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The Reconstruction of the Beirut Central District: An Urban Geography of War and Peace

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Abstract: Three conceptual themes of public-private, temporality, and heritage-modernity are used to develop an urban geography of war and peace of Beirut. During the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war public space shrank and people retreated deeper into localised neighbourhoods, with private space becoming more public as people accommodated those who were displaced. Since the war, the public sector has been rehabilitated, but decision making autonomy on the reconstruction of Beirut's centre has been handed to a private company. The theme of temporality concerns the relationship between the city's past, present, and future, with debates on what parts of the city should be preserved intimately bound with notions of memory and forgetting. The relationship between heritage and modernity, both of which are fluid and evolving notions, has informed the reconstruction of the city. The reclamation by Beirutis of the centre of the city following the assassination of Rafic Hariri in 2005 makes clear that urban space is constructed as much by publics as by architects and town planners, with Place des Martyrs once again functioning as an integrating space for public dialogue and reconciliation.

Keywords: Forgetting, Heritage, Memory, Modernity, Temporality

Introduction

This paper will interrogate the destruction and reconstruction of the Beirut central district using three interconnected analytical themes. The first is the relationship between the public and private spheres. This encompasses property rights, the actors that shape the urban environment, such as government and private construction companies, and the use of shared spaces, such as public squares. The second theme is temporality, that is, the relationship between Beirut's past, present, and future. The theme of temporality is intimately connected to memory and forgetting, with some protracted debates on what parts of the city should be preserved, and which should not. Finally, the paper examines the relationship between heritage and modernity. Since the nineteenth century, the design of Beirut can be explained as a dialectic between externally imposed designs and resistance from citizens appealing to notions such as tradition and heritage. Today this dialectic is inevitably bound up with questions of how the Lebanese can forge a new national identity that enables the country to move beyond the social and material disintegration of the civil war.

This paper will first present an urban geography of war based on memoirs and reportage during the 1975-1990 civil war. It will then develop a geography of peace following the end of the war, focusing on three case studies in the Beirut central district: the old souks, Place d'Etoile and Place des Martyrs. Finally, the paper examines the role played by the people of the city in remaking Beirut following the assassination of former prime minister Rafic Hariri in 2005.

An Urban Geography of War: Living with Risk

Drawing from published memoirs of citizens who lived through the civil war, as well as from scholarly and journalistic sources, this section will develop an urban geography of war using the case of Beirut during Lebanon's civil war.

The civil war saw the division of the city between east and west along the green line which ran through the Beirut central district then along the Rue Damas (Damascus Road), forming a corridor where loss of life, injury and urban destruction were particularly high. The civil populations along both sides of this corridor were forced out and buildings were taken over by snipers. The civil war saw the militarisation—or, more accurately, the “militiaisation”—of the

city. The centre saw the most protracted battles between rival militias and suffered most in terms of destruction. The violence has been characterised as “urbicide,” the systematic and deliberate destruction of parts of the built environment as an expression of hostility against otherness, exclusion and economic inequality, in particular the extremes of wealth and poverty within Lebanon (Fregonese 2009). Beirutis learned to assess risks to their safety as they moved around the city, parts of which were highly dangerous for those who ventured by error or necessity into a “wrong” neighbourhood.

The war changed the urban fabric of the city, of both buildings and nature. Lengthy rounds of mortar and gunfire rounded the corners of buildings and pockmarked walls so that buildings lost their sharp edges and smooth façades. Different forms of erosion characterised different storeys, with the lower floors damaged by proximate gunfire while the upper floors suffered more from distant shellfire (Møystad 1998). Façades were also defaced to claim territorial ownership. When a militia group took over a new area they would often spray their slogans on walls, painting over the slogans of those they had displaced (Al-Jazeera TV 2013). Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish wrote of the civil war “it’s the sound of the bullets that tells you you’re in Beirut. The sound of the bullets and the shriek of the slogans on the wall” (Darwish 2013, 91). Windows and roofs were not replaced, exposing building interiors and their inhabitants to the elements. Plants and grasses grew wild. The so-called green line refers to the belt of greenery that grew during the conflict when trees and bushes took root, growing freely in streets and deserted buildings, often fed by burst water mains.

The war impeded the movement of people and traffic leading many Beirutis to limit travel to their immediate neighbourhoods. There was an inversion of space and a new logic of separation and connection. Thoroughfares that had previously facilitated movement of people and vehicles were blocked by debris and became barriers, while bombed out buildings were cleared and used as rights of way. In some cases holes were opened through walls to shorten the distance that pedestrians had to travel (Fregonese 2012b, 665). Along the green line militia checkpoints interfered with free movement (Fregonese 2012a, 325). Barriers to movement were not only physical. The “target cones” of snipers located in elevated positions represented very real obstacles to movement based on fear (Calame and Charlesworth 2009, 38). This was particularly the case in the central district in 1975-76 during the battle of the hotels in the Ain el-Mreisseh area. Rival militias fought over the hotels, in particular the recently completed Holiday Inn, because they provided commanding heights that were ideal vantage points for snipers.

