

hammoud badawi

November 2015

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Omar Fakhoury, site specific intervention for TandemWorks | Date : 20 September 2015, removed by anonymous on 21 september | Banner, 3 x 24 m
Translation to English: "I regret I won't be eating garbage and drinking sewage this season, for travel purpose" - The Sea.

Editorial note

Mayssa Fattouh

It appears that most of the world's major cities were built on or around areas of freshwater. Our ancestors chose to settle there since rivers are a source of food, a means of providing drinking water for families, herds and crop irrigation, and they delimit cities. In antiquity, when the Romans had built an aqueduct crossing the river, Nahr Beirut was as a source of freshwater that filled the Roman Baths located in the current city center of Beirut. The river continued to do so until the 'industrial age' when, for reasons of convenience and due to its proximity to the city's port, an erratic industrial zone developed along the riverbed drastically transforming the landscape as well as the use of the river.

The Nahr Beirut we now know is a concrete canal flanked by high walls that block visual access to the river as well as to cultural and social signifiers practiced by communities and neighboring residents. By the time the decision was taken to erect the high walls as a security measure against recurrent floods, the country was well on its way to radical change. Lebanon had already lived a political crisis in 1958, experienced

flux of migration, and was preparing for a long civil war that would shape it into what we know today.

With profoundly rooted divisions amongst its citizens, Beirut has become impregnated by fissures as wide as Nahr Beirut, and as opaque as its walls. The intervention Hammoud Badawi comes at a time when civil society, with the help of private and individual initiatives, is filling in the gap of state inefficiency in order to find immediate, viable solutions for deep malfunctions.

It is not so much a gesture of hope or a promise of change that informs Hammoud Badawi. It is, rather, to produce dialogue and access memory, imagination and collaboration. In this inaugural project and publication developed by TandemWorks (TW) – an initiative that aims to raise awareness on social, cultural and environmental issues with arts interventions in the public realm– Hammoud Badawi has commissioned contributions from various disciplines to think about the relationship of the city and its inhabitants to Nahr Beirut. ...[continue reading on page 13.](#)

Bringing Beirut river back to life

About the author

Rivers and streams are dynamic systems, which in their natural state continually modify their form. They are considered living organisms; they breathe life into the lands and the communities surrounding them. They are important biodiversity areas, where a diverse network of species thrives, such as water birds, fish, amphibians and other water dependent organisms as well as humans. Rivers are also important freshwater suppliers as they bring clean, potable water for drinking and irrigating agricultural lands. They play an important role in the water cycle as they carry water and nutrients, and offer plenty of water retention areas that mitigate flood events. They also provide recreational spaces for social activities that bring people together.

Historically, the Beirut River has played an important role in providing ecological and social values. It belongs to a large, natural network where a succession of rich and vital fluvial ecosystems slowly merges into one another from mountain to valley; ecosystem, here, referring to a community of living organisms and non-living components such as air, water, soil and mineral.

In the natural section upstream, the watershed incorporates a functional ecosystem that provides benefits called "ecosystem services". These include a number of points:

Provisioning Services: Provide freshwater in the area of Daychounieh for irrigation and potable water to the city through the roman aqueducts. Transport sediments, organisms and nutrients.

Regulating Services: Treat, store water, as well as control erosion to mitigate the impact of floods and storms, and filter waste through natural processes.

Supporting Services: Offer food, shelter, and water to living organisms. The River acts as a vital migratory path for more than 70,000 soaring birds.

Cultural Services: Provide a space for recreation and cultural activities for local communities such as, the renowned Armenian Water festival Vardavar, in which Armenians traditionally gathered around the river and drenched themselves in water.

Currently, the system is broken. The human interventions interrupt the natural flow of water from the mountains to the Mediterranean Sea. Once it reaches the urban section the river no longer performs as a healthy water body with its usual, natural functions. The polluted water caused by raw sewage dumping, the concrete channel and the construction of the Daychounieh dam drastically altered its physical habitat structure, and the ecological functioning of

its running waters, resulting in the loss of the beneficial ecosystem services. The river no longer provides clean water, a space for flood retention, habitat for biodiversity, and most importantly it prevented cultural amenity and social activities.

theOtherDada is initiating a strategy to rehabilitate Beirut River through methods inspired from biomimicry: design inspired by nature. The aim is to study the function of a healthy riparian ecosystem and recreate these services through the proposed solutions. The rehabilitation of the river integrates nature in the degraded urban environments to improve the surrounding neighbourhoods' living conditions.

Let's bring Beirut River back to life!

Case study diagram:

To understand the current state of the Beirut River in comparison to other rivers, theOtherDada developed a Comparative Table measuring the environmental performance and ecosystem services of the rivers from Worse Case Category to Natural River Category (for more information, the categories are explained further below). Several case studies were examined showing how restorative interventions transformed rivers from Artificial to Natural stream waterways.

In comparison to regional and international case studies, some rivers were in a worse state than the Beirut River. The Cheonggyecheon stream in Seoul, which was once buried and covered by a freeway and concrete deck, was transformed into a recreational linear park even though the concrete walls were still delineating it.

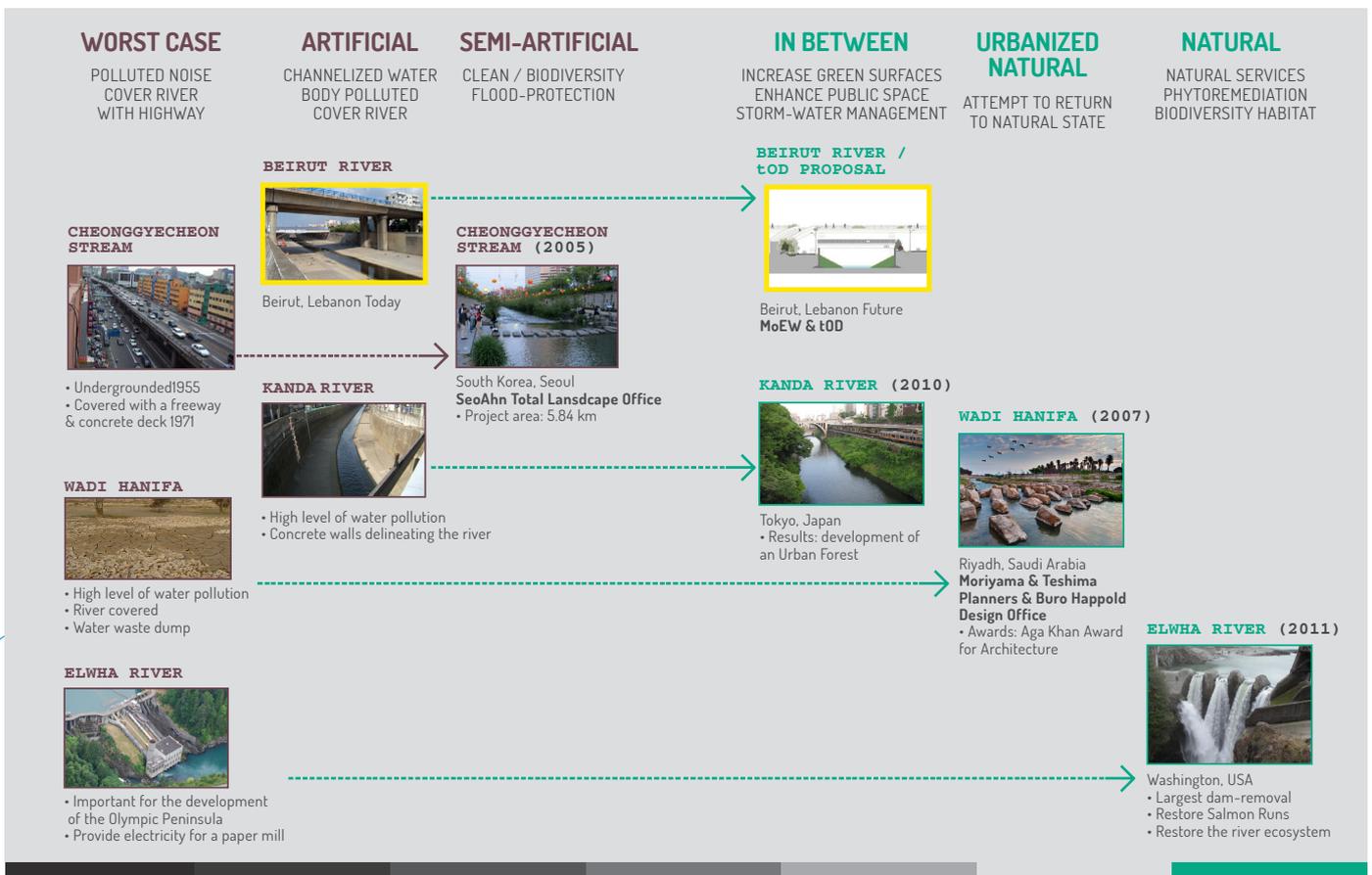
Another example is Wadi Hanifa Project where the sewage and waste water in Riyadh ran through the city posing a health risk to the community and is now treated by natural means [phytoremediation with plants] providing a continuous ribbon of naturalised parkland that interconnects the city, the people and the Wadi.

