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## An Ancient City for the Future: Reconstructing Physical and Intellectual Narratives in Beirut in the 1990s

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An Ancient City for the Future:  
Reconstructing Physical and Intellectual Narratives in Beirut in the 1990s

A Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York,

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*For my friends and family around the globe,  
who are a consistent source of inspiration and love.*

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There are so many people I would like to thank for helping with this project, both on an intellectual and personal level. First and foremost, none of this would have been possible without my advisor, Omar Cheta, who helped guide me through the process from day one, pushing me to think, write, and speak to the best of my abilities.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1: Beirut As a Modern City</b>	
Beirut, the Space .....	8
Beirut Compared .....	10
Populations in Beirut .....	15
On Sectarianism .....	18
Causes for War .....	23
Conclusion .....	25
<b>Chapter 2: Everyday Violence in the Civil War</b>	
Historiography and a Focus on the Causes .....	27
A Brief Overview of the Structure of the War .....	28
The Construction of Everyday Violence .....	33
Displacement and The Construction of Sectarian Neighborhoods .....	37
The Importance of Downtown .....	40
Conclusion .....	44
<b>Chapter 3: Physical Reconstruction Projects</b>	
Forgetting the War .....	46
Globalization and the Privatization of Reconstruction .....	49
Elyssar and the Reconstruction of the Southern Suburbs .....	51
The Failures (and Successes) of Elyssar .....	55
Solidere and the Reconstruction of Downtown .....	58
Backlash Against Solidere .....	61
Conclusion .....	63
<b>Chapter 4: The Formation of Collective Memory</b>	
The Function of Narratives .....	65
The State's History .....	66
Solidere's Beirut .....	70
Sectarian Narratives and the Stories of Street Art .....	72
The Use of Literature in the Creation of Collective Memory .....	75
Conclusion .....	80
<b>Concluding Remarks</b> .....	82
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	87

## Introduction

*“How many cities lie beneath the city, papa ... grandfather ... how many cities lie there to be forgotten? I wonder: am I descending through the layers of this city, or am I plunging down, down to submerge myself in the deepest layers of my own illusory thoughts?”*

*~Hoda Barakat<sup>1</sup>*

In the 1990s, Beirut was a city attempting to recover from 15 years of civil war that had decimated the city’s infrastructure and population and had served as a trauma for countless individuals. The period following the war was characterized by a number of narratives concerning this trauma which attempted to rebuild the city physically and intellectually. This project traces two trends within the narratives that came out of this period of reconstruction. First, it focuses on the specific reconstruction projects of Elyssar and Solidere and their purported goals and constructed narratives as to how the city should be physically rebuilt. These, as well as narratives from the state, served to create a sort of national amnesia concerning the war. Second, it explores the reactions to these projects, especially from middle-class intellectuals attempting to create a collective memory of Beirut as a space that did not forget the war.

Both of these narratives were affected by discourses prevalent both during and before the war (though they were, at the same time, new creations.) In this way, these narratives often attempt to relate to Beirut before the war as a site for return to a happier past. In the 1990s, Solidere purported to be creating an “Ancient City of the Future,” one that would be both a modern, global financial capital and one that held on to this long history. This project attempts to

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<sup>1</sup> Hoda Barakat, *Tiller of Waters*, trans. by Marilyn Booth, (New York: The American University of Cairo Press, 2001): 66.

grapple with the sources of such narratives, showing that often do not contend with truthful representations of the past but, rather, new imaginings of a city whose ancient roots were only used as a tool to create a new city. The history of pre-civil war Lebanon elucidates the causes behind the civil war. These causes illustrate underlying issues within Lebanese society which would continue to be present in the dialogues concerning reconstruction.

In the first chapter, I describe the growth of Beirut in the late 19th century into the modern city that we know of today. I demonstrate how contemporary Beirut was not an ancient city, but, rather, a modern city that happened to have a long history. This history was given meaning through the process of reconstruction, but Beirut was not necessarily the ancient city Solidere purported it was. Here, I explicate Beirut's changing position in the world market in context with other comparable port cities on the Mediterranean, such as Alexandria and Haifa. Beirut became a central part of the Ottoman power structure, and, this, combined with an increase in global trade markets with the implementation of steam travel helped to facilitate Beirut's rise to prominence in the beginning of the twentieth century. From this point, Beirut came to be referred to as both the Paris and the Switzerland of the Middle East as it served as a cross-section between Western and Eastern trade, ideals, and culture. This comparison would serve as a point of nostalgia after the war.

From here, I focus on inter-communal relations within Lebanon as a whole. In the early nineteenth-century, the Ottomans attempted a modernization project known as the *Tanzimat*, for which a number of government reforms were implemented in Lebanon, including the partition of Lebanon in 1842, which separated the country into a northern, Christian district and a southern, Druze district. This split did not separate the sects in practice, but it led to reforms of the power

structures within each district. Such reforms led to communal strife, which created intercommunal strife in Beirut itself as immigration to the city increased with the influx of trade opportunities. These nineteenth-century roots contradict the idea that sectarianism was an ancient problem, but it is indicative of the issues present within Lebanon leading up to the war. The trend of sectarian government systems continued first with the government of the French Mandate and then the National Pact in 1943.

In the second chapter, I examine the civil war itself and the trauma caused by everyday violence. It is in this chapter that I discuss the importance of downtown as a sight for nostalgia for a more harmonious city. First, I discuss the structure of the war, as it pertains to the shifting geographies in the city. This structure places much of the heaviest violence on the Green Line, which separated the Christian East Beirut and Muslim West Beirut and was centered in the north around the downtown area. I also explore the quickly changing loyalties during the war, which made the violence itself appear random and omnipresent. This omnipresence and normalization of violence becomes the major theme for the chapter, showing the ways in which violence had affected everyone, with many either experiencing violence first hand or having friends or family die or become injured. People constantly had to contend with physical and emotional trauma indicative of a civil war as well as the economic repercussions in terms of loss of business and rebuilding the space in lulls in violence.

Citizens were also often forced to relocate either temporarily or permanently in order to avoid violence or in order to move to more “welcoming” neighborhoods for their religion. This helped separate different sects into neighborhoods which were controlled by individual militias which were in place ostensibly to protect the citizens, but, instead, often exploited them and

restricted travel between different parts of the city. This separation was especially stark between East and West Beirut, each of which only retained 5% of the minority sect on each side. Before the war, the sects were far more evenly distributed. The trauma induced by the war as well as the physical divide between the spaces in the city helped to facilitate the narratives following the war. Both Solidere and middle-class intellectuals placed downtown as a focus for reconstructing the city because it was a symbol for inter-communal harmony before the war and a symbol for its loss during the war.

In the third chapter, I explore the physical reconstruction of the city through the projects of Elyssar and Solidere. To begin, I examine the desire of both these companies and the government to forget the war and to move on as though history had simply paused in 1975. I also explain how these companies and the state are connected, showing how both their loyalties and desires are interwoven. I then place the methods for rebuilding Beirut into the larger global context, examining the reasoning behind presenting both a stable city to the outside world and one that was recognizable at home. There were a number of situations in which backlash against the destruction of buildings in Beirut led to more preserved buildings to increase this recognizability, but the desire for a new Beirut was often stronger than this preservation.

I go on to discuss Elyssar, the public company slated to rebuild the South Western suburbs of Beirut after the war. In this section, I focus on the project's concern with reconstructing the airport and the motorway which ran from the suburbs to the downtown area, showing the importance put on the introduction of more wealthy tourists and travelers to downtown Beirut. It ended up failing to construct housing projects, which were originally one of its original purported purposes. In this discussion, I also explore the control of sectarian parties



over the people within these areas, often providing the majority of social services to their citizens. I argue that it is likely that a combination of the state's drive to build up its tourist infrastructure and Hezbollah and Amal's wish to maintain control over these spaces ended up with the construction of the motorway and renovations on the airport, rather than the construction of housing projects.

In the next section, I talk about Solidere and its focus on creating an "Ancient City for the Future." I examine the progression of their building plans, from the Edde Plan, which would be criticized for its "placelessness" to the movement to exemplify the former Merchant Republic, utilizing ancient structures discovered during construction efforts as tourist attractions. Prior plans to create spaces for middle-class merchants fell through as the construction efforts went under way, making the space primarily for the upper class. As well, Solidere demolished a number of the historical landmarks that had been important during and before the war. Finally, I discuss some of the backlash against Solidere, which attempted to halt (or at least slow) the destruction of the historical landmarks. As well, there was big backlash against corruption in the government with many government officials being directly tied to Solidere and, thus, being financially invested in the reconstruction effort.

In the last chapter, I discuss how the narratives constructed by Solidere, the state, sectarian neighborhoods, and middle class intellectuals were all an attempt to cope with the trauma of the war. First, I explicate the narratives of the State and Solidere, which combine to form a collective amnesia concerning the war. The state's narrative (or lack thereof) is illustrated by their regulation of school history textbooks, which do not discuss the war. This narrative is also present in a number of books supported by state funding which displayed Beirut in the

1990s as a blank slate over which Solidere could create a new city. I then go on to discuss the narratives put forth by Solidere, especially concerning the downtown area, which became a symbol for inter-communal relations after the war as it had been before. By focusing on the Beirut Central District (BCD), Solidere placed the violence of the war in this space and made it the symbol for the future of the city. However, it ended up reconstructing the space to accommodate predominantly for the upper class and for wealthy tourists, which placed the middle and lower classes outside of the scope of this identity.

Next, I explore the creation of sectarian narratives of the war, showing how each neighborhood constructed its own version of the war. Each one of these created collective memories within each one of the neighborhoods, maintaining the identities of the sects that had been split because of the violence between sects as well as the displacement of people to create more homogeneous spaces. I discuss the street art created in this time that is often in support of specific political groups and, thus, creates psychological barriers between groups who once were separated by physical barriers. I also explicate some examples of the use of street art to subvert this order. In the final section, I analyze Hoda Barakat's *Tiller of Waters* as an example of one of the many pieces of literature that came out of this period that helped to create a collective memory of Beirut before and during the war. In *Tiller of Waters*, the main character spends the majority of the story in the downtown area, showing the ways in which that space shifted during the war. As well, the novel displays the shifting conception of Beirut as a physical space during the war. This, in combination with the large outpouring of literature and the time concerning the city and the war, created a collective memory of the space. The disparity of the narratives within these works is crucial for the creation of such collective memory, which is not based on a

singular story, but on an amalgamation of many stories all told together. The collectiveness is more in seeking to find the memory surrounding the war than actually having one definitive memory.

This study is, in the end, about a trauma and how people coped with it. It is an attempt to explicate the various narratives surrounding the war and the ways in which people attempted to remember or forget their experiences. With the conclusion of violence with the Taif Agreement, there was a necessity to rebuild a conception of the city, both physically and intellectually. Whether that implied forgetting the war and rebuilding from scratch in the case of Solidere or remembering the war with a wide range of narratives in the case of war literature, the city was being rethought in context with both its recent and ancient history. The methods for reconstructing Beirut may have been different, but they all were an attempt to reconstruct Beirut as an “Ancient City for the Future.”

## Chapter 1: Beirut as a Modern City

*“The outbreak of civil war in 1975 came as a rude shock given the optimism and confidence of the earlier nationalist histories. Salibi, for example, undertook a revisionist history of Lebanon by criticizing various nationalist and sectarian mythologies... He urged the Lebanese and Arabs to unthink many misconceptions and to ‘start from a clean slate.’ Adding to the disenchantment with nationalist discourse, many authors watching the Lebanese predicament singled out sectarianism and religious fanaticism as ‘premodern’ vestiges that have precluded the development of a modern, democratic, and liberal state in the Middle East.”*

*~Usama Makdisi<sup>1</sup>*

### Beirut, the Space

Beirut is often described as an ancient city, one that survived war after war after earthquake after earthquake and saw the rise and fall of numerous empires. Although truly ancient, Beirut did not become the modern city we know today until the late 19th century.<sup>2</sup> During its existence as one of the eastern Mediterranean’s oldest settlements, it had only been a comparatively small port town. Its port was one of many important ports on the Mediterranean, but the city itself was dirty and ugly and crammed with people, covering only 570 meters from the harbor to the southern gate and 370 meters from east to west. In the 1770s and 1820s, maritime threats from Russia and Greece forced consolidation of Beirut’s town walls into seven gates and eight towers around the town center.<sup>3</sup> Outside the fortress-like town lay cemeteries, gardens, sand dunes, and very few houses.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Los Angeles, 2000), 173.

<sup>2</sup> See Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2005).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1-12.

Beirut was also noted to be exceptionally tolerant of most religions. Under the Ottomans, this tolerance was institutionalized with the millet system<sup>5</sup>, but even before the 19th century, Beirut was home to many Maronite Christians, Druze, Greek Orthodox, and Catholics as well as some Shi'a communities. Though Lebanon displayed a wide range of denominations, people also shared a way of life, which facilitated tolerance. Unlike many other cities at the time, Beirut had not been organized into separate sectarian neighborhoods. Some argue that this was due to a lack of strong administrative and manufacturing traditions,<sup>6</sup> while others that social interactions pre-*Tanzimat* were far more concerned with social status than with religion.<sup>7</sup> Either way, the shared way of life between separate religions positively affected behavior between family, friends, and associates, as well as affecting the layout of the city itself.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the 19th century, however, the city was shifting, its old walls mostly destroyed due to a construction boom which caused the price of land to rapidly increase by 40 per cent as the city expanded.<sup>9</sup> By the turn of the century, Beirut (as well as other important Ottoman cities like Istanbul, Salonica, and Izmir) had running water, electricity and tramways which affected the urban landscape as well as every aspect of living.<sup>10</sup> Prior to this point, Beirut had practically no infrastructure. The Egyptians in the 1830s and then the Ottomans in the 1840s onward cleaned up the small and dirty port city and created what would become, in every sense, a new kind of city, one that had more modern infrastructure and a new relationship with its rural

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<sup>5</sup> Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Y. Eyüp Özveren, "Beirut," *Review* 16.4 (Fall, 1993): 469.

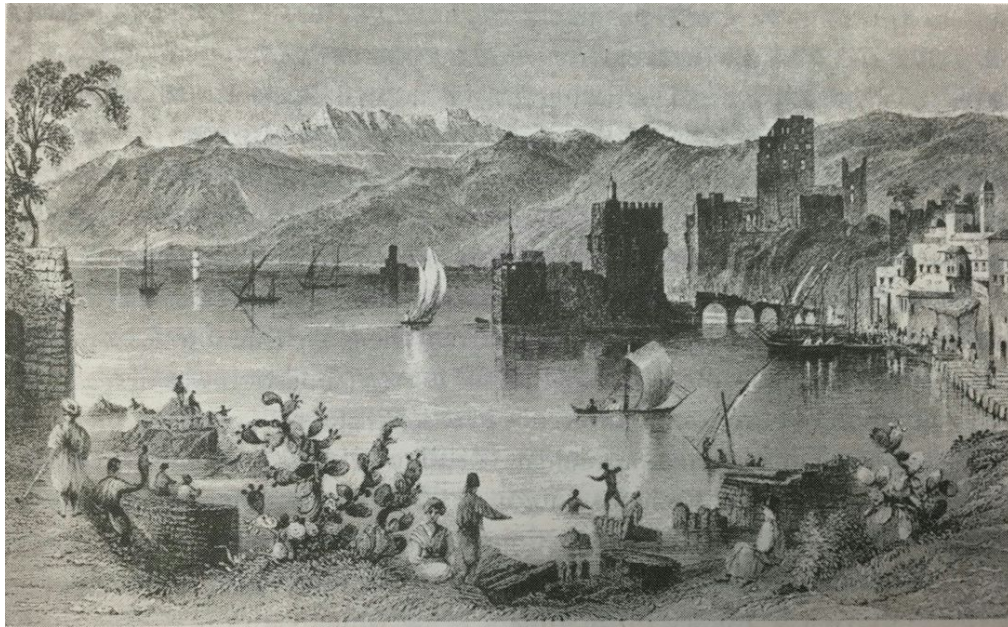
<sup>7</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants*, 104-5.

<sup>9</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto, 2007), 57.

<sup>10</sup> Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, Call.: Stanford University Press, 2011), 22.

surroundings. An increase in opportunities within the city, brought an increase in immigration,<sup>11</sup> and the changing social, political, and economic environment in the Ottoman Empire and in Europe helped to change the layout and organization of the city itself. These shifts, compounded with the increased European involvement in Ottoman and Lebanese politics and the implementation of the *Tanzimat* helped to increase inequalities and animosities between newly conceived sects.<sup>12 13</sup>



**Figure 1.1:** Beirut's port in the early 19th century.<sup>14</sup>

## Beirut Compared

Beirut has often been paired in history with other cities in the modern period. Within the Mediterranean context in the 19th century, it is placed in context with both Alexandria and Haifa, especially as Alexandria and Beirut were both under Egyptian control at this time. The

<sup>11</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 55.

