Martyr's Square: The Lebanese Revolution Revitalizes Public Spaces

Figure 1: Picture of a wall next to Martyr's Square, taken by Farah Salame

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Introduction:

Martyr's Square or "Sahat el Chouhada" is the principal public space of downtown Beirut. It has witnessed many political upheavals and its shape and character changed continuously in accordance to the political evolution of the country. Since its first construction, it has always been considered the "heart" and commercial center of the city. However, after being the end point of the demarcation line between West and East Beirut during the civil war (1975-1990), and even after its reconstruction, this place lost its dynamic and vibrant aspect, becoming an empty, vacant place baptized the "Vital Void" of Beirut by the architect and urban designer Rania Sassine.[1]

After the war, public spaces in Beirut became a rarity in an increasingly fragmented urban environment. The reconstruction of the city, considered as a failure by many architects and urban designers, was undertaken by Solidere, a development firm whose CEO was also the Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. The company was given a lucrative contract to plan and redevelop the downtown but this reconstruction resulted in the privatization of previously public spaces.[2]

Since October 2019, Beirut has been experiencing an uprising in which public spaces have been crucial in enabling citizens to express their demands. Indeed, expression and manifestations of this movement have used many unoccupied public spaces all over the country, especially in the center of the capital.[3] This occupation of public spaces has been considered by the media as a "re-appropriation", or as a way of taking back what belonged to the people to make a statement against the privatization and the corruption of the government. This re-appropriation changed the relationship between the people and certain public spaces and, most importantly between the people themselves. In the early days of the protests, Martyr's Square was one of the most heavily occupied places in the country and generated many debates around concepts that seemed forgotten like the notion of collective memory, identity and the role of public spaces in a society, and especially in democracies.[4] But how has the Lebanese uprising of October 2019 influenced the perception and representation of Martyr's Square as a public space?

This paper will study the evolution of the symbolism of Martyr's Square that led to its re-appropriation during the Lebanese uprising of 2019. First, by describing its reconstruction after the Civil War, and the disappearance of public spaces in Lebanon as well as the loss of their "symbolism" and role in the city, and second, by analyzing the re-appropriation of these public spaces, and their role in the uprising.

[1]Sassine Rania, "Beirut's Heart the life of a square", *Eurozine*, February 20, 2015

[2]Abou Merhi Karim, « l'identité Beyrouthine et la Reconstruction », *Géographie et Cultures* 65 (2018)

[3]Sinno Wael, "How people reclaimed public spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising", *The Journal of Public Space* 5 (2020),

[4]*Ibid.*

Historical Context:

Figure 2: Picture of the "Place des Cannons", from Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection

Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, is a city that has existed since 2800 BC. It is situated in a very strategic location, on the Mediterranean Sea. During the fourteenth century, the Ottoman Empire occupied Beirut and used empty land on the outskirts of the city to build the Palace of Emir Fakhreddine in 1650.[5] The Square will emerge from the palace garden, which was famous at the time. However, the role of the garden changed with the emergence of the Turkish-Russian conflict (1768-1774) over the access to the Black Sea. The cannons of the Tsarina Catherine II of Russia filled the Square during the combat against the Ottoman occupation of the area.[6] In 1773, Djezzar Bacha, governor of Beirut at the time, decided to renovate the place, erecting towers around it and calling it "Place des Canons" or "Square of the Cannons". In 1882, the palace and its surroundings were destroyed and, in 1886, the site became a public garden called the Hamidiye's Square because of the addition of fountains and trees by the Ottomans. The Square then became a public space, the commercial and popular center of the city, surrounded by hotels, cafes, and hosting public shows.[7]

The twentieth century marked the beginning of tensions between the Lebanese population and the Ottoman occupation, but most importantly, between the Lebanese people themselves. Indeed, at the beginning of

[5]Tueni Ghassan, *The Burj, place of Liberty and Door of the East*, Beirut, Dar el Nahar,p120
[6]*Ibid,* p. 124.
[7]*Ibid*, p. 130.

