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**“Where’s the State?”**

**Practicing the Past in Beirut, Lebanon**

**A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Geography**

**By**

**Ali Nehmé Hamdan**

**2013**



ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Where’s the State?”

Practicing the Past in Beirut, Lebanon.

by

Ali Nehmé Hamdan

Master of Arts in Geography

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor John A. Agnew, Chair

In geography, “Landscape and Memory” studies focus on the politicized relationship between place and history, referring to this as the “politics of memory.” These studies frequently over-privilege two specific foci: nationalism and formal institutions, a focus which excludes the ways that history is contested through place in cases where formal institutions like the state are comparatively “weak.” Drawing on Practice Theory, this project attempts show how actors attempt to structure history and the social world in the absence or shadow of institutions like the state through acts of *narrative place-making*. Focusing on the “Hariri Mosque” in Beirut, Lebanon, I argue that political elites from the Hariri family and Future Movement have used this mosque to tell a story about Lebanon that reproduces sectarianism as the primary category of division by which social life is understood in Lebanon.

The Thesis of Ali Nehmé Hamdan is approved:

Adam D. Moore

Helga M. Leitner

John A. Agnew, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

For all that was lost along the way  
and for a longer way ahead.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements – VII

I: Introduction – 1

II: Collective Memory & Place – 5

III: Lebanon As A Place-in-Progress – 21

IV: Elite Acts of Narration – 32

V: Non-Elite Narratives of the Hariri Mosque – 52

VI: Conclusion – 63

References - 72

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Hariri Mosque and St. George's Cathedral – X

Figure 2: Martyrs Statues and Hariri Mosque – 5

Figure 3: Model of Martyrs Square, Solidère – 46

Figure 4: Hariri Mosque and St. George's Cathedral – 60

Figure 5: Postcards – 70

Figure 6: Hamidiye Fountain – 71

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Map 1: The Old Green Line – X



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We use words to capture something whose essence is much larger, to make it more convenient or beautiful to pass along to others. I would like to think that my words here make no such attempt to contain my **gratitude**, because it is not a creature meant for the cage: it is a free, ongoing, and undiminished state of being. I write this as a signpost – nothing more. It also seems a bit grandiose to type these sentiments beneath such imposing headings, given the modesty of this project. But here goes.

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At their most rudimentary, the earliest drafts of this work were more like semi-nonsensical musings aired in a number of Montreal cafés during September of 2012. Despite the distance, preparation, travel, and waiting, my companion was optimistic, patient, and unwavering in her support as I muddled through the details of this project. These qualities were a gift that should not go unacknowledged, and for all of this I am humbled and grateful.

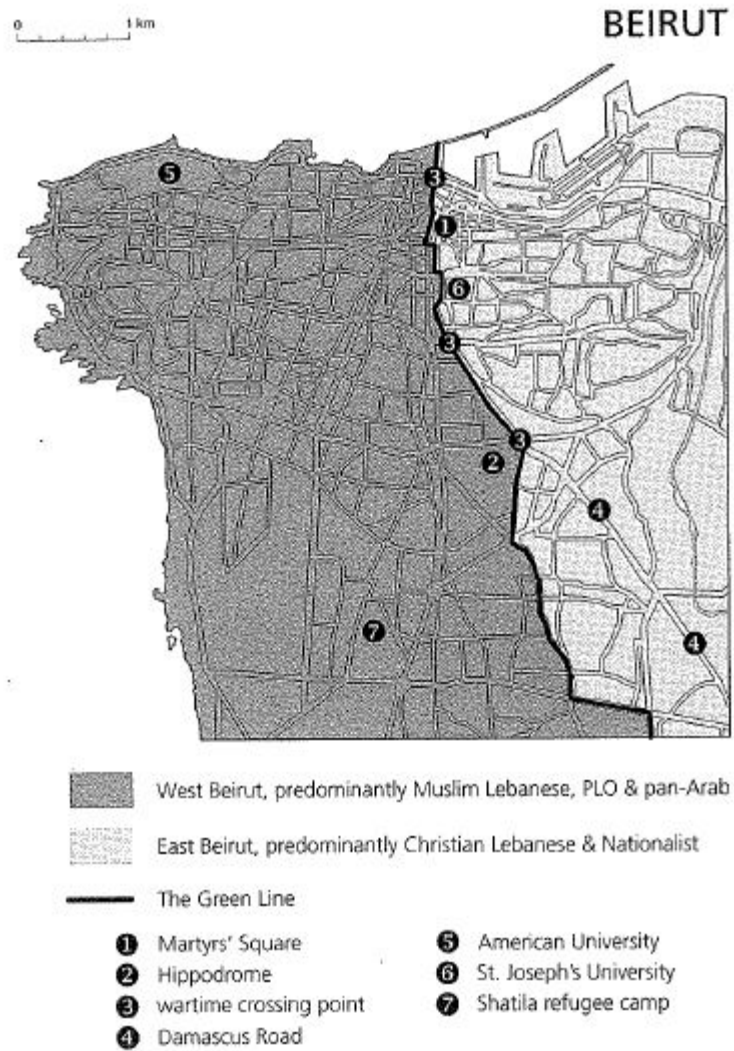
To return to the West Coast: To Professor Helga Leitner I must express my thanks for adopting my cause so quickly, and offering such quality feedback. As for Professor Adam Moore, I cannot count the hours I have spent muddling through issues of theory and method in his office, attempting to reconcile grander visions of geography with their reverberations in everyday actions. For this I am duly grateful. I must address my final thanks to Professor John Agnew, whose guidance and patience haunt the pages of this manuscript. Without so tall a giant to support me, I am not so sure I would have seen so much.

In closing, I must acknowledge the people of Lebanon, whose plight is doubly my own: the struggle to know oneself in the midst of dramatic change.

Thank you.



*1. Right: Muhammad al-Amin ("Hariri") Mosque; Left: Bell-tower of St. George's Cathedral. Downtown Beirut.*



Map 1: The old Green Line dividing Muslim West from Christian East Beirut. Martyrs Square lies at #1. Reproduced from Bollens (2011).

## I: Introduction

For any people to develop and maintain a sense of political community, it is necessary that they share a common vision of their past. In communities having a natural solidarity, fictionalized history often suffices for this purpose...for a historical fiction to serve a political purpose, however, it must be generally accepted (Salibi 1988: 216).

The lights cut out often in Beirut, and with it the air-conditioning, the running water, and people's patience. During the electricity workers strike in the summer of 2012, it was not uncommon to hear the loud complaints of ordinary citizens mingling with the humid summer air. This is life in a state that cannot provide its people with the services essential to its distinct "Arab modernity" (Kassir 2003). There is a unified narrative of disenchantment, a common joke that captures the cynical mood of such moments. As the lights begin to flicker, or as conversation turns to politics, someone will inevitably throw up their hands in mock outrage, exclaiming: "where's the state?"(*wayn al-dawleh*).

The answer, of course, is that it is absent. The Lebanese state hardly asserts its presence in the lives of citizens. It is also absent from the many spheres typically attributed to the modern sovereign state. It lacks a monopoly of violence, fails to perform its "vertical encompassment" of social activity within its borders (Gupta & Ferguson 2002), and in many ways has struggled to overcome the salience of alternative forms of political identification. Indeed, it may well have failed to gain political autonomy from these social forces (Harb & Deeb 2011; Mann 1984). As in Wedeen's Yemen (2008), there are few traces of a Weberian state in Lebanon.

Like the citizens of Lebanon, I too wonder "where is the state?" but in a specific area of concern: the politics of memory. By the politics of memory I mean social disputes over the meaning of the past, and the implications of such disputes for political identity in the present.

Geographers have written extensively on memory, landscape, and the state, emphasizing the role of memory in nationalism. As I argue, this severely limits our analysis of the relationship between place, history, and politics; it also limits our understanding of what is "political" in the struggle to define that

relationship. This paper aims to highlight these limitations by offering a case study in which sectarian, rather than national, narratives of the past are the locus of conflict. I also hope to explore new ways of looking at how memory-work is conducted by actors on the ground. Approaching memory from political geography, I am interested in how memory is made to do different kinds of “political work” when it is inscribed into the built environment. In this way I focus not on conflict over the meaning of past for its own sake, but on how actors use the *trope* of memory to make political claims, claims about how the social world is divided and what that division should look like geographically. Using memory can thus be a productive way to engage with divided cities, ethnic conflict, and transnational political movements in “weak” states.

Lebanon offers an example of substantial value because it allows us to contemplate a few of these significant theoretical puzzles at once. Above all, my primary research question is: what sort of political work does memory do in Lebanon? In addressing this, I encounter a few other pressing questions: how can we best conceptualize the role of “collective memory” in producing social boundaries? What kind of geographical practices instantiate these social boundaries? How do actors make use of memory to understand their political identity? How important are “formal” institutionalized politics – like regime-type and strength – to these practices? How do practices of memory-work call into being meaningful geographies – that is, relationships between places that are worth fighting for? Finally, what does this tell us about the study of memory in geography as a discipline, which stresses nationalism and state-formation in its analytical frameworks? Where *is* the state in our theories of memory? How does it fit in?

This joke orients my study in a few key ways. First, it grounds it in a Lebanese context in which it is a given that the state is absent from political life. Second, the joke begs the question: if the state is absent, what then is present? What kind of political actors or “entrepreneurs” do we see engaging in memory-work in Lebanon, and to what political ends? What kind of geographical practices play out in the eclectic built environment of the capital, Beirut? In particular, I am interested in the way that practices of

memory-work in the built environment might reproduce or challenge sectarian violence in divided cities, using Beirut as an empirical case (Calame et al 2012; Till et al 2013).

Though a “weak state,” Lebanon has a highly charged and ongoing politics of memory (Call 2011; Patrick 2007; Brinkerhoff 2005; Wedeen 2008). Instability following the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991) and reconstruction efforts in the capital have attracted the interests of geographers like Stewart (1996), Nagel (2002) and Fregonese (2009) who have also touched on this, as well as other scholars outside the discipline (Harb & Deeb 2011; Barak 2007; Khalaf 2006; Haugbolle 2012). Perhaps most extensively, Volk (2010) studies practices of memory-work conducted by the Lebanese state. While she offers a rich examination of state practices of memory-work, it does not set these beside the attempts of other vectors of identity (like the sect) to claim priority in political life. I find it questionable to begin with “national memory” as an object of analysis in a “weak” state like Lebanon, especially when the Lebanese regularly scorn its absence. This study hopes to interrogate the power of *all* social categories as a political achievement itself worth explaining, rather than, as *Landscape and Memory* does, take the nation as the necessary object of analysis (Johnson 1995; Till 2009; Brubaker 2002; Wedeen 2008). I argue that geographical practices of memory-work – what I call narrative place-making – are a crucial part of this explanation.

I investigate<sup>1</sup> this in Lebanon by focusing on a specific act of memory-work in the central area of Beirut: the *Muhammad al-Amin* Mosque in Downtown Beirut. This is referred to in interviews and on the street as the “Hariri Mosque” (after its builder, assassinated Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri). Constructed at the corner of Martyrs’ Square, the mosque attempts to situate the legacy of Rafiq Hariri and the sectarian community he represents next to another important national monument, the Martyrs Statues at the square’s center. Martyrs Square is a highly symbolic and historic site, one of the few indisputably “national” sites in an otherwise divided city (Khalaf 2006; Young 2010). With Hariri’s killing in 2005,

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<sup>1</sup> Research for this project took the form of ethnographic observations, informal interviews, and formal interviews conducted between June-August 2012. Unless otherwise noted, all respondents have had their names changed to protect their privacy.

the mosque was transformed from a mere *monument* for the Sunni community in Beirut to a massive *memorial* to his legacy in Lebanon. In the words of Kenneth Foote, the site has been “sanctified,” but the terms of its sanctification remain contested. Is it a national or a sectarian monument (Foote 2003; Johnson 1995; Azaryahu & Foote 2008)? I argue that a specific set of actors attempted to sanctify the site as national to make political claims whose effects are more accurately described as divisive, rather than unifying. These are claims about the nature of Hariri’s legacy, the importance of the Sunni community in Lebanon, and the political meaning of Martyrs Square.

This paper is laid out in the following manner. First, I review the existing literature on memory before articulating a more flexible approach to the subject. I then offer a brief overview of Lebanon’s historical development as a “place-in-progress” over the course of its colonial history. I move on to examine the “Hariri mosque” as an elite practice of narrative place-making, a mechanism by which political entrepreneurs attempt to make sectarianism *present* in a strategic place in Beirut, and then go on to examine non-elite responses to the mosque from a variety of perspectives. I do so to challenge the notion that practices of memory-work in place (so-called “sites of memory”) reproduce state or national unity, arguing instead that they perform many kinds of political work, chief among them making the dominant social order present. In Lebanon, this entails the reproduction of political conflict on the ground through its presence in the visible landscape of the capital city.





2. Martyrs Statues (foreground), Muhammad al-Amin "Hariri" Mosque (right background), Martyrs Square, Downtown Beirut.

## II: Collective Memory & Place

### *The Legacy of Collective Memory*

Memory owes its productive legacy in social scientific research to the theoretical tradition of two key figures in sociology: Emile Durkheim and his student, Maurice Halbwachs. In the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, for instance, Durkheim analyzes how certain forms of ritual reproduce a group's "collective consciousness" by acting as performances of memory that "link the present to the past, the individual to the collectivity" (2001: 282). Building on this, his student Maurice Halbwachs takes collective memories themselves as objects of study in *On Collective Memory* and *The Collective Memory*. In both works he transmits an analytical metanarrative he terms "collective psychology," attributing

emotional and mental states to groups. This metanarrative lingers in sociological and geographical works on memory to this day in the form of studies of collective “trauma,” “amnesia” and “haunting” (Halbwachs 1980; 1992; Somers 1994). In this tradition nearly all memory is socially-determined, asserting “a degree of autonomy from the subjective perception of individuals,” while individual memories are only interesting to the extent that they bear the imprint of the group (Olick 1999:341; Kansteiner 2002; Olick & Robbins 1998; Bell 2003).

Halbwachs’ approach to how people relate to the past is an attractive starting point, but also a troubling one for two reasons: its “groupism,” and its essentialism. First, it is what Brubaker calls “groupist” in the sense that it does not deconstruct the collectivities under study to examine their internal workings; groups are a sociological black box of sorts (Brubaker 2002). Such a framework treats as unproblematic the existence of collectivities that impose their narratives of the past onto individuals. The group or collectivity is a self-aware actor in its own right, while the underlying politics and practices that produce it take place behind the scenes. Interaction between the social and the individual is stifled in Halbwachs’ account; scholars have reminded us that only individuals can truly remember, but this is obscured. In the end, his analytical framework accepts self-proclaimed groups uncritically, using them as a means of explanation rather than as a phenomenon worth explaining in its own right (Olick 1999; Halbwachs 1992; Brubaker 2002; Prager 2000; Kansteiner 2002; Bell 2003).

The second concern is that memory as an analytical concept essentializes. Collective memories presuppose both a group and a body of memories that both exist “out there” in the world. They are, however, only fleeting achievements crystallized in momentary practices that must be reproduced over time. Yet just as Halbwachs does not deconstruct groups into their component actors, he does not break memory down into the specific practices that instantiate it – he incorporates it into his social ontology. Memory is vague and difficult to pin down analytically. It only exists through the actors, practices, and power relations that attempt to claim or conjure a *sense* of collective memory. More critically, the work of political actors is to attempt to naturalize their worldview into taken-for-granted categories like the nation

or sect; crucial to the discourse of these categories is to attribute to them conditions found among humans. DeLanda calls this the “organismic metaphor” in both social science and social practice (2006). In the growing field of memory studies – still influenced by the collective psychology of Halbwachs – we see that “collectivities have memories, just like they have identities” (Olick 1999:342). As scholars we should avoid incorporating the naturalizing categories of political entrepreneurs into our analysis, a criticism of which traditional approaches to “collective memory” are certainly guilty. Instead, we should focus on how memory is employed as a category of practice to make political claims (Brubaker 2002; Bourdieu 1994). This is the basis for my own politics of the past: viewing memory not as an end of politics, but as a crucial means or trope.

Despite its drawbacks, scholars of nationalism have adopted the trope of collective memory with great enthusiasm. This body of research examines the political work that nations undertake using “national memory,” replacing the idea of a clearly-defined “objective” national history with how “the nation” remembers subjectively (Smith 1986; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Gillis 1994). Such work has effectively destabilized nationalist narratives from cases like the United States (Bodnar 1993) and Israel (Zerubavel 1997; Cole 2000), but it has not gone so far as to destabilize the nation as an ontological reality. In other words, “nations” are still used to explain behavior, rather than serving as the object of explanation.

Yet nations on their own do nothing – individuals do (Kansteiner 2002). By taking the nation too seriously these scholars import groupist assumptions that the nation *is* in fact a real thing-in-the-world, if a socially-constructed one. It is as if once constructed, they truly do come into being outside of the practices that generate them. This downplays the work it takes to achieve a sense of nationhood, to make the nation present in social life (Brubaker 2002). In summary, by focusing on how nations remember the past, we learn a great deal about nationalist narratives, but at the cost of how a *sense* of nationhood is achieved in everyday life by individuals and which actors benefit. Billig (1995) is a notable exception, and while Anderson (1991) certainly discusses the process of imagining a community, he devotes his

work largely to institutionalized practices of nation-building. As I will address shortly, this is only half of the story of how “groups” come into being.