The war also saw an erosion of the distinction between private and public space, with the rules of property ownership ceasing to be respected. Residential and domestic spaces were incorporated into the infrastructure of war. A restaurant might be squatted and become accommodation for the homeless and displaced and a school might be taken over as militia barracks (Davie 1993). Private space became more “public” as people accommodated neighbours made homeless or displaced. In this way “family space” was broadened into “neighbourhood space,” though usually only for those from a similar confessional group. A family with a rooftop or balcony that looked down on an “enemy” neighbourhood might be expected to yield that space to a local militia looking for a vantage place for its weaponry. Places became valued for their safety and value as shelters with normally undesirable spaces such as basements becoming coveted refuges during shelling (Khalaf 2006, 115). Large windows that offered pleasing views during peacetime became a source of risk during battles.

The war led to new constellations of community along confessional lines. People withdrew into smaller spaces, creating self-sufficient neighbourhoods (Nagel 2002, 721). As minority populations moved or were displaced more homogenised enclaves emerged with a strong sense of communal solidarity, but at the expense of nationwide solidarity. The war magnified both communal solidarity and spatial segregation. Segregation was not solely a voluntary phenomenon but one that was often necessary to increase the chances of survival. National government ceased to have authority, leaving a political vacuum that was filled by local militias

who within their territory would provide some of the services normally provided by the state such as security, collection of rubbish and electricity. Within communities humanity and concern prevailed, while relationships of fear, suspicion and otherness characterised relations between communities. However, the enhanced solidarity within communities should not be exaggerated; personal relations were more fractious with increases in anxiety, nervous conditions and suicides. Family life itself was eroded. One citizen, Lina Mikdadi, explained the increase in divorces thus: “you can put up with a lot in an ordered system, particular since divorce is considered shameful in an oriental society. Once all hell broke loose and society itself disintegrated, then no one cared any more what people thought of one another” (Mikdadi 1983, 20-1).

There was also an enhanced sense of fatalism, that irrespective of what one did, one was helpless and at the mercy of forces beyond one's control. People's fate depended upon their ethnicity and religion. As Jean Said Makdisi wrote in *Beirut Fragments*:

...struggle though we may, we are being corralled into the separate yards of our fellow co-religionists by the historic events of the moment. Belief and political vision have less to do with how one is seen ... than with external identification—the brand.

(Makdisi 1990, 137)

With respect to violence Makdisi wrote “I can refuse to do it, but I cannot refuse to have it done to me ... There is no longer any question of logic, of will, of belief, of choice” (Makdisi 1990, 140). The space within which people could exercise control shrunk, especially during moments of violence. A new logic came to prevail in which people would try to make sense of the often indiscriminate and unpredictable violence. Journalist Thomas Friedman observed that people would try to rationalise the death around them to try to justify why they lived while others died: for example, people left home at the “wrong time,” or were walking on the “wrong side of the street.” He argues that Beirutis needed to explain the violence to differentiate themselves from the victims: “Without such rationalizations no one would have left his home” (Friedman 1995, 37). However, the reality is that the violence was capricious and arbitrary. Friedman also suggests that those who coped best were those who concentrated only on their immediate environment and the things they could control while blocking out things around them. To cope with this feeling of helpless some people would focus on completing a routine task in their own home. Poet Mahmoud Darwish wrote “I have no personal wish other than to make a cup of coffee. With this madness I define my task and aim” (Darwish 2013, 7).

As well as reshaping the social space of the city the war transformed its temporality. Time was punctuated by battles and ceasefires, between extremes of intense noise and silence. The war imposed erratic rhythms of movement, dictating traffic flows and when people could venture outside. The movement of pedestrians and vehicles on the streets for shopping, errands and family visits was, when possible, timed to take place during ceasefires, and when this was not possible during temporary lulls in the fighting. Planning ahead was difficult and excursions were often undertaken at short notice, sometimes impulsively, when conditions seemed right. People no longer strolled casually down the street. Formerly settled rhythms of movement became more tentative and hesitant as people looked around to assess threats. The more physically able would dodge between doorways and obstacles, eager to limit the time they were exposed in the open. People would calculate risks and seek ways to minimise them, sometimes even sending children on errands. One fourteen year old recalls being told by his mother to go shopping during a lull in the fighting: “you are small and run fast, so you should go” (Interview in Thornhill 2011, 167). Michael Davie argues that the mental geography of Beirut's citizens constantly needed to change to accommodate new variables such as changed risks and perceptions of vulnerability and changes to routes that were considered safe (Davie 1993).

