

Exclusionary tales in Beirut's spaces of craftsmanship: Using historic cartography, archival ethnography, and oral history to map the enduring vulnerability of craftspeople.

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Abstract:

Historic cartography and archival documentations are instrumental to the construction of spatially grounded social histories about neighbourhood change in cities. Through maps, scholars anchor physical changes in urban form to specific areas, and, through archival images and oral histories, they tend to deepen the socio-economic understanding of spatial dynamics and describe other aspects of urban life. However, this endeavour becomes a particularly arduous task when the built environment has been shattered by radical transformations. Moreover, community groups contributing to the city's economic vitality and cultural identity, such as craftspeople and small business owners, are often underrepresented in cartographic representations and official archives. For instance, in Beirut, Lebanon, the city's physical and social fabric has undergone significant, century-long transformations that have profoundly impacted the spaces in which craftspeople run their businesses, with these impacts remaining largely understudied in the literature and unrepresented on official records.

Beirut's urban fabric stands as a testament to the plethora of physical metamorphoses experienced by the city. Beirut's public spaces have been largely remodelled, and sometimes even erased, by Haussmannian development (colonial planning), large-scale infrastructures (urban highways), wars (post-war reconstruction), and extreme real estate-driven development pressure (privatization). By combining an urban morphology approach with ethnographic and archival methods, this study explores the relationship between shifts in Beirut's urban form and the socio-political dimension of crafts workshops' distribution over time. More specifically, this research examines the evolution of Beirut's city form from 1876 to 2020, and it explains how physical spaces of street commerce and craftspeople have come to terms with changes in Beirut's urban morphology.

The contribution of this research is twofold: first, it constructs a series of urban metrics extracted from 5 georeferenced and vectorized historic maps (1876, 1920, 1945, 1958, 1984) and from 2020 GIS data to assess how neighbourhoods changed their physical apparatus over time (Figure 1); second, it deepens the political and socio-economic dimension of cartographic metrics through a novel longitudinal dataset of approximately 700 geolocated archival images of craftsmanship (collected in local archives in Beirut), 110 current locations of crafts workshops (collected through on-the-ground fieldwork in 2020 and 2021), and a selected sample of semi-structured interviews with 8 craftspeople (oral histories recorded in 2023), whose shops have been in business for most of the 20th century and are still operating today.

By weaving longitudinal measurements of urban form parameters into an ethnographic and historical understanding of the socio-political factors determining the geography of craftsmanship in Beirut across 150 years, this research spatializes a history of vulnerability and marginalization due to radical changes in city form enacted by different actors and often fuelled by different ideals of modernization. Upon conducting semi-structured interviews with craftspeople from different industries, neighbourhoods, and ethnic backgrounds, the ethnographic exploration categorizes the oral histories of their long-standing businesses based on drivers of relocation. Most importantly, it uncovers the multifaceted geographies of displacement to which craftspeople have been forcibly subjected, and it links changes in physical spaces to the influence of wars, political unrest, land ownership, proximity to the port, production policies, family businesses, and wealth.

In conclusion, this paper offers nuanced insights into the relationship between craftsmanship and the spatial features in which small-scale production has existed in Beirut. It leverages morphological analyses of cartographic documents,

archival research, and oral history to provide evidence of how the alteration of the city fabric has sedimented forms of enduring spatial inequity over time.

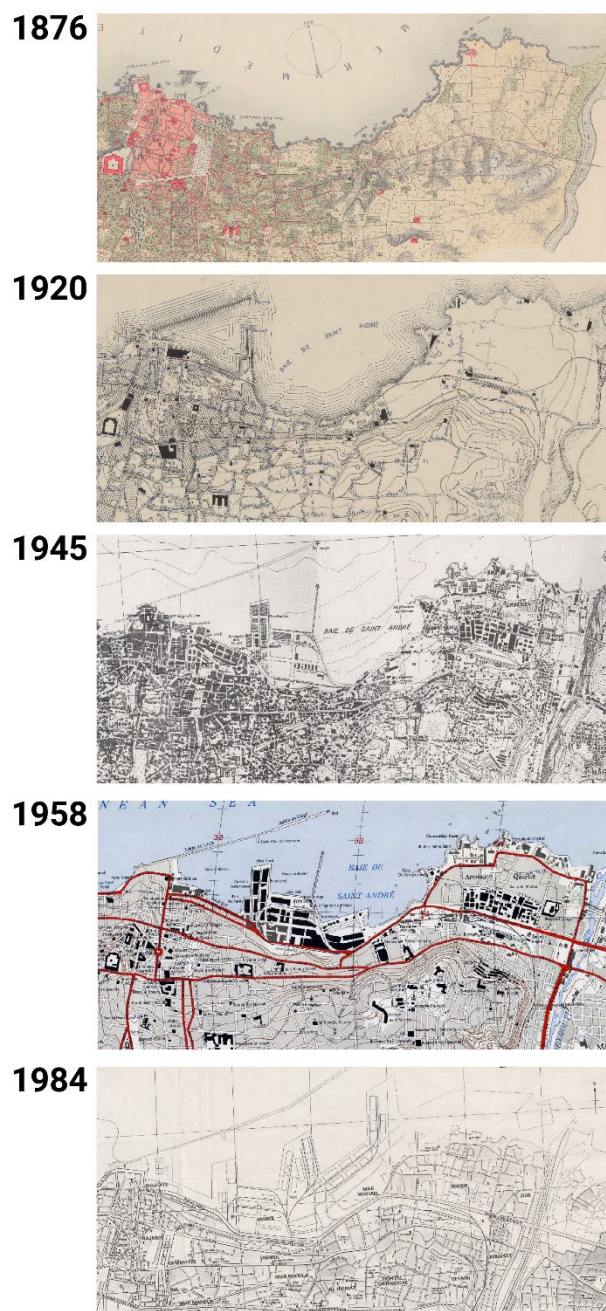


Figure 1. The series of Beirut historic maps employed in this research: 1876 (Loytved, J., *Struckly*, “A. Map of Beirut dedicated to His Imperial Majesty Sultan Abdul Hamid II”); 1920 (*Armée Française du Levant. Bureau Topographique*); 1945 (*Institut Géographique National*); 1958 (*US Army Corps of Engineers. Army Map Service*), 1984 (*Geoprojects U.K.*).

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