



ALFRED TARAZI / A NATION'S INFLATION



Money, numbers and calculations were never of a real interest to me. But it is perhaps in those numbers that lay the secrets that govern our lives. At the outset, it was my interest in Lebanon's history that brought this project to life. I was trying to make sense of the Lebanese Civil War and had a lot of questions to ask. There was the Lebanon my parents had known, there was the war, and there was the Lebanon I knew, and the gap between those different time frames seemed irreconcilable. One of the silent witnesses of this disturbing reality were those bundles of old obsolete Lebanese Lira bills one could still find laying around. If there were one object of nostalgia representing pre-war Lebanon best, it would be those bills. Throughout the war, the Lira lost its value to reach a state of total inflation in the late eighties, until it would finally be stabilized in the early nineties. Before the war, an American dollar would make around 3 liras, after the war, 1500 Lebanese Liras would make a dollar. In the reconstruction process of a country and an economy that had been turned into ruins then came the new bills of this inflated currency, reflecting a new reality. The difference in style between the old bills and the new ones was stark. While the old bills could be read as an obvious effort to bridge different geographies together, the new bills contained abstract geometric shapes highlighting the failure of the first attempt. In the schism between the old bills and the new ones I could perhaps uncover the secrets of the Lebanese civil war, and the answer to all my questions.

But what made me really question the nature of war in relation to money was when I began working on the hypothetical project of a memorial for the victims of the civil war. I was younger, and in my head there was nothing hypothetical about it. Only through the process of remembering, mourning and commemorating their dead together could the Lebanese bridge their separate and conflicting histories. Today it's Lebanon itself that feels hypothetical. When I started fundraising for the memorial project I hit a wall: the cost of the project was too high. But how could that be in relation to the cost of the war, the physical and material loss of a nation? Can one even calculate that cost? The most obvious price Lebanon had to pay for those years of violence is the devaluation of their currency. It is hence the currency that could serve as a canvas to narrate that history. In the geography, or the symbols used on those bills, there already was part of that history. All I had to do then was to introduce in them the protagonists and events that form that story. And combined together, they would give you a historical fresco depicting a nation's inflation.

ILL A : A GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT : 1943

In the aftermath of World War One and with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the French and British colonial powers, in what is known as The Sykes Picot Agreements, divided the Middle East into separate states falling under their respective control. The State of Lebanon was thus created and placed under French Mandate. It would ultimately gain its independence from the French in the midst of World War Two, in 1943, becoming one of the only democracies in the Middle East. It was however a peculiar form of democracy in which the major posts of power had to be shared amongst its various communities according to their respective demographic importance. This unwritten gentlemen's agreement known as the National Pact established a political system built on sectarian power sharing. Based on a census done in 1932 (the only official census ever conducted in Lebanon), which showed a slight dominance of Christians over Muslims, the Maronite Christians were thus given the Presidency of the Republic, the Muslim Sunnis the seat of the Prime Minister, and the Muslim Shiaas, the Presidency of the Assembly. The Maronites were also given the direction of the National Army, and a 6 to 5 ratio in the parliament. While that distribution of power could have reflected the demographics of those days, it would prove to be a very unsustainable yet durable system that the Lebanese cannot seem to be able to overcome.



ILLF : THE SECTARIAN STATE : 1948

Lebanon harbors eighteen religious communities, each with their own clergy and liturgy, a cluster of minorities with a fragile balance of power to maintain. The religious leaders of those communities hold considerable power over their followers as all matters of personal status such as marriage divorce or inheritance are governed by their religious codes, each religious sect following its distinct set of personal state laws. Adding this to a political system appointing government positions according to sectarian quotas, you end up with a society entrenched along its sectarian lines. Another key determining factor for the future of Lebanon would be the creation of another sectarian state in 1948: Israel. Following the Balfour declaration initially made in 1917 through which the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary gave an official cover to the Zionists in view of establishing a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, the first Arab Israeli war of 1948 saw an influx of a hundred thousand Palestinian refugee on Lebanese soil who had been dispossessed and expelled. Lebanon as a state, and to the outcry of the Muslim community, would not participate to the first four Arab Israeli wars. In comparison to the armies of Egypt or Syria Lebanon claimed its main strength towards the Israelis laid in its weakness, and should therefore not provoke it. However it would ultimately become one of the most active fronts in that long struggle.



5 L L F : THE BRIDGE : 1958

In stark contrast with other Arab states, Lebanon developed as a liberal democracy: it established bank secrecy in 1956, granted women the right to vote in 1958, and adopted a liberal economy. Its democratic system allowed for the emergence of a free press, making Lebanon and especially its capital Beirut a regional hub for commerce, business, politics, culture, and thanks to its pleasant climate and rich historical past, leisure and tourism. However the Lebanese constituents were still struggling to define their common identity. And when the Pan Arabist wave of Gamal Abdel Nasser swept Egypt and the Arab world resulting with the union of Egypt and Syria, in 1958, it led to the first demonstration of what a Lebanese Civil War would be. The Muslim street who viewed Nasser as its indisputable hero, and clearly defined itself along his Arabizing, pro Palestinian anti imperialist politics, clashed with the Christian street that was more prone to a separate Lebanese particularism, based on Lebanon's older historic past, and not committed to the armed struggle to free Palestine from the Zionists. That civil war that lasted for about three months ended with a U.S. military intervention. The General of the Lebanese army Fuad Chehab who had maintained the neutrality of that institution during the conflict was then chosen to replace former president Camille Chamoun at the head of the state.



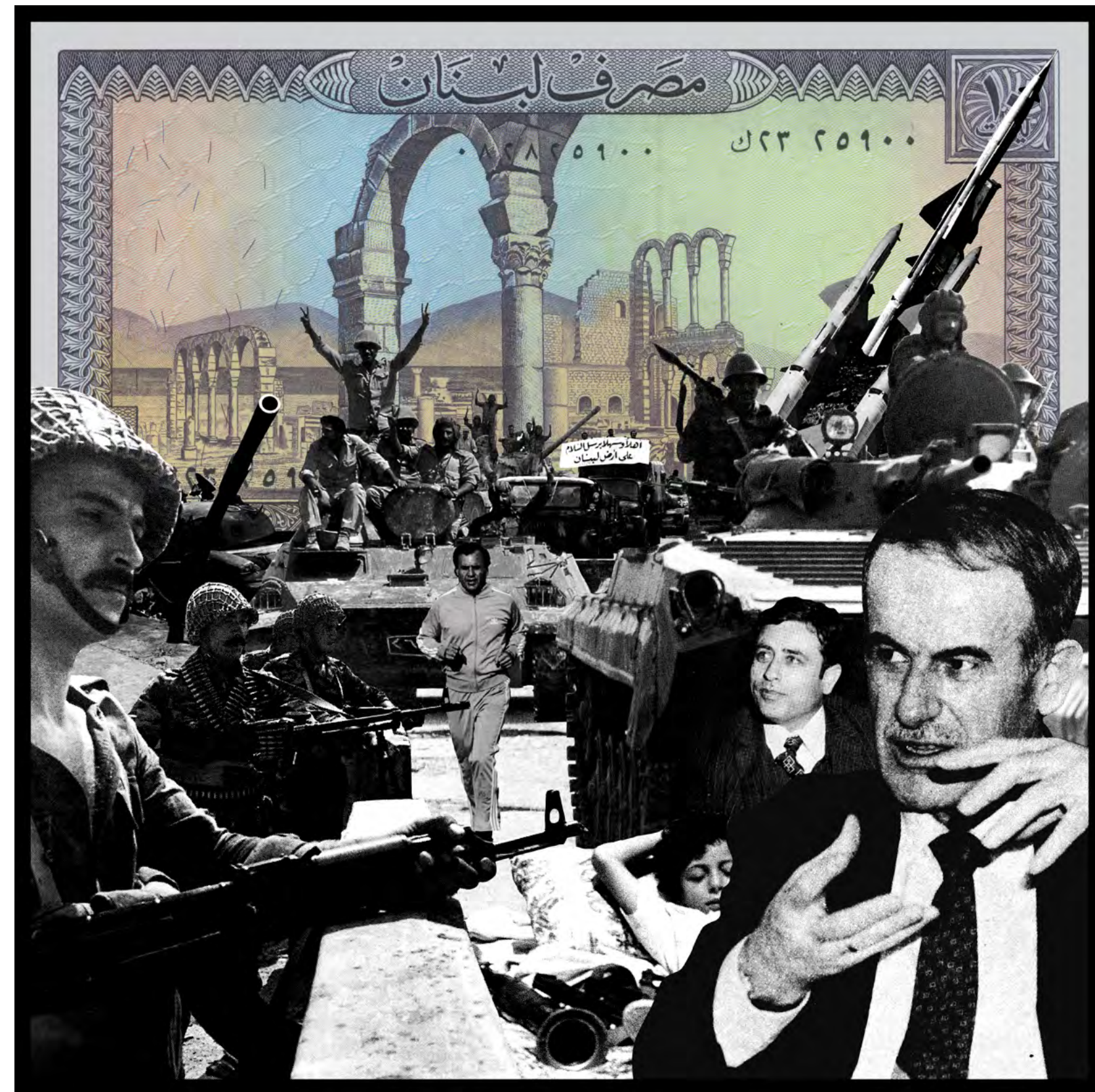
5 L L A : STATE BUILDING : 1961

Fuad Chehab's presidency was marked by the important reforms and large scale social development projects he conducted. However Lebanon with its democratic nature, its pluralism, and its intellectual freedoms had become a regional hub for the politics and revolutionary ideals boiling in the region, so to counter foreign interference in Lebanese internal affairs Chehab created the Deuxieme Bureau, an intelligence and security service. Its sole concern was the surveillance and repression of all the movements that could post a threat to the stability of the country such as the failed coup conducted by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party in 1961. That party was fighting the colonial partitioning of the Middle East and believed Lebanon should belong to a larger Syrian state. The leader of this party Antoun Saadeh had already been sentenced to death in 1949 for a first failed coup. At a time when a Middle East caught up in the cold war was burgeoning with revolutionary movements the Deuxieme Bureau was perhaps necessary. However it was largely unpopular for the Lebanese who viewed it as a threat for their liberties and democratic system. Chehab's term ended in 1964 and he declared that his experience in office had convinced him that the people of Lebanon were not ready to put aside traditional feudal politics and support him in building a modern state.



10 L L A : OUR SYRIAN BROTHERS : 1963

Historically Lebanon had always been part of a greater geographical entity comprising Syria, and the notion of Lebanon and Syria as two separate states was quite foreign for most locals exempting the Maronites and the Druze who had already enjoyed some degree of autonomy in the mountains. At the time of the independence most Lebanese considered themselves to be Syrian, a notion not bound by geography but by a strong Levantine identity. Lebanon still had to craft its own separate narrative. While Lebanon developed as a multiparty democracy, its Syrian neighbor had a different trajectory, moving from being a parliamentary republic, to the brief union with Egypt that ended with a military coup in 1961. In 1963 another coup d'état brought the Syrian Regional Branch of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party to power. Ba'ath, which means renaissance in Arabic, is an ideology mixing nationalist, pan-Arabist, socialist and anti-imperialist interests calling for the unification of the Arab world into a single state. The relations between the Lebanese and Syrian states would always be tense, each accusing the other of interfering in the politics of the other. In 1970 Hafez El Assad would seize power in Syria making it a dictatorship under the rule of the Ba'ath party. He would remain in power until his death in 2000, and would become one of the most important players in the history of contemporary Lebanon and the region.



