

Title	Segregation for aggregation? Detachment and concentration in networked nodes of affluence in the city of Beirut
Keywords	Urban segregation, gated communities, social exclusion, affluence, consumerism
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Abstract ID no.	007

SEGREGATION FOR AGGREGATION? DETACHMENT AND CONCENTRATION IN NETWORKED NODES OF AFFLUENCE IN THE CITY OF BEIRUT

Abstract:

Prior to the July 2006 war on Lebanon, there has been a sense in the city of Beirut that a group of up-scale apartment dwellers, gated resorts and mall visitors, SUV drivers, luxury items consumers, coffee shop squatters, bar-hoppers etc... that this group has been increasingly conspicuously appropriating the city in a way that detaches/ "dis-embeds" itself from its localized context. In deed, the activities of a certain profile of individuals referred to as affluent and status-seeking (ASSI's) have been increasingly restricted spatially to a few nodes. These nodes while scattered geographically throughout the city are nevertheless tightly connected socially and arguably spatially as well. Using some of the theoretical tools provided by the work of Atkinson, Rodgers and Marcuse this paper organizes our understanding of how ASSI's appropriate the city spatially. In addition this paper explains what this mode of appropriating the city really is and why it exists - that is, how it is related to social exclusion and the search for concentration-induced advantages.

One of the core arguments of this paper is that the circulation of affluent individuals in networked nodes is in deed a circulation in a "layer" (Marcuse, 2002, Rodgers, 2004). The constituent spaces of this layer are shielded from the rest of the city and the rest of its inhabitants. It is possible to conceive of this layer as an expanded form of a gated community, one that occupies the totality of the city rather than being confined to a particular "totalizing enclave" or "citadel" (Marcuse, 2002). If gated communities are the embodiment of supply-driven residential segregation, the embodiment of gates in search of a community, the layer that this paper proposes is the spatial embodiment of a residentially scattered group/community that searches for the gate. ASSI's circulate in this layer in order to affirm their status by exhibiting their "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 1998: 68) and to maintain their class belonging by networking with members of their circle. As such, while the apparent logic of this layer is that of detachment, a parallel and more powerful logic of concentration exists. In deed the process might not be so much that of segregation but rather of aggregation.

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1. Introduction

This paper conceptualizes spatial divisions that are generated by and for a certain profile of affluent individuals in the city of Beirut. It argues that the activities of this particular profile of city dwellers are increasingly restricted to certain socially segregated places in the city networked together through tunnel effects. This ensemble of static and dynamic segregation produces an infrastructure of segregation that seeps through the totality of the city rather than being restricted to certain localities only; an infrastructure that can be read as a *layer* superimposed onto the city. In deed, this layer can be conceived of as a spatial variant of the type of segregation that Engels (1845) described in Manchester. In what follows we first explain the concept of the layer, second, we briefly describe the methodology used to arrive at the findings, third we sketch the outlines of this layer as it exists in Beirut with a view at what it is composed of and what justifies it, fourth, we explain the logic of this spatiality of segregation, and fifth, we identify the main repercussions on the city. We conclude by raising a number of pertinent questions.

2. The concept of the layer

The starting point for this paper has been an interest in understanding the way a certain profile of individuals have come to appropriate the city of Beirut during the post-war period. These individuals have in common first their attribute of affluence, and second, their practise of exhibiting affluence in order to confirm their status, hence forth, these individuals are termed as ASSI's- Affluent Status-Seeking Individuals. In Beirut, following the end of the civil war, gradually the perception accentuated that up-scale apartment dwellers, gated resorts and mall visitors, SUV drivers, luxury items consumers and bar-hoppers etc... are conspicuously detaching themselves from their localized spatial and social context, and connecting to extended social and spatial networks while being simultaneously geographically dispersed throughout the city. Hence, a spatiality has emerged in the city of Beirut in which a certain profile of individuals practice varying degrees of spatial segregation¹ beyond the residential level to produce a *living space*

¹ The tow terms spatial segregation and detachment are used interchangeably in this paper.

composed of geographically *dispersed* and locally *detached* spaces that are *connected* to each other. But *how can we conceptualise the spatiality formed out of these processes of detachment and connectivity? What is the underlying logic for this spatiality and what are its repercussions on the city of Beirut?*

Existent literature on spatial segregation in cities does not give a satisfying account of the spatiality emerging out of the type of that this paper is concerned with in present day Beirut. In deed, this research rejects the applicability of the rather convenient concept of duality – the formal versus the informal city (Sassen, 2001), walled in versus walled out (Caldeira, 2000) to the context of divisions described in present-day Beirut. It also rejects the notion that affluent individuals increasingly live in city fragments (Glasze, 2003), *fixed* exclusionary enclaves (Marcuse, 2002) or partitioned city quarters (Marcuse, 2002). All of these concepts are very attractive perhaps because they are neat dramatizations of the conditions that they are concerned with. This paper suggests an alternative reading that is less exaggerated and closer to reality while being equally dramatic. In deed the fabric of the city of Beirut attests, that socio-economic spatial divisions are not that neat. This might be due to several reasons. First, as a result of the extension of rent control over pre 1992 rent contracts, wide spread gentrification is slowed down and there continues to be a mixture of income groups particularly in parts of the city in which private renting was a dominant tenure. Second, the housing market is geographically segmented along lines of confessional association, resulting in the fact that residentially different socio-economic groups are relatively quite mixed in their simultaneous confessional enclaves. Third, as in other Mediterranean cities “vertical differentiation of urban functions as well as social classes is common and single land-use zoning is rare [in Beirut]: a significant portion of urban land serves multiple purposes. Many buildings have commercial, administrative or industrial uses at ground level and residences in their upper storeys” (Leontidou, 1990:13) Last but not least, in the context of slow economic growth and rising public debt, the size of the affluent group remains rather small, making the emergence of self-sustained enclaves to cater for this small group, a non-sustainable business.²

