Popular Housing and Urban Land Tenure in the Middle East

Includes essays on:
Forms and Norms in Damascus in an Informal Settlement
Selling Property in an Informal Settlement in Syria
Securing Property in Informal Neighborhoods in Damascus
Practices to Obtain Legal Status for Homes
Constraints of Living Conditions in Informal Settlements in Syria
The Politics of Sacred Space in Downtown Beirut
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Legitimizing Land Ownership in the Suburbs of Istanbul
Law, Rights, and Justice in Informal Settlements in Beirut
Analysis of an Upgrading Project in Beirut

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Popular Housing and Urban Land Tenure in the Middle East
Case Studies from Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey

Edited by Myriam Ababsa, Baudouin Dupret, and Eric Denis
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beautiful or not, the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque (Fig. 6.1) is Lebanon’s largest mosque. The view of its characteristically blue dome dominates the Beirut city center, and its construction of this mosque arguably marks the magnum opus of the late Rafiq Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister assassinated in 2005. This new structure, in a pervasive way, transforms the immediate urban environment and embodies a politically meaningful evolution of the city’s skyline.

This chapter will show how a prestigious building like this mosque, in its actual form, is the result of a confrontation with a number of norms that imposed themselves upon the built fabric. In other words, we will illustrate how various (legal, administrative, aesthetic, legal, religious) norms affected the (architectural and urban) form of the edifice. At the same time, we will also document the ways in which the physical form of the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque has impacted the environment that hosts it.

At first sight, the construction of this monumental mosque may appear to have little to do with informal building. Urban informality in Beirut, as any occasional visitor will probably argue, can be found across several areas and neighborhoods of this eastern Mediterranean port city but not within its nucleus, the Beirut Central District. Nevertheless, if we look into the details of this project’s origins we find that several formal and informal
It is important and useful to clarify some of the title’s terminology. First, by ‘genesis of a mosque’ I mean to indicate that I will be talking about the creation of a mosque. This covers the mosque’s formation in a wide sense, from conception through to construction, inauguration, and use. In choosing the term ‘negotiation’ of space I wish to stress the fact that acquiring, defining, and appropriating urban space is an ongoing, dynamic process that involves more than a mere moment of price bargaining. The term ‘sacred’ is used in a broad sense and does not mean that the space under analysis is related exclusively to the realm of spirituality or religion. On the contrary, as we will show, although the mosque may seem to be a religious edifice, a great deal of political, judicial, and sociological dynamics are associated with its construction. Finally, ‘downtown Beirut’ refers to the specific part of the Lebanese capital in which the mosque has been built.

From Zawiya to Jami': From Abu Nasr to Muhammad al-Amin (1853–1975)

The mosque’s history dates back to at least 1933, since a document recalls the presence of a zawiya named Zawiya at al-Nasr, on a plot of land registered with the real-estate administration of Beirut in the sector of al-Maruq (the Port). Little more is known about this place of worship related to Abu Nasr except that it had been operating since 1853 when the Ottoman sultan entrusted the land to Sheikh Muhammad Abu Nasr al-Yahi, as a gift to the Muslims of Beirut and in counterbalance to another plot he had presented to the Lazarist monks (Oger Liban 2008).

Several sources mention commercial activity of a different nature on the same site. Chehab Eddine speaks explicitly of a “Suq Abu Nasr,” also known as the Souk al-Moutran, where one could buy “colours, spices and oriental sweets” (Chehab Eddine 1960, 257). Other residents recall a so-called qahvah al-tawas (glass café) on the site where the mosque now stands.

In the early-twentieth century several Sunni Beirut families joined forces with the aim of establishing a place of worship at this location. From then on, the mosque project lived through several generations of Beirut’s community of Sunni Muslims as a communal dream; it lived among the inhabitants in their collective imagination, in terms of spoken references and collection boxes where everyone could deposit his or her contribution to the project.

In order to grasp the significance and the impact of this project, it may be helpful to sketch the historical context in which Zawiya at al-Nasr and...
the subsequent plans for the mosque emerged. This seems all the more relevant since discussions with Beirutis suggest that the attempt to establish a Sunni place of worship in this part of Beirut may have been a reaction against what many non-Christian Beirutis (and they were predominantly Sunni at the time) felt was an invasion of this emerging city by newly arrived missionaries during the second half of the nineteenth century. Such an interpretation may be a bit one-sided but it is an undeniable fact that the arrival of western missionaries and their activities had a considerable impact on the daily lives of Beirut residents, and influenced, among other things, the existing power relations among elites of Beirut in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Kassir 2004, Johnson 1986).

This historical context is important to bear in mind because it allows us to describe the construction of the mosque within a long-term perspective. However, this is certainly not the only dynamic at play, as the recorded history of the project suggests that the project was also caught up in an internal contest between different factions of Beirut’s Sunni community. The identified document prepared by Dar al-Fatwa (an umbrella organization headed by the Mufti of the Lebanese Republic which represents the head of the Sunni administrative hierarchy) is clear about the mosque’s origin, as it states explicitly that the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque was founded in the year 1933 under the name “Zaviyat Abu Nasr” on part 6 of parcel number 323 of the real-estate sector al-Mari’a.

Things are, however, less transparent when attempts are made to determine who exactly took which initiative in order to transform the existing saraiya, a waqf (religious endowment) administered by descendents of the Abu Nasr family, into a full-fledged mosque.

A legal document provides us with more helpful information. On 26 Jumada II 1327/ 5 May 1948, the Sunni Supreme Court of Appeal of Beirut adjudicated the transfer of the title of the mosque and the aforementioned waqf to the Directorate General of the Islamic Awqaf (DGIA). The very existence of such a ruling suggests that a dispute had ensued between the administrators of the waqf and the DGIA.

At this point, it is important to note that the document produced by the Dar al-Fatwa claims that in the years following the ruling of the tribunal, the Directorate General of Islamic Awqaf formed a committee “to care for and supervise matters related to the mosque.” According to the same document, this committee decided to found a “Muhammad al-Amin Association,” which later obtained a permit from the Ministry of Interior and worked for the acquisition of plots adjacent to part 6 and on which the DGIA intended to build “a large and appropriate mosque.” The text then goes on to make a reproachful remark:

the Association, however, proceeded to register the parts that it acquired with the contributions of the Muslims in the name of the Association instead of registering them in the name of the Directorate General of Islamic Awqaf.

Clearly, the text condemns the behavior of the Association and considers that its actions were the start of a problem that accounts for much of the delay in construction during the following decades. Nevertheless, the presentation made in the Dar al-Fatwa document is but one version of a more complex reality.