10 L L F : OUR BROTHERS FROM PALESTINE : 1964

When hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees sought refuge in Lebanon and across the Arab world in 1948 in the aftermath of The Nakba (the catastrophe), they were facing nothing less to what would prove to be a war of extermination at the hand of the Zionists. At the outset, the Palestinian cause having become the credo and unifying call of the pan Arab movements, the Palestinian refugees believed it was the Arab states, with their ultimate hero, Nasser, who would free Palestine. But after the military defeats those states ensued facing Israel, it became clear that it was a war they would have to fight themselves. Thus the Palestine Liberation Front was created in 1964 with the purpose of creating an independent State of Palestine and ensuring the return of the refugees onto their land. It advocated that whatever was taken from the Palestinians by force could only be retrieved by force. The Palestinians began arming and training guerilla fighters in Jordan and Lebanon who would then launch military operations on Israel. In a climate of revolutionary fervor, the Lebanese Muslim and Leftist Street espoused the Palestinian cause, while the Maronites feared they were aiming to create a state within their state. Yasser Arafat became the leader of the PLO until his death in 2004, managing to give an international dimension to the still ongoing Palestinian struggle.



25 L A : THE HOSTAGE HOST : 1967

In 1967 took place the third Arab Israeli war and Israel inflicted a terrible defeat on Egypt, Syria and Jordan in what was then called the 6-Day War. The conflict ended with Israel making large territorial gains some it still controls to this day. For the Palestinians it was now clear, they could not rely on the Arab states to free their land, they would have to do it themselves. They hence intensified their guerilla actions against Israel. In Lebanon this provoked clashes with the Lebanese army that was trying to contain the growth of the guerilla. However, the Palestinian fighters had a tremendous popular and political support from the Lebanese Muslim and leftist street. To avoid the escalation of violence Lebanon asked for Nasser's mediation. Lebanese officials under the General Emile Boustani met with Yasser Arafat in Cairo in 1969 and agreed that the PLO was allowed to operate in refugee camps, to train, arm and recruit fighters against Israel, using Lebanon as its base for military operations. The Cairo Agreements as they came to be known aimed to regulate the political and military activities of the Palestinians in Lebanon while respecting Lebanese sovereignty. For the Lebanese Christian right, the intensified Palestinian armed presence was a threat to their very existence. However when the Lebanese host attempted to discipline or destroy its Palestinian guest, it could not do so without the risk of destroying itself.



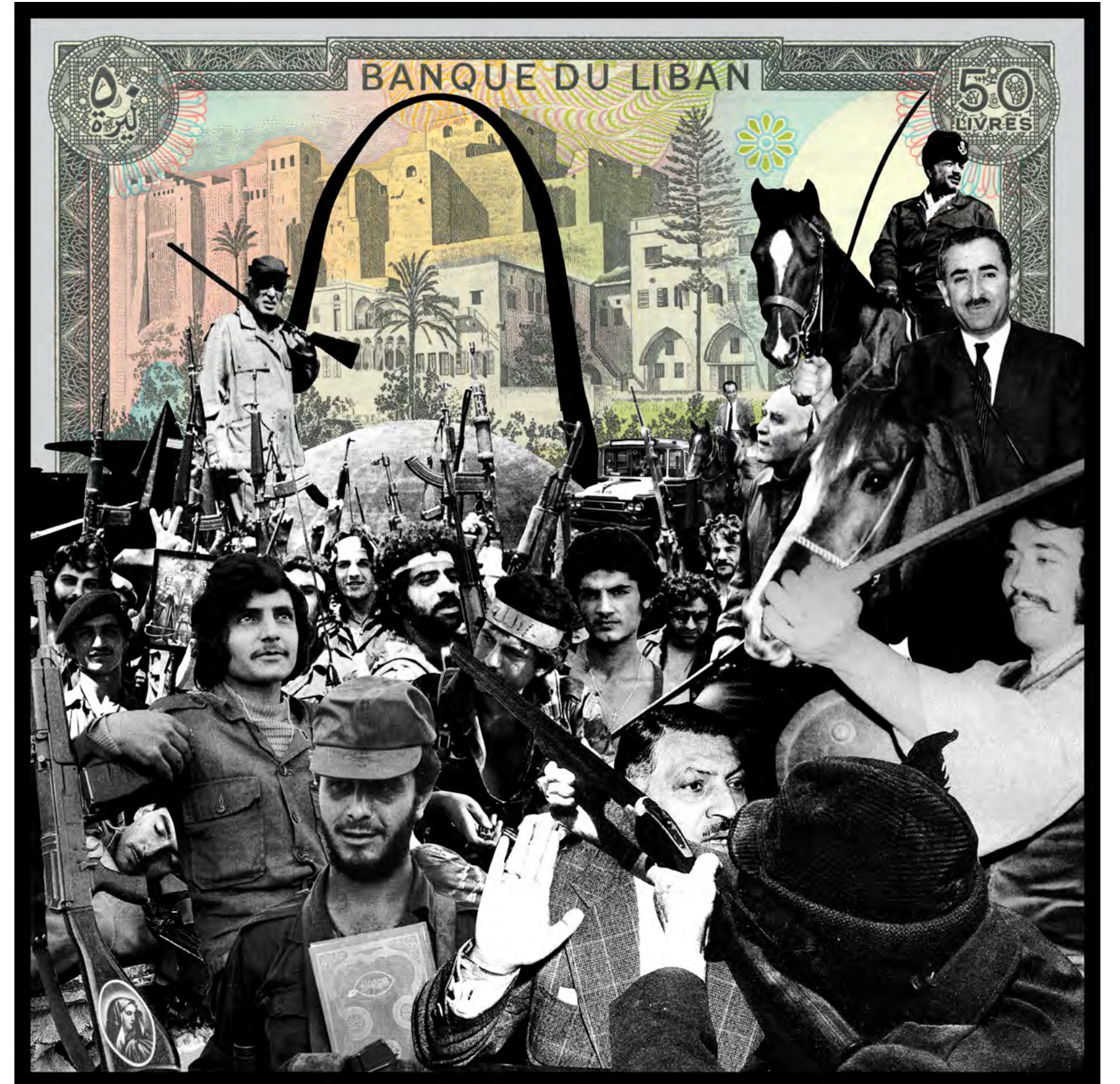
25 L L F : HOLDING THE FORT : 1973

In 1970, following a failed coup in Jordan and a bloody repression, the entire Palestinian resistance relocated to Lebanon making it its one and only politico-military power base to conduct the Palestinian struggle from. The PLO settled in Lebanon because as a state it could not stop them from coming, Lebanon was a garden without a fence in which they could not be controlled nor subjugated. To save face and try reconquering the territories they had lost to Israel in the 6 day war, Egypt and Syria joined together and launched a dual offensive on the Zionist state in 1973. That war also ended with both Arab nations defeated, and Egypt splitting from the rest of the Arabs, and most notably its Syrian war allies to get a separate peace agreement with Israel. Meanwhile the PLO had begun internationalizing its struggle, especially with the Munich massacre in 1972 during which they killed 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. It also intensified its operations on the Lebanese front. This led to several Israeli reprisal raids, in southern Lebanon along the border, but also strikes at the heart of the capital, where they destroyed almost the entire fleet of Lebanon's national carrier, Middle East Airlines in 1968, or targeted assassinations of PLO cadres in Beirut in 1973. President Sleiman Frangieh hence privately advised Maronite parties chiefly represented by the Phalanges not to rely on the army anymore and to take matters in their own hands.



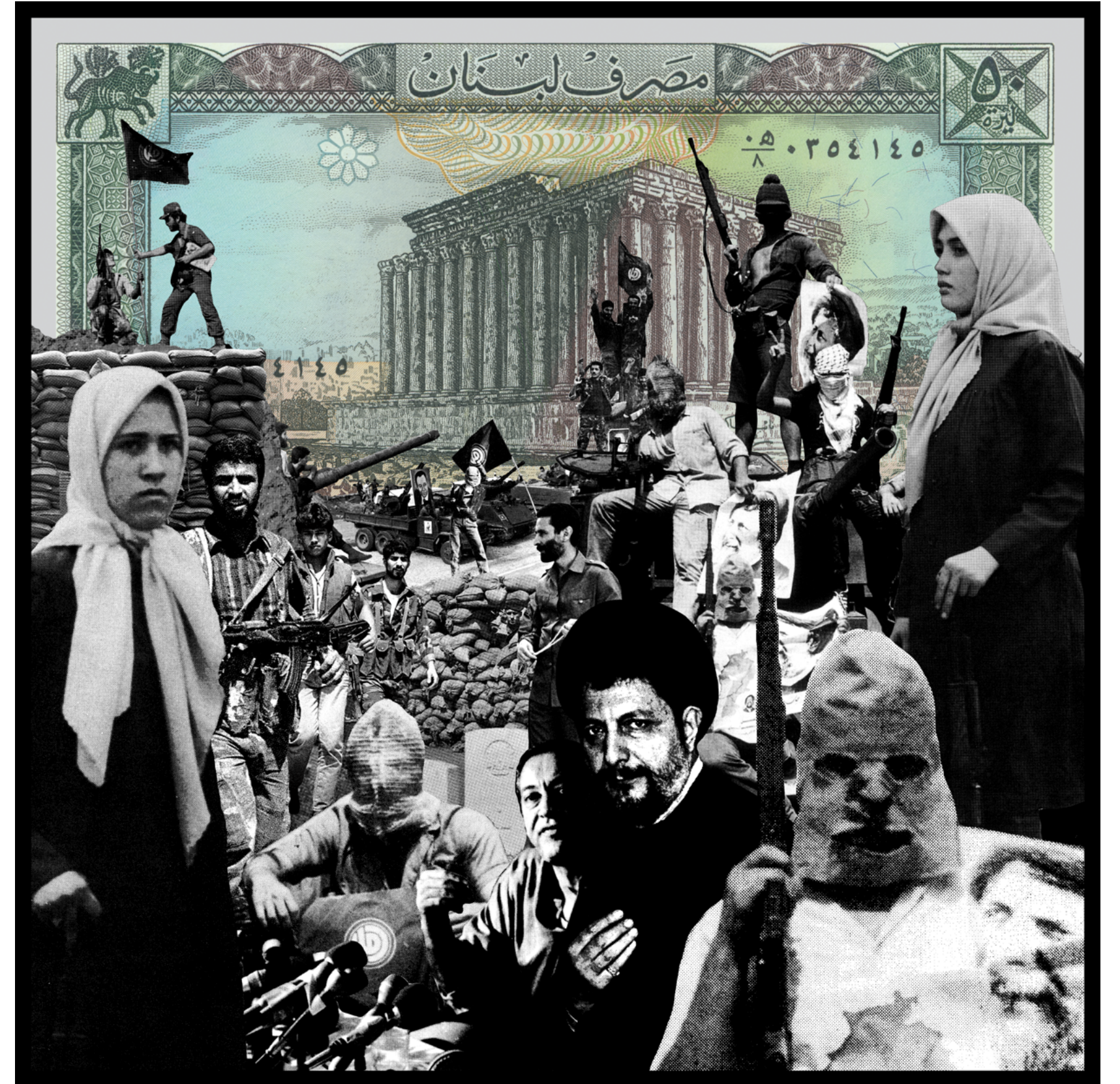
50 L L F : THE FAILURE OF MODERNITY : 1975

