

The Peace Building in Lebanon



Special Edition on #MountLebanon

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Mount Lebanon: Hub of Community-Led Peacebuilding Initiatives

Celine Moyroud *UNDP Resident Representative*

This edition of the peacebuilding supplement explores local approaches to peacebuilding, an area of growing emphasis in the fields of both peacebuilding and development. Like previous region-specific issues of the peacebuilding supplement, such as the one focusing on the city of Tripoli, this edition provides a critical opportunity to explore localization in practice, this time through the experiences of local communities in the governorate of Mount Lebanon. In addition to being a major economic centre of Lebanon, Mount Lebanon is also one of the most ecologically and culturally diverse governorates in Lebanon. Communities in Mount Lebanon, both urban and rural, regularly face the challenges of mitigating and managing tensions and disputes relating to religious and political differences, environment and natural resource management, and competition over jobs and services. While these challenges are being aggravated in the current context of compounded crisis in which Lebanon finds itself today, peacebuilding actors in Mount Lebanon – local people, governments, civil society organizations, businesses and external multilateral and bilateral actors – are grappling to address this immense complexity through a range of initiatives. This edition seeks to highlight some of the community-led peacebuilding initiatives grounded in participatory dialogue, dispute resolution and governance in Mount Lebanon, with a view to identifying lessons and good practices with resonance for broader efforts to rebuild trust and the social contract within communities across the country. Particularly, contributors will explore how initiatives in Mount Lebanon are addressing questions of national resonance, such as:

- How civil war memorialization, healing and reconciliation efforts are providing a foundation for local communities to build Lebanon forward even in the context of ongoing crisis;
- How former fighters are helping to build a movement for peace in Mount Lebanon;
- How environmental issues (such as deforestation, sustainable natural resource management, energy and pollution) are increasingly becoming part of a renegotiation of the public good in Lebanon;
- The role of women and youth as agents for preventing and mitigating conflict and promoting sustainable, inclusive and peaceful pathways out of current crises;
- How digital platforms can be leveraged for peacebuilding, and how youth are leading the way in managing the risks of greater digital access by debunking fake news;
- The situation of Syrian and Palestinian refugees and the peacebuilding potential of participatory local development in Lebanese host communities; and
- The importance of development-centred urbanization in reducing social tensions.

As a long-standing partner of peace building initiatives, UNDP is excited to share the stories of how local communities, including women, youth and vulnerable groups, are creating dialogues, processes and structures to define and realize their own vision and aspirations of a peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive future. We look forward to reflecting together on the challenges, opportunities and potential of scaling up successful peacebuilding and development practices from Mount Lebanon, and to connecting these local initiatives to national frameworks aiming to strengthen trust and accountability in Lebanon.

Mount Lebanon: The Clash of Civilizations and the Crossroad of Interaction

Ghassan Hajjar *Editor in Chief, An-Nahar Newspaper*

I am not from Mount Lebanon, nor do I belong to its two main components, who coexist and fight, without one being able to separate from the other, that is to say, a divorce between them is the sort that will almost certainly be reversed. This is due to historical reasons in the collective memory of both. But far from analyzing this phenomenon, Mount Lebanon has a great impact on the enrichment of Lebanese life, and starting from it was the beginning, the beginning of the formation of this Lebanon, and with it the other districts joined to form the State of Greater Lebanon. The culture of Mount Lebanon prevailed over the rest of the regions, which, while having a cultural heritage, it was undeclared and limited to closed groups. And since those cultures were confined to the place, the culture which was more open to the West prevailed, and was the one which set the basis for an open, educated and cultured Lebanon. However, as the armed manifestations grew during the war, divisive and liberal tendencies also grew. After the left-wing parties that existed, religious movements were born out of nowhere, and worked to break the prevailing pattern by introducing new ideas and lifestyles different from those that prevailed. And Lebanon plunged into a clash of identities, which only produced conflicts on the sidelines of the events that exposed all Lebanese groups, and engaged them in confrontations that revealed their vulnerability and their inability to live together. Mount Lebanon remains the foundation, although other regions are no less important, but the future of Lebanon is governed by the ability of this Mountain to restore coexistence and the return of human interaction between the Lebanese themselves, before they reconcile with the refugee, whatever his identity. Mount Lebanon has a historic role in Lebanon's centenary, and an awaited pivotal role for the second centenary.

Freedom of Expression: A Shared Value

Ed Barnet *Development Director - Foreign, Commonwealth and development office, British Embassy Beirut.*

Defending freedom of expression around the world has never been more pressing. In a world of disrupted facts, distorted truths and fake news, free, credible and investigative journalism holds private and public spheres to account, and helps support a safer, more prosperous and progressive world. At a time of multiple crises, the flow of reliable and transparent information is even more important. Alongside UNDP, the UK has for many years been a partner to Lebanon in preserving the space for free media across the country; it is a universal value which we all must protect.

This special issue, funded by the UK, focuses on the importance of nurturing safe and positive media spaces for public debate and hate-free discourse as part of UNDP's peace building mission. The "Peace Building News Supplement" will reflect on Mount Lebanon's past and current peace building challenges. Across Lebanon, the UK is engaged in countering the surge in the production and dissemination of disinformation, propaganda and other misleading content. With UNDP, the UK has supported the training of 40 youth actors from 10 villages across Lebanese governorates on combatting fake news and engaging with their local communities to consolidate social cohesion and stability. In Mount Lebanon we have partnered with municipalities to deliver several projects, including through the construction of a multipurpose center to promote tourism, local produce, and artisanal products in Kahale, and the rehabilitation of Arc En Ciel Center in Damour that was damaged in the fires Lebanon faced in 2019.

Lebanon's youth has a crucial role in this; as the leaders of tomorrow, government and civil society should support young people to become informed and engaged adult citizens. UK support to civil society organisations – with youth at its heart – has played, and will continue to play, a leading role in driving and constructively contributing to a new form of Lebanese politics, one that puts accountability of the state towards its people at its heart.

Democracies thrive through free media and freedom of speech. We cannot be complacent about defending and protecting those liberties that are often taken for granted. That is why the UK will continue to support the work to preserve the space for free media in Lebanon. Throughout the crises that Lebanon currently faces, the UK continues to be a steadfast friend of the Lebanese people.

Mount Lebanon: The Weakest Link in the COVID-19 Battle

Nadim Ladki *Editor in Chief - The Daily Star*

To say that Lebanon has been sorely deficient in its handling of a plethora of recent crises would be an understatement. However, the pitiful manner in which the country has dealt with the raging coronavirus pandemic has brought into focus the complete lack of preparedness and aptitude required to bring the spread of COVID-19 under control.

These failings have been particularly acute in Mount Lebanon, where COVID-19 has exposed gross deficiencies in health care services at a time when they are most needed.

Although the health care system is overwhelmed across the country, with medical workers and physicians fatigued beyond human endurance and hospitals already at capacity, the situation in Mount Lebanon has been more strained. Cases have been more prevalent in the governorate, which is in dire need of more health care facilities and greater coordination with municipalities in order to address a crisis of this scale.

In parallel, authorities in Mount Lebanon must ramp up enforcement of social-distancing measures. All gatherings must be prevented before they get a chance to cause damage, and unnecessary excursions must be stamped out.

Coronavirus has proved to be a formidable threat, but the only way to bring it to heel is for all of Lebanon to demonstrate the same fortitude and efficacy in the battle against it, as such, the health care sector in Mount Lebanon needs to improve its strategy and increase its capabilities to the same level as the rest of the country.

Moreover, the absolute importance of the vaccination drive, which Lebanon just started, must be impressed upon all residents, who need to understand that attaining herd immunity through the jab is the only way for life to return to normal, and to protect themselves and their loved ones from infection, and potentially death.

Finally, coronavirus does not distinguish between Lebanese citizens and those who are guests in the country, and our government is duty bound to safeguard the health of everyone residing in the country. Medical care must be afforded to all residents, whether Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians or any other nationality without discrimination, as must vaccination efforts, if they are to be effective.

The Mountain, the Backbone of the Lebanese Entity

Michel Touma *Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour supplements*

The year 2020 was marked, despite the series of crises that the country is experiencing, by the celebration of the centenary of the proclamation of Greater Lebanon on the 1st of September 1920. An event that has allowed many observers and analysts to carry out an overview of the historical origins and the socio-political and community roots of Lebanon in its current form. It is now well established, on the basis of historical reality, that Mount Lebanon constituted the backbone and foundation of Greater Lebanon, whether geographically, economically, socially, demographically or educationally. Most historians concur in this context that a certain "Lebanese personality" has been gradually forged over the centuries under the influence of the geographical profile, consisting essentially of a chain of high mountains, which distinguishes Lebanon from the other countries of the region. However, the Lebanese entity only began to take shape and impose itself as a relatively autonomous administrative and political structure from the 16th century, with the beginning of the Ottoman era. In 1516, the Ottoman army won a decisive victory over the Mamelukes of Egypt in the battle of "Marj Dabek", north of Aleppo. This was the beginning of the Ottoman Empire.