World War I, while Beirut was still under Ottoman control, a part of the population started to revolt. The Ottoman's reaction was quick and violent and fourteen Lebanese and Syrian key figures of the national movements were hung by order of Jamal Bacha on the 6th of May, 1916. Since then, it has been considered as a symbol of public expression, liberty and revolution.[8]

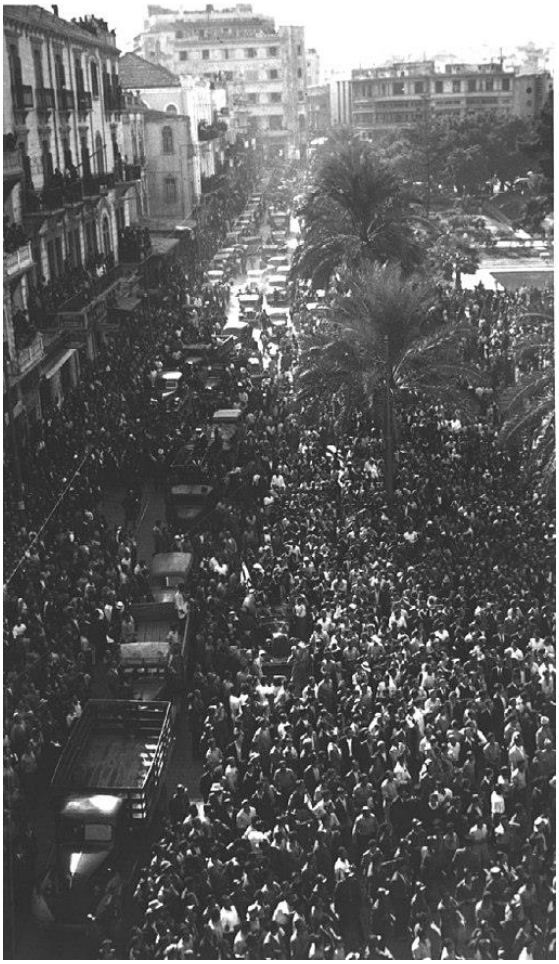

Figure 3: The day of Lebanon's independence. Adib Ibrahim, Al mashreq

At the end of WWI, with the victory of the Allies, the fallen Ottoman Empire was divided and Lebanon was placed under the French Mandate by the League of Nations. At that time the Square was modified to become part of the expansion of Beirut's harbor and Henri Gouraud, the French general responsible for the area, gave it its current name, "Martyr's Square", in commemoration of the 1916 hangings. It gained popularity among the citizens, hosting the main market. It was also a part of an urban planning initiative to sanitize and reconstruct the city. In 1930, the first central monument of Martyr's Square, "The Criers" of Lebanese sculptor Youssef Hoayek was placed in the center of the place. It represented two women, one Muslim and one Christian, joining hands over an urn that represented their martyred children ashes.[9] At the end of the French Mandate, the Martyr's Square was the symbolic location of the National Independence celebrations on the 22nd of November 1943. And, in 1960, the statue of Youssef Hoayek was replaced by the current four-meter-high Martyrs' Monument, a statue created by the Italian artist Marino Mazzacurati.[10]

The sixties also saw many projects of urban planning of Beirut and its suburbs. Newly elected President of the Lebanese Republic Fouad Chehab launched an ambitious program relying on the designs of Michel Ecochard, a French architect and urban planner. The work of Ecochard in Beirut included the project of a master plan for Beirut and its suburbs in 1963. However, his proposals faced political opposition and had to be modified.[11] In 1964, the new President Charles Helou shifted the political alliances and the government gave up many of its urban planning projects. In parallel to the development of the country, this decade witnessed many issues that dominated the regional politics in the Middle East namely the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Arab Nationalism, Pan-Arabism and political Islam which all intersected with long lasting national disagreements over sectarian division of power, social justice, national identity and Lebanon's strategic alliances.[12]

These tensions evolved in a series of events that led to a 15-year long Civil War (1975-1999) that destroyed most of Lebanon's infrastructure, especially in the city center. Among the external influences, the Syrian forces formed an alliance with the PLO, an important political force and militia formed by Palestinians who

[8]Sassine Rania, "Beirut's Heart the life of a square", *Eurozine*, February 20, 2015
[9]Boyé Hélène, "Beyrouth, l'histoire de la statue des martyrs", *Le petit Journal*, 2019
[10]*Ibid*.
[11]Verdeil Eric, "Michel Ecochard in Lebanon and Syria (1956-1968).The spread of Modernism, The Building of the Independent State and the Rise of Local Professionals of Planning", *Planning perspective*, 2012
[12]Sune Haugbolle, "The Historiography and the memory of the Lebanese Civil War", *Sciences-Po*, 2011

had taken refuge in the Lebanese territory since the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. During this conflict, Beirut was divided in two parts: East Beirut, controlled by Christian militias and West Beirut, controlled by Muslim militias.

