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Violent Urbanization and Homogenization of Space and Place

Reconstructing the Story of Sectarian Violence in Beirut

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Abstract

This paper aims at understanding the dynamics of sectarian violence in the city of Beirut, by looking at the early phase of violence in the Lebanese civil war (1975–90), and the process of dividing Beirut into various sectarian enclaves controlled by the warring militias. The paper aims to show the way in which political actors used sectarian violence as a mechanism of social, political, and territorial control. As a point of departure, the paper views the city not only as a backdrop for conflict and violence, but also as an actual target. The objectives of the paper are threefold. First, it shows how sectarian violence was not random but was, rather, a product of a lengthy process that involved calculation and some levels of planning. It includes defining one's …/

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neighbour as an enemy and as a threat. Second, it shows the measures and practices that were employed by militias to consolidate the full control of territory that entailed the transformation of space and place into homogenous entities. Third, it looks at the centrality of the concepts of homogenization of space (and place) and territoriality in the course of waging sectarian violence.

1   Introduction

On 5 August 1976, Muslim (Lebanese and Palestinian) residents of the eastern suburbs of Beirut were violently forced to leave their homes. Their expulsion came after several months of fighting over the control of quarters and neighbourhoods in Beirut's suburbs between Christian militias, on the one hand, and the predominantly Muslim and Leftist militias and their Palestinian allies, on the other.[1] The displacement of the Lebanese and Palestinian Muslim population from eastern Beirut was a major event in a sequence of mass displacements and population exchanges that took place in the early years of Lebanon's civil war, when members of various sectarian communities were forced to leave mixed areas and move to areas where they enjoyed higher sectarian homogeneity.

The war over the control of areas in Beirut during the first two years of Lebanon's civil war (1975–77) was insanely violent. Massacres, mass population displacement, and indiscriminate shelling resulted in cutting the city of Beirut into sectarian enclaves (Davie 1991, 2005; Khalaf 2006). What the war had markedly produced was not only the loss of civilians and the destruction of the city's built environment, but also the killing of the prospects for an open and plural city. War and violence transformed Beirut into an enclaved city. It was both a 'war of the city' and a 'war within the city' (Shaw 2004: 141).

This paper deals with the early phases of Lebanon's civil war in what was labelled the 'Two-Year War' (1975–77), when fighting broke out between the predominantly Christian militias, and the predominantly Muslim and Leftist militias and their Palestinian allies. While war erupted in most parts of the country, rural and urban, the intensity and severity of fighting was at its highest in mixed urban areas and especially in Beirut. The paper, thus, looks at the events that took place in the city of Beirut with a focus on the city's eastern suburbs, where violence resulted in the expulsion of the Lebanese Muslim (mostly Shias) and Palestinian population.

The paper aims at reconstructing the story of violence in Beirut, and the process of dividing the city into various sectarian enclaves controlled by warring militias.[2] It looks at the use of collective violence by political actors as a mechanism of social, political, and territorial control.[3] As such, the objectives of the paper are:

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[1]   I use this terminology in referring to the warring factions based on their use in the media and by the factions themselves. I drop the Rightist label of 'Christian forces', as these forces' involvement in the war was communal rather than based on pure-right political ideology. The same does not apply to the Leftist group, where a number of armed organizations became involved in the war on the basis of Marxist ideology; namely, the Communist Party and Communist Action Organization.

[2]   The analysis in this paper is based on 40 semi-structured open-ended interviews with residents, militiamen and local politicians who lived in the eastern suburbs of Beirut in 1975–77. The interviews investigated the respondents' experiences during the Two-Year War, including the stories of six militiamen who took part in the armed conflict. Fieldwork was conducted between spring 2005 and summer 2006. In addition, the paper undertakes an analysis of the discourse of active political leaders and organizations during the early period of civil war. Discourse analysis is based on material – stories, speeches, and interviews – covered in newspapers during that period in Lebanon's civil war.

[3]   Other writings on the dynamics of violence in Beirut include Khalaf's (2002, 2006) work on the history of violence and some of its urban forms, Johnson (1986, 2001) on the political dynamics on

- To show how the process of homogenization of space and re-territorialization by means of violence was not random. Collective violence was a product of 'planning', and was an outcome of a process that defined one's neighbour as an enemy and as a threat to local fabric.

