

The millennial Medina: Discourses of time, space and authenticity in projects to market and renovate Beirut and Nazareth

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ABSTRACT

The article compares the inception, execution, reception and results of two renovation projects and city marketing campaigns: "Beirut Horizons 2000" and "Nazareth 2000." Analysis reveals parallel sociopolitical processes despite the two projects' different nation-state contexts and recent political histories. Comparisons highlight research questions about the diminished role and constricted capacities of citizens, cities and city systems in the contemporary Middle East. Both projects raised questions about the locus and deployment of power, the ownership of memory and the changing constellations of rights and obligations in rapidly transforming settings during a transitional period.

Introduction

Often, in an effort to create a certain appearance or image, [renovation] projects obliterate spaces where, in the past, a variety of groups and classes crossed each other's paths and interacted. Pristine new tourist- and consumer-friendly zones might well mask a precipitous decline in social solidarity (Schneider and Susser, 2003:4).

Heritage has become today a refuge where we search for our identity. Heritage is a mirror in which we attempt to discover the features of an identity we feel we have lost. But if heritage is a mirror, what images does this mirror reflect? Do we see our real image or the image we would like to see? Is heritage a mirror reflecting our real identity, or does it reflect our dormant desires? (Thabet, 1999:3).

Strength does not come from concentration, purity and unity, but from dissemination, heterogeneity and the careful plaiting of weak ties (Latour, 1998:2).

In the early 1990s, influenced by dramatic global political and economic transformations and their accompanying regional and local repercussions, new amalgamations of governmental, non-governmental and private actors and organizations launched ambitious and multifaceted renovation plans for Nazareth, the largest all-Palestinian city in the state of Israel and the third holiest site in Christendom; and for Beirut, the war-ravaged and divided Lebanese capital and a former *entrepôt* linking the Persian Gulf states with the West. Although the two projects were set in very different political and administrative contexts, not at all comparable in terms of scale and costs, and had nothing to do with each other, both relied on similar strategies and rhetoric, and each gave rise to similar unintended political consequences: totalizing discourses, polarized identities, growing class disparities, and heightened conflicts that problematized the temporal, sociopolitical and cultural definitions of each city. Identity and heritage went up for sale.

Both millennial projects revealed fault lines between the city as a narrative for external (mostly tourist and venture capital) consumption and the city as a cacophony and mélange of local contested intersubjective meanings and collective memory. In Nazareth, the fault lines appeared in the form of a struggle between a fading local communist municipality and a rising Islamist movement, and the positioning of each within the Jewish state. In Beirut, the site of a 16-year vicious war, the situation was more complex, as Nagel notes:

[T]he reconstruction process ... represented not only rehabilitation of physical infrastructure, but, equally, an attempt to reinterpret Lebanon's tumultuous past.... The city, in this respect, is a text in an ongoing discourse about the shape and meaning of Lebanese nationhood and identity. And like many texts, the built environment is significant not only for what it says, but for what it neglects to say about the past and the present (2000:213-214).

As this article will demonstrate, the blurring of boundaries between the public and private, the governmental and the corporate, the local and the transnational, and the historical and the mythic, characterized the renovation of both Beirut and Nazareth. Each project's funding required the expansion of pools of stakeholders to include institutions and individuals far removed from the local context, while simultaneously excluding and marginalizing key segments of their respective local communities along socioeconomic more so than religious or geographic criteria as new profiles of each city were marketed for outside consumption.

1 This study is based upon field research in Nazareth from December 1991 until June 1993, five years of residence (1993-1998) in Beirut, Lebanon; a one-month research trip to Nazareth in August, 2002; and archival research and interviews by telephone and e-mail with individuals in Nazareth and Beirut. I thank the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research program for funding the initial research and architects and urban planners in Nazareth and Beirut for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Although these projects were centered on ostensibly public spaces—Beirut’s war-devastated Central Business District (see Figure 1) and Nazareth’s neglected old city center, Christian holy sites and adjacent streets and squares—private and/or external interests usually took precedence over municipal governments, local social welfare concerns and popular collective memories of lived spaces. As a result, both projects posed troubling questions about identities, accountability, jurisdictions, political representation and, most significantly, notions of ownership, literal as well as metaphoric (Fenster and Yacobi, 2005).



Figure 1. Beirut Central Business District, 1994: “World’s Largest Reconstruction Site.” (Solidere brochure, <http://al-mashriq.net/>, 2005).

Both projects illuminated some negative aspects of urban unification in transitional situations. Although many discussions of unification implicitly convey a valorization of the knitting together of divided or ruptured urban fabrics (seen most notably in discussions of Berlin in the post-Communist era), unification has other faces and dimensions. Both Nazareth and Beirut illuminate some troubling unintended aspects of unification: the potential to silence, disenfranchise and alienate those who previously saw themselves as belonging to particular places and spaces. Unifying—or, to be more specific, totalizing—discourses invoked divisions expressed not only in physical and spatial barriers, but also in changing social structures and altered cognitive maps of each city. Marketing campaigns to launch both “millennial Medinas” created new forms of socioeconomic differentiation through processes of subsumption rather than centralization, in the sense described by Hannerz: “the city is the maximal expression of the human capacity for interdependence” (1980:95).

In both cities, new forms of dependence and inequality, rather than relational interdependence, were the predominant outcome of urban renovation projects. Yet, pluralistic popular efforts emerged from the interstices of these metamorphosing Medinas to resist and transcend official renovation discourses. In the case of Beirut, these developments gave rise to televised spectacles of alternative conceptions of the downtown area’s public spaces, conceptions and symbols which, in a globalized world,

were rapidly deterritorialized and utilized by actors far from central Beirut. Nazareth's emergent discourses, also led by young people, were less photogenic and sensational, and remained hidden to those outside its crowded neighborhoods.

Comparing the inception, execution, reception and results of these two renovation projects reveals parallel sociopolitical processes despite their very different nation-state contexts and political histories. Comparisons can highlight fruitful research questions about the diminished role and constricted capacities of citizens, cities and city systems in the contemporary Middle East (Bishara, 1999; Sawaalha, 2003; UNDP, 2004; Zreik, 1999), as well as the truncation of Middle Eastern urban networks since the establishment of nation-states in the early to mid-twentieth century (Stanley, 2003). "Nazareth 2000" and "Beirut Horizons 2000" posed questions about the locus and deployment of power and the changing nature of rights and obligations in urban settings in a transitional period.

