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Edited by Baudouin Dupret, Thomas Pierret,
Paulo G. Pinto and Kathryn Spellman-Poots

Ethnographies of Islam
Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices

Edinburgh

Exploring Muslim Contexts

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Edited by Baudouin Dupret, Thomas Pierret,
Paulo G. Pinto and Kathryn Spellman-Poots

The opinions expressed in this volume are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations.

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Introduction

BAUDOUIN DUPRET, THOMAS PIERRET,
PAULO PINTO AND KATHRYN SPELLMAN-POOTS

In the past three decades, the social sciences in general, and anthropology in particular, have developed an ambiguous relationship with their descriptive traditions, as epistemic relativism and self-defeating critique have led scholars to reflexive deadlocks and fruitless glossing over issues. Instead of attempting to describe the social world as it unfolds when empirically observed, researchers often lose the actual object of interest and propose new narratives in its place that are devoid of the contextual and praxiological specificities of any actual situation. This holds especially true where religious phenomena are concerned. This is probably due to a theorising attitude, what Wittgenstein called the "craving for generality", that looks for big explicative schemes and neglects the situational and self-producing capacity of the social world to produce its own endogenous order. Without advocating a return to positivism, we contend that the social sciences should pay closer attention to actual social practices and adopt a more empirical and analytical attitude vis-à-vis their object of scrutiny.

We can identify at least three problems in the social sciences which justify some sort of ethnographic re-specification of our attitude vis-à-vis "the real". The first one is the tendency to seek for the nature of things instead of their workings, which often results in a "descriptive gap". The second is the quest for data which is often oblivious to the conditions of how this data is produced and thus provide the reader with sketches that somehow miss the phenomena under scrutiny. The third problem resides in the depreciation of descriptive work due to its limited capacity for explanation; although an adequate description is nothing less than a thorough analysis of a chunk of the world as it actually functions.

An important development in the social sciences over the past three decades has been the spread of the ethnographic approach beyond the boundaries of

CHAPTER 8

Worshipping the Martyr President: The Darih of Rafiq Hariri in Beirut

WARD VLOEBERGHES

The tomb (*darih*) of Rafiq Hariri (*Rafiq al-Hariri*) is one of two elements that make up the mausoleum of the late Lebanese tycoon-turned-politician.¹ Every year, the site draws bus-loads of visitors from inside and outside Lebanon. In spite of its touristic popularity, the burial site and the practices surrounding it have received very little scholarly attention.

Throughout the descriptive analysis below I shall present the location and development of the tomb followed by the salient characteristics of the cult attached to it. I explore the *darih* as a shrine defined by Eickelman as “more than just a building”. In fact, shrines often encompass a whole set of “rituals, symbols, and shifting social and spiritual ties that link believers to Islam and create a sacred geography”.²

In order to highlight the characteristics of this unique urban feature, this chapter examines both the political and religious aspects of the tomb from an ethnographic perspective. By discussing artefacts and practices found or observed on-site, I demonstrate how a detailed account of the funerary complex allows us to reveal a number of ongoing dynamics that other methods might easily overlook but which, in fact, illustrate how the tomb continues to be relevant for Lebanese actors in articulating the boundaries of their constituencies and territories. Contrary to press surveys or interviews which inevitably recall events through intermediaries, the ethnographic method encourages direct observation and first-hand access to those practices that are of interest to the researcher who aims to bridge the aforementioned descriptive gap and analyse the realities of everyday life in considerable detail. This chapter engages in substance with the (re)arrangements in the physical layout of the tomb as well as shifts in the political and religious connotations attached to it.

