

Post-scriptum: This chapter was completed by april 2004. Dramatic changes have occurred in Lebanon during the years 2005-2007 and they have impacted directly the rebuilding of the center of the city and altered its sense of place. Rafiq Hariri, the former prime minister, was assassinated on the 14th of February 2005 and buried right next to the new mosque, along Martyrs Square, which of course had not been planned, just like the mosque itself had not been in the plans for the city center. The site soon became a place for huge rallies by pro- and anti-Syrian demonstrators coming from all over the country. In December 2006, in the context of political struggle following the war of July-August 2006 between Israel and the Hezbollah, a large part of the city center was occupied by a tent village by backers of "opposition" parties and all the activities in the area have almost been frozen. The meaning of the place thus experienced its latest radical changes among its long history of shifts in symbolic meaning over the decades. The war of the summer 2006 also deeply impacted the southern suburb of Beirut, where 30.000 housings had been destroyed. Amidst veiled critics, a new reconstruction project, mostly controlled by Hezbollah, has begun to take place. Sectarian and political lines once again split the geography of the city and urban violence is resurfacing, leading to fears of a new civil war.
(written by January 2008)