Ironically, just as EU and US funding agencies and private foundations were promoting civil society training programs, the actual practices and possibilities of citizenship in Nazareth and Beirut were increasingly attenuated and constricted by new globalized economic configurations and the decision to privatize and market much-needed urban renovation. The consequent representation, packaging and commodification of both cities entailed the adoption of shallow marketing discourses that attempted to define, and thus to underestimate, the potentialities and heterotopias of both locations.

Ostensibly, the two sites are widely different: Beirut (population: 1.3 million) is the cosmopolitan capital and major port of an Arab country, whereas Nazareth (population: 70,000) is a "trapped community" (Rabinowitz and Monterescu, Forthcoming) and the center of a land-locked conurbation of Palestinian communities uncomfortably situated within the Jewish state comprised of an Arab market/shrine town, a Jewish development town (Natzrat Illit) and several surrounding Arab villages which were formerly Nazareth's economic hinterland. Moreover, administrative, commercial, cultural and kinship connections between Beirut and Nazareth ceased to exist in 1948. Nonetheless, comparing and contrasting these two renovation projects reveals that both cities witnessed the sidelining of municipal governance, the silencing of local voices, increasing inegalitarianism and the growing role of a transnational economic elite. All of these developments exacerbated residents' feeling of being displaced without even having to move, i.e., popular alienation and disempowerment, or what a friend in Nazareth called "being in exile at home." Furthermore, and perhaps just coincidentally, both projects began in earnest in 1994, and both suffered setbacks from which they did not recover in 1996.²

2 I.e., the first Israeli aerial assaults on Beirut in fourteen years (Operation: Grapes of Wrath), the climax of which was the Israeli Defense Force's shelling of a UNIFIL base in south Lebanon that killed over

The reconfiguration and commodification of space in each city deformed and disturbed conceptions of place, time, identity and belonging. Thus, although each project promised to deliver economic prosperity and sociopolitical reconciliation in order to offset the negative impact of a long history of systematic discrimination and urban degradation in Nazareth and the utter devastation and social fragmentation of war in Beirut, the outcome of both projects were corruption scandals, intercommunal violence broadcast on CNN, a decrease in tourism revenues, dwindling investments in commercial ventures and the disappearance of recognizable city centers accessible to all. The marketing of each city's reconstruction projects threatened to deconstruct the public realm (Arendt, 1959).

Everything old is new again

Until the late 1960s, the concept of architectural heritage in the world remained confined to a small circle that focused on ancient ruins and historic buildings. Yet, the last few years have witnessed an increase in the field of theoretical studies of the subject in three areas: expanding the field of architectural heritage, connecting that heritage with the surrounding culture, and removing time boundaries ... It is important to note that when the initial attempts of modernizing Arab cities at the hands of the Ottomans began in all parts of the empire ... the issue of heritage was not raised as an obstacle to the attempts of architectural modernity. The only texts that discussed a threat to Arab architectural heritage by modernization were written by Orientalists influenced by European romanticists yearning for an exotic culture that had not been subjected to the shocks of the Industrial Revolution.... Thus, our view of our architectural historical heritage is, to a large extent, the product of the West (Thabet, 1999).

While focusing a spotlight on heritage—actual or imagined, the two urban renewal projects simultaneously capitalized on notions of fresh beginnings and dramatic changes after the fall of the USSR. “Nazareth 2000” and “Beirut Horizons 2000” coincided

100 men, women and children; and the election of Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu in Israel in 1996, a direct consequence of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the disastrous Grapes of Wrath operation in Lebanon, launched by Shimon Peres in a bid to show his toughness against terror. Because of the killings of so many Lebanese civilians in that campaign, Palestinian citizens of Israel withheld their votes for the Prime Minister, allowing Netanyahu to defeat Peres by less than one percentage point. As a result of the events of 1996, investor confidence in Beirut's reconstruction and resurrected regional economic role decreased dramatically, while Nazareth lost its Development Zone “B” status as well as strong state support for the “Nazareth 2000” project once the Labor government was defeated in 1996.

with the Oslo peace process, the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean partnership and the acceleration of “globalization” processes (evidenced by the consolidation of neo-liberal ideology and policies, increased volatility in capital markets, world-wide consumer culture and the emergence of the United States as the world’s sole military and economic superpower). Some in Nazareth and Beirut disparaged this new era as “the age of the death of big ideologies,” i.e., a difficult period that witnessed the sudden demise of socialism, communism and Arab nationalism and the concomitant fragmentation of familiar political solidarities. This era also altered popular conceptions of space, time, belonging and identity in many cities of the Middle East (Al-Khafaji, 2004; Bishara, 1999).

At the national level, both renovation projects demonstrated that key economic decisions could be taken neither in Nazareth nor in Beirut, but rather were decreed in Tel Aviv and Damascus, respectively. While marketing stressed their autonomous existence as sites of growth, progress and change, both cities were in fact very dependent on people and institutions in other, more powerful, cities. Although funding, energies and expertise were focused on the infrastructures of Nazareth and Beirut, superstructures of authority and influence lay elsewhere.

Last, but not least, nearly a decade after their inception, both “Nazareth 2000” and “Beirut Horizons 2000” had fallen far short of meeting their initial economic and sociopolitical objectives. Indeed, by the year 2000, both projects had failed to reconstruct Nazareth and Beirut as attractive, prosperous, peaceful and “modern” cities, let alone as convincing showcases of “traditional culture.” Instead, at the millennial turn, both cities had become surreal theme parks catering to narrow interests. Contrary to stated aims of urban renovation, unification and rebirth, “Nazareth 2000” and “Beirut Horizons 2000” rendered each city parasitical rather than productive, dependent rather than autonomous, and riven with conflicts, rather than sites of intercommunal harmony and integration.

It’s all about branding: Cities as symbols; cities as cash cows

In a rapidly changing global situation, cities and city systems cannot afford to be passive in the face of changes; they must be proactive in their own interests (Stanley, 2003:7).

In a globalized world, every place must compete with every other place for its share of the world’s wealth, talent and attention. Just like a famous company, a famous city finds it much easier to sell its products and services at a profit, recruit the best people, attract visitors, investment and events, move in the right circles, and play a prominent and useful part in world affairs. It is all too easy to become famous for the wrong reasons (Place Branding, 2005).

