Observing Beirut in the throes of reconstruction is a bewitching, often beguiling, experience; both existentially and conceptually. From a close and intimate range, one is not only struck by the massive physical and material transformations underway but one gains insight into how new socio-cultural spaces and territorial entities are being invested with new meanings. One becomes aware of how disembedded groups and communities are recreating and re-inventing their familiar daily rhythms and the city's social fabric. More compelling, we became conscious of the artifacts, objects and spaces in the built environment which are being effaced and discarded and those which are being restored, embellished and rendered more pronounced.

Beirut today is akin to an ongoing living laboratory where one is in a sustained state of being captivated by the perpetual thrills of new discoveries unfolding, as it were, before one's own eyes. It is a marvel to live in such an urban milieu where one, literally, never encounters the same familiar and unchanging street or neighborhood. One is liberated, in an existential sense, from the deadening effects of habit and the sterility of familiar places. A daily stroll always carries with it the visceral sensation of surprise and the prospects of levitating, as it were, into another world. It always heightens one's visual and aesthetic sensibilities. To borrow one of the metaphors of Ghassan Hage, one is in a sustained state of being pushed, pulled, propelled upward and whirled downward at one and the same time.

More compelling Beirut is in another critical threshold in its checkered history. A restless and buoyant city is in throes, once again, of redefining itself. I say once again because it has been in this predicament many times before. It has reinvented itself on numerous earlier occasions. This is, however, the first time that the process has incited such a contested and public debate regarding the rehabilitation scheme itself and its impact on the envisioned or projected public image of Beirut. Indeed in the popular imagination a plurality of images are invoked: A future Honk Kong or Monaco; a Mediterranean town or Levantine sea port; a leisure resort, a playground or touristic site. Incidentally, we are not only talking about tourism in its ordinary or conventional form. At least two new types are becoming salient recently: health or medical tourism and war tourism enticed by the curiosity of travelers to behold sites of the ravages of war and how they are being reconstructed. Beirut is also envisioned as a tempting hub for services, communication network, mass popular entertainment and faddish consumerism. It is rather ironical that the appeals of Beirut, at this moment in its contested collective identity, are embodied and informed by the dissonant forces of ruination, havoc, loss but also rehabilitation restoration and well-being.

The spectacular events sparked by the “Independence Uprising” in the wake of Rafik Hariri’s assassination on February 14, 2005, have been so riveting in their manifestations and consequences that they have drawn the attention of the world and drove global powers to take remedial action. Spontaneous and self-propelled, the uprising – largely because it could exploit the commanding setting of Beirut's historic center – displayed so much daring and inventiveness that it evolved into a formidable public sphere. Sustained demonstrations and expressions of collective grievances allowed the protestors to articulate a coherent set of demands and to mobilize normally passive and quiescent groups to participate in popular grass-roots movements in support of the uprising. Thus far the byproducts have been vast in their immediate consequences and promise to be more consequential in their anticipated future reverberations. The massive sustained uprising forced the resignation of the government and precipitated a sharply contested political crisis. It expedited the formulation of two decisive UN resolutions: 1559, calling for the immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops and security agencies from Lebanon and 1595 to set up an international commission of inquiry into the assassination of Hariri. Perhaps more compelling, in view of its future fallouts, the uprising has initiated the country’s youth into a hands-on and direct tutelage in civic virtues and emancipatory political struggle.

By virtue of its centrality and commanding historic setting – almost akin to an open museum of the World’s most ancient civilizations – Beirut's central square has always displayed some curious historical features which account for its survival as a fairly open, pluralistic and cosmopolitan urban district. Archaeological findings repeatedly show that this very site, often dubbed as the “nursery of Homo Sapiens,” has served as
an abode for man almost since his appearance on the face of the earth. Indeed, some of the implements (mainly stone artifacts) which continue to be unearthed on site, may be traced back to the Lower Paleolithic, roughly two or three million years old. The relentless succession of dynasties and civilizations which left their indelible legacies on this site is truly bewildering. The massive reconstruction efforts underway, particularly around Beirut's historic center, continue to come across, almost daily finds, which reconfirm this most distinguished heritage of its ancient past.

Stunning as its archaeological relics are, one need not though be misled by the prehistoric eminence of Beirut. Nor should one go too far back into the past to disclose the circumstances associated with the distinctive role its central square came to represent. Despite its momentous history, its emergence as a modern, cosmopolitan urban center is of recent vintage. In fact, the most definitive symptoms of urbanization – rural exodus and the spill of the population beyond its medieval walls - did not really appear in any substantial form until the 1860’s. Of course there were earlier signs of rural exodus. Dislocation in native crafts, the decline in silk production and the shift in the pattern of trade, particularly during the Egyptian occupation (1831-41) had generated a shift in population movement toward coastal towns. All these and earlier such movements, however, were limited in scale. For example, when Volney, visited Beirut in 1773, he described it as a small town with not more than 6000 people. There was not, it must be noted, any perceptible increase in the population during the next six decades. By 1830 the population was still in the neighborhood of 8000.

The decade of Egyptian presence, with its concomitant commercialization and opening up of Mount Lebanon to western incursions, added only another two thousand to Beirut’s population. This relatively slow rate of increase (about 500 annually) was maintained during the 1840’s and 1850’s. In short, it was not until the outbreak of civil disturbances in the late 1850’s and early 1860’s that the impact of a massive shift in population began to be felt. Beirut’s population leaped from 22,000 in 1857 to 70,000 in 1863, an annual increase of almost 10,000. During the height of civil disturbances and in the short span of only two months (August-September 1860), an Anglo-Saxon committee of local missionaries gave aid to more than 20,000 refugees in Beirut (JESSUP 1910: 251).

All description of Beirut prior to the 1860’s attests to this. Until then, it was no more than a small fortified medieval town with seven main gates and about one quarter of a square mile surrounded by gardens. The central core of the city was built around its historic port and mole with defenses on the landward side and two towers at the entrance of the port. As in most European towns before industrialization, people in Beirut lived and worked within the same area and carried on nearly all their daily routines within the same urban quarter. Ethnic and religious affiliation created relatively homogeneous and compact residential neighborhoods. Daily routines were carried out within clearly defined quarters, and the neighborhood survived as an almost self-sufficient community with which the individual identified. There was a strong sense of neighborliness, and patterns of behavior were largely regulated through kinship and religious ties. Physical and social space, in other words, were almost identical. More important, these neighborhoods offered the urban dweller a human scale and types of social networks which he could comprehend and in which he could find a uniquely individual space.

