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A Fragmented Unity: Lebanon's War and Peace in Cultural Memory
by Assem Nasr

Abstract

From the turn of the century, Martyr Square in downtown Beirut, Lebanon has been the scene for myriad political events. Beginning in the mid-seventies, Martyr Square was part of the Green Line that saw vicious fighting during the arduous fifteen-year civil war fought along religious identities. More recently, and after a period of peaceful coexistence among the Lebanese, on the eve of February 14, 2005, the Square district witnessed yet another event of an immense magnitude. Former Prime Minister and tycoon Rafiq Hariri was assassinated. This event caused a huge wave of protests and demonstrations claiming the strength of the Lebanese people and their steadfastness against 'foreign' aggression. In essence, this public outcry was a reaction to a tragedy that reminded the Lebanese of the horrors of war and resulted in a series of major transformations in the country. This paper is an exploration of the transformation in cultural memory and the manipulation of historical narratives to suit a particular political agenda. In light of the past collective war traumas, the Lebanese have "mythesized" the rise of their nation above the internal differences to reach its destiny: national cohesion. What the Lebanese have failed to acknowledge, however, is how they have suppressed the trauma of the war, ignored its underlying causes, and fell blind to the haunting possibility for these differences to remerge and ignite yet another war. Without addressing the past or engaging in a post-war healing process, the Lebanese fabricated a cultural memory that served to conceal internal strife placing the responsibility for the internal conflicts on 'foreign powers.' This paper will therefore explore how a geographical site serves as a mediated space for cultural memory. How has Martyr Square served as a locale for negotiating meaning? Finally, the focus will be on the means by which Lebanese used this space for manifesting their fears and dreams, and most importantly how this space became a site for negotiating history.

Biography

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A Fragmented Unity:

Lebanon's War and Peace in Cultural Memory

By Assem Nasr

February 14, 2005 marked a crucial landmark in the history of Lebanon. An explosion erupted in downtown Beirut and claimed the life of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. This tragedy was the beginning of ominous times for all Lebanese. In the months that followed, a number of prominent public officials was assassinated in sporadic explosions in various areas of the country. It was a gruesome reminder of the civil war which had only ended 15 years before. These scenes were all too familiar and were still fresh in people's minds affirming the ease with which they could be plunged into another cycle of violence (Makdisi, 2006, p. 202).

Hariri's assassination created a huge uproar. The public's reaction was significant and swift. People converged on Martyr Square, the downtown square in the center of the city. Martyr Square holds a special value to the Lebanese. It has come to serve as the physical embodiment of the loss and grief of the Lebanese. Immediately after the announcement of Hariri's death, people from various sides of the political spectrum and all religious groups converged on the Square to express their rage and frustration. This mass movement, which became known as the Cedar Revolution, eventually led to the resignation of the government cabinet and the withdrawal of all Syrian troops from Lebanese soil (Khalaf, 2006).

Martyr Square now serves as a place of pilgrimage. As soon as a political rally was announced, followers of the Cedar Revolution would flock to the site in solidarity with their political leaders. Ironically, with a new government installed, the minority opposition, particularly Hizbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement, also began to utilize this site for their demonstrations. Supporters of the latter camp pitched tents as part of an open-ended protest and civil disobedience movement, calling for the new government to step down.

This article is concerned with how the Lebanese have reconstructed the narrative of their past. It investigates how the process of recollecting history involves omissions and inclusions that fit a particular temporal context. The narrative by which the Lebanese -

leaders and public - addressed the country's past entails a reexamination of history. It requires a process that constantly revises the Lebanese collective identity. Reimagining the collective self and a particular collective past, as John Gillis (1994) argues, allows for the imagination of a collective future. Immediately after the cessation of all fighting, the powers that be embarked on a project to redefine the postwar "Lebanese-ness." They employed a space that would give cultural memory a physical embodiment. In what follows, we will explore the importance of this space in the Lebanese collective memory. We will look at how history was narrativized to suit a particular agenda. The question is: in light of the recent political upheaval of the Cedar Revolution, how does the new historical narrative shape the future? What purposes does it serve? And finally, how does a revision of history involve space? How does Martyr Square emerge within historical narratives?