The Lebanese civil war broke out on the 13th of April 1975. At that time its main protagonists could not have anticipated that it would last 15 years and involve so many local and international players in what was to become one of the most convoluted wars to have stricken any part of the world ever. At the beginning it saw the emergence of a coalition of Lebanese Muslim and leftists movements that sought to challenge the whole existing order in Lebanon. The National Movement as they came to be known was seeking reform through arms, the democratic reform of Lebanon's backward, sectarian semi-feudal political system and the abolition of political sectarianism in the legislature, the civil service, the judiciary and the army. For that purpose they had armed themselves and organized militias, and would eventually associate the Palestinian guerrilla to their struggle. They were fighting the reactionary Lebanese Front, an alliance of right wing Christian parties, who were convinced that their identity and survival as a community was at stake. The Palestinian armed presence was the trigger of the conflict, and with their alliance with the Lebanese Left, they became an integral part of it. Although the war started with social and political ambitions aimed at creating a new order, it became from its outset increasingly sectarian, and entered the country in cycles of violence that would provoke the ruin of all previous efforts to create a modern state.



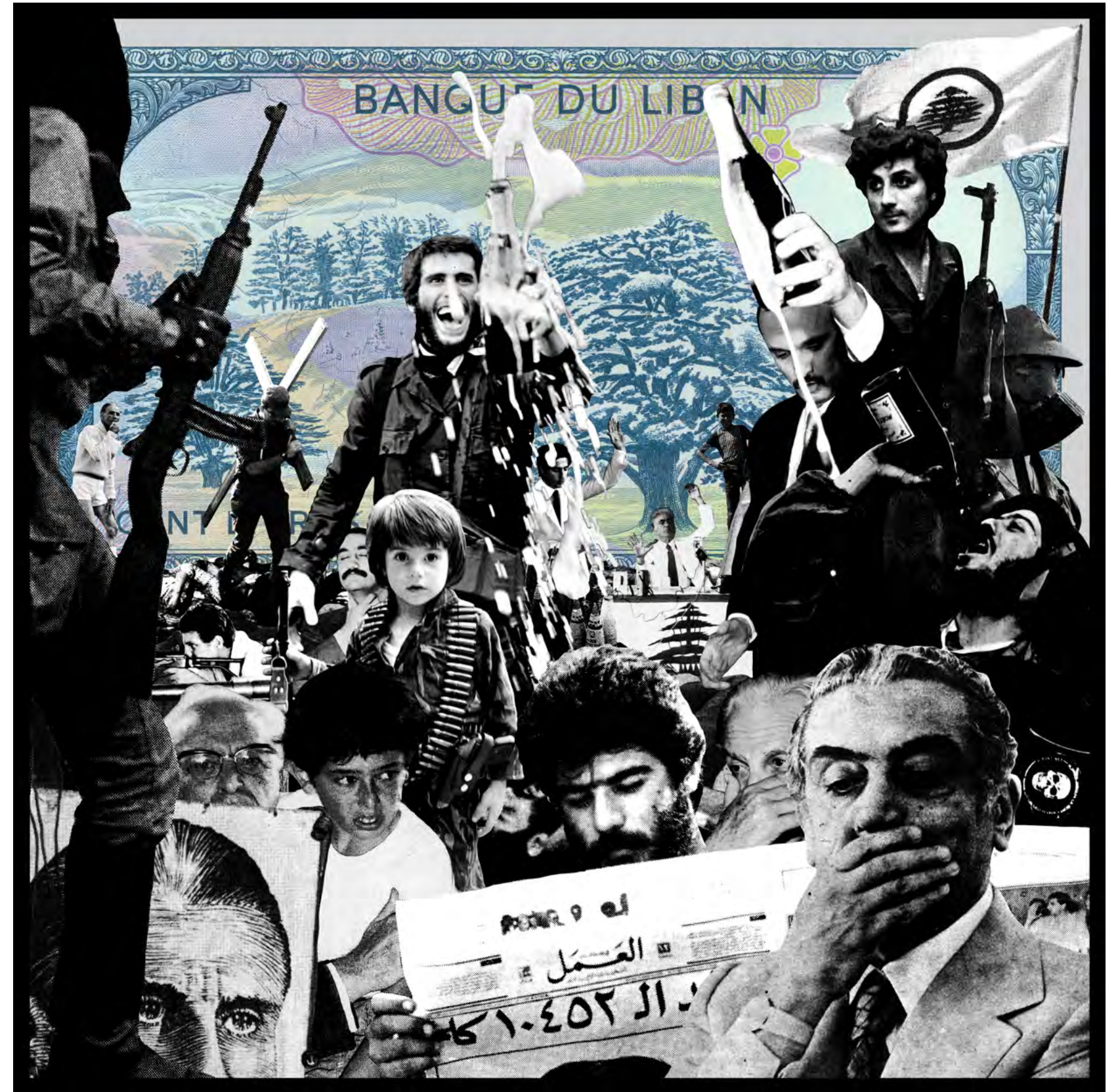
50 L L A : THE OUTCRY OF THE OPPRESSED : 1976

The Lebanese community that had been the most affected by the PLOs activity in South Lebanon and the subsequent Israeli reprisals would undoubtedly be the Shiites of the South. For years, the successive Lebanese governments had been blamed for the negligence with which they treated the peripheral regions in opposition to the attention granted to the capital. The continuous unrest in the south would provoke massive migration of Shiites to Beirut's suburbs who along the Palestinian camps formed a misery belt around the capital. In 1974 Musa Sadr, a charismatic Iranian cleric of Lebanese descent launched The Movement Of the Deprived in a rally in Baalbek. He announced the opening of training camps for all Shiites who wished to defend their homes against Israeli aggressions, since the Lebanese army was not doing it. Sadr denounced to country's ruling elite as corrupt, monopolistic and socially insensitive, and threatened that his followers would attack and occupy the palaces and mansions of the rich and powerful if the plight of the poor and oppressed continued to go unheeded. Thus was born Amal, a key movement, turned militia, that had at the beginning of the war 1500 fighters, a number that would rise to 16000 in the mid eighties. In 1978 following a trip to Lybia Sadr disappeared and Nabih Berry took the leadership of Amal. It would be disillusioned members of Amal who would later create Hezbollah in the 80s.



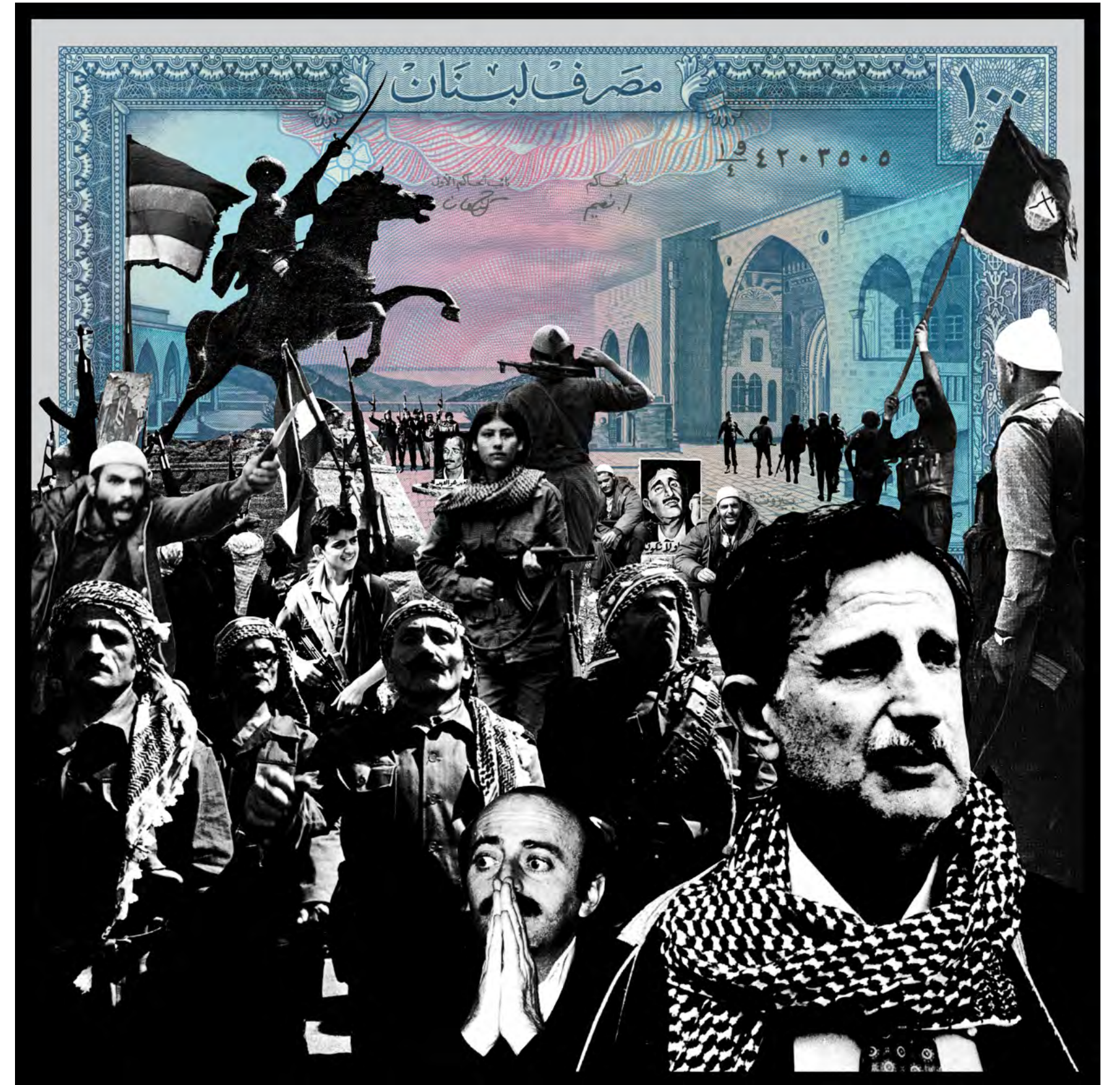
100 L L F : MAROUNISTAN : 1978

Lebanon in its current form would have definitely not come to exist without the lobbying of the Maronite community. To the historical area of Mount Lebanon in which they already enjoyed some kind of autonomy, the French annexed the Bekaa Valley and the coastal cities of Beirut, Tyre, Sidon and Tripoli. It was thus highly ironic that in wanting to preserve their ascendancy over the Lebanese state in the course of the Civil War they would lose control of all of those territories and find themselves confined to their historic Mount Lebanon, in which they also entered in bitter fratricidal wars. The main Maronite contender of that war was Pierre Gemayel's Phalangist party created in 1936 following a visit to Nazi Germany. It started as a paramilitary youth organization, and emerged as the most important Christian movement during the civil war of 1958. The Phalangists were fervent Lebanese nationalists, confessionally minded, conservative, and authoritarian. They believed that their own salvation as a community lay in a strong Lebanese state and their institutionalized ascendancy within it. So when a portion of the Lebanese endorsed to the Palestinian armed struggle, it seemed like the Trojan horse through which Christian Lebanon would come under generalized assault. However in resorting to violence to conserve the system and save the institutions from any change they would largely contribute to destroy that which they were trying to protect.