<sup>12</sup> see Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*.

<sup>13</sup> Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, (University of California Press, 2010): 83.

comparison to Haifa continued in the 1920s as competition between France and Britain manifested itself in competition between the two port cities. In the 20th century, Beirut was defined as both the “Paris” and the “Switzerland” of the Middle East, as a cross section between Eastern and Western cultures and ideals. Comparing Beirut with these cities illustrates the ways in which many historians and writers view the city in both Ottoman and global contexts. Beirut was not singularly an insular safehaven, and its unique qualities are illustrated when paired with these other emerging modern cities. At a certain point these comparisons break down, but these breaks indicates certain changes in the economic and political landscape. The rise and fall of these specific comparisons show how Beirut was viewed at specific points in time, illustrating Beirut’s relationship with both the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire and with Europe, especially with Ibrahim Pasha’s fall to the Ottomans and the British in 1840, wherein Lebanon began to juggle with its loyalties to both the Porte and to European powers.

Beirut’s transformation into a modern city was largely due to its growth as an Mediterranean port city in the 19th century. With the implementation of steam ships as well as the increased global market from Europe, Beirut became one of many cities along the Mediterranean that grew in size and influence during this period. Alongside Alexandria and Haifa, Beirut was in a particularly good geographic location, which made it a critical trade route to Damascus. In addition, its hinterland was productive, and Beirut would draw a large number of workers once its prestige increased.<sup>15</sup> From the 1820s to the 1910s, Beirut grew eight-fold in value in terms of Ottoman trade,<sup>16</sup> which improved its reputation, in comparison to Alexandria,

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Ilbert, *Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, 1890-1920* (Columbia University Press: 2002), 96-97.

<sup>16</sup> Çağlar Keyder, Y. Eyüp Özveren and Donald Quataert, “Port-Cities in the Ottoman Empire: Some Theoretical and Historical Perspectives,” *Review* 16.4 (1993): 530-31.

which was, at the time, the only other port in the eastern Mediterranean that naturally had safe enough harbors for deep-sea vessels. Both Alexandria and Beirut were considered to be Egypt's most important ports during Ibrahim Pasha's nine-year rule of the Levant from 1831 to 1840. Ibrahim focused much of its resources on the control of port cities in the region, including Alexandria, Acre, and Beirut.<sup>17</sup> The transformation of Beirut into a more modern port city was catalyzed by this occupation, as Ibrahim had made Beirut the provincial capital and the main port for Damascus. By the 1840s, Beirut's position gave it special standing in comparison with cities such as Aleppo, Tripoli, and Sidon.<sup>18</sup>

This comparison to Alexandria and other port cities broke down with the decline of sea trade in the 20th century which had much to do with changing economic climates. Alexandria prosperity was largely based off of cotton. Thus, with the decline of both sea and cotton trade in the early 20th century, Alexandria's influence began to wane. Conversely, Beirut expanded more slowly from its international trade as its main export was silk which was far less of a commodity. Instead of quick economic expansion, Beirut diversified its markets, becoming a political, education, and cultural center for the Ottoman Empire. In this way, Beirut was able to maintain its relevance as a port city, while Alexandria was not.<sup>19</sup> In addition at the time, the Ottoman Empire was ushering in the modernization reforms of the *Tanzimat*, and this, in combination with increased European interest in Lebanon, forced Beirut elites to maneuver between the powers of the Ottoman Empire and Europe.

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<sup>17</sup> M. Abir, "Modernisation, Reaction and Muhammad Ali's 'Empire'," *Middle Eastern Studies* 13.3 (Oct., 1977): 302-305.

<sup>18</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 110.

<sup>19</sup> Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants*, 3-4.



In the 1920s, Haifa was again rising to prominence under the British, and the French feared that Beirut would no longer remain Damascus's main port. To combat this competition, the French increased their focus on improving infrastructure within and around Beirut. Communication systems were improved with the installation of telephone lines and radio broadcasting under the name of Radio Orient, which competed with the British's Radio Cairo in Egypt and Near East Radio in Jerusalem. Ultimately, it was an increase in transportation infrastructure that placed Beirut above Haifa in the 1920s with an increase in passenger motor transportation and the use of the train system solely for transporting goods.<sup>20</sup> In the 1930s, Haifa again came to prominence with the doubling of its port capacity, and its prominence over Beirut would not come to a close until the end of the decade with the construction of the Bir Hasan Airfield in 1939. Overall, the comparison and competition between these two cities during the 1920s and 30s led to a huge increase in infrastructure and development within Beirut, which was key to Beirut's development into a modern city.<sup>21</sup>

Starting in the 1920s in the beginnings of the French Mandate and continuing through the 1960s, Beirut was often described as the "Paris of the Middle East", and the whole of Lebanon as the "Switzerland of the Middle East". In the 1920s, this comparison was used to justify an increase in tourist and banking infrastructure within Lebanon.<sup>22</sup> In the 1960s, the terminology was used to represent Beirut as a space with "large Arab banks, pleasure-seeking tourists, fabulous nightclubs, and beautiful women who could be purchased for the right price." It was an idealized space where "carefree vacationers sunned themselves on golden beaches" during the

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<sup>20</sup> This is also the beginnings of the communal taxi system, which improved people's abilities to travel to Greater Syria, Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 273.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, 275-8.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, 273.

day and “in the evening the restaurants and clubs opened their doors, and the dance floors were packed with lively crowds moving to the sound of loud music.”<sup>23</sup> These terms placed Beirut as an intersection between East and West, specifically emphasizing for European travellers and tourists the Westness of the exotic place.<sup>24</sup> This comparison drew from a number of sources. First, Beirut had been one of the most important ports for trade between Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. It was largely affected by the modernization efforts of the *Tanzimat*, centralization projects of the Ottoman Empire, and influence by European powers.<sup>25</sup> The comparison also stemmed from a time when Lebanese elite were attempting to maneuver between portraying themselves as loyal to the Sublime Porte and attempting to glean favor from European powers. Thus in 1844, Maronite leader Nicholas Murad described Lebanon as “like another French land” and France as the “*seconde patrie des Maronites*.”<sup>26</sup>

After the war, many nostalgias emerged for the “old” Beirut utilizing this comparison. This formed a romantic ideal of Beirut as an ancient city that had been connected with the world as an international hub of trade for thousands of years. Beirut had only been an important trading post since the 19th century, but these nostalgias would affect the ways in which the city was reconstructed in order to return it to its former glory. During the civil war and beyond, Beirut’s position as interlocutor between East and West became a memory. Beirut *was* the Paris, *was* the Switzerland of the Middle East. No longer could it hold on to such a name with violence

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<sup>23</sup> This is especially striking in this case from two Zionist authors where this image is set in contrast with descriptions of “trained [Palestinian] terrorists”. Although not coming from the Lebanese post-war perspective, this still illustrates the contrast the ideal image provides. Ram Oren and Moti Kfir, *Sylvia Rafael: The Life and Death of a Mossad Spy* (University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Rachel Morris, “Fear and Loathing in the Levant,” *Australian Quarterly* 74.2 (2002): 26.

<sup>25</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 52.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Murad, *Notice historique sur l’origine de la nation Maronite et sur ses rapports avec la France, sur la nation Druze et sur les diverses populations du Mont Liban* (Paris: Cariscript, 1988 [1844]), 38-40. cited in Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 83.

becoming an everyday event in a city literally split down the middle with sectarian divides.<sup>27</sup> However, it could hold onto this comparison as a form of nostalgia for what Beirut had been and what it could be. When the comparison broke down with the civil war, Beirut became an exemplar of a failed experiment in modernity in the eyes of many European (and also Arab) scholars. The city had been a “polyglot metropolis,”<sup>28</sup> a paradise for those seeking intercommunal (and intersectional) spaces. However, this was only an idealized version of the space, in which people were kinder to other sects. In truth, many of the underlying causes for conflict in the war were rooted in sectarian divides that were very present by the 1960s. I will discuss the desire for return to this ideal both architecturally and intellectually further in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. For now, I will note that it is this vision of a city sitting the West and the East, between modern and ancient, that lay the groundwork for much of the dialogue surrounding reconstruction.<sup>29</sup>

### **Populations in Beirut**

Beirut’s comparison to these cities was predicated by its development into a modern port city. This development also spurred a huge increase in immigration from the hinterlands. On the flip side, Beirut would not have rose to such prominence as a port city without the huge influx of people in the 19th century. The increase in immigration brought a shift towards sectarian conflict. To understand this shift, we first must view which communities were present in the city and how long they existed. While some groups lived in Beirut for centuries, others had recently

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<sup>27</sup> Rachel Morris, “Fear and Loathing,” 26.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* 36.

<sup>29</sup> This could be seen in postcards after the war, which displayed Beirut in the 1960s throughout and after the war. See Lawrence Chua, “Virtual Beirut,” *Transition* 83 (2000): 36.

immigrated due to civil unrest in the hinterlands as well as opportunities for work within the city and its newly forming suburbs. Many of these immigrants did not consider themselves to be Beirut, identifying with the villages they or their families were from originally. Nevertheless, both immigrants and former residents, constructed the populous and environment within the city walls.

Beirut grew in population in the nineteenth century from from about 6,000 residents to 120,000, predominantly through immigration. This growth had much to do with Beirut's rise within a new world market and the ascendancy of Western Europe, as jobs in both the city center and the suburbs rapidly increased. However, the increased population also brought with it many issues. As people migrated to Beirut, they brought their pasts and their reasons for migrations with them. Their positions in Beirut society were often dictated by their place of origin originated and their prejudices carried over into the city, especially while fleeing from decades of sectarian violence in the hinterlands.<sup>30</sup> This began a trend of forced displacement in Lebanon due to violence. In both this context as well as the context of displacement during the civil war (which will be discussed in Chapter 2), we must attempt to understand the difficulties inherent in such forced migration, especially at such magnitude. In her discussion on migration within Beirut during this time, Lebanese historian Leila Fawaz writes that:

Migration involves not just abstract situations but acute disruptions in the lives of individuals, both those who move and those who stay behind. Ties are severed in the family, the clan, the quarter, the neighborhood, the whole village, especially when there is no time to plan because of the circumstances that surround hasty but often permanent departures... but too often scholarly analysis ignores this human element.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants*, 4.

Though always involving personal relations, travel concerns have not remained the same over the past two centuries. In the present day, travelling entails countless bureaucratic concerns, while in the 19th century, the issues rested primarily with physical dangers. In the displacement of the early 19th century in Lebanon, there existed a viable space for relocation within Beirut, in which opportunities for education and trade were far more abundant than in the hinterlands.<sup>32</sup> As a growing political, educational, and cultural center starting in the 1830s under Ibrahim Pasha, Beirut presented a good option for immigrants.<sup>33</sup> This sort of option would not be as present once the civil war began, as refugees would only viably be able to either squat in other houses or live in informal settlements.<sup>34</sup> The human aspect involved in both the process of leaving home and in the process of resettling would largely play into the normalization of violence discussed in Chapter 2. Huge quantities of people were forced to relocate from their homes causing disputes after the war as to ownership of apartments and living spaces, as well as the creation of illegal informal settlements, especially in the southern suburbs. Many individuals left the city altogether, while others grew closer to the idea of Beirut as an un-leavable home.<sup>35</sup> People do not displace themselves without cause, and it is crucial to keep this in mind as we discuss the war itself.

As well as leaving certain spaces for specific reasons, migrants displaced by conflict bring with them holdovers from their previous homes. Individuals forced to relocate were reluctant to change their worldviews when they moved. The shift to an urban context helped to

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> See Falk Jähnigen, "The Coastal Settlements of Ouzai and Jnah: Analysis of an Upgrading Project in Beirut," in *Popular Housing and Urban Land Tenure in the Middle East*, ed. Myriam Ababsa and Baudouin Dupret and Eric Denis (American University in Cairo Press, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> See Jean Said Makdisi, *Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir*, (Persea Books, 1990).

solidify traditional ties to the hinterlands, and assimilation into Beirut culture was often made difficult both by immigrants and residents.<sup>36</sup> All of these factors worked to shift the physical layout of the city, which was originally divided according to socioeconomic standing rather than religious affiliation. The partition in 1842 would cause shifts towards sectarian divides first in the political system and later in the physical layout of Beirut.<sup>37</sup> Along with these shifts in the socioeconomic and political environment due to immigration, Beirut's relationship to its hinterlands was changing. Under Egyptian occupation, it became the provincial capital, and when Ottomans regained control in 1840, it became the capital of the vilayet of Sidon. In 1864, it became a *sanjak* in the vilayet of Syria along with Acre, Tripoli, Latakia, and Nablus. Then, in 1887, it became the capital city of the newly formed vilayet of Beirut.<sup>38</sup>

### **On Sectarianism**

To this point, I have discussed Beirut before the implementation of the *Tanzimat*, a reform project by the Ottoman government which attempted to modernize the empire. The 1840s brought many changes to the political and social landscape with the expulsion of Egyptians occupation, the shift of the Ottoman governor's seat from Acre to Beirut, and the partition of Mount Lebanon. Before this time, Beirut was seen as a space in which social relations were far more based on status than on religion and whose organization followed these ideas. It was viewed as a sort of sanctuary for coexistence between "sects," and there was a surprising lack of violence. In retrospect, the sectarian violence of the 19th and 20th century is viewed as the complete negation of these ideals of tolerance and the reason for the failure of both

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<sup>36</sup> Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 78-80.

<sup>38</sup> Fawaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 52-55.

modernization and of national projects within Beirut. These views on the history of sectarianism break the Lebanese populace concisely into age-old sects which must, inherently, be at odds.<sup>39</sup> It is not correct to say that religious distinctions were not made in the early 19th century (in fact, conversion was viewed as treachery). However, the categories of rank and status were far more important in terms of the treatment of different people. Violence was present in pre-1840 Lebanon, but this violence was mainly between elites in the context of a status-based society. This divide was more marked by power, money, and education than by religious affiliation.<sup>40</sup> The culture of sectarianism in late 19th century Lebanon stemmed from the policies of conflicting reform efforts and the reactions to them by local peoples.

Europeans often sought to categorize and separate Lebanese culture along sectarian lines, as their worldview originated in a culture that was predicated on such divides. However, while encountering coexistence between religious groups, they saw Christians and Muslims participating in each others' feasts and customs. Missionary, Louis Abougit described this as the "kind of activity [that] passed for good manners, sociability, while in truth it resulted in nothing more than the weakening of religious sentiments."<sup>41</sup> In many ways, missionaries like Abougit saw this coexistence as an inconvenience for the purity of their mission to convert and educate the Lebanese people. Their conceptions of religious discord within European society transferred to Lebanese society, as their worldviews did not allow for such coexistence.

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<sup>39</sup> For a more complete discussion on sectarianism as well as historians who mark sectarianism as such a scourge on modernization, see Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 23-27.

<sup>40</sup> Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Riccadonna, quoted in Jullien, *La Nouvelle mission*, 1, pp. 81, 263, quoted in Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 92.

Drawing from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Ussama Makdisi, chair of the Arab-American Education Foundation, describes Lebanese tribes as a European invention and not, as Said would describe it "an inert fact of nature."<sup>42</sup>

European imagination invented the tribes of Lebanon. While most accounts reminisced about a biblical topography, they invariably enumerated and described the different communities that lived in Mount Lebanon... so although Druzes and Maronites often lived in the same village, shared the same customs, and owed allegiance to the same notables, they were nevertheless described separately in Western literature and therefore were imagined and experienced separately in Mount Lebanon.<sup>43</sup>

This invention informed countless European and American travelers and historians visiting Lebanon, viewing the people of Lebanon through the lens this self-referential discourse which was "distributed textually and reinforced anecdotally."<sup>44</sup> From this understanding, European histories often attributed concrete labels to ethnic groups and assumed that each had distinct political interests. With the nation-state at the core of their understanding, Europeans often drew ethnic and religious lines within Lebanese culture.<sup>45</sup> Thus, when encountering a more mixed space that often prided itself on this fact, there was a desire to categorize its peoples into sectarian categories. In this way, they involved themselves in what Makdisi describes as a "gentle crusade", an attempt to reform Lebanon and its Islamic despotism using missionaries and education.<sup>46</sup>

The Ottomans, on the other hand, were in the process of implementing the *Tanzimat* (the Gülhane decree) which stood on the basis of religious equality and came as a reaction to both military pressure from Ibrahim Pasha and European diplomacy. Outside of Beirut, the Ottomans

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<sup>42</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 7-8.

