Beirut: The Story of a City Destroyed by Peace

By

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To my mother and motherland

Calligraphy by Christian Nahas, commissioned by the author
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Beirut:
The Story of a City Destroyed by Peace

Giorgio Guy R. Tarraf

ABSTRACT

This thesis advances an explanation of the failure of the Lebanese state to control, properly urbanize and suitably develop its capital city, Beirut. It draws from various disciplines – including history, architecture, economics, legal analysis and urban planning – to explain the pitfalls of Beirut’s postwar reconstruction. A wide array of interviews was conducted with experts in the relevant fields in addition to activists who witnessed the capital’s many transformations first-hand. The research assesses the various urban policies and initiatives implemented on the city and their impact on cultural and social identity. It also sheds light on the current trends, laws and plans that are shaping Beirut today. The thesis exposes how the clientelist relationship between decision-makers and real estate developers greatly influenced the shape and functioning of Beirut and the wellbeing of its inhabitants. Furthermore, it argues that the consequent rupture between the city and its peoples is creating a dangerous identity crisis and a new rift in an already divided society. Finally, this thesis offers recommendations to help shape a more sustainable city that resembles its proud citizens.

Keywords: Lebanon, Beirut, Postwar Reconstruction, Solidere, Urban Planning, Sustainable Development, History, Master plan
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The former Ayyas Palace, current residence of PM Saad Hariri is seen in the lower right corner of this photograph. Also of note is the sharp contrast in construction and planning between the area under Solidere’s mandate and the rest of Beirut, separated by the Fouad Chehab ring road running along the middle of the photo. – Personal photograph

Comparative map of the properties of the Muslim waqfs before and after Solidere’s expropriations. Note that all properties within the Souks are no longer religious properties; also note significant losses on the Northern side of Martyrs’ Square. Finally, the destroyed Santiyye cemetery is no longer listed as a religious property. – Source: Schmidt, 1999

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Prewar aerial photograph showing the Santiyye Cemetery, the resting home of many notable Sunni families

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The sign at the entrance of the demolished Santiye cemetery. Note that the Arabic word for cemetery has been covered by spray paint. Heavy controversy surrounds the Santiyeh cemetery. Initially claimed to be the property of the Makassed religious foundation and expropriated by Solidere; a statement by the company in 2006 claims that the land is now municipal property and that the foundation was compensated with 873180 Solidere shares. The most recent master plan shows that the land will become the Santiyeh gardens with no mention of the existence of a cemetery. – Photograph courtesy of Nadine Ghaith

This rare aerial photograph shows that the BCD retained the entirety of its urban tissue by the end of the war. The flattened areas visible on the side of Martyrs’ Square are the Saifi (East) and Souk Sursock (West) districts, willfully bulldozed in 1982 and 1983. The Normandy landfill, future site of the Beirut Marina and reclaimed territories is clearly visible in the top left. – Photograph courtesy of Michael Davie

Aerial photograph showing the demolition of 642 buildings (Solidere Annual Report 1994, p.24), which represents 88% of the post-war urban tissue. Further demolitions were done in 2008 in the Wadi Abou Jamil area located in the vicinity of the Grand Serail. Note the destruction and redesign of entire districts such as, from West to East: Minet el Hosn, Zokak el Blat, Wadi Abou Jamil, Riad al Solh Square, Ghalghoul, the historic Souks, the entirety of Martyrs’ Square, the disappearance of the Debbas Square, and the north of the Saifi districts. Also notice the extensive reclaimed area over the sea partly constructed with the remains of the demolished buildings and archeological excavations
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Beirut was not destroyed in one day. The city we are experiencing today is the result of thousands of years of overlapping development. The roads and buildings we consume and occupy every day are the result of security turmoil, failed urbanism and weak legislation. This thesis offers an explanation of the current failure of the Lebanese state to control, properly urbanize and capitalize its largest city.

Indeed, evidence will show that for the past century or so, Beirut’s modern shape has been molded more by political interest than urban planning practices. This occurs in Beirut more frequently than in other cities. More recently, the profit-seeking social and political ruling classes have greatly benefited from a real estate bubble driven by investors from the gulf. These opportunistic investors are profiting from a lack of legislation and oversight in the post-war legislative chaos that rules Lebanon. The thesis exposes how the clientelist relationship between decision makers and real estate developers has greatly influenced the shape and function of Beirut. Furthermore, it argues that the resulting rupture between the city and its people is creating a dangerous identity crisis and a new rift in an already divided society.

This thesis will also identify and correct many myths about Beirut, its history and development. The research will assess the various urban policies and initiatives implemented on the city and their impact on cultural and social identity. It will also shed light on the current trends, laws and plans that are shaping the city. Finally, this thesis will offer recommendations to help shape a healthier Beirut that resembles its proud citizens.
1.2 Literature Review

This thesis draws from various disciplines such as history, architecture, economics, legal analysis and urban planning to attain a well-rounded understanding of Beirut. It uses a large number of interviews conducted with experts in the relevant fields along with laymen who witnessed the capital’s many transformations.

Samir Khalaf’s *Reclaiming the Bourj* is a good historic review of the urban development of Beirut. Khalaf’s account of the Bourj area extends from Ottoman times to French reconstruction of the square. He also addresses Beirut in the 1960s and revisits the city in the postwar period. Khalaf does not expand on the war period itself – a period covered in this thesis. However, Khalaf’s accounts before and after the civil war are valuable as an introductory overview of the historical transformations that Beirut – most notably the Bourj area – has undergone in recent decades.

The thesis will make use of the many descriptive and photographic books that will help build an accurate schema of the old Beirut. Most notably, I have been granted unprecedented access to the Fouad Debbas private collection. With over 45000 documents, it is the world’s largest collection of photographs, aerial views, postcards and stereoscopes dating back from 1860 until the 1950s – most never published. Books such as Pierre Maadanjian’s *دياكري في بيروت* (Beirut in my Memory) (2009) are full of nostalgic photographs that will help me recreate the city at different stages of its development. These types of documents will help me connect the dots between the past and the current state of things.

Robert Saliba’s *Beyrouth architectures aux sources de la modernité 1920 - 1940* discusses, in technical detail, the various elements of Lebanese architecture. Saliba’s other book, *Beirut City Center recovery: the Foch - Allenby and Etoile conservation*
area, has some valuable mappings of Solidere’s master plans for the Beirut Central District (BCD). The architectural survey of the city is decked with many before and after images of Beirut and therefore effectively displays the work Solidere has put into the BCD. In my detailed study of Solidere, such comparisons and maps will come in handy. It is especially interesting to assess this book because it was commissioned and paid for by the company itself. The book is very beautifully executed with many high quality maps and photographs populating its glossy pages. The question I want to answer is: do these beautiful pages justify what Solidere has created in the BCD? The before and after photographs are most impressive; they almost make one forget the significant losses suffered in the process.

The process of drafting a unified master plan for Beirut has been an elusive task. To this day, no master plan has been properly adopted and implemented; rather, elements of each survive to the present in antiquated legislation and decrees that fundamentally shape the capital. It is interesting to compare the various versions of the plan as they evolved throughout the twentieth century. A map of the 1977 plan appears at the end of *Beirut of Tomorrow* (1983), edited by Friedrich Ragette. When placed alongside the more recent Solidere plans of the 1990s, the differences are striking. *Beirut of Tomorrow* is a collection of presentation pieces delivered in a Symposium on issues in urban planning and reconstruction. Ironically, the Symposium was held the same day demolitions were initiated in the BCD. Gregoire Serof’s “Visions of the Beirut of Tomorrow” piece, for example, recreates the prehistoric map of the city and travels in time through the Phoenician, Roman, Middle Ages and Ottoman periods. Toward the end of his article, Serof presents his ideal vision for the city of Beirut. It is nowhere near what we have ended up with and does not provide any input to how the development of
Beirut went wrong. Mohamad Fawaz’s contribution to the symposium is an in-depth account of the transportation and traffic congestion problems Beirut began to face as of the early 1970s. His pleas for a solution are echoed by Samir Khalaf’s calls to control the rampant urbanization of Beirut. Both authors provide basic insights into the inception of congestion and the ill use of space. No significant answers or solutions to the issue are given, however. Though published in 1983, the book does not provide insight about what went on during the war either.

Eric Verdeil makes an important point in his *Plans for an Unplanned City: Beirut 1950-2000* study regarding the “rampant” construction of Beirut. Unlike Khalaf, he believes that the city’s planning has been very well studied -- even if the final result appears to be chaotic. Verdeil supports this idea by listing and discussing several master plans of Beirut beginning with Echochard’s contributions in 1943 and 1964 until the Lebanese civil war of 1975. His book *Beyrouth et ses Urbanistes* (2009) painstakingly addresses all major urban ventures in Beirut during the period of 1946-1975.

Another interesting collection of articles was the product of the annual AUB City Debates overseen by Mona Fawaz. The 2005 edition provides insightful material on the state of urban heritage and future urban development prospects. The Urban Heritage and Politics of the Present collection focuses on postwar reconstruction efforts. This topic was one of the most widely discussed as was each of Oliver Kogler’s Post War Heritage Projects in *Beirut: Perspectives from Human Geography*. George Arbid also addresses it in his lecture entitled “Inherited Modernism.” When discussing the reconstruction of the BCD, Kogler introduces the term ‘national amnesia’ and follows it with claims that the local identity has been compromised in favor of economic development. This strongly suggests that the BCD reconstruction plan has come with a hefty moral price tag. Arbid
calls for the preservation of the more recent modernist architecture of the 1950s and 1960s (alongside French and Ottoman heritage). Arbid also redefines what should be meant by heritage. His overview of modernist architecture serves the argument that what we consider traditional was also once modern. It poses again the question of what need and what need not be preserved. It has been a common trend in all reconstruction initiatives to remove what was before; the Ottomans and the French did it, Solidere did it too. It happened under different pretexts, yet deliberate destruction has been a constant in Beirut’s developmental efforts. Arbid’s attachment to modernist architecture brings in a fresh perspective to the question of preservation.

With the civil war having ended just two years prior and the first postwar parliament elected, Oussama Kabbani’s *The Reconstruction of Beirut* (1992) could not have been timelier. It fills a little of the gap between Ragette’s pre-1990 rendition of tomorrow’s Beirut and Saliba’s insight of the 2000s. Kabbani writes at a turning point in Beirut’s history. His first chapter looks into the legal framework of the real estate company before the official creation of Solidere. The publication continues to examine the Beirut master plans presented by Dar Al-Handasah in the 1980s and ‘90s -- many of which were proposed but not implemented. Kabbani strongly emphasizes the fact that the BCD fails to integrate with the rest of the city. In addition, building on the legal concerns that Kabbani raises is Henri Éddé’s account in the last part of his autobiography *Le Liban D’où Je Viens* (1996). Formerly a close collaborator with the late Rafic Hariri, Éddé exposes in scandalous detail the various reconstruction initiatives of Solidere and the exploitation of the dreams of a ravaged population and state. In fact, he describes the company’s final plans as a human, urban and aesthetic catastrophe.
Adding to the debate of what happened during the reconstruction of Beirut is Assem Salam who accuses the various master plans of erasing Beirut’s very soul -- a process that was perfected with the plans of 1977, 1983 and 1992. Salam, who wrote his book *The City and Architecture in the Service of thegeneral* in 1995, immortalizes the conversations that were going on in the mid-1990s regarding the reconstruction efforts. His book strongly questions some of Solidere’s actions.

A few years later, in 1998, former MP Najah Wakim, produced the book *البيانات السوداء* which provided a firsthand account into the corruption of the 1992 and 1996 governments – Wakim participated in both parliaments. The book also extends before and after the aforementioned period and taps into the details of controversial topics such as Solidere, the mishandling of public property and the telecommunications and oil sectors, the Elissar project and many others. Wakim scrutinizes the government’s key players (especially the Hariri, Hrawi, Berri troika) and subjects them to his justice. He focuses on what he deems Hariri’s corrupt real estate ventures in Beirut. In fact, when it comes to Hariri, Wakim leaves no stone unturned.

One final book that surveys corruption in modern day Lebanon is Reinoud Leenders’s *Spoils of Truce* (2012). The book extends out of the civil war corruption to assess its spread in the years pertaining to “peace” intervals. In the Lebanese second republic, there has been no slowdown to the rampant fraud and exploitation exercised by the same warlords who tore up the nation in the 1970s and 80s.

From Kabbani’s 1992 rendition to Leenders’s account 20 years later, the chosen literature provides a well-rounded review of what went wrong and what could have been executed differently.
1.3 Research Questions

Throughout the history of Beirut’s reconstructions, governing bodies have often enforced a top-down *tabula rasa* approach. Consequently, we have inherited an unfinished city facing fundamental problems in its functioning. The thesis will question the validity of applying the same pattern to modern-day Beirut. It will argue that the recurring disruption of the urban fabric has hindered the regrowth of a national cultural identity. This thesis will conclude that the creation and preservation of landmarks and neighborhoods will promote social cohesion and propose that a new approach to urban development is vital to the building of a sustainable city.

Furthermore, this thesis will offer an analytical explanation to the seemingly chaotic nature of the urban fabric of Beirut. It will also assess the correlation of these transformations on culture and identity through the preservation of architectural, archeological or even immaterial heritage. These elements allow the assessment of the value of patrimony, identity and culture in relation to the speculative value of land. It will show that the post-war reliance on land sales and real estate development as sole generator of wealth in the capital is an unsustainable economic strategy that inherently destroys any genuine attachment of individuals to their land and heritage. More dangerously, it reduces national identity to nothing but a facade. Furthermore, my research will show that legislation, a proverbial tool for state building, has become a dangerous weapon in the hand of the government. Case studies will prove that legislative, executive and judicial institutions in Lebanon selectively pretend to be powerless when facing the realpolitik that is currently ruling the reconstruction process. In reality, current laws give awesome leverage to the Lebanese state that could
potentially reduce the detrimental impact of neoliberalism on indigenous culture and art-de-vivre.

The thesis will answer the following research questions: How did the successive governing bodies in Beirut address the reconstruction needs? What approach have we adopted after the 1975 civil war? How has the current state of affairs affected Lebanon’s identity, culture and heritage?

1.4 Methodology

The methodology used in this thesis combines various approaches ranging from structural observation to in-depth interviews. Because I am attempting to evaluate the reconstruction process of Beirut city, I will draw heavily on both primary and secondary sources; I will look at the existing literature but also resort to the oral histories of first-hand witnesses. Oral history research will also explore ballads and sayings on the subject of Beirut. I will not make futile attempts to stay away from nostalgia, but rather use it as a constructive analytical tool to assess the losses incurred by the Lebanese population. I will argue that what people choose to remember and reminisce about is an exceptionally revealing indicator to better understand what to preserve, what to transform or what to destroy. I will therefore borrow from the memories of those old enough to remember a Beirut before Solidere, before the war and even before the creation of Place de l’Étoile. The nostalgic publications of photographers and autobiographers will also be part of this research, as much as the input of historians and geographers.

I will attempt a mixed methods research strategy that combines both qualitative and quantitative research. As qualitative research does not divorce the individuals
involved from the natural setting, it becomes fundamental to study the phenomenon concerned through the players that shape it. As such, my study will borrow extensively from first hand experts and witnesses. It is as much a people-oriented thesis as this city is a product of the people who inhabit it. Overall, my method will lean a lot more toward the qualitative than the quantitative method. The numbers are still important, however, and will be applied when necessary.

In addition, an overview of the various master plans drafted throughout the 20th century will be analyzed and the catastrophic consequences on the urban fabric of the capital exposed. In order to do so, I will present an exhaustive list of the planned urban initiatives that Beirut has suffered through, pointing out the specificities of each individual plan and its significance in presenting a timeline of power expression in its historical context. I will also show the consequences of the implementation -- whether complete or partial -- of all these successive plans on the current urban fabric of the city.

In order to evaluate the visual impact of the fundamental transformations of the capital, my thesis will offer extensive photographic evidence of Beirut through the ages. This selection of pictures is the result of a personal initiative to collect and archive images from various public and private sources in addition to images I have personally taken during the last few years.

As for case studies, I will offer an overview of reconstruction efforts in various districts of the capital such as the Beirut Central District, Ashrafieh, Zokak el Blat, the Southern suburbs and the Ouzai coastline. These case studies will attempt to describe, evaluate and then explain emerging trends in the city. Some will be restricted to one edifice while others will look at an entire street or neighborhood. My data collection process for the case studies will be a blend of individual and group interviews, review of
relevant documents, leaked information and personal observation. Social media will be used in order to crowd source the search for information in rarely seen before historical imagery.

In addition to photographs, rare high-resolution aerial photos taken at various times -- some dating back to the French mandate -- will be annexed to the text. Furthermore, excerpts of historical and updated maps will be shown in order to better geographically contextualize the discussion. These tools will prove instrumental in my argumentation, as they allow exact dating of major urban transformations. Furthermore, I will present an exhaustive map that shows in great detail the phases of demolitions inside the BCD.

1.5 Map of the Thesis

Chapter 1 - Introduction
The first chapter will present an overview of the topic at hand, including the presentation of the research questions, methodology and a map of the thesis.

Chapter 2 - The Histories of Beirut
The history of Beirut has been written about extensively, what I will offer in this chapter is a new approach to the available timelines and data. I will present history through the eyes of the inhabitants of the city, offering visual, oral and written accounts of the relationship of the population to Beirut and its transformations. For instance, I will present how the major axis of the Roman city of Berytus persist to this day, how the long destroyed city gates and walls remain relevant, how the actions of influential entities and individuals dating back a century continue to affect the lives of the Beirutis, how the relationship of the city to the sea has fundamentally transformed its population and
economic activity... These observations and many others will give the reader a renewed vision of the impact of ancient urban features on the city of tomorrow. This approach will allow for the linkage of various phases of Lebanese history from pre-independence until the end of the war.

Every phase will be presented with the various master plans drafted; a presentation of the major urban features implemented and destroyed, a flyover population analysis and the disruption or improvements made to people’s lives and functions.

The nature of my approach has allowed me to make surprising discoveries on the shaping of Beirut such as the humongous influence of the religious waqfs throughout time, and other conspiracies for the deliberate bulldozing of downtown Beirut even during wartime.

Chapter 3 - The Legislation of Lawlessness and the Blinding of Oversight: Solidere and Clientelism in the Age of Reconstruction

Chapter 3 will address the question of how the Lebanese state and population lost the heart of their capital to Solidere. I will present an explanation of how laws and decrees that leave legal experts aghast were forced through a government weakened by 15 years of civil strife. This chapter will offer important information on how the entire Lebanese state surrendered not only land and infrastructure but also income and oversight on the largest construction project in the world: Solidere, a private company founded by billionaire prime minister Rafic Hariri. It will also show the strategies adopted by the company to expropriate and overexploit land taken not only from its
rightful owners, but also from the very same government that allowed its inception in the name of public good.

I will also expose the weakening of public institutions through the nomination of allies in key positions. This nepotism has facilitated modifications of the master plan in order to maximize real estate speculation and the amount of empty plots, often in contradiction of existing legislation. I will also show how the very creation of Solidere was designed to purchase the silence of potential political opponents through the offering of lucrative stock deals and real estate projects.

**Chapter 4 - Leftover Urbanism: Reconstruction outside the BCD**

This complex chapter will look at the city outside the BCD in order to show the evolution of urban space when left to reconstruct by the public. I will present recurrent patterns of destruction in various districts of the city and expose them as the result of what I call ‘leftover urbanism’: the disastrous result of successive failed urban plans. Indeed, the various master plans have left the city in turmoil: Current legislation allows immense exploitation coefficients in the oldest and most central areas, it also forces the misalignment of buildings with the ancient streets, it includes an open-sky policy which gives infinite height for construction and allows the use of any shapes and construction materials. These lax regulations coupled with a lack of social responsibility from developers and a weak government’s oversight have often created buildings that are alien to their surrounding and that become culprits in the destruction of traditional urban fabric and the displacement of entire neighborhoods. My analysis will show the disconnection of such projects on the street level and the detrimental effect of such
construction not only on infrastructure, transportation, and esthetics but also on urban and social cohesion.

A significant part of the chapter will study the impact of road plans in Beirut. Indeed, as a futile attempt to reduce congestion, the city council intends to destroy entire historic neighborhoods to implements road plans dating back to the 1960s or even prior. I will show through numbers how these unimplemented road plans ironically allowed for the preservation of exceptional pockets of green space and heritage districts. Finally, I will offer an in-depth analysis of how political interests and profits weigh much more than scientific arguments in the prioritization of urban projects and regulations.

Chapter 4 part II - Save Beirut Heritage: Civil Society’s Role in Retrieving Beirut

Lebanon is the only Arab state not to have a law protecting its cultural heritage. Though a law from 1933 protects antiquities; the issue remains largely ignored by political stakeholders. Furthermore, it fails to preserve Beirut’s heritage which dates back to the 19th and 20th centuries. In this sense the legal definition of heritage in Lebanon is obsolete and in no way adheres to the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention recommendations on modern heritage. Moreover, political stakeholders often fail to respect even this outdated law. Passing proper legislation to protect historic districts and regulate urban planning has been a major aspect of social activism for decades. Founded in 1960, the Association for Protecting Natural Sites and Old Buildings in Lebanon (APSAD) ultimately failed to stop the wave of post-war demolition. In the early 1996, a census by APSAD counted 1600 traditional homes and buildings in Beirut’s peri-central area. We estimate the current number within the historic core – excluding the BCD – to be close to 200 remaining protected structures.
The discussion will then shift to Save Beirut Heritage (SBH), an NGO that I co-founded and preside that is currently fighting for the preservation of the architectural heritage of Beirut and beyond. Following a successful demonstration in 2010, Save Beirut Heritage has become a reference for those who are fighting for the Lebanese capital’s history and culture. Armed with anonymous tips received via its 24-hour hotline, SBH monitors the city and its illegal demolitions in real time. With over 11,000 supporters connected through social media, we have helped save over 150 heritage buildings.