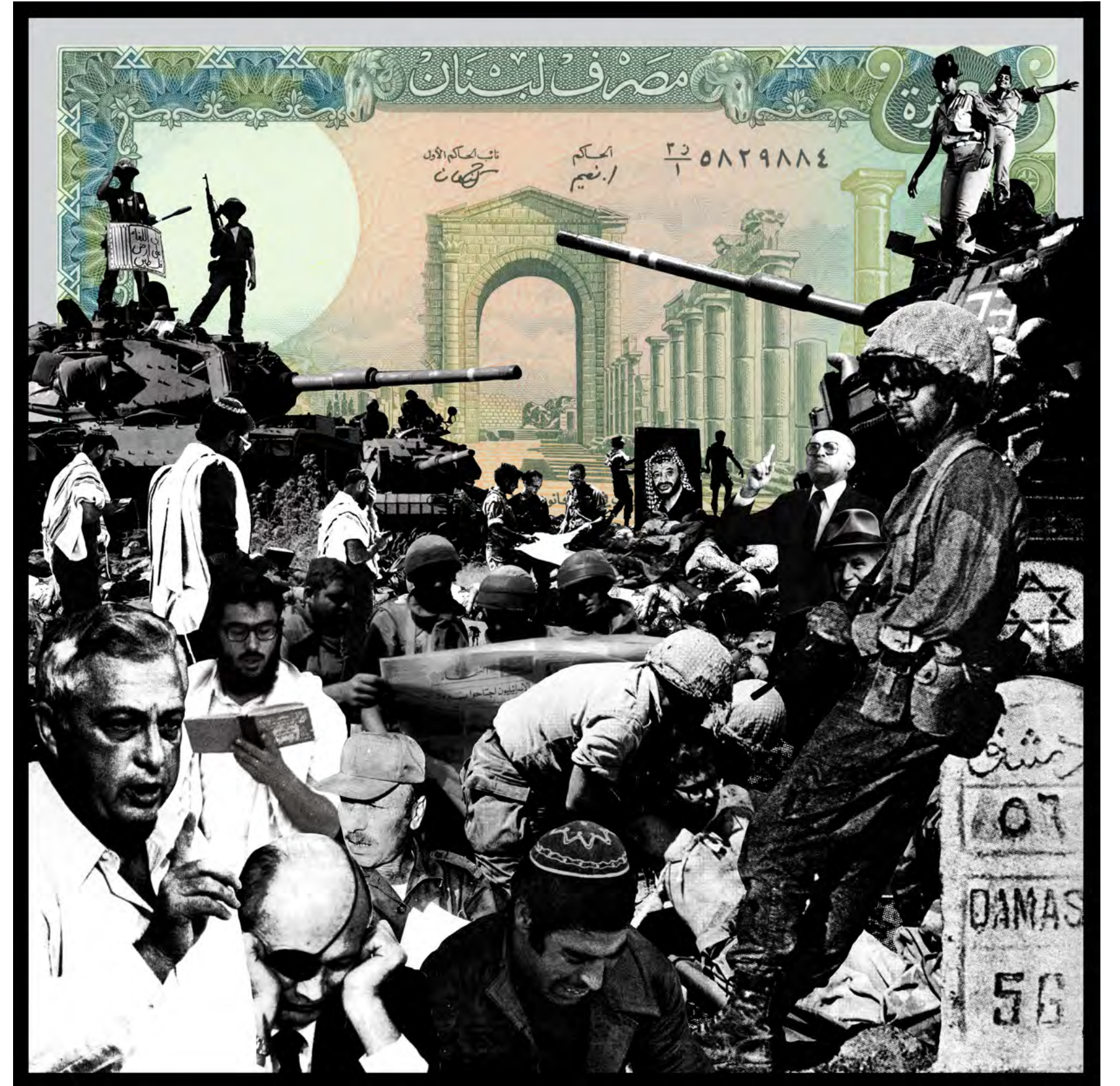
100 L L A : THE MOUNTAIN : 1977

The leading figure of the leftist National Movement was Kamal Jumblat the hereditary leader of the Druzes. An offshoot of Ismailism, the Druzes are a branch of Shia Islam, a persecuted community for although monotheists they also believe in soul eternity and reincarnation. They have been present in the Lebanese mountains for hundreds of years, where in the context of regional wars and tensions they had already been opposed to the Maronite Christians, their historic foes in the mountain. In 1949 Jumblat founded the Progressive Socialist Party, demanding a new Lebanese order based on secularism, socialism, Arabism and an abolition of the sectarian system. He was also convinced that change through the Lebanese political system was impossible. So when the Palestinians embraced armed struggle to fight Israel, they also were his natural allies to overrun the system in Lebanon. In 1977 as the National Movement and the PLO were already in control of 70% of Lebanon, the Syrian troops entered at the invitation of the Maronites to save them from a probable defeat. Jumblat who was against the Syrian intervention and believed the war should have been conducted until it reached its goal was then assassinated in 1977. His son Walid took over, and would see the Druze and Maronite militias engaged in brutal battles known as the Mountain War reenacting the massacres of their common ancestors



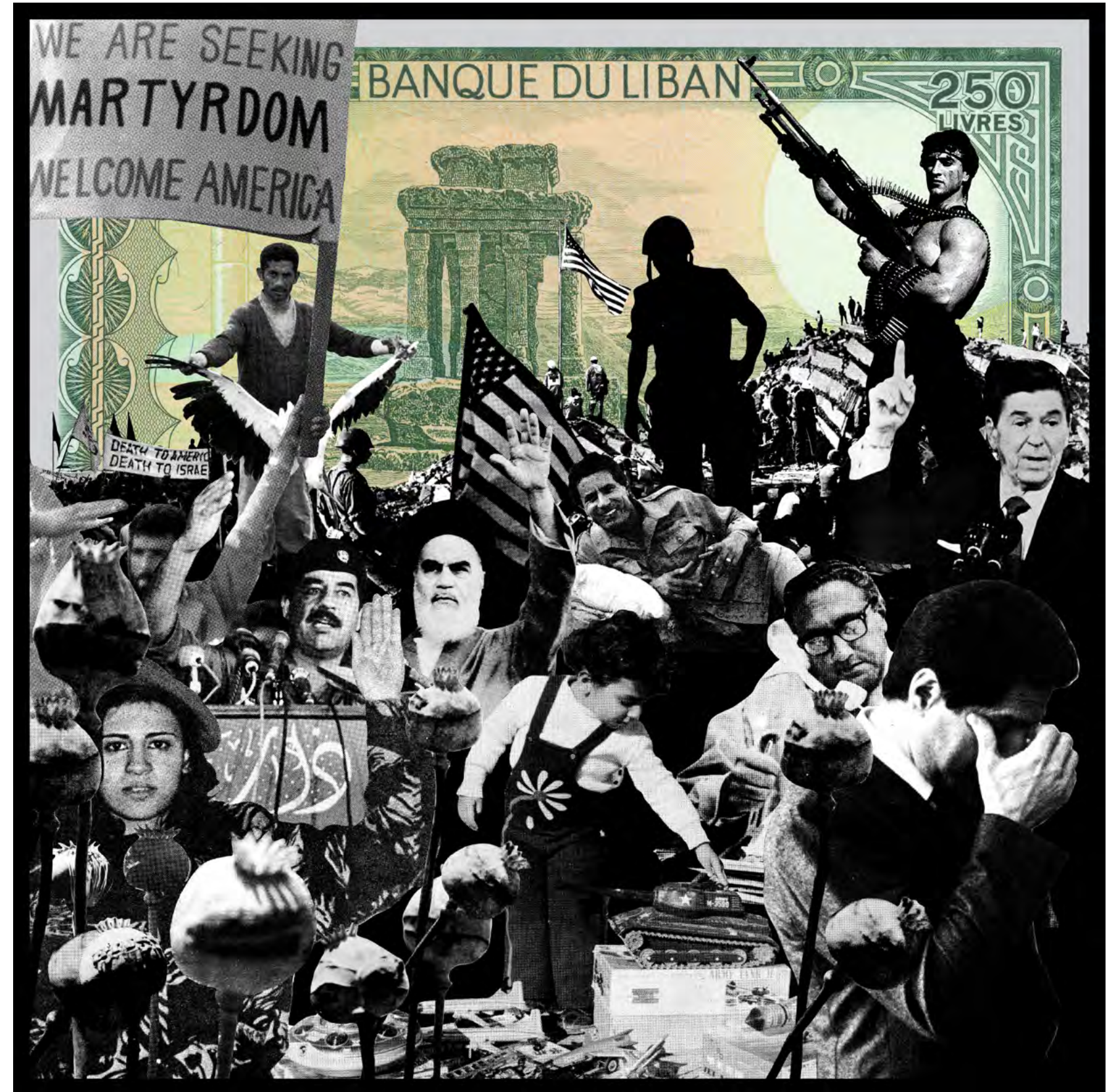
250 L L A : PEACE IN GALILEE : 1982

The Western world was ready to compensate the Jewish people for the Holocaust with a state in Palestine. In the process, they adopted double standards wherein Palestinian violence was 'terror', an evil which in and of itself nullified the legitimacy of any cause it might have claimed to promote, while Israeli violence came under the banner of 'the purity of arms', the slogan of a righteous army that was able time and again to defeat its hostile Arab neighbors. In Lebanon after having resorted to the Syrian army to save them from being defeated, the Maronites turned to their Israeli neighbor to solve once and for all their Palestinian problem. For the interventionist, expansionist and hegemonic Israelis this meant a full fledged invasion in the summer of 82 wherein they would seek to crush the PLO and transform Christian Lebanon into the natural ally they had always deemed it to be. However once they had secured the removal of all PLO fighters from Lebanon and placed Bachir Gemayel their Phalangist ally at the head of the state he refused to sign a peace treaty unless all Lebanese would agree to it. An impossibility since, in the wake of all the violence of that invasion, Israel had created what in time would prove to be its fiercest enemy: Hezbollah. The young president of 35 would be killed a few weeks following his election at the head of Israeli bayonets. and members of his militia would commit under Israeli supervision one of the worst massacres of the war in retaliation.