“Nazareth 2000” and “Beirut Horizons 2000” were first and foremost city branding campaigns to sway perceptions of and attract international capital to damaged or

neglected urban settings with significant image problems. Both campaigns attempted to overcome or obscure serious present-day deficiencies and defects by narrowly focusing on the imagined glories of “ancient” pasts and the economic promise of hoped-for tomorrows. In both cases, the present was absent. The present, which is the temporal setting of any experience of urban settings in which situated social interaction, relationality and conflicts take place, was banished by both branding campaigns.

The millennial and futuristic connotations of the year 2000 fostered perceptions of transformative and decisive breaks with troubled histories. A new era was surely at hand. Thus, both “2000” projects made bids for new identities and positions in the emerging “New World Order” of the post-Cold War era.

Imaginative modelings of a rebuilt Beirut and a renovated Nazareth (see Figure 2) were compellingly represented through visual media in the form of web sites, colorful newspaper supplements, glossy publications, public events, the opening of American pizza chains and Beirut’s Hard Rock Café, as well as through the dissemination of T-shirts, coffee mugs, posters and music videos, not to mention displays of exquisite maquettes and huge billboards illustrating stunning changes to urban landscapes. All of these visual expressions of “the future” communicated desires to reposition both cities on the global stage as attractive venues for investment in commerce, construction and tourism.



Figure 2. Marketing Nazareth to potential investors (“Nazareth 2000” web site, <http://www.nazareth.muni.il/html/museum.html>, 1996).

Both renovation projects strove to restructure images as much as to repair infrastructure. Shoring up the symbolic capital of each city was a prerequisite to augmenting its physical and economic capital. In the rapidly globalizing world, if one did not have an appealing identity, one could buy or manufacture and market it abroad. Selling it at home was not as easy.

As city branding campaigns, both “millennial” projects requiring considerable financing and expertise from a variety of sources, few of them indigenous or conversant with local textures of daily life or the details of communal histories. “Nazareth 2000” and “Beirut Horizons 2000” employed symbols and discourses of progress, harmony and modernization while also laying claim to notions of the “traditional Middle Eastern city” complete with the exotic sights, sounds and scents of colorful and lively Arab *souqs*, warm Arab hospitality and the enjoyment of delicious traditional cuisine and building styles (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Early twentieth-century postcard of a market scene in Beirut's famous, and now destroyed, souq (<http://al-mashriq.net/>, 2005).

The projects touted Beirut and Nazareth to Western consumers and investors by appealing to Western notions of historic depth, ancient monuments, cultural authenticity and biblical imagery. Beirut's “Horizons 2000” slogan, *Beirut: al-madinat al-'areeqa lil-mustaqbal* (Beirut: The Ancient City of the Future), summed up the sweeping and totalizing nature of both projects' temporal and spatial claims, as well as the tendencies of marketing discourses to occlude and dismiss alternative histories and divergent memories, meanings and interests claimed by people who actually inhabited each city. As the poet and artist Etel Adnan lamented at the end of the Lebanese war, “our memories have no future.”

Both projects soon evolved from marketing campaigns into sales and investment ventures, and then into (re)construction projects. The two schemes, now amalgamations of local and national government offices, businessmen, and private corporations and transnational capital, sold shares of Beirut's and Nazareth's future development to potential investors around the world, promising profits to local and foreign entrepreneurs. They utilized quasi-public and quasi-private mechanisms to advance costly renovation goals: the Solidere real estate company in Beirut, a private enterprise in which the country's billionaire prime minister, the late Rafiq Hariri, owned controlling shares; and the Israeli Tourism Corporation, a state-owned company that viewed Nazareth's tourist potential in the millennial year as a timely substitution for lost tourism revenues from Bethlehem, which was slated to be turned over to the Palestinian Authority's jurisdiction in the mid-1990s.

Dominant discourses, silenced voices

The dominant discourse of Beirut's renovation scheme was the resurrection of Lebanon's capital as the leading regional center for business, banking, investment and insurance, i.e., the war-ravaged city's miraculous transformation into the Middle East's version of Hong Kong, replete (in the initial plans and maquettes) with glass skyscrapers soaring above gentrified neighborhoods graced by lovingly restored eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings.

Nazareth's renovation, on the other hand, revolved around the town's identity as the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph; hence, its attraction for Christian pilgrims and tourists from around the world. Making Nazareth more tourist friendly—by building new hotels; expanding and improving roads and parking facilities; cleaning up the impoverished and run-down, but culturally rich, old city; and opening boutiques, museums, restaurants and conference centers to service visitors—was the primary goal. The year 2000 would be capped by the visit of Pope John Paul II to Nazareth, an event that was heralded on T-shirts and pen-and-pencil sets sold in Nazareth gift shops in the late 1990s.

Another commonality shared by the projects was the challenge posed to developers by displaced and poorly integrated communities within each city's boundaries. Viewed as outsiders, problems to be solved, human trash and impediments to re-establishing each city's historic identity and cultural profile, "internal refugees" in Nazareth (predominantly Muslims who had sought refuge in Nazareth in 1948 when their villages were razed and their agricultural holdings appropriated by the new Israeli state)³ and

3 In 1948, thousands of uprooted villagers from the surrounding lower Galilee region flooded into Nazareth between May and August as their villages were razed, their crops and animals taken, and their lands expropriated during the Nakba ("catastrophe") and its aftermath. The arrival of these refugee villagers,

Beirut's legions of *muhajiroun* (families who had fled rural villages because of shelling in the south or massacres in the Shouf mountains, sometimes moving several times before finding refuge in bombed-out buildings and deserted apartments in the fragmented Lebanese capital) were never active participants in the "Nazareth 2000" or "Beirut Horizons 2000" projects (King-Irani, 2002, Forthcoming; Sawaalha, 2003).⁴

Given the length and destructiveness of the 1975-1990 Lebanese war, everyone in Lebanon was metaphorically and sociologically a "displaced person" by the cessation of hostilities. With the emigration of hundreds of thousands of educated and skilled workers, the deaths of over 125,000 civilians, the complete destruction of Beirut's economic and physical infrastructure, the kidnapping and disappearance of 17,000 individuals (who are still missing) and the erosion of pre-war social and political structures and hierarchies, not to mention the absence of the rule of law, post-war Lebanon presented numerous logistical, political, psychological, judicial and economic challenges to Lebanese from every social class and ethno-confessional sect. Beirut required much more than architectural and engineering attention, but Solidere was not geared to address the non-infrastructure needs of average people.

