprised of six chapters (i.e. Lebanon's physical features, future challenges, essential choices, master plan perspectives, principles of land use, and implementation guidelines), with its recommendations abiding by three key objectives: "unity of the country; balanced development; and rationalization of uses of resources" (Council for Development and Reconstruction, 2005, p.4). It is a publicly accessible document targeting "all stakeholders participating in national and land use development" (ibid. p. 7) – inclusive of governmental bodies (e.g. municipalities, ministries), as well as private sector entities (e.g. real estate developers). Although the master plan is very much instrumental in function, as it guides the nation's spatial (re)development, I engage with it as a discursive indication of stated government ambitions. In this respect, its positioning of the baher will be used as a bellwether for government intent, with related discourse subsequently compared with implemented on-the-ground realities.

The Lebanese baher is initially depicted in the master plan as a natural landscape, usually through language that both highlights its beauty, as well as its connection with the environment: "Among the most important landscapes of Lebanon... outstanding coastal sites" (Council for Development and Reconstruction, 2005, p.24); and "The major assets that the coastline offers are: Sandy beaches... shorelines with high ecological and landscape values... Picturesque ports..." (ibid, p.192). The baher is then described as a social space that informs the nation's identity and social

fabric: “The valorisation of the coastline is important not only for tourist development, but also for the quality of life in coastal cities” (ibid, p.192); and “In Beirut... the rock and the bay of the Grotte aux Pigeons¹², as well as the white trail of sand of the Ramlet EL Bayda¹³... remarkable sites that are an integral part of the capital's identity” (ibid, p.193). Finally, the baher is denoted via a more threatening tone, which conveys an imminent danger that it faces: “Coastal zone is considered to be the richest but at the same time the most endangered area of Lebanon” (ibid, p.32); “Lands located along the seashore are in extremely high demand... This pressure results in reclamation activities, marina projects for leisure and other maritime public domain violations” (ibid, p.32); and “...the particular case of Lebanon, marked with numerous coastline abuses...” (ibid, p.194). Such descriptions present the Lebanese baher as a natural site intimately connected to the nation’s identity and psyche; as well as a victim of Lebanon’s short-sighted development projects and numerous encroachments¹⁴.

The master plan subsequently promotes a Coastline Wealth Valorisation Strategy, which aims to address the baher’s numerous abuses, encroachments, and violations (ibid, p.194). Four recommendations are provided: the first crystallises the right of citizens to access the seashore: “opening of the sand beaches to the public should be carried out in the framework of a global free sea-access policy and free passage width of minimum 3 m along the coast” (ibid, p.192). The second delineates the public maritime domain as being *non aedificandi* (Latin for ‘non-construction’), and enshrines the principle that human intervention within this zone should be of a temporary and reversible nature: “Beyond this 3m wide passage, the general rule is that the maritime public domain must remain *non aedificandi*, but can receive provisional facilities (without foundations) of seaside resorts that are dismantled at the end of each season” (ibid, p.194). The third codifies a list

¹² The Bay of the ‘Grotte aux Pigeons’, also known as ‘Pigeon Rocks’, constitutes the surrounding area for the Dalieh of Raouche. Though, it is a matter of debate whether Dalieh is considered to be within this area or adjacent to it

¹³ Ramlet EL Bayda, Beirut’s last sandy beach, was selected as a field site for this research

¹⁴ Encroachment refers to an instance where a property owner violates the property rights of others – including the public – by building on or seizing part/all of their land

of conditions that need to be met should any future government wish to enact a ‘special decree’ exempting bordering property owners from the abovementioned requirements. These conditions specify that ‘special or exceptional decrees’ should not infringe on existing laws, and that any exploitation of the *baher* should be in accordance to the public interest and ensure free access to the shore (ibid, p.195). The master plan thus advises the preservation of a group of coastal sites from all changes according to their natural configuration. These sites include but are not limited to: the rock and the small bay of Grotte aux Pigeons in Beirut, the sandy beach of Ramlet El Bayda in Beirut, and the sandy beaches in the south of Tyre (ibid, p.149) – encompassing this research’s chosen field sites in Beirut and Tyre. The final recommendation outlines how to best deal with current encroachments and violations plaguing the baher, where violators should ensure the public’s free access to the seashore, settle any taxes and fines with the public treasury, as well as dismantle any infringements upon the space. As such, the master plan regulates coastal exploitation, in a manner that is sustainable socio-economically: “the objective is to institute a situation in which seaside resorts benefit financially from the services they offer to the visitors, rather than from the “privatization” of portions of public property” (ibid, p.195).

Despite a concerted effort by the authors of the master plan to enshrine access to the public maritime domain, advance encroachment resolution strategies, and promote sustainable development within the space, it falls short of an implemented reality, given the existence of presiding political obstacles that obstruct its proper enactment. This was explained by Cynthia Bou Aoun, a journalist and public space activist who has extensively written about the Lebanese baher:

“[The master plan’s] problem is the decree that was created to apply it. The study is amazing, but the decree emptied the study of its content because of political will [or lack thereof]. No one [capital holders] will agree to lose their holdings. There should have been subsequent decrees, which they [politicians] said were coming, but they never came. Secondly, the master plan said that municipalities and directorates need to revise existing local master plans, in order to conform with the national master plan. However, it didn’t give them a time frame! ... There exist loopholes with the laws, and there is a lack of political will to push it through.” [Interview, 20/08/2018]

Bou Aoun's testimony highlights how the master plan was originally intended to lay the groundwork for future decrees, which would have in turn codified this vision into an implemented reality. However, a lack of political will stemming from politicians' conflict of interest, given their connections to baher encroachments, has hampered an exhaustive enactment of the plan. Jina Talj, a marine ecologist and environmental activist, problematised: "we don't have a problem with [baher] laws, but with their implementation" [Interview, 31/07/2018]. To this end, Yiftachel (2006) theorises that governance is met with 'stubborn realities' in the global South. These include intergroup conflicts over territory, fluid property systems, liberalism as an economic agenda, an unstable constitutional order, and "insurmountable social disparities, deepening fragmentation and social conflict" arising from globalising capitalism (ibid., p. 213). Meanwhile Berke and colleagues (2006) assert that the more pressing question is whether plans can get implemented, and not whether they are good. Painter (2006) focuses on processes of implementation, and admits that passing legislation often has little effect, rather it is through the mundane practices and actions of officials that legislation takes form. Finally, Goodwin affirms how "governance still operates in the shadow of government, and a critical conceptual task is to understand how the two systems are linked and interrelated" (2009, p.598).

By acknowledging how the master plan was never implemented, I am pinpointing a clear disconnect separating government ambition (i.e. stated aims and objectives) from on-the-ground manifested realities. Although the master plan conveys a façade of a government pursuing a sustainable management of the Lebanese baher, its implementation was met with 'stubborn realities' given a lack of ensuing legislation and clear implementation guidelines. This process, where the master plan's realisation was ultimately obstructed, is indicative of a governance that operates in the shadows (Goodwin, 2009). I thus endeavour to explore the sphere of government action – or rather strategic inaction, in the master plan's case – by situating it within broader

governance, and examining related interests and power dynamics guiding baher decision making (Raco, 2009). Accordingly, I inquire: what informs this governance in the shadow, and what does it say about Lebanon's 'stubborn realities' in the context of the baher? I address this in the following section by exploring *why* the baher's governance structures exist as they are; before moving onto the manner in which this system manifests itself through institutional policies and practices within Ramlet El Bayda – or rather *how* these structures materialise and subsequently shape the baherscape.

5.4 Governance in the shadow: a hybrid melange of liminality and neoliberal ideology

In unpacking the “why” behind government decision making, this section examines its rationale, or as Goodwin (2009) frames it, the governance in the shadow of government. I do this by examining the nature of the ‘stubborn realities’ within Lebanon, which inhibit the implementation of the master plan's ambitions, and instead degrade the ‘public’ nature of the baher. I explore factors shaping baher governance, and pay particular attention to three dimensions: the baher's physical liminality; Lebanon's political liminal context; and the prevailing neoliberal ideology. Through this, I claim that the Lebanese government strategically benefits from these physical and political liminal dynamics, and subsequently leverages them to facilitate a neoliberal takeover of the baher. As a result, the baher is rendered ‘betwixt and between’ public/private designations, with related activity deemed legal/illegal, as the government acts on behalf of public interest/private rights. Accordingly, I expand on each governance dimension below.

First, the baher's physical liminal setting facilitates the space's encroachment. Decree no. 144 (see chapter 2) enshrines the right to access natural resources and defines public property as all things that are by nature intended for public use. They cannot be sold and no ownership over them can be acquired with time. This definition encompasses the public maritime domain, an area that

includes the shore as extending to the farthest point that waves reach during winter, as well as sand and gravel beaches (Legal Agenda, 2016). However, how does one delineate the public maritime domain, especially given the baher's liminal setting – between land and sea, with an ever-changing natural typology, stemming from the perpetually shifting waves? Lama Karame, an advocate lawyer working with Legal Agenda, notes: “The problem is the 1925 law is not well detailed... Okay, you have the highest point of water, but in practice how can you measure it? Who has a ruler that measures the highest point of waves on the shore?!” [Interview, Lama Karame 16/08/2018]. McCay, an anthropologist who has written extensively about the littoral, alludes to the contentious nature of coastal properties, especially in connection to their liminal nature, given how they are “complex, contextually contingent, and changing, challenging those who want solid and easily defined property rights or management jurisdictions” (2008, p. 8-9). As such, the baher's physical setting results in related properties, inclusive of the public maritime domain, being difficult to pin-down. This in turn reinforces a lack of clarity over a space's classification, and by association its related regulations and users' allocated rights. This subsequently relegates baher spaces to a grey area – i.e. liminal zone, where legal protection is open to interpretation, and a public/private designation allocated irregularly. This effectively differentiates the baher from other types of public spaces (e.g. urban squares parks), whose spatial boundaries tend to be more discernible, and thus relatively less susceptible to interpretation. I thus postulate that liminal public spaces are more at risk of encroachments, given the relative indiscernibility of their respective boundaries.

Second, Lebanon's political liminal context shapes subsequent government (in)action along the baher. Szakolczai asserts that “liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame” (2000, p. 220). He frames communist regimes as in permanent liminality given their lack of ‘reintegration’, due to their inability to heal their wounds and look to the future. Thomassen expands on this permanent condition by affirming how “without a proper re-integration, liminality is pure danger” (2012, p.

30). I argue that Lebanon's political liminal context continues to evade proper re-integration as a result of the transitional nature of its politics – i.e. between conflict-ridden civil war, and a yet-to-occur post-conflict resolution. This is best evidenced by citing the following examples: the 1943 national pact, an unwritten confessional power-sharing agreement, originally envisaged as provisional and temporary (France 24, 2020). The 1989 National Reconciliation Accord, which shifted – as opposed to removing – the balance of confessional power-dynamics, in an effort to end the civil war (Comaty, 2019). The adoption of a general amnesty law in 1991, which undermined accountability for civil-war atrocities, and in turn transformed militia leaders into ruling politicians. An estimated 17,000 'disappeared' (a.k.a. 'مفقودين' in Arabic), or rather individuals kidnapped or missing during the 1975-90 civil war, thus effectively straddling the boundary between life and death (Humaydan, 2006). Excluding the civil war from the national school curriculum (Maktabi, 2012), which indicates an inability to come to terms with the nation's turbulent past. The country hosting quintessentially liminal and marginalised refugee populations (Ramadan, 2013 and Mason, 2020), who evade proper integration, with noted tensions with hosting communities. As well as Lebanon existing 'betwixt and between' perpetual crises, with the latest being the ongoing economic catastrophe, as well as the August 2020 explosion. All of these come together to co-produce Lebanon's transitional (post)conflict liminal politics. Accordingly, Carpi (2019) frames liminality as a performative act and deliberate political approach by the Lebanese government, which preserves its agency via ensuing repression and neglect. Lebanon's political liminal context permeates across every facet of society, with baher governance being no exception. This is best cited by noting encroachments linked to civil war era lawlessness; governmental shortcomings that spur private sector involvement; and (post)conflict political structures, marked by a lack of accountability and political infighting, which subsequently inhibit intragovernmental cooperation. I will expand on each of these below, before returning to my main line of argument – i.e. establishing a connection between physical and political liminal dynamics, and subsequent a neoliberal takeover of the baher.

A 2012 report by the Directorate General of Land and Maritime Transport highlighted the existence of 1,141 cases of baher encroachments, with 73 licensed by the government, while the remaining 1,068 were deemed as transgressions. The report also affirms that only around 18% (i.e. 40km/225km) of the Lebanese baher remains open to the public (Bou Aoun, 2018). However, the representative of the Syndicate of Seaside Resort Operators asserts that a significant portion of encroachments came as a result of the civil war's chaotic environment: "So, either people carried out activities without a permit because there was no government at the time practically. Or else they received a permit from a minister, and then the parliament came and annulled all permits later on..." [Interview, 15/12/2015]. As such, baher transgressions may stem from the then government's incapacity to fully assume its responsibilities regarding these tourist institutions. The representative of the Syndicate of Seaside Resort Operators went on to argue that government shortcomings have necessitated private sector actors to step-in and provide much needed investment:

"This is a problem of a government that is falling short in its duties. So, it is not the fault of investors who are filling this gap. If today we don't have any electricity, it's not because of people who own generator companies, but because of a government that is not providing this service! The same goes for beaches" [Interview, 15/12/2015]

In this respect, the proliferation of private beaches is in direct correlation to the lack of government investment along the baher. The main premise behind this rationale depicts private beaches as filling the gaps that have been produced by the government's ill-formulated baher strategy. This implies that the blame should be attributed to the latter's inaction, instead of criticising private sector for undertaking much-needed investments, especially given related economic benefits. This relegates private beaches, similarly to the rest of the baher, as being in-between: legal/illegal, economically imperative/socio-environmentally damaging, and linked to governmental shortcoming/private sector proactivity.

Furthermore, public institutions dealing with the baher are locked in a 'blame game', which impedes intragovernmental coordination and leads to a disjointed baher development approach. Ziad Shbib, Beirut's then governor, highlighted this during a 2015 public space conference organised by Nahnoo, which I attended. Shbib argued that: "this [Dalieh] fence was built due to a permit that was given by the old governor. Regardless of whether the permit was lawful to give or not, plot owners now have the right to claim ownership of this fence" [Conference, 05/08/2015]. This declaration came as a result of an audience member's inquiry into the governor's lack of response to a letter from the Minister of Environment, which specifically requested the removal of the newly erected fence around the Dalieh of Raouche. Mr. Shbib's response not only disassociates himself from any culpability regarding the fence's erection, by framing the source of the issue as resting with his political predecessor; but it also discourages any future prospect for partnership in the fence's removal. Furthermore, talk of "plot owners now having the right to claim ownership" over a fence whose permit may have been unlawful, further crystallises how Lebanon's political liminality is deployed as a performative act and deliberate approach, which preserves the Lebanese government's agency via ensuing repression and neglect (Capri 2019).

Another facet of this intragovernmental 'blame game' is the use of jurisdiction, or lack thereof, as an indicator of who is to be blamed for the government's ineffective baher strategy. In a 2014 'Creating a public beach in Beirut' conference, which I attended in person, Eng. Rashid Ashkar – a previous member of Beirut's Municipal Council – proclaimed beaches within the city as outside the municipality's authority: "We all know that the beach and coastline is in the public maritime domain, so it is not the property of the municipality even if it was in the city" [Conference, 19/07/2014]. However, this 'blame game' seems to be reciprocal in nature, as the Director General of Land and Maritime Transport, who was also in attendance, held the Municipality of Beirut

responsible for Ramlet El Bayda's sewage: "With all due respect to the Municipality of Beirut... they assigned CDR to carry out two [sewage] pipelines on Ramlet El Bayda..." [Conference, 19/07/2014]. As such, assigning blame onto others is habitually embraced by numerous governmental stakeholders, and often leads to a perpetual cycle of 'passing the buck', thereby impeding intragovernmental cooperation. This is best evidenced by an exchange between two Beirut municipality officials – who shall rename nameless following their preference – during an August 2018 interview about Ramlet El Bayda's sewage:

- Official #1: "Of course the sewage is not our responsibility! Anything from the corniche upwards is the municipality's responsibility, while the corniche to the sea is the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Works & Transport."
- Official #2: "No, actually it is our responsibility"
- Official #1: "Really?!"
- Official #2: "Yes, it is."

[Interview, 28/08/2018]

Returning back to my main line of argument, the third and final dimension shaping the "why" behind baher governance is the nation's prevailing neoliberal ideology. This is best evidenced by the government's particular understanding of private rights versus public interests, as well as collusion between political and economic elites. Weintraub and Kumar (1997) theorise that the private/public divide could be understood as an axis with individual rights and interests on one end, and collective and community considerations on the other. Accordingly, private rights versus public interests are seen as being both mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, which indicate that any extension of one sphere would inversely impact the scope of the other. Geographers have asserted that designating a space as public/private is an ideological act carried-out by governments, especially given that public authorities are responsible for legislating the rights attributed to individuals within spaces (e.g. Collins, 2009). Accordingly, safeguarding a space as public inherently implicates the government choosing to intervene on behalf of public rights rather over private interests. To this point, a representative of the Directorate General of Urban Planning clarified during a September 2015 interview:

“The problem that we have is that lands are predominantly privately owned, so it belongs to individuals and not the government. So, it’s very hard to deal with these issues... This is where the problems arise, when you try and apply zoning laws on these [privately owned] areas. You are trying to impose a protection on the area, but individuals have a right also... We have examples like the marina in Dbayeh, Zaitunay Bay, and Mövenpick. These are private plots and the owner has a right to invest in them...” [Interview, 09/10/2015]

The Directorate General of Urban Planning, a government body that is mandated to formulate and monitor land-use practices in Lebanon, is considered to be the foremost public authority in matters concerning urban planning practices. Urban planning in this research is understood as the government’s regulation and management of spaces, in an effort to organise their respective social, economic and political characters. Geographers’ interest in urban planning largely centres on spatial relationships, and how planning guidelines and decisions impact the lives of inhabitants (Ehrenfeucht, 2013). As such, geographers have noted how urban planning may be used to advance the interest of capital holders, which comes at the detriment of the working-class population (Huxely, 2009). Harvey (2008) asserts that the neoliberal turn has reinstalled class power to rich elites, which manifests in a city’s urban planning through the mushrooming of gated communities, as well as privatized public spaces under constant surveillance.

In the case of the Lebanese baher, the Directorate is attributing disproportionate weight to private rights and investment, over the protection of the public interest. The examples of ‘marina Dbayeh, Zaitunay Bay, and Mövenpick’ are all controversial luxury real-estate developments, which have degraded the public nature of these previously frequented sites. The normalisation of the Mövenpick hotel’s ‘right to invest’ is problematic given the history in which this project was executed. The area in which Mövenpick is situated had been previously comprised of a natural bay and rocky seashore. Its plots of land, historically owned by a number of individuals, were consolidated and purchased by the Merriland Company in 1986. The owner of the company, a businessman with close ties to politicians and militias at the time (Dictaphone Group, 2012),

leveraged his connections in order to obtain exceptional decree no. 169 in 1989, which exempted the proposed project from the existing zoning laws and allowed the hotel to be built (Saksouk-Sasso et al., 2015). One is thus able to grasp how the Lebanese government, as enabled by the nation's political liminal context (i.e. facilitating encroachment through 'exceptional' decrees) and the baher's physical liminal setting (i.e. via the indiscernibility of its boundaries), may bolster the rights of private land owners over the public interest – i.e. specifically those connected to large real estate projects. This is primarily what differentiates the Lebanese baher, as an empirical context, from other examples in the literature; with liminality – be it physical and/or political – being a notable influence in the production of the baher as an (un)public space. As such, I argue that the Lebanese government strategically benefits from these physical and political liminal dynamics, and subsequently leverages them to facilitate a neoliberal takeover of the baher.

The privatisation of the baher is achieved not only by valorising private rights over public interest, but is also facilitated due to a collusion between political elites and large-scale real-estate developers. Mills' (1956) work on urban elites – be it economic, political, or both – alludes to obscure decision-making processes and a concentration of power which serves their own narrow interests. A number of sociologists and geographers have pointed to a strong collusion between real-estate developers and politico-economic elites during profit-making urban development projects (Davis, 2007; Logan and Molotch, 1987; Molotch, 1976). This is further developed by Harvey (1989) who highlights how urban governance predominantly caters to capital holders and disenfranchises working-class populations. Politicians in Lebanon have significant ties to the nation's real-estate sector (Krijnen et al., 2010; Traboulsi, 2012), which indicates a degree of personal interest in easing related legislative constraints. Chaaban (2019) details how political elites control 43% of assets in Lebanon's commercial banking sector. Politicians also substantially control the banks' Board of Directors, with 15 out of 20 banks having their chair of the Board

linked to politicians. Moreover, a 1997 report,¹⁵ commissioned by the World Bank and the Lebanese Government, found that 81% of the sea front property between Jounieh bay and Beirut International Airport, approximately 51 kilometres in length, was owned by capital holders – some of whom hold political office (The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, n.d.). This conflation between political power and economic interest intensified in the post-war reconstruction period and coincided with the boom of the real estate sector – the second largest contributor to the nation's GDP. This meant that “several real estate developers and contractors held, and still hold, prominent governmental positions, and several politicians have investments in the construction sector” (Saksouk-Sasso et al., 2015, p. 28). In fact, Khalili affirms how Lebanon exemplifies “the convergence of state power and private capital, often physically embodied in the same persons and families, [which] strips the public of any remaining right to spatial commons” (2016, p.7). Lebanese economic and political elites are thus considered to be one-in-the same. Politicians are seldom visibly tied to real estate projects, and instead choose to employ more deceptive methods when operating within this industry. In fact, they leverage ‘silent associates’, ‘one-project companies’ and ‘shell companies’ to conceal their involvement in large-scale projects (Saksouk-Sasso et al., 2015). As such, politicians operating in the shadows, shape the baherscape in a manner that best serves their respective interests, through both new legislation and exceptional decrees – that facilitate their exploitation of the baher. This dynamic comprises a key focal point of the baher's governance in the shadow, which subsequently informs government activity and intervention along the coast.

Through this section, I have explored the “why” behind government decision making. I have demonstrated baher governance as shaped by three dimensions: the baher's physical liminality; Lebanon's political liminal context; and a prevailing neoliberal ideology. In fact, the baher's liminal

¹⁵ The report was undertaken by ECODIT, an international advisory office, and the French Institut d'Aménagement Urbain de la Région d'Ile de France (IAURIF). See: <http://www.ecodit.com/ProjectDetails/?contId=5337>

dynamics (i.e. physical and political) pave the way for a neoliberal takeover of the baher, especially given the government's valorisation of private rights over public interests, as well as a collusion between political and economic elites. This in turn informs 'stubborn realities' plaguing the Lebanese baher, which inhibit the implementation of stated master plan ambitions, and instead degrade the public nature of the space. In the following section, I explore Ramlet El Bayda, the pilot project within the 'National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public', as a case study for how the government's baher aspirations translate – in practice – to implemented programmes. I thus inquire to what extent can government intervention structurally alter a space's socio-cultural liminal function, as either conduit for *communitas* or a platform for difference and othering.

5.5 The National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public: Environmental (in)justice?"

"Ramlet El Bayda, Beirut's last remaining sandy beach strip, is sandwiched between two five-star beach resorts: Mövenpick to the north, and Eden Bay to the south. Its corniche consists of a long concrete pedestrian sidewalk lined with palm trees, as well as sporadically-functioning light posts. Awkwardly positioned benches are just out of reach of the palm trees' shade, and lie unused during the heat of the day. Joggers are seen running along the length of the 1km corniche, while families and single people occupy the different benches at dusk. Young men use the corniche as a socializing space, and relax in the area with foldable chairs and shishas. Hawkers recurrently patrol the length of sidewalk, selling corn, cotton candy, DVDs and inflatable balloons.

A gated entrance separates the corniche from the beach. Upon arriving on the beach, one is greeted with a danger sign, warning visitors of potential riptides. There is a small café selling snacks, a large shack where beachgoers consume food and drinks in the shade, and huts for the beach administration. Nearby, one finds out-door showers, run down toilets, and a play area for children. Closer to the water, there is a seating area for beachgoers, including umbrellas, plastic tables and chairs; however, users must rent these facilities for the day, with prices averaging 15,000LBP to 20,000LBP (i.e. \$10 to \$18) at the time of fieldwork. Women tend to stay near the seating area, while men and children frolic and swim in the water. The conservative and working-class nature of beachgoers is reinforced by their covered bodies, as they swim in their clothing, which they simply wring-out upon their return to shore.

The north section of the beach holds a strong athletic character, including a makeshift gym, a football pitch, and volleyball court. The southern section is littered with rusted umbrellas, broken swings, as well as dilapidated equipment (see figure 7). This run-down feel is reinforced by litter, as well as sewage that slowly runs from open pipes towards the sea (see figure 8). The smell propagating is pungent, with the water covered

in algae, as birds are often seen landing nearby for a quick drink. Interestingly, a plaque posted on the corniche in 2018 by the Seven political party,¹⁶ reads: “Danger. High water pollution. Swimming may lead to serious diseases”. [Compilation of notes taken from fieldwork diary entries, 2015-2018]



Figure 7. Dilapidated structures, Ramlet El Bayda. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine



Figure 8. Ramlet El Bayda sewage. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine

¹⁶ The Seven political party is an opposition party to the then Lebanese government

In this section, I focus on Ramlet el Bayda, the pilot project for the National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public. I critically examine the programme's objectives and activities, with special attention drawn to related stakeholder narratives, both governmental and beachgoer. Through this, I explore "how" baher governance manifests spatially, with an emphasis on its ensuing environmental and social consequences. I ask whether presiding governance has the ability to structurally alter a public space's liminal character, as either a conduit for *communitas*, or a platform for difference and othering. Accordingly, I hypothesise should governance reinforce the latter, then this would gradually sever the connection between public spaces and their users, and subsequently facilitate further encroachment and privatisation.

The Directorate General of Land and Maritime Transport (hereinafter Directorate), located under the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, is responsible for setting, implementing and monitoring policies related to maritime public properties and waterfront development (DGLMT, 2016). This entity is the preeminent authority dealing with the public maritime domain and public beaches. Its work on the National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public, which commenced in 2003, has been deeply-rooted in the understanding that "all people" (see below) have the right to enjoy the nation's beaches. Eng. Abdel Hafeez El Kaissi, the Director General of land and Maritime Transport, recounted the programme's conception during a speech delivered at a 'Creating a public beach in Beirut' conference, organised by the Nahnoo¹⁷ and which I attended.

