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TAMAS AND THE DOUBLE GAZE

WALKING AS A WOMAN IN LEBANON

Introduction: Walking as women

Tamas means tangency, a near-contact space that is not always welcome. In Beirut, as in many colonized and militarized urban spaces, contact can be a modality of violence, disciplining, fragmenting, and violating bodies. For two decades, a demarcation line called *khat al-tamas* separated Beirut's Muslim West from its Christian East. Yet, it also produced dangerous crossings (*maʿbar*), where contact was slow yet fleeting, imposing yet invisible, momentary yet lasting. In this paper, I look at *tamas*, an Arabic term, as both an urban concept and a method that reframes *contact* –the theme of Scroope 34– as a gendered, violent, and often resisted encounter in Beirut. Drawing on walking, photography, and annotated maps, I document checkpoints, barriers, and forced interactions across Beirut between 2018 and 2023, tracing these personal narratives with a feminist ethnographic approach that centers local (non-Western) knowledge.

Hence, the paper poses many questions: *What form of contact is tamas?* How does *tamas* help us understand contact as a space of violation and resistance in Beirut's securitized streets? How do walking and mapping serve as tools for documenting the lived experiences of checkpoints and barriers beyond their physical infrastructure? What forms of refusal and counter-contact emerge through practices of seeing and gazing back, particularly from walking as a woman? My positionality –as both an insider and an out-



FIGURE 1
Two maps showing my path on foot (green) from 2018 to 2022, traced on top of Solidere's 2011 "The Map" in the BCD.
Source: Jenan Ghazal, 2022

sider, a Lebanese veiled woman who had returned for research after years in Western institutions– dictated my methodology, shaping my access, vulnerabilities under the military and male gaze, and my interpretation of the city. In other words, these limits and risks are integral to the methodological framing, as they demonstrate how I experienced *tamas* itself through exposure, negotiation, and refusal and how I documented *tamas* through photography.

Walking in Time

I walked in Beirut, as long as I could, on streets holding the names of French and British war generals, like Weygand, Foch and Allenby. Walking was not a research practice but a traditional urban practice that allowed me to navigate the city as a resident rather than a visitor. At that time, Lebanon had endured a wave of demonstrations (2011, 2015) ending in a historic uprising (2019), a pandemic (2020-2021), a financial crisis, and a devastating port explosion (2020). These events unintentionally and necessarily structured my walking excursions into 3 phases: first, between 2018 and early 2019, when I conducted daily walks through the Beirut Central District documenting the urban traces of the demonstrations in the streets using a touristic map; second, in 2020–2021, when lockdowns and the port explosion reshaped both the city and my own mobility; and third, between 2022 and 2023, when I returned for follow-up walks and video recordings, shifting from walking to driving as a method of discreet documentation. When I began walking in 2018, some of the roadblocks and checkpoints were mobile and flexible, allowing the guards to keep them

open or shut and shift positions back and forth. They were the remnants of the 2015 uprising in the Beirut Central District, which ended with the erection of a series of walls around the political center, infamously called The Wall of Shame in 2019. Between 2019 and 2020, I was on parental leave and in lockdown, watching the Lebanese uprising (*thawra*) unfold from behind many screens in Tkaronto. I returned to Beirut on August 5th, 2020, a day after the port explosion.

My mind was replaying the infamous footage of the blast in a vain attempt to fully grasp the scale and impact of the damage. On these walks, my camera recorded ruins, and in my mind, today still, are images of solidarity, resilience, and respect for communities lifting rubble, cleaning glass shards, and rebuilding together, putting their differences aside. In the last phase of documentation in 2022 and 2023, I revisited the BCD area, opting for quick video recordings while driving rather than walking and taking photos. In my last walking excursions, I did not walk alone. My female companions practiced walking in a rich context while serving their communities. I walked in 2023 with a local guide, Samira (accompanied by tales of her *teta* and *Jeddo*, her grandparents). In 2023, I walked in the marginalized neighbourhood of Karantina with other women as part of a co-design project led by CatalyticAction (CA), a design research NGO. My practice of walking in the BCD limited my walking in other neighbourhoods further from the center in Beirut. Policies of urban planning, favoring cars over pedestrians, made the practice of walking in these spaces of the margins unsafe, inefficient, and sometimes impossible.[1]

On Photography: The double gaze and the shutter

Between 2018 and 2023, my camera's lens captured, zoomed in on, and isolated moments of contact that would otherwise go unnoticed due to their assimilation with streets, buildings, intersections, or squares, or within these urban elements all at once. This paper draws on my practice of photographing Beirut's checkpoints to explore how acts of visual reciprocity complicate the gendered dynamics of *tamas*, making visible the contested politics of urban contact. Most of my photos are necessarily discreetly taken, and I am fully aware of the personal risks involved.[2] Some photos may seem out of focus, have distorted centers, or be low-resolution. This is because, in some instances, I use my cell phone instead of my professional camera. In most cases, I rush to take a quick shot after I see a security guard approaching or because they have already asked me to leave. When interrogated on the streets, I would utter the words "architectural heritage" and "postwar reconstruction" so that it was easier to say I am an architect photographing "buildings"

1 My failure to see Karantina in 2020 confirms my colleague Dr. Diala Lteif's opinion piece in the Toronto Star published on 17 August 2020. See Lteif, D. (2020, August 17). "Change for Beirut must start in the oppressed neighbourhood of Karantina," Toronto Star.

2 Any form of documentation of military personnel, buildings, posts, and checkpoints is prohibited in Lebanon. Photographers breaking this rule are often harassed, assaulted, taken into custody, and interrogated, and their cameras confiscated.

than to say to the armed guard: "I am a researcher investigating your very presence here, sir."

I should add that my conversations with soldiers are not aimed at understanding why they are here, but rather at how their fluid, unpredictable, and imposing presence distorts the urban and spatial landscape through the constant creation of crossing lines between temporality and permanence, a space of *tamas* in motion. The practice of photography preserves these openings and closures of access by freezing the urban frame right at the moment of *tamas*. The rapidity of the shutter movement allows me to document a scene just before being asked to leave. Here, the camera becomes an ambivalent tool. I evoke Ariella Azoulay (2019: 2-7), who argues that the imperial speed of the photographic shutter operates as a form of violent capture, reducing subjects, especially women of colour, to objects of domination and spectacle. Yet, when turned back upon the gazer, when used to document soldiers, provoke conversations, and record their gaze, the shutter can be transformed into a tactic of counter-contact: a means of unsettling the gendered power of the gaze.