Another explanation for the inertia that hit the project seems to reside in a battle for influence between various factions of Beirut’s Sunni community. It appears that the Muhammad al-Amin committee was founded in the early 1940s, and later (most likely around 1965) evolved into an “association.” This body consisted of members of several influential families within the Beirut Sunni establishment and was indeed set up with the objective of raising funds for the acquisition of neighboring plots. However, crucially, it considered itself autonomous and, as such, acted independently from the DGIA—which it viewed as a rival institution.

As a consequence, the verdict by the Sunni Supreme Court of Appeal did not settle the dispute that had ensued between the Association and the DGIA. On the contrary, the Association contested the legality of the 1948 ruling in favor of the DGIA. It continued to pursue its own activities and had its newly acquired properties registered in its own name, which, as we have seen, was considered illegal by the DGIA on the grounds that it alone was the authority with the legitimacy to administer what it called “Muslim contributions.”

Relations between the two bodies remained strained, with both sides rallying for political backing from local and regional actors—thus worsening the situation rather than paving the way for a settlement of the dispute. Notwithstanding (or probably because of) the involvement of a vast network of local, national, and even international donors (including Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, among other royal eminences) the project did not materialize. A look at the ifada ‘aqarriya (real-estate notification) of parcel 323 attests to this bickering between 1966 and 2002. That is not to say that plans were not elaborated; on the contrary, architectural schemes had been drawn up by
the mid-1960s, and a billboard placed on the site made explicit the ambition to build a mosque there.

However, if during the 1960s the Muhammad al-Amin Association appeared to have been dominated by local political chiefs and clientelistic patrons in Beirut, during the last two decades of the twentieth century the Association—reflecting a wider trend among Muslim institutions—was reported to have been subject to growing Islamization (Mermier 2009; Rougé 2007).

Thus, as the second millennium drew to a close, few Beirutis could have guessed that a breakthrough in this ambitious project was near. This critical point was in fact arrived at through an accumulation of various factors.

**The Controversy over Beirut Central District (1975–90)**

**The birth of a company**

A first, important, and quite spectacular factor that influenced the construction of the mosque was the development of the area surrounding it. That area is the Beirut city center, known as Beirut Central District (BCD). Although the city center comes across today as a homogenous neighborhood dominated by the sandstone color of its buildings, and may, as a consequence, provide the occasional visitor with a feeling of natural uniformity, the BCD is in fact the artificial result of a huge enterprise that entailed uncountable rounds of formal and informal negotiations at a multitude of levels.

As Nabil Beyhum (1992) and others have shown, all of these plans were—each in their own way—the expression of how the urban engineers intended to react to the socio-political alterations and the physical transformations brought about by the successive waves of hostilities arising from the fifteen-year-long Lebanese civil war.13

It is no coincidence that the mosque arose on its actual location; there are historical reasons for this choice. Moreover, this corner of Martyrs Square in downtown Beirut is a prime location in itself because of the special place it occupies in Lebanese historiography, as Najjem maintains:

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the Beirut Central District is the most prized piece of property in Lebanon. During Lebanon's prosperous years (1950–1975) the city center was not only the heart of the country's economic, cultural and bureaucratic establishment, but it was also the financial and commercial center of the Middle East. It might even be argued that the center's prosperity confirmed Lebanon's success as a country (Najjem 2000, 163).

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that as soon as the violence appeared to calm down in the early 1990s major efforts were deployed to bring this central part of the capital back to life. The reconstruction became a highly important issue that attracted much attention and was, at times, heavily debated by many different actors. Tom Pierre Najem puts it well, when he describes the political dimension of the reconstruction effort as follows:

> From a symbolic standpoint, rebuilding a center accessible to persons of all faiths would help to signify an end to the divisions in Lebanese society. . . . There has been a continuing belief among many observers of the Lebanese scene that those who dominate the city center will also dominate the rest of the country (Najjem 2000, 164).

Among the figures who promoted such reconstruction plans, one was increasingly present on the Lebanese political scene—even though he remained out of the spotlight for the most part. That man, Rafiq Hariri, while mediating between belligerent factions with a mandate from the Saudi king Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, had nourished his own vision of Beirut and dreamed of making the city rise up once again from the ashes. Years before the warfare had stopped, he had offered his logistical support to help clear the capital's rubble (Verdeil 2001). At the time, protests emerged to contest this contribution, arguing that the bulldozers were destroying valuable architecture rather than helping to clear the debris. The project to rebuild Beirut had, however, been in Hariri's mind since the early 1980s (Blanford 2006, 41).

A Lebanese entrepreneur, Hariri was the founder of a flourishing conglomerate with construction activities as its core business. He was determined to propose his services as well as his vast network of powerful friends for the purpose of rebuilding the Lebanese capital and had proved his skills and ambitions in his hometown of Sidon (Bonne 1995). Najjem recalls that:

> the degree of Hariri's personal interest in the BCD's reconstruction was such that critics have suggested that it was one of the main factors behind his decision to make himself available as a candidate for the office of prime minister (Najjem 2000, 164).

One of the main obstacles concerning reconstruction initiatives was the management of the property rights of the ruined, and in some cases partly
abandoned, quarters of central Beirut. To deal with this problem, Solidere, The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District s.a.l., was set up in 1994, almost two years after Hariri became prime minister. The purpose of this privately owned, real-estate company was to return Beirut to its prewar glory and to firmly re-establish the city as an attractive international center for the finance, business, culture, and tourist industries. The mere task of identifying property owners and documenting property certificates was a daunting one that led to fierce debate and contestation, particularly because of Hariri’s simultaneously dominant position, in both the reconstruction project and in Lebanese politics.

A Contested Transaction

The project proposed by Solidere for the rebuilding of the Beirut Central District was not to the liking of several Lebanese, who did not hesitate to formulate their objections. In fact, from the very beginning, Solidere’s proposal to compensate property owners in the form of shares in a new private company encountered much criticism. Two kinds of contestation emerged. The first was based on factual grounds (condemning urban amputation and contesting ownership rights), while the second was a more ideological type of criticism.

To start with, a considerable and valuable part of the old city has been lost in what amounts, according to some, to an operation of major destruction:

- the demolition of three hundred buildings in the old city center, without determining whether they could be salvaged, generated a contrary feeling. What the fighting had not managed to destroy of the urban memory and the national heritage, the bulldozers of those reconstructing the city destroyed far more radically (Beydoun 1992, 52).