"We started [the programme] given the importance of all people, both Lebanese and people living in Lebanon, to enjoy the beaches along the coastline. This is an important initiative since it concerns 96% of the population. They [the working class] care about free beaches since they aren't able to attend private beaches due to their expensive fees... we made it a point not to use the term *sha'abel*¹⁸ in the programme's name, since people might think it means 'second-hand' or 'tertiary category'. That's why we settled on National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public, so that it may be comparable with any private beach." [Conference, 19/07/2014]

¹⁷ Nahnoo is a Lebanese NGO that specialises in issues relating to public spaces

¹⁸ Arabic for public, although denoting a more pejorative connotation, and commonly refers to a 'popular' or 'common' area frequented by lower economic classes

Adopting a programme that promotes free beaches denotes a prevailing threat posed by baher encroachments, which tend to reproduce a ‘classed’ understanding of the public through entrance fees that alienate working-class populations (Dictaphone Group, 2012; Sawalha, 2010; Zbeeb, 2012). Furthermore, branding concerns expressed by the Director refer to a larger issue: how public amenities may be perceived within Lebanese society. First, there was an evident linguistic aversion to using the term *sha’abeh*. This is solidified by a nuanced effort to name the programme as the National Programme for Free Beaches *for the* Public, instead of the National Programme for Free *Public* Beaches. ‘Public beach’ seems to encompass a pejorative connotation, which incentivises the government to distance both itself and its programmes from it. Second, Eng. El Kaissi’s insistence on making the programme “comparable with any private beach”, indicates the latter is viewed as a benchmark. One is thus able to deduce that public beaches, as well as the wider conceptualization of the term ‘public’, are often conflated with notions of a diminished status when compared to private spaces in Lebanon. Such an understanding may be the result of governmental ineptitude in providing basic necessities in Lebanon, including a restricted supply of utilities (Fardoun et al., 2012), as well as multiple waste management crisis (el-Husseini, 2015). This, in turn, necessitates the population to rely on private sector interventions (Nader, 2013), which are deemed as more dependable and of a better quality, although relatively more expensive. As Layla Kabalan, a program coordinator at the Issam Farres institute at the American University of Beirut, attests: “there is so much cynicism when it comes to the public, when it comes with anything that’s government run. We’d rather not have anything that’s government run. The private sector is seen as better” [Interview, 19/10/2015].

As part of the programme, the Directorate completed a study of Lebanon’s coastline and pinpointed fourteen separate locations that it deemed important to safeguard. This classification was based on the beaches’ topography, historic and cultural significance, as well as their proximity to high-population density areas. The selection of Ramlet El Bayda as a pilot project is unsurprising,

given how it constitutes the last remaining sandy beach strip in Beirut, and one of the few sites still catering to the working class (Khalili, 2016). Moreover, Ramlet El Bayda was once considered an integral part of Beiruti society, where families flocked from different quarters of the city to not only swim in the beach, but also perform culturally significant traditions such as Job's Wednesday¹⁹.

This tradition alludes to the legend of Job, a biblical prophet revered by Abrahamic religions, who was divinely-directed to swim in Ramlet El Bayda's pure waters in order to heal his illnesses. The tradition is believed to have spanned generations, and is meant to celebrate the prophet's patience and resoluteness while facing adversity. It is said women across the city would be responsible for gathering attendance from their respective areas – e.g. the Itani family overseeing Hamra and Aicha Bakkar neighbourhoods, the Salam family Basta, the Doughan family Tarik Al Jadida (Etlala Byblos, 2017). Once on the beach (see figures 9), Beirutis would prepare a traditional rice pudding dish (i.e. 'mufattaka'), smoke shisha, drink coffee and tea, exchange stories and narrate old tales, with children known to collect seashells and fly kites (Battah, 2015). Music was a focal point, with a melodious atmosphere accompanied by a traditional drum and chants. Games were typically played, including racing on the sand, tug of war, cards and backgammon. The event concluded with a bathing ritual, where beachgoers would dip into the water seven times across seven waves, while seeking a vow – normally in connection to prayers for fortune, or the healing of ailments (Itani, 2019). Preston-Whyte affirms how:

“...the cleansing act of immersion that takes place during religious ceremonies on beaches, are probably ages old. These actions seem to induce in believers a feeling of religious passion that imbues the beach with special meaning. It becomes a liminal space in which normal statuses are temporarily suspended: it becomes a sacred place” (2004, p. 353)

¹⁹ Known in Arabic as: "أربعاء أيوب", and previously occurring on the last Wednesday of April

In fact, an old Beirut saying proclaims: “whomever doesn’t bathe on Job’s Wednesday, their body would degrade and deteriorate”. Hassan Chehab, an elderly resident of the city declared: “everyone used to head down to Ramlet el Bayda... We would eagerly await the event every year, and thousands of people from all over Beirut would attend. It was so beautiful!” [Interview, in Beirut Urban Lab, 2020]. Ramlet El Bayda was thus a quintessential liminal site – be it religiously or socially. This is evidenced by the occurrence of quasi-sacred healing rituals, where beachgoers seeking divine assistance would dive into the water; but also, in terms of *communitas* educing experiences, where Beirutis gathered from different parts of the city, to weave together the social fabric of their shared cultural identity.



Figure 9. Crowds preparing for Job’s Wed in Ramlet El Bayda. **Source:** Al Anba’a Online

However, this tradition has become a distant memory, given how rising political tensions interrupted its occurrence, with the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war transforming the beach site into a space of fear and quasi ‘no go area’. This includes a 1976 incident, where the bullet-riddled bodies of the U.S. Ambassador (Francis Meloy Jr.) along with his economic counsellor were disposed in Ramlet El Bayda (Markham, 1976). The beach site was also adjacent to the infamous Beau Rivage Hotel, headquarters of the Syrian intelligence until 2005, where a number of Lebanese had been detained and abused (Al Jazeera, 2005). As such, the connection binding Beirutis to Ramlet El Bayda unravelled over time, with the nation’s protracted political instability acting as a key catalyst for this deterioration. In fact, a 2018 Nahnoo survey, which I helped formulate, uncovered how 73% of respondents signalled not being aware of any historical rituals or cultural practices along the seashore (Nahnoo, 2018). To this point, Ahmad Khouja, an architect and artist whose installation was placed in Ramlet El Bayda, decried: “the process of memory making stopped during the war. People stopped doing the rituals and traditions they would do. It interrupted their connection, and their children’s connection to these spaces” [Interview, 13/09/2015]. The vacuum created from diminished use, related memory loss, and dissipating cultural practices, subsequently enabled other groups to ‘take over’ the space, with Eng. Abdel Hafeez El Kaissi declaring in a speech delivered at a ‘Creating a public beach in Beirut’ conference:

“One only needs to consider who were the people that used to go before 2003, before we came and put our hands on the beach... There was a lot of challenges, effort and obstacles standing in our way from cleaning the area from the filth that was there... We don’t want families to go down to Ramlet El Bayda, and excuse me but be with *zo’ran* [thugs or people with deviant behaviour] ... The beach was divided in zones through wooden walkways, one for singles and the other for families... The project was successful, and when one would go down, they could now see the type of people there” [Conference, 19/07/2014]

The Director’s reference to *zo’ran* was made both directly and indirectly throughout the conference in connection to several groups: single men (i.e. who catcall and drink), drug users, and gay men who treated the space as a cruising area (Merabet, 2015). Furthermore, the government’s effort to

segment the beach into a family zone and a singles' zone highlights an inclination to police and control the behaviour of beachgoers, in order to limit unwanted activity. Notably single men are only allowed on the beach from 9am to 7pm, at which point they are asked to leave since the beach becomes family only from 7pm to 2:30am. One of the means employed by the Directorate to develop the pilot area was to invest in the beach's infrastructure. This was concluded in several stages: First, a cleaning effort mitigated the danger posed by the abundant litter. Second, cabins were provided for both administrative and first aid use, as well as toilets, and open-air showers. Third, the beach site was improved through the provision of umbrellas, look-out towers for lifeguards, potted vegetation, a play area for children, as well as wooden walkways. Finally, the Directorate appointed Cedars for Care Association,²⁰ a local NGO, to administer the beach site by providing needed human capital – namely administrators, lifeguards, first aid personnel, cleaners, and security guards [El Kaissi, conference, 19/07/2014]. This further crystallises the neoliberal ideology framing baher governance, where governmental actors outsource responsibilities to private and voluntary sectors (Raco, 2009).

The Directorate's efforts to maintain the pilot project were met with two key 'stubborn realities'. First, the National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public was placed on hold in 2011, following funding shortages. This explains the dilapidated conditions characterising Ramlet El Bayda at the time of fieldwork. Madanipour (2004) illustrates how public spaces that cater to marginal communities in various European cities (e.g. Amsterdam; Osteraum, Wuppertal; and Nøjsomhed, Helsingør), are substantially neglected in terms of upkeep and amenities offered, when compared to spaces that are frequented by dominant groups. For example, public spaces in Osteraum are characterised by "insufficient lighting, waste and inadequate repair" (ibid, p.278). Second, a fractured baher governance resulted in the Municipality of Beirut placing two sewage

²⁰ The Cedars for Care Association was later replaced by one of its subsidiaries: Operation Big Blue Association

pipelines onto the beach site – a fact validated by Eng. El Kaissi during the conference, and through my interview with Beirut municipality officials. Cynthia Bou Aoun, a journalist and public space activist, this affirms:

“A public space is not necessarily a dirty space. Beirut [municipality], what did they do? All these years they’ve been throwing their sewage in Ramlet El Bayda. So, it’s not about being public or not; people [who can afford private beach entrance fees] don’t like going there because it’s dirty. The poor only go there because it’s free. They know there’s sewage but cannot afford to go somewhere else. So automatically the area has been stamped as being working class, with the most marginalized social groups, because where are they going to go? They won’t go somewhere with a \$40 entrance fee, as much as half their wages!” [Interview, 20/08/2018]

Ms. Bou Aoun discredits any interpretation that links Ramlet El Bayda’s current problematic health and safety standards to its identity as a public space. Public spaces are not inherently polluted nor are they dirty spaces, but they become so when mismanaged by local and national governments. In this respect, a government that willingly places sewage lines directly onto the beach, and opts to reduce funding towards baher development initiatives, has rendered Ramlet El Bayda into a ‘sacrifice zone’ (Bullard, 2011) – where poor and marginalised communities bear witness to locally unwanted land use projects such as sewage. However, environmental discrimination targeting working-class populations is not unique to Ramlet El Bayda. Academics have explored both ethical and politico-ecological considerations of environmental (in)justice – specifically relating to the use of nature, its connection to power dynamics, as well as the resulting asymmetric socio-environmental effects on different groups (Lehtinen, 2009). Bullard (1990) examines how black and poor communities in the U.S. south hosted toxic dumping sites. Pulido (2000) argues that processes of suburbanisation in Los Angeles hold a connotation of white privilege, where white communities secure cleaner environments by moving-away from industrial areas. This equates to rich privilege in Lebanon, where middle and upper-class populations escape health hazards by purchasing admission to private beaches. This in-turn signifies a market-based rationale for environmental equity distribution, where consumerism secures healthy and safe environments.

Finally, geographic literature has focused on the ramifications of environmental injustice across different scales, with bodily harm being a key dimension (e.g. cancer, birth defects, asthma, etc.) (Towers, 2000; Taquino et al., 2002; Kurtz, 2003).

The health and safety risks stemming from Ramlet El Bayda's sewage is best evidenced by my interaction with two young men. A beachgoer and I had been hanging-out and talking about the water quality, or lack thereof, when he invited his friend to join our conversation: "Turn! Show him your skin" the beachgoer demands from his friend. The young man's skin was covered with discoloured blotches that run from his neck towards his lower back and onto his arms. "What is this?" I inquire. "This is what happens when you spend a lot of time in the water. I used to be a lifeguard here, and my body progressively got covered with this throughout the summer" the young man answers. "Are you treating it?" I inquire. "I don't have the money to treat it" he responds. "See what we swim in! We swim in polluted waters that make us sick!" the other beachgoer declared. To this point, two survey respondents from Basta and Jneh, who used to work on the beach, once declared that Ramlet El Bayda is jokingly called the 'red sea', given the reddish tint of polluted water. They recounted an incident the previous week, where a young girl's face swelled after entering the water. In fact, Jina Talj, a marine ecologist and environmental activist, affirming the biggest issue facing the baher is "sewage... if it's faeces, then it's a matter of disgust. But if it contains bacteria that is harmful to us, or in levels that are higher than they should be, then it becomes dangerous... Ramlet El Bayda is horrible" [Interview, 31/07/2018]. Unfortunately, bacteria levels in some parts of Lebanon's baher exceeds 100 times the amount that would prompt the closure of a public beach within New York (Enders, 2018). Given the above, a representative from Operation Big Blue Association, a non-profit non-governmental environmental organization in charge of the beach site's administration, alluded towards a wider baher governance dynamic gripping the space:

“It is very clear the political games at play, and their [elites] goals. If you look at Zaitunay bay²¹, it was made into a landfill and wasn’t of any use to anyone. They then reclaimed it and turned it into resorts... The objective I want to get you to is that there is no coincidence that the sewage is in Ramlet El Bayda... Why are people not applying this [existing laws safeguarding from sewage practices]? You know that the people who carry-out these projects are the same authority figures in the government. Why didn’t they take it and apply the law?” [Interview, 28/08/2018]

OBBA’s representative speculates about the intent behind placing sewage lines onto the beach site. He frames this as a strategic effort by government elites to drive people away from the space, thus facilitating a neoliberal takeover of the beach. Geographers have written extensively on how perceived abandonment and dereliction of public spaces leads them to be claimed by marginalised groups; and how a resulting backlash ensues, where governments and capital holders subsequently exclude these populations in pursuit of their neoliberal interests (e.g. Staeheli and Mitchell, 2007; Doherty et al., 2002; Mitchell, 1998a and 1998b). The representative’s belief is centred around the disregard for existing maritime safety standards and regulations, specifically by contractors partnering with local municipalities and national public entities. He claims this has paved the way for the privatisation of the southernmost section of Ramlet El Bayda by the Eden Bay hotel.²² Interestingly, a few days prior to the opening of Eden Bay, workers from Ashour holdings, the real estate company behind the project, blocked a sewage pipe in Ramlet El Bayda. The sewage line was subsequently rerouted towards a fishermen’s port in the nearby Saint Simon area, a working-class coastal neighbourhood. To this point, Mohammad Ayoub, a baher activist and Nahnoo’s president, decried: “The calls for removing the sewage have been there since the 1990s. So, there is a scandal today, because of one project [Eden Bay], because of one person [Ashour], suddenly the sewage has been blocked and rerouted somewhere else!” (Interview, in Al Jadeed TV, 2018).

²¹ Zaitunay Bay, also known as St. Georges Bay, is a high-end commercial development project

²² Eden Bay hotel’s takeover of Ramlet El Bayda will be discussed in more detail in the third empirical chapter

In this section, I have examined the National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public, via an exploration of its pilot project: Ramlet El Bayda beach. Despite Ramlet El Bayda's socio-cultural significance, as evidenced by Job's Wednesday, its relationship with Beirutis has been severed across three governance takes. First, Lebanon's political instability rendered the beach a 'no go area' dominated by *z'o'oran*. Second, the programme was placed on hold in 2011, following funding shortages. This rendered the beach site neglected, with resulting dilapidated conditions being observed at the time of the fieldwork. Third, a fractured governmental baher approach resulted in the Municipality of Beirut placing two sewage pipelines onto the beach; with some framing it as a strategic effort by political and economic elites to drive people away from the space, in order to facilitate subsequent privatisation of the beach site. As a result, environmental injustices manifest within Ramlet El Bayda across varying scales, including: the beach site, which reinforces the working-class nature of the space; as well as beachgoer's bodies, with the sewage causing bodily harm, as swelling and skin conditions. Baher governance has thus shaped Ramlet El Bayda's transformation from a quasi-sacred place, where Beirutis previously gathered to perform cultural experiences that knit together the communal fabric of society; into a sewage-infested, dilapidated, and neglected beach site, that reinforces social fragmentation via health and safety concerns targeting marginalised communities. Consequently, Ramlet El Bayda has been gradually disconnected from everyday Beiruti lived experiences, as evidenced by the disappearance of cultural practices like Job's Wednesday. This process has not only facilitated a neoliberal takeover by the Eden Bay hotel, but was eventually replicated in Saint Simon – a neighbouring working-class beach site.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have critically assessed the Lebanese government's role within the baherscape, by unpacking its influence over the production of the baher. I have explored baher governance

across two scales: nationally, via a discourse analysis of the 'National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory'; and more locally by turning attention to Ramlet El Bayda beach – the pilot project for the 'National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public'. I juxtapose these two framings in order to elucidate governance processes shaping the baher, which hollow-out stated government ambitions, and ultimately result in exacerbated environmental injustices. Preston-Whyte (2004) affirms: "...whether or not the regeneration, relaxation, and recreation associated with beaches induce a sense of liminality depends on the conditions conducive to releasing the magic of the place" (2004, p. 352-353). Accordingly, I posit that the release of a place's 'magic' is partly influenced by presiding governance, given how it guides government intervention, and subsequently shapes the type(s) of beachgoer experiences that a space is able to host.

Through this analysis, I have demonstrated the existence of a synergetic relationship between a public space's governance and its liminal context and function. In fact, the combination of the baher's physical liminal setting, along with Lebanon's political liminal context, enable the government to enact a neoliberal (re)ordering of the space. This facilitates the baher's (un)public transformation, especially given the government's valorisation of private rights versus public interests, as well as a collusion between political and economic elites. Moreover, I have illustrated how the governance of public space may structurally alter its liminal character. In fact, baher governance guides the government's subsequent spatial intervention(s), which consequently informs the type(s) of liminal beachgoer experiences that a space is able to host. I have deployed the case study of Ramlet El Bayda to demonstrate how baher governance led to environmental injustices, which in turn severed the connection between coastal communities (i.e. Beirutis) and this socio-culturally significant beach site. As such, governance – via its socio-spatial manifestations – may alter the liminal character of public spaces, and transform them from sites of relaxation and community building, to becoming spaces that accentuate difference and social disparities. To put it more simply, I have illustrated how the function of public spaces may

transform over time, in a manner that correlates with government intervention within a space. With this in mind, the following chapter pivots focus towards exploring how private beach actors shape the baherscape, and how this in turn informs the production of the baher.

6 | (Un)public space II: Weaving private beaches, via in/out groups and ‘snagged threads’

6.1 Introduction

“Upon my arrival at the Tehoum field site, I drive towards my desired venue, park my car, and hand my keys to the valet-parking. This first gateway is marked by brief, although discernible, effort by the parking representative to gauge who I am – including a glance at my car, the company I am with, my behaviour, and my chosen attire. I walk down a path and arrive at a second gateway, where I am greeted by a receptionist who first carries out the financial transaction that would grant me access; and second, rummages through my belongings and confiscates ‘outside’ food items and beverages. After paying, I navigate my way through the venue, walking past neatly landscaped gardens and flowers, to reach a clearly demarcated segment of the beach strip (see figure 10). The staff member responsible for seating subsequently sprints to set-up my lounge chair and umbrella, and hovers in the near-vicinity in search of a tip. Every so often, my relaxation is momentarily interrupted by a waiter asking whether I would like to have any food delivered from the restaurant, or drinks from the bar. Additionally, cleaners can often be seen walking around the venue, picking-up any litter that has been left behind by beachgoers.

Sunbathing and swimming are widely-embraced by Tehoum’s beachgoers. Other recreational activities include: massages, sports equipment rentals, wellness classes (e.g. yoga and Zumba), and periodic events (e.g. night-time parties, or themed days – e.g. ‘Happy Wednesday’ for discounted alcoholic drinks). Bikinis and swimsuits, often matched with a pair of designer sun glasses, are a staple for the liberal and economically privileged beachgoers. Additionally, interaction between male and female patrons is prevalent in Tehoum, where I often observed public displays of affection, including: hugging, standing in close proximity, and kissing.” [Compilation of notes taken from fieldwork diary entries, 2015-2016]



Figure 10. ‘Loco beach’ aerial view. Source: Loco beach (Instagram)

I deem private beach venues along the Lebanese baher as (un)public spaces. I deploy the qualifier (un) before 'public', given how the publicness of these spaces is highly contingent on an individual's belonging to a preconceived 'spending public'. In fact, private beach administrators lay claim over the Public Maritime Domain adjacent to their respective venues, which according to Decree No. 144 is defined as public property that is intended for public use (Legal Agenda, 2016). Additionally, urban geographer Kurt Iveson (1998) defines public spaces by categorizing them into different models, one of which being 'community spaces' where the public materialises in both publicly and privately-owned spaces. However, he clarifies how this model has been equated lately with gentrification and is often tailored to the 'spending public'. Private beaches in Lebanon are thus sites of contestation, where power relations and identities are reproduced through formulations of in/out-groups and (non)belonging, and reinforced via related exclusionary policies and practices. With this in mind, I ask: for whom are private beach venues 'public'?

In this chapter, I assess the role of private beach actors (i.e. administrators and beachgoers) within the baherscape, by unpacking their influence over the production of the baher. I explore how the baher is rendered (un)public by examining the nexus between identity politics, as informed by competing interpretations of 'acceptable public', as well as related exclusionary territorial practices. Although a rich body of geographic research engages with identity politics, discussions are often primarily anchored around binaries of 'self' versus 'other', 'belonging' versus 'non-belonging', 'in-group' versus 'out-group', and 'inclusion' versus 'exclusion'. In contrast, I shift focus away from the roots and outcomes of identity politics, and instead examine identity politics as a process. I do this by focusing on threshold experiences where/when an individual's belonging is negotiated, a designation of in/out-group is formulated, and constructions of a specific 'public' are underway. I explore to what extent beachgoers undergo liminal experiences within spaces of regulated baher-consumption, with particular attention paid to a number of 'gateways' intrinsically linked to, and

informed by, specific beachgoer identities. As such, I pivot attention towards the scale of the body, and unpack the connection between liminality and multiple concurrent binaries – i.e. in/out-group and (non)belonging. Furthermore, I examine whether conceptual engagement with in/out-groups and (non)belonging is better served by decoupling these notions via a nuanced analysis of their existing dissonance. I postulate that despite a large degree of resonance between said concepts, a designation of one does not necessarily implicate an equal and proportionate allocation of the other.

Empirically, I focus on Tehoum's private beach venues. The site attracts both locals – be it from the adjacent areas, or driving-up from Beirut – and tourists alike. This is largely due to its relative proximity to the historic and culturally influential cities of Byblos and Batroun, as well as its reputation of having clean and beautiful waters. After setting out connections between identity politics and liminality, I examine three articulations of identity politics in private beach spaces: first how narratives and imaginations of private beach actors contribute to formulations of in/out-groups; second how politics of representation inform exclusionary practices along the Lebanese baher; and third, triangulating the above information via an exploration of liminal beachgoer experiences, with an emphasis on how this theoretical reframing results in more granular and nuanced understandings.

6.2 Reconciling identity politics and liminality as conceptual approaches

Identity, given its connection with space and place, constitutes an important notion for geographers. In this respect, space is not just understood as a container of identity, but is also seen as informing and being informed by it (Keith and Pile, 1993). Geographers have most commonly looked at identity through work on geographies of difference (Law, 2002; Sibley, 1981 and 1995; Mitchell, 1995). This includes a large breadth of literature that focuses on identity derived

difference linked with race, gender, class and sexuality; however, these differences are not perceived as being mutually exclusive, for they are intersectional and co-constitutive (Clayton, 2018). As a result, geography uses out-groups, where identity is shaped by 'what is not' rather than 'what is', as a lens to comprehend the politics of places, as well as exclusionary and inclusionary spatial policies. Dubow (2009) affirms that identity necessitates the construction of a symbolic boundary that cements selfhood as being distinct from the 'other', and this symbolic boundary often also translates to a physical boundary – a threshold – through the production of space. In his influential work on this topic, Sibley (1981, 1995) highlights how dominant groups use residential segregation in order to 'purify' spaces of the unwanted 'out group'. Anderson (1991) also illustrates that spatial processes play a role in constructing imagined communities that separate the self from the other. Consequently, geographers' focus on out-groups and marginalised communities has led to nuanced analysis of identity politics.

Young (1990) defines identity politics as the 'politics of difference' that assesses social and political relations through the material and metaphorical reproduction and consolidation of 'self' and 'other'. Given the inequality that results from exploitative power dynamics and its contextualisation within spatial practices, the notions of territory and territoriality have been central to geographic explorations around the relationship between identity politics and space. Territory is thus understood as a politicised space that is mapped and claimed, measured and demarcated, ordered and bordered (Elden, 2010). It is also understood as a circumscribed space within which people who possess commonalities differentiate themselves from out-groups by spatially demarcating their communities (Sack, 1983). Territoriality, meanwhile, is the attempt to control a geographic area through the exertion of influence on its inhabitants and activities (Sack 1983). Territoriality's physical space, which can roughly be equated with social space (Anderson, 2010), reflects the importance that a geographic location withholds with regards to identity, social networks, power and politics (Graham et al., 2006). This 'spatial apartheid' (Davis, 1990), whereby

a specific group creates homogenous spaces through the exertion of power, tends to solidify social exclusion as well as incite negative stereotypes of out-groups (Dikec, 2007).

Discussions of intersection of identities with inclusion/exclusion have often been linked to the notion of belonging. There exists two interlinked layers for understanding belonging, with the first being intrinsically social, whilst the second being more spatial. Social belonging describes an affinity or attachment to a particular community or social group; whilst spatial belonging situates this connection in a particular geographic location or place (Mee and Wright, 2009). Both these views materialise at a number of scales, from the local, to the national, to the transnational (Gilmartin, 2017). Additionally, legal scholars have used the term belonging while discussing property rights – be it private or public; given how property is located at the intersection between space and belonging (Keenan, 2014). Building on the aforementioned, Antonsich (2010) declares that belonging lies at the intersection between ‘place-belongingness’ where one feels at ease, and ‘politics of belonging’, which is characterised by inclusionary/exclusionary processes that overlap with notions of power and territoriality. Within the vein of ‘politics of belonging’, Massey (2011) argues that the key question is ‘to whom a place belongs’, rather than ‘who belongs in a place’; which further highlights the connection between territorial practices, identity politics, and belonging. Finally, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, p.1010) affirm that ways of belonging encompass identity-based practices that embody “a conscious connection to a particular group”. As such, belonging is thus formulated through other key concepts including: space, social inclusion/exclusion, and most importantly identity.

Given its connection to both identity and belonging, class constitutes an important lens of analysis when examining exclusionary practices within private beaches. This is typified through discriminatory financial barriers of entry which marginalize working class populations. Geography has largely embraced class through Marxism and its connection to key geographical concepts,

including: space, place and the environment (Das, 2019). Class is normally examined through an investigation of presiding neoliberal policies, with Harvey (2006) arguing that neoliberalism and privatisation have been deployed by the capitalist class to further cement its power and subsequently reinforce its rift from the labour class. Steven Lukes (2005) asserts that power is predominantly employed by dominant groups in order to pursue their economic agendas and class interests. Additionally, Sayer (2005) has written extensively on the moral significance of class, in which he asserts that class-based inequality transcends wealth, to also incorporate differences in access to 'valued ways of life'. It must be noted, however, that geography's cultural turn, which took place in the late twentieth century, emphasises research around identity, difference, and representation, and in turn diminishes the importance attributed to 'class' as a lens of analysis. This has been met with criticism from a number of geographers who still affirm that power dynamics and inequalities are very much intertwined with 'class' as a notion (Wood, 1998; Valentine, 2001; Cox, 2016). Most notably, Smith (2000) declared the irony behind class becoming a less-examined factor, especially given the rise of both the global industry and neoliberalism in recent decades. In response, Smith attests that class needs to move-away from inflexible Marxist interpretations, to instead encompass a more nuanced formulation of its intersection with other identity markers, such as: race, gender, age, and sexuality.