These are two serious issues to contend with in research on the politics of memory. The concept of memory tends to homogenize individuals into a collective, and to focus on reified abstraction to the detriment of actions, change, and process. Both problems reinforce one another; they obscure how groups are not pre-existing entities that remember, but that instead *individual practice* and agency is essential to the work of calling the nation into being, of making it present. In particular it is to concrete individual practices like *narrative place-making* that we must look if we wish to catch a glimpse of the collective in social life.

Finally, the dominant trend has focused on one specific form of collective to the detriment of all others: nations and nationalist movements. Only now are scholars in memory studies examining how alternative forms of identification and spatial imaginaries are constructed from “memories” that transcend borders in a globalizing era (Vermeulen et al. 2012). This still privileges “the nation” and projects of state-formation as objects of research, at the expense of other vectors of identification like class, party, religion, or region. It thus renders the term collective memory a blunt instrument for studying “weak states” like Lebanon, which lack strong nationalist movements but by no means lack a vibrant politics of memory. Indeed, this lack may point to the opposite.

As a conceptual tool collective memory, no less than the nation, is thus of dubious merit. Both problematically reify groups in social analysis. As Brubaker argues (following Bourdieu), we should not import the common-sense narratives of group coherence espoused by individuals in practice into our analyses of conflict. This “common sense...is a key part of what we want to explain, not what we want to explain things *with*; it belongs to our empirical data, not our analytical toolkit” (Brubaker 2002:9; see also Bourdieu 1994). We might extend our skepticism a little further. We should not only question the ontological status of groups like nations, but also whether actors consciously use them to justify everyday life. It is for this reason that Mann refers to humans as “social, not societal” beings (1984:4). Once more,

it is individual practice that we must interrogate if we wish to see when totalities are called into being, how they are instantiated, by whom, and for what purpose.

Memory studies has come under critique for many of the reasons listed above. The critique, however, has not been systematic. Rather than challenge the concept, most have merely “churned” new variations: we thus see social, cultural, collected, collective, public, vernacular, post-memory, and mythscapes. One has to ask, after so many diminished subtypes, whether the term collective memory still bears much analytical weight (Olick 1999; Kansteiner 2002; Hirsch 2012; Bell 2003; Fentress & Wickham 1992; Bodnar 1993; Sidaway & Mayell 2007).

We need not jettison the concept of memory entirely. Asserting that memory is not a valuable category of analysis is not to suggest that the idea of memory does not do important work in social practice; this is, in fact, the very phenomenon that is most worthy of our attention as scholars. Both the rhetoric of political entrepreneurs and the everyday practices of non-elites draw on as a piece of the “mental equipment of society” (Confino 1997). Rather than incorporate its naturalizing claims into our analysis, we should instead examine empirically how the *trope* of memory is put to work by actors in practice. As political geographers, I suggest we focus on how it is put to work in the built environment to make claims about political order, and the geography of variation between how these claims are made (Brubaker 2002; Bourdieu 1994; Moore 2008; Confino 1997). This allows us to ask the right questions about our cases: What is the work to which memory is put? What agendas does the idea of memory serve, and in what concrete practices can we witness this? In other words, how is memory used as a tool of political struggle?

It is the central argument of this paper that neither nations nor places remember, but that 1) individuals attempt to inscribe “memories” into everyday life through practices of place-making, and that 2) these inscriptions of memory are not explained by a pre-existing group, but are actually an essential means by which the group is made to “exist.” It is important that we turn the matter on its head: groups do not produce memories – individual practices of memory-work produce a feeling of “groupness,” a feeling

which can only be witnessed in its instantiation through practice. I argue that geographical practices from elites attempt to make this instantiation of social order more durable, but that non-elite geographical practices have equal bearing on how the social order is made present in place.

This work thus situates itself within a broader literature on how political entrepreneurs attempt to generate legitimacy for their visions of the social world via practices of geographical worldmaking like the construction of what Gordillo calls “locations of hegemony” (2002; Bourdieu 1985; Kaiser 2002). In doing so, I hope to highlight how geography, rather than being a mere epiphenomenon of social practices is in fact essential to the act of forming social life. It is how elites attempt to make this order present, and it is for this reason that the Lebanese state is absent. I pursue this project, however, not merely with an interest in how a social “vision of division” is reproduced through practices of place-making, but also how non-elite actors view it “from below” – in other words, the tensions between individual experience and the symbolic violence of group-formation (Tilly 1999; Bourdieu 1991; 1994; Ortner 1997; 2006).

### *Landscape & Memory in Geography*

The existing paradigm in geography has incorporated many of the pitfalls of memory studies. Halbwachs has several more spatial accounts of memory, and historian Pierre Nora wrote extensively on the differences between *lieux* and *milieux de memoire* (Halbwachs 1980; Nora 1989 1997). Geographers primarily engage with memory through these two authors, and the subfield of “Landscape and Memory” in geography connects these authors and their focus on nation-states to the tradition of studying cultural landscapes (Cosgrove & Jackson 1987; Dwyer & Alderman 2008; Legg 2007; Azaryahu & Foote 2008). Geographers have thus examined how “social memory and social space conjoin to produce much of the context for modern identities,” not merely reflecting but contributing to their emergence (Hoelscher & Alderman 2004:348; Johnson 1995; Till 2009). The dominant view is that collective identities or imagined communities cannot simply be cooked up out of thin air, but must be territorialized, embedded,

and made relevant to the actual experience of social relations in a particular place (Kaiser 2002, Anderson 1991, Watts 1992, Johnson 1995).

Early works that track this process of “placing memory” are those touching on the Paris Commune revolt (Harvey 1979), the imperial ambitions of newly unified Italy in its “impossible capital” (Agnew 1998; Atkinson & Cosgrove 1998), the struggle for Irish independence (Johnson 1994), and numerous others (Savage 1994, Leitner & Kang 1999; Azaryahu 1996). These offer rich portraits of how sites of memory act as claims or opportunities for producing a political order.

Again, there are two concerns with this tradition. The first is that although well-detailed and valuable, these studies continue to view political order almost exclusively in terms of nations. Johnson (1995) and Whelan (2001) frequently focus on “Irish” memory, Till (2005) of “German” memory, Forest & Johnson (2002) of “Russian” memory, Foote et al (2000) of “Hungarian” memory, Zerubavel (1997) and Benvenisti (2000) of “Israeli” memory. Some geographers have begun looking for ways out of this impasse, but remain focused on cases that stress nationalism – here I look to Yoneyama’s work (1999) “Japanese” memory, and more recently, Mills (2006) on “Turkish” memory. The majority of these authors view the politics of memory as primarily a contested nation-state ideal.

For instance, Karen Till describes how the German state addressed the “need to be haunted” by the legacy of World War II through remaking the city of Berlin (2005:13). Though Till addresses moments of conflict over the meaning of the past – and this is largely the goal of her work – there is no question that that meaning lies firmly within the sphere of “the nation.” At no point does she problematize the state as the arbiter or institutional arena for such struggles. Its authority, legitimacy, and capacity in the process of writing history and shaping geography are seldom questioned in analysis, as if the sovereign state were the “appropriate scale” for addressing contention over the meaning of the past (Till 2005; Murphy 1996; Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Her analysis does not fully acknowledge alternatives to the nation, for example, the experiences of history through the lens of class identification, regionalism, or subaltern status as a *gastarbeiter* from abroad. The nation is certainly important to understanding how the

trope of memory is used in Germany, but the state's ability to speak louder than alternatives does not equal the *absence* of alternatives.

The second concern is a closely related focus on “strong states” dominant in studies of memory in geography. By this I mean states possessing strong formal institutions that regulate political and social life. The discipline is also somewhat inconsistent in its distinction between “states” as political entities and “nations” as communities of shared belonging, mingling the two uncritically. Connor calls this “terminological chaos,” a result of which is confusing how people are governed with how they identify, which rarely align in the post-Colonial world, if ever (Connor 1994; Brubaker 2002). Not all states have strong nationalist myths, nor do they have the capacity to engage in the imposing acts of “homeland-making” which Kaiser describes (2002). Political entrepreneurs can and do justify their actions by other forms of identification and solidarity like class or religion, and this not always in overly “political” terms. These actors, in turn, assume roles many attribute to a strong state, roles like providing material infrastructures (like social services) as well as ideological infrastructures (social solidarity) (Mann 1984).

Nations or states are not everywhere a salient category of practice (Brubaker 2002:12), and a “weak” or “failed” state does not mean that there are no politics of memory. It may well be the reverse. The politics of memory more regards the struggle over which inherited categories of identification will define the social world in the present and why. It also concerns how this “why” is used to make political claims. We should thus rearticulate what precisely we consider the politics of memory, how it connects to specific kinds of claims, and how such differences vary from place to place.

Finally, there is one more concern, and that is the focus on formal or “big P” politics. Like the focus on states, there is an equally powerful bias toward the study of formal institutions like museums, civil society organizations like survivors’ associations (Yoneyama 1999), urban planning boards (Till 2005; Volk 2010), as well as government bureaucracies at the local, provincial, or national level. But even in the presence of formal institutions there are often informal venues and practices of politics, forms of what Lisa Wedeen calls “the messy stuff of contestation – of initiative, spontaneity, self-fashioning,



revelation, ingenuity, action, and creativity,” (2008:110). This is what one could call “little P” politics. Wedeen calls us to “take into account participation and the formation of ‘public spheres’ as activities of expression in their own right” (2008:111). While formal politics and elites matter, so too do non-elites when it comes to reproducing or challenging the social order. We therefore have a lot to learn from viewing citizens or non-elites as more than passive readers of memory-work or democratic citizens, but as practice-minded individuals who also draw on the trope of memory through practice and reactions to elite practice. In the dangerous geographies of divided cities, practices of memory-work like narration and place-specific routines are key to interpreting whether one is in or out of place (Cresswell 1996).

These practices, though informal, need not be grand, disruptive “episodes of contention” (McAdam et al 2008). In Beirut, for instance, it is through continued use of old place-names like East versus West Beirut that Shiites narrate their relationship(s) to East Beirut and thus to members of other categories living there (Maronites) (Fieldnotes: 7/28/2012; see Map 1). The political dimensions of “memory” are thus in many ways deeply tied-up in urban geopolitics, or the role the built environment can play in producing violent conflict (Cresswell 1996; Graham 2003; Bollens 2012; Fregonese & Brand 2009; Coward 2007). This conflict is often reproduced through such “minor” practices, latent for a time until it “flares up,” crystallizing into an event in which the relevance of these categories is reasserted (Fearon & Laitin 1996; Brubaker 2002; Moore 2011). A focus on monuments and memorials as the key spatial forms that memory takes misses the practices through which non-elite memories define geography and in so doing, reproduce social boundaries like sectarian divisions in Lebanon.

In this regard I merely echo a concern voiced by political scientists: regime-type matters. Such considerations are not unheard of in geography. Forest et al (2004) compare memory-work between Russia and Germany, finding significant differences among elite practices of memory-work and popular reception or engagement. Though laudable their comparison still treats the respective “nations” of Germany and Russia as the sole objects of study, without addressing alternative spatial imaginaries. Gupta & Ferguson implore us to heed the erection and maintenance of “spatial orders,” of which the

nation-state is but one. The sectarian geography of a divided city like Beirut is another. There are innumerable “frameworks of collective memory” (Halbwachs 1991:38) towards which we must turn if we wish to explain political violence. There is more to the politics of memory than nationalism and state-formation.

It is important to register these critiques and offer alternatives. It is not enough to admit that state-engineered projects “invite alternative readings,” as do Hoelscher & Alderman (2004:350). Memory-politics are not just conducted by elites and read by non-elites; they are produced through geographic practices *by both*. They are as much bottom-up as they are top-down (Tilly 1999). We need not only to disaggregate nations into the networks and logics of entrepreneurs who summon them into being, but also acknowledge other salient categories of political practice used in group-making. It is precisely this sort of variation in political affiliations across geography that should appeal to political geographers (Bourdieu 1989; Wimmer 2010; Anderson 1991). In this paper at least, I will show that in Lebanon it is sectarian identities that are most salient in politics, not the national.

Like Wedeen’s study of Yemen, this paper thus examines what forms the politics of memory take when state institutions are comparatively “weak.” It addresses how political entrepreneurs in Beirut offer a distinct narrative of Lebanese “memory” through practices of place-making using a specific case, the construction of a monumental religious edifice in Downtown Beirut: the Hariri Mosque. They do so to pursue political projects that reproduce sectarianism as a salient category of practice and to uphold social hierarchies. I thus hope to explore a specific empirical case, and to push the conversation on memory and place into a more useful set of questions, some of which I have already addressed.

### *Memory-work as Practice: Narrative Place-Making*

There are alternatives to the issues with memory in Geography. I have already noted that one can discuss the empirical concerns of collective memory without subscribing to its analytical metanarrative, but I have yet to discuss how exactly one does so. There are a few ways I attempt to achieve this.

The first is to shift from “memory” and its hyphenated forms to a stricter focus on story-telling or *narrative* in its place. As understood by Somers, narratives are “constellations of relationships...embedded in time and space, constituted by causal emplotment” (1994:616). These do not simply help us explain behavior, but are in fact “an ontological condition of social life”(1994:614). This renewed focus on stories and narratives has been taken up by many scholars in the social sciences (Gonzalez 2006; Brubaker 2002; Tilly 2002; Polletta et al 2011). Like the “collective memory” of Halbwachs, narratives are produced interpersonally (Somers 1994:618) but do not treat the individual as an atomized part of a monolithic collectivity (626). It concerns how actors *situate themselves* with regards to time, space, ideology, and other actors; it returns agency to non-elites by showing how they opt in to stories rather than passively accept elite memory-work; and it thus offers a way out of Wedeen’s concern with an over-emphasis on elite agency in telling the story of the social (2008).

The social action of individuals thus “loses its categorical stability,” allowing for some intriguing perspectives onto narrative as a form or practice of place-making (Somers 1994:632). Pointing to her own experience as a lower-class female, Somers shows how membership in a “class” or “gender” is not a given, but is factored into the stories actors tell in relation to a given context. These are stories that situate places as much as they situate individual experience; individual actors, places, and ideas are aligned in a sequence that implies meaning and cause, and thus, explanation. To narrate oneself as “in Beirut but not of Beirut” is as much an explanation of one’s social position as it is about where one *positions* one’s neighborhood relative to Beirut in a hierarchy of places (Agnew 1987; Somers 1994; Fieldnotes: 7/28/2012). In addition, narrative practices are not only verbal (through story-telling) but can be material, the act of inscribing meaning into place (Foote & Azaryahu 2008). Narrative produces place thus through simplifying knowledge into a convenient sequence of story, and through the physical inscriptions into the built environment.

The second is that while acknowledging our debt to earlier scholars in Landscape & Memory, I would like to transition from a focus on “things” (like a putative “Lebanese landscape” or “Lebanese

memory”) towards actions and process (Volk 2010; Khalaf 2006). In doing so I am inspired somewhat by Mitchell’s (2002) call to convert landscape “from a noun to a verb,” but draw primarily from Practice Theory to do so. I rely more on this tradition to explore narrative place-making “as [an] embodied, mediated [array] of human activity centrally organized around a shared practical understanding,” practical sense, or what others call “social skill” (Schatzki 2001:2; Fligstein & McAdam 2012; Bourdieu 1991).

There are five benefits of this approach. The first is to offer, as mentioned above, a strong focus on *process*: shifting from nouns to verbs. The second is that by nature of its focus on process, action, practice, Practice Theory acknowledges materiality and can articulate a valuable heuristic of place, exploring the interconnections between human activity, the built environment, and meaning:

Practice Theory...joins a variety of ‘materialist’ approaches in highlighting how bundled activities interweave with ordered constellations of nonhuman entities. Indeed, because human activity is beholden to the milieus of nonhumans amid which it proceeds, understanding specific practices always involves apprehending material configurations. Ethnomethodologists, for instance, examine the immediate settings within which activity propagates, while students of science and technology map the wider human-nonhuman networks that form and orient activity within them. Philosophers ponder how the meanings of material contexts depend on human practices, while sociologists study how the stability of practices and meanings partly reflects the *solidifying inertia* of material layouts (Schatzki 2001:3, emphasis added).

Practices are the means through which places acquire meaning (coming to feel “at home” versus in a house), but places in turn provide the context for those practices. More clearly, places make certain ideas, practices, and worldviews seem more *reasonable* than others (Schatzki 2001).

Third, Practice Theory avoids over-emphasizing *elite actions* in the production and the reproduction of the political order. It allows us to avoid the pitfalls of merely reading the landscape “as text” from afar, which highlights the more visible elite practices of narrative place-making (building monuments) while downplaying non-elite practices (Duncan 1990). How do non-elites, for example, substantiate their own narratives of the past through place? What are everyday acts of memory-work which, though less imposing, generate political orders and borders in the city of Beirut? These are important questions that often go under-researched.