I will also show how Save Beirut Heritage’s aggressive public relations and media strategy shifted the issue of heritage demolition from a closed circle of intellectuals and academics to the editorials of national and international news outlets. This evolution shows that heritage has an important role to play as a ligand between communities in the post-war reconstruction of identity.

**Chapter 5 - Future Beirut: Solutions and Recommendations for a Sustainable City**

Chapter 5 will present an overview of the history of heritage preservation in Lebanon and show its relevance to the planning of a sustainable Beirut. I will make the argument that the establishment of protected historic districts should be a national priority for the protection not only of culture and tourism, but also as an inevitable stepping-stone on the way to the creation of a functional Lebanese territory and, in the long-term, of a common national identity.

I will dissect the current BCD master plan; describe its successful provisions and initiatives notably within the conservation area. I will also consult expert urban planners in order to assess the project and its impact on the population.
Finally, I will offer exclusive projections of future projects that haven’t been published yet. These projects will show that the development strategies used today are far removed from a ‘public good’ vision and that shareholders’ profit remain the major driving force behind the shaping of the Beirut Central District and beyond.

The role of heritage activists has become central in shaping the physical city during the construction bubble the city has experienced in recent years. Furthermore, heritage activists have also become the major opponents to the ongoing implementation of outdated master plans and construction regulation. Civil society actors now lobby for a fundamental shift of Beirut’s future projects away from real estate speculation and large-scale urbanization toward softer approaches such as public transportation, green spaces and sustainable construction.

I will present many aspects of this work in progress with – and against – various Lebanese state institutions and their representatives.
CHAPTER TWO
THE HISTORIES OF BEIRUT

2.1 Introduction
A city in the making for millennia, Beirut was invaded by many civilizations: Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, Crusaders, Byzantines, Ottomans and the French all called it home before independence. Each invading civilization contributed to the urban fabric and development of today’s city. This chapter will offer an overview of the histories of Beirut. Chapter two opens with the very first citing of urban dwelling in Beirut some 8000 years ago, and will address all the significant historical stages of Beirut’s urban development. It will begin in Roman times by introducing the basic axis on which the city is still loosely based. The pre-20th century part will also cover Beirut’s urban development during Byzantine and Ottoman times. The rest of the chapter will address the Ottoman period after the turn of the 20th century and the French influence that soon followed suit. The chapter will end by briefly introducing the period after the Lebanese civil war and the latest reconstruction initiative: Solidere.

2.2 From Roman to Ottoman
The Roman Berytus was set up on or near the ruins of a Hellenistic city by the port, which itself was built on the remains of a Neolithic city (8000 BC to 3500 BC) (Davie, 1987). Berytus was founded as a Roman colony in 10 A.D. It is often theorized that the western periphery of the city reached the bottom of the hill on which now stands the Grand Serail. It is also believed that the plot of the serail could have been home to a temple (Davie, 1987). As a Roman colony in the 1st century A.D., Beirut was bestowed the rational planning tactics implemented at the time. It was founded on two axes in an orthogonal plan: The Decumanus Maximus and the Cardo Maximus (Khalaf, 2006). This divided the city into four quarters that can still be vaguely observed. Much of the modern existence of the city falls within those ancient axes. The city was also equipped with elegant Roman towers, baths and even a law library that remains buried somewhere in the BCD.
The implications of the Roman grid can still be traced. The pre-war souks, with their oriental plan were aligned with the Roman city. A notable example is souk al-Haddadin: It started at Bab al-Darkeh (the main southern gate of the city) and remained straight in its alignment until reaching the Omari mosque. This northern oriented stretch overlays with the vertical Roman Cardo axis. The horizontal Decumanus Maximus begins at Bab al-Saraya and heads west. In the 19th century, and after it was widened, it became Weygand street. This axis remains a main artery in the BCD, which passes right by the Beirut municipality and connects Western and Eastern Beirut, eventually joining the seaside highway through the Charles Helou main road.

Following its Roman time, the city continued to flourish until an earthquake and subsequent tidal wave, destroyed it in 551 A.D. During its subsequent occupation by the Arabs from 635 AD to 1110 AD, it became a recurring battlefield. In the 13th century, under the Mamluks, and in the last few centuries before the Ottoman invasion of 1516, Beirut was in ruins. The Mamluks, as those who invaded before them, extensively built in cities like Tripoli in an attempt to win over the locals: They would set up elegant mosques and would destroy the old to create something new. But it was not only the invaders who shaped the city; affluent locals were often involved in reconstruction. Nevertheless, construction planning remained haphazard due to local pressures and circumstances. For instance, a notable family may decide to build their house in the middle of a path and it would later become impossible to remove that structure. This often resulted in crooked streets due to stubborn citizens (M. Davie, personal communication, August 9, 2013).
Aside from recurrent invasions, population growth was also a driving force in urban development. As its population increased, Beirut became more and more urbanized. In 1773, 6000 people lived in this prospering, walled, medieval city on the Mediterranean. In those times, the city was a mere passing point for travelers on their way to Damascus and Jerusalem. The silk flowing down from Mount Lebanon toward the sea brought with it trade and income and though small, the city by the port was thriving. During the following century, the local population slowly grew to 8000 inhabitants. But soon enough, the Silk Road brought with it more than precious textile. The Maronite population of the mountain flocked to Beirut looking for safety and commerce. By the 1860s Beirut had a population of 70,000 inhabitants (Khalaf, 2006).

Beirut remained an unindustrialized medieval city town well into the 19th century. Within its seven gates, flat-roofed medieval houses and souks were built so densely that one could jump from a roof to another. However, with the increase in population, urban development began to seep out of the ancient walls into what would later become the Ashrafieh and Ras Beirut areas.
On the beautiful hills surrounding the city, wealthy families constructed palatial homes far too large for Beirut intra-muros. These houses -- few of which survive to this day -- were described by Lamartine as elaborately decorated with charming balconies and stair rails, with abundant and well-kept gardens (Khalaf, 2006). By the first decade of the 20th century, Beirut had become an important port city and a vital connection between Europe and the areas of Syria and beyond. It already had an extended port and a developed railway.

Figure 3 1913 – The Gemmayzeh area and the Mar Mitr hill, as seen from the sea. Note the imposing Sursock Palace on the right easily recognizable with its corner towers – Photo courtesy of Gaby Daher

Figure 4 2011 – The Mar Mitr hill and cemetery. The cluster highlighted in red has since been demolished. On the hill, we can see the Great Israelite Universal College – Photo courtesy of Gaby Daher.
Figure 5: 1910 – The Great Israelite Universal College in a time when tarbouche and kippah cohabitated peacefully.

Figure 6: 2013 – The Great Israelite Universal College, almost unrecognizable because of improper renovation. A commemorative plaque at the door indicates that the poet Alfonse de Lamartine lived there between September 1832 and April 1833 with his daughter Julia; she died there on December 2nd 1832. The imposing structure sitting on the Mar Mitr hill, one of the highest in Beirut, has since been converted to a girls’ dormitory.
Figure 7 1924 – Rare aerial photograph of both Grand (foreground) and Petit (on the right side of the photo) Serails before the construction of Place de l’Étoile. One must be careful not to confuse the petit serail and the Ottoman Military Hospital located in the vicinity of the Grand Serail (Currently the offices of the Council for Development and Reconstruction)

Figure 8 The Grand Serail before the civil war. It was home to the French High Commissioner during the mandate – Compilation of two postcards, courtesy of Gaby Daher

Figure 9 1990 – The desolate Grand Serail after fifteen years of civil strife.
Figure 10 1996 – The Grand Serail during its renovation. Save for a few groin vaults, the entirety of the internal structure was emptied out and a third floor was added. It must be noted that following independence, improper renovation left the monumental structure heavily disfigured by haphazard concrete additions.

Figure 11 2011 – The Grand Serail today. Note the addition of colonial windows, arcades and ornaments to the main façade. – Personal photograph.
In four centuries of rule, the Ottomans established many edifices -- some of which remain until today. The greatest of the remaining structures is the Grand Serail, built in 1840. Other outstanding examples of Ottoman architecture are the St. Georges Maronite cathedral constructed in 1767 and the Amir Mansour Mosque built in 1572. The Amir Mansour Mosque is the oldest standing mosque in Lebanon.

During the first Russo-Ottoman war in 1772, the Russian fleet descended in the port of Beirut and destroyed the city. The Russians invaded again the following year (Davie & Frumin, 2007). During their stay in 1773, however, the Russians produced two maps – a naval and a land map – which depicted Beirut at that time. These are the earliest maps of the city to be uncovered so far. Ever true to its resilient nature, Beirut shook off the rubble and the city walls were rebuilt. However, the British navy destroyed it again in 1840. As the French marched into Beirut in 1920, only a 5-meter piece of the wall remained in the garden of the Anglican Church.

For the longest time, we believed that the walls of Beirut had forever disappeared until postwar archeological digs by the AUB Museum team under the directorship of Dr. Leila Badre unearthed a 160-meter section of a Phoenician wall on Martyrs’ Square. The Phoenician glacis was found preserved to seven meters high, found directly under the asphalted road. The slanted wall was built with large pebble stones and roughly cut limestone. This glacis follows the same curve as the earlier wall and is parallel to it. It is believed to have been built by the Canaanites in the 13th century BC and was still used by the Phoenicians until the 11th c. B.C. (Badre, 1998).

In the middle 19th century, the Ottomans began to renovate the old Arab cities under their reign (M. Davie, personal communication, August 9, 2013). The goal was to create modern cities that looked more European. The Ottomans rationalized the expense by considering that the many houses that were destroyed had to go as a natural result of the process of modernization. According to Davie, they tore down most of Beirut -- save a few religious edifices -- to reconstruct the city. Despite a plethora of invading rulers, however, Beirut did not industrialize quickly.
Figure 12 To the West, the old urban fabric contrasting with the new one, to the East with its planned organization (Source: Ottoman map, redrawn by Davie).

Figure 13 1848 – The Midan outside Beirut’s monumental gates, future site of Martyrs’ Square.
Figure 14 1891 – Place des Canons - Note the newly constructed Petit Serail in the background – It was built on the site of an older serail demolished at the order of the Wali. The monumental building, then known as the New Serail was inaugurated in 1884. The Petit Serail will be demolished in 1950, after the Lebanese independence to eventually become a parking lot for public buses. Its underground foundations are visible today in lot 441 Saifi.

Figure 15 1910 - The motorcar appears among horse-drawn carriages on Place des Canons.
Figure 16 1923 – The Declaration of the Grand Liban in front of the Petit Serail

Figure 17 1935 – Place des Canons, notice Les Pleureuses by Lebanese sculptor Youssef Howayek, a monument commissioned by the French Authorities in remembrance of the martyrs executed by the Ottomans on the 6th of May 1916 at this location. It represents a Muslim and a Christian woman crying over the same tomb. The statue was damaged in 1948 and replaced “because we do not cry over martyrs who gave their life for a cause” according to Mohammad Barakat, former general director of Dar el Aytam. The statue was moved to the gardens of the Nicolas Sursock Museum. It has since been moved to an undisclosed location during the renovation works of the museum.
Figure 18 1934 – Place des Canons. The Petit Serail is at the bottom of the picture. We are looking south. Notice the Cinema Opera building (current Virgin Megastore) in the lower right corner.

Figure 19 1934 – Rare aerial picture of Martyrs’ Square and its surroundings.
In the late 19th century and right outside the ancient walls lay the Midan: A surface wide as a cannon’s range, designed to expose any invading army. It was the battlefield upon which clashes were fought. Its open, wide space made it ideal for targeting enemies because there was no place to hide. In 1884, on orders of the Ottoman Porte, it became the Place des Canons. A century later, during an uncertain halt in the civil war, Michael Davie visited the pockmarked central district. He remembers, “There was a ceasefire. The American GIs in Beirut said you could go down to the city center. So I did. I was the only person on the Place des Canons: I could only hear my own footsteps. I looked around and said to myself: ‘I am an ideal target if someone wants to snipe me -- right in the middle’ (M. Davie, personal communication, August 9, 2013). After a century of urbanization, the exposed nature of the Midan returned in modern times.
2.3 Transitioning into the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century

By the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Ottomans had destroyed the city gates, the old port, the two medieval towers and the main towers of the city. The inside of the city had remained more or less intact until April 8, 1915. Based on a consultation by the Germans, the Ottoman Wali Azmi Bek destroyed the first stone of the old souks of the port city (Tabet, 1996). The Ottomans wanted to modernize. They razed the old parts of the city, which led to hundreds of displaced, starved and disease-ridden locals. It is curious to consider the reaction of the locals while all this was happening. May Davie explains that in those days, the concept of striking and rioting, in the manner we understand it today, was not common. People resolved their problems by appealing to their local representatives such as religious figures, judges or notables. Strikes only took place when a new or unfair ruler compromised the local figures or notables.

Overall, Beirut was a city accustomed to reconstruction. One example of how the same building plots were recycled again and again at different intervals of history is Prince Fakhreddine II’s winter residence near the now destroyed Petit Serail in the BCD. Fakhreddine had decided to build his winter residence in Beirut. When he came to the city, he settled in the preexisting medieval castle and reclaimed land over the port. This decision forced many Beirutis to flee to the southern city of Saida. Later, in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the Sursock family bought the Fakhreddine II palace from the Ottomans, demolished it and built Souk Sursock on a modern grid. Eventually, the souk itself was also bulldozed during the dubious reconstruction efforts of 1983.
2.4 Ô Liban ma patrie, Ô Liban mon amour

When the allies marched into Beirut in 1918 at the end of World War I, they found a city that was almost completely destroyed. However, the French entirely redesigned Beirut in only ten years. (Tabet, 1996). The French continued the trend of modernization initiated by the Ottomans. In order to rebuild, they destroyed many of the Ottoman buildings that preceded them. By the time the French arrived, Beirut’s population was around 130,000 (Fawaz & Peillen, 2003).

France’s urban planning policy in Beirut was an extension of their colonial experience from the last 100 years. They had a tendency to exercise their urban plans on their colonies before executing them in the motherland. In 1921, the French cut the Allenby road and created the Borj Place. They renamed the streets after war victors such as Ferdinand Foch and Maxime Weygand. The French were on a mission to recreate Beirut as a façade for western modernity (Tabet, 1996). This vision of Beirut was not in line with preservation initiatives – weak as they were - in French colonies such as Morocco and Tunisia.

The ambitions for modernizing could not coexist with cultural preservation initiatives. As a result, the city was refurnished and the French even poured the stones of the old city into the sea in order to widen the seafront – an action that foreshadowed Solidere’s work in the 1990s. Notably, they used the valuable stones of a byzantine church to create the sea wall (Tabet, 1996).
Figure 23 1955 – The tramway on the corner of Foch and Wegand Streets, facing the municipality building on the left. You can easily locate this photo on the map in figure 22.

Figure 24 1965 – The tramway in its last year of operation. – Photograph by Cushman
When the French razed the city center to create the Place de L’Étoile according to the Duraffour plan of 1926, the residents of that area had already been evacuated and the Ottomans had expropriated the land. The residents were placed outside the city center with promises of reimbursement. However, the locals were not reimbursed until the French Mandate period. By then, the currency had radically depreciated and the French refused to realign with current market prices. Due to the compensation discrepancy, tension rose between the French and the locals, most notably with the Catholic clergy. The consequences of this urban resistance remain visible to this day; in the Duraffour Plan, the Place de L’Étoile was to have 8 arms, just like in Paris. Two of the arms - those going through the St. Georges Orthodox and the St. Elie Catholic churches were never constructed due to a lack of agreement on the compensation amounts.
Those two arms were to connect the new Place de l’Étoile to the thriving Bourj Square. It is also interesting to note that Cinema Opera building (now the Virgin Megastore) was constructed with respect to the alignment of these missing arms. It is a glaring piece of evidence to the failure of the French to fully implement their urban plan. These examples notwithstanding, the French removed a great number of medieval and Ottoman architecture including places of worship such as a mosque (Mosque Zawiyat al Moghrabi) and the Misgab Ladekh synagogue (founded in 1817). The Bourj Square itself was preserved and transformed solely because it was relatively new and a financial and popular success.
Figure 29 The demolitions perpetrated by the French Authority in 1920, represented by dotted lines. – Source: Forces Françaises du Levant, scale 1/5000, 1920. – Map courtesy of Ifpo.

Figure 30 1930 – Demolition works on the medieval city to make space for the future Place de l’Étoile. Note the Ottoman Military hospital in the background and the towering modern construction on the right.
Figure 31 1935 - Place de l’Étoile during its construction. The towering clock gifted in 1934 by Brazilian-Lebanese Michel Abed. It was moved in the 1960’s to Corniche el Nahr to make space for roman columns found in its location. The clock was returned in the 1990s with a Rolex quadrant - Note the surviving Orthodox St. Georges and Catholic St. Elie churches.

Figure 32 1944 - Place de l’Étoile, Beirut. The Banca di Roma building is seen on the right.
Figure 33 A comparison of aerial photographs of the BCD from 1926 [top] and 1942 – Courtesy of Antoine Atallah
A decade later, in 1943, French architect Michel Ecochard was commissioned to establish a master plan for greater Beirut. Ecochard’s approach was practical; he wanted to relieve the city already suffering from traffic congestion. He proposed that all government facilities be moved out of the commercial center. What he envisioned to create was a functional city alongside an industrial port (Saliba, 2004). Ecochard was tasked with modernizing the capital – especially in the areas where governmental administrations would be built. The French architect’s efforts, however, did not materialize beyond setting up an airport in Khaldeh and widening a few roads. Sporadic political tensions, culminating in the brief civil war of 1958, stalled development. The election of Fouad Chehab as president in the same year quelled the tensions and paved the way for a revolution in Lebanon’s urban planning – which became symbolic of his reign.

The proposals submitted by IRFED and Ecochard in the middle of the 20th century were the products of Fouad Chehab’s grand scheme for Lebanon. IRFED was a nation-wide venture to reorganize the country, leaving Beirut as a footnote in the regional planning project. IRFED wanted to balance out the rest of the country with Beirut’s development and thereby minimize the capital’s hegemony and congestion. To achieve this, it planned to offer all the necessities of modern life found in Beirut to the rest of Lebanon. Consequently, planning the greater Beirut itself was a necessary task, but in no way a priority.

It was Ecochard’s obsession with Beirut that drove him to initiate studies regarding the city’s urban planning. Ecochard had returned in the 1960s and by 1963 had submitted a master plan for Beirut and its suburbs. His strategy focused on urban decentralization, new high-rise buildings and wide streets. The projects were fuelled by then elect-president Fouad Chehab’s ambitions for modernizing Lebanon. But these dreams were only partially realized; while several administrative buildings in the Bir Hassan area and the road networks were actualized, no public housing, new town projects or renovation of the BCD was completed. Soon after, and because of a shift in power and the financial setbacks of the 1967 crisis, these ambitions had to be abandoned altogether (Nasr, 2008). It is worth noting that the great autonomy given to IRFED and
Ecochard by the Lebanese government resulted in disjointed construction. These were two entities that though not at odds with one another, did not communicate well regarding their plans for Beirut and the nation (Verdeil, 2009).

The 1963 road plan introduced a hierarchized circulation system that relied heavily on privatized cars, instead of public transportation. Ecochard created two types of roads: The penetrating roads which would cut through the city and protect pockets of development, and the ring road which was supposed to link Beirut to the coastal highway. These plans were only partially implemented. Some of the most visible aspects of this project are the Fouad Chehab ring road, which borders the southern edge of the BCD and the Charles Helou highway, which works as a connecting point between the ring road, and the seaside highway (Verdeil, 2009). Construction regulation was also modified to allow more modern construction within the central areas of Beirut. In 1954, a law was passed to divide Beirut into building zones that allowed immense construction coefficients irrespectively of the existing urban tissue’s land use and densities. This allowed for the construction of massive buildings in the historic core such as the Azarieh center, the City Center and the Esseily building. The construction of these wide and low-
rise commercial centers led to the displacement of many tenants of the Souks (Serof, 1982).

With time, the maximum height of construction was gradually increased from 26 meters for residential neighborhoods under the French mandate, to 40 meters under Chehab. The end of Chehab’s term allowed for lax urban planning regulation eventually leading to the implementation of Henri Edde’s open-sky policy that removed the maximum height of buildings in Beirut (Kassiir, 2003). Building height became solely limited by the width of the street. The city’s antiquated zoning system allocated the largest amount of constructible areas to the most central – and most ancient districts. The open-sky policy was passed without any modification to construction codes. Initially planned to give more freedom to architects, it has instead become an immense source of income for developers. It also creates intense pressure to demolish existing buildings in order to construct profitable towering structures often at odds with their environment but which offer desirable views of the Mediterranean.
Figure 36 1975 – The Holiday Inn is a textbook example of a building made possible by the open-sky policy. A few months after its inauguration, it became a strategic occupation site for fighters in the civil war.