As such this paper uses Rodgers’ (2001) concept of the “dis-embedded layer” to argue that the spatiality formed out of the processes of detachment and connectivity that ASSI’s practice can be conceived of as a “dis-embedded layer”. The concept of the *layer* captures the complexity of the

² Rodgers makes a similar comment on the case of Managua. He argues that “the relatively small size of the urban elites in Managua makes the emergence of self-sustained gated communities a non-viable proposition. These classically are spaces from which residents hardly ever need to leave, as they contain all the social, economic and cultural services that they require, with the businesses involved essentially serving isolated markets. The small size of the urban elites in Managua means that any enclaves would have to be modest in size, and businesses within them would therefore find it difficult to be profitable” (Rodgers, 2004: 120).

seemingly contradictory yet simultaneous spatial conditions of ASSI's, namely, first, their geographic dispersal, second, their spatial and social detachment from the immediate localities of their home, work and play functions, and third, their social and spatial connectivity to dispersed groups. However, unlike Rodgers concept of the "dis-embedded layer" which depicts a permanently fortified network formed out of gated and guarded places that are *physically* connected through high-speed streets and round-out-about's, our concept of the "dis-embedded layer" provides a reading of the city that takes into account the mobility of ASSI's beyond fixed routes and the capacity of ASSI's to use their own various mechanisms to maintain local social distance and extended/non-geographic social connectivity. This reading is hypothetical, but it is not theoretical. In fact we insist that this reading is a very realistic account of the way ASSI's appropriate the city of Beirut spatially. In other words, we hypothesize that ASSI's live in the city in a way that can be conceived of as a layer, however, the layer is not only a conceptual tool, but it is also an actual spatial entity that exists in the city.³

The concept of the layer extends the conception of segregation beyond the modes of segregation in, first, residential locations and, second, other static locations of work/study/play, to include dynamic modes of segregation as well. The concept of the layer thus suggests that ASSI's construct a *continuum of segregation*, one in which the state of "being gated" is transformed from hard enclosure by actual physical walls to protection by private security personnel, concierges, CCTV, to dynamic protection modes such as the use of SUV's, headphones, cellular phones, hiring mediators such as chauffeurs, maids etc....

Graham and Marvin provide useful tools for us to comprehend the components of this layer. They propose that the "unbundling" of networked infrastructure has resulted in the "splintering of urbanism" and the disintegration of the urban fabric into isolated "nodes" connected through "tunnel effects" (Graham and Marvin, 2001: 201) Atkinson develops this into a conception of a "time-space trajectory of segregation", a trajectory that is formed through territories, objectives and corridors- where "territories" are shielded residential neighbourhoods, "objectives" non-

³ We must be careful here to distinguish between the *spaces of the layer* and the *space of the layer*. The former refers to the individual spaces that make up the layer. The *spaces of the layer* are those delimited segregated nodes and corridors that we could pinpoint on a map. They are the spaces where ASSI'S socialize, circulate, consume, work, study and inhabit. While the latter term, the *space of the layer* is an overarching construct which captures the complex groupings and regroupings of the *spaces of the layer*. These groupings may vary according to occasion, season, day of the week, time of day etc... The *space of the layer* is *not* a compilation of the totality of the spaces where ASSI'S socialize, circulate, consume, work and inhabit. Rather the *Space of the layer* is the space formed out of a networking of these spaces at a singular point in time. The *space of the layer* is the space in which ASSI'S *live*. It is the "*living space*" of ASSI'S. The *space of the layer/ the living Space* of ASSI'S is essentially a space in flux, continuously changing.

residential locations to which people travel on a daily or repeated basis- the places of work/study/play- and “corridors” the mode of shielded or immunized travel between territories and objectives (Atkinson, 2004: 887) This paper uses Atkinson’s territories, objectives and corridors to organize the everyday life spaces of ASSI’s.

3. Methodology

In seeking to answer the questions posed in this paper, we use information collected as part of a pilot study for the author’s PhD research. This pilot study used the “living space” of case studies of ASSI’s in the city of Beirut as the object of analysis. The variables measured were the degree to which this “living space” is detached from its immediate localized context and the degree to which this “living space” concentrates ASSI’s. The aim of this pilot study was to understand the nature of this object, “the living space”, its logic and the way it relates to the rest of the city. In studying this “living space” as an object, this study started from case studies of a profile of affluent individuals as subjects that give insight on the way they construct and perceive their “living spaces” and the logic that drives this construction. These case studies were interviewed and observed for a fixed period of time to understand their perceptions of social and spatial segregation in the home/work/play/mobile context. Even though, the findings of this paper are derived from these observations and interviews, in what follows we will not refer to these specific case studies, but rather present the conclusions drawn.