After the assassination of ex-prime minister Rafiq Hariri, his family acted quickly to acquire a plot of land immediately next to the luxurious Muhammad al-Amin mosque. Hariri had commissioned this mosque on Beirut's most emblematic public square as a pious coronation of his impressive if not undisputed reconstruction efforts in central Beirut.³ The positioning of the tomb itself was hardly a coincidence and both the mosque and the tomb are inextricably connected – if only because a direct passage connects the tomb to the mosque via a couple of stairs hidden between two dedicated trees.⁴

The construction of a monumental mosque on Martyrs' Square (a strategic site that occupies a prominent place in Lebanese political history) has had a strong impact on residents as well as on occasional visitors. The will (not only Hariri's) to bestow a landmark of Muslim civilisation onto the skyline of Beirut can be seen as a meaningful gesture that has not taken long to spark acts of contestation. This became especially apparent during the activities of a paralysing sit-in (*i'tisam*) staged by opponents of Hariri's coalition between December 2006 and May 2008. The campaign not only caused an institutional deadlock but, in a subtle, complex and dialectal way, also turned the surroundings of the emerging mausoleum into a locus of spatially contested power.

SITE LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

On Wednesday, 16 February 2005, two days after his assassination by a heavy car bomb, tens of thousands of supporters carried Hariri's coffin from his residence in Qoraytem to its final destination in central Beirut where a large white tent structure had been erected to accommodate what was to become commonly known as *ad-darih*.⁵ In the case of the tomb of Rafiq Hariri, this term designates the spacious area covered by the shelter, which hosts Hariri's tomb as well as the graves of seven of his bodyguards. Although the funeral complex (see Figure 8.1) nowadays presents itself as an integrated whole, it has gone through considerable alterations since 2005.

Initially, nothing indicated that Hariri would be buried in this particular location (or in Beirut at all) and the decision to do so can be qualified as a political one.⁷ However, once the ceremony at the Muhammad al-Amin mosque was over and Hariri had been laid to rest just next to it, events rapidly succeeded each other. Vast amounts of people amassed at the nascent grave-site and soon the tomb became a popular attraction and media spectacle.

During these early days, the tomb resembled a big, green, white and red pile of souvenirs left by visitors (see Figure 8.2). Flowers heaping up on an ever-widening space atop Hariri's grave were cordoned off by a large circle of planters filled with sand and candles. The shelter covering tombs and visitors soon turned into a space that people creatively fitted out with more Lebanese flags, portraits



Figure 8.1 An overview of Hariri's grave-site (under the white shelters) bordering Martyrs' Square, the Muhammad al-Amin mosque, the Maronite cathedral of St George and the Garden of Forgiveness (under development) in 2006. (Photo: W. Vloeberghs)

of Hariri, children's drawings, tributes, wreaths and copies of the *surat al-fatiha*. One also discerned candles with pictures of Mar Charbel (a Catholic monk venerated as a saint by many Lebanese Maronites) or the Virgin Mary.

In the weeks after Hariri's dramatic assassination, the concept of "*ciné-diner-darih*" appeared as a popular locution among Beirut residents, reflecting the extent to which visiting the tomb of the ex-prime minister had become an ordinary, almost leisurely activity. Spurred on by its touch of novelty, people would pay a visit to the *darih* just as they might have gone for a walk along the "corniche" or visited an internet café. Other practices soon emerged, as impressive numbers of common citizens took possession of the site, now easily accessible twenty-four hours a day. Parents took their children there on an excursion, and numerous recently-married couples visited. Victorious football teams insisted on having themselves photographed in front of Hariri's grave. These practices are all in line with Eickelman's concept of a shrine, since he maintains that "visits to shrines secure blessings for the household and can be used to signal changes in personal status – marriage, the birth of a child, or mourning".⁸



Figure 8.2 Hariri's tomb in April 2005 (upper) and April 2006 (lower). (Photo: W. Vloeberghs)

Gradually the site became more properly organised by Oger Liban,⁹ which oversees the maintenance of the grave-site, and large printed banners with pictures, slogans and messages of commemoration, as well as propaganda material, appeared. For instance, a digital screen was installed that counted the days that had elapsed since the day of the assassination, above which in red letters stood the phrase “*al-haqiqa ... li-ajli Lubnan*” meaning: “the truth, for the sake of Lebanon”.

