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Reconstruction and Fragmentation in Beirut

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Editorial Note

This paper was produced as part of the *Middle East and Mediterranean Studies* postgraduate programme at King's College London under the module moderated by Dr Craig Larkin entitled 'Urban Conflict and Transformations in the Middle East'. The module focuses on how ethnic and national conflicts shape the socio-spatial structure and physical urban environment of cities. It draws on recent research conducted under the Conflict in Cities programme and Centre for the Study of Divided Societies at King's College London.

Biographical note

Edward Randall is a postgraduate in the Middle East and Mediterranean Studies programme at King's College London. His research at King's has also focussed on development and democratisation in Arab states after the uprisings of 2011.

Edward Randall

Abstract. This paper examines the impact of conflicts over urban reconstruction in Beirut. I draw on rich case studies presented by the reconstruction of the Central District by Solidère and Haret Hreik by Hezbollah in order to examine the vision, methodology and impact of distinct yet comparable reconstruction projects. I examine promotional brochures, internet and multimedia sources, media campaigns and primary source interviews. The paper also counterposes the Elyssar project and Al Wa'ad, both in the southern suburb of Beirut (Dahiyya), highlighting competitive pressures and control by sectarian actors and their impact on Beirut's everyday space. I find that reconstruction efforts have served more to fragment than unite the city around a common pluralistic vision. The division of sovereignty in Lebanon has given rise to new lines of united contestation and further division.

Keywords: Beirut, Solidère, Hezbollah, reconstruction, urban politics

Introduction

Cities are dynamic environments. In deeply divided societies this dynamism is complicated by conflicts over power, resources, history, identity, memory and space. Beirut was an open and liberal city which became the focus of the Lebanese civil war of the 1970s and 1980s. Conflicts over urban space that were begun by the civil war have continued in the politics of reconstruction. A comparison between the reconstruction of Beirut's city centre after the civil war and that of Beirut's southern suburb (Dahiyya) after the 2006 conflict with Israel illuminates the connection between reconstruction and socio-political relationships. Physical reconstruction efforts have exacerbated and been exacerbated by Lebanese consociational and communal politics. They have not enabled post-conflict societal and political reconstruction in a divided society. Beirut's conflicts over space reflect that the very notion of 'reconstruction' is contested: what is being rebuilt, for whom and why?

Space, sovereignty and memory

In analysing the reconstruction of Beirut, I draw upon two theoretical frameworks. Firstly, following the idea advanced by French sociologists that space is dialectical and mobile, I argue that space and debates over space influence political and socioeconomic relationships (Sawalha, 2011: 11-12). Spatial memory and identity affect politics and the use of space. Space can become exclusive, divided or prohibited. Areas of a city can be classified as 'prohibited space' by becoming exclusive areas for some or all of their inhabitants (Ibid). Dividing lines like the Green Line between East and West Beirut and developing

homogeneous zones, where different communities exist in physically and socio-economically separate areas, are features of many divided cities even after the conflict has formally ended (Bollens, 2012: 16-17). Aseel Sawalha (2011: 3, 10) argues that the top-down imposition of Beirut's reconstruction has prolonged the uncertainty faced by Beirutis. I would question how applicable simple dichotomies of power can be in a country with Lebanon's complex confessional and consociational politics. More useful is the notion of sovereignty over space, in the sense of power to influence change in the urban environment. The Lebanese state does not have a monopoly of sovereignty over the city so co-exists with non-state and external actors. 'Hybrid sovereignties' emerge where geographies of power are shaped both by state and non-state actors (Fragonese, 2012: 294). Sovereignty is continually negotiated and each actor seeks to influence the terms of accommodation. In Beirut, 'sovereignty appears as a collective of knowledges, agents and practices thriving alongside and beyond the state, and shaped by the presence and changes in urban materiality' (Ibid). Both Solidère in central Beirut and Hezbollah in Dahiyya are non-state actors directing reconstruction in each area of the city. Civil society groups and architects, planners and youth have contested the occupation and domination of such space. The multiplicity of visions and prescriptions for the reconstruction of the city are instrumentalised in the politics of space and urban policy (Bollens, 2012: 14-15).