4. Description of the spatiality of everyday-life of ASSI’s in the city of Beirut

4.1. Territories and objectives linked through corridors

The “time-space trajectory of segregation” (Atkinson, 2004: 887) begins and ends at home. Hence, it seems appropriate to start tracking the constituents of our layer by investigating the nature of segregation at the residential level. Of course, the home is a private place, among its functions is to exclude and filter. In fact the exercise of segregation at the doorstep of the home is a “sense held in common” (Gramsci in Harvey 2005: 39)⁴. We abide to this “common sense” and proclaim, therefore, that we are not concerned here with the internal dynamics of the home- who is allowed in and who isn’t, rather we are concerned with the way the home relates to its immediate localized context- who comes out and who doesn’t!⁵ In other words, in investigating

⁴ “What Gramsci calls ‘common sense’ (defined as sense held in common) typically grounds consent. Common sense is constructed out of long standing practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional or national traditions. (Harvey, 2005: 39)

⁵ However, this should not dismiss the importance of understanding the home also as a status object, whose function is also to be showcased. This is beyond the scope of this paper, but a few remarks are in order here. In the context of Beirut, showcasing entails among others bringing in a

spatial segregation at the residential level we are concerned with the relationship of the residence as a spatial entity containing a social entity, to its immediate spatial and social context. This relationship is determined by a membrane that mediates between the social constituents of the home, that is, the residents, and their immediate context. In deed this membrane determines the nature and scale of the territory around the home.⁶ In studying spatial segregation at the residential level, the questions that need to be asked here are the following: How thick is the membrane (physical or symbolic) that separates the ASSI's from the immediate context of their residential place? How capable is this membrane of stretching to conquer adjacent areas and territorialize them? How tight and controlled are the valves/filters that release these residents from the confines of the security provided by this membrane into the insecurity of the "wild"? How visible is this membrane? As such, four variables adjust the characteristics of this membrane, first, thickness, second, elasticity, third, impermeability and fourth, visibility. We must be aware that these variables while affected by the real and perceived security condition, they are also fashioned by dominant tastes, values and trends. As such, the membrane is as much a device for actual segregation as it is a status good whose possession (operational or else wise) advertises wealth and hence relays the message of segregation.

As mentioned earlier, a number of specificities in Beirut, such as the existence of a highly segmented housing market, persistence of rent ceiling and a Mediterranean land use pattern, result in a residential fabric that is quite mixed socio-economically. This entails that the membrane separating ASSI's from their context is both thin and there are serious limitations to the attempt of stretching its area of operation. Hence, in the face of these limitations, strategies to enforce segregation in the "territories" (Atkinson, 2004) work on bolstering the third and fourth variable of the membrane, namely its impermeability and its visibility. Strategies could vary from fortifying up strategies, such as, barb-wiring, gating, monitoring access through CCTV, closing off balconies, double glazing windows, to more muscle showing strategies which include hiring armed private security personnel and body guards.

very selective public into the exhibitionist part of the home, namely, the *salon*. The *salon* is the zone of maximum display to an audience that is carefully selected and therefore has maximum effectiveness in terms of word of mouth transmission of evidence on wealth possession. In a sense, the *salon* itself is "gated". The *salon* is referred to as an outside, *barra*. In many instances, it is locked up in the absence of visitors, but always kept clean and ready to be showcased. Kids are usually not allowed to enter the *salon*; if they are they are reminded that they should not misbehave here. Investigating the architectural plans of apartments with the intention of uncovering patterns through which the *salon* relates to the inside/out could yield interesting findings as to the function of this space

⁶ This conception diverges from Atkinson's conception of territories. Atkinson uses the term to refer to shielded residential *neighbourhoods*, composed of *numerous* households, such as, gated communities. On the other hand, this paper uses the term *territories* to refer to the *insular* territory around a *singular* household.

Perhaps of particular interest though are those strategies that are used to bolster impermeability from the inside out. An example of these strategies is the hiring of maids and concierges to which the business of engaging with the immediate context is outsourced. In deed, the responsibilities of maids extend beyond the confines of the household; maids mediate negotiations of disputes regarding issues such as dripping laundry. They walk the kids and pets in the neighbourhood; they also monitor older kids who play in parking lots and other common areas. They buy the (forgotten/ recurring) goods from (too) local non-car reachable grocery stores. Maids are assisted by concierges who receive maintenance personnel and buffer undesired entrants. Concierges also carry messages to other neighbours and mediate in disputes over parking space, cleanliness of common areas and other. Maids and concierges each often establish their own social networks in the neighbourhood, while other residents refrain from interacting with or even noticing who lives within their immediate confines. These networks are negatively valued even conceived as threatening by residents; in deed maids are frequently dismissed after too many years of service have enabled them to weave a quite elaborate local social network.

As ASSI's engage in spatial segregation in their residential place they also opt for working, studying and spending their leisure time in places that are segregated. In deed, we hypothesize that the type of spatial segregation demanded in non-residential places is a more accentuated one. This non-residential segregation might be boosted by its suppliers who compete for selling a "better" segregated space, but it is also affected by demand for a certain level of visibility that these places are expected to bestow upon their users, however, more on this later.

Thus, ASSI's opt for recurring travel to selective places in which a membrane is supplied for collective use. Gated commercial and entertainment complexes, resorts, enclosed department stores, guarded downtown ("the mall without wall" Source?) and other hotspots in town are examples of such "objectives". What distinguishes the membrane in these places from the membrane of the "territories" is the following. In these places, first, the membrane is supplied as a service, second, the membrane is collectively consumed, and third, the membrane's span is more widespread than its residential or dynamic version. As such, these places become the places where members of the group experience a sense of freedom; they are the places where it is permissible to walk and talk to semi-strangers, where body guards take a break, where it might be even considered bad taste to outsource to the maid or driver.