Within this literature, public space has emerged as a key site in which intersections between identity, belonging, and class emerge alongside exclusionary policies and practices (Goheen, 1998; Law 2002). For example, Ruddick (1996) focuses on crime within public spaces to examine how the control over public space plays an important role in the reproduction of class strategies. The dominance of private interests within public space is also of concern to geographers, as this facilitates the exclusion of out-groups (Low and Smith, 2006). For example, Keul (2015) highlights how a neoliberal ordering of Connecticut's beaches resulted in mechanics of exclusion that hinge upon race, class and locality. McCay alludes to the "tragedies of the commoners" (2008, p. 16), a

zero-sum game where certain members of the public gain special privileges while others lose public rights. Lamarque (2009) points to increasingly restrictive conditions within commons along coastal lands and waters, largely stemming from related urbanization, industrialization and gentrification.

With the above theoretical framing in mind, I question whether dualistic framings of in/out-group, (non)belonging, self/other, inclusion/exclusion, and (un)public can adequately deal with the intricacies of complex intersectional identities. Using such labels falsely conveys, even if unintentionally, a sense of uniformity between individuals whom are grouped together. It is within this constraint that I turn to liminality as a complementary lens that enables a more thorough engagement with identity politics. I do not argue that assessing liminal experiences enables us to overcome binary thinking, for as Banfield (2022, p. 612) notes “...an academic focus on the threshold between two terms is still bound to the two terms that define the threshold”. Instead, I claim that threshold experiences within private beaches, where beachgoers are betwixt and between (Turner, 1967) dualistic designations, comprise a better vantage point for unpacking varying degrees of socio-spatial belonging. As Downey and colleagues (2016) suggest, this fluidity and malleability enables a broader explanation in an imprecise world. Liminality has become an increasingly popular framework within tourism studies, especially given the transitional nature of tourist experiences (i.e. in time and space), as well as its subsequent impact on encounter (Bristow and Jenkins, 2020). Pritchard and Morgan (2006) highlight how scholarly work linking liminality with tourism has been mostly associated with beaches – a quintessential liminal space between land and sea. As such, I examine liminal tourism experiences within Lebanese private beach venues, with particular attention paid to associated identity politics that may inform them.

6.3 ‘Common thread’ and ‘Other’: narratives, imaginations, and politics of representation

Private beach venues cater to a specific subset of the Lebanese population, its clientele – or rather an ‘acceptable public’ that secures access to this space via consumption. This is best illustrated by the representative of the Syndicate of Seaside Resort Operators, who delineated two-key concepts: the ‘common thread’ (i.e. in-groups) and the ‘other’ (i.e. out-groups), during an interview held at his family-owned ‘Bel Azure’ hotel and beach resort:

“Every institution has its clientele, who form a common thread... When a stranger [other] goes in, they’ll feel weird and move to another location... Some institutions cater to families, some to women only, some to clubbing fans with alcohol and dancing. Every institution has a type of client that feels content there” [Interview, 15/12/2015]

Private beach venues are thus viewed as being open and accessible to a limited, prescribed and predefined public, rather than truly embracing the unrestricted ‘public’ nature envisaged by the National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory. Additionally, it is revealing how a beachgoer’s belonging is linked to their emotional experience within a space, or as the representative of the Syndicate of Seaside Resort Operators phrases it: “they’ll feel weird” or “content”. This projects the decision to belong, or not, onto the beachgoer themselves by virtue of their subsequent comfort level; which also effectively discounts the role of private beach administrators in ordering and managing their respective spaces. As such, he stresses ‘place-belongingness’, where one feels at home/ease, and understates the ‘politics of belonging’, as informed by related exclusionary processes that overlap with notions of power and territoriality (Antonsich, 2010). Designations of in/out-groups are thus integral to comprehending private beach venues – be it in Lebanon or abroad – especially since access and use of these (un)public spaces tends to be negotiated. As such, in this section I examine how private beach actors’ (i.e. administrators and beachgoers) narratives and imaginations contribute to formulations of in/out-groups – or rather the ‘common thread’ or the ‘other’.

6.3.1 The ‘common thread’: archetypes of Tehoum’s private beachgoers

Identity is most commonly defined as being a set of socially constructed traits around which members of a group organise (Kobayashi, 2009). It is imperative to recognise that individuals and groups are not limited to a uniform identity, but instead express multiple identities (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). Identities are often classified into different categories in order to facilitate their analysis. Hutchinson and Smith (1996) classify identity as either being ‘primordial/intrinsic’, where identities are static and fixed, or ‘instrumental’, where identities are social constructs that alter according to the socio-political context they serve. In this respect, being a family relation to someone would constitute an intrinsic identity, whereas being a member of the same economic class would be considered as more instrumental. As such, this research focuses on the ‘instrumental’ dimension of identity when examining Tehoum’s in-groups. Instead of attempting to describe a singular understanding of the ‘typical’ Tehoum beachgoer, this research draws on private beach actor narratives and imaginations to outline a plurality of different archetypes that jointly inform the sites’ ‘common thread’. These archetypes may differ from each other when viewed through a specific lens of analysis, however they are understood as intersecting when examined through the lens of economic privilege. With this in mind, this section details the existence of four archetypes that partly inform Tehoum’s in-groups, and which include: the liberal beachgoer, the family unit, the cosmopolitan elite, and the ‘papaz’.

The ‘liberal beachgoer’ label was both explicitly and implicitly mentioned throughout the data collection, with the latter being predominantly illustrated through mentions of: “drinking”, “partying”, “being open-minded” and “wearing revealing clothes” [Interviews and surveys: 26/08/2015; 25/09/2015; 16/06/2016; 27/07/2018]. This archetype contrasts with the conservatism demonstrated by Ramlet El Bayda’s users, where there is a noticeable absence of the exposed body, as well as relatively restricted participation of female beachgoers – who tend to

remain close to the tables dotting the shoreline. This liberal mindset is evidenced by Pierre & Friends' manager when discussing the venue's clientele:

“[our clients are] mainly young people [who] drink and enjoy the music... When you have nice music and are creating a nice ambiance where people go down with their girlfriends and friends then you have fun” [Interview, 08/10/2015]

The manager's characterisation of the venue's beachgoers encompasses two telling dimensions. First, the evident liberal nature of the Tehoum's beachgoers is linked to non-marital relationships (i.e. “their girlfriends”), drinking alcohol, and music. This is reinforced by observed public displays of affection (e.g. flirting, hugging, kissing, and cuddling). This was echoed in a focus group discussion with private beachgoers where one participant (Beachgoer #10, Female, 22) noted that “we are equally comfortable no matter where we are [in Tehoum]. Because they are liberal people.” [Focus group interview, 16/06/2016]. Relatedly, Beachgoer #10 – who visits the field site on a monthly basis – signals that her comfort in Tehoum is primarily related to it being frequented by “liberal people” who respect her choice to wear a bikini and drink.

Research participants also articulated how different archetypes appropriated the beach space in distinctive ways, with ‘liberals’ embracing party-esque behaviour, whilst the second archetype – the ‘family unit’ – enjoying the culinary experiences offered within these spaces. Pierre & Friend's manager asserted that: “We also have families that come since we have a restaurant. We have very good food... families come eat and leave” [Interview, 08/10/2015]. The owner of Oasis Beach also noted this pattern, with the venue's safety being a key appeal: “we also have some families, who don't throw their women wherever, so they tell me they come here feeling as if they are at home... I want families to feel safe” [Interview, 08/10/2015]. This alludes to the reproduction of a patriarchal Lebanese mind-set within private beaches, where women are perceived as requiring protection. This is noteworthy given how such a narrative partly diverges from what would be typically expected of a liberal mind-set, which indicates a Lebanese interpretation of liberal – where

drinking and revealing attire are condoned, but patriarchy with its sexist undertones is very much upheld. Moreover, signalling the presence of a safe-space implies that a threatening experience may await female beachgoers outside (i.e. within public beaches).

The third archetype is that of the ‘cosmopolitan elite’. Research participants did not specifically use this label, but rather mentioned specific nationalities, or used the term ‘foreigner’. It must be noted that the term ‘foreigner’ does not have the same pejorative connotation in Lebanon as in Western examples (e.g. United Kingdom, United States), possibly due to foreigners comprising a lifeline to the nation’s tourism and service industries. That being said, I have refrained from deploying ‘foreigner’ as an archetype and opted instead for ‘cosmopolitan elite’, given how the former generally comprises a loaded term within geographic scholarship. In fact, cosmopolitan elite repeatedly came up in discussions around Tehoum’s different user groups, especially with beach administrators:

“We have a lot of foreign customers that come from embassies like Ukraine, Russia, and France... Some Lebanese people tell me that they don’t feel like they are in Lebanon. They feel like they are in Europe and Greece!” [Oasis Beach, 08/10/2015].

“We see Europeans, Americans and Australians. I don’t think there’s any tourist that wants to experience the nightlife without passing by” [Pierre & Friends, 08/10/2015].

Given the above, this archetype seems to be racialised, with a preference attributed to white beachgoers, rather than Arab beachgoers who constitute the largest tourism group (BLOM Bank, 2015). This is deeply rooted in post-colonial discourse characterising the Lebanese cultural context. The colonisers, in Lebanon’s case the French during the mandate, were seen as civilised and possessing a certain cultural superiority; which is still visible in certain aspects of Lebanese society, with the French Language being embraced by the educated elite, whilst the native tongue being at times considered inferior (Bacha and Bahous, 2019). By advertising the presence of cosmopolitan elites within their venues, beach administrators signal how this archetype deems the space as

meeting 'White-Western' standards. Moreover, by affirming that "Some Lebanese people tell me that they don't feel like they are in Lebanon" (see above) while visiting Tehoum's venues, administrators are subtly disassociating the space from Lebanon's muddled environmental image – which comes as a result of prevalent beach pollution (Azar and Nasser, 2018); all while conveying an experience comparable to Western beaches.

The final archetype is the 'papaz', a Lebanese slang term that derives from the French word *papa*, meaning father, and colloquially denotes a daddy's boy/girl. This term, both explicitly mentioned and implicitly hinted at, was exclusively deployed by private beachgoers within this research. For example, Beachgoer #7, a 23-year-old female Tehoum beachgoer, recounted: "In Lebanon we have a term 'papaz'. It's people that do not live for themselves but for others. That put on a show. We find those people in resorts because they are more expensive" [Interview, 25/09/2015]. This connection to overt expressions of economic privilege was echoed by other interviewees:

- "[Papaz is] the type of beachgoer in private beaches with the champagne. The overly show-off rich person... They like the idea that they can afford an entrance fee, then they post it on social media so everyone can know that they paid 40\$ to get in. Its empowering to them" [Beachgoer #14, Interview, 16/08/2016]
- "In the more privileged ones [private beaches], you are going there for a show. People get dressed up... Everyone looks their best. It's nothing new, the expensive Lebanese mentality." [Beachgoer #3, Interview, 26/08/2015]
- "Some people who go to Bonita Bay [Loco Beach] could be better off because they pay an entrance fee that is higher. So, obviously you'd see people carrying designer purses, and maybe not see that in White Beach" [Beachgoer #10, Interview, 16/06/2016].

Participants often mentioned papaz when describing private beachgoers with unappealingly, ostentatious behaviour. This was articulated in multiple ways, with Beachgoer #7 noting how they live for others; Beachgoer #14 directly associating them with a show-off rich person; Beachgoer #3 acknowledging a connection with show-obsessed "expensive Lebanese mentality"; and Beachgoer #10 affirming how some of Tehoum's venues have a higher proclivity such behaviour,

especially given their more expensive entrance fees. Papaz is thus linked to conspicuous consumption (Veblen and Mills, 2017), with related behavioural patterns signalling relative upper-class social power and prestige – be it real or imagined. This archetype demonstrates how not all in-groups are viewed positively within private beaches, and signifies a fracture within Tehoum’s ‘common thread’. As such, grouping archetypes into a dichotomous structure of in/outgroups may be a misleading endeavour in itself, with said designations not necessarily implicating an equal and proportionate allocation of belonging.

6.3.2 The ‘other’: working-class public beachgoers as ‘conservative’ and ‘nawar’

Detailing archetypes that jointly inform Tehoum’s ‘common thread’ shines light on part of the identity-derived power dynamics within private beaches along the Lebanese baher. Accordingly, it is also imperative to explore how out-groups are conceived of by private beachgoers. Scott (2009) affirms that politics of representation promote specific ways of knowing and imagining the world around us, and are subsequently embraced by dominant groups to marginalize and exclude the unwanted ‘other’. Within this vein, politics of representation may also be used to identify existing constellations of power and privilege (Duncan and Duncan, 2004), as in the case of private beaches in Lebanon. That being said, scholarly interest in representation seems to be diminishing, with human geographers diverting more attention to embodied practices and experiences (Castree and MacMillan, 2004). In response, this chapter recognises the importance of politics of representation, and acknowledges the linkage between representation and ensuing embodied practices of discriminatory behaviour.

Othering is understood as the process through which dominant groups construct the ‘other’ by accentuating a dissimilarity – be it real or imagined – that separates them from the ‘self’. As Staszak (2009, p. 43) puts it: “difference belongs to the realm of fact and otherness belongs to the realm

of discourse”. This implies that otherness is connected to an instrumental view of identity, where it is largely defined through simplistic, stigmatising, and socially-constructed stereotypes. Saïd (1978) elaborated on the imaginative geographies of ‘self’ and ‘other’ through his writings on Orientalism. According to him, Europeans ‘other’ the oriental and project stereotypes onto them as a result of the presiding geographic distance and cultural difference that separates them from the ‘savage’. This often transcends the metaphorical realm to materialise physically through spatial organisation, like segregation or territorial constructions – which in turn further emphasises the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Sibley, 2009). Similarly, ‘non-belonging’ is normally used by geographers to focus on marginal societal groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, women, homosexuals, the disabled, etc.) (Gilmartin, 2017). It is related to ‘otherness’ as a concept, but also builds on it by moving past identity-derived rhetoric to also examine marginalisation through exclusionary policies and practices. ‘Non-belonging’ can be expressed both socially and spatially, with the latter being upheld through processes of territorialisation that produce borders, boundaries, and enclaves. Winders (2007) investigates new bordering practices in the U.S. south, and how they promote the ‘non-belonging’ of Latino immigrants; and Yuval-Davis and colleagues (2005) unpack ‘non-belonging’ through the perspective of female migrants in Britain.

This research establishes a parallel between the ‘other’ and the public beachgoer, given how research participants leveraged examples of the latter when discussing out-groups. This largely stems from private beachgoers rarely frequenting public beaches,²³ thus perpetuating this apparent chasm. This was highlighted during a focus group interview with Tehoum’s private beachgoers:

- Tarek: “Would you ever go to a public beach in Lebanon?”
- Beachgoer #10: “No, because we know what public beaches in Lebanon are like, from word of mouth... Public places and the public sector are not well maintained; so, it isn’t appropriate nor sanitary to venture into them. You wouldn’t feel comfortable going to public beaches in Lebanon because they are all filthy with

²³ With the exception the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve, which will be examined in the third empirical chapter

sewage, and because the type of people they attract make me feel uncomfortable and unsafe”

- Beachgoer #11: “...the problem is you go there, and since you are the minority then you would be judged [for your attire]”
- Beachgoer #10: “You won’t fit in. The same way they [public beachgoers] do not fit into Pierre & Friends. Just like you’ll never see a woman wearing a burka there, you will never see a woman wearing a bikini and lounging in Ramlet El Bayda”

[Focus group interview, 16/06/2016]

Accordingly, Tehoum’s clientele – both female, one 22 and the other 18 – linked out-groups to public beachgoers, whom they perceived as being working class and conservative. Beachgoer #10 & 11 thus draw a parallel between their personal reluctance of visiting public beaches, to Ramlet El Bayda users “not fitting into” Tehoum. In this respect, Ramlet El Bayda users are othered due to their relatively conservative practices (e.g. wearing a burka), which are seen as threatening to the private beachgoer ‘mode de vie’. It is noteworthy how private beachgoers hold strong conceptions of the ‘public beachgoer’ despite never personally frequenting public beaches, nor interacting with their user groups. This was illustrated by Beachgoer #10’s admittance that “we know what public beaches in Lebanon are like, from word of mouth”; as well as during an interview with Beachgoer #7, a female 23-year-old marketing executive:

“You hear what people think about them [public beaches], what your parents say, and it’s usually very negative. They basically say it’s not for women, not even just that, but it’s not for my type of person. Not because its free – we would all love to have a free beach – but I think the result of it being free brings [hesitation]... I don’t want to sound horrible, but lower classes. In Lebanon the difference between social classes is really big, and you find lower classes extremely conservative” [Interview, 25/09/2015]

To this point, Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory states that children learn and adopt negative attitudes, like hate and ‘othering’, from their socializing agents since they are driven by their need to be accepted and loved by those who are important to them. As such, Tehoum’s private beachgoers are socialised by their respective families and surroundings to formulate a predefined understanding of out-groups, which namely others low-economic classes through their perceived high-degrees of conservatism. Beachgoer #10 reaffirms this during the focus group interview:

“You have to keep in mind that we are in a third world country and around 70% of the population, if not more, is uneducated... Uneducated means they are not aware of what there is outside their surroundings. They do not know that some people wear a bikini, and that there is nothing wrong with that” [Focus group interview, 16/06/2016]

It is precisely due to this perceived “lack of knowing”, and how this translates onto the physical and sociological dimensions of the beach, that private beachgoers are disincentivised from embracing out-groups within their spaces, and from frequenting spaces dominated by them (i.e. public beaches). This rhetoric culminates in Tehoum’s private beachgoers frequently employing ‘Nawar’ when discussing out-groups. ‘Nawar’ is an Arabic term that denotes undesirable behaviour normally with connotations of a low social status. It historically refers to a group of Middle Eastern nomads. When asked to define the term ‘Nawar’ interviewees noted:

- “A nawar would occupy the whole beach. They would be very loud, they would throw dirt left and right, and leave trash everywhere. Provoking people.” [Beachgoer #5, Interview, 02/09/2015]
- “Poor Syrians, especially refugees. Poorer segments of the population. Less educated segments of the population. Usually men between 15 and 30, with their hair slicked back.” [Beachgoer #4, Interview, 14/09/2016]
- “Lower class, sketchy, rude. It’s also religious, because when guys dress in long pants and the girls that are all veiled go to the beach, we perceive them as nawar” [Beachgoer #10, Interview, 16/06/2016].

Nawar is thus used as a designation of unsanitary and bothersome behaviour pertaining to uneducated and conservative working-class beachgoers. To this end, Taylor (2008) looks into the loaded term ‘chav’, its connection with disgust, and how working-class people are represented by the British media. Additionally, Staszak (2009) theorizes how confining marginal social groups to ghetto-like spaces, promotes the perpetuation of misery. As such, these ghetto-like conditions are consequently used, a posteriori, as justification by dominant groups for their marginalization of the other, as well as for deriving a sense of superiority of the ‘self’. Private beachgoers’ conceptualization of nawar relates to behavioural patterns that deviate from those typically

observed within Tehoum. As such, beachgoers who are not socialised to act in a manner befitting a private venue's locale, may run the risk of being labelled as nawar and subsequently othered. Having explored private beachgoer formulations of 'common thread' and other', I move onto examining private beach administrator's exclusionary policies and practices, especially given how the latter often frame the 'other' through efforts designed to exclude them from their respective venues.

6.4 Separating 'common thread' from 'other' via exclusionary policies and practices:

Unsurprisingly, beach administrators were generally unwilling – throughout my interviews and fieldwork interactions – to explicitly describe whom they deem as to be an out-group. Instead they would recur to arguments around civility, politeness, and respect – or lack thereof – when describing whom is unwelcome in their respective venues. McDowell (2007) affirms these concepts have often been used when discussing 'disreputable' working class populations, with working-class boys being labelled as less respectable. This is evidenced by an interview with Pierre & Friends' manager:

“The thing we care about most is classiness, politeness and respect... You respect yourself and the venue, if that's the case then welcome... Yes, we are a public beach, but as long as there is respect... We became good at reading people. To know a person. The contact happens from valet parking upstairs, to the lifeguard down on the beach. Some people we tell them: “sorry but you need a reservation”. A lot of people come not knowing where they are coming. Don't get me wrong, it's their right to access the beach and sea, but not here. Their mentality maybe doesn't allow for alcohol, so we [explain] and they say thank you” [Interview, 08/10/2015]

It is important to clarify that Pierre & Friends is very much an outlier when it comes to private beach venues in Lebanon. In fact, its manager noted how its 'free entrance' policy, was a strategic effort to create an inclusive space within a coastline that is often inaccessible to many beachgoers. Indeed the venue comprises – to this day – my favourite private beach destination. That being

said, the above testimonial affirms how identifying out-groups in Pierre & Friends is reliant on the staff's prowess at "reading" and "knowing" people. This reduces an individual's complex and multi-layered identity to a limited number of discernible traits that can be read and known. It remains unclear how staff translate vague concepts of classiness, politeness and respect into specific signalling traits that demonstrate their presence/absence. However, the fact that receptionists, valet parking attendants, and lifeguards are empowered with the decision to either include or exclude a beachgoer from the space, reveals that a collective understanding of who should be labelled as an out-group exists. Additionally, Pierre & Friend's manager highlighted conservatism as an indicator of an individual's lack of belonging: "Their mentality maybe doesn't allow for alcohol". A significant distinction must be made here where conservatism, and not Islam, is being deliberately used as a signalling trait for otherness. This is apparent in the prevalence of liberal minded Muslims, as well as the dearth of veiled women in Tehoum. As such, formulations of out-groups mirror those held by private beachgoers, who portray the 'other' as being conservative, uneducated, and bothersome. The main distinction here stems from private beach administrators refraining from using the nawar designation, given the term's socially charged connotations.

Pierre & Friend's manager uses linguistic contradictions when discussing the publicness of the baher: "if that's the case then welcome"; "Yes, we are a public beach, but as long as there is respect"; "it is their right to access the beach and sea, but not here". Such rhetoric signals that the *baher* is perceived as being an (un)public space, where private businesses have the right to impose conditionality on accessing their respective spaces. This results in a dynamic where private beach administrators acknowledge an individual's theoretical right to access the baher, but also consider their specific venues exempt from having to practically abide by this standard. Within this vein, Pierre & Friend's manager also hints at a slanted power-dynamic, where a beachgoer must 'know' the space that they intend to frequent, and thus assimilate and adapt to its metaphorical landscape

or else risk being excluded. Furthermore, the fact that lifeguards are seen as enforcement personnel of an out-group's presence, signifies that the territorial claim of private beaches extends into and encompasses the Public Maritime Domain – even the water itself. This is reinforced by the Oasis Beach's manager, who proclaimed that: "The beach is open to everyone since it's public maritime domain, and no one can deny access... If someone wants to go down and doesn't want to pay then it's not a problem if they are polite" [interview, 08/10/2015].

This prevalence towards an oxymoron-inspired understanding of their authoritative limits within the baher, is strategically deployed by private beach administrators as a means to project their power and control over their respective spaces, as well as legitimise their use of related exclusionary policies and practices. These include three distinct strategies, which also have the added benefit of facilitating the space's economic organisation and activities (Gottman, 1973). The first creates a 'defensible space' (Newman, 1996) through the use of physical barriers, which forces prospective beachgoers to access the baher through predefined and controlled points of entry. This comprises a warped understanding of Newman's (1996) defensible space theory, which originally envisages strategies to reduce crime and vandalism within residential housing developments; with private beach administrators, instead, using it to increase their territorial claims over their respective spaces – with vandalism and crime, in this specific context, being attributed to free access to the baher and the presence of out-groups in private beaches. The second establishes financial barriers of entry as a means of filtering-out working-class populations. Finally, the third strategy uses monitoring and policing tactics in order to target remaining out-groups. In what follows I focus on the second and third strategies, especially given the beach strip's natural landscape – wedged between a steep cliff and sea – which renders the site quasi-inaccessible.

Setting-up financial barriers to entry comprises an integral and the most heatedly discussed – by activists and the media – method of excluding out-groups from the consumerist landscape of

private beaches. At around the time of the research Amber consulting, an independent hospitality and tourism consulting firm, concluded that adult entrance fees ranged from a minimum of \$10 to a maximum of \$67, with an average of \$25 per person on a weekend (Amber consulting, 2018). Additionally, its market research noted that food and beverage spending represent 70% of a private beach's revenue; with the average food and beverage check per person being around: \$40 in Beirut, \$33 in the south, and \$30 in the north (ibid.). Even though Tehoum's venues are on the lower-end of the entrance fee range, a day at the beach would still set an adult beachgoer back by around \$30 to \$40 – excluding additional charges incurred by families, as well as transportation costs. This is a significant amount, especially given how the minimum salary in Lebanon was around \$450 at the time of fieldwork. Thus, a day trip to one of Tehoum's private beaches constitutes almost 10% of the minimum wage per beachgoer.

The third exclusionary strategy uses monitoring and policing tactics to either block outgroups from entering private beaches, or forcibly remove them should they be found within their premises. This is achieved through a spectrum of techniques. At one end are covert techniques facilitated via deception and education with, for example staff falsely claiming the need for a reservation, or even “educating” conservative visitors of the venue's liberal practices (e.g. serving alcohol), which in turn may incentivise them to willingly change venues. At the other end of the spectrum, monitoring and policing are manifest by forcibly removing out-groups whom are deemed to not belong. This was highlighted during my interview with the Oasis Beach's owner:

“A group of seven or eight guys by themselves will normally start something up... I have someone at the parking entrance that usually doesn't allow a group of young men to enter. They usually need to be accompanied by their sisters or a family member... I care that families and women feel safe... I have employees on the beach that monitor these violations, question people that harass, tell them to leave, and give them their money back” [Interview, 08/10/2015]

Single men, as an ‘out-group’, are viewed to pose a significant ‘threat’ to the safety and comfort of two particular in-groups: families and women. This is consistent with wider dynamics along the Lebanese baher, especially considering the example of Ramlet El Bayda where single men are asked to vacate the public beach at 7pm in order to accommodate for a family-oriented environment. With this comparable example in mind, it becomes apparent that Tehoum’s private venues take the exclusion of groups of single men to a more significant level, by possibly denying access outright – whereas Beirut’s public beach at least assures access to the baher before 7pm. Having noted beach administrator’s exclusionary policies and practices, which separate the ‘common thread’ and ‘other’, I now shift attention to threshold experiences where/when an individual’s belonging is negotiated, a designation of in/out-group is formulated, and constructions of a specific ‘public’ are underway. I thus inquire to what extent does forging a dialogue between identity politics and liminal beachgoer experiences generate additional insights into the production of the baher as an (un)public space?