<sup>46</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 16.



often implemented their conception of religious equality on far more homogenous spaces. In the case of Lebanon, which had strong religious majorities and minorities, the implementation of such religious equality was often problematic and led to a number of reforms that ended up acting in opposition to this ideal. The first of these reforms was the partition of Lebanon in 1842, which separated it into a northern, Christian district and a southern, Druze district.<sup>47</sup> This partition was highly affected by European pressure, led by Stratford Canning. Ottoman rulers were very cautious about the idea at first, believing that it would cause more disorder than order, but European powers refused to listen, and the Ottomans ultimately enacted the reform. Although proclaiming religious equality, this partition assumed distinct tribes and prompted conflict between Druzes and Maronite leadership in the two districts, which both called upon their “ancestral histories”, claiming to the rightful leaders of the land. Demographic relationships were also at issue, especially in the south, where Christians were still held the majority.<sup>48</sup>

The second reform enacted in 1845 was the *Règlement* of the new Ottoman foreign minister, Şekib Efendi. This created a council for each one of the denominations, consisting of a judge and an advisor. The concept for the *Règlement* rooted back to Egyptian rule when Damascus suggested for Egypt to create a local council in Beirut consisting of a president, an Egyptian officer-engineer, six Muslims and six Christians. It also served as a precursor for the 1860s municipal council, which would, in turn, serve as a precursor for the sectarian government the French Mandate period and of the National Pact in 1943.<sup>49</sup> This idea of a religiously based government was an attempt at attaining religious equality, but, instead, it further divided the

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, 78-80.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>49</sup> Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 31.

sects.<sup>50</sup> These two examples indicate the larger issues raised by the implementation of the Gülhane decree.

The often conflicting attempts of both the Ottomans and the Europeans to “modernize” Lebanon caused both Maronite and Druze elites in Lebanon to maneuver in order to glean favor from these higher powers. Both religious groups portrayed themselves along strong sectarian lines in order to achieve intelligibility by the Ottomans and the Europeans alike. In this way, these sects would define themselves as the voice for their supposedly primordial tribes.<sup>51</sup> This was a successful as a way to justify their individual rights to power, but it also further galvanized sectarian difference, as religion became the proper strategy to maneuver for power in Lebanon. While discussing relations between multi-religious communities in the Ottoman Empire, historian, Michelle Campos emphasizes that the existence of violence in the early 19th century was undeniable, but, more often than not, this stemmed from causes outside of religion.

The Ottoman record on intercommunal relations was neither one of peaceful coexistence nor one of intractable violence, although elements of both were certainly present. Rather, relations between Muslims, Christians, and Jews were inexorably linked to political, economic, and social factors that stemmed from local, imperial, and global geopolitical concerns.<sup>52</sup>

As Fawaz explains, there is a difficulty in knowing the amount of hostility between religious groups in Beirut in the mid-nineteenth century as most of the sources are a European or Christian perspective. However, being in the same era under the same Ottoman government and being in close proximity with Palestine (which is Campos’s focus) one can infer that relations were similar at the time in Beirut. The beginnings of these sectarian conflicts lay in the political

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<sup>50</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 84-85.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, 77.

<sup>52</sup> Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 11.

context of the region at the time. However, they would become far more ingrained in the political system and the social context with the approach of the 20th century.

### **Causes for War**

It is the question of any historian working within a linear framework to decide when to begin. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, the search for root causes is common in the historiography of the Lebanese Civil War. The causes discussed in the following section not only would affect the beginning of the war, but they would affect the course of the war and the dialogues present during the 1990's. I focus specifically on two events, first, the Events of 1860 and second, the shift to Independence from the French Mandate in 1943. Both of these focus on the effects sectarian divides within the government had on relations between people within different religious affiliations. Along with the short civil war in 1958, they are marked as precursors or warning signs for the civil war in 1975.

As explicated in the previous sections, the seeds of sectarian conflict were being sown with the growth of modernization efforts by both Ottoman and European powers in the early 1800s. Much of the conflict within Beirut was tied to immigrants who arrived in Beirut attempting to escape violence in the hinterlands. The outbreak of violence in 1860 was indicative of this growing animosity, and, it paved the way for further sectarian strife.<sup>53</sup> Before this violence, Beirut had been characterized as extremely resilient to the sectarian struggles surrounding the city in the hinterlands and in greater Syria. This resilience is largely due to the financial and commercial interests of Beirutis which would be largely disrupted if stability broke down.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Leila Fawaz, "The City and the Mountain: Beirut's Political Radius in the Nineteenth Century as Revealed in the Crisis of 1860," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16.4 (1984): 494.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, 494.

Conflicts are counterproductive to business relations, which are a huge impetus for social stability or change. While Beirut grew as an important port city and economic and political capital, this stability was crucial. In this way, the Mountains surrounding Beirut grew to rely on Beirut financially, making Beirut to become the heart of economic and cultural life in the area. Unrest in the hinterlands affected Beirut through a combination of immigration and economic relationships. When sectarian conflicts erupted in the hinterlands and later the Mountains, Beirut was affected by nature of proximity in space, personal relations, and economies. These conflicts were local reactions to the Gülhane decree, the partition of Lebanon, and the introduction of sectarian divides in government. They marked a turning point in Beirut's intercommunal relations from one of general peace to one of discord.<sup>55</sup>

As stated above, Şekib Efendi's *Règlement* of 1845 provided the groundwork for sectarian government structures, calling for single advisors for each one of the supposed sects.<sup>56</sup> This structure would be mimicked by the French Mandate after the fall of Faisal's Arab government to the Allied Forces in 1920.<sup>57</sup> The Lebanese constitution that came out of the French Mandate called for a Chamber of Deputies that had to proportionately represent the population's sects. In the Chamber of Deputies, each member chose the president who chose the prime minister who, in turn, formed a cabinet.<sup>58</sup> The conception of the French Mandate system is markedly different from the *Règlement*, but it stems from the same conception of the necessity for representation by each one of the religions in Beirut. This system shifted again with the

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, 490.

<sup>56</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 84.

<sup>57</sup> For more of a discussion on these events see Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), Preface.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Chamie, "The Lebanese Civil War: An Investigation Into the Causes," *World Affairs* 139.3 (Winter, 1976/77), 172.

National Pact of 1943 which stated that Lebanese presidents should be Maronites, prime ministers Sunnis, and speakers of the Chamber Shi'as.<sup>59</sup> This pact may have followed independence from the French Mandate and purported equality between all citizens, but it perpetuated and furthered the system of sectarian government with Maronites in control.<sup>60</sup> Other denominations presented a desire to change this secular government system which is still based off of a census taken in 1932, but this would be made impossible once the sectarian system became more entrenched. The concrete religious divide within the power structure sowed the seeds for conflict in both 1958 and 1975.

## **Conclusion**

Political and demographic changes within Beirut have strongly affected space and sectarian relations within the city. Before the 19th century, Beirut had been a small, relatively unimportant port town, consisting of a cramped and dirty fortress with under 6,000 people. In 19th century, it grew exponentially with mass immigration from the hinterlands due to a combination of conflicts in these areas and opportunity within the city and its newly forming suburbs. The factors that affected sectarian relations also affected the physical space of Beirut. The Egyptian occupation of the Levant made Beirut the provincial capital and improved maritime trade which greatly increased migration in the following decades. Because of this, the city expanded quickly, demolishing many of the walls of the former fortress. Those entering the city brought with them changing notions of their sectarian relationships based on the modernization policies of the Ottomans and Europeans. The partition of Lebanon 1842

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, 173.

<sup>60</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 109.

sectarianized the geographic and political layout of Lebanon, shifting relationships between Druze and Christians. The implementation of sectarian-based governance led to power struggles based on religion. This continued through to the French Mandate system and the National Pact of 1943.

As we discuss the civil war itself, this relationship between people, politics, and space will play a crucial role. During the war, the urban environment changed drastically, dividing itself into distinctly Christian and Muslim sections. Citizens were forced to come in direct contact with violence regularly and adjusted their lives accordingly, effectively normalizing the violence. Family members were killed or injured, buildings were pockmarked, cars were destroyed, and people were forced to migrate out of the country or change location within the city. Beirut's relationship to itself and to the world around it changed with its people and the space itself. No longer was it a small port town, but rather, a large metropolis in crisis.



**Figure 1.2:** Beirut's port in the early 1970's.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 361.

## Chapter 2: Everyday Violence in the Civil War

*“Abhorrent as it was, the fighting went on largely because it was, in a sense, normalized and routinized. In the words of Judith Shklar...it was transformed into an ‘ordinary vice;’ something that, although horrible, was expectable. The grotesque became mundane, a recurrent every-day routine. The dreadful and outrageous were no longer dreaded.”*

-Samir Khalaf<sup>1</sup>

*“Despite Beirut’s success in creating a common way of life, its talent for blending disparate elements was overcome at last by ideology and politics. Its meeting places, no longer forums of gregarious civility where the corrosive effects of narrow self-interest were resolutely combated, turned into desolate crossroads from which each person could pridefully depart without having had to cede the least part of his dignity. Henceforth the synthesis of the city’s contradictions was to be achieved in the perpetuation of war.”*

~Samir Kassir<sup>2</sup>

### Historiography and a Focus on the Causes

In the last chapter, I discussed Beirut in both its global and Lebanese contexts as well as explicating some of the longer-term causes of the civil war. This search for early “warning signs” of sectarian conflict is a common trend among historians studying civil wars. As Al Jazeera’s documentary series *Harb Lubnan* states about the aftermath of the Ain el-Ramaneh shooting, “26 Palestinians were killed in the bus, and finally, Lebanon’s war broke out.”<sup>3</sup> Using the term, “finally” (*akheeran*) implies that history was all leading to that moment. It takes two and a half 45 minute episodes beginning with the National Pact in 1943 to reach this point, illustrating sectarian differences and underlying causes for the war that would end up playing a huge role in

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<sup>1</sup> Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internalization of Communal Conflict*, (Columbia University Press, 2002): 237.

<sup>2</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 440.

<sup>3</sup> “The Lebanese Civil War -- Explosion - 03/15- الحرب الأهلية اللبنانية,” Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-iQIachtjs>.

the violence.<sup>4</sup> Though perhaps deterministic of the war's inevitability, the series (and many of the causes discussed in the previous chapter) does illustrate the context in which the Civil War was made possible. These causes remain prevalent throughout the war and after.

In this chapter, I will illustrate three trends during the war that provide context for the discourses surrounding the reconstruction of Beirut. First, I will examine the ways in which violence manifested itself in the everyday functions of ordinary people. This will help to illustrate the psychological (and physical) toll of the war that necessitated a reconstruction of the city, both physically and intellectually. Second, I will discuss the ways in which the war solidified sectarian neighborhoods that would play a huge part in the discussion of Beirut's past as a cosmopolitan site. Lastly, I will discuss the war's effect on the downtown area, which would be the focus of Solidere's reconstruction plans after the war. This will show the disparity between Solidere's vision of downtown as an ideal *tabula rasa* for reconstruction and the existing physical space of downtown directly following the war. After the Taif agreement, downtown was bulldozed to make room for Solidere's reconstruction project and for its narratives which will be discussed in the following chapters.

### **A Brief Overview on the Structure of the War**

It is not my goal to define all of the militias<sup>5</sup> who participated in the war or to present all of the constantly shifting targets of violence. My presentation of a handful of these parties is only to show that, sides shifted so often that it was consistently difficult to tell who was fighting

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps an even more telling example of this is Samir Kassir's *Beirut*, which spends five pages on the war after 510 about the leadup to that point. The epilogue then skips to reconstruction. Samir Kassir, *Beirut*.

<sup>5</sup> By 1984, there were at least 186 factions, so to delve into that subject would be, as Khalaf puts it, "a dizzying and perplexing task" and beyond the scope of this paper. Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 240-1.



whom. Violence appeared to be random, in a day, allies could become enemies or vice versa.<sup>6</sup> Ruling out the practicality of providing a comprehensive account of the war, I will outline a selective structure of the war in order to preface the ways in which reconstruction was treated after the Taif Agreement. I will also bring to attention specific moments in which the downtown area was especially affected and in which neighborhoods were split, which will be very pertinent to my discussion on the reconstruction efforts. The war itself was separated into three longer periods (though violence also started and stopped within these periods and did occur between them).

The first period (1975-76), described by historian Fawaz Traboulsi as the “Two Year War” or the “Christian-Palestinian War,” consisted of a confrontation mainly between the Maronite Phalange party and their allies in the Lebanese Front on one side and the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) on the other.<sup>7</sup> With tensions building, the war officially erupted on April 13, 1975 with the massacre by Phalangist gunmen of 27 Palestinians returning from Tall al-Za’tar to their camp in Shatila. According to Lebanese historian, Samir Kassir, in the beginning of the conflict, many denied that this conflict was a war, describing the events as just that: “events” or *ahdath*.<sup>8</sup> However, later that year, it could not be denied that the events had become a full-fledged war. This period marked the loss of the downtown area's position as a meeting point for members of the larger Beirut community. Previously being a cosmopolitan site which acted as a bridge between East and West Beirut, downtown became a barrier between the increasingly homogenized spaces. It is also during this period that the Battle of the Hotels

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<sup>6</sup> For an in depth view of the different militias, see Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: the Abduction of Lebanon* and Fawaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*.

<sup>7</sup> Fawaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 187.

<sup>8</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 511.

occurred, characterized by a struggle to control the main large hotels in the downtown area. In June of 1976, the Syrian army entered Lebanon to fight against the Palestinian resistance, creating further divides between different communities within the city. However, the Syrians also promoted stability under the recently elected President Elias Sarkis (1976-82), and the intervention was able to maintain peace for about a year.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2.1:** The Phoenicia Hotel and the Holiday Inn, two of the main contested spaces in the Battle of the Hotels. Photograph by Author in 2015.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Fisk describes the last battle of this period saying that “for to the very last absurd minute, the combatants went on shooting at each other, as if they could not resist one last battle, as if the front line and the war had become inseparable from their own lives.” This is indicative of the difficulty of ending habituated and geographically situated. violence Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: the Abduction of Lebanon*. (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002): 88.

The second period of the war (1977-82) erupted with the assassination of Kamal Jumblatt, Lebanese politician and leader of the opposition to the Syrian intervention, combined with Israel's growing control of southern Lebanon in September. Both events sparked violence that would last until September 1982 with the stabilizing of Beirut after Israel's invasion.. This phase was characterized by many major shifts in allegiances. One example is the Hundred Days' War in 1978 in the East Beirut neighborhood of Ashrafieh between the Christian Lebanese Front militia and the Syrian Arab Deterrent Force (ADF). This marked a break in these groups' former alliance against the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). This is exemplary of the seeming randomness of violence, as former allies quickly turned into enemies and vice-versa as the war went on. During this period, as well, Israel gained power in the South, beginning with a proxy army used to put pressure on Syria and disarm Palestinians, then invading in March 1978 and creating a frontier zone in the South. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) ended up constituting another buffer zone between Israel's frontier and the PLO. By 1981, the PLO were able to halt Israeli advances for a time, but the conflict flared again with Israel's invasion of Beirut in 1982. The siege in August decimated West Beirut and forced the exit of the PLO under the supervision of the U.N. Multinational Force (MNF) on August 23. Although many of these events did not occur specifically in downtown, this violence furthered animosity between different sects and sharpened the divide between East and West Beirut, as the East remained relatively unscathed by the Israeli siege. The assassination of president-elect Bashir Gemayel (1982) on September 14 lead to both Israeli forces entering West Beirut and the massacres of over a thousand Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila camps at the hands of the

Lebanese Forces (LF).<sup>10</sup> The MNF, which had left for a short period in the beginning of September, returned and helped to stabilize the country for about a year.

During this lull in violence, Beirut's downtown was able to rebuild for a short time. However, in 1983, the third period (1983-90/1) erupted with violence in the Shuf Mountains between the Maronite Phalangists and the Druze. This period was characterized by especially strong violence in the downtown area and huge splits within the remaining government system. Within the city itself, violence sparked as the Syrians killed three Israeli soldiers in West Beirut, launching resistance against the Israeli invasion which would lead to their withdrawal from most of Lebanon in February, 1985.<sup>11</sup> These events between Syrians and Israelis within Lebanon are indicative of the growing complexity of the war as both an internal conflict and a proxy for conflicts in the surrounding area.<sup>12</sup> The remaining years of the war were marked by the lack of a president (Amin Gemayel's presidency had ended without the election of a new president), the competition between two prime ministers (Gemayel had appointed General Michel Aoun, and Salim al-Huss retracted his decision to resign as Prime Minister after Aoun's appointment), and the conflicts between Aoun and Samir Ja'Ja', the head of the LF. After the war, Aoun was exiled and Ja'Ja' was sentenced to life in prison, the only case in which a Lebanese official was tried for war crimes.<sup>13</sup> Aoun would return to the Lebanese political stage as President in 1998. The existence of such returns is indicative of the desire of many Lebanese after the war to forgive and forget wartime atrocities. In 1989, the Document of National Understanding, known as the Taif Agreement, was signed in Saudi Arabia, calling for the creation of a Third Lebanese Republic.

