

# Death of a Statesman – Birth of a Martyr

## *Martyrdom and Memorials in Post-Civil War Lebanon*

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**Abstract:** This article furthers the study of post-civil war memorialisation in Lebanon by analysing the trajectory of the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri from statesman to martyr. This transformative process offers a window into the symbolism of Lebanese statehood, and demonstrates how the politicisation of confessional martyrs is used to decry injustice and stake out claims to the state. There is no tradition for prosecuting and punishing political murders in Lebanon, causing victims to be pronounced martyrs. Impunity is therefore the major reason why martyrs and memorialising are so widespread. To this end, the article offers a semiotic reading of Hariri's posthumous transformation from political patron to patron saint, and is a contribution towards the importance of martyr symbolism for understanding the purported weakness of Lebanese statehood.

**Keywords:** Hariri, Lebanon, martyrdom, patronage, political anthropology, semiotics, statehood

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Lebanon is a country awash with martyrs and they are remembered in anniversaries and memorials, revered in song and popular culture and, most visibly, reincarnated in larger-than-life posters lining roads, highways and thoroughfares demarcating popular neighbourhoods. All the Lebanese sects engage in the iconography memorialising slain leaders and cadres. Yet, none are bigger and more imposing than the images of the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. During the decade since his assassination in 2005, the Hariri billboards have grown even bigger and bear the inscription: 'we will not forget [you]' (*la nansâ*). Hariri is now commemorated at two memorial sites in downtown Beirut in addition to his tomb next to the imposing Mohammad al-Amin mosque he endowed. The magnitude of Hariri's posthumous commemoration



makes it important to examine both its foundations and the implications for the understanding of martyrdom in post-civil war Lebanon.

There is no tradition for prosecuting and punishing political murders in Lebanon. Instead, vigils, memorials and anniversaries are held to commemorate those dead who are commonly pronounced martyrs (*shahid*, pl. *shuhadâ*). This article argues that the absence of closure and justice is one reason why memorials and memorialising is so widespread; there will be neither truth nor justice. The truth will be contested and justice denied due to lack of evidence and the politicisation of the judiciary. The bereaved families, followers and supporters are left to immortalise their slain leaders by seeking divine redemption rather than justice. So as to redeem their loss, victims are made martyrs. Hariri's death also made him a martyr – but crucially, his picture was displayed with the subtitle the 'truth' (*al-haqiqa*). For him there could not only be redemption through martyrdom but an explicit call for justice and finding the truth behind his murder. Now, a decade since the murder of the late Premier, this article examines Rafik Hariri's posthumous transformation from political patron to patron saint and what this can teach us of political culture, nation-building and statehood in post-civil war Lebanon.

## Memorials and Martyrs

Post-civil war memorialisation in Lebanon has been examined in studies of war and memory (Haugbolle 2010; Larkin 2012), memory and space (Sawalha 2010) and public mourning (Segneurie 2011). The most recent addition is Lucia Volk's (2010) seminal work on memorials and martyrs in Lebanon. Volk examines a variety of martyr categories – civilians, soldiers, paramilitaries – and shows how their martyrdom has been memorialised at historic and contemporary sites – Nahr al-Kalb (1938), Biq'âta (1958), Qâna (2006) – but foremost in the historical transformation of the Martyr's Square from the 1960s until becoming the site of the country's main Hariri memorials. Volk argues that martyrs are key to nation-building since the French mandate period (1923–1946), with roots in the early protests against Ottoman rule and the creation of the country's first independence martyrs in 1916 (Volk 2010: 31).

An important addition to the understanding of martyrdom and nation-building is Sune Haugbolle's (2013) study of the crafting of the secular martyrdom of former President and communal hero Bashir Gemayel (1947–1982), killed by a powerful car bomb during the first phase of the civil war. The celebration of Bashir as a martyr coincides with the post-civil war political and demographic decline of the Maronites, the country's former economic and political elite. Bashir's brutal wartime record means that the annual memorial of his secular sainthood remains a sectarian, party-dominated rather than national event. The cult of Bashir hence celebrates communal virtues, party

credentials (Lebanese Forces) and his personal qualities. Despite Bashir's mixed war-time legacy, he is portrayed as the message (*risâla*), dream (*hulm*) and the truth (*ḥaqiqa*). This is bolstered by artefacts and insignia such as crosses (faith), cedar trees (independence), civil war imagery (hero) and the crafting of evocative epithets (assassinated saviour).