6.5 ‘Snagged threads’: beachgoers betwixt and between ‘common thread’ and ‘other’

“On June 16 2016, I visited Tehoum for a day at the beach. I chose to enter through Pierre & Friends, given how it is the only venue without an entrance charge. Upon my arrival, it became apparent that the venue was full, with no sunbeds available. I decided to make the uncomfortable journey along the pebble beach strip towards White Beach. Upon my arrival, I was met with a pop-up style bar and lounge (see figure 11) with a sign that read: “free entrance daily from 10am until 12pm”. I walked-up to the adjacent White Beach reception to inquire whether I can grab any available seating in the pop-up area, and was subsequently instructed to pay a 7,000 LBP entrance fee and 3,000 LBP to rent a lounge chair (equivalent to \$7). I was taken-aback and felt very much conflicted since the sign read “free entrance”. I found myself at an inflection point, where I could either pay the nominal sum, or push back and risk escalating the situation. I ended-up paying the entrance fee, partly to avoid conflict, but also out of shame of being called-out publicly, especially over what I considered to be a small amount. After completing the financial transaction, I was greeted as a patron, with a waiter subsequently ushering me to my seat. He had seen my interaction with the administration and divulged that I should not have been asked to pay since I was already on the beach. However, he advised me to not escalate matters further, since I would either be asked to leave, or even worse, the management would contact local security officials to forcibly evict me.” [Field diary reflections, 16/06/2016]



Figure 11. Pop-up lounge and bar at 'White Beach'. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine, June 2016

This chapter has until now conveyed a clear distinction between in/out-groups, as formulated by private beach actors' narratives and imaginations. Tehoum's 'common thread' has been examined via four private beachgoer archetypes: the liberal, the family unit, the cosmopolitan elite, and the papaz. The 'other', on the other hand, has been predominantly linked to public beachgoer conceptualisations, as working class, conservative, unsanitary, uneducated, and lacking civility – all of which lead to the demeaning nawar label. The baher is subsequently viewed as an (un)public space, where despite acknowledging an individual's theoretical right to access, private beach administrators vie to cleanse their respective venues from out-groups via exclusionary policies and practices. These include the creation of a 'defensible space', the adoption of financial barriers of entry, as well as monitoring and policing tactics. However, grouping archetypes into a dichotomous structure of in/out-groups may be a misleading endeavour, given how such labels falsely convey, even if unintentionally, a sense of uniformity between individuals whom are grouped together. This is best illustrated by the example of papaz, whom are often negatively perceived and othered by remaining in-groups. As such, this section examines liminal experiences linked to abovementioned exclusionary policies and practices, in order to subsequently unpack

varying manifestations of othering within private beaches. With this in mind, I ask three questions: First, how does shifting focus to liminal moments, add to our understanding of Tehoum's prevailing identity politics? Second, how can an exploration of the varying spatial manifestations of these liminal experiences, provide a more nuanced comprehension of identity politics? Third, are any beachgoers betwixt and between 'common thread' and 'other', thus blurring the boundary between in/out-groups and (non)belonging?

In order to address these questions, I explore liminal experiences across three localised thresholds: the parking lot, the entrance gate, and the water's edge – each comprising a gateway that private beachgoers normally cross while navigating Tehoum's venues. My focus on these gateways harkens back to van Gennep's (1960) work on rites of passage, a ceremonial journey commonly associated with the territorial crossing of a threshold. Although van Gennep theorisation pertains to traditional ceremonial rites of passage, Schouten argues that "in the modern, secular world... people may create personal rites of passage, shaping new identities with such symbols and activities as are made available by our consumer culture" (1991, p. 421). Elizabeth Teather (1999) builds on this by acknowledging how rites of passage ought to be reframed in modern societies, and understood through individuals' consumption patterns. As such, I argue that by crossing these gateways, beachgoers undergo a private beach rite of passage, which – if successfully traversed – confers onto them belonging to a predefined desired 'public', as formulated by private beach actors. In fact, crossing each gateway is marked by a quasi-ceremonial activity, which in turn signals a successful overcoming of related exclusionary barriers. These include the exchange of car keys/valet voucher at the parking lot; the transfer of money/ticket stub at the entrance gate; and finally, immersing oneself in the baher at the water's edge. As such, a beachgoer's inability to successfully navigate these three gateways results in an individual being othered and defined by their relative difference(s). By focusing on these three sequential liminal sites, this chapter provides a more nuanced understanding of identity politics within private beaches – one which transcends

neat orderings of in/out-groups and (non)belonging. Moreover, this chapter contributes to a key gap in the literature, which overwhelmingly focuses on *communitas*-generating experiences, especially within the romanticised setting of publicly accessible beaches. Examples include the loss of social classifications within Brighton beach (Shields, 1990 and 1991), bridging together ethnically divided communities and tourists in Mauritius (Dobson, 2007), as well as the celebratory ‘schoolies’ ritual in Australia (Coldicutt, 2014). Contrastingly, I posit that focusing attention on ‘othering’ liminal experiences comprises an equally important, if not better, vantage point for unpacking identity politics within private beaches – sites often synonymous with landscapes of exclusion.

The parking lot comprises the first gateway that beachgoers must traverse within Tehoum’s private beaches. As illustrated by the vignette at the start of this chapter, my interaction with the valet parking attendant is marked by a brief, although discernible, effort to gauge my belonging – including a glance at my car, the company I am with, my behaviour, and my chosen attire. I was not fazed by this brief exchange as I had no reason to doubt my admittance, especially following years of frequenting similar leisure venues – be it private beaches, restaurants, or night clubs. However, not all beachgoers undergo a similar frictionless experience, with Pierre & Friends’ manager affirming that “the contact happens from valet parking upstairs... Some people we tell them: sorry but you need a reservation” [Interview, 08/10/2015]. This points to valet parking attendants being tasked with formulating determinations of belonging, stemming from brief interactions with prospective beachgoers, who – until a decision has been made – are betwixt and between in/out-group and (non)belonging designations. Given the ephemeral nature of these interactions, private beach administrators reduce an individual’s complex and multi-layered identity to a limited number of discernible traits that can be “read” and “known”. Examples include groups of single men, with Oasis Beach’s owner affirming: “I have someone at the parking entrance that usually doesn’t allow a group of young men to enter” [Interview, 08/10/2015]; or even people

whose “mentality maybe doesn’t allow for alcohol” as deduced by explicit symbols of related conservatism (e.g. a hijab) [ibid]. This first gateway’s function is thus to primarily filter out the most apparent examples of out-groups who do not belong, as formulated by abovementioned private beach actors’ narratives and imaginations. As such, liminal experiences within this gateway comprise the briefest in terms of temporality, but the most pronounced in terms of othering; especially since a beachgoer’s accentuated differences are deemed so flagrant, that they are immediately denied further entry into these defensible spaces.

Unlike those shunned from the parking lot, financially constrained beachgoers who succumb to exclusion at the entrance gate may be understood as exhibiting a relatively higher degree of belonging. In fact, they would have already successfully traversed the previous gateway, been awarded a metaphorical stamp of approval by the venue’s first gatekeeper, and would thus be one step closer to securing access into the space. These beachgoers have, at the very least, demonstrated an ability to pass (Goffman, 2014) as part of the private beach’s ‘common thread’, either by virtue of exhibiting qualities of a predefined desired public, or inversely by not assuming traits normally affiliated with the ‘other’. Furthermore, this gateway, originally devised to marginalise out-groups, has also been noted to affect beachgoers who at times belong to the ‘common thread’. This was a recurrent topic of discussion, with private beachgoers often complaining of limiting the frequency of their baher visits to an economically viable amount:

- “I love coming here [Loco], but unfortunately I can only afford it once a week. I would love to come here more often, even every day if I could. A visit here costs me around \$40 for entrance, food and drinks. I may be comfortable [economically], but I’m not a millionaire [laughs].” [Beachgoer #15, Interview, 14/09/2016]
- “They’re ridiculously expensive... Even I sometimes contemplate going to private beaches because of the entrance fee. Sometimes I think: I went yesterday so I’ll go in three days” [Beachgoer #14, Interview, 16/08/2016]

Beachgoers #14 and #15 point to a dynamic where their “non-millionaire” status limits their ability to repeatedly frequent their preferred venues. What is most telling about this dynamic is how these beachgoers, along with most other (upper-)middle class beachgoers, may be viewed as ‘snagged threads’ – i.e. beachgoers who blur the boundary between in/out-group and (non)belonging designations. In fact, they repeatedly switch between ‘common thread’ and ‘other’ designations, depending on whether they are able and willing to attend private beaches. As such, being labelled an in/out-group does not represent a fixed state of being, but rather a highly dynamic representation of a beachgoer’s ability to access the private beach in question.

Having cleared the valet parking representative’s scrutiny, and secured admittance via the entrance gate, private beachgoers may subsequently be perceived as literal in-groups. However, as illustrated by the example of papaz whom are often negatively perceived by remaining patrons, individual strings (i.e. archetypes) woven together to produce the ‘common thread’ may exhibit varying degrees of belonging. It is here that the water’s edge offers another interpretation of ‘snagged thread’ – i.e. liminal beachgoers whose belonging within private beaches is relatively constrained. To demonstrate this, I shift focus towards an in-group archetype that is commonly found straddling the edge of the water: the domestic worker (see figure 12). Lebanon hosts a sizeable migrant domestic worker population, around 250,000, whom originate from mostly Ethiopia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (United Nations, 2021). These workers operate within the ‘kafala system’, a sponsorship system likened to modern-day slavery, that binds workers to their employers with exploitative conditions, as well as restrictions on rights and freedoms being observed (United Nations, 2021, and Cholewinski, 2023). Although frequently seen within Tehoum’s private beaches, especially within the family-oriented venues of White Beach and Oasis Beach, domestic workers were notably absent from private beach actor’s formulation of in-groups – markedly not mentioned once during interviews. This is in contrast to white tourists, whom were often brought-up and labelled as cosmopolitan elites. These ‘snagged threads’, although

comprising a strand within Tehoum's 'common thread', demonstrate a particular manner of occupying space that differs from all other archetypes. These women are fully clothed, despite the striking heat; teetering at the water's edge, with their feet dipped-into the sea; normally in close proximity to a small child, who is often venturing relatively deeper while playing in the water. Domestic workers thus constitute a quintessential liminal group within private beaches. One that blurs the boundary between (non)belonging and (un)public – especially given how their access to the space is normally granted in connection to the families that they accompany. As domestic workers are often attributed free entrance into private beaches, though with the understanding that they would not be allowed to swim (Gatten, 2012).



Figure 12. Domestic worker and children at 'White Beach'. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine, May 2016

It is imperative to clarify how these snagged threads' liminal identities point to wider-dynamics observed within Lebanese society, both within the baher specifically, and beyond more generally.

A black person may still at times be colloquially referred to as ‘Abed’ in Arabic, which literally translates to ‘slave’. Black and Asian woman are largely assumed to be domestic workers when encountered; with these stereotypes being so engrained, that ‘Sri Lankan’ is often used as an interchangeable term for a domestic worker – even if she hails from a different country. Additionally, the wife of the Philippines ambassador to Lebanon was rumoured to have been denied entry into a private beach, given how she had been mistaken for a domestic worker (Executive Magazine, 2014). In fact, a Human Rights Watch investigation uncovered that 17 out of 27 private beaches surveyed, did not allow Asian or African domestic workers to swim (Sterns, 2009). With the Ministry of Labour even warning private beach venues from barring domestic workers’ entry (Daily Star, 2016). As a result, domestic workers are often perceived as belonging to a lower class, and frequently dehumanised into a similar quasi-slave classification (Houry, 2007).

This third gateway thus sheds light on the liminal experiences of domestic workers, as ‘snagged threads’ that either do not belong, or at the very least belong less than other strands forming the ‘common thread’. As such, I argue that conceptual engagement with in/out-groups and (non)belonging, is better served by decoupling these notions via a nuanced analysis of their existing dissonance – as observed via the liminal experiences at the water’s edge. In fact, I postulate that despite a large degree of resonance between said concepts, a designation of one does not necessarily implicate an equal and proportionate allocation of the other. Finally, this section frames liminal experiences within this final gateway, as only affecting in-groups, being the most protracted temporally, and also resulting in a deeply uncomfortable and dehumanising manifestation of difference and othering – i.e. where domestic workers are shown the privilege of private beaches, but subsequently and consistently denied equal participation within them.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have brought together three bodies of literature – politics of representation, geographies of difference, and liminality – in order to examine identity politics within Tehoum's private beaches. In doing so, I have elucidated how private beach actors shape the nation's baherscape, and how this in turn informs the production of the baher. This is largely achieved through identity-inspired exclusionary territorial practices, which facilitate the establishment of enclaves of privilege and consumption targeting a preconceived understanding of acceptable public. In Tehoum's case, private beaches are understood as catering to the 'common thread' of economically privileged, liberal-minded, and cosmopolitan beachgoers; whilst also excluding the 'other', whom is constructed as being working class, conservative, uneducated, and 'nawar'. However, these designations are neither static nor standardised, for this process is highly dynamic and contextualised – depending on when it is taking place, whom is making it, and where it is made. Accordingly, I problematise whether dualistic framings of in/out-group, (non)belonging, self/other, inclusion/exclusion, and (un)public can faithfully deal with the intricacies and complexities of intersectional identities. As such, I propose liminality as a complimentary conceptual framework that engages with identity politics in a more nuanced manner.

Embracing liminality as a conceptual framework has enabled a deeper engagement with Tehoum's identity politics. I have sought to demonstrate how, contrary to previously discussed politics of representation, beachgoer identities cannot be neatly ordered between 'common thread' and 'other'. I also highlight the need to decouple in/out-group and (non)belonging designations, for one does not necessarily implicate an equal and proportionate allocation of the other. Additionally, by shifting focus to the scale of the body, I conclude that liminal experiences may be acutely spatialised, with varying spatial manifestations being inherently linked to the beachgoer identity in

question. Moreover, I contribute to a key gap in the literature, which tends to emphasise *communitas*-generating experiences, especially within the romanticised setting of publicly accessible beaches. Contrastingly, I posit that focusing attention on liminal experiences that engender difference and othering comprises an equally important, if not better, vantage point for unpacking identity politics within private beaches – especially given how they are often synonymous with landscapes of exclusion.

With this in mind, this thesis has explored two important takes into the baherscape: First, how Lebanon's presiding governance shapes the production of the baher which fails to preserve uninterrupted access to the coastline, exacerbates health and safety conditions for public beachgoers, and dilutes the space's *communitas*-generating potential. Second, how identity-inspired exclusionary territorial practices, transform private beaches into enclaves of privilege and consumption that cater to a preconceived understanding of acceptable public. These two prongs of analysis highlight how the Lebanese baher may be understood as an (un)public space, being developed towards particular interests and strategies that ultimately disenfranchise marginal communities – chief-among-them working-class populations. With this in mind, the next and final empirical chapter explores civil society's calls for the 'right to the baher'.

7 | (Un)public space III: “The Baher is Mine”, (re)claiming the baher as an arena for social and political action

7.1 Introduction

The 2018 Lebanese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale was abuzz with visitors. This marked the first time Lebanon had participated in the art and architecture event, with this year's theme being “freespace”. In a room full of architects, designers, reporters, and artists; Jad Tabet, the Head of the Syndicate of Architects and Engineers in Lebanon, gave an impassioned speech: “[we have] ten thousand architects, engineers, and young militants who want to protect our territory. Who want to protect our environment. Please help us! Help us protect our territory. Help us protect our values. Help us protect our mountains. Help us protect our rivers. Most of all, help us protect our public maritime domain. Lebanon has a coast that extends to 220 km. What remains of this coast is only 20%. All the rest is privatised. All the rest is dilapidated. All the rest is no more accessible to us. Please help us...” (Coastal Coalition, 2018) [Observations reflect my review of a YouTube video uploaded by Coastal Coalition. Jad Tabet's speech, also recorded in the same video, was transcribed in verbatim]

This chapter examines Lebanese civil society's role within the baherscape, by unpacking its influence over the production of the baher. I explore the baher as an arena for social and political action, where civil society efforts challenge presiding neoliberal policies and exclusionary practices. I do this by examining how the notion of the ‘right to the city’ extends to the baher, leading to articulations of a ‘right to the baher’. I probe whether liminal spaces – like the baher – may be deployed as vantage points for unpacking ‘right to the city’ articulations; with liminality leveraged as a prism for unpacking moments of transformation, characterised by intense creativity, and ambivalence (McConnell, 2017). I examine civil society's modalities of resistance as liminal thresholds, where baher articulations for the ‘right to the city’ emerge, and an alternative ‘urban’ is prefiguratively advanced. By addressing the questions: What is the ‘right to the baher’? How, by who, and for whom is it being claimed? This chapter contributes to debates around the role, function, value, and struggle over public spaces.

Empirically, this chapter focuses on three sites: Ramlet El Bayda, with Lancaster Eden Bay Hotel's partial encroachment of the beach; the Dalieh of Raouche, a previously shared open space that

has been fenced-off by real estate developers; and Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (hereinafter TCNR), often cited by Lebanese civil society as a model for the baher's use and development. I conclude this chapter with an ethnographic vignette of Ahmad, a Palestinian refugee residing in TCNR's Rashidieh camp. Through Ahmad's experiences, I destabilise the narrative framing the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve as a model public space, and explore whether the 'right to the baher' extends to all beachgoers, with particular attention paid to the liminal experiences of Palestinian refugees.

7.2 Reconciling the 'Right to the City' and Liminality as conceptual approaches

Whilst this research does not focus on the city per se, albeit many of the beach fieldsites do lie within urban areas, the notion of the 'right to the city' is a productive one to engage with given its opposition to hegemonic capital interests, which tend to negatively impact local inhabitants and the spaces they frequent (Lefebvre, 1968; Purcell, 2002; Dikeç, 2002; Harvey, 2003 and 2008; Marcuse, 2009; Mayer 2009; Crawford, 2011a). I contribute to 'right to the city' discussions by deploying the baher as a lens of analysis, as opposed to more generally examined public spaces (e.g. streets, parks, and squares). Moreover, I position liminal spaces – like the baher – as ideal vantage points for unpacking 'right to the city' articulations, especially given their proclivity in hosting experiences that advance an alternative 'urban life'. Liminality, as a spatio-temporal process of in-betweenness, yields more nuanced understandings for the 'right to the city'; especially in connection to moments of transformation, intense creativity, and ambivalence (McConnell, 2017).

The 'right to the city' has been extensively debated within academic and policy circles, with civil society groups often citing this 'right' while arguing for their respective interpretations of what constitutes a more equitable society (Purcell, 2014). A review of existing literature indicates that this notion has been used as an umbrella term designating multiple and often dissimilar formulations of what exactly this 'right' pertains to, as well as the 'city' to which it is connected

(Attoh, 2011). Some scholars have criticised this ambiguous nature, which in turn hollows-out its significance (De Souza, 2010); whilst others have championed its openness, given how it brings together different socio-political, economic, and environmental struggles (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009). Academics have thus framed this ‘right’ through various dimensions, including democracy and citizenship (Purcell, 2003 and 2013), anti-capitalist struggles (Harvey 2012 and 2008), and public spaces (Mitchell, 2003 and Van Deusen, 2005). In order to explore how these different formulations came to be, one must acknowledge the contributions of Henri Lefebvre (1968) who first theorised the ‘right to the city’ in response to the growing influence of capitalist urbanisation. Lefebvre feared capitalist expansion would structurally alter the diverse patchwork of spaces which coalesce together to co-produce a city, thus resulting in a homogeneous and commodified landscape where “space itself becomes the ultimate object of exchange” (Speer, 2015, p.4). The ‘right to the city’ is thus brought forward as a means for urban dwellers to reclaim the city by leveraging the streets as a means for social and political action – i.e. ‘cities for people and not for profit’ (Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer, 2011). In doing so, Lefebvre argued for a different kind of city with an emphasis on ‘use value’, with the ‘city’ symbolising a new ‘urban life’ rather than simply denoting the city in its practical and limited sense (Marcuse, 2009). He clarifies that this ‘right’ is not specifically legal in nature, but instead a morally founded demand that counterbalances the hegemony of the rich and powerful; however, he fails to detail its scope, or rather how this ‘right’ is made tangible to city dwellers.

Other scholars have built on Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’, by situating it within multiple contexts, as well as reframing the notion to fit present day dynamics. David Harvey argues the ‘right to the city’ is intrinsically linked to city dwellers’ ability to change, shape and reinvent their city in accordance to their heart’s desire (Harvey, 2012). For Harvey, the city must not only be representative of its inhabitants and their respective needs, but should also allow them to co-create, appropriate, and claim it as theirs. This effectively empowers urban residents to “take back their

city” (Harvey 2012, p. 8). Similar to Lefebvre, Harvey frames the ‘right to the city’ as an anti-capitalist class-based struggle aimed at ensuring distributive justice for access, management, ownership and use of urban resources (Harvey, 2008, 2012). Although Harvey’s theorisation critically unpacks the neoliberal order within contemporary political and economic systems, it has been critiqued for its overwhelming focus on class, which in turn excludes other forms of struggle (Purcell, 2002). Unlike Lefebvre, who perceives ‘urban inhabitants’ as working class, Marcuse (2009) offers a more inclusive alternative via two separate groups: the ‘deprived’, whom are oppressed and should thus be allocated prioritised attention; as well as the ‘discontented’, signifying the wider public who may benefit from the ‘right to the city’ (Castaneda, 2016). Marcuse affirms a right to redistribution, not for everyone but for the deprived (Mayer, 2009). Purcell (2002) alludes to multiple identities and their respective struggles; with urban inhabitants coming together to not only challenge the capitalist city, but also the “racist city, the patriarchal city, or the heteronormative city, all of which confront inhabitants in their daily lives” (Purcell, 2002, p.106). As such, urban dwellers may pursue the use value of urban space, but not necessarily through a Marxist lens that decries exchange value. Instead, inhabitants may opt to promote safe access to women within city streets; or combat the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals in heteronormative spaces; or even resist spatial segregation of minority communities. The ‘right to the city’ likely comprises all of the above, with this new ‘urban’ catering to the complex, multiple and evolving needs of the city’s inhabitants.

By engaging with literature on the ‘right to the city’, I argue this notion extends to the baher given three-interconnected dimensions: first, the baher comprises a focal point for ‘right to the city’ rallying calls; second, ‘planetary urbanisation’ reproduces urban socio-economic processes within the baher, thus implicating it in wider ‘urban liveability’ struggles; and third, the baher tends to host liminal experiences that advance an alternative ‘urban life’. I expand on each of these points below.

"Beneath the pavement, the beach!" (i.e. "Sous les pavés, la plage" in French) was a clarion call by French protesters in 1968. The slogan references tearing-up streets' cobblestones to build barricades, thus revealing the sand beneath (la nouvelle republique, 2018). It indicates a hope for an alternative, more progressive, and inclusive society, where cobblestones represent hardened socio-political and economic structures, whilst the sand is a metaphor for the 'city' beneath a city – i.e. symbolising freedom and nature, and a divergence from oppressive shackles. This slogan was employed in 1995, when 'reclaim the streets' protesters in London dug-up part of a motorway and covered it with sand to create a temporary beach (Jordan, 1998). A similar call was embraced during Lebanon's 2015 waste management crisis, where protestors demanded "we want a baher in Baalbek" (see figure 13). This seemed impossible as Baalbek is an inland city. However, Osseiran (2015) notes: "is it so different to ask for a baher in Baalbek, than to call for the downfall of the sectarian [system]? Twenty-four-hour electricity? Water? Education and social benefits?... yes, it is impossible, but when all the other demands seem impossible, what's one more?". Beaches thus comprise focal point for 'right to the city' rallying calls, be it past or present, and denote a metaphorical beacon for an alternative urban life.



Figure 13. Protester sign "we want a baher in Baalbek". **Source:** Addiyar, 2015

Another argument supporting the extension of the ‘right to the city’ to the baher centres on ‘planetary urbanisation’. This concept, first theorised by Lefebvre (1970) and subsequently developed by Brenner and Schmid (2015), contends that post-industrial globalisation leads to ‘complete urbanism’ (i.e. characterised by a lack of an ‘outside’). Here, the urban encompasses all socio-economic relationships, especially given the expansive nature and dominance of globalised social networks (Lefebvre, 1970). According to Brenner and Schmid (2015), there is a ‘concentrated urban’ and ‘extended urban’, with the latter highlighting the global and pervasive scale of urbanisation. ‘Urban’ is viewed as a process and not a form, which indicates that it transcends a bounded spatial unit to become a process that is reproduced and remade worldwide. This process lends itself to discussions of ‘touristic urbanisation’ (Batzing et al., 1996), where the tourism industry helps transform areas previously deemed as ‘rural’; and ‘naturbanisation’ (Bolliger et al., 2015), which explores the commodification of nature and the valorisation of land for capital gain. Translated into the Lebanese context, it is difficult to separate the baher from ‘urban’ processes, especially given deep-seated links to adjacent cities and their inhabitants. Lebanon’s coast is not only dominated by urban settlements, with respective encroachments, but local urban tourists predominantly contribute to the baher’s usage and development (see chapters 5 and 6).

The final dimension extending the ‘right to the city’ to the baher, is the latter’s liminal character. Van Gennep paints liminal space as emerging when transitions, transformations, and reclassifications of realities are evoked (1909). Turner argues liminality is a realm of “possibility and opening” (1969, p. 97), a space of liberation from “structural obligations” (1982, p. 27), where “anything may happen” (1974, p. 13), thus “un-structuring and restructuring existing orders through both transgression and collusion” (Liu and Fan, 2022). Preston-Whyte (2004) frames beaches as quintessentially liminal, for they are zones of uncertainty, replete with difference and hybridity, and imbue visitors with a sense of freedom and emancipation from daily obligations. Here, uncertainty, difference, freedom and emancipation are often derived through transgressive

and ludic behaviour, with Monterrubio (2013) detailing nudist beaches as upturning societal norms; Merabet (2014) noting gay cursing in Ramlet El Bayda beach as challenging Lebanon's heteronormative mindset; and Rogerson (2017) illustrating how protest swims in apartheid South Africa, have contributed to beach desegregation. Transgressive and ludic behaviour within the baher is thus wide-ranging and liminal inducing, with each suspending and inverting – be it temporarily or more permanently – a specific normative structure of society. Moreover, liminal spaces – like the baher – may be unifying, given their potential to generate *communitas* experiences (Turner, 1969). Lefebvre stipulates the coming together of heterotopic groups (Foucault, 1986) produces liminal social spaces where a prefigurative alternative urban is advanced (Harvey, 2012, p. xvii; Purcell, 2014; Castaneda, 2016). Shields (1990, 1991) argues liminality in Brighton beach offers a poignant basis to understand moments of in between-ness where loss of social classifications occur. Dobson (2007) elucidates how public beaches in Mauritius, being deeply liminal spaces, are characterised by the production of a *communitas* between ethnically divided Mauritian communities, as well as visiting tourists.