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<sup>10</sup> Fawaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 214-9, Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*, trans. John Richardson, (London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1993): 256-64.

<sup>11</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 516.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the effect of these proxy struggles, see Fawaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 228.

<sup>13</sup> "Amnesty for Lebanese ex-warlord," BBC, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4693091.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4693091.stm).

This agreement proposed to formally abolish sectarianism and reorganize the government to follow suit. Although successfully drawing the violence to a close, the agreement was unsuccessful in abolishing sectarianism, especially with the Green Line between East and West Beirut still strong in the Beiruti imaginary. As well, there was strong opposition to desectarianizing the space from Christian leaders who greatly benefited from the existing system. The agreement did, however, shift some aspects of the political system, with a readjustment in the distribution of parliamentary seats to more sectarian equality. As well, sectarian quotas were abolished in most civil service posts.<sup>14</sup> The structure of the war that I have provided illustrates just some of the nearly 200 militias and their shifting relations and shows the impetus for the desire to reconstruct the downtown area after the war. The structure would deeply affect the ways in which people treated everyday functions throughout this process.

### **The Construction of Everyday Violence**

In order to tangibly illustrate the seemingly random and complicated system of routinized violence during the war, I will examine three aspects. First, I will discuss the physical damage inflicted on buildings and persons, illustrating the scope of death and violence. Second, I will illustrate children's practices and games which show the larger effect of violence on the younger generation who were either born into or were growing up during the civil war. Finally, I will explicate the economic implications of such protracted violence, in order to show the financial implications of reconstruction. To preface this discussion, I note that, more often than not, those who were involved or affected by violence were ordinary people. By this, I mean those who "fall

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, 244.

within the statistical mean for society” and those who do not suffer from serious mental illness.<sup>15</sup> To describe the ways in which violence crept into the everyday, one must note that, very often, it was not extraordinary or extremist people who were involved in the violence (let alone those who were affected by it without involving themselves directly). Very often, it was ordinary people who coped with the violence by making it part of their daily routines. The toll that violence took on ordinary people and spaces would lead to a reconstruction process centered around a dialogue on a more idyllic Lebanese past, one bereft of 15 years of an omnipresent civil war.

Most people in Beierut during the war either experienced deprivation, were forced to take refuge from violence, or had friends or relatives die or get injured. A survey taken in 1983 on 900 heads of household showed that 74% of this group experienced deprivation of some sort, meaning “being denied water, electricity, and other basic amenities.” It was also far from an uncommon event for people to have family or close friends affected by violence. More than half of this group’s friends and relatives also experienced deprivation during this time. Though often not extreme, this basic deprivation was more-or-less a constant in people’s lives. By far more traumatic was close contact with death and injury. 36% of the respondents had family members who had died and 38% had close friends who had died. As well, a quarter of these people had been witness to war-related deaths.<sup>16</sup> The scope of violence was huge, but it was also routinized, as people changed their daily rhythms, taking precautions to not stay outside for very long and often moving jobs and schools closer to home.<sup>17</sup> This is also shown through personal diaries and

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<sup>15</sup> Lina Haddad Kreidie and Kristen Renwick Monroe, “Psychological Boundaries and Ethnic Conflict: How Identity Constrained Choice and Worked to Turn Ordinary People into Perpetrators of Ethnic Violence during the Lebanese Civil War,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16.1 (Fall, 2002): 33.

<sup>16</sup> Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*, 254.

<sup>17</sup> Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon*, 357.

memoirs, which would often report deaths matter-of-factly as though they were weather reports.

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This matter-of-factness stretched into the lives of children who grew up during the war and did not know a world outside of it. The ages of these children ranged from infants to adolescents, so each age was affected differently, but, as a rule, the war became the only lifestyle these children knew. Violence affected their daily routines, often closing school and affecting the way they interacted with the world. As well, even if the schools were not closed, they were often in extremely poor condition after years of neglect and did not pay teachers high enough salaries to survive. Schools also ended up cutting down on some subjects including sports, art, history, and geography, so they could cover what they considered more important material in shortened school years.<sup>19</sup> Violence was even normalized in children's games, for which they collected cartridges, empty shells, and bullets and played war with their friends.<sup>20</sup> The war also led to the death of many parents and relatives, often moving children to join militias out of either revenge or a search for a sort of family, providing a sort of stability, calm, and fearlessness that was often not present in the home space. Militias also provided the possibility for social mobility in a space that did not provide such opportunities elsewhere. Members of militias would often sit playing cards on the streets with their weapons, displaying their power with their fearlessness towards other militias.<sup>21</sup>

One can see this interaction with war and violence clearly in the award winning 1998 film, *West Beirut*, which focuses in on the life of Tarek as he grows up during the war. It serves

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<sup>18</sup> Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*, 238.

<sup>19</sup> Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon*, 358.

<sup>20</sup> Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*, 238.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, 239.

as an homage to the lives of children during the war as they were often deprived of education and stability. In the opening scene, Tarek witnesses the Ain el-Ramaneh Massacre from the window of his school. Being a Muslim from West Beirut, he is soon unable to cross the city to attend his French school in East Beirut and so his education is put on hold. Instead of attending school, he explores West Beirut with his friends, one Muslim boy and a Christian girl who was unable to cross the Green Line between East and West Beirut and is often expected to hide her religion in order to survive. In the beginning of the war, the children act as though the war is a game, as they get to miss school and are able to do what they want with their days, but this shifts by the end as they wonder if the lifestyle of violence would ever end.<sup>22</sup> The normalization and routinization of violence into the everyday is illustrated very clearly in these children. Through them, we see the ways in which the entire family unit was affected by violence. Not only would a large majority lose their access to basic amenities and have close relations die, but children would grow up knowing only a world in which violence was a normal affair.

Violence, in this way, clearly took a toll on the psyche of individuals and the communities throughout Beirut, but it also ended up destroying the physical and economic space. Before the war, the services sector had accounted for approximately 70 percent of Lebanon's GDP. Though often resilient to wartime strains as some damages were repaired after each round of fighting, the war took a huge toll on the economy.<sup>23</sup> Estimates from 1982 from the World Bank, the U.S. Government, the International Monetary Fund, and the Lebanese Government stated that the physical damage between 1975-82 would cost approximately twelve billion dollars to repair. By 1984, the cost of the war had increased to 16 billion dollars, and this was

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<sup>22</sup> *West Beirut*, Directed by Ziad Doueiri (1998; Lebanon, 38 Productions).

<sup>23</sup> Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon*, 350.



just at the beginning of the third phase of the war (1983-90), which would end in 1990.<sup>24</sup> This cost was assessed from the combination of repairs on destroyed and damaged houses and hotels, shopping centers, factories, roads and infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and personal and business assets,<sup>25</sup> as well as losses due to movement of emigrants and their assets out of Lebanon during the war.<sup>26</sup> Oddly enough, there are certain parts of the city that were spared from the violence. The Rue des Banques, for example, remained generally untouched by the war as the effect of money deterred militias from fighting there.<sup>27</sup>

### **Displacement and The Construction of Sectarian Neighborhoods**

The war created a shift in the ways in which Beirutis related to their place. Michel de Certeau explains that a *place* (i.e. a distinct location) transforms into a *space* when people interact with it. “In short, *space* is a *practiced place*” (Certeau’s emphasis).<sup>28</sup> When *places* are physically changed, and people have to move to new spaces, their interactions with these places shift. Throughout the war, there was a mix of both temporary and permanent displacement of individuals from their homes. As described by Maha Yahya, a Senior Associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center, temporary displacement implies that people left their homes during periods of intense fighting with the intention of returning, and permanent displacement indicates that people left their homes with the intention of settling in more welcoming areas, unlikely to ever return home until the violence completely subsided (and even then, improbable due to people

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<sup>24</sup> Edward E. Azar, *The Emergence of a New Lebanon: Fantasy or Reality?*, (New York: CBS Educational and Professional Publishing, 1984): 70.

<sup>25</sup> Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon*, 351.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, 353.

<sup>27</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 520.

<sup>28</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984): 117.

who squatted in their old homes).<sup>29</sup> A study conducted in 1986 on 3,000 individuals in both East and West Beirut showed that 27.8% of these people in East Beirut had made a permanent migration, and 47.8% of those in West Beirut had done the same. The numbers are significantly higher when it comes to temporary displacement (82.5% in East Beirut had been temporarily displaced once, and 69.9% in West Beirut). Although this study covers only a small portion of the population, this is indicative of the general trend of displacement, with estimates of at least 1 million displaced by 1984 alone.<sup>30</sup>

This displacement paid a huge psychological toll on residents of the city. Samir Khalaf, historian and a prominent figure in the narratives in reconstructing the city after the war, describes displaced peoples as homeless in three ways:

They suffer the angst of being dislodged from their most enduring attachments and familiar places; they also suffer banishment and the stigma of being outcasts in their neighborhoods and homes; and finally, much like the truly exiled, they are impelled by an urge to reassemble a damaged identity and a broken history. Imagining the old places, with all their nostalgic longings, serves as their only reprieve from the uncertainties and anxieties of the present.<sup>31</sup>

These displaced people were usually not technically homeless. They did find shelters, though the concept of shelter itself is problematic as buildings were often shelled and surrounded by violence. However, they did lose their original abodes and, in this way, their sense of a present home. Individuals were forced to acquaint themselves with new maps of place and new boundaries between themselves and others. De Certeau argues that, in urban environments especially, people tend to map out boundaries between their location and others, that of the local and that of the journey. “From the functioning of the urban network to that of the rural

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<sup>29</sup> Maha Yahya, “Reconstituting Space: The Aberration of the Urban in Beirut,” in *Recovering Beirut: Urban Design and Post-War Reconstruction*, ed. Samir Khalaf and Philip S. Khoury (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993): 162.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, 157-63.

<sup>31</sup> Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*, 244.

landscape, there is no spatiality that is not organized by a determination of frontiers.”<sup>32</sup> This is especially evident in terms of a wartime scenario in which the boundaries are both psychologically and physically constructed.

The neighborhoods reinforced by forced migration manifested themselves in a number of ways. First, they had an increased military presence from individual militias intended to protect the people living in these areas. Yahya describes the separations between these neighborhoods as originally “invisible barriers” which “grew visible through their military presence; their checkpoints, their graffiti, posters of their martyrs, their control of parking spaces, access into and out of all areas, etc...”<sup>33</sup> Ostensibly designed to protect citizens from violence, these militias ended up blocking movement and communication between neighborhoods and led to citizens often being intimidated and harassed by militia members. They were also largely in control of the economic functions inside of the neighborhoods, taxing imported goods, often reaping huge personal benefits from their control of the areas. Participation in militias was often an opportunity for social mobility in this way.<sup>34</sup> The propaganda of these militias each created their own narrative of the war helped reinforce a “here” versus “there” mentality among neighborhoods even within the same denomination.<sup>35</sup> “The stronger the identification of one’s quarter, the deeper the enmity and rejection of the other.”<sup>36</sup> There was also serious danger involved in leaving one’s own neighborhood, including the risk of being kidnapped or murdered.

As well, with an increase of violence came an increase in communal solidarity in neighborhoods. A survey taken in 1984 between January and April showed increases in

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<sup>32</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 123.

<sup>33</sup> Maha Yahya, “Reconstituting Space,” 133.

<sup>34</sup> Fawaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 236-7.

<sup>35</sup> Maha Yahya, “Reconstituting Space,” 135.

<sup>36</sup> Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*, 247.

solidarity from 37% to 62% in Muslim populations and 41% to 54% in Christian populations between January and February when the fighting broke out again. As well, there was an increase in the amount of people who believed there to be no conflict within their communities during this time. This separation between neighborhood bred enmity between different neighborhoods, but it often strengthened the bonds between individuals in the same neighborhood. These spaces were, in this way, more welcoming to members of the religious community. I will discuss the narratives that came out of this connection further in Chapter 4 when I talk about the narratives that were prevalent during the reconstruction period. For now, I note that permanent migration to more “welcoming” spaces helped to create concrete divisions between neighborhoods separated by both sect and military presence.

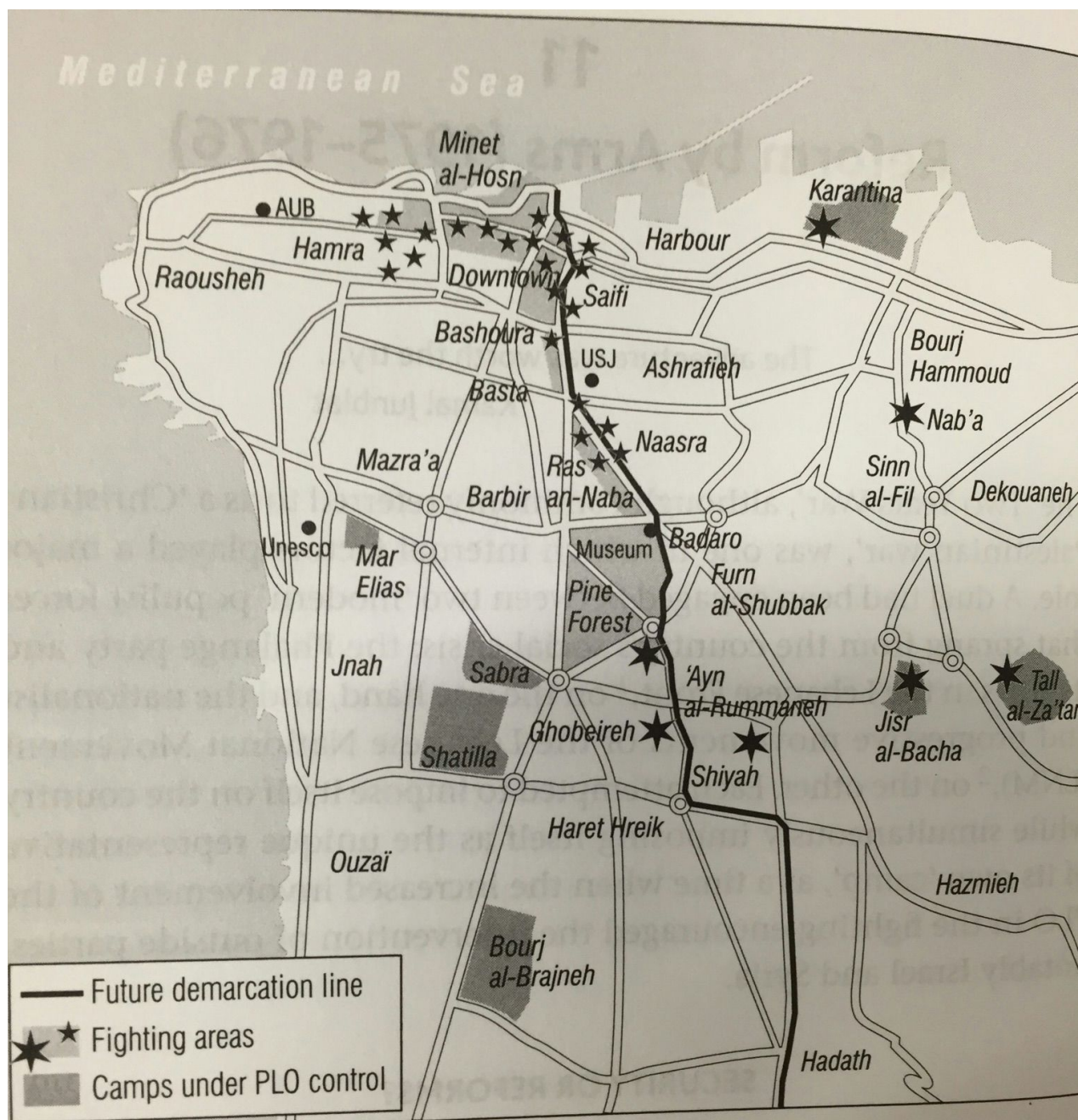
### **The Importance of Downtown**

Before the war, The Beirut Central District, or BCD had been a space known for hosting a number of public functions. In addition to public squares, the area housed the parliament, municipal headquarters, financial and banking institutions, religious buildings, transportation, souks, malls, and theaters.<sup>37</sup> It served as the hub for most interactions within Beirut and Lebanon as a whole.<sup>38</sup> Those planning the reconstruction of Beirut would argue that downtown had become an empty space during the war, and to some degree it had, though not necessarily in the way expressed by Solidere. As such, following the war, many historic landmarks and districts

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 246.

<sup>38</sup> Maha Yahya, “Reconstituting Space,” 132.