Interrupted access to water and electricity also disrupted the rhythms of the city. Controlling water and electricity supplies became an instrument of war; supplies would be cut to rival neighbourhoods. Hacking into electricity cables and water mains was often the only way to gain

access to such resources. People no longer washed clothes on a certain day of the week, but when they could gain access to water. Meals were no longer eaten at set times, but when food and power supplies permitted.

The period since the ending of the civil war in 1990 has led to a “normalised” reordering of the city. So, for example, roads have been reconnected and transformed from places of fear to open thoroughfares; the temporal rhythms of people and traffic have become more regular and routinized; the need to assess risks and threats to life and property has been, if not completely eliminated, then significantly reduced; buildings have been reclaimed by their lawful owners and rebuilt or refurbished; and urban nature no longer grows wild but has been tamed and restricted to designated places, such as flower beds. Perhaps most importantly of all, there is a search for a new solidarity. The next two sections will develop an urban geography of peace in post-civil war Beirut, including the role played by the people of the city in reclaiming public space.

An Urban Geography of Peace: Remaking Beirut

The loss of a functioning city led to economic fragmentation as capital fled from Beirut’s banking quarter to more politically stable centres, in particular Dubai. Businesses and banks relocated from the centre along confessional lines to neighbourhoods such as Hamra in west Beirut and Achrafiye in the east. The destruction of the centre also deprived Beirut of the only part of the city to which all Lebanese, irrespective of their confession, felt a sense of cultural ownership (Dlugy and Scott 2001). The reconstruction and revitalisation of this area was thus seen as key to Beirut’s future, both to attract foreign investment and visitors back to Lebanon and to provide a social space to which all Lebanese felt a sense of belonging.

One of the main obstacles to reconstruction was property rights. Thousands of people claimed ownership or tenancy in the centre, some of whom could not be traced (Gavin and Maluf 1996, 14). To have untangled the web of multiple, often competing, claims to property rights, so that reconstruction took place only with the consent of all as Lebanese law required, would have stalled the reconstruction process. The solution was to change the law. In December 1991 Law 117 was passed giving the government the right to sequester all rights to land and buildings in the centre in exchange for compensation to the rights holders. In 1994 the government legally transferred these rights to the company established to reconstruct central Beirut, Solidere (Société Libanaise de Developpement et Reconstruction). The transfer of property rights was controversial as the head of Solidere, Rafic Hariri, was also the Lebanese prime minister. Hariri responded to claims that he was using public office for private gain by arguing that a piecemeal approach to reconstruction would take too long and that only if property rights were clear and unencumbered could investment capital be attracted and rebuilding take place on the scale necessary.

In exchange for being granted title to the centre Solidere agreed to clear all rubble and restore the electricity, water and sewage infrastructures. In exchange for losing legal title property holders were compensated with shares in Solidere. Type A shares were allocated to the original property owners based on property value as estimated by appraisal committees. Type B shares were purchased by investors and were issued to raise investment capital. 100 million Type A shares and 65 million Type B shares were issued (Solidere 2013). Although Type A shares are more numerous they are spread over thousands of ex-property rights holders, while there are relatively few Type B shareholders. Type A shareholders are thus relatively powerless compared to the more wealthy Type B shareholders. Solidere has been accused of underestimating land and property values, thus undervaluing the worth of Type A shareholders and resulting, in effect, in a *de facto* land expropriation that benefits Type B institutional shareholders at the expense of the original property rights holders (Kassir 2010, 533; el-Khoury 1998). A further criticism is that there is no grand plan for the city (Stewart 1996; Charlesworth 2007). Some areas, such as Rue Damas and Dahieh (the predominantly Shia southern suburbs), have been relatively neglected,

while the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps have been neglected entirely. Reconstruction has been confined to areas where investors anticipate the highest returns, not to areas where there is greatest social need.

The remainder of this section will examine Solidere’s approach to reconstruction through three case studies. They are the souks, Place d’Etoile and Place des Martyrs.

1. The Souks

The future of the souks in post-war Beirut has been highly contested. Before the war the Souk al-Nouriyeh and Souk Sursuq, located to the north of Place d’Etoile and Place des Martyrs, were a thriving social space that represented the heart of the central district (Figure 1). Thomas Friedman described the pre-war souks thus: “covered markets and stone arched alleyways, the red roofed houses and craft workshops ...seven thousand shops once stood shoulder to shoulder, with the Maronite cobbler next to the Druze butcher and the Greek Orthodox money changer next to the Sunni coffee seller and the Shiite grocer next to the Armenian jeweller” (Friedman 1995, 215).

