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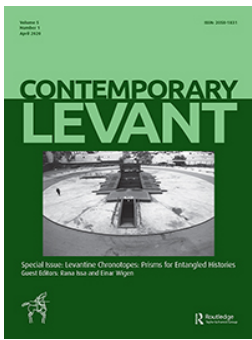
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Precarious Chronotopes in Beirut: a comparative spatio-temporal analysis of Rafic Hariri's grave and nightclub B018

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the intersection of time and space in large parts of the Levant is, above all, precarious. With a close analysis of two meaningful places in Beirut – the shrine of Rafic Hariri and the nightclub B018 – the article seeks to tease out how such a precarious chronotope is given form, meaning and value through narratives, practices and spatial design. Moreover, the article builds upon Walid Sadek's conceptualisation of shared mourning as a possibility for a new sociality under Lebanon's precarious conditions. It argues that despite their engagement with loss, the two sites under scrutiny here do not allow for such an ethical position. The findings of the analysis are relevant for the Levant more broadly as the flows of refugees in recent years have produced new and particularly precarious geographies inscribed with a profound sense of loss and grief.

KEYWORDS

Precariousness; Beirut; mourning; urban design

In Beirut, the energy for renewal seems to radiate from the ground.

– Angus Gavin, Head of Development at Solidere (Gavin 2005, p. 16)

J'irai danser sur vos tombes. (Boustani 2001, p. 186)

If there is one word that can capture the chronotope of the contemporary Levant, it might well be precarious. The region's spatial organisation is radically unstable and fragile. Territorial borders have been contested in Israel, Palestine and more recently in Syria; buildings and infrastructure are to various degrees exposed to destruction, by rockets, shells and bombings, or by rounds of demolition; and the accommodation of large waves of refugees have led to semi-permanent camps as well as makeshift temporary dwellings throughout the region. This spatial provisionality is entangled with a peculiar temporality. It is a temporality that is characterised by a lack of closure with regard to a troubled past and by the difficulty of imagining a future. Indeed, sociologist Isabell Lorey argues that 'to live under precarious conditions today means that there is no continuity of time at all anymore' (Puar 2012, p. 173). Elsewhere, I have called this temporality 'the suspended now' (Naeff 2018). It refers to a precarious present that seems to be suspended, because it is characterised by a stretched-out waiting for a resolution that is indefinitely postponed, and because it seems to be dangling in a temporal void cut off from a troubled past and a radically uncertain future.

This article offers a close analysis of the ways in which people have struggled to give shape and meaning to such an entanglement of precarious time and space in two places in Beirut: the shrine of Rafic Hariri and the nightclub B018. The two sites in their own way have sought to engage with a history of violence and prolonged precariousness by crafting meaning and value in the proximity

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of human remains. Significantly, neither of them exists today in the way they did when I started analysing them for a paper presented at the workshop *Levantine Chronotopes* in Oslo in 2013 on which this article builds. This instability of the urban environment, constantly changing and wrapped in ever-unfolding narratives that remain, moreover, highly contested, is precisely at the core of the argument made here. While the two case studies are defined by their local histories, I believe that, first, the qualitative analysis of how meaning and value are produced, and, second, the question of how to live ethically under precarious conditions offers insights that are relevant for the precarious Levantine region more broadly.

Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope is relevant to this analysis for two reasons. Its primary appeal is that it entwines time and space as equally important factors. This article follows Henri Lefebvre in conceiving of space and time as attributes that only attain meaning through social construction ([1974] 1991). This means that the places analysed in this article are given meaning by users and observers through practices and narratives, which invariably have a temporal component to them, both in terms of content (the storyline, the seasonal pilgrimage) and in terms of form (the time of narration and the rhythm of rituals). The two case studies in this article demonstrate how, in Bakhtin's words 'time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes ... visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time ... and history' (1981, p. 100).

However, the article is not merely a heuristic exercise. The second way in which Bakhtin's work is relevant to this study is its ethical component. As Parslow has pointed out in this special issue, Bakhtin addresses the ethical answerability of subjects even if conditioned by their unique spatial and temporal *presence* (Parslow 2020). The first section critically discusses a dominant narrative of cyclical rebirth that eclipses Beirut's temporal present and, with it, bypasses the ethical answerability of subjects 'involved in a concrete event' (Steinby 2013, p. 110). The section proceeds to offer a possible alternative by developing the attempt by artist and intellectual Walid Sadek to carve out an ethical position in the suspended now of Beirut. The main question in the analyses of the two funerary places discussed in the subsequent two sections is therefore whether these places, constituted by narratives and practices, allow for Sadek's ethical presence, a question that is vital to the contemporary Levant more broadly.