Furthermore, the opponents maintained that the appropriation of real estate by Solidere as well as the expropriation was “highly illegal,” and a violation of the democratic rights of the owners and tenants of property because they had not been consulted or even been given the right to opt out.

The proponents of the plan defended the decision by saying it was the only feasible solution to enable reconstruction—a view that was once again contested by the critics of Solidere on the grounds that identical constraints had not prevented development elsewhere in Beirut.

These legal arguments laid bare a more philosophical kind of criticism about the ways in which reconstruction should be conceived.

If the objective is to transcend the war, then it must reverse the profound sociological changes caused by the war. Reconstruction does not simply imply rebuilding but also includes social processes; it is a process taking into account time, and is not merely a transformation of space. Reconstruction must act to regenerate urban society (Beydoun 1992, 44).

Moreover, notwithstanding the conveniently altruistic meaning of its French homophone (solitaire), much of Solidere’s actions suggest that its raison d’être is essentially commercial: to maximize profit for its shareholders. The privately owned real-estate company indeed soon turned profitable, and today its shares trade on the stock exchanges of Beirut, London, and Kuwait.

Since Hariri was involved in the project on both the public and private levels, suspicions of a conflict of interest seemed not completely unjustified. Hariri was wearing two hats: first, as supposedly impartial decision-maker on the political level and second as that of an investor in a private company. Crucially, this company was involved in many of the projects he had to take decisions on in his capacity as a politician. Therefore, several close observers of events expressed their concern at so ambiguous an arrangement.

The contradiction between the project’s theory and praxis was problematic. Conceived of as an island of wealth and power, the city center would no longer play a centralizing role in the country as a whole, but would instead become an island like all the other urban islands that arose during the civil war (Beydoun 1992).

At the time of writing, the appropriation procedures used by Hariri have become a well-known and substantially documented fact. The opposition to Solidere is ongoing and a committee of defendants continues to organize activities aimed at denouncing what has taken place and continues to take place. This did not, however, prevent Solidere from acquiring a comfortable bargaining position, since the company has solidly imposed itself as an unavoidable actor and global reference in terms of the urban reconstruction of Beirut’s historic heart. We have chosen to highlight some of these reconstruction efforts in Beirut during the aftermath of the civil war because they provide interesting examples of property transactions and legal practices in a period of countrywide economic renewal.
Political Rivalry as a Catalyst (1990–2003)

As much as in the years before the Lebanese civil war, the history of the mosque in the war’s aftermath was rife with political rivalry. However, whereas during the war this competition had brought the project to a standstill, similar antagonisms after the war served to accelerate the mosque’s planned evolution. It is therefore useful, for the sake of argument, to look at two periods: The first period runs from 1976 to 1996 and explores the restructuring of Beirut’s Sunni community, while the second period unravels the sudden boost to the mosque’s construction that took place between 1996 and 2003.

One significant factor in the development of the mosque was the reconfiguration of the Sunni political scene in Beirut, a process that had begun several decades earlier. From the mid-twentieth century, the Sunni religious authorities had initiated a gradual and laborious expansion of their influence over the traditional communal leaders (za'uma) of Beirut’s Sunni community. This dynamic had become explicit with the 1951 inauguration of the Dar al-Fatwa complex in the Musaytheh area of West Beirut and continued, with ups and downs, under the tenure (1966–89) of the charismatic Mufti Hassan Khaled during the civil war in Lebanon.19

After the Sunni militias were jeopardized or defeated because of their alliance with the Palestinian fedayeen, radical Islamism gained some measure of popularity in the 1980s. With the gradual disintegration of the Lebanese state, the importance of Sunni religious institutions in the community’s religious and political affairs increased, and more pronounced communal identities became the norm. At the same time, the traditional leadership of the za'uma came under pressure, if only because they had growing trouble providing their constituencies with the patronage of state administrations and charities, such as the Maqasid—which increasingly came under the (financial) control of Saudi Arabia and its Lebanese proxies.

While some of the established leaders, such as the Salam family, adapted to this situation, others tried to exploit it. Among them, Mufti Khaled gained so much political influence that he grew too powerful and was assassinated in 1989. By this time, new actors had emerged on the scene.

Raﬁq Hariri, for one, had systematically established a patronage network that was not linked to traditional Sunni religious institutions, thus overcoming the principal weakness of the Salam family. On the other hand, because of his apparent moderation and cross-communitarian alliances and partnerships, he was generally regarded with suspicion by the more radical Islamist groups, some of whom were rumored to have infiltrated the Muhammad al-Amin Association, which was still overseeing the development of the mosque on the ground.

Regarding the physical evolution of the mosque during these decades, only an advertising board of sorts, installed on the plot in question, indicated the intention of building a mosque there. Unsurprisingly, this signboard did not survive the war. However, according to eyewitness accounts, as informal a structure as a tent was set up on the site. It is unclear, however, who exactly placed it there and who actually used this tent and how frequently, but it appears that the tent was meant to allow local laborers to pray when on duty.20 This tent was virtually the only thing that could be seen on the mosque’s plot by the time a forest of cranes had transformed Beirut’s city center into a huge, continuously evolving construction site.

It was the strategic alliance between Raﬁq Hariri as prime minister and Sheik Muhammad Rashid Qabbani as head of the Dar al-Fatwa on a number of issues, alongside the rapid development of the urban area surrounding the planned mosque, that thrust the project for the mosque into a new period of accelerated development between 1996 and 2003. This alliance, however, was not simply a result of the previously described transformations permeating the Sunni community of Beirut during the 1976–96 period.

Alongside the development of the urban area surrounding the planned mosque, another important factor was to bolster the mosque project: the new du’s aim to overcome the tutelage issue by excluding the Muhammad al-Amin Association from being an actor in the mosque’s construction.

The enthusiasm of Dar al-Fatwa, embodied in the will of the Mufti of the Lebanese Republic, Sheikh Qabbani, appears to have been fueled by a number of factors. First, there was the explicit willingness to go on with the project of building the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque and to turn it into a beacon of Sunni Islam in Beirut. The following statement from Dar al-Fatwa is clear testimony to this ambition:

Dar al-Fatwa ... took upon its shoulders, together with the DGIA, the work of realizing this hope to allow this mosque to become a landmark among the landmarks of Islamic civilization in Lebanon and more specifically in the capital, Beirut.