theOtherDada

Active since 2010, the architecture lab theOtherDada defends an alternative position towards the current practice of sustainability through context and medium, invoking new relationships between climate, landscape, and inhabitants. Informed by biomimicry, they connect natural ecosystems of sites to understand and consequently devise new potential living habitats. theOtherDada works within a collaborative process between architects, scientists, botanists, artists, economists and the craftsmen.

Case studies

River rehabilitation from artificial to natural



Taking successful case studies showing how interventions transformed rivers from artificial to natural steam waterways

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From Vartavar to concrete to environmental disaster

« The current global emphasis on infrastructural rehabilitation has introduced infrastructure as a major field which urban designers need to engage and re-envision. In Lebanon, basic infrastructures like channels and roads take the priority in funding and execution in front of affinities like public space, yet these infrastructures are never conceived beyond their technical dimension. That is the case of Beirut's river (Nahr Beirut); one of many rivers on the Lebanese coast which was channeled as a flood mitigation measure, gradually becoming an open-air sewer and an isolated urban island in Beirut. » — **Sandra Frem**

About the author

TandemWorks' project, Hammoud Badawi, stems from an invitation by theOtherDada (tOD) Integrated Architecture Lab, who have initiated a strategy to rehabilitate Beirut river, create biodiverse public parks and a pedestrian bridge alongside the existing Yerevan Bridge, and thus connect Bourj Hammoud to Achrafieh and Badawi. Perceived as underdeveloped and critical areas on the margins of Beirut, these neighbourhoods have a complex, rich history and a dense social fabric that have been adversely impacted by the implementation of the river walls.

Part of TW's mission is building communities and projects around critical urban issues, and providing platforms for reflection on future possibilities and initiatives. In this context, Hammoud Badawi developed a community-building initiative through focus-group meetings with participants from Bourj Hammoud, Nabaa, Badawi, and to a lesser extent the area of Sin el-Fil. The aim was to assess the respective neighbourhoods' relationship to the river, its significance, and the role it plays in their lives. Those who partook in the meetings included the public and private sectors, press, civil society, as well as urban planners, students, academics, researchers, members of different political parties, minority groups, residents of the area and were invited based on their experience in relation to the river as well as their proximity to it.

The overriding sentiment towards the situation of the Beirut River was negative, and the participants were in agreement that the current situation was deplorable. The river currently represents a dry concrete channel that separates neighbourhoods, and has become a smelly, dysfunctional dumpster. They believed that not only was the river and its environs abused, but also that its function as a natural resource – as well as the name 'Beirut River' (since it is no longer a natural river, but a water channel) – has become obsolete. In fact, one of the interesting findings revealed that residents from different generations didn't know that the channel was a river, and was instead perceived as an open sewer.

On the other hand, some participants recounted stories from a time when the river

was a braided waterway where people would gather and celebrate a festival called Vartavar on July 18th of each year, and which dates back to Armenian pagan customs. Memories of a playful, recreational time in a clean river filled with frogs, fish and green surroundings still prevailed among an older generation of residents. The river was an emblem of nature that had a direct impact on people's lives on an economic and social level. Others remembered that the area around the river represented a border during the civil war, and recalled the river flooding in 2005. It is indeed due to several floods that the decision to canalise the river was issued in 1956, yet it was not until 1972 that it was concretised.

A common sentiment among the residents of Bourj Hammoud and Badawi was that the walls protruding into the landscape of the neighbourhood should be removed. Walls are confining and oppressive, creating a sense of enclosure within the neighbourhoods themselves. For all these reasons, a commonly voiced suggestion was to try and bring the river back to its natural state, where the water flow is regenerated and the urban landscape is adapted to human life in the city (public space, green areas, safe crossings, etc.).

Recent attempts at changing the current situation include a campaign initiated to clean up the river from trash and animal residue, and an urbanism project initiated with the municipality of Bourj Hammoud aimed at creating a link between both sides of the river through a hovering garden. Unfortunately, none of these projects has seen the light of day. The summer of 2015 saw a drastic worsening of the river's state, an environmental disaster (or 'trash crisis') across Lebanon, and irreversible damage to our natural environment and everyday life.

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The river

About the author

When I asked a friend, a Lebanese woman in her mid-30s who grew up on the Beirut side of the river what she thought of the waterway, she answered with a shrug: “It was never a river. It was a concrete block that overflowed with sewage.” Her answer echoed in interviews and conversations I had with nearly every person her age. My own experience of the Beirut River was informed not only by my experience of its pungent odor, reaching its zenith in the dry summer months when abundant rain could not dilute its mysterious contents, but it was also colored by my experience of another concrete river that divided a city halfway across the world where I grew up: the Los Angeles River. For decades just a “concrete wash” to most Angelenos, recent years saw a revival of interest and in some case genuine surprise at the fact that this is a natural river not some kind of manmade flood control. This disconnect between the movement of water is forged not only by the high walls of the concrete corridor, but also by the inaccessibility to an experience of a river that is clean enough to swim in, to fish in, or to touch.

Gazing at photographs of the Beirut River and the areas to east of it before the 1930s and 40s, it is impossible to reconcile that image of agricultural fields and wide, flowing waters with what would later become the densely populated and urbanized municipality of Bourj Hammoud. Still, I was surprised to find little nostalgia in most of my interviews, even among those with people who were born a generation or two before my friend, who only thinks of the river as a concrete sewage block. Distant memories of powerful floods that would occur during heavy rains shaped the memory of one of my interviewees, as she recalled fantastic stories of cars being pulled into the water. In another interview with a woman in her 60s who had lived in Bourj Hammoud for most of her life, she recalled hearing that the river water used to rise and flood homes in the days before the concrete walls and improved drainage protected houses from this particular danger. The river, for many of this generation, was a source of unpredictability and fear; an untrustworthy opponent to urban development.

Still, embedded in the stories of a woman who used to catch frogs in the swampy land near her elementary school on the Bourj Hammoud side of the river in the early 1980s, I caught glimpses of another experience of this river and the muddy banks that used to line its apparently ever-shifting shores. “Now that spot is a parking lot,” this woman recounted. I cannot help but think of the graffiti on the walls of Paris during the uprisings of 1969: *Sous les Pavés, la Plage!* [Under the pavement,

the beach!]. Given the ambivalence of many of the people I spoke with about the river, and given the fact that they seemed to have little nostalgia for it, it seems that an appeal to a romanticized past when the river was pristine might not be enough to change matters. It is not about a return to a past golden age, but a willingness to think about how the river and more importantly its surrounding areas, might contain possibilities for new interactions and new uses of space that do not simply yield more public areas to parking lots and malls. Perhaps we can still find something beneath the pavements.

Perhaps the way to do this would be to think how people would best like to use the spaces around them; to allow people to co-imagine the future of their cities. Doing this would necessarily involve invoking memories of how things used to be, but also, and more importantly, a creative approach to thinking about how they could be. Paying attention to neglected spaces like the Beirut River could help reorient questions about the future of the city, the state of the present, and the possibilities for actual change.

Joanne Randa Nucho

is an anthropologist and filmmaker who earned her PhD at the University of California, Irvine in 2013. She is currently director of graduate studies and clinical assistant professor at the Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies at New York University.