This call for “truth” referred to the claim for an international enquiry to determine who was responsible for the murder of Hariri. The claim was expressed repeatedly in the months following February 2005 by Hariri’s family, supporters and (international) allies, and it became a political mantra for the emerging 14 March movement. In this sense, the truth and the sentence *li-ajli Lubnan* was a vengeful truth, implicitly thought to be directed against what was seen as the “lies” coming from Damascus, as well as showing opposition to a chaperoning role by Syria, perceived as hostile to a sovereign Lebanon.

As crowds continued to show up, a system had to be found to organise and manage visits to the site. Surveillance personnel appeared, as did crush barriers and, later on, a CCTV system. Soon, Hariri’s own grave was being rearranged. A wide elevated bed of white flowers was installed on top of it while huge pictures showing Hariri kissing his father’s hand, sitting next to his mother or visiting “his” reconstructed city centre came to surround his tomb. A giant Lebanese flag was hung from the ceiling over a lozenge-shaped space subtly sealed off by a dark-red velvet-cloaked cord, the sort of barriers one encounters in palaces or museums. On the walls behind the tomb were more Lebanese flags.

To the left of Hariri’s grave (when facing it) an impressive composition of identical white flower diadems was installed. Each one bears the name of one of his (grand)children and all have the same portrait of the *pater familias* at their centre. On top of these garlands stands a similar spray, this time with red flowers – presumably offered by Hariri’s wife, Nazik – with the words *ila rafiq ‘umri*.¹⁰ All floral arrangements on-site were made of fresh flowers which were specially flown in from Italy until artificial ones were installed in 2011.

To the right of Hariri’s tomb, a short corridor formed by transportable barriers leads to a separate chamber accommodating the graves of seven of Hariri’s private bodyguards who perished with him when their motorcade was blown up. The design of Hariri’s tomb and those of his bodyguards has been carefully studied to comply with religious and aesthetic guidelines as the bodies were placed on an axis defined by the Ka’aba in Mecca and the Martyrs’ Statue.

Simultaneously with the rearrangement of Hariri’s grave, the tombs of his security personnel were more neatly organised. In the beginning, each of them had been decorated with flowers, little Lebanese flags, pictures of the deceased, candles and a ring of flowers bearing Hariri’s picture (see Figure 8.3).



Figure 8.3 The tombs of Hariri’s seven bodyguards in April 2005 (upper) and April 2006 (lower). (Photo: W. Vloeberghs)

As the site continued to be developed, the bare earth of the early days was covered with a green carpet, and a more sophisticated presentation appeared. Behind the graves, the shelter was closed off by a wide banner reproducing the Lebanese flag while a large white wreath was placed in front of each tomb. All tombs mentioned the mother's first name next to the bodyguard's full name. The tombs were now each covered by a large Lebanese flag, with a flower arrangement and a framed portrait depicting the bodyguard next to Hariri installed on top of each tomb. Strings of praying (and playing) beads (*misbaha*) hung from the corners of frames containing a picture or an Islamic blessing. Finally, behind the tombs another large display of white flowers bore a religious dedication.

During the past couple of years, the layout of the site has tended overall to exhibit fewer but more strictly selected objects and images. This objective is accomplished through frequent and ongoing reorganisations of the posters and artefacts on display. The rationale behind this selection is not only to provide for a more orderly, choreographed space but also to create a setting that is in tune with the prevailing socio-political circumstances. Permanent artificial lighting and selected Qur'anic recitations create an atmosphere conducive to piety and worship. The main objective seems to be to generate an ever-perfect, almost sanitised portrait of Rafiq Hariri combining orderliness with enhanced visibility.

Furthermore, access is another way to analyse the changing disposition at the *darih*. While no formal admission procedure applied in the beginning, eventually guards would operate a brief but efficient control of visitors, asking them to open bags and sometimes, conducting full security scans.

