In her book, *For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Frontiers*, Hiba Bou Akar convincingly reveals the considerable weight of the anticipation of war and violence in the production of urban geographies in one emblematic contested city, Beirut. She names this phenomenon “the war yet to come.” The mechanisms she skillfully describes are profoundly anchored in the urban dynamics of this city but could also be easily found in other cities suffering under communitarian tension or the strong presence of what some label “violent non-state actors,” a term covering a broad range of actors, from local vigilantes to militias and organized crime.[1]

The conceptualizations of these dynamics, including the “doubleness” of ruins, the “lacework” master planning, and the real estate “ballooning” (chapters 2, 3, and 4), are interesting and insightful. Also, the idea of “planning without development” that Bou Akar proposes in the illuminating fifth chapter can only be applauded, together with the brilliant methodology of “patching stories and maps” (p. 13). She does all this in a lively, precise, and always reflexive writing style. Bou Akar’s demonstration and interpretation of events goes in the direction of portraying communities as actors, in the sense of a large, more or less homogeneous body at work. However, in reading the book, the question of agency within the communities seems weak or at least secondary.

This is accentuated by the fact that she chose to focus on four main “religious-political organizations”—Hezbollah, the Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and the Maronite Church—knowing that in each community there is a wide diversity of political, social, and economic actors. Many aim to differentiate themselves from and sometimes stand in direct opposition to the dominant organization in their communities. This point is not to be understated. Bou Akar mentions Fuad Khuri’s book, *From Village to Suburb: Order and Change in Greater Beirut* (1975), twice in her argumentation. However, she does not build enough on what seems to be the most interesting idea of the book, which is its depiction of the community as a larger umbrella of social networks and symbolic capital. Hence, the mobilization of this identity aims at legitimizing but also contesting projects and interests of social, economic agents.

Another example illustrating this complexity of relations between actors, which is not necessarily a top-down political leadership relationship, that Bou Akar brings forth in her book deals with the real estate developers in the southern suburbs of Beirut, who tried to build in the suburban small town of Hadat around 2000. They were...
faced with a new proposed municipal master plan to reduce urbanization in Saqi AlHadat, an area used to represent a demarcation line during the war. Against this background, they brought their case to Nabih Berri, the head of the parliament, who is leader of Amal, a Shiite communitarian party, not of Hezbollah. Hence, I dare say that with some exceptions, real estate developers are pushing the religious-political organizations to support their agendas rather than the other way around. In fact, large political-religious organizations are tremendous agents in these territories and they do resort to tactical thinking. However, there is much investigation still to be done on the nature of the relationship between economic actors, real estate developers, and these organizations. But this is undoubtedly a complex social analysis exercise where access to information is difficult.

Secondly, Bou Akar has chosen to focus on real estate, which by its nature is different from other research topics, such as public spaces, the urban environment, and retail activities. The consequence of such a choice is also not to be understated. Real estate property in Lebanon is exclusionary: you either own the land or you do not; you do not share it. This has repercussions in a country where land rent is at the center of the country's political economy and where land is the backbone of conceptions of centuries-old representations of community identity. So this is an issue prone to lead to strong conflict in Lebanon. In contrast, on issues of urban environment (including water, waste, etc.) and retail development, people tend to be more pragmatic. Different local authorities and local communities from different sects come together to try to solve local issues, even despite their affiliation with opposing political-religious organizations.

In conclusion, the book is an enormous effort that succeeds in describing how fear of “the war yet to come” is profoundly affecting urban and territorial dynamics in the contested suburbs of Beirut. But it is worth noting that these dynamics do not necessarily mean that the war is coming, rather that the city is yet to come together.

Note
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