Fourth, the focus on actions as *instantiations* of a macro-social order means that we view practices as contingent manifestations of that order, rather than as proof of its inevitability. They do not

merely represent, but *are* that order (Coulter 2001). In their absence, the “macro-social” order disappears – this is how we may speak of the “absence” of the Lebanese state. We thus avoid viewing these concrete features of the built environment (like monuments) as actual embodiments of a reified abstraction like collective memory. These literal structures are the outcome of a practice of narrating the meaning of place, momentary instantiations of a practical sense that *attempts* to produce social order but does not necessarily represent it. They are a temporary window into the “macro-social,” a moment where one can glimpse this practical sense “at work” but not necessarily successful. This is a way of re-introducing contingency into the production of social order. Actors may thus engage in practices like building monuments, but they may not become hegemonic; instead, subalterns may exploit gaps to produce their own meanings and behaviors in place (Ortner 1997; 2006). ). I will examine these distinctions in greater detail later.

Fifth, and finally, Practice Theory offers a formal vocabulary through which we can appreciate struggles for power outside of formal political institutions – little P politics. By pointing to contests between categories and the elites that put them into practice, we can acknowledge that the salience of a given category of identification is historically contingent, and varies substantially with whether it is or is not institutionalized in some form. Yet this does not mean that categories that are not institutionalized are unimportant; the politics of the past in general concerns the struggle of political elites to impose informal categories onto others in such a way that they *become* formalized; this is in many ways how the category of “Lebanese” came to be (Bourdieu 1991; 1994; Salibi 1988).

Drawing primarily on Bourdieu and other advocates of the “practice turn,” I assert that we can only grasp the “structuring structures” (as discourse or as practical sense) that structure “the sect” by looking for them at their point of origin – not in the landscape itself, but in the inter-subjective practices of place-making that shape the land. In particular, looking at practices that shape the land to tell stories about who we are today. In this way, the material behaviors and outcomes we associate with practice are

the instantiations through which one witnesses discourse at play (Bourdieu 1973; Coulter 2001; Mueller 2008; Mueller 2013).

To focus on process is perhaps not so new. In *Shadowed Ground*, Kenneth Foote (2003) enumerates four social practices of inscribing narratives of the past into the sites of its passing: sanctification, designation, rectification, and obliteration (Foote 2003:7-8). For Foote, these practices reproduce a society's practical sense in a more permanent way:

Human modifications of the environment are often related to the way societies wish to sustain and efface memories...the very durability of the landscape and of the memorials place in the landscape makes these modifications effective for symbolizing and sustaining collective values over long periods of time (2003:33).

Inscription into place or place-making is a social practice, one that attempts to stabilize group consensus around a shared story of the past and maintain this story into the future. As an attempt at constructing durable unity, place is material durability or *presence* of practice over time, which makes place-based practices a powerful medium for transmitting narratives through time. It is, in many ways, the naturalizer *par excellence* of a given social order (Cresswell 1996).

Foote is most effective when discussing communities as totalities, but scarcely addresses contested memory after the place has been "purposed" according to his scheme. It lacks the conceptual vocabulary to address a situation like Beirut, where a site may be "sanctified" by one set of actors but "obliterated" in the narratives of another. Furthermore, Foote reads these landscapes as texts, focusing on the material infrastructures planned and implemented by elites. These should not be taken too seriously as an expression of group consensus, but as an *attempt* to fix consensus. Non-elites will "purpose" these sites on their own, develop alternative stories or incorporate them into their own sequences of time, space, causality, and thus meaning.

The presence of an abnormally large Sunni mosque in Beirut is not, *contra* Foote, to be taken at face value as a realistic expression of Sunni power or coherence – that is largely the point. We should not mistake attempts at producing a sense of the group (groupness) with their intended goal – groupness (Brubaker 2002). For example, both Amal and Hezbollah are Shiite political movements, sharing

neighborhoods and competing for followers within the Shiite sect. Not only does this competition highlight the inadequacies of discussing the “Shiite sect” as an analytical category, but it highlights other issues. Though Amal is profligate in its use of visual markers and propaganda, Hezbollah is far more modest. Yet few “on the street” would profess that Amal is more powerful than Hezbollah. Quite the reverse; as Bourdieu points out, actors bring external knowledge of structure into their interactions with symbols that makes merely interpreting them independent of those structures quite empty. Instead, it is that knowledge of structure, what he calls the *sens pratique* or “social skill,” that we should examine in our empirical studies (Bourdieu 1991; Fligstein & McAdam 2012).

There are some valuable implications to narrative place-making as a way forward. It offers a window into how the “macro-social” is put both into practice and into the land itself at the level of non-elites and elites alike. This in turn can help us overcome the “elite discourse problem” in critical geopolitics, to cite one possible implication (Ó Tuathail & Agnew 1992; Mueller 2008; Agnew 2013; Mueller 2013). It is thus a way of articulating a broader “popular geopolitics” (Dittmer 2010), though I hesitate to rely on this term, which might still over-emphasize the role of elites in ordering and bordering the world. Non-elites are not merely the “cultural dupes” of collective memory or geopolitical discourses (Adams 2003); instead, both the practices of elites and non-elites are acts of worldmaking that generate the social categories by which people live their lives and over which they struggle. In my empirical case, it is to engage in acts of worldmaking as Lebanese, as pan-Syrians, as Arabs, as Christians, or as Muslims. I have simply decided to focus on narrative place-making as an important means through which the social is generated. Because of its emphasis on the past and on how the past matters *here*, narrative place-making is a crucial mechanism whereby individuals configure categories, histories, and places into distinct alignments of knowledge about the social world, and how they use this knowledge to generate power over it. This is especially important for understanding places where relations of power unfold outside of formal or elite politics, as in so-called weak states.

Finally, and perhaps most salient, is that such an approach pushes us to focus on the *why* of narrative place-making and how this varies comparatively across sites and states. Why this story, and not another? As I have mentioned above, much of the literature on Landscape and Memory takes the nation-building agenda of nationalists or state governments perhaps too seriously, often eliding the two (Connor 1994). They fold very different goals into one all-encompassing term. The struggle over the meaning of the past may be a struggle in its own right, but the existing literature often folds notions of state (government), nation (identification) and territory (place) into the singular concern of the “politics of memory in X.” Not only does this reproduce the methodological nationalism I have just critiqued, but it discourages us from teasing out how commemorative place-making is a diverse strategy of claims-making, where the object of those claims need not be formal governing power or territorial autonomy.

Claiming important public spaces can accrue political capital to the claimants that neither move it closer to power in government nor break down barriers between political camps to form a new “group” (Bourdieu 1994). Rather, such a practice is political through its ability to trigger the reproduction of conflict rather instead of consensus. Such is the case of the Hariri Mosque in Martyrs Square. Telling a story to claim a strategic *place* and its associated symbolic capital thus differs strategically from doing so to acquire greater social capital by forming a larger coalition or nationalist movement (Till 2005; Foote 2003). To phrase it bluntly, different narratives produce different “collective memories” directed towards different goals; nationalism is but one narrative, sectarianism another.

Seen this way, the political motives of actors as group-making projects are more important than memory as such. We should not fold these diverse agendas into the vague “politics of memory,” but disaggregate it narratives of claims-making and the role of place in the pursuit of these claims. Critically, we should do so without presupposing those claims in advance, as do scholars of nationalism. These are important distinctions. The politics of memory should concern the production and legitimation of social boundaries more broadly, nationalist or not. It may be that European states have hegemonic stories about “nation-building,” but the same is hardly true for weak states like Lebanon.



All of these conceptual gymnastics are of course only useful inasmuch as they help us understand concrete experiences through empirical cases. In a “weak state” like Lebanon, one misses the many political geographies at play by noting only national memory-work and discourse. Political struggle in Lebanon frequently takes the form of what Graham (2004) calls “urban geopolitics” and produces distinct geographies of power relations specific to categorically divided cities like Mostar, Jerusalem, Nicosia, or Belfast (Fregonese & Brand 2009; Calame et al 2012; Pullan 2011; Coward 2007). Each city, however, reflects unique histories of struggle over the categories by which social practice is made meaningful and made present through place. They thus engage in distinctly political acts of worldmaking.

### **III: Lebanon as a Place-in-Progress**

In different eras, actors devise new narratives of the past to justify or challenge the social order of the day. Lebanon has been the object of many such narratives. This is partly due to changing administrative boundaries, and partly due to changing visions of the same territory. It is thus an informative example of group-making in process because the high degree of dissonance exposes the lack of symbolic monopoly exercised by one narrative over another. Whereas the state normally attempts to police identity, in weak states like Lebanon there is no entity powerful enough to articulate a singular “Lebanese memory” of the past (Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Instead, there is a veritable marketplace of narratives with differing ideologies, agendas, and imagined geographies. It can be quite difficult for political entrepreneurs in Lebanon to mobilize a following given the many options available with which to identify. Michael Young, a prominent Lebanese journalist, calls this Lebanon’s “paradoxical liberalism” (2010:14), which, through weakening the state, “creates spaces in society for individuals to pursue...freedoms with relative ease” (Young 2010:247). For Young, Lebanon’s weak state apparatus becomes its strength: unlike its despotic neighbors, no one narrative of history, geography, and identity is hegemonic, leaving gaps for

alternatives to emerge. It is even more accurate to speak less of “gaps” than of an empty playing field. What little presence the Lebanese state asserts is highly laissez-faire.

To begin, Lebanon is a small state in the Eastern Mediterranean in which Arabic is the primary language of communication but code-switching in French and English is common. Religious sects are recognized by the legal system as adjudicating civil disputes and personal status concerns (like marriage or inheritance), with all citizens being categorized as members of a sect (Joseph 1997). Conversion is possible but highly bureaucratic and occurs at a relatively high social cost. The sect thus represents a categorical social division that intervenes between the state and the citizen, has its own institutions, and provides social services and an important sense of belonging in Lebanon. There are seventeen religious sects recognized by law, which are automatically recorded on one’s identification documents. These can be struck from the record but at great cost to one’s access to institutions and to social capital. As one respondent pointed out, no one would trust him if he struck his sect from his ID card, as shared citizenship is not considered sufficient to guarantee oneself (Fieldnotes: 6/21/2012).

The absence of a powerful state is an enduring theme of Lebanese history, one worth addressing from the beginning. The historical record abounds with narratives casting Lebanon as a Zomia-like “mountain refuge” for minorities, who supposedly sought shelter from regional empires and the orthodox Sunni Islam they represented (Scott 2009; Salibi 1988). These are relatively straightforward in their notions of plot and causality: Physical geography – fertile agricultural land and rugged mountains – sustains a unique community of minorities and *genre de vie*, what some called *l’asile du Liban* (asylum of Lebanon). Natural borders produce “Lebanon” as both a geographic and social entity distinct from surrounding Turks, Persians, and in many versions, Arabs (Livingstone 1992; Hartman & Olsaretti 2003; Kaufman 2004). But as Salibi points out, “*l’asile du Liban*” is *just* a narrative, one authored by francophone orientalist cooperating with Francophile Maronite (Christian) students and institutions to tell a story that justified French intervention in Lebanon (Salibi 1988:134). Close investigation reveals that, in general, the imposing mountains offer better scenery than safety. In spite of the attractive stories

one can weave from the mountains, “there was nothing especially unique about the Lebanon Mountains in Islamic times” (Salibi 1988:142-143). There is copious evidence of central authority extending its reach into Lebanon to discipline local elites and non-elites alike. Lebanon’s distinctive character cannot be easily reduced to the protective powers of its physical geography. Rather than incorporate this narrative or other hackneyed descriptions of Lebanon as a “Paris of the Middle East” into my discussion of history, I would like instead to focus on three broad but significant transitions that have shaped the territory of Lebanon over time and provide anchor points for many of the narratives that do emerge.

The first is the transition from pre-Muslim to Muslim rule, which entailed a major re-orientation of mobilities, imaginaries, and thus sources of political legitimation. This can be read as part of a larger process where the emergence of Islam precipitated the collapse of a cultural universe centered on the Mediterranean and rooted in a shared experience of Roman custom, exchange, and political unity (Pirenne 2001; Braudel 1995). Prior to the advent of Islam, Lebanon had been home to the Phoenicians, an ancient sea-faring people, as well as an outpost of the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. Under Roman rule, Beirut hosted the Roman School of Law, and later became a vibrant center of early Christianity. As part of coastal Syria under Islam, Lebanon became a periphery to the caliphates centered on Damascus and later Baghdad, which presided over a vast network of overland trading caravans and pilgrimage routes oriented toward the Arabian peninsula (Hourani 1992; Salibi 1988). The city of Beirut, which had flourished as a Roman colony, was decimated by earthquakes and fires in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. that rendered the city unattractive to Muslim conquerors. Under Islamic rule it became a relatively unimportant borderland town for roughly a millennium. Beirut and its mountain hinterland shifted from being a dynamic center of Roman civilization and early Christian effervescence to a mere scrap of land over which to squabble with Byzantine Greece (Kassir 2003). The key implication of this shift was that Christians no longer ruled Lebanon, and were now a tolerated minority within the larger Islamic *umma*. The changing geographies of political authority converted Lebanon’s Christian population into a regional minority. This became the dominant theme for how many Christian politicians narrate Lebanon’s past. It

also became the justification for Lebanon's continued relationship with the Christian West much later (Salibi 1988).

The second major transition is a social transition, one rooted in relations of production that emerged a few centuries after the Islamic conquest and during the height of Abbasid rule. After changing hands over the centuries, Mount Lebanon (the mountain region) and the coastal cities of Syria came under Ottoman rule in 1517. By now coastal Syria hosted many religious minorities: Christian denominations like the Maronites, "unorthodox" sects of Islam like Jaafari (Twelver), Ismaili (Sevener), and Alawi Shiism, as well as the Druze; and Jews. Records attest that one largely found practitioners of Sunni Islam and Greek Orthodox Christianity in the small coastal cities of Beirut, Sidon, Tyre and Tripoli, while Maronites, Druze, Shiites and other religious communities clustered in various parts of the Lebanon Mountains (Kassir 2003; Traboulsi 2012; Salibi 1988).

Conflict between tribes in the mountains was endemic, erupting primarily along longstanding historical feud between *qaysi* (Northern) and *yamani* (Southern) tribes from the Arabian peninsula. To minimize this, the Ottomans continued a regional tradition of offering land to minority communities to act a surrogate police force, upset the existing balance of power, and give them a local stakeholder beholden to them for support. This was not new. Centuries before, the Mamluks settled a number of Turkoman converts to Sunni Islam in the mountains of northern Lebanon as a means of disciplining Shiites, forming what is now known as the Kesrouan region around Jbeil (from the Persian *khosroan*, "soldiers"). The Ottomans offered land grants (*iqta'* or "allotments") to Druze elders (*muqati'ji*), known for their military skill, on the condition that they farm the land and collect taxes (*iltizam*) for the central administration. Ottoman authorities in distant Istanbul received a cut of taxes but otherwise the mountains were ruled by a succession of local Druze *emirs* from the Ma'n' and Shihab families. Peasant labor from the Druze and Maronite communities supported this agricultural economy until massive migrations of Maronites from the north began to destabilize the ratio of Druze to Maronites (Traboulsi 2012).

This arrangement offered the Emir of Mount Lebanon a great deal of autonomy from the Ottoman government, though this was hardly unique to Lebanon; many provinces of the Ottoman Empire were under similar arrangements, among them Yemen (Salibi 1988). For this reason, the period of the Emirate of Mount Lebanon is a typical starting point for narratives highlighting Lebanon as an enduring, independent political entity. Under the ambitious Emir Fakhreddine Ma'n (1590-1633), the Emirate established diplomatic ties with Italian city-states like Venice and Genoa. He did this to ameliorate relations with local Maronite Christians as well as to improve his hold over the mountains and coastal cities by boosting revenue. The renewed orientation toward the Mediterranean, now dominated by Italian merchants, is quite clear when one visits historical buildings dating from the Ma'n period, which are heavily influenced by Venetian aesthetics and window design. In fact, a great deal of "traditional" Lebanese architecture is a direct product of this new set of cultural exchanges fostered by Fakhreddine.

Much more important than these were the economic ties Fakhreddine fostered via a silk trade based in the mountain villages using Maronite labor. Fakhreddine re-oriented the Mountain economy toward the Mediterranean to supply Venice and Tuscany with silk, produced by a growing class of Maronite Christian entrepreneurs. In return he received technical expertise from Venetian engineers, administrative advice, advanced weaponry, and growing legitimacy from Maronite Christians at home (Salibi 1988; Traboulsi 2012).