Worst affected, though, were the war-displaced, who had fled to Beirut from under-serviced rural villages, becoming urbanized during the course of the war. Having defended their adopted ramshackle, bullet-scarred neighborhoods with their own bodies and blood during periods of violent fighting, the war-displaced, who comprised nearly one fourth of the total Lebanese population by the late 1980s, felt that they had earned the right to stay in Beirut and make their new homes there. The Solidere Real Estate Company had other views and plans, however: the expropriation of the entire city center and some adjacent neighborhoods by means of dubious legality, the razing of many old buildings (including some considered to be salvageable architectural treasures), to be compensated by minimal cash payments to rightful property owners and/or the provision of shares in the privatized Solidere renovation scheme. Long-time Beirut residents from the middle and upper classes were offended by the compensations offered by Solidere, but the displaced were stunned. Most families

known ever since as "internal refugees" or the "displaced population," increased and diversified Nazareth's population overnight, creating social, logistical, moral and political problems that Israel's largest Palestinian municipality has yet to resolve. Although Nazareth had to absorb 7,000 to 10,000 new bodies to shelter and mouths to feed in 1948, the town's allotted living space was immediately frozen by state decrees and land expropriations.

- 4 The limitations of this presentation do not permit a discussion of the immense challenges and threats confronting Palestinian refugees in the metropolitan Beirut area. In 1997-1998, residents of the Shatila camp were alarmed by the building of a massive and modern sports stadium adjacent to their neighborhoods. If Lebanese displaced are treated poorly, one can only imagine that Palestinian refugees will have even worse treatment as the overall Beirut development program unfolds.

received only \$1000 to \$5000 in compensation and were turned out on the streets, left to their own devices in a country devoid of public welfare programs and social safety nets. Their plight did not go unnoticed by groups such as Hizbullah and Amal, two Shi'a political-military-charitable institutions that often played a countervailing role to the Hariri establishment in the mid-1990s (Hamzeh, 2004; Sawaalha, 2003).

In Nazareth, meanwhile, a municipality long dominated by a primarily communist coalition of progressive, secular and Arab nationalist forces was desperately searching for ways to survive the collapse of the Soviet Union, the discrediting of communism and the 1991 thrashing of Saddam Hussein, an erstwhile spokesman for Arab nationalism. It was difficult enough to be a Palestinian citizen of Israel, but to be a communist in the post-Cold War world was equally dispiriting. Furthermore, the Oslo process had rendered Palestinian citizens of Israel marginal to the Palestinian cause and the larger Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Nazareth's leading political coalition was learning that all politics are, alas, indeed local; their focus on the rights and suffering of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and refugees in Lebanon now served no purpose. Emerging discourses in Nazareth were increasingly sectarian, not secular.

With the election of Yitzhak Rabin and the triumph of the Labor Party in the 1992 Knesset elections, in which record numbers of Arab citizens voted for Zionist parties such as Labor and Meretz, the fortunes and positioning of Palestinian citizens in Israel initially appeared to be improving. Although Prime Minister Rabin did not welcome any non-Zionist Arab-dominated parties into his governing coalition in any ministerial capacity, the votes of a handful of Arab MKs served as a crucial "blocking bloc" (*kutlat al-maani*) to prevent no-confidence motions capable of threatening Rabin's government.⁵ As a result, Arab MKs and parties were able to wrest unprecedented social benefits and political concessions from the 1992-1996 Labor government.

Chief among these concessions was official Israeli governmental support for and ministerial assistance with the ambitious "Nazareth 2000" renovation project, an endeavor that the ruling municipal coalition in Nazareth hoped would guarantee their political relevance and reelection. The central government granted Nazareth Development Zone "B" status in order to encourage investments, provide tax incentives and facilitate development and infrastructural upgrades. In the summer of 1993, a member of the Nazareth municipality and a long-time activist in the leading political coalition, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (*al-jabha ad-dimouqraatiyya lis-salaam wal-musaawah*, or *jabha* for short) confirmed that Nazareth's 1992 popular summer work camp, which had drawn volunteers for nearly two decades from far and

5 Indeed, it was the Rabin government's dependence on non-Jewish parliamentary votes, along with peace-making with the PLO, that led Yigal Amir, a fanatic right-wing religious Zionist, to assassinate Rabin in November of 1995.

wide to assist local neighborhood teams in renovating schools, sidewalks and homes by day while enjoying festive meals, music and pro-Palestinian agit-prop theatre presentations by night, had been quietly cancelled at the request of the Labor party. The official, a vice-mayor from one of the former noble Muslim families of Nazareth during the Ottoman era, cheerfully characterized the Rabin government's support for "Nazareth 2000" as "nice co-optation."

Although the renovation project required anti-Zionist communist leaders to cooperate and collaborate closely with the Israeli government, "Nazareth 2000" also promised a lucrative solution to the city's perennial problems: overcrowding, poor sewage systems, unending traffic jams, worn-out infrastructure, urban blight and a rising drug and crime problem in the center of Nazareth, the city's historical core and hence a repository of architectural treasures, but also the city's most impoverished and neglected neighborhood. Nazareth's old city had become home to drug dealers, collaborators from the West Bank who had been relocated to Nazareth by the IDF and the Shabak for their own safety and the "traditional poor" of the city, predominantly Muslim and usually from internal refugee families.⁶

"Nazareth 2000" not only held out the promise of badly needed infrastructural upgrades and a dramatic up-tick in tourist dollars, but it was also a lifeline for the now-floundering *jabha* (DFPE) coalition. Thus it was that an Arab nationalist and communist-dominated municipality eagerly launched a renovation project that stressed Nazareth's Christian heritage (the millennium, after all, marked the 2000th anniversary of the birth of the city's most famous son), hand-in-hand with the Israeli government, in a town that was, by 1994, 70% Muslim and at least 30% internal refugees. Nazareth's elite viewed "Nazareth 2000" as a politically savvy business move and a way of cooperating honorably with the central authorities. They saw it as a way of strengthening Nazareth's regional and national role and fortifying its economic base. But looming over Nazareth was a better-funded municipality, the Jewish development town of Natzrat Illit, the role and plans of which Nazareth's leading coalition had not taken into consideration.

