Distance in Vicinity: Beirut's Zuqaq el-Blat, a Place of Transformation, Conflict and Co-existence

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> In each city there is another, an underground city, underneath of which there is an endless number of hidden cities that time reveals in the most unexpected ways. These underground cities are at once both the past and future; they are all that no longer exists or does not yet exist in the present.[1]

Since religions are one of the most important culture-constructing factors they – especially the monotheistic ones – are often blamed for being sources and giving impetus to conflicts and hatred. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, Beirut was a meeting point and a place of coexistence for the brightest intellectuals of the contemporary Arab world. It was a multiconfessional and thus multicultural city where the different groups managed to conduct the unrestrained development of their cultural and religious lives. The intellectuals of various confessions who created this unique and exemplary ambience used their respective religions as tools for building a common universe in which education and dialogue gave birth to fruitful cooperation and respect.

In the Lebanese case – a country that has been divided between different religious denominations – historical research has so far not clarified the causes of the confessional system. Some historians explain its genesis as a genuine Lebanese tradition of power brokerage between clan-leaders, whereas others refer to the Ottoman millet system as the decisive factor of the confessional structure. Other historians take the influence of European conceptions and enforcement of foreign interests as being responsible for the development of such a system. Therefore, looking back may provide an idea to a later scholar of what could have been a potential, inherent, innate way of development for a given community.

One has to take into account that Lebanon, historically as well as geopolitically, is a buffer state. Consequently, it acquired hybrid characteristics and developed the complex Lebanese paradox, the phenomenon we deal with today. As the Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi pointed out "the Lebanese society enjoyed the reputation for liberalism and tolerance, being traditional rather than zealous or fanatical in its attitude towards religion and political

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[1] Review of *Yesterday's Man* by Tony Chakar, Rabih Mroué, Tiago Rodrigues. "A Portuguese man visits the town of Beirut year after year. (...) The city changes (...) at the mercy of time's erosion and history's convulsions. This man never changes, but lives different days at each visit – the days that the ever-changing city allows him to live." http://funzine.hu/200909283690/Culture/yesterdays-man.html

ideology".[2] Samir Khalaf supports this image stating that "Beirut with increasing urbanisation absorbed and assimilated successive waves of migrants and political refugees without any apparent degree of mass violence or urban strife".[3]

Still, the confessionalist system in operation since 1926 has led to polarization, rather than the moderation of sectarian divides for it transforms differences which are not religious in and of themselves into religious conflicts. It is well illustrated by the manner in which the persistent social and intellectual struggles over the space of habitation in Beirut take religious and sectarian character.

Throughout history, the coastal cities of Lebanon shaped their populations. Being, essentially, merchant cities, they function as places where, in spite of the country's artificial and imposed borders, people have a chance to create and share a culture. By culture I mean a plural "system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating" where the individuals are challenged to recognize each other as belonging to the same nation.[4] The word "nation" is used here with strong reserve since Lebanon as a nation is still under construction. I consider "nation" as a cultural concept that has already been launched in Lebanon. Naturally, there are different interpretations of the meaning of nationhood in Lebanon, but a shared sense of belonging to a specific territory that has its clear political identity is common between many communities in Lebanon. I argue that the nineteenth-century Beirut was a microcosm where such Gellnerian "convictions and loyalties and solidarities" were born that invested the Beiruti intelligentsia with the potential to create a very different Middle East of what exists today. It provided fertile ground for the evolvement of Ottomanism, Muslim Reformism, Syrianism and Arabism, and later, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Lebanism. However, even if these currents shared various degrees of inclusiveness and supra-denominational openness, due to the special historical and geo-political background of the creation of "Greater Lebanon", after World War I the place of intercommunal cooperation so characteristic of the end of the nineteenth century, was gradually taken over by collision and open conflict.

The most creative phase of the unique Beiruti intellectual endeavour started in 1863, only three years after the massacre of Christians in Mount Lebanon, when Boutros al-Boustani's National School opened its gates to pupils of all sects and beliefs to study under the guidance of the most eminent Muslim and Christian educators and scholars of the time. Boustani's initiative meant the triumph of loyalty to the land, Mount Lebanon and Beirut in particular, and to its Arabic heritage in general, and a firm belief in a promising common future for all its inhabitants.

It must be noted, that the duality and balance of European and Ottoman influence ensured the stability that made possible the realization of such initiatives. The struggle for influence between the Ottomans, the British, and the French over cultural and economic control helped to create a long lasting liberal environment in which schools, newspapers

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[2] Salibi, Kamal: *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered.* I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1993. 1.
[3] Khalaf, Samir – Kongstad, Per: *Hamra of Beirut: a case of rapid urbanization.* Brill, Leiden, 1973. 2–3.
[4] Gellner, Ernest: *Nations and Nationalism.* Blackwell, Oxford, 1983. 7.

and societies proliferated.[5] As Leila Fawaz has shown, at mid-century, this city was a place where foreigners dominated the economic and political sphere. However, the civil war of 1860 also generated a deep crisis for the imperial government in Istanbul and urged it to accelerate provincial and municipal reforms.[6] Thus, the nineteenth-century Beirut was at once the product, the object, and the project of overlapping European, Ottoman, and municipal civilising missions competed in the fields of administration, infrastructure, urban planning, public health, education, customs, journalism, and architecture.

With the direct control of France after 1921, and its determination to guarantee the political dominance of its Christian allies, the atmosphere changed, and the imposed westernization together with the Maronite supremacy gave way to upheavals and unrest thus making the newborn state more and more vulnerable to the enforcement of foreign interests in the decades that followed.

The aim of this essay is to give a broad outline of Beirut's transformations in the nineteenth and twentieth century, with special attention to one of its quarters called Zuqaq el-Blat (Zuqāq al-Balāt), the birthplace of those intellectual efforts that could at the same time absorb and preserve confessional identities and amalgamate them into an exemplary and specific universe, capable of providing forum for dialogue and mutual efforts for self-definition.

The first part of this study is dedicated to a general historical background of the nineteenth-century Beirut, which is followed by the description of the cultural ambience in its most famous and important 'intellectual workshop', Zuqaq el-Blat. The third part of the essay provides an outlook to the city's later history and the impact of the imposed Confessionalist structure with hints to the symbolic degradation of its cultural heritage and its conscious abandonment by the potent actors of the contemporary political life. This paper is aimed to challenge the repeatedly reinforced notion of Lebanon as a place – with Jens Hanssen words – "where things copied from the west are considered material proof of progress and a conscious stepping-out of centuries of unproductive identity accumulation".[7]

I. Beirut in the 19th Century

1. Historical background

The two main religious groups of Mount Lebanon, the Christian Maronite and the Muslim Druze communities developed peaceful relations with each other. The balance power was shaken when in 1788 the Maronite Bashir Shihab II (1767–1850) was elected emir and appointed wali of Mount Lebanon, and the Druze leaders were extruded from political power. The first bigger clashes between the two communities that contained

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[5] Fawaz, Leila: "Foreign Presence and Perception of Ottoman Rule in Beirut." In: Jens Hanssen – Thomas Philip – Stefan Weber (ed.): *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capital's in the Late Ottoman Empire.* Orient-Institut, Beirut, 2002. 93–104.
[6] Review by Jens Hanssen of Samir Kassir's *Histoire de Beyrouth* available: http://www.atrissi.com/kassir/books2.html
[7] *Ibid.*

sectarian character as well, took place in the 1820s. Bashir II supported Muhammad 'Ali (1769–1849), the pasha of Egypt who took Acre from the Ottomans in 1822, consequently the Druze forces were aligned with the Ottoman wali of Damascus. Bashir II disarmed the Druze and allied with France, governing in the name of Muhammad 'Ali, who entered Lebanon and formally took power in 1832. In the following years the conflict was deepened by the increasing economic isolation of the Druze, and the growing wealth of the Maronites.