Gross density was high – around 300 per hectare – and the town gave an overwhelming impression of congestion. Lamartine, who visited Beirut in 1832, said, for example that the roofs of some houses served as terraces to the others. Except for souqs, khans, baths, places of worship and other public buildings which dominated the town, the prevailing house types were flat-roofed farm houses and the traditional two or three-storied, red-tiled villas with elaborate facades and decorative railed stairways and balconies. Sandstone blocks, quarried in the area, were the predominant construction form. A lush subtropical vegetation graced the well-tended gardens of its houses and lined its winding alleyways.

The cactus-lined alleys were soon converted to macadamized streets. Urban construction leaped beyond the medieval walls of the city to accommodate the persistent inflow of rural migrants into Beirut. The construction of the wharf in Beirut’s port in 1860 to accommodate the increasing maritime traffic, like all the other infrastructural developments and public amenities undertaken throughout the second half of the 19th century (e.g. harbor facilities, Damascus railways, gas lights, potable water, electric tramways, telegraph and postal services, quarantine, dispensaries and hospitals along with schools, colleges and printing houses) assisted naturally in the expansion and urbanization of Beirut. As a residence for consul-generals, headquarters for French, American and British missions, and growing center of trade and services it gradually began to attract a cosmopolitan and heterogeneous population. It is then that some of the early symptoms of cosmopolitanism, marked by elements of sophistication and savoir faire in public life, started to
surface. This was particularly visible in the opening up and receptivity of seemingly local and provincial groups and neighborhoods to novel and mixed life styles and mannerisms.

But Beirut's swift urbanization (the consequences of both internal migration and natural growth rates in the population) carried with it other more disheartening consequences. Since nearly two-thirds of the rural exodus was directed toward Beirut, the capital trebled its residential population between 1932 and 1964 and grew by nearly tenfold between 1932 and 1980. This rapid growth of Beirut was not only due to internal demographic factors but, to a large extent, it was also a reflection of external pressures which generated added demand for urban space. First, the Armenian Massacres of 1914 brought over fifty thousand Armenian refugees from Turkey. The waves of Palestinian refugees after 1948 and the political instability in neighboring Arab countries intensified this demand, as did the subsequent inflow of capital from the Gulf states and foreign remittances, which poured into the already lucrative real estate and construction sectors of the economy. The building boom of the 1950s and 1960s, with its manifestations of mixed and intensive land-use patterns and vertical expansion, was largely a by-product of such forces. The resulting uncontrolled and haphazard patterns of growth were maintained during the early 1970s. Shortly before the outbreak of civil disturbances in 1975, greater Beirut was probably absorbing seventy five percent of Lebanon's urban population and close to forty five percent of all the inhabitants of the country. In addition, its already overcrowded 101 square kilometer area had to accommodate an estimated 120,000 daily commuters from adjoining suburbs (RAGHEB 1969: 110).

By the early 1970s Beirut's annual rate of growth was estimated at four percent, which implied that the city was bound to double in less than twenty years. The magnitude of this change may be expressed in more concrete terms: if the current rates of growth were maintained, Beirut would have had to accommodate and provide housing, schooling, medical services, transportation, and other services for at least 40,000 new residents every year. It is in this sense that Beirut was at the time associated with the phenomenon of primacy and overurbanization. Insofar as the degree of urbanization was much more than would be expected from the level of industrialization, then Lebanon was among the few countries – along with Egypt, Greece, and Korea – that may be considered overurbanized (SOVANI 1969). We will subsequently explore some of the spatial and sociocultural implications of such overurbanization. Suffice it to note that this is one of the most critical problems Lebanon continues to face, a problem with serious social, psychological, economic, and political implications. Urban congestion, blight, depletion of open spaces, disparities in income distribution, rising levels of unemployment and underemployment, housing shortages, exorbitant rents, problems generated by slums and shantytowns, and, to a considerable extent, the urban violence of the war years were all by-products of overurbanization. In short, the scale and scope of urbanization had outstripped the city's resources to cope effectively with continuously mounting demand for urban space and public amenities.

Hence, Beirut has always been gripped by a nagging dissonance between conceived and lived space. The city, as we shall see, has never been short on blue prints and envisioned, often idealistic conceptions, of how planners and builders perceive the defining elements and shape of the spatial environment. For a variety of reasons, such perceptions were not consistent with the concrete spatial realities. In other words, lived space almost always assumed a life of its own unrelated to its original or intended expectations.

From its eventful past, much like its most recent history, a few distinct but related features stand out. Together these defining elements continue to be vital in informing the way Beirut, and its central square in particular, could continue to serve as a vibrant and transcending public sphere amenable for collective mobilization and for forging a hybrid popular culture for tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

**City and Mountain**

First, and without doubt, one of its most striking attributes is the dual role Beirut managed to epitomize throughout its eventful history as a port city and a national capital linked to its hinterland. Hence, any understanding of this distinctive feature requires an elucidation of the timeless interplay between the accidents of its pregiven geographic and ecological endowments, namely the sea and its mountainous hinterland. Indeed, to many of its articulate historians, philosophers and writers, who often evoke these natural gifts with high and emotive hyperbole, much of their country's accomplishments are seen as an outgrowth of such seemingly dissonant attributes. Some, like Charles Malik, Michel Chihaa, Said Akl, Kamal el-Hajj among others speak, with more than just a hint of geographic determinism, of the “horizontal” effects of the sea and the “perpendicular” effects of the mountain to account for the two most distinctive
characteristics which informed its distinguished history: the open, adventurous, itinerant and worldly predispositions generated by its seafaring heritage, along with the role its mountains served as a secure asylum for displaced minorities and dissident groups.

To Albert Hourani, Lebanon’s political culture, particularly its republican and liberal features, managed to reconcile two distinct visions or ideologies which had been tenuously held together since the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920:

On the one hand, there was the idea of Mount Lebanon: a society rural, homogeneous, embodied in an institution, the Maronite church, with a self-image...and with a vision of an independent and predominantly Christian political community. On the other, there were the urban communities of Beirut and other coastal cities, mainly Sunni Muslim but with Orthodox and other Christian elements, and with a different idea: that of a trading community open to the world, and serving as a point of transit and exchange, and therefore a community where populations mingled and coexisted peacefully; of a society which needed government and law, but preferred a weak government to which the leaders of its constituent groups had access and which they could control (HOURANI 1988: 7-8).