Transect of erosion

About the author

Rivers transport human and natural deposits. They filter water, carve pathways from uplands to lowlands, creating confluences, storing surface water, and forming watersheds that shape subterranean layers of cities. Historically, urban centres emerged in the vicinity of estuaries or coastal plains, fertile in soil, allowing agricultural and marine trade to prosper. Key spatial and visual features, open water bodies fashion the urban tissue and identity of neighbourhoods, they stitch the hinterland to city and carry narratives and sediments across the banks. They are not static, but change with the seasons, mirroring climatic conditions.

Since 1956, the Nahr area has delineated the administrative Eastern border of Beirut and has shaped its urban mobility and traffic patterns. Prior to canalization, traversing the Beirut River [Nahr Beirut] by foot was once a social activity for residents of Mar Mikhael, Geitaoui, Bourj Hammoud and others in proximity to the river. Catching frogs and counting them, interacting with the flow of water, and recording cyclical changes from wetter to drier seasons; these and other recollections come from a time when the river was a flourishing ecosystem and a celebrated civic space ¹.

Perceived as edge, barrier, open sewer and municipal waste disposal pit, today the river endures in collective consciousness. Pedestrians and motor vehicle drivers loathe the Nahr area as it resonates with traffic congestion, but also testifies to the general degradation of the environmental quality of Beirut.

The deterioration of the river's ecological condition is synonymous with neglect and abuse of an urban common. Its present condition is the result of layers of human agency to redirect, store, and limit its natural flow over time. Restoring the river's ecological and civic functions should constitute the next phase of intervention, and reflect contemporary discourse on the visible and invisible role of water and wilderness in dense urban centres.

One of the earliest recorded interventions in the Beirut River area dates to around 50 BC when the Romans diverted water via the Zubayda aqueduct to supply Roman Beirut with potable water. This system carried water to the city until early Ottoman times, after which it was mostly used to irrigate peri-urban agricultural land, gardens and orchards on its banks ². Until the mid 19th century, the Eastern plain of Beirut was abundant thriving with orchards of mulberry, fig, carob, banana, citrus trees, and vegetable gardens ^{3,4}. The river also served domestic functions such as bathing, laundry, cooking, and fishing ².

Yet, Beirut witnessed numerous transitions during the second half of the 19th century. The character of the riverfront zone was forged by the formation of an Eastern industrial ensemble to the East of 'Bayrouth al Qadimat' (walled Beirut)⁵. The quarantine built in 1834, adjacent to the port docks, shaped the character of the area⁶.

Beirut was declared an Ottoman provincial capital in 1888, and in 1890, the port was enlarged (Companie du Port, des Quais et des Entrepôts de Beyrouth) garnering the city importance in the region as a Levantine commercial port ^{5,6,2}.

In addition, the onset of railway transportation in 1895 connecting Beirut to Damascus added another layer to the changing urban landscape. The industrial character prompted by the port and the quarantine was further emphasized by the construction of railway stations near the port in the areas of Mar Mikhael, and later in Furn al Chebbak, extending the industrial character of the area East towards the riverbanks.

The geography of the city shifted even further with the waves of migrant rural inhabitants seeking employment in the urban centre^{7,8,9}. This contributed to an increase in the city's population from 10,000 in 1840 to 80,000 in 1880 [8,9]. With the continuous arrival of new minorities to the Nahr area, the port area sprawled to encompass the national slaughterhouse [al-Maslakh], small-scale steel, metal, and wood industries, as well as shipping services in the waterfront zone of the river¹⁰.

During the French mandate, rapid urbanisation further changed the river's ecosystem. A short-lived concrete division dam was built in 1934 at Daychounieh in an attempt to modernise urban infrastructure and to irrigate adjacent, arable lands ². Rapid urbanisation kept seeping eastward towards the Nahr area, and encroachment on the river's flood zone triggered a major flood in 1942.

Later in 1968, canalizing the Beirut River – a modernist approach to mitigating flood threats – was a translation of the socio-political approach in urban infrastructural reforms that Beirut witnessed during the 1960's. In a sense, urbanisation over the flood plain had cast a reality that could only be mitigated at the time by such invasive urban planning policies and operations illustrated by drastic canalizing of the river, heavily disrupting its water flow, its social function and wetland species that had until then flourished. Coupled with lax land use regulations, and the constant arrival of refugee communities to the Port and the Nahr area, the canalisation process transformed

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the river into a cavity and remnant of what it once had been. While the river is now eroded, its memory is still captured by those whose recollections take them back to a time when playing around the river area was a lived reality^{1,11}.

Despite its degraded condition, the river watershed remains an important habitat for migratory birds. During the fall and spring seasons, flocks of migrating birds fly over the Beirut river valley, since Lebanon lies on an important migratory flyway. It is therefore plausible to reimagine corridors of wilderness, injecting pockets of freedom and repose from the urban cacophony, and creating alternative viewsheds and moments of urban rest along its banks.

The story of Nahr Beirut clearly reflects the manner in which the river has been

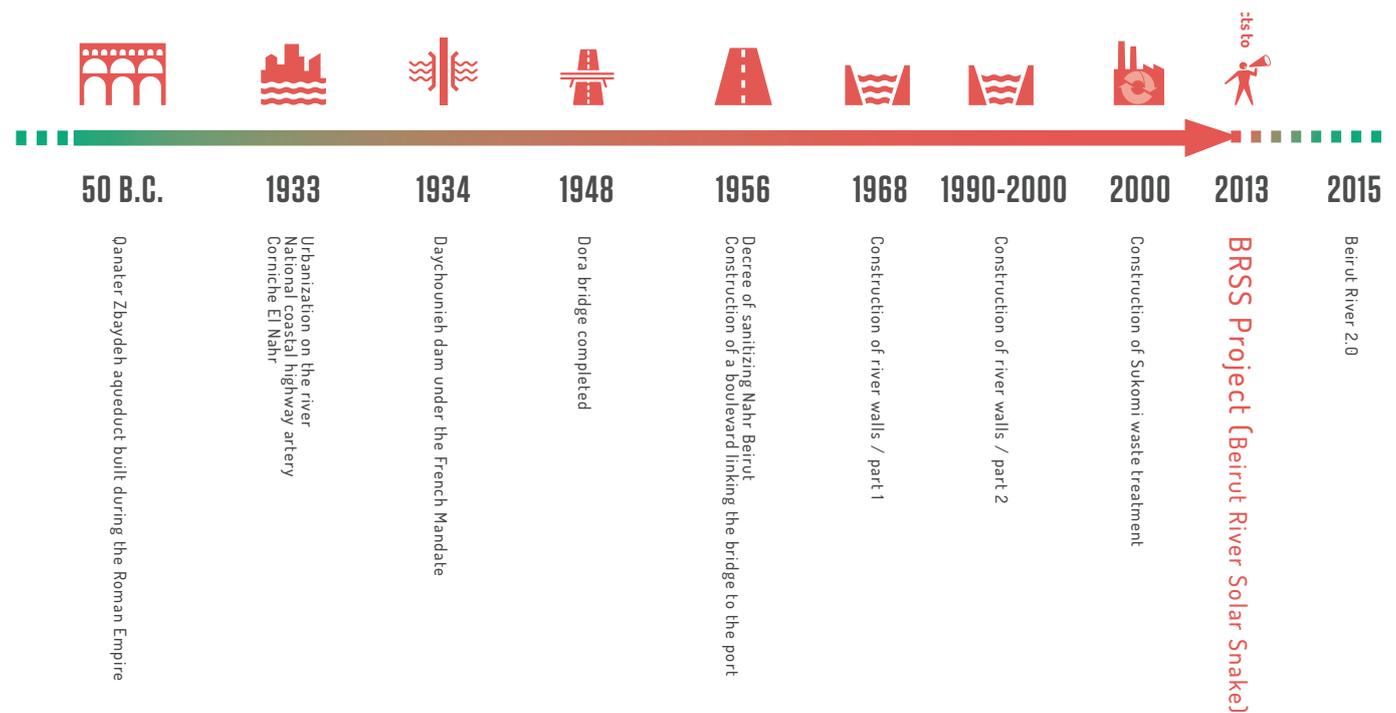
altered throughout history to fit human needs for potable water and irrigation, as well as a fear of natural processes. It is, therefore, indicative of the process of human agency on the landscape.

