

Some of her ancestors, she writes, were among these lower-class Unionists. But she avoids over-romanticization. Bill Owens, the leading Unionist guerrilla in North Carolina, she notes, was a cold-blooded killer. But heinous acts were not limited to one side. Confederate soldiers tortured Owens's wife to gain information about his whereabouts. Local militia units mistreated Unionist women and children. Owens himself, after his capture toward the end of the war, was taken from his jail cell by unknown parties and murdered.

Bynum's book is not so much a narrative history as a series of discrete, overlapping and somewhat disjointed case studies. But it adds a dimension to McCurry's far broader study by taking the story beyond the end of the Civil War to trace the long-term legacy of pro-Union activism. One chapter shows how family traditions of dissent survived in new forms as veterans of the "inner Civil War" and their descendants joined the biracial Republican Party during Reconstruction and emerged as leaders of Populism in the 1890s and the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs. The legacy of violent white supremacy also survived. The wartime Confederate militia was succeeded by the Ku Klux Klan after the war and "whitecappers" around the turn of the century.

Bynum invokes court cases to track the shifting political fortunes of the postwar South. In one North Carolina county, the members of an extended family challenged the right of a female relative to inherit land on the grounds that she had African ancestry. In 1892 a court ruled against the woman, and she lost the farm she and her late husband had tilled for two decades. Honor, supposedly a central characteristic of white Southern culture, seems to have been in short supply after the Civil War.

One of the more fascinating figures Bynum discusses is Newt Knight, the leader of an armed band of Unionists in Jones County who lived with a black woman and became "the patriarch of an extensive mixed-race community." Bynum relates his long, unsuccessful campaign for monetary compensation from the federal government for his wartime activities. She also explores the fate of his mixed-race children and grandchildren. Some identified as people of color; some disappeared into white society. One descendant, David Knight, served in the US Army during World War II, married a white woman in 1946 and two years later was convicted in Mississippi of the crime of miscegenation. The Confederacy certainly cast a long shadow. ■



A rally in Beirut to commemorate the second anniversary of the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, February 14, 2007

## A Forest of Fathers

by ELIAS MUHANNA

**O**ne weekend during the spring of 2008, I found myself in a discussion with a friend about Lebanon's latest political crisis. In Beirut the office of the Lebanese prime minister was being besieged by a sprawling tent city of protesters led by the country's opposition, demanding the resignation of the premier and his cabinet. The business of government had long since ground to a halt, as had all commercial activity around Martyrs Square, not far from where the protesters were gathered; and multiple efforts to reach a compromise between the opposition and the "March 14" loyalists, a coalition of Sunni, Christian and Druse parties backed by the Bush administration and its European and Arab allies, had ended in failure. Pundits warned daily of a descent into the abyss of sectarian violence and civil war.

Like many Lebanese, I found this state of affairs to be both maddening and deeply ironic. Three years earlier, Martyrs Square had been the scene of what was heralded around the world as Lebanon's rebirth, a popular uprising 1 million strong demanding the end of Syria's military occupation of the country. This uprising—dubbed the Cedar Revolution—was triggered by

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### The Ghosts of Martyrs Square

*An Eyewitness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle.*

By Michael Young.

Simon and Schuster. 295 pp. \$26.

the assassination of a billionaire former prime minister, Rafik Hariri, the architect of Lebanon's postwar recovery. Syria was widely blamed for the assassination, and the ensuing protests—unprecedented in size and in their brazen defiance of Damascus—coupled with intense international pressure, succeeded in forcing the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. While no one could have imagined that Lebanon's endemic divisiveness was now a thing of the past and that a strong democratic state would emerge spontaneously from the ashes of Syrian tutelage, there was a palpable hope, naïve in retrospect, that the Lebanese could finally take their first step toward building such a state.

Nothing so optimistic had come to pass. In the three years since the withdrawal of Syrian troops, the country had been racked by a series of high-profile assassinations and a devastating war with Israel. An international tribunal established to investigate the murder of Hariri seemed to have stalled, and street violence was mounting between youths allied to opposing factions. Most significant, the country had no president.