From mythical rebirth to tarrying with grief

Beirut's suspended now is produced by an infinitely complex history, the details of which are beyond the scope of this article. Two issues are worth mentioning here. First, the unresolved (geo)political divisions in the country have led to recurrent eruptions of violence that keep the Lebanese in a state of anxious expectation. Second, far-reaching laissez-faire politics, combined with clientelist loyalty, have led to an increase in structural inequality. Recent developments, such as the influx of Syrian refugees, tie into and exacerbate both the existing political divisions and the problems caused by economic deprivation. All of this is inscribed in Beirut's geography from the bombing and subsequent restructuring of Haret Hreik (e.g., Fawaz 2007) to refugees taking over available nooks and crannies (e.g., Onishi 2013). The political instability that leads to fear and anxiety for renewed violence is therefore doubled by the instability of the spatial environment, parts of which are disfigured, erased, replaced or repurposed with relative frequency. These cycles of destruction and renewal are not limited to Beirut's episodes of violence, however. Rampant real estate speculation has produced the rapid construction of rows of new apartment buildings, often preceded by a phase of demolition that shows little regard for architectural and social preservation in the area (e.g., Makdisi 1997, Ghandour and Fawaz 2010). Not only real estate but also the service industry has a short turnover time with rapid gentrification transforming diverse parts of the city (e.g., Deeb and Harb 2013, Krijnen and de Beukelaar 2015).

One dominant narrative that attempts to give meaning to the suspended now in Beirut is that of mythical rebirth. An often-retold myth recounts how Beirut was destroyed and rebuilt seven times since ancient history. In this narrative, the destruction of the civil wars or the 2006 war are only

the latest rounds in the cyclical history to which the city is destined for eternity. Inhabitants often refer to this myth, and it can be found in fictional and non-fictional accounts of Beirut. The myth of rebirth is also taken up by parties that are interested in marketing the city. The Ministry of Tourism, for example, published an advertorial following the 2006 war titled 'Phoenix, from the Flames'. The folder's subtitle states that, being 'the cradle of civilisation, Lebanon is determined to rise from the ashes to shine once again' (Ministry of Tourism 2006). While the promise of rebirth is obviously appealing in a postwar setting, the marketers seem hardly disturbed by the fact that the figure of the phoenix equally heralds renewed destruction.

Moreover, focusing on a prosperous distant past and a prosperous distant future reduces the troubling recent past of war to a moment of absolute rupture, while the present is altogether eclipsed. Revealing in this respect is the main slogan of Solidere, the Lebanese Society for Development and Reconstruction, which is the private company that supervises the reconstruction of Beirut's Central District. As critics have pointed out, 'Solidere's slogan "Beirut, ancient city for the future" comfortably leaves out the present and immediate past' (Haugbolle 2010, p. 86, see also El-Dahdah 1998). By representing the present as a transitional period, this approach tends to instigate a passive attitude of waiting for future release.

In addition, the myth of cyclical rebirth resonates with the celebration of martyrdom that is widespread among all communities in Lebanon, from fallen soldiers of Hezbollah's resistance against Israel to the newspaper *An-Nahar's* veneration of journalists assassinated for speaking out against Syrian occupation. While the notion of martyrdom functions as an 'honorific title' (Volk 2010, p. 34), the informal use of which has broadened to such an extent that it may now include any 'pitiable death',¹ it always infuses violent death with meaning and value. Indeed, framing death as sacrifice moves it from the category of loss, in the sense of unprofitable expenditure, to the category of investment (Bataille [1946–1947] 1991, French 2007, p. 88). Violent death is understood to generate or invigorate 'life', both on Earth, where the sacrifice contributes to the worldly struggle, and in the afterlife, where paradise and eternal gratitude await the martyr. Banners that commemorate political martyrs often bear slogans that frame the death as redemptive or regenerative for the life of the nation or the cause.

The narrative of cyclical rebirth gives meaning to the suspended now because it situates its sense of suspension between a glorious past and future, rendering it as a transition. At the same time, the myth constructs past violence as an absolute temporal break, understood as death. It is precisely within this notion of absolute destruction that the myth then situates the ability to produce new life. Consequently, this narrative leaves no room for a consideration of structural problems that would reveal continuities running throughout periods of 'death', 'life', and the eclipsed present. The myth of cyclical rebirth is therefore complicit in maintaining a social, political and cultural system that deflects concerns over continual structures of inequality, exploitation, repression and corruption into what Ken Seigneurie dubs the 'mythic utopianism' of sectarian essentialism and rightful retribution (Seigneurie 2011, p. 8–11).