The new power, wanting to devote itself essentially to questions of a strategic nature, will entrust the management of daily affairs to the feudal chiefs of the mountains. Mount Lebanon would thus be marked by the long reign of the emirs. But it is especially with Emir Fakhreddine II, at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, that Lebanon began to take shape, more or less in its present form. Coming from the Druze clan of "the Maan" who ruled the Chouf, cared for and educated from an early age by the Maronite dignitaries of Keserouan (the Khazen sheiks), Emir Fakhreddine will set out, as soon as he comes to power after reaching adulthood, to conquer from the Chouf the territories that would form, to some extent, present-day Lebanon. Endowed with the qualities of a true statesman, Fakhreddine II will succeed in developing and relatively maintaining autonomous the Lebanese entity built around Mount Lebanon. The reign of the Emirate of the Mountain, ensured by the "Maan" until 1697, then by the "Chehab" emirs, lasted until 1842, when a new political system was set up by the powers of the time, still built around Mount Lebanon, as its backbone. This situation lasted until the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, in the wake of the First World War, leading to the proclamation of Greater Lebanon in September 1920, which will always have the Lebanese mountain as its central backbone because of its economic, demographic and educational weight.

Collective Memory and Dealing with the Past and Future

Makram Rabah

Lecturer of History at the American University of Beirut

It is perhaps quite difficult to go over Lebanon's modern history without focusing on Mount Lebanon, which was the bedrock of the Lebanese Republic founded by the French mandatory authorities a century ago.

Up until 1920, the history of Lebanon, as the late great historian Kamal Salibi puts it, was a story which included the Druze and the Maronites, with other actors playing minor or supporting roles, something which would change with the annexation of the Lebanese coastal town and the Beqaa to what is not Lebanon. Consequently, the Druze-Maromite experiment in Mount Lebanon with its many ebbs and flows was crucial in bringing about the rise of the modern Lebanese state, yet equally, a number of violent conflicts and ultimately civil wars which branded these two founding communities, perhaps unjustly as arch enemies.

The Druze and the Maronites as communities have faced off on three main occasions in all-out civil wars (1840-1860, 1958, 1983) which have led to dire political and economic consequences that still reflect on the day-to-day dynamic of the social fabric of Mount Lebanon. While the warring political factions, the Druze-Progressive Socialist Party and the Maronite-Lebanese Forces have openly reconciled, this has yet to penetrate all segments of their communities, who despite not harboring real animosity have yet to truly dissect and process the violent memories they inherited.

The lack of closure and proper reconciliation is not necessarily fully the responsibility of Lebanon's political elite but rather their inability or neglect of the crux of the conflict which is the collective memory of both communities, which was left unattended and thus allowed for the resurgence of the conflict when the factors

and the actors permitted.

In my recent book *Conflict on Mount Lebanon, the Druze, the Maronites and Collective Memory* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), I explore the collective memory formation of both the Druze and Maronite communities, which have been utilized by their respective centers of power as weapons to mobilize their own in the service of a presumed existential group threat which in essence serves the leader's personal agenda (s). Consequently, rather than dwelling on the conventional approaches to understanding Lebanon's recurrent slide into violence and fixating on the Lebanese sectarian system or international intervention, collective memory ought to be dissected, and understanding its intricate mechanism is a gateway to grasping why neighbors, would feel the urge to become bitter enemies. Throughout researching and interviewing many of the subjects of my book, who

actively participated in the conflict in 1975-1990 both on the political and military level, collective memory features heavily and underscores the role that it played in bringing about the conflict. Yet, the collective memory formation as well as the perception of themselves as well as the other has remained virtually unaddressed and instead left to linger until another form of conflict arises.

In 1991, the Lebanese parliament which represented the different warring factions passed an amnesty law which was supposed to open a new chapter in the history of the country, but failed to do so on different levels. Rather than using amnesty to open up to these memories and violent events, much like the South African truth and reconciliation model, the Lebanese political elite simply moved on and prevented any real chance of discussing such matters, the Syrian military occupation equally made sure this would be the case.

The main premise of openly dissecting collective memory does not aim at creating a single national collectiveness but rather to disarm the different communities' collective memory, at least the aggressive elements, while leaving the rest to organically continue to bestow diversity and pluralism on the Lebanese society.

Dealing with the past is never an easy endeavor especially that people prefer to stay in their comfort zone and refuse to admit their shortcomings. Yet, for Lebanon to reach this reflective communal and national level it needs years or perhaps decades to properly process its history and to acknowledge that collective memory should be preserved as an incubator for diversity rather than a tool to put people against one another.

Understanding collective memory does not merely allow us to properly understand the conflict on Mount Lebanon but also to understand many of the conflicts throughout Lebanon's more contemporary history such as the Alawite-Sunni schism in Tripoli or even to project it on the ongoing Sunni-Shiite supposed primordial feud. Above all, conquering collective memory would serve as a first step towards properly engaging in reconciliation, one of which would involve all sides without the mediation of their sectarian custodians and thus act as a gateway towards achieving proper closure with the past, and nationhood for its future.



Peace and Reinterpretation of the Past: Dismantling Conflicts in Mount Lebanon

Shadi Alaa Eddine
Journalist



Badri Abu Diab: Reconciliations are great but not enough

Badri Abu Diab, a former combatant who co-organized and managed the workshops with the youth, explains the mechanism of action, saying that it is based on slogans that emphasize that violence is not a solution, that there is no need to live the pains and repeat them, and that the path of solutions begins with dialogue.

The direct framework of the workshops according to Diab, was based on the process of connecting generations and components of Mount Lebanon, and has chosen Aley, Al-Shahar and Brih as a field for work on the topics of conflict analysis in accordance with general political, gender, sectarian and political criteria.

He pointed out that some participants considered that the reconciliation was completed with the famous "Reconciliation of the Mountain" in 2000, which took place under the auspices of the late Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. This reconciliation created a positive atmosphere that allowed many Christian families to return to their villages, under the roof of a project aimed at turning the page on war and establishing coexistence.

For his part, he asserts considering that reconciliations are positive, but when they are achieved under political and religious patronage, they remain of a superior character, unless they are reinforced by the dissemination of a culture of reconciliation in the heart of conflicting societies and permanently empowering them, which has not happened yet, and therefore, many problems continue to occur repeatedly.

Abdullah Malaeb: A youthful reading of the history of conflicts

Abdullah Malaeb recounts his experience of participating in the workshop in Al-Shahar area, based on youthful and regional specificity. This experience, in his view, produced a sharp confrontation process with history and established a conviction about the need for a generation independent of ideas and references based on the history of grudges and disputes.

Disclosure of what happened is necessary to establish a knowledge that allows all parties to admit their mistakes as a prelude to building deep, solid and clearly defined reconciliations.

According to Malaeb, Al-Shahar bears a special symbolism capable of transmitting general indications related to all of Lebanon, due to its sectarian, confessional and political diversity, but on the other hand, he recognizes the difficulty of dealing with the issue because the history that is being addressed is not distant, but rather goes back to a relatively recent period.

Hence, he explains that the emphasis was on how to create a new youthful experience by promoting scientific knowledge and analyzing global experiences in conflict resolution, which led to the emergence of a new type of discourse which seeks to convey the essence of this knowledge and the ideas it defends such as reconciliation, coexistence and rejection of violence, to the practical field based on the concept of the unity of belonging.

Malaeb concludes by emphasizing that this experience is only an initial step that must be completed with a series of successive steps to ensure its success, especially in the presence of authorities that derive their legitimacy from the past.

In its search for an interpretation of the history of war and conflicts, "Fighters for Peace" does not attempt to dispel and deny history, but rather works to acquire it by establishing and unifying the standpoint towards it to prevent its house arrest in the event of semantic, cognitive and interpretive fragmentation imposed on it by those in power.

The former combatants have consolidated their personal history and united their attitudes towards it. Transferring this experience to the youth would provide an entry point for considering the most complex structural problems facing the peacebuilding process in Lebanon in general and in Mount Lebanon in particular, namely the search for history, which to this day remains lost in the jungle of sectarian and authoritarian interpretation.

The Civil War is Over

The war in Lebanon has ended and the path of peace has begun, but its bloody and painful past continues to succeed time and time again in infiltrating the present and directly influencing it through a range of economic, security, political and cultural pathways.

Many associations have worked to promote a culture of peace in order to counter the heavy legacy of war, most notably the "Fighters for Peace" organization.

This organization was founded in 2014 and worked, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to address the cumulative effects of the civil war through a speech to younger generations aimed at preventing the re-experience of conflict and fighting.

Mount Lebanon, with its sectarian and political diversity and the bloody conflicts it stores, has been the scene of the organization's latest experiences in building a culture of peace among youth. In 2020, the organization launched a series of workshops and panel discussions targeting the youth in Mount Lebanon areas. Twenty young people from Aley and Al-Shahar regions were selected and trained on inside mediation, peace-building and conflict resolution techniques, and many areas that serve to enhance their ability to communicate positively and effectively with young people at risk of being caught up in extremism and violence.

