Fabrice Balanche, in *Lebanon after the Cedar Revolution*, Are Knudsen and Michael Kerr, 2012, London, Hurst, 323 p.

The socio-economic dimensions of the Lebanese conflict have often been overlooked in favour of political and geopolitical readings since the Syrian withdrawal in 2005. The same is true of the Arab Spring of 2011. Granted, the search for freedom and democracy are universal aspirations. But the deterioration of real or perceived living conditions and a frustration born of unequal economic growth also generates political contestation. The endemic conflicts in Lebanon are thus not a simple effect of regional geo-politics, even if they accentuate the internal problems. Based on my experience living in Lebanon (2003–7) and research in political geography in this country conducted over the past decade, this chapter argues that the policy of reconstruction3 followed by Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and his successors in this post is largely responsible for the current crisis, because it was unable to solve any of the pre-1975 problems. As George Corm writes: 'It is either wilful blindness or a dangerous illusion to think that trade and some luxury tourist services will solve the grave structural, political, eco-nomic and financial crisis with which the country has been struggling since the end of the war'.

From the end of the civil war in 1990 until the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, political tensions existed but were mostly silenced by the presence of the Syrian army. Following the Syrian army's departure, these conflicts could no longer be suppressed. After the civil war, the reconstruction of the Lebanese state was confronted with many dificulties such as foreign occu-pation (by Syria and Israel), former militia control of various parts of the territory, widespread corruption and, moreover, an international process that can best be described as 'a steady decline of state institutions' with globalisation. Moreover, Hariri tried to place Lebanon on the path of eco-nomic liberalisation, a political position whose declared aim was to restore Beirut's pre-war position as an international financial centre and a tourist destination for wealthy Arabs from the Gulf.

This chapter proposes a political geography reading of the conflict in Lebanon since 2005. For this, we need to go back to Lebanon's reconstruction policy since 1990, and particularly its impact in Beirut, where it appears to have been a mere continuation of the civil war by other means. The proposed approach consists of a reading of space to understand the dialectical relationship of power struggles. The study of public policy and the dif-ferent actors is thus an essential first step, before subsequently considering the interplay of various spatial scales. Since Lebanon is an arena for regional and international conflicts, geopolitics are inescapable. However, although spatial processes in Lebanon are strongly connected with regional policy, the latter should not be a prerequisite for analysing Lebanon. In fact, social and therefore territorial fragmentation in Lebanon, mostly due to civil war, is responsible for

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weak state sovereignty, not the other way around.

Hariri's Lebanon: An 'Under-Developed' Country

After fifteen years of civil war (1975–90), Lebanon embarked on a policy of national reconstruction under the leadership of Rafik Hariri, a Lebanese businessman of humble origins who made his fortunes in Saudi Arabia and was appointed prime minister in 1992 as the result of a Syrian-Saudi agreement. The combination of profit and politics has been a constant feature of Lebanese political life, even at the height of the civil war. Indeed, the coun-try witnessed its only truly independent executive policy during the term of President Fuad Chehab from 1958 to 1964. However, this brief attempt to build a strong and modern state ran up against coalitions of notables from all the major Lebanese confessional communities, as well as the intervention of major powers. Hariri was the perfect inheritor of this Lebanese political class—'*fromagistes*', in the words of Fuad Chehab—which sought to take economic advantage of political power instead of implementing a public policy benefitting the people. Hariri regarded the reconstruction of Leba-non as a means of bringing Beirut back to the position it enjoyed before the civil war. He sought to re-establish the city as the interface between the East and West, as a hub for commercial trafic, as a tax haven that would attract capital from the Gulf and as the favourite destination for tourists from the petrodollar monarchies. It has succeeded on the latter two points, becoming a tax haven and attracting Arab tourists but, as we shall see, it has lost its importance as a port and a hub.

Hariri's policy was part and parcel of a very ambitious economic project. It sought to establish Beirut as a metropolis capable of integrating Lebanon into the new global economy, a policy that was certainly optimistic in its evaluation of a prompt resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and reconciliation between all the Lebanese factions. To the discharge of Hariri, after the end of the Cold War, many businessmen, politicians and people in the Near East were optimists too, but it seems that Hariri ignored the economic changes that were taking place in the Middle East during the time when Lebanon was torn apart by civil war. In fact, since 1975, the countries of the Gulf had begun developing their own transport infrastructures and investing their financial resources. The city of Dubai had established itself as the main economic centre in the Middle East. But still Hariri based his post-war reconstruction of Lebanon on the myth that Lebanon would, once again, be the 'Switzerland of the Middle East'.