One critic of the promise of future rebirth is artist and thinker Walid Sadek. In his discussion of the suspended now, which he calls 'the protracted now' (2012, p. 481), he argues that

together, the cyclical recurrence of violence and truce and this longed-for future release, indefinitely deferred, generate an ethic of despair that appeals to a wholesale rejection and abandonment of the past in the name of a regeneration which recognises that all have suffered equally. (Sadek 2012, p. 482)

His alternative approach to the suspended now relies on Judith Butler's *Precarious Life*. Butler, in the wake of the 11 September attacks in 2001, looks at loss and mourning as an opportunity to acknowledge a shared precariousness. Rather than the notion of equal suffering – which is widespread in postwar Lebanese society but, as Walid Sadek claims, is ultimately untenable – Butler puts forward the equality of dependency on others. So while some needs are thwarted and others are met, vulnerability remains a primary condition of all (Butler 2004, p. 31–32). In response to US president George W. Bush's launch of the war on terror, Butler asks, 'Is there something to be gained from grieving, from

tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence?’ (ibid., p. 30). Here, the ‘presentness’ of precariousness is acknowledged and embraced as an antidote to discourses of violent retribution. Because such discourses aim to ‘get over’ the past in search for an indefinitely deferred release, they leave subjects suspended in a ‘protracted now’. What Butler seems to propose is an attempt to willfully inhabit the present and acknowledge the need, dependency, and vulnerability of all human life, rather than to perceive it as a vacuum between a discarded past and an unlikely future.

Walid Sadek identifies an actually existing example of such a willful tarrying with grief in the ritual of congregating around the corpse to mourn the deceased. The corpse has been theorised psychoanalytically as ‘the utmost of abjection’, as ‘death infecting life’ (Kristeva 1982, p. 4). As an object of after-death, not merely representing but embodying what life withstands, the corpse disturbs the boundaries between life and death and as such inspires revulsion and fear (ibid., 3). Funerary rituals symbolically restore those boundaries, but in the specific moment of congregated mourning in the presence of the corpse, Sadek identifies an approach toward the threshold realm of the corpse rather than a rejection of it. In this realm, the embodied individual meets the overwhelming force of nature’s organic materiality. The subjective temporality of the lost individual is still inscribed on the dead body, which simultaneously gradually integrates with the objective temporality of nature’s larger cycles of decay and fertility. Because of the messy coincidence of the decay of one organism and the abundance of life of other organisms, the dead body resists easy narratives of rebirth, which propose violent temporal rupture and material erasure as the condition from which new life emerges.

Those who are able to linger around ‘the radical alterity of the corpse’ without impatience are propelled into a silent soliloquy, argues Sadek (2012, p. 481). For him, it is this soliloquy that ‘turns impatience upside down towards the temporality of the corpse and not away from it’ (ibid., p. 486). In contrast to psychoanalytic perspectives on mourning and in line with Judith Butler’s argument, Sadek stresses the sociality of this congregation of silent soliloquies. The temporality opened up in the presence of the corpse raises ‘a set of concomitant questions regarding what sociality may remain or is still plausible outside protracted civil wars’ (ibid., p. 482).

Two forms of living the suspended now should thus be distinguished. One is a day-to-day survival, broken off from the past and in anxious anticipation of an unknown future. Such a disposition is sustained by discourses that promise future rebirth and that ‘wish for the past to be declared evil in the hope that one day evil be declared past’ (Sadek 2012, p. 482). In contrast, Butler and Sadek propose the possibility of inhabiting that equally suspended now by turning toward loss and toward the dead instead of away from them. Such a temporality, they argue, could open up a new sociality that acknowledges the vulnerability and grievability of all without claiming that their exposure to harm and consequent suffering is equal.

The remainder of this article will analyse two sites in contemporary Beirut where the closure promised by the funerary rites is postponed. By contrasting the ways in which the temporality of the suspended now is given meaning through design, practice and narratives in these two places, the article seeks to demonstrate the complexities of time and space in contemporary Beirut and the difficulties of opening up a space for shared mourning as envisioned by Sadek. While the analyses are attentive to the particularities of post-civil war Beirut, the struggle to design a meaningful place in an urban environment both shaped by and implicated in the region’s continual exposure to violence provides insights that apply to the Levant more generally.

