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**TERRITORIAL MARKERS AND SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION
IN BEIRUT'S VISUAL URBAN LANDSCAPE**

Professor, Mrs Liliane BUCCIANTI-BARAKAT¹

Abstract: Lebanon has 18 religious communities and a democracy that we qualify as consensual because 20 years after the end of the civil war, tensions persist.

In Lebanon as in other Arab countries, the religious affiliation is reflected in the landscape with signs: schools, places of worship ... many visual tags, resounding... which delimit the territories of faith within Beirut and the country.

Our statement shows a particular interest to the markers, the fragmentation and socio-cultural campaign of intimidation fostered by some Lebanese factions who maintain mental as well as identity borders within the population.

**Key-words: LEBANON - RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES – TERRITORIES –
MARKERS – MENTAL**

INTRODUCTION

Religion in Lebanon has traditionally overriding importance in defining the Lebanese population, dividing state power between the religious sects and granting religious authorities judicial power.

The National Pact (1943) is an unwritten agreement on which the country's independence is based. That informal agreement established the political foundation of modern Lebanon, and allocated political power on an essentially confessional system, as follows:

- President of the Republic always to be a Maronite
- The Prime Minister always to be a Sunnite
- President of the National Assembly always to be a Shi'a
- The deputy speaker of the Parliament always to be a Greek orthodox

The Ministry of Defence was entitled, before the civil war, the Druze community

In 1975, Lebanon begun a long civil war on a confessional background after which the country will be devastated and even more stigmatized by faith fractures manifested through signs thus shaping new territories in the core of the cities and Lebanese regions. Lebanon, as several states in the Middle East, is currently deeply cleared along ethnic and socio-religious lines of force.

This paper will point out all the markers, audio, visual messages and campaign of intimidation led by several factions on the national territory so elaborating developing

mental borders which maintain by representations, fears and conflicts within the various communities.

I- CIVIL WAR (1975-1990) AND ITS TERRITORIAL MARKING

The war broke out April 1975 in a popular suburb of Beirut. Maronites, Greeks Orthodox, Sunnis, Shiites, Druze and Palestinians were the civil war's main contenders, who at different times from 1975 to 1990, fought and allied with each other.

From the earliest days of the war, attitudes and political frustration pushed underprivileged young people of all faiths to occupy and plunder downtown Beirut. The capital was not just Lebanon's seat of government and of the country's economic heart; it was also the symbol of Lebanon's multi-confessional character. For better or for worse, the port-city became the nation's capital city gathering which represent almost all of Lebanon's 18 confessional groups.

Fig. 1-Martyrs square during the war

The downtown has been the stage of the most brutal fighting. It has also been the ground where the resilience of the Lebanese identity is played out. During the civil war, the Martyrs Square and Damascus Street were known as the demarcation line, a new urban border between the two sectors. Muslims left East Beirut and Christians moved out of West Beirut. Both territorial division and internal migrations led to a relative communal homogenization of each of the city sector. This new human geographical and economic divisions put a stop to coexistence in the same area and

suburbs, in the whole country between different communities. Nowadays, this mental frontier is still alive in the inhabitant's mind.

I.1- Visual markers and messages

Very quickly the protagonists have resorted to bodies identity, physical and graphics of all kinds. Territorial markers both political and religious were interpreted as a sign of affirmation community responding to a territorial need: "this land is mine".

Fig.2- Lebanese Forces cross on a wall

So, the different visual messages (bill-boards, posters, graffiti, flags...) seen in Beirut were combined to mark the boundaries of ideological territories: the way they were exposed, their number, the choice of the places... reflected the desire to communicate effectively and as quickly as possible, a message to political and ideological supporters and residents.

Only cemeteries and places of worship consecrated to God or Allah were beyond this territorial marking because the worship cannot display political messages.

II. - RETURN TO PEACE

II.1- Political issues and confessional new territories

In areas where conflicts last, the comportment change, looks are not the same anymore, tensions add up.

Following the conflict in 1990, the former warlords moved into the heart of the state. The search for the public good was transformed in defending private interests, screen of an implicit challenge that lies at the community levels.

The militia control of the former territories performs today in a legal way targeting economic development and tourism, with the exception of Hezbollah, which maintain its “secure lands”.

II.2- Media and audio-visual markers

If leaders draw on the historical, religious and political heritage and are using the strategies to consolidate their power, it is the same for the second playmaker that are religious authorities of all faiths using all the time the media and television. Some TV channels are owned by holy orders:

- al-Manar belongs to Hezbollah
- Télé-Lumière belongs to several catholic congregations

They preach the good word and the demonization of the others religious communities. They constantly mobilize their audience on topics of current politics, society, morality etc.