Tourism and finance were promoted at the expense of manufacturing and agricultural activities. Hariri signed an association agreement with the European Union, which included a free-trade agreement, as well as various free-trade agreements with other Arab countries, notably Syria. In this respect, he joined the Arab common market (GAFTA). Faced with brutal

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competition from the whole world a few years after the end of the civil war, and without any government backing, Lebanon's industrial sector, which at the time was still important, was quickly shattered by foreign competition. In 2009, the industry's contribution to GDP was 6.1 per cent, against 13.7 per cent in 1997 and 15.9 per cent in 1970.

Some dissenting voices complained that this policy was Hariri's way (and more generally the Sunnis' way) of weakening the Christians, since most industrialists belonged to the Christian communities, while the Sunnis controlled Lebanon's trade and the import and export markets.16 In Lebanon, any political decision is interpreted in sectarian terms. Of course, one cannot exclude the communitarian aspect of any economic decision taken in Lebanon, as communities and politics are linked, hence the constitution of a Christian opposition to Hariri's policies. Nevertheless, in this case, we have at hand a more traditional opposition between production and trade interests in the Middle East, an opposition that is itself based upon two different conceptions of the role of the state. Producers want protectionism and merchants an open market. In the first case, the state is a protector, while in the second it is an obstacle to private business interests.

Economic liberalisation ruined many professions in the manufacturing sector, especially ones that required certain skills that were not offset, either in quantity or in quality, by the reinforcement of the tourism sector and the development of finance. The resumption of youth emigration, especially of Lebanese graduates, was a direct consequence of this policy. Between 1996 and 2001, emigration percentages, in both absolute and relative terms, rose to levels even higher than those during the civil war. This was a cruel awakening to those who had hoped to return to Lebanon after their forced exile. The middle classes that had resisted the conflict were becoming more and more impoverished, whereas political patronage (clientelism), mostly established on confessional grounds, resumed its role, undermining the fragile return to democracy.

Indifferent to the deterioration of the standard of living of the majority of Lebanese, Hariri, like the Lebanese oligarchy in general, was preoccu-pied with the reconstruction of Beirut. The ruins of the city centre were put under the control of a private company named 'Solidere'. Most of the damaged buildings were demolished by the company, except those with patrimonial significance, such as the Beirut Synagogue. Those who sold properties were given shares from the company, but Hariri was the major shareholder.

The creation of Solidere necessitated a vast campaign of corruption and bribery by Hariri that targeted all the main decision-makers of the country. Solidere has been in charge of the reconstruction of downtown Beirut ever since, and this area became the symbol of the 'new Lebanon'. The Hariri government therefore concentrated investments on Beirut and its

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communication infrastructure, to the detriment of the rest of the country. The financial power of prime minister and businessman Hariri and his control of the Beirut municipality allowed him to draw huge profits from the reconstruction of the downtown area.

Controlling the Beirut Municipality

Lebanon's municipal oficials are elected democratically, without any obligation to comply with confessional quotas. This is contrary to the legislative elections where a fixed number of deputies by religious confession are elected and the nominations for the key posts as (Maronite) president, (Sunni) prime minister and the (Shia) speaker of parliament. Despite their non-confessional nature, the lists for municipal elections try to respect the communitarian distribution of the population. Politicians justify this prin-ciple by reference to the National Pact of 1943, which defines Lebanon as a consensual democracy where no major confession (Sunni, Shia, Maronite, Druze, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Armenian) should be excluded from power. More practically, this system helps garner the largest number of votes by incorporating representatives of each community.

However, the representation of the population within the municipality is based on registered voters and not actual residents. Indeed, the Lebanese do not vote where they reside but in their village of origin, where their ancestors lived in 1932, the year when the first and only population census was completed in modern Lebanon. The transfer of legal domicile is pos-sible in theory but very dificult in practice. Oficially, the electoral lists were not changed after the civil war, to avoid regularising the displacement of population after the war. Examples include the expulsion of Christians from the Shouf and West Beirut, or Muslims from East Beirut. Unoficially, politicians have an interest in freezing the electoral lists in order to control the voting process through traditional middlemen who negotiate the purchase of votes for MPs and municipalities. It is not uncommon on election day to see buses chartered by oficials and political parties filled with registered voters in their community of origin with which they have not had any physical link for the past half-century. They come to vote for the list of the highest bidder. These practices often change the outcome of the polls and augment the disillusionment of the Lebanese about their political institutions.