Rafic Hariri’s shrine

On 14 February 2005, shortly after former prime minister and business tycoon Rafic Hariri was assassinated, his relatives acquired a piece of land on the central square of Beirut for his burial (Volk 2010, p. 163–164). Rafic Hariri was a Sunni Muslim born to a farming family in Sidon, who had acquired billions of dollars as a businessman in Saudi Arabia during the 1970s and 1980s before returning to Lebanon toward the end of the civil wars. In Lebanon, he intensely engaged in the reconstruction

of the country through investment and politics. As a major shareholder of Solidere, Hariri proudly showed the maquette that visualised the future cityscape of Beirut's Central District (BCD) to friends and colleagues, as a tangible representation of his vision for Lebanon (Blanford 2006, p. 24). He was personally responsible for the construction of the giant al-Amin Mosque in BCD, as well as for numerous projects in his hometown of Sidon.

Upon his return from Saudi Arabia, Rafic Hariri quickly became involved in politics as well. The obvious conflicting interests of a real estate investor in government did not prevent friend and foe alike from admiring his resolve to get Lebanon's hopeless postwar economy back on its feet, even if it meant a disturbingly high national debt (Kubursi 1999). However, given the tense divisions in Lebanese politics, his position was not uncontested. Tensions rose with Syria-backed colleagues, and it was the Syrian regime that was quickly accused of being responsible for the giant bomb blast in BCD that killed Hariri and twenty-one others. His death provoked the largest demonstrations in Lebanese history, which unfolded on Martyrs' Square, again in BCD. This 'Beirut Spring' eventually led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanese soil, and although Hariri had always opted for diplomatic and pragmatic negotiations with Syria, he became *ar-ra'is al-shahid*, the 'martyr president', of the resistance against Syrian occupation.

The choice of the Hariri family to bury Rafic Hariri on Martyrs' Square, rather than in his hometown of Sidon, is highly significant. The burial site is located right next to his great al-Amin Mosque, which grants the tomb a religious character. The stream of visitors to the tomb quickly turned it into a shrine. In a temporary tent structure, Hariri's tomb was separated from those of the bodyguards in a neighbouring room, emphasising its special character distinguished from the graveyard. Seen together, the shrine and the mosque can be considered a large mausoleum (Vloebergh 2012, p. 15). Large images at the tent glorified his person during life, and slogans such as 'for the sake of Lebanon' lent a sense of redemptive sacrifice to his death. With the Syrian withdrawal, the idea of regeneration engendered by his violent death seemed to materialise. And although the hopes of that period were quickly smothered in the worst sectarian and political tensions since the end of the wars in 1990, his commemoration remains associated with notions of salvation, while his burial site became a place of glorification.

Significantly, Hariri's martyrdom was formulated in trans-confessional terms in the first months after his assassination. With martyrdom playing a major role in all religious communities in Lebanon, the religious symbolism of Hariri's commemoration could be shared by different communities. Although his funeral was conducted according to Sunni Muslim customs, it was attended by public figures and private visitors of all confessions. Subsequently, the presents and ornamentalations on display at the shrine contained Muslim, Druze and Christian symbols. His martyrdom therefore functioned as 'a unifying trope of remembrance of the dead' (Volk 2010, p. 34). In contrast to his hometown of Sidon, which is predominantly Sunni, the location in BCD, which has traditionally been located in between confessionally more homogeneous neighbourhoods, whether as a frontline or as meeting place, provided neutral ground (e.g., Khalaf 2006). Moreover, the alignment of the grave with the upcoming, permanent place of the Martyrs' Statue – which commemorates both Christian and Muslim martyrs of the Arab revolt who were hanged by the Ottoman authorities in 1916 – placed Hariri in a line of martyrs for the nation. Thus, Hariri's grave was constructed as a 'national shrine' (Volk 2010, p. 166) (Figure 1). However, this meaning was then used 'to make political claims whose effects are more accurately described as divisive, rather than unifying' (Hamdan 2013, p. 4).