The baher constitutes a fertile ground for social and political action, which vie for the 'right to the baher' specifically, and the 'right to the city' more generally. It comprises one of the many arenas (e.g. the streets, the square) in which the 'right to the city' may emerge, with an alternative 'urban life' being advanced. As such, I deem liminal space to be an ideal vantage point for unpacking 'right to the city' articulations, especially given its ability to host transgressive behaviours and *communitas* generating experiences. I argue liminality, as a socio-spatio-temporal process of in-betweenness, comprises a highly pertinent prism for exploring the 'right to the city'. Liminality encapsulates periods where individuals, groups and/or societies are betwixt and between identities and possibilities – i.e. neither what they used to be, nor what they will be come, but also both at the same time. Liminality renders participants in a state of "indeterminacy and ambiguity at the interstices of social structure where identity is destabilised and open to reconfiguration in novel

and potentially revolutionary ways” (Banfield, 2022, p. 611). It enables “intense creativity and thereby shines a light on practices of innovation, political renewal, and imagination” (McConnell, 2017, p.142). I thus deploy liminality as prism for ‘right to the baher’ articulations, with liminality generating more nuanced understandings of moments of transformation, characterised by intense creativity, with an associated air of ambivalence (McConnell, 2017).

With the above in mind, I explore a key facet of the ‘right to city’: the ‘right to difference’ – as cited by Lebanese civil society actors arguing for the ‘right to the baher’. Purcell (2002) posits two main ‘rights’ in connection to the ‘right to the city’: first, the right to participate in producing urban spaces; and second, the right to access, occupy and use urban spaces. These transform the ‘urban’ into: “a space for encounter, connection, play, learning, difference, surprise, and novelty. The urban involves inhabitants engaging each other in meaningful interactions, through which they overcome separation, come to learn about each other, and deliberate together about the meaning and future of the city” (Purcell, 2014, p. 149). The following section will thus frame our understanding of the baher as a medium for convivial encounter.

7.3 Valuing the baher as a medium for convivial encounter

The ‘right to the city’ is intrinsically tied to encountering difference, and necessitates urban dwellers to negotiate their respective differences while co-producing a convivial ‘urban’. Butler (2012) argues that the ‘right to the city’ is inherently linked to Lefebvre’s less cited ‘right to difference’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 64), with Speer stating that “the right to difference threatens to fade into the realm of discourse and ideology. It is only alongside the right to the city – an explicitly spatial demand – that it gains a material existence” (2015, p.4). The ‘right to difference’ is thus inseparable from the ‘right to the city’, with the two intertwining to produce the ‘urban’ as informed by inhabitants’ interactions and lived experiences. Grigolo (2019) asserts the ‘right to the city’ is

anchored to the right of social groups and communities characterised by difference to come together, co-create and appropriate urban spaces. Purcell affirms that the ‘right to the city’ is “set in motion when inhabitants decide to rise up and reclaim space in the city, when they assert use value over exchange value, encounter over consumption, interaction over segregation, free activity and play over work” (Purcell, 2014, p.151). It is for this reason that spaces of encounter – public spaces generally and the baher specifically – may encompass an integral function of rapprochement between various societal groups, and act as catalysts for *communitas* generation. Public spaces should thus “never serve as barriers or as interruptions to the intricate functioning of the city around them. Rather, they help knit together diverse surrounding functions by giving them a pleasant joint facility” (Jacobs, 1992: 101). To this end, Merrifield (2012) affirms:

“[public spaces] enable public discourses, public conversations to talk to each other, to meet each other, quite literally. They are public not because they are simply there, in the open, in a city centre, but because these spaces are made public by people encountering one another, there. We can rename them spaces of encounter...”. (2012, p. 280)

Public spaces are venues where inhabitants of different backgrounds can come together, establish contact, shape public discourse, and produce a convivial ‘urban’ – in what otherwise may be a highly fractured and segregated city. That being said, Lebanon lacks spaces where various socio-economic, religious and political groups may freely come together, which in turn inhibits the possibility for bridging prevailing divides via peaceful rapprochement. It is through this rationale that Jessica Chemali, Director of Programmes at Nahnoo – a youth-led non-governmental organization advocating for sustainable access, use and management of Lebanon’s public spaces – contextualises the important role assumed by public spaces within a (post)conflict society:

“Nahnoo’s main field of work is public spaces, under the principle that for people to meet each other they need spaces that don’t constrain them with money or sect... In Lebanon we have a crisis between people’s relationships with each other... It’s like sewing together the city that has been ripped apart. If we do a comparison with the personal level, you have your house, bedroom, kitchen and living room - where you receive people, right? Take it to a broader scale. You have the city. You have people’s

apartments and buildings. These are all private... Where is the only space that acts as the city's reception area? Public space... They are important tools that the government should utilise in a policy for reconciliation and peacebuilding.”
[Interview, 16/09/2015]

Ms. Chemali's testimony touches on a number of interconnected themes. Lebanon is characterised by a protracted crisis around “people's relationships with each other”. This is not only influenced by periodic local, national, and international armed conflicts, but also informed by a prevailing hegemony of neoliberal policies and practices, which valorise private spaces of consumption and subsequently alienate populations deemed to be less desirable (see chapters 5 and 6). Ms. Chemali proclaims public space as an integral component for reconciliation and peacebuilding, and draws a parallel with the living room – i.e. whose function is to host, encounter, and interact with others. The rationale for promoting encounter, and by association public spaces, as a peacebuilding tool stems from Gordon Allport's ‘contact hypothesis’. Allport, a social psychologist, stipulates that individuals fear what they deem as unknown; as such, encounter fosters a sense of predictability and familiarity, which also reduces related prejudice and promotes social integration between different groups (Allport, 1954). However, multiple types of encounter exist, with this chapter focusing on three: fleeting encounters, more sustained and purposeful encounters, and play.

Fleeting encounters – like holding doors, smiling at passers-by – are common occurrences in modern-day society, and represent one ‘doing’ togetherness within others (Laurier and Philo, 2006). Thrift (2005) argues that these acts of kindness foster the foundation for mutual recognition and democracy; while Watson asserts that this ‘rubbing along’ helps combat the withdrawal into the private and disconnected realm (Watson, 2006), which in turn challenges discourses and stereotypes of the unknown other (Watson, 2009). However, Matejskova and Leitner (2011) and Valentine (2008) caution against positioning encounter as a ‘be-all and end-all’ solution, for not all encounters produce ‘meaningful contact’ or rather the acceptance of otherness. Encounters can at times simply be limited to tolerating another's presence, rather than a meaningful embrace of

‘otherness’. This is especially true within transient spaces, like city streets, that lead to mitigated connections between strangers (Amin, 2002); especially given recent technological shifts (e.g. smartphones) that empower our respective private worlds to obstruct our experiences within the public realm (Cameron, 2002). As such, more sustained and purposeful encounters may be needed to foster meaningful contact. Amin (2002, p. 959) proclaims meaningful contact is achieved through “micro-publics of everyday social contact and encounter”, with related sites including: communal gardens, sports clubs, music/art venues, etc. This type of encounter was detailed by Remi Hamze, a founding member of Movies on the Move – a collective aiming to bring together Lebanese youths from various parts of the country by screening films within public spaces:

“We want to let teens to meet and get to know each other from all over Lebanon. That’s why we’re moving from one area to the other. We’re taking our audience with us. Most of the films we’re showing shed light on an issue, politics, the environment, religious... we have music and discussion around a campfire after the movie. That’s what makes people come and get to know each other. We have friends who play guitar and oud²⁴ and they start singing... People tend to stick to friends at first, but they eventually move on to meeting people that they don’t know... We don’t only try to bring people to these spaces, we aim to get them to stay... Of course, they are peacebuilding places... Our friends started going to Ramlet El Bayda after our event. After getting to know the place” [Interview, 15/08/2018]

I stumbled upon Movies on the Move’s screening of ‘Notes on Blindness’ whilst ‘hanging out’ in Ramlet El Bayda (see figure 14). The event gathered 90 participants from across Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and was co-organised with Empowerment Through Integration²⁵. Although the movie screening drew in the audience, including beachgoers already present within the site; it is the campfire afterwards – along with its discussion, music, and social exchanges – that promotes meaningful contact between attendees. Ms. Hamze highlights a strategic choice behind movie selection, which aim to raise awareness of particular topics (such as the struggles and lived experiences of blind individuals in the Ramlet El Bayda event), facilitate related discussions and

²⁴ Oud is a middle eastern musical instrument, similar to a guitar

²⁵ A non-profit organisation committed to developing a more inclusive society through both empowering youth with disabilities individually, and transforming social and cultural stigmas against disability globally

the exchange of ideas, shape public discourse, and promote contact between attendees. She notes how over the course of the event, participants break-out from their immediate social circle, and eventually establish relationships with “people they don’t know”. As such, these spatial interventions prompt attendees to frequent public spaces, build connections with their existing users, and nurture intimate relationships with the space itself. Ms. Hamze emphasises “we don’t only try to bring people to these spaces, we aim to get them to stay”. As such, she notes attendees’ increased visits to Ramlet El Bayda post-event, as well as Mount Lebanon participants “preserving and caring for spaces they attended after our screenings. They built a gate leading to our screening site to preserve the trees and the prairie” [Interview, Remi Hamze, 15/08/2018]. These emerging connections – between attendees, the spaces they frequent, as well as existing users – not only facilitate meaningful contact via sustained attendance, but may also result in ameliorated spatial conditions (e.g. the preservation of a prairie). Ms. Hamze thus frames public spaces generally, and Ramlet El Bayda specifically, as peacebuilding places.



Figure 14. Movies on the Move, film screening in Ramlet el Bayda. **Source:** Tarek Kheir Eddine

Play, this section's final mode of encounter, is particularly prevalent within the baher. In his seminal work "the beach as a liminal space", Preston-Whyte details beaches as a "place of strong magic" (2004, p. 349), with an ability to facilitate emancipatory liminal experiences, should "the nature of the conditions conducive to releasing the magic of the place" be present (ibid., p. 353). I argue play within the baher may release the conditions for this magic, thus facilitating liminal social experiences that promote convivial encounter. Baldacchiono positions beaches as the preeminent environment where adults regress to child-like behaviour; given how they are "at liberty, and are even expected, to fool around, build sand castles, dig canals, and perform other childlike acts" (2010, p.773). I have observed ample examples of play during my fieldwork, from ballgames on the sand, to water fights in the sea, to other modes of recreation (e.g. cards, palettes). These often times spontaneously materialise, implicate beachgoers in the near vicinity to join-in, and ultimately foster contact between participants. I was often asked to join impromptu games of beach volleyball/football in Tyre and Ramlet El Bayda, in order to ensure a balanced representation between both teams. Looking back, these games comprised the most 'natural' (i.e. unforced) manner of meeting other beachgoers, and organically facilitated opportunities to 'hang out' and get to know one another afterwards. Castaneda emphasises play as "a function of urban space where the diversity and concentration that characterise cities also give way to playful encounters – sudden, unplanned, and unpredictable –, thereby generating opportunities to explore and develop new possibilities for social life" (Castaneda, 2016, p. 26). Play is thus a key ingredient of 'use value' of urban spaces, a partial antidote to the rising tensions observed within modern cities, especially since playing in public denotes "encounters with difference, encounters which contest the fragmentation and alienation of contemporary social experience" (Stevens, 2007, p. 29). Play has the potential to not only promote shared experiences, but can also enable the establishment of convivial societies (Woodyer, 2012). It is equated with radical freedom (Amin and Thrift, 2002), and can thus be interpreted as political tool that offers an alternative to rigid preconceived societal formulations. Kofman and Lebas (1996) stipulate play enables the

imagination to roam free, and by doing so it incentivises alternative possibilities ripe with potential for influencing the world in which we live – especially given its ability to convert ‘spectators’ into ‘performers’ (Shepard, 2011).

I argue meaningful contact and playful behaviour within the baher have the potential to foster convivial encounters, but, Lebanon’s coastline is plagued by governmental mismanagement and private sector encroachments (see chapters 5 and 6), which inhibit the space’s function as a medium for encounter, and hollow-out its liminal potential as an arena for *communitas* generation. However, Cynthia Abou Aoun – a journalist, academic and public space activist – proclaims: “the loss of the public space contributed to the further division of the city [Beirut]... The baher is the only public space that is left” [Interview, 20/08/2018]. As such, despite its encroachment and mismanagement, the baher comprises one of the few remaining public spaces in Lebanon, thus further reinforcing its significance. With this in mind, I pivot focus towards exploring modalities of resistance vying for the ‘right to the baher’, with an emphasis on their ensuing impact on the baher’s liminal character.

7.4 The ‘right to the baher’: framing modalities of resistance as liminal thresholds

Liminal spaces are shaped by temporal trigger events, which set-off subsequent transitional periods (McDowell and Crooke, 2019; in Mady, 2022). For example, McConnell and Dittmer (2018) demonstrate how the 1982 Argentinian invasion of the Falklands, and the 1997 volcanic eruption on Montserrat constitute tipping points that redirected the overseas territories’ state of political being. With this in mind, this section explores Lebanese civil society efforts to (re)shape the baherscape by (re)claiming the ‘right to the baher’. I examine associated modalities of resistance as liminal thresholds, where baher articulations of the ‘right to the city’ emerge (i.e. via the ‘right to the baher’), and an alternative ‘urban’ is prefiguratively advanced. I frame ‘right to the baher’

practices as liminal periods where urban dwellers' relationship with the city is redefined. I deem these events threshold moments that (re)negotiate the boundary between public/private, legal/illegal, and inclusion/exclusion. By doing so, these events structurally alter a space's liminal function, either ephemerally or more permanently, from a platform of difference and othering towards a conduit for *communitas*.

'Civil society' encompasses three interconnected layers of meaning (McIlwaine, 2009), with the first being the most widely embraced, and refers to a range of formal and informal non-state actors including: nongovernmental organizations, community organizations, labour and trade unions, activist groups, faith-based groups, and the voluntary sector – to name a few. The second layer is anchored around the values that these groups call for; with civil society not only referring to the actors themselves, but also denoting the principles of representation, participation, cooperation, and inclusion – especially pertaining to marginalised communities. The final layer moves beyond the actors and their respective values, to encompass the arena of interactions between civil society groups, the state, the market, and the individual (Edwards, 2014). An arena of contestation and transformation, where society's functioning is redefined and reshaped, as well as "the ways in which the state and civil society were related or separate... and how it functioned as a space for action, and as a buttress against the state" (McIlwaine, 2009, p. 137). This third layer partly informs the *baherscape*, where Lebanese civil society groups vie to reshape the *baher's* socio-political and economic order, while advocating for the 'right to the *baher*'.

It is precisely within this third layer that civil society and activism intersect. Takahashi affirms that "activism describes a large and varied set of actions and practices that set out to change current political, social, and/or economic circumstances, policies, and values" (2009, p.1). Activism is performed at the individual and/or collective level, with Maxey (1999) arguing everyday acts and thoughts co-create the social world in which we live. Accordingly, Carl Boggs coined the term

prefigurative politics to denote “embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience that are the ultimate goal” (Boggs, 1977, as cited in Jeffery and Dyson, 2021, p.643). Kreutz (2020) views prefigurative politics as social change activism that plants the seeds of society’s future within the soil of today. Prefigurativism advances an alternative future, where society rids itself from existing tyrannical shackles – whatever they may be; with adopted means conveying a glimpse of post-revolutionary future, where hope informs the realm of possibilities. Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) thus advance prefigurative politics as a cornerstone for most contemporary political activism, with it being a useful prism for unpacking ‘right to the city’ efforts.

My fieldwork has elucidated a varied set of baher activism modalities, of which this section focuses on two groupings: public engagements, and spatial occupations. I understand public engagements as activism tactics targeting the general public, in hopes of either shaping public discourse, and/or fostering alternative visions for the baher’s use and development. Spatial occupations, on the other hand, are relatively more pronounced in terms of their political demands, and include more radical means and strategies – including the use of force. These modalities of resistance are not mutually exclusive, for they exude a symbiotic relationship that jointly instigates socio-political and spatial transformation. Public engagements often precede spatial occupations, by raising awareness for the cause in question, and articulating the need for change; whilst spatial occupations assert a more direct claim on the space itself, thus advancing a prefigurative alternative urban. It must be noted that my research focuses on a number of civil society groups calling for the ‘right to the baher’, chief among them: Nahnoo, the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, Dictaphone Groupe, TWIG, and Movies on the Move – with Green Environment Movement and Legal Agenda also being interviewed, though not included in this chapter. Although informal coordination linked some of these groups throughout my fieldwork, it was not until the end of my

research that the Coastal Coalition was formed – i.e. a more formal cooperation unifying civil society groups and individuals operating within the Lebanese baher.

7.4.1 Public Engagements: sowing the seeds of an alternative ‘urban life’

Nahnoo has been at the forefront of shaping public discourse relating to Lebanon’s baher. This includes organising numerous conferences and public debates (see chapter 5) that bring together concerned stakeholders – i.e. local communities, academics, politicians, lawyers, and activists. Nahnoo’s president – Mohammad Ayoub – affirms:

“we are trying to discuss with the government, but [others] say we should be against them because they are thieves. For us, dialogue is very important... It is important for any strategy or solution that we adopt to be inclusive; not only in certain dimensions, but also inclusive of people that would make your strategy a success”
[Interview, Mohammad Ayoub, 16/09/2015]

This testimony highlights how for Nahnoo, the ‘right to the baher’ has evolved from its radical Lefebvre-ian roots, towards more pragmatic approaches within existing socio-political and economic structures. It vies to (re)shape the policy terrain, and avoids alienating governmental gatekeepers who may be instrumental to the success of its strategy. I volunteered with Nahnoo over the summer of 2018, while collecting data for its ‘Beirut Seashore: Through People’s Eyes’ report – a survey of Beirut’s baher users. The research is both a process and an outcome, and aims to trigger participants’ imagination and critical thinking – be it volunteers and/or survey respondents; promote knowledge sharing; arrive to data led recommendations; and ensure the enactment of a ‘valid’ master plan (Nahnoo, 2018a). Nahnoo conducted its research via a three-step process. First, volunteers undertook a one-day orientation (see figure 15) historicizing laws and regulations pertaining to the public maritime domain, as well as introducing key concepts: master plan, public/private, contested spaces, etc. The focal point of the session was a collaborative survey discussion, where volunteers were shown the survey, asked to provide

feedback, with subsequent roleplays for approaching participants and note taking. Second, volunteers were then asked to collect responses across three predetermined field sites, though I limited myself to Ramlet El Bayda. Finally, Nahnoo analysed the data, and drafted the report.



Figure 15. ‘Beirut Seashore: Through People’s Eyes’ volunteer orientation. **Source:** Facebook, Nahnoo

Interestingly, the report opens with the below quotation from David Harvey, emphasizing the right to the city. Through this, I understand Nahnoo’s report as framing the baher as an arena in which articulations for ‘right to the city’ emerge:

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.” (Harvey, 2017, as cited in Nahnoo, 2018a, p.1)

The framing positions this research as a tool enabling societal transformation, via more inclusive and participatory baher placemaking. Volunteers are tasked with making survey respondents feel

that their voices are being heard, especially those from marginalised working-class communities. After the completion of the survey, we were instructed to educate respondents of their legal and environmental rights within the baher – i.e. so that they may become informed citizens, and exercise their rights. The survey concluded with an open-ended question, designed to stimulate creativity, freedom and hope for an alternative ‘urban life’: “how would you imagine the ideal seashore of Beirut?”. Public engagements thus sow the seeds for an alternative ‘urban life’, by prefiguratively advancing inclusive decision-making processes, where urban dwellers co-create their city. By spreading awareness of the cause in question, educating citizens of their related rights, and emphasising the need for participants to claim them; public engagements not only challenge presiding socio-political and economic structures, but also establish the foundations for wider societal transformation.

Public competitions comprised another avenue of Nahnoo’s public engagement. I participated in its 2015 ‘Tyre Rally Paper’, which vies to strengthen youths’ relationship with the city’s public spaces. Play was deployed as a mode of discovery and encounter, with participants frequenting various sites (e.g. Tyre’s public beach), answering historical and/or cultural questions connected to the space, and completing challenges (e.g. balloon games). Play comprises an activism tactic that “de-commodif[ies] public space and, bring[s] a sense of fun back into the city: to reclaim public space as a space of and especially for the people” (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2009, p. 515). Playful spaces and practices allow “urban inhabitants to become aware of the joy that can emanate from such encounters to the extent that they will come to desire, cultivate, and struggle for these connections” (Castaneda, 2016, p. 29). Public engagements leverage play to prefiguratively advance a glimpse into a possible future, where urban dwellers’ relationship with their city is decoupled from private consumerist spaces, and instead reinforced by fun-filled experiences within the public domain. These initiatives advance alternative interpretations of what the ‘urban’ ought-to-be, with

the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche's (hereinafter CCPDR²⁶) 'Revisiting Dalieh' ideas competition being another notable example:

"In an effort to prevent the transformation of Dalieh to another private beach resort, the CCPDR launched this Ideas Competition to solicit visions for safeguarding Dalieh as a unique natural site and a shared open space. The Competition was an open call for architects, landscape architects, urbanists, planners, and other related environmental design disciplines. Participants were invited to articulate creative, sensitive, and environmentally sustainable design proposals for the conservation and future development of Dalieh. Competitors' entries provided a platform to open a public debate about open-access shared spaces and how these spaces can be designed, managed and sustained in ways that provide viable design alternatives to current practices along the coast of Lebanon... Competitors' visions were anticipated to broaden the collective understanding of the meaning of place within a highly individualized market-driven urban geography in Lebanon." (CCPDR, 2015)

The competition, which vies to preserve Dalieh²⁷, was formulated when news broke of renowned Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas being commissioned to redevelop the roughly 100,000 sqm plot of land (Battah, 2015). The competition solicited entries to reimagine Dalieh's future and potential; one that safeguards it from encroachment, and protects it as a shared open space via sustainable design. CCPDR thus frames the 'right to the baher' as an intrinsically anti-capitalist struggle, which advances an alternative to the "highly individualized market-driven urban geography in Lebanon", and halts the transformation of Dalieh into "another private beach resort" (ibid.). Although public engagements generally target an implicated space (e.g. Dalieh), related efforts may often times be widened towards alleviating broader 'urban' liveability concerns. This is made apparent by CCPDR claiming "competitors' entries provided a platform to open a public debate about open-access shared spaces", with resulting public discourse concurrently formulated across various scales – Dalieh specifically, public spaces generally, and urban liveability ultimately.

²⁶ CCPDR advocates for the preservation of the Dalieh of Raouche (i.e. Dalieh). It is a coalition of individuals and NGOs with commitment to preserve Beirut's shared spaces and cultural diversity as pillars of the city's liveability.

²⁷ Dalieh is natural site adjacent to Beirut's Pigeon Rocks, used as a shared space by the city's working-class



Figure 16. The Baher is Mine. **Source:** Dictaphone Group, 2013

Artistic interventions comprise the final layer of public engagement activism. Dictaphone Group, a research and performance collective, conceived ‘هذا البحر لي’ [this baher is mine] live performance (see figure 16) as a means to challenge Beirut’s baher access issues. Participants were transported via fishing boat along Beirut’s coast, from Ein El Mreisse to Ramlet El Bayda – five at a time, with twenty daily performances, spanning a period of 10 days. The journey historicises coastal land ownership, details laws governing the space, and sheds light on traditional and cultural beachgoer practices. The performance is thus “an invitation to (re)imagine our city, and how to demand our rights to it” (Dictaphone Group, 2013, p.1). Tanya El Khoury, Dictaphone Group co-founder who led script and performance components, admits:

“[The performance component brought] embodied knowledge. To not just think, “ah wow Hariri [a previous prime minister] came and bought all the plots”, but actually be there, see it for yourself, and test these boundaries. We come from the sea by boat and attempt to swim for free, in areas where you’re not supposed to. To see borders that are placed, and expose ridiculous policies that close off part of the sea. Seeing it for yourself. There are a lot of people that don’t know where Dalieh is. Some people never saw Beirut from the sea, and never had this point of view. It’s very different because when you see it from the sea, you realise the tall buildings are in front, and not the opposite. There is a barrier between the sea and the rest of the city. Most importantly, to build this collective memory with this space. We had coffee at Dalieh, and talked about the fact that one day we will probably not be able to have

coffee there. When you build this collective memory, it's probably harder for everyone to make [these spaces] disappear... The performance is offered as a conversation and not a monologue. This allowed people to add their stories. It's an interactive piece. It's also fun for people, you're on a boat, you're swimming whenever you want to swim, you end up on a beautiful place that you are discovering for the first time. In the end, there's oral history from fishermen and Dalieh inhabitants" [Interview, 30/09/2015]

Ms. El Khoury stresses the importance of embodied knowledge in claiming the baher, where one does "not just think... but actually be there, see it for yourself", "attempt to swim", "have coffee", and "end up on a beautiful place that you are discovering for the first time". First hand experiences "expose ridiculous policies" by "test[ing] boundaries". They enable a reframing of urban challenges, given how participants may have "never [seen] Beirut from the sea", thus better elucidating how "tall buildings are in front... a barrier between the sea and the rest of the city". They rekindle the relationship between urban dwellers and their city, and reinforce collective memory making. They shed light on alternative lived experiences, as told by Dalieh inhabitants, which may be unfamiliar to participants. Most importantly, the performance implicates participants in transgressive practices (e.g. "swim in areas you're not supposed to") and interactive conversations, where they are transformed from spectators to collaborators. Where they jointly, in partnership with Ms El Khoury, reclaim the baher as theirs.