The importance of the activity of the "Fighters for Peace" organization lies in transferring the work for peace from the emotional sphere and turning it into an institution that employs

the experiences of those who have experienced and participated in the war and its tragedies, in the arduous and difficult search of building the pathways to peace.

Assaad Chaftari: Fighting for a moment of hesitation in front of the leader's speech

The importance of working with Mount Lebanon youth lies, according to former combatant and organization member Assaad Al Chaftari, in opening the way for new generations to ask questions about dangerous topics, which, if left unaddressed, will prevent the crossing into a secure future.

He summarizes his experience working with youth under three main headings:

- 1- General awareness and recognition of oneself and the other.
- 2- Rehabilitation to enable the youth to interact with their communities.
- 3- Transforming the youth into disseminators of the culture of peace.

He acknowledges that the general atmosphere in the country creates a culture that is adverse to the culture of peace, because it reinforces the discourse of violence, but he believes that the moment of youth hesitation when a leader speaks out calling for violence deserves all these struggles.

Does Mount Lebanon Have a Clear Presence in Local Arts?

Nadim Jarjoura

Journalist and film critic



Nostalgia

The representation of Mount Lebanon, as a geography, social settings, educational behavior and cultural characteristics, in the Lebanese artistic production, at least in cinema and television, is not easy. In this context, defining the concept of "Mount Lebanon" is difficult. Considering it a countryside, with all its customs, concepts, paths and relationships, facilitates a review that seeks to show the presence of an integrated entity in works that emanate from the "rural locality", tell its stories, reveal its conditions, and show its features. The Rahbani Brothers, Assi and Mansour, have a key role in promoting, theatrically and lyrically, an ideal concept of a country and a life. Several of their plays aim to establish a reality they create and strive to confirm, work after work, in theater, songs, and acting scenes. Some history is present, but the rural environment (an unreal picture of a country, people, livelihood and gathering) is present, in one way or another, as a model of the victory of certain values over others: For example, Rome's full might collapses before the attachment of Petra to the right to living and life ("Petra", 1977). This is some kind of additional confirmation of the victory of good over all injustice and evil despite the awful tyranny of injustice and evil, for good is above and more important than everything else, and will not fall with a knockout, no matter how brutal the tyranny of its owner may be.

The Rahbani Brothers' depiction of the country is linked to an idealism that makes the country beautiful, and life in it modest, where everyone loves and respects everyone, and those who disagree with all of this -albeit for a short time- are fought and defeated in front of the kindness, blissfulness, tolerance and colors that decorate the daily lives of a peaceful and calm people, in a geographical environment that tends to the countryside, geographically, culturally and behaviorally, most of the time. Sometimes the city becomes a decor, but the environment remains rural, spontaneous, and innocent, and reaps all the victories.

In the three films of the 1960s, "Bayyaz el Khawatem" (The Rings Salesman) (1965) by Youssef Chahine, and "Seferberlik" (The Mobilization) (1967) and "Bint Al Hares" (The Guard's Daughter) (1968) by Henry Barakat, there is a deep tendency towards a beauty that is impossible to find and experience in daily life. An imagination mightier than facts, if it doesn't wish to render them invisible. And evil, entering a peaceful environment, is part of the nature of things, but the solidarity of the good people against it constitutes a victory for them, and for the good they want as rules of life and relations. This refers to a rural environment, perhaps typical of "Mount Lebanon", the most important pillar of the "State of Greater Lebanon" (1920).

While "Bayyaz el Khawatem" and "Bint Al Hares" are dramatically entrenched in a purely rural environment (or suggest such an entrenchment), the mountain in "Seferberlik" faces the sea, and the sea is a way of salvation or a breather from the occupation pressure. The countryside is present in the pores of the script and the behavior of the characters and the features of living, although this remains difficult to determine, as is the case in "Ila Ayn" (Towards the Unknown) (1957), the first feature film by George Nasser, based on a story that Lebanese towns, villages and cities have known for a long time: migration for a better life. Nevertheless, the film - presented at the official competition of the tenth edition (2 to 17 May 1957) of the Cannes Film Festival - calls for a human, moral and life-long attachment to the countryside/mother country, and not to drift into dreams that turn into nightmares when migration is achieved.

The most critical response to the Rahbani Brothers, and to the myths that were made in their plays and films about a country, countryside, heritage and beauty which all do not exist in reality, is given by Ziad Rahbani, the son of Assi and Fairouz, in his fifth play, "Shi Fashel" (What a Failure) (1983), using sarcasm in dismantling the ideal world of the two brothers, and re-asking questions of identity, heritage and belonging, the meaning of the country, and the relationships of its people with its history and theirs. A Sarcasm that culminates the cultural confrontation between the son, his father and his uncle, and reaffirms the "realism" of Ziad in the face of the "idealism" of the first generation of the Rahbani family.

And while George Nasser chooses migration and the relationship with the Lebanese countryside (a village in Mount Lebanon), in his first few films, the Lebanese cinematic scene at the time (between late 1920s and early 1960s in particular) is incomplete in terms of productions which existence (even though abundant) allows, in one way or another, reading the local production and its relation to local geography. Most of these films do not identify a clear location, geographically or through characters, whose names cannot refer to an environment, religion, confession or social class. In this sense, Lebanese cinema will rarely come out from the public settings, except before the various cultural, artistic, aesthetic, dramatic and moral upheaval of Lebanese filmmakers in the very few years preceding the outbreak of the civil war (1975-1990), and their involvement in it and its details, from Beirut to the South, from Lebanese affairs to the conditions of the Palestinian camps and mainly Palestinians. Later, films - the vast majority of which are

documentaries - will be made in the context of cinematic research on environmental conditions that can be attributed to the geography of Mount Lebanon. A few examples reflect some form of professionalism, and the delving into the horrors of a country, its life, and the conditions and concerns of people, especially during that civil war, which suddenly stopped (militarily) without actually ending. Simon Al Habre in "The One Man Village" (2008) and Reine Mitri in "In this Land Lay Graves of Mine" (2014): The first goes to his village in the Upper Metn (Mount Lebanon) to meet his uncle, the only returnee to the village after the displacement of its inhabitants in the mid-1980s (the mountain war between the region's Druze and Christians); The second narrates chapters (according to documents and testimonies) of the history of demographic change, which took place during the same war, in many places, most notably in Mount Lebanon as well.

Compared to the Rahbani Brothers' involvement in a work that belongs to some Lebanese countryside, Abou Melhem confirms - in a television work that begins broadcasting in the late 1960s entitled "Abou Melhem", before it becomes "Yeszed Masakom" (Good Evening) - the authenticity of the countryside and its human importance and the power of tolerance, forgiveness, kindness and innocent ingenuity in the face of evil, the evil being non cruel, non-violent and not very harmful; The indirect response to its geography would be a work by Mohamed Shamel entitled "El Denya Heik" (That's the World), which takes place in a Beirut neighborhood, the predominant dialect (especially the Mukhtar's whose role is performed by Shamel himself) being clear Beiruti, knowing that Abou Melhem dialect (who pronounces the 'Qaf' like the Druze of Mount Lebanon) which states that the environment belongs to the Lebanese countryside more than to a specific community or confession. This is without abandoning the attributes of "Abou Melhem" and "Yeszed Masakom", as Shamel inserts them in the city environment, which Salah Tizani (Abu Salim) will have the merit to establish on the Lebanese television, him who comes to Beirut from the capital of North Lebanon, Tripoli.

The precedent in such a short article would be nothing more than observations, which should be discussed further, especially in relation to Mount Lebanon. Observations intended to present an incomplete picture of a larger and more comprehensive Lebanese artistic and literary work that has several links to local environments shaping the fragile Lebanese entity.

Metn Municipalities Set the Right Example by Embracing Collective Responsibility Principles

Jeanine Jalkh
Journalist

"This is the first time that I feel a slight presence of the State. The first time I don't feel completely left to my fate." It is with these words that Rita, a single woman from Dbayeh who contracted COVID-19 few months ago, expresses her gratitude towards the municipality that accompanied her during the two weeks she was confined to bed. A medical advisor contacted her on a daily basis in order to inquire about her health and her symptoms' evolution while ensuring that she did not lack anything and that she could get through this painful ordeal.

cannot benefit from a public service, which is their natural right, if they do not pay the price in return, during elections or by some allegiance to the local "Zaïms". A deviation that some municipalities, though, have decided to reverse, and particularly since the advent of a pandemic that no longer spares anyone and that has ended up sharpening some people's sense of collective and civic responsibility. In Dbayeh, as in other localities of the Metn, it is the human aspect that has regained the upper hand in the face of this tragedy. The time has come, not for

been deployed: distribution of gel, gloves and disinfectants to all inhabitants. Patients were even provided with a medical kit containing the full range of necessary vitamins and medicines formally prescribed by the attending physician. "We had to avoid self-medication at all costs and spare the local authorities from any responsibility," says the president of the municipality, Jean Pierre Gebara, a very active man who has been socially committed for years. Re-elected in 2016 with 90 percent of the vote - an exceptional score - Jean-Pierre Gebara has since

communication policy from the outset. "Every evening and at the height of the pandemic, a vehicle equipped with a loudspeaker would drive around town to remind people of the lockdown instructions and the dangers of spreading the virus," said the president of the municipality Adel Bou Habib. Respect for public order was just as important as the social support to be given to the most disadvantaged. On several occasions, the local authorities conducted PCR tests free of charge to those who wished to take them. The last round was carried out by two members of the municipality whom the president of the council had sent for training, to ensure local autonomy in terms of testing.