**Figure 2.2:** Map of the Green Line and areas of fighting during the civil war from 1975-76.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Fawaz Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 188.

were demolished under the aegis of Rafiq Hariri in preparation for the argument that the downtown area had become a blank space primed for reconstruction of a new city. In 1992, the area surrounding Martyrs Square was demolished, including the old Rivoli movie theater, which had been a prominent feature of the square, despite its blocking a view of the sea. What remained of the former red-light district was razed, as was many other buildings, which the prominent Lebanese historian Samir Kassir described as “perfectly salvageable”.<sup>40</sup> Following these demolitions, the old souqs in Bashura were demolished along with Wadi Abu Jamil, the old Jewish quarter.<sup>41</sup> There is a stark contrast between Solidere’s narrative of downtown as a blank space and Kassir’s narrative of buildings that were often in good enough condition to save. It is indicative of the larger dialogue (to be discussed in Chapter 4) between those who would wish to forget the war and rebuild a brand new space and those who would want to remember the war and retain many of the old buildings that would be demolished in order to build this “new” city.

The downtown area may not have been a tabula rasa architecturally directly following the war, but it was certainly devastated socially in many ways. As discussed in the previous section large portions of the population were displaced by violence during the war, creating segregated secular enclaves outside of the city center. Citizens migrated away from the BCD, which was hit hard by violence, centering around the Green Line which separated the Muslim West Beirut and the Christian East Beirut. This was not a complete split, as West Beirut did retain a 5 percent Christian population and East Beirut retained a 5 percent Muslim population.<sup>42</sup> However, this is a decrease from a 40% Muslim population in East Beirut in 1975 and a decrease from around a

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<sup>40</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 532.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, 532.

<sup>42</sup> Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*, 247.

55% Christian population in the West.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the war, people flowed out of both “unwelcoming” neighborhoods and out of the more consistently violent downtown area. This left a no man’s land physically dividing the city. On either side of the line lay military personnel and snipers, often making it deadly to attempt to cross.

Throughout the three periods of war, the geography of downtown as a space of violence did not change. There were many points of separation between communities throughout Beirut, but the Green Line represented the strongest one. During every lull in violence, it became possible to cross this line, but every time violence returned, the same geographic barrier would reemerge. This resulted in a psychological barrier between the East and West after the violence ended. From a number of conversations I had with the younger generation in Beirut, I got the impression that, even as it became physically possible to pass from the Muslim West Beirut and the Christian East Beirut, citizens were wary of crossing the space that had separated the sides for 15 years. Though definitely not a rule, this trauma has also often been passed down to children who did not even live through the war, as parents were (and still are) often wary of allowing their children to cross the line or involve themselves in activities on the other side. Although the new generation does not feel this separation directly, they are still affected by it. It is also indicative of the effects of the trauma of war and how reconstruction would be treated, especially with the downtown area which was such a contested spot for Beirutis.

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, 247.



**Figure 2.3:** Photograph of the Green Line after the 1982 siege of Beirut by Israel.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

The war changed the function of everyday life in Beirut. Citizens either involved themselves in violence or came in direct contact with it on a daily basis. Habits and games shifted to accommodate for this shift towards hostility and violence within communal relations. Even the space itself altered, changing the way people interacted with the space itself, restricting movement and creating closed-off communities. Individuals were forced to leave their homes either temporarily or permanently to relocate either outside of Lebanon or to more “welcoming” communities within Lebanon. As well as the psychological toll of violence on citizen, the war

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<sup>44</sup> Roderic Grigson, “The Siege of Beirut,” Sacred Tears Book, <http://sacredtearsbook.com.au/image-gallery/siege-of-beirut/#prettyPhoto>.



also cost Lebanon billions of dollars in repairs to buildings and infrastructure as well as financial losses to businesses and individuals.

These effects would not simply disappear with the close of the civil war. The habits and routines developed in order to cope with the conflict would deeply affect the process reconstructing the city physically and intellectually. Many wished to forget this process of normalization, yet were still affected by the way the war shifted social dynamics between neighborhoods and the social map of the city. Conversely, many wished to remember the war as a way to cope with this normalization. The main drive of the reconstruction efforts focus on the downtown area that had once been a symbol of intercommunal relations. With a war that caused a huge increase in sectarian divides, downtown became a dream of what communal relations used to be and what they could become in the future when the space was rebuilt.

## Chapter 3: Physical Reconstruction Projects

*“In 1983, the Lebanese-Audi entrepreneur Rafiq Hariri had paid millions of dollars for the restoration of the city centre. Then the fighting had resumed and the streets were re-seeded with mines. In truth, the Beirut front line could not be repaired, restructured, rebuilt or re-roofed because it had become necessary to the Lebanese. It was a reference point without which the tragedy could not be expressed. It represented the cruellest of all front lines, one that lay deep within the minds of all who lived in Lebanon and all who came there.”*

*~Robert Fisk<sup>1</sup>*

*“How are we to preserve the memory of this place in the face of such architectural amnesia?”*

*~Elias Khoury<sup>2</sup>*

### Forgetting the War

After the war, the government and a large portion of the population worked to forget the conflict and move on. By necessity, it became a “war of others in our land.”<sup>3</sup> I say necessity because everyone had been either complicit in war crimes or directly affected by war trauma, so there was a necessity for a separation from the conflict, else Beirut slip back into violence. School history books removed all references to personal responsibility for the conflict. Many wanted to imagine as the war had just not happened at all; for Beirut to return to its status as “Paris of the Middle East”, as an interlocutor between the West and the East. This didn’t take into account the changed political climate in the region or the lack of the existence of such a “golden age.” However, it was important for people to have this ideal as to maintain a distance from the conflict, even if contrived. Elias Khoury, a Lebanese novelist and journalist who lived through and participated in the war, writes that “a city and its myths are inextricably linked” so

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, 52.

<sup>2</sup> Elias Khoury, “The Memory of the City,” *Grand Street* 54 (1995): 139.

<sup>3</sup> Maha Yahya, “Let the Dead Be Dead: Communal Imaginaries and National Narratives in the Post-Civil War Reconstruction of Beirut,” in *Locating the Modern City*, ed. Alev Çinar and Thomas Bender (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 241.

that “Beirut today can be understood both as a mythological prototype of the city torn by civil war, disheveled by death, dismembered by destruction, and as a former Roman and Phoenician city.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, some wished to tear down the disheveled city to rebuild and renew its former glory, and others wished to forget it altogether and build a new world financial center, “a collage of other cities’ fragments.”<sup>5</sup>

At the same time (and as a factor of forgetting), former militia leaders and business people “in the cloak of sectarian representatives”<sup>6</sup> became main political figures. As referenced in the previous chapter, General Michel Aoun was exiled in 1991 but returned and became prime minister in 1998.<sup>7</sup> Amnesty was offered by the government for crimes against humanity committed during the war, no matter how egregious. The only situation in which this was not the case was with Samir Ja’Ja’ who was deemed responsible for a number of political assassinations. Although not tried for it, he was also head of the LF when they executed the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila camps. He was sentenced to life in prison but was granted amnesty in 2005.<sup>8</sup> Government figures were involved in bringing the militias together into one army and one police force, in doing so, restoring the state’s authority. They were not entirely successful in either endeavor, as evidenced by the power of groups like Hezbollah and Amal which retained military power after the war. Other political leaders owned or were directly involved with companies that were to reconstruct Beirut as an influential capital city. The two largest of these were the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of the Beirut Central District, or Solidere, and the Public Agency for the Planning and Development of the South Western

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<sup>4</sup> Elias Khoury, “Memory,” 137

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 138

<sup>6</sup> Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>8</sup> “Amnesty for Lebanese ex-warlord,” BBC, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4693091.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4693091.stm).

suburbs of Beirut, or Elyssar.<sup>9</sup> Solidere was owned by Rafiq Hariri, a Lebanese-Saudi entrepreneur who had been bankrolling Lebanese reconstruction since 1983 and who became the prime minister of Lebanon after the war from 1992-8 and from 2000-4. Elyssar was responsible to the central government during his tenure, being formed in 1996.

The entire reconstruction project was officially orchestrated by the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR). Although a government agency, many of its senior members were also part of Oger Liban, a Gulf-based firm owned by Hariri.<sup>10</sup> Hariri and his constituents in the government had their hands wrapped up in the success of the reconstruction projects. They represented and owned private companies like Solidere, and so private companies had huge stakes in the government and in government projects. Hariri accrued large financial gains from the reconstruction project, and this was the impetus for controversy. Although controversial, Hariri and his investments were a huge factor in the reconstruction and rejuvenation of parts of the city that had been desecrated by 15 years of warfare.<sup>11</sup> Much of the money that went towards reconstruction came from Hariri's own pockets, his assets in 1996 estimated to be between \$3 to \$4 billion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Elyssar was named after the Phoenician queen who left Tyre to move to North Africa. This is another example of the desire of many Lebanese to connect to this ancient past. Mona Harb, "Urban Governance in Post-War Beirut: Resources, Negotiations, and Contentions in the Elyssar Project," in *Capital Cities: Ethnographies of Urban Governance in the Middle East*, ed. S. Shami (Toronto University Press, 2001), 111.

<sup>10</sup> Maha Yahya, "Let the Dead be Dead," 242

<sup>11</sup> Marwan Iskandar, *Rafiq Hariri and the Fate of Lebanon* (London: Saqi Books, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Dona Stewart, "Economic Recovery and Reconstruction in Postwar Beirut," *Geographical Review* 86.4 (1996): 498.

## Globalization and the Privatization of Reconstruction

There are many ways of looking at the goals for rebuilding Beirut after the war. One way is to see reconstruction as an attempt to cope with or move on from the war. Both supporters and critics desired to recreate the war-torn city. Another viewpoint is to see reconstruction as a way to unite the country after the sectarian conflicts, using the downtown area as a symbol for cosmopolitan rebirth. The third is to view the process as the interplay between the desire to present both stability and recognizability to local and international audiences. This third view focuses more on the practical implementation of the reconstruction projects and illustrates the first and second viewpoints. It also places Beirut in the larger context of the emerging global economic system built in the 1980s.

In this context, wartime reconstruction was seen as a rare and “important window of opportunity” for local investors as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to help recreate cities as a global economic powers. This idea of creating or recreating a city as an economic powerhouse used for market-driven urbanism is at the heart of neoliberal ideology<sup>13</sup>, wherein “human freedom is understood as the liberation of a universal economic rationality from the fetters of politics and culture.”<sup>14</sup> The ideal locations for building such cities are either on a clean slate of land or after a city has been torn apart by something such as a long

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<sup>13</sup> There are some similarities between Neoliberal and classical liberal economic theory, both of which focus on non-involvement by government actors in the economy and with personal liberties. However, the involvement of government actors specifically in the freedoms of corporations mark the separation from classical liberalism. David Harvey writes: “Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.” David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Najib Hourani, “From National Utopia to Elite Enclave: “Economic Realities” and Resistance in the Reconstruction of Beirut,” in *Global Downtowns*, ed. Marina Peterson and Gary W. McDonogh (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012): 137.

civil war. In the case of a city like Beirut, which has a long history and the collective memory of a 15 year conflict, the use of the space itself is very important. In order to create a good location for investors, Beirut had to be quickly rebuilt to show that it would be stable in the future. At the same time, companies had to present a recognizable city to local residents. This, in many ways, meant commodifying the space itself, using the historic landmarks as heritage sites and reminders of Beirut being an old and strong city.

It was the opinion of Hariri and Solidere that reconstruction necessarily had to handle the reconstruction of the BCD. There was no other choice, as the project had to be completed swiftly in order to symbolize stability at the end of the war. With the state in disarray and without nearly enough funds to complete the projects itself, planners could not also deal with the parceling-out of private land from the war, inheritance, and complex rental laws.<sup>15</sup> The projects would be bankrolled by Hariri himself, along with grants and loans from the EU, the World Bank, the IMF, UN agencies, and Arab countries. This swift increase in investment potential would, in turn, finance future government programs that would help unify the country and restore legitimacy to the state itself.<sup>16</sup>

Elyssar stood as a contradiction to the privatization of reconstruction. The Shi'i parties in the southern suburbs forced the government into allowing them a voice in the decisionmaking process, thus creating a public agency instead of a private one for rebuilding the southern suburbs.<sup>17</sup> Though similar voices had input into both Solidere and Elyssar (ie Rafiq Hariri, Dar

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<sup>15</sup> Maha Yahya, "Let the Dead be Dead," 246.

<sup>16</sup> Aseel Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut* (University of Texas Press, 2010), 25.

<sup>17</sup> Maha Yahya, "Let the Dead be Dead," 241.

al-Handassah, Oger-Liban<sup>18</sup>, etc.), the participation of local parties in the process allowed for them to have more control over the planning and implementation of the project. That is not to say that Solidere was completely out of the influence of local desires in northern Beirut or that Hezbollah and Amal were representative of those in the southern suburbs. In fact, Solidere, unlike Elyssar, conducted public debates, published books and articles, and held conferences over the planning of the project.<sup>19</sup> In the case of Solidere, after the initial master plan (the “Edde Plan”) was produced by Dar al-Handasah, it was rejected due to its “placelessness” and lack of any discernible Lebanese character. The plan created a city “without history, as if arising anew from the open desert.”<sup>20</sup> Due to backlash, the plan was redone in order to concentrate on Beirut’s connection to a long and ancient history, increasing the number of preserved structures from 100 to 265, while still focusing on the idea of market-driven globalization.

### **Elyssar and the Reconstruction of the Southern Suburbs**

Even before the war, the Southern Suburbs of Beirut were home to a number of informal settlements. The late 1950s saw a growth in the use of beaches in the southern suburbs for leisure time. This drew rural refugees looking for work in the suburbs and at the beaches. Informal settlements were created around the existing neighborhoods, mostly consisting of people from the Bekaa Valley and Southern Lebanon. As well, the Palestinian refugees camps of Sabra and Shatila steadily increased in population from 1949 onwards from increased displacement by the

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<sup>18</sup> Dar al-Handassah was one of the largest private consultancies in the region and was bankrolled by Hariri. Najib Hourani, “From National Utopia to Elite Enclave, 142. Oger Liban was a Gulf-based firm also owned by Hariri. Maha Yahya, “Let the Dead Be Dead,” 242.

<sup>19</sup> Mona Harb, “Urban Governance in Post-War Beirut,” 111.

<sup>20</sup> Najib Hourani, “From National Utopia to Elite Enclave,” 142.

Israeli occupation.<sup>21</sup> During the war, countless residents of Beirut were displaced by constantly shelling and fighting. As a result, an increased portion of the population moved to illegal suburbs and slums in informal settlements built on other people's land. By 1996, only 38% of the population in these southern suburbs lived in legally parcelled lands.<sup>22</sup> In total, this site had about 50,000 residents in 1992 and 80,000 by 1995, most of whom were displaced lower-class Shi'a Muslims or economic migrants.<sup>23</sup> On top of this, there was an increase in migrant workers from Syria<sup>24</sup>, Egypt, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka who could not afford the high rent of northern Beirut.<sup>25</sup> The organization itself was what made the settlements illegal. Huge lots were often owned by hundreds of people who had various numbers of shares. So the property rights were not geographically situated, and people built where they wanted in these spaces, without official permissions and regulations.<sup>26</sup> During the war, the state remained outside of municipal functions in the southern suburbs, leaving Hezbollah, Amal, and their sub-organizations to provide public services including electrical supply, water supply, financial aid, reconstruction, and environmental protection.<sup>27</sup> As well, neighborhood committees formed to help manage conflicts between different neighborhoods and address issues concerning infrastructure and resource management. This remained the case long after the war ended, even while the state attempted to regain more of a foothold in the southern suburbs.

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<sup>21</sup> Falk Jähnigen, "Coastal Settlements," 322.

<sup>22</sup> Mona Harb, "Urban Governance in Post-War Beirut," 111.

<sup>23</sup> Valérie Clerc, "Law, Rights, and Justice in Informal Settlements: The Crossed Frames of Reference of Town Planning in a Large Urban Development Project in Beirut," in *Popular Housing and Urban Land Tenure in the Middle East*, ed. Myriam Ababsa and Baudouin Dupret and Eric Denis (American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 304.

<sup>24</sup> For more on Syrian migrant workers specifically, see John Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Falk Jähnigen, "Coastal Settlements," 322.

<sup>26</sup> Mona Harb, "Urban Governance in Post-War Beirut," 114.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, 338.