However, segregation remains sporadic, if it is merely experienced in the "territories" and "objectives". Thus, to achieve consistency in the experience of segregation ASSI's seek to *sustain* social distance. This is done by extending the condition of segregation beyond both the static "territories" and "objectives" to include the space in between. This space is experienced in

mobility; we term it “mobile space”. In the context of Beirut, “mobile space” travels in a road network that remains by large inexcludable and hence open to the public. In deed, even though it is common practice for political elites to have roads temporarily privatised to enable their un-eased and secure flow through the city⁷, this assault on the road network is not sustainable over longer periods of time and remains at best an intermittent activity. So the question that we need to address is the following, how is mobile space immunized or shielded against dangerous or casual encounters (Atkinson, 2004) particularly in the absence of the capacity to control the context of this mobile space? In other words, what strategies are used to privatise and enclose mobile space?

These strategies include the dependence on the use of the private car to reach even the shortest distances. This is so because the car enables its user to be escorted by a mobile membrane that shields against encounters. “The car.... is privacy, a place to be alone, as a mobile apartment, a place where your children can misbehave without embarrassing you and themselves in public, a place for sexual activity; you can pick and choose your companions; the car waits for you; waiting at the bus stop is far less comfortable than sitting in traffic jams” (Hamilton and Hoyle, 1999, 29) Particularly the use of large cars, Sports Utility Vehicles (SUV’s) boosts the protection of riders from the insecurity of the roads. SUV’s not only function as an image of expensive and upscale status symbols, but also as a show of muscle power that intimidates other drivers or passerbys. How else to explain the coming in fashion of bright yellow military vehicles (Hum-Vee)⁸ on the streets of post-war Beirut? In a sense, these shielded mobile spaces ensure that the closest encounter with the public realm becomes experiencing short glimpses of it in mobility.

In the context of increased traffic volume, dominated by a fleet of lower income jitney drivers, the use of private drivers/ chauffeurs also fosters the sense of segregation for ASSI’s. The engagement in traffic dialogue with lower income drivers is outsourced to the chauffeur. His duties also include ensuring if not a seamless, but nevertheless a smooth continuity of segregation by dropping off and picking-up his employers at the closest point to the gate. Chauffeurs usually carry cellular phones and wait at a comfortably close distance for their employers’ call, or, rather missed call to save on wasted expenditure.

⁷ This is done by either closing off certain streets temporarily for public use or through travelling with a convoy of security personnel that dangle from the moving vehicles and shout the streets into obedience- “Gehorsam”.

⁸ In 1991, AM General began selling a civilian version of the M998 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV or Hum-Vee) to the public under the brand name Hummer. California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was the first private citizen to own a Hummer and continues to own several. Source (<http://www.answers.com> accessed on April, 2006)

Hinge-spaces that connect the protected domain of the car to the protected domain of the “territories” or “objectives” are sensitive transitory points. Hinge-spaces that ensure smooth transitions provide recessed drop-off points and shielded car parking directly connected to the facility in question. In the absence of ample space for parking one of Mc Donald’s branches in Beirut offers valet parking to consumers, interestingly one of the few if not only McDonald’s restaurants in the world at the time to offer this service.

However, if the dip into the public realm cannot be avoided, the task becomes how to mask or eclipse its experience. While waiting for pick-up at drop-off points, ASSI’s hurry to use their cell-phones to portray an image of being busy and dis-engaged. In some instances sunglasses are used to filter the incoming scenery, in other instances headphones connected to I-pods cut off the incoming noise of the public.

In conclusion, shielding mobile space becomes a strategy to create “tunnel effects” (Graham and Marvin, 2001) or “corridors” (Atkinson, 2004) through which locally detached territories and locally detached objectives are connected. As such, an ensemble of territories, objectives and corridors works together to produce an infrastructure of segregation that seeps through the totality of the city rather than being restricted to a certain locality only. This infrastructure of segregation is superimposed onto the city in the form of a layer, a spatial variant of Engels’ (1845) Manchester. If the walker that Engels described, avoided the squalor and decay of the city “as long as he confine(d) himself to his business or to pleasure walks” ⁹(Engels, 1845), our ASSI walker is capable of strolling through the totality of the city and even residing in the midst of squalor without ever coming in contact with it.

4.2. Tackling defiant leaks to avoid encounters

There are certain places that defy excludability and continue to be accessible to all. Examples pertain to public facilities and include airport waiting halls, voting centres and post offices among others. Viewed from the perspective of the layer, these are the places where members of the public “leak” into the layer. Viewed from the perspective of the totality of the city and the totality of its inhabitants, these places are rather the points of intersection of different layers. Experiences of these places invoke feelings of utter dis-comfort to ASSI’s as they are confronted with the diverging subcultures of the other. The market continues to be resilient in searching for innovative solutions to address this niche and commodify its needs. This is done by rendering elements of these areas/services excludable. Examples include a business class lounge in the airport, coffee

⁹ “The town itself is peculiarly built so that a person may live in it for years and go in and out daily without coming in contact with a working-people’s quarter or even with workers; that is as long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks” (Engels, 1845)

shops in waiting areas. The privatised Lebanese post company, LibanPost, offers the services of LIPOS. Portrayed in the image of a muscular supermanish character in yellow suit (the postal equivalent of the Hum-Vee?), LIPOS enables obtaining official records (such as renewing passport etc...) without the hassle of standing in line. As such, LIPOS commodifies this place in the line, by rendering it excludable. This is done by offering a service that enables a comfortable distance from the crowd and from decayed government services and offices.