Another dimension of artistic interventions is digital design activism, as evidenced by 'Beirut Beiti' [Beirut My home] – a user generated digital advocacy platform and tool, which enables Beirutis to activate, document and create public spaces in the city (incl. the baher). I came across Beirut Beiti whilst attending Beirut Design Week 2018. The year's theme was "Design and the City: ____", an examination of urban life, with the blank space symbolising an open call for designers to reimagine their city. TWIG, a collaborative design studio, focused on public spaces "in response to our lived experiences in Beirut and to three key questions: What defines a public space in Beirut? Why does Beirut have a very limited number of active public spaces? How can denizens of this city work

together to activate existing public spaces, and create new ones?” (TWIG, 2018). Rami Saab, TWIG’s Managing Director explains:

“How do we stop this [loss of relationship with public space] from happening? How do we actually allow real communities to come together? ... How can we activate existing public spaces and create new ones? The answer was design activism in the form of Beirut Beiti... The name capitalises on a strong culture of domesticity that was formed and reinforced during the years of the raging civil war. Where domesticity and the house were seen as safe and a refuge. So, it was claiming that the urban can also be your home. It’s saying that all these values associated with domesticity, can be expanded to the city... to bridge communities, and the urban fabric of what is, to this day, an un-homely and un-welcoming city... The way the platform is designed allows you to see the zeitgeist of the city, as it plays out over time... We are giving people tools, resources, and knowledge; then it is up to them to decide what to do with it, and what type of public they create.” [Interview, 08/08/2018]

Beirut Beiti co-produces – via its users – “a more liveable city” (TWIG, 2018) through the preservation and creation of public spaces. It plays on the culture of domesticity stemming from the civil war, where Beirutis deemed their homes as refuges from the lawlessness of the city. By (re)claiming public spaces, the platform expands the concept of dwelling towards the city, and advances an alternative ‘urban’. Beirut Beiti was formulated during a period of political upheaval, where Lebanese residents took to the streets to first protest the waste management crisis, then subsequently championed a slew of urban liveability concerns. Mr. Saab affirms: “we really wanted to pick up on this [revolutionary] momentum. Let’s just give them [protesters] a tool to be able to use” [Interview, Rami Saab, 08/08/2018]. The platform is transformational in aspiration, with an emphasis on community building and participatory action, especially given its framing as a “condenser of the many voices of designers, planners, activists, and denizens... a space for questions that are yet to be asked, identities that are yet to be formed, and conversations that are quite overdue” (TWIG, 2018). Beirut Beiti, as a modality of resistance, intersects with liminality across multiple fronts. Beirut Beiti mediates Lebanon’s socio-political transformation, where identities are yet to be formed, where communities are being bridged, and civil war wounds are being healed. It is thus a catalyst for *communitas* generation, and an arena in which users can claim

the ‘right to the city’. Moreover, by cartographically documenting public spaces across the city – even if their access is currently constrained – Beirut Beiti advances an alternative vision of Beirut; a realm of possibility of an urban potential, a digital reality of what the city ‘could be’ or ‘ought to be’, where these (un)public spaces are rendered public. Virtual spaces, such as social media platforms, have been noted as liminal arenas, where curated digital experiences allow users to remove themselves from society’s mundane social norms, and generate on-line forms of *communitas* (Conti and Heldt Cassel, 2020). Beirut Beiti comprises a site of digital transgression, “betwixt and between” reality and aspiration, where the publicness of documented spaces is (re)negotiated – with the tool also equipping users with a legal and political advocacy framework, or rather step-by-step playbook, to reclaim these spaces.

Turner (1974) deems art and leisure experiences in modern consumerist societies as liminoid, rather than liminal. Liminoid experiences are “optional and do not involve a resolution of a personal crisis or a change of status. The liminoid is a break from normality, a playful as-if experience, but loses the key feature of liminality: transition” (Thomassen, 2015, p.28). Although Turner makes a compelling argument, I caution that further nuance is needed before limiting art and leisure experiences to the liminoid sphere. When viewed in isolation, artistic interventions may certainly be misconstrued as being mere ‘breaks from normality’ – after all, how can a simple performative boat ride, or digital *dérive*²⁸ through Beirut’s public spaces, be transformative? That being said, I argue liminoid experiences, when aggregated, act as catalyst for liminal societal transformation. In order to demonstrate this, we must reframe the scale of our analysis from the ‘individual’ towards ‘society’ as a whole; as well as widen the breadth of examination beyond singular events, to focus instead on the totality of related activism. I argue that public engagements plant the seeds for revolutionary societal change by continuously shaping public discourse, and

²⁸ *Dérive*, French for drifting, signifies wandering through a city, aimlessly, without direction or destination

calling for an alternative ‘urban life’. Public engagements entail a myriad of tactics (e.g. public debates, participatory research, playful competitions, and artistic interventions) that persistently and recurrently perpetuate liminoid experiences, which aggregate over time across an ever-increasing societal footprint – i.e. attendees at various conferences and public debates, participants across a range of competitions, audiences across numerous artistic interventions, readers of multiple research projects, etc. Instead of gauging the liminoid experience of an individual’s singular boat ride, one must widen focus towards the liminal potential derived from the sum of all public engagements within ‘society’. Moreover, liminal transformations are further reinforced by examining the relationship between ‘public engagements’ and ‘spatial occupations’. As stated earlier, public engagements plant the seeds for revolutionary societal change, whilst spatial occupations – through their more radical political demands and intrinsically spatial practices – reap the seeds that have been sown. With this in mind, exploring now move on to explore spatial occupations as pivotal thresholds where articulations for the ‘right to the baher’ emerge.

7.4.2 Spatial Occupations: reaping the seeds that have been sown

The ‘zaffet el rayyes’ protest [translated as ‘celebrating the leader’] was organised by Nahnoo in June 2018. I was unable to attend the protest in person, and thus used archival video footage on YouTube and Facebook to observe the event, and interviewed a number of participants to receive first-hand accounts of what unfolded. Activists hired traditional Lebanese dancers (see figure 17), normally accompanying a bride and groom in a wedding procession, to satirically celebrate the efforts – or lack thereof – of Beirut Governor Ziad Shbib in halting Eden Bay Hotel’s partial encroachment of Ramlet El Bayda beach. Loud drums and music accompanied the celebratory procession towards the municipality’s headquarters. The protest ridiculed the politician’s inaction, and framed him as a ‘groom’ who failed to undertake his matrimonial duty towards his bride – Beirut. Mohammad Ayoub, Nahnoo’s president, proclaimed in the event:

“we’re here to demand the president and prime minister to dismiss Ziad Shbib [the Governor], because he hasn’t fulfilled his role in protecting the public maritime domain... We’re here to have fun, practice our rights, defend the public maritime domain, and celebrate the governor... we’re trying to do something unusual... There is a wedding registry with all the beaches that will soon be stolen” (Nahnou, 2018 b)

Protesters celebrated the absurdity of the baher’s theft by wearing veils, carrying a tuxedo in a hanger (i.e. for the governor to wear), and proudly showcasing congratulatory signs – including one depicting a diamond ring placed on a beach with the words “just stolen” inscribed (i.e. a play on “just married”). Activists took over the street leading to the municipality, where a traditional Lebanese dance (i.e. dabkeh) erupted, with protesters interlocking hands, standing shoulder to shoulder, jubilantly swaying side to side, and ululating. The scene unfolded in front of security forces wearing riot gear, photographers, and bemused onlookers. A sense of jubilation was noticeably in the air, with members of the crowd smiling and laughing, as they chanted: “Oh governor tell the truth, have you sold the beach or not?” and “Oh governor tell the truth. Have you been paid-off, or not?”. The song “*zayyinou el saba*” [decorate the square] played in the background, with protestors responding “*al saba lina*” [the square is ours]. Despite its radical political nature, spatial occupation may employ elements of satire and play. Shepard (2012) notes that play is incorporated within activism when creativity and prefiguration are deployed as means for attaining policy victories. As such, play within ‘zaffet el rayyes’ serves multiple purposes: first, galvanising awareness for the cause, by capturing the media’s attention; second, reshaping the baher’s political terrain, by lobbying for the removal of Beirut’s governor; third, advancing a prefigurative alternative ‘urban’, with a glimpse into the potential hope and joy associated with (re)claiming the city.



Figure 17. Protesters dancing during the ‘Zaffet El Rayyes’ demonstration. **Source:** Nahnoo, 2018

Eden Bay Hotel’s encroachment of Ramlet El Bayda has also instigated several protests on the beach itself, with spatial occupations often recurring to the use of force. A dozen activists infiltrated the construction site on 14 November 2016, in order to halt the construction process by targeting its drainage pipes. A fortnight later, protesters faced-off with internal security forces, with the latter ironically leveraging the pungent sewage pipeline as a defensive fortification (see figure 18). A third protest took place on November 16 2019, in the wake of the ‘October 17’ revolution,²⁹ with protestors penetrating the grounds of the now completed Eden Bay Hotel. A human bridge facilitated the gradual descent of protestors from the adjacent hill to the protest site. Lebanese flags were being waved, whilst protestors chanted: “Thief, thief, Wissam Ashour [Eden bay’s property developer], is a thief”; “whoever is staying at the hotel, you’re funding the capitalist system”; “oh soldiers, who are you defending?”; and “all of you quit, all of you quit” – aimed at politicians (Nahnoo, 2019 a). Although protests were predominantly peaceful, there was palpable tension in the atmosphere, with violence momentarily erupting (see figure 19). One protester, beaten with a baton to his head by a member of the internal security forces, decried: “The

²⁹ A period of mass civil disobedience in 2019, in reaction to rampant political corruption, the government’s failure to provide basic services, and planned tax hikes

protectors of the nation hit me. The protectors of the thugs inside [Eden bay]. The protectors of the people that encroach on our properties hit me” (Nahnoo, 2019 b). Spatial occupations thus result in socio-spatial ramifications that operate across various scales – be it the beach itself, with the removal of a drainage pipe; or on the scale of the body, as exhibited by protestor injuries. Unlike public engagements, which normally entail peaceful tactics and ephemeral practices; spatial occupations often times result in long-lasting material changes to the site itself, with Ramlet El Bayda’s graffiti being a notable example.



Figure 18. Protestors’ stand-off with Internal Security Forces at Ramlet El Bayda Beach
Source: Middle East Eye, 2016

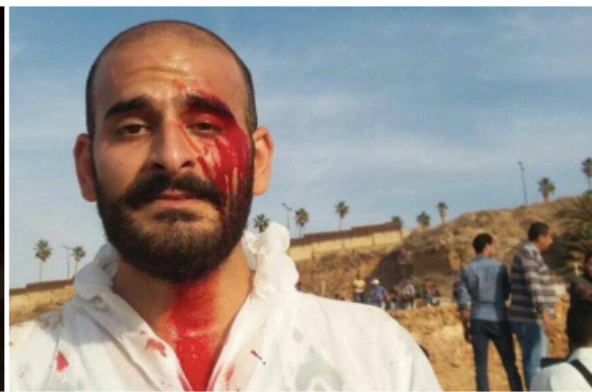


Figure 19. Protestor punched in the face during Ramlet El Bayda demonstration
Source: Middle East Eye, 2016

Although my last official stint of fieldwork was in the summer of 2018, I decided to pay Ramlet El Bayda a visit in December 2022, whilst I was home for the holidays. The beach site had not changed much over the past four years, barring one notable difference: graffiti dominated the northernmost section of the beach strip, adjacent to Eden Bay Hotel’s grounds. I suspect these were placed during the abovementioned protests, in an attempt to reclaim the beach site, spatially demarcate its publicness, and capture related protestor demands. The graffiti includes: "This baher is for us" (see figure 20), "beaches are for everyone", "eat the rich" (see figure 21), "we want Beirut's baher", "revolution", "anarchy", "against confessionism", "a neighbourhood built on the backs of proletariat", "we are all Tripoli" [a northern city at the forefront of the October 17 revolution], "we are citizens in the state", and "your future is golden". Ramlet El Bayda’s graffiti elucidates the wide-ranging nature of protestor demands, including: reclaiming the baher (e.g. “the

baher is for us); anti-capitalist struggles (e.g. “eat the rich”); tearing-down Lebanon’s confessional political system (e.g. “against confessionalism”); advancing an overarching revolution (e.g. “revolution” and “anarchy”); and the hope for an alternative future, characterised by equality (e.g. “we are all citizens in the state” and “your future is golden”). Protestors thus not only sought to reclaim the ‘right to the baher’ specifically, but have also leveraged the space as an arena for political transformation, where other demands for the ‘right to the city’ may be brought forward.



Figure 20. This Baher is Ours
Source: Tarek Kheireddine



Figure 21. Beaches for everyone & eat the rich
Source: Tarek Kheireddine

Although Ramlet El Bayda remains (un)public, relegated to a liminal in-between state, with a private hotel erected on public maritime domain; related spatial occupations – both within the site itself, as well as the politically connected Beirut municipality – constituted liminal triggers where the publicness of Eden Bay Hotel’s plot of land was repeatedly (re)claimed. Associated modalities of resistance, although unsuccessful in reversing the beach strip’s partial privatisation, may have dissuaded future encroachment attempts on Beirut’s last remaining sandy beach. That being said, other instances of spatial occupations have managed to structurally alter the public/private divide, leading to more permanent reordering of a space’s character, and even reversing related baher privatisation – with Dalieh being a notable example.

The etymology of the word Dalieh traces back to the Arabic term for plants that ‘hang down’, and describes the topography of the ground facing Raouche’s Pigeon rocks, sloping down from a raised

corniche towards the Mediterranean Sea. Although Dalieh's plots have historically been privately owned, the area has traditionally been used as a public space. Dalieh was a renowned picnic destination, where families would gather on Sundays and holidays, along with their shishas and beverages. It was also particularly used for '*siran*', a cultural practice of recreation within natural sites, including the preparation and consumption of food (The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, n.d.). The site encompassed a myriad of activities, including: swimming and cliff-diving by the city's youth (see figure 22); a secluded refuge where couples would meet, far from the gaze of onlookers; it was also the venue for a number of cultural celebrations, namely the Kurdish Nowruz festival (Dictaphone Group, 2012). That being said, Dalieh's private plots increased in size on cadastral maps throughout the years; to the extent that they became directly bordering the sea, and trespassed on the public maritime domain (The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, n.d.).



Figure 22. Young men cliff diving in Dalieh, n.d. **Source:** CCPDR, 2015

1995 marked an important year in Dalieh's history since it was characterised by the consolidation of ownership of its plots. Three distinct real estate companies (Al-Bahr Real Estate, Sakhrat Al-Bahr Real Estate, and Sakhrat Al Yamama), all of which could be traced back to the then Prime

Minister Rafik Hariri (Chardon, 2014), purchased the plots from their respective owners. According to a man appointed by Hariri to negotiate with the plot owners: “Hariri envisioned the coast covered with resorts, hotels, and yacht marinas. Such a project would attract a different type of tourists to the city through commercial activities and restaurants” (Dictaphone Group, 2012, p.17). This indicates the Prime Minister viewed the baher as being a commodity to be consumed by a specific type of ‘public’ – one able to pay for such luxuries, and consequently alienating working-classes. Dalieh’s consolidation coincided with two important legislative developments: the enactment of decree 7464, and the passing of law 402 – the former allowed the exploitation of the public maritime domain in Beirut’s zone 10, while the latter enabled landowners with plots larger than 20,000m² to increase their respective exploitation factors. The pieces were thus strategically being set in place, as to allow for a takeover of Dalieh.

In 2004, representatives from the three real estate companies began rounds of negotiations with Dalieh residents, namely local fishermen who informally resided on the site for generations. These negotiations sought to establish an agreed-upon sum of money to vacate the site, which would in turn enable the commencement of work on redevelopment projects (Kabalan, 2014). However, Hariri’s sudden assassination in 2005 halted progress, and created an uneasy stalemate lasting years. The period of ‘inactivity’ ended in 2012 when the Ministry of Public Works and Transport decided to invest in Dalieh by enlarging its fishing port, in order to protect the fishermen’s boats and sea-adjacent houses. The Ministry’s decision signals perception of the site falling under the public maritime domain, and subsequently its jurisdiction. However, this initiative was abruptly interrupted following interventions from the real estate companies, and thus the concrete structures (known as acropods) meant for the port expansion were left lying around the site. In April 2014, the real estate companies erected a fence along Dalieh’s corniche front, which effectively blocked entrance to the site (see figure 23). The barrier consisted of steel posts and a metallic mesh, that was later-on reinforced with barbed wire. Additionally, a municipal security

booth was erected inside the Dalieh site, to presumably protect both the private plots and the recently installed fence (Harb et al., 2015). The following month, Internal Security Forces placed a barrier on a road leading towards Dalieh's fishing port, which obstructed passage to the site. It is interesting that two separate government entities, the municipality of Beirut and the Ministry of Interior who respectively placed the booth and roadblock barrier, would invest public funds to preserve the private interests of a landowner – the Hariri political dynasty.



Figure 23. Dalieh fence. **Source:** Léopold Lambert, the funambulist

I volunteered with the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche (hereinafter CCPDR) in 2015, during my fieldwork. The CCPDR is a coalition of individuals and NGOs advocating for the preservation of the Dalieh of Raouche, as a means of preserving Beirut's shared spaces and cultural diversity. Over the course of my volunteering, I both observed and – at times – participated in a range of activism, with the aim of reclaiming Dalieh as a public space. These included: a beach clean-up effort; lobbying the Ministry of Environment to designate Dalieh as a natural reserve, which would legally halt all construction; lobbying UNESCO to designate Pigeon Rocks as a world heritage site, which implicates a five hundred meter no construction perimeter

(i.e. inclusive of Dalieh); successfully lobbying the World Monuments Fund, to add Dalieh on the list of endangered monuments (Capatides, 2015); and organizing several press conferences and protests, often in collaboration with Dalieh fishermen and residents. Despite all these modalities of resistance – each comprising momentary inflection points that renegotiated Dalieh’s publicness; the coup de grâce materialised in September 2015, when activists tore-down Dalieh’s fence (see figure 24).



Figure 24. Activists tearing down Dalieh’s fence. **Source:** Habib Battah, 2015

The 2015 ‘you stink’ protests, initially stemming from Lebanon’s ongoing waste management crisis, quickly morphed into an amalgamation of urban liveability demands – including LGBTQ rights, feminist legislation, the preservation of public spaces (Nagel 2015). One of these political movements, ‘Jayi Al Taghyeer’ [A Change Is Coming], staged a take-over picnic of Zaitunay Bay – an upscale marina built on public property – which I attended. The picnic started at 3pm, with protesters taking-over Zaitunay Bay’s wooden walkways. Working class meals were prepared, in symbolic protest of the vicinity’s upscale restaurants. Unbeknownst to myself and most other attendees, ‘Jayi Al Taghyeer’ was planning another spatial occupation that day: the removal of Dalieh’s fence. Whilst protesters were leaving Zaitunay Bay, attendees were told to head to Dalieh. During this time, 40 members of ‘Jayi Al Taghyeer’ had arrived to the site, equipped with bolt

cutters and gloves. They decided to penetrate the fence in front of the municipality's booth, in symbolic defiance and as a means to reassert their claim onto the site. Metal beams were then removed from the ground, in order to obstruct future attempts at re-erecting the fence. In the meantime, protesters started arriving from Zaitunay Bay, and flocked into the site. Some even chanting "the baher is mine" before lunging into the sea (Choueifi, 2015).

This section has framed the baherscape as an arena of contestation, where competing articulations of the baher, manifest in a process of perpetual claiming and reclaiming –mirroring the ebb and flow of waves. These struggles render the baher (un)public, 'betwixt and between' public and private designations. Baher contestations materialise through the claiming of privatisation tactics, and reclaiming of modalities of resistance; with each event comprising a trigger – or threshold period – that: (re)draws the boundary between public/private, legal/illegal, and inclusion/exclusion; (re)shapes a space's liminal potential as either a platform for difference and othering or conduit *communitas*; and ultimately (re)defines urban dwellers' relationship with the city. Privatisation efforts frame the baher through difference, where its [exchange] value is derived as a commodity for consumption by a specific type of 'public'; whereas modalities of resistance reframe the space's [use] value through participatory placemaking, convivial encounter, and *communitas* generation. By claiming the 'right to the baher' specifically, and the 'right to the city' more generally, modalities of resistance instigate revolutionary socio-political transformations that result in associated socio-spatial ramifications (e.g. reclaiming the publicness of Dalieh by tearing down its fence). Public engagements thus sow the seeds for an alternative 'urban life', by shaping public discourse and perpetuating recurrent liminoid experiences; with spatial occupations – along with their more radical political demands and intrinsically spatial practices – attaining emancipatory liminal transformation (i.e. for the site and its users), as revolutionary seeds may finally be reaped. Having elaborated on modalities of resistance vying to reclaim the 'right to the baher', I will now explore the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve, which is often cited by Lebanese civil society as a model

for the baher's use and development. I thus ask, to what extent does the 'right to the baher' manifest within the TCNR, and does it extend to all beachgoers – i.e. paying particular attention to the liminal experiences of Palestinian refugees within the Rashidieh camp?

7.5 Tyre Cost Nature Reserve (TCNR): A bastion for the 'right to the baher'?

TCNR benefits from a legally protected status, with it being declared a nature reserve in 1998 under law number 708 (TCNR Brochure, n.d.). This designation makes TCNR less susceptible to coastal encroachment – unlike my other field sites. TCNR constitutes an excellent example of how intra-governmental collaboration may lead to a better administered, maintained, and regulated baher. Law 708 stipulates that although the reserve is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Environment, an Appointed Protected Area Committee shall be responsible for running the affairs of the reserve, under the ethos of community participation and stakeholder involvement. This committee is comprised of five members, three of which are permanent fixtures (i.e. Ministry of Agriculture, Municipality of Tyre, and Sub-Governor of Tyre), as well as two rotational positions for local NGOs (i.e. assumed by Amwaj,³⁰ and Foundation for Protecting the Environment in Tyre³¹ at the time of fieldwork). This structure ensures various stakeholder voices are represented, and reinforces local community participation and engagement. This in turn empowers a sustainable agenda, with TCNR's management plan featuring a series of multifaceted projects, including: "Reduce the impact of the tourists' activities on the beach during the summer", "Mobilize international and national funding sources for wetland conservation and wise use", and "Finance an alternative income-generating plan for kiosk owners located in the tourism zone of the reserve"

³⁰ Amwaj is a local NGO that aims to protect the environment, conserve natural resources and biodiversity, spread environmental awareness within society, and collaborate and coordinate with local governmental associations in all matters relating to the environment - www.amwajenvt.com.lb

³¹ Foundation for Protecting the Environment in Tyre is a local NGO that advocates for both green spaces, as well as protecting maritime biodiversity - <https://bit.ly/3f4VJYq>

(TCNR Management Plan, n.d). Abir Saksouk-Sasso, a member of the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, asserts:

“In Tyre, the sandy beach in its entirety is public property, and the municipality regulates it as publicly open. This tightened people’s relationship with the baher, it made it even better. Tyre is a very good case study that encompasses the poor, the rich, conservatives, Arak [a local alcoholic beverage] in kiosks, the municipality cleaning, and there are no problems!” [Interview, Abir Saksouk-Sasso, 13/09/2015]

Fifty-nine regulated tents line TCNR’s shoreline. The kiosks differ in decoration, ambiance (e.g. Arabic versus Western music), the crowds they attract, as well as the choice of items served (e.g. alcoholic versus non-alcoholic beverages). Although a beachgoer’s desired tent may signal their identity to an extent, with ‘Cloud 59’ attracting more liberal clientele (e.g. revealing swimwear and alcohol); this division does not extend to the rest of the beach. Some visitors may forgo the tents altogether, and simply claim a section of the sand for the day (see figure 25). TCNR hosts a variety of sports activities, with beachgoers able to rent aquatic equipment for the day (e.g. paddle boards), play sports, and exercise. Beachgoers are often seen socialising beside the water, tanning, and even playing games (e.g. cards, backgammon). Tania Al Khoury, a member of Dictaphone Group, highlights: “it’s open to all classes... Open stretch of sand that people can use however they want... it’s the only stretch of sandy beach that’s not dirty” [Interview, 30/09/2015]. The site not only comprises a seldom example of a hygienic public sandy beach strip in Lebanon, but also hosts beachgoers and practices linked to a multitude of backgrounds.



Figure 25. TCNR aerial view. **Source:** Instagram, @captured_by_maha

TCNR seems to strike a balance between the site's exchange value, as an economic engine for the local community; and its use value, as a conduit for encounter, a conservation zone for its fauna and flora, as well a space of leisure and relaxation for beachgoers. Nahnoo's President, Mohammad Ayoub, admits: "in Tyre you see people wearing bikinis and burkinis, conservatives and liberals, people from different religions, and foreigners. You see everyone" [Interview, 16/09/2015]. Unlike Ramlet El Bayda and Dalieh with their noticeable dearth of exposed female bodies, and Tehoum with a tangible absence of burkinis; Tyre exudes inclusive representation. Jebran Elias, curator of the 'Live Love Tyre' Instagram page, admits: "Tyre has one of the cleanest beaches in Lebanon. The locales are super friendly. Their coexistence is amazing, between Christians and Muslims... They don't have the religious sensitivities of Beirut" [Interview, 14/09/2015]. This diversity of backgrounds and practices upholds the right to difference, promotes convivial encounter, and crystallises the relationship between beachgoers and the baher; with encounter operating along multiple intersections: conservative and liberal, economically privileged and working class, and various national, gender, and age groups.

On the southern edge of TCNR lies the Rashidieh refugee camp. Visiting the camp proved to be challenging, given how it is fenced-off from the remainder of the reserve, with a Lebanese army check-point guarding its entrance. Since visitors are not allowed to freely walk-in, I had to leverage my local network to secure an invite by one of the camp's residents – Ahmad, whose name has been changed to protect his identity. The below portrait recounts my day with Ahmad, and draws on my field diary entry, along with takeaways from a sit-down interview in August 2018.

I woke-up on Sunday brimming with excitement. I had visited Tyre countless times before, but today was different... I was finally going to enter the Rashidieh refugee camp! The drive down from Beirut, typically a little over an hour, felt quicker than usual. Upon my arrival, I rang Ahmad and inquired about our meeting spot. He instructed me to park near to the camp's entrance, as I'm unable to enter with my car. Ahmad showed-up five minutes later on a moped. After exchanging greetings and small talk, Ahmad asked me to ride behind him, and to say nothing whilst we pass the check-point. I obliged, with my excitement increasingly diluted by nervousness. Upon passing the military checkpoint, a sense of relief overtook me. I admired my surroundings and noticed Palestinian flags hung all over the streets, pictures of unfamiliar politicians stamped onto the walls, political posters and emblems that I had not seen before, and graffiti proclaiming: "فلسطين اننا عائدون" [Palestine, we will return], "Free Palestine", etc. I found myself transported into a foreign land, a patch of Palestine located within Tyre.

Ahmad showed me around his neighbourhood. I noticed surrounding buildings were worn down, some half-constructed, and others structurally questionable. Ahmad explained: "there are a lot of things that are banned in Rashidieh. A lot of essential things. Like building material, you're not able to bring inside the camp. Palestinians in all camps can't, not just in Rashidieh... I am not allowed to own property outside the camp. I can't register land outside in my name... [the baher's waves in winter] reach four or five houses deep. So, residents either go to other houses, if they have another place to stay; if not, then they drown... there are a few houses that collapsed because the waves impacted the foundations". Ahmad took me down to the baher to witness the crumbled structures first hand (see figure 26). He elaborated this oxymoron situation, where Palestinians are made to protractedly reside in temporary camps whose housing cannot be ameliorated, is shaped by Lebanese people's fear. Fear that Palestinians would set roots into the land, and wish to stay. Fear of security repercussions, where the camp's residents may use building materials for smuggling tunnels. Palestinians are thus relegated to a limbo-like existence spanning decades, and still ongoing.



Figure 26. Crumbled structures in Rashidieh refugee camp. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine

Ahmad took me to the northern edge of Rashidieh's strip of baher. He pointed towards a concrete wall and nearby surveillance station, which separate the camp from the rest of TCNR. "You see the separation barrier? We can't traverse it. If you try now, then the army will yell at you and tell you to go back... They just tell us it's not allowed... The army is positioned at our 3 entrances, the main entrance of the camp, as well as the north and south sides of the beach... they call Rashidieh a camp, but for people that live here it is a prison. When you're fenced off. You have guards placed upon you. Am I not living in a prison?"