Initial reactions to "Beirut Horizons 2000" were similarly optimistic. My brother-in-law, a Greek Catholic dentist from an upper-middle class family displaced from Beirut in the first years of the war, hoped that the project would increase the value of a parcel of land he and his brothers owned in the neighborhood of Saifi to the immediate southeast of the newly designated Beirut Central District. At first, he applauded the

6 Until the early 1970s, the old city center of Nazareth had been home to some of the city's most noble families. The lack of access by car to the old city and the dearth of municipal funding for the upkeep of houses built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries prompted most of the old families to move out to new and modern neighborhoods with excellent road systems on the hills to the northwest of the old city core.

development scheme and Rafiq Hariri's business acumen, and approvingly called "Beirut Horizons 2000" a "cash cow" for rebooting Lebanon's economy and putting Beirut back on the world map as an important financial, commercial, and tourism center. Soon after, however, upon learning that he would be compensated for his property at rates set by Solidere, devoid of any governmental regulatory mechanisms and well below market values, he disparaged Rafiq Hariri as a *luss* (thief) and decried the lack of any countervailing Christian investor/billionaire entrepreneurs to moderate Hariri's initiatives,⁷ which he, like many Christians, perceived as benefiting Sunni-dominated business networks in Lebanon, the Lebanese Diaspora and Saudi Arabia.⁸ Although there were wealthy Lebanese Christians, most were unwilling to invest their fortunes in Lebanon after the war because of the prominent role of the Syrian government in every aspect of Lebanese life, as well as the general perception that the Christian factions and militias had lost the war.⁹

Since a key discourse of both city branding campaigns was an emphasis on the communal harmony, economic stability and political safety of each city (the better to calm tourists' and investors' fears and ensure a steady cash flow), as well as a focus on essentialized and picturesque religious and ethnic communities (in order to highlight the rich "cultural mosaic" of traditional Middle Eastern cities), local boosterism and special gala events emphasizing cultural heritage proliferated. Among the most notable, and the most surreal, were Beirut's annual "Festival of Shopping," countless beauty contests and huge Ramadan entertainment tents in central Beirut, as well as Nazareth's emphasis on the upcoming papal visit and a reception at which Nazareth's municipal employees dressed up as biblical characters and served local cuisine to visiting potential investors, some of whom were affiliated with the Disney Corporation (King-Irani, Forthcoming).

Yet a decade after launching these city branding campaigns, hidden scripts (Scott, 1990) about "Nazareth 2000" and "Beirut Horizons 2000" emphasized failure,

7 It is telling that my brother-in-law did not bemoan the lack of state bodies to enforce accountability and protect citizens' interests and rights. Instead, despite the end of the war and discourses of national unity and reconciliation, he looked to confessionalism for salvation and answers.

8 Rafiq Hariri, originally from Sidon in south Lebanon, made his fortune as a contractor on large building projects in Saudi Arabia and took Saudi citizenship. Saudi buyers and investors played a significant role in the Solidere enterprise, and wealthy tourists from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states were constant visitors to Beirut and the mountain resort communities during the post-war era.

9 The fact that only one war lord from the war years, the Lebanese Forces' leader Samir Geagea, was tried and jailed in the post-war era, while all other war lords were self-amnestied by the 1991 General Amnesty Law, contributed to this perception. For all Lebanese, whether Christian or Muslim, it was galling to see those who had destroyed the country in their capacity as militia leaders suddenly assume the mantles of parliamentary and ministerial leadership in the post-war era. Impunity still reigns in Lebanon, though recent events may signal a reaffirmation of the rule of law in confronting criminal, as well as commercial, offenses in Lebanon.

powerlessness, frustration, cynicism and the continued marginalization and negative perceptions of the two cities at the local, regional and international levels. The two projects also fostered the estrangement of Beirutis and Nasraawis from one another and from phenomenological experiences of place and collective memories at the level of everyday local life. "During the war, we knew where to go to escape the bombs," a Beirut cab driver told me in 1995 as I sat in his taxi in a mid-day traffic jam. "But now, tell me: where do we go to escape from the bills?!" Similarly, those doubtful about the ultimate success of the "Nazareth 2000" project sarcastically renamed it "*Naasira sittat alaaf*" (Nazareth 6000), in a sardonic critique of its unwieldiness and the withdrawal of ministerial support for the project from the central government after the election of Binyamin Netanyahu in 1996. Beirutis were equally cynical, as evidenced by the following comments of a Lebanese professor of architecture and urban planning who was interviewed for this paper:

The reconstruction project here was always shifting.... In the beginning, it was clear, from Solidere's plans, that Beirut was now meant to become the Singapore of the Middle East. This changed dramatically after the "Grapes of Wrath" events of 1996. Hariri wanted to send the army to the south and get it over with Hizballah. That did not happen, though. What did happen is that Beirut was being reconstructed by a newly empowered Sunni bourgeoisie (the Christians had only objections, but no real project) while simultaneously, there was still a war going on in the South fought by Shi'a peasants. A division of labor: "you fight there and we'll build here." "Grapes of Wrath," though, changed the rules of the game. Beirut itself was attacked by the IDF and the DT [downtown] was threatened. Plus, it was then clear that investors were not coming in this situation. So Beirut gave in for the spectacle; it exchanged serious businessmen in sharp suits for fun-loving Arab tourists, families, yes, but more often individual men who wanted nothing more than a chance to f*** Lebanese girls who resembled the sexy newswomen on Future TV and LBC (Lebanese Broadcasting Company).... After that, we all became tourists in a sense. We go to visit downtown, but no one really lives there, like they did before the war. We ended up with two Beiruts, like a split personality: one superimposed upon the other. The fashionable one with its ostentatious spectacles (after all, wealthy women need a place where they can show off their siliconed lips, breasts, and nose jobs), and then the forgotten Beirut, the one you don't see unless it scares you, like the Southern suburbs (April 2005).

Crumbling facades

The demise of "Nazareth 2000" became apparent with the outbreak of ostensibly ethno-confessional conflict in the late 1990s. Although media reports consistently emphasized

the Christian-versus-Muslim “clash of civilizations” dimension of the conflict that became known as the “Shihab ad-Deen” affair, it was not among Muslims, but rather, among Greek Orthodox Communist Party members that I heard the first stirrings of dissent about “Nazareth 2000.” In late 1992, Yasmeena, a Communist Party activist and feminist from a middle-class Greek Orthodox family, joked about the “weighty background” (*khalfiyyah thaqeelah*) of the historically significant Nazareth Muslim families, such as the Faahoums and the Zo’abis, the owners of the old, crumbling Ottoman era mansions in Nazareth’s city center slated for renovation. Yasmeena cheekily punned on another possible meaning of *khalfiyyah thaqeelah*: “fat asses,” i.e., those who had been resting too long and too comfortably in seats of power, and who were in danger of growing “too big for their britches.” Like Yasmeena, other Communist Party members expressed concerns that the elaboration of a mythologized discourse about “historical” (i.e., Christian) Nazareth might threaten the egalitarian, secular and progressive emphases that had helped to bring the *jabha* (DFPE) coalition to power in the first place, and could accentuate sectarian divisions and thus erode overarching Arab nationalist sentiments. Their concerns proved prescient.