Figure 37 1975 - The Lobby of the occupied Holiday Inn. The Pinnacle, its rotating cafeteria on the top floor became a popular attraction during its short-lived operation. – Photo courtesy of An-Nahar
Figure 38 1977 – The construction of the Murr Tower. The sign reads “un étage par jour” or “one floor per day” touting the speed of modern construction. Ironically thirty years later, the tower is yet to be completed.

Figure 39 1981 - Some argue that construction of the Murr tower was illegal as it conflicts with the air space reserved for planes going in and out of the Beirut International Airport – Photo courtesy of Annahar
Figure 40 With its location almost on top of the Fouad Chehab ring road (middle), the Murr Tower offers breathtaking views of the city. Note the disrupted Zokak el Blat neighborhood in the forefront - Photo courtesy of Annahar

Figure 41 1984 – The Murr tower became the tower of terror, as it was a strategic location for snipers, bombers and observers alike. In the background, note the Rizk tower in Ashrafieh, also a result of the open-sky policy and a wartime bombing station. – Photo courtesy of Annahar
1985 – The Lebanese marching for peace. Notice the ongoing demolition work to widen the ring road – Photo courtesy of Annahar

Figure 43: 1987 – The Murr tower occupied by the Amal party. Today, the lower floors are a Lebanese Army base and its entrance remains fiercely protected. – Photo courtesy of Annahar. Right: 1997 – The Murr Tower was subject of many failed renovation initiatives. Its low ceilings stump architects who deem it unfit for modern use. Its future remains uncertain – Photo courtesy of Annahar
Aside from the natural population growth and internal relocation, the influx of Armenians fleeing genocide in 1915; and exile of Palestinians starting in 1948 created intense demand for space and pushed the urban sprawl beyond the Beirut River. This spike in population led to the over-urbanization of the city of Beirut (Khalaf, 2006). In fact, the levels of industrial activity do not in any way match or justify the population magnitude of the capital. From the 1950s to the 70s Beirut was riding a high wave of success and economic expansion, which caused a huge increase in population – it had exceeded a million people. This was, in part, due to the city’s banking sector which attracted investors from neighboring countries and rural locals looking for work. Many nationalities flocked to the then glittering hub, giving it the cosmopolitan vibe it became famous for. By 1975, a third of the population of Lebanon was clustered in and around Beirut.

The civil war broke out on the 13th of April 1975.

The glimmer of peace that brought in the first “postwar” master plan for reconstruction in 1977 was quickly followed by a flurry of urban redesign projects, all very ambitious. Though differing in their approach and scope, one tactic seems common to all: demolition.

In 1977, the Beirut municipality commissioned a master plan to the Atelier Parisien d’Urbanisme (APUR). It followed some of Ecochard’s logic regarding traffic flow and modernizing of infrastructure (Saliba, 2004). This plan built on Ecochard’s ring road by extending it to other highways and the coastal tunnel. The Foch and Allenby streets were also extended to create a new quarter that would house underground parking and a highly dense area with shopping facilities. The Foch – Allenby and Etoile area would also become partially pedestrianized and Martyrs’ Square would gain large underground parking facilities, both ideas were revived in Solidere’s plans of the 1990s.

Following the prewar plans, the 1977 plan also considered serious modifications to transportation routes and more specialized land use. There was intent to create more office and commercial space instead of residential. The new plan, however, introduced three new developments that would influence subsequent maps. For one, there was a shift of re-centralization into downtown. Another development was the creation of a new
façade along the Beirut waterfront – notably on the Minet El Hosn area. Finally, appreciation for Ottoman and French architecture would be expressed by preserving [religious and public] edifices dating from those periods (Saliba, 2004).

The 1977 plans contained much of the reconstruction ambitions of the 1950s. At that time, the Beirut municipality was charged with organizing the timeline for the reconstruction studies and following up on their implementation. For this purpose, a committee, headed by then governor Mitri Nammar, was set up to oversee the reconstruction process.

According to Michael Davie, the 1977 master plan was an extension of a previous French plan. The aforementioned plan suggests the construction of a North-South penetrating road linking the Salim Sleim road to the sea-hugging Avenue de Paris. It also had previsions for an extensive subway system. Both ideas never materialized. At the time, very little was yet destroyed. Wadi Abu Jamil, Saifi, the area around the Grand Serail and around the Bourj were all still intact. The map for the 1977 master plan indicates that very little -- aside from the churches, mosques, parliament, serail and a few others -- would be preserved.
With the restart of the war, no further initiative for Beirut’s reconstruction was initiated until a lull in the fighting occurred in 1983. In that year, during a short-lived period of peace, Oger Liban, a Hariri-owned enterprise since 1979, completed a survey of the BCD. During that time, the APUR plan was brought back and updated to accommodate the damage that had occurred until 1983.

The survey shows that many landmarks predating the French mandate were already lost. These include: Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Ottoman remains, as well as the harbor towers, sea castle, city walls and gates, Bourj tower, Fakhreddine and Shehab Palaces, Petit Serail, Khan Antoun Bey and several Allenby and Foch street buildings. As usual however, mosques and churches were not touched. (Serof, 1992)

In that same year Michael Davie describes Martyrs’ Square as an empty green space. The sewers and neglect had allowed for random vegetation to grow effectively materializing the green line that separated East and West Beirut. “Everything was pockmarked and there were fortifications everywhere,” recalls Davie. “Everything was closed; they had only just opened Weygand as an east, west connection. The [Fouad Chehab Avenue] ring was still closed between Tabaris and Rizk Hospital,” (M. Davie, personal communication, August 9, 2013).

Religious edifices are a sensitive point in the demolition process. Ideally, such buildings should be untouchable; in practice many were removed or compromised after various religious and political leaders were compensated. According to May Davie, in 1983, President Amin Gemayel, made a deal with Rafic Hariri where Hariri would be entrusted with the reconstruction of the BCD. Among the resulting demolitions, the Nouriyeh church on Place de L’étoile - one of the oldest in the city - was destroyed. Davie speculates that the bishop was also given a piece of the deal. The Nouriyeh Church was rebuilt after the war.
The period between 1982 and 1983 marked a significant loss for heritage. Though none of the wartime Master Plans had been implemented, demolition began before any legislation or legal entity was created to regulate the shape or future of "Al-Balad.” Using the need for cleaning up the rubble from the war-torn city as a pretext, the bulldozers of Oger-Liban wiped out entire heritage areas without request or authorization from the government. The loss included the Nuriyeh, Sursock and Jewellery (Sagha) souks of the BCD. The entirety of the east of Martyrs’ Square was also removed, which included a large section of the Saifi district. Unfortunately, outside of academic circles, these incidents did not attract much attention. They were especially overshadowed by the renovation of Maarad Street that occurred around the same time (Salam, 1995). The alarm over the 1983 demolitions was not raised until similar destructive initiatives were adopted in 1986, also without governmental authorization. The 1986 demolition plans, which bear some likeness to the future Solidere plans, called for the demolition of about 80% of the remaining edifices of the BCD (Makdisi, 1997). By then, however, Hariri had already firmly attached himself to the reconstruction efforts that will shape the city for decades to come.

Figure 46 1983 – Bulldozers clearing out rubble...
Figure 48 1990 – Souk Sursock, bulldozed in 1982/1983. We are on Martyrs’ Square looking toward the Place de l’Étoile. Note the Orthodox St. Georges and Catholic St. Elie churches on the right. The demolished Sayyidat Al Nuriyyeh church’s location is delimited by the barbed wire.
As bulldozers destroyed significant parts of the BCD, renovation works had begun in others. Note the municipality on the right. As fighting renewed, the scaffolding was used to build barricades in the streets.

Fighting erupted again. In 1986 the master plan for Greater Beirut, prepared by Institut d’Amenagement et d’Urbanisme de la Region d’Ile de France (IAURIF), put central Beirut in the larger perspective of Greater Beirut. Sub-centers were then created around the city center. This plan aimed to establish Beirut as a center for commercial, financial, governmental, administrative and cultural activities on a regional and international level.

In 1990, after the end of the war, Dar al Handasah prepared yet another master plan. According to Robert Saliba, the plan was approved in 1992 after an extensive public debate. Detractors of the plan argue that its inception was done in secrecy and public debate had only an informative rather than formative function.
The plan was mostly in line with the APUR plan from 1977. Although keeping the emphasis on extended highways and the conservation of Foch-Allenby and Étoile areas, the plan “modified in a bold and drastic way the sea-land interface zone,” (Saliba, 2004). Following up with Saliba’s comments and after a comparative study of maps with urban planner Antoine Atallah we notice that the waterfront has in fact become a huge project – even in 2014, it is still many years in the making and long from over. It has completely alienated the general population from the area, as the waterfront became an exclusively private project.

![Figure 51 A timeline of the Police Station on the eastern wing of Martyrs’ Square. Solidere initially claimed that it was demolished “by mistake” and that it would be rebuilt, along with the Petit Serail. Both projects have since been cancelled. (Solidere Annual Report 06, p.29)](image)

The final plan of 1994 was developed in consultation with the French firm Sato et Associés and addressed important issues in the 1992 plan. We should note that the 1992 plan intended to widen Martyrs’ Square so that it becomes 10 meters wider than the Champs Elysees – effectively making it the widest avenue in the world. The 1994 amends annulled this and minimized the effect of new development on the preexisting historical urban fabric. This amendment, however, came too late. By then, all buildings on Martyrs’ Square had been bulldozed except for the Cinema Opera (now Virgin Megastore) that was protected by its wealthy owner. In fact, even the iconic police station on Martyrs’ Square – that was protected in the APUR plan of 1977 – was removed in 1994.

Although the civil war raged on for 15 years, the population continued to grow – even if in a limited manner. According to the United Nation’s Economic and Social

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1 Demolition workers claim they got the wrong plot number, and that its demolition was a mistake. According to the company’s 2005 annual report, Solidere promised to reconstruct it but changed its plans, choosing instead to build the Rafic Hariri Public Library on lot 1085 Saifi. [Video of the demolition: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gab6SOgPj2Y]
Commission of Western Asia (UN ESCWA) reports on Lebanese diaspora, the country did not again see a huge burst in population growth until the early 1990s. This burst was short lived and growth has been gradually declining again in more recent years.

Over time, Beirut has always maintained a trend of recreating itself. In history, every generation sees the BCD mostly wiped out and reinvented. Just as the invading Ottomans and French destroyed to rebuild, so did Solidere in the 90s. This raises two questions: Is it justifiable to wipe the slate clean in the name of modernization? Moreover, does that place Solidere in the category of invader?

The destruction of edifices in Beirut is by no means a new concept. If it was not due to natural causes or political turbulence, it was done deliberately. Solidere destroyed buildings in the 1990s and we continue to witness sporadic episodes of demolitions inside and outside the Solidere zone today, so did our fathers and grandfathers before us. One must pause, however, to make the point that the demolition of landmarks – if inevitable – should not be treated casually because they do attribute a great tangible and emotional loss to many people. It can be argued, at least, that the approach to demolition should be highly guarded with caution and much study regarding the implications of such a venture on the people and neighborhoods affected.

Today, the city is still undergoing construction and the process seems infinite. The final product has been pending for centuries without yield. It wasn’t up to the Romans, Ottomans or the French to paint the final face of this city. Will Solidere be the answer?
CHAPTER THREE

THE LEGISLATION OF LAWLESSNESS AND THE BLINDING OF OVERSIGHT: SOLIDERE AND CLIENTELISM IN THE AGE OF RECONSTRUCTION

3.1 Introduction

“He, who controls the Beirut Central District, controls the nation” (Wakim, 2002). In fifteen years of war, no faction was able to fully occupy the historic core of Beirut. During the Lebanese civil war, the Beirut Central District (BCD) remained an unclaimed prize. In the wake of the Ta’ef agreement, the country was looking for hope. The capital’s historic core, in dire need of reconstruction, quickly became the focal point of legislators, capital holders and the public alike. When Solidere was entrusted with the project in 1994, this signaled the beginning of a new era for the city. The reconstruction of the BCD was to be the largest construction project in the world at the time.

This chapter will construct a map of the entire Solidere process from early beginnings to recent times and beyond. It will address the politics and events that aligned to give birth to the company that bore sole responsibility for the reconstruction of the heart of Beirut. Furthermore, the chapter will provide anecdotes and recount notable events from Solidere’s 20-year history.
3.2 The Events Leading to the Creation of Solidere

Lebanese-Saudi businessman and billionaire Rafic Hariri, who had influenced BCD reconstruction efforts throughout the 1980s, orchestrated the Solidere initiative. The creation of Solidere was a patient and expensive process. In fact, plans for the reconstruction of the BCD were discussed as early as 1977, when the first cessation of fighting took place and it became possible to believe the war might be over. Indeed, a pattern of rekindling reconstruction efforts whenever the fighting halted can be observed throughout the course of the civil war.

On 6 October, 1978, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 65 for the establishment of a “United Nations Agency for the Reconstruction of Lebanon.” This resolution was voted at the demand of the Lebanese government, but was never implemented: The UN had no role in the reorganization of the BCD. The only study my research has found is a commendable 2006 UN-ESCWA study for Solidere on handicapped access in the mall that replaced the historic souks.

In 1983, Hariri personally commissioned Dar Al Handassa Group to draw up a plan for the reconstruction project at his own expense. As a result, unlicensed demolitions to “clean up” the space for rebuilding began years before the civil war actually ended. His participation in the establishment of the Taef agreement allowed him to attain more power in the new government and many other political advantages. “Hariri has used his wealth in helpful ways. He bankrolled the 1989 Taef peace conference, picking up the tab for the dozens of Lebanese politicians and warlords who gathered for a month in Saudi Arabia's mountains to work out the agreement that ultimately ended Lebanon's civil war” (Hundley, 1993)².

By the time Solidere was officially created in 1994, a significant number of the surviving buildings were already bulldozed (Schmidt, 1998). The justification for the tabula rasa policy was that it was the best way to overstep the many complications of sorting out property rights that had developed after 15 years of abandonment and war.

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3.3 The Birth of Solidere

The Lebanese constitution, article 15 declares: “Rights of ownership shall be protected by law. No one's property may be expropriated except for reasons of public utility, in the cases established by law and after fair compensation has been paid beforehand.”

The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District S.A.L. (SOLIDERE: SOciété LIbanaise DE REconstruction) was established as a joint stock company on 5 May, 1994, and registered on 10 May, 1994 under commercial registration No. 67000.

The creation of Solidere was made possible by ratifying law No. 91 – 117 on 7 December, 1992. This law gave the vital responsibility of rebuilding the historic core of the city to a single Real Estate Company. From the day of its ratification, detractors believed that it directly contradicted Article 15 of the Lebanese Constitution. Indeed, law 117/1991 defines the judicial framework relative to the creation of a Real Estate Company whose main goal is to rebuild war damaged areas according to a master plan approved by the Lebanese Parliament. Initially, it was also decided that one company would take on the task of reconstructing the BCD and give owners shares in the new company. Others could also buy publicly traded shares -- which would fund the construction process (Schmid, 2002). Furthermore, the company was exempt from income tax on profit for a period of 10 years from the date of its establishment (Solidere Annual Report, 1999). The duration of the company’s mandate was initially determined at a period of 25 years (ending in 2019). This was eventually extended to 75 years from the date of its establishment during an extraordinary general assembly of parliament on 29 June, 1998 and ratified in 2005 under the mandate of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

The objectives of Solidere also expanded with time. In its first annual report, dated 1994, Solidere’s activities were: The acquisition of the lots pertaining to the BCD; the financing and execution of infrastructure works at the expense of the Lebanese state; the demolition, renovation and construction of buildings according to the master plan and the subsequent maintenance, leasing, selling or leasing of buildings; the reclaiming
of land over the sea and its development; and any action or works necessary to the realization of the project by the company. All of these goals were limited by a strict geographical boundary, defined in the 1994 master plan. On 16 November, 2006, however, “an extraordinary general assembly allowed the company to provide services and consultancies for projects outside the BCD area and all over the world,” (Solidere Annual Report 2010). Moreover, on 7 June, 2007, Solidere realized its greatest expansionist coup by creating an associate company in Dubai: Solidere International Limited (SI). Solidere International Holding S.A.L. (99.5% owned by Solidere) provided 35.5% of SI’s capital. This ploy allowed the company to go beyond the boundaries set by the original master plan’s mandate and to contract projects in Lebanon and all over the world -- notably in Saudi Arabia, Cairo, Monaco and the Beirut suburb of Hazmieh (Solidere Annual Report, 2007).
3.4 Solidere’s Liberal Interpretation of Legislation

Many legal experts claim that Solidere has committed copious violations since the 1990s. For instance, in a news conference in 1999, lawyer Mohammed Moghraby – who had worked on the illegal demolition of the Khayyat family building located just outside Solidere’s jurisdiction (Daily Star, 1998)\(^3\) -- explains that Solidere’s corrupt business practices did not come into scrutiny until after Rafic Harriri had left the position of prime minister in 1998. Furthermore, Moghraby insists that the government obliterates Solidere’s practice and return the lost rights of property owners instead of allowing the company to continue to usurp sea, land and public and private property (Khalil, 1999)\(^4\). What is rather worrisome is what Solidere was able to achieve through liberal interpretation of legality. Whatever legislation the company could not bend, it simply changed through political leverage\(^5\). Solidere’s first annual report from 1994 explains the company’s account of the legal and social process that created the right conditions for Solidere’s creation and development. While the official literature presents a transparent and straightforward process, our research tells another story.

To defend the legality of Solidere, Dr. Nasser Chammaa, CEO at Solidere, claims that the laws for the real estate company have been long rooted in the Lebanese constitution and therefore cannot be unconstitutional\(^2\). He states that the law for real estate companies exists since 1962. It is certainly true that a law was ratified during the presidency of Fouad Chehab and later amended in 1965. The application of this law was suggested in 1977 with a decree to reorganize the BCD – especially the Ghalghoul and Saifi areas. And indeed, a decree asking for a single real estate company to handle BCD renovation was created in 1983. Furthermore, decree 1163 to renovate Saifi and Ghalghoul was released in 1987. Chammaa’s selective justification is revealing of Solidere’s philosophy. In fact, a study of the legislation debunks Chamma’s logic.


According to Eric Verdeil, urban geographer, by 1963 Fouad Chehab had indeed created the Executive Council for the Large Projects of Beirut (CEGPVB), (Verdeil, 2010). This council was a mark of the interventionist aspect of Fouad Chehab’s vision; and among the prime achievements of the public executive council was the creation of the Bechara El Khoury Avenue, which linked the BCD to the Airport. Another project entrusted to this public council was to renovate the areas of Saifi and Ghalghoul, two popular districts that remained untouched during the French mandate. The stated goal for the urban renovation of these two areas – which implied their total destruction – was the decongestion of the BCD by widening the streets and reorganizing antiquated Ottoman land-use. Verdeil argues that the true purpose of this intervention was to ‘clean up’ Ghaghoul, a notable migrant area, and Saifi, the prostitutes’ district. While the project never materialized by the beginning of the 1975 civil war, it was an example of state rather than private intervention, and all added values, financial or otherwise, would have gone to the Lebanese government rather than shareholders.

Therefore, while the use of real estate companies for redevelopment was a matter of debate, this never materialized and other options were considered.
In 1991, Hariri was unable to pass the law for a single real estate company to take on BCD reconstruction by the government of Prime Minister Omar Karami. Without this law, Solidere could not exist. However, in a matter of months, Hariri was able to push this same bill into parliament after his advisors (which then included Fouad Saniora and Alfadl Shalak) allegedly compensated several ministers (Wakim, 2002).

Hariri was keen on becoming prime minister. He eventually achieved his goal in 1992 with great popular support, under the mandate of President Elias Hrawi. By then, president Hrawi, historically a rival of Hariri, was living in a mansion offered by the ambitious billionaire. Hariri will occupy the post of prime minister a second and final time between 2000 and 2004, during President Emile Lahoud’s mandate. His first assignment to the post, in 1992, extended new powers to his Solidere project. As prime minister in the early 1990s, Hariri was not only able to bring Solidere into existence, but also fend off opposition and resistance that would have otherwise hindered the company’s growth and profit.

In order to get fellow politicians on board and kickoff company profits, Hariri made a masterful play that involved many key members of parliament. Wakim describes in detail the process by which parliament members and other officials were convinced of the rightfulness of the Solidere project: Hariri secured interest free loans from BankMed and the Saudi-Lebanese Bank for over 40 politicians so that they could buy stocks in Solidere. Shares would then be bought at the market price of $100 and sold at an inflated price promised by Hariri. Indeed, in a period of few months, stock prices skyrocketed to 170$/share --during which the politicians were alerted to sell their portfolio for a profit, consequently making millions (Wakim, 2002). This ploy was a firm response and an irresistible deal to politicians who had opposed the project. Henri Eddé also exposes some of the mechanisms used to silence opposition to the Solidere project. He argues that if Hariri had not silenced ministerial opposition, law 117 would not have passed and

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6 This was something he had mulled over for years. In fact, former President Amine Gemayel allegedly claimed in a 1998 live interview with Maguy Farah on MTV that ten years earlier, Hariri offered him 30 million dollars for the post of prime minister - President Amine Gemayel Our Color. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.lebanon2013elections.org/Amin-Gemayel.html.