The celebration of Bashir's martyrdom can be considered an example of what Corstange has termed an iconographic discourse (2011: 128), an outgrowth of Lebanon's sectarian make-up that organises politics along communal lines to form communal cults. This not only includes public displays of faith through icons, figurines and insignia but also political symbols such as posters, flags and banners as well as other types of political imagery. Political-cum-sectarian communities communicate through this iconographic discourse. A key to this discourse is martyrs and martyrdom, in most cases confessional martyrs, that signals inward solidarity and outward displays of unity and purpose. The best example is Hezbollah's Martyrs' Day rally, the movement's annual commemoration of fighters, cadre and leaders who have been killed on active duty. The martyrs are the movement's rally point for unity, a source of strength and a powerful weapon serving its political goals and ends.

The importance of sectarian and confessional martyr categories is evident from Laleh Khalili's (2007b) study of the annual commemoration of the Palestinian refugees killed in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre.<sup>1</sup> The Shatila memorial lies within the perimeters of the Hezbollah-controlled Ghobeiry municipality, enabling Hezbollah to steward the commemoration and symbolically equate the Sabra and Shatila massacre with the many Shia Muslims killed in the Qana massacre by Israeli artillery in 1996. To this end, huge posters of both massacres are displayed alongside each other at the Shatila memorial festooned with Hezbollah's bright-yellow flags, banners and replete with anti-U.S. and anti-Zionist propaganda. Hezbollah is by many Palestinians considered a political ally that champions their cause (Knudsen 2005), yet these actions met with disapproval from refugees who resented the overtaking of their memorial site, the commemoration and equating disparate martyrdom narratives. This example illustrates the problem of competing martyr narratives, pitting a weak against a powerful group with the former struggling to remain in control of its martyr narratives.

The architectural symbolism of memorials is featured in the works of Ward Vloeberghs (2008, 2012a, 2012b) who has analysed the intersection between memorials and martyrdom in the construction of the Mohammad al-Amin mosque in downtown Beirut. The towering mosque became a powerful symbol of Hariri's martyrdom that together with his elaborate tomb (*darih*), became a routinised stop-point along the *ciné*, *diner*, *darih* that turned the Hariri memorial into a leisurely memory lane of public worship and a fixed stop-point for visiting statesmen and dignitaries paying their respect to the slain leader (Vloeberghs 2012b). Despite the number of annual martyr commemorations in Beirut, none of them has the lavish grandeur and sophistication that typifies

the centrally located Hariri memorials, each highlighting different aspects of Hariri's martyrdom.

Taken together these studies point to the importance of studying the creation of martyrs and the uses of martyrdom for political ends, public display and consumption; indeed, as suggested by Volk, as an alternative nation-building process in a deeply divided society. This article furthers this analysis by a specific focus on how Rafik Hariri was transformed from political patron to patron saint. This transformative process is not only a window into the symbolism of Lebanese statehood but also how the politicisation of confessional martyrs is used to stake out claims to the state, decry historical injustice and contemporary grievance. Importantly, martyrs can also take on protective functions to help, steward and save a country gone astray, a nation on the brink and a state on the verge of collapse. The symbolic importance of martyrs thus represents a sacred counterpoint to the country's politicians, widely seen as incompetent, corrupt and self-serving.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, martyrs and martyrdom are essential elements for understanding the purported weakness of the Lebanese state (Fakhoury 2014; Fregonese 2012), and the paternalist (Rivoal 2014) and clientelist nature of national politics (Mermier and Mervin 2012).

## Patron

In life, Hariri was Lebanon's preeminent political patron and post-civil war politician. This says a lot in a country where powerful patrons (*za'im*, pl. *zu'amâ'*) have dominated political life, often over several generations, to form economic and political elites (Gilsenan 1996; Johnson 1985). Hariri's wealth and business acumen laid the foundation for a new family dynasty that eclipsed the traditional Sunni elites and their benevolent institutions (Baumann 2012). As Prime Minister, Hariri not only amassed enormous wealth, and wrested control of the real-estate market (Becherer 2005), but spent it lavishly on philanthropic projects, in particular through the Hariri Foundation providing scholarships to students, outflanking the older and more established al-Makased Foundation patronised by the country's traditional Sunni elites (Skovgaard-Petersen 1998). Hariri also founded a loosely organised political movement-cum-party, the Future Movement (*al-mustaqbal*), supported by his newspaper, radio and TV network carrying the same name. Hariri was appointed premier twice (1992, 2000) before resigning in October 2004 over a disagreement with Syria's president Assad. Despite his departure as prime minister, he was expected to return and win the upcoming parliamentary elections in May 2005.