- To show the measures and practices employed to consolidate full control of territory and which entailed the transformation of space and place into a homogenous entity through actions and measures such as building partition barriers, checkpoints, and murals aimed at asserting and maintaining one group's control over place and space.

- To look at the centrality of the concepts of homogenization of space and place,[4] and territoriality in the course of waging collective violence.[5]

The paper posits that cities are more than a backdrop for conflict and violence. Cities themselves are the target of deliberate and engineered campaigns that seek 'to destroy the security, public order, civility, and quality of life of all their citizens, and damage or destroy the viability and liveability of the city itself' (Safier 2001: 422). Conflict and violence destroy not only cities' 'built environment and the urban political economy but cities as social institutions and the very fact of urbanism itself' (Beall 2007: 4). In communally mixed cities, the target is often the 'other' in 'our' city. This stems from the desire of one group to dominate the territory and to re-territorialize it in an exclusive way that involves expelling and killing the 'others', and destroying their livelihood, infrastructure, and their built environment.

2   How it all started

By the early 1970s, political and sectarian tension in Lebanon was very high. The background of the political rift included conflict over changing the power-sharing mechanism to give the Muslim population a better stake in the government. It also included the position of Lebanon vis-à-vis the regional crises that were shaking the Middle East during that period, chiefly the Palestinian–Israeli question. Tension accelerated after signing the Cairo Agreement in 1969 between the Lebanese state and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which granted the right of Palestinian militias to bear arms and operate on Lebanese land in order to launch guerrilla attacks on Israel (El-Khazen 2000). The majority of Christian politicians and political groups were sceptical about the agreement, as they saw in it a major threat to the sovereignty of Lebanon. The majority of Muslim politicians, however, accepted the agreement, partly out of fear of opposing the revolutionary and radical Arab-nationalist sentiments that were sweeping the Muslim streets (Johnson 2001). The political system's failure to

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the eve of the war, and Davie (2002, 2005) on Beirut's green line and the process of territorial control by militias.

4   Whereas part of the literature sees space as abstract and place as concrete, another part sees place as a space with meaning (see Massey 1992); the use of the two terms in this paper follows Massey's work in this area (Massey 2004), who argues that both place and space are concrete.

5   Violence is defined here as 'a basic form of social action that occurs under concrete conditions, targets concrete victims, creates concrete settings and produces concrete results' (Shroder and Schmidt 2001: 6).

mediate between the conflicting parties, and its inability to mitigate this crisis, increased the political divide.

Communal tension was exacerbated as increased awareness of sectarian identity and politicization of communities were at their peak. Political parties and movements were organized, more than ever, across sectarian representation. The Lebanese Kataeb Party, for example, succeeded in mobilizing the Maronite[6] community and in spearheading an agenda to protect their communal rights (Entelis 1973, 1974). Similarly, the Shia Movement of the Disinherited emerged as a formidable and popular movement in its demands for a better share for Shias in the Lebanese polity (Norton 1987). Other sectarian movements included the mostly Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the predominantly Sunni Murabitoun Movement. Such sectarianization of politics contributed to high levels of communal polarization.

In Beirut's eastern suburbs, as in other communally mixed areas in Lebanon, the Palestinian presence became a major dividing line between communities. Polarization over the Palestinian question and Palestinian military activity on Lebanese land concurred with other structural issues. Many of the disenfranchised Muslims and, particularly, the Shias – who felt the skewness of the political system towards Maronite Christians and wealthy Lebanese – were attracted to the Palestinian cause. They found in it a space of rebellion against traditional politics. As one former Lebanese militant who fought with Fatah, the military wing of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, puts it:

> I joined the *Fida'yeen* [the term, meaning 'commandos' in Arabic, was used to refer to Palestinian militants] training sessions when I was 14. I joined a non-Lebanese group as I believed at that time that the *Kataeb* were prevailing over everything. *Kataeb* and *Ahrar* [two Christian parties] were clearly our enemies.

For Christians, and particularly Maronites – who did not have a 'real problem with the [Muslims and] Shias', as one respondent described it – the Palestinian and Muslim armed presence had become very disturbing. The visibility of Palestinian militiamen and their Lebanese allies on the streets and in Christian neighbourhoods became more than a nuisance: it was seen as a tangible threat. More importantly, it was a sign of the fragility and loss of sovereignty of the state of which Christians had, so far, been main guardians.