We headed back down, walking past numerous *istirahat* [an Arabic word denoting a break, but used to designate recreational establishments]. We observed kids playing on the swings, with empty plastic tables and chairs awaiting to be filled by patrons at the end of the working day (see figure 27). Ahmad pointed to a section of the baher, and told me of a wedding celebration occurring there last week. He painted a jubilant picture, with music, dancing and food. All of which took place in close proximity to a seaside cemetery (see figure 28), given how space is not a luxury afforded within the camp. Ahmad jokingly admitted that 'all roads in Rashidieh lead to the baher'. When probed further, he explained: "The baher for us is an escape. Like they say, you can go share your troubles and complaints with the baher. When you feel bothered, when you feel happy, when you want to unwind and breathe, when you want to invite your friends, you go to the baher. They say if someone lives between four walls, then their only escape is the roof... well the baher is our roof. The baher for us is a *montazah* [Arabic denoting a trip or wondering, associated with recreational areas]... You feel like you've taken your full freedom in the baher. When one goes there, or even looks at the baher from far, you feel your soul is in peace".



Figure 27. Children playing Rashidieh refugee camp. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine

After a few hours with Ahmad, my day at the Rashidieh camp came to an end. I asked him to drop me off at my car, and we subsequently left the camp the same manner we had entered – on his moped, passing through the army’s check point. I thanked Ahmad for giving me glimpse into his life. On the ride back, I found myself transfixed by my experience. I was left wondering how there could be such a stark difference, between the TCNR that I know and love, and this new side of the reserve that I had just discovered. As I played back my experience, I found myself deeply impacted by my last exchange with Ahmad. I felt compelled to ask: “would you ever go back to Palestine, if you could?”. He responded “you see the clothes in my closet? I wouldn’t even take these, because I’d be out of here so fast. I would go as I am and leave everything behind...”



Figure 28. Seaside cemetery at Rashidieh refugee camp. **Source:** Tarek Kheireddine

Refugees are known to inhabit a liminal socio-spatial and temporal position (Thomassen, 2015); with academics exploring a variety of connected liminal spaces: refugee camps (Ramadan, 2013), detention centres (Mountz et al., 2013), waiting rooms (Seitz, 2017) and in-between countries (Shakhsari, 2014). Refugees are often in perpetual transition, forced to navigate numerous physical, psychological and metaphorical thresholds – between safety and danger, home and sanctuary, what has taken place and what is to come (Waardenburg et al., 2019; Wimark, 2021). Life in Rashidieh is quintessentially liminal. As Ramadan frames it: “The refugee camps are populated by Palestinians, culturally and politically Palestinian, within Lebanon but not a part of it, of Palestine but not in Palestine... slogans and icons attempt to nationalise the space, turning concrete into Palestinian concrete, a slum in southern Lebanon into a Palestinian refugee camp... The production of Palestinian space in the camp is an important context and means for the producing and reproducing of Palestinian identity” (Ramadan, 2009, p. 74 and 86). Rashidieh’s residents are betwixt and between ‘refugee’ and ‘security threat’ status, labelled as foreigners despite being born and raised in Lebanon. The camp straddles two nations, a patch of Palestine in Lebanon, with the checkpoint acting a physical threshold. Palestinians are protractedly made to reside in what ought-to-be a temporary camp. The baher occupies multiple concurrent binaries, an in-between state with glaring contradictions: both prison and an escape; a space of jubilation (e.g. wedding) and danger (e.g. crumbling houses); a venue for recreation (e.g. istirahat) and death (e.g. seaside cemetery). What is most striking, however, is the stark contrast between Rashidieh and the rest of TCNR. A site for difference, where Palestinians are othered and physically separated; versus a beach strip open to everyone, and marked by convivial living. Although TCNR is often advanced as a model for the baher’s use and development, some identities – namely Palestinian refugees in Rashidieh – are left behind, and thus excluded from co-constituting the ‘right to the baher’.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the baher as an arena for social and political action, where civil society efforts challenge presiding neoliberal policies and exclusionary practices. I juxtaposed economic conceptualisation of the baher, as derived by the space's exchange value (see chapters 5 and 6), with an elaboration of its use value as a platform where urban dwellers negotiate their respective differences while co-producing a convivial 'urban'. These spaces of encounter – public spaces generally, and the baher specifically – encompass an integral function of rapprochement between various societal groups, with civil society actors framing them as integral components for Lebanon's reconciliation and peacebuilding. As such, meaningful contact and playful behaviour within the baher may foster convivial encounters, with resulting connections – between attendees, the spaces they frequent, as well as existing users – resulting in ameliorated spatial conditions (e.g. the preservation of a prairie).

I have demonstrated how the 'right to the city' extends to the baher, given three interconnected dimensions. First, the baher comprises a focal point for 'right to the city' rallying calls – be it past or present, international or local. Second, 'planetary urbanisation' reproduces urban socio-economic processes within the baher, thus implicating it in wider 'urban liveability' struggles. Third, the baher tends to host liminal experiences, which often advance articulations for an alternative 'urban life'. As such, the baher comprises one of the many arenas (e.g. the streets, the park, the square) where interpretations for the 'right to the city' emerge. Furthermore, my empirical data elucidates how associated modalities of resistance not only sought to reclaim the 'right to the baher' specifically (e.g. access to Dalieh), but also leveraged the baher as an arena for political transformation, where other demands for the 'right to the city' may be brought forward (e.g. the downfall of Lebanon's confessional political system via Ramlet El Bayda Graffiti).

I have framed liminality, as a socio-spatial and temporal process of transformation, as comprising an ideal vantage point for exploring the ‘right to the city’. It encapsulates periods where individuals, groups and/or societies are betwixt and between identities – i.e. neither what they used to be, nor what they will be come, but also both at the same time. Accordingly, I have examined civil society’s modalities of resistance as liminal thresholds, where baher articulations for the ‘right to the city’ emerge, and an alternative ‘urban’ is prefiguratively advanced. By claiming the ‘right to the baher’ specifically, and the ‘right to the city’ more generally; modalities of resistance instigate revolutionary socio-political transformations, that result in associated socio-spatial ramifications (e.g. reclaiming the publicness of Dalieh by tearing down its fence). As such, modalities of resistance constitute liminal periods that: (re)draw the boundary between public/private, legal/illegal, and inclusion/exclusion; (re)shape a space’s liminal potential from a platform of difference and othering, towards a conduit of *communitas*; and ultimately (re)define urban dwellers’ relationship with their city.

8 | Producing the Lebanese Baher Through Baherscape Contestations

8.1 Introduction

This research primarily deals with the production of (un)public space within the context of the Lebanese baher. By engaging with Lefebvre's (1991) 'production of space', I have explored the baher as a social space in perpetual (re)production, with its socio-temporal and spatial transformations (Thomassen, 2015) being informed by an interplay of its 'perceived', 'conceived', and 'lived' elements. I have found the baher to straddle an ambiguous and hybrid classification, 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1967) public and private, with resulting socio-spatial manifestations being indicative of power relations imbued within the space. In seeking to understand the production of the baher, I have examined the processes, outcomes, and subsequent effects of this socio-spatial production. As a result, I have engaged with the baher across three interconnected empirical chapters, each focusing on a key dimension of (re)production: first, the Lebanese Government, with its associated baher governance; second, private beach actors (i.e. administrators and beachgoers), with their identity inspired exclusionary policies and practices; and third, civil society groups calling for the 'right to the baher'; with liminality comprising a connecting conceptual thread that weaves together my empirical chapters. To achieve this, I have deployed the baherscape as an analytical framework, and positioned it as an arena for power-related contestations, a site of both oppression and resistance, where different stakeholders meet, negotiate their various interests, and attempt to pursue their respective agendas. As a result, I argue that the baher and its users are implicated in a liminal process of transformation – i.e. dynamically moving betwixt and between public/private designations, legal/illegal implications, and inclusionary/exclusionary practices.

In this concluding chapter, I revisit this thesis' research questions, and elaborate on key findings developed across each empirical chapter. Through this, I elucidate my contribution to geographic scholarship by forging a dialogue between empirical and theoretical arguments spanning the breadth of this work. From here, I acknowledge existing gaps that may not have been addressed throughout this manuscript, and which may subsequently inform areas for future academic exploration. Finally, I conclude by discussing the relevance of this research, with particular emphasis paid to both academic and personal motivations behind this body of work.

8.2 Key Findings & Contributions to Geographic Literature

My overarching contribution to geographic scholarship has been advancing baherscape as an analytical framework, by bringing together the 'production of space' as a theory, with 'liminality' as a concept. In doing so, I have argued that liminality comprises a valuable vantage point for exploring the production of space, given that it allows us to move beyond outcomes of said production, to instead focus on related processes of transformation (Thomassen, 2015) – be it towards privatisation and/or a public reclamation. Accordingly, I have used liminality to unpack how the baher straddles public and private designations, along with the wide-ranging political and social possibilities emanating from this oscillating fluidity. I have explored the baherscape as an arena of contestation, where competing articulations of the baher manifest in a process of perpetual claiming and reclaiming – dynamically mirroring the ebb and flow of waves. These struggles render the baher (un)public, 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1967) the claiming of privatisation tactics, and reclaiming of modalities of resistance. Here, privatisation efforts frame the baher through difference, where its [exchange] value is derived as a commodity for consumption by an 'acceptable public'; whereas modalities of resistance reframe the space's [use] value through participatory placemaking, convivial encounter, and *communitas* generation. As such, baher contestations comprise thresholds that: (re)draw the boundary between

public/private, legal/illegal, and inclusion/exclusion; (re)shape a space's liminal potential as either a conduit for *communitas* or a platform for othering; and ultimately (re)define urban dwellers' relationship with the city.

Empirically, I have used the baherscape to unpack the production of (un)public space across four beach sites: Ramlet El Bayda, Dalieh, Tehoum and the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve. By deploying a liminal reading of Lefebvre's spatial triad (i.e. perceived, conceived, and lived space), I have uncovered how these spaces – along with their respective users – are (re)produced as (un)public, and relegated to a state of flux with prevailing contradictions. I did this by leveraging Thomasson's (2015) tripartite framework, which understands liminality as socio-temporal and spatial process of transformation – i.e. affecting both the space and its users. Socially, I have engaged with liminal individuals (e.g. beachgoers, see chapters 5-7), groups (e.g. Beirutis, see chapter 5; Palestinian refugees, see chapter 7), and societies (e.g. Lebanon, see chapter 5 and 7). Temporally, I have detailed liminal moments (e.g. negotiating access to private beach venues, see chapter 6), periods (e.g. civil society's modalities of resistance, see chapter 7), and epochs (e.g. decades of life within the Rashidieh refugee camp, see chapter 7). Finally, spatially I have explored liminality via specific places (e.g. acute gateways, see chapter 6), areas (e.g. a beach strip, see chapter 5 & 7), and larger regions (e.g. Lebanon's baher). In doing so, I have articulated the baherscape across multiple scales of analysis, each yielding specific insight(s) into the production of the baher as an (un)public space.

While this thesis focuses on the baher specifically, I do not claim that the Lebanese case is wholly exceptional in nature. Through the baherscape, I offer an analytical framework for exploring the production of contested spaces, either in connection to coastal spaces that may be situated in various geographical contexts, or even other types of public spaces whose boundaries – similar to the baher – may be difficult to pin-down (e.g. public wetlands). The baherscape illustrates how liminality comprises a pertinent tool for examining the production of (un)public spaces; with this

conceptual and theoretical marriage enabling scholars to generate added nuance and insight regarding associated processes of (re)production – i.e. with this research detailing intersections with governance, identity politics, and the right to the city. I expand on each of these intersections in the following sections.

8.2.1 Governance and a Space's Liminal Context, a Synergetic Relationship

By asking “*In what way, and for what purpose(s), is the Lebanese Government ordering the nation's baher?*”, I have critically assessed the government's role within the baherscape, by unpacking its influence over the production of the baher. In Chapter 5, I have explored how presiding governance renders the baher (un)public, by examining the disconnect between stated governmental ambitions and on-the-ground ‘stubborn realities’ (Yiftachel, 2006). Here, I deployed ‘government’ in connection to specific state entities (i.e. ministries, directorates, municipalities, etc.), whilst ‘baher governance’ denoted forces guiding the government's production of the baher – i.e. inclusive of power dynamics across state (i.e. government) and non-state (i.e. private and voluntary sectors) actors alike. Empirically, I have engaged with baher governance across two scales: nationally, via a discourse analysis of the ‘National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory’; and more locally, by turning attention to Ramlet El Bayda beach – the pilot project for the ‘National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public’. Although the master plan conveys a façade of a government pursuing a sustainable management of the Lebanese baher, its subsequent hollowing out, due to the lack of ensuing legislation and clear implementation guidelines, is indicative of a governance that operates in the shadows (Goodwin, 2009). What emerges is a system in which political elites protect their personal interests by curtailing the proper enactment of the master plan. To deduce this, I have first examined the “why?” behind government decision-making by uncovering a set of structural governance pitfalls (i.e. on-the-ground ‘stubborn realities’), which inhibit the implementation of the master plan's ambitions, and instead degrade the ‘public’ nature

of the baher. I then leveraged Ramlet El Bayda as a prism for exploring “how?” baher governance implicated competing and conflicting spatial interventions by various factions (i.e. Ministry of Public Transport, Municipality of Beirut, and the Lancaster Eden Bay Hotel). This has not only hampered the realisation of the ‘National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public’, but has also led to detrimental socio-environmental consequences plaguing the space and its users.

My research has uncovered how Ramlet El Bayda is ‘conceived’ (Lefebvre, 1991) differently by various factions of the government. On one hand, the master plan vied to safeguard Beirut’s last remaining sandy public beach; and the Ministry of Transport deployed it as a case study for ‘National Programme for Free Beaches for the Public’ – although this was later placed on hold in 2011 following funding shortages. On the other hand, the Municipality of Beirut used it as an outlet for sewage pipelines, and later as a zone for private sector investment by issuing a construction permit to Eden Bay Hotel in 2016. This fractured baher approach leads Ramlet El Bayda to be ‘perceived’ as a neglected beach site, with dilapidated and polluted conditions observed at the time of fieldwork. Furthermore, Eden Bay’s neoliberal takeover parcelled-off the site’s Southern edge from the remainder of the space. These ‘conceived’ and ‘perceived’ dimensions subsequently inform beachgoers’ ‘lived’ experiences, with environmental injustice consequences reinforcing the working-class nature of the space, and inflicting bodily harm through swelling and skin conditions. As such, Ramlet El Bayda has seen its relationship with Beirutis gradually severed over time, with baher governance transforming the liminal character of the site: from a quasi-sacred place, known for the healing properties of its water, where Beirutis previously gathered to perform cultural experiences that knit together the communal fabric of society; into a sewage-infested, dilapidated, and neglected beach site, that reinforces social fragmentation via health and safety concerns targeting marginalised communities. The beach site has thus been gradually disconnected from everyday Beirutis lived experiences, as evidenced by the disappearance of

cultural practices like Job's Wednesday, which subsequently facilitated a neoliberal takeover by the Eden Bay hotel.

By engaging with my first research question, I have deduced a synergetic relationship between governance and a space's liminal context. First, I have claimed that the baher's governance is shaped by a melange of three constituents: the baher's physical liminal setting; Lebanon's political liminal context; and a prevailing neoliberal ideology. In fact, the baher's setting as in-between land and sea, renders property boundaries difficult to pin-down given the constant ebb and flow of shifting waves. This muddies the boundary between public/private, and relegates legal protections and user rights as open to interpretation. This differentiates the baher from other types of public spaces (e.g. urban squares, parks) whose spatial boundaries tend to be more discernible; with liminal public spaces being relatively more at risk of encroachment, given the indiscernibility of their respective boundaries. Additionally, Lebanon's (post)conflict liminal politics have shaped baher governance through civil-war era baher violations, government shortcomings that spur private sector involvement (including a mushrooming of exceptional decrees), and a lack of accountability and intragovernmental 'blame game' hampering cooperation. The Lebanese government uses the combination of these two liminal dynamics - physical and political - as a catalyst for neoliberal strategies that facilitate the privatisation of public spaces, especially given its valorisation of private rights over public interests, as well as a collusion between political and economic elites (Krijnen et al., 2010; Traboulsi, 2012; Khalili, 2016; Chaaban, 2019). Second, I have elucidated how governance has the ability to structurally alter a public space's liminal character. I illustrated how baher governance informs subsequent government action in Ramlet El Bayda, and ultimately led to environmental injustice implications. This in turn severed the connection between coastal communities and the beach site, and facilitated further encroachments and privatisation. This hampered the space's *communitas*-generating function (i.e. previously denoted by Job's Wednesday), and inversely bolstered divisions and societal fragmentation. Put

more simply, the liminal character of public spaces may transform over time, in a manner that heavily correlates with how governance shapes subsequent government action.

In terms of contributions to wider scholarship, although existing literature draws parallels between a beach's physical liminal setting and resulting social liminal experiences, this is largely limited to how these dimensions mirror one another (Coldicutt, 2014; McCay, 2008). Conversely, my research has established a much-needed direct causal link between these two dimensions. I do this by detailing how the Lebanese government leverages the baher's physical liminal setting, along with the nation's political liminal context, to facilitate a neoliberal reordering of the space; and how this in turn alters a site's liminal function (i.e. from a conduit for *communitas*, to a platform for difference), and shapes beachgoer liminal experiences within the space. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of academic engagements have predominantly drawn attention to positive features of liminal beach spaces, particularly in what concerns emancipatory, ludic, transgressive, and carnivalesque behaviour (Shields, 1990; Preston-Whyte, 2004; Azaryahu, 2005; Dobson, 2007, Monterrubio, 2013; and Coldicutt, 2014). I have thus supplemented these discussions by detailing processes that alter a space's liminal character, away from community building experiences (e.g. Job's Wednesday), and towards the unravelling of the communal fabric via accentuated differences (e.g. Ramlet El Bayda's health and safety concerns, and ongoing encroachment). In doing so, I have argued that liminality may be just as dividing as it is unifying. As a result, I have engaged with liminality as a bidirectional process of transformation, with both liberation and subjugation being possible experiences, depending on the specific 'micro-scaled dynamics' (McConnell and Dittmer, 2018) instigating this transformation. With this in mind, I expand on the notion of 'dividing' liminal experiences, by elaborating on transformational processes marked by exclusion and othering. As such, I inquire what new insights may be derived by widening focus to a less cited beach space within scholarship: private beach venues?

8.2.2 ‘Snagged Threads’: Revisiting Identity Politics via Liminal Gateway Experiences

By asking “*Private beach venues are ‘public’ to whom?*”, I have sought to assess the role of private beach actors (i.e. administrators and beachgoers) within the baherscape, by unpacking their influence over the production of the baher. In Chapter 6, I have explored how the baher is rendered (un)public by examining the nexus between identity politics, as informed by competing interpretations of ‘acceptable public’, as well as related exclusionary territorial practices. Young (1990) defines identity politics as the ‘politics of difference’ that assesses social and political relations through the material and metaphorical *reproduction* and consolidation of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Accordingly, I have framed designations of in/out-groups and (non)belonging as integral to comprehending the production of private beach venues, especially since access and use of these (un)public spaces tends to be negotiated. However, I have also questioned whether Young’s dualistic framing of self/other, along similar designations of in/out-group, (non)belonging, inclusion/exclusion, and (un)public can adequately deal with the intricacies of complex intersectional identities. It is within this constraint that I have turned to liminality as a complementary lens that enables a more thorough engagement with identity politics. Here, I positioned threshold experiences within private beaches, where beachgoers are ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner, 1967) dualistic designations, as a better vantage point for unpacking varying degrees of socio-spatial belonging. Empirically, I have focused on Tehoum’s private beach venues across three interconnected takes: first, how narratives and imaginations of private beach actors contribute to formulations of in/out-groups; second, how politics of representation inform exclusionary practices along the Lebanese baher; and third, an exploration of liminal beachgoer experiences, with emphasis on how this examination results in more granular and nuanced understandings of a space’s identity politics.

Instead of describing a singular understanding of a Tehoum beachgoer, I drew on private beach actor narratives and imaginations to derive various interpretations of in/out-groups. I detailed the existence of four archetypes that partly inform Tehoum's clientele: the liberal beachgoer, the family unit, the cosmopolitan elite, and the 'papaz'. Out-groups, on the other hand, were predominantly linked to public beachgoer conceptualisations as working class, conservative, unsanitary, uneducated, and lacking civility – all of which led to the demeaning 'nawar'³² label. Tehoum's politics of representation spatially manifested themselves through territorial claims of private beach administrators, who vied to cleanse their respective venues from the 'other' – i.e. despite having acknowledged an individual's theoretical right to access their spaces. This was achieved through three distinct exclusionary policies and practices: The first created a 'defensible space' through the use of physical barriers, which forced prospective beachgoers to access the baher through predefined and controlled points of entry. The second established financial barriers of entry as a means of filtering-out working-class populations. Finally, the third strategy used monitoring and policing tactics in order to target remaining out-groups.

My research has uncovered how Tehoum's private beach venues are concurrently 'conceived' as public (i.e. via the public maritime domain) and private (i.e. via private beach actors' narratives and imaginations of a predefined 'acceptable public'). This leads to 'perceived' on-the-ground implications, with neatly manicured and well-serviced facilities being guarded by a defensible space. Tehoum's 'conceived' and 'perceived' dimensions subsequently inform prevailing exclusionary policies and practices, with varying manifestations of 'lived' beachgoer experiences materialising as a result. I have explored these through three acutely-localised thresholds: the parking lot (i.e. where/when a beachgoer traverses the defensible space), the entrance gate (i.e. where/when a beachgoer traverses the financial barrier to entry), and the water's edge (i.e. where/when a

³² an Arabic term that denotes undesirable behaviour normally with connotations of a low social status

beachgoer overcomes monitoring and policing tactics) – i.e. each comprising a gateway that private beachgoers normally cross while navigating Tehoum’s venues. I have argued that by crossing these gateways, beachgoers undergo a private beach ‘rite of passage’ (van Gennep, 1960; and Turner, 1969), which – if successfully traversed – confer onto them belonging to a predefined ‘acceptable public’. In fact, crossing each gateway was marked by a quasi-ceremonial activity, including: the exchange of car keys/valet voucher at the parking lot; the transfer of money/ticket stub at the entrance gate; and finally, immersing oneself in the baher at the water’s edge.

By engaging with my second research question, I have focused on liminal experiences where an individual’s belonging is negotiated, a designation of in/out-group is formulated, and constructions of ‘acceptable public’ are being articulated. Through an examination of liminal experiences linked to Tehoum’s exclusionary policies and practices, I was able to unpack varying manifestations of difference and othering within private beaches. Accordingly, I have deduced the existence of ‘snagged-threads’, or rather beachgoers who blurred the boundary between in/out-group and (non)belonging. This included ‘papaz’, whom were often negatively perceived by remaining patrons; beachgoers who recurrently switched between in/out-group, in accordance to their financial ability at a given time; and most importantly domestic workers, who were often relegated to the water’s edge. Through these examples, I have demonstrated how conceptual engagement with in/out-groups and (non)belonging, is better served by decoupling these notions via a nuanced analysis of their existing dissonance. In fact, I have postulated that despite a large degree of resonance between said concepts, a designation of one does not necessarily implicate an equal and proportionate allocation of the other. Moreover, I have concluded that these designations are neither static nor standardised, for this process is highly dynamic and contextualised – depending on when it is taking place, whom is making it, and where it is made.

In terms of contribution to wider scholarship, I have diverged from existing beach liminality literature by focusing on private beach venues – whereas most academic engagements centre on public beach examples (Preston-Whyte, 2004). By doing so, I was able to examine an often-overlooked angle within liminal beachgoer experiences, that of exclusion and othering, rather than the relatively more cited emancipation and communitas (Shields, 1990; Preston-Whyte, 2004; Dobson, 2007). In fact, existing tourism geography engagement with liminality often deploys anonymity as an analytical starting point (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006; Meethan, 2012; Monterrubio, 2013; Trimbach, 2022); however, I opted to examine liminal beachgoer experiences through the prism of encounter – i.e. where/when identities are discerned, constructed, negotiated, and potentially othered. Moreover, tourism scholars have widened liminality to “any transition that may occur... this of course may mean a digression from the initial theory of liminality, and the notion of threshold” (Bristow and Jenkins, 2020, p. 220). As a result, dealings with liminality have understated the role of geographic thresholds, and opted instead to focus on a broader conceptualisation of spaces – e.g. the littoral (McCay, 2008), and hotels (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006; Underthun and Jordhus-Lier, 2018). In contrast, I have reemphasised thresholds as a quintessential focal point for unpacking liminal experiences, and did so by exploring three specific gateways within private beaches: the parking lot, the entrance gate, and the water’s edge. Through this, I was able to unpack varying manifestations of identity politics and degrees of socio-spatial belonging within Tehoum’s private beach venues.

Moreover, through this chapter I have bolstered Squire’s (1994) call for humanistic and cultural geography to adopt tourism as a research angle, due to its overlap with identity, power, culture, and representation. This stems from the capitalistic nature of tourism related production and consumption, and how this in turn influences territorial competition over touristic sites (Britton, 1991). Even though geography, as an academic discipline, has been central to tourism studies, tourism geography has been labelled as being a peripheral and marginal sub-field within

geography itself (Gibson, 2008; Che, 2017). That being said, tourism geography's contribution to academic knowledge should not be underestimated. Gibson (2008, 2009, and 2010), undertook an analysis of scholarly publishing in connection to tourism geography, and concluded that it explored core geographic themes around the connection between people and space/place, with an emphasis on: power relations, identity, gender, class, mobility, and tourism networks. Additionally, he asserts that this sub-discipline challenges the Anglo-American hegemony of geographic research, by studying examples from the developing-world. In fact, Hall and colleagues (2013) acknowledge that one of the most notable achievements of tourism geographers has been to provide conceptual insights on peripheral areas. Accordingly, by exploring the Lebanese baher as a tourism landscape of consumption, I have not only contributed to wider tourism literature, but have also addressed a needed gap within geographic scholarship. Building on this, I now turn attention to the baher's emancipatory potential as a site for social and political action.

8.2.3 Modalities of Resistance as Liminal Thresholds for Claiming the 'Right to the Baher'

By asking "*What is the 'right to the baher'? How, by who, and for whom is it being claimed?*", I have examined Lebanese civil society's role within the baherscape, by unpacking its influence over the production of the baher. In Chapter 7, I have explored the baher as an arena for social and political action, where civil society efforts challenge presiding neoliberal policies and exclusionary practices. I did this by engaging with the 'right to the baher' specifically, and the 'right to the city' more generally, with an emphasis on how the 'right to the city' extends to the baher. Henri Lefebvre (1968) first theorised the 'right to the city' in response to the growing influence of capitalist urbanisation. The 'right to the city' is thus brought forward as a means for urban dwellers to reclaim the city by leveraging the streets as a means for social and political action. Academics have engaged with this 'right' through various dimensions, including anti-capitalist struggles (Harvey 2012 and 2008), democracy and citizenship (Purcell, 2003 and 2013), and public spaces (Mitchell, 2003 and Van

Deusen, 2005). I have contributed to these discussions by deploying the baher as a lens of analysis, as opposed to more generally examined public spaces (e.g. streets, parks, and squares). Empirically, I have focused on three beach sites: Ramlet El Bayda, with Lancaster Eden Bay Hotel's partial encroachment of the beach; the Dalieh of Raouche, a previously shared open space that has been fenced-off by real estate developers; and Tyre Coast Nature Reserve, often cited by Lebanese civil society as a model for the baher's use and development.