Shortly after Bashir II had been forced to leave and the Ottoman Empire reasserted control, in 1841 clashes broke out between the Druze and the Maronites and for twenty years unrest and tension prevailed in the mountains. In 1842 the French, British, Russian, Austrian, and Prussian ambassadors to Istanbul met with the Ottoman foreign minister, but agreed only on the irreconcilability of the Druze and Maronite positions. Consequently, they decided to divide the Mountain into two *qa'im-maqamiyyas* (governorates), one in the north under a Maronite governor and the other in the south under a Druze district governor. Therefore, as Ussama Makdisi commented, in 1842 Europeans together with the Ottomans reinvented Mount Lebanon in sectarian terms, dividing it administratively along religious lines.[8]

In the south, however, placed under a Druze administrator lived a large number of Maronites, whose lord-peasant relationship gradually broke down and was replaced by a more egalitarian structure. This led to tensions among the Maronites still living in the north, and the peasants began to express their resentment toward the "feudal" privileges of their notables. The rebellions started in 1858 in the north encouraged the Druze to regain their lost supremacy over the whole territory. Their military offensive in April 1860 turned into a general massacre of Christians in Mount Lebanon that spread into Damascus.[9] After such antecedents the civil war of 1860 can be seen as partly an outcome of the administrative redefinition of communal and social boundaries and a response to the declining feudal system.[10] After 1860–61 a special administrative regime, the *mutasarrifiyya*, was established, giving the Mountain more autonomy from rest of the Ottoman Empire.

2. Beirut the Imperial City

Until the 1830s, Beirut had only been a harbour city of secondary importance behind Tripoli, Sidon, and Acre. It was a small medieval town with six gates, souqs, khans, narrow streets, hammams, churches, mosques and a population from various origins and of different confessions. In opposition to Jerusalem, Istanbul or Damascus, Beirut did not have distinct confessional quarters and "there was no professional segregation between confessions, nor was there any opposition between the districts and production activities, and the white *izar* covered all women, Christian and Muslim alike".[11]

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[8] Makdisi, Ussama: *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon.* University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000. 84–86.
[9] Weiss-Green: *A Survey of Arab History.* American University of Cairo, 1995. 249–50.
[10] Makdisi, 133–136.
[11] Barakat, Liliane Buccianti: "Beirut – A City With So Many Faces." In: *Dela 21.* 2004. 485–493., available: http://www.ff.uni-lj.si/oddelki/geo/Publikacije/Dela/files/Dela_21/043a%20baracat.pdf

As Samir Khalaf pointed out, the most definitive symptoms of urbanisation – rural exodus and the spill of the population beyond its medieval walls – did not really appear in any substantial form until the 1860s.[12] The decisive moment in the history of the city was when Ibrahim Pasha made it an administrative centre during the Egyptian occupation (1832–1841). The growing political importance led to the development of the harbour into the major import-export trading centre for Mount Lebanon and the Syrian hinterland and to the rise of a new urban commercial bourgeoisie.[13] When the Ottomans regained control, Beirut was made the capital first of the wilayet of Sidon in 1842, later that of the wilayet of Beirut from 1883. Thus, urbanization in Beirut was more a precedent or antecedent to economic development than its result.[14]

It is true that after the war in 1860 refugees from Damascus and Mount Lebanon have created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion in Beirut, still, the city was not profoundly affected by the socio-political tensions between 1840 and 1860. According to Leila Fawaz as compared to the clashes in Mount Lebanon, Beirut enjoyed a certain degree of stability during the nineteenth century despite the vast influx of refugees. When sectarian tensions broke out in the capital from time to time, mostly due to the forced westernisation and Christian economical dominance, the urban notables of different confessions made joint efforts for a quick settlement.[15]

Beirut grossly benefitted from the Ottoman urban reforms carried out in response to the strengthening western influence in the region. Construction of infrastructures and communication took place: the harbour was widened, a road and then a railroad joined Beirut to Damascus; telegraph and gas lighting were installed, electric tramway was inaugurated, and streets were paved. The Ottoman government expanded the city beyond its walls and a new centre of business and transportation activity emerged on the eastern side *extra muros*, in the area where trade caravans gathered and organized before entering the city. The place later was named as Martyrs' Square in memory of those six Lebanese patriots who rose against the Ottoman rule.[16] This area further developed when the Ottomans transformed a part of it into a public garden on the northern side of which the Petit Sérail (the Small Government Palace) was built in 1884.[17] Edifices such as the Beirut's City Hall, Train Station, the Grand Sérail, and the Ottoman Bank were constructed in this period. The last Ottoman wall was demolished in 1915.

As Ralph Bodenstein writes "the intensified trade and the increasing political presence of European powers – particularly in the wake of the 1860s civil clashes in Mount Lebanon and Damascus – made Beirut an interface between the European countries and the United

[12] Khalaf, Samir: *The Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj.* Saqi, London, 2006. 21.
[13] Bodenstein, Ralph: "Housing the Foreign." In: Jens Hanssen – Thomas Philip – Stefan Weber (ed.): *The Empire in the City...* 105–127.
[14] Khalaf, Samir – Kongstad, Per: *Hamra of Beirut...* 3.
[15] The most serious of such clashes were the great riots of September 1903 between Greek Orthodox and Sunni groups. Fawaz, Leila: *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1983.
[16] Sarkis, Hashim: "A Vital Void Reconstructions of Downtown Beirut." In: Vale, Lawrence J. – Campanella, Thomas J. (ed.): *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster.* OUP, Oxford, 2005. 281–298.
[17] Khalaf, 63.

States on the one hand and the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire on the other hand."[18] Foreign consulates, missionary and educational institutions were established; next to the numerous primary and secondary schools, American Protestant missionaries built the first university in Beirut in 1866 followed by St. Joseph University, established by the Jesuits mission in 1875. Between 1860 and 1880, Europeans invested massively into silk economy, more than 200 mechanical spinning mills were set up in the mountains. Some, mostly Christian traders, became European trade agents and grossly benefited from the concentration of western interests. The new local bourgeoisie identified more and more with western cultural values and took charge most of the innovations indispensable to the modernization of a city such as transport, lighting, food and public health.[19] In the framework of the *Tanzimat* (Ottoman reforms initiated in 1839), new administrative divisions were introduced to reassert their more or less direct rule over Lebanon, causing a growing opposition between the Turkish power and the emerging local bourgeoisie.[20] From about 10.000 inhabitants in 1840 the population rose to around 120.000 in 1900 accompanied by the mushrooming development of new residential quarters *extra muros*.[21]

It is also necessary to acknowledge that unlike the *mutasarrifiyya* of Mt. Lebanon, Beirut's main institution of government, the municipal council, was not institutionalized into confessional quotas (what is referred to in Lebanon as the *sitta sitta mukarrar* logic) until the French Mandate period. A chart of the composition of first one hundred popularly elected municipal councillors between 1868 and 1908 demonstrates how widely the religious affiliations of its twelve members oscillated. Unlike in Istanbul and Alexandria, after 1877 foreigners were barred from municipal elections in Beirut. According to Hanssen the municipal council defended the interests of the city against European capitalism and colonialism, and against the Ottoman imperial government.[22] He argues that the Ottoman government's decision to listen to the calls for the creation of a new province around Beirut and grant it provincial capital status in 1888 paved the way for fundamental urban and regional reconfigurations long before colonial policies during the French Mandate period. This new Ottoman province came to constitute the territorial embodiment of regional self-determination for Arab nationalists in Beirut until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.