The DFPE’s—and hence, the Nazareth municipality’s—failure to widen not only its political and physical infrastructures over a period of two decades, but even more so its failure to transform its social and cultural matrices of meaning and belonging to make room for marginalized communities on the city’s political map, played a major role in the eruption of violent conflict in Nazareth in the late 1990s. Despite the demographic weight and pressing needs of Nazareth’s poor Muslims and internal refugees, the municipality’s considerable attempts at effecting renovations did not include revisions of the community’s cognitive maps of who was and was not a true Nasraawi.

Media reports and local discourses highlighted the sectarian dimensions of the confrontations that flared over a Muslim holy site (the tomb of Shihab ad-Deen) in the heart of Nazareth in 1997-1998. Initial protests were sparked by conflicting claims to a formerly neglected piece of land near Nazareth’s main thoroughfare at the entrance to the *souq*, which the DFPE-led municipality claimed was state land. Nazareth’s Islamic Movement leaders, who had emerged a decade earlier on the local political scene, contended it was Islamic *waqf* property by virtue of the presence of the nearby ancient domed tomb, said to be the burial site of the nephew of Salah ad-Deen, the heroic Muslim leader who had defeated the Crusaders in the Middle Ages.¹⁰ The piece of land in question was located just north of the tomb and just south of the immense Basilica of the Annunciation, a modern and unattractive structure, noticeably out of proportions to its surroundings, which had been funded by the Vatican in the late 1960s and built

10 Most legal records appear to verify the municipality’s claims about the status of the land.

over the top of a seventeenth-century church that many preferred to the new gargantuan structure. The area adjacent to the Basilica had been the site of a Mandatory-era government school, now razed. The municipality planned to transform this space into an Italianate plaza and promenade to accommodate the expected droves of millennial pilgrims and, more spectacularly, to serve as the staging area for the long-awaited visit of Pope John Paul II in 2000 (Rabinowitz, 2001).

In the process of preparing the area for paving and landscaping, however, architects and engineers constructed a fence to close the space off from pedestrians. In so doing, they obstructed access to the *maqam shihaab ad-Deen*, the aforementioned tomb. A local Muslim conservationist of Islamic properties, outraged by this insensitive and disrespectful act, raised the alarm, and in a remarkably short period of time, the *maqam shihaab ad-Deen* became the rallying point and epicenter of Muslim political identification and mobilization in Nazareth. Muslim activists and preachers, many from outside Nazareth, soon claimed collective ownership of the site, tore down the engineers' fence and commenced daily prayers near the tomb.

Before long, tents were erected and prayer rugs rolled out. Fluttering green and white flags demarcated the borders of this little piece of holy land, now the epicenter of the municipality's crisis of legitimacy and representation. Dividing lines quickly emerged: the dispute pitted native Nasraawis, Greek Orthodox, the Vatican, some Israeli officials and communists against Muslim internal refugees and the poorer Muslim communities native to Nazareth, who found surprising support from ultra-religious right-wing Jewish parties, in what could only be described as a manipulative ploy for the Arab vote, which, given emigration patterns and birth rates, was now the *Muslim* vote. The conflict escalated, and within months, meetings of Nazareth's municipal council, now dominated by Islamic Movement representatives, though still headed by a communist mayor, were rendered impossible because of threats, accusations and bitter acrimony. Eventually, the Israeli government stepped in as a mediator, but not an honest one, according to an Israeli Jewish member of the mediation team (Israeli, 2001).

At the time I conducted research in Nazareth in 1991-1993, the *maqam shihaab ad-Deen* was a neglected and seemingly forgotten site on the margins of Nazareth's main thoroughfare. In fact, I did not notice the small domed structure behind a chain fence for several months, as the area was always full of garbage and stray cats. Yet, it is no wonder that the Muslims of Nazareth's *souq*, many of them internal refugees, very few of them participants in the DFPE's networks or visions, nearly all of them poor, saw themselves and their status reflected in this disrespected religious monument. They, like it, had been marginalized and neglected; they, like the legendary Shihab ad-Deen, a stranger in the strange land who ended up planted in Nazareth for eternity, were stuck forever in a city not their own. And now, with the "Nazareth 2000" project catering to world Christendom, Muslims in Nazareth felt they were facing a latter-day commercial crusade and foreign investment invasion that threatened to transform their daily lives and sociocultural milieu profoundly, all without their participation.

The “Nazareth 2000” project spotlighted a particular historical dimension in local discourse about the city, its problems and potentialities. But history is every bit as constructed as the buildings that supposedly record its glories, as Herzfeld illustrated in his study of historical renovation and urban development in Crete (1991). By the dawn of the millennium, “Nazareth 2000,” a project framed as a great opportunity for advancing the city’s progress and development, had become a dense thicket of competing political claims and clashing historical interpretations from which Nazareth has yet to emerge. Although designed to unify and beautify the city, the project only exposed and widened incipient social, class and political fractures and left building projects unfinished and unsightly.

The class, sectarian and ideological differences separating the poor, internal refugee, Muslim *souq* residents from the middle-class, educated, politically progressive municipal officials of 1993 were not just indices of “pluralism” or cultural diversity, but reminders of unacknowledged and unresolved inequalities, injustices and neglect within Nazareth itself. “Nazareth 2000” only increased these problems. Internal refugees had been marginalized and silenced in the DFPE’s narrative of Nazareth’s identity and importance in the past, whether the recent communist past or the more ancient Christian past, just as the war-displaced and lower- and middle-class homeowners were shunted aside by the “Beirut Horizons 2000” project as mere squatters.

Essentialized as backward and primitive villagers, or even as a “criminal element,” *souq* residents in Nazareth and the war-displaced in Beirut, though a significant presence in each city, had been excluded from full city membership and thus lacked shares, literal or figurative, in either project. The fact that many native Nasraawis still called a third of the population of Nazareth “refugees” half a century after their arrival from villages destroyed in the 1948 war was evidence of their marginal status in the “capital of the Arabs in Israel.”