It was inevitable that, with heightened sectarian tension and failure of the political system to resolve the conflict, a clash would occur. Several violent episodes took place in the early 1970s before an orgy of violence broke out in April 1975 between the Muslim-Leftists and their Palestinian allies, and the Christian-Maronite side. The war was fought by consortiums of sectarian militias and ideological parties, led by warlords and strongmen. On the Christian side, the Lebanese Kataeb Party (LKP), as the leading Christian party, 'naturally' became the leading organization in the 'protection' of Christians and Christian areas. LKP led a group of small Christian militias in the two-year offensive against Palestinian and Muslim forces in East Beirut. These militias

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6 The Maronites are an eastern Christian sect that follow the Catholic Church in Rome. They are the largest Christian community in Lebanon, comprising around 35 per cent of Lebanon's population.

ranged from groups of defected Christian army officers, to small local strongmen who wanted to defend their neighbourhoods and towns, to ultra-nationalist and xenophobic factions.

On the other side of the conflict, most of the Muslim and Leftist militias operated under the umbrella of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), a consortium of 12 parties and movements under the leadership of Kamal Jumblat, a Druze[7] *zaim*[8] and head of the Progressive Socialist Party (MERIP 1977). The LNM militia allied with Palestinian militias under the banner of the so-called 'Joint Forces'. During the first two years of the war, LNM factions relied heavily on the logistic and arms support from Palestinian organizations (El-Khazen 2000). Militias included armed wings of parties such as the Communists, Arab Nationalists, and Syrian Nationalists, in addition to sectarian forces such as the Shia Amal Movement, which became the military arm of Musa Sadr's Movement of the Disinherited and smaller Sunni factions in Sunni areas of West Beirut. Beside the sectarian militias and armed wings of political parties, local neighbourhood armed groups led by local strongmen emerged as 'protectors' of their communities (Farsoun 1976).

The first phase of the war lasted for two years and came to be known as the 'Two-Year War'. It was one of the most violent acts of warfare. It resulted in the killing of around 35,000 people, mostly civilians (Randal 1984). Gruesome massacres and expulsions of people were committed in the first few months of the war. The Two-Year War was mostly urban warfare. The eastern suburbs became the main arena for this war. Most of the fighting and clashes were around, or en route to, the Palestinian refugee settlements, known as camps, in Tal Za'atar, Jisr El-Basha, and Dbaye; and in the predominantly Shia and Muslim quarters and neighbourhoods in the areas of Sin El-Fil, Bourj Hamoud, Maslakh, Qarantina, Naba'a, and Dekwaneh (see Figure 1).