II. Zuqaq al-Blat

1. Setting

Zuqāq al-Balāṭ, which means "cobbled lane" in Arabic is the name of a Beirut neighbourhood whose main street, named after Amin Beyhum, was the first paved road outside the old town, built in the framework of the infrastructure works during Egyptian

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[18] Bodenstein, 106.
[19] Barakat, 487.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] Bodenstein, 106.
[22] Review by Jens Hanssen...

rule (1831–1840). The quarter stretches between the Grand Sérail in the north and the Greek Catholic Patriarchate in the south. It is one of the *extra muros* areas of Beirut that developed from middle of the nineteenth century as a residential quarter for the Beiruti bourgeoisie who left their old houses *intra muros* and built villa residences in the orchards and gardens on the hills overlooking the old town and the sea.[23]

Zuqaq el-Blat occupies a unique position within Beirut's urban fabric and it can be considered as a microcosm of the history of modern Beirut. It was one of the city's first sites of urban expansion before 1840; during the Civil War (1975–1990) parts of the district were on the Green Line (demarcation zone) between Christian East and Muslim West-Beirut. After the war rebuilding affected only the northern parts because of its proximity to the downtown commercial centre but completely neglected the south-eastern region, a fact that well exemplifies the anomalies of Lebanon's post-war reconstruction both in its social and political aspects.

The introduction of an outstanding interdisciplinary study *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut* refers to the Lebanese writer and biographer Paul Suwayd, stating that three distinct cultural centres existed in mid-nineteenth century Beirut, the oldest of which was Zuqaq el-Blat "where from the 1840s to the 1880s, the Boustanis and Yazijis taught, wrote and published an enormous range of Arabic literature and appealed to their compatriots to embrace social and confessional harmony".[24] It was here that the Yazijis developed Modern Standard Arabic, taught and wrote about Ottoman, Arab and Syrian patriotism. Boutrus and Salim al-Boustani considered the centrality of their country in the global economy as well as the geographical division of labour between *Bab Beirut* and *Batn Syria* in the 1880s. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Qabbani and Khalil Sarkis, the publishers of the two main newspapers, *Thamarat al-Funun* and *Lisan al-Hal* were residents of this district.[25]

In the past, Zuqaq el-Blat was a place for wealth and luxury. From a mainly agri- and horticultural area outside the city walls in the 1820s it turned to become first a garden suburb with growing educational institutions in its golden age, and later, in the second half of the twentieth century to a densely populated pericentral city quarter.[26] A comparison of the maps of the 1840s with the 1876 Löytved map shows that the urbanisation of Zuqaq el-Blat advanced vigorously from the middle of the nineteenth century.[27] The Ottoman infantry barracks (later, in 1920 turned into the "Grand Sérail"), a military hospital (erected in the 1860s and turned into the Palais de Justice in 1920), the residence of the *mutasarrifs*, consulates, and the establishment of schools ensured the high status of the quarter and made it attractive for foreigners as well. Ottomans and Europeans rented lodgings from local owners, shared their houses and socialised with them,[28] so even if the number of foreigners

[23] Bodenstein, 105–106.

[24] Gebhardt, Hans (ed.): *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut. The Quarter of Zokak el-Blat.* Beiruter Texte und Studien 97. Orient-Institut der DMG Beirut, 2005. 2.

[25] Review by Jens Hanssen...

[26] Bodenstein, Ralph: "The Making and Remaking of Zokak el-Blat." In: *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut*, 36–107.

[27] *Ibid.* 63.

[28] Özveren, Yaşar Eyüp: *The Making and Unmaking of an Ottoman Port-City: Nineteenth Century Beirut, Its Hinterland, and the World-Economy.* Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Binghamton, 1990. 151. Quoted by Bodenstein: The Making and Remaking... 65.

in the city was not more than 1-3 per cent of the population until the French Mandate Period,[29] together with the local upper- and middle class they created 'foreign-native continuum' that was characteristic of the late nineteenth-century Beirut.[30]

To mention only a few significant religious institutions of this quarter: the Armenian Prelacy of Lebanon was also seated here in 1920 with its centre the St. Nichan Armenian Orthodox Church built later, in 1938, just south of the Sérail. At the centre of the quarter stands a Sunni mosque dating from the mid nineteenth century, now dominated by the sunni-sufi group al-Ahbash.[31] At the northern border of Zuqaq el-Blat, below the hilltop Grand Sérail building stands Beirut's only Synagogue, Maghen Abraham. The surrounding area, known as Wadi Abou Jamil, was historically the Jewish neighbourhood of Beirut. The Selim Tarrab Talmudic School building was demolished sometime after 2006.[32]

In Zuqaq el-Blat the socio-economic status of the neighbour was always more important than his religious affiliation. Until the mid twentieth century, residences were inhabited by better off people from different confessions such as later, in the years of degradation, slums are housing the poor of different ethnic and religious background (Kurds, Palestinians, Shiites, Sunnis). According to the family names of the population of Zuqaq el-Blat was mixed, mostly Sunnis lived together with Christians of all denominations, and their mansions were surrounded by the modest houses of their clients. As a late resident, Lamis Mukhayesh recalls her memories from the 1950s: "On religious holidays, we all celebrated together. In Rue Mar Elias, where Christians and Muslims used to live, they decorated for Christmas as well as for Ramadan."[33] The large residences of mercantile families were the first in the quarter, but later became surrounded by lower and middle class homes, forming a heterogeneous settlement pattern common in the Middle East.[34]

Despite the many political and consequently social and architectural changes, the quarter did not cease to be a cultural centre till the outbreak of the war. A good example for this fact is the mansion of Maud Farjallah that gave place to Beirut's longest-lived weekly salon where politicians, foreign diplomats and intellectuals met between World War I and 1963. The *Pios Building* was another famous place where in the 1950s and 1960s intellectuals, painters, and journalists gathered regularly.[35] In his book *Al-Hawajis al-Aqalliyya (Minority Anxieties)*, the Lebanese author Ramez Khalil Sarkis, born in the quarter in 1921, describes Zuqaq el-Blat as a model cosmopolitan space. According to him, the district was inhabited by middle class "spiritual families" – using Michel Chiha's term: *al-'ā'ilāt al-ruḥiyya* – who created an atmosphere of mutual respect and support that represented "the essence and phenomenon of Beirut in particular and Lebanon in general and intuitively held the firm belief in their humble popular wisdom that if only we

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[29] Fawaz, Leila: *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut*. Cambridge (Mass.), 1983. 52.
[30] Özveren, *The Making and Unmaking...* Quoted by Bodenstein: The Making and Remaking... 65.
[31] "Walking Through Zokak el-Blat." In: *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 23–33.
[32] http://members.virtualtourist.com/m/ac11c/1b809c/4/?o=1&i=3
[33] Stolleis, Friederike: "The Inhabitants of Zokak el-Blat." In: *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 175–211.
[34] *Ibid.* 178.
[35] *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 30.