Solidere would have not existed. Eddé cites for example, an office tower belonging to an unidentified minister of the time: Hariri had guaranteed a generous offer for the expropriation of the tower in exchange for that minister’s support on law 117 – The deal never materialized and the minister retained ownership of the property. Furthermore, another minister saw his ownership in Starco center returned to him in exchange for renouncing his initial opposition to the Solidere law. Finally, an important maritime agent, who had rallied the press and succeeded in obtaining a ruling from the state council that would have allowed him to slow down expropriations in the BCD, saw his property returned and the road plan which intended to plow through it cancelled in return for his support (Eddé, 1997).

Figure 55 1994 – A proposed vision of a future BCD as promised by Solidere. - Photograph courtesy of Annahar

3.5 Solidere and the Property Owners’ Battle

Ideally, the business owners and tradesmen who populated the streets of the BCD before the war should have had considerable say in the reconstruction efforts of the district. Estimates of their numbers range between 90,000 and 250,000 right holders. They were the occupants of the 1.8 million square meters entrusted to Solidere. However, the company has managed to marginalize many of them, alienating them from their constitutional rights (Wakim, 2002). The estimating committee, commissioned by Solidere to give business owners a price for their meter squares of ownership in the BCD, had a twofold strategy: On the one hand, property owners in BCD were given
prices that ranged between $400 and $1200 per square meter. The overall value of BCD plots was announced at 1,074 million dollars on 25 February, 1993 and property owners were given three months to submit any comments or objections they may have regarding the estimates. On 26 August, 1993, the final, non-negotiable estimated value of BCD plots was adjusted to 1,170 million dollars\(^8\). On the other, developers were offered land at prices ranging between $5000 and $10,000 per square meters (Wakim, 2002). This meant that right owners were unable to buy back their properties because the estimated value they received for their lands was tenfold less than the market price at the time. Aside from the flagrant discrepancies between property value and prices, the committee allegedly received outside “funding” to make those unfair calls. In theory, the estimating committees’ budget should have come solely from the Ministry of Justice. Some legal experts argue that any outside pay for its members is considered illegal.

The association for the right owners of the BCD explains that only the owners of the retained buildings were allowed to purchase back their properties. The number of retained buildings was increased from 190 to 265 due to intense public pressure; and only 146 properties were eventually returned to their respective owners. These owners had to pay back 10% of the value of their legally owned land, in addition to other financial and non-financial guarantees set by Solidere. Furthermore, if the owner bought his own building back, he would have to return the rented properties to their old tenants – who were often benefiting from old rent -- effectively destroying any possible financial profitability from the return of the property. The remaining buildings rested in the hands of Solidere, who had no obligation to return anybody to their territory (Wakim, 2002).

Figure 57 A building under renovation within the BCD sector of Bachoura. Retained at a high cost by its original owner, it is the only residential heritage building remaining in this sector. It remains unoccupied. – Photograph courtesy of Annahar.
Among other privileges that Solidere received are: Exemption from taxes, limited-to-no government supervision of its actions, exemption from covering the expenses of foundation work, and a cancellation of all cultural projects which included a library, a museum and a meeting space for conventions. Instead, these potential projects were replaced by commercial and office space. Eddé evaluates the cultural projects that never saw the light of day as a gift [to Solidere] at 110 thousand square meters of constructible areas worth over a hundred million dollars in 1997 (Eddé, 1997).

The legislation also permitted Solidere to add an extra floor to the exploitation coefficient of the constructible areas in all the sloped parcels of the BCD. As Eddé notes, however, all BCD parcels are on a slope. Indeed, the BCD itself is technically a slope toward the sea (Eddé, 1997). Through that same decree, Solidere was granted the ability to transfer a significant part of its constructible allowance from one zone to the other – a power that can only belong to the public authority. In effect, this meant that Solidere could manipulate building heights in a way to maximize its profits by giving the most profitable parcels the highest number of meters. Solidere also destroyed historic buildings initially planned for preservation on plots 59, 60, 61 in Zokak El Blat district and plots 911, 914, 997, 1003, 1008 and 1011 in Minet El Hosn district (Wakim, 2002). This was a violation of decree 4830 -- issued on 4 March 1994 -- which called for the protection of these buildings due to their historical and heritage value. By undermining this decree, Solidere destroyed more than 80 percent of heritage sites in the BCD. In their place Solidere intended to build 650 edifices. Of these buildings, and according to CEO Nasser Chammaa, only 25 or 26 edifices will be high-rise buildings of 20 floors and above9. Chammaa further explains that the skyscrapers only constitute 5 percent of the building space. He further questions why all modern nations can build high-rise while we are restricted to 5 or 6 percent. Also, he claims that 38% of the original built space will be preserved and that this may reach an area of 600,000 meters initially.

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Figure 58: 4 May, 1996 – Activists lighting candles, mourning the demolition of one of the red houses by Solidere. The company demolished this house and 8 others in Wadi 'Abou Jmil and Zokak Al Blat during a period of turmoil in South Lebanon. These buildings were protected by Decree number 4830 dated March 4th, 1994. Solidere presented an apology to the order of Engineers and Architects. – Photograph courtesy of Annahar.

Figure 59: 4 May, 1996 – This is a photo of Plot 62-1 in Zokak Al Blat, another building protected by Decree 4830. The company claimed that it had removed the internal ceiling of the house overnight and irretrievably damaged the structure. A press release by the company states that they were therefore forced to demolish it, in the name of public safety.
For over 4500 years, the BCD has been a venue of continuous habitation and trade. In the last few years leading up to the civil war, more than 39,000 people owned properties in the BCD and over 70,000 others were employed in the area. Until the beginning of the civil war in 1975, the BCD was a leading business district in the Middle East. When the war began, however, the BCD became the scene of much violence, largely due to its neutral disposition; it was the meeting point for bombs and bullets hailing from Muslim-held West Beirut and Christian-held East Beirut. Therefore, the green line cut right through the district rendering it a no-man’s-land for many years. The area that the green line divided was largely populated with small businesses and office space forcing the owners of those properties to operate from their homes or reopen somewhere else temporarily (BCD right and property owners report, 2009).

Between 1978 and 1982, the Lebanese government set up a plan to restore the BCD. The plan was keen on preserving the fabric of the BCD. The plan also intended to return most of the owners to the district except a few which would be provided alternative residence or compensation (BCD right and property owners report, 2009). None of this transpired because by 1984, the fighting renewed. During that same period, and especially after the Israeli invasion of 1982, many families from the south became refugees and settled in the BCD in properties that had been vacated by their owners.
Table 1 – Owners of the BCD. - Source: (BCD right and property owners report, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Property owners</th>
<th>Number of Property owners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Store owners</td>
<td>10,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building owners</td>
<td>10,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent profession / company owners</td>
<td>7,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light work and industry owners</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehouse</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel, restaurant and bar owners</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families living in the BCD</td>
<td>5,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The green line area, which is where most of the damage was inflicted, only constituted 35 percent of the BCD. Therefore, only a limited number of buildings were irremediably destroyed, had their foundations disrupted or were completely void of human presence. In the areas of the BCD that were further from the green line, everyday life had endured with relatively functioning foundations (electricity, phone lines and water). The residents in those areas had continued to exist and function in the region.

Many of the owners, whose properties were closer to the green line, were looking forward to the time when they would be able to inspect their properties and many of them had asked for reconstruction permits. These demands were all denied by the government with the pretext that the BCD area was under study. By the end of the civil war, and after factoring in for deaths and inheritances, the right and property owners totaled 63,000 people (BCD right and property owners report, 2009).
When Solidere’s estimating committee issued the very first estimates for property values in 1993, many people were not pleased. In an interview from that same year, Chammaa explained that objection is only natural when there are so many people affected and involved in the BCD project. He dismissed the thought by observing that there are always going to be people who object to any project and cited objections that were made when the government constructed road plans or public interest projects in the past (Al-Nahar, March 15, 1993). According to Chammaa, BCD owners, as stock type “A” holders, are given the priority over any other customer if they want to buy stocks.

As tensions increased between Solidere and BCD property owners, Solidere activities became hindered by protests. Many unhappy owners attempted to stall construction work pertaining to foundations in Wadi Abu Jmil and to stop works on a tunnel leading from Fouad Chehab Bridge to Fakhreddine Street (Phoenicia Hotel) and road works at the Kantari intersection\(^\text{10}\).

61 1994 – The implosion

62 1994 – The Rivoli kneels. The implosion fails and ironically destroys a bulldozer owned by the company. The Solidere information kiosk is seen at the center.
3.5.1 Solidere’s Stock Fluctuations

In the first year of Solidere’s commence many Lebanese were shocked by the rapid increase in stock prices at the company. By August of 1994, the price per stock had reached $150, which was a 50 percent increase in just 43 days since the company was established.\(^{11}\) Some attributed this phenomenon to the newness of the company explaining that it’s natural to have a quick jump in stock prices before they slow down in the future.

By August, stock price had risen to $173.8 or at a daily average of 4.34 percent until August 10, 1994. Because the number of stocks supplied was always much less than the amount of stocks demanded, the prices increased rapidly. This was especially true in the period between July 22 and August 9, 1994, which witnessed the fastest increase of stock price. During the rest of August, however, between 102 and 130 thousand new stocks were introduced daily to bring down the price. By August 18 the price of stocks for Solidere A was $144 and the price of stocks for Solidere B was $151. Due to higher demand for type B Solidere stocks, typically held by business investors and capital holders, it remained of higher value than type A Solidere stocks, which belonged to property owners.

It is worth noting that stock movement is much more active in type B stocks because many type A stocks are attached to their properties. Also, in 1994, many of the estimations for property owners had not been finalized. Thus, big investors were more eager about the acquisition of stocks rather than land.

On March 22\(^{\text{nd}}\), 1995, the price of Solidere stocks was $124 for Solidere A and $128 for Solidere B whereas it was $125 and $130 respectively just the day before. By mid-April of 1995, Solidere stocks had reached a bottom low of $114.25 for type A and $115 for type B stocks. The prices fluctuated heavily throughout the rest of the year and 1995 closed with prices closer to those seen in April (Solidere annual report 1995). In the next three years Solidere stocks would see a price decline more dramatic than the 50

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percent stock spikes of 1994. In fact, by 1998, share prices had already plummeted by a margin of about $100 into the $10s and $20s.

In the last few years approaching 2014, Solidere prices have been stagnating. In July of 2011, Solidere shares dropped to $16.20 for Solidere A and Solidere B shares closed at $16.31\(^\text{12}\). At the times of this writing, share prices are closer to $10.

3.6 Two Case Studies from Solidere’s Reign: The Hemilians and the Ayyases

On 4 May 1994, an advertisement appeared in Annahar newspaper announcing new plots that were now included in the BCD. The ad explained that the 1992 law had been modified and listed the new dimensions of Solidere’s reach. This was done stealthily and gave property owners little to no chance of fighting it. One of many victims of this maneuver was the Hemilian couple from Zokak El Blat (Mango, 2003).

In 1994, when Solidere expanded the number of plots it would control, the Hemilian family was surprised to find their house was included in the list. Ovedis Hemilian’s three-story building was located at the edge of the Serail and provided a clear view of the city center. The building had survived the long civil war when neighboring buildings did not make it.

Hemilian’s family had lived in the building for three generations when he read the ad in the Annahar newspaper, which included his home in the new list of Solidere plots. In effect, this meant that the Hemilian property’s ownership had slipped from hands of the family and fallen into Solidere’s hands without his knowledge or consent. The situation escalated when the Hemilians were billed a sum of $250,000 on their property by Solidere for recuperation fees. This occurred regardless of the fact that the building had miraculously escaped any structural damage during the war. If they paid the fee, the Hemilians could keep their home, otherwise they would face eviction.

With the support of his children, Hemilian was able to scrape together the fee, but Solidere returned two months later with another pretext. In March of 1995, the company handed the Hemilians a two-week eviction notice because the Hemilian property was obstructing the insulation of a traffic light – a matter the Hemilians had settled with the municipality 20 years earlier. Believing that Solidere could legally do nothing to oust them, the Hemilians tried to endure Solidere’s attacks. However, and after three years of constant harassment, Solidere finally won with brute force by sending in a troop of policemen and Solidere strongmen to physically force the old couple out of their home. They then confiscated all the couple’s furniture, paintings, antiques and other belongings (Mango, 2003). The couple’s children later helped their parents find a home in another part of Beirut, but the Hemilians never received the justice they so rightly deserved.

Saad Hariri, Solidere founder Rafic Hariri’s son and political heir, has acquired many properties over time. One of his many homes is located in the BCD and often referred to as Bayt al Wasat – the central home – a term coined by a public relations company. The palace is famous for being a political and social venue for the Hariri family, but few realize that it belongs to someone else. The true name of the property is Ayyas Palace and the legitimate owner is still alive and fighting for his rights. Indeed, the palace was taken over by Solidere and the owners were ousted with no compensation.
– a story that has become all too familiar in Beirut. Then, Hariri moved into the house located on plot 105 in the Minet El Hosn district on France Street. In fact, the Ayyas property was not part of the original Solidere limits. Mohamad Nsouli, the son of Hanifa Ayyas who inherited 75 percent of the property from his parents and passed it on to her son, explained that Solidere added the property to its plan in 1995 and allegedly destroyed part of its roof. Nsouli was not aware of these actions as he was living abroad in the gulf. All he knew was that the palace had been robbed; and his uncle, who had continued to live in the palace alone during the civil war, was fell to his death from the second story balcony. Nsouli never imagined that his family would lose ownership of the house. When he returned from Kuwait in 2005, however, this is exactly what had happened (Abu Zaki, 2011).

Figure 64 2010 - The former Ayyas Palace, current residence of PM Saad Hariri is seen in the lower right corner of this photograph. Also of note is the sharp contrast in construction and planning between the area under Solidere’s mandate and the rest of Beirut, separated by the Fouad Chehab ring road running along the middle of the photo. – Personal photograph
3.7 More of Solidere’s Legal Violations and Liberal Interpretation of Legislation

Solidere also overstepped the municipality’s domain by forcing property owners to abide by its policies and conditions for renovation. However, the private company has no right to demand such taxes from civilians. In fact, while Solidere demanded renovation taxes from citizens, it was allegedly evading its own taxes, which were due in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Aside from dues to the government, by 1998, Solidere was in debt to the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) for 6,232,474,000 L.L. (Wakim, 2002). The failure of Solidere to pay what is due to the CDR is a violation of decision 8, which was issued on 25 August 1992 by the parliament. Decision 8 states that Solidere must pay back all expenses owed of it to the CDR.

By the time Solidere was established in 1994, Hariri had placed his allies in many key positions. Bahij Tabbara, his personal lawyer, was minister of justice. Fouad Saniora, his chief advisor, was minister of state for financial affairs. The board of the company was -- and still is --headed by Nasser Chammaa, an employee of the Hariri-owned Oger. The board offered no representation to the right-owners of the BCD, but rather to representatives of the religious waqfs who owned extensive land that was protected from expropriation by law.

Figure 65 Comparative map of the properties of the Muslim waqfs before and after Solidere’s expropriations. Note that all properties within the Souks are no longer religious properties; also note significant losses on the Northern side of Martyrs’ Square. Finally, the destroyed Santiyye cemetery is no longer listed as a religious property. –Source: Schmidt, 1999
In addition, in 1991, Alfadl Shallaq former chairman of Hariri-owned Oger Liban and board member of the Hariri Foundation was appointed at the head of the CDR; Nabil El Jisr, former president of the Hariri-owned company Oger France, succeeded him. Furthermore, with the establishment of CDR, the Ministry of Planning was put on hold and attempts to revive it in 1994 to reduce CDR’s authority failed (Lendeers, 2004). To this day, control over the CDR remains instrumental to maintain the smooth functioning of Solidere. This council, housed in an Ottoman building renovated at Hariri’s personal expense, is located in the vicinity of the Grand Serail and has become the main authority on matters of public works. “Amendments to the decree of 1977, formalized by law 117 adopted in December 1991, granted the CDR far-reaching authorities to single-handedly negotiate and secure funding for reconstruction from foreign sources, request the Central Bank to issue treasury bonds, and finance infrastructural projects undertaken by an equally unaccountable private real estate company in charge of rebuilding the downtown business district of Beirut (later named Solidere). Moreover, ‘reconstruction’ became to legally include a wide range of activities, from infrastructure works to education, public health, agriculture and industry” (Lendeers, 2004).

Figure 66 The map of the Solidere demolitions. –Schmidt, 1998
Figure 67 Prewar aerial photograph showing the Santiyye Cemetery, the resting home of many notable Sunni families.

Figure 68 The same area post-war - the Santiyye cemetery has been heavily damaged and overgrown, the seaside corniche is extended in 1974 and many of its old buildings were destroyed in the process. Solidere bulldozed whatever remained. Note the Normandy landfill.

Figure 69 The sign at the entrance of the remodeled Santiyye Cemetery. Note that the Arabic word cemetery has been covered by spray paint. Heavy controversy surrounding the demolition of this initially Islamic property of the Makassed religious foundation and a vast cemetery by Solidere in 2006. The company claims that the land is not actually a cemetery and that the demolition was for the new coastal road, corniche and seawater. The most recent master plan states that the land will become the Santiyye gardens, with no mention of the existence of a cemetery. – Photograph courtesy of Nadine Ghaith.
Figure 70 1991 – This rare aerial photograph shows that the BCD retained the entirety of its urban tissue by the end of the war. The flattened areas visible on the side of Martyrs’ Square are the Saifi (East) and Souk Sursock (West) districts, willfully bulldozed in 1982 and 1983. The Normandy landfill, future site of the Beirut Marina and reclaimed territories is clearly visible in the top left. – Photograph courtesy of Michael Davie.
Figure 71 1999, November – Aerial photograph showing the demolition of 642 buildings (Solidere Annual Report 1994, p.24), which represents 88% of the post-war urban tissue. Further demolitions were done in 2008 in the Wadi Abou Jamil area located in the vicinity of the Grand Serail. Note the destruction and redesign of entire districts such as, from West to East: Minet el Hosn, Zokak el Blat, Wadi Abou Jamil, Riad al Solh Square, Ghalghoul, the historic Souks, the entirety of Martyrs’ Square, the disappearance of the Debbas Square, and the north of the Saifi districts. Also notice the extensive reclaimed area over the sea partly constructed with the remains of the demolished buildings and archeological excavations.
Figure 72 15 February, 1996 - A human tragedy occurred when a building in Wadi Abu Jamil (plot 999 Mina El Hosn) collapsed on the Eid family. The company had reportedly weakened the foundations of the building and the resulting collapse resulted in the death of 15 people and injury to eight others. Though widely accused in the media, Solidere was never prosecuted for the incident (Wakim, 2002). – Photograph courtesy of An-Nahar
Figure 73 1996 – A man pleads for help as the hopeless search for survivors continues. – Photograph courtesy of An-Nahar
In order to benefit from the residue of the hundreds of demolished buildings, Solidere negotiated a deal with the government: Solidere would overlook the 200 million dollars owed to it by the government due to infrastructure works and would rehabilitate the Normandy landfill if the government allows the rubble to be poured into the sea. In effect, Solidere received 3 billion dollars’ worth of land for executing a process that would not exceed the cost of half a billion dollars. This land amounts to 600 thousand meters square – which were supposed to be the government’s share, the only significant expanse of public land of the BCD (Eddé, 1997). In reality, this land remains public and is only leased to Solidere for $1.67 a year per square meter according to a 50-year, renewable lease.\textsuperscript{13}

Finally, Solidere also took over the lands of the port [reportedly adjacent to the first basin] – which are worth an estimated 400 million dollars, by claiming that all lands with no plot number in the land registry are government lands and thereby under the mandate of Solidere (Wakim, 2002). Eddé argues that this maneuver was planned since October 1991. Solidere assimilated state-owned properties used as private spaces with state-owned properties used as public spaces to obtain the former parcels in the settlement of the state debt owed to the company. The land adjacent to the first basin of the port – a state-owned property – was transferred to the portfolio of the company. This land, represents a constructible area of over 70 thousand square meters (Eddé, 1997).

In 1997, Solidere committed another violation by allowing foreigners (non-Arabs) to own stocks in the BCD. Previously only Lebanese and Arabs were able to do so. Furthermore, the company introduced a million stocks into foreign markets. Solidere also exceeded its domain of 20 hectares of permitted exploitation to include an area of 60 hectares. The next year Solidere’s public committee took a decision to extend the tenure of Solidere from 25 years to 75 years. This, among many other violations led to the company’s first engineer for the reconstruction project, Henri Eddé, to resign. Eddé later wrote that he could not stand witness to a project that contradicted his professional vision and responsibilities toward the government (Wakim, 2002).

Figure 74 1965 – Wadi Abou Jamil, also known as the “Valley of the Jews”. Note the surviving Besancon school in the upper left. The Abdelkader palace in the center has been retained and renovated. The house in the upper right corner was also retained. Everything else was destroyed. - Photograph courtesy of Cushman.