Because of his involvement in the real estate market, Hariri had become a controversial figure. He was criticised for ruining the city centre, orchestrating a land grab and wresting control of the capital's most valuable property. Still, most Sunnis and many Maronites adored him, seeing him as the country's

saviour, salvaging and rebuilding the war-torn country. After years of working along with Syria's Assad-regime, Hariri chartered a more independent course following a marked shift in U.S. policy vis-à-vis Syria from 2004, followed a year later by UN-resolution 1559 that, inter alia, demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, a resolution Hariri was rumoured to have mid-wifed (Knudsen 2012). The subsequent fall-out with Syria's Assad regime led to Hariri's fateful motorcade tour through central Beirut.

## **Victim**

On 14 February 2005, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 22 members of his staff were killed by a massive car bomb in downtown Beirut (Blanford 2009; Young 2010). The assassination of political leaders and heads of state significantly increase the likelihood of violent manifestations of dissent (Iqbal and Zorn 2008) and can change the course of history (Brittain 2006). The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is a case in point; it started a popular revolt. Hariri's assassination brought the country to its feet in huge public demonstrations on 8 March and 14 March. The shockwaves were critical enough to warrant an international investigation and prosecution (Bosco 2009: 359). The popular uprising, the Cedar Revolution, was largely peaceful, but was followed by a surge of assassinations and attempted assassinations. Only a few of these incidents were properly investigated, even fewer went to trial and almost none led to credible convictions (Knudsen 2010). Impunity, I argue, is a major reason for the proliferation of everyday martyrdom in contemporary Lebanon.<sup>3</sup>

While there is no disagreement that Hariri is a victim, there is apprehension among sections of the Lebanese as to why his murder should be prosecuted when those of so many others were not. Why is Hariri accorded special status and given special treatment? He is one victim among many. During the civil war more than 17,000 persons disappeared, the majority of them Christian civilians. As Humphrey and Kisirwan (2001) have argued, uncovering the truth of those missing is not only about recovering their lost humanity and bringing closure to families and relatives but, more significantly, challenging the impunity the 'disappeared' represent as a politically constituted category. Apparently, none of these victims were important enough to warrant an impartial criminal investigation and would offend Syria. Instead, their fate was ignored or in some cases denied altogether. Unwilling to open war-related files, the then Prime Minister Hariri sought to close the chapter on the missing persons by naming them 'martyrs of Lebanon' (Humphrey and Kisirwan 2001). Thus, by turning victims into martyrs, further inquiry into their disappearance was not only put hold but made secondary to divine redemption. Despite some recent progress towards uncovering the truth of those missing, such as unearthing mass graves and recovering bodies, their fate remains elusive.<sup>4</sup> This

example underlines my main argument that as criminal responsibility is put on hold, the bereaved families are left with the only option: to lament their loss and proclaim those missing martyrs. Injustice and impunity are hence powerful drivers in the creation of martyrdom narratives.

Unlike his slain countrymen, Hariri is not an ordinary victim – he is a victim *extraordinaire*. The UN Security Council deemed his murder to be a threat to international peace and stability and the resolution that authorised a criminal investigation into the assassination refers to him as a victim of international terrorism (Knudsen 2012). This made prosecuting his murder an international responsibility and was backed by three permanent members of the council: the United Kingdom, the United States and France. To this end, the Security Council established a fact-finding mission to inquire into the crime, followed by a UN investigative commission and finally a hybrid tribunal in The Hague (2009–present) to try those found responsible for his murder.<sup>5</sup> The Tribunal’s mandate empowers it to inquire into attacks and assassinations related to Hariri’s murder. Due to a lack of evidence, political clout and funding, the Tribunal has so far not pursued this option. Implicitly, justice for Hariri must provide justice for all unnamed victims. Hariri’s vindication will be theirs too. Thus, Hariri’s trial will symbolically provide justice for all, and this too points to the centrality of Hariri’s case for understanding the link between impunity and martyrdom.

In mid-August 2011, the indictment was released by the tribunal, charging four (later five) Hezbollah members with responsibility for the crime. Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s secretary general, denounced the indictment as politicised and unfairly targeting the movement (Knudsen 2012). Hezbollah, Nasrallah claimed, was not a perpetrator, but a victim of a U.S.–Israeli conspiracy. In this sense, victimhood has been reversed: Hezbollah is not a perpetrator but a victim. Saad Hariri (Rafik Hariri’s son) condemned Hezbollah’s actions and urged the new Hezbollah-controlled government to collaborate with the Tribunal and extradite the five men charged with involvement in the crime.<sup>6</sup> If not, Lebanon would not only face international sanctions but, more importantly, by obstructing justice, Martyr Hariri would be victimised yet again.