Often enough, the elected mayors and members of the municipal coun-cils are, like the voters, fictitious residents. They present themselves for elections to defend the interests of their family or to become the natural successors of a relative who is also the head of the municipality. Nepotism is a very vivid Lebanese political tradition. In addition, municipal manage-ment can be very lucrative through the control of real estate since the mayors are empowered to issue building permits.

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In Beirut, businessman Hariri evoked communitarian sensibilities and deployed his enormous financial assets29 in order to control the municipality. Nobody could suc-ceed against Hariri's fortune in Beirut. As prime minister, he also controlled the nomination of the *muhafez* [governor] of the city, who is appointed by the cabinet, the council of ministers. The mayor is traditionally from the Greek Orthodox community, since it is one of the two original Beirut com-munities (the second one is the Sunni community). On the other hand, the Maronite, Shia, Armenian and Druze populations consist of communities who have recently moved to the city. They are still mostly on the margins of the urban space, even if they will eventually be integrated into the city's urban fabric.

The political conflict between President Emile Lahoud (in ofice from 1998 to 2007) and Prime Minister Hariri had repercussions for the municipality of Beirut. Between 2000 and 2005, the *muhafez* was a man close to Lahoud, while the municipal council was supporters of Hariri. During this period, the *muhafez* consistently opposed the construction projects of Hariri. After the Syrian withdrawal in mid-2005, Hariri's successor, Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, managed to appoint a new governor (the former governor became a minister in Siniora's cabinet on behalf of the opposition) who was more sympathetic to the business interests of the Hariri family. His appointment allowed Hariri's business ventures to resume construction projects despite the political turmoil aflicting the country. Indeed, the growth of property investment after 2005 is more likely to be linked to the total control of the municipal executive power by the Hariri family than to any confidence in the Lebanese economy. This control provides the Hariri family with a steady income from the urban services that are delegated by the municipality to private companies. For example, Sukleen, a company owned by the Hariri family through a figurehead, obtained the contract for rubbish collection in Beirut and the Greater Beirut Area with an inflated fee of USD 100 per ton, while it only earns USD 25 per ton in the municipal-ity of Zahleh, another major city of the country.To avoid a default from the cash-strapped municipalities, Sukleen obtained, by virtue of a decision of the council of ministers, the right to be refunded directly by the Autono-mous Municipal Fund (*La caisse autonome des municipalités*). This fund is, in theory only, under the control of the ministry of interior but is, in fact, controlled by the ministry of finance and, therefore, by Hariri partisans. From 1992 to 2004, except during the short-lived Salim al-Hoss govern-ment (1998–2000), Siniora, Hariri's childhood friend, was finance minister.

After the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, Siniora became prime minister (2005–9) but maintained control over the ministry of finance through his collaborators. The last finance minister in the (Saad) Hariri government (2009–11) was Raya Haffar al-Hassan, a member of the board of the Future Movement. Recently, Alain Bifani, general director of finance, denounced the Hariri and Siniora governments for their lack of transparency and accountability in the

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ministry of finance.

It is generally acknowledged that the profits generated by Sukleen, amounting to about USD 60 million per year, are used to finance the elec-toral campaigns of the Future Movement which is controlled by the Hariri family. The new government, formed in June 2011 under the premiership of Najib Mikati, tried to cancel the Sukleen privileges and refused to pay the company until a new agreement was reached.