Martyr Square

During the 1975-1990 civil war, Martyr Square was the center of a warzone that parted the city into "East" and "West" Beirut. Before the fighting broke out, throughout most of the past two centuries, the Square served as a public sphere that saw various milestones in Lebanese history. Most notably, the Square is known for the struggle for independence from the French in the 1940's. It was the site where the French army executed a number of activists (Toueini & Yassine, 2000). The Lebanese commemorated their martyrs' heroic deeds by erecting a monument in their honor. Martyr Square was celebrated as the symbol of Lebanese steadfastness, unity, and independence. It gloriously stood with pride holding the torch of liberty in the center of the city. During the 15 years of civil war, the Martyr Square district was badly damaged. The Martyr Statue along with the buildings surrounding it were peppered with bombs, bullet holes, and artillery shrapnels; many were reduced to bare structures beyond repair. Because this particular area saw the most intense fighting, it remained a no-man's land for the entire period of the conflict. Abandoned and neglected, shrubs and greenery sprouted out of the building and pavement crevices earning it the name "Green Line."

The war ended swiftly on October 13, 1989. Syrian forces overtook the east side of Beirut and the associated territories (BBC News, 2008). In less than half a day the areas

dominated by the right wing Lebanese army were surrendered, marking the end of all fighting. As abruptly as the civil war ended, the frontlines that split the city vanished. Most - if not all - Lebanese set out to discover the other side of their country. They were tourists in their own land celebrating a long-awaited reunion. The Square soon became an intersection for the two communities it had divided. However, the ideological schisms and religious tensions that had started the war remained unresolved. The Lebanese did reach a cease-fire and maintained the peace designed by the multi-lateral Ta'if Accord. Curiously, the Lebanese warlords who once had been at each others' throats were now embracing one another. Lebanon was on its way to a state of 'fraternity' and 'unity.'

After the war, the government exerted a substantial effort to remove the conflict from public discourse and focus on reconstruction, and economic and political recovery. Rebecca Saunders and Kamran Aghaie (2005) referred to this process as a "program of collective amnesia." The government granted amnesty to all parties as part of reconciliation. Essentially, it implemented "a policy of 'la ghalib la maghlub' (no victor, no vanquished)" (Saunders & Aghaie, 2005, p. 25). If there were no victors nor vanquished, no community would be seen as a victim or a perpetrator.

Nowhere is the practice of this policy more evident than in the downtown area of Beirut, the center of which is Martyr Square. The reconstruction of this district, as Usama Makdisi and Paul Silverstein (2006) put it, was "based on an idealization of prewar inter-communal harmony that ignored questions of the particular responsibility among militias for the fifteen years of violence" (p. 6). With promises of a prosperous and peaceful future, the Lebanese became preoccupied with rebuilding a homeland in ruins. Led by Rafiq Hariri at the time, the Lebanese government set out to rebuild the city as quickly as possible.

The rebuilding process, however, transformed the authentic character of the once-beloved downtown area to the dismay of many Beirutis. The district had a unique architectural legacy inherited through past centuries. Its souks and alleys represented the richness of culture and reflected its religious and communal diversity. The reconstruction, on the other hand, gave it an image sanitized of any political or ethnic affiliation altogether.

According to historian Kamal Makdisi, the case was set and clear from at least 1983 when a truce was reached. Saree Makdisi (1997) found that: "there has been a concerted

effort to wipe the surface of central Beirut clean, to purify it of all historical associations in the form of its buildings, to render it pure space, pure commodity, pure real estate. The most obvious and striking potential war memorial (in a country that has all but forgotten war), the shrapnel-scarred statue in Martyrs' Square, will be completely repaired - its bullet holes erased and covered over just as the historical referents in the city center (and history itself) are being erased in the reconstruction” (p.692). Caroline Nagel (2000) argues that the government made such choices because it needed legitimacy and acceptance from all Lebanese communities. According to Patrick Devine-Wright (2003), memories are utilized “to legitimize or delegitimize social institutions and collective actions” (p. 31). In Lebanon’s case, there was a pressing need to prove that peace prevailed.