Similarly, *Khadamat* (meaning service in Arabic), a telephone based service company launched in the late 90's offered a wide range of delivery services accessible by demand through telephone. By giving an order through the call centre of Khadamat, hamburgers were delivered, official transcripts were received, and errands were run. Khadamat's pool of drivers commodified niches of mobile space to the lazy but more importantly to those seeking to outsource certain encounters¹⁰. One can also speculate about the impact of internet on increasing the capacity for withdrawal. In the context of low internet and computer penetrability, the digital divide is likely to accentuate spatial divisions. It is likely that in the future those who are excluded will be standing in a long chaotic line at government facilities while the ASSI's will be only a click away.

5. The logic of this spatiality

5.1. Spatial segregation and voluntary social exclusion

The type of segregation that we are concerned with in this paper is one in which a certain profile of individuals voluntarily withdraws from the *spaces* of the rest of society. However, does withdrawing from the *spaces* of society entail withdrawing from society? In other words, how does spatial segregation relate to social exclusion? Are these two parallel conditions, or is there a causal link?

Let us first define and operationalize the concept of social exclusion in order to link it to the pattern of spatial segregation that we are concerned with. Social exclusion is defined as the following: "an individual is socially excluded if: (a) s/he is *geographically resident* in a society but (b) for reasons beyond his/her control s/he cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society" (LSE Center for analysis of Social Exclusion, 2002, emphasis added) Barry (2002) suggests that there are two thresholds of social exclusion, a lower involuntary one that divides those who regularly participate in the mainstream institutions from those outside of them and an

¹⁰ "Khadamat SAL was established in 1998 to provide the Lebanese market a reliable and fast delivery service. It introduced the concept of "non-scheduled" or Instant Delivery Service to individuals and companies. Khadamat innovated by delivering basically any product that one could think of. Since then, many new services have been added in order to constantly adapt to market needs and even create new market niches. Khadamat delivers everyday of the week from 8:00 am till midnight through its fleet of scooters, cars and vans." (www.Khadamat.com.lb)

upper voluntary threshold that divides those in the middle from those who voluntarily detach themselves from the mainstream institutions¹¹. The type of exclusion that we are concerned with is related to the upper threshold of exclusion “in which a minority is in a position to exclude the majority” (Ibid). Burchardt et al identify five dimensions of (involuntary) social exclusion, namely, production, consumption, savings, social interaction and political engagement (Burchardt et al in Hills ed., 2002: 30). We have not come across research that operationalizes voluntary social exclusion (VSE) and as such we take Burchardt’s dimensions to be applicable to VSE as well.

We have argued elsewhere (Section 2) that in the context of Beirut ASSI’s remain dispersed in the city rather than being concentrated. The dispersal of ASSI’s entails that they produce, consume and save in a manner that contrasts sharply with their immediate contexts. As such, in the absence of spatial segregation, they are continuously exposed to diverging practices. Hence, segregation can be explained as a defensive strategy that responds to this exposure.

With regard to the last two dimensions of VSE, namely social interaction and political engagement, we argue that the type of spatial segregation that we are concerned with has a causal relationship with these two dimensions of VSE. Spatial segregation isolates people and is likely to decrease their level of spatial and thus social exposure to those whom they exclude; as such, it is likely to decrease their level of social interaction with the society that resides within their proximity. With regard to political engagement, the political concerns of those who segregate are likely to diverge from those whom they spatially exclude. In deed, ASSI’s might be politically engaged, but their agenda is likely to be different from that of their immediate context.

Hence, in conclusion spatial segregation as practised by ASSI’s while triggered by the first three dimensions of VSE, namely, consumption, production and savings, also works to bolster VSE, by accentuating the social interaction and political engagement dimensions of VSE.

¹¹Quoting Aristotle who said that to live outside society one would have to be either a beast or a god, Barry remarks that “ we would not be altogether missing the spirit of that remark if we were to identify those below the lower threshold with the beasts and those above the upper threshold as the gods: one group lacks capacity to participate in the common institutions while the other group has no need to” (Barry in Hills et al, 2002: 24). “The more sharply the thresholds are defined e.g. in the US, the more those above and below the thresholds are a mirror image of each other e.g. the inhabitants of inner-city ghettos in the US receive little police attention, as do inhabitants of gated communities as they employ their own security guards” (Barry in Hills et al, 2002: 17)

5.2. Spatial segregation for concentration-induced advantages

We have argued so far that spatial segregation practices assist ASSI's in excluding themselves socially from their immediate localised contexts. However, what is also of significance is that these practices work to fasten the connection of ASSI's to their dispersed network. After all, they "belong not to their immediate surrounding but to a largely *invisible* network" (Caldeira, 2000: 258, emphasis added).

In deed, the type of spatial segregation that ASSI's practice in their territories, objectives and mobile spaces yields two kinds of concentrations that can be experienced simultaneously, first, non-geographic concentration and second temporal concentration. Non-geographic concentration refers to concentration induced by tightly knitting various homogenous spaces that are geographically scattered, a situation in which spaces belonging to different geographies are networked to create a space centred with a homogenous group. In this space exposure to non-members is minimized and exposure to members is maximized. The term temporal concentration refers to concentration induced by a temporal presence of a homogeneous group in a certain geographic locality. This locality is usually, but not solely, restricted to the objectives. It is due to these types of concentrations that the social network that ASSI's belong to can be conceived of as invisible, even though the individuals themselves and their spaces are quite visible.