The figure of rebirth had also been central to Solidere's reconstruction project and Hariri's economic policies. The company's vision of BCD was, and remains, a regional financial hub and is aimed at attracting business and tourism with low taxes and high-end retail and leisure facilities. As was briefly mentioned above, the war period is represented as a rupture of complete destruction on which Solidere aspires to build the future city it envisions, while the postwar period is consequently presented as a period of transition. The company's disregard of the present is coupled to its disregard of socio-geographical context (e.g., Salam 1998, Ragab 2011). Over the course of the development project,



Figure 1. The tent structure of Hariri's shrine between the Martyr's Statue in the front and the Al-Amin Mosque in the back, flanked by construction sites (2014).

BCD has become a hyper-secured and hyper-expensive area that is not welcoming to the majority of Beirut's inhabitants. The 2005 demonstrations were meaningful not only as a cross-sectarian alliance, but also as a class-based re-appropriation of the city centre, something that was repeated in the protests that erupted in response to the garbage crisis in 2015. Unlike the Syrian withdrawal, the demonstrations have not produced any durable transformation with regards to socio-economic exclusion. The mausoleum still forms part of an area that only caters to foreigners and the richest segment of Lebanon, the very same district that had been the crown jewel of Hariri's politics of postwar recovery. A politics of exclusion forms, therefore, an integral part of the site's spatiality.

On the level of identity politics, too, the shrine was as dividing as it is binding. While it is true that Druze, Christians, and Muslims gathered in unprecedented numbers on 14 March 2005 to express their rage at Hariri's killing, they did so only in response to a huge demonstration on 8 March organised to express support for Syria's role in installing and sustaining peace in the country, and consisting mainly, though not exclusively, of Hezbollah-affiliated Shiites. More assassinations followed, and the growing divide between the 8 March and 14 March coalitions had several long-term ramifications: it contributed to events leading up to the 2006 war with Israel; caused a political deadlock, which brought the country to the verge of another civil war in 2008; fed sectarian mistrust, which burst out in occasional street clashes; and reached new heights in relation to the Syrian uprising and civil war from 2011 on.

This division in Lebanese politics was visible at Hariri's burial site. The scale and stylistic features of the al-Amin Mosque and the centrality of the shrine already suggested 'a neo-Ottoman assertion of Sunni power' but the ornaments surrounding the tomb, too, gradually became exclusively Sunni (Vloebergh 2012, p. 13). The tomb was set up in a temporary tent structure and was for years



Figure 2. Hariri's shrine in May 2014.

covered by fresh white flowers every few days, as if the coffin had remained aboveground waiting for its final burial (Figure 2). Billboards throughout the city counted the days after Hariri's murder until justice would be done. After 1476 days they were removed with the completion of the special UN investigation committee and the inauguration of a special UN tribunal. One remained in place, counting the days since the start of that tribunal. The event was celebrated at the shrine by a marble plaque in a glass case, engraved with the line 'The Basic Rules for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon'. However, this call for 'truth' was not a neutral one. It became central to the contribution by Hariri's Future Movement to the vengeful party politics that brought about the crisis in 2008. Given this politicisation, it comes as no surprise that the tribunal's intentions were called into question and seen as part of wider Western geopolitical interests. Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah typically dismissed it as a US and Zionist plot. Moreover, while the tribunal worked on several lengthy and complicated cases, and eventually passed sentences on a number of Hezbollah officials, it ordered the release of four Lebanese generals held in custody until 29 April 2009 and never seriously charged the Syrian authorities. The process has thus withheld the anticipated moment of salvation.

Between 2012 and 2015, more bodies were added to the tent. In the section with Hariri's bodyguards, the top security official Wissam al-Hassan, assassinated in 2012, and Minister of Finance Mohammed Chatah and his bodyguard Tarek Badar, both assassinated in 2013, were buried. As a place that continued to include martyred members of the Future Movement, the shrine lost its ability to transcend political divisions. The funerals were characterised by rage against Hezbollah and Syria, the parties that were held responsible for the assassinations. The new graves thus emphasise the continuing divisions and violence in the country and preclude a sense of final closure that was initially expected to emerge from the UN trials.

At the tenth anniversary of Hariri's assassination, the bodies were moved to a permanent grave, inaugurated by a widely attended ceremony. The new site, designed by French architect Marc Barani, forms a solemn plaza built from massive rectangular limestone blocks. The square is fully integrated into the design logic of BCD while also consolidating its relation to the Al-Amin mosque, as evidenced by the wider use of the word mausoleum (e.g., 'Rafik Hariri legacy rendered eternal by new mausoleum', *Daily Star* 13 February 2015).