Though Fakhreddine was eventually executed for fomenting rebellion against the Ottoman state, connections to Europe would long outlast him. The silk economy took off, enriching Maronite entrepreneurs in the mountains and connecting them directly to Catholic merchants and institutions in Italy and France. This empowerment and reconnection with their Christian brethren abroad led to a relative crystallization of Maronite identity in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the Maronite Church attempting to assert legal autonomy and engage in greater transnational activity with the Vatican with less interference from Istanbul (Salibi 1988). As Maronites in the mountains grew wealthy, the agricultural sector declined and Druze *muqati'ji* saw their power erode. Many wealthy Druze *muqati'ji* went into debt

with Maronite merchants, and the sources of political conflict subsequently began to shift from primarily tribal (*qaysi/yamani*) to religious-sectarian (Druze/Maronite). What emerged was a new division of social space in which the sectarian division of labor raised the salience of the categories of Druze, Maronite, and other sects. In competition with one another over power and resources, these boundaries hardened and became more meaningful than antiquated tribal distinctions from Arabia (Traboulsi 2012). To resolve the growing tensions between the impoverished Druze warrior-landowning class and the ascendant Maronite entrepreneurs, the Ottomans chose a territorial solution. In 1841 they dissolved the Emirate, dividing it into two *qa'imaqamiyah* (“lieutenancies”), one ruled by a Druze council, one by a Maronite one. Yet this division left it ambiguous whether political rights would rest primarily on the basis of territorial residency or sectarian affiliation. Facts on the ground were quite “messy,” with lots of intermingling among the two. It was thus quite problematic because neither *qa'imaqamiyah* was home to a homogeneous population. This was the first attempt to institutionalizing sectarianism in politics, attempting to solve disputes by aligning these new social divisions with spatial divisions. However, this attempt led to overt conflict, put increased pressure on peasants and, eventually, induced the massacres and cleansing of mountain villages that marked the 1860 Civil War in the mountains (Traboulsi 2012; Fawaz 1995). In institutionalizing sectarianism through territorial division, the Ottomans did not resolve conflict but merely raised the stakes.

European involvement in the Mount Lebanon region intensified after 1860, reaching a climax during the hostilities of World War I. In the midst of the war, European powers formulated their own territorial solution to what they called the “Eastern Question” (Bonine et al 2012). In 1916, Great Britain and France signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement, mandating vast expanses of the Ottoman Empire’s Arab lands to one another: to the British went Iraq, the Gulf, and the area of modern Jordan and Israel-Palestine, while the French assumed control of coastal Syria proper. When France assumed direct control of its mandate it engaged in serious acts of redistricting, dividing its new colony into two: Mandate Syria and Mandate Lebanon. A new administrative entity, Lebanon was separated to make the French colonial

project easier: to provide a toe-hold in the region's affairs and to extend French protection, civilization, and commerce to their allies, the Maronites.

This was assembled from the two former *qa'imadiyahs* of Mount Lebanon as well as the city of Beirut, to which was added the plains of the Bekaa Valley, the Jabal 'Amil region (now just "the South") and the city of Tripoli with its hinterland in the north. Intended as a "Christian homeland" in the Middle East, it became clear that with these new additions Lebanon was roughly half Muslim (Traboulsi 2012). The French hoped that "Greater Lebanon" would be a self-sustaining territory, viewing this as the better option in "a tragic choice between the 'Christian refuge' and the spectre of...famine" (2012:85). In its efforts to call into being an enduring space of safety for Christians – in particular, their Maronite allies – France sacrificed a Christian majority for a plurality. Severed from Damascus, the territories of coastal Syria were now administratively merged to the mountains for the first time, bringing together Christians, Muslims, and Jews of various stripes and affiliations in the newly urbanizing capital of this territory, Beirut. The Lebanon of today, independent since 1943, was a necessary evil in French guarantees to the region's Christian population. As a result of such demographic gerrymandering, the Lebanese state has been haunted by its arbitrary boundaries and religious diversity since the Mandate Era, with attempts to establish a sense of unity and orientation a difficult task at the very least (Haugbolle 2012; Kassir 2003; Traboulsi 2012).

The "modernizing" infrastructural projects initiated by the Ottomans and continued by the French produced a literate, urban, politically motivated population, one capable of imagining and demanding new forms of community (Anderson 1991). They sparked a period of artistic and intellectual dynamism – the "Arab Awakening" – and a number of radical visions emerged to articulate what a modern, independent Middle East should look like. These were often based on explicitly geographical imaginaries, where those "visions of social division" favored by one narrative of Lebanese history would imply a specific division of physical space: an independent Lebanon, a Greater Syria, a pan-Arab *watan*. These persist long after the colonial moment and still inform sectarian political ideologies underpinning sectarianism today:

Lebanism, pan-Arabism, pan-Syrianism, (formerly) Protectionism, the global *umma*, and others like global Communism (Salibi 1988; Traboulsi 2012). What each of these differing visions offered were different narratives about which sort of categories would take precedence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In attempting to adjust the region to nationalist notions of citizenship from Europe meant that the stakes of determining which category would *define* that citizenship – membership in a state and territory – were very high.

One of the reasons these stakes were so high were the implications for political power of certain groups based on the relationships among social categories; that is, which categories would “encompass” others. How, for instance, should a Syrian relate to an Arab? A Muslim to a Lebanese? Or a Christian to an Arab? Furthermore, how did the spatial division of the region *create* minorities and majorities? Even when articulating more expansive forms of categorical identification, hurdles still remained: pan-Arab nationalism was hampered by the majority/minority dissonance between being Arab *and* Muslim versus being Arab *and* Christian. Salibi captures this dissonance quite well when he describes how Arab nationalism “meant different things to its Muslim and Christian adherents...Muslim Arab nationalists continued to speak of Arabism and Islam in the same breath, while the Christians did not” (1988:48-49). At this crucial moment emerged numerous ideological groups emerged, offering distinct visions of division that clarified “proper” categories for political practice in the post-colonial world.

We thus saw a movement advocating pan-Arabism as the proper category of political identity, while others claimed pan-Syrianism was more meaningful or relevant. Still others opted for pure “Lebanism,” while at the opposite end of the spectrum some clamored for a return to pre-colonial Islamic unity. What these visions share is an attempt to induce unity by arguing for the *primary relevance* of a given category and thus generate the legitimacy necessary for a “modern” nation-state. With these ideologies came the mass social movements and episodes of contention that would prioritize, affiliate, and act on the basis of very different geographic frames of reference for the agendas they saw as important (Haugbolle 2012; Kassir 2003; Khalaf 2006; McAdam et al 2008).



The third major transition is thus somewhat related to the second and was deeply influenced by French investment in Beirut. Even after the collapse of the *iqta'* system, many families retained wealth and prestige based on the *mansab* ("title") they held from this period. These formal credentials translated into informal prestige in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries during the late Ottoman and French Mandate era; these families merely became known as *beys* or *za'ims*. It was understood that traditional *za'ims*, while maintaining sectarian boundaries to their benefit, ensured a degree of stability among different sectarian communities through "in-group policing" (Fearon & Laitin 1996). This changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the more dynamic, urbanized politics of ideological movements after the Arab Awakening.

The rise of ideological movements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century transformed religious sects under the traditional patronage of the *za'ims* into social movements making dramatic political claims. Changes brought about by upgrades to Beirut's educational, logistical, and symbolic infrastructures carried out by the Ottomans and French brought about a need to reconceptualize relations to one another, to the past and to the future. Though the *za'ims* lingered on in the countryside, their hegemony over their sectarian "flock" was shaken by mass migration into the city and the accompanying social changes like increased disparities in wealth, access to Western commodities, gender norms, and even novel configurations of the home. Younger, more charismatic political entrepreneurs like the Gemayels and the Junblatts took center stage at the head of new political movements representing the needs of those undergoing transitions into "modern life" but within a specific sectarian context. Since each sect experienced this transition rather differently, there was much room for innovation.

This is somewhat the reverse of Weber's notion that within religious sects, authority begins as charismatic but is codified through tradition. Sectarian entrepreneurs in the streets of Beirut (like the Gemayels and the Junblatts) adopted what had been a long-established tradition of sectarian feudal patronage and turned it into a charismatic, at times revolutionary social movement. On the other hand, Weber comes quite close when he points out that over time, the actual *religious* significance of the sect

dissipates as it comes to act more as a “status group” or a political party. It is certainly true that in the midst of these ongoing changes, identification with sect shifted from a matter of religious doctrine and belief to one of political orientation and identification (Weber 2002). This was born out somewhat in field observations (Fieldnotes: 6/21/2012). But it was the bureaucratic work of the Ottoman and later French administrations that enshrined the “sect” into the legal system as the categorical division of society par excellence, which had enormous impacts on the viability of other categories coming into currency like “Arab,” “Syrian” or “Muslim.” This was incorporated into the Lebanese Constitution of 1943, which similarly enshrines sectarianism in law (Traboulsi 2012).

Still, the institutionalization of sectarianism did not foreclose the activity of political groups with alternative visions of social and geographic division. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (which was pan-Syrianist) attempted a coup in 1961 to merge Lebanon with Syria, while the Lebanese Communist Party was highly active in the South. Sunnis continued to call for union with Nasser’s United Arab Republic for some time during the sixties. Sectarianism thus left plenty of room for these other categories to retain political salience. For example, to Sunnis pan-Arabism was often more significant than Sunni religious identity as such. This predisposed them to sympathetic attitudes toward the Palestinian cause in the sixties and seventies, leading ultimately to Lebanon hosting the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1973. To Maronite Christians, on the other hand, Lebanist Phoenicianism provided the vocabulary that could obscure sectarian divisions within Lebanon and legitimize a sovereign, Western-inflected state (Kaufman 2004; Salibi 1988). Different visions of social division between sectarian political movements thus lead to agonistic struggle over categories of political practice in search of legitimacy, and by extension, differing notions of how relate to the “outside world.” What constituted a valid form of affiliation versus a “violation” of Lebanese sovereignty was ambiguous and depended entirely on whom one asked, leading (with the arrival of Palestinian refugees in the 70s) to the Lebanese civil war in 1975.

Essentially a war over what kind of place Lebanon would be, and for whom, the civil war was an outcome of the three broad transitions I mention above as well as others, like the growing economic

disparities of the fifties and sixties as Lebanon's finance and real-estate market expanded (Traboulsi 2012). The war lasted for sixteen brutal years, resulted in massive damage at the collective level (emigration, destruction of infrastructure, loss of social capital) and at the individual level (psychological trauma, loss of family members, personal injury).

The other results have been catalogued quite extensively by scholars in the aftermath. During the war, "Lebanonization" entered media circulation as a geographical analogy on par with "Balkanization," and the horrors of sectarian violence found their way into popular and scholarly accounts of the war alike (Agnew 2009; Makdisi 1999; Khalaf 2006). Though it ended the war, the Taif Accord of 1992 merely deepened the institutionalization of the *sect* as the primary political category in post-war Lebanon. This ensures that institutional outcomes will continue to make the sect meaningful in social interaction, as it already is in the spheres of marriage, citizenship, and inheritance, among others (Joseph 1997). The post-War landscape of Beirut is a series of semi-homogenous, largely self-reliant neighborhoods of the city dominated by charismatic sectarian political institutions. Lebanese youth are socialized into this urban environment, developing a distinct social skill or practical sense for navigating so fragmented a social world (Larkin 2010; Fligstein & McAdam 2012).

The city of Beirut itself, which had transitioned from a provincial port to a major "cosmopolitan" center of the Arab world, capital of "Arab modernity," has been rendered unrecognizable in many ways. Though once a place of interaction and commerce, it is now a fragmented, securitized zone of conflicting claims to neighborhood sovereignty, in which "battle-scarred, war-weary [selves]" search for points of 'passage' rather than 'meeting'" (Fawaz et al 2012:188; Seidman 2012:31). Martyrs Square, former center and "heart of Beirut," has been reduced to an unfinished construction site and eyesore, while adjacent neighborhoods of Downtown have been appropriated by the private developer Solidère, turning the symbolic meeting point of the Lebanese into an unaffordable, gentrified enclave for a global elite (Makdisi 1997).

Lebanon has a rich historical record from which actors may draw in producing narratives, but it is used differently through time. In recent years, sectarianism has become the primary categorical division which is put into practice through narrative place-making. The entrenchment of sectarianism in law and landscape, as well as the ideologies of actors, render trivial discussion of a Lebanese politics of memory that produces consensus. Instead, we see actors engage in narrative place-making in ways that articulate Lebanon's history as one of conflict *among* categories (to identify as Lebanese or as Arab, for instance) as well as conflict *within* categories (between the sects of Sunni Islam and Maronite Christianity). The practices of elites are essential to understanding how these conflicts and categories become present and thus part of the practical sense of Lebanese society.

#### **IV: Elite Practices of Narration**

##### *Power, Practice, Narrative*

Narratives of Lebanon's history are as much a part of the built environment of Beirut as they are part of its history books. In this section, I look at how elites engage in narrative place-making in a public square of Beirut in an attempt to gain legitimacy by defining the "field of possibilities" for political identification in Lebanon. To view place-making as an elite practice orients us toward the contingency of social categories (which require active upkeep through practices) and toward viewing the traces of these practices as mere instantiations or "moments" in which actors make the macro-social order present (Coulter 2001). I do so to achieve two goals: to highlight material forms of narrative place-making as a primarily *elite* practice, and to turn place (as with landscape) from a noun to a *verb* which is ongoing, dynamic, and intentional (Mitchell 2002). Like the writing of history texts, inscribing narrative into place is an act that (re)presents and (re)produces power, but operates outside the bounds of formal political institutions. Yet discussing a struggle for power and social order outside of formal institutions requires a framework of its own, and for this reason I turn to Practice Theory.

Practice Theory offers a distinct approach to power. Using linguistic practice as an example, Rouse suggests that “whether an unfamiliar way of...dealing with a situation is taken as an innovation, a mistake, a curiosity, an irony, or a variation on the familiar depends crucially upon asymmetries of authority among those who encounter it” (Rouse 2001:194). We might then understand power as the authority to model “appropriate” uses, practices and forms of subjectivity. Actors wield authority by offering tropes, models, or “uncontested uses” through which appropriate practices become known (Rouse 2001: 194). These tropes give *definition* and *presence* to the social order by offering examples, context, and notions of causality:

Power is only *effective* in enabling or constraining action through dynamic alignments that bring one action to bear upon another. Knowing is likewise only informative through dynamic alignments that enable one thing...to be about another (Rouse 2001:195).

Neither knowledge nor power can be witnessed, then, if they are not positioned in relation to actors and objects in a sequence, what Rouse calls “dynamic alignments” or tropes.

Such alignments define the meaning of action by emplotting it in relation to objects, actors, ideas, and other actions. In many ways, they are *the* “structuring structures that structure” articulated by Bourdieu (1991). As a form of dynamic alignment, narrative place-making is a practice that “emplots” persons and events in relation to time, space, and one another, structuring the context against which social categories acquire meaning and are put into practice with others. This context resembles a structured “field of possibilities,” the kind mentioned by Bourdieu, and it is in articulating these possibilities that political elites come to acquire legitimacy or “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). In particular, altering the built environment is a costly but powerful medium for attempting to structure those possibilities, one that speaks to the particular power of place-making as an elite practice:

[An] adequate conception [of power] would recognize the *material* mediation of power by its circumstances, such that tools, processes, and physical surroundings more generally all belong to dynamic alignments of dominance, subordination, and resistance. Thus, just as practices should not be reduced to *social* practices, power should not be reduced to *social* power (Rouse 2001:195).

Elite practices like inscribing “collective memories” into the built environment through monuments is thus an attempt to fix the alignments necessary to reproduce the field of possibilities for a given social

order. This alignment, in turn, informs the practical sense or social skills which an actor must “acquire” (Bourdieu 1980; Fligstein & McAdam 2012). Place – as the necessary context of social action – is the presence of naturalized social relations, while place-making is a practice of naturalizing that very order; it is a practice of ordering itself (Agnew 1987:27; Cresswell 2004).

It is important to clarify more precisely how it is that place-making and its traces are taken up in social practice. As models or alignments, one could suggest that monuments and memorials function more like *representations* than as practices; indeed, this has been the standard account of such structures in geography’s “landscape as text” tradition (Duncan 1990). Yet to characterize them as representations, while not incorrect, may well be an inadequate gauge of their function. It highlights their roles as content-laden symbols that intervene between actors and the world, but in doing so it raises two concerns. The first is that one can then “interpret” from afar that symbolic content, to “decipher” what is going on without fully engaging with *how* that content is actually being taken up in practice by actors. A focus on representation highlights the importance of discourse or meaning at the cost of reception and use. It does not so effectively gauge how symbolic statements *about* the social actually *reflect* or *influence* the social.

The second concern is about the nature of place and place-making: that beyond symbolic content, places are actual, *material* structures, whose symbolic content only acquires meaning as it is emplotted relative to ideologies, histories, bodies and other places. There is no abstract meaning of a monument like the Hariri Mosque in Downtown Beirut because place in its material situatedness changes, and this changes the nature of the context in which that meaning is known. The meaning of place is known through context, but that context is not an abstract meaning; it is a concrete emplotment in geography and a subjective emplotment in narrative. In other words, place does not intervene between the actor and the world, it *is* the actor and the world. Places are more than content-laden representations because they provide the necessary context through which such content makes any sense at all, without which symbols are unmoored, lacking meaning or causal emplotment. Thus Rouse calls us (above) to recognize “the *material* mediation of power by its circumstances,” in such a way that knowledge and power are not

eternal and meanings and hierarchies, but are ways of “knowing about” or “having power over” something specific, situated, and material (Rouse 2001:195). We should not reify knowledge or power through an emphasis on discourse and representation, because it is through place-making that actors intentionally align these meanings into a context that gives them a certain kind of sense. Context makes content, and places are thus (quite literally) structuring structures that structure.