Hourani traces the theoretical basis of this vision and its embodiment in the Mithaq or covenant of 1943 to, of course, the writings of Michel Chiha, in which we can see the marriage of the two ideologies; the mountain and the city. To Chiha this largely accounts for what he termed Lebanon’s “spiritual dominance”:

Lebanon the mountain of refuge and Lebanon the meeting place, rooted in its own traditions but open to the world, with bilingualism or trilingualism as a necessity of its life; possessing stable institutions which correspond with its deep realities, an assembly in which the spokesmen of the various communities can meet and talk together, tolerant laws, no political domination of one group by another, but kind of spiritual domination of those who think of Lebanon as part of the Mediterranean world (CHIHA 1966).

Chiha’s optimistic vision notwithstanding, the marriage was strenuous from its very inception. It was, after all, an arranged liaison, a contract; not a romantic bond. With all the bona fides of its architects and the noblesse oblige of the consenting parties, the Mithaq could not have possibly survived the multilayered pressures (local, regional, and international) it was burdened with. It was a partial covenant. It did not fully express the changing demographic and communal realities of the time. With the creation of Greater Lebanon, Christians as a whole were no longer in a majority, though arguably the Maronites were still the largest single community. The annexation of the coast and the Biqa’ also ushered in an unsettling variety of political cultures and disparate ideologies.

Incidentally, it is these “New Phoenician” voices which captured the attention of the American Legation offices in Beirut at the time; particularly those of Chiha, Gabriel Menassa, Alfred Kettaneh, and their extended network of family circles and close associates of the commercial and political elite. As staunch advocates of free trade, they were opposed to any form of central planning and protectionism, shunned industrialization, jealously guarded the sources of their new wealth and lived by the edict: “import or die.” Writing to the Secretary of State, on August 19, 1947, Lowell Pinkerton of the U.S. Legation had this to say:

The ancient commercial craft of the Phoenicians is still very evident ...perhaps it will prevail more modern counsels, or be more effectively supplemented by expert foreign advice. In any case, here are vigorous exponents of the capitalist system who now look only to the United States for ideas and encouragement (GENDZIER 1990: 35).

Chiha himself, incidentally, was fully aware that his vision was far from an exemplar of stability and harmony. His liberal image of Beirut as a cosmopolitan city-state coexisting with the more archaic tribal and primordial loyalties of those of the mountain and hinterland was, to say the least, a cumbersome and problematic vision. This was compounded, particularly after 1920, by impassioned claims of the rival ideological currents taking root in the coastal cities. The “Lebanism” of the Christians was pitted against the “Arabism” of the Sunni Muslims with reverberations among the Shiites and Druze of the hinterland. No wonder that during the 1930s the neighborhoods of Beirut were periodically “the scene of violent clashes between Christian and Muslim gangs, one side bandishing the banner of Lebanon, the other of Arabism” (SALIBI 1988: 180).
The shortcomings of the *Mithaq*, it should be noted, are not inherent in its basic philosophy or modus vivendi to arrive at a consensual compromise between communities seeking to contain potentially explosive issues of sovereignty, collective or national representation, and peaceful coexistence. The *Mithaq* was also addressing perhaps the more delicate problems associated with the “fears” of the Christians and the “demands” and “grievances” of the Muslims. Like most pacts it involved mutual renunciation. The Christians undertook to renounce their traditional alliances with the West and France in particular, while the Muslims promised to abandon their pan-Arabist aspirations. In effect both communities were to turn away from the larger world to help galvanize their loyalties to Lebanon. George Naccache’s pungent aphorism notwithstanding – “deux négations ne font pas une nation” – this double renunciation seemed both feasible and appropriate at the time.

The Ta’if Accord of 1989 has not fared any better in allaying some of the disheartening manifestations of such persistent fragmentation and conflictual images regarding Beirut’s collective memory and national identity as the nation’s capital. The Accord is often heralded as an innovative and remarkable pact marking the threshold of a new republic. It is credited for putting an end to nearly two decades of protracted violence for laying the foundation for reconciling differences over the three implacable sources of long standing discord and hostility, namely: political reforms, national identity, and state sovereignty.

The tensions between the two seemingly dissonant “ideologies”, those of the city and the mountain, have been compounded by yet another unsettling feature: the “ruralization” of Beirut as seen in the tenacity and survival of large residues of non-urban ties and loyalties. Repeated studies have shown that the swift and extensive urbanization Lebanon was experiencing at the time was not associated, as is the case in most other societies, with a comparable decline in kinship and communal loyalties (see, for example, Gulick 1967; Khalaf and Kongstad 1973; Khuri 1975). In other words, the intensity and increasing scale of urbanization as physical phenomenon was not accompanied by a proportional degree of urbanism as a way of life.

What this suggests, among other things, is that a sizable portion of Beirutis were, in an existential sense, *in* but not *of* the city. To both recent migrants and relatively more permanent urban settlers, city life was predominantly conceived as a transient encounter, to be sustained by periodic visits to rural areas, or by developing rural networks within urban areas. In practice, urbanization in Lebanon has not meant the erosion of kinship ties, communal loyalties, and confessional affinities and the emergence of impersonality, anonymity and transitory social relations.

As in other dimensions of social life, the network of urban social relations, visiting patterns, and the character of voluntary associations still sustain a large residue of traditional attachments despite increasing secularization and urbanization. In many respects Beirut remains today more a “mosaic” of distinct urban communities than “melting pots” of amorphous urban masses. Often neighborhoods emerge that consist of families drawn from both the same village and the same religious group, resulting in patterns of segregation in which religious and village ties are reinforced. The survival of such features has been a source of communal solidarity, providing much of the needed social and psychic supports, but they also account for such of the deficiency in civility and the erosion of public and national consciousness. More important, as will be shown later, they may obstruct rational urban planning and zoning.

The protracted civil disturbances of 1975-92 did not only reinforce the communal character of neighborhoods but generated other problems of a far more critical magnitude. Vast areas, in addition to the central business district, were totally or partially destroyed. Massive population shifts generated further disparities and imbalances between the various communities and intensified religious hostilities and feelings of paranoia and/or indifference towards the “other.”