The major Palestinian and Muslim-Leftist stronghold in the largely Christian eastern suburbs was Tall Za'atar Camp and its nearby Shia and Muslim-controlled neighbourhood of Naba'a (see Figure 1). As clashes intensified, Christian forces in the eastern suburbs saw in these areas an imminent threat – being under the control of Palestinian and Leftist-Muslim forces and as 'bases for launching attacks became unbearable'.[9] The Christian forces' decision was to 'liberate' the area.[10] Violence erupted in early 1976 but was at its height in the summer of that year. After a nine-month siege, Tal Za'atar, Naba'a, and other neighbourhoods fell under the control of Christian militias. There were a large number of casualties during the siege. It is estimated that in Tall Za'atar alone, 'perhaps 3,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, died in the siege and its aftermath' (Harris 1996: 165). Khalili describes the Tal Za'atar attack as 'the most numerically significant massacre in the chronicle of atrocities perpetuated against Palestinians in the twentieth century' (Khalili 2005: 37). A large number of Christians, militants, and civilians also fell in this war. There is no accurate estimate of the numbers: one Christian militiaman interviewed for this study lost four of
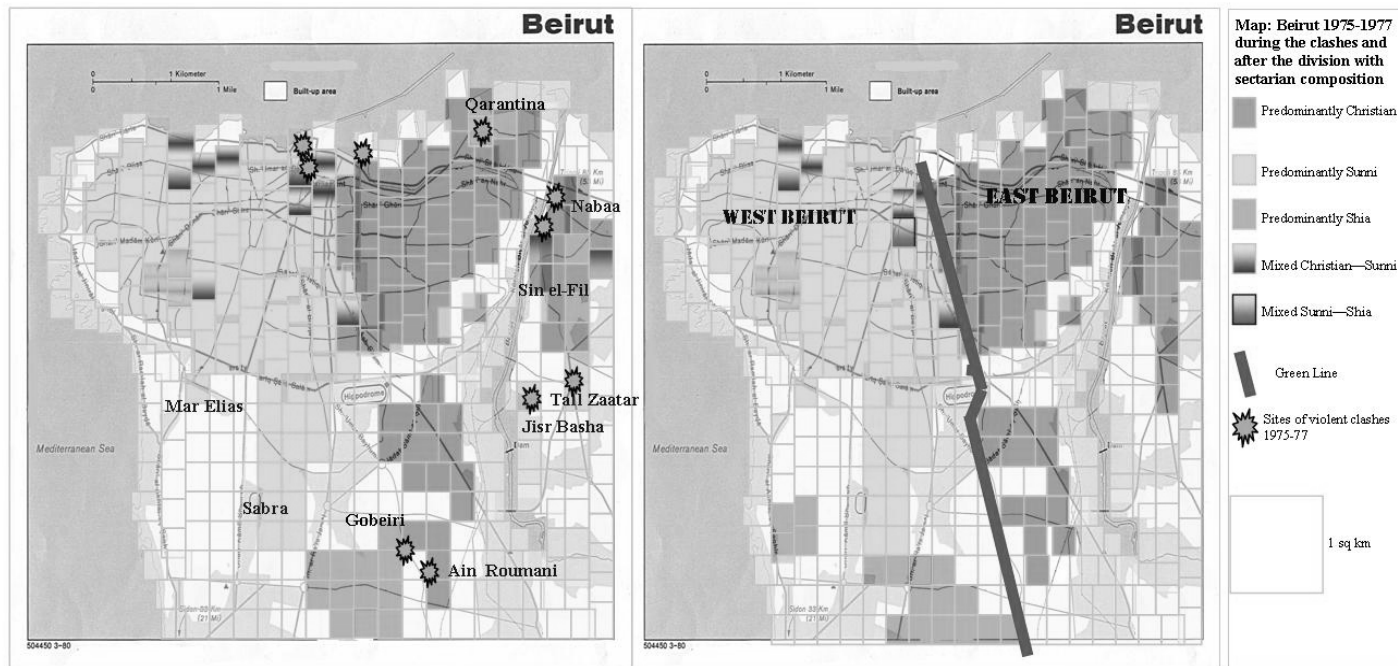
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7   A small Islamic sect.

8   Zaim (plural Zu'ama) in Arabic means a traditional political leader or political patron.

9   From interviews with former militiamen.

10 Ibid.

Figure 1: Beirut's sectarian composition during the clashes in 1975 and after the division in 1977

his brothers and sisters and six other family relatives. Two of them fell while fighting in the eastern suburbs in 1976.

The fighting and its aftermath eventually led to the displacement of almost all Muslim (Lebanese and Palestinian) residents from these areas. It was estimated that 30,000 Lebanese Muslims and 30,000 Palestinian Muslims were displaced from the eastern suburbs. The Palestinian camps were completely bulldozed over to prevent any return. Most of the displaced resettled in the predominantly western side of Beirut (Nasr 1993). Displacement of Shias and other Muslims from the eastern suburbs was confronted with forced displacement of Christian residents from West Beirut and its southern suburbs.

The Two-Year War resulted primarily in the division of Beirut into two major enclaves: the Christian-controlled east, and the Muslim and Leftist-controlled west. The green line between the two sides of Beirut was 'installed' as a no-man's-land, with a handful of militia controlled-crossings between the two Beiruts (see Figure 1). The division lasted until a peace settlement was reached towards the end of 1990.

3   Collective violence, expulsion and homogenization[11]

The campaign to homogenize areas in Beirut was often declared as a security-necessity based on the assumption that members of the other collective group posed a threat.[12] It is a perception that saw individuals of each collective group as members of a homogenous entity that was causing a threat. The campaign to control the eastern suburbs of Beirut in the 1975–77 phase of the war stemmed from this very assumption. It was portrayed by Christian-Maronite political and militant figures as a strategic security necessity. It was justified on the basis of the military and security threat from the presence of Palestinian Camps and quarters with a predominantly Muslim-Shia population in a historically Christian area.