Thus, while the site displayed a spontaneous and uncoordinated character in the beginning, it gradually developed into an ever-more elaborate and structured shrine – complete with life-size portraits, paraphernalia and an accompanying cult.¹¹

AN EMERGING CULT

Several factors converge to explain how and why Rafiq Hariri acquired the status of a mythical "martyr". His considerable achievements in life – as the single most powerful Lebanese politician to have emerged since the late 1980s – and his international radiance with direct access to global leaders are only part of this explanation. Indeed, it is the brutality of his assassination combined with thoughtful planning and political manoeuvring that have resulted in the current reverence. The fact that he is nowadays systematically referred to as *ar-ra'is ash-shahid* (the martyr president) is but one example of this trend. Within less than a year, the *darih* had become a pilgrimage site that, just like its martyr during his lifetime, imposed itself on the local political liturgy.

While there may have been a brief period (in the first two months or so after Hariri's assassination) when visiting the *darih* was quite an acceptable mourning practice for individuals of virtually all political, social and religious backgrounds, this changed rapidly. Since the site was attached to anti-Syrian rhetoric, it soon became caught up in a climate of political polarisation whereby the Lebanese increasingly came under (social) pressure to take sides along the divide between the so-called "8 March" and "14 March" coalitions. A number of interventions and activities at the tomb and its immediate vicinity reflect a sustained and orchestrated endeavour to nourish the relevance of the grave-site as a political forum as well as efforts to renew and reformulate the legacy of Rafiq Hariri.

Some examples of such practices include a staged celebration of the first anniversary of the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, flowers offered at the *darih* on the occasion of Hariri's sixty-third birthday, and the commemoration of "Day 1000" after the assassination.¹² Of particular interest in this respect is the installation at the *darih* of a showcase containing a solemn plaque celebrating the establishment of the basic framework for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon by the adoption of resolution 1757 by the UN Security Council in May 2007.

Among the most significant series of activities contributing to the establishment of Hariri's shrine as a new centre of political life was the phenomenon of an annual pilgrimage. Every year since 2005, a large commemorative gathering has been organised on 14 February and no expense has been spared to publicise the event or to attract supporters. These mass manifestations as well as their professional management have confirmed the centrality of the *darih* as a locus for political mobilisation.¹³

Furthermore, scenes of Lebanese and foreign dignitaries visiting Hariri's tomb have become standard political practice, almost since the installation of the *darih*. As a longstanding friend of the Hariri family, French President Jacques Chirac was the first foreign official to pay his respects to Rafiq al-Hariri at his burial site. Just hours after the latter's funeral, Chirac appeared at the freshly arranged grave, accompanied by his wife Bernadette, Nazik and Saad al-Hariri. Together they joined a large circle of Lebanese citizens surrounding the flowered, candle-lit tomb in a moment of silence and prayer.

National and international, political and religious dignitaries swiftly followed suit, eager to mark their visit to Beirut by a show of appreciation for the slain politician and his family. Among those who came to pay their respects at the *darih* were Kofi Annan (Secretary General of the UN), Condoleezza Rice (US Secretary of State), Nancy Pelosi (Speaker of the US House of Representatives), Angela Merkel (German Chancellor), Gulf leaders, high-ranking EU diplomats and many others. They were joined by numerous Lebanese politicians and religious dignitaries. Mufti Qabbani (Lebanon's most senior Sunni official) was frequently photographed at the *darih* while Walid Jumblatt, then a pillar

of Hariri's coalition, was one of the first politicians to participate in such ritual visits. In March 2006, even Hizbullah's Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah came to the grave-site in person.¹⁴

Not only does the visit of a dignitary strengthen the cult of Hariri, it also confers considerable visibility and legitimacy upon the visitor(s) in question. These appearances must be seen as political statements and expressions of sympathy to the family, the person of Hariri and even to his allies who continue "his fight" – however they may (re)define it. Such visits perpetuate Hariri's ability to attract the world's elite and the ease with which he "circulates" among the famous and powerful. Finally, particularly during the first ten months following Hariri's inhumation, the public exhibitions of mourning and grief at his grave generated valuable scenes of trans-confessional tolerance and (inter-)national unity which fuelled Hariri's political heirs and allies.