This confrontation of a new kind between Lebanese religious communities is also reflected in building places of worship more and more impressive in size. For example, in September 2010, Maronite church inaugurated a towering cross in a village that stands 73 meters tall.

The rehabilitation of places of worship damaged by the war, reconstructed minarets increasingly higher, and multiplies bells and powerful speakers to carry away the word of God or Allah.

Fig.3- Mir el-Amin Mosque, downtown Beirut

This new visual sounding war is transposed also to a much more fertile ground because more permeable: the youth. Besides the great Catholic establishments and Makkassed Sunni ad other Institutions we are witnessing the consolidation of Community Lebanese universities: University of Balamand is for the Greek orthodox, University of Holy Spirit of Kaslik is Maronite, Islamic university for the Shi'a and Arab university for the Sunni...

Religious leaders can, thus shape and influence the behaviours and thought patterns of the upcoming generation in each community.

Modern, subtler and far more dangerous is the “cyber propaganda”. Having become a real political phenomenon, advocates for communicators and indoctrination have quickly understood the importance of “digital” propaganda. It has invaded the screens and raging in all fronts in Cyberspace: *“Internet is a wonderful tool that gives to political movement an echo of disproportion relatively to their real size”* (DESTOUCHES G., 1999.)

What others have called the effect *“CNN of the poor”*. The *“Arab spring”* that overthrew in few weeks, powers entrenched for over thirty years (Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt) and threaten authoritarian powers as Yemen, Libyan, Syrian etc. is the illustration of the political power of social networks like Facebook, Twitter ...

The Islamists and other religions websites, or terrorist and militia networks... practice cyber propaganda that amplifies ideological messages sending them instantly all over the world. Their targets are teenagers or young unemployed people for whom the Internet is a privacy place that is beyond parental and state supervision.

Mobile's screen or electronic billboards have also become new media calling for rally, commemoration, they broadcast slogans and information's.

II.3- Clothing and behaviour

One of the symbols of the Muslim world is the veil. But rigor is not the same everywhere. In Lebanese streets, one can see the latest in western fashion and the Iranian chador, the suit "destroy" and the Islamic headscarf, body piercing, tattooing and fundamentalist modest outfits. Ditto for the TV announcers, some show plunging necklines, while others are veiled and clad in traditional Muslim tunics.

Fig.4- Fashion in Beirut

The veil has a meaning of conquest territorial marking, visible in the streets, in schools... Symbol of hardening Islam, it takes a political sense, claiming a king of aggressive identity.

Since the end of the Civil War, new attitudes have gradually imposed such to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages in Sunni cities like Sidon and Tripoli. The measure also extends recently in Christian areas: so a bakery "Pain d'or" owned by a Sunni family whom opened branches in Christian area, does not sell anymore alcoholic beverages.

A new type of territorial marking has emerged recently during the month of Ramadan, as for Christmas decorations, the Muslim parts of the cities are decorated with crescent moon, palm trees... The decorations constitute a new field of analysis both of symbols represented, as colours and languages used.

It should also be recalled that some educational institutions and stores do not close during a religious holiday of another community.

Display advertising reflects better the subdivision of the binomial Christian/Muslim. As part of a national campaign, advertising companies are forced to consider two posters for the same product in order not to incur as a shock and vandalizing signs.

The calendar of commemorative dates of events that occurred during the war to each community is still respected: it keeps alive the memory of the tragedies that have affected the majority of the civilian population.

II.4- Sport and politics

Even the sport is gradually transformed into a playground like the national or regional tensions. In general, any emerging Nation seeks to assert its sovereignty and independence and quickly creates its own sports teams.

Football is a team sport that allows a collective national cohesion and promotes a “group”. Generally, at the opening of sports events, the crowd sings the national anthems. This symbolic representation of the Nation State is increasingly subject to pressure and political turmoil. In Lebanon since 2005, following scuffles between players and audience, football games are played without spectators.

Militia maintains its religious behaviour. Even unarmed, with the exception of Hezbollah, for reasons of national resistance against Israel, the militia still have a great influence on people, in its former territories.

In reality, this territorial fragmentation has further widened the gap between the wealthier social groups that hold the key responsibilities of the country and the rest of the population. One study estimates that 28% of Lebanese families of all faiths, lives below the poverty line and the minimum wage, today does not exceed the 350 \$ a month. It is on the field of “forgotten growth” that the militia is informally active in

various sectors: launching various social projects, support to youth groups, etc. In a socio-political crisis and search of identity, these actions allow the militia to perform an ideological indoctrination and to recruit from a much more fanatical mobilized youth than before.