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There are three additional factors bearing consideration: First, according to a longstanding tradition in Lebanon and not unlike common practice in other Middle Eastern countries, leaders of religious communities yield considerable influence over political affairs (Khoury 1991; Eckelman and Piscatori 2004; Kouroubas 2006). Thus, as the leader and representative of a major religious community, the Mufti of the Lebanese Republic is a senior political actor and, as such, eager to strengthen his legitimacy. Widely seen as the candidate championed by Hariri, the Mufti had been elected to office on 28 December 1996, hours after an item of institutional reform—masterminded by advisers close to Hariri—had modified the voting procedure (Rouvier 2007, 130). As a newly appointed leader in search of credibility, the Mufti had to earn his credentials among his constituency and, in this respect, the construction of a mosque was a welcome opportunity to do so.

Moreover, both Hariri and the Mufti seem to have viewed the construction of the mosque as a means of epitomizing the regained political strength of the Sunni community in post-war Lebanon, and this landmark mosque can be understood as the symbolic crown on the work of those members of the Sunni community who had labored long and hard for more influence within the Lebanese political system.

Besides, another factor had come to influence Hariri’s position regarding the mosque. For, until then, Samir Kassi recalls Hariri as having been opposed to building a mosque on this prime location. According to Kassi, Hariri’s opposition was inspired by two reasons: The first was the fact that, as a Muslim who considered himself to be pious but moderate, Hariri did not want religious markers “on the postcard of Beirut.” The second reason for his opposition was that, as a businessman, Hariri did not want to sacrifice one of the most expensive parcels of Solidere to a mosque, a building unlikely to generate any added value.

So, what was the trigger that caused Rafiq Hariri to review his position toward the plans for the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque? In order to answer this question, it is important to recall the—by now legendary—friction and strained relationship between Hariri and Emile Lahoud, then commander-in-chief of the Lebanese Army. Hariri unsuccessfully tried to prevent Lahoud from becoming president of the republic in 1998. This animosity between the country’s two most powerful officials had been a paralyzing factor for countless political issues in Lebanon, and affected the construction of the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque as well.

President Lahoud, a secular and military-minded figure and a Maronite Christian, saw an opportunity to weaken the position of his political opponent on his own territory, that is, within the Sunni community of Beirut. President Lahoud reportedly invited Al-Waleed bin Talal, the well-known Saudi prince and one of the world’s richest men with alleged ambitions in Lebanese politics, to participate in the financing of the mosque. In 2001, Al-Waleed, whose Lebanese mother, Mona al-Solh, is the daughter of the late Riad al-Solh, donated two million dollars toward the purchase of parts of the land parcel.

If, until this point, Rafiq Hariri’s attitude had been one of disinterest or even opposition to the building of a mosque from that point, he found himself in a position where circumstances forced him to act. Hariri could not consider withholding financial contributions, therefore allowing himself to be perceived as parsimonious or sidelined by a rival on a major project in his own backyard. Neither could he limit himself to making a symbolic contribution since this would be seen as merely endorsing an initiative taken by notable political competitors.

Hariri reacted decisively: in a style true to his image and reputation he pledged to fund the project entirely and, from then on, he became closely involved in every phase of its operations. He personally oversaw each and every step in the construction process, thus clearly putting his mark on the project. This gradual move toward the appropriation—through financial means and networking—of the mosque project was a striking development in Hariri’s association with the mosque.

This shift in Hariri’s position can be explained by several factors. First, this is a good illustration of Hariri’s double-sided but not per se contradictory position as a Lebanese and Sunni politician. On the one hand he carefully nourished his image as being that of a truly Lebanese statesman, a consensual leader who enjoyed massive, trans-communitarian support, as his popularity among the Christian bourgeoisie attested. On the other hand, given that he occupied the highest public office available to a Lebanese Sunni Muslim, he was eager to actively uphold his reputation as a devout and practicing Muslim, assets essential to the role of a true za‘im (communal leader).

Second, one should be careful not to exaggerate Hariri’s opposition to the Muhammad al-Amin project, however. For two reasons at least, it seems that Hariri’s revised position was more an opportunistic reconsideration than a volte face. For one, the rivalry between Hariri and Al-Waleed, who share business interests and a similar personal background,
should not be overestimated (Sakr 2002: 73). Besides, and perhaps crucially, Hariri’s attitude to the plans for a mosque may have been more one of lukewarm disinterest than one of outright opposition. In fact, it appears that Hariri had been looking for some time for a suitable place to erect a major mosque in Beirut.14 When that project failed to materialise, the opportunity of pulling off a breakthrough in the long deadlocked Muhammad al-Amin project suddenly became more alluring.

One may wonder, therefore, whether Hariri’s trajectory concerning the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque was not more one of consciously crafted gradual involvement (and later appropriation) based on personal (electoral) interests rather than one of a radical U-turn in response to a threat from one of his perceived competitors—one whose areas of interest range far beyond tiny Lebanon anyhow.

Be that as it may, less than one year after the contribution made by Al-Waleed bin Talal, the alliance between Hariri and the Mufti paid off. The prime minister was able to obtain, with the backing of Dar al-Fatwa, the ministerial signature to decree number 8572, by both the minister of interior, Elias al-Murr, and President Lahoud. This decree, published in the Official Gazette on 31 August 2002,20 declared the Muhammad al-Amin Association to be illegal and dissolved by virtue of the law, thus removing perhaps the biggest obstacle to the mosque’s actual construction.


In this section we will focus on a selected number of actors and issues involved in the relatively short phase of actual construction of the mosque, in order to highlight how different interests clashed and how several norms upheld by the various stakeholders affected and regulated the final form of the mosque.

Now that he had established himself as the project’s principal sponsor, Hariri was able to have a determining impact on its plans. This was greatly facilitated by the fact that he commissioned Oger Liban, his own contracting company, to carry out this new, valuable contract.

One of the issues raised in the case of the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque concerned the Roman remnants, laid bare merely weeks after digging works for the foundations had started, in 2002. These ruins were of particular interest to archaeologists and historians of ancient Beirut, who yearned for the opportunity to investigate them. Thus, a bargaining process started between contractors and developers of the site, who pressed for a swift continuation of building activities, on the one hand, and archaeologists and the

Directorate-General of Antiquities (DGA), who devoted all available energy to their quest for the time and money to allow for more serious excavations under optimal circumstances, on the other. Permission and funding was finally obtained and excavations onsite started in late October 2002,25 but only for a limited period of time and under strict conditions since no more than a handful of researchers were allowed onsite.