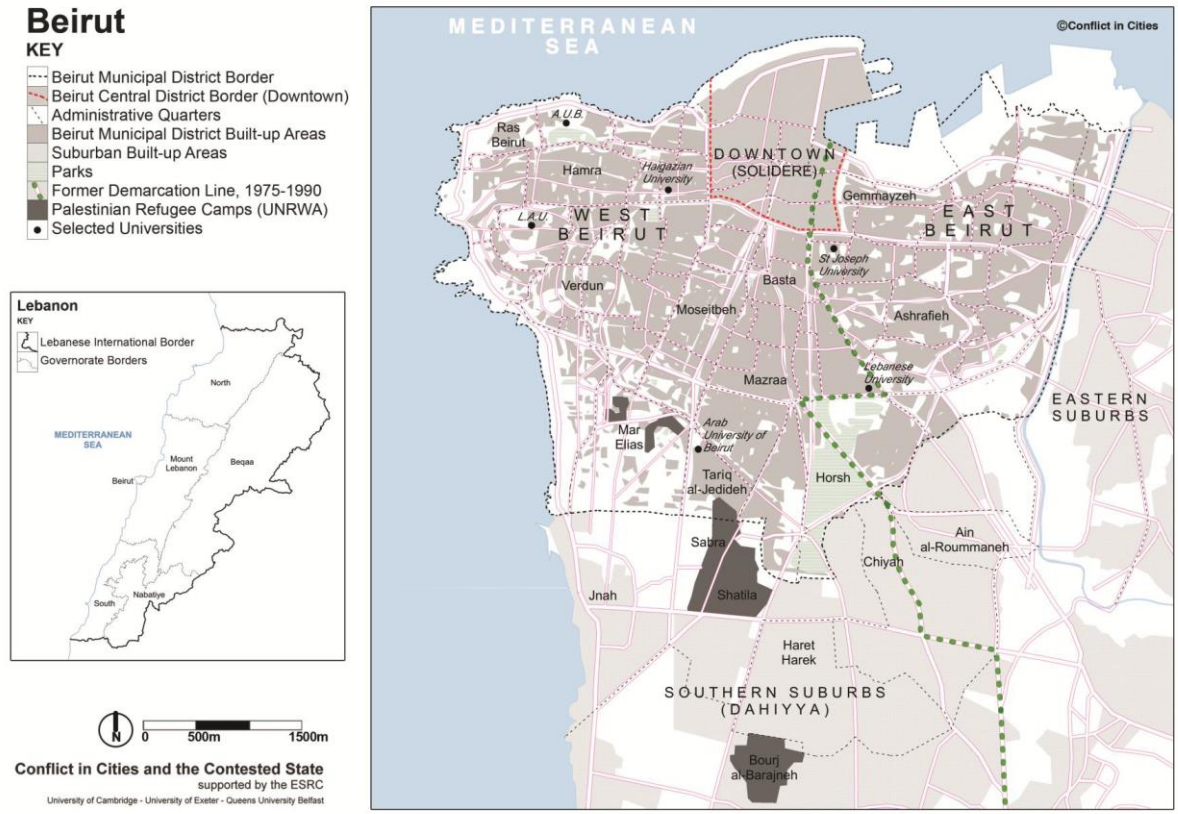
Secondly, I draw on the association between the physical and the mental, emotional or psychological. The reconstruction of the physical environment can be as symbolic and moving as its destruction (Bevan, 2006: 176). Since buildings are imbued with an apparent permanence, their destruction, whether in conflict or as part of reconstruction, can entail a disorientating loss of memory and collective identity (Ibid, 7-13). Post-war reconstruction involves having to choose which buildings to restore and how. Reconstruction involves adopting particular historical narratives because of the association with the memory of destruction (Al-Harithy, 2010: 73-74). Reconstruction ascribes new identities onto the physical and mental environment. It fosters the construction of an 'urban imaginary' in those living collectively in urban spaces: cognitive images formed by the association between the imagination and urban encounters (Larkin, 2010: 416).

This paper will examine how the reconstruction of Beirut has played into Lebanese cross-confessional politics and, more broadly, into relationships between Beirutis in the aftermath of the devastating 1975-1990 civil war. Lebanese politics is conducted under a rigid consociational model, where political offices and patronage are allocated according to confession. Despite this, has urban regeneration been a force for unity or continued division along confessional or broader inter-communal lines? I shall focus on two cases. Firstly, I examine the reconstruction of central Beirut by Solidère, the private company founded by

Rafik Hariri, former Prime Minister from 1992 to 1998 and 2000 to 2004 who was assassinated in 2005. Central Beirut, or the Bourj, was the political, cultural and economic heart of Beirut and Lebanon before it was targeted and decimated during the Lebanese civil war. Solidère transformed 4.69 million square metres of Beirut city centre indicated on the maps on pages 7 and 10. The project involved razing many of Beirut's damaged buildings, restoring Ottoman and Mandate era buildings, excavating and preserving archaeological finds, upgrading infrastructure and building new spaces and areas like the Saifi village and souks. Solidère currently manages and controls the area.

Secondly, I consider the reconstruction of the Haret Hreik area of Dahiyya after the 2006 conflict with Israel. Dahiyya is a predominantly, but not exclusively or historically, Shi'a residential and commercial neighbourhood in southern Beirut. Haret Hreik is indicated on the maps on pages 5 and 12. Hezbollah's headquarters, its service institutions and a large portion of its constituency are located there (Harb and Fawaz, 2010: 21). Israeli bombing razed an estimated 250 apartment buildings (Ibid). The reconstruction effort, called Al Wa'ad, was directed by Jihad Al Bina', Hezbollah's affiliate responsible for reconstruction projects.

In the case of both Solidère and Al Wa'ad, I will discuss the context of the reconstruction effort, the aims of their proponents, their methods and their effect on the wider socio-political context within Beirut. As a counterpoint to the success of Al Wa'ad, I will also examine Elyssar, a project proposed by the Hariri government to regenerate the western half of Dahiyya, as shaded on the map on page 13. The project was to include the construction of major infrastructure and affordable housing and would have involved the demolition of 'illegal' housing. The project failed when Al Wa'ad succeeded. I shall explore why. Finally, I will assess the impact of each reconstruction attempt on the wider integrity of Beirut. I shall argue that, rather than engage with the deep divisions of the present, the nature of the Solidère project as an exclusive consumerist project has fed into the spatial conflict at the heart of Beirut society and has not recreated the pluralistic urban environment of the pre-war years. Al Wa'ad was a means of rebuilding Hezbollah's power base. Both are cases of hybrid sovereignty between the state, private interests and foreign investment. Both represent distinct and separate visions of Beirut, one a vision of renewal to a pre-war state now inaccessible to many Beirutis and the other of renewal as a safe sectarian space independent of the state.