"Where are you coming from?" is a common question I have answered while walking in Beirut. As a female researcher wearing a *hijab*, there are sectarian affiliations that people assume about me because of how I dress. My gender and display of religious identity have had an undeniable role in impeding or facilitating access to information, people, and sites. In instances where I took photos of soldiers at their checkpoints –an illegal action– I was seen as a non-threat; the soldiers who aligned with my presumed sectarian identity, politely asked to see the photo and deleted it, often assuming I made a mistake in good faith. In the words of Abu Lughod, I was visible as a passive gendered subject without agency (2013: 40-41). This was more prevalent before 2019, and I certainly experienced less lenient behavior toward women after the Lebanese uprising, in which women were at the forefront, organizing, guiding marches, and clashing with police.

While on the streets, women remain acutely aware of the visibility of their bodies. They are in constant anticipation of street harassment, catcalling, or other forms of violence, particularly when navigating crowded streets or poorly lit areas. They feel and see themselves being looked at –their bodies derogatorily objectified and diminished– while male bodies are empowered as sites and sights (Mulvey 2013: 62-63). This gaze, a proxy for surveillance and control, aims to regulate and police female bodies. I argue that the most prevalent form of policing in Lebanon is a double gaze: the military and male gaze that lurks behind checkpoints, borders, and roadblocks. The male gaze is not confined to checkpoints; it becomes more weaponized and intrusive when spatialized. The military gaze also operates without security devices and military uniforms (Figure 11). In the streets, it merges with a commonly practiced male gaze –a gaze that Arab women often learn to internalize and accept from an early age. The male gaze employs security protocols and/or spatial configurations (such as a watchtower, a wall, a metal barrier, a gate, a bench, or a chair) to legitimize, empower, and extend its temporality. The actions of women in that moment of forced

encounter, where their bodies are subject to the double gaze, define *tamas* as a spatial rupture through which they reclaim momentary control. Here, the checkpoint, as an apparatus of spatial violence that delineates a predominantly male space, is not fixed and predefined, but is reconstructed through negotiations, refusals, and resistance.

The impossibility of *flâneur*: A literature

Throughout this paper, my concern is not to attempt to make a woman fit a masculine concept, but to redefine the concept itself. It is here that *tamas* offers a counter-concept to the *flâneur*. Where the *flâneur* embodies freedom of movement, *tamas* reveals the conditions of restriction under which women walk. During the late 1980s, a debate occurred among Western feminist scholars (Janet Wolff, Susan Buck-Morss, Elizabeth Wilson) about whether a female *flâneur*, or 'flâneuse', was possible.[3] In Western literature, Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*, a term popularized by the French poet Charles Baudelaire, embodies the ability to walk carelessly through the city's streets. For the *flâneur*, the modern city of the nineteenth century represents a place of fascination where a man, likely white and wealthy, possesses the time and means to engage in an urban amble without concern. Even when writing about instances of walking as disruption –as acts of resistance against planned paths and orthogonal streets– Michel De Certeau depicts this resistance as "creativity" and a way to "write back" to the city planners (De Certeau 1984: 98). For him, the city is a language only a conscious walker can read. Walking is thus a space of enunciation. De Certeau's "walker" possesses agency and a voice, and to some extent, is empowered by the practice of walking. "He," because these privileges are available to men rather than women, may not come from marginal spaces or experience systemic injustices.

The *flâneur* is a male concept that describes how white men walked the streets in a space and a time when the city was designed exclusively for them. In Wanderlust: A History of Walking, Rebecca Solnit writes about the experience of women walking in the city streets. Solnit posits three conditions for a leisurely walk: "free time, a place to go, and a body unhindered by illness or social restraints" (Solnit 2001: 99). Solnit's narrative –like De Certeau's– unfolds in European cities (Paris, London, New York, and San Francisco) through the lens of her own experience as a white, upper-class woman. Her writings overlook the complex and often perilous experiences of Black women and women of colour, particularly those from the Global South, who walk daily in defiance of systemic inequalities and violence, intersecting with racism, sexism, and classism. The *flâneur* enjoys mobility without vulnerability, an active gaze, and a body unmarked by threat. Yet the experience of walking as a woman in postcolonial and militarized cities (such as Beirut) is violated by surveillance and control. If the male *flâneur* moves through space untouched, surveying without being surveyed, the woman walker experiences the city through involuntary, often violent and fleeting contact.

3 For a recent take on the matter, see Lauren Elkin's book *Flâneuse*, published in 2016

Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) reminds us that in such contexts, agency is not expressed through liberal ideals of unbounded public movement, but through embodied, situated practices of navigating visibility and risk. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2015) work on the gendered violence of carceral landscapes further deepens this reading: in spaces shaped by occupation, checkpoints, and surveillance, women's bodies become hyper-visible targets of both state and patriarchal power. What is called the *flâneuse* could not be a woman. Even if a *flâneuse* exists in Western literature, she could not be a Levantine woman. This paper closely follows Doreen Massey's (2005: 63) reading of space as constantly forming through interrelations. Refusing a colonial perspective that views space as a continuous, pre-existing surface waiting to be discovered, Massey advocates for the simultaneity of stories in a space that is perpetually under construction. In this space, meanings are also reconstructed.

A history of *khat al-tamas*: Beirut, 1975

From 1975 to 1990, *khat el-tamas*, خط التماس (the demarcation line), was one of the most dangerous places in the city. A literal English translation of the term *khat el-tamas* would be "the line of contact."[4] The English term commonly used, however, is "demarcation line." Demarcation is a noun, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, that means: "the action of marking the boundary or limits of something, or of marking it off from something else; delimitation; separation."[5] In comparing these two definitions, the term "*Khat el-tamas*" conveys a very distinct notion of the function and dynamics of the Line as an area of danger and uncertainty. Unlike "demarcation," the literal English translation of the Arabic term "line of contact" does not suggest or emphasize any distance between the two sides of the line but still hints at their distinct limits as two (or more) entities. It is as if the value of this distance is negligible to a limit where the boundaries of the entities become tangential. The term *tamas* is popular in Arabic Differential Geometry, where the "point of contact" نقطة التماس is the only point where a line or a curved surface touches another curve or surface but does not ordinarily intersect it.[6] The emphasis is then on this "void," *al-faragh*, where two foreign bodies come into confrontation without invading and cutting into each other's spaces. Militia fighters operated a network of buildings as military bases and strategic checkpoints to guard territories and headquarters. They formed make-shift roadblocks: tires (sometimes set on fire), Czech hedgehogs (metal beams intersecting in the shape of an X), and sandbags. These militias were the architects of the line of demarcation, also known as the Green Line.