One of the ways the Lebanese government sought to achieve this goal was to rebuild what the war had destroyed: to recreate Beirut in a new frame, in a new identity. This identity “somehow harks all the way back to the Phoenicians and can be summoned now in commodity form to add an unproblematic tinge of local color to an otherwise global project” (Makdisi, 1997, p.701). Granted, the city was built on the ruins of past civilizations, one of which was Phoenician. However, making the connection between the present-day civilization and one that existed millennia ago had specific functions. “The redevelopment of downtown Beirut,” Nagel (2000) states, “reflects intense political pressures for legitimacy, stability and consensus, emerging from the civil war” (p.226). As the country emerges from a devastating period, the government was under much pressure to demonstrate Lebanon’s unity and ability for maintaining peace (Nagel, 2000). The erasure of any remnants of the conflict was a must. Any symbols that could be associated with either side of the war had to be eliminated. The downtown area required a detachment from any image of Arabness associated with the Muslim culture as well as Western features that could be identified with the Christian community. This architectural disconnect, on the other hand, would create a void. It would be necessary to utilize an alternative narrative; a narrative that engages a neutral past and provides a conciliatory rhetoric. The answer was to connect the “new Beirut” to an ancient heritage that predates all friction between religious factions – the shared Phoenician history.

Solidere, Hariri's brainchild development company commissioned with the rebuilding project, promoted the new city based on redefining who 'we,' the Lebanese, are. The paradigm focused on a history that binds 'us' and looking beyond the differences that separate 'us.' Hayden White (1987) argues that history is a constructed product. Historical representations are subjective results of "possible conceptions of historical reality." These conceptions, he argues, "are alternatives to the fully realized historical discourse that the modern history form is supposed to embody" (White, 1987, p. 5). Similarly, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) asserts that historical production requires a diligent and careful effort of inclusions and absences. He states that these "presences and absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither neutral nor natural" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 48).

The subjectivity of recreating the identity of the 'new Beirut' is evident. The government sanctioned a development plan that suited its post-war agenda. It omitted a past fraught with conflict and eliminated its traces. As an alternative, it beckoned a more distant past. This process is an "*uncontested* narrative of the Lebanese national identity" (Makdisi, 1997, p.694).

Nagel (2000) suggests that "the Phoenician imagery is intended to symbolize a linkage between Lebanon's ancient seafaring inhabitants, who once controlled Mediterranean commerce, and today's Lebanese, who [...] are united by their commercial interests and entrepreneurial spirit" (p. 222). Furthermore, Nagel (2000) explains that highlighting the Phoenician identity is an effort to tie a national identity to a civilization that surpasses all communal schism in the past centuries. In this context, Nagel (2000) adds, the Lebanese people are not fractured religious communities. Rather they all belong to "a more ancient 'race' of people" that was a melting pot of East and West (Nagel, 2000, p. 226). Performing a national identity as such mediates between the polarized sides of the conflict. A Phoenician context creates a safe ground that focuses on the common within a contested identity. According to Saunders and Aghaie (2005), collective memory is "dynamic" and "transformable." They explain that it is not defined by temporality and spatiality. On the contrary, it is constantly evolving.

Hashim Sarkis, one of the architects at Solidere, describes Beirut and the reconstruction of history as “catharsis through architecture.” The intention of the project was symbolic, declared Sarkis. It was as if the Beirutis “were re-creating a style to redeem them from the fact that they destroyed downtown” (Convington, 2000, p.45). Now, the people of Lebanon suppress the sense of loss (or trauma) by believing that Lebanon’s new reconstruction, particularly of downtown Beirut and Martyr Square, is a triumph over their violent past. It is a “formal, civic-minded eradication of grief, a politically necessary forgetting, one often reinforced by the banishment of mourning practices from the public sphere” (Saunders & Aghaie, 2005, p. 25). The officially recognized version of this “forgetting” is the collective amnesty upon which all parties agreed when they signed the peace accord.

