
Gated housing estates in the Arab world: case studies in Lebanon and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract. The authors analyze the cultural, economic, and political background of new gated housing estates in the Arab world with the aid of case studies in Lebanon and Riyadh. Their question is to what extent these developments represent a reappearance of the fragmented settlement patterns in many of the old towns. On the one hand, new compounds of several villas and common facilities housing extended families in Riyadh may be interpreted as a revival of certain sociospatial settings in the old town, in which extended families often shared a common courtyard. The compounds for Western foreigners in Saudi Arabia follow the principle of spatial seclusion of social groups with different cultural and religious backgrounds—a principle of the sociospatial organization of many old towns in the Arab world. The emergence of gated housing estates in Lebanon, on the other hand, has obvious and specific sociopolitical origins in the 20th century. The failure of public regimentation and provision created a gap, which was partially filled by the private sector. For their mostly wealthy clientele, gated housing estates offer private small-scale solutions to nationwide problems.

1 Gated housing estates in the Arab world: a reappearance of traditional housing patterns?

In the cities of the Arab world the spatial seclusion of social groups is not a new phenomenon. Urban research on premodern towns depicted the sociospatial and material fragmentation of urban patterns in small and distinct quarters as one of the most typical characteristics of Arab cities. As Raymond described in 1994, the “compartmentalization of the city ... [was] particularly marked in the case of numerous religious and ethnic communities” (page 15) but, because of extended family structures, also existed in cities with a more homogeneous population. Many scholars have identified two reasons for this fragmentation (Abu-Lughod, 1987; Raymond, 1989; Wirth, 2000):

1. *The quarter as an extension of private space*

Wirth interpreted the courtyard of houses itself, as well as clusters of different houses along a blind alley, as the “material expression of the retreat from the public sphere, that is, for the intimacy and seclusion of family life” (1991, page 63, translation Georg Glasze). The social space of the quarter offered a jointly used extension of the private space (Eickelman, 1974, page 283).

2. *The quarter as a self-governing, protective community*

Frequently, the inhabitants of a quarter had a high degree of autonomy and, as the premodern state often “failed to concern itself with matters of day-to-day maintenance”, the neighborhood fulfilled functions of a self-governing entity (Abu-Lughod, 1987, page 169). Furthermore, in contrast to European cities of the Middle Ages, cities in the Arab world have seen many conflicts *intra muros*. Therefore, the residential quarters, which were often accessible through only a single gate which could easily

be barred and defended, offered protection which the city's central authorities did not always assure.

In the 20th century, inner-city areas were transformed by cutting straight axes through the old *medina* or by replacing old structures with formal geometric street patterns in adoption of European ideas of enlightened 'modern' urban planning. Walls and gates between different quarters of the old city lost their function. With the exception of a very few government and diplomatic districts, newly built quarters in the suburbs were not fenced or walled.

Although traditional urban quarters have received a great deal of scholarly attention, the current emergence of *new* gated, and often fenced or walled, housing estates⁽¹⁾ in the Arab world has hitherto not been widely explored.⁽²⁾ In this paper we aim to provide an analysis of the cultural, economic, and political background of the new gated housing estates in the Arab world. One of our leading questions concerns the context of these modern developments; in particular, whether they represent a reappearance of traditional settlement patterns. To put it another way, are these new projects adequately described by labels such as 'self-governing protective communities' and 'extensions of private space'?

Our analysis is based on case studies of urban centers in Lebanon and the Saudi capital, Riyadh. The two countries differ fundamentally in their political, cultural, and socioeconomic structures and, therefore, present an interesting comparison.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Saudi capital Riyadh was a small town situated at the economic and cultural periphery of the Arab world, with not more than 20 000 inhabitants. The town's limited importance lay in its role as Wahabi spiritual and political center (Pape, 1977, page 16). With the exploitation of oil in the middle of the 20th century a process of rapid modernization in Saudi Arabia was begun. The Saudi state receives the rents derived from oil, and has used this income for two purposes: on the one hand assuring growing individual prosperity of Saudi citizens, and on the other hand developing a modern infrastructure (transport, supply of water and electricity, health care, education) (Barth and Schliephake, 1998). The economy of independent Lebanon was (and to a large extent still is) based on international trade between the Western and the Arab worlds as well as on the influx of capital from abroad into the Lebanese banking, real estate, and tourist sectors. In a liberal economic system with a predominantly *laissez-faire* ideology, the Lebanese state has played and continues to play only a minor role as regulatory (Gates, 1998, page 84).

Lebanon's society is multiconfessional, consisting of several different Muslim and Christian communities. In contrast to the heterogeneous socioreligious character of Lebanon, the confessional composition of the Saudi population is largely homogeneous—all citizens have to be Muslims. With the growth in individual prosperity and the need for technical assistance, however, a large number of foreigners migrated to Saudi Arabia as guest workers. Today, there are about five million foreign employees in Saudi Arabia—almost one third of the total population and two thirds of the workforce. The largest group of migrants (more than two million) originates from other Arab countries which have lower wage levels, and they work chiefly as semiprofessionals

⁽¹⁾ In our view the notion of 'gated communities' is primarily a North American one and carries specific nostalgic, communitarian, and antiurban connotations. Therefore, we employ the neutral technical term 'gated housing estates'.

⁽²⁾ The first descriptions of gated housing estates in Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey were discussed at the workshop on "gated communities as a global phenomenon" at the 6th annual conference of the German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO) on 3 December 1999 in Hamburg. Abstracts of the workshop are published in: *DAVO-Nachrichten* number 11, 2000. Online at: www.gated-communities.de. On Egypt, see also Denis (1998).

or technicians. The demand for unskilled workers and domestic servants is met by foreigners from Southeast Asia—a continuously growing group which numbers around 1.6 million today. In addition, there are several tens of thousands of professionals from the Western world and the Levant in Saudi Arabia (Barth and Schliephake, 1998, page 37; Meyer, 1991).