We are, of course, concerned here with the implications such unresolved socio-cultural and political realities have on the spatial and architectural heritage of Beirut and its central square. More particularly, what role can urban planning and landscape design play in providing spatial settings conducive for allaying some of the segmental and divisive loyalties which continue to undermine prospects for forging transcending and cosmopolitan urban environments.
Postwar Setting

Another compelling reality, with substantial implications for the envisioned role the Bourj can play in providing venues and outlets for forging the desired collective and spatial identities, has much to do with the process of postwar reconstruction. Such ventures, even under normal circumstances, are usually cumbersome. In Lebanon, they are bound to be more problematic because of the distinctive character of some of the residues of collective terror and strife the country was besieged with for almost two decades and which set it apart from other instances of postwar reconstruction. The horrors spawned by the war are particularly galling because they were not anchored in any recognizable or coherent set of causes. Nor did the violence, ugly as it was, resolved the issues which might have sparked the initial hostilities. It is in this poignant sense that the war which devastated Beirut was wasteful, futile and unfinished.

As such the task of representing or incorporating such inglorious events into Beirut’s and the country’s collective identity becomes, understandably, much more problematic. But it needs to be done. Otherwise, the memory of the war, like the harrowing events themselves, might well be trivialized and forgotten and, hence more likely to be repeated. Some of the disheartening consequences of unfinished wars are legion. Two are particularly poignant and of relevance to the concerns of this essay: First the salient symptoms of “retribalization” apparent in reawakened communal identities and the urge to seek shelter in cloistered spatial communities. Second, a pervasive mood of lethargy, indifference, weariness which borders, at times, on “collective amnesia.” Both are understandable reactions which enable traumatized groups to survive the cruelties of protracted strife. Both, however, could be disabling as the Lebanese are now considering less belligerent strategies for peaceful coexistence.

Both manifestations – the longing to obliterate, mystify and distance oneself from the fearsome recollections of an ugly and unfinished war or efforts to preserve or commemorate them – coexist today in Lebanon. Retribalization and the reassertion of communal and territorial identities, perhaps a few of the most prevalent elements in postwar Lebanon, incorporate in fact both these features. The convergence of spatial and communal identities serves, in other words, both the need to search for roots and the desire to rediscover or invent a state of bliss that has been lost; it also serves as a means of escape from the trials, tribulations and fearful recollections of the war.

Expressed more concretely, this reflex or impulse for seeking refuge in cloistered spatial communities is sustained by two seemingly opposed forms of self-preservation: to remember and to forget. The former is increasingly sought in efforts to anchor oneself in one’s community or in reviving its communal solidarities and threatened heritage. The latter is more likely to assume escapist and nostalgic predispositions to return to a past imbued with questionable authenticity. The two however, as will be seen, are related. It is only when certain artifacts and objects are remembered and, by exclusion, begin to cause others to be forgotten.

If there are then visible symptoms of a culture of disappearance, evident in the growing encroachment of global capital and state authority into the private realm and heedless reconstruction schemes which, are destroying or defacing the country’s distinctive architectural, landscape and urban heritage, there is a burgeoning culture of resistance which is contesting and repelling such encroachment and dreaded annihilation or the fear of being engulfed by the overwhelming forces of globalization.

One unintended but compelling consequence of all this is that through this restorative venture, and perhaps for the first time in recent history, a growing segment of the Lebanese are becoming publically aware of their spatial surroundings. It has enhanced, in appreciable ways, their spatial sensibilities and public concern for safeguarding the well-being of their living habitat. By doing so, consciously or otherwise, they are transforming their tenuous, distant and instrumental attachments to “space” to the more personal and committed identities engendered by deep and more meaningful and supportive loyalties to one’s “place”. It is these loyalties afterall which are receptive to the needs of urbanity and civility. Hence, rather than deriding and maligning one’s roots and primordial attachments (religious, sectarian, kinship, communal and otherwise) as sources of retrograde or infantile nostalgia, they could, if judiciously mobilized, become routes for forging new cosmopolitan identities and transcending loyalties and commitments (for further elaboration, see Khalaf 2003).
Global, Regional and Local Encounters

Lebanon is not only grappling with all the short-term imperatives of reconstruction and long-term needs for sustainable development and security, but it has to do so in a turbulent region with a multitude of unresolved conflicts and contested strategies for steering postwar rehabilitation and the broader issues of national development. Impotent as the country might seem at the moment to neutralize or ward off such external pressures, there are measures and programs already proved effective elsewhere, which can be experimented with to fortify Lebanon's immunity against the disruptive consequences of such destabilizing forces. Such efforts can do much in reducing the country's chronic vulnerability to these pressures. A central premise of this essay is the belief that urban planning and design, architecture, landscaping, among other overlooked forms of public intervention, can offer effective strategies for healing symptoms of fear and paranoia and transcending parochialism.

This is not, after all, the first time that the country – Beirut in particular – faces such predicaments. As will be seen, during earlier confrontations with both Ottoman and French attempts at the production of social space, local builders, architects and other indigenous groups displayed considerable awareness, knowledge and skills relevant to processes of construction and reconstruction underway at the time.

Since Beirut as capital and imposing port city was subjected to successive planning schemes, the construction of monumental edifices, thoroughfares and public squares, it is instructive to re-examine how such attempts were perceived and implemented. Were local groups, in other words, merely passive recipients in such instances of struggle for power and control over lived space? Or were they active participants who often succeeded in resisting and changing the imperial and colonial impositions? The experience of Beirut, particularly its central square and contiguous urban spaces, become instructive in conceptual and comparative terms. In this respect, Beirut offers another grounded and living instance of the production of social space which depart from other common experiences and patterns observed in other settings (see for example, King 2003; Nasr and Voilet 2003). Beirut's experience, as will be argued, was not and is not merely a process of transfer, transplantation or imposition of external visions and schemes on a willing, compliant and non-participative public. More vital perhaps, by disclosing the interplay between this inevitable plurality of forces – local, regional and transnational – which are involved in the construction of the collective identity of a particular settlement, one is also probing into the elements which make up the “imagined community” of the Bourj, Beirut and Lebanon as a nation-state.

Regardless of what perspective or paradigm one adopts for contextualizing the nature of spatial identities – i.e., the perspective of world systems, globalization, postcolonial or postmodern – in the final analysis this requires an understanding of both the broader macro and structural transformations along with the nature, scale and the particular manner local considerations continue to make their presence felt in redefining and reconstituting social space. Indeed, in some instance, so-called “postmodern” attributes – i.e., fragmentation, fluid and multiple identities, the mixing of different histories, pastiche, irony, the destruction of the vernacular and provincial – were present in Beirut long before they had appeared elsewhere, including Europe and the US.