Beirut's estuary – where the Beirut River flows into the Mediterranean – is absent from the visual landscape. It is clogged with industrial pollutants and bares significant traces of the civil war, as it situated in the vicinity of the quarantine area. Reconciling the intersection of river and its coastal plain should constitute the beginning of a process of restoring the river landscape by combining functional water management systems that create a semblance of unscripted wilderness places to be experienced and celebrated by city dwellers, but also by bird, insect and other non-human communities.

How did it all start?

The historical development of Beirut River

theOtherDada



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Beirut's theatre slides into an island of trash

About the author

The Lebanese Ministry of Planning issued a decree to canalize the Beirut River in 1956. The same year, the Lebanese state drew the borders of administrative Beirut limiting its northern line to the River bank. Consequently, the edge of the Western Theatre Bank became Beirut's border separating it from the municipalities of Furn el Chebbak and Baabda, while the edge of the Eastern Bank verged on the municipalities of Burj Hammoud, Sin el Fil and Mansourieh. The theatre drifted down from the mountains to the suburbs to the city. Then the sea became an open-air sewer and receptacle of trash formed by an environmental squelch and exiled citizenry. Spill the air. Spell it. Lair. Toxicity blares in legislation.

The sun hasn't shut down yet; we wait. We look stern at the walls facing us; they peck a little; we stay in place. Another drop of sweat slowly forms on the right slants of our noses. It plods towards our cheeks, drips off our faces and falls on our shirts. We glare at sweat. We are certain that it will dissipate in less than a minute. As we get up to close the curtains, we look back to stand, gunk becomes metonym of flesh, our hands and shoulders stick together. With our left arms, we try to dis sever them from each other, they too glue, sticky muck, solar muffs. Our legs are set ablaze. Heat whiffs of collectivity.

Methane and Bioxide hurl out of our flesh, what a ghastly odour they have! We pass outass out! We pass our legs are set ablaze. Heat whiffs of collectivity. We dream of leaving. We are thirsty. We see what Keess¹ from afar. We enclose him with a dance, but we don't know why we are dancing. Abou Keess dances سلاولي لولي. He repeats his dance and multiplies until he becomes an army of Abu Keesses. The army continues to move laggingly, they look like models in French perfume ads. We wake up. A light wind blows. We go. We try to orient ourselves, and head towards the edge of the stream. Down the drain, we wonder, "Am I in the first slot, or in the last?"

We look at this place; it seduces us. Something is luring us to stay here in the underearth.

The sun hasn't shut down yet; we wait for it. Our bodies leak during this time of year. We reek of garbage. We wait longer. We don't wait. These hallowing walls are unbearable. Winter is freaky. We have piled the city with our remains, mired by the state and threatened by rain currency. Spill the air, spell it, blare.

We thought we could dig a trench; a podium and an exhibition hall built out of slimy asphalt, artificial tar, and small stone.

It looked like an inverted tunnel. Our new concrete theatre will emulate the roads of the city, ensconcing its svelte buildings, kissing cars, and trade wind trucks. Adjacent to the Beirut Pitch, a second stage will be built once the urban overground is concealed. Highways emulate horizons. Break the beat, cover the sun but don't speak of victory. The new theatre matches the old in depth. It looks like an inverted tunnel – a heckling architecture of screams and held gasps.

But when garbage wasn't buried in Lebanon, and when waste resurged, we too came up with a new plan. Our drilling intervention was no longer necessary in a time of reeking spectacles.

We often wonder why we scream whenever we pass through a tunnel. We probably scream to assert the limits of our speech among other physical boundaries. We often wonder why we hold our breath whenever we pass through a tunnel. Perhaps because we think we are underneath a sea. Perhaps the phenomenon of not-flattening the earth still startles us so we let out a long scream out of fear, or hold a breath for so long out of shock. The pronoun old refers to the Housing Committee for the Preservation of the Underground. In the underground, I remember that I am an animal taking refuge. Abolish language!

Garbage demos on the streets for a while in winter... From sewage to home, and from underground to home, muck trips. Muck brings along putrid water. The Beirut Pitch snaps, the River hurls: "These walls cannot contain me!"

In their work on islands and emerging extraterritorial spaces, curator and writer Anselm Franke and theorist and architect Eyal Weizman contend that the modern political project is built on two complementary actions. The first action rests on domesticating the disciplinary 'culturally hygienic' politics of the state's interior, and the second, on exclusion of an 'outside' by the constant redrawing of borders and the normalization of the violence of delineation. In Arabic, the noun for 'wastes', nifayat, is derived from the verb 'to exile', nafa. Herein, language and the Lebanese history of waste and exclusion attest to a modern state that denies by way of both accumulation and the sustenance of economies of exile. Through occupation of the public space that is the river and turning it into a dump and border, the Lebanese state does not only exile the space of the refugee from the city but also that of the underground.

What we also witness today is an accumulation of absence within the river

Jessika Leopauldine Khazrik and the Society of False Witnesses

Jessika Leopauldine Khazrik is an artist and linguist born in Beirut/ Baghdad in 1991 and currently based in Boston. She often works under the alias of The Society of False Witnesses (2014 - present) that studies and plays with the geophilosophy, political economy and spectatorship of wastes. She is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT) at MIT.



stream. Expunging the traces of modern archeology, filth is heavier-than-air. What happens to what is left? We look for treatments. We seize the occasion of witnessing an earth that has not yet been flattened. This place pushes us away from it. We want to approach its spectacle.

Abolish language. From a temporal perspective, waste is the antithesis of the classical work of art displayed and preserved within the museum space. While the former is comprised of expired matter that has survived beyond its time and thus banished and excluded from the city – if not impelled to be recycled, and hence transformed into something else – the latter is comprised of both immaterial and material value that is required to survive and be preserved infinitely beyond its time.

“Is the museum a landfill fixed in time?”, the Housing Committee for the Preservation of the Underground also asks. What type of art will the probation of refuse instigate? Art whiffs of new refuse.²

What will become of the wastes contained by the canalization of the river? The scientific collective SEDRA³ was formed in 1993 in defiance to the Horizon 2000 project; what was later to become Solidere. It was founded by its three members: Dr. Milad Jarjou’i an analytical chemist, Dr. Pierre Malychef an ecotoxicologist and herbal pharmacologist, and Dr. Wilson Rizk, a hydrologist and nuclear engineer. The three scientists met in 1988 when they were assigned by the president of the central inspection at the Lebanese government – or ‘Republiche Libanes 1987’ as construed by the fake company that hosted the scum and trashy lingo⁴ -- as the official investigators of the toxic waste trade that travelled by sea from Italy into Lebanon with the help of one of its still presently reigning political parties. In this framework, the three

scientists decided to create SEDRA to oppose and treat, through research and writing, cases pertaining to the nebulous fields of the energy and environment in Lebanon. In the context of their work, they took samples, and examined and collected wastes. They wrote and proposed long-term treatments. They were threatened as well as commissioned by the authorities. They organized symposia and stood in court until one of the scientists was arrested and accused of false testimony. Interestingly enough, their first pursued case was the reconstruction of Beirut. Their slogan read as follows: “We refuse the reconstruction of Beirut and its downtown on a mountain of industrial and construction waste!”

How does this relate to the river?