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, and political power is concentrated in the hands of the ruling Al-Saud family. Notwithstanding the advanced technical modernization of the country, the ruling elite aims to preserve the feudalist power structures and to conserve or reestablish social norms derived from a rigorous and rigid puritanical Wahabi interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna.

The basis of the political structure of the Lebanese Republic is the National Pact of 1943, in which the distribution of public power is organized between the religious communities. This kind of religio-factional allocation of political and administrative power accounts for the fact that public and political offices are systematically used for particular interests, and the fact that public authorities are hardly accepted as rational and neutral political actors.

Despite their distinctly different political regimes, both countries have experienced a process of rapid urbanization since the 1950s. The Saudi government, with the assistance of Western consultants, established guidelines of urban planning and was, to a degree, able to steer urban growth. In Lebanon, the concept of a *laissez-faire* state, combined with a temporarily thriving private real estate sector, meant that public urban planning largely failed.

2 Gated housing estates in Riyadh: community and cultural segregation

Gated developments in Riyadh may be classified into three main types: *extended-family compounds*, *cultural enclaves*, and *governmental staff housing*. In the year 2000, these types of housing estate comprised about 10% (around 45 000 units) of the total housing supply in the city. In the following discussion we focus on the first two types of development.

2.1 Extended-family compounds: a revival of a traditional sociospatial environment

Extended-family compounds consist of a group of villas surrounded by a common fence or wall. They are designed and built to accommodate extended families. The physical layout of these complexes is composed of two or more architecturally identical houses built on the same block. Usually, these complexes contain one larger unit—which accommodates the head of the extended family. Although they are surrounded by a single wall or fence, extended-family compounds also have separate entrances for each residential unit, providing independence and privacy for each individual family. Common areas within the walls usually contain a swimming pool, a garden, and a children's playground [figure 1(c), over].

The emergence and spread of these developments may be viewed as a remedial response to the haphazard economic, social, and urban changes, which took place between the 1950s and the 1970s and led to the disruption of the traditional socio-spatial and material setting of the city. Until the 1950s, the physical layout of the old town of Riyadh consisted of clusters of courtyard houses, which jointly surrounded common urban spaces [figure 1(a)]. Shared space between clusters of dwellings was used for social gatherings, festivities, and as playgrounds for children of the residents, who were mostly members of one extended family (Talib, 1984, page 58).

The discovery and exploitation of vast oilfields in the 1930s enabled the young Saudi state to develop Riyadh systematically as the capital of Saudi Arabia. As people from different parts of the kingdom migrated to the capital in search of work, demand for housing increased substantially (Al Hathloul, 1981, pages 149–150). The Saudi

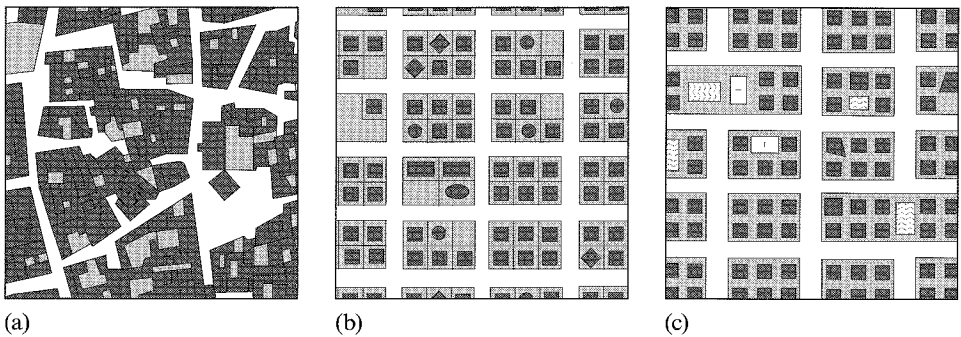


Figure 1. Housing patterns in Ar Riyadh: (a) traditional housing pattern with courtyard houses and blind alleys, (b) 'modern' single-family homes in a gridiron pattern, (c) neotraditional extended-family compounds.

government sought expert assistance from the US Corps of Engineers to design a complete housing project for government employees—the relationship between the Saudi and US governments was strong because of their close links in the ARAMCO, Arab American Oil Company. The physical pattern of the project, which was called Al Malaz, follows a gridiron plan with a formal geometric hierarchy of streets; a pattern which was nonexistent in the traditional urban structures. (Al Hathloul, 1996, pages 162–164). The Mediterranean-style villas of Al Malaz introduced the first single-family houses in Riyadh. During the 1960s, these 'imported' developments were mandated through land subdivision and setback regulations, imposed by the Riyadh Master Plan, which was formulated by Doxiadis Associates from Greece. Subsequently, almost all suburban developments have followed the gridiron pattern and the villa prototypes [figure 1(b)]. Throughout the 1970s, the country experienced an economic boom which also accelerated a shift away from the traditional structure of the extended family to the nuclear family. New job opportunities, higher wages, governmental housing loans, and land grants encouraged young married couples to seek houses away from their extended families (Fadan, 1983, page 75).

During the 1980s, however, a new trend emerged. Many extended families started to build compounds of several villas on large parcels of land. Within a short time, real estate developers noticed this trend and responded to the growing demand for extended-family compounds. At present, there are no official records detailing the number of these developments in the city because they do not represent a distinct housing category. However, most of these developments can be seen in the northern and eastern parts of the city, where the acquisition of large parcels of land is more feasible.

Extended-family compounds may be viewed as a revival of the traditional living environment, which offers social and economic benefits. The traditional shared space, which was used for social activities, has been reconstructed as the common space within the walls of extended-family compounds. In social terms, extended-family compounds offer a solution for the fostering of extended family ties while maintaining the independence of the nuclear family. In addition, they provide a large and safe common space for children's play. In economic terms, these compounds reduce the cost of common areas (such as children's playgrounds) and common structures (such as internal fences or leisure facilities).