In 2010, more than 1.5 million inhabitants lived in Greater Beirut, or about 35 per cent of Lebanon's total population. Despite its size, Greater Beirut has no executive institution or even an umbrella coordination entity. The *muhafez* of Beirut does not have this prerogative, since he only governs the municipality of Beirut with its 400,000 inhabitants and 20 square kilo-metres (which is less than 23 per cent of the Greater Beirut population and 8 per cent of the urbanised area). The bulk of the urban area is located in the *muhafaza* of Mount Lebanon (an autonomous *Mutassarifat* during the Ottoman era) because administrative divisions did not change after the French mandate, and most of the urban growth takes place outside the Beirut *muhafaza*. There has been no attempt to create a 'metropolitan coun-cil' to govern Greater Beirut. This is due to irreconcilable differences between the Shias living in the southern suburbs, headed by Hizbollah and Amal, the Sunnis who form the majority within the capital and who are led by the Future Movement of the Hariri family, and the Christians, who are powerful in the eastern suburbs of the city. The southern suburbs, *Dahiyeh*, have an informal management unit created and directed by Hizbollah and in charge of the suburb's municipalities. However, this unit cannot serve as a substitute for the state in large-scale infrastructure projects other than in emergency cases. During the Israeli blitz in the summer of 2006, large sections of the southern suburbs were devastated by Israeli warplanes. To reconstruct them, Hizbollah's development wing, *Jihad al-Binaa*, conceived a reconstruction project tasked to rebuild the *Dahiyeh*, called *Waad* (prom-ise), after the 'promise' given by Hassan Nasrallah. The southern suburbs constitute a single Shia urban entity, while the eastern suburbs are torn between the various Christian political parties—the Lebanese Forces, the Free Patriotic Movement, the Kataeb and local leaders like Michel Murr. There is no overall management of the metropolitan area, which partially explains the dificulties in establishing viable systems for transportation, water and electricity. But above all, this institutional blur benefits the property developers by offering them investment opportunities they would not have obtained through an agglomeration council representing the entire Greater Beirut area. Even if such a council, like the municipali-ties, had little concern for urban planning, all political parties would be represented in it and could therefore oppose, or at least denounce, the excesses regarding the management of real estate. The Hariri family is the main beneficiary of the weakness of local governance in Greater Beirut, which has

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ensured that there is minimal legal impediment to its many real estate projects.

The Privatisation of Beirut's Reconstruction under Hariri

The city of Beirut is run in accordance with the financial interests of the Hariri family.46 Building permits in the most lucrative areas are routinely blocked by the municipality if the projects are not led by a member of the Hariri clientele. Conversely, when partisans of the Hariri clan want to side-step the regulations on urban development, such as building height etc., they receive exemptions. This can be substantiated with reference to the Lebanese chapter of Transparency International, which claims that: 'As a result of this arrangement, the late Prime Minister Hariri became the sole decision-maker on matters related to the economy and most importantly the reconstruction process, whereas the speaker of parliament, Nabih Berri, was in charge of the reconstruction and relief program for the south of Lebanon and the president of the republic, Elias Hrawi, had special interests in the oil and gas sector'. Yet, the main symbol of the Hariri family's grip on the city of Beirut is Solidere,a chartered company in charge of reconstructing and managing the city centre, which was ravaged during the war.

Solidere was created in 1992, and initially won the concession for reno-vating the city centre for twenty-five years, which later was extended to seventy-five years in November 2005 by the council of ministers. Through several figureheads, Hariri gathered the majority of the shares. The destroyed buildings and damaged properties were expropriated from the original owners under dubious circumstances. As compensation, they received shares in Solidere, but the stock prices were manipulated so that small shareholders panicked and sold their shares when they were at their lowest, only to be purchased by Hariri. This strategy strengthened his financial assets and secured his grip on Solidere.

Selling as well as renting apartments and ofices in properties rebuilt by Solidere guaranteed huge profits for several reasons. First, construction costs were low due to cheap Syrian labour. Second, the land on which buildings were built had been acquired virtually for free. Third, huge investments in infrastructure served to encourage companies and traders to relocate to the city centre. Indeed, downtown Beirut is served by a formidable network of urban highways that were either superimposed on the existing urban fabric or were made to cross the city through tunnels. Moreover, the city centre is only fifteen minutes away from the airport and only five minutes away from the sea and seafront promenade, the *Corniche*. It is also located in the centre of the main axes that permit citizens to leave Beirut without spending hours in trafic jams. The traditional shopping areas, like Hamra Street and Ashrafieh, were deliberately neglected in order to encourage the owners to relocate to the downtown area. Foreign companies quickly realised that it was better to have their ofices in

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downtown Beirut in order to benefit from proximity and ease of interaction with the Lebanese administration. Finally, the location in downtown Beirut allowed foreign companies to divert a portion of their profits. Financial transfers oficially intended to support commercial facilities in downtown Beirut were in fact recycled in Lebanese banks that invest in the profitable Lebanese treasury bonds.