4 The Arabic definition of تماس *tamas* is translated from https://ontology.birzeit.edu/term/تماس

5 "Demarcation, n." https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/49595?redirectedFrom=demarcation (accessed June 19, 2023).

6 In English, this line is called "tangent Line" or simply "tangent" (to a curve or a surface), and the point of contact is "tangential point." "Tangent, adj. and n."

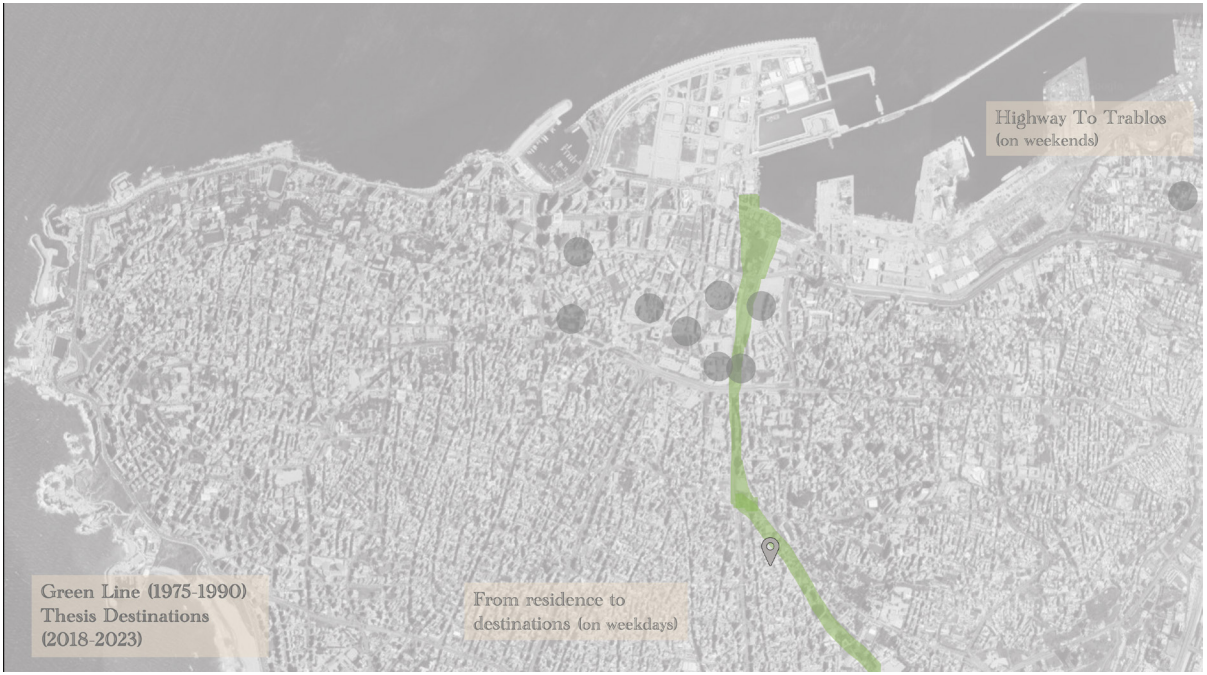


FIGURE 2
The Green Line of 1975 (green) marked on the Google Earth map along with my research's fieldwork destinations (grey circle), my residence in Sodeco on Said Khadige Street (location pin).
Source: Jenan Ghazal, 2023

The Line was a north-south vector that began at the old port area, reaching Martyr's Square, proceeding along Damascus Road to Sodeco, reaching south to the Hadath neighbourhood. Periodically, when instances of life returned elsewhere, this territory became a reestablished militia battleground, where *tamas* was an intense military contact, as evidenced by the damage from military fire, which marked buildings according to their relative distances from the fighting front. The "green" of this line is most visible when someone is observing the area from above or from a distance, where the details of buildings, streets, and entire neighbourhoods blur into the green of overrun foliage, trees, and weeds. But there is nothing green about death.[7] In the collective memory of the war generation, walking within the Green Line was a dangerous and fraught experience.

The most infamous checkpoint in the Green Line was the primary crossing (*maabar*) between East and West Beirut, near *Barbir* (a hospital) and *Mathaf* (the National Museum). Checkpoints reinforced the Line as a physical border where identities transformed into guarded territories (Muslim neighbourhoods became exclusively for Muslims, and the same applied to Christian neighbourhoods). Roadblocks, whether checkpoints or barricades, made the Green Line visually recognizable and defined lines of defence and control to grant or withhold access or transit. Upon arriving at a checkpoint, individuals braced themselves for the possibility of either not crossing safely or not crossing at all. Questions and interrogations about religious, political, or personal affiliations with the caretakers of the roadblock preceded this (potential) transit. Physical borders did not merely mark the Line. Snipers and their concealed lines of fire distorted the limits of the Line. While combat escalated gradually, the militarization of the city was established instantly, and *tamas*, as an uncertain, fluid, and dangerous spatial relation, became part of everyday life.

Checkpoints as Gendered Contact Zones: First Encounters

During the postwar years, a closed system of checkpoints, jointly controlled by both the Syrian and Lebanese armies, altered how residents navigated the streets for the following decades.[8] Syrian army, deployed in Lebanon, was stationed at the cities' entrances, opting for larger roads and enclosed locations to control and protect their bases and stra-

7 The Green Line in Palestine is a term that was coined in 1949 during the armistice talks of the 1948 Arab-israeli war. It emerged with the establishment of israel and marked the borders between the apartheid state and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It is believed that the Green Line was named for the green pencil with which israeli general Moshe Dayan drew a line across a map of Palestine. The arbitrary thickness and small deviations of the line crossing along houses and agricultural lands between communities generated legal confusion and its own urban challenges. Hilal and al. 2013: 201. https://doi.org/10.1093/lril/lrt011
The Green Line in Cyprus has divided the Turkish and Greek communities in the city of Nicosia since 1974. Calame and Charlesworth 2011: 121-142.

8 On the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, see Leenders 2012: 154-158.

tegically avoid residential neighbourhoods. Inside Trablos, checkpoints were primarily stationed around or in previous militia or army bases. For example, in the neighbourhood of *Al-Maarad*, the Syrian military was based in the Rachid Karame International Fair,[9] and their checkpoint was in front of Al-Ghandour Mosque, near our family's home, and another one near my grandmother's house, in the *Metran* neighbourhood. Strategic checkpoints were located around Trablos in the *Mina, Malloulleh, Bahsas, Beddaoui, Khannaa,* and *Ebbeh* neighbourhoods. As a child in the postwar years, I waved to the soldiers guarding their posts. They waved back, and I often saluted them, and they smiled. I wanted to cheer them on, believing they were protecting us. Later, as a teenager, I became more aware of my parents' behaviour, tone of voice, and facial expressions when arriving at the checkpoint. I overheard them recounting distressing stories of manhandling, capture, and harassment of relatives and friends. I began to notice how our conversation abruptly stopped, and the atmosphere shifted as my father slowed down and rolled down his window to salute the officer, waiting for a hand gesture or a nod to proceed.

