On February 15, 1996, 13 squatters were killed in Beirut when the building they were living in was brought down by demolition workers for Solidere, Lebanon’s reconstruction and development company. Solidere, a brainchild of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, claimed it was a mistake; the dead were carted off, destitute migrants with no place in the government’s vision of the revitalized cosmopolitan city center. Brushing off criticism that reconstruction is proceeding too fast, the prime minister insisted that Lebanon today is the site of “a struggle between good and evil.” The alternatives facing the nation, he insisted, are clear: either the “will to progress” or “the will to despair.”

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Ussama Makdisi “The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon,” Middle East Report 200 (Fall 1996). However, Lebanon’s sectarian system proved immune to the domestic and regional pressures unleashed by the Arab Spring. How can this be explained? How has the country’s political elite dealt with challenges to the system? Using extensive field work, The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon looks at the mix of institutional, clientelist, and discursive practices that sustain the sectarian nature of Lebanon. The book exposes snapshots of an ever-expanding sectarian web that occupies substantial areas of everyday Lebanese life. It also surveys struggles waged by opponents of the system – by women, teachers, public sector employees, students or coalitions across NGOs – and how their efforts are often sabotaged or contained by various systematic forces.
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