The demarcation line between the two sides was named the "Green Line", a North-South axis that ended in Martyr's Square. The Square became, therefore, an empty space, synonymous with death and division. In March 1989 a "liberating war" was undertaken against the Syrian forces and the conflict ended with the Syrian assault of October 1990.[13] At the end of the Civil War, Lebanon still suffered from the presence of the Syrian army on its territory. During this period, Martyr's Square was mostly empty and many artists tried to use it as an exhibition space to help it regain its dynamic aspect without much success.[14]

Figure 4: Martyr's Square in the sixties, from the private collection of Nancy Wong

On the 5th of May 1994, Solidere was created and began the reconstruction of the city, and, in 2004, an international contest for the design and reconstruction of Martyr's Square was launched. However, this reconstruction resulted in the disappearance of public spaces and created much public debate between Lebanese intellectuals, especially over the question of the very use of the term "public space" and the notions of identity and collective memory.[15]

[13]George Lucien, « Quinzes années de guerre civile », *Historia*, hors-série numéro 7, 2016-2017

[14]Sassine Rania, *op. cit.*

[15]Abou Merhi Karim, « l'identité Beyrouthine et la Reconstruction », *Géographie et Cultures* 65 (2018)

Post-war reconstruction:

The destruction and the damage to the infrastructure and to the built environment is a direct result of the war, which destroyed both the physical and the social fabric of the population. The work on rebuilding the physical environment is fundamental for post-conflict reconstruction of the society and its reconciliation.[16] For countries that lack effective administrative and governmental institutions, programs of external intervention, often determined by political agendas, intervene in the reconstruction process. Those programs often apply standardized approaches while rebuilding the damaged area without taking into consideration the local needs and traditions.[17] It was the case of Lebanon: lacking governmental stability at the end of the Civil War, the reconstruction of the country was undertaken by Solidere whose objectives depended on its CEO's political and private goals, regardless of the needs of the population.

Figure 5: Destroyed Martyr's Square during the Civil War, archives of the Habeeb.com website

According to Sultan Barakat in his book "*After the conflict*": *the* priority of a sustainable rehabilitation lies in the reconstruction of social structures and livelihoods. The main focus of successful restoration strategies is the initiative and involvement of the people themselves, avoiding dependency on institutionalized provision, leading to wider social and cultural benefits.[18] During the Civil War, Martyr's Square was heavily damaged and lost its function as a place of meeting and discussion. During the reconstruction, Solidere ignored the public opinion and post-conflict needs in order to attain higher profit and create a new image of the country's capital. The reconstruction of the Square, therefore resulted in an empty, privatized void in the middle of the city.[19]

[16]Barakat Sultan, *After the Conflict: Reconstruction and development in the aftermath of war* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2010) p156-159
[17]*Ibid,* p156-159
[18]*Ibid,* p164
[19]Abou Merhi Karim, « l'identité Beyrouthine et la Reconstruction », *Géographie et Cultures* 65 (2018)

Public spaces:

In political philosophy, the "public sphere" is considered a place of political debate and democratic practice, becoming one of the main means of communication. It is an abstract political space produced by exchanges between citizens concerned with public affairs.[20] In a city, public spaces are conceived for public use, being accessible, attractive and contribute positively in the definition of economic, social and cultural functions. They build a sense of community and civic identity. Moreover, the public sphere has a crucial role in the definition of an overall social fabric of cities and is often the center of civic uprisings, serving both as a symbolic purpose and a tactical one.[21]

In Lebanon, public spaces are a rarity.[22] Their absence or the lack of use of the reconstructed and present public spaces is due to the absence of any kind of public reconciliation or unity that should have resulted from the reconstruction. Indeed, according to the poet Abbas Beydoun "the war atomized society, dispersed it. People seek refuge in the family, in the community. There is no longer a state as an intermediary between the communities. There is no civil society".[23] This absence of civil society results in the abandonment of public spaces, supposed to be the places for civic practices and activities. Indeed, without any desire of reconciliation, any place of convergence loses its role as a representation of a united community.