Christian forces saw the threat to the eastern suburbs from a frontier perspective, fearing that a military defeat would mean linking these Palestinian and Muslim-Shia areas to the predominantly Muslim West Beirut. As a former Christian militia officer from the Sin El-Fil suburb described it, 'we had seven fronts' – referring to the surrounding areas that were controlled by Muslim Shias and Palestinian forces. This, had it materialized, could have led to Muslim and Palestinian control of all Christian areas in the city of Beirut and its suburbs.[13]

The raison d'être saw the defence of the locality intertwined with defending the community and the nation. The relationship became one of three intermingling circles:

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[11] Violence in Beirut and its suburbs was, indeed, perpetrated from both sides. The focus here, however, will be on the Christian militias' final push to eject the Muslim and Palestinian population from the eastern suburb. The focus on the Christian militias is by no means an attempt to vindicate other factions from violence but, rather, is studied here as an example of using collective violence for the sectarian homogenization of space and place.

[12] Boal makes the same observation in Belfast, 'where ethnic difference would be eliminated by removal of one of the sources of the threat' (Boal 2001: 11).

[13] From interviews with former militiamen.

the neighbourhood or town, the Christian community, and Lebanon as a nation. The failure or defeat in the locality meant he defeat of the whole community and a downfall for the nation. This logic mobilized many of the Christian residents of the eastern suburbs. To George,[14] who was eighteen during that period:

> There was an atmosphere created that we have to defend the neighbourhood. The feeling at that time was a matter of survival. Everyone carried a gun; some guns were so dated and were used in the Second World War. I even carried a rifle and went one day to patrol the locality.

3.1 Discourse of fear: 'They want to throw us in the sea'

The discourse of fear was instrumental in mobilizing support for armed groups. It became a central part of the rhetoric and discourse of political and conflict entrepreneurs. The perception of fear involved a set of emotions that were evoked from the threat surrounding a person. Political actors and conflict entrepreneurs tended to exaggerate the threat of the other to strengthen the bonding of their communities and group sentiments. This emphasized and strengthened the leader's duty and role in defending against the threat and in countering fear. The discourse of fear was often complemented with self-portrayal of capability of self-defence and protection.

The discourse of *threat of existence* was very effective in communal mobilization during the war in Lebanon, particularly among the Christians and the Maronites. It played well in the collective psyche of the Christians. Its wide resonance goes deep into the feeling of the Christians and Maronites as minorities in the wider sea of Arabs and Muslims. Several political slogans were created to spread fear of the 'enemy'. The exaggeration of the enemy's force, including their military power and encroaching intention, were played time and again. One of the widespread stories that contributed to the creation of a sense of fear was the rumour of boats waiting to ship Christians from Lebanon.[15] Fear among the Christians became, as Pierre Gemayel described it, 'organic, visceral, and unshakable'. Gemayel goes further in portraying fear among the Christians as natural and the request for reassurance from the other group: 'we can't do anything about it. It's up to the Muslims to give us reassurances' (Rouleau 1975/76: 242).

The fear of annihilation became a suitable pretext for arming and for mobilization. It was often portrayed in interviews that Christians were forced to arm and defend themselves. Part of the success of the Christian forces in East Beirut was in their portrayal of the principles of countering fear by the right of self-defence. Violence was seen as the only means to survive and to stay alive, as one militiaman of the Christian forces described it:

> We imagined that we will die. We were either going to get killed or kill them. This was the norm (*mafhoum*). This was put in our head. We were

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14 Interviewed in eastern suburb of Beirut.

15 This story was mentioned several times in interviews with Christian respondents. The origin of the story is not clear, neither is its accuracy.

> told that all the Muslims are going to kill us, all the Palestinians will kill
> us, all the Druze will kill us, and all the Arabs will kill us.

3.2 The militarization of the others and their spaces

For violence to be collective, the process involved creating the mental image of the other as militant. It entailed the militarization of the other, and portraying him as an occupier and as a security threat. Labelling the other and the other's spaces and areas as 'military' justified the military campaign to cleanse these areas. This step was crucial to rallying militant support against the perceived enemy. It prepared the stage for violence, and paved the way for expelling and killing the other. So, what was called the 'misery belt' around Beirut became the 'military belt'.[16]

Quarters, buildings, and thousands of their residents became 'militarized'. They were seen as targets and military posts that needed either to be destroyed or controlled. Labelling this area as a 'military belt', and the naming of the Shia Muslim, and Palestinian neighbourhoods and quarters as 'military bases' by the Christian forces and militias was a powerful way to show the threat of these areas and to mobilize military action against them.[17] The terminology used was very indicative of the dynamics of collective violence and how it unfolded. As Peteet puts it, 'names are thus not only components of a repertoire of mechanisms of rule and a prominent part of historical transitions but are, methodologically speaking, themselves a means of tracking power in this process' (Peteet 2005: 154).