Figure 75 2010 – The house in upper right corner of the previous photograph during its renovation in 2010. The road seen in the middle has been executed post-war according to a modified older project, demolishing the entire area in the process. In the upper right corner, note the St. Elie church in Kantari. – Personal photograph.
Eddé argues that starting with the moment when owners in downtown were no longer treated equally; the existence of Solidere became indefensible. “It would appear that the conditions and selection of those buildings was not innocent. The exclusion of the public from the decision-making process is a prime example of the abuse that comes with too much power.” Eddé notes that even government institutions were excluded in the process.

On Solidere’s extension toward the sea, Eddé claims “that the reclaimed land on the sea was not supposed to be more than 20 hectares whereas it has been extended to over 60 hectares. Of the 308 thousand square meters of constructible land, 292 thousand square meters of that area was for Solidere. Only 26 thousand square meters ended up being for the government. The reclaimed land represents half of the BCD superificies in 1975 and through increases in exploitation coefficients, the constructible area would be multiplied by 4. In addition, this high densification will put immense pressure on a city center with congested entry and exit points.”

Eddé claims that the estimation of costs to make the reclaimed land constructible was given by Solidere as 350 million dollars – without oversight. Solidere would be offered the project without any price consultation. This allowed the company to create two million and seven hundred square meters of constructible area.

“The separation between state and Solidere and government was just a façade; this separation became a cover-up for a blatant bypass of public participation in the reconstruction of downtown,” (Eddé, 1997).
Figure 77 2006 – This building dating back to the French mandate was demolished in 2008. Note the Synagogue on the left. Photograph courtesy of Lea Pavlicevitch

Figure 78 Wadi Abou Jamil – Photograph showing the surrounding cluster of heritage buildings around the synagogue that will be demolished a few months after this photograph was taken to resell the land parcels to developers. On the site of these buildings, archeologists will find the Roman Hippodrome of Beirut; a major archeological landmark to be merged within a construction project approved by Minister of Culture Gaby Layoun. Photograph courtesy of Lea Pavlicevitch
Figure 79 2011 - The Wadi Abou Jamil Maghen Abraham Synagogue was constructed in 1925. Here it is in 2011, after its renovation completed partly thanks to a $100 000 Solidere grant. Out of the 16 synagogues that existed in Beirut, only this one survives. – Personal photograph

Figure 80 2013 - The archeological site adjoining the Riad Al Solh statue (lot 1520 Bachoura) has been officially presented as a candidate for preservation by the Ministry of Culture. Yet the towering Jean Nouvel project has not been cancelled yet. – Personal photograph

14 Other plots with significant archeological findings also remain in danger such as 1474 Marfaa, located behind the Annahar building. In the background, note the Grand Theatre, a section of which was demolished in 2010 to prepare its transformation into a Solidere branded boutique hotel.
3.8 Archeology

Archaeological initiatives were launched in 1991. Many experts voiced their demand that a survey of the BCD’s archeology should be completed before any reconstruction efforts commence, and this for two reasons: 1) To ensure that the process goes smoothly and without the pressure of contractors and 2) It would allow for any archeological discoveries to be incorporated into the new reconstruction project (Abi Akl, 1999).

By 6 October, 1991 a general consensus had been reached regarding the necessity of digging for archeological remains. A meeting was set between all stakeholders during which a document to confirm the agreed upon consensus was signed by Georges Zouein, UNESCO Coordinator, and head of CDR and engineer Alfaadl Shalak. Following this, the DGA, Lebanese and foreign experts and UNESCO began negotiating the excavation process.

According to Georges Zouein, and in April of 1992, Hariri invited him to a business meeting in Paris to discuss archeology initiatives in the BCD. Hariri then offered to donate a million dollars via his Hariri Foundation to initiate the archeology project, on the condition that excavations would only include the area spanning from the churches to the Borj Place. This area would then become the Garden of Archeology. However, Zouein clarified to Hariri that the law dictates that the entire BCD area should be surveyed for archeological ruins. Hariri agreed and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) accepted his donation and added an amount of $600,000 to the project annually for three consecutive years (Abi Akl, 1999).

The archeology project was composed of three periods. In the first period, spanning nine to 12 months, the necessary documentation would be gathered and stored in the information bank. The second period would begin after the establishment of the real estate company (Solidere). This period consists of the digging operations ranging from Martyrs’ square westwards and would span between 24 and 30 months. The third stage has to do with the actual removal or rescuing of archeological ruins. This was supposed to be done in coordination with the reconstruction process to ensure the least possible damage on the removed artifacts. The timeframe for the overall project was set
for five years. It was crucial for the archeological phase to be completed before the reconstruction phase began and that phase one and three of the archeological project be implemented with the cooperation of Solidere and the DGA. Phase two, during which large holes will be dug, is not included in the reconstruction area. This area falls between Borj Place and Nejmeh Place and is defined by the Azarieh building at its southern terminal and the Cinema Opera and Omari mosque at its northern terminal. This area spans about 60,000 m² and its completion was not determined within a specific timeframe, meaning that excavation may continue as long as there is possibility of extracting archeological ruins.

This three-phase plan received a lot of criticism from leading experts. Consequently, several people dropped out of the project. Speaking on condition of anonymity, some said their biggest argument was that a holistic survey has to be completed before any reconstruction efforts begin. These experts insisted that a clear timeframe be set for all archeological activities and that these activities be completed at least one or two years before reconstruction even begins (Abi Akl, 1999).

Actual excavation began on 8 September, 1993. Henceforth, a constant battle between heritage supporters, especially archeological experts who denounced plans that were insensitive to the history of the BCD, and the Solidere bulldozers ensued. By the time the company was established in 1994, the clash between heritage and reconstruction was more than evident. Furthermore, serious efforts were made toward ensuring that the media did not catch wind of what was happening regarding archeology in the BCD. In fact, the minister of education and culture at the time, Michel Eddé, insisted that any scientific expeditions working in the BCD had to go through him for approval before making any information public (Abi Akl, 1999).

One of the historic sites Solidere attempted to conceal in 1994 was the Banco di Roma site on Place de L’Étoile. Solidere wanted to raze the site to construct parliamentary offices and meeting rooms instead (Abi Akl, 1999). In July of 1994, and during the razing of the Banco di Roma building, some laborers found parts of a Roman arch and informed the DGA; the next day however the arch was gone. A huge debate ignited between the parliament -- which owned the building and wanted to use the arch
as a decoration in the new offices -- and the Ministry of Culture -- which believed that the arch belonged in the National Museum -- regarding who should keep the arch. In the end, the arch was found thrown on the side of the road. Naturally, the site of the new parliamentary offices was closed off to the media. On 23 September, 1994, however, journalist May Abi Akl investigated the building with a photographer and discovered a plethora of what she described as “wonderful archeological ruins” inside the building (Abi Akl, 1999). When the pictures ran in Annahar newspaper the next day, the DGA archeology expert who was supervising the site, Rinata Tarazi, was physically assaulted because she was believed to be the one who leaked the photos. The aggressive campaign to suppress all archeological findings on site -- and there were many -- was maintained in order to accelerate the construction of the parliament building extension.

Some of the most significant discoveries at the Banco di Roma site included a historical wall made up of eight arches. The wall contained elaborate flowery engravings and was made up of high quality marble, which led many to believe it was part of a very important Roman structure in ancient Berytus. Also uncovered was an omphalos stone made of red granite and used as a basin into which water and wine was poured in one of the houses of worship. The site also contained Roman columns and part of a statue of a noble-born Roman woman. Indeed, it was a site of very rich Roman heritage because it was located between the ancient roman baths and Apollo’s temple -- currently believed to be under the Azarieh complex.

In October 1994, the Italian architect Giorgio Golini arrived to conduct a topographical study of the area that was jointly funded by UNESCO and the Italian government. During his stay in Lebanon, Golini had the answer for the fate of the Banco di Roma ruins. Golini suggested that an underground museum is the best solution for the archeological findings. He argued that an underground, metro-like pathway would be created where people can access the sites without passing through the parliament or other government buildings. His plan, which would have cost $350,000, was to almost entirely recreate the Berytus forum and allow visitors to enjoy various periods of Beirut’s history without the hustle and noise of cars. His plan never saw the light due to the pretext that there was no funding for such a project (Abi Akl, 1999).
When the new parliamentary building was completed in April of 1997, it contained seven floors above ground and six underground floors. The historical detail, which is omnipresent in BCD buildings, was maintained on the exterior of the building and the third underground floor was to be allocated for the Banco di Roma relics. None of the artifacts made it back into the building however; they remained locked up in the basement of the St. Georges Maronite cathedral.

The Phoenician city was one of the most important sites destroyed by Solidere during the 1990s. Sporadic work, supervised by head of the Lebanese University team Dr. Hussein Sayegh, had begun on the site on 22 January, 1994 and continued until 31 July, 1995. In June 1995, the urban plan of the city was uncovered. This site proved that the first urban planning initiatives in Beirut were Phoenician rather than Greek. The Phoenician city was the first of its kind to be discovered in the Levant. But regardless of the historical value the city offered, by August 1995, Solidere begun the construction of an underground parking, thereby razing a significant part of the Phoenician city (Abi Akl, 1999).
The Romans only bestowed their biggest cities with basilicas. Beirut’s Roman basilica was located on the northwestern area of the cardo maximus axis. When excavations began in 1993, archeologists had high hopes of uncovering the legendary basilica and the Roman law library. Part of their dreams would come true. In 1997, the southeast cornerstone of the Roman basilica was uncovered in plot 1145 near nejmeh square. In the summer of the following year, a 200-meter square area of the basilica was discovered in neighboring lot 1155 -- owned by Solidere -- in Ahdab street. These discoveries, alongside another massive building on the cardo maximus line were of the utmost significance. Appeals were made to then minister of culture, Fawzi Hbeish, to save the basilica (which was on Solidere property), but Hbeish issued his decision on 29 September, 1998 to dismantle the basilica and reconstruct it in one of the public gardens. Hbeish did not elaborate on the technicalities of such a venture. May Abi Akl confirms that instead of listening to the pleas of heritage and other experts to not take the basilica apart, Hbeish chose to work in tune with Solidere’s preference to remove the basilica because of alleged political ties. Thus, the bulldozers commenced to take apart the edifice less than two months later, on November 5, 1998. The DGA was able to stop the project a few days later decrying serious worksite violations and a lack of coordination with its experts. This infuriated Solidere CEO, Chammaa, who then made sure laborers razed the property on Friday November 13, 1998. Solidere often inflicts its damage on weekends when governmental authorities and press are off duty (Abi Akl, 1999). Some of the ruins were salvaged and distributed between the Archeological Tel, the storage of the St. Georges cathedral and Martyrs’ Square (Abi Akl, 1999).

On 26 December, 1997, while everyone was distracted with the Christmas holidays, the Nejmeh square excavations began to be buried over. This was taking place without the approval of the DGA – which is the only governmental authority for such decisions. According to Abi Akl, speaker of parliament Nabih Berri gave the order for the burial, completely overstepping the authority of the DGA. The general secretary of the parliament, Adnan Daher, late explained that the archeological site was buried to protect it from rain and filth, as the DGA is unable to maintain it. Still, the operation was completed without the supervision of any archeological experts, which puts into question the government’s interest in the well being of those artifacts (Abi Akl, 1999).
In fact, throughout the excavations of the 1990s, many sites fell victim to “accidental” razes. For example, on 10 February, 1995, bulldozers hit an ancient wall located southeast of Martys’ Square. This work was being conducted on a Saturday when experts are not on duty. It led to the breakage of the corner of a historic tower and its complete disappearance. Before the year was over two more similar incidents had occurred: On 20 October, a bulldozer ran over a piece of mosaic spanning 50 square meters. It was considered an archeological disaster of international relevance at the time. And on 9 December, 1995 a piece of mosaic was razed near Riad el Solh. The destroyed piece was an astonishing 15 meters long and dated back to the Roman period. Early in 1996, on 10 January, 1996 a couple of Roman columns were destroyed during construction work on Weygand Street. That same month, and while the Electricité du Liban (EDL) was fixing some electric cables behind the Orient building, near the Phoenician city, bulldozers razed an area of 120 meters square. Then, on 9 February, 1996, the bulldozers buried relics found in the ghalghoul area behind the St. Georges cathedral. Also, in March 1997, while digging for a large parking lot that was to be completed near the Orient building, a trench dating back to the Middle Ages was compromised (Abi Akl, 1999).

Figure 83 1940 – The St. George bay, its iconic hotel, its yacht club and popular marina.
3.9 Solidere in the Last Decade

3.9.1 Selling the Bay

The Saint Georges Hotel and Marina is one of the very few edifices, predating the civil war that still stands prominently on the Beirut coast. An early modern structure designed by a team of local and international architects in the early 1930’s, it was a pre-war focal point not only for postcard photographers, but also for the local and international elite. Solidere set its sights on the iconic hotel and has continually harassed its owner, Fadi El Khoury, to hand over rights to the hotel’s bay access. The hotel explains the danger of Solidere’s intentions on its website: “The desire of Solidere to be the sole lease holder of the entire St. George Bay has paralyzed the renovation project of the Hotel who would lose its historic and commercial value if it lost its access to the water front and its beach facilities.” Regardless of pressure by Solidere, the St. Georges endures and refuses to give into the pressure of Solidere. The iconic hotel is practically the only feature still recognizable from prewar pictures of the minet el hosn region.

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3.9.2 The case of Zaytouna Bay

Figure 85 2010 – On the left, the St Georges hotel. On the right, the Zaytouna Bay project. Notice the wooden deck, which extends across the St. George hotel to the Jetee and blocks the hotel from accessing the sea. Today, the Marina is under the sole control of Zaytouna Bay. – Personal photograph

In partial compensation to the reconstruction of the BCD, the Lebanese government – supposedly lacking funds – gave Solidere the Normandy landfill on a 50-year lease. This was the only public waterfront property in the downtown area. The lease was heavily discounted and came down to 2,500 L.L. or $1.67 per square meter. It was the land on which the Zaytouna bay project was constructed\(^8\).

The transformation of a public seafront into a 66000-meter luxury marina was one of Solidere’s most recent accomplishments. The word “public” here is misleading, however. Initially and according to act 3808, the Zaytouna bay lands – which were created by the reclamation of the sea which included plots 1455 and 1456 -- are public and Solidere had no rights over them\(^8\). On 9 March, 2006, however, during the tenure of Mohammad Safadi, minister of public works and transport, act 16546 was issued to privatize plots 1455 and 1456. In 2007, acting Beirut governor, Nassif Qaloush, granted the Zaytouna bay project permission to build over a time frame of six years\(^16\). After the land ceased to be public, and with Qaloush’s approval, the project expanded into six above the ground floors and three underground floors. Currently, the only public access

that visitors to the Zaytouna bay have is a narrow wooden strip of sidewalk, which is surrounded by expensive shops and restaurants. Zaytouna bay boasts of an 800-member yacht club, 9,000 square meters of residential property, about 12,000 square meters of high-end furnished apartments – all these seemingly permanent projects were constructed on a temporary building license\(^8\).

![Private Property](image)

*Figure 86 The controversial sign posted at the entrances of the Zaytouna Bay project declares the historic St Georges bay as private property with specific rules enforced by private security guards. – Personal photograph*

### 3.9.3 More on Regional Expansion

In recent years, Solidere has been decried for expansion initiatives within the gulf and even further. What this would mean is the use of local capital – initially given to Solidere for improvement of the BCD – to fund private regional projects that the Lebanese cannot benefit from. This is in complete contradiction with Solidere’s main purpose of public service and reconstruction of the BCD.

In November 1996, Solidere investment certificates (GDRs) began to circulate in the London Stock Exchange\(^{17}\). With a stock price set for $115, Solidere received 140 million dollars’ worth of demand from international investment companies. These investment certificates, however, were not stocks in the capital of the company, but rather a document with ability of trade, which allows its holder to benefit economically from stocks in the form of price and profit increase. By 1997, Solidere had announced its intention to remove all restrictions on foreign investment so that non-Lebanese and non-Arabs could also participate freely by stock. The company planned an initial date for October of 1997 to set forth this initiative. By then, it hoped to finish distributing the 11

million stocks still pertaining to Solidere A and that had not yet been given to the property owners. This announcement to open up to the west ignited local interest and the stock price increased to $12. Henceforth, investment certificates were being circulated at $15.6 per stock. Before then, only Arab investors could buy stock which at the time totaled in worth some US $1.93 billion dollars. Since the introduction of western investors would instill a reorganization of the company’s initial order, Solidere modified its laws to stop any foreign investor from overstepping a 10 percent ownership in the company. Solidere’s pretext for this move was that it wanted to establish a balance between the lower local stock price and higher foreign GDR price. It was also suggested that a Solidere C materialize which would keep property owners’ stock in Solidere A intact and would reap in 20 to 30 percent of stocks outside type A. This was only one of many ways by which the company attempted to increase its low stock prices.

Foreign sales began to flow by September 1997. On 19 September, 1997, Chammaa signed an agreement with Mar Modico, a high-end Italian marble company, for land in the Foch-Allenby commercial district. The deal was worth five million dollars. A few days later, on September 25, 1997, Chammaa signed a deal with two electro mechanic French companies, Enterprise and Kylique, for land in Chateaubriand Street in the Minet el Hosn district. The headquarters of those two companies would be established on those lands. This deal is worth eight million dollars. Solidere then modified subject 9 and 19 of its constitution to allow foreign ownership and investment. Subject 9 had to do with the nationality of Solidere owners and subject 19 refers to the size of guarantees that members of the administrative committee need to secure (which had to be increased). The number of stocks for committee members was increased from 200 to 2000 without an increase in the price of stocks – which by then had hit a low of $10.

Before Solidere modified its laws, there were four types of investors in the company: Right and property owners and renters in the BCD, public institutions and

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Beirut municipality, those of Lebanese origin and those of Arab origin. The addition of foreign investment to the group, and according to main shareholder Rafic Hariri, was aimed at helping Lebanon shake off the decline it had fallen into during many years of civil war. Needless to say, the Solidere modifications seamlessly passed in Parliament on 9 October, 1997.

Figure 87 A confidential sketch of the plan to transform the grounds of the historic mental hospital in the Beirut suburb of Hazmieh into a privatized district including two high-rise residential towers, mid-rise buildings, a possible country club and a commercial plaza or mall. This conceptual sketch of the project on lot 609 Baabda is dated 2010 and issued by the National Company for Real Estate Projects. Sources privy to the project say that all development is occurring within the Solidere offices, by Solidere staff.
Figure 88 Lot 609 Baabda is today one of the largest green spaces in the greater Beirut area. It is home to old-growth trees.

Figure 89 The Doctor’s house is one of the buildings of high architectural value contained within Lot 609 Baabda.
Another building of interest contained within the limits of the project. Its future remains uncertain.
3.9.4 The Souks

When the historic souks of Beirut were rooted in tradition and represented the essence of Mediterranean trade, the mall that replaced them is an archetypical western-style mall of mostly imported brands. Few remember the souk of the past, and even that is a fading memory. “One day I was standing there and everything was white, from the souks to the port. We had no idea where we were,” recalls Michael Davie of a visit he attempted to the souks with his wife, May Davie, in 1992. By then, the souks had been completely razed.

Figure 91 Souk el Franj, Bab Idriss before and after the civil war.

Figure 92 The souks during their demolition; Zawiyat Ibn irak in the center has been preserved. Note on the left that a spectacular portion of the vaulted Souks initially slated for preservation was later demolished. – Photo courtesy of Al-Nahar
Bulldozers destroy the archeological findings under the demolished historic souks. Only the fraction of the Phoenician city will be preserved in the underground of the souks. Repeated requests to visit the underground site have been denied. Note the preserved Zawiyat Ibn Irak in the upper right corner. – Photograph courtesy of Annahar

The Solidere-owned mall constructed on the location of the historic Beirut souks. – Courtesy of Solidere Annual Report 2010
Figure 95 1980 – Aintabli’s surroundings. “The Aintabli Restaurant welcomes you.” Photograph by Abed Elrazak Elsayyid

Figure 96 2013 – A few decades later…-Personal photograph
When Solidere took journalists and visitors on a tour of the new souks on 1 October, 2009 -- the souks were scheduled to open the very next day -- it boasted of an ultra-modern shopping space with a medieval city’s urban planning (Hourani, 2011). The company even kept the original names of the various quarters of the souk. The souks were: Al Jamil, Al Tawila -- which were covered souks -- and Arwam, Ayyas and Souk Sayyour which were uncovered. The mall also cannibalized the Intabli and Ajami squares as well as the gold souk. The ancient names, however, have little in common with the foreign-imported designer brands that crowd the mall of today.

3.9.5 Linking past and Future

When the Solidere model was publically unveiled it did not accurately present the vision the company had for the BCD. Indeed, Eddé argues that only the retained buildings and the low-rise projects were represented whereas, even then, the master plan had provisions for constructions 30 to 50 stories high (Eddé, 1997). Today, looking at that same model -- currently on display at the Beirut souks mall -- only a fraction of the projected towering projects are represented -- again giving a false vision of the future.
This chapter addressed the eventful reign of Solidere thus far. It covered everything from how Solidere was created to its major achievements and shortcomings.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE GREATER BEIRUT: HERITAGE PRESERVATION, CIVIL SOCIETY & CASE STUDIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a survey of heritage preservation efforts in pre and post-civil war times. A spotlight on former Minister of Culture Salim Wardy’s work in heritage is presented as well as a look at the aftermath of Wardy’s mandate. The chapter also looks at civil society’s efforts with regard to heritage preservation – especially Save Beirut Heritage’s work. A few case studies on heritage success stories and catastrophes are presented at the end of the chapter.