[Lebanese] lived together and understood each other we'd be safe and well."[36] The social and cultural bonds of Maronites, Sunnis, Greek Catholics, Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Protestants – that Sarkis calls *al-rābiṭa al-busṭāniyya* – were further strengthened by "brotherhood of milk" (ukhūwat al-ḥalīb), a good example of which is the "milk bond" that connected the Sunni Yamouts to the Sarkis family. Khalil Sarkis brings examples how these ties created solidarity even in the years of the war.[37]

2. Golden Age

Zuqaq el-Blat played a prominent role in the Arab cultural renewal which took place in different places in the Arab World. One major figure in this renewal, especially in education and Arabic language modernization, is Boutros al-Boustani who founded the National School in 1863.[38] Due to the journalistic and educational efforts, it became a place where leading Syro-Lebanese, Arab-Ottoman and Egyptian intellectuals met since the second half of the nineteenth century. These thinkers played a decisive role in the development of the most important trends of modern Arab political thought – Ottomanism, Arabism, Syrianism and Muslim Reformism. Although Lebanism as a national ideology emerged only during and immediately after World War I, its most influential promoter, Michel Chiha (1891–1954) was also rooted in Zuqaq el-Blat's intellectual circles. It was also this quarter where the serialised Arabic novel and the newspaper commentary took their first forms as articulators of political expression.[39]

The relative stability in Beirut and Mount Lebanon after 1860, under the Ottoman rule, encouraged the scholarly renaissance that took place in this diverse, dynamic, late-Ottoman bourgeois district.[40] Residents of Zuqaq el-Blat were among others Boutros al-Boustani (1818–1883), Khalil Sarkis (1842–1915), Abd el-Qader Qabbani (1837–1935), Hussein Beyhum (1833–1881), Ahmad Abbas al-Azhari (1852–1929).[41] By the turn of the century, these intellectuals, journalists, teachers, national politicians, and municipal councillors had already formed flourishing interconfessional networks "of neighbours who visited each other, participated in the same regular saloons and were employed in the same institutions. (...) They wrote school books, edited newspapers and left behind foundational texts of modern political thought and social reform that continued to inspire scholars of the Middle East into the age of decolonisation, nationalism and beyond."[42]

The ideas of the intellectual elite connected to Arabic Revival (*al-nahda al-'arabiyya*) were spread in the numerous primary and secondary schools of the quarter by novel teaching methods that combined Arab tradition with the most important principles and

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[36] *Al-Hawājis al-Aqalliyya: Min Zuqāq al Blat ila Kensington.* Beirut, 1993. 25–26. Quoted in *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 3–4.

[37] Sarkis, 10–12. In: *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 4.

[38] Yazbaq, Ibrahim Yusuf: *Al-Awraq al-Lubnaniyya.* Vol. 1, Beirut, 1955. 118. Quoted in *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 6.

[39] Hanssen, Jens: "The Birth of an Education Quarter." In: *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 143–174.

[40] *Ibid.* 144.

[41] *Ibid.* 165–174.

[42] *Ibid.* 144–145.

practices of the European enlightenment. Consequently, "the guarantors of the remarkably stable hegemony of Beirut's late Ottoman bourgeois public sphere were secondary school students who – as audience and later as articulators – came of age between the 1860s and 1880s."[43] According to Jens Hanssen "the literary networks, newspaper journalists, schools and teachers generated a communication- and information-based public sphere which mediated between Beirut's population, the Ottoman state and foreign missionaries. Almost 2500 pupils studied in these institutions the most important of which were Boutros al-Boustani's National School (al-Madrasa al-Wataniyya) inaugurated in 1866, one of the three imperial lyceums, the Madrasa Sultaniyya, opened in 1883, the Ottoman College ('Uthmaniyya) founded in 1895 by Ahmad 'Abbas al-Azhari, and the Greek Catholic Patriarchal School (Patrarkiyya), four of the most prestigious secondary schools in Bilad al-Sham. The School of Arts and Crafts (Sanayeh) an industrial education complex concentrating on teaching practical skills for underprivileged children was opened in 1907, and the Rushdiyya was opened in 1910, called (from rushd, adolescence), an advanced primary school brought into existence by the Ottoman Public School Law of 1869 and instituted thereafter throughout the empire."[44]

For almost 150 years a cross-confessional upper and middle-class population formed the intellectual life of Zuqaq al-Blat among whom Christians were a relative minority, still their role proved to be formative owing to such unique and outstanding figures as Boutros Boustani. In his National School pupils and teachers of all sects and beliefs were guaranteed freedom to carry out their respective religious practices. Proselytizing was strictly prohibited, and educators shared their knowledge and collaborated in service of the future generations. A contemporary American missionary drew attention to the remarkable fact that "in little over three years after the dreadful scenes of massacres and blood[shed] in 1860, there should be gathered in Beirut a school of 115 boarders composed of almost all various sects in the land and that children of Moslem sheikhs and papal priests, and Druze okkals should study side by side."[45] To teach Islamic religion and philosophy, the protestant Boutros al-Bustani invited the prominent scholar, Ahmad 'Abbas, a graduate from al-Azhar University in Cairo. The students came from Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Istanbul and Greece, and among the locals we find persons like Ibrahim Bey al-Aswad, 'Abd al-Qadir Dana, 'Abd al-Qadir Qabbani who by the turn of the century became the leading intellectuals and municipal councillors in Beirut.[46]

As early as in 1867 the teachers of the National School founded the interconfessional Syrian Scientific Society (al-Jam'iyya al-'ilmiyya al-Suriyya) "for the spread of knowledge, science and arts".[47] In 1875 Shaykh Youssef Assir (1815–1889), the teacher of Arabic grammar in Boustani's school founded the Society of Arts (Jam'iyyat al-funūn), which put more emphasis on applied arts and practical skills than on foreign languages and liberal arts. The society launched a bi-weekly newspaper Thamarāt al-Funūn and its Muslim

[43] Ibid.148.
[44] Ibid.147.
[45] American Board of Commissioners, Foreign Missions, 16.8.1., Syrian Mission vol. 5, Annual Report of the Beirut Station for 1863. Quoted in History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut... 32.
[46] Hanssen, Jens: "The Birth of an Education Quarter." In: History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut... 152.
[47] Ibid. 153–4.

activists formed the *Maqassed* – Islamic Benevolent Society – in 1878 "to promote modern state education, uphold Islamic morality and embrace the principles of the Ottoman Public Education Law of 1869". Its founder 'Abd al-Qadir Qabbani aimed to follow the Jewish and Christian curricula as examples and launched two schools for Muslim girls as well.[48] The Muslim schools of Zuqaq el-Blat pursued the liberal arts tradition, their aim was to produce educated workforce for the institutions of modern society.[49] The deans of the Ottoman College were prominent journalists, such as Ahmad Tabbara, the owner of the Beiruti newspaper *al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, and 'Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraysi, the owner of *al-Mufid*, and leading politicians of the Beirut Reform Movement during the Young Turk Period (1889–1908). Among the teachers we find two influential female figures as well, such as 'Afifa and Zahida Shihab.[50]