More disturbing, the demise of “Nazareth 2000” prepared the way for a different sort of unification process, but hardly a positive one from the viewpoint of residents of Nazareth. The neighboring, but administratively separate, Jewish development town of Natrat Illit had already become the home of educational, commercial, recreational and governmental facilities for Palestinian citizens of Israel in Nazareth and surrounding villages. Now, Natrat Illit was enjoying the benefits of “Nazareth 2000” in the form of new hotels and restaurants. Also, Natrat Illit, not Nazareth, was the staging point of the long-awaited and heavily marketed papal visit of 2000 (Rabinowitz, 2001).

During a month-long research visit in the summer of 2002, I heard many rumors that the Israeli government would appoint a committee to oversee the work of the divided municipality. Some friends and ethnographic informants opined that it was just a matter of time before the merger of Nazareth and Natrat Illit would be complete, after which Nazareth would become simply the colorful and exotic—though dangerous and perennially run-down—Arab section of Natrat Illit, following a trend already visible in the old city of Acre (Torstrick, 2000). Such pessimistic and conspiratorial rumors

were not groundless. Signs of a likely future merger between the two municipalities, to the clear advantage of Natzrat Illit and the detriment of Nazareth, had already appeared, quite literally, on the horizon.

An important index of a healthy, dynamic urban culture is a cinema or similar centralized sites of sociability, cultural expression and leisure activities. In 1991-1993, when I was conducting field research, several informants commented that the demise of Nazareth's cinemas and coffee houses was a curious matter warranting further research. Most hypothesized that it stemmed from the advent of television: private entertainment had killed off public leisure activities and all the social and cultural elements associated with them. "People just stay at home now, watching videos and eating *bizr* (roasted watermelon seeds)!", an exasperated political activist of 30 had told me in the summer of 1992.

One man, however, cited a correlation between Nazareth's growing population, its chronic overcrowding, and the fact that, since 1948, it was no longer a city, but a collection of loosely linked, yet distinct and semi-autonomous "villages," largely due to the presence of so many internal refugees who had preserved their diverse traditions, dialects and kinship networks, remaining unintegrated into Nazareth's social structure and kinship networks for several decades. He suggested that the death of Nazareth's coffeehouse culture had much to do with the fact that the city no longer had an identifiable center, but rather was home to many competing centers. "Nazareth's heart used to be near the *'ain* [Mary's Well]. Now where is it? No one knows!" (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Late nineteenth-century postcard of Mary's Well in Nazareth (<http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/700/760/769/koudalakian/beirut-market.html>, from the postcard collection of Artin Koudalakian).

One of two new architecturally distinctive and symbolically significant structures on the border zone between Nazareth and Natzrat Illit may well be a good candidate for the new title of city center: the *Lev Ha'ir* shopping center and cinema. The center's name ("Heart of the City" in Hebrew) raises eyebrows in Nazareth. "If they are considering *that* location the 'heart' of their city, a place that is right between Nazareth and Natzrat Illit, rather than a kilometer or so east in the true heart of Natzrat Illit, it means they are planning to swallow us," said a young man from Nazareth's Coptic quarter. Despite these misgivings and suspicions, Nasraawis, along with Palestinian citizens of Israel from surrounding Arab villages, are frequent visitors to the mall's shops, restaurants, ice cream parlor and cinemas. During the two visits I made to there in late August of 2002 in the company of Palestinian friends, large groups of Arab teenagers were buying back-to-school supplies in the lower shops, and enjoying pizza, ice cream and falafel sandwiches in the fast food area on the top floor next to the cinema entrance. Though many of the young Arab women present were dressed conservatively, some even wearing the *hijab*, many of the young Jewish girls strolling through *Lev Ha'ir* wore risqué, eye-catching ensembles reminiscent of sexy MTV attire. A group of young Arab men had staked out a table in a pizza restaurant overlooking the lower shopping area to survey these young women.

By far the most noticeable and commented upon visual change in the Nazareth/Natzrat Illit conurbation's horizon, however, is the new monumental courthouse in Natzrat Illit. An immense and imposing structure entirely out of proportion to its surrounding landscape, the new courthouse is an inescapable and towering presence on the horizon—as long as viewed from Nazareth or the western sector of Natzrat Illit. If one travels to the easternmost edges of Natzrat Illit, the new building is not visible at all. Clearly, it was built with a particular audience in mind: Nasraawis, who have given the gargantuan building disparaging names: *al-waHsh* (the monster) and *al-qal'a* (the fortress), noting that it is "like a finger in our eye," a constant, concrete taunt reminding them who calls the shots and dictates the terms. Foucault would have had a field day with this building.

A number of government offices formerly located in Arab Nazareth have gradually been relocated, one by one, to Natzrat Illit over the past two decades. The area designated as the new administrative center for the entire northern region of Israel will eventually cover 17 acres along the highest point on the border between Nazareth and Natzrat Illit. Clearly, this planning and construction process will blur the borders between the two municipalities and result in a highly egalitarian form of urban unification (King-Irani, Forthcoming).

In Lebanon, "Beirut Horizons 2000" ran into different sorts of problems in the late 1990s, mostly centered on accusations of corruption, waste and mismanaged funds (Wakim, 1998). As Adwan (2004) notes, post-war reconstruction provides particularly fertile ground for corruption, since legal and judicial mechanisms are often weak, suspended or absent. "Beirut Horizons 2000" and the associated Solidere Real Estate

Company came under attack by local and foreign observers for prioritizing expensive commercial developments in a small and now isolated section of the city, formerly its vital heart, while so many Beirutis in rapidly expanding and unplanned suburbs were living at or below the poverty line in poorly constructed housing.

Beirut's Central Business District (CBD), called "Centreville" by those who frequent its expensive establishments, was lovingly restored, but not as a living neighborhood so much as a showcase of Lebanese entrepreneurial acumen and the will to rebuild. No one actually dwells here. The CBD is reminiscent of Disney's Epcot Center: streets graced by Ottoman and French Mandatory era buildings were juxtaposed tastefully with archaeological finds. Chic restaurants and shops cleverly exploit themes related to various historical eras to create an imaginative ambience, accessible only to those with significant resources. As the Lebanese architectural theorist, Jad Thabet, noted:

The exterior [facades] will always be secondary if compared with the goal of creating unity within diversity instead of simply having an accumulation of isolated buildings, and if it is connected to the production of space for social relationships, a space that connects and not separates (1999:18).