Some checkpoint encounters were more lenient and subtle than others, and occasionally, cars were stopped in the right lane for a thorough search. Around Al-Ghandour Mosque, the checkpoint isolated the street from its urban fabric, creating a "thin border," to borrow Wendy Pullan's term (Pullan 2013: 24-25), in a bustling neighbourhood. We learned to take alternative routes to avoid these checkpoints. Local businesses also avoided the area. After the 2005 political uprising and mass protests, the Syrian army handed over all remaining checkpoints to the Lebanese army upon their withdrawal from Lebanon following nearly thirty years of military presence.[10] Following the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, the operation and control of checkpoints fell under different security protocols. "Fluid" or temporary checkpoints guard government buildings and the residences of high-ranked officials and are operated mainly by the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Fixed Army checkpoints (such as the *Madfoun* checkpoint between the North and Beirut) are positioned between cities and neighbourhoods where sectarian geographies were inscribed onto the landscape.[11]

9 The Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site in Trablos, Lebanon, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, spans over 600,000 square meters. It was envisioned as a site with innovative architectural designs, including parabolic arches and faceted cones, spread over a 1.1km ellipse. Due to the start of the Lebanese civil war, construction was interrupted and never resumed. As a result, what remains today is a bare, almost complete representation of Niemeyer′s original plan, showcasing all the main elements of the design. During the fighting, it was often used as a barracks for the Syrian military. Refer to Adrian Lahoud's article published in 2016 in the Journal of Architecture. Lahoud 2016: 809-834.

10 Between February and May 2005, Lebanon experienced a period known as the Independence Intifada, and the ″Cedar Revolution″ or the ″Beirut Spring.″ The main goal of the movement was the removal of Syrian troops, which had been stationed in Lebanon since 1975-76. For more context on Intifadat al-Istiqlal, see Haugbolle 2006: 60-77.

11 Refer to the profile of the Berbara checkpoint in the Mapping Mena project, a collaborative digital project that aims to map and

The street changed drastically over the years, and I changed too. As I got older, I moved and walked unchaperoned. I became increasingly uncomfortable and critical of the soldiers' presence as I arrived at a checkpoint. "Keep your head down; just look at the path ahead" was a phrase my father often said as we walked together. I understood this utterance as an attempt to undermine the presence of the checkpoint and deter me from engaging with the soldiers or acknowledging their power. Conscious of the male gaze and how it distorts and often conditions my walking trajectory, I accepted ceding my space to the occupiers of the checkpoint, who self-righteously built their small concrete and metal fortresses on what was once a beautiful pavement adorned with fallen Jasmine (*Yasmeen*) flowers. In this instance, channelled through my father's fears, I internalized surveillance in my bodily comportment, a practice urban feminist scholars have written about in response to the male gaze (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015). Eventually, our neighbourhood's checkpoint was dismantled. I still remember the first time I walked on that sidewalk without the familiar architecture of the checkpoint. Walking by the mosque, my breathing and my steps were lighter. Why would anyone rush on a beautiful street where white Yasmeen trees, mighty and soft, gracefully lean from the neighbour's garden into the sidewalk? Why would I keep my head down if Jasmine can touch it?

The checkpoints were not established to protect us; they functioned as instruments of control, surveillance, and exclusion, reinforcing male dominance in the streets and empowering an already masculine urban environment. In their own stronghold, Militiaman committed crimes against the people they claim to protect (Traboulsi 2010:235-238, AbouJaoude and Rugo 2021: 14-16). Fathers and brothers, despite their softness at home, must embrace their gendered roles as protectors in Lebanese streets. It's a power dynamic that counters –but also resembles and reproduces– the role of the soldier behind the checkpoint. Sami Hermez states that "for many in Lebanon, the past persists and threatens to continuously fold into the present" (Hermez 2017: 150). For years after the checkpoint's dismantling, and even today, the space remains underdeveloped and marginalized compared to nearby streets and intersections –another void where *tamas* lingers.

Tamas at the Checkpoints: A(void)ance, negotiation, and gazing back

At the edge of Beirut's voids, I sought *tamas* first through avoidance: stopping before the checkpoint, turning around at the nearest detour, watching from a distance, changing directions. Later, I realized that inaccessibility is, in itself, the center of my inquiry. *Tamas* cannot be limited to the near physical encounter. It is the negotiation of identity and roles, through

document human rights abuses across the Middle East and North Africa. This interactive map includes victim testimonies, media reports, and visual materials, serving as important resources for engaging communities in promoting a rights-based society through the preservation of collective memory: https://mappingmena.org/ar/map/lebanon/berbara-checkpoint



FIGURE 3
Best of Beirut Pocket Map.
Source: Jenan Ghazal, 2018

FIGURE 4
Map of the Achrafieh, Sodeco, and Monot neighbourhoods showing my residence in Sodeco and the path I took every day to the BCD area.
Black circle: residence, green line: walking path.
Source: Photo and annotation by author on top of the Best of Beirut pocket map, 2018



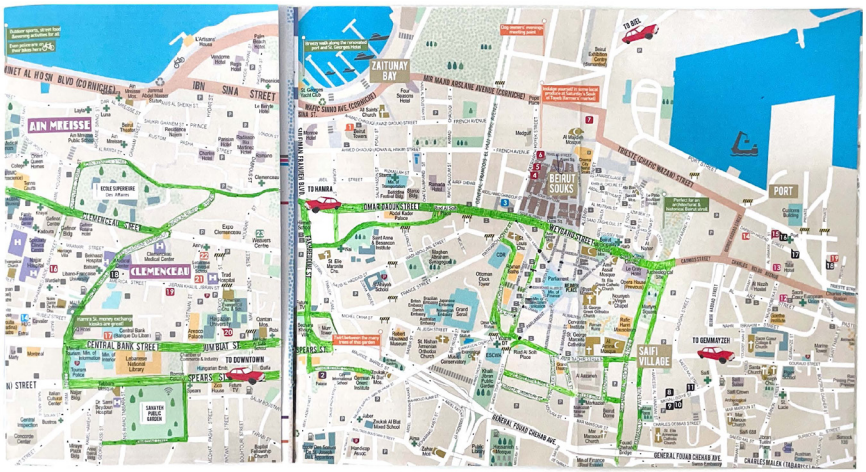


FIGURE 5
Best of Beirut pocket map, Beirut Central District (BCD). The black dots represent various forms of roadblocks, and the green lines represent my walking path.
Source: Best of Beirut pocket map. Annotation by author, 2018.