No matter for example how we define globalization, it involves as Roland Robertson (1992) reminds us, “an increasing consciousness of the world as a whole.” He goes on to suggest that

"[T]he contemporary concern with civilizational, societal (as well as ethnic) uniqueness – as expressed via such motifs as identity, tradition and indigenization – largely rests on globally diffused ideas. In an increasingly globalized world... there is an exacerbation of civilizational, societal and ethnic self-consciousness. Identity, tradition and indigenization only make sense contextually (Robertson 1992: 130)."

While Anthony King is in agreement that identities are established and validated contextually, he is not though of the view that they are usually the outcome of the broad and distant forces of “globalization.” Instead, he argues that they are usually “constructed in relation to much specific, smaller, historical, social and spatial contexts.” He goes on to say that people do “express their resistance to the global political and economic situations that engulf them, and at the same time may also immerse themselves within these situations” (King 2003): 10.

Such consciousness and proclivity to engage with cosmopolitan encounters were also present in Beirut before the advent of globalism and postmodernity. The identity of some urban Beiruts - if one were to infer
The gargantuan Al-Amin Mosque, about to be completed, occupies a massive space of about 4000m². It literally dwarfs everything around it. It is a joint by-product of three benevolent foundations: Walid Ibn Talal, Rafik Hariri, and Al-Amin Mosque Association. Because of its colossal proportions it has been a source of controversy. If the sacred features have become more conspicuous and redoubtable but then so are the profane, to invoke Durkheim's classic dichotomy. Any land use mapping of the district is bound to reveal the dominance of mass consumerism, retail shops, boutiques restaurants, coffee shops, side walk cafes, night clubs and bars. But here as well the global and postmodern (i.e., shopping arcades, internet cafes, chat rooms, fast-food franchises and elegant fashionable boutiques) co-exist symbiotically with some of the provincial outlets.

On the contrary, and in many instances, geography, attachments to place are becoming more important, not less. Geography, location, territorial and spatial identities have become sharper and more meaningful at the psychic and socio-cultural levels. Such manifestations should not be dismissed as nostalgic or transient interludes destined to "pass" into "secular", tenuous and more impersonal or virtual encounters. Indeed, one of the central premises of the essay is that we can better understand the emergent socio-cultural identities – even the political and economic transformations – by seeing their manifestations in this ongoing dialectics between place and space. How, in other words, are spaces being transformed into places and how, in turn, places degenerate into mere spaces to be occupied and exploited for commercial and mercenary pursuits.

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If the sacred features have become more conspicuous and redoubtable but then so are the profane, to invoke Durkheim's classic dichotomy. Any land use mapping of the district is bound to reveal the dominance of mass consumerism, retail shops, boutiques restaurants, coffee shops, side walk cafes, night clubs and bars. But here as well the global and postmodern (i.e., shopping arcades, internet cafes, chat rooms, fast-food franchises and elegant fashionable boutiques) co-exist symbiotically with some of the provincial outlets. Quite often global franchises (i.e., McDonald, KFC, Pizza Hut, Dunkin Donuts etc...) "go native" - so-to-speak – by appropriating local elements such as valet parking and other semiotic images of the vernacular to enhance the appeals of their products and services. Likewise, traditional outlets often fain the scintillating features of their global counterparts to validate their own public images and marketing ploys.

Within such a context, it is no longer meaningful to talk about local/global, provincialism/ cosmopolitanism, vernacular/universal, space/place, being/becoming, village-in-the-city/global-village etc... as though they are distinct, irreconcilable dichotomies. Such polarization and ideal typologies, much like the earlier misplaced dichotomies between the sacred/secular, traditional/modern, mechanical/organic, are not a reflection of what is in fact grounded in the real world (see SHORT 2001: 7-20 for further elaboration).

Such realities must be borne in mind as we explore or anticipate the future national image or collective identity Beirut's central square is likely to assume at this juncture in its checkered history. We are, after all, dealing with the convergence or interplay of three problematic and tenuous realities or considerations: postwar Beirut, regional uncertainties and global incursions. Hence the emergent identities in Beirut are blurred and are in perpetual states of being reconstituted and redefined. The views of a growing circle of recent scholars – Ulf Hannerz (1996), H. Bhabha (1994), A. Appadurai (1997), John Short (2001), among others – are in support of such expressions of cultural diversity and hybridity.
Collective Memory vs. Collective Amnesia

Beirut, is not only grappling with all the trials and tribulations of a postwar setting, local fragmentation and the unsettling manifestations of unresolved regional and global rivalries. These are not new to Beirut. What is fairly recent, however, are some of the compelling consequences of postmodernity and globalism: a magnified importance of mass media, popular arts and entertainment in the framing of everyday life; an intensification of consumerism, the demise of political participation and collective consciousness for public issues and their replacement by local and parochial concerns for nostalgia and heritage.

Within this context, issues of collective memory, contested space and efforts to forge new cultural identities, begin to assume critical dimensions. How much and what of the past needs to be retained or restored? By whom and for whom? Common as these questions might seem, they have invited little agreement among scholars. Indeed, the views of perspectives of those who have recently addressed them vary markedly. To Ernest Gellner (1988), collective forgetfulness, anonymity and shared amnesia are dreaded conditions resisted in all social orders. Perhaps conditions of anonymity, he argues, are inevitable in times of turmoil and upheaval. But once the unrest subsides, internal cleavages and segmental loyalties resurface. MacCannell (1989) goes further to assert that the ultimate triumph of modernity over other socio-cultural arrangements is epitomized not by the disappearance of pre-modern elements but by their reconstruction and artificial preservation in modern society. Similarly, Jedlowski (1990) also maintains that a sense of personal identity can only be achieved on the basis of personal memory.

Paul Connerton (1989) likewise argues that it is collective memory – i.e., commonly shared images of the past – which legitimate a present social order. To the extent that peoples’ memories of a society's past diverge, then its members will be bereft of sharing common experiences, perspectives and visions. These memory claims figure significantly in our self-perceptions. Our past history, imagined or otherwise, is an important source in our conception of selfhood. In the final analysis, our self-knowledge our conception of our own character and potentialities is, to a large extent, shaped by the way in which we view our own past action (Connerton 1989: 22). Likewise, Halbwachs (1950) argued persuasively that it is primarily through membership in mediating groups such a religion, national ideological or class membership that people are able to acquire and then recall their memories (Halbwachs 1991). These become the venues for creating and sustaining shared memories. We often forget that for man, as for no other creature, to lose his past to lose his memory is to lose himself, to lose his identity. History, in this case, is more than just a record of how man becomes what he is. It is the largest element in his self-conception.