4.2 History of Heritage Preservation

In 1869 the Ottomans officially institutionalized the notion of heritage as ruins and archeology, and in 1906 the notion of old buildings was introduced to the concept of heritage after widespread demolitions in the old city. A few decades later, during the French mandate, and by decree Law 651, issued on 12 December, 1926, the French authorities forbade the import or export of archeological artifacts and suspended all licenses for such commerce, decrying the pillaging of national heritage treasures during periods of turmoil in previous years. On 7 November, 1933, the French issued decree 166 LR, or the Antiquities Regulation (Règlement sur les antiquités, 1935). This regulation defined the notions of antique and real estate. It introduced the concept of the listing of historic parcels and forbade any manipulation of such monuments without consent of the state. Furthermore, the law introduced the notion of compensation to the owners of such parcels. The following year, on 28 September, and by Decree Law 225, the French authorities set regulations for the punishment of infractions regarding antiquities and historical monuments.

For several decades after Lebanon gained independence in 1943, there were no significant heritage initiatives – save the formation of L’Association pour la Protection
des Sites et Anciennes Demeures au Liban (APSAD) in 1960. Lady Yvonne Sursock Cochrane, Mr. Assem Salam and Mr. Camille Aboussouan created APSAD, with the support of several academics and social activists. All these people had one goal in common: to protect the country’s natural and cultural heritage. APSAD is the oldest NGO that addresses heritage issues in Lebanon. The next significant action would come in 1983, when the Lebanese State passed a construction law that makes obligatory the approval of the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) to obtain a construction permit in classified areas. This law also created landmarks that should be protected for “artistic, historical or environmental reasons.” Works related to renovation that do not structurally affect the edifice were unfortunately exempt from obtaining a permit; this loophole contributed to significant deterioration of the city’s architecture and esthetic standards. Then, on 6 February, 1988, Decision 8 by Minister of Tourism Waleed Jumblatt suspended all existing licenses allowing the export of heritage artifacts out of Lebanon. The Minister also stopped the head of the DGA from issuing new licenses -- a reminder was issued on 27 February, 1990 by Jumblatt’s successor.

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4.3 Return of APSAD in the Mid-nineties and the Battle of the Shrinking Heritage Homes

The NGO’s activities had come to a halt during the civil war and only resumed in 1995. A review of APSAD’s archives allows us to retrace the series of events from that period:

On 25 September of that year, Minister of Culture Michel Eddé commissioned five architects and urban planners, members of APSAD (Abel Halim Jabr, Fadlallah Dagher, Habib Debs, Hanaa Alameddine and Wissam Jabr) to undertake a survey of heritage buildings in the immediate surroundings of the BCD. This survey only covered a limited area of Beirut. Its East/West boundaries were the American University of Beirut and the Mar Mikhael Electricity building; as for its North/South boundaries, they were the Fouad Chehab highway and Sodeco Square. The BCD was excluded from the survey. In 1996, Eddé addressed decree number 1879 to the Governor of Beirut Nicolas Saba. The
The demolition of 1016 buildings listed by the survey was therefore frozen. This step was considered a hasty one by APSAD as the survey was still in its early stages and did not constitute a comprehensive study.

The 1016 buildings will, in a matter of few years be shortlisted to 209 buildings only – which is ironically less than the 265 heritage buildings preserved in the BCD. The downsizing process began on 6 February, 1997 when Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, at the suggestion of Minister of Culture and Higher Education Fawzi Hbeich and Minister of Public Works, the engineer Ali Harajly, issued decree number 12/97. This decree created a council to reevaluate the frozen properties listed by the APSAD survey. This council was headed by the Directorate General of Antiquities’ (DGA) Camille Asmar21 and its members included the head of the Directorate General of Urban Planning (DGUP) Dr. Camille Asmar and his sons were later convicted for embezzling public funds through his position at the DGA - See Convicted DGA embezzlers dispute prison sentences. (2001, January 05). The Daily Star. Retrieved from http://goo.gl/X9SSgP

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Saad Khaled and the DGA Chief of Staff Hanna El’aamil. Out of the initial 1016, the council allowed the demolition of 571 buildings with historic character; effectively reducing the number of preserved buildings to 485. On 16 June, and at the request of Dr. Saad Khaled, the APSAD team presented a draft project for the preservation of heritage buildings that stresses the conservation of four major clusters that retain somewhat intact urban tissues. The draft suggested the creation of new building regulations within these clusters; this measure would allow these areas to retain their historic charm without the disruption of high-rise construction. It also blocked any and all unimplemented road plans affecting these areas. Furthermore, the draft also called for the creation of a committee to compensate the owners of classified buildings for lost exploitation of their parcels. Finally, it added 35 buildings to the conservation list bringing it to a total of 520.

The clusters candidates for preservation are:

Ain el Mreisseh – Minat al Hosn – Qantari – Spears – Zarif

Zokak el Blat – Bachoura – Basta Tahta

Ashrafieh – Jesuit area – Abdel Wahab – Furn el Hayek – South of St. Nicolas Church

Mar Maroun – Gemmayze – Sursock

This was a small and short-lived victory. A few months later, on 18 October 1997 Dr. Saad Khaled, head of DGU who also represented Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in the council, arbitrarily removed 78 classified buildings from the conservation list. The number of classified parcels was then reduced to 469. APSAD noted that some of the declassified buildings were not even on the preservation list in the first place. Opposing parties to this decision included the head of the Federation of Lebanese Engineers Assem Salam. Salam claims that the decision taken was outside Khaled’s jurisdiction, as the power to declassify a parcel belongs only to the Minister of Culture. Ignoring media and public outrage, the decision was made official by a decree issued by the Minister of Culture Hbeich to the attention of the governor of Beirut dated 3 December, 1997. By

22 صلاحياته من ليس خادم قرار - إسلام (1997, November 04). Annahar
23 La liberation "arbitraire" de 78 demeures classées indigne les architectes-urbanistes. (1997, November 01). L’Orient le jour
7 January, 1998, the Directorate General of Urban Planning unanimously issued a decision to place the four heritage clusters under study. In other words, no demolition or construction permit could be issued during a period of one year during which the DGUP would undertake the necessary measures to implement the studies regulating construction in those areas. This decision is forwarded to the Council of Ministers. However, the Council of Ministers, headed by Rafic Hariri, ignored the DGUP decision and issued decision number 33 (decree 47), on 5 February, 1998, which appointed the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) to undertake yet another reevaluation of the remaining buildings. While the official list counted 469 buildings to be protected, the list sent to the CDR only included 459 buildings – ten buildings mysteriously disappeared in the process of transfer.

On 4 April, 1998, the CDR appointed a private engineering and consulting company, Khatib and Alami to undertake a study on the remaining 459 heritage buildings not yet declassified. They were given a delay period of only ten weeks to complete the study. In July 1998 Khatib and Alami released their report and unveiled a never-seen-before classification system that not only relied on the obsolete principle of single-building preservation, but also divided heritage buildings into five distinct categories based on their state of conservation:

“**Type A:** Landmark building with historical background and/or distinctive architectural values, contributing to the cultural heritage of Lebanon.

**Type B:** Building possessing high architectural values, illustrating a type, period or method of construction, requiring financial support for upgrading.

**Type C:** Buildings with similar characteristics of type B, but severely damaged or distorted, requiring substantial financial support for restoration.

**Type D:** Buildings with specific features, illustrating a period and method of construction, requiring financial support for upgrading.

**Type E:** Buildings that are not eligible aesthetically and do not convey sense of historic and architectural environment.”
The new classifications soon came out. Nabil Al-Jisr, then president of the CDR, presented decision 2375/1 to the Minister of Culture. This decision stated that the 250 buildings classified D and E do not qualify for preservation; and therefore only buildings classified A, B and C should be preserved. This decision effectively brought down the number of protected buildings to 209. On 3 March, 1999, the cabinet of Prime Minister Salim el Hoss issued decree 33 which approved the CDR’s recommendation and ordered the Minister of Culture to reevaluate the buildings classified A, B and C and to officially “free” buildings classified D and E for demolition. Minister of Culture Mohammad Youssef Baydoun therefore appointed a secret council formed of the head of DGA Hassan Sarkis, counselor to the minister, Asaad Seif, and architects Jean-Marc Bonfils, Nach’at Awaida, Sami Nasri and Samir Chami to assess the situation.

Renewed efforts by former Minister Amin Al-Bizri to draft a law on heritage preservations commenced in 1999. Throughout that year, Al-Bizri tried thrice to entice Minister Baydoun to endorse such a law. This law proposed a mechanism for preservation that allows the owners of heritage buildings to be compensated without having the Lebanese government carry the financial burden. Minister Baydoun ignored the successive motions, however.

In an attempt to reverse the crackdown on heritage homes, in October 1999, the Ministry of Culture’s committee issued a recommendation to preserve all buildings classified A, B and C and called for the evaluation of the declassified D and E buildings for potential preservation. The committee also warned of the dangers of clearing up any building for demolition before a comprehensive urban study is completed and any legislation pertaining to its implementation is ratified by parliament. The Minister of Culture Baydoun refused to abide by the recommendations, however, and the committee consequently resigned. Under Baydoun’s mandate, at least 24 buildings classified D and E were demolished at the request of their owners; furthermore the B-classified Khoury palace in Zokak el Blat located on parcels 941/942 was declassified by the minister and

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24 This number is ironically lower than the total number of buildings preserved by Solidere in the BCD.
consequently demolished in September 1999\textsuperscript{25, 26}. When pressed on the topic, Baydoun commented: “I’m sick of this issue.”\textsuperscript{27}

On 7 July, 2002, the Council of Ministers issued decree 25 in response to a request by then Minister of Culture Ghassan Salameh to immediately freeze demolition pending the ratification of regulation that protects the remaining heritage buildings. The ministerial cabinet, headed by Rafic Hariri, reported the freezing of demolition to an unspecified date. On 11 December, 2004 Building Law 646 was promulgated. Section 13 of this legislation added constraints in relation to matters of health, public safety and equipment. The law permitted the Lebanese state to refuse any construction permits if the project is likely to endanger public safety or affect the architectural landscape of an area. On 14 January 2006, Minister of Culture Tarek Mitri officially renewed the 25/7/2002 request to the cabinet of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. The Council of

\textsuperscript{25} قطع أخر عناقيد التراث في زقاق البلاط وسماه سمح بإزالته،.سلم طلب بحمايتها. Annahar (1997, September 03). Annahar

\textsuperscript{26} بيروت تراث لإبادة مجزرة. Annahar (1997, September 09). Annahar

\textsuperscript{27} Haddad, R. (1999, December 02). 'indifferent' Beydoun approves tearing down heritage homes. The Daily Star
Ministers issued no decision regarding the matter of freezing the demolition of heritage buildings.

On 24 November, 2007, draft law number 1057 for the protection and safeguarding of old buildings and patrimonial sites was proposed but never ratified. The law would have given the power to preserve a building to the Minister of Culture who can protect it at his discretion for a period of six months. This decision would be automatically repealed if a technical consultation committee takes no decision within this period. If the committee, in association with the Higher Council for Urban Planning (HCUP) chooses to protect the plot or area, the area would be put under study for a period of two years, renewable once. The ministers of Culture and Public Works then must draft a decree relating to the protection of the site. This draft decree becomes subject to discussion and ultimately to approval by the Council of Ministers. The law would also provide compensation of up to 75% of the lost exploitation to the owner of the property; it would have also exempted built-up properties from taxes for a period of up to ten years and reduced, by half, transfer and registration fees. At the date of this writing, this draft law has not been presented to parliament. Furthermore, the high expense to the government makes any potential classification a long and expensive process.

4.4 During the Mandate of Salim Wardy

Upon assuming office in 2008, Minister of Culture, Salim Wardy, declared that he spent several weeks reviewing all the files pertaining to work in the ministry. “I wanted to know the limits of the Ministry of Culture,” he said. During his term from 2008 to 2011 – made short because of governmental void and political insecurities in the country – Wardy worked hard to introduce improvements to the ministry. To fight corruption, he replaced incompetent employees and demanded full files for all demolition requests. In fact, he insisted that the files for each demolition case be stocked with shots of the buildings from all facades and minute details of its location, condition – including interiors -- and other necessary documentation. Wardy also worked toward

28 Wardy, S. (2013, September 17). Personal interview.
separating religion and politics from culture. For instance, he refused to permit the exercise of any political and religious event at the UNESCO Cultural Center.

Wardy fought demolitions when they came up. By his own declaration, Wardy was able to add, and thereby save, 55 additional buildings to the classified list of untouchable edifices. Despite all his positive efforts, however, the heritage law, which would effectively curb unfair demolitions, did not pass during his term and is still pending review in the Parliament. Another blow was his failure to bring in new experts to the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA). During his term, Wardy made all the necessary arrangements and shortlisted three professionals. By the time Wardy’s request for more staff was processed, his term was over and the new minister Gaby Layoun, had assumed office. With the arrival of the incumbent minister, Wardy’s efforts were thwarted and Layoun hired then retired archaeologist, Asaad Seif to join the DGA. Seif was the only person Layoun introduced, even though Seif was beyond the legal retirement age of 44 when appointed. This poses the question: Why was Layoun so keen on having Seif appointed?
In theory, the minister of culture has the final say in whether a demolition goes through or not. The green light for any demolition depends on whether the minister of culture signs a decree to that effect or not. Wardy said that he resisted pressure (financial and otherwise) to oblige real estate initiatives and this insistence to preserve heritage buildings cost him close friends and allies. Wardy remains convinced that he did the right thing – he never regretted his tenacity.

Figure 101 18/4/2010 – Annahar caricature by Armand Homsi.

On 11 March, 2010, Wardy renewed the 25/7/2002 request to the cabinet of Prime Minister Saad Hariri (this was its third renewal). The cabinet finally approved the request to freeze the demolition of buildings classified A, B and C. Furthermore, the Council of Ministers requested the Minister of Culture to issue a call for offers in order to create a new list of candidates for preservation that completes the existing list within Beirut; and to expand the classification nationwide. Once complete, this list would be presented to the Council of Ministers in order to take an “appropriate decision regarding the matter.” Finally, this decree allowed minister Wardy to appoint a new committee headed by the minister of culture and composed of any and all consulting parties needed by the minister. The committee must include the general director of the DGA, the general director of the DGUP, the head of the order of engineers in Beirut and the president of the municipality of Beirut - instead of the Governor of Beirut as initially legislated. This decree created a mechanism where every demolition permit nationwide
must be granted a permit by the Ministry of Culture. For the first time in Lebanon’s history, the cultural impact of demolition was institutionalized.

Moreover, on 9 June, 2010 decree number 56 allowed Wardy to classify two of the most magnificent palaces of Beirut. The Hneineh and Akar palaces in Zokak el Blat were added to the protected list based on the 1933 law 29.

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Figure 102 2013 – The Ziade palace on the left, the middle and the rising 50-floor tower belonging to their owner. – Personal photograph.
The Heneine palace in 1900 when it was the residence of Dr. Calmette, professor at the St. Joseph University. — Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Library of Congress. Right — the same location in 2010. — Personal photograph. The Heneine palace, constructed in 1880 was once the Holland consulate. Its second floor was home to the mystic Dr. Dahesh and housed his collection of Orientalist paintings dating to the nineteenth and twentieth century, housed today in the Dahesh Museum in New York.
Most of the palace’s ownership now belongs to a developer constructing a 50-floor tower adjacent to it. It housed the construction workers who heavily damaged the internal ornaments. After Save Beirut Heritage lobbied for its preservation, a decree was issued by the Layoun Culture Ministry to clear the palace and protect what was left. – Personal photograph
Figure 105 This unpublished photograph shows the fourth palace on the corners of Zokak el Blat. The date of its demolition is unknown, and “The Phoenician Tower” is being erected in its location – Photograph courtesy of APSAD.
In an unexpected turn of events on 22 April, 2011, Wardy approved the demolition of lots 1508 Ashrafieh, 633 Mar Mikhael, 5 Ashrafieh and 635 Mazraa. While most were decrees of ‘reconstruction with added floors’ or of facadism, the media reported that they all belong to influential individuals belonging to the March 14 movement, in line with Minister Wardy’s political affiliation. Consequently, the committee that spearheaded the conservation of over 40 heritage buildings from demolition resigned.

Figure 107 2011 – Plot 5 Ashrafieh. Note the clothing of the demolition workers living there, slowly destroying the 150-year-old house. – Personal photograph

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31 One source revealed that the minister was put under political pressure by the March 14 leadership. He was threatened by the possibility of removal from any future public office if he did not allow the construction plans to go forward.

32 It later emerged that an architect member of the committee was involved in the redevelopment project on lot 635 Mazraa. An anonymous source has alerted SBH that Minister Layoun has canceled the planned reproduction within the new development, but SBH was unable to independently confirm the information.
108 9/5/2011 – lot 633 Mar Mikhael, a façade compromise. Wardy obtained from the developer that a section of the façade would remain to be integrated in the tower. In addition of a commitment to renovate the Mar Mikhael stairs adjacent to the project. – Personal photograph

Figure 109 Before/After renderings of the AYA project on lot 633 Mar Mikhael showing a better integration on the street level with the urban tissue of the area after public action by Save Beirut Heritage and pressure from the Culture Ministry.
4.4.1 The Relationship between the Ministry of Culture and the State Council

Although the State Council can override decisions by the ministry of culture, Wardy states that relations with the State Council were good and the two entities cooperated regularly. Another source of pressure on the ministry is the private sector. “The government allows the private sector to take over sometimes,” attests Wardy. But he continues saying that “80 percent of the Ministry’s direction is affected by the character of the minister.” In other words it is up to the minister to steer the ministry away from temptation or yield into the greed of the private sector. This holds true irrespective of the sectarian division of ministry roles or ministers. According to Wardy, the Ministry of Culture is a good example of Lebanese unity because over the years, it has had a minister from almost every sect (Sunni, Shiite, Druze, Orthodox, Maronite and Catholic). Neither sectarian nor political disputes should ever be a pretext for denying people their individual right to ownership and their common right to culture.
4.5 Wardy’s Aftermath

Wardy’s departure from the Ministry of Culture represented a setback for heritage preservation in Lebanon. For example, on 12 October, 2011 at 11 pm, the Akar palace in Zokak el Blat was almost entirely demolished overnight as the electrical current was cut off (to turn off municipal lights and stop neighbors from filming) and an armed militia blocked the streets. An attack also began on the Hneineh palace but was stopped in time. Save Beirut Heritage, however, drove Minister Gaby Layoun, Wardy’s successor, to the site for him to witness the demolition. Legal action has been taken and the plots are now legally frozen. Furthermore, a police force now monitors both the Hneineh and Akar palaces.

*Figure 110* 2013 *Palais Akar remains frozen at the time of this writing.* The Murr tower can be seen in the background. – Personal photograph
Figure 111 2011 – The demolition of the Hneineh palace was stopped in extremis. Today, a concrete pillar reinforces the structural damage thanks to constant pressure by civil society and to a multitude of decrees issued by Minister Layoun. – Personal photograph
On 26 June, 2012, lot 1398 Mina el Hosn was bulldozed after Minister Layoun allegedly gave a verbal promise to the developers (Venus and Solidere). Decree 70, officially declassifying the archeological site, would only be published in the Official Gazette two days later. This decision contradicted a decision issued by Wardy on 4 April 2011 that classified the site as a Phoenician harbor of utmost historical and archeological importance. On the same day, Save Beirut Heritage officially requested intervention from the International Council of Monuments and Sites, which acknowledged the request and offered assistance to the Minister of Culture. Layoun turned down their expertise and blocked any attempt of a reexamination of the site. APLH (Association for the Protection of Lebanese Heritage) unsuccessfully presented a petition to Prime Minister Nagib Mikati and on the day of the demolition attempted recourse with the judge of urgent affairs in Beirut, Nadim Zouain. The judge claimed that the decision to stop the demolition is outside his jurisdiction and referred the NGO to the state council, where it still awaits a verdict while construction goes forward.33

![Figure 112 2012 – The Phoenician archeological site on lot 1398 Mina el Hosn classified as site BEY194 is believed by experts to be a port of high archeological value. Successive Ministers of Culture (including Tammam Salam, Tarek Mitri and Salim Wardy) classified this site to stop its demolition and any further developments. – Personal photograph.](image)

Figure 113 28/6/2012 – Minister of Culture Gaby Layoun declassifies the site and allows its demolition amidst local and international outrage. In the meantime, former Ministers of Culture Warde, Salam and Mitri had started legal action, in association with civil society to overturn the declassification. –Personal photograph

Figure 114 A rendering of the Venus towers project under construction on lot 1358 Mina El Hosn34. The vice President of the Municipality of Beirut, architect Nadim Abou Rizk lists Venus as a key project on his curriculum vitae.35

4.5.1 The Medawar Building: Amin Maalouf’s Home

Among the landmark buildings of the Badaro-Mathaf area was Amin Maalouf’s home in the Medawar building\textsuperscript{36}. Famous Lebanese French writer, first Lebanese admitted to the Academie Francaise, Amin Maalouf, spent his childhood on the second floor of that building. In 2011, Maalouf’s mother was the last member of the family to evacuate the apartment after Kettaneh group bought the property in the same year. The building, located on plot 3696 Mazraa, was 80 years old when it was razed down in January of 2013 to make room for the 22-story skyscraper that Kettaneh group intends to build. Culture minister Layoun gave the construction company the approval in October of 2012. On Oct. 23, 2012, Layoun said: “The Culture Ministry approves the destruction of the building on plot 3696 in Mazraa since the building belongs to the transitional period of the French mandate and its architecture does not have any unique traditional techniques.” On September 25, 2012 the decision to declassify and effectively demolish the Maalouf house is discreetly taken. On Christmas Eve, 2012, the governor Nassif Kalouch signed the decision. Four months prior to his October decision, however, Layoun and his committee had initially rejected the company’s request to demolish because he claimed the edifice “represents a unique architectural pattern in the area.” This raises questions as to what happened in those four months to change his mind.