It should be recalled that Oger Liban was the final supervisor and coordinator of the works onsite. The firm outsourced many of the construction activities to subcontractors.28 At Oger Liban, the architectural planning of the mosque was in the hands of a team of engineers under the expertise and leadership of Azmi Fakhouri, an architectural engineer by training who had gained his credentials while working on several other projects for Hariri, including the Hind Hijazi Mosque and the Bahaeidine Hariri Mosque in Sidon.29

The first stone of the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque was laid on the first day of Ramadan (6 November) 2002, by both Sheikh Qabbani, the mufti, and Hariri, then prime minister. The first concrete for the foundations was poured on 3 October 2003, and by March 2005 the raw construction of the whole building, including the 65-meter-high minarets and the 48-meter-high dome, had been finalized. The total surface covered almost 4,000 square meters and the built-up area covered over 11,000 square meters. The calculated surface per worshiper (0.75 m²) provides space for more than 7,000 attendants, including a mezzanine for 800 female worshipers.

The stone used for the Ottoman-inspired32 scheme came from Riyadh, while the studios of the Saudi Sheikh Utman Taha prepared the calligraphy. The design of the mosque’s interior was in the hands of Nabil Dada, a Lebanese decorator who had worked for Hariri on previous occasions. As for the characteristically blue color of the dome, it was a composition chosen by Hariri himself out of a selection of blues compiled by an Italian laboratory after almost a year of experiments. The total cost of the project was estimated to be in the region of $30 million.

Before as well as during the construction work, the engineers at Oger Liban were confronted with a great number of technical challenges. Let us now look at some of the more informal practices involved in negotiating space, one that influenced the final form of the mosque. Indeed, Oger Liban had to translate the wishes and directives of all the actors involved into a feasible building within budgetary and spatial limits. However, the interests and intentions of the actors involved were not always compatible.
To be more explicit, Solidere was initially opposed to the construction of a monumental mosque and did everything possible to downscale the project so as to make it fit into the urban context and projects surrounding the mosque. In fact it favored an alternative scheme for the mosque, devised by the Jordanian architect Rasem Badran. For its part, Dar al-Fatwa had clearly expressed its ambition to turn the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque into a landmark of Islamic civilization in Lebanon. Rafiq Hariri, once involved, had come to consider the construction of this mosque as one of the cornerstones of his reconstruction efforts in the BCD and one which put his prestige and reputation at stake. Oger Liban, from its side, faced technical and budgetary constraints and wanted the project to be completed as efficiently as possible. These actors were the ones with decision-making power; others, such as neighboring locals, archaeologists, and residents of Beirut were all directly or indirectly concerned, but had very limited means at their disposal to influence decisions. This diversity of objectives among the various actors is important to take into account because it is here that one discovers the political maneuvering behind the construction of a religious building.

One example of these potentially conflicting objectives and the ordinary practices that surrounded the actual construction on a daily basis became clear through a dispute that arose in the northwestern corner of the land parcel. The problem was that this corner was not, initially, part of the lands acquired for the construction of the mosque but was in fact part of Solidere land committed by the latter to another project, namely the Garden of Forgiveness. The trouble was considerable since the orientation of the main entrance was scheduled to be exactly on this plot of land, in the direction of this northwestern corner (Fig. 6.3), facing the heart of BCD—the Nejmeh Square—and thus completing, in a way, one of the two missing radii that depart from the square. Early drafts of the more than three hundred and twenty schemes prepared by Mr. Fakhouri’s team at Oger Liban as well as several maps published by Solidere, clearly indicate the intention of orienting the main entrance of the mosque toward the northwestern corner (Fig. 6.2).

The problem was all the more serious because the 2.3-hectare Garden of Forgiveness project was a high-profile initiative destined to become a “paragon of social integration” for the purpose of offering “an important neural location with a multi-communal history” and serving as “a meeting point for Lebanon’s many communities.” Solidere had encountered considerable difficulty in finding a suitable location for the project, which was closely monitored by international NGOs because of the unique opportunity it offered to commit a public space in reconstructed Beirut to the sensitive issue of sectarian reconciliation. Its brochure spoke in glowing terms of using “foundations of the past to build foundations for the future” and of providing “a place for individuals to reflect on their collective memory” with the hope of nurturing a “renewed sense of common identity” among the Lebanese.18

Solidere insisted on securing a passage between the mosque and the cathedral that would allow visitors to the Garden to connect Rue Wegand with Rue Emir Beshir. However, it came under pressure twice to sell more land. For Oger Liban, the problem was significant because not including this part would have major effects on building stability and force the relocation of the main entrance. This problem turned out to be the biggest challenge for Fakhouri’s team of architects and they had to muster all their talent to find a solution. In the end, a compromise was struck which allowed both projects to go ahead with minimal nuisance.
Nevertheless, a permanent visual reference to all this bargaining remains. The solution involved Solfiere giving up an additional plot of land to accommodate what Falckouri calls “the mosque’s umbrella,” a vaulted structure covering the northwestern corner at the level of the first elevation (Fig. 6.3). This creates an unhindered passage for visitors to the Garden while at the same time accommodating a secondary entrance to the mosque.

In doing so, the trapezoidal form of the parcel and the stability of the original plan were secured, but the mosque’s main entrance was now transferred beneath another vaulted hall, to the northeastern corner of the parcel, which gave direct access to Martyrs Square and no longer to Nejmeh Square.

We have highlighted this rather technical problem because it reveals how the different parties negotiated and finally settled a dispute about a plot of land. It illustrates how negotiating over space leaves physical marks. Another example of clashing interests and actors can be found in the reaction of the ecclesiastic leadership in charge of the Saint George Maronite Cathedral, located just next to the mosque.

The constant interactions between different communities, sometimes harmonious, sometimes confrontational, sometimes occurring along intracommunal lines, at other times transgressing confessional boundaries, is an essential feature of Lebanese society—be it in times of peace or war. As such, the interplay with other buildings in the surroundings of the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque, and especially with the religious architecture in its vicinity, greatly affected the construction and use of the mosque and continues to do so.

The Saint George Maronite Cathedral, based upon the Basilica Maria Maggiore in Rome, was built to replace a church of the same name which had become too small for the growing Maronite community. Archbishop Debs (c. 1872–1997), who had decided to increase the visibility of the Maronite community in Beirut, inaugurated the cathedral in 1894.

Exactly a century later, the cathedral was restored (at a cost of $8 million) at the behest of the archbishop of Beirut “because it had not been used for twenty-five years and wild herbs had invaded the cathedral during the war.” To emphasize the importance of the cathedral “which is to Maronites of Lebanon what the Notre Dame is to the Catholics of France,” the inauguration ceremony of the restored cathedral, in 2003, was presided over by Patriarch Steir “in the presence of President Hariri and Cardinal Lustiger of Paris.”