Source: Conflict in Cities

Solidère

The deliberate destruction of the Central District of Beirut during the civil war and displacement upset the communal mix of the area, which was vacated except for a number of Palestinian refugees and displaced Lebanese from the south. Given the centrality of the area to Beirut and Beirut's regional position, reconstruction was urgent (Shwayri, 2008: 86). Solidère was established and given the legal mandate to regenerate the Central District. Solidère's 1994 promotional video gives an idea of the vision (Solidère, 1994). The viewer is presented with dark shots of a ghost town with sinister background music followed by faded pre-war photographs of Beirut. The solemn and matter-of-fact voiceover introduces us to Beirut as a formerly multicultural city now in ruins and then informs us of the need for urgent work to restore its 'unique Levantine character', driven by a 'fever for renewal'. 'Lebanon is determined to reclaim its key position in the world...as a bridge between East and West'. Claiming to speak for 'Lebanon', brief clips are shown where ordinary Beirutis express their hopes for 'more community life' and that people can 'be attracted to the centre of Beirut' again. Whilst this is a marketing video targeting investors in the Solidère project, it does illustrate the Central District reconstruction project as primarily a commercial venture to propel Beirut's, and Lebanon's, renewal. Solidère continues to refer to the diverse city of the

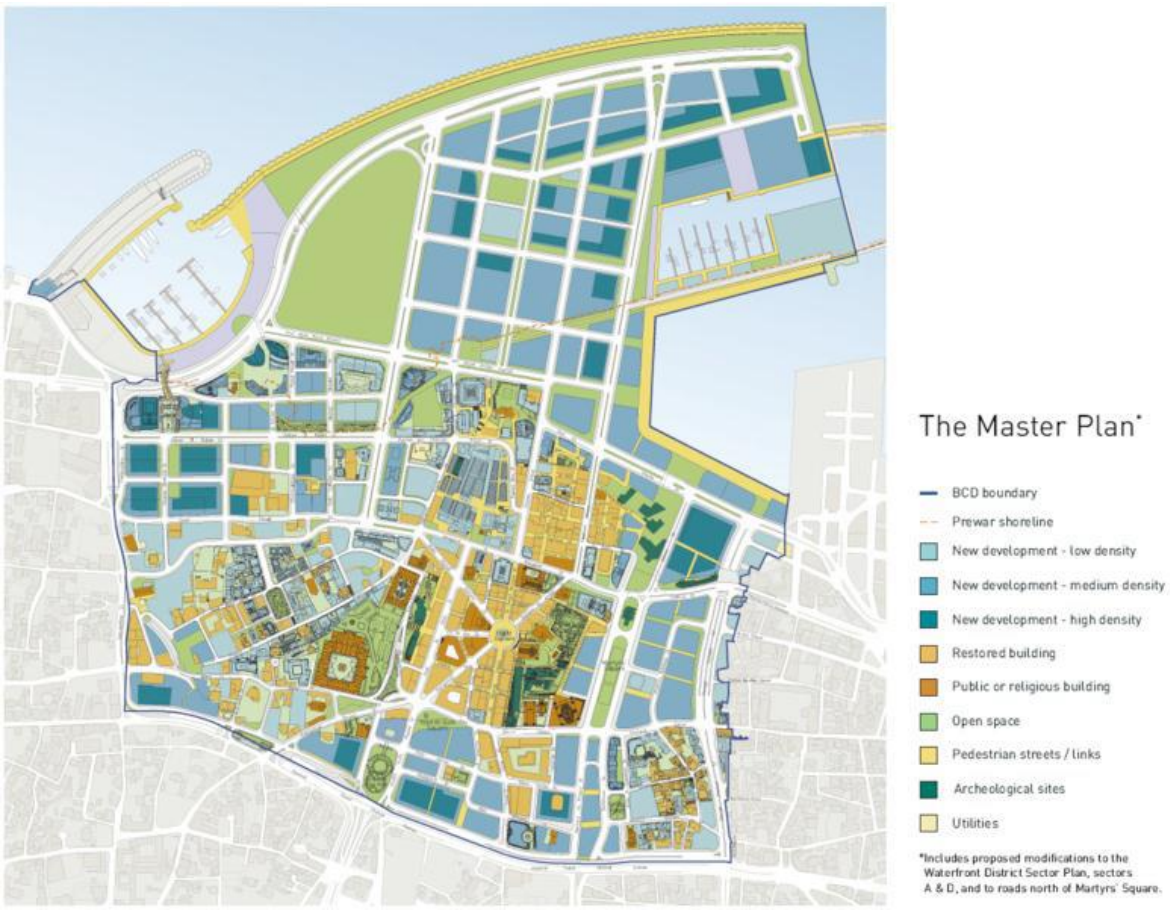
past, ‘as a beacon of modernity and tolerance’ (Solidère, 2011: 4). Yet the project is not at heart an exercise in social and cultural reintegration. It represents an effort to revive the mercantile community in Beirut by the ‘new contractor bourgeoisie’ who returned to Lebanon in the 1990s having made fortunes in the Gulf (Baumann, 2012: 125). The reconstruction of central Beirut was the centrepiece of Rafik Hariri’s vision of Lebanon’s economic rebirth which he claimed to embody (Makdisi, 1997: 670). It represents Hariri’s dominance of Lebanese politics and the Sunnis’ enhanced position in consociational politics after the Ta’if Agreement in 1989 (Baumann, 2012: 132). Ta’if brought an end to the Lebanese civil war and reinforced the powers of the Prime Minister vis-à-vis the President offices which are allocated to a Sunni and Maronite Christian respectively. Solidère was very much Hariri’s personalised project to realise a revived and prosperous Lebanon. This was primarily a Sunni vision of Lebanon and Beirut as a centre of trade, commerce and transit (Hourani, 1988: 7-8). Some Christians suspected that Hariri’s liberal policies weakened their industrial production base (Balanche, 2012: 147). They also viewed Solidère’s vision with suspicion, particularly its alleged disregard for Lebanon’s pre-Islamic past. Solidère stimulated Christian discontent at the post-Ta’if order, with a diminished presidency and the intrusion of Gulf influence and finance to the Sunni elite (Blanford, 2006: 45-46). Hariri’s vision of reconstruction met with resentment from confessional rivals.