After the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 many refugees arrived to Beirut, among them the leading Egyptian reformist Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905), who was enthusiastically accepted by the Zuqaq el-Blat intellectuals. 'Abduh spread the ideas of reform in Lebanon and gained many disciples, both Christians and Muslims through writings as well teaching Islamic theology in the high school al-Madrasa al-Sultaniyya.[51]

Between 1827 and 1871 the Protestant missionary work centred around Zuqaq el-Blat, and their schools had a formative influence on the intellectual life of the quarter. The Mission House was set up in 1832 followed by the first printing press in the Middle East in 1853. The library of the Mission – where Eli Smith began to translate the Bible into Arabic – housed valuable Arabic manuscripts and liturgical literature.[52] With the leadership of Boutros al-Boustani, local members of the Protestant Congregation founded the Native Syrian Church in 1848. The most important missionary institution the Syrian Protestant College (later the American University of Beirut), was opened in 1866, and in 1870 moved to away to the more exclusive Ras Beirut.[53] One of the quarter's earliest school complexes was established in 1860 by the British Syrian Missions and later became the Lebanese Evangelical School.

As Jens Hanssen stresses, in the second half of the 19th century, "Zuqaq el Blat became the meeting place of leading members of both strands of the Arabic revival – the Christian secularists of Beirut and Alexandria and the Islamic reform movement of Damascus and Cairo".[54] Hanssen also mentions an assumption according to which some Zuqaq el-Blat intellectuals formed the secret society called *Union of the Three Faiths* with the aim to "unite the Islamic, Christian and Jewish faiths and to co-operate in relieving the East of the pressure exerted by the West".[55]

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[48] *Ibid.* 154–5.
[49] *Ibid.* 157.
[50] *Ibid.* 161.
[51] *Ibid.* 157–8.
[52] *Ibid.* 149–150.
[53] *Ibid.* 150.
[54] *Ibid.* 158.
[55] Amin, Osman: *Muhammad Abduh* (1944), translated from Arabic by Charles Wendel. Washington, 1953. 7. Quoted by Hanssen, Jens: "The Birth of an Education Quarter." In: *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 158.

On the basis of Hanssen's study a high degree of interconnectedness, moreover intimacy can be supposed between Muslim and Christian scholar circles. The intellectual atmosphere of Zuqaq el-Blat provided not only an open space to negotiate common ground between Christian and Muslim visions of Lebanon but also set a promising path for Lebanon's political culture.

III. Stages of Decline

1. French Mandate

When the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of the World War I, the French gained control over Syria. The five provinces that make up present-day Lebanon were soon separated from the rest of Syria pleading that its Christian population needed protection. Besides Beirut and Mount Lebanon, "Greater Lebanon" included the coastline (Sahil), the Beqaa Valley and Anti-Lebanon as well, thus including significant number of Druze, Shiites and Sunnis into the would be state. Consequently, Lebanese Christians, of which the Maronites were the largest subgrouping, now constituted barely more than 50 per cent of the population, while the number of Sunnis multiplied eightfold, and the Shiites fourfold. Thus the quota system that was accepted on the basis of the national census of 1932, and made Maronites the official majority assuring them political dominance as opposed to the numerical majority of the Shiite community, generated mistrust and ignited alienation.[56]

The Maronites had indicated precisely what they wanted, mobilized into politics earlier than the Muslims and had – with the help of the French – dominated the political and the economic system. A western oriented business class pulled in foreign capital, but the institutional, politico-sectarian structure created gross social inequalities and disparity in economic development between Beirut and the rest of the country. Greater Beirut and the mountainous areas in south and north of the city were like a prosperous mini state while the Akkar region in the north, Jabal al-'Amil in the south and Beqaa Valley in the east, populated by mostly Sunni and Shiite Muslims, were zones of economic stagnation.[57]

Under the French Mandate, serious efforts were initiated to prepare master plans by the architect and planner Michel Ecochard (1905–1985) for Beirut. Functionalism and rationalism set such an urban zoning in which the segregation of functions became the key

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[56] The census of 1932 concluded that there was a demographical 5:6 proportion between Muslims and Christians of the population. Under French pressure the presidency went to a Christian, the premier to a Sunni and speakership to Shiite. On the basis of the 1932 census, parliament seats were divided according to a six-to-five Christian/Muslim ratio. The constitution gave the president veto power over any legislation approved by parliament, virtually ensuring that the 6:5 ratio would not be revised in the event that the population distribution changed. See: Sarkis, 51.

[57] Nicolaysen, Leif G. N.: *Consociationalism and Segmented Cleavages: The Case of Lebanon.* Master thesis in Political Science, STV 3902, Department of Political Science Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tromsø, May 2008. 26.

concept.[58] In order to eradicate the old urban order major constructions such as the National Museum of Beirut, the Parliament, the Frenchmen avenue – a replica of the Englishmen Promenade in Nice were carried out starting in 1924. During the 1930s, the old Arab core disappeared to be replaced by a modern French style centralization set around the Parliament: Place de l'Étoile (the Star Square), with large orthogonal arteries named after French heroes. Military cemeteries appeared, signboards were written in French, khans were transformed into theatres and cinemas. The Lebanese traditional house increased in height thanks to new building techniques and the ochre colour became dominant in the city.[59] The confessional minorities (Christian, Jewish, a small Sunnite elite as well as the Armenian refugees) beneficiating from the support of the mandatory country adopted European customs in every field of life.

However, the new middle class' residential areas were sited in locations far from the elites, so it was the beginning of social exclusion in the city. In the new suburbs where social and economic discomfort prevailed, youth movements, charities and sports clubs sprang up. In order to gain political support they put themselves under the protection of sectarian based parties; and later, during the unrest in 1958 and in the civil war, constituted manpower for the militias.[60]

Confessionalism gradually drove the non-Christian communities to seek a similar type of mobilization, beginning in the 1940s as an effort to balance the growth of Christian influence. As a result, this mode of modernization forced the process of urbanization to be framed by a confessional form. Therefore, instead of assuming a class-based and nationally inclusive character, urban transformation was shaped by group solidarity. Privileged confessional groups concentrated themselves in the urban centres, whereas disadvantaged communities ended up in the suburbs and peripheries. Within this context, urbanization in Lebanon has been a process of displacing people from a familiar rural setting but at the same timed it has forced the urban social actors to resurrect their primordial allegiances, such as familism, regionalism and sectarianism, in order to tackle the hardships of urban life providing members of a given group with all sorts of welfare, health and education services.[61] As Samir Khalaf pointed out, "urbanization in Beirut as a physical and ecological phenomena has not been accompanied by an equal degree of urbanism as a way of life".[62]

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During the Mandate period, Zuqaq el-Blat remained an important locus of power, housing institutions of colonial administration, such as the seat of the French High

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[58] Ghorayeb, M.: "The work and influence of Michel Ecochard in Lebanon." In: Rowe, P. – Sarkis, H. (eds.): *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*. Prestel-Verlag, 1998. 106–121.

[59] Barakat, 488.

[60] Soliman, 23.