## **Martyr**

Funerals for political figures are a spectacle, as Marc Manganaro (1996) observed while attending the tearful crowd mourning the death of former President Suleiman Frangieh (1910–1992), laid to rest in his mountain stronghold Zgharta. Frangieh’s death of natural causes was seen as a communal disaster by his band of loyal followers and clients. Attended by dignitaries, clerics, army brass and scores of followers, his funeral turned into to an elegy for a deceased statesman, but still, fundamentally a local and sectarian one. Despite being a former president, Frangieh was not mourned as a national leader, nor

posthumously cultivated as such. Although Lebanese flags were on display and the funeral graced by the presence of political and military leaders, the funeral commemorated Frangieh's role as a political patron.

Unlike Frangieh's state funeral, the ritual of mourning following political assassinations tend to follow a standardised 'grammar of grief' that includes a three-day mourning period, shocked silence, public outcry, posters eulogising the victim, vigils, followed by burial in the victim's ancestral village (Segneurie 2009: 382). Hariri's funeral and ritual of mourning departed from this grammar of grief in important ways: in its complexity, grandeur and symbolism. Hariri was not laid to rest in his hometown Sidon but in the capital Beirut. And not only in Beirut but in the symbolic 'heart of the capital', the Martyr's Square, the country's most sensitive and symbol-laden public space (Khalaf 2006). The funeral was therefore carefully crafted in order to appear neither sectarian nor partisan; no party flags were allowed, only the flag of Lebanon should be on display. Hariri's funeral on 17 February was the largest in the country's history and turned into a ritual of public mourning attended by an estimated 250,000 people. The lavish funeral presaged Hariri's transformation from statesman to martyr and aimed to turn his memory into an 'elegy for a wounded nation' (Segneurie 2009: 383). In turn, this refashioned the city centre as a commemorative space that, as I return to later, included the Hariri mosque, mausoleum and memorials.

Martyrdom has special salience in Lebanon and is a key to civil war history. In the theatrical performance *Three Posters* (Khoury and Mroué 2006), the authors-cum-actors explore martyrdom using narrative excerpts from authentic videos recorded by a young man preparing for his mission against the Israeli invaders in 1985. The would-be martyr rehearses for the video that will be aired on national TV shortly after his death. The three recorded versions represent slightly different attempts at constructing a narrative for undertaking his mission. Khoury and Mroué speculate that the videos, rather than the martyrdom itself, can be considered both a truthful rendering of martyrdom and a 'fabrication of [the] truth' (2006: 184). The same argument, although under different circumstances, can be used to understand the creation of Rafik Hariri as a national symbol and martyr of the nation. The role of the 'truth' is essential in the case of Rafik Hariri. His death led to the demand for the truth (*al-haqiqa*), the single most important slogan from what became known as the Cedar Revolution or Independence Revolution. Yet, the truth about his murder is contested and this in a country where lying (*kidhb*) is an important part of the national ethos (Gilsenan 1976; see also Haugbolle 2006: 66).

The magnitude of martyrdom in Lebanon can be gleaned from the pages of the English language newspaper, the *Daily Star*. In the 14 December 2009 issue, three slain persons were memorialised on a single page: the MP and Editor Gibran Tuani, Brigadier General Francois al-Hajj (both were killed by car bombs) and Imam Musa al-Sadr, who disappeared without trace in Libya in 1982.<sup>7</sup> The iconography of slain martyrs is also used to bolster the

credentials of present-day political leaders, hence posters and placards show them hovering dreamlike behind their political heirs; a smiling Rafik Hariri pictured behind his son and heir Saad(-eddin); the Amal leader and speaker of the parliament, Nabih Berri, flanked by the towering founder of Amal, Musa al-Sadr.<sup>8</sup> However, martyrdom is not only an elite phenomenon but also extended to militia members and soldiers.<sup>9</sup> Lucy Volk (2009) has analysed how martyr imagery in Lebanon's south and northern margins conveys different notions of belonging to sect and state. The memorial pictures of slain army soldiers are portrayed as martyrs of the state of Lebanon, hence their patron, Army General Michel Suleiman (President of the Republic, 2008–2013), is pictured above them.<sup>10</sup> Hezbollah's iconography, on the other hand, is different. The slain Hezbollah-fighters are martyrs of the Resistance (*al-mukâwama*) rather than the nation; hence pictured above them is the radiant image of Hezbollah's leader, Syeed Hassan Nasrallah.<sup>11</sup> In both cases, the martyrs' sacrifices are interpreted in relation to the status and position of their peers, Suleiman and Nasrallah respectively.