Makdisi (2006) notes that suppressing the memory of war was not an “unconscious defense mechanism.” He reiterates that “the general reluctance to engage systematically with the war, to embark on a collective historical project to digest and process the memories and images, to salvage a history from all those fragments and moments [...] is partly a matter of public policy and partly a matter of widespread popular will to deny” (p. 204). Michele de Certeau (1988) explains that historical writing is a process that takes place only when the recollection of history produces a division between the past and the present. De Certeau maintains that “an initial act of exclusion separates current time from past-time, or the living from the dead” (p. vii). For the historian, therefore, the period recalled is defined by what remains and is considered as past. In the case of Martyr Square, the division of time took a concrete form. The demolition of buildings destroyed by war marked a new era of prosperity. More importantly, wiping out these buildings symbolized an elimination of a dark past. By defining “what remains,” the history to consider was that which represses the memories of war, or at least its physical evidence (Makdisi & Silverstein, 2006).

Saunders and Aghaei (2005) claim that the act of memorializing is a “process and a dialogue.” There are many perspectives in a particular historical dialogue. However, the authors reiterate that the diversity of views is based on subject position and power. The “[m]ourning of a traumatic event frequently becomes the focus of conflict and

competition, as opposing interpretations are suppressed, contested, or subverted” (Saunders & Aghaie, 2005, p. 27).

Paul Ricoeur (1980) asserts that a narrative is made out of chosen events. These particular events serve a particular plot. He points out that “to be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening” (p. 171). Ricoeur (1980) adds that an event is defined by its position in the development of the historical plot. Choosing distinct events means the suppression of others in the service of the narrative as a whole. These suppressions, according to Trouillot (1995), are integral to the narrativization process. “The creation of that historical moment,” Trouillot (1995) believes, “facilitates the narrativization of history, the transformation of what happened into that which is said to have happened” (p.116).

This historical scenario plays a crucial role in determining the future of Lebanon. The attempt to manipulate cultural memory is part of rebuilding the country. In Pierre Nora’s (1989) words, “each historian was convinced that his task consisted in establishing a more positive, all encompassing and explicative memory” (p. 9). Therefore, in considering Lebanon’s history in the latter half of the 20th century, historical production seeks to highlight the more positive periods over others.

The new Lebanese historical narrative is based on omitting a dark past. The history it recalls overlooks the atrocities the Lebanese endured. Choosing to forget and forgive allows for a fresh start: a construction of nationhood from a blank slate. Painting Lebanon as the ‘phoenix’ emerging beyond all that had befallen it has a romantic quality to it. Makdisi (2006) notes that the post-war Lebanese government’s amnesty for all those involved in the violence is dangerous. He maintains that creating a history that absolves the “perpetrators” of the civil war ignores the conditions that triggered the conflict to begin with. These conditions “remain fully intact” and are bound to re-emerge and haunt the Lebanese society (Makdisi, 2006, p. 201-202).

Rewriting the narrative of Lebanese history can best be explained through what Dominique LaCapra (1999) describes as the “avoidance of anxiety.” This avoidance is manifested by a projection of blame “onto identifiable others, thereby inviting a generation of scapegoating or sacrificial scenarios” (p. 707) LaCapra maintains that the process is an effort to transform “absence” into “loss.” The transformation entails an

assumption that “what was (or at least could be) some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity which others have ruined, polluted, contaminated, and thus made ‘us’ lose” (LaCapra, 1999, p.707). In order to “regain” the “wholeness” lost, the causes that permitted this loss to occur must be removed. LaCapra (1999) adds this removal involves one to re-imagine one’s identity by eliminating “the sinful other in oneself” (LaCapra, p.707).