250 L L F : THE PLAYGROUND : 1983

Following the Israeli invasion of 82, in addition to the numerous Lebanese militias, you now had on Lebanese soil amongst others, soldiers from the Syrian army, the Israeli army, the American army, the French army, the Italian army, and an international contingent of the United Nations. In 1979 the Islamic Revolution took place in Iran, and Ayatollah Khomeini was determined to export his revolution to the rest of the world. It would find its' earliest, most obvious and dramatic consequences in Lebanon. One of Khomeini's strategies was to emphasize the ecumenical, pan Islamic credentials of his revolution by identifying it with the pan-Arab cause par excellence: Palestine. So when the leaders of Amal accepted the American plan to have the Palestinian guerilla relocated from Lebanon a number of defectors created a group called Islamic Amal, which would later generate Hezbollah. In the aftermath of the 82 invasion and the assassination of Bachir Gemayel, his brother Amin was elected president, and was seeking to reestablish with the support of the Army and the Phalanges the Maronite domination of the country, and what was perceived to be a client regime to the west in the eyes of the new born Islamists. So the year 1983 saw a series of spectacular suicide attacks on French, American and Israeli targets costing the lives of hundreds of soldiers in a now open war to fight God's cause against Israel and the hegemonic west.



500 L L A : LIBERATION WAR : 1989

In 1988 fifteen minutes before the expiry of his term Amine Gemayel appointed Michel Aoun to the post of prime minister, who also took the title of acting president since the presidency was vacant. Aoun thus became president, prime minister, general all at once, and saw himself in the unique legitimate position to reestablish Greater Lebanon, sovereign and independent once again. To achieve that, all foreign armies had to leave Lebanon, Aoun thus waged a Liberation war against the Syrian army. In parallel he also waged war on the Lebanese Forces the Maronite Christian militia to impose the supremacy of the Legitimate Lebanese Army on all of Lebanon, starting with his own Maronite turf. This led to some of the most futile demented self-destroying violence between the two most powerful military institutions in the country. The situation would radically change when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990 and Hafez El Asad's Syria sided with the Americans who thus gave the Syrians the green light to end the war in Lebanon. The Syrian army thus stormed the presidential palace that Aoun had rebranded as The People's Palace and where he was holding very popular rallies advocating the cause of a free and sovereign Lebanon. Free and sovereign, Lebanon was not meant to be, as Aoun had to flee the country admitting his defeat, and leaving the ground for a Syrian occupation that would last another 15 years.



500 L L F : THE TERROR FESTIVAL : 1990

The civil war lasted 15 years, and what began as a fight to save an order or to create another order ended in the greatest disorder ever. Moving beyond all ideologies all parties concerned perpetrated massacres and atrocities, institutionalizing practices such as random shelling, identity card killings, sniping, random kidnappings, with the civilian population paying the highest tribute. In its last years, the war saw some intra sectarian battles that were perhaps the bloodiest of the whole war. In the Southern Suburb of Beirut the Shiites Amal and Hezbollah fought to establish dominance over their community, in Mount Lebanon, the Maronite Lebanese Forces and the Lebanese Army under the command of General Aoun fought a war of elimination. During the whole course of the war, conflict was constantly fed by booby-trapped cars and assassinations that would always go unsigned and unpunished. People were killed for their communitarian belonging, for being at the wrong place and time, in acts of vengeful clueless retribution, and all of the crimes of the war would ultimately go unpunished. The legacy of the war was all around the Lebanese in casualties, physical destruction, economic loss, and the large-scale emigration of a disgusted populace. Psychologically, the war was devastating leaving the Lebanese in a benumbed acceptance of the peace settlement that was in store for them.



1000 L L F : PEACE : 1991

The war ended with an agreement signed in Saudi Arabia in the town of Taif, where 58 of the country's deputies ratified a Charter of National Reconciliation. First on the question of identity that had haunted the political discourse throughout the civil war, it positioned Lebanon as a country with an Arab identity and belonging. It also changed the power sharing formula that formerly favored the Christians to a 50:50 ratio and enhanced the powers of the Sunni prime minister over those of the Christian president. Although the Taef agreement identified the abolition of political sectarianism as a national priority, it provided no timeframe for doing so, and in practice mainly served to reinforce it. Taef called for the dissolution of all militias, their members joining either the army or the internal security forces. Then an amnesty law for all crimes perpetrated before 1991 was passed exempting the warlords from any accountability for 15 years of continuous bloodshed. Taef internationally consecrated Syria's guardianship over Lebanon decreeing that its forces shall assist the new Republic to spread its sovereignty over the whole country emphasizing on the special relations between Lebanon and Syria. Having orchestrated the Taef agreements Rafic Hariri became Prime Minister, and would stabilize the crumbling rate of the inflated national currency that was now trading at 1500ll for a dollar.



1000 L L F : THE ISLAMIC RESISTANCE: 1992

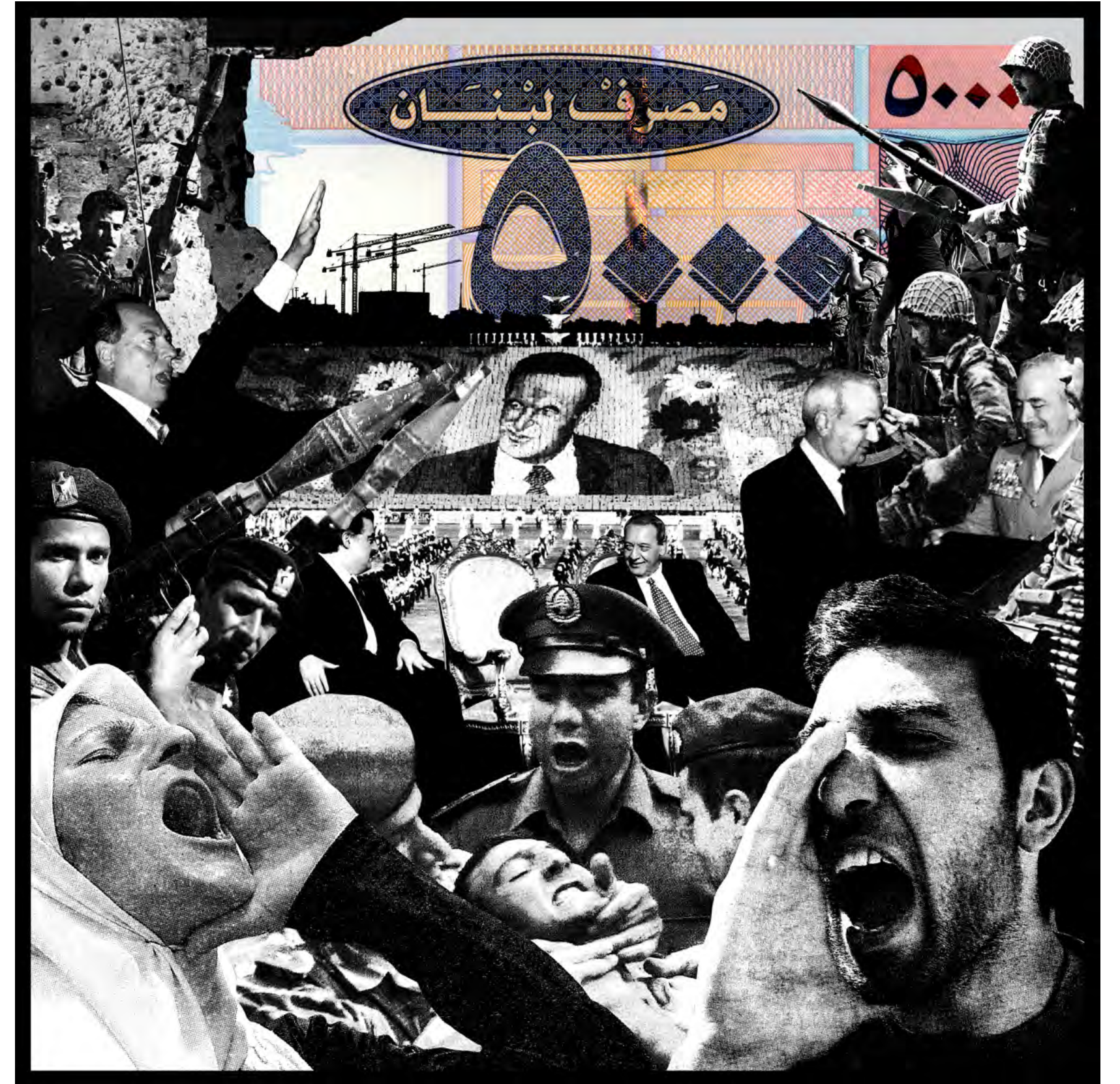
Of all the militias of the civil war only one was officially allowed to survive, Hezbollah, which by then didn't consider itself a militia anymore but a resistance movement. Since the mid eighties they had been conducting operations in southern Lebanon to fight the Israeli occupation, but they were not the only ones on the field, there were all kind of Palestinian, communist, and leftist militant groups. However by the end of the civil war they had managed to monopolize the armed struggle against Israel and make it their core mission. On the ground Hezbollah was an expression of a Syrian and Iranian entente that still stands to this day. In 1992 Israel assassinated Sheikh Abbas Musawi, Hezbollah's secretary general. A 23-year-old Hassan Nasrallah would immediately be elected to replace him. One of Nasrallah's first public declarations was the 'retribution' policy: if Israel hit Lebanese civilian targets, then Hezbollah would retaliate with attacks on Israeli territory. Meanwhile, they would consistently attack IDF targets within occupied Lebanese territory. However Hezbollah would not limit itself to warring activities but would also present its members and supporters with a wide range of social services, such as schools and hospitals. Born in the chaos of the civil war Hezbollah demarcated itself from the rest of the Lebanese militias and political groups by its discipline, integrity and dedication. The group is funded by donations from the Shia community and mainly by its Iranian backers making it one of the most important military and political forces in Lebanon.