FIGURE 6
My path on foot (yellow) + driving trajectory (black dashed line) drawn on top of a Google Map showing Riad el-Solh Square, the Grand Serail (center), the House of Parliament and Nejmeh Square (right), Weygand Street (top right) leading to the neighbourhood of Bab Idriss (top left circled in red).
Source: Jenan Ghazal, 2018.

gazing and gazing back, and the distance in between the violent and vulnerable exchanges. After settling in Beirut in 2018, I walked every day from my residence in Sodeco to Riad El-Solh Square, using a tourist pocket map to document my path and record instances of (in)accessibility. My daily walks along Damascus Street –situated on the old Green Line– took me past Sahat el-Shouhada (Martyrs' Square), Sahat el-Nejmeh (the square of parliament, also known as Place de l'Étoile), Sahat as-Sur (the Square of the Wall), known as Riad el-Solh Square, Bab Idriss, and Burj el-Murr. The act of walking became a form of spatial indexing, a personal practice for tracing the physical and symbolic restrictions embedded in the city's landscape. In other words, I documented the physical infrastructure where *tamas* unfolds in the unwanted brush of a shoulder, the sustained gaze of a soldier, and the spatial discipline enacted through checkpoints and barriers.

While not academically rigorous sources, tourist maps can be revealing in what they emphasize or omit. *The Best of Beirut* map I carried (winter edition, 2018) graphically presented a sanitized vision of the city, advertising its modern boulevards and historic charm. Curiously, it marked some roadblocks and checkpoints in the Beirut Central District but offered no legend to explain them. Perhaps it was a quiet acknowledgment of the city's fragmented reality. This contested capital markets itself as both a tourist haven and a commercial hub, even as it remains bounded by walls and surveillance. My annotations on the map– green lines for walking paths, black dots for roadblocks and moments of forced stillness–transform this glossy tourist object into a tool of spatial testimony. The black dot marks more than my position; it registers my pause, my immobilized body facing a checkpoint or a wall.

In those moments of stopping –of being stopped– I documented not only obstacles but also the distance on the map between myself and the structures that obstructed me. That space, neither inside nor outside, is precisely what I call *tamas*: a fleeting, unresolved contact between my moving body and the spatial barrier. When I raised my camera to photograph the watchtower or the yellow caution tape, I captured a spatial record of my immobility and of what that immobility entailed: my body suspended under the gaze, transformed from subject into object. In this way, *tamas* unfolds not only through touch but through the intensified tension of almost nearness, of being close but unwelcome, present but policed. Here, mapping transcends the elemental, normative (and often deliberately reductive) production of a map – usually aimed at showing an accumulative extractive process – and, together with walking, mapping yields a spatial record of *tamas*: each dot or line marking not only a site of obstruction but the embodied moment of near-contact with it. In this way, the map becomes a methodological extension of my walking practice, recording not distance and orientation alone, but contact itself.

Having examined *tamas* through immobilization – instances when walls, barriers, and checkpoints conditioned my body– I now engage with *tamas* as a space of contact that forces negotiations and conversations, collapsing gendered and authoritative roles, revealing vulnerabilities. If the gaze enforces tamas through domination, photography reclaims it as counter-con-

tact: a way of meeting the gaze, initiating dialogue, and documenting power in the moment of encounter. In the exclusive neighborhood of Bab Idris, I documented the same intersection in 2018, 2020, and 2022. I stopped to photograph a building and the glass security kiosk guarded by three concrete panels—new, clean versions of the Wall of Shame, this time without graffiti, as if untouched by protest. Almost immediately, an ISF officer approached me:

— **ISF:** "Excuse me, what are you doing here... do you have permission to take photos?"

— **JG:** "I was just walking by and did not know I needed permission. I am an architect and a PhD student doing research."

— **ISF:** "Can I see your student ID?" He speaks into his Ham radio: "Sir, I have a student taking photos here. She said she is an architect doing research."

I handed him my Carleton University and Order of Engineers and Architects IDs.

— **ISF:** "What is your research about?"

— **JG:** "I'm looking at post-war reconstruction in Bab Idriss."

— **ISF** (into the radio): "She said heritage buildings and post-war reconstruction... ok, listen carefully... These are the chief's orders: you can take photos from that parallel street down there, but not this street. This is a very sensitive post." I tried:

— **JG:** "Can I take one photo from this side? Because I can see the three buildings together."

— **ISF:** "I understand, but the chief said no, I could get into trouble for this. You can still see all the buildings from the other side. It is the same thing for you, just not for us. I won't take your camera and ask you to delete what you already have, but you cannot take more photos. Again, it's a sensitive area, and high-ranking officials live here."

— **JG:** "Like who?"

— **ISF:** "I can't say... I don't know... what does it matter to you? Can I ask you a question about something else?"

The conversation shifted. His tone softened.

— **ISF:** "So, you live in Canada? How long have you been there?"

I answered cautiously, sensing the shift but unsure where it would lead. Then came unexpected questions about Canada's provinces.

— **ISF:** "I don't know much about Canada; I know they speak two languages, and I know of Quebec. Can you explain where Toronto and Quebec are?"

— **JG:** "Toronto is a city in the English-speaking province of Ontario. Montreal and Quebec City are in Quebec, a French-speaking province. Many Lebanese have historically settled in the French-speaking area."

— **ISF:** "Ah, ok. This may sound forward, but can I ask you for tips on applying for immigration? We cannot leave the country unless it is a pre-approved short vacation, but I want to leave for good, and I'm planning to join my brother in the United States."

The conversation deepened, quieted. He spoke of love, lost dreams, stolen savings, and the illusion of a stable job. The uniform he wore restricted his movements across cities and borders. The same uniform now made him vulnerable to disciplinary action for his desire to leave. He leaned in:

– **ISF:** "I'm not planning on immigrating to Canada. Once I get a visitor visa, I'll fly there and cross the border to the US. I heard it's safer than the route through Europe."