In Dbayeh, the municipality has taken on the task of providing medicines for the sick at home. Those who could afford it, reimbursed the due amount weeks later. The most destitute also benefited twice from vouchers of LBP 100,000 for provisions, and LBP 300,000 for medicines, a measure designed to temporarily relieve the less fortunate inhabitants. "In the beginning, we even went to the homes of the sick to collect their garbage. But when we had reached one hundred and thirty infections, we no longer had the time to devote to this task," says Rachid Bou Nader, the health advisor of the municipality.

It is noteworthy that, in the three municipalities, politics have quietly faded to make way for social and mutual aid. In Dbayeh, as well as in Kornet Chehwan and Roumieh, the municipal council regroups a wide range of political parties. None of them has ever been dominant, even if sometimes the president had a pronounced sympathy for a particular political group. "The credit goes to the orchestra conductor and the culture he instills in his team," says one political analyst.

According to Ziad Sayegh, an expert in public policy, these personal initiatives and the success they have achieved mark, albeit timidly, the beginning of decentralization in the medical and social fields. A notable breakthrough which, the analyst hopes, can be extended to all areas and spread to the four corners of the country.



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A gesture of compassion and a benevolent attentiveness sufficient to show her that she was not alone in her fight against this pernicious virus that attacked the morale as much as the organs.

"Yet, I do not vote in this town where I am a simple resident?" this 40-year-old woman testifies. With this statement, Rita had just summarized the entire phenomenon of visceral clientelism that has lodged itself in the unconscious of the Lebanese in the past years. The latter ended up integrating the principle according to which they

political haggling, but for the help of the most vulnerable, whom the State has long since left behind and completely ignored. In this town, as well as in Roumieh and Kornet Chehwan, the health situation and social cases were addressed very early on. Here and there, crisis cells have emerged to help, support, and relieve. And above all, to ensure that the pandemic was contained and no longer wreaked havoc.

In the municipality of Kornet Chehwan, which also includes the towns of Ain Aar, Beit el-Kiko and Hbous, all means have

enjoyed absolute confidence in his region, especially among the wealthy people of the area who have never faltered to support him in his mission.

In Roumieh, the municipality even went so far as to pay for the consultations of doctors sent to the patients' bedside. It has recently acquired those precious oxygen tanks to pass them to those affected. And since the lockdown measures were decreed, Roumieh's municipal police have been firm in its dealing with the careless people and have adopted a dissuasive

Mount Lebanon's Hospitals Struggle under the Weight of a Pandemic and Economic Crisis

Ghada Al-Sharif

Journalist

BEIRUT – Six months ago Samer Saade, an ER doctor in Mount Lebanon's Bellevue Medical Center, never imagined that the coronavirus intensive care units would be overflowing with patients in critical condition.

The hospital has 22 regular beds and eight ICU beds for coronavirus patients. The medical staff had been preparing for a health crisis for months. These are all now at capacity. Still, Saade said numbers of coronavirus patients were beyond what he had expected. Lebanon in January witnessed its most dangerous surge of coronavirus cases to date, jumping from around 3,000 recorded daily cases to over 6,000 in a matter of days.

"The incoming flow of patients was so high that we hit capacity. We have had to treat [coronavirus] patients in the ER because we couldn't transfer them anywhere," Samer said.

"Every hospital in Mount Lebanon was full."

Mount Lebanon Governorate has around 10 hospitals spread out amongst its six districts: Aley, Baabda, Chouf, Jbeil, Keserwan, and Matn. The combined local population in the

governorates of Beirut and Mount Lebanon is estimated to be around two million people, nearly half of the Lebanese population.

There have been a total of 141,988 coronavirus cases in Mount Lebanon's six districts (as of Feb. 9**), making up 43.7 % of the country's 324,859 cases since Feb. 21, 2020. Overlapping with the coronavirus pandemic, Lebanon for over a year has been grappling with the worst economic crisis it has witnessed in decades, which has placed an additional burden on its already fragile health sector during a critical time.

"Thirty percent of our staff has left because of the economic crisis, the pressure has been incredible," Saade said.

In the last year, Lebanon's national currency has depreciated by 80 percent.

"We used to get our salaries in dollars and now we're getting them in Lebanese Pounds... So if I was getting \$6000 before, it's now only worth \$100," Saade explained. "So medical staff are going to other Arab countries where they can get paid in dollars."

The economic crisis has also impacted hospitals' ability to afford and equip themselves with coronavirus protective equipment. Saade said that while the Health Ministry has provided some support, the hospital has had to ration PPE, including masks and gauze in case they run out.

Mount Lebanon Hospital, one of the largest in the governorate, has received 650 coronavirus patients since the start of the pandemic, according to Elie Gharios, the hospital's medical director. Of these, 90 have died, around 13 percent of its incoming coronavirus patients.

The hospital is equipped with 80 beds to treat coronavirus patients, 40 of which are ICU. These are entirely at capacity, Gharios said.

Mount Lebanon Governor Mohammad Makkawi said that strict lockdown measures were implemented too late after the Aug. 4 Beirut Port explosion. Coronavirus safety measures became less of a priority for Lebanon's population in the wake of the blast's destruction, which had damaged half the capital.

"In August, after the explosion, people gathered a lot in the streets to protest and to help clean up glass and debris," Makkawi said.

People from across the country and the various districts of Mount Lebanon had come down to Beirut and gathered to help clear up the wreckage over the weeks following the blast. Some areas of Mount Lebanon had been impacted by the explosion, including Bourj Hammoud, Sin el Fil, and Hazmieh.

Just before the explosion, 177 coronavirus cases had been recorded over 24 hours across the country by the Health Ministry. On Aug. 19, two weeks after the explosion, coronavirus cases jumped to 589.

"We should have had a 20-day lockdown in September to stop the virus from spreading. We might have been able to slow it down," Makkawi said.

The Mount Lebanon Governor said the economic crisis has greatly impacted resident's ability to adhere to lockdown measures.

"The delay in implementing restrictions... has caused us to be in a longer lockdown, but now it is happening during an economic situation when most people cannot stay without work for this long," Makkawi said.

Lebanon implemented an unprecedented 24-hour lockdown in January, to stem the spread of the most dangerous coronavirus surge the country has witnessed to date. The lockdown is set to continue until the end of March. The surge has been largely blamed on authorities' decision to lift most lockdown restrictions over the holidays.

The crisis-hit country is getting ready to rollout coronavirus vaccines as of Feb. 14. The government has reserved some 2.1 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine which are set to arrive in different shipments. The first phase of vaccines will aim to inoculate the most vulnerable residents, including frontline healthcare workers and people over 65 years of age.

Please note these numbers are calculated from Health Ministry data up until February 9 2021, before the date of publication.



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Thank You

Syrian Women in the Hands of Fate

Hani Rustom

Psychotherapist

The rounds of conflict in Lebanon have had an impact on local communities, particularly in the North, the Bekaa and South Lebanon, three of the most vulnerable regions across the country, some of which are still recovering from the effects of sectarian clashes in recent years. At the same time, Lebanon has the highest percentage of refugees in the world, with some 4.5 million Lebanese sharing an area the size of the island of Cyprus, with an estimated 865,531 Syrians¹ displaced due to the conflict in Syria, and nearly 470,000 Palestinian refugees² residing in Lebanon since 1948, in addition to Palestinian-Syrian refugees.

Due to the lack of official camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, it is believed that about half of the Palestinian refugees from Syria have settled in some of the estimated twelve Palestinian refugee camps run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Other refugees from Syria have settled in Lebanese neighbourhoods, many in the most vulnerable and deprived areas of the country, particularly Mount Lebanon. In this article, we tried to focus on Mount Lebanon region and the situation of Syrian refugees in it, and we were faced with the fact that the suffering of men and women refugees in Lebanon transcends the geographical dimension to be a common suffering that carries with it a lot of common psychological, social and economic pressures, because of a complex and difficult political reality. Therefore, the article shifted from focusing on Mount Lebanon region to an overview of the Syrian reality in Lebanon.

The coronavirus pandemic was like the straw that broke the camel's back, tightening the stranglehold on Syrian community and especially women.