Massey argues that the geographic concentration of poverty and wealth results in diverging subcultures, heightened social tension and *spatially induced* advantages and dis-advantages (Massey, 1996, emphasis added). Likewise, we argue that both non-geographic and temporal concentrations of ASSI's also yield diverging subcultures and heightened social tension, however, the advantages and disadvantages are *concentration-induced* rather than *spatially induced*. In deed, we are concerned here with the advantages that are concentration-induced. Understanding these advantages would enable us to understand why the ASSI's demand spatial segregation.

As such, the demand for spatial segregation is a demand for concentration-induced advantages. Spatial segregation is a strategy exercised to attain non-geographic and temporal concentrations, a strategy that aims to link to this "largely *invisible* network" (Caldeira, 2000: 258, emphasis added). What are these advantages of concentration?

In countries, with rising crime rates, spatial segregation is a response to crime and increasingly to the fear of crime. Gated communities in Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires and Johannesburg (Caldeira, 2000, Pirez, 2002, Robins, 2002, Low, 2000,) are examples where spatial segregation is practiced to concentrate the delivery of security. There is no evidence that this is the case in

Beirut. Bizarrely, Beirut remains a relatively secure city. Kidnappings for bounties remain an exception in the city, robberies are also rather contained and sporadic. In addition there does not seem to be any economic efficiency advantages in this non-geographic concentration. On the contrary, the continued dispersal of ASSI's limits their ability to join efforts, pool their needs and benefit from the economies of proximity. So if it is neither security nor economic efficiency that guides this demand for concentration, why do ASSI's seek spatial segregation? Veblen argues that status-seekers expose their "conspicuous consumption" and leisure activities in order to affirm their status. By consuming wastefully, status-seekers relay the message that they can afford waste. Bourdieu argues that it is taste rather than waste (Bourdieu, 1979). Whether waste or taste, for our purposes, what is important is that people engage in an act that aims to send messages about who they are. These messages, if delivered to the right audience, affirm the status of the messengers. We argue that concentration enables ASSI's to target and deliver their messages, whether of waste or taste.

As such, the continuum of segregation, which we have illustrated earlier, functions as a *medium* for message delivery. The hotspots of this network are the "objectives", the restaurants, café's, malls, gyms, spas and boutiques in which the possession of status symbols¹² is exhibited¹³ to a temporally concentrated audience. Seen as such, objectives are in deed exhibition walkways. Status symbols are continuously revised as they filter down to lower-status groups. Objectives are also revised as, with time, concentration seems to reach a ceiling that tapers off. This helps explain why these places need to innovate periodically. The high turn-over of restaurants and café's in Beirut attests to this coming in and out of fashion.

However, neither Veblen, nor Bourdieu explain *why* there exists a need to affirm status? We argue that in the context of Beirut, status facilitates networking with a range of gatekeepers that enable access to information concerning jobs, resources and business opportunities. This need for networking is further accentuated in the context of the clientelist political system in Lebanon that thrives on guarding access. Hence, we propose that affirming status is geared towards maintaining class belonging.

¹² Possessions perceived as status symbols include: Brand clothes, expensive accessories (the Gucci purse, the sunglasses), Expensive jewelry, expensive gadgets (state of the art cell phones), the possibility of outsourcing (the maid, the chauffeur), a marketable degree from a prestigious institution, the condition of one's body (tanned and fit).

¹³ Society journals, such as Mondanite and Layalina can be viewed as means to expand the circulation of the messages. These journals circulate images of people in restaurants, pubs and bars attending wedding ceremonies, private dinners and lunches among others. These journals also capitalize on the curiosity of lagging groups.

5.3. Other actors involved in the manufacture of the demand for segregation

Detachment and concentration once kick-started become self-perpetuating processes. Concentration leads to diverging subcultures which in return accentuates the sense of detachment. However, we must avoid understanding segregation as purely demand-led and should also acknowledge a role of supply factors and a role of government.

The market finds a business opportunity in responding to the demand for VSE and the demand for concentration. In addition, businesses also thrive on segregation. By delivering segregated space, businesses become capable of isolating market segments, which in turn increases their targeting efficiency. The abundance of advertisement of how “better” segregated space leads to a happier and better life is one example which illustrates how spatial segregation is also supply-led.

Moreover, as the globalisation of finance has instigated the rise of networked urban economies, cities have increasingly become immersed in the competition for “luring capital to come to town” (Harvey, 1994). This also entails *luring in* affluent groups. In deed the yardstick for measuring the success of cities is increasingly reduced to how attractive these cities are for these groups. Cities increasingly resort to the use of neo-liberal practices to make “the city a more comfortable place for urban elites” (Rodgers, 2004: 119). Interestingly, these practices might at times be at odds with neo-liberal theory (Harvey, 2005: 19). In the case of Beirut, the coming to power of the Hariri government in the early 90’s with a definite agenda of putting Beirut back on the regional map, has mainstreamed a vision of the success of the city as being linked to the degree in which its spaces of affluence are interconnected and organized. In the early 90’s, a lot of public money was spent by government to upgrade the roads infrastructure of the city. Many of these roads were linking strategic nodes of affluence in the city. In addition, great concessions were given to private urban development companies, such as Solidere and Linord¹⁴, to participate in the implementation of this vision. This attempt of organizing the spatiality of affluence is perhaps best portrayed by a statement delivered to the author by Fadi Fawaz, CEO of Linord at the time, in a private interview in 1996 “*they will work in Solidere and live in Linord*”.