To conclude, the spatial orientations and ornamentations of Hariri's tomb intersect to produce a complex set of temporalities. The presence of Hariri's corpse initially inspired feelings of loss and indignation that momentarily brought unprecedented numbers of Lebanese together. The daily replacement of flowers and the temporary tent structure both suggest the postponement of his final burial. Following Walid Sadek's logic, this postponement offered the opportunity to linger in the presence of his corpse, even though it was no longer physically present aboveground. However, there has been little room for Sadek's silent mourning because the shrine's narratives and design were defined by exclusionary narratives of cyclical rebirth that quickly replaced a shared hope with feelings of fear or indifference.

Temporally, the spiritual notion of a mausoleum connects the historical event – that is, an event that has its unique temporal and spatial specificities – to a transcendent narrative of human suffering and divine eternity. At the same time, the tomb is political, meaning that the commemoration of Hariri's sacrifice is understood in terms of national martyrdom, fitting within narratives of shared Christian–Muslim suffering that have been fundamental to the forging of a Lebanese national narrative (Volk 2010). The transitoriness of the tent emphasised the lack of closure and the fact that the regenerative promise of his death remained unfulfilled. The final burial site did not signify resolution or salvation to this anticipation, but rather an entrenchment of existing divisions. Hariri's martyrdom and its discourse of regenerative sacrifice, as well as the discourse of retribution as represented by the special tribunal, are framed by the discourse of mythical rebirth, which is complicit in perpetuating the cycles of violence and truce that keep the Lebanese locked in the suspended now and continue to produce despair. With the new political alliance between Rafic Hariri's son Saad Hariri and Hezbollah since 2017, the site and the loss it signifies have been treated with indifference.

B018

As a counterpoint to Hariri's shrine, and in order to elucidate some of the difficulties in realising Butler's politics of mourning in contemporary Lebanon, it is worth looking at another 'funerary' site in Beirut. For many years, the legendary nightclub B018 was located in Karantina, an industrial district in the north-eastern section of the municipal district close to the port, until it moved to Mar Mikhael's abandoned train station in 2014. Karantina originally housed the regional Quarantine, built by Ibrahim Pasha in 1834. In 1922, it became the first Armenian camp in the city. Its initial tents were later replaced by more permanent structures, as Palestinian refugees settled in Karantina from 1948 on, followed by Southern Lebanese, Kurds, and Syrians fleeing unemployment (Fawaz and Peillen 2003, p. 9). The shantytown of Karantina and the neighbouring Maslakh (slaughterhouse) district, known for their high population density and poor living conditions, were separated from their urban surroundings by a wall and later by large highways. Apart from residential structures, the districts housed businesses, a slaughterhouse, and a tannery.

On 18 January 1976, less than a year after the start of the civil war, militiamen of the Christian Lebanese Forces (LF) entered the shantytown, killing hundreds of its inhabitants – estimates vary between 150 (Sayigh 1997, p. 376) and 1500 (Harris 2006, p. 162), mostly Muslims – and expelling the remaining thousands to West Beirut. The structures of the neighbourhood, including the isolating wall, were subsequently razed with bulldozers, and the Lebanese Forces established their headquarters, where they stayed throughout the war, at the empty site. After the war various industries, including the country's largest waste management company, were established on the site, and recently a number of art galleries have also opened up. However, the urban tissue has remained meagre compared to the dense districts on the other side of the highways. No physical memorial reminds passers-by of the atrocities that have taken place there; no commemoration has ever been organised; no commemorative narratives circulate in the public sphere. Like so many instances of fratricidal violence, this memory seems to be considered too dividing to remember.

The razed site of Karantina was still largely abandoned when architect Bernard Khoury was asked to design a nightclub on that location in 1998. He says that it was a site 'which [he] did not choose but



Figure 3. Nightclub B018: interior. @ Bernard Khoury / DW5.

had to confront' (as cited in Khalili 2007, p. 173). The design is a bunker-like structure, situated three-and-a-half metres underground. Upon entering the club, the visitor descends into a vestibule, which is separated from the club by a wall punctuated by 'sniper windows' through which the clubbing clientele can be observed. Inside, low tombstone-shaped tables carry fixed black-and-white pictures of now deceased Arab musicians, next to a small bowl carved out from the table's surface, which carries a flower. The tables are surrounded by low sofas as if at a wake. The backs of the sofas are collapsible so that they can serve as elevated dancing platforms. With its material of thick wood and the handles for transforming the furniture, the sofas/dancing tables resemble coffins (Figure 3). The walls of the club are covered with red velvet, suggesting that the subterranean club is itself a coffin too. At the height of the party, the rooftop opens up, letting in the cool breeze and opening the dancing crowd to the stars, while a massive mirror at a fifty-degree angle reflects the city lights to them (Figure 4).