5000 L L A : TUTELAGE : 1993

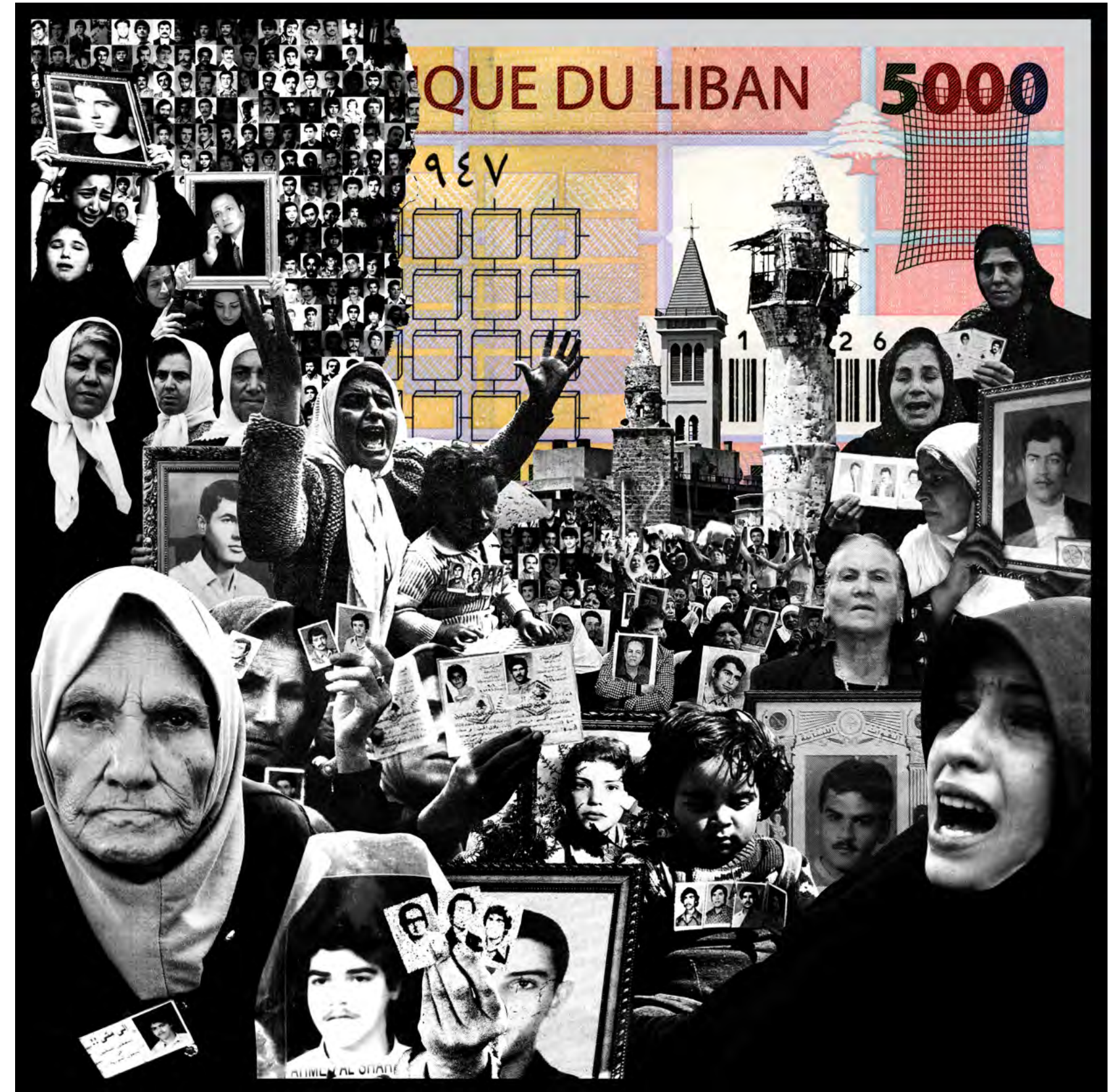
The post war period was marked by the treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination signed between Lebanon and Syria highlighting the unity of destiny between both countries. However Syria did not observe even the outward forms of a sovereign Lebanon turning its foreign policy into an integral extension of its own.

Most of the political class was then subjugated in the acceptance of the new role Syria was playing in Lebanon. The leaders of the Maronite community who did not agree on that Pax Syriana were killed, jailed, or forced into exile. In addition to the Syrian military presence across the country, the joint Syrian Lebanese security apparatus would keep a strong grip over the political, social and cultural life of the country, using methods of repression and control already tried and tested in Syria. On two instances the Syrians would have the constitution amended in order to renew the terms of Maronite presidents who were favorable to their presence. While the Taef agreements had set a framework for their beginning and complete withdrawal from Lebanon, it became clear that the Syrian regime had no intention of losing its Lebanese card that served them as an indirect front with Israel through its support to Hezbollah. A card that could be essential in potential peace negotiations with Israel in order to retrieve the Golan Heights the territories they had lost to the Israelis in the course of the 6 Days war in 1968.



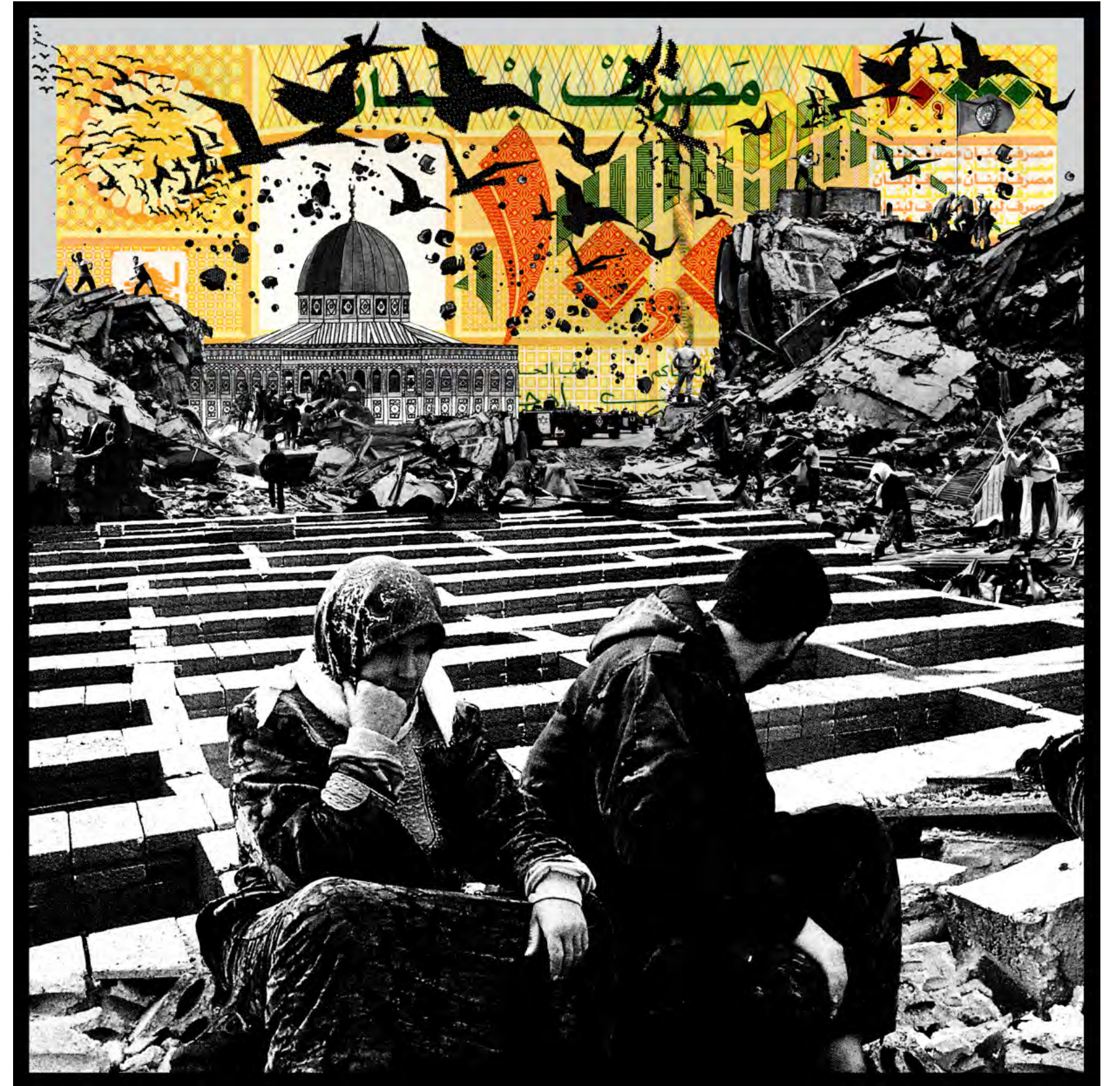
5000 L L F : THE WAR'S LEGACY : 1995

With the law of amnesty exempting all crimes committed before 1992 from any kind of prosecution came a period of forceful amnesia. The debate about the war and the committed atrocities was non-existent. It is believed that more than 200000 people were killed, while around 17000 went missing. There is not a single Lebanese family that hasn't been wounded physically or materially during the war. And all those wounds were treated with the indifference of a subjugated political class trying to make the most for itself out of the reconstruction process. Reconciliations had happened at the top, with some warlords and warring factions apologizing to others and going through a light headed mea culpa process, however, the Lebanese remained separated in their muffled suffering along the demarcation lines of the war. During the "events" as the war is often referred to in Lebanon, there was the quick and certain death at the hand of bullets, shrapnel, in the random course of this lottery of violence. But there also were the flying roadblocks at which anyone could wind up kidnapped by a militia or another in their policies aimed at inflicting more damage to the opposing faction. Most often those arrested would vanish in mass graves and disposal sites all around the country. The fate of the 17000 missing people of the Civil War lies still in the unwritten story of those graves. Despite the work put on by the civil society, the parliament still blocks resolutions to determine the fate of those who have vanished.



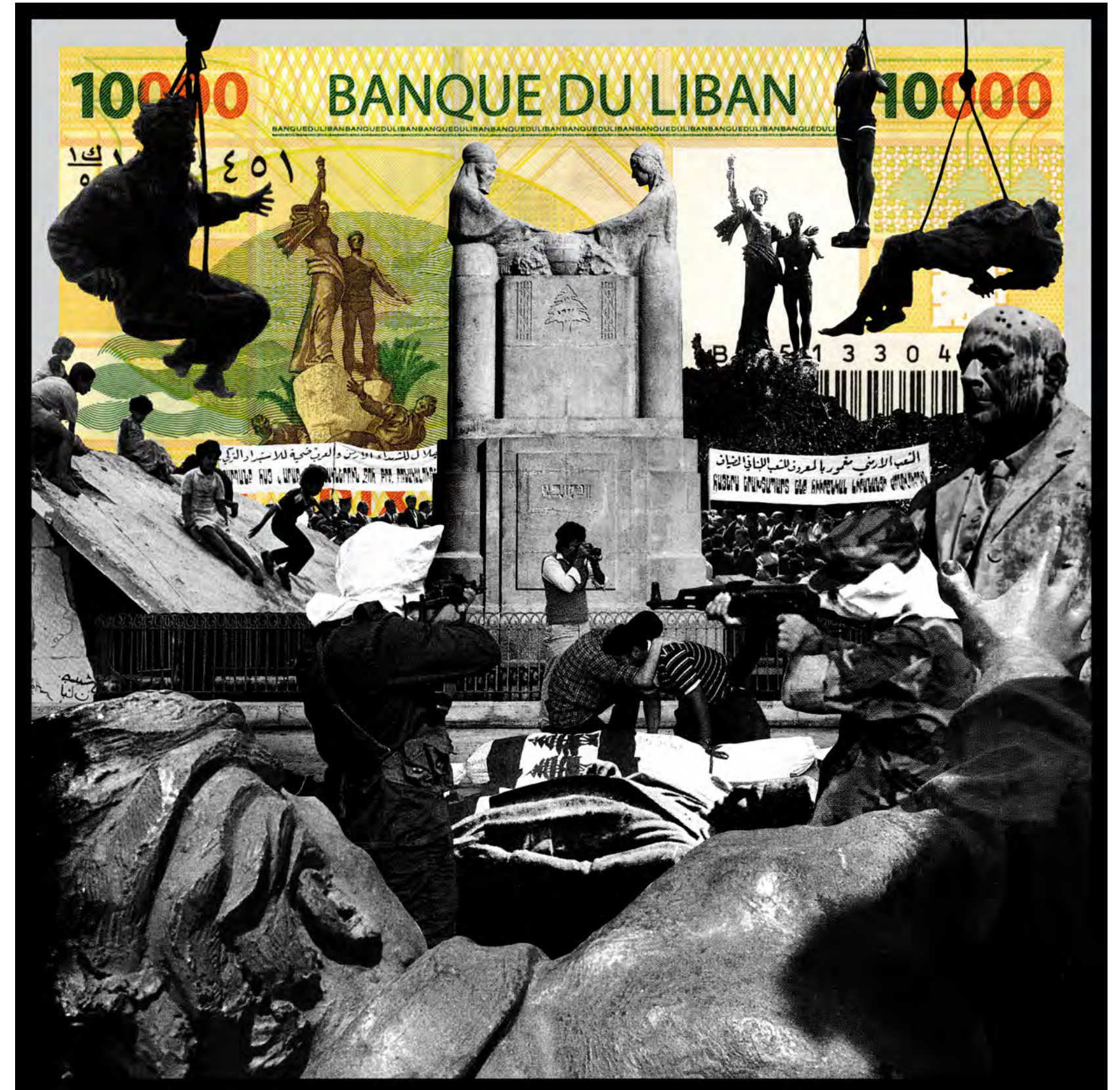
10000 L L A : THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM : 1996