2.2 Cultural enclaves: compounds of Western professionals

The discovery and exploitation of oil on the Arab Peninsula by Western oil companies in the 1930s led to an influx of Western professionals to the Gulf region, and created

a surging demand for housing. From the 1940s, companies like the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) and, in Saudi Arabia, the Arab-American Oil Company ARAMCO responded to this growing demand by building residential compounds for their employees; examples are Awali in Bahrain, Ahmadi in Kuwait, and Dhahran in Saudi Arabia (see Barth and Schliephake, 1998, page 179; Bourgey, 1987, pages 18 – 19). Saudi government policy promoted this development, and obliged foreign companies with more than 50 foreign employees to provide housing for their workforce, not least in order to limit and control the cultural influences of Western foreigners on Saudi society (Bombacci, 1998). Generally, we can distinguish three different forms of compounds for foreigners in Saudi Arabia. First, compounds for single unskilled or semiskilled workers offer basic accommodation in portable units, mobile homes, or rapidly constructed prefabricated units. Second, there are compounds for individual or unmarried semiprofessionals or technicians, which consist of simple lodgings with few amenities or support services. Third, there are compounds for expatriate professionals who are accompanied by their families. These compounds are generally well maintained, landscaped, and offer a range of support services such as kindergartens and local clinics as well as amenities like tennis courts, swimming pools, etc (Talib, 1984; see also figure 2).

In Riyadh in the 1950s, temporary gated compounds for semiskilled foreign workers were developed close to construction sites, but removed when construction was completed. The first private gated compounds for foreign professionals were built during the

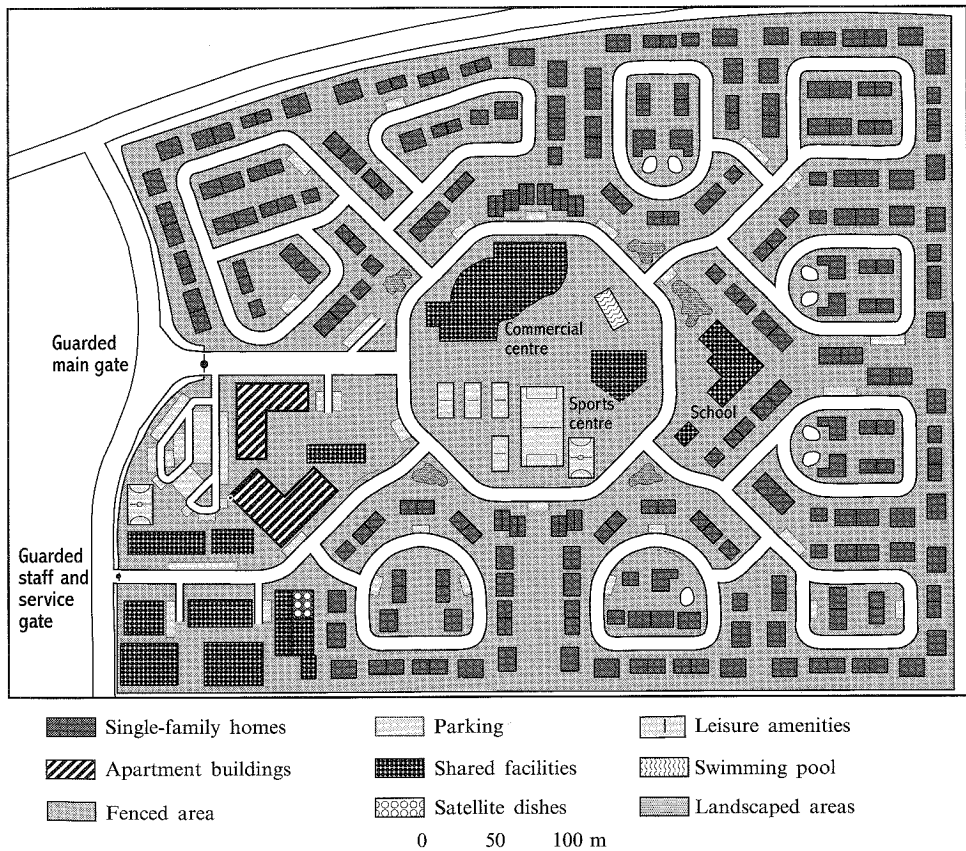


Figure 2. The Kingdom compound for Western professionals on the outskirts of Ar Riyadh.

1970s when the country experienced a major building boom (Fadan, 1983, page 193). In 2000 there were around fifty private gated compounds in Riyadh, accommodating a total of between 6000 and 8000 inhabitants (about 1% of the total foreign population in the city).⁽³⁾ Most of these compounds represent the third type, with houses for high-income Western professionals who are provided with accommodation for their whole family as part of their employment contracts. A small proportion of the residents comes from the Levant states, especially Jordan and Lebanon. The compounds are guarded, generally patrolled by security guards. Access is strictly restricted to residents and their visitors. Administration and maintenance are provided through an on-site management structure, and Saudi nationals are mostly excluded from residing in these communities. A co-owner of one of these compounds justified this exclusionary policy as being intended to 'avoid conflicts'.

Rent costs in these communities represent the highest stratum in Riyadh's residential rental market. The rent for a residential unit in a private gated compound is more than double the rent for an equivalent unit in a nongated development, and the premium can be taken as a valuation of the collective goods and services provided. Gated developments within central parts of the city are smaller in size, contain fewer amenities, and are less expensive than gated developments located in the peripheral areas. In central Riyadh there are about forty gated communities, which range from ten to seventy residential units. Whereas the smallest developments include only a common swimming pool, larger compounds have sports, leisure, and commercial facilities. In peripheral parts of the city there are ten large private gated compounds, which were built during the 1990s. These developments encompass between 100 and 300 residential units and offer a wide range of services and facilities, including golf courses in some estates. To increase security measures both within and outside, these bigger compounds make use of high-security measures such as surveillance cameras and concrete barricades.