The “gargantuan” mosque literally dominates and “dwarfs” the adjacent cathedral in such a way that many visitors (including residents and non-residents irrespective of their faith) perceived it as a form of provocation. The least that can be said is that the hegemonic ambition of the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque went neither unnoticed nor without criticism.

Archbishop Matar, eager to respond to the construction of the mosque regardless of political conjunctures, ordered the design of a visible reply to the new mosque. He commissioned a well-known architect to draw up plans for a campanile that would “not reach higher but attain the same height” as the minarets. As a result, detailed plans (Fig. 6.4) have been finalized and the construction of the new campanile is now well underway. It will take the form of a high clock tower on the street side, to the west of the cathedral, where it will replace an existing building (Fig. 6.5). Archbishop Matar explains how, shortly before the construction of the mosque:

Hariri came to see me and tell me that they would build a mosque there. He told me that it would be the height of the cathedral, “but what more do you want, in Islam the domes are high.” But they created a monumental structure that conceals the cathedral and the Maronite presence. In fact, they wanted a presence on Martyrs’ Square. So, in response we will construct the campanile.
The prelate goes on to describe the campanile's appearance:

I have asked Sheikh Pierre El Khoury\(^9\) to prepare the plans by looking at Saint Marc in Venice and the Pisa Tower for inspiration. The campanile will be sixty-five meters high, not higher than but the same height as the minarets. In fact, I do not reproach Hariri for having built a mosque, but I do reproach him for having built a mosque that is disproportionate in relation to the city. . . . This is a kind of showing off, to attract attention. By the way, from an architectural point of view, this is not a big success; Solidere never photographed it and actually tries to avoid displaying it in their promotion brochures. It is a bit like the Tour Montparnasse in Paris; everyone wants to be inside in order not to see it.

According to some, this step must be understood in the context of a contest for visibility by mosques and churches in the downtown area.\(^{40}\)

Competition arises not only as to which monument has the highest minaret or church tower but also which call to prayer is loudest, that of the adhan or ringing church bells.

The Installation of the Darih (Tomb) Next to the Mosque and Its Effects (2005–2008)

Quite dramatically, much of this competition and rivalry was forgotten during the dramatic events that followed Hariri’s assassination. On Monday 14 February 2005, a massive explosion shook the city of Beirut, one which changed the course of the country’s political history. As Hariri’s impressive motorcade passed the Saint Georges Hotel in Ayn al-Maysalun,\(^{41}\) around a ton of TNT was detonated, killing more than twenty people, including Hariri.

On Wednesday 16 February, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese joined the funeral procession from Hariri’s residence in Qoraytem to the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque and the subsequent funeral ceremony to which President Lahoud was not invited.
Hariri's family subsequently decided to bury Hariri and his bodyguards on a plot of land bordering the Mohammad al-Amin Mosque on Martyrs Square. The decision to install Hariri's tomb in Beirut was taken overnight and, like the decision to turn his funeral into an anti-Syrian event, the decision to lay the martyred president to rest in Beirut amounted to a political statement.

Virtually from the very first moment of Rafiq Hariri's burial in Martyrs Square, vast numbers of people amassed at the improvised tomb, and soon the site became a popular attraction. Indeed, as a consequence of his accomplishments and his international renown, combined with the shocking violence of his assassination but also as careful planning, political maneuvering, and a dose of well-timed propaganda, Rafiq Hariri acquired the status of a mythical martyr, al-ra'is al-shuhid (the martyr president) whose tomb has evolved into an improvised shrine, complete with large lifesize portraits, flowers, and candles (Fig. 6.6).

As a consequence, and because of the events that followed, this newly created sanctuary soon acquired a prominent place in Lebanese public life. Scenes of Lebanese and foreign dignitaries paying their respect, or a local football team celebrating a championship, at Hariri's tomb are particularly significant in this respect. These visits by celebrities as well as ordinary people have contributed to shaping the character of the darib which has de facto evolved into a modern pilgrimage site.

Just as the mosque can be said to have started under a tent, so too did the mausoleum develop out of a tent. A more permanent structure—to be co-designed by one of Hariri's sons—is destined to replace the actual, temporary large hall created by the tent structure. What is more important is that the mosque has become inextricably linked to the tomb. This is not only the result of the extreme physical proximity between mosque and emerging mausoleum, but also because Hariri's spectacular death has affected the mosque in a profound way. If before 14 February 2005 some Christians felt outspokenly humiliated by the mosque, the installation of the darib and the dramatic events during the month following the assassination have had an attenuating effect: all of a sudden, the Mohammad al-Amin Mosque appeared to lose some of its dominant and provocative characteristics and found itself transformed into a symbol of unity and understanding. At that moment, the mosque and grave ceased to be a site of contention and appeared to be embraced, even by some outspoken Maronites. In later years, however, the site took on more markedly confessional connotations, especially after the July 2006 War (see below).

At the same time, because of its high popularity, the darib became a useful tool for communication and a convenient tool in the political liturgy for members close to Hariri. As such, the tomb only added to the mosque's importance and turned it de facto into one big sanctuary devoted to the cult of the slain president. Hariri's family and sympathizers have assiduously reinforced Hariri's connection to the mosque through the darib. One example of this is the display, at the burial site, of a special series of postage stamps, issued in commemoration of his death, on which Hariri is featured four times; one stamp bears Hariri's portrait next to an image of a minaret and a church tower of the same height, all collated next to the well-known statue of the martyrs, while another stamp shows a small portrait next to the large Mohammad al-Amin Mosque (Liban Post 2005).

It must be noted, however, that soon after Hariri's assassination, two broad political coalitions emerged: the 8th March group (in reference to an enormous pro-Syrian demonstration organized by Hezbollah) and the 14th March group (in reference to an even bigger demonstration organized to commemorate the first month after Hariri's assassination). Both of these camps evolved considerably as the weeks and months went by, eventually becoming the two main new political actors of the post-Hariri era in Lebanon. The gap between these two opposing currents widened
during 2005, worsened after the July 2006 war, and developed into deep mistrust during the economic and socio-political deadlock of 2007. That same year saw both camps, each with their respective international allies, pitched even more fiercely against each other over the highly problematic issues of electing a successor to Emile Lahoud and finding an acceptable, power-sharing formula in government, a problem that lasted well into 2008 and culminated in the traumatizing armed takeover of Sunni neighborhoods in Beirut by Shi’i militias on 7 May 2008.