Such was the vision of Solidère. Solidère’s methods too left the reconstruction of the city centre open to criticism from the outset. The state abdicated authority for reconstruction under Law 117 of 1991 by allowing Solidère to acquire the ownership rights of property owners. The Central District, both open shared space and private space, is owned and managed by Solidère. In this sense, all space became private space. Those with a historic stake in the district became shareholders in an impersonal corporate structure. Solidère has been accused of bribery and of operating its patronage network independent of public scrutiny (Ibid: 43). The reconstruction effort was realised with huge Gulf investment and by assigning portions of the national budget as part of confessional deal-making with Druze and Shi’a parties (Ibid: 61). Solidère’s sovereignty over the Central District is shaped by a non-state corporation invested with public functions and supported by external finance. Politically, it was not seen as a national project but a bargaining chip in Lebanese confessional politics. The project remains contested along confessional and communal lines. Tensions play into confessional politics and many Beirutis struggle to avoid confessional loyalties. Poor Shi’a residents of Ayn al-Mreisseh turned to Shi’a political parties Amal and Hezbollah for protection from property developers seeking to build on ‘illegal’ settlements (Balanche, 2012: 155-156). Not all Sunnis benefited from Hariri’s project, yet many in the lower middle-class quarter of Tarik al-Jdideh remain loyal to the Hariris’ Future Movement for protection against

the perceived danger posed by the adjacent Shi'a dominated neighbourhood of Dahiyya (Ibid). Tarik al-Jdideh itself is contested and many see the Future Movement as the only, if inadequate, protection against Salafist groups currently moving into the area.

A broader critique focuses on Solidère's occupation of public space and commodification of that space for elite consumption and investment. The influx of Gulf finance has elevated property prices in Beirut to unaffordable levels – a rise of 400% between 2000 and 2010 (Ibid). Reviewing Solidère's 2011 Annual Report, it is clear that Solidère operates as a brand with commercial priorities. Although the report is targeted at investors, it is still the principal public statement of the company's achievements and ambitions. Its current Chairman in his foreword identifies Solidère's 'revenue-generating assets that add value to the land bank' (Solidère, 2011: iv). The 'value added' is not principally cultural or social but commercial. The report does acknowledge the importance of giving places an identity so that they do not all 'feel the same' (Ibid: 5). 'The end-user's experience is no longer the focal point of urban development' (Ibid). The word 'end-user' implies a space for consumption, spectacle and enjoyment rather than belonging or depth. It speaks of public space to be taken advantage of for short-term gain rather than imbuing place with meaning.

Private capital and consumerism have influenced development in many cities, but the scale of Solidère's remit in reconstructing and managing the Central District, in as fragmented a city as Beirut, is more controversial. Central Beirut was occupied by protesters between December 2006 and May 2008 after the Qatar-brokered Doha Agreement gave Hezbollah veto power in the cabinet led instead to political deadlock. Protesters in support of and against the government articulated different political agendas and visions. Protesters also criticised the exclusion Solidère had imposed on the city centre and affirmed their 'right to the city' (Balanche, 2012: 155). It was a significant moment when the Central District became a national space for the expression of diverging visions of Lebanon and gave rise to new contestation. One view is that the occupation movement represented a new anti-sectarian politics challenging the ability of any one group or faction from dominating the city and impose control. This view criticises the pro-Hariri March 14 movement for claiming unique possession of Beirut's central square, Martyrs' Square, 'like the rest of Beirut, not as a centre for all citizens but as another district under sectarian control' (Shams, 2011). Another view sees the occupation movement as having turned the city centre for more than a year into a 'hideous and smelly tent city, killing all the neighbourhood's businesses in the process' (Hamoui, 2013). Solidère is unfairly targeted as 'the villain in the story', accused of destroying Beirut and leaving it 'empty and charmless' but in fact the company 'rebuilt it and made it liveable again' (Ibid).