"I lived three years in the shadow of the war in Syria, trying hard to be patient and protect my home and my children. Despite

the bombing and financial hardship, I was determined to stay in Homs and send my children to school. Education, for me, was our only guarantee of survival. We were in a tight situation and danger loomed over us, and Lebanon was the only refuge. We came, and we had nothing but hope in this country. Lebanon has always been a country of joy for us" Layla says in a psychological support session. And "Layla" continues and tells me that since her first arrival to Lebanon, she has seen nothing but good treatment from her neighbours. She loved this country. It is the place that has embraced her and given her the safety that she and her children have lost in her motherland. She adds: "But today, after the coronavirus outbreak, everything changed, I became afraid that my children would get out of the house. I fear for them and grieve for them at the same time. I fear for them of what might happen and grieve for them because of the prison in which they live in fear of the disease."

Layla's suffering is fundamentally not naïve. She doesn't suffer because her children are locked up with her at home and she is fed up with them. The truth of What she is living is a bitter reality experienced by all the displaced Syrian community in Lebanon. It's what expresses the core of human suffering that anyone could go through. And because of the repeated lockdowns in the country, Syrians have to make a double effort to secure a living, and this often does not happen, and debts accumulate on them in shops next to their homes. According to a World Food Programme report, nearly 18% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon suffer from debt accumulation.³ The average of this debt is equal to one million and eight hundred thousand Lebanese pounds per month. These high percentages include food, rent, medicine and water costs. If we look in depth at what this increase means, we need to be aware that this increase only leads to an increase in psychological pressure on the owners of these debts, and there is no other alternative for them, and at the same time, there is no other resource through which they can pay off their debts. In addition to the economic

burdens imposed on the Syrian community in Lebanon, the fact that the whole family must stay at home as a result of quarantine

children is the greatest burden and pressure. Since schools are closed to prevent any infection from being



has created a new type of pressure, which most women do not know how to deal with. One of the most important factors was the long-term unusual presence of men at home. This change in the way of life and routine of the Syrian family has become a frustration for the men and women in the family. This has often led to an increase in domestic violence, and thus the rate of persecution of women in these communities increased by 4% compared to 2019, according to the joint task force agencies to prevent gender-based violence in Lebanon. It was also found that the rate of gender-based violence increased among Syrian communities, specifically in Lebanon, and this rate included sexual harassment and violence against women and adolescent girls in the home. In particular, it was found that the incidence of psychological violence prevailed in all forms of gender-based violence against women. Research also showed that 15% of women were afraid to return to Syria, which resulted in high levels of stress and tension.

Finally, with all the pressures experienced by women in Lebanon in general and in Mount Lebanon in particular, the burden of accessing education services for their

transmitted by children, most children now participate in online classes. And that usually requires, and in ideal cases, smart devices that the child can use, permanent electricity, a high-speed internet, and an adult who can follow up with the child. Considering the situation of Syrians in Lebanon, this has become a luxury that they cannot afford financially and psychologically. They have no money to get smart devices for their children, and if they do, there are no basic services to support this educational path, such as the internet and electricity. In addition to all of this, most families live in a house often consisting of one room. And in families with more than one child at school, it is impossible for them to participate together in different classes at the same time.

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Burj al-Barajneh: The Production of Urban Space and Forms of Local Engagement in the Palestinian Refugee Camp

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Many of Burj al-Barajneh camp's Palestinian inhabitants originate from villages in the Northern Galilee, annexed by the state of Israel in 1948. The establishment of a refugee camp in Burj al-Barajneh in 1949 was due in large part to long-standing, regional socio-economic ties between Beirut and the villages and towns of the Galilee. Such ties between prominent families of Tarshiha and Burj al-Barajneh led to a number of families from Tarshiha finding refuge in Burj al-Barajneh in 1948.

The League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (LRCS) responsible at the time for the welfare of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon found it easier to disburse humanitarian aid to an already assembled group of refugees. Access to humanitarian aid, along with a desire to reunite with lost family members and fellow villagers, increased the number of refugees sheltering in Burj al-Barajneh. In 1949 the settlement was recorded by the LRCS as a refugee camp.

Living conditions in Burj el-Barajneh during those early years were dire. An insufficient number of tents provided the only shelter. Unrelated families were forced to share tents intended for single families. Many tents were already

worn out from previous use, and even newly issued ones were badly damaged by the heavy winter rains. Toilets were communal. Water had to be filled in jars and cans and carried over a long distance.

The situation improved marginally when UNRWA was established in 1950. Each family was allocated a tent to itself, and refugees were permitted to reinforce their tents with low walls of beaten earth. Over time families were able to construct one to two room shelters from corrugated iron and scrap wood. However, the construction of more durable structures was strictly prohibited, as were private toilets.

These strictures were strictly enforced by the Deuxième Bureau which maintained an office at the entrance of the camp. Initially established under the French Mandate as a military intelligence gathering and counterespionage unit directed at those deemed threats to French authority, the Deuxième Bureau was retained in this capacity after Lebanese independence, albeit for the new Lebanese state. Refugees were prohibited from leaving the camp between dusk and dawn. Permits were required to visit family and friends in other camps. Gatherings of more than a certain

number were prohibited; hence even weddings and funerals required Deuxième Bureau permission.

These shared experiences of forced displacement, impoverishment, and the Deuxième Bureau's control engendered a new collectivity based on living within the camp. This new collectivity was shaped by the kinship-based norms and practices of the pre-Nakba village, which were transposed on to it. The layout of refugee dwellings followed the pattern of pre-Nakba village houses in consisting of a number of rooms encircling an open courtyard or dār. Upon the marriage of a son, a new room would be built to accommodate his burgeoning family. Since relatives and former neighbours preferred to live next to each other, over time, hayys (neighbourhoods) came into being. As the number of family and village clusters grew, so did the need for directions. In giving directions, people began to refer to an area by the name of the family—or their former village in Palestine—inhabiting it. Many of these place names are still in use.

Over the course of the 1950s new social and economic ties began to develop between Burj al-Barajneh camp's inhabitants and their Lebanese neighbours. Many refugees found work in the orchards owned by Christian families in nearby villages. The construction of the Beirut International Airport in 1954 provided additional employment opportunities to the refugees, as well as to Sunni and Shi'a rural migrants from the south and the Bek'ā, who also settled in the area. Having in common the experience of rural to urban migration and the class status of impoverished, new migrants to the city, ties began to form between the emerging migrant and camp communities. The formation of these ties was facilitated by a shared kinship-based ethos, and further cemented by intermarriage.

These relationships were not uniformly harmonious and free of conflict. However, by dint of working and living together a solidarity came into being and was articulated through various discourses. At times it was expressed in the language of class; at other times as revolutionary pan-Arabism; and at other times in the language of kinship.

The establishment of the PLO's base of operations in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon was accompanied by the formation of a range of health, educational, and social welfare institutions in Bourj al-Barajneh that provided much needed services to Lebanese and Palestinians alike. Of these, Haifa Hospital alone survived the PLO's withdrawal in 1982. Initially established as a clinic by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, Haifa Hospital continues to provide a broad range of low-cost medical services to inhabitants of the camp, as well as its environs.

Out-migration from the camp and the influx of Syrian refugees since the onset of war in 2012 have significantly changed the composition of the camp over the last two decades. The camp's proximity to the city and comparatively lower cost of living has created an informal rental housing market that is an important and steady source of income for many families who rent out rooms and apartments to Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees from other camps, and foreign migrant workers. Hence, the services provided by Palestinian NGOs established after the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990, as well as by Haifa Hospital, function as a potential bridge between the different communities that today inhabit Bourj al-Barajneh camp.

Mount Lebanon's Women Engagement and Participation in the Political, Economic, and Social life in History till Today

Joanna Fayad

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Looking back at the history of women's role in Mount Lebanon

Ever since the Mutassarifiya of Mount Lebanon was declared in 1861, the history of this region has shifted and changed. Mount Lebanon transitioned from primarily agricultural-based villages to an industrial region harboring 58% of the total number of Lebanese industrial firms, the highest concentration in Lebanon by the year 2016¹.

Historically, women in Mount Lebanon have been the support on all levels to families and communities, and were tasked to do extremely hard labor. This includes supporting the household by making informal income from agricultural work, sewing, taking care of the sheep and silkworms as well as taking care of the babies, cleaning the house, preparing food, and taking care of the husbands, all while willingly accepting the patriarchal decisions that came their way from the men in their lives². These tasks changed over the course of the years, as changes occurred across agricultural communities to cities and industries.

The history of Mount Lebanon, from the autonomous status of the Mutassarifiya and after the Greater Lebanon was declared in 1920, was riddled with wars, and has had its fair share of conflict and destruction. During the war, women played a peacebuilding and peacekeeping role, specifically on local levels. In addition, they were in charge of everything related to taking care of the house and families while the men were busy fighting the wars. Even though women have always been active in societies and communities, during the 19th and 20th centuries, women were not given a voice neither in their families nor their communities, they were only expected to follow orders of male dominated communities. During the war, women were cast aside when actual peace negotiations took place, men fought the war, and men ended it.