War and Peace, Revisited

The Lebanese war may have been resolved in the political sense. People who were affected, however, did not receive a tangible resolution or closure. Close to one-fifth of a million people died while almost one-third of a million were wounded (Makdisi, 2006, p. 201-202). Khalaf (2006) reports that more than half of the population was at one time or another uprooted from their homes. None of those who suffered losses received any official form of restitution nor were they able to work through the trauma. The Lebanese people - the common citizens - have not been involved in the process of peacemaking.

To claim that Lebanon will return to a state of harmony that predates the war required one to grossly embellish memories of the past. The Lebanese had never shared a common vision of their country nor had they risen above their religious differences (Salibi, 1988). Khalaf (2006) notes that “the ‘Lebanism’ of the Christians was pitted against the ‘Arabism’ of the Sunni Muslims with reverberations among the Shiites and Druze of the hinterland” (p. 25). Makdisi (2006) describes that in the 1930’s, Beirut saw much violence between Christians and Muslim gangs. The truth of the matter is that the Lebanese have had religious and communal strife for at least the past two centuries. The 1975-1990 civil war had been brewing for decades. David Gilmore (1983) explains that the Maronite community’s history “is a continuous struggle to maintain national and religious identity in a dominant Muslim environment” (p. 75). Philip Hitti (1987) reminds us that tensions between the Maronites and the Druze were so high that fighting finally erupted following an incident as trivial as two boys, a Maronite and a Druze, who started a brawl (p.437). Janet Hancock (1987) attests that “it is Lebanon’s misfortune that no one of her largest communities is strong enough to assert control unaided, but all are too

strong to be allowed to coalesce” (p. 30). In his research on post-war Lebanon, Simon Haddad (2000) states that “Maronite [Christian] attitudes indicate that they have an inherent fear and lack of confidence in Muslims” (p.473). Before the war began, seemingly, Lebanon prided itself on the cohesiveness between the Christian and Muslim communities. As the war spread, communication between these communities became increasingly difficult to maintain (Haddad, 2000).

The claim that Lebanon was once a unified, cohesive nation is problematic. Such belief is, however, an attempt to redeem the Lebanese from the traumatic past they experienced. Most importantly, the national unity mantra is well suited to the plot developed by the war leaders of the country, most of whom have maintained their political status. Having “re-unified” the nation, these leaders emerged as reconciliatory, thus averting any blame or responsibility for the atrocities some of them committed during the war. Instead, the position these leaders adopted was to hold external agencies and foreign meddling to blame. While on the surface all is forgiven, the fact remains that on the ground, there was no appropriate closure for all the atrocities committed.

Makdisi (2006) asserts that “memories of the war remain raw and undigested” (p. 204). Families that suffered loss of family members and loved ones were not given a chance to process the trauma or mourn their loss. There was no attempt to address the bereavement that afflicted many in the community. No form of remembrance stands for the many lives that were lost during the war. Instead, the only monument that filled in for this task was the badly damaged Martyr Statue. This statue that once stood to commemorate Lebanon’s fight for independence, now serves as a symbol for all “martyrs” fallen during the civil war (Makdisi, 2006). Therefore, by fabricating this polished narrative, cultural memory has stood in lieu of an actual national dialogue that addresses the challenges in this society. However, this narrative does not exist in the Lebanese psyche only. Rather, it came to occupy a physical space.

With the symbolic rebirth of the Lebanese people embodied in the renovation of Martyr Square in the early 1990s, the government gave legitimacy to the newly constructed history. It assigned this history with a space and a defined location, and therefore, provided for it a tangible manifestation. Saunders and Aghaie state that narratives sometimes require “a beginning, a middle, and an end” (Saunders & Aghaie,

2005, p. 20). Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of rituals and monuments in which these narratives take on purpose and meaning. Similarly, Nora (1989) argues that “memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects.” According to Edward Casey (2000):