Rouse avoids reifying knowledge and power through discourse by highlighting their contingent alignment at the right time and place:

...practices are mediated not by conventional meanings, languages, or beliefs, but by partially shared *situations*, which have a history. One consequence of recognizing their dynamics highlights the importance of tropes, whose contrast class is not ‘literal’ meanings, but familiar or uncontested *uses*...Models, I argue, should be thought of as simulacra rather than representations. The crucial difference is that ‘representation’ too often denotes a semantic content that intervenes between knowers and the world, whereas simulacra are just more things in the world, with a multiplicity of relations to other things. What makes them models, with an *intentional* relation to what they model, is their being taken up in practices, ongoing patterns of use that are answerable to norms of correctness (Rouse 2001:194).

Place-making is an attempt to make these shared situations endure. As the outcome or traces of place-making practices, monuments thus do not reflect conventional meanings, but are things in the world which themselves interact with actors and model uses which are then taken up by actors in practice. How this is taken up in practice is key, because the discursive claims of political entrepreneurs may not reflect popular sentiment or practice (Brubaker 2002). We can only understand their social impact by looking not only to the monument-as-representation, but *beyond* it to the monument-as-trope: how actors interact with its content in a given situation: a Mosque in a central square, for instance. Once more, context makes content. While the theoretical language of discourse and language value the symbolic content of such monuments, practice and tropes highlight how these monuments are the context through which elites posit the terms of the social order for non-elites and give those terms meaning. To summarize, they are not a representation of power, they are the practice through which power is produced. They *are* power.

I hold that this practice of altering the built environment is wielded primarily by political elites, and that Beirut today is full of its traces. In particular, this study focuses on a specific building in a specific site in contemporary Beirut: the “Hariri Mosque” in the Bourj neighborhood. The situation at the

city center, *centre-ville*, Downtown, or *Bourj* (hereafter Bourj) neighborhood (named for the tower that once guarded the harbor) differs historically from that of the suburbs and other residential quarters of the city proper. Beirut was literally constructed by elites to be the functioning heart of a newly formed administrative entity, an effort which focused first and foremost on what is now called Martyrs Square. This space has come to represent the whole of Lebanon in a way quite rare in a state still plagued by categorical divisions like Lebanon. To Michael Young, “it was not inevitable that the Lebanese would transform Martyrs Square into the scene for their activities, and yet it was, because there never was anywhere else, physically or symbolically” (Young 2010). It acts as an instantiation and barometer for Lebanese society more generally (Volk 2010; Khalaf 2006; Tueni 2000). If one wished to stand in the presence of Lebanon, one might only refer to this place at the city center (Gordillo 2002; Coulter 2001).

I will now turn to both the legacy of elite acts of narrative place-making and “inscription” in Beirut as well as to my contemporary example of the Hariri Mosque.

#### *Elite Inscriptions Before the Civil War (1800s-1975)*

Martyrs Square figures prominently in the narratives of political elites of one stripe or another. The square’s emergence as a hegemonic site of the category of “Lebanese” is tied up in a long tradition of elite practices of narrating the past through place-making. But how is the space understood historically? What we now call the square was originally conceived of in Mamluk times (13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) as a *maydan*. According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, “every town with a Muslim garrison of any importance had one or more *maydans*,” which were leveled at great expense by local elites solely for military activity (Viré 2013).

Under the Mamluk sultans, the construction of a maydan constituted a large-scale project and mobilized a considerable labour-force; it was necessary, in effect, to level a surface of sufficient size to accommodate the manoeuvring of several hundred horsemen. Enclosures, water-conduits, shelters, stables, stables, studs, personnel quarters, pavilions, baths and other amenities represented enormous expense, and every sultan was eager to establish his own maydan, neglecting those already in existence, which rapidly fell into ruin (Viré 2013).



Elites who constructed *maydans* thus produced them as a means of reproducing their symbolic capital as elites in Mamluk society.

As cavalry-armies grew obsolete, *maydans* like Beirut's became a purposefully ambiguous space kept apart "as a result of human intervention directed not toward the addition of identity, events, or character but rather towards keeping land free and indeterminate and therefore negotiable" (Khalaf 2006:180). Being malleable, the *maydan* left space (social and physical) for "itinerant and unanchored social groups" like pilgrims, traders, travelers, and nomads to engage with the city without specific social impositions. *Maydan* thus "came to be identified with images of plains, meadows, grounds, or fields," – not cultivated, enclosed, or defined, but consciously left to a neutral, fluid state (Khalaf 2006; Young 2010). When the Ottoman Turks took control of Beirut in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this was the kind of space they encountered near the city-center, and would remain so for some time.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was full of change for the Ottoman Empire: ethnic turmoil within its borders, defeat at the hands of European states, and dramatic reforms to governance from Istanbul. Seeking to compete with Europe, the Ottoman Qabbuli Pasha decided to use the *maydan* of Beirut to tell a story to the city's inhabitants of the empire's rebirth along more modern lines. They thus embarked on a number of renovations to the city's infrastructure (Scott 1999), but they began another effort as well. In addition to upgrades of the city's health-works, water, transport, communications, port, lighting, administrative, and policing infrastructures, the Ottomans renovated what I will call the city's *ideological infrastructures*. They did this in an attempt to fix the presence of the empire in the practical sense of its Lebanese members, to "transform the available possibilities for human action...by materially enabling some activities and obstructing others, and also by changing the situation such that some possible actions or roles lose their point, while others acquire new significance" (Rouse 2001:194). As Kassir notes:

Unable to prevent the intensification of ethnic and denominational differences or to hold the West at bay, the state had little choice...but to take an active approach to provincial administration and social questions that laid particular emphasis on changing the look of Ottoman cities, which were both the theater and the object of the Tanzimat's most visible changes. Indeed urban policy, even more than the legislative program from which it profited, was the principal expression of the age of reform. This was due, first, to the fact that it translated on a human scale the new relations between the

empire and its subjects...it allied the most dynamic segments of the population with public initiatives (Kassir 2003:132).

The project was to effect a shift in the basis of political legitimacy: from backward, universal Islam to the more modern *osmanlilik* (Ottomanism or Ottoman-ness). This was a nationalist category of identification inspired by ideological trends prevalent in Europe at the time (Kassir 2003). Kaiser would call this an Ottoman effort at “homeland-making in Lebanon,” but more specifically it was an effort to re-articulate the relationship of one category of identity (religion) to another (political identification).

This elaborates on Mann’s notion of infrastructural power. While Mann argues that political entrepreneurs from the state establish internal order through control of logistical infrastructures and services, I stress that they engage in parallel attempts to control the infrastructures that uphold ideology, much as Althusser describes “ideological state apparatuses” (Althusser 2006). In this way, ideological infrastructures produced through place-making are a mechanism through which the state attempts to fix a presence independent from the minds and actions of its subjects and thus gain currency as an autonomous actor “above” society. To situate this notion more appropriately, it is ideological infrastructures that states construct when they engage in acts of “homeland-making” (Mann 1984; Gupta & Ferguson 2002; Kaiser 2002).

To become a meaningful entity autonomous from their representatives in Beirut, and thus present in the practical sense of the city’s inhabitants, required massive investment in practices that would narrate what kind of place the city was. Not only did the empire thus downplay alternative categories of identification (like religion), but created a new visual idiom for the empire, the ideological infrastructures that would relay the new imperial ideology of *osmanlilik*. These were a “modern” Ottoman architecture and urban landscape that characterized the similarly novel urban spaces meant to perform the Ottoman-ness of the city – the Grand Serail, Petit Serail, Military Academy. Such buildings were

meant to bring out the distinctive character of the empire in relation to the West, never absent from the minds of its rulers. Throughout the Ottoman lands, and quite particularly the Arab provinces...the new imperial concept of *osmanlilik* made use of these ornamental references to a glorious past in order to proclaim...unbroken authority and to demonstrate...perpetual vigor. From Edirna to Beirut, an identical style prevailed (Kassir 2003: 140).

Not only did the Ottomans use individual government buildings to tell the story of Beirut's *osmanlilik* through Martyrs Square; the Ottomans “discovered” urban planning in Beirut by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hoping to remake the city as an Ottoman Paris (Kassir 2003). They crafted Beirut into a provincial showcase to place *osmanlilik* above the empire's ethnic and religious heterogeneity in social practice and impress European visitors. It became, as Kassir calls it, a “window on Ottoman modernity,” evidence of Ottoman progress and renewal in the provinces.

The former *maydan* was central to this urban planning effort. As Beirut urbanized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under Ottoman reforms, the city center or *Bourj* neighborhood<sup>2</sup> grew crowded against the medieval city walls, earning the space the new title of *sahat al-sur* (Wall Square) in colloquial use. To define the space, the Ottomans bounded it to the north from access to the sea with the Petit Serail, which housed the newly-formed municipal government. The square was soon surrounded by upscale restaurants, hotels, and a red-light district.

A newly-formed municipal government, staffed by the *nouveaux riches* of urban Lebanese, took up *osmanlilik* with enthusiasm. The transition from a malleable *maydan* to a more defined *saha* (more like a planned plaza or square) marked a turning point in the space's history. Adopting the narrative of *osmanlilik*, Lebanese administrators used their positions to pass ordinances to cultivate a garden and fountain at its center, which was renamed *Saha Hamidiye* in honor of Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid. In this chapter of Lebanese history, Lebanese elites adopted the Ottoman ideology of *osmanlilik* for Beirut, with Martyrs Square offering a narrative trope for what it meant to be an Ottoman citizen, rather than Muslim or Arab. Once again, the square formed the context in which some actions became more meaningful than others.

The ideology and narrative of *osmanlilik* did not long go unchallenged as the primary means of identification in the region. Ottoman reforms and missionary schools spread literacy in Arabic, English, and French, resulting in a flourishing literary and publishing scene for which intellectuals could articulate

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<sup>2</sup> Named for the tower (*burj*) that had guarded the city's harbor.

and imagine alternative communities (Anderson 1991). Missionaries from Europe and the Americas, undercover agents from Britain and France, as well as transplants from other Arab regions had alternative narratives that cast the Ottoman Turks as oppressors. Members of the rising intellectual class told a counter-narrative of Turkish oppression and Arab rebirth, the so-called *Nahda* (Renaissance). Alongside the intellectual and artistic ferment I have described above, political movements began calling for more substantial political autonomy and representation in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, some even for independence.

This was supported by European agents and intellectuals, and led to a series of protests in Beirut and Damascus against Ottoman rule in 1915-1916. The Ottoman response was to hang the seventeen intellectuals responsible for the protests in *Saha Hamidiye* as a performance of Ottoman authority in both Lebanon and the Arab provinces. Yet this elite punitive practice elicited a powerful non-elite response: the Arab masses of Beirut began referring to the space as *Sahat at-Tahrir* (Freedom Square), sanctifying the space as a locus of Arab resistance to Turkish oppression (Foote 2003; Khalaf 2006; Kassir 2003). The square became an arena for conflicting narratives, one inscribed into the square's materiality, the other not. This is an important reminder that while elites may attempt to impose social categories (*osmanlilik*) through narrative place-making, there is always room for non-elites to posit alternative categories of identification (Arabism) and thus assert political agency (Ortner 1997; 2006).

The Ottomans were defeated in World War I, and the territories of present-day Lebanon and Syria passed to France as mandates from the League of Nations. The French used the square to tell a new story about Lebanon: as a showcase for its *mission civilisatrice*. French planners reworked the visions of Baron Haussman in Paris to the colonial context of the Middle-East, clearing massive areas of the city center for wide avenues, which it then named and directed towards monumental projects like the Petit Serail, the Abed Clocktower, and others. The monumental planning projects of the French Mandate administrators attempted to narrate a new relationship to the world in a very specific configuration of space and time, as a topological affinity for Europe rather than a topographical proximity to the surrounding region:

The mandate administration was staffed by veterans of Morocco who drew freely on their experience in North Africa, where a colonial approach to urban renewal relied on the French tradition of grand designs and balanced compositions, mixing the classicism of the seventeenth century with Haussmannian ideas and Beaux-Arts ideals to create a spectacular display of power. Taking into account the exceptional richness of the Levant's history, this striking embodiment of the triumphalist style, with its expansive perspectives and clean lines punctuated by monumental gestures, was calculated to make it unmistakably clear who was now in charge (Kassir 2003:286).

Rather than inscribing memories into the city, they attempted to inscribe *futures* for Lebanon. They hoped to efface Ottoman history, distance Lebanon from its Arab heritage and promote Lebanon's position as a "modern" country:

Unlike Aleppo and Damascus, however, which welcomed this "pose of the protector," Beirut possessed little that was ancient or otherwise worthy of being protected, and both the mandate authority and local developers felt free to cultivate the spectacle of modernity without unduly encumbering themselves with a concern for preserving the past (*sic*, 287).

The French vision was thus a modernizing one. Planning was meant to render appropriate the French presence in Lebanon, and as good for its future. For example, the French retained the name of *Place de la Liberté*<sup>3</sup> for the former *Saha Hamidiye*, as an allusion to the French liberation of Lebanon from Ottoman oppression and its legacy of ties to the Islamic world.

But to speak of this as a form of inscribing "memory-work" would be inadequate. The French attempted to emplot Beirut in a new set of relations: relations to time (towards the future) and space (toward Europe). In particular, it was meant to orient this new political entity toward France. Though Nora speaks of *lieux de memoire* as places for the past, French officials constructed places for the future. To stretch this a bit further, Nora focuses on instantiations of a society's memories, while the French attempted to instantiate its dreams. The ideological infrastructures of this period, the architectural legacy left by the French colonial administrators, endure to this day in the Bourj neighborhood of Beirut.

Lebanon eventually gained independence from France in 1943, but on bitter terms (Traboulsi 2012; Kassir 2003). Having tired of French rule, the new Lebanese state tried its hand at producing ideological infrastructures in its early years, hoping to produce its presence in the practical sense of its members – to assert the category of "Lebanese-ness" as sovereign. The most important of these

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<sup>3</sup> *Sahat at-Tahrir* or Liberation Square.

infrastructures has no doubt been the Martyrs Statues. With memories of French and Ottoman oppression still recent, the government hoped to author its own narrative of a free, independent Lebanon by repurposing *Sahat at-Tahrir*.

The Lebanese government commissioned designs for sculptors to produce a monument suited to the narrative of a newly-independent nation recognizing the sacrifices of its founding fathers, a statue that would model Lebanese-ness as appropriate in the minds of citizens. The process was long and controversial, as even in the early years of the state it was unclear how best to represent Lebanese-ness in the face of competing categories of identification like sectarianism. The concern was over what ideological infrastructures could instantiate Lebanon's unique diversity while expressing unity. The flag was perhaps the first and only easy choice for iconography, and it is almost the only definitive statement of Lebanese-ness in existence. The other was the statue that resulted from this contest. Ultimately, it was a foreign sculptor whose design won out. Though initially controversial, his design has become accepted as the sole instance of narrative place-making capable of instantiating Lebanese-ness as meaningful, legitimate, or as proponents of Practice Theory would suggest, appropriate. The statue became known as the Martyrs Statues, and *Place de la Liberté* was renamed *Place des Martyrs* or Martyrs Square in its honor. Both endure to this day.

Beirut thus has a significant history of political actors (Ottomans, French, Lebanese) using ideological infrastructures in place-making to legitimize their authority and reproduce their "visions" of social relations: modern Ottoman citizens, French colonial subjects, Lebanese citizens. In this way, these authorities not only attempt to gain political autonomy from local interests via control over material infrastructures, as Michael Mann describes, but from the ideological as well (Mann 1984; 1986). They do this through making the abstractness of their power *present* in place by telling a story about who is in charge. I will now turn to a contemporary example through which political elites engage in narrative place-making in Martyrs Square.

*Narrative Place-Making after the War (1975-Present)*

The Lebanese Civil War precipitated the effective collapse of the Lebanese state in 1975. The end to formal state politics collapsed into informal, sectarian politics, where the boundaries between religious sects acquired lethal salience (Traboulsi 2012; Kassir 2003). Once a site where one could stand in the presence of “Lebanon,” the War punished Martyrs Square for this very centrality in social and physical space. As a central location, it became a no-man’s land, and its national associations “were sentenced to death: an attack that killed dozens of Muslims – and a few Christians by mistake – showed that it could no longer hope to be a public meeting place” (Kassir 2003: 514; Calame & Charlesworth 2009). The statues were riddled with bullets, its modernist architecture destroyed, and its spaces emptied of those identifying as “Lebanese.” It became “the Green Line,” a wide swath of destruction, dust, and shrubbery that marked the physical and social boundaries between a Muslim West Beirut and a Christian East Beirut.

The War then not only tore apart the state, but tore apart the spaces that made the state of Lebanon seem viable. A more salient political order emerged predicated on sectarianism, an order narrated through new places like the Green Line, and Lebanon all but disappeared from social life. In the midst of the carnage, “where is the state” became a valid question, then an anguished cry, and finally, a bitter joke. Lacking control over logistical and ideological infrastructures, the Lebanese state was no longer autonomous from the forces of civil society, and its duties – to provide services and a source of solidarity – were taken up by sectarian political entrepreneurs. These elites like Amin Gemayel, Walid Junblatt, and the leaders of other militias like Amal, the Murabitun, and others, gutted state functions, cleansed Lebanon and the neighborhoods of Beirut into relatively homogenous enclaves, and centered economic activity on the war effort (Traboulsi 2012; Kassir 2003; Salibi 1988).