III. THE CULT OF MARTYRDOM

In Middle East countries, just as in the West, boast statues, monuments, memorials... these "*markers strike the imagination and allow us to individualize a place to make it unique*". (NESSI J. 1999)

Memorials are numerous in this region and are sometimes the object of true pilgrimage: Jerusalem is emblematic, place of pilgrimage for Jewish, Muslims as for Christians.

In Israel any official visitor must first be collected before the Wailing Wall where he must wear a kippa and then visit the memorial of Yad Vashem. In Lebanon, the cult of martyr was born in the current civil war in which the militias were able to use the symbolic dimension of space by manipulating symbols to control the identification process and legitimize their power.

In the Christian's ghetto, public places will be upgraded gradually symbolizing the militia and the violence of war. In West Beirut, the Muslim sector, Amal party will mark its territory by displaying the pictures of "martyr" Moussa Sadr disappeared in Libya in 1978.

Hezbollah in 1984, will use a different concept of territorial marking by putting up pictures or painted panels representing the Iranian religious leaders and sound and lights shows in the southern suburbs of Beirut... the cemeteries where the gravesites

are decorated with pictures of dead militiamen in combat who died for freedom of the motherland against Israeli occupation, Quran verses extolling martyrdom and flags decorated with Katyusha. The political affiliation of martyrs is always reported, with emblem, logo shown next to the name and rank of the deceased.

For young Shi'a, martyr falling in the service of the precepts of God thus become a supreme honour. And the goal is not a military victory but rather to have had the privilege of being a martyr.

At the time of the "Pax Syriana" (1990-2005), several statues in the likeness of Hafez al-Assad or equestrian portrait of the deceased son had been installed in many regions to remind Lebanese people that the Syrians controlled their country. These statues will be unbolted or vandalized by the Lebanese during the withdrawal of Syrian troops April 25 2005. Only the equestrian statue will be toppled by the Syrian Intelligence Services and taken back to Syria.

In the other hand, dead political leaders as Hafez al-Assad, king Hussein, Lebanese Prime minister Rafic Hariri became heroes. Their posthumous biographies praise the exemplary nature of these "great man" builders of the Nation.

Since the assassination of Rafic Hariri, 14 February 2005, the list of people killed lengthen and the "new martyrs" also have their public places now. Surprisingly, since Islam forbids and condemns all image representations of the figure: Rafic Hariri and other murdered persons were Sunnis.

A whole series of plaques, statues and gardens... have been erected at the scene of the killing, near the workplace or the Party headquarter. These spots are fast becoming places of memory from which the Lebanese people come regularly to pray.

This attitude towards death, the sacredness of the concept of martyrdom creates a barrier, a psychological border that divides and separates the various religious communities.

CONCLUSION

In Lebanon, these messages maintain the tension and the ideology of fear which *“creates a report of mistrust and potential conflict with each other; “us” and “them” have built virtual walls that draw the boundaries of our new identities and affiliations”* (RAMADAN T., 2005).

Because of its multi-confessional political construction, the Lebanese Constitution carries with it, the seed of community division. The major powers both western and Arab or regional continue to “use” Lebanon to set their differences. The national dialogue, established with great difficulty still cannot start since the Lebanese leaders are mostly corrupt.

After Taëf Agreement in 1989, the system of government, while partly intended as a compromise between sectarian demands has caused tensions that still dominate Lebanese politics to this day. Shia’s is by now the largest sect gained then additional representation in the state apparatus.

Should we despair? Certainly not since a large part of the Lebanese civilian population is fighting for values such as family, education, civil order, social relations between communities. The constant being religious coexistence in Lebanon for centuries.

Former Rector of Saint-Joseph University, Sélim Abou of Beirut wrote:

“In Lebanon Christians and Muslims share more than they think common patterns of behaviour and thought; the former are more Arabized and the Second more Westernized that they do think.”

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ⁱ Pr. Liliane BUCCIANTI-BARAKAT, Member of the IGU Urban Commission, Member of IPEMED, Member of the AEFM, Member of the Arab Tourism Association, Coordinator of the Scientific Research Commission, Delegate of the Faculty, Responsible of Tourism and Cultural Planning Section,

tel: (+961)1.421 000 ext. 5303
fax: (+961)1.421 055
E-mail: lbarakat@usj.edu.lb