Solidere and the rehabilitation after the Civil War:

When the reconstruction of Beirut started after the Civil War, two main positions where taken. First, the position of intellectuals who wanted to keep the traces of the war, integrate them into the reconstruction and rebuild according to the city's needs. And second, the position of Solidere that followed the logic of the "tabula rasa", destroying an important part of the downtown, including Martyr's Square, and building a luxurious center, transforming Beirut into a global city in order to be prepared to the hypothetical return of wealthy expatriates and tourists from the Gulf countries.[24]

This type of reconstruction resulted in a widely spread phenomena: the privatization of public spaces. The ownership of public spaces by the private sector transformed them into places centered on the production of a consumption-based environment rather than a place of free expression and meeting between people.[25] Indeed, when a public space is privatized, private interests overrule the collective interests of people, limiting their freedom of expression. In this way, the economic aspect is prioritized, marginalizing the part of the population with a low purchasing power (youth, elderly, working-class…).[26]

This phenomena is present in Lebanon, especially since the reconstruction of the downtown by Solidere. Indeed, proprieties in the Central District area were expropriated by the company as it privatized the whole area in order to fulfill this urban project reserved for an elite. Military checkpoints were installed all over the area, and "gated communities" were created.[27] Indeed, the company, used procedures in derogation of the law, obtaining the ownership of a part of the expropriated land in order to evade property taxes. In the context of post-war demographic increase, the sale of these properties promised to be very profitable for the former Prime Minister. According to Jean-Pierre Frey, this project based on the promising land speculation ignored many official laws in order to allow questionable transactions and self-interested

[20]Schmidt, Stephan and Németh, Jeremy(2010) 'Space, Place and the City: Emerging Research on Public Space Design and Planning', Journal of Urban Design, 15: 4, 453 — 457

[21]Sinno Wael, "How people reclaimed public spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising", *The Journal of Public Space* 5 (2020),

[22]Cauter Lieven, "Towards a phenomenology of Civil War: Hobbes meets Benjamin in Beirut", *International Journal of Urban and regional Research* 35.2 (2011)

[23] *Ibid.*

[24]Abou Merhi Karim, « l'identité Beyrouthine et la Reconstruction », *Géographie et Cultures* 65 (2018)

[25] Laborey Claire, "Mainmise sur la ville", France : Arte France Distribution, 2015

[26] Bradley L Garrett, "The privatization of cities' public space is escalating. It is time to take a stand", *The Guardian,* 2016

[27]Abou Merhi Karim, *op. cit.*

expropriations. This reflects a significant transformation in the status of urban planning in Lebanon.[28] In this perspective, many movements tried to resist Solidere's power and actions, like the "Stop Solidere" campaign, which seeks the return of Beirut's center to its original landowners by confronting the company through legal procedures and public debate.[29]
The multicultural city center, with its Jewish neighborhood and old churches, disappeared and was replaced by Prime Minister Hariri's image of a "new Lebanese identity", oriented towards luxury and wealth.[30] Only the neighborhood built during the French Mandate and the Ottoman archeological sites were saved by the intervention of the two French architects Louis Sato and Jean-Paul Lebas who modified the initial plan, saving over 200 buildings of historical value.[31] This partial preservation would lead one to believe that Solidere tried to offer a certain identity to the city while limiting the possible existence of sites for collective memory.[32] This was achieved by determining what architectural heritage was kept, the company chose to keep reminders of a certain past while erasing others. Identification to a past that seems to no longer exist is, therefore, impossible. This reconstruction also resulted in the fragmentation of public spaces in Beirut's Central District.

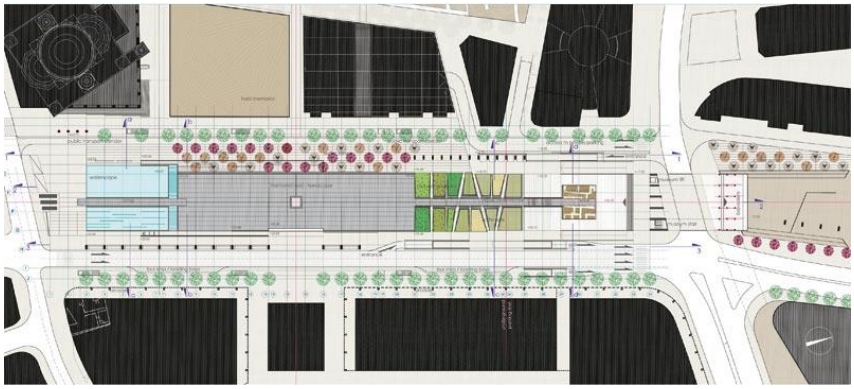

Figure 6: Plan of Martyr's Square, from Solidere's archives

Martyr's Square post-reconstruction, between memory, identity and presence of absence:

Since the end of Civil War, the symbolism of Martyr's Square changed, developing a new relation to the collective memory, the shared memories of a certain social group that is associated with the notion of identity.[33] A post-war country is usually torn between a desire to forget the events that led to the destruction and a desire to remember them in order not to repeat history.[34] Indeed, reconstruction can create a new place for stimulating collective memory and the reassertion of identity through architecture. It is possible by the integration of the rebuilt monuments into the daily lives of the people, filling the gap between the past events and the present situation. But the impetus to create an aesthetic unity and historical continuity can evolve into the eradication of collective memory.[35] The integration of damage into

[28] Verdeil Éric. Reconstructions manquées à Beyrouth : La poursuite de la guerre par le projet urbain. In: Les Annales de la recherche urbaine, N°91, 2001. Villes et guerres. pp. 65-73
[29] *Ibid*, pp.65-73
[30] Abou Merhi Karim, « l'identité Beyrouthine et la Reconstruction », *Géographie et Cultures* 65 (2018)
[31] *Ibid*
[32] *Ibid*
[33] Cauter Lieven, "Towards a phenomenology of Civil War: Hobbes meets Benjamin in Beirut", *International Journal of Urban and regional Research* 35.2 (2011).
[34] Bevan Robert, *The Destruction of Memory*, Reaktion Books, 2016, p228-229
[35] *Ibid*, p 241-242

the city's collective identity is a central criterion of mourning, allowing the community to remember the past instead of threatening a part of the people's collective memory.[36]
In Beirut, after the reconstruction, any trace of the Square's role as a demarcation line had disappeared.[37] This disappearance resulted in a form of collective amnesia, due to the absence of places for remembrance.[38] This amnesia was reinforced by the circulation of pictures of "Old Martyr's Square" that represent a nostalgia for a certain image of the past and an attempt to ignore the damage and repercussions of the war. By representing certain events of history, the Square could have helped address the memory of the war and make peace with it. But, instead of symbolizing the Civil War and becoming a place of commemoration by showing its previous role as a demarcation line, it became a place where the remembering of previous events was impossible because of the absence of any traces. The complete eradication of the past suggests that the events of 1975 resulted in a rupture, which split the symbolic resonance of the Square as a place of national significance.[39] Although the Square was unable to act as a memorial site for the martyrs of 1916 after the Civil War, the culture of martyrdom wasn't altered, it was relocated outside of the city. This process is a sign of the fragmentation of the Lebanese society that results in the impossibility of having a single national site of memory.[40]
It was not until 2005, with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, an influential post-war figure, that the Square played its civic role after the reconstruction. Since then, there have been several protests that attempted to reclaim the square as a symbol of revolution and national unity.[41] Among them, the 2006 Mu'arada led by Hezbollah's partisans challenged the viability of the Lebanese government and the legitimacy of Solidere through the blockage of Beirut's downtown and its square. This protest was the crystallization of the underlying Saudi-Iranian conflict as Iran-backed Hezbollah challenged the hegemony of Riyadh's ally Hariri.[42]

17th October 2019, the beginning of the uprising:

On the 17th of October 2019, after the government's announcement of a new tax plan, around a third of the Lebanese population filled the streets in protest, accusing the political elite of corruption, theft and driving the country's economy to the brink. Among their demands, protesters asked for better living conditions, full citizenship rights and the abolition of the sectarian system, implemented during the French Mandate, which dictates that the highest offices are proportionately reserved for representatives from certain religious communities.[43] In many ways, this uprising is different from other protests since the end of the Civil War: it was decentralized and wasn't orchestrated by political parties.[44] Young people have been the main actors of these protests. Usually underrepresented or marginalized, they are using this movement as an opportunity to express themselves.[45] Moreover, social media was the principal tool of organization for the protests, they

[36]Bevan Robert, *The Destruction of Memory*, Reaktion Books, 2016, p247-248
[37]Dados Nour, "Revisiting Martyrs' Square … again: Absence and presence in cultural memory", in *Moment to monument*, ed Ladina Bezzola Lambert, Andrea Ochsner
[38]*Ibid.*

[39]Hadjothomas Joanna, Two suns in a sunset, *Jeu de Paume*,2016
[40]Welch, *op. cit.*
[41]*Ibid*.