The same year, SEDRA published a trilogy of articles in *Revue du Liban* presenting an alternative plan for the reconstruction of downtown Beirut, one that would not entail the expulsion of its residents, nor efface the central city’s mnemonic legacies. Below is an excerpt from the third essay entitled “Beirut and the Downtown: We Want: Historical Heritage and Green Spaces”. In it, they outlay their year-long study of the Normandy landfill and their proposal for its rehabilitation through turning it into a public park, as well as a nature preserve for flora and migrant animals:

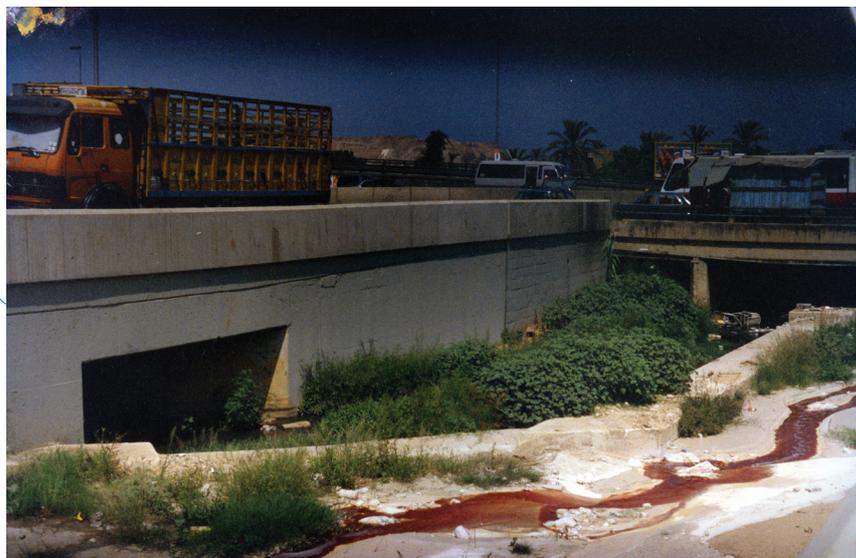
“By the siliceous depths of the sea, we will grow coastal ponds made of fresh water, lagoons supplied by treated sewage water that has been extracted from a discrete purification station. The station’s primary and secondary refineries and aeration basins will be installed at near ground level and will be encompassed by a thick protective vegetal blanket of flowers and greenery. These ponds burgeoning with trees and

aquatic plants and seeded with ovoviviparous fish (that conceive alevins who are capable of swimming immediately upon birth and who prey on mosquito larvae) will become the haven of several species of migrant and aquatic birds who will travel hither to rest and grow. Of them, we could list ducks and geese, grebes, herons, cranes, sandpipers and most importantly, storks, as since they are becoming an endangered species. Hereby, this artificially grown/turned natural reserve will become a safe environment for them to live and reproduce freely. [...] In any case, within a year or two, this national park clad with densely wooded pathways surrounded by grass and flora all watered with treated sewage water, will become a place of study, promenade and meditation for the city dwellers, students and relatives of the Missing in Lebanon for whom an entrancing collective memorial stone will be erected in the midst of a growing bed of flowers.”

If we were to go back and exhume the Normandy landfill, we'd find the sea. In 1925, the sea was paved for the first time under the auspices of French colonisation. During the war that has not ended, we turned the avenue of the French into a landfill. After the war that has supposedly ended, the landfill was neither turned into an aquatic reserve, nor into a public park, nor into a collective memorial for the Missing. The landfill has become Zeytouna Bay sold by Solidere, who had signed that they would turn it into a public park.

Once again, the anosmatic theatre has returned under a new guise gathered by the domestic space and exiled by the sovereign state. The sun hasn't been shut down since the mid 90s. Time was protracted. The protraction has accumulated. Mountains were emptied and refilled with imminently abeyant trash. Mountains went Missing, an absence of forests⁵ have resurged. Artworks recursively accommodate new artworks. Waste eats history.

After Solidere was founded in the early 1990s to Recycle Beirut from the remnants of international waste mingled with empty mountains and the entrails of an underearth, it created Sukleen to collect and commodify trash as private currency legitimised by the



state. A few years later, in 1998, Sukleen founded its sister company, Sukimi, for the management of solid waste. Sukimi built its factory on a new canalization of the Beirut River, and hence narrowed its streamline. This led to a catastrophic flood in 2005 that overtook an entire bridge.

Our bodies leak while Beirut transforms into an island of trash, a catalyst for an anticipated political awakening, and a swathe of collective epidemics. We look for treatments; we seize the occasion of witnessing an earth that hasn't been flattened yet. This place pushes us away from it. We want to approach its spectacle. The anosmatic theatre has not killed us yet. Accumulation kills. This underground is reminiscent of so many 'something else'. We try to hold our breath; we hesitate and move while we attempt to topple the trash of a nation. Nation-states eat our histories. While we scour for direct confrontation and safe resolutions, we wonder: What should be preserved? Waste Accumulation Kills. Do we want to die?

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¹ A Lebanese folk tale figure of a man who abducts children and puts them in a black trash bag that he carries at all times on his back. His name can be translated into 'Bagman'.

² Interestingly enough, the newly re-opened Museum of Sursock, where this publication will be launched, has recently morphed into an artwork. Since the Lebanese government has enlisted the museum as an archeological building and

the present Lebanese antiquity law edicted in 1933 decrees that all archeological sites, buildings and artefacts should be preserved intact and protected from time, the new museum directorship had to move its renovation and expansion to the underground. Three new floors, 20 meters in depth/height, were constructed under the museum's structure hosting two new exhibition spaces and a storage space. This

again corroborates that, according to the illicit juridical, time and the law do not exist underground. It is ungovernable. The Housing Committee for the Preservation of the Underground³ asks, "Is Sursock a landfill?"

³ SEDRA is the acronym for the Scientific Society of Energy and the Environment for Academic Research/Société scientifique de l'environnement et de l'énergie pour

la recherche académique.

⁴ The correct Italian translation of the 'Republic of Lebanon' or the 'Lebanese Republic' would be 'repubblica libanese'.

⁵ In Arabic, the noun for 'forest', ghaba, is derived from the verb ghaba: to become absent. While walking in a forest, I become absent.

Wild imaginations: The «Beirut River crocodile» frenzy

About the author

In mid-July 2013, news began to circulate of one or more crocodiles spotted in the Beirut River, and the city's inhabitants became ensnared in the jaws of a yearlong crocodile frenzy. A July 24th report in the daily *Al Joumhouria*, accompanied by pictorial evidence of a lone crocodile on the river's banks, triggered the fever and bestowed credibility on claims that at least two other crocodiles were lurking in the river's waters, and measured up to 4 meters in length and 1 meter in width.¹ The pictured crocodile, it was confirmed, belonged to the species *Crocodylus niloticus*,¹ or Nile crocodile – the second largest extant reptilian and, as citizens would repeatedly be reminded, one of the most dangerous worldwide to humans. Readers were asked to refrain from approaching the sighting area, and from hurting or killing the crocodile(s) if encountered.²

Questions arose as to how the crocodile(s) might have come to infest the river's waters. Was it originally destined to be a pet, only to be released in the river by a vendor or owner when it grew too large and vicious to keep? Had it arrived on its own by making its way through salty waters? Could the rising water levels of wintertime bring concealed crocodile populations into sight along the river's lengths? Could these populations spread via the sea and wash up on other riverbanks and beaches in the country? How much of a threat did the crocodile(s) pose to humans living in the river's proximity?³ And how could a crocodile survive in a river infamous for being a dumping ground for industrial waste, sewage, and slaughterhouse refuse?⁴ In other words, how could a blatantly 'unnatural' environment play host to 'nature'?

Ensuing investigations featured statements by employees of the nearby fish market and garbage collection company Sukleen, as well as residents of surrounding neighbourhoods who testified to having seen the crocodile from as early as the year 2000.⁵ Members of the police force, military officials, ministerial dignitaries, print journalists, television crews, and scores of locals and tourists headed to the river in the hope of finding the ever-elusive crocodile.⁶ Fisherman tried their hand at coaxing the crocodile into their nets, but the creature wrestled and gnawed its way out each and every time.⁷

Amidst public reassurances that only one crocodile inhabited the river, and that it had most likely been dumped by its owner, the Ministry of Agriculture, Municipality of Beirut, and NGO Animals Lebanon worked together to coordinate a rescue-capture effort.⁸ Animals Lebanon Director Jason Mier took the helm of the 20-person expedition tasked with treading the river's treacherous shallows in pursuit of the

animal.⁹ Peter Prodromou, England's version of Australia's 'The Crocodile Hunter' – known to followers as 'Safari Pete,' was flown to Beirut, but left empty-handed days later, finding it impossible to plunge into the toxic stream.¹⁰

Finally, it was for fisherman Fadi Baalbaki that the 'Beirut River Crocodile' would become the 'catch of the day' on April 3rd 2014. Images of Baalbaki posing alongside the 137 cm long, 9.5 kg-heavy crocodile with a duct-taped snout were swiftly transmitted across national media.¹¹ Custody of the crocodile was eventually granted, as pre-ordained, to Animals Lebanon, which set out to arrange for the animal's transfer abroad to an appropriate nature reserve or conservation centre. On June 30th 2014, the crocodile made headlines for the last time when its new home was announced: the UK-based centre Crocodiles of the World.¹²

What might explain the enthusiasm with which the 'Beirut River Crocodile' was met? Evolutionary biologist David P. Barash provides potential insight into this question, noting that seeing animals gives humans a "new appreciation for reality itself, since their vitality not only mirrors but magnifies our own."¹³ Philosopher Anca Ghaeus expounds on this point, emphasizing the centrality of animals' biological similarity and dissimilarity to the allure that they hold. Ghaeus suggests that even for only marginally similar animals, those traits that are shared with humans "concern essential aspects of existence such as birth, death, [and] bodily transformation over time." Looking at animals then provides humans with the exciting opportunity to witness the unfolding of a vitality that reflects their own. On the other hand, and particularly significant in this case, animals' dissimilarities – their ability to soar in the sky or lurk in the depths of water – have the potential to "enrich our lives", enabling us to "discover new meanings"¹⁴ and ways of being that complement and extend those which we possess.