One of the only fields in which women and girls were able to find some kind of equality is education. Studies have shown that Lebanese women had an easy access

to education. Numbers show that since the Mutassarifiya and until today, the number of girls enrolled in education almost matches that of boys. This education has not, however, enabled them to reach decision-making positions³. Currently, women constitute only around 25% of the labor force, with the majority of women workers concentrated in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Nevertheless, women still suffer from the gender pay gap and lower professional status. "Women thus represent a significant labor power but their access to positions linked to decision-making and implementation, as, more generally, to stable employment, remains uneasy⁴." Marie Bonte mentions in her analysis, "A gender and ethnic division of labor". Women, in Mount Lebanon and in the whole country have been the drive of social work, civil work, and community support. The majority of organizations that aim to provide services and social support are led and operated by women. But as usual, we do not see women breaking the glass ceiling and reaching decision-making positions.

A noteworthy fact is that Bourj Hammoud, a city in the middle of Mount Lebanon, was the first municipality to hire women police officers, because women's inclusion in the police force has more "effective community relations as a foundation for long term growth and peace⁵".

During the last municipal elections, we saw an increase in women candidates, defying the conservative ideas of their families and communities. Mount Lebanon Governorate held the second highest number of women running for municipal seats⁶ (528 women) and the highest number for Mukhtar seats (156 women). The highest number of elected women for both municipal seats and Mukhtar are in Mount Lebanon (246 seats belonging to women in municipalities and 17 Mukhtar seats). These numbers show a 15% rise from the 2010 election results in local representation.

As for the last parliamentary elections that took place in 2018, a record number of 113 women submitted their candidacy

for the elections⁷. After the deadline set within the context of the new electoral law, which required all candidates to take part in lists, 86 women candidates remained in the electoral race. The highest number of women candidates was at the Governorate of Mount Lebanon, set at 27 women candidates running for the parliamentary elections⁸. This record number was followed by a disappointing outcome of only 6 women winning the elections none of them from Mount Lebanon.

When examining all the above-mentioned facts, women have shown since the dawn of history that they are the pillars of societal sustainability, they have been the backstage crew for all events throughout the history of Mount Lebanon. The presence of women most of the time provides higher guarantees for democracy and almost always takes into consideration a human-rights perspective in all social, economic, and political causes. It is time we give women the long overdue credit for all the work they have been doing and give them space to put their fingerprints on all matters for the purpose of improving the society we all live in.

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Aley, Choueifat, and Damour Youth Combating Fake News

Rouba Abo Ammo
Journalist

Do you want to be part of the combating fake news project in your area? Such a question is expected to attract many young people, but not in the circumstances that Lebanon has experienced over the past year in particular, not starting with the October 17th 2019 revolution and not ending with the ongoing outbreak of the Covid-19 and the difficult security, economic and social conditions, which are getting worse by the day.

Some of them asked whether it was useful. Is combating fake news a priority today? This question has been repeatedly asked for many reasons such as despair of change or influence on society. But in spite of all of the above, young people from three regions in Mount Lebanon, namely Aley, Choueifat, and Damour, joined together to become part of the project implemented by the "Dawaer" Foundation in partnership with the United Nations Development Program and with the support of the United Kingdom, to form a nucleus in their areas to combat fake news. It is true that the days when they felt frustrated were many, and it is true that they look to the future with greater fear in light of the lack of opportunities, but this remained a personal and societal turning point for them, and they reflected the information they received for the benefit of their regions.

One of the main reasons is their awareness of the seriousness of the fake news spreading in their areas. Within minutes, news can be found on many groups on WhatsApp, as well as on other social media sites. This was a major motivation for them to train on how to check fake news. The same motivation made them determined to continue despite living in a deteriorating reality.

It didn't take long for them to gain the trust of the people in their areas, who started sending them news to check, especially since fake news in the regions have their own specificity.

Prior to that, they had been trained for months on media education, verification and verification of fake news, as part of the "Combating Fake News" project, which was implemented by "Dawaer" Foundation in partnership with

the United Nations Development Program, and with funding from the United Kingdom.

They have also developed action plans to curb the spread of fake news in their areas, and launched the "so7tak_men_so7et_lkhabar" campaign. The latter is comprised of 10 awareness videos, which covered some of the fake news that spread in each region. The Coronavirus had a significant part in it, especially in the regions of Riyaq, El Hara, Sidon and Chekka. The other videos covered trending news about political and sectarian differences.

The term fake news is not new, and dates back to the end of the 19th century, which means that it formed part of the history of the media long before the use of social media. If we compare fake news between the past and today, we will find a difference. The speed with which it spreads and the way it can affect consumers makes it more prominent, in terms of social media.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan says: "Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation around the world. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us make sure that young people are given every opportunity to participate fully in their communities."

Once society gives youth confidence, they can achieve a certain change. Greater change must not always be contemplated, but rather any small detail may pave the way for bigger changes in the future. For the youth of the three regions, this was their principle. Knowing that they were now able to monitor and combat news, and educate people both face-to-face and on social media about the seriousness of such news and their impact on social stability, this was an achievement for them and their regions.



Mount Lebanon Youth Pioneering Initiatives: A Model to follow in All Regions

Iman Abed
Journalist

Since 2019, Lebanon has been suffering from a severe economic crisis that led to the deterioration in the living conditions of the Lebanese people as the coronavirus imposed its restrictions on the economy, followed by the 4th of August 2020 explosion. Like other Lebanese governorates, Mount Lebanon Governorate has been affected by these successive crises, which have weighed heavily on its economy. However, the youth have played a key role in helping to overcome and address these crises through numerous initiatives.

Since the coronavirus crisis, Ali Ayash, a 20-year-old from Aley district in Mount Lebanon Governorate, along with 10 young men from neighboring areas, has been raising awareness among residents of the region about the coronavirus and how to prevent it. As a result of the general lockdown, the closure of businesses and the deterioration of the economic situation, Ali and a group of his mountain companions spearheaded initiatives aimed at raising financial donations to buy food rations and distribute them to the poorest families in the region.

Likewise, since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Liliane from the Bchamoun area in Mount Lebanon, has also with a number of young people, filmed awareness-raising videos about the

coronavirus and the need to limit social events to avoid mixing. Also, during the holidays, such as Christmas and Eid al-Adha, Liliane greeted the people and residents of the area through the radio and microphone to avoid street celebrations, as the region used to every year.

From Ali and Liliane to Tony Abou Mitri, from Hammana region, who has been working with youth in the region since the beginning of the economic crisis, in collaboration with the municipality and associations, to support the poorest families. With the onset of the pandemic, students in most Lebanese regions, especially those in the town of Hammana, were forced to resort to distance education. Through communication with expatriates and a number of associations, the region's youth have secured computers for students of the poorest families so they can follow their lessons.

From the coronavirus and the economic crisis to the disastrous August 4 explosion that shook the capital Beirut, the sight of young volunteers from various Lebanese regions on the front lines healing the wounds of those affected, cannot be forgotten. The explosion of the capital mobilized the Mount Lebanon youth of all affiliations and communities to support the wounded city. Ali and a group of young

people from the mountain region first gathered themselves spontaneously and took to the streets of the stricken capital, then afterwards organized their movements over consecutive days. They split into groups, each specialized in a particular field: "cleaning operations, distributing food rations, repairing a number of houses...". After the August 4 explosion, the primary role of Liliane and the young people from Bchamoun was to distribute meals to volunteers in the affected area. The group was also keen to collect financial donations from the people of Bchamoun and offer them to the affected and poorest families, who are generally from the Karantina area. They also reached out to the Lebanese diaspora to secure medicines for the disabled living in the region and those suffering from chronic diseases.

Apart from the crises, in the context of encouraging domestic tourism in Mount Lebanon Governorate, specifically in Kfarmata, which includes famous archaeological and natural landmarks, the Health and Environment Committee of the "Kfarmata Development Charity" organization, which includes the youth of the region of various affiliations, has launched a project to encourage domestic tourism. With funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

it rehabilitated the tourist area which was neglected and contaminated and made it a destination for tourists. At the same time, the youth of the area launched a group called "Kfarmata al-Tanazoh" through which they organized activities and visits to archaeological sites, in which residents of nearby towns and villages took part. As a result of this activity, the number of visitors from all Lebanese regions to the town of Kfarmata has increased.

Hiba Rameh is one of those who participated in the expedition to explore the areas of Kfarmata, although she did not know the archaeological and natural areas in the region, but the activity in which she participated introduced her to her village more.

For his part, the chairman of the Health and Environment Committee of the "Kfarmata Development Charity" organization says that the youth have played a key role in raising awareness, stressing that there is a new environmental culture promoted by the current generation in the region, such as hygiene, prevention of hunting and killing small birds, protection of nature from pollution, etc. He explained that combining the experience of the veteran generation with the capabilities and energies of the youth, is crucial for the inclusion of Kfarmata on the tourism map.