The Lebanese state under Hariri financed a great deal of infrastructure development with public funds. Highways, power plants, public schools and an oversized airport (renamed 'Rafic Hariri Airport' after his murder)— all of them paid many times their real construction costs as a method of financing the political allegiance of rival politicians through their clientele of contractors. In part, some infrastructure works were implemented by Hariri's own contracting companies. The use of political power and state money for private purposes is not limited to the reconstruction of down-town Beirut. This strategy was used in the municipality of Beirut too, which is under the control of the Hariri family thanks to the municipal council and the many administrations in charge of the urban development of the city, such as the department of urban development and the CDR. Building permits were issued to Hariri partisans only, and the prime minister had an informal right of refusal over plots that interested him, especially along the sea front where luxurious high-rise buildings catering for rich Saudi custom-ers or Lebanese emigrants are constructed. The residential model of Solidere and the public services it provides attract many Lebanese, as the urban services in the remainder of the city are deficient.

A new residential area was to be erected in the southern area of Beirut between the golf course and the sea: 'the Elyssar project'.58 The land is occupied by illegal residents, mostly Shia who fled southern Lebanon after the Israeli occupation. To force the departure of these residents, Hariri began by separating the district located near the sea, Ouzai, from the rest of the suburbs by means of the Beirut-airport-Sidon highway. Then a second highway, parallel to the first, was set to destroy the commercial centre of the district. The residents refused to be moved and have their properties expro-priated, and rallied behind Hizbollah to stop the bulldozers. The highway to the south and the north of the Ouzai district was completed in 2000. The prime minister was waiting for a more favourable political situation in order to complete the remainder of the project. While the first highway was partly motivated by public interest, the goal of the second one was the expulsion of the residents of Ouzai in order to claim the seafront and con-struct luxurious buildings, which would become the extension of the ones facing the sea in downtown Beirut. Had this highway been indispensable for reducing trafic in this region, it could have been built as a flyover, as was the case for the express highway crossing the Armenian district of Burj Hammoud in East Beirut. The prime minister did not want to lose the votes of the Armenians, who were defending the unity of

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their neighbour-hood. Additionally, the poor, popular neighbourhood of Burj Hammoud did not hold the same potential for property development as Ouzai, hence Hariri had no problem in getting the Lebanese government to finance the additional cost of the work, especially since the job was done by companies he owned.

The territory of Beirut is coveted by property developers eager to attract the investment potential of the afluent Lebanese diaspora and wealthy Arabs of the Gulf. It is true that Beirut is a unique city in the Middle East thanks to its relative moral freedom and festive atmosphere. Moreover, Lebanese emigrants seek to acquire plots and properties in order to stay connected with their country and strengthen the Lebanese identity of their children. In comparison, the majority of the Lebanese were impov-erished by the civil war and the country's brutal entry in the global market. The war had more or less protected the population of Beirut from real estate speculation and structural adjustment. The return of peace was, paradoxically, an economic disaster for many people, given the character-istics of the political reconstruction that followed. Lebanon is facing a social housing problem of great magnitude, but the contestation quickly becomes communitarian because of the Lebanese political system and the territorial struggle for urban space, both of which are organised along confessional lines.

Social Crises, Communalism and Territorial Fragmentation

Income differences are substantial and growing between the lower class, working in the local sector (agriculture, industry, domestics services, etc.), and the upper class, attached to the global sector (international finance, import/export, luxury retail, real estate, etc.). The increases in real estate prices are the clearest expressions of globalisation in Beirut. The downtown area has become a gated community for the global class, while the rest are excluded from this part of the city. The occupation of downtown Beirut, between September 2006 and May 2008, by the opposition to the Siniora government, was not only a political campaign targeting the government's support of the STL, it was also a fight against the urban exclusion of the hundreds of thousands who invaded downtown Beirut—opposition sup-porters also claimed 'the right to the city'.

During the decade 2000–10, the real estate prices in Beirut increased by about 400 per cent.64 Additionally, in many places illegal settlements in the vicinity of the downtown area are under pressure from property barons. In places such as Bachoura and Ayn al-Mreisseh, poor Shia settlers have pleaded with Hizbollah and Amal for protection against eviction. The Sunni urban class is also impoverished by the effects of globalisation but, unlike the Shia opposition led by Hizbollah, does not complain about Hariri policies because the Sunnis do not protest against their own govern-ment out of confessional solidarity. Although betrayed

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by the economic system, it supports the system's masters. In this confessional society, vertical links are more powerful than horizontal links. For instance, in Tarik al-Jdideh, a lower middle-class Sunni quarter of Beirut, the population ada-mantly supports the Hariri family. People are frightened by poverty and unemployment, but they consider that the danger comes from the Shia-dominated southern suburb, the *Dahiyeh*. There were many riots at the Dahiyeh-Tarik al-Jdideh border, pitting young people from both sides against each other. *Shabab* (young men) from Tarik al-Jdideh want to pro-tect their quarter from 'invasion', like the militias did during the civil war. In January 2006, four people were killed in Tarik al-Jdideh, and the army declared a curfew to protect Beirut from sectarian violence between the Shia and Sunni.