Dissimilarities enrich our lives, specifically by triggering our curiosity and providing fodder for our imagination. Michel Foucault underscores the importance of curiosity, suggesting that it "evokes 'concern'; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things... a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and essential."¹⁵ It is here then that we might find a key to understanding the 'Beirut River Crocodile' frenzy, for the reptilian's difference seems to have unleashed citizens' care for what could exist and rendered ancillary, if only temporarily, the banal entanglements of

Nadia Christidi

is a PhD student in History and Anthropology of Science, Technology and Society at MIT. She studies human-animal and environmental relations within contemporary warfare in the Middle East. Nadia previously held appointments at Beirut Art Center and Darat al Funun and has worked independently with Ashkal Alwan and the Young Arab Theatre Fund.

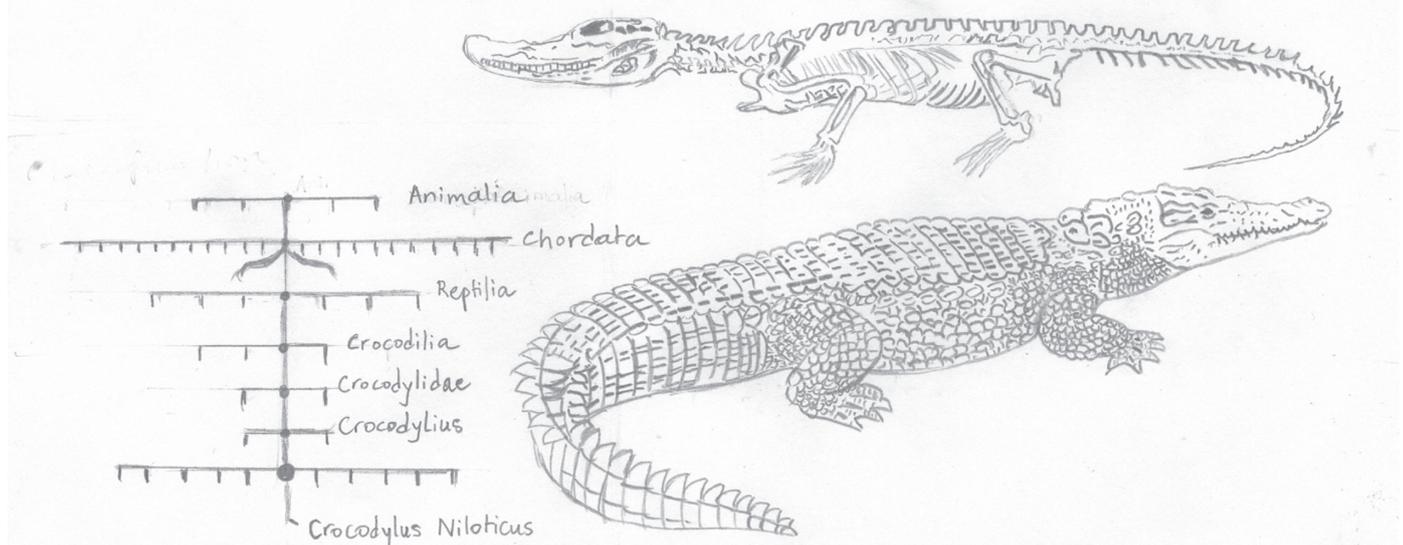
everyday life.

Like others around me, I too became caught up in the Lebanese crocodile hysteria. Animal welfare considerations aside, I found myself continuing to imagine scenarios in which the crocodile managed to escape Baalbaki's net and was still swimming in the Beirut River waters. In one storyline, other pet owners and vendors follow suit, dumping their overgrown reptilians into the river, and the Nile crocodile becomes a thriving non-native species; the re-introduction of life into the largely stagnant stream triggers a new ecological balance and results in a thriving 'natural' eco-system. In another less optimistic one, the crocodiles' diet of toxic waste triggers physiological mutations – Godzilla-style – and a pack of 'unnatural' monsters rampages Beirut, wreaking havoc in its streets. In a third, Baalbaki and Crocodiles of the World remain a reality, but the mutated crocodile escapes from the centre

and slithers along to the River Thames...

As I imagine such scenarios, I mourn the loss of possibility that the crocodile's capture posed. With Beirut's return to normalcy – with rumours and hysterics being replaced by official accounts and order – the spark of curiosity and imagination that had briefly flickered was once again extinguished. Insisting on imagining nonetheless, I resist in my own way the reversion to stagnation and monotony, and entertain a dream I share with Foucault: a "dream of a new age of curiosity" in which there is no distinction between "good" and "bad" information, and "the paths and the possibility of comings and goings" are infinite.¹⁶

Meanwhile, fantasies aside, the very ordinary 'Beirut River Crocodile' remains in a carefully controlled and monitored ('unnatural natural') environment in Oxfordshire, England.



Anatomical sketches of the *Crocodylus Niloticus* and its taxonomic tree

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Map illustrating the Beirut River Crocodile's movement from initial capture to import into Lebanon and repatriation in the UK



Portraits (from left to right) of: Fadi Baalbaki, Peter Prodromou, and Jason Meir

Mayssa Fattouh

is Co-Founder and Artistic Director of TandemWorks. She spearheaded formal and informal art platforms and is responsible for further developing spaces such as Katara Art Center in Doha, where she was Artistic Director and Curator and Al Riwaq Gallery in Manama, as Curatorial and Programme Manager. Mayssa is based in Doha and holds a BFA in Fine Arts from the Lebanese University.

About the author

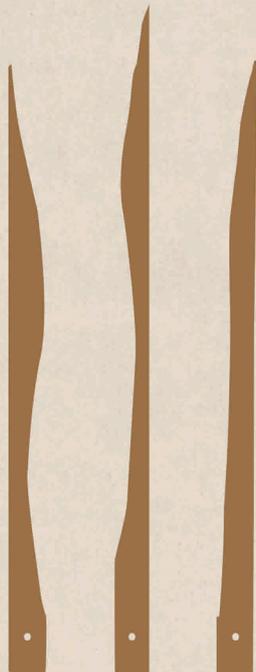
[Editorial continued...] These intervention are based on existing studies and analysis, as well as drawn from unwritten stories and oral histories. Fictional narratives are conjured by Nadia Christidi and Jessica Khazrik, urbanist Sarah Lily Yassine presents her research on urban transformation, and theOtherDada address questions of environmental impact. Community meetings organized by TW around Bourj Hammoud and Badawi are presented in summary form in order to give voice to the residents and stakeholders, as are the workshops conducted by Public Works. Moreover, artistic interventions by artists Marwan Rechmaoui and Omar Fakhoury have been included in the publication as a metaphor for intervention in the public realm. A review by Rayya Badran of the artist Vartan Avakian's proposed sound installation is present

alongside visual material he has created to accompany the upcoming installation. In attempting to sketch a portrait of Nahr Beirut, we highlight the responsibility citizens have in resisting fatalism in all its forms. The sound installation by Avakian has configured part of this venture and acts as a mediator between neighbouring, disconnected areas and the buried river that, every once in a while, has its presence revived through an unpredictable event, a water stream, a Masterplan, a graffiti, or more recently, the trash crisis. These are the many forms of life that Nahr Beirut continues to be afflicted by, in silence, solitary, behind closed walls, but where movement still and always occurs.