[61] Salamey, Imad – Tabar, Paul: "Consociational Democracy and Urban Sustainability: Transforming the Confessional Divides in Beirut." In: *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 7, Nos. 2–3, June–September 2008. 239–263.

[62] Khalaf – Kongstad: *Hamra...* 3.

Commissioner (accommodated in the Grand Sérail), the Law Courts, and the French Admiralty.[63] However, while before the introduction of the confessional system enlightened ideas and intellectual ties proved to be stronger than kinship, in the coming decades estrangement and distancing took over.[64]

From the 1920s the concentration of economical activities and job opportunities (mostly on the construction sites) in centre Beirut generated Shiite, Kurd, and Armenian settlement in Zuqaq el-Blat because of its proximity to the city centre. Shiites arrived from the annexed Jabal 'Amil and the Beqaa valley, while Armenians and Kurds were refugees from neighbouring countries. The migration caused a significant population growth in the quarter between 1921 and 1931 from 6200 to 8200 inhabitants. Consequently, between 1920 and 1945, the number of buildings increased by about 30 per cent.[65] Nevertheless, the settlement of poorer migrants made some upper and middle-class families leave Zuqaq el-Blat.

2. Beirut, "Open City"

The laissez-faire politics of presidents Béchara el-Khoury (1943–1952) and Camille Chamoun (1952–1958) created economic prosperity for Beirut. The Banking Secrecy (1956) transformed the capital into a "safe for fuel income". Lebanon reached the peak of its economic success in the mid-1960's, but the stability and prosperity was paralyzed by the collapse of Intra Bank, the country's most important financial institution, in 1966. Between the 1940s and 1960s the Lebanese government shaped the face of the growing metropolis from the plans of foreign experts like Écochard, Egli and Doxiadis, by building bypass roads north of downtown.[66]

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s the rapid urbanization in metropolitan Beirut, or "Greater Beirut", coincided with dramatic demographic expansion. In 1960 Greater Beirut's population stood at 450,000 residents, but the number had increased threefold by 1975 to 1,250,000.[67] This rapid expansion of the city population initially favoured the growth of middle-class and secular neighbourhoods where city and market growth weakened confessional demarcations.[68] However, as opposed to the capital, rural areas remained underdeveloped, thus social inequality and tensions were constantly on the rise in spite of the reform politics of the Shihab era (1958–1964). The consequent massive rural migration presented a major challenge to both the traditional sectarian and secular urban areas and catalyzed a rising contention over the sectarian distribution of urban space and state resources. According to the analysis of I. Salamey and P. Tabar this led to outbursts of violent sectarian conflicts for the past 50 years that "have often undermined the many 'consociational' aspects of the urban communities".[69]

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[63] Bodenstein: *The Making and Remaking...* 67.
[64] *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 5.
[65] Bodenstein: *The Making and Remaking...* 69.
[66] Sarkis, 290.
[67] Salamey – Tabar: *Consociational Democracy...* 242.
[68] *Ibid.* 247.
[69] *Ibid.* 242.

The centre belonged to the confessionally mixed high and middle-class bourgeoisie. West of downtown, an area called Ras Beirut "was an important hub for literary and publishing activities that made Beirut centre of Arabic-language free press. Finally, the concentration of students, writers, journalists, academics, and radicals in Ras Beirut meant that the area enjoyed an atmosphere of social permissiveness".[70] Arab tourists and businessmen from the Gulf States came in great number to Beirut which, for them, represented Switzerland (Banking Secrecy), Monaco (Casino) and Paris for its shops and leisure activities. A second down-town, Hamra street was established with offices, hotels, cinemas, merchant galleries making out of this avenue the Middle-East Champs-Élysées. On the eve of the war, and in order to satisfy the needs of a totally addicted consumers' society, a third urban pole construction was about to start in Sodeco street in Ashrafiyeh. Real-estate investments multiplied and the number of new suburbs increased. The capital was named the Greater Beirut with more than one million inhabitants annexing the narrow coastal plain as well.[71]

Since the end of World War II, Beirut witnessed a heavy population shift due to sociopolitical and economic crises. The inflow of capital and investments attracted not only the rural population of the interior but also refugees. In the villages recently attached to the capital second generation rural migrants lived, essentially wage-earners, officers and craftsmen. Between this intensifying ring and what could be considered as the middle-suburb of Beirut, articulated the "Misery belt" constituted of the Palestinian camps and the spontaneous districts of mostly Shiites migrants fleeing from the Israeli retaliations in the South.[72] Consequently, cells of poverty took roots in unhealthy zones such as Karm el-Zeitoun and Hayy al-Syrian. The informal, illegal suburbs started to mushroom as "the people's spontaneous and creative response to the state's incapacity to satisfy the basic needs of the impoverished masses".[73] Urban informality thus often managed through illegal attempts of the low and middle strata of the society to restore their "space" or "order" to the urban landscape.[74] As Barakat claims "their inhabitants were 'the left out' population, forgotten by the posterity and growth enjoyed by the 'first category citizens'. This situation provoked resentment and allowed the militias to recruit among the frustrated youngsters, offering them an ideology based on fighting for their rights and taking their revenge".[75] The French planners did not touch the informal areas surrounding the city of Beirut for religious and political reasons.[76]

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[70] Nagal, Caroline: "Reconstructing space, re-creating memory: sectarian politics and urban development in post-war Beirut." *Political Geography*, 2002. 719.

[71] Barakat, 489.

[72] Shortly after the last French troops withdrew from Lebanon in 1946, more than 110,000 Palestinian refugees arrived in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab–Israeli War. After the 1967 Arab–Israeli War additional Palestinian refugees, and in 1970 thousands of Palestinian expelled militiamen from Jordan arrived. Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization started to attack Israel from the politically and militarily weak Lebanon.

[73] De Soto, H.: *The Other Path: The Invisible revolution in the Third World.* Harper and Row Publisher Inc., New York, 1989. Quoted by Soliman, 18.

[74] Soliman, 19.

[75] Barakat, 490.

[76] Soliman, 24.

Consequently, the social dimension gained importance on the Lebanese political map. Migration offered political leaders a reservoir of desperate youth becoming increasingly a powerful resource of violence. Michael Johnson described how political patrons utilised the services of their clients and in turn provided them with social services, employment and legal protection thus merging class domination with the confessional modes of social organisation.[77] Still, newly arrived migrants were deprived of the political representation in the capital since Lebanese electoral law required everyone to vote in their place of birth.[78] As would one expect, the youth got radicalized in similar fragile conditions. The extremist leftists and the nationalist parties exploited fully these conditions. M. Johnson again provides an accurate description of this situation when he asserts that "Beirut's sectarian violence, then, was neither primordial, nor a rural import. For the poor it was, rather the outcome of confessional or 'ethnic' strategies devised to cope with social inequality under conditions of intense urbanisation. For the ruling elites it was a means to defend social and political privilege".[79]

Since Shiite immigrants represented largely unskilled labour, they lacked financial resources and remained dependent on the better-off Shiites, thus replicating the feudal structures of the countryside.[80] A fact, that by the 1970s resulted in the formation of Musa Sadr's Amal movement, and later led to the birth of Hezbollah as well.[81]

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In the southern and eastern outskirts slum like settlements evolved a process that affected the eastern part of Zuqaq el-Blat as well. After the independence in 1943 till the outbreak of the civil war in 1975 the immigration – mainly of the Shiites from South Lebanon and the Beqaa – accelerated, and the quarter's residential quality of life constantly deteriorated since no effective efforts were made to adjust urban planning and social housing projects corresponding to the new social reality. In the same period the historic fabric of Zuqaq el-Blat, more than 45 per cent of the buildings were demolished due to the construction of the Avenue Fouad Chéhab and the new airport road.[82] The urbanisation in this quarter as in most parts of Beirut was essentially unplanned and as the estate surveyor

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[77] Johnson, Michael: *Class and Client in Beirut: The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State, 1840–1985.* London, 1986.