In southern Lebanon Hezbollah's strategy was simple and consisted in making their enemy bleed slowly, and bleed it did to the point that Lebanon was considered to have become Israel's Viet Nam. Hezbollah's operations increased from 19 in 1990 to 187 in 1994 becoming more and more ambitious with time. Israel would then retaliate through stand-off operations that basically consisted in a merciless pounding from afar. This policy would culminate with Operation Grapes of Wrath in April 1996 and the ensuing massacre in Qana when Israeli shells hit a UNIFIL compound killing 102 people. Those punitive Israeli strikes hitting military and civilian targets aimed at smashing the guerillas and persuading the Lebanese state and people to turn against Hezbollah. However it would only manage to outline the incapacity of the Israeli military to counter effectively the actions of a determined group of fighters. In 2000 and after an occupation that lasted 18 years, the Israeli military abandoned all its outposts in Lebanese territory and retreated behind the frontier. It would be the first time the Israeli would leave conquered land through force, highlighting the success of the armed resistance. That Liberation day became a landmark for Lebanon, Hezbollah and the Arab world highlighting that they did not need tanks, strategic balance, rockets or cannons to liberate their land, but the courage and will of a group of fighters who are ready to die.



10000 L L F : A NATION OF MARTYRS : 1997

What is Lebanese nationalism, and does such a thing even exist? What the Lebanese have mostly demonstrated is their relentless capacity to exercise their narcissisms of small differences, with each community perceiving itself to be more important or relevant than another, while at the same time feeling oppressed or persecuted by others. In Lebanon there is no dominant community, but a complex mix of people who share a lot in terms of culture and values. However their histories differ in often-antagonistic ways. The contenders of the Civil War fought and died for visions of Lebanon that were sometimes irreconcilable, and the historic gap between the communities after the war was even wider than before. How can the Lebanese ultimately create a sense of political community with such a troubled and bloody history? Perhaps that is what they share, now more than ever. That useless futile senseless blood they poured in episodes of blind elliptic violence. On Martyr Square in the historic center of Beirut there was a statue made by Youssef Howayek, a Lebanese sculptor, representing a veiled woman and an unveiled woman their hands joined on an urn containing the ashes of Lebanese martyrs that were hung by the Ottomans during World War One. Ultimately it is only if the Lebanese accept and respect their historic differences, the moment they mourn their dead together and reconcile those fractured identities that Lebanon could become a true nation state.



20000 L L F : MR LEBANON : 1998

Born in a modest Sunni family in the coastal city of Sidon in 1944 Rafic Hariri immigrated to Saudi Arabia in 1965 where he eventually worked as a contractor. There, he attracted the attention of the King by managing to build the resort of Taef in a record time, becoming the main contractor used by the Saudi Royal family for all their important developments which made him one of the richest men in the world. Hariri had also gained the Saudi nationality and worked in the Saudi diplomatic circuit, through which he was able to orchestrate the end of the civil war in 1991. He had been working for years through philanthropic projects to create himself a political stature in Lebanon. In 1992 at a time when the entire country and especially the heart of Beirut had been reduced to a maze of ruins he became the first postwar prime minister bringing hope to a lot of Lebanese. He is the undoubted architect of Lebanon's post war reconstruction with the creation of Solidere in 1994, a privately owned company listed on the stock exchange, which through a unique form of public-private partnership was in charge of planning and redeveloping the Beirut Central District. Solidere was the drive that put Beirut back on the world financial map creating the dream of Lebanon regaining its pre-war stature as the Switzerland of the Orient, meeting place of East and West, oasis of freedom and democracy, high place of culture, commerce and the good life.



2000 L L A : FROM THE RUINS : 2000

Reconstruction however happened in a generalized state of corruption repression and ever growing social inequalities. In this process it was hard to differentiate between the interest of private individuals and that of the general public. State institutions such as the parliament were subverted by the post war political clique to pass laws allowing them to implement projects to their own benefit. The biggest and most ambitious of those projects was Solidere. The former owners or tenants of Downtown Beirut were expropriated in return for stocks in the company, which were not worth the real value of their properties. In order to rebuild the heart of the city, 80% of the surviving buildings of the war were demolished and only 20% of those historic buildings were kept and restored. The once populous heart of the capital was thus turned into a high-end luxury oriented business center. However once the heart of Beirut was rebuilt real estate speculators were quick to invest the remaining parts of the city, and most of the architectural heritage of Beirut was destroyed in those years. Underneath the ruins of the war, the reconstruction process unveiled Beirut's rich archeological past, turning the capital into the biggest open-air dig in the world. However, most of those ruins were not kept. The harsh form of laissez faire capitalism in those years created even greater disparities of wealth, leaving a lot of Lebanese disillusioned.



50000 L L F : THE BEIRUT SPRING : 2005

After 9/11, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the future of the Middle East was to radically change. American Neo Conservatives were drawing a vision of the world along a supposed axis of evil to which Syria belonged (Lebanon too via Hezbollah) that America had to fight in order to implement freedom and democracy across the region. On the 14th of February 2005 Rafik Hariri was killed in a car bomb. He had been active lately to try and garner international support for Lebanon to free itself from its Syrian tutor and upon his assassination all fingers were pointed towards Syria. A popular uprising swept the country to demand the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Hezbollah would however gather hundred thousands of its supporters at a rally on the 8th of March and thank Syria for helping stop the civil war and for their support of the Lebanese resistance. On the 14th of March a counter rally would gather more than a million Lebanese in the heart of the capital in an unprecedented public outcry that demanded the complete withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. The country would then find itself polarized between two confronting power blocs, the 8th of March that defined itself along the lines of the armed struggle against Israel and American imperialism, and the 14th of March, a pro-western moderate group of democratic reformist that would however in time slip back into Lebanese traditional sectarian politics.



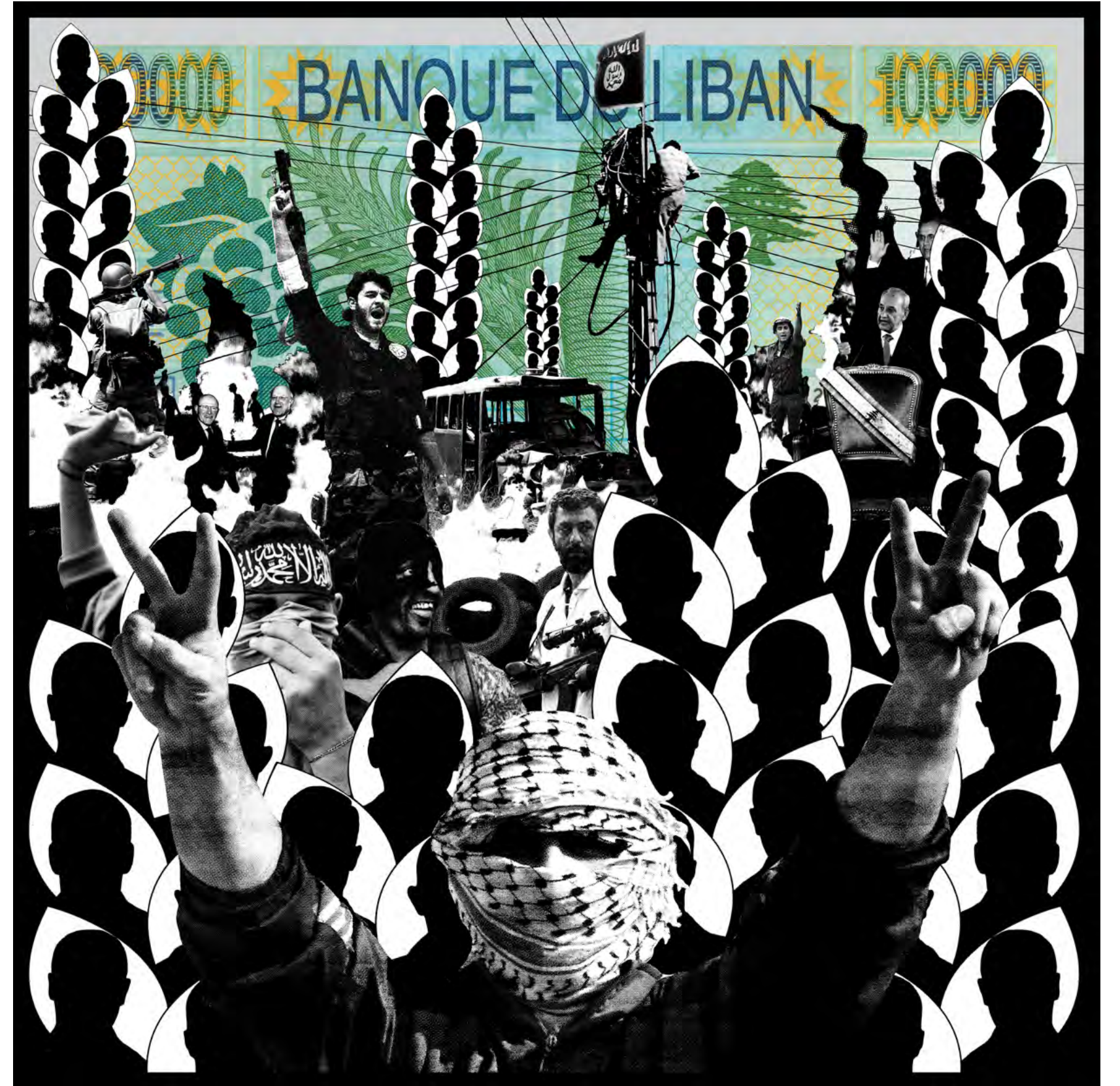
50000 L L A : THE NEW MIDDLE EAST : 2006

What most Lebanese were probably not fully aware of was that America was set on a geopolitical restructuring of the entire Middle East, and was determined to eradicate all regimes hostile to its presence and mission in the area. That is America, or to be specific the pro Zionist neo conservatives who had managed to hijack the foreign policy of the world's only superpower. So after toppling the regime in Iraq, their eyes were set on Syria and Iran. In this context took place the Sixth Arab-Israeli War in August 2006. In an operation baptized True Promise Hezbollah managed to capture two Israeli soldiers from Israeli territory in order to demand the release of all Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails. The IDF then proceeded during 33 days to the systematic pounding through artillery fire coming from land air and sea of civilian and alleged Hezbollah targets killing more than a thousand people. The American Secretary of States Condoleeza rice said that although the war was a terrible thing for the Lebanese people what we were witnessing was the birth pangs of a new Middle East. However throughout the 33 day conflict Hezbollah maintained its military activity firing rockets at Israel and conducting successful ground operations against the Israeli military. When a cease-fire was finally implemented Hasan Nasrallah whose popularity skyrocketed across the Arab world bypassing the now prevalent sectarian divide announced it as a Divine Victory.