- sokumi
- trash
- jisir el basha [broke in 1958]
- pile of white stones
- big building
- kanater zbaydeh [the roman aquaducts]
- delbeh spring source
- river valley [before entering beirut]
- fish
- old mill
- trees
- mines
- wild bore

The similarity between a river and the work of Marcel Duchamp's "3 Standard Stoppages" is about a line made by chance.

Duchamp explained later about his experiment. It was back in 1913, in his studio, he tried to "imprison" and "preserve" forms that he obtained through chance: "At the same time, the unit of length, one meter, was changed from a straight line to a curved line without actually losing its identity [as] the meter, and yet casting a pataphysical doubt on the concept of a straight edge as being the shortest route from one point to another."





**Marwan
Rechmawi**

is an artist based in Beirut. His work focuses on urban dynamics, demographics and behaviours. He uses industrial materials such as concrete, rubber, tar and glass to create tactile works on a large scale. His works have been exhibited in Lebanon and internationally. He has participated in the Istanbul Biennial (2015), São Paulo Bienal, Brazil (2006), and the Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2005 and 2013).

Mapping Beirut through its tenants' stories

About the author

“Mapping Beirut Through its Tenants’ Stories” is a project that aims at opening a debate about housing possibilities in Beirut, and an attempt at understanding and mapping the city through the narratives of its residents.

Initiated by Public Works Studio, the project focuses on the experiences of what are referred to as the old tenants of Beirut, ensuring they have a place to live in the city despite ongoing attempts to evict them, whether by the new rent law or by de-facto market procedures. Since its issuance in April 2014, the new rent law has spurred a series of ongoing debates about the right to housing especially to low and middle income residents, and has acted as a symbolic tool to further alienate and exert social and psychological violence on old tenants. We argue that the primary actors in drafting the new law and the major beneficiaries from the process of eviction are a handful of real-estate developers. In light of this reality, this project aims to recast the debate around the old rent law and to propose new ways of engaging with it, departing from people’s rights to their city, and to provide venues to contest current urban policies.

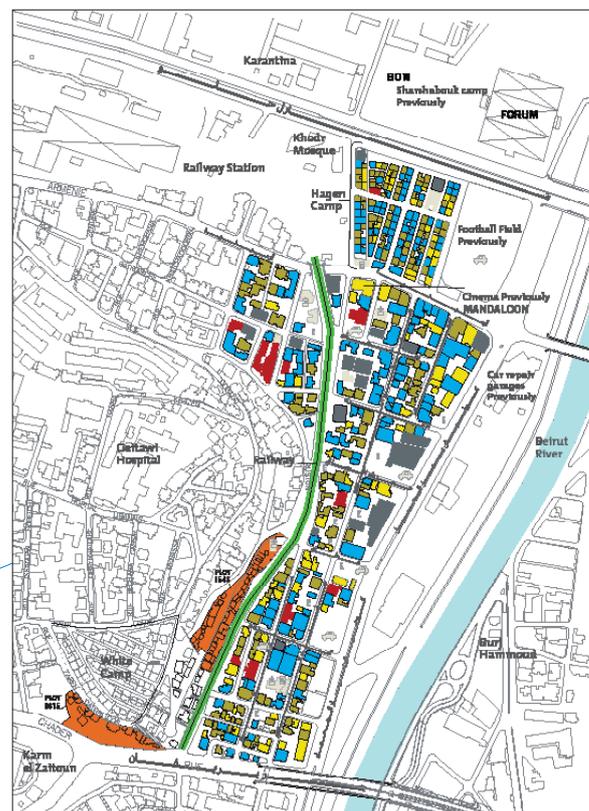
The project consists of workshops conducted with groups of young men and women in which we collectively initiate urban research that looks closely into one of Beirut’s neighbourhoods. Through this activity, we aim to involve youths and students from different neighbourhoods and universities in the research, reflection and production process, with the purpose of enabling them to develop concepts around spatial justice and housing rights. We consider that the loss of homes without guarantees of rehousing is a loss that is not limited to old tenants, but concerns the entire city, its inhabitants and its future.

The following is the outcome of the second workshop conducted in the neighbourhood of Badawi.

A History of the Neighbourhood

Badawi is located on the Eastern limits of administrative Beirut. It is the last neighbourhood within the cadastral district of Achrafieh that borders the river and that separates it from the area belonging to the municipality of Bourj Hammoud. Badawi is historically known as the area surrounding the Khalil Badawi Street that extends along

BADAWI Morphology map



Public Works

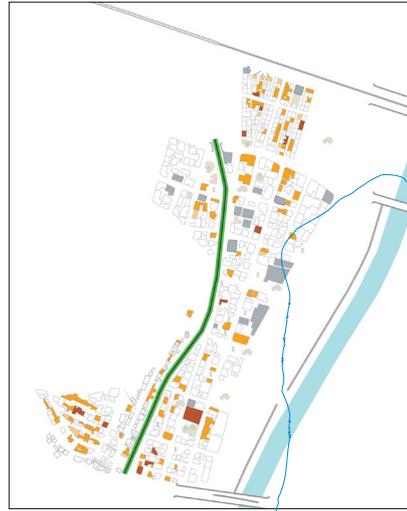
is a design and research studio initiated in 2012 by Nadine Bekdache and Abir Saksouk. The collective overlays the disciplines of architecture and graphic design with the study of urbanism. Its aim is to spur thinking on the interface between social practices, representations and the built environment, in the context of spatial injustices in Lebanon.

Old residents map



- Old tenants dwelling
- Old landlords dwelling
- Old tenants and old landlords dwelling
- Ground floor commercial old rent

New tenants map



- New tenants dwelling
- New tenants and owners dwelling
- Foyer

Eviction map



- Vacant building
- Vacant apartment
- Evicted and destroyed building
- Demolished building

the Beirut River from the hills of Karam el Zeitoun to Armenia Street. Before the creation of the Khalil Badawi Street, the site consisted of forested and agricultural hills that extended East from the railroad until the Beirut River.

In 1922, around ten thousand Armenians arrived fleeing the massacres in the Cilicia region. Back then, the Red Cross and the French Mandate authorities installed thousands of tents on the empty lands of North East Beirut, specifically in the Medawar district.

With the arrival of Armenian refugees, the first informal neighbourhood in Beirut was formed: the Medawar camp in Karantina. As of 1926, through the initiative of Armenian associations and with the help of the Mandate authorities, permanent solutions were proposed to lodge refugees outside the camps. They were therefore gradually moved into neighbouring areas outside of the Karantina district, such as Bourj Hammoud, Karam el Zeitoun, Hadjin Camp and Khalil el Badawi.

The Armenian Hunchak party was an active political agent since the early urbanization of the Badawi area. With the outbreak of the 1958 revolts, the party aligned itself with the Lebanese left, opposing the then President Camille Chamoun. During that period Badawi was transformed into a demarcation line. In light of the political conflicts between the Hunchak and the Tashnag parties, supporters of the latter left the Badawi area and headed to Bourj Hammoud. A number of houses were left empty and subsequently inhabited by

Maronite families who came to Beirut from the North looking for work.

At the beginning of the civil war, in 1976 to be precise, Badawi was shelled, and a number of its inhabitants left their homes and displaced elsewhere. Consequently, a number of families moved to the area and squatted the empty houses. Later in the 1980s, an agreement between the owners and the “squatters” became the basis upon which leasing contracts changed to suit whoever chose to stay in the neighbourhood. Hence the area increasingly included a mix of people as a result of the many migrations that had passed through it.

During the past few years, and before the ground floors of residential buildings turned into cafés and restaurants in Mar Mikhael, the low price of land and low rents in the neighbourhood compared with other areas in Achrafieh, were appealing to new residents. Badawi was considered on the border of the city (almost a suburb), but it also benefited from services such as electricity provided in the administrative area of Beirut.

Today, the majority of the residents in Badawi are Armenians and are old tenants. Land purchases in the area doesn't compare with other areas in Beirut, particularly since many Armenian owners refrain from selling their properties. Despite this, the area is currently undergoing considerable changes that are forcing its old residents to sell or be evicted from their homes, and threatening to demolish the area's architectural fabric.