Solidère's role is divisive because, in a post-conflict city which had been destroyed on Beirut's scale, reconstruction involves choosing what to keep and what to destroy. With its reduction of the Central District to a *tabula rasa*, Solidère stood accused of levelling more buildings than were destroyed during the civil war (Makdisi, 1997: 662). In response, groups campaign for Beirut's heritage to be preserved in order to retain the soul of the city. The notion of heritage is of course problematic because it attaches meaning to physical architecture to support particular historical narratives and present-day concerns. A nostalgic appreciation for the past can serve as a form of catharsis and escape from modern consumerism (Khalaf, 2006: 35). Solidère does acknowledge the importance of preserving and integrating archaeological sites into the city centre: 'culture remains a dynamic and integral element of everyday life, just as it is central to the formation of the urban fabric, character and economy of a city' (Solidère, 2011: 61). For instance, it ensured that Ottoman and Mandate era buildings were carefully restored, along with mosques and churches central to communal life in the city (Khalaf, 2006: 133-139).

Yet Solidère stands accused on two charges. Firstly, it is criticised for trivialising the heritage of Central District. Lebanese architect Bernard Khoury (Amaya-Akkermans, 2012) pours scorn on Solidère's motto, 'An Ancient City for the Future', because 'it evokes and

links the past and the future, but shrugs off any notion of the present', that is the city as it is currently experienced by Beirutis. In this manner, Solidère's urban renewal strategy prioritises the global economy and tourism over local 'urban' renewal by creating a common shared space accessible to all. Lebanese youth's response to reconstruction of Beirut city centre reveals contradictory attitudes: from alienation at the perceived superficiality of the venture to optimism that a more stable future is possible in a new shared space (Larkin, 2010: 427-428). Many feel a disconnect between the new developments as physical buildings and the attempt to evoke Beirut's pre-war past. Solidère rebuilt the Beirut souks, for example, as a way of evoking the bustling social and commercial heart of the multicultural city before the war. According to the architect (Moneo, 1998: 263), the souks were designed to "revitalise the familiar character of a souk while accommodating contemporary needs of shopping and retail". The design showcased on Solidère's website (Solidère, 2013) incorporates existing older structures as at Imam Ouzai or seeks to replicate a closed shopping souk as at Souk Jamil. Yet the souks are principally centres of consumption for exclusive brands inaccessible to many Beirutis. Research suggests that the physical reality fails to reunite a divided city but disconnects the now exclusive Central District from the rest of the city (Larkin, 2010: 428-429).

Secondly, Solidère is accused of neglecting the heritage of the Central District. Outside the Central District, Beirut's architectural heritage is contested. One argument runs that 'heritage buildings' remain at risk where developers buy listed property and then bypass planning restrictions and maximise land plots to build tall and characterless apartment blocks (Collard, 2011). The Central District may have been reconstructed painstakingly, but other areas have been neglected by public planners, including the waterfront where skyscrapers and modern hotel blocks have sprung up (Sharp, 2010). Campaign groups like Save Beirut Heritage (SBH) and the Lebanese Economic Association lobby for the preservation of heritage buildings. The Lebanese Economic Association argues in its online documentary 'Beirut: the Space in between Hope and Public' that public policy on urban regeneration favours developers and fails to 'respect the dynamic of the city' and provide sufficient public space for citizens (Lebanese Economic Association, 2013). 'Cities are built on interaction, on the things that people share' (Ibid). SBH campaigns to save buildings it has identified as listed for demolition. Such campaigns appear superficial and highly selective in view of the contested meaning of 'heritage' and how and when to integrate buildings of different architectural styles and historical meaning into the broader urban fabric. One commentator criticised recent campaigns as 'alarmist and attention grabbing', even 'infantile' in their approach (Atallah, 2011). Poor planning and zealous development is contributing to the architectural fragmentation of the city begun during the civil war. Much of the contestation,