These settlements were illegal and extremely impoverished and had to be addressed by the state after the war ended. Valérie Clerc, a French researcher at the Research Institute for Development, writes in a study on the Law, Rights, and Justice in Informal Settlements that:

The selection of planning projects depends largely on these complex representations. Questions of rights, laws, and standards play a leading role therein, especially since the residents of these areas are in breach of the law. What is the impact of the issue of law and lawfulness? What is the role of the law and of rights in the creation of a project? How are decisions made, and based on which representations, for projects concerning informal settlements.<sup>28</sup>

When planning the reconstruction of an informal urban environment, there are many factors that urban planners must consider, mainly involving the intersection between the law and social justice. Illegal squatters receive informal rights to land that they may have acquired by way of force with the recommendation and aid of local militias. Town planners needed acknowledge the necessity of squatting to survival in wartime, especially with a lack of space for settlement. The size of the displaced population and lack of viable housing left the “need for communities to rely on militia practices for their survival.”<sup>29</sup>

The Public Agency for the Planning and Development of the South Western suburbs of Beirut, or Elyssar was created in 1995 in order to remodel and reconstruct the Southern suburbs of Beirut, especially Ouzai. Elyssar was a public agency consisting of six members and one director. The members were to represent the main religious groups within Lebanon: Maronite, Greek-Orthodox, Sunni, Shi’a, and Druze. The plan was formulated through negotiations between the government and the Shi’i parties Amal and Hezbollah which had control of the area.

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<sup>28</sup> Valérie Clerc, “Law, Rights, and Justice,” 303.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 313.

The government wanted to regain some control of the area, while Amal and Hezbollah wished to provide infrastructure and services to the people already under their control.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 3.1:** Settlements in Beirut. Map by Valérie Clerc, 2010.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 307.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 305.

Elyssar was faced with the task of reconstructing a highly populated area and creating what they saw as an ideal representation of their city. In this way, Elyssar cannot be considered independently from Solidere, the project to rebuild downtown Beirut, despite the different location and impoverished conditions of the suburbs. In order to create an ideal Beirut, there had to be unity between these neighborhoods, so the wealth differential between the suburbs and downtown could not be so high.<sup>32</sup> The redevelopment of Ouzai would provide Shi'a people access to the capital to help integrate them into urban society.<sup>33</sup> This was the ideal goal purported by the Elyssar project. The discourse of creating this ideal vision of the city, however, was still very much wrapped in war discourse. The reasons behind the project were often explained to the actors in terms of reconquering and defending territory.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Failures (and Successes) of Elyssar**

The Elyssar project had a narrow focus on area consisting of only 25 percent of the population in the southern suburbs.<sup>35</sup> One of the main goals was to reconnect the southern suburbs to the city center. This would work contrary to the goals of creating new housing projects for displaced individuals, as it implied destroying informal settlements and forcing inhabitants to be re-displaced to other areas in the suburbs.<sup>36</sup> Instead of creating space for these re-displaced peoples, Elyssar only succeed in building the main roads and highways that pass

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 311.

<sup>33</sup> These are just a few of the considerations that went into the negotiations between the government and the local Shi'i parties and allowed the project to move forward. For others see Valérie Clerc, "Law, Rights, and Justice."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>35</sup> Mona Harb, "Urban Governance in Post-War Beirut," 113.

<sup>36</sup> Maha Yahya, "Let the Dead be Dead," 241.

through the area. The apartments intended for rehousing were never built, and the residents who were evicted from that area were offered monetary compensation instead, against the original plan. The highways were made a priority because of the importance of the downtown area, and the existence of illegal settlements was deemed counterproductive to tourist development on the only sandy beaches in the city located in these southern suburbs.<sup>37</sup>

The state had the funds to implement the plans (which were all drawn up but never implemented), and Hezbollah and Amal had the legitimacy in the area to convince residents to agree to being relocated. There are many speculations as to why this combination of powers was not able to implement the project. First, in the case of Hezbollah and Amal, the existence of informal communities with a lack of state involvement strengthened their political base in the area. For the state to create low-income housing and relocate locals to these locations would give the state more of a foothold in the area, decreasing Hezbollah and Amal's standing as the almost sole-providers of services to the people. They did not want the weak and sectarian government to become the benefactors of their constituencies.<sup>38</sup> The parties could more firmly support the highways, which connect the southern suburbs to the Central District as it would aid with the local economy and allow access for the local Shi'i population to the downtown area. In some cases, Hezbollah intervened on the behalf of inhabitants who were ejected from their residences.

<sup>39</sup> However, in the construction of the motorway in Hayy al-Zahra in the north of Ouzaii, Hezbollah and Amal pushed its residents to take monetary compensation for their displacement in support of a connection to the BCD.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mona Harb, "Urban Governance in Post-War Beirut," 116-7.

<sup>38</sup> Falk Jähnigen, "Coastal Settlements," 340-3

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, 343-4.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 344.

The government's main concern was rebuilding the Central District and placing Beirut back on the map as a world economic power. Although proponenting that the goal of the Elyssar project was to demolish the informal settlements and rebuild the area, they only succeeded at creating the motorways that connected the airport and the BCD. This connection was crucial to drawing tourists and investors to the capital to help improve Lebanon's failed economy. Demolishing houses along the highway (and giving the residents compensation) created the illusion of a rebuilt Beirut. As a weak and sectarian government, they could stand on the platform of rebuilding the southern suburbs, giving themselves that legitimacy while always pushing the project back due to lack of funds or the existence of countless other issues at hand.

Even if the project was never completed and the discourse surrounding it was wrapped up in wartime dialogue, some would argue that a compromise between the government and Hezbollah and Amal served a greater purpose of national reconciliation. The fact that they were able to agree on a large project like that of reconstruction implied that they would be able to continue relations in the future. The project was also able to open up the southern suburbs to the rest of the city through the building of the motorways, so that was a huge step for both the government and for the suburbs.<sup>41</sup> To a large degree, the southern suburbs had not been integrated into the economy of the city. The motorways helped to increase their participation in the urban economy, while also providing much needed foreign investment, which would satiate Sunnis and Maronites who saw Shi'a Muslims as rural migrants who would be detrimental to the economy. On the other hand, Hezbollah and Amal have had to intervene in many cases to protect the inhabitants from being evicted without compensation or spaces to move. In a few situations,

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<sup>41</sup> Valérie Clerc, "Law, Rights, and Justice," 318.

a combination of public protests and pressure from high-ranking Hezbollah representatives in the government halted evictions from the building of a motorway. In other situations, the parties had to negotiate for adequate compensation for those being evicted and helped exert pressure on the residents to leave. Amal and Hezbollah often played a very crucial role in advocating for the residents of the southern suburbs.<sup>42</sup> On the flip side, Mona Harb, professor of Urban Studies at the American University of Beirut, argues that these parties cared more for national and global concerns in the building of the highways rather than helping advocate for the building of apartments for rehousing evicted residents.<sup>43</sup> Information was often restricted from residents by Elyssar, Hezbollah, and Amal, and the committees that had once had a function as mediators in disputes lost their central role to the Shi'i parties.<sup>44</sup>

### **Solidere and the Reconstruction of Downtown**

As referenced earlier, reconstruction in Beirut consisted of the interplay between desires to globalize economic capital and to remain recognizable to local audiences as a historical city. In the early 1990s, soon after the Taif Agreement was signed, the Hariri government entrusted reconstruction to the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of the Beirut Central District, or Solidere. On their website, Solidere defines itself as “a private joint-stock company [which] has been entrusted with the implementation of the project. Solidere is vested with a challenging and historical mission: restoring life to this vital part of the country, an important political and symbolic dimension.”<sup>45</sup> Solidere’s created its master plan with the help of

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<sup>42</sup> Falk Jähnigen, “Coastal Settlements,” 343.

<sup>43</sup> Mona Harb, “Urban Governance in Post-War Beirut,” 116.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, 118.

<sup>45</sup> “Beirut and its City Center,” Solidere, <http://www.solidere.com/city-center/beirut-and-its-city-center>.

Dar al-Handassah, one of the largest consultancies in the region located in Cairo which was also bankrolled by Hariri.<sup>46</sup> The original master plan, created by engineer, Henri Edde, was largely criticized for its “placelessness,”<sup>47</sup> focusing almost solely on the creation of Beirut as a high modernist capital for international trade.

Due to this criticism, the new plan was drafted by a roundtable lead by Jad Tabet, a Lebanese architect who was also a fierce critic of the Edde Plan. This plan preserved over 100 more historical landmarks from demolition. Solidere alluded to Beirut’s long history and stated its wish to recreate the city as “an Ancient City for the Future”.<sup>48</sup> As discussed in the first chapter, this desire was wrapped up in a false conception of the city’s past. There were many challenges to creating such a space. Solidere had to create a city that emphasized historical imaginaries of the area while not appearing to be affected by the war in order to support.<sup>49</sup> One element that Tabet called for (and was ratified in the master plan) was to create “partially decommodified spaces” so that middle class merchants who had worked in these areas before the war could return. This would imply having spaces which were not specifically for upper-class markets and would leave room for merchants to sell their wares. In order to achieve this while still maintaining high investment meant that the higher rents would subsidize the lower ones. The existence of the middle class in the space would ensure that anyone in the city could afford to shop in the area regardless of class, while there would also be locations and investment possibilities for more affluent customers.<sup>50</sup> This part of the plan fell out of the equation when put

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<sup>46</sup> Najib Hourani, “From National Utopia to Elite Enclave,” 142.

<sup>47</sup> Part of the reason for creating the new Beirut in the image of other capital cities was to entice expatriate Lebanese from around the globe to return to Lebanon. Yahya, “Let the Dead Be Dead,” 249.

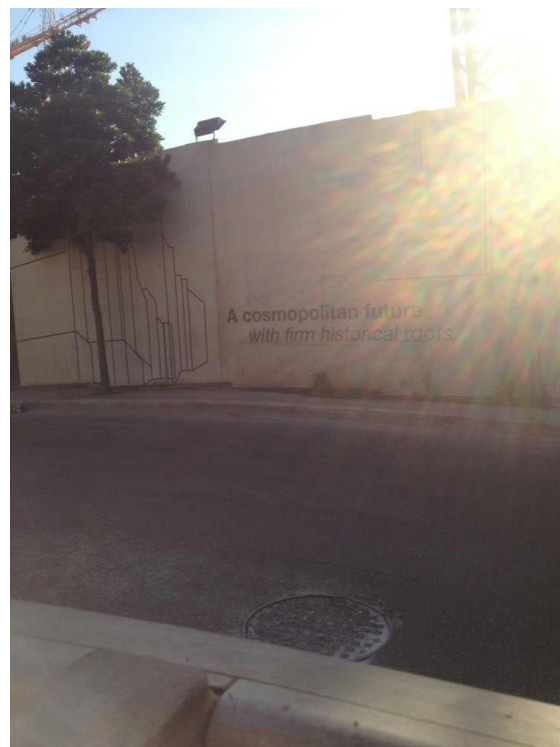
<sup>48</sup> Aseel Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut*, 36-43.

<sup>49</sup> Najib Hourani, “From National Utopia to Elite Enclave,” 148.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*, 150.



in practice, leaving room only for attracting investors in order to bring Beirut back into the global economy. Solidere hosted a number of public events in the BCD to introduce its plans to the world. This included tours highlighting the planned features for the district. In this way, Solidere was very clear with its plans for the new Beirut, publically presenting the outlines for the city that would be placed on top of the war-torn capital. In the following years, they would evict the residents of the Central District, demolish hundreds of historic landmarks, and erect new hotels and shopping centers so symbolize Beirut as a new world economic capital and as the interlocutor between East and West.



**Figure 3.2:** “A cosmopolitan future with strong historical roots”; on the wall of a construction site in downtown Beirut. Photograph by author in 2015.



## Backlash Against Solidere

The backlash against Solidere can be seen through the lens of the contradictions between how the company presented itself and what it actually did. With all of its accomplishments, some credit Solidere (and especially Hariri) as having rebuilt and revitalized a war-torn Beirut.<sup>51</sup> The privatization of reconstruction and the use of personal funding allowed for swift action, and consequently for actual progress to be made. In some respects, the goals of Solidere were impossible. The regional political landscape in the Middle East had changed so drastically in fifteen years that Beirut could not have returned to its position as the physical and economic connection between East and West. However, the privatization (and the lack of public control over the Elyssar project even with it being a Public Agency) brings into question the place of the citizen after the war and what rights individuals had to their city. To varying degrees, citizens were able to affect change within both the Elyssar and Solidere projects, but both projects pushed citizens out of their homes and businesses to make room for reconstruction projects. Solidere itself constructed a city intended for the elite which excluded the middle and lower classes.

A few main arguments run throughout the opposition to Solidere in the academic and journalistic world. First, Solidere is blamed for the destruction of landmarks for the purpose of economic gain. Damages from the war were estimated at at least \$25 billion of damages, with approximately 180,000 housing units ruined and 180,000 badly damaged.<sup>52</sup> After the war, Solidere tore down many of the ruined units as well as hundreds of cultural landmarks, including the Rivoli, a pre-war movie theater. Citizens were, more often than not, helpless to the destruction of these landmarks, observing from a distance as these buildings were replaced by

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<sup>51</sup> See Marwan Iskandar, *Rafiq Hariri*.

<sup>52</sup> Dona Stewart, "Economic Recovery and Reconstruction," 494.

high rises that were to be sold to foreign investors. Even as more historic landmarks were saved with the rejection of the Edde plan, still hundreds more were destroyed. Though it was a step towards preserving the old city, at the same time, the remaining buildings were taken out of context as they were placed alongside glass and metal monoliths. They were used as references to the past, while the majority of the space would be reconstructed.<sup>53</sup>

The second main argument pertained to political corruption and wealth inequality. Economic gain economic gain was often filtered into the hands of government officials who were extremely involved in the private companies (Hariri founded Solidere and it was speculated that he owned 50% of the shares in the company). That involvement resulted in a favoring of the elite. Only a very small segment of the population could afford the services provided in the BCD, and the wealth disparity in the early 1990s was huge and growing, with only seven percent of the population earning over \$2,000 a month by 1996.<sup>54</sup> Solidere failed to create a space for middle class merchants to work within the BCD which left most of its growth up to real estate investment. Former Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss (1976-80, 1987-90, 1998-2000) argued that Hariri placed construction over social welfare,<sup>55</sup> creating a space for the rich and pushing out everyday Beirutis.

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<sup>53</sup> Aseel Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut*, 36.

<sup>54</sup> Najib Hourani, "From National Utopia to Elite Enclave," 152.

<sup>55</sup> Marwan Iskandar, *Rafiq Hariri*, 92.



**Figure 3.3:** St. George Hotel on the Corniche. The owners have refused to sell the space to Solidere for 25 years. It is on this curve where Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated in 2005. Photograph by author in 2015.

## Conclusion

Beirutis were, more often than not, powerless to change the situation. Although public debates were held, prior to these debates, major decisions were already made to raise locations such as the Sursock souqs and the Saifi area.<sup>56</sup> Despite their powerlessness to change the situation, some Beirutis openly criticized Solidere. Some utilized academia and intellectual criticism to point out corruption within the government. This critical lens has helped bring out some of the contradictions in Solidere’s mission and did aid in the improvements to the original

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<sup>56</sup> Jad Tabet, “Towards a Master Plan for Post-War Lebanon,” in *Recovering Beirut: Urban Design and Post-War Reconstruction*, ed. Samir Khalaf and Philip S. Khoury (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993): 93.

master plan. However, as illustrated above, these improvements were minimal and the rhetoric in favor of preserving old buildings became co-opted for Solidere's larger narratives. Other citizens criticized Solidere in a physical context, utilizing the space of Beirut as protest. One such display is the St. George Hotel, a symbol of pre-war Lebanon that has refused to sell the space for 25 years while the company has blocked renovation plans. Citizens also utilize street art as a form of protest against Solidere, subverting the space the company attempted to recreate. Still others criticize Solidere in newspapers and blogs.. For example, the Beirut Report, a news site run by Habib Battah, often runs articles highlighting corruption in the government and future demolition plans by Solidere. Battah has photographed construction sites and brought attention to the demolition of historic and cultural landmarks. The attention his blog brings to these sites often leads them to be saved from demolition.

Criticism to Solidere's project came in many forms. For the purpose of this project, I focus on the literature of the 1990s which created collective memory surrounding the civil war as a way to combat Solidere's practice of historical erasure. In the next chapter, I will discuss the formation of this collective memory as a form of individual protest against the demolition of historic landmarks that citizens had no control over. In this way, novelists were able to intellectually reconstruct the city without delegitimizing other visions of how the city had been and would it could be in the future.

## Chapter 4: The Formation of Collective Memory

*“The helplessness and inability of the city dwellers to stop Solidere’s calculated destruction was vividly illustrated through a description of the photographers’ hands that held the cameras waiting to document the death of one of the city’s major landmarks. City residents were incapable of protecting one of their childhood sites, but they insisted on witnessing, documenting, and mourning its destruction. The publication of these nostalgic accounts in daily newspapers allowed personal narratives to enter the public sphere and transformed private memories into acts of collective memory.”*

~Aseel Sawalha<sup>1</sup>

*“Others, particularly those who were outside the country or were born during the war, are coming forward to testify or to demand testimony which ‘is generated by tension, by the conflict between the impossibility of healing and the need for healing.’”*

~miriam cooke<sup>2</sup>

### The Function of Narratives

In the early 1990s with the close of the civil war, some questioned whether the war ever really happened. Nationalist Historian Kamal Salibi writes: “There’s a mechanism in the human mind, which obliterates terrible memories. I sometimes wonder now whether it really happened.”