“To be embodied is *ipso facto* to assume a particular place and position. It is not just to have a point of view, but a *place* in which we are situated. It is to occupy a portion of space from out of which we both undergo experiences and remember them [...] To be disembodied is not only to be deprived of place, *unplaced*; it is to be denied the basic stance on which every experience and its memory depend. As embodied existence opens onto space, indeed *takes place in place* and no where else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific: it is bound to place its own basis. Yet it is this importance of place for memory that has lost sight of philosophical and common sense concerns with the temporal dimensions of memory” (p. 82)

The importance of Martyr Square in cultural memory has evolved with the Lebanese’s understanding of their history. The symbolic meaning the Square holds for the public has metamorphosed over time. This is a site that reflects the sublimation of public anguish into a physical locale. As the political power shifted and evolved, the physical manifestation of public discourse changed as well. The embodiment of history in Martyr Square is inherently significant since so many major events took place in that particular space. The very space, along which the city was divided during the war, became a site for celebrating unity.

Hariri’s Assassination: Narrative Redefined

In 2005, Martyr Square was beckoned once again to perform its function as a symbolic space for historical narratives. A violent wave of assassinations beginning with the murder of Hariri created a patriotic frenzy. The Lebanese public took to the streets and flocked around Martyr Square, which now served as a launch-pad for verbal attacks on Syria. The Cedar Revolution was unique in its form. As Khalaf (2006) notes, “Christians and Muslims [were] praying in unison or bearing cross-religious placards as they observed moments of silence over Hariri’s gravesite” (p. 16). Khalaf describes this gathering as a “mélange” of inconsistencies: “a Woodstock or a Hyde Park gathering, a

triumphal post-World Cup rally or a bit of a carnival, a rock concert, a ‘be-in’ or other rejectionist manifestation of early-1970s ‘counterculture’” (2006, p. 15).

Hariri’s assassination awakened memories of a horrible past. The trauma, anguish, and bloodshed were too tragic for the Lebanese people to bear responsibility for. In Mieke Bal’s (1999) terms, there was “the need for traumatic memories to be legitimized and narratively integrated in order to lose their hold over the subject who suffered the traumatizing event in the past” (p. viii). Ernst Van Alphen (1999) refers to this phenomenon as the “failed experience.” The “failed experience” creates the need for a discursive exploration by which “experience and memory are enabled, shaped, and structured according to the parameters of available discourses” (p.96). Makdisi and Silverstein (2006) hold that whether framed within the context of trauma or destiny, “the historical domain of violence” becomes the cornerstone upon which the “collective narratives of origin, loss, and recovery, as well as the precondition for any future reconciliation” are built (p. 1). These narratives, they argue, are not permanent. They are constantly challenged, amended, reworked, and rewritten as the political scenarios and social situations require.

Saunders and Aghaie (2005) point out the importance of cultural agents in the process. Cultural construction of trauma is created and passed on by these agents such as mass media and religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific, and state institutions. Their role in the process is to “define the nature of the trauma and the victim, establish the relation of the trauma to those who experience it only indirectly, and assign responsibility” (Saunders & Aghaie, 2005, p. 18).

Following the ‘liberation’ from all foreign military presence, Syrian and (previously) Israeli, anti-Syrian parties announced the dawn of a new era; an era of a cohesive society and a unified nation. Khalaf (2006) observes that as the site where Hariri was buried (within proximity to Martyr Square) has become a monument of its own, it soon became “a national shrine for the evocation of collective grief and deliverance from the oppressive designs of our ‘sisterly’ Syrian regime and its hapless cronies in Lebanon” (Khalaf, 2006, p. 15). It is important to point out that the Syrian military presence in Lebanon was solicited by numerous leaders of Lebanese warring factions at one point or another during the civil war. Their parties relied on Syria’s military power either to

maintain their militias' positions or to enforce a ceasefire between them. Many of the Lebanese warlords sought Syrian support to maintain their political power. The abrupt transformation of political allegiance and ideological rhetoric is a perplexing phenomenon. Hariri's assassination was a breaking point. Suddenly, political speeches and rallies blamed Syria for meddling in Lebanese affairs and incriminated its collaborators for Hariri's murder and the wave of violence that followed. For this article's purposes, the details of the assassination or the identity of the culprit is not relevant. Rather, it is the political transformation and the carefully manipulated recollection of the civil war that is of interest. As quickly as the Lebanese chose to accuse 'external powers' and 'foreign interests' for the series of assassinations, they chose to forget their own involvement in the war. But this recollection is not purely voluntary.