The fear of dropping down the social ladder is creating a neighbour-hood-level unity against *Dahiyeh*, which is perceived by the Sunni of Tarik al-Jdideh as being rural and Shia in nature. The same situation prevails in Tripoli between Jabal Mohsen (pro-Syrian Alawi quarter) and Bab al-Tabaneh (pro-Hariri Sunni quarter). Most of the Sunnis are clients of Hariri's Future Movement, and Muslim associations, such as al-Ahbash, received money from the Hariri family, yet ended up turning against it. In these places Hariri can recruit guards for private security companies such as 'Future Secure Plus'.Hariri realised that he needed his own militia for protection against the Hizbollah threat. The Lebanese army would never fight against Hizbollah due to either political sympathy or weakness. In May 2008, Hizbollah overran the Sunni neighbourhoods of West Beirut in a few hours, following a government crackdown on the group's secret telecommunications network. In this case, Hariri's private security com-pany was unable to prevent his mansion from being surrounded by opposition militia.

Clashes can occur at any time in Beirut. In August 2010, the al-Ahbash group clashed with Hizbollah, its political ally, in a mixed Sunni and Shia quarter of Beirut, leaving three people dead. This was the most severe security incident since May 2008. Beirut's mixed neighbourhoods have become urban conflict zones due to the high concentration of socio-economic problems along confessional boundaries. Since the end of the civil war and departure of the Maronite Christians, these Muslim-majority neighbourhoods remain the prime sites of communitarian confrontation. The confrontation between them cannot simply be reduced to a dichotomy of 'pro-Syrian' and 'anti-Syrian' groups.

Partisans of the State against Entrepreneurs and Militias

'Pro-Syrians' versus 'anti-Syrians': this is how most Western media carica-ture the current political conflict in Lebanon. According to this stereotype, the Syrians want to re-establish their hegemony over Lebanon and, in order to do so, they use the Lebanese people and more particularly their long-time ally, Hizbollah. Western media and television portrays a stand-off

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between, on the one hand, the bearded Islamist rambling in Arabic, and on the other, respectable politicians who speak French and English fluently and who are presented as the ramparts of democracy and modernity. While it is dificult to understand Lebanon—hence the dictum: if you think you understand Lebanon, you have not studied it long enough—it seems that Manichaeism plays an important role in this country. The ruling coalition holding power from May 2005 until January 2011 consisted of three major parties—the Future Movement of Saad Hariri, the Progressive Social-ist Party (PSP) of Druze leader Walid Jumblatt (the Druze form about 5 per cent of the Lebanese population) and the Lebanese Forces (LF), for-merly a Christian militia lead by Samir Geagea. The essential element in this coalition is the Future Movement, composed mainly of Sunnis (25–30 per cent of the Lebanese population), while the other two parties (PSP and LF) represent smaller portions of the Lebanese population. The coalition is called '14 March', in reference to the giant gathering dubbed the 'Cedar Revolution', which took place in 2005, demanding the withdrawal of Syr-ian troops from Lebanon following Hariri's murder. But what did these leaders do before becoming the champions of Western chancelleries?

Walid Jumblatt was one of Syria's most faithful allies during the Lebanese civil war and until the autumn of 2004, when he suddenly switched sides and decided to join the anti-Syrian opposition. Following the parliamentary elections in August 2009, Jumblatt left the 14 March coalition and, two years later, formally joined the Hizbollah-led opposition (8 March). In January 2011, the Saad Hariri cabinet collapsed, and Jumblatt supported Najib Mikati as new prime minister. The LF leader Samir Geagea was tried and imprisoned in 1994 on multiple murder and terrorism charges, but informally because of his opposition to the Syrian stranglehold. As for Saad Hariri, who presents himself as the successor to his father's legacy, we tend to forget that Rafik Hariri as the prime minister of Lebanon was brought to power by Syria and ruled Lebanon with its support, until he decided to challenge his erstwhile protector.