[42] Frederic Wehrey, Theodore W. Karasik, Alireza Nader, Jeremy Ghez, Lydia Hansell and Robert A. Guffe, *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam,* RAND Corporation, 2010, p77-80

[43]Sleiman Andre, "A moment for change: The Lebanese Uprisings of 2019*", Democracy Reporting International, (2019)*

[44]Zakharia Nai, "A View of the Revolution in Lebanon from Martyr's Square". *The New Yorker*, (2020)
[45]*Ibid.*

have shown their effectiveness in coordination of actions and communicating a message, allowing civilians to warn protesters against potential attacks by members of political parties.[46]

Reclaiming public space, between expression and revolution:

Public spaces have not only been a spatial background for the events of the revolution, but they have constituted a main component in its production and evolution. Protesters reclaimed privatized public spaces and "reshaped" them in order to serve the revolution, creating civic spaces in order to assume their rights and used them as a platform for expression, protestation and discussion about citizen concerns. These spaces evolved from empty squares and parks to a public sphere that provoked debates and formation of political opinions.[47]

Figure 7: Protesters on the stairs of the Mohammad Al-Amin mosque, taken by Farah Salame

This phenomena is not proper to the Lebanese uprising, it has also been observed during the Arab Revolution of 2011. Public spaces which had not functioned as such for almost fifty years with the implementation of military regimes played a primordial role in the civil protests.[48] Indeed, before losing its role as a place of public debate, the mosque was the oldest form of public space in Islamic cities where the male, adult population exercised their political rights, especially on Fridays.[49] Its previous function was recovered during the Arab revolution and it became a place of meeting, protest and discussion. This revolutionary episode created a dialog that may result in a new order where public spaces regained their civil roles through the actions of protesters, allowing the expression of people's civil rights.[50] It is also the

[46]Zakharia Nai, "A View of the Revolution in Lebanon from Martyr's Square". *The New Yorker*, (2020)
[47]*Ibid.*
[48]Rabbat Nasser, "The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space", *Research Gate*, January 2012
[49]*Ibid.*
[50]*Ibid.*

case of the Mohammad el-Amin mosque, located on the border of the Square, which was filled with protestors, giving it back its old function.

In Lebanon, the reclaiming of public spaces since October 2019 has taken many forms and shapes: physical, intellectual, symbolic, artistic, etc. Indeed, the uprising changed the image of Beirut's downtown and the reclamation of this urban landscape that used to represent political divisions and political tensions allowed people's convergence, civic practice and the formation of public opinion.[51]

Figures 8 &9: Protesters in the "Grand Thêatre" of Beirut, taken by Farah Salame

Physical reclaiming of public spaces:

The physical re-appropriation of public spaces, especially Martyr's Square, took many forms.[52] As a means of marking their territory, many people brought their own furniture and created facilities to give life to the otherwise empty space, street food was available at affordable prices, local businesses installed small stands etc. The Square changed into a "spatial configuration that evolved through collective actions that were not planned" affirmed Hussam Hussein Salama. Martyr's Square revived through those spontaneous patterns of interaction between people, creating a new collective experience and memory of the place.[53]

[51]Zakharia Nai, "A View of the Revolution in Lebanon from Martyr's Square". *The New Yorker*, (2020)
[52]*Ibid.*
[53]*Ibid.*