Residents of these communities enjoy a Western-style open environment, which allows them to escape from the strict cultural restrictions outside the gates. Importantly, within the boundaries of these compounds women are not obliged to comply with the traditional dress code which is enforced outside. A Lebanese Christian woman tells about her life in a compound in Saudi Arabia:

"... for a family which does not live in a compound it is very hard ... because with the Saudi people—they are very nice, but it is different, it is another culture... you see the women who veil themselves; you know, in Arabia the woman does not have the right to drive and I had the car in the compound of Holzmann;⁽⁴⁾ the compound was so big that I wanted to drive, it became a pleasure, so I took my car in the compound because Saudi people do not enter the compound, it was prohibited...; the women, one was always in bathing costume and shorts;... when we left the compound we dressed well, long you know..." (interview conducted in French, translated by Georg Glasze).

The compounds provide enclaves of Western lifestyles: a space where, compared with the outside environment, totally different social norms and institutions apply. For Western professionals, who often live as expatriates in Saudi Arabia for several years, the compounds offer the material and social bases to realize their lifestyle—a lifestyle which is largely independent of their social surroundings and is therefore 'transportable'

⁽³⁾ These figures are estimated from the information provided by a number of official socio-economic data from the Riyadh High Development Authority (1999). Other data and information are based on site visits to these gated developments.

⁽⁴⁾ One of the biggest German construction companies.

(Peißker-Meyer, 2001, page 152). Satellite dishes, the Internet, and availability of current films and magazines assure connection with the centers of Western culture.

3 Gated housing estates in Lebanon: enclaves of wellbeing

Gated housing estates in Lebanon may be differentiated as *condominiums* containing apartments, and *gated model towns* and *villa complexes* with dominantly single-family homes or terraced houses. The accommodation within these complexes is intended for use as main residences, but there are also several *gated beach* and *mountain resorts* and two *gated ski villages*, which mostly comprise secondary residences. All these projects combine common property with the individual property of a housing unit: respectively, the right to use an apartment or house with some kind of access limitation through gates, fences, or walls (table 1). They all offer maintenance and 24-hour security services as well as natural (for example, beach, view) and artificial (for example, pool, tennis court) amenities. The common property and the common services are managed by a self-governing organization. Altogether these estates represent approximately 1% of the Lebanese housing supply.

Table 1. Typology of gated housing estates in Lebanon.

Physical structure	Primary residence	Secondary residence	Legal structure
Apartments	Gated condominiums examples: Al Majal (Aley); Bel Horizon (Kesrouane)	Gated beach and mountain resorts examples: Rimal (Kesrouane); Satellity (Kesrouane); Las Salinas (Koura)	Condominiums: <i>grands ensembles</i> Resorts: special tourist-project legislation
Single-family homes; attached homes; apartments	Gated model towns example: Al Mechref (Chouf) Gated villa complexes example: Les Domaines (Metn)	Gated ski villages example: Faqra (Kesrouane)	<i>Lotissement</i> (allotment)

The oldest type of gated settlements in Lebanon includes the beach and mountain resorts. These resorts consist of 50 to 800 small apartments, which are called chalets in Lebanon. The first projects were started in the late 1960s, on the coast and in the mountains. Although the rationale for defining these tourist projects as gated housing estates may be questioned, they functioned as predecessors of Lebanon's later gated housing estates. Most of the resorts sprung up in the 1980s when tourism in Lebanon was reduced because of the civil war (1975–90). It was the influx of middle-class and upper-class Christians, fleeing from Beirut and Tripoli to the Kesrouane region which was controlled by Christian militias, which created a massive demand for comfortable and safe refuge (figure 3, see over).

In the 1980s this rush of people led to a demand-driven boom. Existing hotels were transformed into complexes of cooperative resorts. There were expansions and new projects created in response to the change in demand by offering larger apartments and the facilities necessary for permanent residents (figure 4, see over). With the deterioration of political security in the Kesrouane region in the late 1980s, the boom shifted northward to the coast between Batroun and Tripoli—a region under the control of Syrian forces and therefore regarded as safe. Originally, the area of most of the beach resorts did not exceed 2 ha, yet many doubled or even tripled their size later on. In a