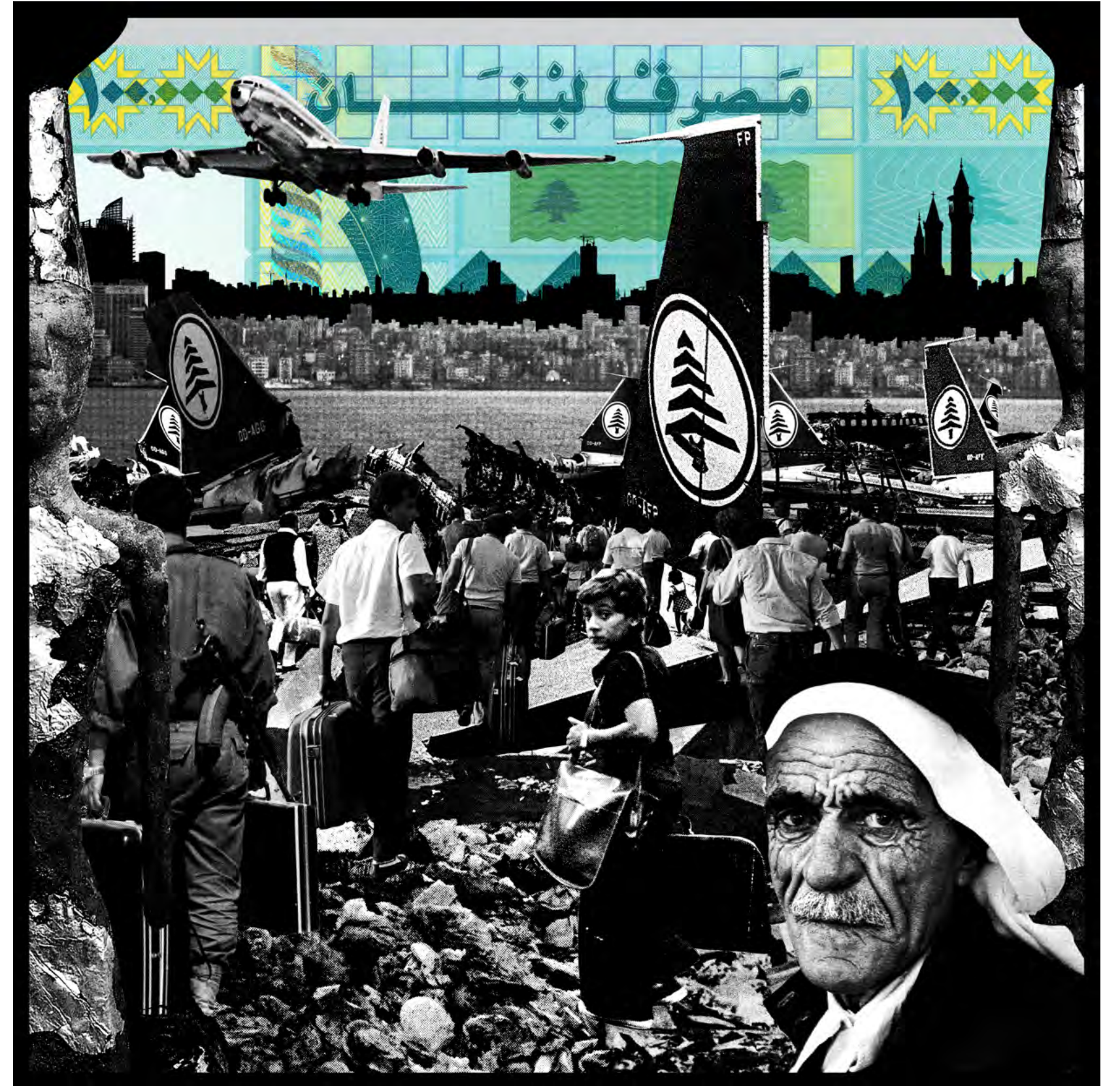
100000 L L F : RETURN OF THE CALIPHATE: 2012

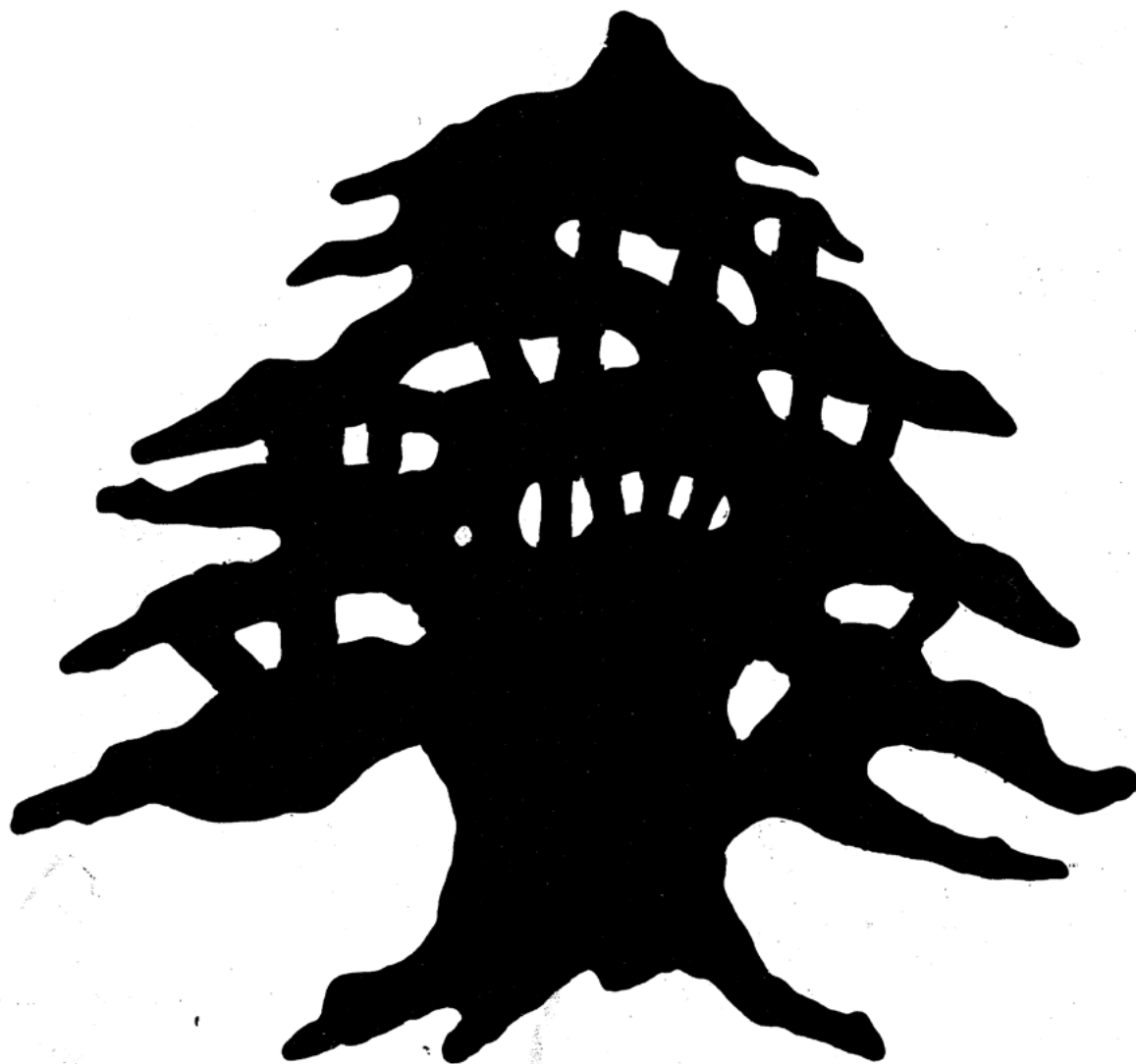
And after the Beirut Spring there was the Arab Spring, a series of protests and insurrections across the Arab world that saw the dictatorships of the region stumble one after the other. And there was hope. And then hope withered as those movements were hijacked by various forms of radical Islam. In Syria a series of peaceful protests to demand a change of regime led to a raging civil war. Then, from the ruins of the Iraq invasion and the Syrian civil war emerged a group called The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) with the intension of reestablishing an Islamic Caliphate. About a century after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, ISIS was the ultimate expression of the failure of the Sykes Picot partitioning of the region. However, the same way Sykes Picot was a conspiracy and a betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the people of the region, that latest developments could also be the expression of another conspiracy aiming at creating the New Middle East the Americans were advocating. The civil wars, the terrorist organizations, the unrest and instability could all be the expression of that American constructive chaos out of which new orders grow. Since 2012 Hezbollah started fighting alongside the Ba'thist government in the Syrian hinterland getting dragged into the sectarian nature of the Syrian Civil War. However for Hezbollah and its Syrian and Iranian allies the conflict is not just about the future of Syria, or Lebanon, but of the whole Middle East and above all about the place of Israel in it.



100000 L L A : A NATION OF MIGRANTS : 2014

As nations and governments crumble across the Arab world Lebanon is no exception. The Lebanese state never truly recovered from the civil war, nor from the Syrian tutelage and its subversive corruption. Furthermore the Lebanese political class has proven time and again that they would always act as pawns to regional and international politics, the interest of the country being always relegated to the background. Today Lebanon is a failed state surviving in a region of turmoil and wars. What we are perhaps witnessing is the Libanisation of the region, which is defined in the French dictionary as “a process of fragmentation of a state, as a result of confrontation between diverse communities”. But if the project of strong independent states fails, what is going to take their place? We might be facing the old Zionist ambition to transform the Middle East in a pluralist mosaic of minorities through a fratricidal drama quite similar to the Lebanese civil war. For many Lebanese the only way out throughout the decades of wars and instability has been exile. For a population believed to be around 4 million people, there are more than 14 million people of Lebanese decent spread out across the world. It is this diaspora that partly explains the financial survival of a country whose economy is on the constant brink of collapse. And it is this diaspora that could save a country whose citizens are forever more held hostages of a never-ending regional struggle.





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