The previous one, Émile Lahoud, a pillar of the pro-Syrian regime, had resigned four months earlier, and the polarized government could not reach agreement over a successor.

All of this I related to my friend—a Syrian expatriate living in New York City—expressing my amazement at how Lebanon had turned into a farce, its political system so broken that it could not even carry out the most elemental of democratic processes: voting a person into office. Amused by my frustration, he suggested that far more remarkable than Lebanon's paralysis was that the Lebanese state had survived without a president for more than 100 days, with no attempted coups, military takeovers or invasions. Imagine such a thing anywhere else in the Middle East: a power vacuum at the highest levels of government “lasting five minutes, let alone four months.” The laws of political gravity, he mused, do not apply in Beirut as they do in other Arab capitals. What's more, they never have.

**T**he theme of weak centers and strong peripheries features prominently in *The Ghosts of Martyrs Square*, in which Michael Young tries to make sense of “the Lebanon that emerged between 2005 and 2009, an essential moment in modern Lebanese history.” To call that span of four years a “moment”—a term of art employed by cultural historians to allude to the fleeting and the floating—is to suggest its evanescent quality. Indeed, for Young the moment has long since passed, along with whatever possibilities it may once have aroused among the partisans of the Cedar Revolution.

*The Ghosts of Martyrs Square* is pervaded by a pessimism that only rarely strays into wistfulness, and for those familiar with Young's previous writings the tone may come as a surprise. Since the birth of the March 14 movement, Young has been one of its most prominent spokesmen, as well as an occasionally disconsolate critic. In his weekly columns for the English-language *Daily Star* newspaper in Beirut (where he serves as opinion editor), Young played a central role in chronicling the tribulations of the post-Syrian order and defending the cause of Syria's opponents in Lebanon to an audience based in Beirut and, just as significant, the West. When the movement lost steam and started to accommodate Syria's allies—including the Shiite militant group Hezbollah—Young declared that Syria had won, “its crimes forgotten and its interests protected.”

This bleak diagnosis suggests that for Young, what was most important about the fallout from Hariri's assassination wasn't the opportunity for Lebanon to emerge as a sovereign state. Rather, it was the possibility that the Syrian regime would be punished and crippled, perhaps fatally, by the ensuing UN investigation into Hariri's death. Indeed, no commentator has been as singularly focused on the twists and turns of the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon as Young, who has tracked its development and criticized its proceedings in the *Daily Star*, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. His preoccupation with the investigation has been both obsessive and understandable. While assassinations are, sadly, routine in Lebanon, international investigations into political crimes are not. In this respect, the establishment of the UN tribunal was not merely a development of great political significance. On a more fundamental level, it seemed to redefine the very borders of what was knowable, subverting the entrenched logic of faceless assassins and perfect crimes.

During the heady summer and autumn months of 2005, reports of German and Swiss forensics teams arriving in Beirut were greeted with a mixture of wonder and shock. “They're actually going to prove that Syria was responsible,” a relative gushed to me in disbelief. “They won't get away with it this time!” But as the investigation dragged on without indictments being issued, optimism in Beirut was sapped by impatience and eventually frustration, an emotion that courses through Young's prose. Here again was the authoritarian order crushing the will to truth, squelching any hope of justice. What was more, the Cedar Revolution, which had produced the first stirrings of popular resistance to Syrian hegemony, was by Young's lights “never a revolution in the first place, and [was] now as exposed as any old tree to being cut down.”

If it was never a revolution to begin with, then what was it? In Young's mind, the outcry against Syria following the Hariri assassination was, at its core, a sectarian phenomenon, the reaction of Lebanon's Sunnis and their allies to “the Shiite gauntlet thrown down on March 8,” when hundreds of thousands of Hezbollah supporters demonstrated in support of their allegiance to the embattled Syrian regime. What mobilized a million people to take to the streets six days later under the leadership of the slain man's son, Saad Hariri, was not the stirrings of liberal principles—the story line favored by the international media—but

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rather the sectarian impulses that have always undergirded Lebanese politics.