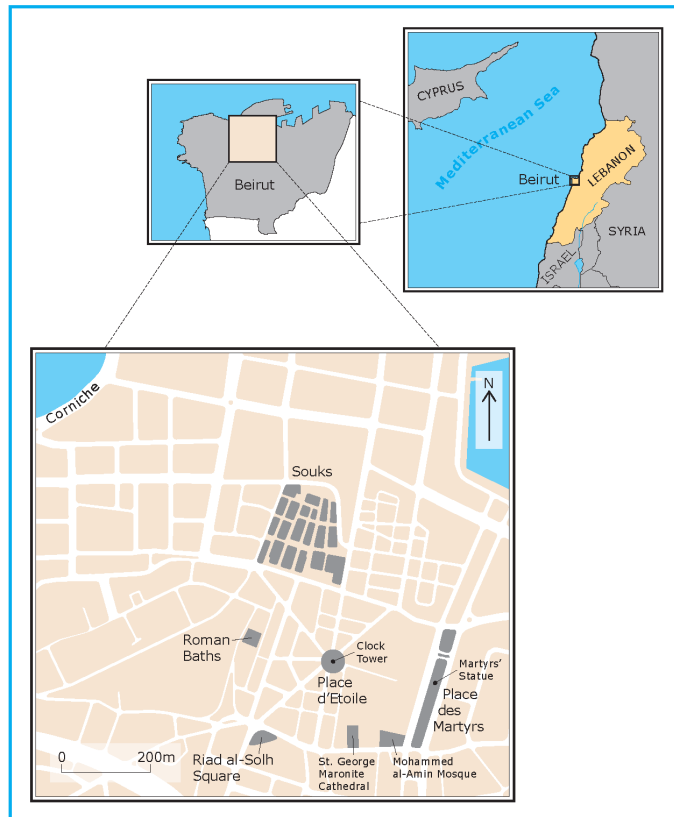


Figure 1: The Beirut central district

Source: Custom map designed for the author by Howie Twiner

The fate of the souks illustrates the tension between Solidere as a private company that has responsibilities both to its own shareholders and to the Lebanese government. Solidere faces the challenge of reconstructing Beirut’s centre while simultaneously serving as the custodian of Lebanon’s ancient and architectural heritage (Saliba 2013, 21; Ragab 2011, 110). The company

opted not to restore the souks but to level those souks not destroyed during the war, building in their place a modern commercial sector. This met strong opposition from a diverse group including shop owners and wealthy landowners, which lobbied the media and members of parliament. One reason for the opposition was the loss of property rights of those who owned property in the souks. The sharp break with the past that Solidere proposed was also significant. To many Lebanese the pre-war souks were imbued with memory and nostalgia. They represented a meeting place for Lebanese of all confessions. The dense network of streets that accommodated the souks had evolved along a gradual and organic temporal scale and many Lebanese believed that they should remain as a social space that enabled a traditional Arab way of doing business in the open air, with prices set by bargaining between buyers and sellers. This view was summed up by Raya Daouk, the wife of one souk owner, who said “You can’t implant a downtown... It’s built up naturally with years. If you erase it, you erase a whole atmosphere that is created. ...A soulless city, you can implant it anywhere in the world, but it won’t work” (Raya Daouk, cited in Dlugy and Scott 2001, 9). Daouk spoke of “the natural downtown area, that is built throughout the ages with the reflection of the needs and character of the people” (Raya Daouk, cited in Dlugy and Scott 2001, 9). Opponents argued that souk owners should make their own arrangements for rebuilding. This piecemeal approach would have respected local diversity and preserved a variety of different retail outlets. However, redevelopment would have taken longer, and would not have attracted the investment that Solidere did.

The debate was essentially one of traditional versus modernising development. However, there have been other times in Beirut’s history when the “old souks” have been criticised. During the Ottoman period a French doctor, Benoît Boyer, criticised the urban infrastructure of the city on hygiene grounds, arguing that what was needed was a “gutting (*éventration*) of the bazaar” (Benoît Boyer, cited in Hanssen 2005, 130). During the First World War there was a redevelopment of the area that saw many souks destroyed. Some souks were “redeveloped” in the 1920s during the French mandate.

So some of the souks that Beirutis tried to preserve in the 1990s as “traditional” were only seventy years old. The campaign was unsuccessful. Those souks not destroyed during the war were razed by Solidere. An international design competition was held. The winning entry was for a new commercial centre and shopping mall to be built in the space that the souks once occupied with underground car park, cinema, supermarket and separate souks for gold and jewellery. The Beirut souks website claims that “the practicality of modern design embraces historical and cultural heritage. This has been transformed into a portal between past and the future” (Beirut souks 2014). The design is intended to bring together the traditional characteristics of a souk as an open and shared public space with modern retail based on car access. However to one critic, Saree Makdisi, to call a shopping mall a souk “can amount to nothing more than a postmodern pastiche of the concept of the souk” (Makdisi 1997, 686).