Spectacularly, this political cleavage has had spatial repercussions which have affected both the gravesite and the mosque. Quite revealingly, if Hariri’s tomb, during one (brief) moment—that is, immediately after his assassination—seemed to have had the potential to develop into a national mausoleum that could attract visitors of almost all confessions, the gradual degeneration of the political situation soon prevented this. As time passed, an opposite dynamic surfaced, one which transformed the darūb and the neighboring mosque into a space clearly belonging to the 14th March camp.13

By December 2006, the 8th March camp14 had confirmed this dynamic of spatialization of power by launching a major sit-in ( skirmis)15 in the central squares of Beirut and by organizing a subsequent ‘siege’ of the downtown area—from the Grand Serail (the prime minister’s offices) to the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque. In contesting ‘14th March space,’ the 8th March supporters chose to occupy rival space and turn it into a clearly marked political space of their own.16 Thus, the stalemate acquired visible expression and, on the occasion of the second annual commemoration of Hariri’s assassination, on 14 February 2007, the mosque was surrounded by barbed wire, as a safety measure.

From then on, one literally had to choose sides in order to access the city center, either entering through the tent camp17 installed by the supporters of 8th March or by passing the darūb, thus paying respects to the 14th March camp. Thus, the mosque had been politically hijacked even before its inauguration.

It was not until the political climate in Lebanon had cooled and the suffocating sit-in had been lifted in June 2008, that the solemn inauguration ceremony could finally take place. On 17 and 18 October 2008, an impressive array of international guests, among them the Mufti of Egypt and the Shaykh of al-Azhar, participated in a Friday prayer accompanied by a crowd of thousands.18 After a century and a half of accumulated efforts, the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque had finally been brought to life.

This brief overview of the genesis of Lebanon’s most prestigious Sunni place of worship shows how its gradual elaboration consisted of numerous small and often quotidian stages of planning, adjusting, and readjusting by a multitude of ambitious actors. As such, the mosque’s history is not only the history of a community through the decades but also the illustration of a good deal of appropriation as well as contestation of sacred space. This chapter has documented how intended acts can have unintended consequences and how the constraints of various stakeholders can leave physical traces on the built fabric. In other words, besides being the outcome of a communal aspiration of power, the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque can also be seen as an example of how urban form is produced and accomplished in both formal and informal ways.

Notes
1 The five phases selected here are of unequal length and were not picked based on any specific rationale other than the practical and didactical, that is, to focus on practices of acquiring and claiming land and of titling a settlement.
2 Dar al-Fatwa, “Masjid Muhammad al-Amin salla Allah ‘alayhi wa sallam, Beirut.” The document is undated. However, repeated inquiries made of the Mufti’s administration allowed for the retrieval of the date of publication, which was given as 28 August 2004.
3 A zarīyat (pl. zarīyayn) is a space closely associated with Sufism and can take extremely diverse physical forms. For more discussion of the term, see Kane 1995.
4 See also: al-Hadeer 2007 and Hallaq 2008.
5 This café was a commercial outlet where one could order drinks and food or enjoy a water pipe. Ridwan al-Sayyid, for example, remembers having breakfast at the coffee house “for 25 piasters.” Interview, Beirut, 27 June 2006.
6 In addition to the construction of a Lazarist convent on the plot of land mentioned earlier (located just opposite the entrance to the zarīyat), one of the most tangible testaments to the missionaries’ activities is the opening of universities such as the Syrian Protestant College in 1866 (later the American University of Beirut). The convent was subsequently replaced by a 1933 design by André Leconte, which is the complex that stands to this day.
8 Dar al-Fatwa, n.d.

This was not an unusual situation; other mosques were also hampered by poor relations with the religious authorities. See Charara 1989, which also contains some information on the Muhammad al-Amin project.

The policy of the author from the Directorate-General for Property Issues (Ministry of Finance) dates from 29 March 2006.

Since this episode is replete with instances of legal practices and contestations, we are compelled to include a discussion of the controversy here. However, the story of Beirut’s reconstruction has been the object of numerous studies and for that reason we will keep this discussion as brief as possible. In addition to the works referred to throughout this chapter, more elaborate analysis can be found in Rowe and Sarks 1998. For another dimension of the same issue, see Köglar 2005. In addition to the works cited in this chapter, more elaborate analysis can be found in Rowe and Sarks 1998, Najem 2000, Schmid 2002, Köglar 2005, Faiz 2007, and Harb 2010.

A first plan was elaborated and presented in 1977–78 and dealt exclusively with the renovation of the city center, destroyed during the civil war violence of 1975–76. The second, more inclusive and ambitious plan of 1983 covered the entire Metropolitan Beirut and, finally, the 1991 plan was unveiled, which once again covered the entire Beirut city center.

A French acronym for Société libanaise de développement et de reconstruction de Beyrouth. See http://www.solideire.com. It should be noted that adoption of Law No. 117 of 1991 (the preparation of which had been heavily influenced by those close to Hariri) had cleared the way for the establishment of a private company to carry out the reconstruction.

Marwan Iskandar (2006, 39) maintains that Hariri’s participation in Solideire amounted to $183 million, thereby covering “the cupped 10 percent shareholding by any individual, institution or group.” Extensive details of the complex history of the birth of Solideire and the respective actors and stakes involved are well described by Najem 2000, 163–73. It is important to note that the attribution of A-shares was a complicated matter, since several owners claimed to own the same property.

For a presentation of Solideire’s core project by a senior adviser to Solideire, see Gavin and Mahf 1996.

Paul Mourani and Assam Salam, quoted in Najem 2000, 165.

For another critical analysis of Solideire’s reconstruction practices see Makti 1997.

See, for example, the articles in The Daily Star of 11 March 2004, 18 July 2007, and 6 August 2007, which show that the property-owners committee is still active under the presidency of members of the Daouq family. Some sources have put the number of “citizens with legal entitlements” in the city center at as much as 120,000. See Assam Salam, interview, Beirut, 20 July 2007. Verdel 2002 cites this same figure, whereas Najem (2000) puts the number of “property owners” at 40,000.

For more details on the transformations of the Sunni community, see Johnson 1986 and Stovgaard-Petersen 1998.

The idea of an informal mosque in a tent may appear to be a strange one, especially given the fact that several other mosques are available in the surroundings, but one should not forget that the nearest mosques, the Amir Assaf and the Omari mosques, were themselves under construction in the 1990s. At least one article confirms the presence of a tent; see “Group Agrees on How to Build New Mosque,” in The Daily Star, 3 December 1999. According to Aziz Falahiti (interview, Beirut, 18 July 2007) the tent did not correctly face the qibla.