3.3 Expulsion and 'urban cleansing'

As violence became an *acceptable* means by which to achieve order, the expulsion/purification machine was wide and diverse – and, by nature, it was indiscriminate. Whether in the random kidnapping and counter-kidnapping of members from the other community, or 'identity-killing' (where militiamen checked IDs and, based on name, religion, and origin rounded-up those from the other communities), the objective was to push members of the other community from territories the militias were aiming to homogenize. Indiscriminate killing by shelling 'enemy' neighbourhoods and areas aimed at targeting all those associated with the 'other' group.

Consequently, collective violence forced individuals and families to move from mixed areas and neighbourhoods to those with higher sectarian homogeneity. Almost all Muslims were displaced from the eastern suburbs and other Christian-dominated areas. Many Christians, in return, were displaced from West Beirut and the Muslim dominated areas. No exact data on population exchange in the first two years are available, but statistics in later dates show the extent of change that took place in a short period of

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16 The term 'misery belt' was widely used in the media to refer to the area that stretched around the municipal boundaries of Beirut that consisted of low-income neighbourhoods and quarters. The 'belt' ranged from a low-income neighbourhood to tin-built squatter settlements and Palestinian refugee camps. The residents in the 'belt' were mostly Shia Muslim working-class Lebanese, in addition to Palestinians, Kurds, and other foreign labour migrants, especially Syrians.

17 See Abu Arz press conference on 9 August 1976 in *An-Nahar*, 26 July 1976 and 10 August 1976.

time. Between 1975 and 1989, the proportion of Christians in West Beirut dropped from 30–40 per cent to 5 per cent. In Ashrafieh area in East Beirut, the proportion of the Muslim population dropped from 4–10 per cent in 1975 to less than 1 per cent during and after the war. Similarly, the eastern suburbs of Beirut had a Muslim population of 40 per cent in 1975 compared with 5 per cent in 1989 (Huybrechts 1991; Nasr 1993; Genberg 2002).

4   Transforming space

After the expulsion of members of the 'other' community, further measures were employed to reorganize the urban space and territory to reflect the new political and military realities. The city and its milieus were 'redesigned' by the military machine to reaffirm the new military, social, and political orders. Militia leaders and their men became urban designers and, through their monopoly of violence in the areas under their control, they re-produced a new spatial order.

First came the setting up of physical boundaries to demarcate one's area against that of the other. The biggest division was through the green line between East and West Beirut, a 'line' that stretched from the old city southward along the Damascus and Old Saida roads dividing the city into two enclaves (see Figure 1). It created a narrow no-man's-land between the two areas. Makeshift walls were built, and sandbags and burned buses were installed to achieve this *physical partition*. Although this partition arose from efforts to maintain a sense of communal security, as portrayed by leaders of the militia, it contributed to maintaining and protracting the conflict. It perpetuated an atmosphere of fear. It was analogous to Peter Marcuse's description of how walls 'represent power, but they also represent insecurity; domination but at the same time fear; protection but at the same time isolation' (Marcuse 1994: 43; see also Shirlow 2001).

The partition and enclaving were, then, enforced. The sniper was the most effective person in monitoring the borders of the area and keeping the 'enemy' at bay. Snipers occupied high-rise buildings that offered access and a view to a wide expand of areas. They would kill, indiscriminately, any individual who crossed from the enemy area to theirs. Snipers succeeded in building mental walls and psychological borders for the Beirutis. They were fast and effective in redrawing the war map and communication lines of the city. The sniper became the guardian of the geography of fear that spread over Beirut during the 15 years of civil war.

4.1 Control and homogenization of territory

The control and homogenization of territory was engineered in various ways: by the installation of checkpoints; by means of posters and artwork; and by bulldozing spaces and places.