These developments are yet another evidence of a political instance where history is re-narrativized. Those who not long ago were servants of Syrian interests in Lebanon have again beckoned specific historical events to support their current and radically different position. In Michele Foucault's (1972) terms, "history itself appears to be abandoning the irruption of events in favor of stable structures" (p.6). Stability of structure - in this case, political power in Lebanon - absolves those who were once seen as leaders of militias and validates their authority under the banner of national unity. Gillis (1994) maintains that popular memory is fundamentally different from elite memory. The latter, he explains, followed a methodical approach to history. "Elite memory" narrated history from a particular perspective following a "linear" chronological pattern. "Popular memory," on the other hand, was scattered and incoherent. Gillis (1994) holds that through their construction of memory and narrativization of history, "elite time colonized and helped construct the boundaries of territories that we have come to call nations" (p. 6). The utilization of historical narratives, therefore, is crucial in maintaining the elite's position of power.

There is a clear distinction between the people and the political leaders: the elite. In Lebanon, the leaders agreed on the conditions of the Ta'if Accord. The peace that the leaders 'achieved' was imposed on the Lebanese people (Haddad, 2001). Undoubtedly, the end of combat was a much awaited and an urgently needed action. The declaration of the Ta'if Accord heralded the end of a grave period of violence, lawlessness, fear,

despair, and hopelessness. Nevertheless, the Lebanese have not come to fully understand how the war ended nor have they completely processed the traumatic experience. They found that the narrative that their leaders wove allowed them to come to terms with the transition from war to peace.

Conclusion

By manipulating the cultural memory and redefining the narrative, the Lebanese attempted to redeem themselves from the horrors they had inflicted on themselves. Bal (1999) uses the term “cultural memorization.” He describes “cultural memorization as an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future” (Bal, 1999, p. vii). Furthermore, Bal states that this memory surfaces in different formats “ranging from conscious recall to unreflected reemergence, from nostalgic longing for what is lost to polemic use of the past to reshape the present” (p. vii). He adds that “the interaction between present and past that is the stuff of cultural memory is, however, the product of collective agency rather than the result of psychic or historical accident” (Bal, 1999, p. vii).

As the sincere desire to be ‘one people’ and ‘one nation’ emerges amidst trying times in Lebanon, this narrative takes a physical form in Martyr Square. In order to rid the Lebanese of the cross they bear for inflicting the tragedy of war on themselves, slogans of victory and chants of defiance in the face of external pressures (the “Other”), surge as the Martyr’s Statue holds its torch victoriously. The Lebanese are preoccupied with exonerating themselves in the historical narratives of their past. They still have to claim responsibility for the havoc wreaked by the war. By taking the ostrich approach and burying their heads in the sand, the Lebanese are ignoring the looming differences in society that are bound to haunt future generations. In the wake of the recent assassinations and the current political stalemate, people still converge on Martyr Square to revive a sense of unity. However, the ominous threat of social differences is still at large. The atrocious war will not disappear by simply displacing the blame and suppressing the real causes. The Lebanese will have to work through their past. They will have to acknowledge their differences and agree to manage them and coexist. In order to guard the future, the people of Lebanon will have to come to terms with their past and

seek peaceful retribution from within. Perhaps they will find that the political leaders who act on their behalf should be under scrutiny. Who knows? Maybe citizens of Lebanon may realize that the amnesty with which their leaders absolved themselves was a ploy to legitimize and secure the elites' positions during peace. Perhaps then, Martyr Square would serve as site for a better understanding of the past, and a space for imagining a common future.

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