The Civil War ended in 1992 with the Taif Agreement (signed in Taif, Saudi Arabia). A policy of “No Victors, No Vanquished” (*la ghalib wala maghloub*) defined the spirit of the day, and as a condition of this the Syrian army (which had entered the war in its middle stages) remained in place as an “Arab

Deterrent Force,” an occupying presence meant to stabilize Lebanon and, perhaps more importantly, allow for the resumption of economic activity. It did so with the approval of the UN as well as the United States. The influence of Syria over Lebanese affairs was substantial, wielded by the head of Syrian Intelligence from Anjar in the Bekaa Valley. While most welcomed an end to war, many chafed under the overt violation of Lebanese sovereignty and interference in the country’s economic affairs.

Returning to normal relations has proven difficult, and is in many ways a failure, as sectarianism remains in many ways the primary category of social life in Lebanon. It intervenes between the individual and the state, taking on many of its responsibilities and often challenging those it *does* exercise like security (Joseph 1997; Mann 1984). Furthermore, the Lebanese state itself has been and remains highly *laissez-faire* in its attitude toward these responsibilities – the paradoxical liberalism of which Michael Young speaks (2010).

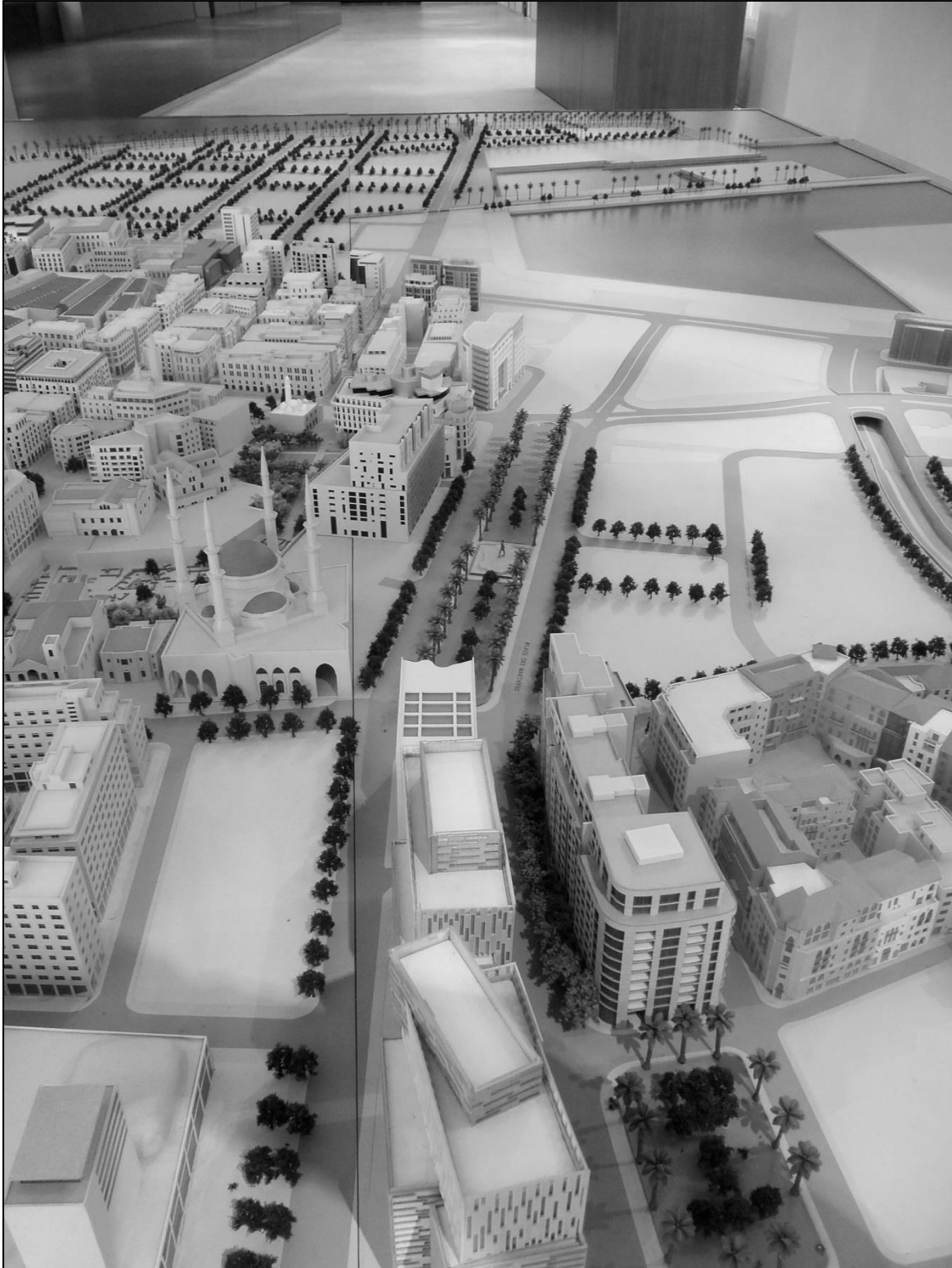
Despite this, much effort went into assuring that Beirut would be great once again. Two constituencies are essential to appreciating this: the first are economic elites, and the second sectarian elites. I will first touch on the role of economic elites in influencing reconstruction of Martyrs Square, and then transition into how sectarian elites have characterized and made their mark on the city as it is rebuilt from scratch. I will also argue that Rafiq Hariri is essential to understanding both.

There were three dimensions of reconstructing Beirut as an economic hub, which map quite neatly onto Agnew’s tripartite notion of place. As the capital of Lebanon and a former financial center of the Arab world, economic elites in Lebanon were keen to reassert Beirut’s *place-as-location* in a global hierarchy of cities. To do so required substantial investment in reconstructing the city’s material infrastructures and thus reconstitute the *place-as-locale* in which business transactions and everyday activities could take place. As planners, financiers, and sectarian elites (who were now integrated into the national government) met to discuss this, Lebanon’s distinct *place-as-sense-of-place* as a former “Paris of the Middle East” informed their designs. The task was therefore to reproduce a narrative of Beirut as a financial center that alluded to its pre-War history to engage the city with the global economy.



Rafiq Hariri was an essential elite author of these plans and the key force behind their implementation. A self-made billionaire from Sidon, closely-tied to the Saudi royal family, Hariri had become an important political personality upon his return to Lebanon from working in Saudi Arabia in the eighties. In 1992 he became Prime Minister of Lebanon, working to undermine Syrian influence in Lebanon and spur economic growth. To do so he privatized a number of state functions, both to limit formal avenues for Syrian influence and to generate revenue and spur business. For this reason he founded Solidère to privatize the redevelopment of the Bourj district as well as deal with the land-settlement claims of the war-time displaced. As PM he took over the Committee for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), used it to summon the pseudo-public Solidère into being, and as a private investor he purchased roughly a third of its shares. Unsurprisingly, the tension between his roles as state politician, sectarian leader, and private investor exposed him to charges of corruption.

Once created, Solidère quickly developed as an autonomous elite actor. The Beirut Municipality granted it exclusive rights to control zoning and construction in the areas under its jurisdiction, mostly lying within the destroyed Bourj neighborhood, with Martyrs Square among its intended showcases. Taking as its goal an orientation toward the global economy, Solidère has restructured the built environment of the Bourj using two narratives. The first is to lean heavily on the legacy of French colonial planning, rebuilding most of the Downtown in what Makdisi calls a “façade architecture,” or Young a “pastiche” of styles that allude to the Mandate era (Makdisi 1997; Young 2010). This is, in effect, a nostalgia for the kind of future the Mandate era seemed to promise. The second narrative attempts to follow through with the first, casting Beirut as an “ancient city of the future.” This narrative emphasizes Beirut’s history as a place of cultural interaction (or perhaps more accurately, as victim of many conquests), with a firm emphasis on its ancient history. It then projects this ancient history into the future by counting it as an attribute unique to the Lebanese and essential to success in the contemporary global economy.



3. To-scale model of Martyrs Square, reproduced from Solidère. “Hariri Mosque” (center-left) and Martyrs Statues (center).

In attempting to embody Beirut as the ancient city of the future, Solidère has emphasized the quality of its work and a careful attention to detail like stonework, mosaics, and streetlamps that “connects the past to the present day” (Fieldnotes: 7/24/2012). They emphasize authenticity, though it is a highly structured, nostalgic, and costly sense of authenticity. Solidère’s narrative of attempts to connect the “ancient city of the future” to the façade architecture of the Mandate Period in a display of nostalgia for connection to the Western world. Neither the intervening Mamluk nor Ottoman periods are similarly highlighted, while the Civil War has been effaced almost entirely. This nostalgia is, as Khalaf (2012) notes, a cause for serious concern, as it detracts from addressing the city’s contemporary social divides.

While much of the Bourj has been completed, Martyrs Square remains a work in progress (see figure 3). At the time of writing, the space is still undergoing approval from the Beirut Municipality for the construction of an underground parking lot to ease congestion. In the meantime, it is an unruly combination of rubble, weeds, dust, noise, and statuary (Fieldnotes: 7/12/2012). Yet efforts to define this space and make present the “ancient city of the future” are ongoing. Not only has Solidère hosted design contests for the square’s layout, but it has encouraged development along its periphery to literally define its geometry, and has initiated its own projects like Saifi Village.

In 2008 I witnessed numerous empty lots and found access to the Roman *tell* (an archaeological mound) completely unimpeded. During fieldwork in the summer of 2012, however, luxury hotels (Le Grey), wine bars, and shopping complexes (under construction) had come to occupy these lots, putting into practice the role of Beirut as a center of consumption, a port of call for Lebanese eager to connect to global commodity networks, fashions, and information. Billboards guarding construction sites envision a renovated square filled with pedestrians clutching shopping bags spilling onto a marble courtyard that connects the Martyrs Statues to the newly-finished Muhammad al-Amin Mosque. Though this image is *only* a visualization (this particular project has no role in the planning process for the square), the seamless alignment between the statues and mosque, a gap bridged by Lebanese consumers, turns the space into glue for the “holy trinity” of church, mosque, and Virgin Megastore identified by Khalaf

(2006). Furthermore, Solidère is constructing a museum with Kuwaiti funding to anchor the north side on the site of the former Petit Serail, bounding the space off from the sea once more, creating another cultural center to house the relics discovered during excavations of the *tell*.

In summary, Solidère has literally redrawn Beirut to serve a globalizing agenda. To legitimize this project and produce a Lebanese public willing to consume its expensive urban landscape, the company has invested in architectural projects and “cultural centers” (their buzzword for any non-commercial or residential real-estate). Much of the Bourj has thus become a space through which “the Beirut of memory” can be viewed, outside the reach of sectarian violence and catering to mass nostalgia. The cost of this has been to render the one universally-agreed national space in the capital unaffordable to most Lebanese (Fieldnotes 6/24/2012; Makdisi 1997; Khalaf 2006; 2012). In turn, it has reserved the larger Bourj neighborhood for a globally-oriented elite. Escaping into the nostalgia of a non-sectarian, cosmopolitan Beirut is a memory accessible to few.

Even as Hariri founded Solidère to privatize and commodify the Bourj district, he was working hard to leave his own symbolic stamp on Beirut as a sectarian leader. He plotted, planned, and paid for the construction of a massive mosque on the southwest corner of Martyrs Square, next to the St. George’s Maronite cathedral (Vloeberghs 2008). He also paid to have the Martyrs Statues refurbished and returned to the center of Martyrs Square without informing President Lahoud, which created some conflict over who would “own” their restoration: the pro-Syrian President, or the anti-Syrian Prime Minister. Lahoud, abroad during all of this, returned to find the statues back in Martyrs Square; he promptly ordered them returned to storage. This conflict between the two top executives of state became known in the papers as the “crisis of the statues” (Volk 2010).

Over time, Hariri’s opposing Syria became more important to his political career. After leaving the Prime Minister’s office he grew active in enrolling foreign support for his campaign against the Syrians. This opened him and his allies up to charges of conspiracy with the United States and Israel; more importantly, it made Hariri the object of intense surveillance. On February 14<sup>th</sup> of 2005, as Hariri’s

motorcade left the St. George's Hotel, an explosion took his life and several of his bodyguards'. This event, and the subsequent assassinations of anti-Syrian journalists, led many Lebanese to point the finger squarely at Syria. Though still unverified, Syria's involvement in the assassination of Hariri is to a certain extent a social fact on the streets of Beirut with far-reaching consequences.

Rafiq Hariri was not assassinated in Martyrs Square. Despite this, the square played an important role in attempts to give meaning and context to his life. It was, to repeat, a trope used to tell a story about the social order. Though it is customary in Lebanon to be buried in one's place of origin (in this case, Sidon), the Hariri family decided to bury him at Martyrs Square (Fieldnotes: 7/9/2012). A "temporary" funeral tent was erected adjacent to the Muhammad al-Amin mosque at the square's southwest corner, and has become so associated with the mosque as to have become fused with the structure in people's minds. Colloquially, it is now referred to as the "Hariri Mosque" (*jami' al-Hariri*) rather than by its formal name (Vloeberghs 2008, Volk 2010; Young 2010). In this way, the mosque is an act of place-making that emplots Hariri's legacy in time (as enduring), space (as central) and ideology (as of national importance) (Somers 1994; Vloeberghs 2012).

The mosque is thus an important narrative trope that structures the meaning of Hariri's legacy to residents of Beirut. By building the mosque in the first place, and being buried there by his family, the Hariri political dynasty (Vloeberghs 2012) highlights the contest over categories of identification that define life in a divided city and a weak state: was Rafiq Hariri a national martyr or just a Sunni martyr? I address this more fully in the next section, but the Hariri family and Future Movement have attempted to use this "building of might and faith" to emplot Rafiq Hariri as a national figure, but in so doing have merely reproduced sectarianism through the controversy surrounding this action.

Situated in the symbolically "thick" Martyrs Square, they thus situate the mosque in a spatial narrative to tell a story about the importance of Rafiq Hariri, his community, and his ideals (Foote & Azaryahu 2008; Casey 2001). They do so by making use of symbolic elements like position, size, and style. These are quite important to the "work" the mosque performs in the story of Hariri's role in

Lebanon. Visually and materially, the mosque dominates the Martyrs Statues as well as the nearby St. George's cathedral (originally the largest religious structure). The church has since constructed a bell-tower in an attempt to surpass the height of the mosque's many minarets (Vloeberghs 2010).

Size speaks to the issue of style as well. As part of the Islamic hinterland and never a political capital until the late Ottoman period, Beirut lacks a tradition of monumental architecture on the order of Damascus, Aleppo, or Istanbul. For this reason, the choice of so grand a size and the "foreign" neo-Ottoman façade for the structure narrate Lebanon as part of a forward-leaning, transnational community of Sunni Muslims in the vein of Turkey. Seen as extensions of their founders, monuments like the Hariri Mosque hold a space for these individuals in the heart of the state's capital, a symbolic presence more grandiose than the Martyrs Statues and the state itself. It is hard to see Lebanon for the minarets.

With his death and burial there, the mosque became the "inevitable" staging ground for episodes of contention that led, a month later, to the famous March 14<sup>th</sup> protest which "forced" the Syrians from Lebanon (McAdam et al 2008; Young 2010). This has been variably characterized as the Cedar Revolution or, in Lebanon, as the Independence *Intifada* (uprising). Not only did supporters and allies of Hariri use the mosque as the base for claiming the *physical* space of the square, they used the mosque to tell a story about what *kind* of space it was, who had the *legitimate right* to claim public spaces in Beirut, and what kinds of orientations toward the outside world were more valid. Using the square as an emblem of their legitimacy, the protests and tent city that erupted there sought to define it.

Not only have social movements organized by political entrepreneurs claimed the square in their narratives of Lebanon, but the Hariri family has continued to use it in the stories it tells about Lebanon. Rafiq's son Sa'd went on to become PM himself. On Martyrs Day 2012, Sa'd made use of the Hariri Mosque's proximity to the Martyrs Statues to draw connections between his father's legacy and Lebanon's future: to paint Rafiq Hariri as more than just a leader of the Sunni community, but as a national martyr. Though his term as PM had ended, Sa'd Hariri delivered a Martyrs Day speech to a

crowd assembled in the Martyrs Square on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012, linking his father's legacy and the sacrifice of the Independence Martyrs from 1916:

A few years ago, Martyr Prime Minister Rafik Hariri stood in this same square to announce in front of a huge crowd of Lebanese the commemoration of Martyrs Day. He did not know that he would become one of Lebanon's greatest martyrs, that his grave would be in this square, and that the Lebanese who gathered around his martyrdom would make this place a symbol of freedom and independence.

... there is a thin line connecting both events. In the first event, great figures from Lebanon offered their lives for the sake of Lebanon's independence, from Al-Burj Square in May 1916 to Saint George Square in February 2005. (Sa'd Hariri, Speech 5/6/2012)

In the vision put forward by the Sunni Future Movement, Rafiq Hariri is on equal footing with the Independence Martyrs of 1916, who sacrificed themselves for the ideal of a free Lebanon. To avoid the controversy over his killing, however, Sa'd performs some gymnastics. Thus he claims that "we do not hold any Lebanese community, group or category responsible for the blood of Rafik Hariri, whom we consider the martyr of all of Lebanon." Yet it is categorically false that all communities of Lebanon would also consider Rafiq Hariri a martyr of all of Lebanon. Hariri keeps his wording vague to avoid divisive language and blame, to present himself and his father as viable representatives of a Lebanese nation and to anchor that viability in the national space of Martyrs Square.