<sup>3</sup> This is in response to the collective amnesia that was ever present during the reconstruction period in Lebanon. Without an official history from the state, the Lebanese people were left to either collectively forget the war or to create an assemblage of narratives to describe it. These narratives were often conflicting, but I argue that it is their very sprawling nature that served to create a collective memory of Lebanon during and after the civil war. In his essay entitled “Beirut, a City without History?” comparative literature professor, Saree Makdisi argues that

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<sup>1</sup> Aseel Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut*, 30.

<sup>2</sup> miriam cooke, “Beirut Reborn: The Political Aesthetics of Auto-Destruction,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 15.2 (Fall 2002): 401.

<sup>3</sup> Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 73.

three main narratives were constructed after the civil war. First, the state fostered collective amnesia, with no official history past 1946 taught in schools. Second, a handful of authors wrote war novels and memoirs experimenting with form and narrative structure in an attempt at self-recognition of the war. Third, Solidere attempted to blend the two, narrating a pre-war past that moved smoothly into the present and manufacturing a space that would feel historical while serving contemporary functions.<sup>4</sup> In addition, each sectarian neighborhood constructed narratives surrounding their martyred leaders in order to promote support for local militias.

In this chapter, I will explore these narratives, demonstrating the formation of collective amnesia in the case of the state and Solidere or collective memory in the case of literature and sectarian narratives. The latter formation constitutes an intellectual reconstruction of the city, outside of the architectural projects of Solidere and Elyssar. The ideas in literature form an act of resistance “against the erasure of a heterogeneous social, cultural and religious demographic from the urban space of central Beirut.”<sup>5</sup> The act of remembering reminds the reader of the existence of war criminals and corruption within the government and calls into question the goals of reconstructing the city. All of these narratives emphasize the disparity between the memory and the history of prewar- and wartime- Beirut.

### **The State’s History**

In other countries, the postwar period has often yielded reconciliation for the acts committed. One can look at cases such as Rwanda, South Africa, and Yugoslavia for examples

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<sup>4</sup> Saree Makdisi, “Beirut, a City without History?” in *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006): 201-214.

<sup>5</sup> Ghenwa Hayek, *Beirut, Imagining the City: Space and Place in Lebanese Literature*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015): 26.

of national and international hearings and trials used to serve justice for those harmed by the conflict.<sup>6</sup> These acts of reconciliation were predicated on the recognition of the war itself by both the states and the citizens. In Lebanon, there was no such recognition of war crimes. The general policy was that of letting bygones be bygones, no matter how large.<sup>7</sup> Everyone had been complicit so it was in everyone's best interests to forgive lest they be blamed themselves. This state-supported amnesia was present in a number of different venues. The two I explore are the presence of former warlords in the government and the erasure of the war from school textbooks. The lack of an "official history" indicates its own officialness. The lack of persecution of war criminals and the erasure of the war from textbooks indicates a policy by the state to forget the conflict. Following this, public desire for amnesia is illustrated by popular books and postcards.

In previous chapters, I gave examples of the instances in which former militia members and warlords rose to power in the 1990s. Only Samir Ja'Ja' was tried for his crimes out of all of the participants in the conflict. This treatment of war criminals illustrates the state's tendency to forget the conflict. It is also indicative of the corruption itself, as the former warlords-turned-politicians had vested interests in this amnesia. To remember the war would result in their arrest or, at least their resignation from positions of power in the government. This resulted in a lack of recognition in the war in any official venue. Exemplary of this is the state's policy vis-à-vis school history textbooks, which have Lebanese history ending at 1946, soon after independence from the French. There have been a number of attempts by non-state actors after the war to revise these books. However, these attempts at negotiating for a new curriculum have been made impossible by a combination of state inaction and criticism from sectarian actors

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<sup>6</sup> Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 71.

<sup>7</sup> This sentiment is echoed in a number of sayings, one of which being "*la ghalib la maghlub*" or "no victor, no vanquished. This idea was also used after the civil war in 1958. *ibid*, 70.

who continually took issue with different descriptions used in these revisions.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the official history of Lebanon does not include the 15 year civil war. This echoes the ever-present culture of amnesia that placed the civil war in an unreal past and didn't attempt to face up to the atrocities committed.<sup>9</sup> This is also tied up in the desire for a return to the supposedly glorious pre-war past before there was a need to forget the war.

Popular desire for amnesia is visible in the postcards that are sold in bookstores and stationery stores. These images rarely if ever show Beirut after 1975. Instead, they display images of Martyrs' Square full of people and cars (and in its original location which is now the site of a Virgin Megastore). These are not postcards that people actually buy (especially with the lack of an effective postal service in Lebanon), but they serve as "substitutes for the practice both of memory and of forgetting, and in so doing they fill in the gap of the trauma of the war."<sup>10</sup> They are a reminder of what Beirut used to be and what it could have been without the war. They also show the every-day nature of amnesia, that a picture of an undestroyed Martyrs' Square becomes just as commonplace (if not more so) than the present day, bullet-ridden space. They display the location as it is desired, as opposed to how it is presented in physical form. The state also produced a number of books that help facilitate this popular amnesia. These are often photo-based, displaying photos with little-to-no context, which, Saree Makdisi argues, "may eventually come to supplant other forms of memory, and eventually other forms of history itself."<sup>11</sup> One example of these texts is *Beirut's Memory*, which was created by Ayman Traoui, Hariri's personal photographer and published by the Banque de la Méditerranée, one of

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<sup>8</sup> Saree Makdisi, "Beirut, a City without History?," 201.

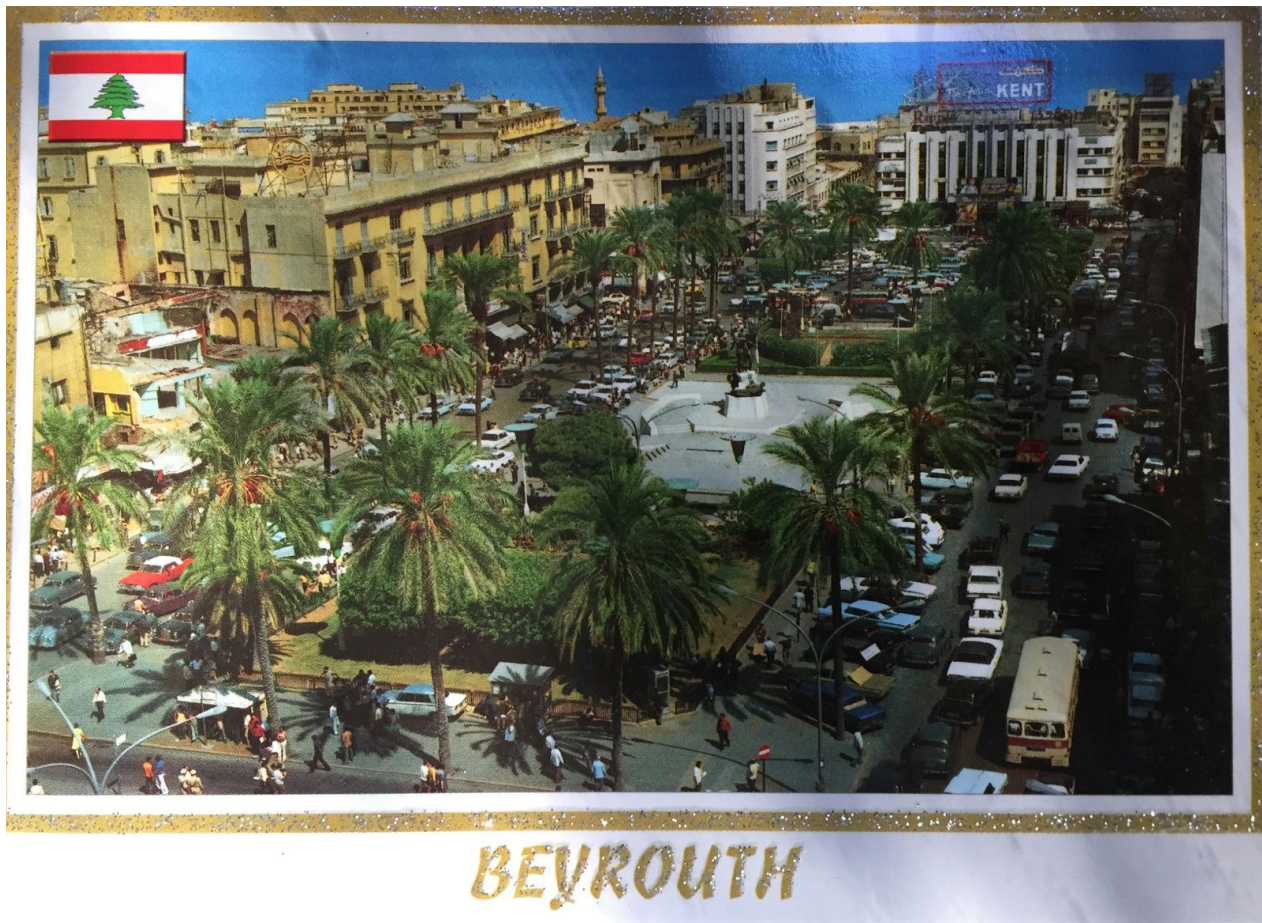
<sup>9</sup> Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 73.

<sup>10</sup> Saree Makdisi, "Beirut, a City without History?," 203.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, 205.



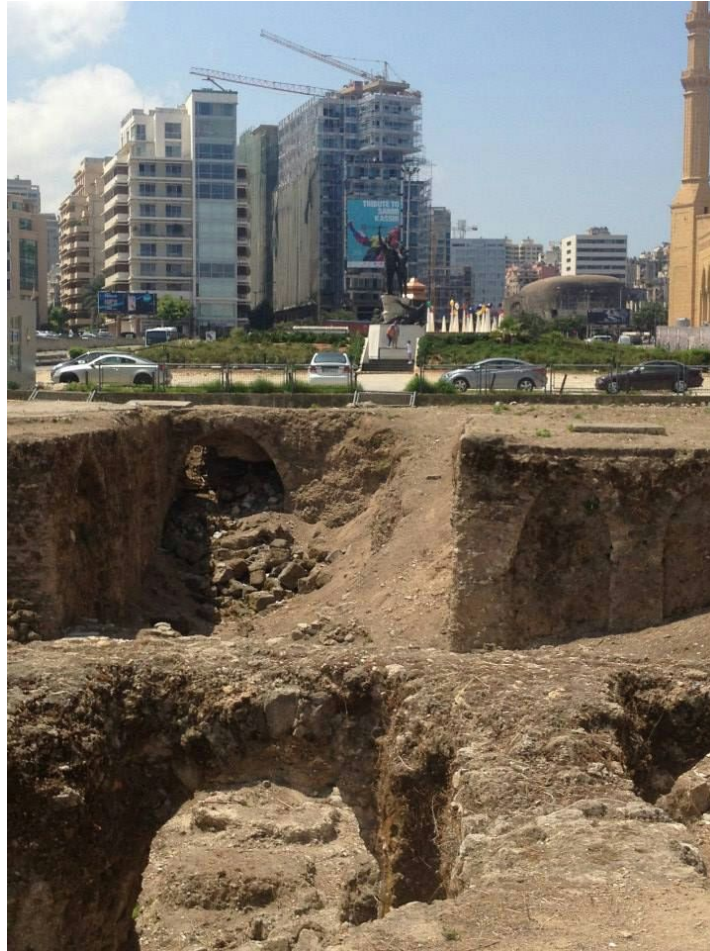
Solidere's main economic pillars. It displayed Beirut in 1990 as a blank slate (with a rich ancient history of course) over which Solidere could reconstruct a city. These photos act to depict a history all to themselves, one that is frozen in time and commodified.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 4.1:** Postcard of Martyrs' Square in the 1960s. Purchased at a bookstore in Hamra in 2015.

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 206.



**Figure 4.2:** The relocated Martyrs' Square facing South. Photograph by author in 2015.

### **Solidere's Beirut**

Solidere was a huge proponent of the creation of this collective amnesia. Arabic literature professor, Miriam Cooke argues that Solidere created the memory of a traditional war front in the downtown area. By focusing its efforts on demolishing and reconstructing the BCD, it at once placed the violence of the war there and forgot it. Creating a traditional war front created the possibility for a traditional war story, and reconstructing that space allowed for the possibility

of closure. Solidere created a space in which those who desired to forget the war and its violence could forget. A traditional war front also reinforced the concept of the civil war as a “war of others” without internal causes and with an idyllic past.<sup>13</sup> As well, the intellectual reconstruction of national identity was tied up in the architectural project of Solidere. Since they placed the war front in the BCD, the methods of reconstruing that space would affect how Beirutis saw the city both locally and globally. Purporting to create an “Ancient City of the Future,” Solidere tore down historic buildings and built a downtown space that could only truly serve the upper echelons of society. The narrative created by Solidere placed Lebanon’s national identity in the downtown area and made this space for the upper-class, thus placing the lower- and middle-classes outside of this identity. On the flip side, the renovation of the city center that had symbolized the sectarian divide could serve to unite the sects once more.<sup>14</sup> In practice, however, the lack of middle class presence would prove to be detrimental to this process.

Saree Makdisi writes that the debates surrounding Solidere’s reconstruction projects would “determine the extent to which this space can be regarded as a blankness or, instead, as a haunted space: a place of memories, ghosts.”<sup>15</sup> The blankness in this case symbolizes the amnesia that was physically present in the demolition of the BCD. Directly following the war, much of the city center was bulldozed in preparation for this dialogue to take place. This demolition focused the debate on the absolute necessity of rebuilding Beirut according to Solidere’s plans. The company constructed this blank space in order to lay the intellectual groundwork for its architectural projects.

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<sup>13</sup> miriam cooke, “Beirut Reborn,” 398.

<sup>14</sup> For more on Lebanon’s national identity see Saree Makdisi, “Laying Claim to Beirut: Urban Narrative and Spatial Identity in the Age of Solidere,” *Critical Inquiry* 23.3 (Spring 1997),

<sup>15</sup> Saree Makdisi, “Laying Claim to Beirut,” 664.

## Sectarian Narratives and the Stories of Street Art

The narratives created by the different militias and sects within Beirut did not forget the war. Instead, militias used their common memories to increase their standing within their neighborhoods as military borders were taken down. These dialogues take place outside of the city center and, thus, physically outside Solidere's main narrative. They also play counter to Solidere's narrative as they depict a Beirut that is defined by its sectarian separateness. These discourses are tied to the illusion of deep sectarian roots within the city. As discussed in the first chapter, these ties were not necessarily founded in historical fact, but were, rather, a more modern phenomenon. Sune Haugbolle, Middle Eastern Studies professor at Roskilde University writes: "Multiple loyalties are maintained by various cultural practices. In the postwar period, the social histories of Beirut's neighborhoods were deeply embedded in the war experience and the construction of social and spatial boundaries therefore closely tied to memory of the war."<sup>16</sup> Each neighborhood defined itself as separate, part of specific sectarian groups, and thus, intrinsically related to the war which create the physical divides between them. Even the methods for symbol-creating themselves are reminiscent of the war.

These narratives exist in a number of venues, from graffiti created by the populace to public signs created by the propaganda units of the political parties. In Beirut (and in Lebanon as a whole), graffiti is extremely common practice both for artistic purpose and for political messages. On the highway to Saida, I read one quote on a wall that read, "Walls are still a free media." Though inferring from a singular personal experience, I argue that this is very indicative of how walls are treated in Lebanon. Their use to publically present political messages subverts

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<sup>16</sup> Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 163.

Solidere's narrative while utilizing the very physical space Solidere attempted to reconstruct.

Public space is used in this way to criticize political corruption at a fundamental level. I would also argue, however, that, although often used as a subversive practice, graffiti is regularly used to solidify boundaries between different sects.

Both graffiti and state-run posters and signs often support former militia leaders-turned-politicians and echo sentiments from the war, thus remembering the war through a sectarian lens. In the case of Ashrafiya, militias dominated the political, residential, institutional, and educational space during the war, creating barracks and spreading propaganda in the form of political posters and symbols. After the war, these militias could be considered to be replaced by political offices that ended up spreading similar propaganda with posters, graffiti, and signs.<sup>17</sup> This can also be noted when travelling in Dahiya and into areas of Lebanon that are controlled by different militias. In these spaces, there are flags and signs regularly lining streets and buildings representing the specific militias that control the areas. The practices of utilizing propaganda in order to divide neighborhoods stems from practices during the war. At that time, martyrdom posters were used to spur on loyalty to specific militias. These posters blamed enemies for the death of their leaders and heroes, equating this to a threat to their very identity within Lebanon. This helped to facilitate the "us" vs. "them" mentality that was carried throughout the war and beyond.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 173.