More questions followed: about provinces, borders, distances, and language. He thanked me. He reminded me to take my photos from the other side. I thanked him, and I reminded him to seek legal counsel before he crossed. This scene of contact unfolded within the fragile architecture of *hajez* –the checkpoint, the wall, the gaze. It began with suspicion, a barrier, an interruption. But over the course of minutes, through the slow unfolding of questions, permissions, and shared uncertainty, the exchange shifted. *Tamas* is thus unfolding through a different kind of contact: as fleeting, charged contact between bodies unequally positioned but momentarily entangled. In this threshold space, the gaze was returned, the soldier's authority softened, and the camera, rather than being confiscated, as usual, was tolerated, even acknowledged. Contact unsettled the dynamic of the checkpoint in a moment when vulnerability, intimacy, and power existed simultaneously. In this space of *tamas*, photography reminds us that we engage with others outside our scripted roles (Azoulay 2019: 148). The officer was, at the same time, the enforcer of a colonial patriarchal order and a precarious worker constrained by two borders: the nation-state borders he was planning to evade and the checkpoint he was guarding.

During my last field trip to Beirut, driving allowed me to capture the walls' perimeters more discreetly. I held my phone at an angle, facing the sidewalk, reframing the moment of *tamas*, not as an encounter of proximity, but as one of distance, speed, and visual alignment. The recordings I took on 7 January 2022, 11 August 2022, and 1 March 2023 reveal the evolving nature and continuity of this wall of checkpoints and roadblocks. Viewed frame by frame, the elevation of the street, seen from a pedestrian's eye level, discloses a space increasingly structured by obstruction. It was also a space where the double gaze lingers in a void designed to hide it and sustain it, minimizing encounters, passage, and negotiations.

In the first video still from January 2022, three arteries leading to Nejmeh and Riad El-Solh Squares–the institutional heart of the state–were sealed with concrete walls, black metal fencing, grey gates, and yellow construction tape. The same void extended to side alleys bordering Al-Omari Mosque and Souk el-Bazerkan. By May 2023, these walls had been punctured by selective openings: metal gates, window-sized apertures, and narrow doors that allowed access only to those deemed necessary. These new thresholds were not invitations to the public, but instruments of regulation. Even at their most porous, they preserved the logic of *hajez* –a system of barriers that filters and disciplines movement.

Along Weygand Street, two forms of the gaze operated in parallel: the uniformed ISF officer behind the roadblock, fully armed, and the civilian security agent –possibly General Security or a private guard– stationed discreetly with a concealed weapon. At these micro-checkpoints, the checkpoint culture persisted in civilian form. The military gaze was reproduced,

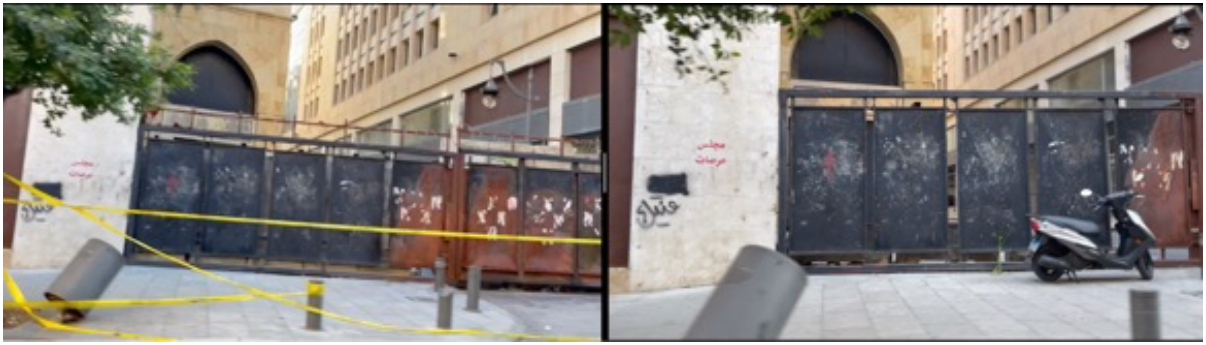


FIGURE 7
The security post in Bab Idriss where an officer (bottom left) is making his way, after warmly greeting the sheikh, to investigate my presence and the photos I had taken.
Source: Jenan Ghazal, 20 August 2020.

FIGURE 8
My path on foot (yellow) and my driving trajectory (black dashed line) drawn on top of a Google Map showing Riad el-Solh Square, the Grand Serail (center), the House of Parliament, Nejmeh Square (right), and Weygand Street, top right circled in red) leading to the neighbourhood of Bab Idriss (top left).
Source: Jenan Ghazal, 2018.

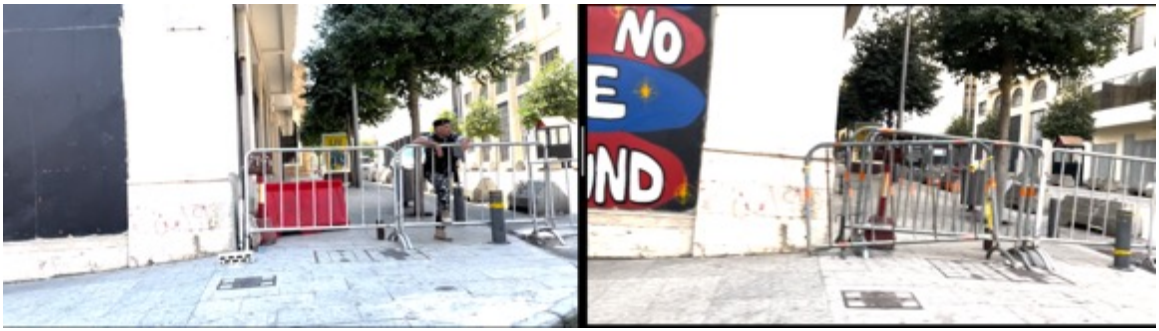


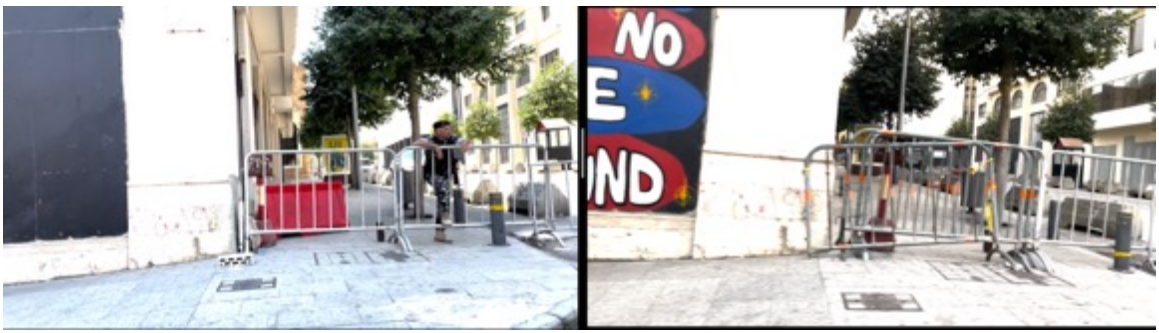
FIGURE 9 (next page)
Six still images from Weygand Street and El-Omari Mosque Street. The first frame was taken on 7 January 2022, and the second on 1 March 2023.
Photos: Jenan Ghazal