Persuasive as such pleas on behalf of collective memory are, particularly with regard to their impact on reconstituting the frayed symptoms of social solidarity and national allegiance, a slew of other scholars make equally persuasive claims on behalf of collective amnesia and social forgetfulness. Benjamin Barber, for example, argues that successful civic nations always entail a certain amount of “studied historical absentmindedness...Injuries too well remembered,” he tells us, “cannot heal” (Barber 1996: 167). What Barber is, of course, implying here is that if the memories of the war and its atrocities are kept alive, they will continue to reawaken fear and paranoia, particularly among those embittered by it. Without an opportunity to forget there can never be a chance for harmony and genuine co-existence.

David Lowenthal, in his preface to an edited volume on The Art of Forgetting (2001), goes further to underscore the close etymological connection of “amnesia” with “amnesty.” He invokes one of the basic premises of Hobbes who, he reminds us, treated forgetting as the basis of a just state and amnesia as the “cornerstone of the social conduct.” What he termed “remedial oblivion” was a common strategy of 17th century statecraft (Lowenthal 2001: xi). Lowenthal advances, in this regard, another compelling inference: that much forgetting turns out to be more beneficial and enabling than bereavement; a “mercy” rather than a “malady”... “To forget is as essential as to keep things in mind, for no individual or collectivity can afford to remember everything. Total recall would leave us unable to discriminate or generalize” (Ibid.: xi).

To reinforce his plea in favor of forgetting as a merciful as well as a mandatory art, Lowenthal makes a distinction between individual and collective forgetting. While the former is largely involuntary, collective oblivion, on the other hand, is mainly:

Deliberate, purposeful and regulated. Therein lies the art of forgetting – art as opposed to ailment, choice rather than compulsion or obligation. The art is a high and delicate enterprise, demanding astute judgment about what to keep and what to let go, to salvage or to shred or shelve, to memorialize or to anathematize (Ibid.).
Adrian Forty (2001), in supporting the view that forgetting is an intentional, deliberate and desirable human response, invokes the classic tradition, particularly the perspectives of Durkheim, Freud, Ernest Renan, Martin Heidegger and a sampling of a few contemporary cultural theorists and philosophers like Michel de Certeau, Walter Benjamin and Paul Connerton. By fulfilling this universal need to forget, which to Forty is essential for sustaining normal and healthy life, groups normally resort to or take shelter in two rather familiar and well-tried strategies. They either construct an artifact, by building monuments, war memorials and the like, i.e., a material proxy or substitute for the delicate and fragile nature of human memory. The trauma, senseless destruction and sacrifices are in this case redeemed. Or, and more likely, society resorts to iconoclastic predispositions, by effacing and destroying much of the relics and material heritage of the past.

Both these traditions, as we shall see, have been quite salient in Beirut. Indeed, they have provoked an ongoing, often heated, polemics over the architectural heritage of the city and how to memorialize the country's pathological history with protracted civil strife. Critics of Solidere's massive rehabilitation scheme of down-town Beirut continue to decry and berate how much of the city's distinctive archeological heritage was needlessly destroyed in the process of reconstruction. If the belligerent and recurrent cycles of random violence had devastated much of the city's center and adjoining urban neighborhoods, the reconstruction schemes, the critics often charge, compounded the ruthless destruction by acting more like a merciless bulldozer. When the more divisive issues associated with the war's collective memory; i.e., how, where and in what form can they be recalled are invoked, manifestations of discord and ambivalence become equally contentious. They always generate and reawaken sharp and heated debate and, thereby, give vent to layers of hidden hostility and unresolved fear.

These, clearly, are not merely rhetorical and benign concerns. Nor are Beirut's experiences in this regard unique or unusual. They are embroiled with the testy issues of collective memory, space and national identity. More explicitly they inform the entangled discourse regarding the connection between objects, memory and forgetting. Adrian Forty, in fact, (2001) takes us back to the Aristotelian tradition to show us how it was inverted by Freud, Ernest Renan and, more recently, by Michel de Certeau.

To Forty, the Western tradition of memory, since the Renaissance, has been founded on the Aristotelian premise that material objects, whether natural or artificial, can act as the analogues or correlates of human memory. What this also came to mean is that such objects may be interpreted as the means by which members of a society may get rid of what they no longer wish to remember. This was predicated on the assumption that memory loss is inevitable through the passive attrition of time.

Freud's theory of mental process is the antithesis of such an Aristotelian conception of memory. He questioned this presumed relationship between objects and memory. Since to Freud memory is no more than a mental process, he advanced the thesis that in "mental life nothing that has once been formed can perish – that everything is somehow preserved in and suitable circumstances... can once more be brought to light (Freud 1969: 6). In other words, rather than memory loss taking place through the passive attrition of time, as Aristotle had assumed, Freud considered that memory and, thus, forgetting is an active, intentional and desired force, not passive, natural and involuntary. The French philosopher Michel de Certeau views this connection between memory and objects from an interesting and telling perspective. He writes, intuitively, that "memory is a sort of anti-museum: it is not localizable." For him, the defining element of memory is that "it comes from somewhere else, it is outside of itself, it moves things about." (De Certeau 1984: 108). This is taken to imply that if and when it ceases to display such alteration, when it becomes fixed to particular objects or local artifacts, then it is destined to decay and may well suffer oblivion. Seen in such a light, objects become the enemy of memory. Confining memory down will most certainly dispel its forgetfulness.

Within this context, it is understandable how the natural reactions of the Lebanese to all the unbearable atrocities and traumas they were beset with, that they should try to forget, or at least distance themselves from and sanitize, as they appear to be doing, the scars and scares of almost two decades of cruel and senseless violence. As the country was preparing itself to commemorate the 30th anniversary of its misbegotten civil war on April 14, a score of voluntary associations were declaring their birth and pronouncing their envisaged programs and strategies for healing, reconciliation and enhancing national consciousness through voluntary and cross-communal work-camps and social welfare projects which cuts across and transcends sectarian and local attachments. Interestingly leaders and spokespersons of these associations are on the whole youthful groups who are too young to have witnessed first hand any of the treacherous events of the war. They are also perceptive in launching their programs on the dreaded "green
line” adjoining the National Museum, a site which conjure up images of demarcation, distance and the bounded territoriality of warring factions.