As such, while, the *demand* for spatial segregation can also be explained as government-driven, the *pattern* of spatial segregation described in this paper can be conceived of as a failure of this vision to come to full fruition- a reality in which ASSI’s still have to go through the trouble of

¹⁴ Solidere is the private urban development company in charge of reconstructing downtown Beirut. Linord is the private urban development company in charge of developing a residential area on reclaimed land to the north of Beirut.

organizing their spaces and where the fabric of the city itself, while supportive of their efforts to create their own spatiality, does not realize a vision of a fixed, continuous and “totalizing” (Marcuse, 2002) “enclave of well being” (Glasze, 2006).

6. Repercussions on the city

6.1. Beyond gated communities?

Literature on spatial segregation is quite abundant with the segregative nature of gated communities (GC's). The definitions of GC's tend to cluster around housing development that restricts public access, usually through the use of gates, booms, walls and fences. These residential areas may also employ security staff or CCTV systems to monitor access. In addition, GC's may include a variety of services such as shops or leisure facilities. (Atkinson et al. 2005:177) Another important aspect of GC's is that residents resort to private modes of public goods provision. Residents own or control common areas or shared amenities, and this in return “carries with it reciprocal rights and obligations enforced by a private governing body” (Judd in Glasze et al ed., 2006: 46). Hence, the basic criteria for the definition of GC's are first, the restriction of public access, second, the resort to private modes of public goods provision and third, the adherence to the laws of a private governing body. However, as Atkinson points out “the apparently ‘unique’ characteristics of GC's present immediate problems for an accurate definition”. (Atkinson et al. 2005:177) In what follows we challenge this uniqueness of definition based on a number observations that pertain to the context of Beirut.

First, if restricting public access is one of the basic criteria of the definition, “should we include flats with door entry systems, tower blocks with concierge schemes or partially walled housing estates, even detached houses with their own gates in the definition?” (Atkinson et al. 2005:177) In deed in Beirut, tower blocks seem to be particularly close to the definition. Gated and fenced off from their immediate context, tower blocks frequently also feature a number of communal facilities such as a gym, communal swimming pool, concierge scheme etc... Hence, in the absence of a specification of the scope or threshold at which public access is restricted, the condition of public access restriction does not seem to be a unique characteristic of GC's and hence cannot be used as one of the basic criteria for the definition.

Second, if resorting to private modes of public goods provision is taken as one of the basic criteria for the definition of GC's, the following argument presents a challenge to this definition. In the context of unreliable services provision by the state and decaying public utilities infrastructure, resorting to alternative means of public services provision (e.g. infrastructure services such as electricity, sewage, water, telephone or security services, social services) either as a substitute or as a standby option are quite common in Beirut. For example, privately managed generators

provide electricity to be collectively consumed in neighbourhoods during power cuts. Another example pertains to the events following the series of assassinations in 2005. At the time the security condition was perceived as rather unstable. A number of residential neighbourhoods mobilized their local youth to gate their turf and provide collective security. In deed, what might be termed Lebanese adaptability, as the willingness and capacity of the Lebanese to bypass the state, bend the rules that govern the public and take things into their own (private) hands¹⁵, enables the materialization of alternative modes of collective service provision, whose ownership or control is shared by private entities rather than by the state. As such, in the context of Beirut, resorting to private modes of public goods provision is not uniquely restricted to gated communities and hence cannot be used as one of the basic criteria for the definition of GC's.

Third, if the consumption of collective goods in an excludable fashion is the determinant factor of the definition, does it matter whether this "club good" (Tiebout, 1956, Foldvary, 1994,) say the private swimming pool, is located *in* the premises or in other part of town? As mentioned elsewhere, in the context of Beirut, affluent status-seeking individuals are not concentrated in "islands of well being" (Glasze, 2003) but remain relatively dispersed throughout the city. There might be a pattern of clustering of tower blocks with concierge schemes particularly around high value terrain, e.g. Saifi village, Ramlet el Baida, Tal el Bahr, Verdun, Bliss, the Sursock quarter, Achrafieh hills etc.. but these clusters are not "totalising" (Marcuse, 2002) entities. As such, this residentially dispersed group, consumes a number of geographically dispersed club goods, does this group a gated community?

In light of the vagueness of the definition of GC's and taking into consideration the observations above, we propose the concept of the layer as an *expanded* form of the concept of the gated community, one that occupies the totality of the city rather than being confined to a particular "totalizing" (Marcuse, 2002) residential enclave. If GC's are the embodiment of supply-driven residential segregation, the embodiment of gates in search of a community¹⁶, the layer that this paper proposes is the spatial embodiment of a residentially scattered group/community that searches for the gate at the scale of the city and rather than merely at the residential level. Therefore, the layer can be conceptualized as a version of gated communities in which residences are geographically scattered. Rather than appropriating a certain delimited enclave of the city, users of this layer expand their gated activities over the totality of the city, while simultaneously being detached from their immediate context.

¹⁵ This capacity or trait might have been acquired during the war years but it has also been supported by the *laissez-fair* attitude of the Lebanese state.

¹⁶ Although several authors question the degree to which the people inside the gates actually become a community. (See Caldeira, 2000 and Low, 2002) Moreover, the seedling for some gated communities, particularly earlier versions, was a nucleus of a community searching for "ideal town". The case of Rabieh is one such example.