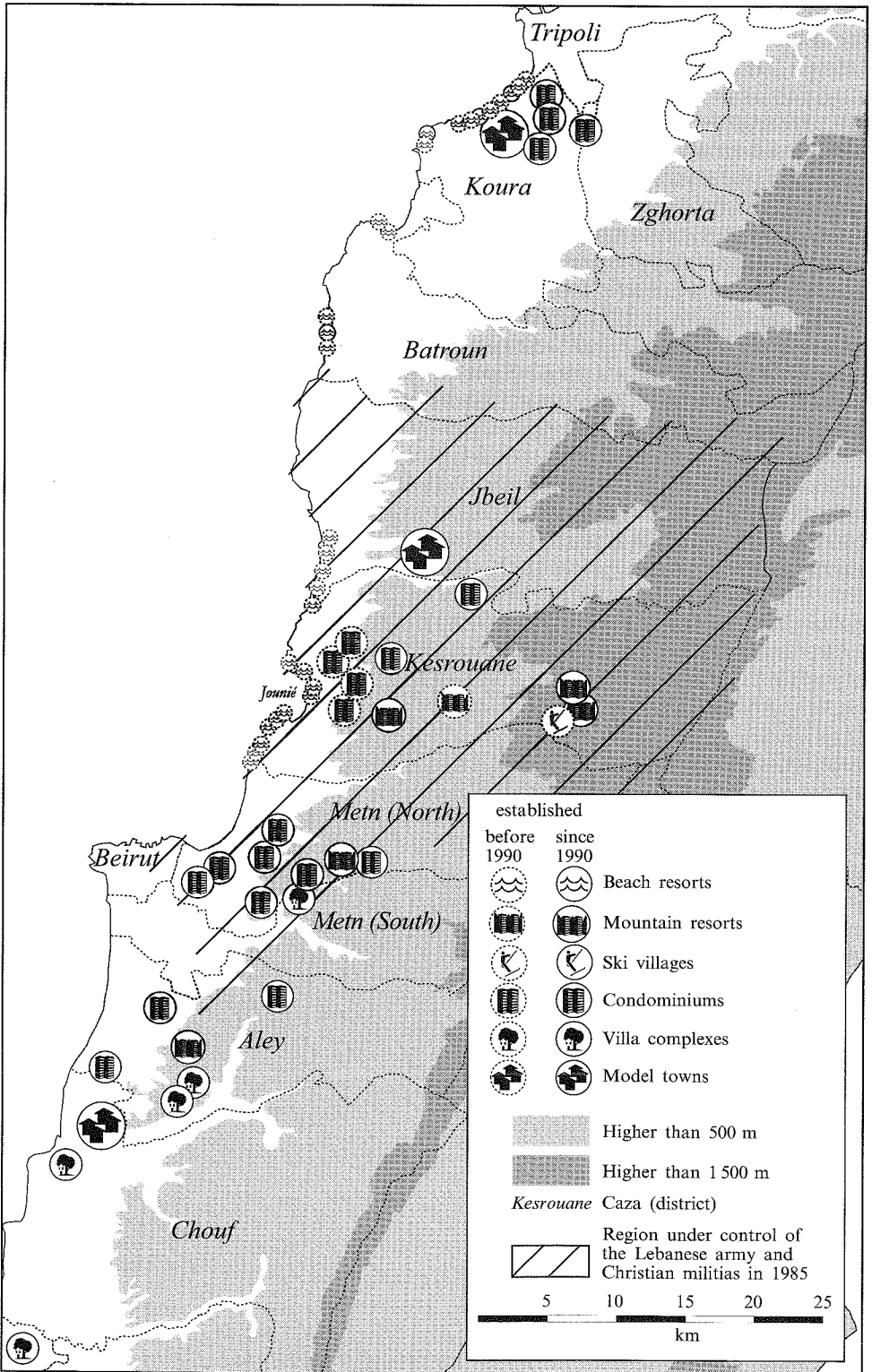


Figure 3. Gated housing estates in Lebanon.

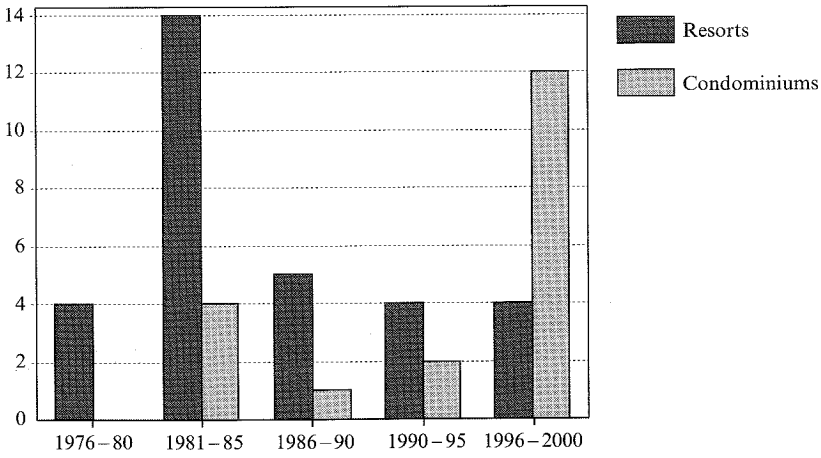


Figure 4. Period of completion of resorts and condominiums in Lebanon.

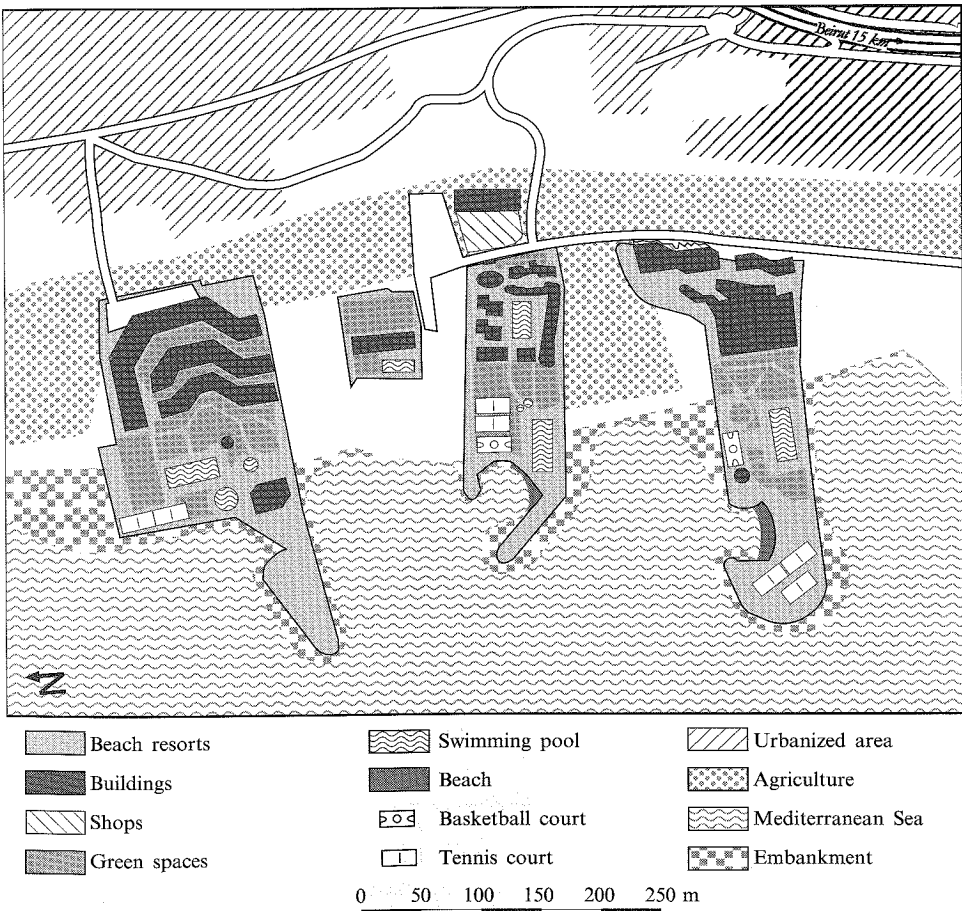


Figure 5. Beach resorts in the Kesrouane Region.