This is a line the Future Movement has taken frequently, one which is contested both within the March 14<sup>th</sup> Coalition (from allies of different sects) and without. Michel Aoun, for instance, prominent Maronite (Christian) MP and head of the Free Patriot Movement, allied with Hezbollah, cuts through the "neutral" language of Hariri's typical narrative:

March 14 has "killed [former PM Rafik] Hariri a thousand times and he is no longer Lebanon's martyr, but only a family's lost one to the extent that they find his name [useful]," Aoun said in a speech at an FPM dinner. (*Now Lebanon*, 3/13/2011)

Far from accepting the "conciliatory" words of Hariri, Aoun exposes the political opportunism embedded the Future Movement's narrative, in particular its narrow historical vision. As a story about Hariri, Aoun may not challenge it as a vision of history, but it is merely *their* vision, not a properly national vision, of Lebanon.

This is an important theme of political discourse in Lebanon. In a divided society like Lebanon, the divisive political ideologies are clothed in the language of nationalism even as they seek to advance

the interests of one group over another. While this kind of discursive double-speak is not unique to Lebanon, its embeddedness within a weak state government makes it quite an interesting practice all the same, with each sect claiming to represent and defend the “real” Lebanon from interlopers and their illegitimate connections to the outside world. Unlike Till’s Berlin (2005), there is no state here to arbitrate the competing claims of different camps.

Working Hariri into a narrative of Lebanon’s past and present is thus not uncontested at the elite level. Though he is certainly a part of Lebanon’s “forest of fathers,” it would be difficult to take the claim of his importance as a national figure seriously (Young 2010; Brubaker 2002). To take him as a superficial example of a “national politics of memory” in Lebanon obscures the nature of the politics of the past in Lebanon, as a struggle not merely between actors but *between the categories of identification* that legitimate, and thus empower, some at the expense of others. In Lebanon, sectarianism as a category of political identification is highly salient, often at the expense of Lebanese nationality, and it is in the struggle between these two categories that we might locate a more intriguing politics of the Lebanese past. But it is not just elites who contest Hariri’s legacy and view him as merely another sectarian elite. Non-elites do so as well. In the next section, I will touch on how non-elites respond to the Hariri mosque, Hariri’s legacy, and thus how we might see the sectarian order become present in these responses.

## **V: Non-Elite Narratives of the Hariri Mosque**

### *Interviews*

Elites may attempt to impose a social order through narrative place-making, but it is not a given that they will succeed. The results are often mixed, because non-elites assert agency even as they acknowledge the dominance of a given practical sense – of sectarianism, nationalism, or cosmopolitanism, for instance. Elite actions and discourse are certainly important, and figures like Sa’d Hariri, Michel Aoun, or the French and Ottoman administrators who preceded them should not be neglected. They command



significant resources that allow them to author certain narratives with relative legitimacy and to engage in the sort of grandiose practices that literally substantiate those narratives in places like Martyrs Square. Yet these figures are only powerful if they have power *over* something – for instance, a category of non-elites who identify with their vision of the political order. A sectarian entrepreneur requires non-elites to accept his vision of sectarian division in order to put this collective into practice (Rouse 2001).

In this section I highlight how non-elites assert agency in the face of elite attempts to impose political order by focusing on non-elite reactions to the Hariri Mosque in Martyrs Square, and what this tells us about the struggle between social categories in Beirut. Since narrative place-making is merely an attempt to model the political order, there are those who will either take up or contest this model as irrelevant to their daily experience. It is this that I address below.

A focus on elites has two problems: there is often a sense in the literature on group-formation and nation-building that elites somehow exist “outside” the visions they model, and that their models and narratives are thus *only* tactics designed to “dupe” non-elites into embracing their conception of the political order (and thus, their role as its agent). In her work, Wedeen (2008) cautions that such an analytical stance assumes that political elites do not actually believe the visions they promote. What results is thus an over-emphasis on elite agency (in *producing* categories) to the detriment of non-elites, who are relatively passive recipients of these categories, “cultural dupes” with few options (Wedeen 2008). Extreme adherence to theories of Gramscian *hegemony* or Bourdieusian *symbolic violence* would, as Scott notes, be most guilty of these assumptions (Scott 1992).

But what happens, to push Bourdieu further, when actors *recognize* the categories of their social world as arbitrary? Must this lead to agonistic struggle, or do non-elites willingly reproduce these categories in their own narratives? Practice Theory bids us take non-elite agency as essential to the reproduction and contestation of political order. Without their acceptance and integration into everyday practices of politics, narration, and identification, categories like the sect or nation become less taken-for-granted and readily noticeable as elite impositions. In Lebanon, for instance, many regard claims of a

national Phoenician heritage with derision, viewing them as after-the-fact justifications for the arbitrary political entity that is Lebanon as a state (Hartman & Olsaretti 2003; Kaufman 2004). It is thus no easy task to impose such visions of categorical division onto society, but one that involves the agency of non-elites to realize it.

Second, once erected in the landscape, monuments and memorials are just as much subject to the interpretations and repurposing of non-elites as they are to the maintenance-work of elites. What may be sanctified by the Lebanese Sunni community or government may well be repurposed by the Maronite or Shiite communities: it may be obliterated in social consciousness or (to build on Foote) blacklisted for its provocative nature (Foote 2003). Elites may make places into narrative tropes for political orders, but these are *only* tropes: guidelines or context for actions that give them meaning, but not the control of action itself (Rouse 2001). Bourdieu likens such tropes to the boundaries of a sports arena (again, a “structured field of possibilities”), with which an actor decides whether or not to “play along” according to the social skills required (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Thus, it is essential to *symbolically verify* the ways that the “text” of the landscape is politically practiced by non-elites, and how this affects conceptions of the past of present more broadly (Duncan 1990). In other words, to explore how the agency of non-elites is put into practice within the politics of memory.

We learn a lot about how political order is maintained by focusing more on non-elites, their actions, and how they interact with elite projects like the Hariri Mosque. It may be unsurprising to note that reactions to the Hariri Mosque in interviews were in general quite varied. Rather than a singular collective response to the mosque or to Hariri’s legacy, the individuals I interviewed emplotted the mosque in the city and in narratives of time in quite nuanced ways.

To Maurice, who ran an ice-cream shop in a predominantly Christian neighborhood of East Beirut, the mosque was a non-issue. He responded to my questions with a simple “it’s nice!” Asked to elaborate on how others might perceive the mosque, he distinguished the mosque from its namesake, Rafiq Hariri: “they don’t like *Hariri*...you see, some like him and some don’t...and they killed him! His

son [Sa'd] ran away to France!" He focused his critique on rising costs in the Bourj area, which, like American cities, "are so expensive that only millionaires can afford to spend a night out." Martyrs Square to Maurice was not so much a symbolic as an economic space now closed off from the ordinary Lebanese (Fieldnotes: 7/2/2012).

Maurice was not alone in downplaying the symbolic significance of Martyrs Square. Walid, a young college student and self-described atheist (a fairly stigmatized label in Lebanon), situated the mosque as normal within the context of Beirut's divided political order. He asserted that, although there was indeed a "struggle" over the Bourj being waged through the construction of religious buildings, in everyday life he thought that "no one ever cares." Again, the mosque is a non-issue. He suggested with skepticism that many of the churches and mosques built in Downtown are "empty," though this is not the case on worship days like Fridays and Sundays. Walid drew a sharp contrast between the elite construction projects (like the Mosque) and more mundane practices that reproduced sectarianism like posting religious iconography in the streets, keeping religious books at home without ever using them, and banal institutional practices like the presence of sect on identification cards. He even pointed to the sectarian character of Beirut's university system: coming from a Sunni background, he "naturally" attended Beirut Arab University, an institution founded with transnational support from Gamal Abdel Nasser during the height of the pan-Arabist movement. These practices, to Walid, put sectarianism into practice more than the "empty" projects of elites in Downtown (Fieldnotes: 6/21/2012).

His skepticism was somewhat confirmed in a visit I took to the tomb-complex of Rafiq Hariri, adjacent to the Hariri Mosque. A security guard with whom I spoke at this site pointed out that "almost no one ever comes here...very, very few" (Fieldnotes: 6/26/2012). It is difficult to tell, however, how much this attitude of doubt reflects apathy or the success of its naturalization in the political order. I will return to this question momentarily.

In many accounts, the Square seems quite peripheral to many people's experience of the city – inessential to everyday urban life, symbolically undefined, or too expensive. This is what Abu Ali most

emphasizes. A poor seller of *ka'k* (sesame breads) from an old-fashioned street cart, Abu Ali notes the transition of the square from a lively city center to an unaffordable, inaccessible space: “A while ago, before the events, Martyrs Square was called ‘the city.’ Everyone went there; there were cinemas, restaurants, cafes...now, Solidère bought it all, and now it’s all foreign (*ajnabi*). No one can afford it. Also, it’s hard to get to because you can’t bring in your car. They stop you, say ‘no, no, you have to leave it outside” (Fieldnotes: 6/24/2012). An elderly man and disadvantaged, the symbolic infrastructures of Solidère and the Hariri family are wasted on him. In this way, costs are a mechanism that distances non-elites from this once-important space in the city-center.

The theme of real-estate development emerges in other ways. Jumana, who owns a tourist shop in *Gemmayzeh* (a Christian neighborhood of East Beirut), sees the mosque not as representing but as resisting private development. The mosque is, to her, “really nice! I *love* looking at it. Have you been inside? It’s magnificent [*bijannin*]! The people who say that [it’s a problem] are only interested in money. They want to do what, take it down? And put what? No, they don’t think of religion, only of if there’s something in it for them.” She emplots the mosque in her narratives of the space not next to an affordable square from the past, but to the chaotic high-rise development of the present. A religious structure is, to her, a welcome relief from the drab concrete apartment blocks crowding out the view of the sea all over East Beirut. Her thoughts on sectarianism, however, are somewhat telling:

“...here, we don’t have [categories like] Sunni, Shiite, Christian, Druze. ‘To those of any religion, God will help them’ (*kill wahid ‘ala deenu allah bi’inu*). I love hearing the *adhan* (call to prayer) from the Mosque.”

I mention the bell-tower being built by the St. George’s cathedral.

“Yes, they’re building it for bells – very nice, right? There are some who get annoyed by the bells...but why? When we enjoy the *adhan* so much? There are some people who’s religion is just strange...bizarre thinking...some just want to only look out for their own interests” (Fieldnotes: 7/23/2012).

Jumana repeats a common refrain, that “we don’t have categories” in Lebanon. At the same time, her “talk” betrays the salience those categorical boundaries maintain in her sense of the political order of Beirut. This hints at the role of the bell-tower and mosque in activating those boundaries on occasion. While “we [Christians] enjoy the *adhan* so much,” others “only look out for *their* own interests.” Given the context of her earlier statements, it would appear that the “other” in the pair she constructs is the

category of “Muslims.” In a divided city like Beirut, where most of one’s activities can be confined to a single residential area dominated by one or two sects, a large central square might seem unimportant. But even as they indicate its lack of centrality, actors of various sects *code* the mosque through talk as sectarian (“theirs”) in nature, in contrast to the square, which was “everyone’s.” Quite simply, Martyrs Square remains national even as the Hariri Mosque is viewed as telling a story of sectarianism. It is clear to non-elites what is “going on.”

That Martyrs Square was a national space seems to retain its appeal as a potential source of unity in Lebanon. Pierre works at a bank in Downtown, but on the weekends volunteers as a groundskeeper at the St. George’s cathedral next to the Hariri Mosque. After walking me through the post-War renovations to the cathedral, I asked him how he felt about the mosque, to which he responded that

this church had been here forever, before there had ever been a mosque on the spot. Before the events, Christians and Muslims used to come here to spend time together and pray. When they put up the Hariri Mosque, people got upset. Why? Not because it’s a mosque – we have no problem with that. Even Muslims – and all practicing Muslims should – get angry, because yes, sure, they put a place to pray [for Muslims], but they were going against history and tradition. And it blocked the view from the church! Look, I don’t have any problems with Muslims. None of us do.” (Fieldnotes: 7/10/2012).

Pierre asserts that he has “no problems” with Muslims, but then attributes collective intent (threat) to their actions. In other words, he uses their sect (Sunni Muslim) as a justification and explanation for their action (Brubaker 2006). He continues to highlight how categorical distinctions along sect have grown more threatening with time:

While the church was struggling financially, Hariri gave some \$12 million to build a new mosque and renovate the old ones (of which there are five). He started building on the site and said he wanted to build a minaret; so the municipality said okay, but there’s a church next door, so be careful. Then they went and built four minarets, and made the dome bigger – enlarged the whole thing. Just a question I’ll pose: why would the city need a new mosque if there are already five Sunni mosques Downtown? What is it needed for? It’s the same as what Hariri did in Sidon [referring to the Hariri mosque built there, which is quite similar in style and size]. But you shouldn’t think we’re building this [the tower] because of all this...as Christians we’re supposed to live peacefully with others. Everyone knows it (Fieldnotes: 7/10/2012).

He then characterizes Muslims as unable to get along with one another. He may well have “no problems” with Muslims, but it is clear from Pierre’s account that he believes that they have problems with Christians. To him, the mosque acts as a boundary-activating mechanism between Sunni Muslims and Maronite Christians, who used to share a space of prayer (the cathedral) which could be described as

Lebanese. The Hariri Mosque is seen as a disruption of inter-communal relations and tradition of which he has such fond memories. These personal memories, then, become part of how he emplots Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims in the space and time of a political order called Lebanon, where Sunnis have begun to threaten Maronites. As he makes clear, the way Maronite Christians might code the construction of the mosque is not as a religious practice, but as a political one.

Mahmud, who identifies as Sunni Muslim, works at a small *furn* (bake-shop) near the Bourj. He came to a similar conclusion about the intentions behind building the mosque.

There are a lot of people who think that the mosque was built for just a small class of people. All over the city there are smaller mosques where people pray, but what of this one? I think he put it there for the tourists, to show them that Islam can be developed (*mutatawwar*) and that's why he built it like something out of Istanbul [this seems to come up without prompting a lot]. But very few people go there (Fieldnotes: 6/28/2012).

Mahmud highlights the intentionality behind constructing the mosque (which was “for tourists”) but points out that “very few people go there.” He thus codes the mosque as a statement, an ideological infrastructure to highlight the presence of religion in Lebanon, and at the same time emphasizes the importance of *audience* for it to do anything. To Mahmud, the narrative he tells of the mosque downplays its class character and role in sectarian conflict, but emphasizes how it emplots Islam in Beirut within a “developed future.” Its audience, in turn, is not local Lebanese, but visitors from abroad. Hariri’s legacy is, to him, unproblematic and the project is a worthy one.

For Mahmud, the mosque’s provocative potential goes unremarked – perhaps because, for him (as a Sunni Muslim) it is in an unmarked category (Brubaker 2006) of behaviors, practices, and objects. Others are more critical. When asked whether the Hariri mosque was “too big,” a Christian shopkeeper in Gemmayzeh (Marie) responded with a loud, abrupt “Yes!” (Fieldnotes: 7/23/2012). A number of Shiites from near the Bourj also commented to me that “we would never go there,” wishing that Hariri would “turn over in his grave” (Fieldnotes: 7/6/2012). One among them attempted to justify it as a worthwhile excursion, one without risk of harm or conflict (as they were from a rival political camp), but the attempt

fell on deaf ears. For them, the mosque was a provocation and thus a marked category of sectarian practices (Brubaker 2006).

I also spoke with Rima, who worked at a bookstore in the Bourj. At the time I was looking for Arabic-language works on sectarianism and reconstruction, but she was unable to locate any. I elaborated on my topic, which she understood quite quickly:

“You mean, the influence of sectarianism on reconstruction in Beirut, in Martyrs Square? Oof. I’m not sure what there is...this is something very interesting that you still see. There’s a lot written about commercial issues with buying land, with Solidère and others, for example, but with religion...? This still exists in obvious things like the old East/West Beirut partition, but other than that...” She takes a moment to think. “It’s actually very interesting, because in Mseitbeh [neighborhood of West Beirut], which everyone used to consider a 100% Sunni neighborhood, the Party [Hezbollah, Shiite] started buying up land a few years ago, and now...you wouldn’t know it. The neighborhood’s completely changed.”

I mentioned the Hariri mosque issue.

“Of course people don’t like it, they say it’s too big, etc...but there had always been a mosque there [she explains its pre-war designation and history]. And people mentioned the church’s view, so now you see this thing [she makes a tall and growing gesture with her arms and smirking] that they are building” – “the bell-tower?” – “Yes...and it’s definitely a reaction to the Hariri mosque. Don’t let them tell you otherwise” (Fieldnotes: 7/23/2012).