The Heritage Crusade

It is the ambivalence and uncertainty with which we behold the past, along with the fear of disappearance, which account for the concern for what Lowenthal aptly calls the heritage crusade. In postwar Lebanon this crusade has become so pervasive that it is beginning to assume all the trappings and hype of a national pastime and a thriving industry. Escape into a reenchanted past has obviously a nostalgic tinge to it. This tinge, however, need not be seen as a pathological retreat into a delusory past. It could well serve, as Bryan Turner has argued, a redemptive form of heightened sensitivity, sympathetic awareness of human problems and, hence, it could be “ethically uplifting” (TURNER 1987: 149). In this sense it is less of a ‘flight’ and more of a catharsis for human suffering.

This nostalgic longing, among a growing segment of disenchanted intellectuals, is a form of resistance or refusal to partake in the process of debasement of aesthetic standards or the erosion of bona fide and veritable items of cultural heritage. Impotent as such efforts may seem, they express a profound disgust with the trivialization of culture so visible in the emptiness of consumerism and the nihilism of the popular culture industry. They are also an outcry against the loss of personal autonomy and authenticity. Even the little common-place, mundane things and routines of daily life – street smells and sounds and other familiar icons and landmarks of place – let alone historic sites and architectural edifices, are allowed to atrophy or be effaced.

Here again this nostalgic impulse is beginning to assume some redemptive and engaging expressions. A variety of grass-roots movements, citizen and advocacy groups, and voluntary associations have been established recently to address problems related to the preservation and protection of the built environment. Earlier special interest groups have had to redefine their objectives and mandates to legitimize and formalize their new interests. A succession of workshops, seminars, and international conferences has been hosted to draw on the experience of other comparable instances of postwar reconstruction. Periodicals and special issues of noted journals, most prominently perhaps the feature page on ‘heritage’ by the Beirut daily An-Nahar, are devoting increasing coverage to matters related to space, environment, and architectural legacy.

At the popular cultural level, this resistance to the threat of disappearance is seen in the revival of folk arts, music, and lore, flea markets, artisan shops, and other such exhibits and galleries. Personal memories, autobiographies, nostalgic recollections of one’s early childhood and life in gregarious and convivial quarters and neighborhoods of old Beirut are now popular narrative genres. So are pictorial glossy anthologies of Beirut’s urban history, old postcards, maps, and other such collectibles. They are all a thriving business. Even the media and advertising industry is exploiting such imagery and nostalgic longing to market their products.

Another mode of retreat or escape from the ugly memories of the war and the drabness or anxieties of the postwar era is the proliferation of kitsch. While kitsch, as an expression of the appeal of popular arts and entertainment whose objective is to “astonish, scintillate, arouse and stir the passions,” is not normally perceived as a mode of escape, its rampant allures in Lebanon, as will be shown, are symptomatic of the need to forget. Hence, it feeds on collective amnesia and the pervasive desire for popular distractions.

Mediating Agencies of Social Forgetting

What are the mediating agencies or artifacts in the Bourj which can evolve into effective vectors for the process of social forgetting, or what Hobbes had termed “remedial oblivion.” There is no shortage of candidates. The envisioned “Archeological Trail,” the “Garden of Forgiveness” under construction, some of the distinct architectural icons or edifices can easily play such a role since they all embody elements of cultural pluralism, tolerance, hybridity and peaceful co-existence. Likewise, some of the proposals also addressed issues of how to incorporate the Martyrs’ Monument (which commemorates the national heroes executed by the Ottomans in 1915 and 1916), or how to envision a war memorial or a monument to celebrate or memorialize all the victims and sacrifices of the civil war. Such efforts become pertinent not by way of helping us dwell on the pathologies of civil and uncivil violence but they can also serve as the socio-
cultural venues for cultivating the sorely needed outlets for forgetting. Generations of Lebanese, either directly or vicariously, are still old enough to remember those years. In no way have they or can forget such dark and misbegotten episodes of their past. Indeed, they often remember it so well that they deeply resent being reminded of it. Indeed, as will be elaborated later, much of the carefree abandon, exuberance and the proclivity of the Lebanese to embrace novelties, crazes and popular pastimes are largely symptomatic of their eagerness to distance themselves from the dreaded memories of the war.

Here again, the longing of the Lebanese for a respite from their beleaguering elements of their collective memory, finds parallels in other comparative instances of internecine hostility. For example, the outbreak of violence in former Yugoslavia may well be seen as the outcome of the refusal to forget past events. Likewise, the Northern Irish protracted conflict is symptomatic of the fact that the protagonists – both parties and religious groups – were reluctant to forget the elements of their belligerent past that other groups might no longer feel the urge to remember. Neil Jarmann’s (2001: 171-95) account of the Irish in Belfast epitomizes so graphically the consequences of a people so trapped in their past, so embroiled in reliving their contentious and bloody history that they are unable to free themselves from the constraints of such conflict-prone history. Such selective retention certainly implies that some of the more redemptive and beneficial elements of that past are not celebrated on commemorated with the same passionate intensity. In short, what we remember and what we forget are socially constructed.

From these and other such instances, it is clear how essential to stable political life; indeed to the well-being of individual life as well, is a certain measure of amnesia or social forgetfulness. By re-examining the checkered history of the Bourj it is our hope to re-construct from its rich and diverse past a history, to paraphrase Forty, “not of memorials but of amnesiacs!!” (Forty 2001: 8).

It is in this sense that the experience of the Lebanese, particularly their ambivalence regarding how to cope with, let alone incorporate; the barbaric legacy of the war, is not at all unique. The setting in postwar Europe is very instructive in this regard. Indeed, as some historians argue, the relative stability of Western Europe since 1945 has in part been due to that colossal act of collective, consensual forgetting. For example, the divisions between wartime partisans and collaborators, which whatever may be said in private, have been largely forgotten in public (see Forty 2001: 7). As indicated earlier the very word “amnesty” denotes a certain measure of public forgetfulness. As Ernest Renan reminds us, most of the social contract theories of the state, upon which modern democracies are based, assume that their members are prepared to forget the more divisive differences which on occasion pull them apart. Renan was unequivocal when he asserted that the “essence of a nation is that all individuals share a great many things in common also that they have forgotten some things” (Quoted in Wolin 1989: 37).