On the other hand, the 'pro-Syrian' coalition (if we borrow the terminol-ogy used by oficial news channels) is formed by Hizbollah and its allies— the Amal Movement (Shia), the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of former General Michel Aoun (a secular group mainly composed of Christians), the Nasserists, the Communists, and people of all communities who are opposed to both parties and the families who back the Future Movement of Saad Hariri. Hizbollah did not participate in any Lebanese government up until 2005. Throughout the post-civil war period of Syrian occupation, Hizbollah was part of the parliamentary opposition to the governments headed by Rafik Hariri. The FPM represents the majority of Christians in Lebanon. Before joining hands with Hizbollah, Aoun was decidedly anti-Syrian, but has since the 2006 'memorandum of understanding' with Hizbollah moderated his stance for electoral

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reasons.

In Lebanon, the electoral alliances are strategic and not ideological. The personal interests of ruling families, as well as greed and presidential ambitions, are the elements that help compose and recompose coalitions. However, since the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, politics are timidly regaining some ground. What we see during 'pro-Syrian' opposition demonstrations is a gathering of people from all communities and from rather modest backgrounds, who are asking for a just and lawful government. This situation generates political conflicts that are grafted onto communitarian ones. Those instabilities are thereafter recovered by regional geopolitics with Syria, Iran and Israel at one side, Saudi Arabia and the USA on the other. Each community in Lebanon is trying to get help from an external power in order to impose itself on the national scene. Money and weapons are flowing into Lebanon, as tensions rise.

Beirut Urban Conflict and the Regional Cold War

The massive sit-in in downtown Beirut between October 2006 and May 2008 (coming to an end after the Doha Agreement) demanding the resignation of the government, symbolises the excluded people's 're-appropriation' of the city centre, which was traditionally a place of communitarian and social mixing before it was appropriated by Solidere and offered to wealthy Arab tourists and to the Lebanese upper classes. By installing a protest camp in downtown Beirut over the concessions of Solidere, the Lebanese opposition not only protested against the creation of the STL, but also against the massive acquisition of the public domain by the businessman Rafik Hariri, and after 2005 by his son Saad: 'In September 2010, a year after taking ofice, Saad Hariri took possession of 29,486 square metres of downtown Beirut, under payment of Solidere, in the work of clearing the ruins of the capital. Since the beginning of urban renewal in Beirut (1992), the Hariri family has acquired one-third of the project's available land (107,102 square metres of 291,800 square metres)'. At the same time, it discourages investments in the city centre by impairing the economic activ-ity. Indeed, the military deployment in the city centre as well as the trans-port restrictions and the mere sight of the camp discourage most regulars and tourists from going there. Shops and restaurants closed their doors and moved their activities to other parts of the city—Hamra, Gemmayzeh and Sassine. Faced with this local economic crisis, the government of Sin-iora declared a tax exemption for those who maintained their activities in the city centre.

The attack in Beirut by Hizbollah in May 2008 showed the extreme fragility of the politico-economic system of the Hariri family. Young Sunnis recruited in security companies to protect West Beirut quickly disbanded when faced with the Hizbollah and Amal militias,

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demonstrating thatmer-cantile patronage within the Sunni community has its limits. Certainly it helps to buy votes during elections or to mobilise the population for dem-onstrations, but in case of armed conflict it is ineffective. Hizbollah's ideo-logical hegemony of the Shia community, coupled with Iranian financial support, has been much more successful.

The Hariri coalition of 14 March managed to win parliamentary elec-tions in 2009 thanks to its huge financial resources, its ability to bring in voters from abroad in strategic areas like Zahleh86 and the fact that Aoun's party lost 10 per cent of its votes because of its agreement with Hizbollah. Nevertheless, Saad Hariri was unable to keep his majority in the parliament because most of the PSP group of Jumblatt left the 14 March coalition majority in January 2011 to join 8 March.

In Greater Beirut, a real struggle for territory has begun. Globalisation reinforces land speculation, which leads to the expulsion of the poor and middle classes from downtown Beirut. It threatens their very existence in the suburbs, where geographical amenities, the coastline and hills, are very attractive for luxury-orientated property developers. While expulsion meas-ures mostly target illegal settlements, the very concept of legality remains questionable in the Lebanese context, especially in the south. The 'crony capitalism' that is developing in Lebanon produces a legality of two sorts, which works like a spider's web, allowing influential people to pass while stopping the insignificant.