6.2. End of neighbourhoods?

By seeking spatial and social detachment from the localized contexts of their home, work/study and play and by seeking connectivity to social networks beyond their immediate localised context ASSI's decrease the occurrence of "locally based social [and spatial] interaction" (Kennett et al 2006: 715) and expand their "living space". As such, for ASSI's the neighbourhood ceases to be the locus of 'everyday life-worlds' (See for example Healey, 1998). By developing, what can be termed, *conditional* nearness, in spaces beyond the vicinity of their home, the neighbourhood ceases to yield human relationships that the recurrent encounters of "dwelling in nearness" produce¹⁷ (Casey, 1997). These relationships are important for psychological purposes related to feelings of comfort and security that result out of predictable and familiar encounters¹⁸. They are also important for social purposes related to what Henning and Lieberg (1996: 22) call the bridging of weak ties- most of which do not extend into the world of work- with networks of strong ties. Weak ties are of particular importance for vulnerable and marginal groups¹⁹ (Forrest, 2001: 2133), and of lesser importance to affluent individuals.

6.3. Reconditioning the urban?

By disengaging from the immediate localised social and spatial contexts of the territories, objectives and corridors and in seeking to create "communities without propinquity" (Webber, 1964) ASSI's turn the condition caused by the dense urban fabric of the city into a condition in which propinquity exists without exposure. In other words, geographic "nearness" ceases to yield social or spatial "nearness". This extinction of "nearness" occurs throughout the city and not only at the level of the neighbourhood. "Nearness" is replaced by temporal and non-geographic concentration. This has significant consequences on the definition of the urban condition as "a

¹⁷ "The philosopher Edward Casey, in his book *The Fate of Place* (1997), utilises Heidegger's concept of 'nearness' to argue that places are about 'dwelling in nearness' to others- 'nearness' entailing face-to-face contact and a reciprocal relationship; and that this 'nearness' brings about neighbourhood" (Kearns et al, 2001: 2104)

¹⁸ "If cities are 'landscapes of marginal encounter' (Gornick 1996), then neighbourhoods are arenas of predictable encounter (which for many people would also mean comfortable and secure encounters) where, to use Beauregard's (1997) terminology, people know the narrative rules of encounter and have the appropriate discursive strategies easily to negotiate public space: they feel 'at home'. Residents in their own neighbourhoods can read encounters correctly and can respond appropriately without having to resort to assertiveness and inventiveness since lower levels of discursive and social competence will suffice" (Kearns et al, 2001: 2106).

¹⁹ Elsewhere, Forrest mentions that residentially based networks perform an important function in the routines of everyday life and these routines are arguably the basic building blocks of social cohesion through them we learn tolerance, co-operation and acquire a sense of social order and belonging. (Forrest, 2001)

context of proximity” as Storper (1997) terms it. In a context in which proximity is consciously and carefully manufactured and which yields at best selective and temporal proximity, is it proper to term this context as urban?

7. Conclusion

This paper has proposed an inquiry into socio-economic spatial segregation that begins not with the physical urban fabric but rather with the players, with their ways of life, their circulation patterns, their values and their goals. It is the interplay of these mores with the physical fabric that we are interested in. In this paper we have used even “the smallest of trivia as projecting handles of some important but buried reality” (Heilbroner, 1995). The reality is such that spatial segregation is not always a neat static physical condition, but often rather a messy dynamic process encompassing numerous and various practices. The concept of the layer captures this process by organizing the elements that contribute to it and the different practices involved.

We conclude by raising a number of pertinent questions:

There is an underlying statement that this process of spatial segregation is a new phenomenon in the city of Beirut. In what ways does this phenomenon diverge from various phenomena of divisions that existed in the past, during the civil war and before? Looking at the history of divisions in the city of Beirut, could shed light at the novelty of this phenomenon and identify the agencies that facilitated its emergence.

The synchronicity of the emergence of this phenomenon with post-war reconstruction suggests the following:

This phenomenon could be linked to the enhanced security condition of the post-war period. “Consumer society –the air we breathe as George Orwell described it-disappears during economic downturns and political crises. It becomes visible again when prosperity seems secure” (Schor and Holt ed., 2000: vii). Is this rise in visibility and its associated demand for segregation linked to the enhanced security condition? In other words *has the onset of a more secure environment which instigates in people a desire for ostentatious lifestyle brought about increased desire for concentration?*

This rise in the demand for visibility could rather be linked to the increased affluence of a *new* group of people, the newly rich, which seeks to affirm its newly acquired status by engaging in “Veblen-esque competition” (Schor and Holt ed. , 2000: vii). *Is the spatial segregation practiced in the city of Beirut during*

the post-war period, linked to the rise of new economic elites and their attempt to confirm their status?

Spatial segregation as described in this paper seems to be a recurring process in many other cities in the world. Is this the case? If yes why is that so? *Is this process enhanced by globalisation as “that package of changes” (Giddens, 2002:3) leading among others to the rise of a Trans-national capitalist class (Sklair,2002) with converging tastes and values,? What evidence if any is there of a role of globalisation in enhancing this process in the case of Beirut?*

On the surface the pattern of segregation emerging out of this process of segregation seems to be benign. People have not moved into “totalizing citadels” and “totalising enclaves” (Marcuse, 2002). Moreover, the superimposition of administrative segmentation onto the emerging pattern of socio-economic segregation seems difficult. Yet simultaneously, this pattern of segregation seems to be malignant and is likely to create resentment. Are there any inequality-reinforcing effects of this pattern of segregation? Has it compounded the benefits and liabilities of affluent groups? *What are the repercussions of this pattern of segregation on social justice and social solidarity?*

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