[78] The system assigns voters to electoral districts of origin rather than residence, namely their villages and remote areas under sectarian control. Most voters who reside in mixed religious neighborhoods in Beirut or its suburbs, for example, have been forced to vote for sectarian candidates running in their respective villages and hometowns, their voting districts of origin. This electoral mechanism has weakened residential ties to the living space, establishing political alienation and a fragmented sense of urban identity. See: Salamey – Tabar: *Consociational Democracy...* 248–249.

[79] *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 14.

[80] Stolleis, 181.

[81] Amal and Hezbollah are two Shiite Muslim Political movements. The former emerged in the mid-1970s with the outbreak of the civil war, and the latter emerged in 1982 with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

[82] Bodenstein: *The Making and Remaking...* 82.

of British Embassy remarked in 1963, the neighbourhood was about to "become increasingly slummy".[83]

The exodus of the mainly Christian upper-class inhabitants increased in the 1960s and continued into the civil war. Their late Ottoman mansions were neglected, transformed and inhabited by poor migrants. What happened in the eastern area was in sharp contrast to the large-scale construction works in the western part of the quarter which was near to the strikingly developing Ras Beirut area with its new commercial centre of Hamra. Between the late 1940s and the mid 1960s (till the crisis generated by the Intra Bank crash in 1966) high rise office buildings and blocks of flats were erected in western Zuqaq el-Blat, very often in the amputated gardens of the late Ottoman mansions. Two new boulevards were constructed in this quarter based on the master plan of 1954 and on the adopted parts of Écochard's *Masterplan for Metropolitan Beirut 1963/64*. However, the lack of investment security from the 1960s led to the neglect of both the implementation of the plans and the degradation of the existing buildings.[84] Street extensions, ring roads, axes and arteries were created by cutting through neighbourhoods, demolishing houses and displacing inhabitants, thus causing considerable social friction that more and more took the form of intercommunal tensions.[85]

3. War years and post-war reconstruction

The continuing civil war of 1975 led to a radical change in the demographic fabric of Beirut's overall urban structure. The resulting population shifts and migration due to conflict changed the distribution of the population in and around the city radically. The ongoing clashes with Israel from 1972 and the two Israeli invasions (1978;1982) forced a large number of refugees (mostly Palestinians and Shiites living in the South) to move and settle in the periphery of Beirut thus transforming most of the open spaces of the southern suburbs into large informal areas, like the *Dahiya Janubiyya* (the southern suburb).[86] These settlements were of two categories; the first, comprising various social groups of Lebanese and non-Lebanese people, was inside Beirut's administrative border. The second, reserved for Palestinians who were joined by some Lebanese families – basically residential tent-clusters set up on land provided by the state or rented by UNRWA from private property- was in refugees camps in Beirut's suburbs.

Due to the multiplication of waves of internal displacement the demographic structure of the city of Beirut was fragmented in a multitude of confessional territories by which Muslims moved from Eastern Beirut to Western Beirut, and Christians moved into the opposite direction. As Soliman states "this reorganization of population was in line with ethnicity and dominated by militarization, religious ideologies, and the maintenance of political structures that govern through patronage, division and economic oppression".[87]

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[83] Quoted by Bodenstein: *The Making and Remaking...* 36.
[84] *Ibid.* 82–91.
[85] *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 13.
[86] Soliman, 19.
[87] *Ibid.* 20.

After the civil war a dramatic change in the demographic urban fabric of Beirut has occurred. Also, the division of the city (eastern and western sectors) created new urban centers to meet the needs and demands of population and market mechanisms. Along the coastal line in the southern part of the city of Beirut, as a consequence to the multiple waves of war displaced persons coming from south Lebanon or the Beqaa, informal, illegal habitats proliferated and produced the two largest informal areas, *Dahiya Janubiyya*,[88] and *Dahiya Sharqyyia*.[89] To the north of the capital, an urgent and increasing need for lodging accommodation generated an unrestrained real estate speculation.[90] Vacant apartments and sectarian neighbourhoods were occupied by the respectively evicted sectarian groups, known as 'al-mouhajjereen', or war displaced. As an immediate result, secular urban communities' neighbourhoods shrunk considerably and became occupied mostly by displaced families.[91]

The incursions and invasions by Israel into the largely Shiite Southern Lebanon (1993, 1996, 2006) after the end of the civil war continued to force massive waves of Shiite rural-to-urban displacement contributing to the further expansion of the southern suburbs of Beirut, at times reaching the airport's runaway.[92]

The Taef agreement (1989) that maintained confessional consociationalism as the working formula of the Lebanese state provided a 'quick fix' rather than a sustainable political arrangement that could have encompassed the urban dynamics within its power-sharing formula.[93] It deliberately ignored the roots of the civil war and set about restoring Beirut's old financial role at the expense of the impoverished and marginalized rural and suburban populations. Little political efforts were invested in the return of internally displaced communities living on the outskirts of the Lebanese cities.[94]

The post-war urban setting in many ways reinforced family ties and made them essential. Consensual solutions that serve the interests of the population and not that of the their traditional leaders have so far been impossible to find, since the 1943 National Pact, only sectarian communities have been allowed to become vocal and effective within the Lebanese polity.[95] Consequently, the political leader or za'*im* is playing a major role in shaping the built environment, preserving his socio-political and economic role in the urban

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[88] Dahiya Janubiyya is divided by the north-south axis of the airport road by which two different parts were formulated. The eastern part combines dense old villages (Burj Al Barajneh, Mrayjeh, Harit Hrayk, Ghobeyri, Shiyyah) and peripheral illegal sectors (Amrusseyeh, Hay Al Sillom), while the western part contains major illegal sectors (Jnah, Uzai), legal low-density urbanization (Bir-hassan, Ramlit Al-Baydah), together with relatively large non-urbanized areas. Uzai, a liner and the largest illegal settlement, has been created along the axis linked Beirut and Saida. This area used to be a sea resort area for Greater Beirut before the civil war. (...) The southern suburb is inhabited by one third of population of Greater Beirut, almost 0.5 million, and occupies an area similar to that of municipal Beirut (respectively 16 and 17.6 square kilometres). See: Soliman, n.1.

[89] *Ibid.* 25.

[90] Barakat, 490.

[91] Salamey – Tabar: *Consociational Democracy...* 248.

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] *Ibid.* 246.

[94] Soliman, 20.