Nearby, however, just adjacent to Centreville and its expensive bars, restaurants and boutiques, is Martyrs' Square, the former heart of Beirut. Oddly, this expanse of prime real estate remained undeveloped, empty and neglected, a stark scar-like space surrounded by an upgraded and rebuilt urban environment. The former crossroads and meeting place for all of Lebanon, the beginning and end of bus and taxi routes, was now a sadly vacant and silent no man's land. The fact that this area automatically and instinctively became the venue for protests by diverse groups following the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in February 2005 spoke volumes about the hidden scripts (Scott, 1990) and silenced discourses that had existed in Beirut under the radar of the city branding discourses touted by Solidere.

After decades of official neglect of Martyrs' Square, popular protests quickly and dramatically transformed it into the largest political and social reconstruction site in Lebanon, a venue of vitalizing *communitas* and social unification where people could talk, express and participate freely. Youths from a variety of confessional backgrounds (though mostly members of Lebanon's middle and upper classes) set up tent cities, gave flowers to soldiers standing guard and demanded a restructuring of Lebanon's post-war political order and economic priorities, with some initial success.

Totalizing and essentializing discourses were muted as new heterogeneous, clashing and generative dialogues and debates emerged from the young people camping out for nearly two months in Martyrs' Square. Without any marketing courses or corporate training, they seemed to have realized instinctively that popular participation was key to any successful urban renovation process. The quasi-public, quasi-private groups who had taken Nazareth and Beirut public on the world financial stage had done so without bringing along the entire public in each city.

In their own ways, internal refugees in Nazareth and protestors in Martyrs' Square in Beirut re-wove a more representative sociocultural fabric by resisting and debating the rhetorics of renovation packaged by marketing specialists. As a young architect told me, with no small satisfaction in his voice in March 2005, "Martyrs' Square is generating meaning again!" It had become a place and space embodying the opposite of alienation, powerlessness and exclusion. Generating meaning, it would seem, is every bit as important as generating capital for the successful renovation of damaged and neglected cities.

On a smaller scale, and never featured on BBC, CNN or Al-Jazeera, was an endeavor launched by a number of young men and women from all confessional backgrounds in Nazareth in 2000, a cinema/café (*maqhaa*, in Arabic) named Kabt (frustration and disempowerment in Arabic). A center for young people to meet, watch art films, see documentaries, listen to stand-up comedians and discuss politics, Kabt was the creation, through sweat equity and innovation, of a group of young people (internal refugees and native Nasraawis) claiming ownership of an old Ottoman-era warehouse not far from the Nazareth municipality. The milieu at Kabt was bohemian and cosmopolitan, and quite unlike any other social setting in Nazareth. The music was jazz, Arabic classics and the sardonic songs of Beirut's Ziad Rahbani. The discussions were secular, progressive and cynical about the older generation of political leaders who lost control of the city, ceding power to religious fundamentalists as well as to Israeli businessmen. But there was also an atmosphere of pride, dignity, hope and ownership among the young people who had carved out this unique space in Nazareth, a space that is generating new meanings and possibilities, however subtle.¹¹

The marketers of "Nazareth 2000" and "Beirut Horizons 2000" did not do a thorough reading of the latest city branding literature, which stresses participatory and inclusive approaches:

A place branding strategy must be ... firmly rooted in the existing policies, resources, intellectual capital, capabilities, motivations, manifestations and perceptions of the place. It is essential for the stakeholders of the place to create and share this vision, and work jointly towards determining how it will be achieved. Teasing out this collective inspiration is not an exercise in seeking the lowest common denominator, but of stimulating debate between the various interested parties.... Although seldom considered as defining elements of a city branding strategy, the policies and relations of a city government have a profound effect on its relationship with local and external communities and decision makers.... The

11 See the photos featured on the Kabt web site: http://photos.groups.yahoo.com/group/kabt_nashaz/list?dir=/Pre+Kabt&src=gr&order=&view=t&done=http%3a//briefcase.yahoo.com/.

people of a city are its most valuable asset.... [D]ynamic and vibrant cities retain imaginative people who make full use of their creativity, and attract others to live, work, invest, visit and play there (Place Branding, 2005).

Yet, the young people who set up tent cities in Beirut's Martyrs' Square to reclaim their city soon realized the difficulties of managing identities, social transformation and political change. They also learned, to their chagrin, that their actions could be, and were, interpreted as new city branding efforts by individuals and organizations far from the lived realities of contemporary Beirut (see Figure 5).

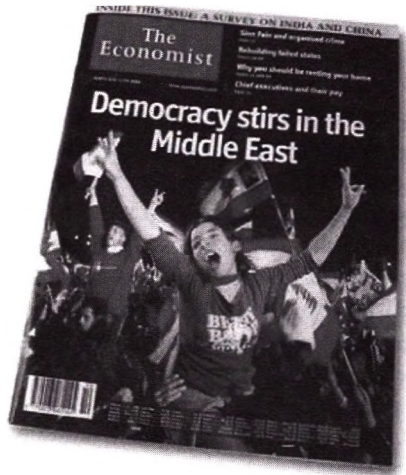


Figure 5. From “Beirut Horizons 2000” to “Independence 2005”? The Economist touts the “Cedar Revolution,” a brand name coined in Washington (cover of the March 3, 2005, issue of the Economist).

Beirut's sudden *intifaadat al-istiqlaal* (Independence Uprising, or, as signs, T-shirts, and bumper stickers termed it, “Independence 2005”) was reinterpreted as American imperialism in Damascus and as the harbinger of a new democratic order in the region by officials in Washington. Civic initiatives were reframed in Lebanon as confessional ploys, just as protests at the *maqam shihaab ad-Deen* in Nazareth had been characterized as a clash between essentialized Islam and Western modernity. Beirut and Nazareth, meant to be a meeting place of businessmen and a playground of tourists, were rendered a metaphorical battle zone of conflicting notions of heritage and future trajectories, battle zones upon which various external parties also entered the fray.

Caught in the crossfire of these conflicting interpretations of authenticity played out in the center of each millennial Medina, Beirutis and Nasraawis were forced to acknowledge that, in a globalized world, all is grist for the branding and marketing mill. Ownership—of discourses, identities, spaces, infrastructure and memories—is never stable or guaranteed. Beirut and Nazareth exist in the present, and are thus narratives that cannot be frozen in a brand name or slogan.

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