time of absent, weakened, or corrupt state authority, developers took advantage of the public domain of the coastline and illegally privatized access to the beaches (figure 5).

The first four gated condominiums in Lebanon were established in the Kesrouane region in the mid-1980s. Condominiums offer large apartments, intended as permanent residences. They consist of 50 to 400 apartments grouped into clusters of one to ten buildings. The clients of these first condominiums were for the most part upper-class and middle-class Christians, who had left Beirut or Tripoli. Many had already lived in the beach resorts, where they had taken refuge, and had come to appreciate this kind of housing. Once they decided to stay in the region, many looked for larger apartments in a condominium estate. A 1996 census of the buildings in Mount Lebanon and Beirut reflects the construction boom in the Kesrouane region during the civil war: whereas in the whole district of Mount Lebanon (Jbeil, Kesrouane, Metn, Aley, and Chouf) and Beirut, 19% of all buildings date from before the war period 1976–90, in Kesrouane 26% of the buildings were constructed *during* the civil war (ACS, 1997).

During the war, the resorts and the condominiums constituted enclaves where a secure supply of water and electricity was guaranteed, when all around public services had more or less ceased to function (Awada, 1988; Dajani, 1990). Generators and wells or enormous water tanks made the complexes largely self-sufficient. The census of the Central Administration of Statistics shows that in 1996 only 9% of all buildings in the districts of Mount Lebanon and Beirut had an independent well and 12% a generator (ACS, 1997); but within the gated housing estates *all* buildings are equipped with a generator and either with a well or with large water tanks.

As a lot of developers were associated with the Christian militias and, as the homeowner associations were able to articulate the needs of their inhabitants in a coordinated way, the residents of the gated housing estates benefited from a privileged relationship with the ruling powers. Furthermore, living in the estates communities, with their security services, offered a certain degree of protection against the threats of the civil war. A resident of a gated condominium explained:

“I wanted to be sure, that my family is not alone during the times of bombing, I wanted to assure that not anybody could come in here...”

In the postwar real estate boom of the early 1990s, more than fifteen new condominium projects were started (figures 4 and 6). Condominiums became the standard type for residential projects of this size in Lebanon. Most of these projects are marketed internationally, targeting the Lebanese diaspora in the Gulf states, Europe, America, and Africa, as well as the upper class of the various local communities, with a homepage and brochures in English and French (see, for example, www.dohahills.com; www.cibco.com/al-majal/; www.mechref.com.lb).

The first new condominiums located close to Beirut sold well. Several of the new owners had already lived in a compound in Saudi Arabia, a condominium in Latin America, or a gated community in the United States and looked for a similar type of housing when returning to Lebanon after the war. However, projects situated at a greater distance from Beirut and finished later than 1996, are largely unoccupied as there is a massive surplus of luxury apartments and a severe economic crisis has been in existence since the end of the 1990s: within a few years, the market for gated housing estates in Lebanon has turned from a demand-driven to a supply-driven market. Aveline (2000) identifies three reasons for the paradoxical state of the Lebanese housing market in which thousands of luxury apartments remain empty and unsold while at the same time the majority of the society suffers from a lack of affordable housing. First, since 1940 there has been a *de facto* capping of rents by a protective law, which has made investors turn away from building apartments for rent (the law was partially liberalized in 1992). Second, the scarcity of credit: on the one hand,