Interestingly, however, the trajectory of the tomb as a symbol of national consensus was rather ephemeral; it soon became invested with sectarian meanings and competing narratives about truth and national unity, thus reflecting the semantic shifts that these terms, as well as the concept of "darīh" itself, suffered during the waxing of Hariri's cult.

As I have indicated, during the early weeks, one could find Lebanese of varying age, descent and confession ritually burning candles, placing flowers and praying side by side.

Hariri's grave was initially surrounded by a permanent cordon of mourners: Christians praying and making the sign of the cross, Muslims next to them reading from tiny copies of the Qur'an.¹⁵

Later on, specific objects indicated the manifest will to create an atmosphere of Islamic piety: a large picture of Hariri performing the *Hajj*, prayer beads and written or spoken Qur'anic verses are all elements of the religious character of the cult and worship woven around the "martyr president". So there is a large stone Qur'an, standing on a book holder – obviously a present, as it is dedicated "to the soul of the martyr Rafiq al-Hariri". Next to it stands a shield-shaped plate (see Figure 8.4) displaying *surat ya sin*, a gift from the Union of Beirut family associations.¹⁶ Perhaps as indicative of the religious aspect of the cult are little black prayer books occasionally distributed at the *darīh*,¹⁷ or the ceremonial atmosphere of hushed conversations created by the tranquil transmissions of *tartil* (a specific way of Qur'an recitation) by Shaykh Khalil al-Husari. Tellingly, many attendants of the Friday prayer precede their entry to the Muhammad al-Amin mosque with a visit to the tomb.

The markedly religious character of the cult surrounding Rafiq al-Hariri at his tomb and, in particular, an apparent tendency to add Sunni elements to it must be understood in relation to a wider trend of increased communal polarisation that affected Lebanese society soon after Rafiq al-Hariri's assassination. This



Figure 8.4 Shield with Quranic verse, a gift from Beirut families to "Rafiq of Beirut" (2009). (Photo: W. Vloeberghs)

eventually culminated, first, in a sit-in protest that lasted for eighteen months and then, in May 2008, in the violent takeover of Sunni parts of Beirut by Shi'i militias.¹⁸

The sit-in saw supporters of opposition parties (mainly Michel Aoun's FPM, Amal and Hizbullah) camping in tents, thus closing off downtown Beirut which is considered as government territory. Although the sit-in should not be seen as a direct response to the installation of the mausoleum but rather as a reaction to the situation prevailing after Hariri's assassination, the protestors' choice of location was highly symbolic and anything but accidental. It is therefore interesting to note how the ethnographic approach allows us to document exactly how one and the same place has been used as a locus for competing truths. This partisan mobilisation, the proliferation of counter-narratives and competition between various truths, including religious ones, around Hariri's funerary complex not only illustrates how relative truth can be; it is also an urban, spatial expression of ongoing political contest.

In a delicate but unmistakable manner, the layout of the grave-site both responded to this evolution and participated in it. In other words, the gradual elaboration of Hariri's funerary complex became caught up in a political struggle