The debate over the redevelopment of the souks saw modern designs clashing with a Lebanese notion of traditionality. Despite the emphasis of the new souks on connecting past with future the redevelopment represents a clear temporal break. While the souks have been redeveloped in the past it would be wrong to see their loss as a continuous process that Solidere merely finished. Previous redevelopment had been piecemeal and incremental, but with the planned destruction of the 1990s the dense, narrow and winding street network in which the old souks were located vanished forever.

The redesigned souks have been criticised as an exclusionary space, an “enclave of luxury” (Kassir 2010, 537) that caters for wealthy Lebanese and international visitors and is beyond the reach of the urban workers and poor that frequented the pre-war souks. The construction of a leisure and commercial centre can be seen as an expression of a desire for enjoyment, for those Lebanese who can afford it. To Samir Khalaf a collective amnesia and a culture of escapism is at work through which Lebanese seek solace from the stresses of living in a fragile democracy characterised by fear and suspicion (Khalaf 2012). In this respect the new souks represent not

only a clear break from Lebanon's past in an urban-material sense; they also represent a psychic break, a will to forget past traumas and present difficulties, such as political uncertainties and basic public services.

Both the design of the new souks and the campaign for the preservation and restoration of the old souks can be explained in terms of memory and forgetting. For many Lebanese the destruction of the souks has had a psychic cost that can be explained as loss of place, a phenomenon that arises when people are separated from places from which they derive their identity and sense of self and to which they are attached through a sense of cultural belonging. Loss of place may arise in two ways, both of which characterised the Lebanese civil war. First, people may be removed, by force or circumstances, from places to which they belong and in which past memories are rooted. This was the fate of many Beirutis who either fled Lebanon or relocated to another neighbourhood in search of safety. Second, people may suffer loss of place even when they are not displaced in a spatial sense but when around them the places and buildings to which they are attached are destroyed. The destruction of the urban fabric leads to a sense of cultural and emotional disintegration and, in many cases, to trauma and psychological destabilisation. The loss of the old souks as a shared social space—both through destruction in the war, with the remaining souks being lost at war's end—left many Beirutis feeling a sense of displacement, uprootedness and loss of identity. Trauma at the loss of the built environment is felt not just by individuals; it also applies at a collective level when shared common spaces are destroyed and the emotive and historical significance of places is eroded.

2. Place d'Etoile

Place d'Etoile dates from the French mandate era. The radial design of Place d'Etoile—a pattern of radiating wedges converging on a square at the centre of which stands a clock tower—was a French design inspired by what is now Place Charles de Gaulle in Paris (formerly Place d'Etoile and still commonly called that by Parisians). In Paris 12 streets converge on the Arc de Triomphe. In Beirut eight streets were planned but only six were built following local resistance to the design in the 1920s. Building all eight streets would have required the demolition of three cathedrals (Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Maronite) and a mosque. Some local “notables” would also have been required to yield land. The mandate authorities thus faced local opposition so that the design of the star, intended as a symbol of modernity and the rational management of urban space, was not fully implemented (Khalaf 2006, 80-2). The modified design was finally implemented in 1927. In order to legitimise the development the French used local craftsmen and architects.

Place d'Etoile and the surrounding Foch-Allenby area were relatively spared from destruction during the civil war and Solidere decided to restore the area so that, in outward appearance, it closely resembles the area pre-war. Solidere designated Place d'Etoile and Foch-Allenby as a conservation area. The clock tower, dismantled before the civil war, was restored and reassembled in its original place. Robert Saliba has summed up how Solidere viewed the challenge it faced in rebuilding the area:

How to reconcile townscape and architectural conservation with the exigencies of economic revitalization, to mediate between preservation and modernization or, more generally, past and future, when a historic area is subjected to the demands of economic development.

(Saliba 2004, 12)

Solidere's solution was not to conserve the full integrity of the buildings according to their original design. Lightly-damaged buildings were restored (although not always to their exact earlier designs) so that, in effect, French mandate urban design and architecture was claimed as legitimate Beirut heritage and incorporated into the city's post-war urban fabric.

For buildings that had suffered more severe damage the approach was to conserve the façade behind which was either a restored, but structurally altered, building or, in the most extreme cases, a completely new, and modern, building that bore no relation to the original. In so doing Solidere constructed what may be termed an “historical modernity,” that is an urban form that mediates temporally between the heritage of the past and the needs of the modern present and future. From the street the cultural identity of the area is respectful of Beirut’s architectural heritage with restored original façades while the interiors of the buildings cater to the perceived needs of modern office space. Interior modernisation includes installing elevators, air conditioning and heating systems and provisioning for disabled access. In some cases basements were converted to car parking space. Reconstruction work at Place d’Etoile has thus been a hybridization driven by exterior conservation and interior modernization (Saliba 2004, 181). The restoration work also illustrates how perceptions on what constitutes architectural heritage can change over time. Saliba suggests that through accepting Ottoman and mandate era architectures into the post-war urban fabric Beirut is the first city in the Middle East to have come to terms with its colonial heritage (Saliba 2004, 13).