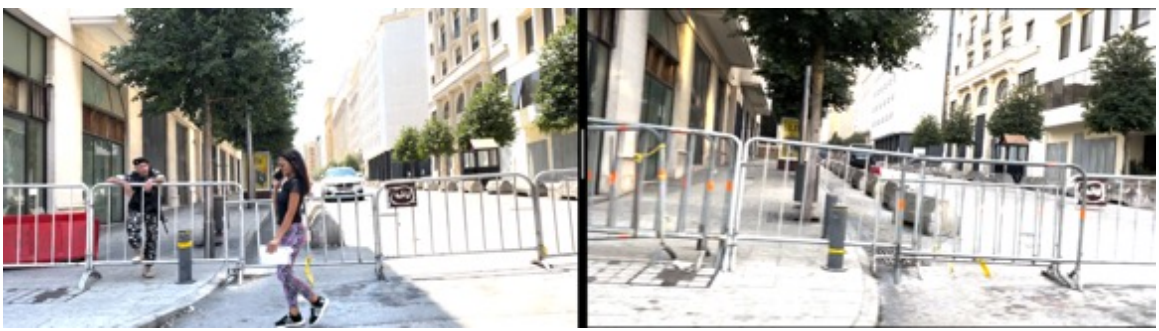


FIGURE 10 (previous page)
Six still images from Weygand Street. The first frame was taken on 11 August 2022, and the second on 1 March 2023.
Photos: Jenan Ghazal



FIGURE 11
First Frame: A still from Weygand Street and Riad El-Solh intersection showing an ISF officer gazing at a female pedestrian, 11 August 2022.
Second Frame: A still from Weygand Street and Souk El-Bazerkan intersection shows security personnel standing at the street entrance, gazing at my camera, 1 March 2023.
Photos: Jenan Ghazal,

miniaturized, and diffused into the everyday life. Behind these lines, the guards themselves were bound to the voids they inhabited. The alleys around Al-Omari and Bazerkan, once part of the city's commercial and pedestrian life, had been transformed into marginal and useless corridors—semi-public, semi-private, stripped of function. These were not spaces to pass through, but to guard: spaces of waiting, watching, and stillness. There, the men stood in shifts, suspended in the spectacle of urban stasis. *Tamas*, in this setting, was no longer physical —it became optical. A contact deferred, distanced, and refracted through glass, metal, and weaponry. But even in these fragments of controlled encounter, the logic of proximity remained. The custodians of the void were themselves entangled in its making, locked into an urban choreography where the city touched them back—not with clarity, but with the slow, suffocating gaze of a city withheld.

Conclusion. Looking back: Photography, Refusal, and *Tamas*

The most common English translation of *hajez* means barrier: "a fence or material obstruction of any kind erected (or serving) to bar the advance of persons or things, or to prevent access to a place."[12] Thus, a barrier creates a space of separation to defend against external elements. In Arabic, used on its own and in an abstract form, حاجز *hajez* is an entity or a separation device that could take many forms. For example, *hajez* is regularly used in human anatomy to describe a structure, a tissue, or a membrane that separates a larger organ into smaller cavities. It exists in various body parts (nose, tongue, eyes, lungs, and heart...). *hajez* is closer to the word *septum* –from the Latin– "a thing that separates," "a dividing wall or partition between two cavities or areas of tissue in the body of a human or other animal,"[13] such as that between the nostrils or the chambers of the heart. In the Arabic literary context, the term *hajez* can be used in a nonspatial context as a metaphor to materialize the act of overcoming a personal (psychological) obstacle. *Kasr hajez el-samt* (كسر حاجز الصمت) translates to breaking the silence barrier. It describes the state of finally speaking up after remaining quiet for a long time and is mainly used to refer to certain subjects considered taboo or suppressed by fear. To break the barrier of silence, one must face fear. *Kasr hajez al-khawf* (كسر حاجز الخوف) means the breaking of the barrier of fear. Employed next to fear and silence, *hajez* endows a physical manifestation of oppressive practices in public space. Most importantly, it alludes to an internal understanding of barriers as structures that hinder growth and incite overcoming. Barriers, both external and internal, exist to be broken. *Hajez*, here is a form of border that maintains and protects the spaces of the void –pockets of inaccessibility and surveillance, locus of the military and male gaze– and physically sets them apart from accessible and lively space.

12 "Barrier, n.1" https://www.oed.com/dictionary/barrier_n?tab=meaning_and_use#27003200 Accessed June 2023.

13 "Septum, n.I.1.a." https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=barrier+&tl=true Accessed June 2023.

These varied meanings of *hajez*, as anatomical membrane, psychological threshold, and spatial obstruction, remind us that the space of the barriers is not fixed and defined from the side of the gazer. In Lebanon, *hajez* is a space of violence: a site of controlled passage, heightened visibility, and forced contact. But it is also where the body registers *tamas*, however fleeting or coercive. If *hajez* marks the physical separation, the distance, *tamas* names the momentary contact that occurs despite it, sometimes against it. It is the brush, the gaze, the hesitation, the stuttered negotiation of presence.

In this paper, *tamas* allowed us to see, redefine and document fleeting contact under conditions of gendered surveillance as not merely incidental, but as politically designed and emotionally charged. At the edge of the voids that tamas creates, the double gaze –the soldier's eyes policing movement, and the male's eyes invading the body′s privacy – lingers in moments where power is enacted on gendered bodies through forced proximity. Yet *tamas* also holds the potential for interruption and redefinition: the possibility that even momentary contact may be reappropriated, refused, or reoriented. It is here that the camera enters as a subtle counter-tactic, repositioning the one who looks. In capturing the checkpoint, I engaged the very architecture that seeks to erase and control. Through walking, photography, and mapping instances of mobility and immobility, I turned *tamas* into a political gesture, initiating contact on my own terms. This reversal unsettles the presumed hierarchy of visibility and reclaims a moment of spatial agency. Such brief reversals matter in cities where public spaces are fragmented, restricted and controlled. They mark the uneven scale of refusal, the near-contact that *tamas* renders visible, and the fragile reconfiguration of space through bodies that continue to move, gaze back, and endure.