[95] Salamey – Tabar: *Consociational Democracy...* 245.

setting.[96] Within these neighbourhoods the names of streets, highways, shops, buildings, mosques, parks and every physical space marked with images and symbols, remind the onlooker of the dwellers' affiliations. "A sectarian urban demarcation reaffirms continuity through a strong sense of historic community and common destiny."[97] This urban fragmentation is prevalent "in the clothes as well as in the publicity posting, the non-conformity to religious celebrations, even sport have become a new field of confrontation".[98]

The post-war reconstruction of the city was entrusted to a private company, Solidere (*Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction du Centre Ville de Beyrouth*), through a governmental decree that allowed the expropriation, reconstruction and management of all land in the city centre, what covers effectively the area of the "Old Beirut". Thus the reconstruction effort was largely focused on the city centre, in addition to other projects that would be of service to it, such as the airport, highways, and other infrastructure projects. In the last two decades Beirut has witnessed a boom in the demolition of historic buildings, thus giving way to the dominance of the French colonial style of the Mandate period and sweeping away the Ottoman legacy. Owners and tenants were compensated with company shares and critics were offered well-paying jobs.[99] The expropriated landowners became mere shareholders in this new arrangement, along with new international investors.

As in the case of the Maronites and the Sunni, the Shiite community developed to a large extent their economic, cultural, social and welfare activities within the confines of their confessional boundaries.[100] Thus the two Shiite parties (Hezbollah and Amal) had a great influence in shaping *Dahiya Janubiyya*.[101] As Helena Cobban stated, well into the years after 2000 it was still Hezbollah that provided drinking water, electricity and inevitable social services for the Dahiyeh residents despite all the rich financial sources of the Hariri led Lebanese governments. The significance of this phenomenon becomes clear when one considers that "Hizbullah's effectiveness in this sphere certainly helped build and buttress its political support in many parts of the country".[102]

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[96] Soliman, 28.

[97] Salamey – Tabar: *Consociational Democracy...* 240.

[98] Barakat, 492.

[99] *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 9–10.

[100] Salamey – Tabar: *Consociational Democracy...* 246.

[101] In addition to their political and military roles, they provide social, educational and medical services for Shiites and other Muslim groups inhabiting the urban areas that fall within their sphere of domination. A third party called the Progressive Socialist Party headed by Walid Jumblat, as a zaim of Druzes, played a major role on urban informality in Beirut and in the mountain of Lebanon, and he was later appointed as the minister of dislodged. See: Soliman, n.7.

[102] "Harik, Hamzeh, and other close observers of Hizbullah all agree that Hizbullah's social-service affiliates, law courts, and schools provide their services on a low-cost basis to those Lebanese who need them, whether Muslim or Christian, and that subsidies are available for very-low-income users. Many Christian parents send their children to Hizbullah-run schools, especially in south Lebanon, where they are often judged to provide the best education available." See: Cobban, Helena: "Hizbullah's New Face." *Boston Review*, April–May 2005. Available at: http://bostonreview.net/BR30.2/cobban.php

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The spread of urban informality as the most significant phenomenon shaping the space and urban fabric within Beirut reached Zuqaq el-Blat as well. Like most of the periphery or former suburbs in Beirut, it has witnessed arbitrary residential development that caused (and was caused by) serious socioeconomic problems.[103]

Between the mid 1970s and 1985 almost all Maronites and Jews left Zuqaq el-Blat and their abandoned houses were taken by Shiites, Kurds and Palestinians.[104] During the civil strife "Palestinian and left-wing militias roamed the streets of in search of shelter and roof-top firing positions (...)" The only way to avoid being killed or made homeless, as Khalil Sarkis recalls, was through emergency phone calls – begging Sunni political bosses to pressure military leaders to spare their old friends and neighbours. As the war dragged on, such lifelines of communication grew scarcer and more Zuqaqis were driven into exile. Members of the quarter's less fortunate minority communities were disposed to retribution. After Palestinians were killed and mutilated in Christian enclaves north of Beirut, Palestinian militias targeted defenceless victims in the easily accessible Zuqaq el-Blat.[105]

During the war, in the absence of state control, in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the quarter low-quality high-rise blocks of flats were constructed by the new, mostly Sunni owners. This fact helped to minimize problems with the Muslim militias in control of the area. The process continued all through and after the war and later was promoted by the new comer Shiite developers as well, all of whom profited from the very low real-estate prizes in the area at that time.[106] As a result, the war completely finished the destruction of the inherent social composition of the neighbourhood.

The Janus-faced nature of the post war development policy is well illustrated by the fact that irrespective of their cultural heritage and significance, in those parts of the quarter outside the radius of the Beirut Central District no new construction had taken place by 2004. While the northern segment of Zuqaq el-Blat has gradually integrated into the city's expanding commercial centre, its vast stretches of empty land where buildings have been demolished waiting for construction works or excavation to provide valuable underground parking, stand in sharp contrast to the rest of the quarter.[107]

In our days, the neighbourhood lost all its charm and appeal, its most densely populated and poverty ridden areas are now inhabited by Kurds and Shiites where streets and walls are stuffed with the signs and emblems of the two main political parties, the Amal and the Hezbollah. Based on surveys and interviews, Friederike Stolleis claims that the inhabitants of post-war Zuqaq el-Blat are locked up in conflicting claims as to who "owns" the quarter. A central strategy to win supremacy – prevalent as it is in the Middle East since 1948 – is proving precedence in the settlement, in order to confer authority over groups who immigrated more recently.[108] "Today, Nasif and Ibrahim al-Yaziji, Boutros and Selim Boustani, are still considered leading figures in the revival of Arabic literature and Syro-

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[103] Soliman, 29.
[104] Stolleis, 98.
[105] *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 8.
[106] Stolleis, 92–95.
[107] *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 25.
[108] Stolleis, 175–211.

Lebanese nationalism. Yet the fertile social setting that made their cultural innovations possible, Zuqaq el-Blat, is all but forgotten in Lebanon and the Arab World."[109]

CONCLUSION

I intended this paper to be a contribution to the ongoing debate among historians about the roots of confessionalism in Lebanon. Oliver Kögler in his study about preservation of historic buildings in Zuqaq el-Blat argues that the battle over architectural heritage is an important aspect of Beirut's post-war urban development. Historic buildings are symbolic sites where conflicting visions of Beirut's future compete and clash with one another.[110] My conviction is that an eventual moment and place of a non-confessional Lebanon was Zuqaq el-Blat in Beirut during the nineteenth century. As part of the Arab cultural and political renewal, it experienced a transforming mechanism which shifted its multi confessional inhabitants into a more inclusive political identity. Nevertheless, external factors, such as the French Mandate, the imposed confessionalism, the influx of Palestinian refugees and PLO fighters, as well as internal ones, including the social disparities between communities, led to continuous tensions, and ultimately to civil war.

In the context of war and post-war, Lebanese political life has been governed by former war chiefs and religious leaders who make use of the social and community territorialisation. It is in their interest to preserve the old militia zones in the capital by exercising political and economical influence, and to exert control over their own communities.

Al-Boustani's National School itself is the symbol of effective collaboration and cohabitation that took place in Beirut in the past. Today, however, amidst the astonishing luxury of the central districts, the school stands as an abandoned place in ruins. Can one hope peaceful co-existence in a country torn apart by such a composite of still bleeding wounds, opposing visions and clashing interests? The answer to this question proves to be difficult as long as no political will attempts at restoring this emblematic institution of national cohabitation and Lebanese solidarity.

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[109] *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 2.
[110] Kögler, Oliver: "Prospects for Preservation of Historic Buildings." In: *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut...* 261–288.