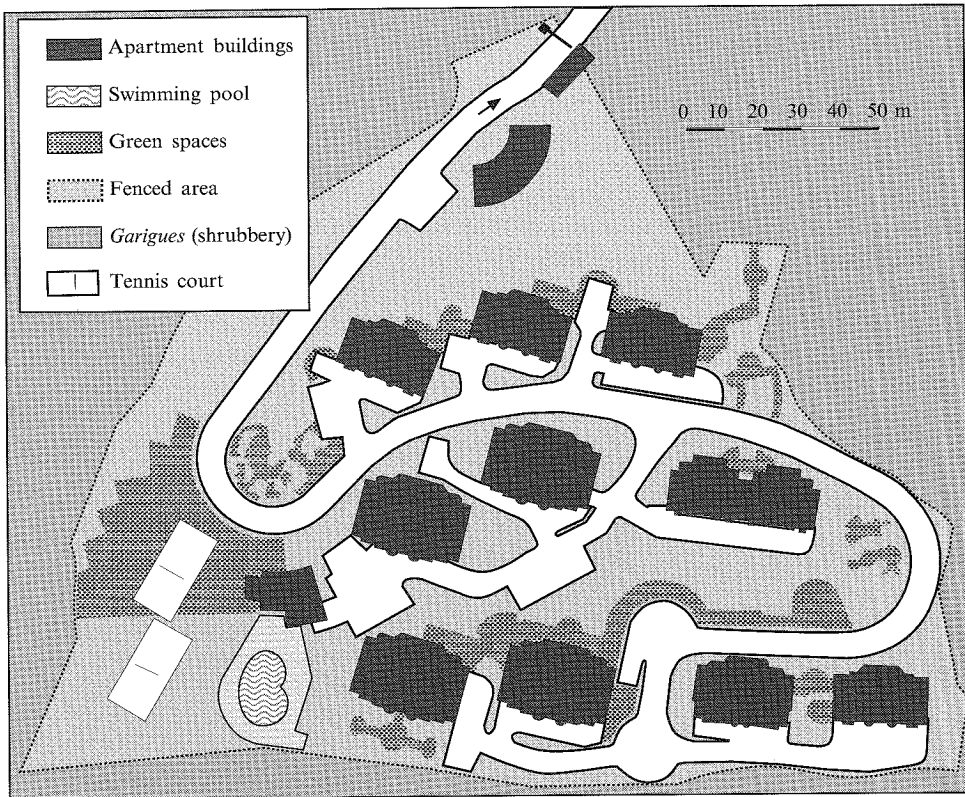


Figure 6. Al Majal, south of Beirut postwar condominium.

even middle-class households are hardly able to buy an apartment with the aid of bank loans, as interests are high and the repayment periods offered are only short (maximum ten years); on the other hand, most investors are not forced to sell unsold apartments at lower prices, or to rent them, as they are financed by their own capital. Altogether, there are US\$ several billion frozen in empty real estate. Third, the absence of professional market studies has led to lemming-like behavior by investors: especially in the postwar boom, almost everybody followed the seemingly successful models (see also Anchassi, 2001).

Interviews with inhabitants who have or had their main residence in a gated housing estate show some differences in motives for choosing this kind of residence. People who moved to a gated housing estate during the war were, in most cases, attracted by the element of safety. After the war, in the 1990s, the protection aspect became less important and the search shifted to one for an environment which facilitated a modern global lifestyle—as promised by these estates in their advertisements. A big condominium project near Beirut, for example, promised “homes for the future society.”⁽⁵⁾ Young middle-class households in particular have been attracted by this image. However, as a Lebanese doctor who had bought an apartment in that condominium recounts, some expectations these advertisements promised, remain unfulfilled:

“...we thought this will be international, you will have some French or some Americans next to you.... I was brought by that publicity to buy there—I wouldn’t do it again.”

⁽⁵⁾ Marketing brochure for the Cap sur Ville project produced by the construction company Murr; original in French, translation Georg Glasze.

Expectations of others were met to a larger degree: a young Lebanese man, who returned to Lebanon after living in South and North America for several years, describes his life in the condominium Al Majal (shown in figure 5):

"I almost feel like I were still in Miami here; there is a basket court, there is a pool, there will be a highway to the city..."

Two further motives were cited by people who had moved to gated housing estates during the war, such as the group which arrived after 1990: first, the possibilities for children to play in safe and green surroundings, and second, the secure supply of water and electricity (figure 7). Thus, even after the reestablishment of public authority, the inhabitants are still attracted by the private provision of goods within the gated housing estates; goods which are provided evenly on a nationwide scale in other modern welfare states. Therefore, gated housing estates fill a gap left by an insufficient supply of public goods.

At the time when you decided to buy or rent, which role played the most important part in your decision?

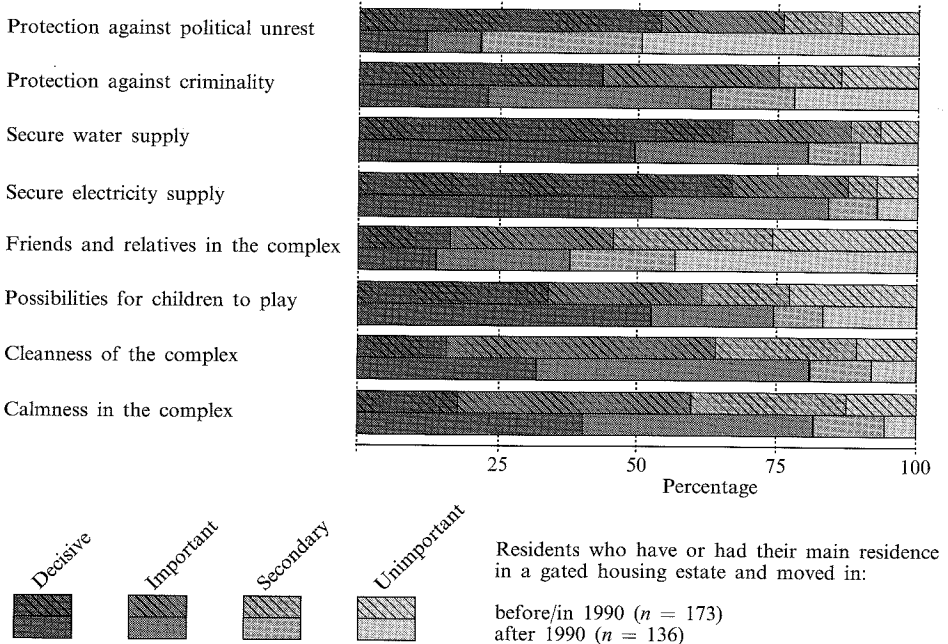


Figure 7. Motivation for move to a gated housing estate in Lebanon.

In Lebanon, the spread of gated housing estates is a direct result of insufficient public control and steering of urban growth. The instruments of public planning are deficient and, since the middle of the 20th century, have barely been adapted or developed. Zoning exists only for 20% of Lebanese territory, and every square meter may, de facto, be used as construction area. This situation, in combination with a legal framework which affords the possibility of developing extensive plots of land and dividing these into smaller ones (legislation of *lotissements*), encourages a (r)urban sprawl, which is destroying vast parts of Lebanon's landscape.

A representative example of the failure of the legislation to adapt are the so-called *grand ensembles*. Following the ideas of a modernism à la Le Corbusier, the Lebanese legislator authorized the suppression of all regulations concerning height and maximum number of floors for projects on a surface bigger than 15 000 m² (3000 m² within cities), having gained the approval of the Higher Council of Urban Planning. Today, this

legislation enables the establishment of self-sufficient and mostly gated condominiums, comprising up to several hundred apartments located in hitherto natural or agricultural areas far away from urban infrastructure.