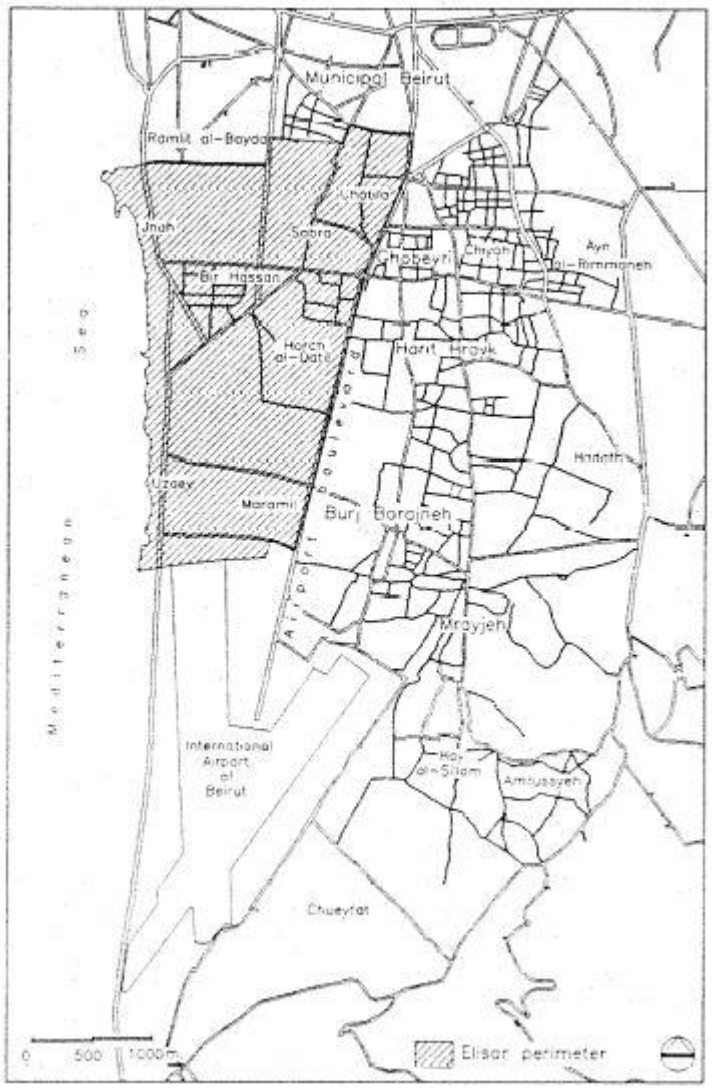
meanwhile, has not articulated a deeper analysis or galvanised consensus about how to reintegrate the city.

Dahiyya

Whilst the reconstruction of Beirut's Central District has been accused of being an exclusive, sanitised space, the southern suburb, Dahiyya, has also been characterised as a sectarian space and the organisation and management of the district – as symptomatic of the fragmentation of the city. The district has been ascribed particular connotations as Shi'a, backward, Islamist and ghettoised (Harb, 2010: 128). However it is not a homogenous space completely dominated by Shi'a parties or iconography. This characterisation masks the complex development of the suburb involving political mobilisation by Maronites and Shi'a in the area and rapid urbanisation caused by the migration of populations displaced by war from northeastern suburbs of Beirut, the Bekaa valley and south Lebanon (Ibid). That said, the area has over the last decades become predominantly Shi'i Muslim. It is dominated by a particular mix of politics and piety which Lara Deeb has described as a 'pious modern', where religious identity based forms and practices of Islam are authenticated and lived. Hezbollah's operates a 'resistance' society in Dahiyya by dominating a space deeply imbued with religious rhetoric and an ideology of social justice and 'authentic' piety (Deeb, 2006: 134-9). Administrative and security planning and territorial demarcation by symbols and networks of control enable the district to distinguish itself from other parts of Beirut (Ibid, 139-148).

It is in this context that we should examine the reconstruction of Dahiyya by reviewing the Elyssar project in western Dahiyya and the Wa'ad project in Haret Hreik. Following the displacement and intersectarian conflicts of the civil war of the 1970s and 1980s, the Elyssar project was proposed in 1994 to regenerate the area of Dahiyya between the Airport Boulevard and the coast, as shaded on the map on page 12. This included both legal and illegal areas of building (Harb, 1998: 175-176). The project is currently in abeyance. Al Wa'ad was Hezbollah's response to the devastation caused by Israeli bombing in Haret Hreik in 2006. Why did Al Wa'ad succeed when Elyssar failed? How do these efforts connect with broader spatial politics?

Fig. 1. The southern suburb and the Elisar Project



Source: Harb, 1998: 175

Elyssar

Elyssar was a corporate intervention by the Hariri government similar to Solidère. The private real estate company in the southwestern suburb was created under the same law and the same context as Hariri's economic renewal programme for Lebanon discussed above (Ibid). The website for the Elyssar agency states that: 'the pace of urbanization in the suburbs was rapid and in some instance chaotic, leading to a fast deterioration of the physical fabric, the natural environment, and the out dated infrastructure' (Elyssar, 2013). Whilst the need for regeneration may have been great, the philosophy behind urban planning is similar to that which underpins Solidère and Al Wa'ad: an urban modernism involving the regularisation and 'rational, hygienic planning of space', in Mona Harb's words,

‘praising modernity over society’ (Harb, 1998: 178-180). Such propositions do not give sufficient consideration, she argues, to social and cultural value. The extent of the population displacement amounted to ‘urban violence’ against those deemed illegal inhabitants in the area, even the destruction of collective memory I refer to above (Amaya-Akkermans, 2012). The reconfiguration of urban space is a means to exploit space with the effect of detaching society from territory.

The Elyssar project fell victim to factional confessional politics and conflicts over space, private interests and public projects. Hariri originally proposed that the project be managed as a private venture like Solidère but after opposition Elyssar was converted into a public agency. The insinuation that the project was an attempt to assert control over a rural, backward, chaotic – and Shi’a – suburb galvanised Shi’a opposition led by Amal and Hezbollah, the two Shi’a parties (Harb, 1998: 176). Negative connotations such as the illegal suburb are given political significance. Plans to run a highway along the seafront through the district of Ouzai involving significant residential expulsions were blocked when residents rallied behind Hezbollah (Balanche, 2012: 154). Arguments have largely focussed on opportunities for redevelopment and, ultimately, for sovereignty over urban space. Unlike the Central District or Haret Hreik, no accommodation has been reached between actors seeking exclusive sovereignty over the area. Necessary discussion around urban reconstruction is caught up in confessional rivalries.