The excavations that followed the civil war gave Beirutis an unexpected opportunity to rediscover the city’s past. Adjacent to Place d’Etoile to the west are the Roman baths, first excavated in the late-1960s and more extensively excavated after the war and landscaped into a terraced garden. The showcasing of the Roman baths can be seen as an attempt to draw a connection across the various confessional divides in Lebanon by reconnecting the past with the present. It seeks to rehabilitate a common cultural heritage but through selective memory, of deliberately forgetting the recent past that fractured the city by refocusing the collective gaze of the city to a more distant past that all Lebanese share in common.

3. Place des Martyrs

Place des Martyrs (Martyrs’ Square) is a symbol of what unites and divides Lebanon. It was originally planned in the nineteenth century as a central square during the Ottoman era. Previously known as Place des Canons, the square was renamed Place des Martyrs following the hanging by the Ottomans in 1916 of Lebanese nationals and intellectuals. A statue to those executed was erected in 1930. It is the one monument in the country to which most Lebanese feel a sense of ownership and it has become a focus for Lebanese unity. The square has acted as a place where Lebanese of all confessions have congregated. By the 1940s the square was home to a bus station, communal taxis, cinemas, shops and hotels. It was well preserved until the 1950s when it became the centre of the city’s vice trade. The square has symbolised Beirut’s cosmopolitanism in peace and its division in war, with the green line running through the square, much of which was destroyed during the war.

Whereas Place d’Etoile was treated as a conservation area a very different approach was taken to Place des Martyrs. Almost all of the remaining buildings were demolished after the war, although some could have been restored. The Opera cinema, now a Virgin megastore, is the only major building on the square to have survived. The statue has also survived, although now bullet riddled. In terms of architecture, reconstruction has thus proceeded from close to a clean slate. Solidere decided early on that the square should be opened to the north to create a Grand Axis that started from the south of Place des Martyrs running to the coast with an uninterrupted sea view. This required the demolition of one of the square’s most famous buildings, the Rivoli cinema. The building of a grand axis incorporating Place des Martyrs mirrors the creation during the French mandate era of wide avenues in the Foch-Allenby district. As Saliba comments, “an urban design strategy reminiscent of mid-nineteenth century Paris, first applied to Beirut in the 1920s, has been brought to its full potential three-quarters of a century later” (Saliba 2013, 21). One commentator suggests that the collective memory to which the city’s axes appeals is not that of Beirutis but that of expatriate Lebanese living in Europe and North America whom the city

wishes to entice back to the country (Yahya 2004). The reconstruction of Place des Martyrs may be seen as one in which Solidere wishes to help redefine relations not only between Beirut and Beirutis but between Beirut and the wider world economy, with the city positioned as a regional power (Huybrechts 2002).

In 2002 work began on the building of the large Mohammed al-Amin Mosque to the south-west of Place des Martyrs. The Sunni mosque was bequeathed by three charitable foundations, including the Rafic Hariri Foundation. A Sunni, Hariri was accused of using his authority as head of Solidere and his political influence (he was prime minister at the time) to gain approval for an iconic Sunni building. The al-Amin Mosque dwarfs the adjoining St. George Maronite Cathedral and the size of the design was opposed by Maronite and other Christian groups some of whom complained of a “creeping Islamisation” of the central district (Blanford 2009, 45). The construction of the mosque illustrates how political and religious power can be asserted through architecture and spatial transformation, embracing some groups but excluding those from other faiths. There is a risk that the reconstruction of the centre could perpetuate key divisions. Buildings are never autonomous objects; they always mediate power relations and cultural values, which poses a challenge for how culture should be represented in multicultural urban environments.

An international design competition for the reconstruction of Place des Martyrs was held which was won in 2005 by an Athens-based architectural team. The design includes shopping arcades, arts and crafts booths, a city museum, an archaeological institute and a library (Wilson-Goldie 2005). The competition was solely an ideas competition and Solidere was under no obligation to implement the winning design. The finished square will have a mix of uses similar to that of the winning entry. One of the first buildings to be reconstructed was the Le Gray Hotel next to the Virgin Megastore. At this writing (November 2015) building work in Place des Martyrs remains ongoing, as does contention over the shape and form reconstruction should take. Solidere wishes to position Place des Martyrs as the commercial heart of the city and the centre of regional trade and finance. However, residents of the city have criticised Solidere for transforming Place des Martyrs from a shared space for all Beirutis to an exclusive zone in which most local people no longer have a place, in the process undermining the healing role the square could have played in reuniting the city and its people after the war (Calame and Charlesworth 2009, 195).