Checkpoints

Members of the militia manned checkpoints, the purpose of which was to make sure that whoever was passing was trusted and was one of 'us'. They acted as deterrents to

the enemy or members of the other community due to fear of interrogation, harassment, kidnapping, or even killing – as happened during the ID-killing campaign in 1976. A handful of checkpoints at the city's green line served as border crossings. They were the most obvious physical manifestation of the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion that sorted out who is with 'us' and who is with 'them'.

Posters and artwork

Murals, political posters, graffiti, and pictures of fallen 'martyrs' and leaders were spread on the walls and other structures. These measures asserted the identity and ideology of the territory and its people. They aimed at confirming the power of militias over space and place, and to remind residents and passers by of the authority in an area or locality.

Bulldozing

Bulldozing spaces and places of the 'other' was the last phase in the reproduction of space. It was a very powerful method in the campaign to control and homogenize territory. The destruction of houses, shops, and religious sites was intended to make sure that no one from the other community would return – at least, not easily. This was notable in the bulldozing of the Palestinian refugee settlements of Tall Za'atar and Jisr el-Basha in Beirut's eastern suburbs, and the slum areas of Qarantina and Maslakh. The destruction of entire neighbourhoods, although stemming from a pretext of the illegality of these settlements, was aimed at sealing off the area from the 'other' – an act that proved to be successful.

5   A new territorial reality: republics of militias

The control of territory transcended the spatial control to full hegemony. In addition to achieving security, territoriality including the control of social, political, and economic milieus became a crucial way of consolidating power and defining the group's identity within spatial boundaries. As such, East Beirut was born and constructed as a Christian and Maronite area. It became a territory with a well-defined political ideology and under a social-political regime influenced and dictated by Christian militias. It was portrayed as the 'liberated area' (*al-mantaqa al-mouhrara*) in reference to liberating it from Palestinian and Muslim-Leftist militias. At the same time, the birth of East Beirut gave a distinctive territorial identity for Christians. It offered a power base for Christian militias and a base for further control, either by political negotiation or by force. East Beirut became a mini republic for the Christian forces.

Though it was one of the most violent episodes in the war, the account of the 'making' of East Beirut by violence was not atypical. Similar practices and policies were employed in other parts of the city, and in the subsequent phases of war and violence in Beirut and in Lebanon. West Beirut was born in the same vein. It was labelled as the 'city of fortitude' (*madinat as-soumoud*) and the 'patriotic area'. Later on, other quarters and neighbourhood were re-territorialized under a new militia regimes – such as the southern suburbs of Beirut under the control of Shia armed factions.

The experiences and events of the Two-Year War in Beirut showed the centrality of homogenization of place and territoriality on the basis of collective identity. Sectarian territorialization was an integral part of the war, as it reflected the power of one faction and, at the same time, helped to make and shape the collective identity of each group.

After establishing their spatial and political control through violence, militias moved to run the economies of the areas under their reign. Operating their own tax system, managing illegal transactions, and preying on private and public funds, militias established their own mini-states. The total militia revenues during the period 1975–90 were estimated to be about US$ 40 billion, exceeding that of the country's GNP (Dib 2004: 157).

6   Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how collective violence in Beirut during the first two years of the civil war (1975–77) was part of a planned process to achieve territoriality and control over the political, social, and economic milieus of the city. Controlling territory to achieve a sense of security was often portrayed as the goal of the warring factions. However, control turned to the practice of full hegemony over space, politics, and economy.

Waging violence entailed the definition of the 'other' as a threat. The discourse of fear of extermination played well in mobilizing communities against each other, as did the discourse of threat from strangers. When construed as a threat, members of the 'other' group were forced to leave the territory. The terror of sectarian purification became contagious.

Through the homogenization of space and the expulsion of the 'other' community, violence was engineered to counter the very nature of city-ness as a heterogeneous place. Violence reshaped the city, cutting it into sectarian enclaves and, thus destroying one central aspect of city life: its diversity. Homogenization, as such, destroyed the foundations of urban culture and society. Violence maimed Beirut's existence as a mixed and plural city. It enclaved the city and killed its prospects of being open and heterogeneous.

The paper has shown how the city was more than a backdrop or a stage for conflict and violence. Beirut, as a mixed city, was itself the target. Its residents and its environment were deliberately attacked, and the target was the 'other' in 'our' city. This stemmed from the desire of one group to dominate the territory and to re-territorialize it in an exclusive way to the extent of expelling and killing the others, and destroying their livelihood and their built environment.

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