Al Wa’ad

The failure of Elyssar stands in contrast to the success of Al Wa’ad. Given the importance of Haret Hreik to Hezbollah’s operations and constituency, the Wa’ad project was vital for Hezbollah to affirm its power base after the Israeli war. The video introducing the project, called ‘The most beautiful promise’ illustrates the party’s vision for urban space (Wa’ad Rebuild, 2013). ‘Wa’ad’ itself means ‘promise’ or ‘pledge’. In uncannily similar style to the Solidère video examined above, this video begins with dark clouds covering the sky and threatening music. Like the Solidère video panning over the destroyed city centre of Beirut, the viewer here is shown the aftermath of the 2006 war, with shots of steaming buildings and craters left by the bombing accompanied by sound effects. The voiceover of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah speaks of Zionist aggression met with Hezbollah resistance. Desperate people plead for restitution and children look pensive. Next we see Hezbollah ‘victory’ rallies and marching music, consistent with their ideology of resistance against Israeli aggression and defiance of social and political oppression. The Wa’ad project is introduced as Nasrallah’s ‘most beautiful promise’ to rebuild the district ‘better than it was before’ (Ibid). This vision of reconstruction is therefore of anti-Israeli and Shi’a solidarity and

self-assertion as opposed to Solidère's objective of economic renewal. Both videos emphasise the speed and extent of reconstruction, with fast paced music and images of construction activity and renewed life in the city. For Hezbollah, reconstruction was an act of defiance and survival so building and media mobilisation had to be swift (Harb and Fawaz, 2010: 24).

The process of reconstruction served similar ends: as a political mechanism of survival and political viability and a tool for shaping spatial and social geography (Bollens, 2012: 177-178). The aim of returning displaced residents as quickly as possible was driven as much by Hezbollah's need to reinforce its support base as to reclaim territory under attack from external forces. Hezbollah exclusively controlled the reconstruction process as its own project (Harb and Fawaz, 2010: 26). The Siniora government limited its strategy in Haret Hreik to monetary compensation (Ibid: 26-28). The government formed an advisory board but, after the Shi'a parties withdrew their support, a generous compensation scheme was negotiated (Ibid). Reconstruction and management of public space became a matter of deal making amongst politicians. So, like Solidère, internal resources for reconstruction were assigned through inter-confessional bargaining and, again like Solidère, the government effectively abdicated responsibility for reconstruction and, with it, a holistic reconstruction effort in wider Beirut. Hezbollah encouraged dwellers to delegate compensation payments to Al Wa'ad and consolidate property claims, effectively ceding control of reconstruction to Hezbollah (Ibid and Bollens, 2012: 175). Dwellers in Haret Hreik were not invited to participate in the planning process, but were reduced to recipients of compensation and aid (Harb and Fawaz, 2010: 28-29). So like Solidère, the role of both government and local inhabitants was circumscribed. Hezbollah's politico-religious goals were to reinforce a 'resistance' society, as a political force autonomous from the state it views as corrupt and unrepresentative of its constituency. Hezbollah, a political movement exercising public functions, reaches accommodation with the Lebanese state and mobilises the support of its Iranian funders, to consolidate its sovereignty over Haret Hreik.

A review of the section 'Project's General Characteristics' on the Wa'ad website shows how the style of reconstruction of Haret Hreik was not so much building 'better than it was before' but to replicate pre-existing high density housing with limited modernising improvements (Wa'ad Rebuild, 2013). Residential buildings were prebuilt on the same plots, the street plan largely unaltered and very little aesthetic alteration introduced, like street furniture and trees on pavements (Harb and Fawaz, 2010: 25). Replication excluded the possibilities for improving the quality of life through public space (Fawaz in Bollens, 2012: 178). Practically, it was thought that any significant alteration of the building layout and use would have delayed the project in political wrangling (Ibid). The political motivation for

restoring the *status quo ante* was speed and a desire to demonstrate a will to stand firm in resistance. Nasrallah articulated this in a speech in May 2012 on the conclusion of the project: 'in the face of this destructive war that aimed to turn to change people's life into hell, there was a military, media, and psychological resistance, as well as a war of reconstruction, survival and steadfastness.' (Wa'ad Rebuild, 2012) Reconstruction is a political and ideological statement of intent: not to develop and grow in an economic sense, like Solidère's vision, but to stay the same, true to an ideological cause.

What does the Wa'ad project represent? Like Solidère's ambition to recreate Beirut as an Arab commercial city on the Mediterranean, the Wa'ad project also presents a particular version of history. On the Wa'ad website, a short history of 'resistance' movements and the significance of the 'Southern Suburb' is presented – from medieval resistance against 'feudal oppression' to the moment when 'a new life found its way through the darkness, the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon, better known as Hezbollah' (Wa'ad Rebuild, 2013). Such a presentation of history is used to legitimate present-day action. Distinct and mutually exclusive historical narratives take on spatial significance and the parties which articulate them seek to exercise control over particular areas of the city. Whilst Solidère's projects rely on finance from the Gulf, Hezbollah and Al Wa'ad were supported by Iranian money. This gives reconstruction an international and sectarian significance. Indeed, just as the war in Lebanon was fuelled by outside interventions, by Israel, Syria, the PLO, so reconstruction brings to bear external support. The reconstruction effort of Haret Hreik is drawn into the geopolitics of Hezbollah's regional positioning: resistance against Israeli oppression of the Palestinians, the Al Khalifa monarchy in Bahrain and the Sunni armed conflict against the Assad regime in Syria (Wa'ad Rebuild, 2012). This is hugely significant since Hezbollah is currently overtly fighting alongside Assad as part of an arc of resistance against Sunni domination in the Middle East.