4.5.2 The October 4 Attacks

On the 10th of October 2013, the Minister of the Interior and Municipalities Marwan Charbel decided to limit the role of the Internal Security Forces regarding matters of construction, renovation and demolition citing that these issues were taking up too much time and resources from the Internal Security Forces (ISF). In effect, this decision made it impossible for civil society or even the Culture Ministry to stop any illegal action against heritage buildings without the personal notification of the Minister of the Interior, leaving the duty in the hands of respective municipalities.

On the 4th of October 2013, Save Beirut Heritage received multiple alerts of unlicensed demolitions happening all over Beirut. Knowing that the ISF has orders not to intervene, demolition workers colluded to overwhelm Save Beirut Heritage, the Ministry of Culture and the Beirut Municipality by organizing a simultaneous attack on at least four different heritage buildings. These lots were 615 Mousaytbeh, 281-282 Zokak el Blat, 2018-2863 Mousaytbeh and 1114 Mousaytbeh. SBH was able to save all lots with various degrees of damage, except 1114 Mousaytbeh as the unarmed municipal forces were unable to face the armed militia blocking the street. Minister Charbel was unreachable on his phone at the time.
Figure 117 2012 - Plot 1114 after Save Beirut Heritage stopped its illegal demolition. – Photo courtesy of Save Beirut Heritage.

Figure 118 2013 - Lot 1114 during its unlicensed demolition completed in a couple hours with no safety measures. – Photographs courtesy of Save Beirut Heritage supporter Leila-May Dalle.
4.6 Civil Society Efforts

Former minister of culture Salim Wardy put it best when he said: “Individual and civil initiatives are Lebanon’s only hope.” Wardy believes that the future of Lebanon is in the NGOs; he is pleased to see them emerge in answer to the corruption of the government.

4.6.1 Save Beirut Heritage!

Initially, the venture began with a very small Facebook group under the name of “Stop Destroying Your Heritage” in 2009 created by Naji Raji. In private interview, Raji attests that the initial group saw no success and had only about 30 members. Seeing all the destruction in the city, Raji had gotten fed up with the situation. Raji’s incentive was heightened when construction workers started to tamper with his childhood building – a beautiful art deco building from the 1930s. He consulted with a graphic designer to find a simple design that would fit a new group. Save Beirut Heritage (SBH) was created with a brand new logo. In early 2010, at his own expense, Raji printed 1000 posters and spread them all over the city. The group logo, which was designed by Jad Bekai, took off; among other awards, it won a best logo award in 2011 at LAU. Intrigued by the posters, many new members started to pour into the new SBH group. Pascale Ingea, an artist, was one of the people who responded to the flyer, and Raji and Ingea met and discussed their prospects. Raji and Ingea eventually held a meeting with Culture minister Wardy to discuss the situation of heritage. The fruitful meeting led to freezing the heritage buildings and saving
them temporarily while a mechanism was put in place to evaluate demolition requests. After the period of six month expired, the SBH group established itself in order to help the government to succeed in its new battle. The group began to prepare for their first official event: a candlelit march.

Save Beirut Heritage (SBH) was publicly launched on September 20, 2010 with a press conference in the honorable presence of Lady Yvonne Sursock-Cochrane. On this day, I assumed the role of spokesman of the group and was later elected president of the resulting NGO; a role I proudly assumed. A week later, on September 27, the newly founded NGO organized their candlelight march with Stop Destroying Your heritage. The march was heavily advertised on Facebook and reaped in huge success as hundreds of citizens participated. To this day, it is still the largest protest calling for legislation to ratify a law for the protection of old buildings.
In the following years, SBH emerged as a strong advocate for heritage in the city. Since 2010, the NGO’s name has been prevalent in local and international media. In fact, SBH efforts have been instrumental in bringing back heritage issues into the media limelight\(^37\).

Initially established as a group to stop heritage demolitions, the NGO’s scope is not limited to heritage homes, but anything that is of value to the people of the city, such as the closure of the century-old glass café, a Beirut icon\(^38\). Joana Hammour, a founding member and coordinator of SBH, explains the definition of heritage that the NGO has adopted. “Heritage is all the things that make the identity of Beirut. It is what Beirutis have in common. Usually yes, it comes from history, but it doesn’t have to be an old traditional house. It is something that we can identify with and that makes us proud to belong to the city.” In fact, many of SBH’s projects are not classified lots, or even old buildings. The Kassir house, on plot 1114 Moussaitbeh, located off Mar Elias street was far from the district of classified houses, but SBH stopped its demolition twice none-the-less. Other projects SBH has fought for are the egg-shaped Beirut City Center on Martyrs’ Square, the archeological Phoenician port, modernist buildings of the 50s, the preservation of green spaces and the social fabric of Mar Mikhael. It has also helped other groups from other cities gain exposure and shed light on issues regarding patrimony, notably in Tripoli and Sidon (Saida).

SBH does not limit itself to a traditional definition of heritage but its action is largely defined by the will of its members, volunteers and supporters. Its hierarchy is flat and only defined on official documentation, allowing large leeway for personal initiative, even from outside groups. Furthermore, SBH prides itself on transparency: all materials published are offered without restrictions or copyrights. Funding relies solely on commercial campaigns, donations and punctual sponsors and many members generously contribute to operating costs of the NGO out-of-pocket. Finally, all staff, consultants and members are unpaid volunteers.


SBH eventually evolved from a group to an NGO. Hammour explains the significance of this. “We had to become an NGO because it gives us legal status and we cannot have grants if we are not an NGO. If you do not have official status, people will not take you seriously.” She also reflects on the heavier weight attached to becoming an NGO. “We now have more responsibilities. As a group we were a bit freer. The good thing is, however, with becoming an NGO, if we are sued it becomes directed at the NGO and not an individual person. We have become more aware of the impact our words can have. We were young, spontaneous and aggressive.”

Hammour also comments on the evolution of SBH from a group of passionate activists into a more grounded and professional network. “I think any group goes through these steps. Any group starts aggressive and then learns the do’s and don’ts. However, people like when we are aggressive, yet criticize us when we are too passionate. People’s reactions can be very paradoxical: When we are not loud and passionate, people want us to make more noise, but in the long term, noise doesn’t make change, it needs to be more than that.”

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39 SBH has not applied for grants yet. Its funding comes from commercial sponsors or out of pocket.
Figure 121 2012 – Shaikha Fayza el Khazen will soon have to leave the iconic Dr. Ardati house in Manara (also known as the pink house) as new owners promise to transform it into a glitzy hotel. The true fate of the unclassified building, built on the most desirable real estate of Ras Beirut remains unknown.

Figure 122 1896 – The pink house next to the old lighthouse. The lighthouse is now non-functional, as it has been surrounded by new construction obstructing its light from ever reaching the sea.
Working with heritage is a nonstop job. SBH maintains a 24-hour phone line, a constantly monitored email, a Facebook group and an iOS application with over 11000 members at the time of this writing. An emergency – whereby a building is being demolished – can occur at any time of the day, any day. Hammour explains: “we are not like any other NGOs; when we have emergencies we do not have the time to plan. An NGO is like a small business, you need strategy, and you need a plan.” Evidently, the endless job of monitoring Beirut’s heritage has been rewarding. For Hammour, this is reflected in the fact that SBH has become a reference on the subject for anyone from fellow activists to researchers to the media. “The greatest achievement of SBH is that it has become a reference for people, for researchers and students. We need to be one for the ministries now. Not just for culture, but tourism and others. We have become a lobby, but I do not think we have reached the ministries yet.” Finally Hammour divides SBH’s roles into three types: emergency function, long-term awareness through advocacy campaigns and government lobbying.

Figure 123 A few days after the issuance of a permit, a spontaneous protest blocks the demolition site. The text printed on the bulldozer mocks us: “If a demolition permit is issued, do not dare to ask why.” Save Beirut Heritage later meets with the owners of the project to question their intent and obtains a compromise seen in Fig. 103. – Image courtesy of Tracey_Lebanon on Flickr.com
4.6.2 APSAD President Raya Daouk Speaks Out

Currently, and since 2005, Raya Daouk has presided over the APSAD NGO. For the sake of full disclosure; we will note that she is also a founding member of the Michel Aoun-lead Free Patriotic Movement, a political opponent to the Hariri-lead Future Movement. In a candid interview with Mrs. Daouk, and her own declaration, when APSAD was getting back on track in the mid-nineties, it could not stand in the face of Hariri’s plan. Daouk emphasizes that nothing but solid legislation will vindicate the cause that APSAD and other NGOs have been championing for years. “Nothing but a law will cancel that law [referring to law 117/91 which allowed the creation of Solidere], we need laws to build a city”. Daouk also recommends that the entire parliament be replaced with decent people who are not relentlessly set on robbing the city.

Mrs. Daouk considers APSAD as only a small stone in the make-up of the fight for heritage. She says the Ministry of Culture has no money and the lack of means is obstructing ministries from making significant change. “I’ve walked into all these ministries and they have no Internet, limited phone lines, no documentation equipment,” she said.

When asked about the Solidere initiative, Mrs. Daouk considers it “the robbery of the century”. To her, what happened with Solidere is so incredibly shocking it seems almost impossible. She denounces the demolition of the historic souks of Beirut as an irreparable crime against world cultural heritage. Rayya Daouk, whose husband, Omar Daouk of the Daouk dynasty, owned extensive properties and souks in the BCD, has never forgiven the real estate company for “robbing her family of their property”. “This was our history they destroyed; when they razed our buildings, my husband collapsed.”
The destruction of the red building on lot 40 of Ain el Mreisseh. The ministry of culture approves the demolition of this unique building under the condition that the Jamil Ibrahim construction company would reproduce the façade on a section of the new tower.

2011 Decree 1824 for lot 40 Ain el Mreisseh – The type of façade compromise that is deemed acceptable by the ministry of Culture. The difference in scale between historic building height and current regulation is also made.
4.7 Case Studies from Beirut

4.7.1 Case Study 1: The Fouad Boutros/Hikmeh - Turk Highway

The Fouad Boutros Highway is an old story, and by any measure outdated in terms of current implementation. The project was initially proposed in the 1960s and revived repeatedly; most recently in the spring of 2013. After SBH broke the story to the media in the summer of 2013, the 75 million dollar endeavor created much uproar across the lines of civil society (Issa, 2013)\(^{40}\).

This controversial project has generated mixed feelings among the residents of Beirut. The CDR claims that implementing the junction – which connects through the Hikmeh area all the way through the historic Mar Mikhail neighborhood into the port highway of Charles Helou – will help diffuse traffic congestion problems in the region. What the CDR failed to mention is that: One, the junction will rip through a heritage rich area (Mar Mikhael) thereby tearing down some 30 historical houses in the region and two, the project will only invite more cars to spill into the region therefore adding pressure on the congested Ashrafieh area.

![Figure 126](image)

Figure 126 26/2/2013 – A tense meeting at the Kataeb offices in Sionfi where CDR engineer Elie Helou confronts Save Beirut Heritage and other civil society activists in the presence of MP Nadim Gemayel, MP Torsarkissian, Minister Michel Pharaon and members of the municipal council. Other than drawings on a map and a flurry of political and sectarian arguments, neither the CDR nor the public servants could produce empirical traffic data justifying the execution of the Hekmeh-Turk junction. – Photograph courtesy of MP Nadim Gemayel’s Facebook page.

Furthermore, even after successive meetings with parliamentarians, members of the municipal council and head engineers of the CDR, no state institution could produce a scientific study proving any beneficial effect of the project on urban traffic flow. According to an extensive survey produced by SBH, the highway will also endanger neighboring buildings thereby bringing up the number of edifices affected by the project to 60 buildings.

626 Many of expropriations that need to be completed to create the road were finalized in the 1960s and 1970s (Issa, 2013). When the project resurfaced recently, it appeared that only a small number of properties remained to be expropriated. The residents of those properties lived in constant uncertainty regarding when they would be asked to vacate their homes. – Excerpt of the SBH survey. Map executed by Antoine Atallah.
Figure 128 'Taïta (grandma) Aïda', a beloved neighborhood figure has been living in this house since childhood. She will be displaced by the Fouad Boutros plan and had previously notified SBH that she has nowhere else to go. The Municipality of Beirut who expropriated the house from a religious Waqf over four decades ago considers her an illegal occupant with no notification or compensation rights. Having had a recent heart operation, I had the delicate task of notifying her that she is at risk of imminent eviction. -Photograph courtesy of Roger Moukarzel.

Figure 129 Taïta Aïda's inner courtyard home is over two centuries old. It is the oldest continuously inhabited house SBH has encountered in its survey of Beirut. The house is marked for demolition by the Fouad Boutros road plan. In response to the demolition mark sprayed on her door, she told me "The Lemon tree in the courtyard has my age. If they kill it, I will die with it." -Photograph courtesy of Roger Moukarzel.
Figure 130 The visual impact of the Hekmeh Turbine – View from Hilltop to below...

Excerpt of the SBM's study.

Original photograph courtesy of Robert Saliba, modified by Antoine Atallah.
Figure 131 ...and on the street level. – Personal photograph modified by Antoine Atallah for Save Beirut Heritage.
Spearheading the campaign against the Boutros plan is Doris Tobaji, who owns one of the few heritage buildings in Mar Mitr that has yet to be expropriated by the municipality. Tobaji’s father was an eminent doctor who helped found the St. George Orthodox Hospital and one of the three doctors of the three doctor’s school who greatly contributed to well-being of the capital. Tobaji refused to succumb to the will of the municipality – which would not only destroy her building constructed in 1900, but also the beautiful gardens that stretch out of the backyard of the building on the very last agricultural terraces of Ashrafieh. Throughout the summer of 2013, Tobaji cooperated with NGOs and lent her residence as a venue for discussions on heritage and logistics to fight the project. Her efforts, alongside the entire civil society movement that blossomed in the spring and summer of 2013, generated so much noise and negative press on the project that the Boutros plan is back in its previous dormant state.

Architect and urban planner Antoine Atallah conducted the most thorough study on the impact of the Fouad Boutros plan. Initiated by Save Beirut Heritage, the extensive study was conducted over a six-month period with the gracious consultation of local and international experts as well as architecture and urbanism students from various universities. The study clearly illustrates the negative impact of implementing the Boutros project on the region in terms of transportation, aesthetics and environment. The experts, some of whom are cited in the study, agree. For example:

Mona Fawaz, associate professor of urban planning and design at AUB: “Terrible news! These projects maintain the mentality of the 1960's where the car was considered the only valid mode of urban transportation in the city.”

Georges S. Zouain, President at GAIA-heritage: “Did you also notice that when it (Hekmeh-Turk road plan) hits Gouraud Street by the Electricité du Liban, it destroys a 3,500 sq.m. garden? The last one in this area?”

Abdul-Halim Jabr, Independent Architecture & Urban Design Professional: “In the late 1990s, I once raised the issue with the late Minister of Public Works Ali Harajli. We were trying to lift all unfulfilled planning easements from Beirut, in order to preserve the
little that remained of its historic fabric. This includes the Sodeco-Georges Haddad segment of Hazmieh-Port highway, and the Hekmeh Bridge/ Fouad Boutros-Gouraud connection. I remember very clearly Mr Harajly saying the following: "The Hekmeh bridge cannot be extended downhill due to slope problems. The planning was a mistake."

**Howayda Al-Harithy**, Professor and Chair Person of the AUB Department of Architecture and Design: “Heritage is an important ingredient in the construction of identity, local and national. The past is always a source of contemporary identity and future development. It embodies economic, social and political values. The systematic erasure of the past through large scale projects threatens our very own identity of today.”

**Abir Al-Tayeb**, Research Assistant - MUPP/MUD Program: “I am puzzled to find out from colleagues about the construction of a highway in the area of Hekmeh. Surprised by the implementation of past-generation plans instead of addressing relevant municipal concerns such as proper sanitation, waste management, etc.... It has been globally acknowledged that the construction of "highway-wide" streets, in effort to decongest traffic, only attracts more cars and causes denser interlock traffic jams.”
Jala Makhzoumi, Professor of Landscape Architecture at the Department of Landscape and Ecosystem Management at AUB: “The fate of the Beiruti house and garden is intertwined, both under threat by realty developers. One by one the Beiruti house and traditional garden are pulled down to make room for high-rise residential towers. And although the traditional Beiruti house is accepted by all as integral to the city’s architectural heritage, gardens are far from being recognized. This is partly because architectural heritage is tangible, visible and permanent while gardens are ephemeral and, if left untended, can die.”

Mousbah Rajab, Professor at the Lebanese University and head of Department of Urbanism: “Implementing this project today means destroying the last traditional urban spaces of Beirut. It will also encourage the application of other inappropriate plans currently awaiting execution. In the long term, it will create a blurred urban landscape that will lead to the asphyxiation of the capital.”

Before the media frenzy of 2013 and according to the list of Beirut municipality projects dating October 17, 2012, the launch of the Fouad Boutros project was supposed to be initiated on February 13, 2013 and completed by June 15 of the same year. Thanks to strong civil society movements, the project was not allowed to see the light of day. These civil efforts extended the life of many heritage edifices as well as green spaces.

4.7.2 Case study 2: The Petro-Trad Junction

The Petro Trad road plan is by far the most destructive project in the Lebanese capital. It is a remnant of Ecochard urbanism and is a penetrating street expected to link the Georges Haddad Street on the eastern border of the BCD to the Damascus road. Its partial implementation in the Sodeco area has already permitted the destruction of the historic Mission Laique Francaise school that has been replaced by Sodeco Square in the 1990s. More recently, it has allowed the construction of Sama Beirut, a 195 meter, 50-floor tower rising at the location of several heritage homes demolished on the flank of Nazareth hill, the highest and oldest hill of the capital. Sama Beirut is completely ill placed, right at the edge of the Tabaris heritage cluster.
The Petro-Trad plan has so far allowed for the destruction at least eight heritage buildings classified by Khatib and Alami. If implemented, it will destroy 13 others, classified A, B and C that represent the majority of the vernacular architecture in the Tabaris and Sodeco area; most have unique features no longer found anywhere else in Beirut.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 133 Dating back to the French mandate; this is one of the last art deco villas of Lebanon. Though well preserved, it is marked for demolition by the Petro Trad plan. Notice the towers constructed along the path of the planned road that benefit from greatly increased height allowances. - Personal photograph.

Ironically, the very existence of the road plan is the reason why these houses still exist. In fact, any construction permit has been blocked on these lots since they would impede the implementation of the road. Like in the case of the Hekmeh-Turk highway, the planned destruction of an entire neighborhood allowed its preservation as the city developed around it.

In addition to heritage homes, the plan will destroy tens of thousands of meters squares of gardens, notably of the Tabet palace, which represents the only significant green expanse in the area. Finally, the plan will cross path with cemeteries belonging to the Jewish, German, Syrian-Catholic and Protestant communities.
Currently, the Petro-Trad plan is rumored to be under study at CDR; it is also rumored to be renamed Bachir Gemayel. Save Beirut Heritage has given a tour to the majority of the municipal council throughout the year 2012, thanks to the cooperation of council member Mr. Hagop Terzian, an ardent supporter of heritage preservation. Most of the members of the council were not made aware of the reality of the situation when a push was attempted by the President of the Beirut Municipality Bilal Hamad to accelerate the execution of the project as a routine decision without further need of discussion. This decision was quickly followed up by the Governor of Beirut, Nassif Kalouch, who was allegedly in line with an implicit decision to demolish a heritage house allegedly owned by a prominent former minister of the same March 14 affiliation. A demolition permit was issued for plot 5 -- a classified house -- from the Ministry of Culture. Wardy, seemingly under pressure, thankfully added a clause to the permit that demolition can only occur if execution on the road plan begins; which prompted the aforementioned action from the municipal complex. Public action by Save Beirut Heritage, notably through a report in Marcel Ghanem’s Kalam El Nass, stopped the vandalism that had begun on the property.
Figure 135 The Tabet house in Tabaris is surrounded by the largest green space of the area. The petro Trad project will destroy the entire garden seen on the right side of this image. For reference, the new USJ Huvelin campus is visible on the right hand side. Can also be seen the towers constructed in narrow streets, profiting not only from the height allowance given by the road plan, but also the views and quietness preserved by the lack of its implementation. – Personal photograph.