However, in 2005 the people of Beirut would reclaim Place des Martyrs, albeit in tragic circumstances.

Hariri’s Assassination and the Reclamation of Urban Space

On 14 February 2005 Rafic Hariri, a critic of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, was assassinated by a car bomb just outside the central district. He was buried two days later in a grave near the al-Amin Mosque in Place des Martyrs at a funeral service attended by approximately 200,000, with Sunnis, Shia, Christians and Druze mingling at the funeral service. With Syria blamed by many for Hariri’s death the funeral became a vote of no-confidence in Syria’s occupation of Lebanon. Thereafter, a series of rallies for Syrian withdrawal was held in Place des Martyrs, attended primarily by Christians, Sunnis and Druze. Syria announced it was withdrawing from Lebanon in April 2005.

Many of the features of these rallies were adopted from outside Lebanon, having their origins in the demonstrations and revolutions that led to the collapse in 1989 of communism in Eastern Europe, in particular East Germany and Czechoslovakia (the “Velvet Revolution”), and subsequent political protests in post-communist Europe, such as the 2003 “Rose Revolution” in Georgia and the 2004 “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine (Ash 1989). They included mass rallies, peaceful vigils, human chains, the involvement of all ages and classes, and colourful protests involving prominent displays of the national flag (Holst 2005, 338). The portrayal of the

demonstrations by the western press, such as the “Cedar Revolution” and the “Beirut Spring,” drew from the iconography of the earlier European protests. The rallies also attracted the name “Independence Intifada” because of their strong emphasis on Lebanese sovereignty.

Lebanon’s Shia were not involved in the Place des Martyrs demonstrations, with Hezbollah, which favoured a continued Syrian presence in Lebanon, organising its own demonstrations, though not in Place des Martyrs but in the nearby Riad al-Solh Square. The largest such demonstration was held on March 8 attracting crowds that were larger than those that the anti-Syrian opposition had been able to muster at that time. Again, the Lebanese flag was prominent (with the Hezbollah flag conspicuous by its near absence) and again there was an emphasis on freedom from foreign interference (although from western governments and the Israelis, rather than the Syrians) (Whitaker 2005). Six days later on March 14 the anti-Syrian opposition responded with a bigger rally numbering at least 800,000 people in and around Place des Martyrs (Khalaf 2006, 16).

These two rallies gave birth to two political alliances—the March 8 alliance and the March 14 alliance—that continue to dominate Lebanese politics to this day. (Some Beirutis yearn for a “March 11” movement, balanced between the two sides (Llewellyn 2010, 16).) By displaying the Lebanese flag both groups sought to avoid accusations of narrow confessionalism, each articulating different visions while showing their commitment to a unified Lebanese nation. Hariri’s assassination, therefore, led to mass mobilisations that between them reinvigorated public debate on Lebanese national identity, with Place des Martyrs and the surrounding area reclaimed as public space. The square is now visited by a steady stream of visitors, including visiting political leaders, to Hariri’s grave by the al-Amin Mosque. With his assassination Hariri was inscribed into Place des Martyrs, a modern martyr who is now immortalised in the memory and heritage of the square.

This illustrates that public spaces are “made” not only by materiality (buildings, architecture and the showcasing of heritage) but by the aspirations, understandings and shared social meanings that citizens articulate and invest in these spaces. Prior to 2005 the fate of Place des Martyrs was uncertain but now, it is clear, the square will not simply serve as a social space haunted by the ghosts of the past. The Lebanese have reclaimed the square as a place of celebration, diversity and protest, so that it will serve, as it has always done, as a place of dialogue based simultaneously on coexistence and conflict. Sara Fregonese refers to this as a “discrepant cosmopolitanism,” characterized by both openness and closure (Fregonese 2012a). Since 2005 the square has served as an open forum for debate and rallies on a range of political and social issues, with demonstrations and sit-ins at times shutting down Beirut’s centre (Sawalha 2010, 136). Today the square is seen by Lebanese as a space of reconciliation and tolerance that has played a vital role in constituting Beirut’s postwar identity (Chahine 2015).

Conclusion

This paper has developed an urban geography of war and peace for Beirut using three themes. The first is the relationship between the public and private spheres. During the civil war the public sphere was shrunken, both in terms of public institutions (with the legitimacy, capability and reach of the Lebanese state significantly diminished) and space (with people confined to localised and homogenised neighbourhoods). The private sphere was also diminished. Private space shrank as people chose, or were forced, to share their property with others. Private capital fled to more risk free locales and smaller private businesses became less viable. Many businesses and people lost the right to use their property, either through human displacement or material destruction. In peace the Lebanese state has regained its legitimacy although its authority remains contested and, at times, fragile. The rehabilitation of the Lebanese state at war’s end was immediately followed by the ceding of state authority for the reconstruction of the centre to a single private company, Solidere, charged with acting in the public interest, with the state using

its legislative capacity to appropriate private property for Solidere. There has thus been a blurring of the public and private spheres in postwar Beirut. It is also worth noting that the mass public rallies in Place des Martyrs have taken place on what is now legally private land.