My research has uncovered how the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve is 'conceived' as encompassing multiple functions, including: environmental conservation, recreation and leisure, refugee habitation, and economic activity. This case study represents – in part – an excellent example of how intra-governmental collaboration may lead to a better administered, maintained, and regulated baher – and therefore less susceptible to coastal encroachment. This is best evidenced by citing TCNR's legally protected status, local NGO participation in its management committee, and free entrance fees. These lead to 'perceived' and 'lived' benefits, with the site being noted as clean, hosting a diversity of beachgoer backgrounds and practices, and striking a balance between its exchange value (i.e. as an economic engine for the local community) and use value (i.e. as a conduit for encounter, a conservation zone for its fauna and flora, as well a space of leisure and relaxation for beachgoers). Although TCNR is often advanced as a model for the baher's use and development, some identities – namely Palestinian refugees in Rashidieh – are left behind. Life in Rashidieh is quintessentially liminal, with residents betwixt and between 'refugee' and 'security threat' status, and labelled as foreigners despite being born and raised in Lebanon. The camp straddles two nations, a patch of Palestine in Lebanon, with the checkpoint acting a physical threshold. Palestinians are protractedly made to reside in what ought-to-be a temporary camp. The baher occupies multiple concurrent binaries, an in-between state with glaring contradictions: both prison and an escape; a space of jubilation (e.g. wedding) and danger (e.g. crumbling houses); a venue for recreation (e.g. istirahat) and death (e.g. seaside cemetery). This stark contrast between

Rashidieh and the rest of TCNR, transforms Tyre's beach into an (un)public space; with Palestinians othered and physically separated, whilst the rest of the site is marked by relative conviviality.

Widening focus beyond TCNR, my research has elucidated a varied set of civil society activism modalities vying for the 'right to the baher', including public engagements and spatial occupations. Public engagements are activism tactics targeting the general public, in the hope of either shaping public discourse, and/or fostering alternative visions for the baher's use and development. These engagements (e.g. Nahnoo's 'Beirut Seashore Through People's Eyes' survey) sow the seeds for an alternative 'urban life', by allowing participants to experience inclusive decision-making processes, and enable urban dwellers to co-create their city. By spreading awareness of the cause in question, educating citizens of their related rights, and emphasising the need for participants to claim them, public engagements not only challenge presiding socio-political and economic structures, but also establish the foundations for wider societal transformation. Here, embodied knowledge is emphasised in (re)claiming the baher, especially in terms of rekindling the relationship between urban dwellers and their city via collective memory making. I illustrated this through 'Movies on the Move', where movie screenings and campfire discussions prompt attendees to frequent public spaces, build connections with their existing users, and nurture intimate relationships with the space itself. Spatial occupations, on the other hand, are relatively more pronounced in terms of their political demands, and include more radical means and strategies (e.g. the use of force). Ramlet el Bayda's protests implicated socio-spatial ramifications across various scales: be it the beach itself, with the removal of a drainage pipe; the surrounding vicinity, through graffiti's revolutionary political demand; or even on the scale of the body, as exhibited by protestor injuries. Although Ramlet El Bayda remains (un)public, with a private hotel erected on the public maritime domain; related spatial occupations constituted liminal triggers where the publicness of Eden Bay Hotel's plot of land was repeatedly (re)claimed. Other instances

of spatial occupations have managed to structurally alter the public/private divide, leading to more permanent reordering of a space's character, and even reversing related baher privatisation, with the removal of Dalieh's fence being a notable example.

By engaging with my third research question, I have argued the 'right to the city' extends to the baher via the 'right to the baher', by demonstrating how the 'right to the city' may materialise in spaces not typically synonymous with the urban core (e.g. the baher). My empirical data has elucidated how modalities of resistance have not only sought to reclaim the 'right to the baher' specifically (e.g. access to Dalieh), but also leveraged the baher as an arena for political transformation, where other demands for the 'right to the city' may be brought forward (e.g. the downfall of Lebanon's confessional political system via Ramlet El Bayda Graffiti). I have thus framed liminal spaces – like the baher – as ideal vantage points for unpacking 'right to the city' articulations, especially given their proclivity in hosting experiences that advance an alternative 'urban life' – i.e. transgressive behaviours and *communitas* generating experiences. I have thus claimed liminality, as a socio- temporal and spatial process of in-betweenness (Thomassen, 2015), comprises a highly pertinent prism for exploring the 'right to the city'. In fact, liminality encapsulates periods where individuals, groups and/or societies are betwixt and between identities – i.e. neither what they used to be, nor what they will be come, but also both at the same time. To this end, I have framed modalities of resistance as liminal thresholds where baher articulations of the 'right to the city' emerge (i.e. via the 'right to the baher'), and an alternative 'urban' is prefiguratively advanced. I have thereby positioned 'right to the baher' practices as liminal periods where urban dwellers' relationship with the city is redefined. I have deemed these events threshold moments that (re)negotiate the boundary between public/private, legal/illegal, and inclusion/exclusion. By doing so, these events structurally alter a space's liminal function, either ephemerally or more permanently, from a platform of difference and othering towards a conduit for *communitas*.

In terms of contributions to wider scholarship, my research has engaged with liminality as a socio-spatial process in modernity, by focusing on the politically charged context of the Lebanese baher – i.e. as opposed to Turner’s work which was criticised as being apolitical in scope and limited in scale (McConnell, 2017). In a shift away from Turner (1974), I have cautioned against relegating art and leisure experiences in modern consumerist societies to a liminoid sphere (i.e. a playful break from ‘normality’, that does not implicate a transition). Instead, I have argued liminoid experiences, when aggregated, act as a catalyst for liminal societal transformation. I have demonstrated this by reframing the scale of analysis, away from the individual towards society as a whole; and widening the breadth of examination beyond singular events, to focus instead on the totality of related engagements. Instead of gauging the liminoid experience of an individual’s singular boat ride (e.g. as in the case of the ‘sea is mine’ artistic intervention), one must widen focus towards the liminal potential derived from the sum of all public engagements within ‘society’ (e.g. public debates, participatory research, playful competitions, etc.). Moreover, liminal transformation is further reinforced by examining the relationship between ‘public engagements’ and ‘spatial occupations’; with public engagements planting the seeds for revolutionary societal change, whilst spatial occupations – through their more radical political demands and intrinsically spatial practices – reaping the seeds that have been sown.

8.3 Avenues for Future Research

It is said that doctoral degree is like an iceberg, with its written outcome being equivalent to what can be observed above the surface of the water – i.e. comprising but a small fraction of the research that has been undertaken. Writing and editing this thesis necessitated the daunting task of making what seemed like almost impossible choices. Which interviews will I include, and which ones should I forgo? Which stories, experiences and voices do I relay, and which do I omit? Which

themes and areas of exploration should I pursue, and which ones should I leave behind? With this in mind, I reflect on themes of interest not included within this thesis, and which I hope may invite future scholarly research around the Lebanese baher specifically, beaches and public spaces generally, or in what concerns liminality more conceptually. I note three overlooked areas of exploration during my fieldwork, and which although may have been hinted at across my chapters, would benefit from an added breadth and depth of scholarly engagement: first, gendered baher dynamics as observed through beachgoer behavioural patterns; second, relations between refugees and hosting communities along the Lebanese baher; and third, rising religious tensions within Saida's public beach.

First, gendered baher dynamics as observed through beachgoer behavioural patterns. Female beachgoer access to Ramlet El Bayda is often made in connection to a male 'protector' – i.e. a family member or partner. There is a noticeable dearth of young women (18-30) in this male-dominated place. Adult women are seldom seen swimming, and generally keep themselves to the allocated seating area. Most women are veiled and maintain a conservative dress code, however one of my interviewees decided to challenge this status quo by wearing a bikini as a sign of protest. Tehoum lies on the other end of the spectrum regarding women's access and appropriation of the baher. Women of all age groups are actively present, even if unaccompanied by a male guardian. They occupy the space in a comparable manner to male beachgoers, with equal participation in the water. Their attire substantially differs from those observed within Ramlet El Bayda, with swimsuits being common place. That being said, not all women exhibit equal rights within this site, with female domestic workers encompassing a vastly different lived experience. In certain ways, parallels can be drawn between female domestic workers in Tehoum and conservative female beachgoers in Ramlet el Bayda, with both groups remaining clothed, limiting themselves to the water's edge, with access to the baher being granted via a guardian – i.e. employers in the case of domestic workers. Finally, Tyre encompasses an interesting juxtaposition, with women wearing

bikinis seen tanning in close proximity to conservative veiled women. What differentiates Tyre from Ramlet El Bayda is veiled women's proclivity to swim and play on the sand. Given the above, it would be insightful to inquire what these beachgoer behavioural patterns can teach us about gendered dynamics along the baher? How does adopting gender as prism of analysis generate new insight into liminal beachgoer experiences? What does a feminist geographic take on the baher add to our understanding of its production as an (un)public space?

Second, relations between refugees and hosting communities along the Lebanese baher. Lebanon holds a notable refugee population, with the country hosting the "largest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometre in the world" (UNHCR, 2021). Around 1.5 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2021) and 479,000 Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2023) reside in the country. My fieldwork in Ramlet El Bayda uncovered tensions between Lebanese and Syrian beachgoers, with the former often accusing the latter of dirtying beach. Interestingly, this dynamic mirrors arguments brought forward by Tehoum's private beachgoers when discussing perceptions of "public beachgoers" – i.e. with the "other" often labelled as unsanitary. This tension also manifests across seating arrangements, with Lebanese who can't afford to rent a table for 20,000L.L (around £9 at the time of research), often voicing resentment of Syrians who rent these spaces – i.e. noting that their 'guests' lead a more lavish lifestyle than them. Pivoting attention to Tehoum's private beach venues, wealthy Syrians seem to integrate relatively better, with little tension cited by Lebanese beachgoers. With this in mind, what knowledge can be generated by exploring various manifestations of refugee and hosting community relations along the Lebanese baher? How does this discussion contribute to our exploration of the baher as an (un)public space, particularly in terms of uncovering novel insights pertaining to government action and identity politics? How does a comparison of liminal beachgoer experiences add to our understanding of Lebanon's refugee communities (i.e. Syrians vis-à-vis Palestinians)?

Third, rising religious tensions within Saida's public beach. Although this did not feature heavily across my fieldwork, religious tensions seem to be flaring-up as of late in Saida – i.e. the third largest city in Lebanon, roughly 45km south of Beirut, with a predominantly Sunni Muslim population. In May 2023, Mayssa Hanouni Yaafouri was harassed by a group of men and driven off the beach for wearing a one-piece swimsuit. This incident sparked a protest by 70 feminists calling for women's rights to be preserved along the baher (i.e. whether they choose to wear a Bikini or a Birkini), and was met by counter protests calling to respect the conservative character of the city. Diana Moukalled, a feminist journalist who co-organised the protest admitted "Unfortunately, with the collapse of Lebanon, ... we are seeing increased will and appetite to harass and intimidate women... Public spaces like public beaches, are being occupied and segregated by various political parties, fanatics, radical people and sectarian groups" (Jamal, 2023, n.d.). Interestingly, the municipality issued a decision to ban swimsuits, and posted a sign at the entrance of the beach reading "no alcohol on the premises... all beachgoers must maintain decent attire" (Ghosn, 2023). With this in mind, it would be interesting to ask what role does religion assume within the (re)production of the baher as an (un)public space? How do religious tensions play-out in the baher, and how does this add to our understanding of Lebanon as a (post)conflict society?

8.4 Conclusion

This thesis comprises my love letter to the Lebanese baher. I left Lebanon, a wide-eyed twenty-four-year-old student, looking to better understand the country I call home. Little did I know that by traveling abroad, I would be replanting my roots across the British Isles. Despite the stunning beauty of my current coastal surroundings, I deeply miss Lebanon's baher, along with its accompanying warmth, people, and my related fond memories. This research has been ten years in the making, with so much about Lebanon changing over this period. In fact, my homeland feels

more foreign to me with every visit, especially as the recent economic catastrophe renders it almost unrecognizable to the country I once knew. That being said, in numerous other ways Lebanon remains unchanged, with my noted baher observations holding true to this day. It is for this reason that I believe in this research's relevance, both as an academic body of work that explores the production of (un)public space; but also, as my personal attempt at reshaping the baherscape and (re)imagining a version of the Lebanese baher, where future generations – no matter their backgrounds – relationship with the space and its users is safeguarded and ameliorated.

My research has comprised a call to take the baher – along with other coastal spaces – more seriously. These sites should not be overlooked, for they transcend mere spaces of leisure, to also constitute spaces of socio-political significance. In fact, existing literature on public spaces in Lebanon overwhelmingly focuses on Beirut, with particular attention being paid to one preeminent example: the post-war planning and redevelopment of the city's central district by Solidère (Yunis, 2012; Leclair-Paquet, 2013; Schmid, 2002). That being said, there is a dearth of scholarly engagement with public spaces outside this central locale, particularly in what concerns coastal spaces beyond the corniche (Nazzal and Chinder, 2018). My selection of the baher as a prism of analysis has thus addressed key gaps in the literature, both geographically and conceptually. By doing so, I have generated a novel perspective into the production of (un)public space, particularly in relation to the baher's unique socio-spatial liminal character. Through the baherscape, I have demonstrated how engagement with the production of space is enhanced by forging a dialogue with liminality as a conceptual lens. This has in turn bolstered this research's significance beyond the case of the Lebanese baher, with related insights being transferable to scholarship on coastal landscapes specifically, public space literature more generally, and geographic engagements with liminality more broadly.

Through this thesis, I have addressed liminality's underutilisation as a conceptual approach within geography (McConnell, 2017; McConnell and Dittmer, 2018), and reemphasised – in line with other geographers' engagements – its less-cited spatial dimension (McConnell, 2017; Banfield, 2022). Given how the baher comprises both a tourism landscape of consumption, as well as an arena for socio-political action, I have deployed both tourism and political geographic approaches to liminality. Accordingly, I have widened van Gennep's (1960) original formulation of liminality (i.e. irreversible, temporary, involuntary, and territorially negotiated), to instead frame it as temporary/protracted, (in)voluntary, and repetitive/one-off – i.e. depending on the chosen scale and subject of examination. Accordingly, my research has diversified the bodies, identities, practices, spaces and moments that count within existing beach scholarship, with particular attention paid to both public/private beach sites, the 'refugee camp' as a baher space, and marginalised communities – chief among them working class population, refugees, and migrant domestic workers.

The baher is not (un)public as fait accompli, instead it is socially produced as (un)public through the interplay of its 'perceived', 'conceived', and 'lived' elements (Lefebvre, 1991). Public spaces and their users are in dynamic transformation, perpetually (re)produced by and subsequently (re)reproducing society, with resulting processes and configurations denoting ideological articulations of what 'public space' is, and which 'public(s)' it caters to.

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Appendices

Appendix I: List of interviews [partially anonymised and pseudonymised]

Interviews											
This sheet elaborates on the interviews conducted for my research											
38 interviews with a variety of experts (activists, businesses, politicians, environmentalists, academics, etc.) and beachgoers											
#	Alias	Bucket	Role	Company	Location	Interview Length	Date	Background - role	Nationality		
1	Beachgoer M1	Beachgoer	Student	-	AUB	00:54:39	17/07/2015	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
2	Beachgoer M2	Beachgoer	Architect	-	Restaurant & Café	00:10:39+00:57:58	18 & 19/08/2015	Beachgoer	British		
3	Beachgoer M3	Beachgoer	Designer	-	Restaurant & Café	00:48:47	26/08/2015	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
4	Beachgoer M4	Beachgoer	Student	-	Private Residence	00:28:02	31/08/2015	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
5	Beachgoer M5	Beachgoer	Public Relations	-	Private Residence	00:21:25	02/09/2015	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
6	Beachgoer M6	Beachgoer	Housewife	-	Private Residence	00:27:12	06/09/2015	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
7	Abir Sakouk-Saro & Ahmad Khoulja	Civil Society	Architect	Dalieh, Coastal Coalition, Di	Restaurant & Café	01:19:00	13/09/2015	Activist	Lebanese		
8	Jebran Elias	Civil Society	Brand Ambassador	Live Love Tyre	Restaurant & Café	00:58:29	14/09/2015	Social Media	Lebanese		
9	Jessica Chemali	Civil Society	Programs Manager	Nahnoo	Office	00:31:05	16/09/2015	Activist	Lebanese		
10	Mohammad Ayoub	Civil Society	President	Nahnoo	Office	00:38:42	16/09/2015	Activist	Lebanese		
11	Andre Sleiman	Academia	Country representative & Part-ti	Democracy Reporting Intern	Restaurant & Café	00:45:33	17/09/2015	Academic	Lebanese		
12	Mona Fawwaz	Academia	Associate Professor of Urban St	AUB	AUB	00:48:51	22/09/2015	Academic	Lebanese		
13	Beachgoer M7	Beachgoer	Marketing	-	Private Residence	00:32:56	25/09/2015	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
14	Tania Al Khouri	Civil Society	Artist	Dictaphone Group, Dalieh	Restaurant & Café	00:49:14	30/09/2015	Activist	Lebanese		
15	Beachgoer M8	Beachgoer	REB user	-	Fieldsite	00:18:06	04/10/2015	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
16	Pierre & Friend Administrator	Beach Administrator	Manager	Pierre and Friends	Fieldsite	00:25:01	08/10/2015	Business	Lebanese		
17	Oasis Administrator	Beach Administrator	Manager	Oasis Beach	Fieldsite	00:31:45	08/10/2015	Business	Lebanese		
18	DGU Representative	Politics & Public Policy	Manager	DGU	Office	00:15:14 + 00:20:27	09/10/2015	Government	Lebanese		
19	Layla Kabalan	Academia	Programme Coordinator	IFI	AUB	00:44:07	19/10/2015	Academic	Lebanese		
20	Jean Beirut	Beach Administrator	Head of Syndicate	Syndicate of seaside resort c	Office	00:25:05	19/12/2016	Business	Lebanese		
21	Beachgoer M9	Beachgoer	Journalist	CNN	Car	10:47 + 57:42	29/07/2018	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
22	Lina Tajj	Civil society	Marine biologist and ecologist	diariesoftheocean.org	Restaurant & Café	01:00:57 + 8:45	31/07/2018	Activist	Lebanese		
23	Maryam Nazzal	Politics & Public Policy	Social Development Coordinator	UN-Habitat	Office	0:59:32	02/08/2018	Dev. Organization	Lebanese		
24	Rami Saab	Civil Society	Managing Partner	TWIG	Private Residence	01:05:58	08/08/2018	Activist	Lebanese		
25	Remi Hamze	Civil Society	Psychologist & Social Activist	Movies on the move	Restaurant & Café	0:52:45	15/08/2018	Activist	Lebanese		
26	Lama Karamé	Civil Society	Lawyer	Legal Agenda	Office	01:15:23	16/08/2018	Activist	Lebanese		
27	Focus Group: Beachgoers M10-13	Beachgoer	-	-	Car	0:42:23	16/06/2016	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
28	Beachgoer M14	Beachgoer	Chief	-	Private Residence	0:36:59	16/08/2016	Beachgoer	Syrian		
29	Beachgoer M15	Beachgoer	Attorney	-	Restaurant & Café	00:21	14/09/2016	Beachgoer	Lebanese		
30	Cynthia Abou Aoun	Civil Society	Architect & Columnist	Nahnoo	Restaurant & Café	01:17:15	20/08/2018	Activist	Lebanese		
31	Rayan Khatoun	Civil Society	Founding member	GEM	Restaurant & Café	01:04:46	23/08/2018	Activist	Lebanese		
32	Ramlet El Bayda Administrator	Beach Administrator	Member	Project Big Blue	Fieldsite	0:55:42	24/08/2018	Activist	Lebanese		
33	Ramlet M16 'Ahmad'	Beachgoer	Sanitary Products	-	Fieldsite	0:58:34	26/08/2018	Rachidieh resident	Palestinian		
34	Roni Jalh	Politics & Public Policy	Academic & Development	-	Restaurant & Café	01:33:07	27/08/2018	Dev. Organization	Lebanese		
35	Beirut Municipality Official #1 & #2	Politics & Public Policy	Media and PR	Beirut Municipality	Office	-	28/08/2018	Government	Lebanese		
36	Eden Bay Administrator	Beach Administrator	General Manager	Eden Bay	Office	-	31/08/2018	Business	Lebanese		
37	TCNR Representative	Politics & Public Policy	Tyre Nature Coastal Reseve	Tyre Municipality	Phone	-	31/08/2018	Government	Lebanese		
38	Beachgoer M17	Beachgoer	Football manager	FIFA certified	Private Residence	0:04:47 + 0:04:30	28/08/2018	Sports	Lebanese		

Appendix II: List of Conferences & Events

Conferences & Events (Public)													
This sheet elaborates on the conferences and events attended/viewed for my research													
10 academic and political conferences & events attended, with an additional 9 viewed via digital platforms													
#	Conference Name	Topic	Date	Organised	Speaker #1	Speaker #2	Speaker #3	Speaker #4	Speaker #5	Speaker #6	URL	Attended (Y/N)	
1	Creating a public beach in Beirut	Beirut Coastline	19/07/2014	Nahnoo	Eng. Abdelhafiz Eng. Rashid Asl Mohammad Ay -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	Y	
2	Public Spaces in Crisis Conference	Public Spaces	26/07/2014	Nahnoo	Dr. Mona Fawa Nizar Saghevel Dr Andre Sleim Mohammad Ay Abir Saksouk - I Raja Nojeim						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	Y	
3	Public debate with Beirut Governor Ziad Shbib	Public Spaces	05/08/2015	Nahnoo	Judge Ziad Shb Mohammad Ay -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	Y	
4	Public Spaces Rally Paper	Public Spaces - Tyre	11/10/2015	Nahnoo	-						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	Y	
5	Discussion on coastal property in Lebanon	Lebanese Coastline	12/12/2015	Nahnoo	MP Ghassan M Eng. Abdelhafiz Dr. Eli Khattar - Pr. Mohammed Mohammad Ay Facilitator - Na						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	Y	
6	Musical Bonfire at Ramlet el Bayda public beach	REB	14/09/2016	Nahnoo	Mohammad Ay Ziad Al Ahmadi Michelle and N Zayed Hamdan -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	Y	
7	Dalieh clean-up campaign	Dalieh	TBC	Dalieh	-						-	Y	
8	Zeitouna Bay protests	Beirut Coastline	TBC	TBC	-						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	Y	
9	YouStink protests	Various	Various	YouStink	-						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	Y	
10	World Monuments Fund - Dalieh press conferen	Dalieh	TBC	Dalieh	-						https://www.wmf.org/	Y	
11	Public debate on Horsch Beirut & REB	Public Spaces & REB	20/10/2016	Nahnoo	Judge Ziad Shb Mohammad Ay -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	N	
12	Debate on Tyre's challenges	Tyre city	12/11/2016	Nahnoo	Mohammad Ay Guest speaker						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	N	
13	How do we save Beirut's coastline?	Beirut Coastline	16/12/2017	Nahnoo	Eng. Abdelhafiz Eng. Jad Tabet Dr. Charbel Na Elie Khattar - Li Mohammad Ay -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	N	
14	رؤية الشط لكل الناس	Beirut Coastline	09/06/2018	Nahnoo	-						https://www.facebook.com/...	N	
15	تحرك البحرية تحرك فلكوي اعترض ليرجع الشط لكل الناس	Beirut Coastline	07/09/2018	Nahnoo	-						https://www.facebook.com/...	N	
16	City Debates - Contesting national authority in t1	Dalieh	08/03/2014	AUB	Abir Saksouk - I -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	N	
17	The Making and Reclaiming of Communal Space	Dalieh	06/05/2014	IFI - AUB	Abir Saksouk - I -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	N	
18	Reclaiming the Public Space	Dalieh	06/10/2016	IETM Satellite	Mona EL Hallak -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	N	
19	At the Edge of the City Re-inhabiting Public Spar	Public Spaces	01/07/2010	IFI - AUB	Jala Makzoum Samir Kalaf - P George Arbid - Fadi Shayya - U -						https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...	N	

Appendix III: List of governmental & civil society reports and presentations

#	Report/Presentation name	Source	Year	Language
1	National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory	Council for Development and Reconstruction	2005	Arabic, English, and French
2	Lebanese Coastal Zone	Ministry of Public Works & Transport Directorate General of Land & Maritime Transport (by Tony Assaf)	2009	English
3	Lebanon's Marine Protected Area Strategy	Ministry of Environment	2012	Arabic & English
4	Dalieh Booklet	The Civil Campaign to Protect the dalieh of raouche	-	English
5	شو قصّة الأملاك العامة البحرية بالداالية؟ [What is the story of the public maritime domain?]	The Civil Campaign to Protect the dalieh of raouche	-	Arabic
6	The sea is mine	Dictaphone Group	2013	English
7	Dalieh of Raouche on the World Monuments Watch 2016	The Civil Campaign to Protect the dalieh of raouche	2016	Arabic & English
8	Updated ICZM Law for the Lebanese Coastal Zone	National Consultancy for the Identification of Legal, Policy and Institutional Gaps and Policy Reforms Drafted for Marine and Coastal Biodiversity Protection	2015	Arabic
9	قراءة قانونية لمفهوم الساحات العامة في لبنان	Nahnoo	2012	Arabic
10	Public spaces and public forums: for a new understanding of the role of Lebanese municipalities regarding public spaces	Nahnoo	-	English
11	From public to private Beirut public spaces: The Case of R.B. Public Sand Beach	Nahnoo	2012	English
12	Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Lebanon: The Northern Coast Policy Brief	METAP - The World Bank	2009	English
13	GEF: Governance and Knowledge Generation Socio-economic Evaluation of Maritime Activities	Plan Bleu	2015	English
14	Tyre Coast Nature Reserve – Management plan	Tyre Coast Nature Reserve	-	English
15	Tyre Coast Nature Reserve – Brochure	Tyre Coast Nature Reserve	-	English
16	Tyre Coast Nature Reserve – Trail Map	Tyre Coast Nature Reserve	-	English
17	قانون رقم ٧٠٨ - إنشاء محمية شاطئ صور الطبيعية	Tyre Coast Nature Reserve	1998	English
18	Lebanon's nature reserves tyre coast	Tyre Coast Nature Reserve	2005	Arabic & English

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- 260

12. How would you describe the cleanliness of the beach?
13. Which groups (sectarian, economic class, gender, nationality, etc.) do you think come to this beach?
14. Are there any individuals that you tend to avoid in this beach? Who?
15. What other beaches do you usually go to? What factors do you consider when you choose a beach to go to?
16. How do you feel about paying an entrance fee to access the beach?
17. What is your opinion regarding the overall state of beaches and the sea in Lebanon?
18. Could you please describe your ideal beach? (Physical characteristics, people, etc.)
19. How does this beach compare to your ideal beach? What is it missing?

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- 262