Rafik Hariri's public imagery replicates the symbolic role of peers described by Volk. At the memorial tomb (*darih*) for Hariri and his security escorts, Hariri's smiling image is placed above the grave of each of his six bodyguards, suggesting not only being watched over by Hariri, but also that their deaths are made meaningful through his martyrdom. Hariri, however, does not need, indeed cannot have, an interpretative frame except himself. Instead, his sacrifice can be used to make sense of the fate of other victims. Hariri therefore becomes a master symbol and interpretive frame for the death of his companions. This argument can also be extended: the public demand for the truth about his murder came to be interpreted as seeking the truth, not only for Hariri but for 'all the bloody incidents of the past' (Haugbolle 2006: 68). Thus, in a semiotic sense, seeking the 'truth' behind Hariri's murder will metonymically represent the truth for all, reflected in the adverbial clause 'the truth, *for the sake of Lebanon*' (Vloeberghs 2012b: 84), hence the demand for the truth is cast as a national concern, not a sectarian or personal one. Typically, Hariri's sacrifice is sloganised as eternal and something death cannot eviscerate, as in 'they killed you, but not your legacy'.<sup>12</sup>

Lebanon has a visual poster culture where bigger is better. Martyrs are commemorated on posters, plaques, banners and other forms of public displays, often in outsized, larger-than-life posters. Huge posters line buildings, irrespective of whether the imagery or intended message is commercial, religious or political (Schmitt 2009). The images are often repeated, to create a mesmerising series of visual images along highways and thoroughfares (Matta 2005).

In the case of Hariri, image repetition created what Riskedahl has termed a 'hyperpresent form' that 'figuratively ... generated an emotional sense of the leader's enduring presence' (2015: 542). During my visits to Lebanon over the three-year period 2005–2008, the Hariri posters and billboards grew bigger and more imposing as if trying to prevent his memory from being erased.

With time the posters not only grew in size but also included subtexts such as ‘we will not forget [you]’, as if to prevent this from happening. After the showdown in Beirut between pro-Western and pro-Syrian factions (labelled 14 March and 8 March respectively) most of the political posters were removed in May 2008 as part of the agreement reached in Qatar (Doha Accords) leading to what was referred to as a ‘poster truce’. Yet, the Hariri posters and billboards were not taken down but still present at several Beirut locations, most notably the huge Hariri ticker next to the Future Movement’s headquarters counting the days passed since his assassination. It was as if Hariri, claimed as martyr for the nation, was too important to be touched, hence not affected by the poster truce. This does mean that Hariri was embraced as a martyr by all groups or sects in the country, but demonstrates the powerful symbolism of his still unsolved assassination; hence, these posters could not simply be taken down, which would represent a symbolic closure of the claim to justice.

Martyrs can, and indeed are, exploited for political ends. For Hezbollah, they are a rally point for the movement’s resistance against the Zionist state of Israel and the glorification of its most revered martyrs – Ragheb Harb, Abbas al-Moussawi and Imad Mugnaniyeh – underpinning the sacrificial foundation of the Hezbollah state (*Dawlat Hizb Allah*). For the Sunni Future Movement, on the other hand, Hariri’s martyrdom was turned into political counter-current and demand for strengthening the Lebanese state, the judiciary and democracy as a novel form of Sunni Lebanese *d’étatisme* popularised as ‘Lebanon first’ (ICG 2010: 7).

As already stated, victims are nameless, private and often forgotten except by the immediate family and kin. Martyrs, on the other hand, are revered and remembered. Martyrs are accorded special status and meant for public display and consumption. You do not forget martyrs, you immortalise them. Martyrs not only exalt the status of individuals but also sustain a claim to criminal responsibility, grievance and injustice at the hands of the aggressor, perpetrator or oppressor. Martyrdom also has a deeper religious significance, especially among the Lebanese Shia, commemorating the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Hussein at Kerbela at the hands of the Umayyad rulers,<sup>13</sup> an elegiac drama that is re-enacted during the annual Ashura commemorations (Norton 2005). Among the Lebanese Sunni, however, martyrdom has been less pronounced and traditionally did not feature in political discourse or imagery despite the many prominent Sunni politicians murdered since the 1950s (Knudsen 2010).<sup>14</sup> The assassination and subsequent attempts to craft Hariri as a martyr of the nation depart from this pattern and can partly be explained by the massive public demonstrations following his assassination. Indeed, as Bob and Nepstad (2007: 1371) have pointed out, transforming slain leaders into martyrs has a great symbolic and mobilising power. In this sense, martyrdom among the Druze is a special case with murdered leader Kamal Jumblatt (1917–1977), turned into the sect’s only martyr, metonymically representing all of the Druze community (Rivoal 2014: 14).