Reintegration or fragmentation?

So how do these reconstruction projects affect the reintegration of Beirut and, given the centrality of Beirut to Lebanon, Lebanon itself? They have consolidated the processes of 'spatial erasure' initiated by war destruction – by replacing communal networks and historical spatial production with centralised impersonal relationships between private management authorities and individuals (Ghandour and Fawaz, 2012). In doing so, they serve to deepen the fragmentation of the city into autonomous zones operating independent of government, each with its distinct vision of history and territoriality. The displacement and sectarianisation of the civil war left a city divided mentally and spatially. In Beirut, spatial and communal identities, the attachment to territory and identity within communities, have converged as a

‘means of escape from the trials and tribulations of war’ and the ongoing uncertainty of political and social existence (Khalaf, 2002: 307). Resources were poured into the city centre, detaching and distinguishing it from the redevelopment of other areas of the city. That process is taking place in Haret Hreik too, as a different kind of exclusive project designed in part to consolidate one party’s hold over a sector of the city. Reconstruction therefore has not involved fostering an inter-communal spatial sphere: amounts spent on post-conflict social rehabilitation programmes are dwarfed by those spent on rebuilding work. Where shared public space and genuine interaction between communities is limited, social reconciliation is difficult to achieve (Amaya-Akkermans, 2012).

There have been alternative proposals for the creation of public space in Beirut. One example has been to open up and develop the Horsh Al-Sanawbar, an area of pine forest at the centre of the city, on the borders of what are principally Sunni, Shi’a and Christian neighbourhoods. The Horsh is closed to public access, on grounds which have been described as elitist and patronising (Shayya, 2010). The Horsh could be rehabilitated as a communal park accessible by all Beirutis, as a free, non-sectarian space for recreation and contemplation. So far, the Beirut Municipality has not acted on such suggestions. In Lebanon’s unstable and vulnerable state, urban planning and design, architecture and landscaping ‘can offer effective strategies for healing symptoms of fear and paranoia’ and overcome parochialism (Khalaf, 2006: 28). The Hadiqat as-Samah, or Garden of Forgiveness, however, is being developed as a location for contemplation, tolerance and reconciliation. It is located on the site of a city centre souk, where the archaeological foundations of Beirut’s Roman and Phoenician past were excavated. It is bordered by Greek Orthdox and Maronite churches and mosques. Solidère allowed the space to be left open. The area could also be a ‘paragon of social integration and reconstruction...along spiritual lines rather than according to physical form or architectural grandeur’ (GHFP, 2013). As the project brochure explains, it will ‘challenge the segregation of communities’ and allow individuals ‘to reflect on their collective memory and perhaps to nurture a renewed sense of common identity’ (Ibid). Where too often spatial solutions are driven by political agendas or partial visions of ‘renewal’ or ‘resistance’, public space can be used as a way for individuals to express their own identity in a neutral and impartial manner. The Garden of Forgiveness is perhaps inevitably not without contestation: the Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri has raised a territorial claim to the site and used the northern end as a parking area (Bollens, 2012: 190). It has also been criticised as a token gesture incomparable with the funding that have been put to Solidère’s Central District project (Larkin, 2010: 430). These plans for shared spaces are exceptions to the general failure to design enough common space in Beirut which could help to reintegrate the city.

Conclusion

Space is in many contexts political and in a deeply divided city like Beirut action over space has additional complex meaning. The spatial reconstruction strategies of Solidère and Hezbollah can be compared because, as Mona Fawaz says, 'they both set themselves against the 'city'.' (Bollens, 2012: 185) In other words they act with limited public affirmation, independent of public or government control and represent interests which are private, whether commercial, sectarian, certainly particular. It is a symptom of the hybrid sovereignties which operate in parallel in Beirut. Each has a different vision of the city. Both visions involve coercive urban politics as proponents of their vision marshal support from within their constituencies. Both visions draw on different historical narratives: Hezbollah's a history of resistance to external oppression, Solidère's a history of commercial integration at the heart of the Arab Mediterranean. 'Whereas Hezbollah's piousness and incorruptibility stands above the corrupt city, Solidère's clean, orderly, and proper district stands above the dirty, disgusting, and inefficient rest of the city' (Ibid). Solidère's sanitised elitist version of Beirut is in a parallel universe to the rest of the city. The urbanisation of Beirut has taken place at the expense of 'urbanism as a way of life': physical reconstruction has not been accompanied by the social transformation of tolerance and understanding characteristic of a cosmopolitan world city (Khalaf, 2006: 26). If Beirut, as Solidère claims, is a city open to the world, it is not open within itself.

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