Mount Lebanon and Water, a Threatened Bond

Desiree Azzi

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Thanks to its remarkable water wealth, Mount Lebanon has a strong link with water, a determining factor of its identity, threatened today by many environmental issues. A quick tour in the Mohafazat would remind us of the important role water played in shaping the landscape itself. In Tannourine, the Baatar Gorge, 250m deep and 260m wide, is entirely carved into the limestone by water. At the entrance of the Tannourine Cedars reserve, a beautiful hoodoo, sheltered beneath a majestic cedar of Lebanon, is another testimony of water's work. A few kilometers further, the beautiful landscape of Kfar Helda waterfall in Batroun is yet again another display of the strong unobstructed water flow. In Feytroun, bizarre limestone rocks stand out in the landscape, a product of the slow erosion action of water.

All these natural manifestations, as well as many natural bridges and beautifully excavated grottos of Mount Lebanon attest to the presence of water in the region. But the governorate is also full of anthropogenic traces of the exploitation of water throughout history (wells, bridges, canals, etc.). The Aqueducts of Zbaydeh in Hazmieh are a fine example of conduits built on Lebanese territory. They bear witness to a particular architecture that ensured an easy flow of water to supply Beirut and its surroundings. The access to water has always been vital for growth. Therefore, ever since inhabitants arrived to Mount Lebanon, they gathered in towns and villages around the main rivers, giving them very evocative names. Diving into the names of towns and villages brings back a piece of the governorate's history and attests, even more, the bond forged with water. Afqa means the flowing spring. El Barouk is named after a source of freshwater called "the blessed" where animals used to rest. Hazmieh means the guardian or protector of water. According to popular stories, el Dibbiyyi's name is in fact "ayn el-debbé" (water source of the bear), in reference to the bear who made its home close to the village's water source. El Laqlouq (the pearls) is a symbolism of the region's water source shining under the rays of sunlight as if they were pearls. Jbeil means the well or the water source of God. Aintoura is the water source in the mountain. Nahr el dahab refers to the river turning golden brown in fall when the yellow leaves of *Platanus orientalis* tree fall into it. Etc. Some of the families who moved into these towns and villages, also held family names reminiscent of water, either because they arrived from areas rich in water, or because their first Lebanese ancestor had a profession related to water. Safi for example is an Arabic word referring to the purity and stillness of water. Rizk is a family name referring to the abundance of rain. Akiki is an Arabic word referring to the valley carved by a stream.

These few examples embarked us backward through time, on the ancient bond between Mount Lebanon and water. Unfortunately, water in this Mohafazat is mismanaged and threatened by many pressures both on the quantity and quality aspects, menacing to transform the Mohafazat as we know it.

Quantity: Even though Mount Lebanon is a natural water

tower with the highest flows in watercourses of the country, it faces water scarcity problems. In fact, water stress is generated by demographic growth, overexploitation, important fluxes of refugees, and unsustainable wasteful water use. And, because the share of freshwater is limited, unable to answer the high-water demand (Domestic, Industrial, irrigation) in the Mohafazat, the water balance is negative. Solutions to provide additional water on the short term must include dams, hill lakes, and recharge aquifers, all with respect to environmental requirements. We also need to reduce the estimated 50% water loss in the distribution systems and irrigation networks, with continuous infrastructure maintenance. In addition, a supervision of the uncontrolled drilling of wells is a necessity. On the longer term, integrated water management reforms must be applied, and the feasibility of using freshwater submarine springs should be studied, despite their estimated high cost.

Quality: All rivers in Mount Lebanon are recipients of significant waste discharge. Contamination with organic and inorganic pollutants is therefore an unfortunate reality, aggravated by the flash floods commonly witnessed in coastal river basins. These short and intense

rain events are accentuated by land mismanagement, important slopes, and deforestation, which lead to important increase in the flow, significant erosion of particles, and pollutant fluxes. Short term solutions must include a better collection and treatment of wastewater and the development of coastal river observatories to follow up on the rivers' state and react to threats as quickly as possible.

On a larger scale, a reorganization of the entire water sector along with investment plans would help improve governance. Then, the responsibilities of water stakeholders, especially Beirut Mount Lebanon Water Authority, should be enacted. Overall, there is a need to ensure a reform in the water sector, with practical and realistic objectives. Integrated Water Resource Management should be established and supported by water laws and legislations. Finally, a collective awareness along with cooperation are needed more than ever to save what is left of our identity.

To preserve Mount Lebanon, there is no time to waste! Water scarcity is a reality and would become worst if we do not react today. There really is not a more pressing issue for us, it is either we survive in our ancestors' lands or we do not. The choice is ours.



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The Seemingly (un)Planned Urbanization in Chouf: Who Is the Planner?

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After the civil war (1975-1990), many regions in Lebanon, including the Chouf district, have been perceived as a patchwork of contested sectarian geographies. While the massacres of the civil war and the failed reconciliation and return attempts of the 1990s are not to be undermined, analyzing urbanization trends in Chouf merely from a sectarian lens today doesn't take us far in understanding the challenges of urban planning in the district. The spatial manifestations of sectarianism ought not to be discussed as a given but rather as symptoms of a much more complex dynamic to be deconstructed through social and historical contextualization. While this is outside the scope of this short article, I aim instead to highlight other causes and consequences of what seems to be an unplanned urbanization in Chouf. Through three examples of spatial transformation, I show that the challenges of this century are not inherently sectarian. I argue that urbanization is actually very well planned, yet driven by capital, profit, and power. Further research is needed to unpack these dynamics and understand their socio-economic impacts on the region.

Comparing urbanization in Chouf after 1998 (Google Earth imagery) to the maps of the National Physical Master Plan (NPMPLT), the trend seems slower than the rest of the country, especially in the upper villages. The densification of most towns has happened before 1998. Most of these towns do have master plans and cadastral registries, namely Debbieh, Naameh, Damour, and Jiyeh (Verdeil et al., 2007). What makes urbanization seem unplanned then? What are the policies devised and how are they shaping the built environment?

Despite the seeming chaos in the way urban areas in the country expand, urbanization is the materialization of specific public policies. In Lebanon, it is mostly private property that has shaped urban policies and land use in the past decades. For Chouf, some of the impacts of such policies materialize through large scale projects with different land uses (residential, industrial and touristic).

Toggling image dates on Google Earth between 2004 and 2020 shows the massive road network implemented as part of the awaiting Medyar residential project in Debbieh. This project was planned to be developed by the Dalhamiyya Development Company in 2010. While land ownership remains for the company, the shareholders changed across the years (Public Works, 2018a). Most importantly, the classification of a natural reserve was shifted to become a residential area in the master plan to allow the construction of the project (Public Works, 2018a). Today, not a building was constructed.

Another remarkable expansion of an already overwhelming facility is the Sibline cement factory. Established in 1974, the factory has become larger than the village. In 1995, the government granted the factory exclusive rights to use the Jiyeh port (decree 6797) on the basis of the decree 4810/1966 that allows the State to rent its maritime public domain. In 1998, a master plan for Sibline industrial area was ratified. The plan allowed factories in this area to be exempt from tax income on the basis of the decree 127/1983 that aims to set "incentives to revive rural areas and expand industries in all regions". In 2002, the company holding the factory was able to change its bylaws to be able

to expand its land ownership portfolio (decree 7993/2002). The factory also gets authorization to exceed legal constraints in water wells depth and capacity (decree 146/2014). With this series of decrees, the factory has been expanding its production and increasing its profits while literally feeding the construction frenzy of the past decades in the country.

The third example is the proliferation of beach resorts along the Chouf coast. The number doubled since 2005 to reach around 40 resorts by 2020. An increase in the scale of these projects can also be discerned on satellite imagery. In Damour for instance, this shift was supported by a modification of land use in the master plan from agricultural to touristic along the coast (Public Works, 2018a). Owners of these lands are mostly investors or real estate companies. Even large parcels of Waqf land previously used for agriculture were raked in 2019 to build another resort that did not see the light yet (Verdeil et al., 2007). The impacts of such changes on agriculture are paramount especially when looked at across the country. Shifting land uses from agriculture to tourism is one of the results of the rentier economic model that has been adopted in the country after the war.

The way state actors, but also land owners and local zouamas influence land use planning go beyond sectarian tensions (Public Works, 2018b). The large companies pushing forward megaprojects in Chouf are owned by individuals from different sects and sometimes from seemingly opposing political groups, if not multinational companies. The private interests of these individuals have replaced the role of the State in planning its territory. However, it is

through these projects that current leaders reinforce sectarian discourse and local clientelistic channels (e.g. discounts on apartments' prices and resorts entrance fees for the "locals", employment in the Sibline factory). Spatial sectarianism and the reproduction of contested geographies are hence the result of a more complex web of political private interests rooted in land and private property. Megaprojects in Chouf, whether residential, touristic, or industrial, show the shift in the way land is used as a generator of profit. Today, with the economic crisis, there are further impacts of the circulation of capital and accumulation of land that have not materialized yet and are to be closely followed in the near future. In the meantime, Medyar project is on halt, and the resorts will have less financial viability with the health and economic crises, yet Sibline factory continues its expansion above and beyond the reinforced sectarian geographies of the Chouf. This "hybrid state" (Fregonese, 2012) will never be capable of devising urban policies that promote the land vocation of each town or cluster of towns as the NPMPLT aspired to.