What sets Hariri's martyrdom apart is the scale, magnitude and sophistication of what we could term commemorative practices. In the early months following his murder, the Future Movement sought to expand the personal cult around Hariri and build a lasting political movement around his legacy, and importantly to make Hariri a martyr for all of Lebanon and not only for Sunnis and his supporters. The huge 14 March demonstration presaged Hariri's transition from victim to martyr, amplified by Hariri's own media franchise providing the visual imagery underpinning his role a national martyr. Indeed, advertising agencies played a key role in conflating the mourning of Hariri with the political views he held (Riskedahl 2015: 542), so they appear inseparable as in: 'we are with you' (*nahnu ma'ak*). The end of the 40-day mourning period was celebrated in April 2005 with a Unity Week showcasing national unity and 'Lebanese-style' life; sports events, concerts and photo-exhibitions centred on the Martyr's Square and Hariri's grave-turned-shrine (Haugbolle 2006: 71). Indeed, the public display of mourning, captured in the phrase 'we miss you' (*ishtaqnâlak*) continued well 'beyond the formal mourning period' (Riskedahl 2015: 543).

## Saint

Hariri's martyrdom is commemorated at three memorial sites in the centre of the capital: Hariri Memorial Garden (2008), National Unity Square (2011) and the still unfinished Garden of Forgiveness (2003 to present). Additionally, there is Hariri's tomb adjoined by the Mohammed al-Amin mosque (2002) he endowed. The Hariri Memorial Garden was inaugurated in 2008 and overlooks the Hariri crime site near the seafront St. Georges Hotel. The 700-square-metre memorial is a replica of the Hariri family's garden and includes a statue of Hariri next to a six-meter-tall bronze column-cum-stylised clock tower (reminiscent of the ancient Roman columns), with inscriptions of the national anthem. Every day at 12.55 – the exact time Hariri was murdered – the clock emits a five-minute sound of church bells followed by the Islamic call for prayer. The soundscape projects an inter-faith unity that indexically underlines Hariri's role as a martyr for all of Lebanon. The same imagery is replicated in other popular and artistic imagery such as one showing a modified image of the al-Amin mosque's four minarets replaced by two towers topped by a Christian cross and Muslim crescent to symbolise how Hariri's martyrdom united the two faiths (Volk 2010: 168). The final transformation of Hariri's martyrdom seeks to turn him into a saintly figure and 'religious symbol for the suffering of all the Lebanese' (Haugbolle 2006: 68). This claim to sanctity is politically charged, and not embraced across Lebanon's sectarian spectrum, yet involves imbuing Hariri with traits that are typical of a saint.

Hariri is buried next to al-Amin mosque at a plot hastily purchased by the Hariri family in the immediate aftermath of his assassination (Volk 2010: 164).

The gravesite includes a huge tented hall covering Hariri's flower-decorated grave and those of his slain companions laid to rest in a separate section of the compound. With time, the gravesite's internal decoration and symbolism got both more sophisticated and elaborate as did the exterior filled with pictures commemorating Hariri's life (Vloeberghs 2012b). As time passed, it became a fixed visiting point for visitors and worshippers paying their respects to the slain leader offering prayers, flowers and candles to commemorate Hariri's martyrdom, thus turning his tomb into a shrine, a devotional turn that is contrary to orthodox Sunni tradition (Volk 2010: 172).

The plans for building a new mosque in the centre of the city were promoted by the country's highest Sunni authority (*dâr al-fatwa*), but got off to a rocky start (Vloeberghs 2008). By a series of events that threatened to sideline Hariri and challenge his role as the country's preeminent Sunni leader and benefactor, Hariri embraced the project, wrested control of the plot and handed the plans over to his construction company (Oger Liban) following approval from Solidere, the chartered company responsible for downtown Beirut's reconstruction and where Hariri was a major shareholder. The construction of the imposing Mohammad al-Amin mosque began in 2002, serving as a new landmark of downtown Beirut. The building, colloquially referred as the Hariri mosque, was inaugurated in October 2008 by Hariri's son and political heir Saad Hariri. The towering mosque injects a Sunni presence in an area otherwise devoid of sectarian images and emblems and dwarfs the modest sixteenth-century Mameluk madrasa salvaged after renovating the city centre. It also towers over the Maronite Saint George Cathedral standing next to the mosque. The three buildings adjoin a larger plot of land, appropriately named the Garden of Forgiveness, which aims to aid the 'process of post-war reconciliation and healing by providing an inclusive, multi-confessional space open to all' (Solidere n.d.). Nonetheless, the al-Amin mosque establishes a Sunni predominance in the city centre and reconfigures it as a Sunni sectarian space. This is especially noteworthy since during the civil war (1975–1990), the martyrs were always commemorated outside of the city centre, reflecting the fragmentation of society and lack of a national memorial site (Dados 2009: 178).