The territorial disputes are reflected in the political opposition between, on the one hand, the supporters of Hizbollah, Amal and the FPM of Aoun, and on the other, those of the Future Movement of Saad Hariri, the LF of Geagea, as well as the PSP of Jumblatt until the latter switched sides in January 2011. It sheds light on the opposition between supporters of a strong state that provides protection against the consequences of a global economy, and supporters of a weak state run by feudal forces and businessmen: 'What's more, Hariri at present seems less state-builder than potential state-profiteer, holding the country hostage to a huge public debt accumulated by his capi-tal spending programme that exceeds forty-fold the debt the country was labouring under during the civil war'. Of course, Hariri did not keep this money for himself, but shared it with Amal leader Berri, Jumblatt and Syria, his allies until 2004.

At the regional level, these conflicting points of view fall into a larger and more dangerous opposition between the USA and Iran, an opposition which can also be analysed in reference to the globalisation of the economy today that has been instigated by the USA. The political, economic and social system developed by Iran and Syria is not compatible with the liberal-ism movement conveyed by globalisation.

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Lebanese political parties are well integrated into the regional geopolitical system, as the Future Movement is funded by Saudi Arabia, Hizbollah by Iran, while Christian and Druze parties are divided between both sides. That is why the social conflict disappears, obscured by geopolitics and communalism. People believe they are better protected by their community than by state or social class unions. In the Middle East, social class unions are rare but powerful. In the 1950s, a small rural bourgeoisie union obtained power in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, forgetting religious cleavages, but soon broke down with tribalism and communalism again taking centre stage. In Syria, after the Baath Party revolution, the Alawites excluded the Sunnis, the Ismailis and the Druze from power. In Lebanon, Chehab's presidency represented a period when middle-class interests converged to create a state, but it was too short-lived to modify the existing social structure.

Conclusion: The Failure of National Reconstruction with a Liberal Policy

According to Jacques Levy, 'The object of political geography is to study the relationship between geographic and political space in the widest sense of the word politics, that is to say, covering all the phenomena governing the organisation of the management and regulation of a collective society'. In the Middle East, the relationship between political regimes and space is mainly based on political patronage. The quality of the relationship between local social groups and the central government influences the national inte-gration of the different territories and their regional organisation. A city is a place of power, and consequently a place that power seeks, as a matter of priority, to control—*a fortiori* in the case of a capital like Beirut. After twenty years of reconstruction, the spatial organisation of Greater Beirut is a direct expression of the political and economic strategies of those elites in Lebanon who have endured. It is an undeniable economic success for the elite, but a failure in terms of a resolution of the Lebanon conflict.

The post-war reconstruction of downtown Beirut by Solidere, and more generally the real estate projects launched in Greater Beirut (residential, commercial and entertainment sites), were sold as investment opportunities for Arab capital and for the Lebanese diaspora. This urban planning, that was inherited from the Gulf and was imposed on a Mediterranean city struggling to recover from the devastation of a dreadful war, is the reflection of Hariri's political governance—an executive supported by foreign capital that was essential for a population impoverished by the war, but also by the effects of 'Dutch disease'. Today, there is a blatant difference between those who benefit from huge profits from a global market and those who subsist on on meagre incomes from the local market.

The liberal economic policy followed by successive Hariri governments increased the divisions within Lebanese society. This situation is most acute in Beirut, where the wealthy of

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the diaspora as well as the rich dealers related to the Hariri family live alongside the poverty-stricken Palestinian refugees and the impoverished Lebanese social classes. It is this politics of reconstruction in Lebanon that led to the extremely tense political situation that we know today. It has considerably increased the social gaps in the country, especially in Beirut. But is it really a characteristic of Lebanon only? Or is it a feature that accompanies the model of governance in a global world, where the liberal management of urban spaces and the co-optation of local institutions by developers and property speculators, like Rafik Hariri, are the main strategists? In this context, the collapse of Saad Hariri's government in January 2011 should have limited impact on Lebanon's socio-economic outlook. This is because it will be dificult for another government, even if it enjoys several years of stability—which is quite unlikely in Lebanon—to modify Hariri's economic system and go against the forces of globalisation. However, with the new government, dominated by Hizbollah and Aoun's party, businessmen are partly kept out of public affairs and this could potentially allow for a reconstruction of the state. After two decades of systematic predation, the internal political situation is now more favourable to the return of *Chehabism*. Unfortunately, in a corrupt environment like Lebanon, it is impossible to eradicate 'abuse of entrusted power for personal gain'. Rafik Hariri was not the only corrupt politician in Lebanon, but he contributed to the system on a scale according to his massive wealth. That is why the Hizbollah 'counter-society' is as successful in Lebanon as the Communist counter-society was in France after the Second World War, if we want to do a heuristic parallelism.

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