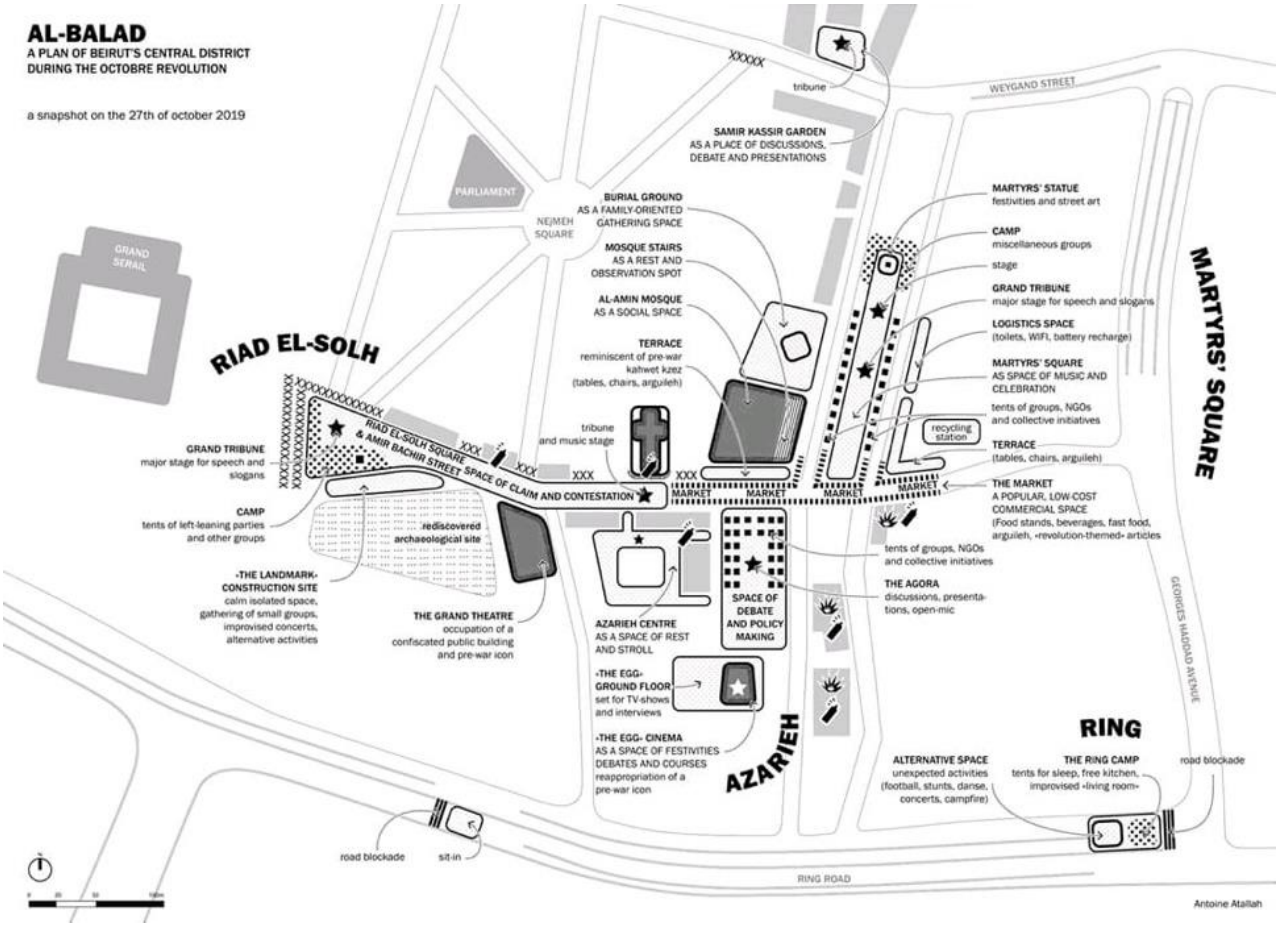

Figure 10: Map of Al Balad, Provided and created by Antoine Atallah

Some protestors only attended specific events while others decided to camp in the square every night as a sign of protest. Tents were installed at the foot of the famous statue and what was just a series of individual tents evolved to become an organized camp: each person contributing to the newly created community by cooking, cleaning, managing electrical devices or taking turns protecting the camp.[54] This re-appropriation did what the post-conflict reconstruction failed to do, initiating the reconciliation of people from different backgrounds and reactivating the square's role as a place of unity, creating a sense of community and civic responsibility.

The physical re-appropriation was also a primordial way for minorities to express themselves and for various organizations to defend their causes. Indeed, small groups, NGO's and organizations also installed tents all over the square, providing specific services: tents for various events, first aid and medical facilities, legal assistance, sheltered gatherings, debates, cooking or distributing food. This installation helped restore the roles of many unions and organizations, allowing them to defend the rights of various groups and animating discussions.[55] Moreover, this reclamation of public space also created a sense of civic duty: many associations were created in order to keep the space clean and safe. This movement demonstrated the collective power of the people to deliver the services and actions that the government failed to provide.[56] This set-up of tents offered an alternative to the elitist image of Beirut's downtown.[57] Through these