Far from treating the mosque as unmarked, Rima groups it in quite readily with other practices of narrative place-making like the persistence of the Green Line in non-elite practice (dividing Christian East and Muslim West Beirut) and the demographic shifts in Mseitbeh, both of which orient neighborhoods as Christian, Muslim, Sunni, Shiite. She further points to the bell-tower as an expression of these competing narratives from the St. Georges’s cathedral and Hariri Mosque. For her, Hariri’s legacy is firmly situated within a tradition of using the urban landscape to reproduce sectarian identity. Unlike Walid, it does not seem to Rima that “no one ever cares.”



4. Southwest corner of Martyrs Square: Hariri Mosque (foreground) and St. George's Maronite Cathedral with bell-tower (back left).

It may be unsurprising to note that Christians (or non-Sunni Muslims) react most strongly to the mosque in general. This was born out by the torrent of a response I received from Claudette, Greek Orthodox. Telling her about my research, I received the following remarks about the mosque as a monument:

People just don't notice. They don't notice. Now when I see a monument, or whatever, I think two things: is its message good, and does it represent me? Take for example the Hariri mosque. I understand that people want to memorialize things important to them – that's normal. If my neighbor and I don't get along, but his son dies and he wants to make a wreath or something to remember his death, that's okay. But it has to represent the people. The Hariri Mosque is not Lebanon – its architecture is more Istanbul than here, it's too big, it's just not *us*. In a small country like Lebanon, these monuments should be mixed, especially in the *centre-ville* where there are so many churches and mosques intermingling. But that's just for him. A monument should really be more mixed. Now everyone knows Beirut only by that mosque! It really makes me angry!" (Fieldnotes: 6/24/2012).

She continues, noting that this attitude is prevalent among Christian politicians as well:



...it's written in the Qur'an that you can get into heaven if you build a mosque, so of course everyone wants to build a mosque...and so Sunnis are of course really happy when they see it, but everyone else? But there are Christians who are also like this, who are like "I built a church!" But it's not useful, and maybe nobody goes" (Fieldnotes: 6/24/2012).

Claudette recognizes both the intentions of the builders of such monuments and mosques, as well as the possibility that – as Wedeen points out – political elites may be just as devout as their constituents (2008). Despite this, she makes the case for a more inclusive monument, one that represents “the Lebanese,” not just one sect:

Well, the thing is...is that that [the Martyrs Statues] is the *real* monument, which actually represents the whole country. They even left the bullets in it to show everyone 'look guys,' we're still here, after all this shit' (Fieldnotes: 6/24/2012).

Claudette draws a clear distinction between the Martyrs Statues (which represent “all of us”) and the Hariri Mosque (which does not). To her, each tells a completely different story and to a different audience. By building on so large a scale, she faults the Hariris for conflating their sectarian vision with a more expansive vision of Lebanon: in other words, for prioritizing sect over state.

### Summary

Respondents thus told a number of their own stories using the Hariri Mosque, but two themes in particular are worthy of note.

The first is that though the mosque is quite visually salient in Martyrs Square, it is not a given that it is socially salient as well. Reading the “text” of the landscape can only bring us so far in exploring the politics of the past on the ground. Non-elites do not necessarily integrate these narratives into their self-identification; they do not necessarily “play by the rules.” This might be for want of money, as with Abu Ali and Maurice, or for lack of interest, as with Walid and to a certain extent, Claudette. Sectarian elites may thus hope to structure the field of possibilities for identification in Downtown Beirut, but non-elite actors rework those possibilities into their own narrative practices of the city.

As Claudette pointed out, “people just never notice,” a sentiment that Walid also expressed: “no one ever cares.” This is significant because much of Landscape & Memory takes as unproblematic the

active engagement (as complicity or resistance) of non-elites with monuments and memorials. Even Till's (2005) landmark study of the "new Berlin" focuses largely on the elites and activists *directly involved* in the politics of memory, with scant attention devoted to their wider implications for everyday social life among residents of the city. Fieldwork, however, bears out a story in which monuments are not despotic infrastructures that impose hegemony, but are in fact mere models for social practice that non-elites might disregard. We must seek to clarify not only the intentions of those who construct monuments like mosques, but also the lived impact they have on their audience.

The second theme is that despite its low salience in the public imagination, discussion of the Hariri Mosque clarified at least one general trend: that it is anything but a national symbol. In spite of the Hariri family's intentions, Hariri's legacy is still provincialized as sectarian, as an important symbol of the Sunni community. This claim is not extended successfully to the nation as a whole. Constructing the mosque and burying him there do not appear to have effectively sanctified him as a national martyr; if anything, it has opened the Sunni community up to accusations that it is overreaching. Again, it is important that we not take the claims of political elites like the Hariri family or Future Movement too seriously, and thus not begin with *national* memory as our object of analysis. Instead, we should follow up research into sites with careful *symbolic verification* to see how these extraordinary places are emplotted in the ordinary routines and imaginaries of urban residents, especially in divided cities. In this regard, the mosque can be seen not as its stated goal (nation-building) but as a practice that reproduces the boundaries between religious sects in the Lebanese capital.

In other words, lack of salience is not itself an indicator that a site of memory is not doing its job to make political order present. Instead, it is the nature of the talk that *does* surround the monument that will tell us what it does. Much of the talk surrounding the mosque takes its presence as appropriate to the social order of Beirut, and while it is controversial it is not *surprising* to respondents. What this further does is speak to the absence of state projects of the same nature. Narratives of sectarian place-making like the Hariri Mosque highlight the absence of the state, which does *not* engage in such performances. As

Lynch points out, “practice is instantiated *in situ*, in a developing production that contingently establishes the recognizability of an incomplete instance of its performance” (Lynch 2001:144). Like so many other infrastructures, the Lebanese state lacks the *ideological infrastructures* necessary to instantiate itself as a category of political practice which, though an absence, is recognizable by its citizens as such. If the sect is making its presence felt and seen through such practices, where is the state? No one expects to see it, and it is through acts of narrative place-making like the Hariri Mosque that sectarian elites challenge state identity as Lebanese and assert the dominance of the sect in its place. Though people continue to ask this question, there is a reason it remains a joke.

## VI: Conclusion

Narrative place-making is a powerful practice for shaping the political order. By inscribing abstract worldviews into the built environment and making them present, political elites attempt to impose these “visions of division” onto social interaction. As Bourdieu phrases it,

... symbolic struggle [is] over the production of common sense, or, more precisely, for the monopoly of legitimate *naming*, that is to say, official – i.e., explicit and public – imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, agents [use] all the power they possess over the instituted taxonomies, inscribed in the minds or in objectivity...

Within this struggle, we might see the social world as divided between those who are credited as legitimate arbiters of the social order (elites) and those who do not enjoy this position (non-elites):

On the one hand, there is the world of particular perspectives, singular agents who, from their individual viewpoint, their personal position, produce particular self-interested namings, of themselves and others (nicknames, by-names, insults, even accusations, slanders), that lack the capacity to force recognition, and therefore to exert a symbolic effect, to the extent that their authors are less authorized and have a more direct interest in forcing recognition of the viewpoint they seek to impose. On the other hand, there is the authorized viewpoint of an agent authorized, in his personal capacity...the mandated representative of the State...[who utters] the authorized, universally recognized perspective on all social agents” (Bourdieu 1985: 731-732).

Acts of place-making accomplish two things. They are a means to provide structure, meaning, or context, or *symbolic effect* to social action, itself essential to understanding the construction of political order in the absence of strong institutions like a central state, which they do by *modeling* a political order;

and they attempt to *naturalize* that political order as appropriate, as good, as inevitable (Cresswell 1996). Narrative place-making represents the practice of not merely structuring the field of possibilities within a place, but how actors *emplot* or orient that place in a broader topological context: in time, space, and ideology. Through the generative power of this practice, elites in Lebanon like the Hariri family reproduce the political order (sectarianism) over which they wield power. They attempt to tell a story about people using place.

This is important, but it is not the whole story. As I emphasize earlier, non-elites do not passively incorporate these structured possibilities into their behavior; they actively engage with these possibilities in the production of their own narratives. They look for their own justifications for the social order. The outcomes of narrative place-making, like the Hariri Mosque, can and do have effects on the political order of Beirut as a divided city. In this case, the mosque acts to reproduce sectarianism as the primary categorical division of social life. But its effects are not so grandiose as the structure itself. The Hariri Mosque is certainly controversial for the story it attempts to tell (Hariri as a national martyr), but it is in no way *surprising*. As Moore (2011) points out about events, such sites may create spectacle without effecting social change; in fact, they frequently do the opposite.

As a place for the reproduction of sectarian identities, the Hariri Mosque challenges the national space that is Martyrs Square. Yet though respondents categorized the mosque as sectarian rather than national, it is not necessarily the case that this will remain so forever:

What those practices are *now* depends in part on how their normative force is interpreted and taken up in subsequent practice. Their present content is subject to reinterpretation and semantic drift (Rouse 2001:202).

The very durability of practices of place-making, the fact of their very *traces* as inscriptions sets them apart from other practices that reproduce the social order. Though momentary instantiations of a political order, the material investment of such practices of place-making extend that moment through time and anchor it in place. This is what Foote means when he says “the very durability of the landscape and of the memorials place in the landscape makes these modifications effective for symbolizing and sustaining collective values over long periods of time” (2003:33).

Though material structures like mosques, walls, and statues can come down, their presence independent of human action implies durability and an autonomy from human authorship. They outlast the dynamism and contingency of their origins, which is largely why elites are so fond of transforming the built environment. It may well be, as Rouse points out, that with time the Hariri Mosque *will* become a national symbol, a part of the square on par with the Martyrs Statues. Elites cannot simply “set and forget” their constructions, because non-elites will repurpose them according to their own narratives of where, when, and how is Beirut. Nowhere is this clearer in Beirut than in Sanayeh, where the Hamidiye Fountain, once pride of place and symbol of Lebanon’s Ottoman-ness, sits dry and unmarked in a dusty corner of a park. Its categorical narrative of *osmanlilik* no longer relevant, it has lost its function as an ideological infrastructure and is relegated to the fringes of urban life in Beirut. Its part in the story has ended for now (Foote et al 2010).

Non-elite agency, then, is key to understanding what it is, to return to an older idiom, that “sites of memory” are doing. One can read the text of landscape, but this risks naturalizing categories of social practice into analysis, taking the objects requiring explanation and using them to explain.

As scholars in a state many describe alternately as weak, post-colonial, or post-war, Lebanese historians have grown quite sensitive to the dynamic between non-elites and the arbitrary social categories imposed by political elites over the years: as Muslims, Ottomans, Lebanese, Sunnis. Concluding his famous work *A House of Many Mansions*, Kemal Salibi writes, somewhat prophetically, that

for a historical fiction to serve a political purpose...it must be generally accepted. While this acceptance may be common in societies which have a high degree of homogeneity at more than one level, and where differences at other levels are of a minimum, it is more difficult to achieve in societies which are heterogeneous in structure, and which happen to exist mainly because circumstances somehow brought their component elements together...Divided societies...cannot afford such fanciful indulgence. To gain the degree of solidarity that is needed to maintain viability, their best chance lies in getting to know and understand the full truth of their past, and to accommodate to its realities (Salibi 1988: 216-217).

Elites may attempt to structure social and political experience through narrative, but not any narrative will do. History matters, as does geography, but most important is the willingness of non-elites to put these narratives into social practice.

In this paper I have attempted to show how elites use place as a narrative model to impose differing visions of the political order in Lebanon. The Lebanese state has struggled since its inception to maintain viability as a meaningful form of political order, lacking as it does the logistical infrastructures of most modern states, and the ideological infrastructures that uphold social solidarity as citizens of a “modern” Weberian state. Capturing this in analysis has required de-centering the discussion from a focus on nationalism to a focus on the narrative practices of place-making that produce the conflicting, dissonant categories of social life in Lebanon. I have highlighted historical as well as contemporary instances of this practice, as well as focused on how non-elites rework these practices in their own narrative emplotments of Beirut as a place. In the remaining paragraphs, I will offer a few questions for studying the politics of the past.

#### *Towards a Politics of the Past: A Few Concluding Questions*

Practice Theory offers a way out of the groupism and essentialism of studying national memory, but it can only lead us so far without further theoretical development in this context. As yet its opportunities are relatively under-systematized with regard to analyzing the way that history is contested. To remedy this, I propose four ideal-type questions to orient a *politics of the past* that address issues similar to the tradition of Landscape & Memory without its theoretical baggage, questions rooted in the logic of Practice Theory.

##### *1. What is the nature of this narrative practice?*

In many cases, there is a plethora of existing institutions which attempt to structure the field of possibilities for narrating the past. As mentioned earlier in the paper, these include museums, survivors’ associations, urban planning boards, and governments like the state, provincial, or municipal. Such institutions are what I call *formal* in that they enjoy overt recognition in the law and from other institutional bodies (like other states). Yet even in strong states, it is not a given that these formal institutions are held as legitimate, possess the capacity to put these narratives into practice, or that they

even capture the whole story of how the past is narrated on the ground. Narrative place-making may thus take place within the realm of informal practices of politics as well, the “messy stuff of contestation” of which Wedeen spoke regarding Yemen (2008: 110). In Lebanon, these take many forms, with sectarian actors engaging in informal practices like constructing the Hariri Mosque outside the channels of formal state authority. What remains to be studied in detail is how these two natures (formal/informal) interrelate, support, and challenge one another (Sidaway & Mayell 2007).

## 2. *What is the vector of this practice?*

In this paper I addressed elite practices of narrative place-making in the built environment, as well as non-elite reactions to these practices. In particular, I focused on the Hariri Mosque in Martyrs Square. Yet there are other practices in which non-elites engage that emplot places through narrative. In addition to distinctions between formal and informal practices or actors, one must pay attention more deeply to distinctions between practices engaged in by political *elites* (who are endowed with above-average resources or “capitals”) and practices engaged in by non-elites, which instantiate narratives through place. In other words, are the practices of place-making of which we speak generated from the bottom-up, or from the top-down? The Hariri Mosque is still clearly a top-down practice of place-making, while I might point to the persistence of the Green Line in non-elite talk as a practice of narrative place-making that continues to instantiate a divided geography of Beirut along a West (Muslim)/East (Christian) partition.

## 3. *What are the objects of its claims?*

Acts of narrative place-making attempt to tell a story about the social order using place, but they often have more immediate goals or *objects of claims* at which such narratives are directed. To fully understand the power of place-making over the political order, we must first clarify to what end it was made. In this way we can relate the intended purpose of a narrative inscription against the circumstances of its integration into social practice. For instance, the Hariri Mosque was intended to situate Rafiq Hariri as a national martyr, but non-elites merely interpreted this as the act of a sectarian strongman. More specific

questions might include: was this project constructed to claim territory in a divided city? To boost personal prestige? To redefine the meaning of place? Or is it merely to reproduce and naturalize a specific social order like sectarianism? These are all questions one might ask of a monumental construction project like the Hariri Mosque.

One must attempt, in answering this question, to arrive at a sense of the intentionality behind its construction. Archival research is thus an essential foundation for understanding the conditions and debates surrounding a monument's origin. This, in turn, should be supplemented with interviews to A) those who may still live who were engaged in constructing and/or planning it, and B) those who make use of the monument in the present (for instance, the Sunni Grand Mufti in Beirut).

#### 4. *Who is its audience?*

Finally, to whom do such projects hope to speak? As Mahmud pointed out, audience is essential to the success of ideological infrastructures, where elites only acquire power if they can exercise it *over* someone(s). As he further notes, this audience might be understood as local, national, or transnational. However we characterize the nature of this audience, actors – elite and non-elite alike – direct their narratives *at* other actors. In this way, narrative is an intersubjective practice of emplotment (Somers 1994). This has substantial bearing on the work performed by narrative place-making. Is the Hariri Mosque directed at Lebanese or at “foreigners?” These are important questions we might ask our research subjects on the ground.

These four questions are important for geographers because they represent a deeper way of engaging with what places do for the social “in practice,” not just “as texts.” To be sure, there are other questions one might ask; these merely initiate a shift from a politics of national memory toward a more robust politics of the past. This not only expands how we choose our cases, but the way we use our cases to highlight the importance of geography in political and social life.



There are signs, even now, that some have begun to work the Hariri Mosque into narratives of a new kind of Lebanon. In July of 2012 I paid a visit to Harissa, the famous mountain church above Jounieh Bay to which one commutes by gondola. At the top of the mountain is a large statue of the Virgin Mary called Our Lady of Harissa with a small chapel at its base. A gift shop welcomes tourists in from the heat with air-conditioning, tempting them to purchase church candles and cedar carvings. Among the other offerings, I found numerous post-cards in which the Hariri Mosque figured prominently: over Our Lady of Harissa (which is a famous symbol of Lebanon and Christian Lebanon more specifically), and over the Martyrs Statues in Martyrs Square. Through such media, some actors attempt to emplot the Hariri Mosque in a narrative of Lebanon as multi-sectarian, as unified, as at peace with its diversity. It may well be that with the passing of time, this narrative will be reproduced in the talk and practice of non-elite residents of Beirut – but not today.



5. Post-cards depicting the Hariri Mosque at the gift-shop of Our Lady of Lebanon, Harissa, Lebanon.



6. Hamidiye Fountain. Once at the center of Martyrs Square and a symbol of Ottoman Beirut, it now runs dry in a small park in a "Sunni" neighborhood of West Beirut. Sanayeh, Beirut.

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