Figure 136 The two wings of the St Joseph University campus before their prewar demolition. Only the church remains today. The Tabet palace and its garden are visible on the Left. The old USJ Huvelin campus is the U-shaped structure in the upper right side of the picture.
4.7.3 Case study 3: The Egg

The egg shaped cinema on the southeast corner of Martyr Square is a modernist edifice from the 1960s. Designed by famous Lebanese architect Joseph Phillip Karam, the egg was once a grand exhibition and cultural venue. Previously, a shopping mall was attached to it, but that has since been demolished. The egg survived against all odds and continues to do so thanks to the support of multiple civil society efforts such as SBH. In fact, so many people identify with the egg that it has received the most passionate support and created more heated debate than any other edifice in Beirut, and with good reason too. Today, The Saudi Olayan group has obtained it, and although the group has expressed some interest in preserving the structure, they could not provide with certainty what their plans for it are.

In a personal interview, Joana Hammour says “When I saw it for the first time I didn’t know what it is. I thought it was something constructed for the army. I thought it was so ugly I thought it should be destroyed. Then I learned what it was a cinema. I learned that my parents knew it and I saw what events used to take place in it. I learned what it meant for Beirutis and Beirut. It was there before the war, it lived through the war and it re-emerged after the war. I don’t know why nobody took the egg as a symbol of Beirut, renovate and clean it so tourists can visit it. They should make it publicly accessible because its memory belongs to the Lebanese.”

In a closed meeting, a Solidere spokeswoman said that when they sold the building to Olayan group, the company recommended the structure be preserved but they could not comment on what to do with it. It was always the egg that created the most violent reactions from people whenever the smallest rumor came about its demolition. It is the last thing on Martyrs’ Square that indicates that this place survived a war.
The Barakat house is a victory of civil society. Originally slated for demolition, a civil society campaign spearheaded by Mona Hallak obtained from the Municipality of Beirut the expropriation of the building. It will be transformed into a museum in coordination with the Parisian Municipality. Due to several delays, the municipality failed to meet the 2013 deadline for its inauguration.

- Personal photograph

Figure 137 2013 – The Barakat house is a victory of civil society. Originally slated for demolition, a civil society campaign spearheaded by Mona Hallak obtained from the Municipality of Beirut the expropriation of the building. It will be transformed into a museum in coordination with the Parisian Municipality. Due to several delays, the municipality failed to meet the 2013 deadline for its inauguration. - Personal photograph
Another house awaiting expropriation. The Akhtal el Saghir mansion was the grandest home of its area. Its vernacular architecture, once a fixture of the area, has become an aberration within its surroundings as construction regulation transformed the city. The home, a result of an architectural contest, is currently collapsing, having lost many of its slender columns and delicate arcades in wartime bombardment and years of postwar occupation by militias. In a few years, nothing will remain of it unless the Governor of Beirut accelerates the expropriation decided by the Municipality of Beirut. Personal photograph.
4.7.4 Case study 4: Plot 1132 in Bachoura

If the minister of culture refuses to sign a demolition permit, the concerned party can appeal to the State Council, the highest authority in the state that can overrule a minister’s decision. In the lack of current legal framework, this creates a window of opportunity for stubborn demolition pleas. One notorious incident, as related by an anonymous government official and whereby the interested parties succeeded in bypassing the minister in this manner, was the house on lot 1132 in Bachoura. The house was classified B and, as such should not have been tampered with. Classified houses cannot even be renovated without approval of the Ministry of Culture and the municipality. Still, anonymous sources reveal that a judge on the State Council apparently waited until he was about to retire, and approved the demolition just before he left office.

Figure 140 2012 – A heritage home in Mazraa that partially collapsed during the construction of neighboring buildings in its garden. It is among the last in the area. - Photo courtesy of Nadine Ghaith for Save Beirut Heritage
Figure 141 An undated photograph of the house on lot 1132 Bachoura, a social media investigation showed that it housed the French Maternity hospital before being sold to a Lebanese owner. Note the surrounding Basta area. Only the mosque still exists.

Figure 142 2011 – Lot 1132 Bachoura under the French mandate and in 2012, mere weeks before its overnight declassification and demolition. - Photo anonymously submitted to Save Beirut Heritage
4.7.5 Case study 5: i. Sursock Residences & Sama Beirut

One present day implication of Ecochard’s road plan is that it greatly increased the speculative value of constructible land. Indeed, the large-scale demolitions that the construction of these roads demands opens up land for lucrative investment. Over time, and as construction coefficients increased, so did profit. Interestingly, when this height increase was intended as a side effect of the construction of roads. It has now become the main incentive for their implementation. Furthermore, pressure from developers to capitalize on the extra building coefficients is leading to the construction of skyscrapers in narrow streets even before the highways materialize.

The sky-high exploitation coefficients coupled with the open-sky policy have allowed for the construction of skyscrapers in the most improbable of places; such as at the top of the Nazareth hill known as Sassine Square, the highest point in the capital at an altitude of 150 meters. The only limiting factors being the width of the streets, focus has shifted back to Ecochard’s plans of vast and wide expanses of asphalt cutting through the periphery. Now that the city has greatly expanded, these peripheral road plans are now in the core of the city, in high value residential and commercial areas. Two notable high-rise buildings that have materialized from such policies are the Sky Gate and Sama Beirut.
The overbearing Ibrahim Sursock tower is ill placed among the grand palaces of Sursock Street. It is situated between Sursock Museum and Villa Linda Sursock and overlooks the neighboring villas’ gardens. MENA Capital, the company who commissioned the project ironically described it as: “a high-end elegant project situated in the Sursock neighborhood, the most prestigious residential area in the capital. It evokes the area’s traditional character, where the future rises to honor the past.” The tower is completely divorced from its historical setting and had even taken the entirety of the Linda Sursock palace garden with it during construction.41

Interestingly, former APSAD member, Ziad Akl, was the consulted architect on this project. APSAD founder Lady Yvonne Sursock-Cochrane reflects on Akl’s submission to the real estate market in a personal interview. “He said to me (Lady Cochrane): If I don’t do it, someone else will.” Lady Cochrane continued to explain, “Ziad Akl was taken by the whirlwind of Beirut, and he lost a lot of friends because of this project.” The project, which includes two closely fused towers, was built on part of the garden around Villa Linda Sursock. Akl reportedly said, “Building a tower around the house (Villa Linda Ibrahim Sursock) is better than demolishing it completely.” What Akl states is a fallacy: Villa Linda Ibrahim Sursock is classified and thereby protected from demolition by the 1933 law. Furthermore, it is not up to the architect of the project to decide if a historic landmark can be removed or not. The decision remains within the jurisdiction of the Lebanese state.

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Figure 145 Sursock Street. On the left, we can see the Linda Ibrahim Sursock palace. In the middle, we can see the Maurice Sursock palace that was demolished and replaced in the 1990s by three residential buildings. – Left photograph courtesy of APSAD, On the right, a personal photograph.

Figure 146 The grand interior of the Maurice Sursock palace. It was demolished to widen a street according to a 1960s road plan. Today, the street is no wider than before and new construction took over the public sidewalk for private parking use, effectively reducing available public space. – Photograph courtesy of APSAD.
Figure 147 1960 – The Nicolas Sursock Museum. At his death Nicolas Sursock donated his residence to the Municipality of Beirut with a promise that a percentage of construction permits would be contributed to its transformation into a national museum of modern art; the project took over half a century to materialize. The palace on the left has since been destroyed and its decorative elements integrated in a residential building, and the garden on the right was bulldozed for a towering construction project.

Figure 148 2008 – Bulldozers activate for the renovation of the house. The Linda Ibrahim Sursock house is in the lower right corner. Note the degradation of the surrounding urban tissue.
Figure 149 2012 – Renovation works on the museum, as executed by the Municipality of Beirut. – Personal photograph
Figure 150 2013 - On the left, we can see the Nicolas Sursock palace that was donated to the municipality to become a museum of modern art. On the right, we can see the Linda Ibrahim Sursock palace. In the middle, clearly visible, is the recently completed i. Sursock residences project. – Personal photograph

In what is an apparent conflict of interest, Akl is also a member of the Superior Council of Urbanism (Conseil Superieur de l’Urbanisme), which serves the DGU and is meant to regulate urban planning, a practice that strives to preserve coherent urban form to promote order in city planning. In defense of the idea to build towers around heritage houses in low-rise areas, Akl reportedly said “an incredible sense of disorder is part of what makes Beirut what it is.” MP Walid Jumblatt has described Akl’s project as “an aberration.”

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

5.1 Introduction

The greed of real estate investors and politicians, coupled with urban planning shortcomings has taken a heavy toll on the city of Beirut. The accumulation of years of misconduct has left us today with a city that is fragmented and inefficient. First, there is no effective public transportation plan for the city and the 1950’s mentality of ‘every man in his car’ prevails. Second, it was not only the BCD that was completely made alien to the citizens of Beirut. The remaining districts of the city are also alien to each other.

This chapter will propose several solutions to the issue of heritage preservation in Beirut. It will map out an array of suggestions and alternatives for urban sustainability. The recommendations will alternate between those that directly and indirectly support the survival of heritage in a nation that has given priority to rampant and reckless construction.

5.2 The Case for Public Transportation in Beirut

It was not that long ago that the Lebanese capital had a functioning tramway system and cab lines – both of which took off and returned to the BCD area. Historically, the BCD was the heart of the transit system. Until the civil war, the Bourj Square was a bustling public hub and a cosmopolitan meeting ground. By the time the civil war finally ended in 1989, the area had become a no-man’s-land and few people visited the destroyed city center. Almost a quarter century after the end of the war, the BCD has yet to regain the lively buzz of the old days. Even today, when it stands completely restored, many buildings and shops remain empty. It is worth noting that there are no public transit lines that pass through the city center. In fact, the BCD has been completely unfurnished from any serious public transportation initiatives at the very time when we had a unique chance to recreate a modern and efficient transportation system. If Beirut was ever to get its public transportation network, if clean bus and cab lines and an efficient subway were
ever meant to be part of the equation, it could have only happened in the early 1990s – at the very beginning of the reconstruction process. To say that the reconstruction of the 1990s was a missed opportunity is an understatement. Save Beirut Heritage and other NGOs often cry out for a better public transportation system. It would not only solve problems of traffic congestion in the city, but it will replace expensive, inefficient and outdated road plan initiatives such as Hekmeh-Turk and Petro Trad.

Nadine Ghaith, contributor to the Zawarib mapping project and member at Save Beirut Heritage, had this to say about the transportation system: “What we ended up with today is a confused and obsolete system.” Ghaith explained that the buses take far too long to reach one district of the city to the other. “Due to a lack of coordination, the buses will often overlap causing delays and petty arguments among bus drivers, that is not to say anything about the hygiene standards.” Ghaith doesn’t blame those who resort to the comfort of their own cars as neither the buses nor service cars are well maintained. “We all get into our cars in the morning, knowing that we will get stuck in ridiculous traffic, but for many people that’s still better than the meager public transportation alternatives the city offers.”

5.3 What is to be Done?

Beirut is a traditional and historical city that should have never been permitted high-rise buildings in its core. Not only does this go against the historic fabric of the city, it has also created a mismatched cluster of edifices that have irremediably eroded its hilly landscape. As urban plans overlapped, the situation has become worse. The concept of high-rise buildings is evolving into skyscrapers of much higher magnitude. These mega-rises have begun to materialize in Beirut. Already we can cite several examples of them in Achrafieh and the port area. How are 50 story buildings sustainable in a city of limited resources such as Beirut? These mega buildings are a mistake; and as long as they are not acknowledged as mistakes they will become the norm. These types of structures need to stop before they become all too common in the city. Simply, Beirut cannot handle these types of constructions because nothing in its limited urban planning will support them.
Looking at the urban chaos in Beirut today, it may appear to be the result of a weak Lebanese state. In fact, the state plays a key factor to the shaping of policies, plans and reforms. As investments grow, it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate real-estate developers from politicians. Furthermore, the construction sector’s growth is still supported by well-enforced, increasingly lax regulations that explicitly benefit the maximization of real-estate profit at the expense of the public good. One may conclude that the Lebanese state is therefore a strong state that serves the economic interests of its dominant elite. (el-Achkar, 2012)

Figure 151 1920 – The historic seafront façade of Beirut has been entirely lost. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Figure 152 2011 – The seaside corniche of Ain el Mreisseh today. Note the shadows cast on the public seaside walk by the towering construction on the sea front, monopolizing the sea view. – Personal photograph.
Thus, there is a need for proper and clear zoning that would keep our history safe and permit high-rises only in areas that are in dire need of urban development. Push the mega structures into the peripheries and out of the city. Abandoned industrial areas and suburbs with low exploitation coefficients and dire need of development such as Maslakh/Karantina and the Beirut riverbanks are textbook example of districts that can still be equipped with modern infrastructure that can accommodate a new financial district; effectively reducing the load on Beirut’s central and peri-central areas. This initiative is not a new concept; it would be similar to the creation of the Hamra area grid; which effectively shifted part of the traffic away from the historic center and into a new, modern and financially attractive periphery that functions very well to this day.

Moreover, the government should establish social housing in every district in the city, including the BCD. In fact, for every 100 meters squared of allowed developed private property, the government should contribute to one meter squared of social housing funded by a 10% increase of the construction tax. The social housing units would be spread out across Beirut and its suburbs. Units would be rented at a lesser price than the market price, enabling citizens of lesser means to find decent housing. It will also have the pleasant side effect of creating socially diverse neighborhoods.
Green spaces are also vital to the growth and wellbeing of any city. Therefore any and all garden spaces should be exempt of municipality taxes. We need to remove the weight of these types of hindrances so that green projects can have a bigger chance of evolving. In addition, new developments in heritage areas often use surrounding landscape and greenery as a selling point in million-dollar marketing campaigns. It is only fair for them to contribute to the maintenance of the views and streets that new residents enjoy. Therefore, a minute municipal tax on high-rise occupants that have a direct view on classified heritage grounds, would compensate for the heavy taxes usually owed by heritage homes and gardens. Any remainder would go to the renovation fund.

Classified property should be exempt from transmission taxes. Beirutis cannot always afford to inherit these homes, which often creates problems in the family. It all too common for heirs to sell their family property so they can afford to pay the transmission tax. The removal of taxation for transactions of classified heritage homes would also make them attractive to capital holders looking to place their money in a safe, tax-free investment. It is important to offer attractive financial incentives for preservation that can at least partly counterbalance the huge profits margins created by demolition and redevelopment.

Most heritage buildings only occupy a fraction of the allowable constructible potential on their plots. This makes them vulnerable to destruction, as any construction project would be more profitable than their preservation. As a way to compensate the owners of plots classified according to the 1933 law for their lost meters, the state would allow the sale of unused meters to developers who could construct them in the newly created financial districts on the outskirts of the city. This would benefit current owners who make substantive profit while remaining in their homes and the developer who is able to construct larger and more profitable structures in an up-and-coming district; most of all, Beirut will benefit from the reduced real estate pressure on the few desirable residential districts that remain. The city overall will gain a new development opportunity and would reduce traffic flow in the overcrowded central districts.
Current legislation does not allow for the reevaluation of old rent according to inflation. This has created a huge burden on property owners who are not able to reap any tangible gains from their rented properties. The old rent law has created an unfair double standard for occupants who rented after the war and are paying significantly higher rates while the renters who remained from before the war keep their very cheap rents indefinitely. This is causing much frustration for both parties and is often times the major incentive for property owners to demolish, as they have no other way to clear the property and monetize their asset. As a fair compromise, we should allow people that have passed the age of retirement living in old rent homes to continue living in their residences peacefully, as they are often too old to relocate. However, after they have passed away, the law should not allow the children of those people to inherit the old rent contract. In the long term, only people above the age of retirement would remain in rent controlled homes, and as time passes properties will inevitably return to their owners. Extending the inheritance privilege further into posterity would only be asking for trouble.

Current proposals calling for a reform to the old rent law seem to lead by real estate companies. In fact, if implemented, these reforms will create an increased demand for housing while increasing the vulnerability of the lower classes. The proposed provisions do not offer any affordable housing alternatives to evicted tenants. (Marot, 2014)
Lack of renovation funds should never be an excuse to demolish old homes. Too many beautiful and historically significant landmarks have perished in that way, but there is a solution. For one thing, a rehabilitation fund could be created and financed through taxation on new building permits. This government maintained fund would help finance the maintenance of historical districts. These funds would allow for the rehabilitation of war-damaged buildings, keeping them safe, financially viable and beautiful. There is little doubt it is of great value for the city to maintain its ancient charm by preserving its unique urban architecture. Towers in heritage districts profit from view of gardens and old houses around them while blocking the view and sunlight from their neighbors; they should therefore contribute to the maintenance and wellbeing of the esthetic features of the city they inhabit.

State-sponsored renovation loans – similar to the hugely popular housing loan with low interest rates would encourage owners to renovate their homes instead of letting neglect and the lack of funds takes their toll on the house. It would also encourage the heirs to continuously inhabit the property rather than let it fall into disrepair.
The Takieddine el Solh mansion in Kantari is falling apart due to a lack of funds for its renovation. – Personal photograph
The delimitation of preservation neighborhoods would first and foremost be an official admission by the Lebanese State that such districts do, in fact, exist. Also, it would force speculation to limit itself to the value of a building rather than the size of a plot of land. By forbidding destruction in traditional areas and limiting the height of new buildings, we would guarantee the long-term preservation of the streets’ historic charm.

*Figure 156 1900 – The original seafront of Ain el Mreisseh has been almost entirely destroyed. Note the Jamal beach in the lower left corner. The Nsouli house is visible at the center of this image, on the coast. – Anonymous photograph*
The Ain el Mreisseh Mosque and the Karol Schayer building on the waterfront before the extension of the seaside corniche in 1974.

The Jamal beach after repeated illegal demolition attempts. During the cornice extension of 1974, many historic buildings on the seafront were demolished; the Jamal beach lost its access to the sea.
Figure 159 – The illegal demolition of the Nsouli house in Ain el Mreisseh. - Personal photograph
It is not unusual to see towers blocking the views of other towers in Beirut; a high floor count no longer guarantees the million-dollar sea view. Specific construction regulation would be enforced in those areas and any existing structures would become more valuable to potential homeowners; who would be guaranteed that their views, sunlight and air would not be blocked by other construction. This would make the current properties desirability increase among new tenants and homeowners who are beginning to perceive old homes as a status symbol but are weary of their future comfort. These new occupants are usually more than eager to renovate at their own expense, reducing the financial burden of renovation on the original owners.
Finally, the residents of those districts would elect a council who would have to approve any development before its implementation to ensure that the public’s right to well being is preserved.

The creation of a small task force with the Ministry of Interior that is strictly trained to handle heritage violations would be an invaluable asset to effectively thwart demolitions. Civil society has established an efficient alarm system through a call line and a network of online volunteers who monitor the city; but current mechanisms of ground action require an armed force in order to counter increasingly violent attacks on heritage. Without strong armament, the fight for heritage will be inevitably lost.

Finally, the importance of creating a proper legislative framework that protects the character of Beirut cannot be stressed enough. Without the passing of a law protecting old buildings, nothing will remain of Beirut’s heritage. Punctual actions on emergency cases only delay demolition; but as time passes, decay takes its toll and renovation becomes more costly and high-maintenance properties eventually collapse. It has become evident that current sectarian leaders have no interest in passing any such law as it contradicts with their strategies for land control and exploitation; without the pressure of civil society, Lebanon will indefinitely remain the only Arab state with no legislation specifically protecting its built heritage.
Figure 161. 1940 – Photo from AUB towards the BCD. The tramway on the right runs on John Kennedy Street. The house in the foreground has been replaced by the AUB Van Dyke building. The house on the right is the only home in this photo that still stands today. It is classified and protected though occupied by a multitude of workers. - Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.
Figure 162 Panorama of Beirut as seen from the sea. The Medawar district is visible on the sea level; the Gemmayzeh axis is in the middle and on top of the hill, the Sursock palaces overlook the coast. The Moussa Sursock palace, current residence of Lady Cochrane, is in the upper left corner of this photograph.

**Epilogue**

In a private interview at her palatial home, Lady Sursock-Cochrane tells the story of how the house was shelled over 30 times, twice with incendiary phosphorus bombs. Dozens of trees and entire rooms were destroyed. Militias also invaded it once. When their souks were closed and later expropriated and demolished, the Sursock, like all of Beirut’s families, fell on hard times. Yet when I last visited, only a broken marble pillar remains as a token of memory from wartime.

The thought of selling the expansive family properties never crossed the Lady’s mind. During fifteen years of civil war, with the available choice of moving to spectacular family properties in Europe, she chose to never leave her Beiruti home: “I am attached to Lebanon, I am a part of this country. I had to stay” she insisted. Today, her children continue to renovate the old buildings and homes owned by the family that contribute to the charm of the neighborhood. They handle the Sursock properties that constitute one of the last intact clusters of heritage in Beirut extending from Sursock Street until the Gouraud axis in Gemmayzeh. Though Lady Sursock-Cochrane has set-up an arrangement forbidding her children to resell the properties except to each other, she confides that she is worried about the future of her historic home.

She regrets a Lebanon with no memory that has become a shell of what it used to be.
Figure 163 2013 - The Moussa Sursock palace as it stands today. The unsightly Sursock Domes looms on the left. - Personal photograph.
Bibliography