[54]Zakharia Nai, "A View of the Revolution in Lebanon from Martyr's Square", *The New Yorker*, (2020)
[55]Bou Aoun Cynthia, "Reclaiming Public Space and its role in producing the revolution", *Legal Agenda* (2020)
[56]Sinno Wael, "How people reclaimed public spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising", *The Journal of Public Space* 5 (2020)
[57]Welch, *op. cit.*

manifestations and re-appropriations, the Square regained its role as a public space, allowing interaction between people while providing them with a sense of community and unity.
This physical reclamation spiked the interest of the media and the people that weren't participating in the protest. Indeed, many pictures of this physical reclamation circulated on social media with the hashtag #ReclaimYourPublicSpace.
The circulation of these images changed the way the Square was represented and perceived by the Lebanese people. Indeed, just like the circulation of pictures of Martyr's Square before the war seemed to erase the memory of the events of 1975, the circulation of these pictures on social media returned the image of the Square as a place of the people, a Square of Revolution.[58]

Intellectual and artistic re-appropriation:

The intellectual re-appropriation was made through discussion circles and public educational sessions that took place in Martyr's Square. These discussion groups helped clarify people's demands, and started many debates over important communal issues, which formed "an educated public opinion that can affect accountability."[59] Indeed, by communicating their ideas and discussing their current situation in groups, some people lacking information could acquire knowledge of their rights as citizens and on the role and duties of a democratic government, raising awareness on the Lebanese constitution and the constitutional and legal frameworks for realizing their goals of reform.
Some places around Martyr's Square were also the stage of socio-political debates, allowing people to discuss political, economic and civic matters and share their opinion. For instance, Samir Kassir garden "shifted from a meditative space to an intellectual one, reminding people of the importance of their participation in the design process of a public space where the users could decide and readapt the main function and the shape of the place".[60] Lecture halls were brought into the streets, offering open classes on public grounds for free. One interesting case of architectural regeneration is the Egg, an architectural landmark that had been abandoned for years it was turned into a vibrant community center, hosting a series of classes and conferences under the name of "Eggupation".[61] This form of re-appropriation helped educate a part of the population on their civic rights and restituted the role of Martyr's Square as an educational and intellectual center, an active public space that allows open debates, freedom of speech and the consolidation of democracy.
This intellectual re-appropriation was made in parallel with an artistic re-appropriation. Indeed, the walls and the floors of "The Egg" were covered by graffiti and artwork from young Lebanese artists. Many artists emerged during this period due to their work on the walls of Beirut's Downtown and marginalized groups were given the chance to express themselves.[62] By reclaiming the public spaces through art, they are becoming confident individuals contributing to the historical and cultural discourse of the country. Arts, culture and dialogue helped connect the excluded groups to the remaining constituents of society by giving them an equal voice, and helping them reclaim spaces that had been limited to a social elite.[63]

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[58]Bou Aoun Cynthia, "Reclaiming Public Space and its role in producing the revolution", *Legal Agenda* (2020)
[59]*Ibid.*
[60]*Ibid*.
[61]Sinno Wael, "How people reclaimed public spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising", *The Journal of Public Space* 5 (2020)
[62]Naamani Assel, "Lebanese youth are reclaiming public spaces with arts and dialogue", *International alert*, (2019), accessed March 8, 2020
[63]*Ibid.*

Figure 11: Open Class in "The Egg", taken by Farah Salame

Conclusion:

Before the uprising of October 2019, Beirut's downtown used to reflect the capitalist economy and Solidere's attempt to manipulate the public sphere in order to transform it into an artificial consumer area and impose former Prime Minister Hariri's vision of the Lebanese identity. However, the uprising changed this image and revived the public sphere's role, giving it a new meaning in the collective memory of the Lebanese people. Through this re-appropriation, the protesters highlighted their rights and need for inclusive public spaces and showed their potential to transform the privatized places into public ones that facilitate convergence, promote citizenship and form public opinion.[64]
Public spaces provided a forum for open discussion, making protest visible and exercising basics rights of citizenship.[65] Public spaces are now open to people of all ages, gender, or social group.[66] However, the future dynamics of public spaces during the "post-uprising" phase is still uncertain. Will it be possible to sustain them as vital places?

[64]Sinno Wael, "How people reclaimed public spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising", *The Journal of Public Space* 5 (2020)
[65]Bou Aoun Cynthia, "Reclaiming Public Space and its role in producing the revolution", *Legal Agenda* (2020)
[66]Welch, *op. cit.*

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