The fundamental cause of the weakness of public urban planning in Lebanon is the “dialectical nature of the relationship between urban planning as a rational strategy for controlling and allocating resources and some of the persisting features of a pluralistic [multicommunal] society ... kinship and communal loyalties, patron–client networks, and other primordial attachments” (Khalaf, 1985, page 214). In other words, in order to establish successful public urban planning, state agencies functioning as independent entities, autonomous from social networks or groups and thus ensuring a rational public interest, are indispensable.⁽⁶⁾ The Lebanese state does not fulfill the ideal of such a separated rational entity. The power and resources of public functions are segmented, following a more or less proportional representation of the religious communities (figure 8). Therefore, any public regimentation is unlikely to find acceptance as the implementation of a public interest and is often regarded as a nonlegitimate attempt to expand the power of one particular group. For example, major officials of the Higher Council for Urban Planning unanimously share the opinion that disapproval of any condominium project is almost impossible since the legislation of grands ensembles as this would be widely interpreted as favoritism and an unfair change of rules. Urban planning therefore remains unregulated in a laissez-faire policy.

A new kind of gated housing estate, which emerged in the postwar period but already had some precursors before the war (see Ghorra, 1975), constitutes a particular response to the deficient planning control: the developers of gated villa complexes and gated model towns compensate for the weak planning control by instituting private regulations for zoning and architecture, thus guaranteeing their wealthy clients an aesthetic environment for the future. Whereas villa districts are small exclusive projects of ten to forty villas and do not offer a lot of amenities, the three projects of gated

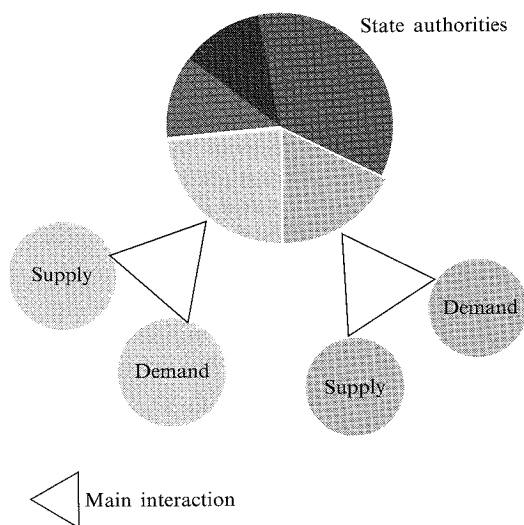


Figure 8. Relationship of the main actors of urban development in the segmented Lebanese society.

⁽⁶⁾ In an ideal modern society, the public interest should be constructed in public discourses (Hermann and Neuberth, 1998, page 49). In this, the state plays the role of an instigator and mediator of such discourses; it represents major economic, social, and ecological interests which are not articulated sufficiently and assures the implementation of the results.

model towns are extensive, covering several hundreds of hectares. After completion, their self-sufficiency will encompass all the services provided in a small town (for example, schools, and commercial and medical services).

4 Discussion: tradition, weak state, strong state, and gated housing estates

In Lebanon, the development of gated housing estates may be interpreted as a consequence of a minimalist weak public sector. The private sector offers enclaves of comfort, amenities, and welfare—small-scale solutions for what are, in principle, nationwide requirements. The mostly wealthy clientele finds an environment in which to realize a lifestyle which follows images of Western globalized models. Nahas (1999) sums it up in describing the emerging Lebanese urban landscape as “îlots privilégiés reliés entre eux par des axes routiers” (privileged islands interconnected by main roads). To some extent, the weakness of the central public authorities in Lebanon is ‘inherited’ from the Ottoman Empire, which had bequeathed a tradition of a high degree of self-governance for the different confessional communities of the Levant. However, a state which fails to ensure the implementation of rational public interest is not unique to Lebanon. In this sense, the development of gated housing estates in Lebanon is comparable with the situation in many other countries where, at a local level, the private sector is a substitute for public regimentation and supply for a wealthy clientele (Glasze, 2001; Khalaf, 1985, page 219). It is to be expected that, with the implementation of structural adjustment politics, more (neo)liberal patterns of urban governance will be established in other countries of the Arab world too, which may also open the way to the establishment of gated housing estates. For example, Denis (1998) traces the expansion of gated housing estates on the outskirts of Cairo back to the changes in urban governance which occurred as a result of the structural adjustment policy in Egypt.

In contrast to Lebanon, gated housing estates in Saudi Arabia seem to present examples of sociospatial arrangements which are at least in part specific to an Islamic state and hang back to traditional urban patterns in the Arab world. The sociospatial separation of foreign employees is the result of a confluence of traditional socioreligious urban segmentation and Western models of gated master-planned communities. The compounds enable people with profoundly differing cultural backgrounds to live side by side, as did the largely self-governing neighborhoods in some of the old towns. Furthermore, the attacks of Islamic fundamentalists on compounds with British and American inhabitants in 1999 showed that these residences do offer some protection—just as the quarters in the old medina did.⁽⁷⁾ The extended-family compounds represent a socio-spatial arrangement which echoes the jointly used spaces of courtyard houses and blind alleys in the medina.

Extended-family compounds can also be found here and there in most countries of the Arab world, and there are also compounds of Western foreigners in some other countries of the Arab peninsula. However, the proliferation of these gated housing estates in Saudi Arabia is related to the state-sponsored conservation and (re)construction of traditional Islamic social norms.

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⁽⁷⁾ “Attaque contre une résidence d’étrangers: un policier tué, deux autres blessés” (attack against a residential complex of foreigners: one policeman killed, two wounded) *L’Orient Le Jour* 10 August 2000, Beirut.

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