Sustainable Housing Arrangements in the Neighbourhood:

Old Rent, Informal Building and Religious Institutions

Despite the destruction of old one-floor homes in order to build high rise buildings, Badawi remains mostly inhabited by its former residents. In addition to old rent contracts, housing arrangements initiated by local organizations guaranteed the presence of long-time residents. In our research, we discovered arrangements that involve religious or civil organizations that ensured housing in the neighbourhood, and specifically worked towards keeping the older residents in their homes through a form of subsidized housing. For instance, there are several plots in Badawi belonging to the convent and which are being offered at cheaper prices. Another emerging phenomena is that of ‘temporary housing’, a local initiative launched by the Armenian community to preserve their social fabric and ensure subsidized housing. As such, and thanks to the initiative of an Armenian centre, a building was purchased to help poor families find rent-free housing for a period of one or two years.

Evictions

Official cadastral registry records indicate that there is an active wave of land purchases taking place in the neighborhood since 2010.

In the context of rising real estate prices in Beirut and growing investment opportunities in the

neighborhood, Badawi neighborhood residents - specifically those living around Khalil al-Badawi Street – are subjected to eviction pressures. In many cases, the tenants are proposing to the landlords that they buy their homes at reasonable prices, but the owners refuse to sell. Some owners are also refusing to receive the rent from tenants, but tenants are making sure to send the amount through a lawyer, to achieve immunity and the right to prove their legitimacy in place.

As for the residential block south of Abyad Camp, it has been completely evicted and mostly demolished during the past few years,

following the construction of the Yerevan highway in the year 2000.

New Rent

In diverse locations in the neighbourhood, rooms are rented in apartments in order to increase a family's income. These rooms are usually rented out to migrant workers for 150 or 200 USD per room, which also includes a shared bathroom and kitchen. There are also rooms or ‘foyers’ for rent.

On another level, there are several local businesses in the neighbourhood where some owners (and often tenants) renovate the building or divide the apartments in order to rent them out at a higher price, thus benefiting from the additional income, and taking advantage of the price hike taking place throughout the entire city. For instance, an old woman owns a building with four floors. She renovated and refurbished the apartments five years ago and is renting at prices that reach 1000 USD per month, even when the apartments are no larger than 20 or 30 square meters. She is selective about whom she leases the flats to, and is not content with whomever comes along. She imposes conditions related to religion, personal status, and sectarian. The apartments are empty most of the time. Another case is that of the owner of a famous grocery shop located west of Abyad Camp. He bought two plots of land in Abyad Camp two years ago, which were both one-story buildings. He added two floors to one house and three to the second one. He renovated them and rents them out for 300 to 400 USD per apartment, mostly to foreigners.

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Interview with Rani Rajji, architect and urban researcher

Urban research and mapping conducted by Public Works Studio

Mona Fawaz and Isabelle Beylan, report on the unofficial neighbourhoods in Beirut, 2003

Website for Beirut's neighborhoods:

Wikipedia entries for Hunchak and Tashnag parties

The maps are the result of fieldwork by participants in the workshop ‘To Map Badawi from its residents’ narratives’ and they are: Mayssa

Kassir, Ahlam Jamaledine, Jean Michel Aoun, Joanna Haddad, Monica Basbous, Nathalie Bekdache, Alain Ibrahim.

River concrete: Vartan Avakian's ghost river

About the author

In her essay “Holy Water”, published in her famous collection of essays entitled *The White Album*, Joan Didion charts her relationship to water. Less concerned with the ‘politics of water’, the author investigates instead the mechanical, physical transportation of water. Or more precisely, she closely follows the physical, material movement of water. By examining the inner workings of how and why water is moved from one county to another in the State of California in the U.S. – a state notorious for its droughts – Didion draws our attention to the fact that the amount of water given to a county rested on the supply and demand of its consumers in different parts of the state. The cities or counties will make their demands of water, which is then dispatched according to a very precise schedule. The very fact that water is perceived as merchandise, as a good within the capitalist market economy, is something noteworthy not only for the author, but also for artist Vartan Avakian in his yet untitled installation involving the Beirut River. The work will be installed this winter, once the rainy season is at its peak, when at least some water is running through the river.

While we tend to regard water as a natural resource, it is also and undeniably, a marketed good. In its many forms and functions, water is tested, purified, moved, controlled, bottled, contained, marketed, bought and sold. Immense infrastructures are built to help transport and contain it. Didion astutely remarks that “it is easy to forget that the only natural force over which we have any control out here is water, and that only recently.” The ways in which we control and perceive water – the Beirut River, in this case – is also what interests Avakian, whose fascination with the control of water is very much in line with Didion’s own thinking and passion for the subject.

His intervention in the framework of *Tandem-Works*, stems from a desire to understand the relationship between matter and movement, as well as water’s rapport with the natural as well as the urban realm. In his piece, Avakian wants to make audible the sounds of the river in its different environs. What the artist is concerned with is the flow of water on its concrete watershed: how those two materialities interact, and what that very interaction might sound like. For the artist, the sound of the water interacting with other matter is a direct consequence of how the city built the watershed, and while water flowing might mirror an unpredictable, indeterminate wave of sounds, the artist asks us and wants the piece itself to surrender to this unpredictability.

The concepts of unpredictability and risk are important economic terms in today’s reigning capitalist era (where some might argue that we have entered post or hyper capitalist conditions). Avakian is interested in how economic risk calculation is intrinsically linked to our fears of unpredictability. It is in this resistance – our need and obsession to control and predict (hear, produce) nature – that the artist’s piece comes to life. Just as the concrete watershed helps transport the flow of water from one place to the next (when there is water to speak of that is), the composition of the piece emulates this by transporting the sound of the water flow to specified points in its surroundings. Pedestrians and visitors alike will be able to listen to the river from specific points, where the sound of water is transported via external pipelines. By doing so, the artist points to the absent-present spectre of the river. While the watershed is there, carved into the land, territorially and geographically delimitating the city, the actual river that runs through it does not. Or at least, it only exists intermittently depending on how much it rain there was the previous winter.

With the current waste crisis, Lebanon is and has been facing – especially with the now much dreaded rain season – the threat of contamination of the riverbed. This undoubtedly poses very grave environmental problems, but it also increases the variables that the piece itself might encounter. Another element will thus factor into the making of sound. No longer will the sound mirror water against concrete, but new matter, an unpredictable, unknown component, will likely come into play. The unforeseeable, but totally plausible scenario of dumped waste becoming part of or indeed hindering the river’s flow – and ultimately Avakian’s installation – reinforces the need to pay attention to the river’s existence as ‘controlled matter’. While the water is contained between walls of concrete, its sound is not, and any unplanned event will surely alter the ways in which it will sound through the pipes that transport it. The more variable factors intervene, the more likely the ‘output’ of the river’s sounds will feel less and less like something we can ever think to control.

The act of ‘ghosting’, a term the artist has chosen to describe the action of transporting sound from the river to its environs, works as a means to engage the listener, and thus the city’s inhabitant with her river. The gesture of transporting sound through pipelines, rather than recording it and placing it in different parts of the city, highlights the artist’s insistence that the piece wants to make audible the sound of flow rather than the

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Circa 1920s

presence of water. It is not enough to ‘remind’ us, as it were, about the existence of water in the river (however intermittent), but to foreground how this flow is itself a question of the interaction of elements, and a question of our own interaction with the river. Matter against matter, solids and liquids, but more importantly the will to control nature even when it is scarce and contaminated. The pipes transport some parts of the river by echoing its sounds outside the infrastructure that contains and controls it. Perhaps the piece operates less as a sound installation and more like a sonic mirror to Didion’s piece; an essayistic attempt to understand our relation to the river we forgot existed. Sound conjures the slightest

hints of life from what we always considered to be dead and toxic. Instead of representation through recording, the artist has prioritized a direct, experiential way of interacting with the motion of this natural resource. It cannot be reiterated throughout the year as it strictly depends on the (un)natural stream, which only ever happens when it rains, when it snows. The ephemerality of the work mirrors the vulnerability of the river. Pipes are just a few avenues from which we can sonically peak or zoom into the short life that runs through the waterbed.

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