The design responds to the troubled history of its location, refusing 'to participate in the naïve amnesia that governs the post-war reconstruction efforts' (Bernard Khoury / DW5 official website). It is supposed to instigate an uneasy conversation about the public silence regarding the atrocities that have taken place during the wars. Khoury especially rejects the way in which the reconstruction of BCD focuses on its future role on the global market rather than on its present role for society at home, stating that 'there is complete denial of the present, a complete denial of context' (cited in Zacks 2007, n.p.). Khoury resists Solidere's discourse of mythical rebirth, which imagines a brand-new city on a tabula rasa. Like a dead body that lingers in the present after the rupture of death, the past massacre is inscribed in the present spatiality of the site, even in the absence of human or material remains after the radical erasure that the LF brought about. It is this present spatiality which inspired Khoury to engage symbolically with the dead that were never properly mourned and with the corpses that were never properly buried.

However, while the design may critically engage with a politics of silence, its own position with respect to commemoration is highly ambiguous. For as long as graves remain unidentified and corpses unnamed, the aestheticised imagery of anonymous death and mourning is complicit in a



Figure 4. Retractable roof with opening mirror. @ Bernard Khoury / DW5.

politics that refuses to acknowledge the identity of victims and perpetrators and the historical circumstances of the event. Rather than engaging with the loss of real people, the design uses their deaths to criticise the Lebanese post-war silence more generally. The question of the exploitation of suffering is exacerbated by the fact that B018 is both commercially owned and a place of pleasure and conspicuous consumption.

Khoury responds to such critique by insisting that ‘my projects are not memory projects – memory does not interest me’ (2005, p. 168, my translation). Rather, ‘they are about intervening on specific sites that are very sensitive and very charged. They are sometimes about the absurdity of the proposition of building in these specific locations’ (as cited in Zacks 2007, n.p.). B018 is not a memorial; it is a nightclub, one that refuses to ignore the meaning of its location and that, through its design, reflects on the absurdity of that very fact – that there is no memorial but a nightclub on that tract. For Khoury, history and memory seem to be only important insofar as they form part of the present spatiality of his design. ‘Presentness’ is also what the function of a nightclub demands. Dancing is one of the most direct ways of inhabiting the present. Khoury concludes that ‘B018 is a very positive place, because it brings life: on Sundays at six or eight in the morning, there is a whole world swarming in that lost pit where the city hasn’t developed. ... That affects me a lot’ (2005, p. 169, my translation).

Should this site thus be seen as a way of inhabiting the suspended now of contemporary Beirut? Yes, the act of dancing in a nightclub that confronts the clientele with its charged location, and thereby with the contemporary frictions in society that discard the past, is a way of inhabiting the suspended now. Does the design open up a new sociality in the presence of a corpse, not merely through its imagery, but also through the awareness that real corpses could be present not far behind the velvety walls? Not quite. Rather than a moment of introspection, the nightclub provokes ecstatic release, especially in combination with intoxication. This fits the sociologist Samir Khalaf’s observation that Lebanon’s war has not generated ‘moods of restraints and sobriety’, but on the contrary ‘has unleashed appetites and inflamed people’s insatiable desires for acquisitiveness, conspicuous leisure and consumption and guilt-free lawlessness’ (Khalaf 2012, p. 11). Khalaf proceeds to

point out how the concomitant lack of 'any concern for aesthetic, human or cultural dimensions of living space' seriously impoverishes the social and cultural life and severely damages the natural and built environment (*ibid.*, p. 12). While having fun in the face of violence is sometimes constructed as a national act of resistance (Kegels 2011), this resistance consists of a sense of resilience against the odds, not of the social reconciliation Sadek imagines as emerging from a shared pensive silence. B018's high pricing, moreover, excludes the less affluent majority of the population from its clientele.

Precarious Chronotopes

In conclusion, recurrent episodes of violence and transformations driven by speculation inscribe a highly precarious temporality upon Beirut's geography. This spatio-temporality is frequently given meaning through narratives of cyclical rebirth. These situate the suspended now between a glorious past and a bright future, eclipsing the present and inspiring a sense of waiting. In contrast, Walid Sadek proposes, after Judith Butler, to inhabit the present by tarrying with loss in the presence of a dead body. Such an approach would give a different meaning to the suspended now, one that faces its uneasy volatility in order to acknowledge the vulnerability of all as the basis for a more humane sociality.