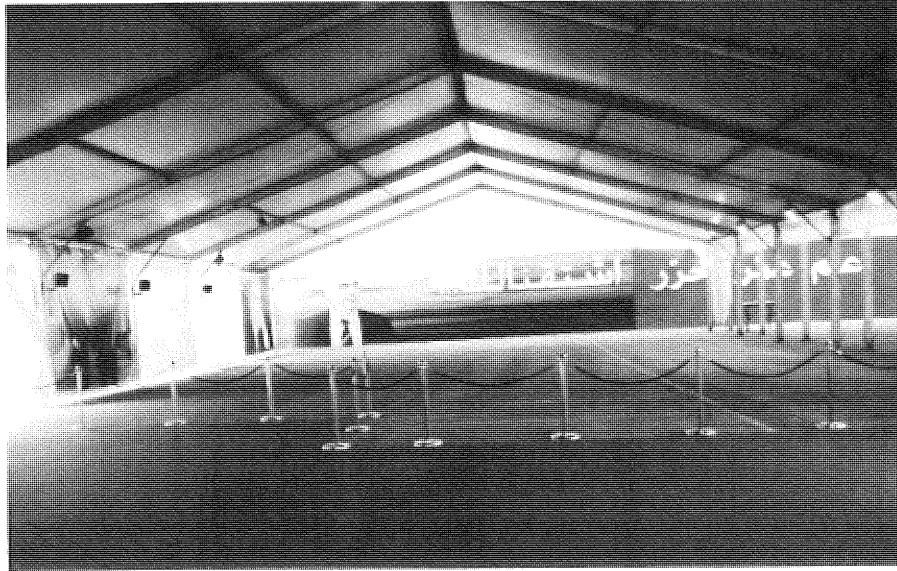


Figure 8.5 A considerable area of the funerary complex has yet to be developed (2009). (Photo: W. Vloeberghs)

where the *darih* served as a formidable forum and an instrument of political mobilisation in a context of heightened communal polarisation in Lebanon.

The apparent tendency to emphasise Sunni identity at and from the *darih* as well as Hariri's entombment next to the mosque itself – while in contradiction to Wahhabi interpretations of Islam eschewing any form of shrine-based idolatry or person-related commemoration – provide a poignant illustration of the *social construction* of a communitarian symbol by (at least parts of) the Sunni community in Lebanon. In fact, the ethnographic account of commemorative practices observed at Hariri's grave-site presented so far shows an even more interesting phenomenon, namely the transition of an emerging national hero to a markedly communitarian symbol in reflection of an evolved political climate. This seems to be corroborated by the fact that, notwithstanding its numerous international visitors, the site nowadays attracts more confessionally uniform visitors than had been the case immediately after its installation.

CONCLUSION

Given all these improvised practices and orchestrated rituals, the *darih* appears as a sacred space entirely appropriated by the Hariri family as a sanctuary for its founding father. As to the future development of the site, it should be added that large parts of the space covered by the tents are currently left unused (see

Figure 8.5) – perhaps because the shelter is but temporary housing for the tomb. At the time of writing, one of Hariri's children – Fahd, his youngest son – was contributing to the design of a more permanent structure to accommodate what may sooner or later become a fully-fledged commemorative complex.

This ethnography of the tomb of Rafiq Hariri, its material culture and the practices associated with it enable us to understand this process and how the *darih* is much more than a space of remembrance devoted to a particular person. For those who visit his shrine and even more so for those who visit it frequently, the practices, convictions and sympathies attached to the grave-site are not only religious or political in nature. The meticulous ethnographic description of the characteristics of Hariri's tomb allows us to transcend initial appearances by providing a distinct understanding of the dynamics at play, most notably by indicating how they may cover various, mutually contradictory realities and visions.

The tomb is in perpetual evolution, neither its distinctive features nor its framing are ever stable but always shifting in relation to the actors' political needs and the subtle complexities of Lebanese multi-confessional society. Highlighting the ever-changing layout of the tomb as a succession of overlapping and unstable narratives helps to establish this and, moreover, how the tomb is being carefully monitored and adjusted in order to sustain and legitimise Hariri's legacy. Illustrating this process in detail allows us to better understand how a contemporary martyr is being worshipped and how a contemporary shrine is being strengthened through the social interactions of its commissioners and visitors.