Such an analysis, Young argues, is not meant to cheapen the March 14 mobilization or detract from its significance. It simply underscores Young's premise that liberalism in Lebanon is the unlikely product of illiberal institutions, "a sectarian system that makes the religious communities and sects more powerful than the state." Whenever communal balance is threatened, a "sectarian thermostat" kicks in "to defend a pluralistic order," which has the dual effect of producing regular deadlocks but also a kind of "paradoxical liberalism." This state of affairs—a political landscape inhabited by a multitude of sectarian leaders, a "forest of fathers," as Young elegantly puts it—is, for him, far better than the alternative, a country with "a single father who cuts down the rest of the forest."

**T**his defense of sectarianism will strike many as odd, but Young is something of a misfit among Lebanese liberals. In a sea of communists, socialists, Arabists and Islamists, Young may be Lebanon's only self-identified libertarian, although there are probably many more unwitting ones among Lebanon's free-wheeling capitalist elite. Indeed, it is tempting to read in Young's portrayal of the "self-regulating nature" of the sectarian system and his valorization of the cacophony of individual freedoms over state-imposed stability a reflection of this libertarianism. When neoconservatives have tried to claim him as one of their own, in light of his support for the Iraq War and George W. Bush's democratization agenda, Young has consistently demurred on principle, reiterating his mistrust of the neocons' "state-centered neo-Wilsonianism" and the "glorification of an uncompetitive form of US domination."

An antipathy toward centrism colors Young's characterization of those Lebanese politicians he most deeply distrusts, like Hezbollah's secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, and the Christian leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, Gen. Michel Aoun. In these figures, Young sees something profoundly at odds with the sectarianism underpinning Lebanon's paradoxical liberalism. They are, as he says, "linear politician[s] in a country of contrapuntal ones," men who view the pluralistic order with disdain and who strive to impose a "uniformity of opinion, the ideal of the one instead of the many." By contrast, a figure such as the Druse chieftain Walid Jumblatt fairly drips with counterpoint; the sectarian

system preserves his relevance as it rewards his malleability.

Young's characterization of Nasrallah and Aoun is puzzling, considering how well it suits another Lebanese leader, one for whom Young evinces no particular affection but also never pillories: Rafik Hariri. By virtue of the immense fortune he made in the construction business and the power granted to him by Syria during the postwar years, Hariri was able to dominate not only the Sunni community but the Lebanese state itself. In fact, during his multiple terms as prime minister (all told, he headed five governments in 1992–1998 and 2000–2004), it often appeared that Hariri *was* the state. He may not have been known for using his power to repress all opposition, but he did use it to tame Lebanon's riotous "pluralism" so as to impose a uniformity of opinion regarding his own visions for the country.

In certain respects, Hariri's governing style wasn't such a bad thing. After fifteen years of civil war and a vacuum of state authority, a strong leader was what many Lebanese desired. As Young suggests in his account of Hariri's reconstruction of downtown Beirut—which involved the seizure of several hundred thousand square meters of private property through eminent domain—the means employed may have been abusive and unconstitutional, but the ends made it clear that the Sunni leader "had won [the] argument." Detectable in this admission is the implication that, for Young, "linearity" in politics is not necessarily a vice as long as the line is pointed in the right direction. In the case of Hariri, who envisioned Lebanon as "a bastion of liberal capitalism and ecumenical permissiveness," the short-circuiting of the sectarian order and its pluralism seemed to be an acceptable price to pay.

There are no heroes in *The Ghosts of Martyrs Square*, only tragic characters hampered by their own flaws and the predations of others. Young's book is a sober and beautifully written acclamation of those elements of Lebanese society that are both constitutive of a liberal identity and antithetical to it. Young recognizes that sectarianism is not an ideal but that, "thanks to the pluralism it elicits, it can be a way station on the path toward a Lebanon that is a common concern for all its citizens." What might this Lebanon look like? And what kind of path might it chart to a liberal state shorn of its paradoxes? Young does not address these questions, leaving the reader to wonder whether he has the answers, or whether this is simply a subject for another book. ■