Bakhtin's chronotope allows for an appreciation of the ways in which meaning is produced at the juncture of space and time, and the crucial role of narratives in this respect. The significance of Hariri's shrine and B018 is that both places inscribe past violence and loss in the suspended now of postwar Lebanon by engaging with the presence of dead bodies that lack a final burial, implying a lack of closure. This is why these places resonate with Sadek's work on mourning in the presence of the corpse. However, neither is able to provide a space in which there is room for reflection and conversation.

If Hariri's final burial was symbolically deferred, this postponement, rather than opening up a new sociality, participated in discourses of future redemption, fully intertwined with the political quagmire that perpetuates the suspended now. Spatially too, the shrine in BCD has not been able to provide a meeting ground. The direct link between Hariri's persona and the district makes him and his grave a full part of its exclusionist politics. Moreover, the shrine has become embroiled in vengeful narratives that aggravate political divisions. Its exclusionist politics are therefore not only class-based but also identitarian.

In contrast, B018 is located at the urban margin and seeks to avoid monumentality with its street level façade. Temporally, the nightclub succeeds in avoiding discourses of future redemption. It does not seem interested in closure at all. Instead, it offers a space in which to inhabit the present. However, this allows the nightclub to escape its troubles, rather than to confront them. Lebanon's culture of escapist consumerism accepts B018's uneasy references to loss as long as they are abstract and anonymous. The setting of a commercial nightclub is unwelcoming to the disenfranchised and practices of dancing, display, and intoxication do not allow for introspection and conversation.

If the preponderant narratives around Hariri's martyrdom reduced the highly politicised and suspended now to a mere transitional phase in anticipation of future redemption, B018's scarcity of narratives in contrast inhibits the present from attaining any meaning beyond its physical immediacy. In both cases, the now is suspended. Hariri's now is an absence, a present eclipsed between past rupture and future redemption. B018's now is a presence that exists only in and of itself, interested in its past and future only as a latent layer that affectively charges the now, without requiring intellectual, humane or juridical investment.

This article's chronotopic reading of these two places is not merely heuristic. By comparing their signification with Sadek's envisioned precarious sociality, this article reveals how these places pose an ethical demand. After Sadek's call for a politics of mourning, this article asks whether Beirut's precarious geography can provide actual places for the Lebanese to congregate and tarry with unbearable loss, appreciate a shared vulnerability, and acknowledge the unequal distribution of suffering. Such a place should be relatively free from the economic exclusion, divisive party politics

and culture of escapism that smother the potential for conversation at the shrine and the nightclub.

Fortunately, there are many possible places that could be discussed in this respect. One such is the Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut's Central District, a public park conceived by a psychotherapist and designed to inspire commemoration and reflection. Another is Beit Beirut, a 'memory museum' with an exhibition space and auditorium housed in a preserved civil war ruin along the former demarcation line. Both of these sites have encountered significant obstacles and delays in their realisation. They have been specifically designed for memory, introspection, and conversation, but they both tend towards the museumification of historical traces. A question that begs further investigation is whether the aestheticised preservation of historical traces is capable of opening up the pensive silence Sadek identified in mourning rituals.

More promising in my view is the Samir Kassir Garden, designed to commemorate the assassinated journalist Samir Kassir and his intellectual legacy. The still pool and old olive trees on the small square just behind Martyrs' Square provide a tranquil place for reflection and commemoration. Kassir's quotations, engraved in the pavement across the street, express faith in the ability of Lebanese youth to shape a better future. These quotations significantly point toward the many ways in which new socialities have already been emerging through various forms of civic activism. The question remains whether that future-oriented activism, symbolically separated by the busy Weygand Street from the quiet garden, would be able to allow for a congregation that carries without impatience in the present. The modest size of the square does not allow for larger congregations, and it is located in the Central District, which is unwelcoming to the poor, but its two sides are meaningful. To symbolically bridge that road would mean a reorientation from the future to the present, and an incorporation of loss and the shared vulnerability of all into the ethical horizon of contemporary social movements – a project that has become particularly urgent at the time of writing when the Levant is reconfigured by an unprecedented number of displaced whose condition is particularly precarious.

Note

1. It is listed as such under the lemma 'martyr', subsection Islam, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/367142/martyr#toc4658>.

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