Recently Jens Hanssen and Daniel Genberg (2002) have coined the term “hypermnesia” to refer to instances in postwar Lebanon of the abundance of overlapping, conflicting and rivaling memories of the war. In their view, such celebrity conceptions of history; indeed, the frequent public debates about collective forgetting has served to amplify and reinforce this notion of “collective hypermnesia.” To them the loss of memory is no more but an “antonym to amnesia... the inaccessible, passive other memory that is triggered inadvertently, to denote a situation where memory is constantly present, multiple and celebrated” (Hanssen and Genberg 2002: 233). In this sense, the whole experience of Solidere in the reconstruction of downtown Beirut became a hotly-contested public debate precisely because it was emblematic of and it embodied the discourse over versions and visions for the past and future of city and country.

The threatening effacement of dilapidated vestiges of the past falling prey to early ‘clean slate’ ideologies ironically produced a public sphere pregnant with divergent versions and visions for past and future of city and country. At this particular juncture the debate represented an effort and commitment to effect a moratorium on the seemingly inevitable and ever accelerated, globalization-induced forgetting (Hanssen and Genberg 2002: 234).

he relentless polemics over the remembrance of the Holocaust, America’s experience in Vietnam, the repeated naqbas (disasters) and naqsas (setbacks) Arabs have had to suffer in their misbegotten confrontations with Israel - from the colossal defeat in the Seven-days War to other equally treacherous failures, including the collapse of the Saddam regime in Iraq - and other such atrocities of modern times, always reinvite the some poignant and anguishing public debates. Of course, forgetting always runs the risk of repetition. In this sense, had the Lebanese recalled and learned from all their earlier encounters with civil strife, perhaps the atrocities would not have been as recurrent. The basic dilemma the Lebanese face today is to know how to remember all the ugly atrocities of the war without lessening their horrors. To put it
differently, the problem is how to recall the hideous episodes of the war without sanitizing them by making them more tolerable to remember. To attribute the war to external forces by which the country, and Beirut in particular, became no more than a proxy battle-field for other peoples' wars, is one such effective strategy or alibi the Lebanese continue to resort to. It obviates their guilt and, hence, their direct responsibility for partaking in the horrors. They become no more than surrogate victims of other warring and belligerent groups.

These matters, incidentally, are not merely of conceptual and abstract interest. As I write, Solidere has just completed the first phase of the "International Urban Design Ideas Competition" for Martyrs' Square and the Grand Axis of Beirut. The competition was launched on June 18, 2004 under the auspices of the Union of International Architects (UIA). By the time the website for the event was made accessible, it was inundated during its first week (last week of June 2004) by some 6,000 to 8,000 internet hits per day!! By the time registration ended on July 31, some 420 applicants (from sixty five countries) had submitted proposals for the competition. The international jury, over three days of deliberations, arrived at a short-list of seven finalists. During the second phase of the competition the finalists are expected to submit their detailed final projects. The winning projects, including by the way of special category for students; will be announced on May 6, 2005, National Martyrs' Day.

Virtually all the finalists, in one way or another, addressed the issue of what, how and where in the reconstructed Central Square of the city's capital can we memorialize or celebrate some of the disparaging elements in the country's checkered history with civil strife. This, too, is a testy and probing issue. It is bound to invite heated polemics, given the disparate and contested views the Lebanese continue to uphold about the war. Will the commemorization be a sober, subdued memorial to recall and dwell upon tragic, lamentable and mournful events? Or will it be a celebratory monument to revel and bask in the glories of past heroic events?

We often associate dramatic iconoclastic reactions, the deliberate acts of destruction of national symbols, with efforts to mark or celebrate moments of transition from one political era or regime to another. Such riddance of monuments (e.g. destruction of the Berlin wall, Lenin's statue, the Buddha statues in Afghanistan, and more recently Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad etc…) often accompanied by the frenzy of aroused masses, is more than just a vengeful act of sheer retribution. It must be seen as a collective attempt to permanently erase or withdraw representations of the maligned or discredited old system that might serve again as vehicles for popular recollection (KÜCHLER 2001: 53).

The importance we conventionally assign to memorial or monuments, or any visual imagery, is clearly not an invention of the modern world. In a fascinating work, Frances Yates (1966) persuasively traced this back to the age of scholasticism and medieval memory where memoria, the conscious evocation of past experience through visual imagery, served to facilitate the spread of devotional learning to laymen. From medieval times onwards, the destruction of such visual imagery appeared to be tantamount to acts of forgetting (YATES 1966: 99).

Although we are often inclined to use terms like “memorials” and “monuments” interchangeably, James Young insists on clarifying the distinct meanings of each. To him memorials “recall only past death or tragic events and provide places to mourn.” On the other hand, there is an element of triumphalism in monuments. “They remain essentially celebratory markers of triumphs and heroic individuals” (YOUNG 1993: 3).

Bearing this subtle distinction in mind, Arthur Danton, in his assessment of the contested Vietnam Veteran Memorial, situates his observations within the polemics of collective memory or the social art of forgetting. Danton is very explicit in this regard. He tells us that

...we erect monuments so that we shall always remember and build memorials so that we shall never forget. Thus, we have the Washington Monument but the Lincoln Memorial. Monuments commemorate the memorable and embody the myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the reality of ends... Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead. With monuments, we honor ourselves (DANTON 1986: 152).
It is hoped that these introductory considerations, conceptual and otherwise, will serve as a meaningful context to situate and inform the “story” I wish to narrate about the Bourj’s historical transformation and the role it is envisaged to play at this critical juncture in Lebanon’s history. From its eventful past, much like its most recent history, a few distinct but related elements stand out: First, the predisposition of the Bourj to incorporate and reconcile pluralistic and multi-cultural features. Second, its inventiveness in reconstituting and refashioning its collective identity and public image. Third, its role in hosting and disseminating popular culture, consumerism, mass entertainment and often, nefarious touristic attractions.

Most of all, as amplified by the riveting popular and emancipatory expressions unleashed by the murder of Hariri, the Bourj can also nurture and play host to some formidable socio-cultural and political transformations. Yes, and perhaps unavoidably, the uprising has given free vent to some of the vestive, light-hearted and frivolous forms of popular entertainment and fun-loving activities. These, however, should not detract from the more weighty and consequential concerns and public issues it has already aroused.

Notes

1 It should be noted in this regard that its central dome is now forty five meters in height. Its original five minarets were reduced to four and scaled down from seventy five to fifty five meters in height.