This Martyr's Square is Beirut most sensitive public space, where no definitive urban plan has been agreed to although several architectural schemes have been proposed (Khalaf and Houry 1993). A garden turned into a square by the Ottoman Sultan Abdel Hamid II, it was renamed the Martyr's Square in 1937 to commemorate the public execution of Lebanese nationalists by the Ottoman rulers in 1916 (Shwayri 2011: 95). In the 1960s, bronze statues commemorating the martyrs commissioned from the Italian sculptor Mazzacurati were installed at the square. The civil war ravaged the square and damaged the statues. As Prime Minister, Hariri organised their restoration and in 2004 inaugurated the return of the statues to the Martyr's Square (Volk 2010: 154ff.). Following Hariri's murder, popular imagery juxtaposed Hariri against that of

the renovated statues, symbolically making him a direct descendent of the 1916 martyrs. In this sense, Hariri's legacy is inscribed into the urban landscape and imposes itself on Downtown Beirut where Solidere, the chartered company Hariri founded for redeveloping Beirut's war-torn Central District (BCD), has been stewarding its renovation.<sup>15</sup>

Not far from the mosque lies the National Unity Square, a steep triangle-shaped memorial situated next to the Prime Ministers' building (Grand Serail). Inside the memorial Rafik Hariri's statue overlooks the Riadh al-Solh Square, named after the late Premier Riadh al-Solh who was assassinated in 1950 (Seale 2010). Facing eastwards, the memorial points towards Hariri's tomb and mosque in the city centre. The location of the statue triangulates Hariri with a triptych encompassing al-Solh's legacy (martyr), Downtown Beirut's renewal (entrepreneur), set against the backdrop of the Grand Serail and governing the nation (statesman). Likewise, the three sites memorialise different aspects of his legacy: Hariri Memorial Garden (victim), National Unity Square (statesman) and the Garden of Forgiveness (martyr).<sup>16</sup>

Saad Hariri's inaugural speech at the National Unity Square in April 2011 addressed his father in the present tense as if Hariri senior was still alive (NOWLebanon 2011):

Dear beloved father, Lebanon's great martyr: Do I talk to you or about you? Or should I tell you the story of the difficult years we experienced? As if you want to lead this gathering and call us to walk together to the Freedom square. ... This day is yours, my beloved father. ... I am filled with joy because I am the son of martyr Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

The speech went on to eulogise Rafik Hariri's legacy as protector of peace, guarantor of freedom, saviour of the nation, guardian of national unity and the benevolent father of the people. In this final stage of transformation, Hariri is claimed as a patron saint who can guard, protect and steward the nation and help its people from being led astray. To this end, the Future Movement's posthumous transformation of Hariri resembles an informal beatification process typical of attaining sainthood. This involves imbuing the martyr with extraordinary virtues and qualities: serenity, selflessness and compassion, traits that are typical of a saint. Sainthood often involves establishing a shrine for worship and tomb or grave for mourning. In this sense, the saint is not only remembered and revered, as is the case with a martyr, but invoked for protection and to relieve pain and suffering at memorial sites built for this purpose. What sets Rafik Hariri's martyrdom apart is the vast political and financial resources invested in the grandiose elements of sainthood and the elaborate construction of his tomb (shrine), mosque and memorials in Downtown Beirut. The final transformation of Hariri's martyrdom aimed to turn him into a saintly figure and a 'religious symbol for the suffering of all the Lebanese' (Haugbolle 2006: 68).

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to chart the symbolic transformation of the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri from political patron to patron saint. I have argued that martyrdom is closely linked to the lack of justice that turns victims into martyrs, leading to an everyday, confessional martyrdom. The prominence of martyrdom is connected to a political culture where impunity is commonplace and the victims proclaimed martyrs. Hariri's assassination prompted the most elaborate attempt yet at creating a national martyr and forging national unity through his martyrdom. Indeed, Hariri was promoted as a martyr for the whole country and symbol of inter-faith unity that evoked elements of sainthood. His martyrdom also served as a master symbol that could console bereaved families and mobilise followers.