NOTES

1. The second constitutive element of the mausoleum, the Muhammad al-Amin mosque, is not considered here because the mosque does not actually belong to Rafiq Hariri but to the Directorate General of Islamic Awqaf, and because the cult of Rafiq Hariri can be best observed at his tomb. A detailed study can be found in Ward Vloeberghs, *A Building of Might and Faith: Rafiq al-Hariri and the Muhammad al-Amin Mosque. On the Political Dimensions of Religious Architecture in Contemporary Beirut*, PhD thesis, University of Louvain (UCL, Belgium), 2010.
2. Dale F. Eickelman, "Shrine", in John Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 4, New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 69–71.
3. Nasser Shammaa, close to the Hariri family and chairman of Solidere (to whom the parcel of land technically belonged), was involved in the discussions of this overnight decision. However, the exact details of this transaction (surface area, price, conditions, and so on) remain undisclosed.
4. One of them, "planted in earth from all Lebanese provinces" on 10 April 2005, was dedicated to "national unity" at the occasion of the Beirut Marathon while the second tree was unveiled on 3 September 2005 as "a tree of peace for a man of

- peace" by the youngsters of Hariri's Mustaqbal (Future) party.
5. The scholar Taha al-Wali informs us that a *darih* is usually understood to be "any luxurious tomb where a man of standing or high rank is buried or any notable or 'alim". He cites Riad as-Solh's burial site as an example of a *darih*. See Taha al-Wali, *Al-Masjid fi-l-Islam*, Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1988, pp. 126–7.
 6. The structure consists of two parallel rectangular shelters (80 by 36 metres and 80 by 35 metres, respectively) and one smaller triangular tent covering the guards' tombs. Two hundred and fifty labourers from the Hariri family's contracting company Oger Liban had worked from 10 pm on Monday evening until 4 am on Wednesday morning to have the site ready in time. See *an-Nahar*, 16 February 2005.
 7. Many expected that Hariri would be buried in his birth town of Saida, where he had commissioned a commemorative mosque for his mother and another even larger one to honour his father. In addition, the funeral became politicised when the Hariri family declared that it had refused a state funeral.
 8. Eickelman, "Shrine", p. 70.
 9. Oger Liban is a contracting company owned by the Hariri family.
 10. This is a literary pun which translates either as "to my life companion" or "to Rafiq, my life".
 11. I am grateful to Kathryn Spellman Poots and Paulo Pinto for pointing out similarities between the cult of Hariri and the practices of remembrance surrounding Princess Diana (1961–97) and Juan Perón (1895–1974) respectively. Also, I am grateful for an exchange with Konstantin Kastrissianakis.
 12. See respectively *al-Liwa*, 27 April 2006 (on the withdrawal anniversary), *al-Liwa*, 2 November 2007 (on Hariri's birthday) and *al-Liwa*, 12 November 2007 (on the 1000 days of martyrdom).
 13. Following the 2006 edition, the family thanked its supporters on billboards with the text "More than a million thanks, Saad al-Hariri".
 14. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 4 March 2006.
 15. Nicholas Blanford, *Killing Mr Lebanon. The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and its Impact on the Middle East*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, p. 153 (discussing events on 21 February 2005).
 16. It is dedicated to "Rafiq (companion) of Beirut", as if to boost his credentials as a Beirut *za'im* (communal leader) rather than a scion of Saida.
 17. Entitled "Prayer for the Martyr President Rafiq Bahaa ad-Din al-Hariri", the eight-page prayer booklet contains fifty-two prayers. I thank Didier Leroy for providing me with a copy.
 18. The strengthening of confessional identities intensified during the sit-in and reached a paroxysm in May 2008 when Shi'i militias took over Sunni parts of Beirut in a couple of hours. That traumatic event made way for a more inclusive discourse emphasising national unity and religious coexistence later on in 2008, as became evident at the inauguration ceremony of the Muhammad al-Amin mosque in October 2008. Tensions soared in 2010 and 2011 over the "Hariri Tribunal".