<sup>18</sup> Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009).





**Figure 4.3:** Organized street art by the College Notre Dame de Jamhour under the Fouad Chehab Bridge, located a block away from Damascus Street. It writes: “Before I die I want Lebanon to...” This question attempts to subvert the tendency of hopelessness among Beirutis. Photograph by author in 2015.

## The Use of Literature in the Creation of Collective Memory

The reconstruction period yielded a huge literature concerning the memory of the civil war and pre-war Lebanon. There are several eras (and generations) of authors who wrote about the civil war. These include works written during the war or directly after like Mahmood Darwish's *Memory For Forgetfulness* (1986), Elias Khoury's *Little Mountain* (1977), and Jean Said Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments* (1990).<sup>19</sup> They also include works written in the early 2000s such as Rabi' Jabir's *Bayrut* Trilogy which indicated a new generation of writers with a degree of separation from the war.<sup>20</sup> In this section, I focus on the generation of authors writing during the 1990s as they respond to the projects of collective amnesia enacted by the state and Solidere. Their works include Hoda Barakat's *The Tiller of Waters* (1998), Rashid al-Daif's *Dear Mr. Kawabata* (1995), Hanan al-Shaykh's *Beirut Blues* (1992), Rabih Alameddine's *Koolaid's: the Art of War* (1998), and Najwa Barakat's *Ya Salaam* (1999).

Out of this range of literature, I chose *Tiller of Waters* for a number of reasons. First, the content stands out in comparison. The writing is especially clear in illustrating the experiences of the war along with recollections regarding the city and its history. It is similar to other novels written at the time in that it focuses on a character's memory of the war and on a connection to an older Lebanese past. However, I chose this novel specifically due to the quantity of time spent in the downtown area, setting the district as the location of struggle and commemoration during and after the war. Second, Barakat received special recognition for the novel, receiving the Naquib Mahfouz Medal for in 2001.<sup>21</sup> She had received the Al-Naqid prize for her 1990 work,

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<sup>19</sup> For more on women writers during the war, see miriam cooke, *War's other voices: Women writers on the Lebanese civil war*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> See Ghenwa Hayek, "Rabi' Jabir's *Bayrut* Trilogy: Recovering an Obscured Urban History," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 42 (2011).

<sup>21</sup> "Hoda Barakat," *The Man Booker Prize*, <http://themanbookerprize.com/people/hoda-barakat>.

*The Stone of Laughter*, which was the first Arab novel with a homosexual protagonist.<sup>22</sup> Her position as a woman in a field dominated by men made the *Tiller of Waters* (and the recognition it received) an especially pertinent novel to the rewriting of popular narratives of national amnesia. All of this literature can be said to have played a palimpsestic part in resisting the palimpsestic efforts of Solidere, placing its own narrative on top of Solidere's. Barakat was not only rewriting the downtown area, but she was also illustrating outsiders within Beirut following the war. In *The Stone of Laughter*, she focuses on a homosexual man. In *Tiller of Waters*, she focuses on the character, Niqula, an average person who would become an outsider to his own city as the war ended.

Barakat was born in 1952 in Beirut and graduated from Beirut University in 1975 studying French literature. Between 1975-76, she went start her PhD in Paris, but she returned to Beirut later that year because of the war. There, she taught and wrote until she returned to Paris in 1989.<sup>23</sup> In *Tiller*, there are quite a number of themes and metaphors symbolizing the war and reconstruction. For the purpose of this project, I will only focus on two that clearly illustrate Barakat's intention in creating an alternate narrative about the war. First, she illustrates the layers of the city's history as a way to understand Beirut as a historic space. Second, she explores the shifting spatial relations within the city, which lead to Niqula becoming an outsider to his own city. In this discussion, she also brings into question Solidere's treatment of spatial relations. I will focus on a few specific scenes that illustrate their relation to the war and to collective memory.

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<sup>22</sup> "Hoda Barakat," Al-Bab, <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/literature/barakat.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*



First, Barakat explores the history of Beirut. From a young age, Niqula heard stories about his grandfather who refused to return to Beirut from Alexandria in the early 20th century because he believed Beirut to be cursed, fated to be destroyed and rebuilt over and over again.<sup>24</sup> To Niqula's grandfather, Beirut had an regular cycle of opulence and destruction intrinsic to the place. Based on this history of Beirut, Niqula exclaims: "Let the face of this city be turned under once again, that its inhabitants may leave and new people assume the tending of it."<sup>25</sup> This is in response to seeing the city center destroyed and recreated again after spending weeks underground in his father's old store. The space of Beirut itself is tilled again,<sup>26</sup> and this is indicative of Beirut's history as a tilled space (at least according to Niqula's grandfather). While walking through the catacombs of the city, Niqula wonders how many times Beirut has been tilled, how many layers Beirut truly has:

"How many cities lie beneath the city, papa ... grandfather ... how many cities lie there to be forgotten? I wonder: am I descending through the layers of this city, or am I plunging down, down to submerge myself in the deepest layers of my own illusory thoughts? Grandfather ... did you grow so passionately attached to cloth because it will not be here when the archaeologists excavate the traces of our disappearance? ... Because its weave will disappear as quickly and easily as the life of cities like this one."<sup>27</sup>

As Beirut is destroyed by the war and destroyed again and rebuilt by Solidere, the city is tilled again. In the novel, it becomes very clear that the pasts of Beirut are physically and intellectually present in the reconstruction projects. This plays into the concept of Beirut as both an ancient and new city.

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<sup>24</sup> Hoda Barakat, *Tiller of Waters*, 8, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Hoda Barakat, *Tiller of Waters*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Hence the title, *The Tiller of Waters*, implying that Beirut is, like water, easily turned over, easily reborn, but made out of the same essence in the end.

<sup>27</sup> Hoda Barakat, *Tiller of Waters*, 66.

Second, Barakat explores the shifting spatial relations in Beirut during the civil war. Niqula continually gets lost in the city he supposedly knows so well. This complicates the idea that Beirut's past is physically present and indicates some of the architectural shifts indicative of reconstruction. Barakat creates a written map of the city during the war and illustrates the shifts as Niqula gets lost in winding alleyways and views unrecognizable landmarks.<sup>28</sup> He renames streets and names landmarks based on events in an attempt to make the city intelligible again. For example, after witnessing a group of dogs devour a human corpse, he names that space the "Square of the Dogs."<sup>29</sup> Thus, the city's memory and Niqula's personal memory are intertwined. His relation to the place itself is interspersed with personal memories and his family's history. Ghenwa Hayek, Arabic literature professor at the University of Chicago, writes that, "In this way, the novel creates a set of conceptual links between, on the one hand, memory, history and story-telling, and, on the other, (individual) artist and (collective) audience."<sup>30</sup> This connects the long history of Beirut to the formation of collective memory, which is formed by hundreds of individual memories in combination with a longer, historical memory. In the novel, the competing narratives just between Niqula's parents alone illustrates the creation of individual memory.

Niqula is just one among many who reconstruct the city, creating maps to make sense of the newly-destroyed space. On the flip-side, Niqula is very critical of non-Lebanese who attempt to reconstruct the space. He notes:

There are two sorts of people who can destroy this careful work: Those who come from outside the city walls, strangers with the vigor of youth who bear parchments on which are drawn new maps, scrolls held open through desire to infiltrate and hybridize and form new connections; or ignorant leaders who draw the strength of their immediate authority

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, 20, 62.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, 63.

<sup>30</sup> Ghenwa Hayek, *Beirut, Imagining the City*, 108.

from the weakness of the threads and the fatigue of the weave. Such are the enemies of their own cities and people, for they bring upon those folk destruction and death.<sup>31</sup>

This is an overt reference to the practices of Solidere who outsourced their construction planning to Dar al-Handassah in Cairo and relied on government compliance for their project. Hayek notes that the novel “emphasizes the disjunction between Solidere’s desire to monumentalize and artificially reinsert the space within a discourse that attempts to produce a clean break with the past, and the Lebanese individual, who cannot forget -- and doesn’t want to.”<sup>32</sup> I would argue that there were also many Beirutis who did want to forget the war, a sentiment that allowed Solidere to do the work it did.

*Tiller of Waters*, and the larger literary corpus to which it belongs, puts these war stories (even if fictional) into the public discourse. These stories form a specific movement aimed at remembering the war. The very act of remembering subverts narratives from both the state and Solidere which attempted to forget the war and form a national amnesia, especially surrounding atrocities committed during the war by current politicians and leaders. These stories are not necessarily cohesive in form or content, but they create a metanarrative of the war. In the context of the novel, Niqula forms his memory from the combination of many disparate stories from his mother and father. Even his mother’s stories, which seem fictitious, help to form a commemorative memory of the space.<sup>33</sup> Any war story, true or not, recognizes a memory of the war, thus subverting programs that worked to erase this history.

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<sup>31</sup> Hoda Barakat, *Tiller of Waters*, 132.

<sup>32</sup> Ghenwa Hayek, *Beirut, Imagining the City*, 96.

<sup>33</sup> Ghenwa Hayek, *Beirut, Imagining the City*, 109.

## Conclusion

Collective memory is created by disparate stories. Just as Niqula's parents tell him contradicting histories which form his conception of Beirut, the narratives created during reconstruction make up a meta-narrative on the war. To say that there exists collective amnesia is not to say that all aspects of the war are forgotten. To say that literature created collective memory is not to say that that memory is the same. This attempt to collectively remember the war was a way to actually move on and as a way to criticize projects of collective amnesia. Novelists coped with the trauma of war by writing semi-fictional stories about it. Others would be like Niqula, who expressed that he wouldn't "feel that what has happened to me is real until after considerable time has passed."<sup>34</sup> The combination of the desire to forget and the desire to hold out on remembering facilitated Solidere's project of erasure.

The narratives presented during the reconstruction period did two things. First, they formed a metanarrative about the war and Beirut's glorious pre-war past. Collective memory is made up by narratives from the state, Solidere, sectarian neighborhoods, literature, and a number of sources not discussed in this paper including blogs, films, and even projects such as this which discuss collective memory. Although focusing on erasure, the narratives of the state and Solidere do add to the discussion of Beirut as an ancient city, a discussion which is key to the formation of this collective memory. Second, all of these narratives sought to cope with the war in some respect. The state and Solidere attempted to forget the war in order to rebuild the space in the image (or rather, the constructed image) of Beirut's glorious past. Different neighborhoods sought to emphasize their supposed sectarian histories in order to maintain the stability of those

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<sup>34</sup> Hoda Barakat, *Tiller of Waters*, 15.

in power. This was in an attempt to retain the status quo in terms of the separation between the neighborhoods, which were no longer demarcated by physical barriers. Literature sought to remember the war in an attempt to deal directly with the traumas inflicted. It also called out the hypocrisy of the narratives of the state and Solidere, which allowed for former warlords to lead the government.

## Concluding Remarks

*“By proposing to start over with a blank slate, making a clean break with the city’s familiar morphology in the service of a poorly specified economic purpose, Hariri’s reconstruction scheme had the appearance of a plan for a new city, but one without any continuity with what had gone before--in other words, without memory.”*

~Samir Kassir<sup>1</sup>

### Overview

This project provided a narrative of Beirut concerning the trauma of war, showing both the roots of the war as well as the narratives surrounding reconstruction. It begins by looking at the space of Beirut before the war and how it shifted in the 19th century from its humble roots as a small port town to becoming a modern city. This shift affected many aspects of the city from its physical layout to its relationship with its hinterland. These changes also brought about a number of issues, including the birth of sectarian conflicts within the city beginning with the War of 1860. This war, combined with an increasingly sectarian government, first under Şekib Efendi’s *Règlement* of 1845, then under the French Mandate in the 1920s, and finally with the National Pact in 1943, would provide the historical seeds for conflict in 1975-90/1. The city’s relatively recent growth is also indicative of the exaggerations within the discourses on reconstructing Beirut which often indicated the city’s ancient history as a point of nostalgia.

This desire for return was predicated on the disappearance of the ancient Beirut with the start of the civil war in 1975. At this point, Beirut’s position as the “Paris of the Middle East” broke down along with its internal stability, which devolved into omnipresent violence for the

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<sup>1</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, 534.

majority of 15 years. War became a routine for adults and children alike, exposing countless people to the death and injury of many family members and friends. In this way, violence became a matter-of-fact affair. Many were also forced to displace themselves, which helped to solidify sectarian conflicts by defining neighborhoods specifically by their majority religious affiliation. This is most clearly represented by the split at the Green Line between the Muslim West Beirut and the Christian East Beirut. The downtown area became a symbol for the loss of harmonious inter-communal relations in the city because it no longer served as a meeting ground for the different sects.

After the war, the companies Elyssar and Solidere concentrated specifically on the reconstruction of this location (even if Elyssar worked on the southern suburbs, its focus on rebuilding the airport and constructing a motorway to downtown, which set the reconstruction of downtown as the main goal). Solidere demolished many historic landmarks within the BCD in order to erase the memory of the war and recreate Beirut as a global financial capital. Due to reactions against this demolition, the company ended up revising its purported goals to accommodate more historic buildings, lauding their creation of an “Ancient City For the Future.” This space, however, was constructed for the upper class, filled with expensive restaurants and five-star hotels. It did not provide space for middle class merchants who had once sold their products in the old souqs. This erasure of previous practices and erasure of the war itself from public conception constituted a collective amnesia concerning the war.

In reaction to this move to forget the war and the guilt associated with it, a number of middle class intellectuals provided a counter-narrative to that of collective amnesia by constructing a collective memory of a city affected by war. This movement could be seen clearly

through the literature of the 1990s, which focused on the space of Beirut as a changing environment during the war. The disparity in the narratives between all of these works provides an understanding that the experience of war was different for all participants. However, the underpinnings of trauma are universal for all of these parties, and recreating the city would necessarily imply addressing this fact. Instead of hiding the trauma, literature in this era brings it to the fore.

### **Significance**

This project began with an interest in the changing conceptions of spatial relations within Beirut during and after the civil war. I was intrigued by the ways in which private space became public space as people interacted with the violence occurring outside their homes. Evidently, that initial project shifted as I continued to research and write. In many ways, that topic focuses relatively narrowly on one aspect of the wartime trauma, namely, its aftereffects. So this project views all reconstruction efforts as attempts to cope with the trauma. Whatever Solidere's intentions for demolishing historic buildings and rebuilding the city as a global financial capital, they played off the desire of many Beirutis to forget the war. Many citizens would far prefer to let bygones be bygones than address either the guilt of participating in the violence or the trauma of experiencing 15 years of bloody civil war. At the same time, many wished to come to terms with these very issues and create a new collective memory of Beirut that acknowledged the war. Both of these narratives constitute coping mechanisms for a trauma, on a personal and a national scale.



In this way, the project is original. It looks at the narratives not as plays for power (though in some cases, they were) but rather as ways of living with the guilt of participating in the war or with the loss of family members or friends or business to violence. The reconstruction of Beirut after the Civil War was far from a recreation of Beirut before the war, even if Solidere purported it to be just that. Instead, it was reconstructing a new city based on a space that had been fundamentally changed within the span of 15 years. It is unsurprising that there would be a desire to return to some sort of pre-war harmony, especially for those who had hardly known that space before violence erupted. On the flip side, it is also unsurprising that there would be those who wished to remember the war and seek to make amends with themselves and others to create a new space. However, the trauma was both on an intellectual and a physical scale. Individuals suffered tremendous losses during the war, and they were thus forced to cope with these losses. In addition, the space within Beirut shifted as people were displaced based on wartime violence. This created physical divides between neighborhoods and people of different sects, a separation that continued to be felt after the war came to a close. Part of reconstruction implied attempting to deal with the issues of separation, thus the focus on the downtown area in both the physical and intellectual reconstruction efforts.

There is definitely room to explore this notion further. In future studies, others may broaden the scope of my research to include the reconstruction efforts of other cities as a way to explore Beirut in the larger context of spaces rebuilt after conflict. In addition, as I explained in Chapter 2, the younger generation, which was born directly after the end of the war, definitely has a different perspective on reconstruction projects from those who experienced the war directly. For example, they were taught about the divide between East and West Beirut but never

felt it in the same way as their parents. Exploring the relationship between those who lived through the war and those who did not would elucidate the ways in which other coping mechanisms have been passed down from the reconstruction period, such as the growth of the extremely popular nightclub scene in Beirut. This list is not exhaustive, but it does show some of the potentials for study within this framework.

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