The use of the word mašā’in (landmark) is important here because of its associated meanings. The most basic significations of the root ayn-lam-mun are linked to concepts such as ‘teaching’ or ‘knowing’, examples being the words tīn (knowledge) or i‘ādān (banner). The word mašā’in therefore embodies several messages within it, one of which is to teach, implying that ‘this’ [mosque] is part of a rich Islamic civilization. The language used stresses this implied meaning through use of the plural form mašā‘īn, a common rhetorical technique.

Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Qabbani had been interim mufti since the assassination of his predecessor, Sheikh Hassan Khaled, on 16 May 1989. This means that Sheikh Qabbani and Rafiq Hariri rose to political prominence in Lebanon at around the same time, that is, by the end of the 1980s. On the assassination of Hassan Khaled, see Harris 1997, 255.

Marwan Iskandar, in an unverified partisan biography, documents Hariri’s contribution to this effort to empower the Sunni Muslims by playing a “pro-active role of acute political awareness” for them as well as creating community “participation that would contribute to the rebirth of Lebanon.” In what Iskandar calls “an uphill struggle to restore Sunni credibility,” Hariri contributed his own “perseverance, as well as substantial resources provided by the Saudis.” See Iskandar 2006, 163–64. Indeed, one of the major shifts since the Taif Agreement (1989) is the enhancement in the prerogatives of the prime minister at the expense of the those of the president of the republic.


For a detailed account of this process, see Corm 2006, especially chapter 11, 267–92. Alternatively, turn to the somewhat partisan but revealing Blanford 2006, especially chapter 4, 71–99.

28 Saad Khaled (Director-General of Urbanism between 1993 and 1999 and a close advisor to Hariri on urban planning affairs) maintains that several sites were seriously considered for this project. Interview, Beirut, 16 April 2009. For more details on this, see Vlooghegs 2010.

29 al-Jaridah al-rasmiya, no. 49, 31 August 2002, p. 5807; al-Jaridah al-rasmiya (the Official Gazette) is a public journal in which laws and governmental decrees are published before they come into effect.


31 Interview with Montaha Saghieh, Beirut, 23 March 2006. The excavations nevertheless resulted in the discovery of high-quality material that shed new light on the alignment of Beirut’s Roman streets. At the time, the DGA and Solidere even held brainstorming sessions about the feasibility of developing a public access to an underground gallery that would allow visits to the unearthed sarcophagi.

32 As many as thirty-five external contracting companies were involved, according to an interview with Azmi Fakhouri, Beirut, 5 July 2006. It should be noted that Oger Liban stepped into the execution of the project after substantial parts of the architectural planning had been accomplished by a collaboration of the Egyptian architect and scholar Saleh Lameir and the Sidon-based Office for Engineering Studies of the Hariri Foundation.

33 These mosques had been commissioned by Rafiq Hariri in honor of his mother (d. 1993) and father (d. 1999) respectively; they were inaugurated in 1999 and 2006.

34 Although the architect insists on the fact that a wide variety of other influences are manifestly present as well.

35 Quotations are from the Solidere brochure outlining the project—Hasarat al-Samad (Solidere, Beirut, 2004).

36 On the cathedral and its history, see Abi ’Ad 2000.

37 All quotes in this paragraph are from an interview with Archbishop Boulos Matar, Beirut, 27 July 2007.

38 Both adjectives are quotations from: Khalaf 2006, 31.

39 Pierre El Khoury is a Maronite Lebanese architect who has designed several highly visible buildings in Lebanon, including a monumental church on Mount Harisa and the emblematic UN House in central Beirut. He died in 2005. See for example El Khoury 2000.

40 Angus Gavin, Beirut, 16 March 2006.

41 Ironically enough, this hotel is an iconic building that had not been restored to its prewar glory, due to a conflict between its owner, Fadi Khoury, on the one hand, and Hariri and Solidere, on the other, about property rights. In fact, the Saint George Hotel was among the most visible symbols of the contestations surrounding Solidere’s activities in BCD. See for example Warren Singh-Bartlett, “St. George and Solidere do battle over souls BCD,” The Daily Star, 23 February 2001.

42 Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Hezbollah, came to pay his respects, together with member of parliament Saad al-Hariri, after the second day of the ‘National Dialogue.’ See al-Sharq al-Awsat, 4 March 2006, 5.

43 The most well-known example is of President Jacques Chirac but dignitaries such as Kofi Annan (al-Lu9, 29 August 2006) and others feature as well.

44 As reported in al-Lu9, 15 May 2006. Syndicates came to visit the mosque on the eve of their strike in a more designed to bolster their action.

45 People of all ages visited the site: newlyweds, youngsters, parents taking their children on a trip, the elderly, and tourists. For more details on the development of Hariri’s tomb, see Vlooghegs 2012.

46 Such as on the occasion of 14 March 2005, when a million people seemed to transform the mosque into a forceful symbol of national unity. See the book published by Dar an-Nahar on the occasion of what has been called “the Beirut Spring,” “Indépendence05,” or the “Cedar Revolution.” See The Beirut Spring, Indépendence 05 (Beirut: Dar an-Nahar and Quantum Communications, 2005).

47 One Lebanese Maronite Christian we interviewed told us that “before [2005], the mosque would arouse my anger; I didn’t like the way the mosque was imposed next to the cathedral. But now [March 2006], all of this is forgotten; it’s almost as if I don’t see the mosque anymore.”

48 In reference to 8 March 1963, which is the day the Ba‘ath Party came to power in Syria.


50 For example, when a significant stop toward the establishment of the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon was taken, this was regarded as a political victory and a small, framed copper plate was therefore installed at the tomb to celebrate this.

51 Mainly consisting of Hariri’s Future Bloc, Jumblatt’s Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and the remnants of the Qornet Shelwan Gathering.

52 Mainly: Hezbollah, Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), Amal, and the Marada.

53 The P’tanim can be understood as a contestation of Hariri’s appropriation of space in Beirut. The connotations of the term P’tanim (safeguarding, resistance, preservation) are therefore meaningful in this regard.
54 The opposition launched the sit-in on 1 December 2006 for an unspecified period of time, in order to obtain a government of national unity that would replace the Siniora government—labeled as illegal.

55 I am grateful to Zouhair Ghazzal for insightful comments on how the tent camp of 8th March was itself divided: in a grouping of tents belonging to the Aoun-led Free Patriotic Movement and the ‘Qawmi’ (on the eastern side of the sit-in) and a grouping of tents staffed mainly with militiamen from Amal and Hezbollah installed more to the west, on Riad Solh Square.

56 See al-Liwa of 17, 18, and 20 October 2008.

References