The second theme is temporality. In war how people use their time is determined by the staccato rhythms of battles and ceasefires. People focus on the immediate present in order to survive. During peacetime temporal horizons are lengthened as people and institutions regain the confidence to plan for the future and cope with the problems of the past. The reconstruction of the central district has seen much of Beirut's past discarded, notably in Place des Martyrs and the old souks. Part of the reason for this is that the urban forms favoured by international capital clashed with more traditional Lebanese notions of urban space. The souks were an integrating social space that lost out to a modernising vision. Christine Nagel writes of the reconstruction producing a "forgetful landscape" that aggravates, rather than heals, the country's divisions by appealing to the wealthy rather than the majority of Beirutis (Nagel 2002, 724). Elsewhere, in Place d'Etoile, colonial architecture has been incorporated into the city's postwar urban heritage. This illustrates that ideas of heritage evolve over time and are open to differing interpretations.

The theme of temporality is intimately bound with notions of memory and forgetting. The reconstruction saw some buildings rehabilitated and others destroyed yet, perhaps paradoxically, both may be seen as strategies for forgetting. In Place d'Etoile the approach was one of healing, of rekindling shared memories by restoring damaged buildings so that, at least in terms of façades, there is little evidence of the damage done and one can almost forget that war took place. This approach plays to nostalgia and enables a sense of social and historical continuity, what Haugbolle calls "the reenchantment of the disenchanting" (Haugbolle 2010, 88). In Place des Martyrs the approach was one of renewal rather than healing. Here forgetting takes the form of breaking cleanly with the past rather than reconnecting with it. However, the aftermath of Hariri's assassination makes clear that social space is constructed as much by publics as urban planners and architects. Through the rallies in Place des Martyrs the Lebanese people reclaimed a traditional place for public discourse and peaceful reconciliation.

Finally, the paper has explored the interrelationship between heritage and modernity. Although in the early stages of the war some modern hotel buildings were targeted by militias for the most part the urbicide of the city during the civil war made no distinction between old and new; both were vulnerable to shelling and to sudden and random violence. Since the end of the war the reconstruction of the central district can be explained as a dialectic between heritage and modernity. Like environmental conservation, urban heritage has an intergenerational dimension; it is an endowment that one generation wishes to bestow to the future. In the case of Beirut there has been protracted debate on what that endowment should be. There are ongoing debates over what, precisely, Beirut's architectural heritage is and how much should be conserved, with dialogues between urban developers (who want to build) and archaeologists (who want to excavate and conserve). Disagreements between proponents of modernisation and those who wish to restore the urban fabric to its pre-war state have played out over various scales, focusing on both individual buildings and specific districts, such as the souks and Place des Martyrs.

Beirut remains a city at risk. Since Hariri's assassination political problems have occasionally turned violent, as in 2008 when Hezbollah occupied west Beirut for three days. Since 2011 hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Syrian civil war have arrived in Lebanon. Within Lebanon there are different approaches to how the situation should be handled, with Hezbollah supporting the Assad regime, which the Sunni and Christian parties largely oppose. Any involvement of the extremist Sunni group Islamic State in Lebanon would further undermine Lebanon's fragile political stability. Integration and fragmentation continue to coexist in the country, although there is a limit to how far each process can go. Due to Lebanon's demography and confessional system cosmopolitanism has its limits and complete integration is not possible. But fragmentation, too, has its limits if the country is not once again to descend into civil war.

However, the role that the Lebanese themselves have played in reclaiming Place des Martyrs as an integrating social space represents a source of optimism for the future. Place des Martyrs illustrates the different roles that open space can play in urban geographies of war and peace. During war, open spaces are inhospitable, threatening places where violent things happen. To cross an open space during the civil war, especially Place des Martyrs and areas close to the green line, was to risk one's life. The inscribing of the green line through the historical heart of the city rendered free movement across the city impossible. A geography of war is one of fear and of confinement, with people reluctant to venture into the open. The civil war terrorised and degraded open spaces such as Place des Martyrs. In a geography of peace, however, open spaces may be transformed into sites of redemption, tolerance, pluralism, and renewal and, in the case of Beirut, into a renewed commitment to the idea of Lebanon as a viable political entity. The revitalisation of Place des Martyrs is not, therefore, solely one of architectural renewal: more importantly, it is one of civic, social, and national renewal.

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