§

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Figure References

Figure 1: Ghazal, J. (2022). Two maps showing path on foot (green) from 2018 to 2022, traced on top of Solidere's 2011 "The Map" in the BCD [Annotated Map]. Annotation by author.

Figure 2: Ghazal, J. (2023). The Green Line of 1975 (green) marked on Google Earth map along with fieldwork destinations (grey circle) and residence in Sodeco on Said Khadige Street (location pin) [Annotated Map]. Base map: Google Earth, annotated by author.

Figure 3: Ghazal, J. (2018). Best of Beirut Pocket Map [Photograph]. Photo by author.

Figure 4: Ghazal, J. (2018). Map of the Achrafieh, Sodeco, and Monot neighbourhoods showing residence in Sodeco and the path taken every day to the BCD area [Annotated Map]. Photo and annotation by author on top of the Best of Beirut pocket map.

Figure 5: Ghazal, J. (2018). Best of Beirut pocket map, Beirut Central District (BCD), with black dots representing various forms of roadblocks, and green lines representing walking path [Annotated Map]. Annotation by author.

Figure 6: Ghazal, J. (2018). Path on foot (yellow) and driving trajectory (black dashed line) drawn on top of a Google Map showing Riad el-Solh Square, the Grand Serail, the House of Parliament, Nejmeh Square, and Weygand Street leading to Bab Idriss [Annotated Map]. Map by author.

Figure 7: Ghazal, J. (2020). Security post in Bab Idris, portraying a police officer on bottom left. [Photograph]. Photo by author, 20 August 2020.

Figure 8: Path on foot (yellow) and driving trajectory (black dashed line) drawn on top of a Google Map showing Riad el-Solh Square, the Grand Serail, the House of Parliament, Nejmeh Square, and Weygand Street leading to Bab Idriss [Annotated Map]. Map by author.

Figure 9: Ghazal, J. (2022–2023). Six still images from Weygand Street and El-Omari Mosque Street [Photographs]. Photos by author, 7 January 2022 and 1 March 2023.

Figure 10: Ghazal, J. (2022–2023). Six still

images from Weygand Street [Photographs]. Photos by author, 11 August 2022 and 1 March 2023.

Figure 11: Ghazal, J. (2022–2023). Stills from Weygand Street intersections – ISF officer gazing at a female pedestrian; security personnel gazing at camera [Photographs]. Photos by author, 11 August 2022 and 1 March 2023.

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CHARLOTTE AL-KHALILI

in response

This is a beautifully written piece that is theoretically and poetically rich. On a theoretical level, Jenan Ghazal's discussion of the concept of the flâneurSe from an intersectional perspective is very compelling and insightful, and constitutes a strong contribution to the regional literature across disciplinary fields. Moreover, her argument on al tamas in the encounters with al hajez and al khat is carefully crafted and clearly defined. The use of local terms is particularly appreciated, as it forces the reader to re-/de-centre their gaze and thoughts. The recourse to the definition and etymology of key terms only renders this conceptual work more powerful.

On a poetic level, the reader is directly caught up by the author's vivid memories of her encounters with al hajez and with soldiers as a child in Trablos; and the reader's curiosity is immediately aroused by the use of the camera as an active research tool and as a means to reverse violent encounters. Given the centrality of the author's own recollections in the text, the reader's only regret is not to see the renewed encounters with al hajez taking place in Trablos.

Some further reflections about the use of the camera as a tool to see, show, and transform power relations would also have been welcome: could a discussion similar to the one of the flâneurSe emerge from the literature on the use of cameras and photography? A conversation that could perhaps also take its roots in Walter Benjamin's work?

Furthermore, the argument concerning the possibility of being a flâneurSe in Beirut would benefit from a more detailed and, at times, concrete interrogations of class and of the materiality of the cityscape. One who has lived in Beirut can only wonder: in which areas does one find sidewalks or space to walk (and to make walking safe) in a city dominated by cars? In a city where the degrading infrastructures and lack of electricity have made street lighting unavailable in most areas, and where manhole covers are often missing from roads, it is the materiality of the city itself that makes walking hazardous and might create different experiences of al tamas.

Finally, bringing the text's first interrogations in dialogue with the author's own fieldwork, one could ask: what type of neighbourhoods does the touristic map cover, and what does this tell us about the possibility of being a flâneurSe, and for whom this is a possibility?

Charlotte Al-Khalili

NOURA
WAHBY

in response

Ghazal's reflections resonated strongly with me. While reading her article, I was reminded of a panicked moment in 2023 while chaperoning colleagues in downtown Cairo for an academic workshop. One of our colleagues stopped to take photographs of the 2011 Revolution's graffiti, some of which was left behind or painted over on one of the American University's Tahrir buildings - the Greek campus. The images were located several storeys above, and his phone was aimed high to fully capture the image.

What he didn't see were the trucks carrying police officers below, at the street level. My initial reaction was to pull him away, insisting that he stop and to just "walk away, walk away, pretend you weren't doing anything." My fear was that someone would see him taking pictures, come over to confiscate the photos, and question what we were doing in the neighbourhood. With both foreign and Egyptian scholars loitering in downtown Cairo, there would be questions.

Meanwhile, my colleagues were completely bewildered by my reaction and sudden abruptness. Only when I whispered, "the soldiers, the soldiers," did they realise what I was seeing - and what he wasn't. I realised then that what I see in the built environment is very different from what others, and especially men, see.

This piece has helped me realise how our ways of seeing as women have been significantly altered since the Arab uprisings and the events that followed. In our streets, we are constantly being seen, monitored, and haunted by memories of what we witnessed. For a while, these spaces were celebrated through revolution tourism, but were quickly reclaimed by security apparatuses, shrinking the urban space for both women and men.

Most downtown neighbourhoods today are securitised, sometimes with checkpoints, but also in the alleys, cafes and empty spaces, representing the "beyond the lines" Ghazal mentions. For women in particular, this has meant the expansion of the "male gaze" into a military, securitised, violent gaze that follows us everywhere.

At these moments of transition, much like Baudelaire's writings on a changing Paris, the destruction, building, re-building of Arab cities embed layers of history, memory, loss and personal attachments into the process of space-making and its outflows. Ghazal's intervention personifies these layers, walking us through what women see, and evokes us to think about our process of being in cities where memory, loss, and eyes haunt us from the walls, pavements and streets.

Noura Wahby