In general, the forging and commemoration of martyrs remains an intra-confessional issue. Hariri's posthumous transformation from political patron to patron saint departs from this pattern, prompted by his personal stature, the politicised context of his assassination and the abrupt loss of a national leader. Benefitting from his great wealth, his role as a national martyr is inscribed at several memorial sites at or near Beirut's most sensitive public space, the Martyr's Square. Only the country's independence martyrs are commemorated at the Martyr's Square: the 1916 martyrs seeking liberation from Ottoman rule and Hariri who sought liberation from Syria's stewardship.

The final transformation of Hariri's martyrdom entails turning him into a saint and a religious symbol for the suffering of all the Lebanese. Yet even in the case of Hariri the truth has been elusive and The Hague trial thus far inconsequential. The popular protest movement his murder started (14 March) has also disintegrated, hence his posthumous role in nation-building is ephemeral and, as Volk has suggested, only a temporal feature of what could be termed quasi-nationalism. The enduring legacy of Hariri's martyrdom, however, can be read as an essential element of Lebanese statehood where martyrs – conceived, created and consumed – highlight the state's inability to prevent strife, protect the citizenry and prosecute offenders, hence the need to seek divine redemption through martyrdom.

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## Notes

1. For a detailed account of Palestinian martyr commemorations in Lebanon, see Khalili (2007a).
2. The popular protests following Lebanon's ongoing garbage crisis (#youstink) underline this fact.
3. Please note that the core of my argument applies to victims turned martyrs and not those seeking martyrdom for personal, political and religious reasons.
4. Several campaigns, sit-ins and exhibitions have been staged to highlight the plight of those missing; see for example 'Shadows of the Past', [http://en.qantara.de/content/photography-project-missing-lebanons-shadows-of-the-past?wc\\_c=8081](http://en.qantara.de/content/photography-project-missing-lebanons-shadows-of-the-past?wc_c=8081) (accessed 29 November 2016) and 'In a Sea of Oblivion', <https://thisisbeirut.wordpress.com/2010/04/20/in-a-sea-of-oblivion> (accessed 1 December 2016).
5. The UN criminal investigation into Hariri's murder was the largest and most sophisticated in the country's history and was followed by an international tribunal, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL, hereafter the Tribunal), set up in 2007 under UN auspices to try those involved in the murder. The Tribunal is of a novel hybrid type, seeking the perpetrators, not of mass murder or crimes against humanity, but of a single assassination termed 'terrorist crime'. The main goal of the Tribunal is to bring the perpetrators to justice and, through this example, deter new attacks of a similar nature.
6. Of the five men slated for extradition by The Hague Tribunal, one is confirmed dead (Mustafa Amine Badreddine), and the remaining are absconding.
7. *Daily Star* (2009), 'Memorial pays tribute to Gebran Tueni'; 'Army officers, politicians attend Hajj memorial'; 'Conference honors [Musa al Sadr], pays tribute to imam's principles'. Beirut, 14 December 2009.
8. The billboards can also be read as a political barometer, with the huge posters of the Syrian president Hafez al-Assad and his heir Bashar al-Assad disappearing from Beirut after May 2005.
9. The same imagery can be found in Palestinian refugee camps where posters of young Palestinian martyrs abound (Knudsen 2005).
10. Since 2007, the deadly attacks on army personnel made the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) commemorate the slain soldiers and officers as martyrs, thereby validating the army's motto of honour, sacrifice and loyalty to the nation.

11. Nonetheless, the Resistance and the nation are conflated in their imagery, discourse and political alliances.
12. 'Rafik Hariri's tragic murder remembered 10 years later', <http://yalibnan.com/2015/02/14/rafik-hariris-tragic-murder-remembered-10-years-later> (accessed 29 November 2016).
13. To the Shia, there is also the deeper, historical injustice in Kerbela at the hands of the Umayyad rulers (Ajami 1987: 139ff).
14. The exception is the Sunni Grand Mufti Hassan Khaled who was assassinated in 1989; his serene image is on display at street corners and roundabouts throughout Sunni Beirut. In addition to Khaled, 21 persons in his entourage were killed and more than one hundred injured (Knudsen 2010).
15. Solidere not only rebuilt Downtown Beirut but also erased the country's civil war heritage. Over twelve hundred damaged buildings in the Beirut Central District (CBD) were torn down and the rubble dumped at sea in what became known as the Normandy landfill (Becherer 2005: 18).
16. The Garden of Forgiveness celebrates all Lebanon's martyrs, not only Hariri.

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