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Construction and Encroachments “As Far as the Eye Can See”: Lebanon is No Longer Green

Amal Khalil
Journalist

The songs of Fairuz about the nature of Lebanon are no longer believable. “Lubnan ya akhdar ya helou” (Lebanon You Beautiful Green) and “Helianeh l dinyeh helianeh b lubnan el akhdar” (The World is Embellished with Green Lebanon) became a “nostalgia” expressing the Lebanese longing for the Switzerland of the Middle East. The mountains and the plains have become deserts and concrete forests due to lawlessness and conflicting laws, encroachments, fires, urban chaos and ill-considered public projects. Reasons that transformed Mount Lebanon into eroded plateaus recording the highest forest cover loss in Lebanon (50%) since 2000 (while still comprising 28% of Lebanon's total area). According to the figures of the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, which date back to the last survey of Mount Lebanon in 2005, it detains a forest area of 49,561.24 hectares, the majority of which is in Aley district (4,611.26), and the minority is in Keserwan district (8,809.44). On the other hand, Globalforest.org figures show that in 2010, Mount Lebanon was covered with 25.7 kilo hectares of forest extending to 13% of its territory. Between 2001 and 2019, it lost 2.09 kilo hectares of its forests, which is equivalent to 7%. It was the highest percentage recorded across Lebanon. The first losses were recorded in Jbeil district (501 hectares), and the last were in Aley district (236 hectares). Those figures are only the result of decades of the official and societal responsibility level towards the forest cover. In 1949, the Forestry Law was enacted forming the regulatory framework for forests protection. Although its provisions detailed cutting and afforestation even for private property, the violations that subsequently occurred through permits or de facto force, rendered it ineffective.

Not only did the violations undermine it, but also a series of decrees issued later, such as the Law of 1964 on village ownership of communal or abandoned land and a section of the forests, which in some places led the State to abandon its role in preserving public green spaces. In 1983, Legislative Decree No. 43 was issued exempting licensed or to be licensed construction projects, and public works projects conducted by public administrations and institutions from the prohibition of trees cutting! Eight years later, the decree was converted into a law without the introduction of mandatory requirement for afforestation in exchange of the harvested forest space. The State's failure to impose its protective power has been accompanied by other factors. According to George Mitri, Director of the Land and Natural Resources Program at the Institute of the Environment of the University of Balamand, socio-economic changes have led to a loss of interest in forests and their marginalization, such as the abandonment of firewood collection, pruning and organized grazing. This has made forests increasingly vulnerable to fires due to the accumulation of vegetable fuels. Apart from the fires, the forests of Mount Lebanon have been reduced by urban expansion and the spread of quarries and crushers. Urbanization (whether construction or infrastructure) has put enormous pressure on some areas of Mount Lebanon, particularly after the exodus from the upper to the central areas or the coast, specifically the areas of Keserwan and the southern and northern Metn, including the southern and northern suburbs of Beirut. Among the causes of forest erosion, were the construction permits which doubled between 2007 and 2008 alone, from 4.3 million to 8.4

million square meters. Dr. Mitri blames the current system for the land-use anarchy: “It is not immune to political interference and does not adopt strategic and sustainable land-use planning. Even the Comprehensive Plan for Lebanese Territory Arrangement has not been taken into account.” Dr. Mitri assigns the Ministry of Agriculture the biggest tasks in reviving a green Lebanon. So what is the Ministry actually doing?

The Ministry's Director of Rural Development and Natural Resources, Chadi Mohanna, points out that there are obstacles to the protection of forests, including the small number of forest guards and their role limited to controlling the violation and referring it to the judiciary that sentences the offender for less than the size of his offence, which lost its deterrent power. The conflict of laws has made the ministry itself lose its authority over the forest cover. “When referring a plan for a public project, the Department of Forests issues permits based on prior approvals issued by other official departments, such as a logging permit, for the purpose of public road construction and building a dam... Here, it is legally bound to grant permits upon application submittal with complete legal documentation. As for private property, allowing gumwood logging is limited to two reasons: licensed construction and sometimes public safety preservation. In the case of leafy trees, a third reason is added: land rehabilitation for agricultural investment”. This is where the responsibility of the Urban Planning Council, the Ministry of Public Works, and the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities is highlighted in the granting of building and rehabilitation permits. In exchange for allowing the cutting, the ministry is engaged in

afforestation. According to Mohanna, in 2012, the “40 million trees” program was launched to increase the forest cover from 13 to 20 percent of Lebanon's land area.

On a parallel line, several associations, most notably “Jouzour Loubnan”, are working to increase forest areas and promote sustainable afforestation methods in partnership with local communities. By 2019, more than 350,000 trees were planted, protected and cared for, based on scientific research, in collaboration with the Faculty of Science at St. Joseph University. Mount Lebanon had a share of afforestation with Cedar, Pine, Carob, Terebinth, Juniper and Evergreen Cypress trees... Several official and civil initiatives have been recorded in the context of reforestation. According to Globalforestwatch.org, Mount Lebanon recorded the highest afforestation rate in Lebanon between 2001 and 2012, reaching 778 kilo hectare. The Chouf district ranked first with 241 hectares planted. Keserwan district ranked penultimate with 98 hectares and Baabda district ranked last with 77 planted hectares. Knowing that these two districts include coastal cities and towns such as Jounieh, Zouk Mikael, Zouk Mosbeh, and Dahiyeh with a high population density, the majority of which are displaced from the high mountain villages.

The civil society worked on the line of legislation as well. In 2019, the “Lebanese Advocacy Network for Environment” submitted a bill to the Parliament aimed at “protecting and developing Lebanon's high mountains”. Paul Abi Rached, founder of “T.E.R.R.E. Liban Association”, said the law is making its way through the parliamentary committees for approval.

Zouk and its Smokestacks...A City of Cancer and Death Threat

Pascale Sawma
Journalist

Besides the road to Jounieh or Zouk or Tripoli often buzzing with traffic, it has also been encircled for many years by the smokestacks of the Zouk power plant, and in winter days, toxic emissions can be seen mixing with the sky clouds to form a white layer over the heads of the inhabitants who have become afraid to roam their city, or stand on a balcony or open a window.

Generations come and generations go, but the Zouk two smokestacks pillars remain. They are the intractable crisis for which the Lebanese State has for many decades been unable to find a problem, like many others, and which in turn awaits a miracle from heaven. The two Zouk smokestacks pillars have thus been transformed into basic milestones of the region's sad aspect, and they are still standing and blowing their smoke peacefully, while the residents face a health and economic threat every day, in every walk or breath they take.

The Zouk plant was established as a gas-operated power station in 1956, but soon became a station that pollutes the environment and threatens the lives and safety of the population. And the promises that have been scattered here and there for decades, to find a solution for the Zouk plant, ended in extinction and oblivion. So the Zouk plant with its two steadfast towers, despite

the change of governments, presidents and deputies, has become, due to inaction and quotas, a living example of draining the environment, spreading of diseases and cancer, and exposing the region's inhabitants to various dangers. All this is matched by the continuing serious failure in securing the electricity needs of this and other Lebanese regions.

“I've been living in Zouk for ten years, and I coexisted with the idea of not opening the windows and the balconies. I bought a dryer and started to spread the laundry inside the house, so that the smoke from the power generating station would not contaminate it,” Najwa says, adding: “My son suffers from respiratory and chest problems and he is five, and this is because of the pollution!”

In this context, environmental journalist Mostapha Raad explains that “the black Zouk file constitutes for years now a rich substance for circulation, and has led to a rise in cancer rates and an impact on vegetation in the region.” He continues: “Many people living in the vicinity of the plant either lost a loved one to cancer or have someone who has cancer, and acid rain is usually active in these areas when there is a problem with the filters, which EDL says comply with environmental specifications, knowing that the national air pollution management plan is

not in line with international specifications of air pollution standards, and needs immediate and rapid adjustment to protect people from the risk of death”.

Raad believes that “the Zouk plant and the smoke resulting from it lead to terrifying health damage in a circle ranging from 1 to 20 km in diameter, including chest diseases, and result in shortness of breath, asthma, and diseases targeting the skin and eyes, and also pose a threat to children in the near term, in addition to causing cancerous diseases after 5 years of inhaling the toxic gas mixture found in the black smoke clouds”.

Scientifically, the emitted black clouds contain toxic gases such as nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, soot, and other toxic substances that we inhale on a daily basis, Raad says, and a study prepared by “Greenpeace” stated that Jounieh was declared the fifth Arab city in the proportion of air pollution in 2018 due to the number of factories in these areas, including the Zouk power plant.

The battles of the Zouk people with the power plant and its pollution date back to 1973, when heavy and thick sulfur smoke was emitted from the fuel generators, causing damage to the crops around the plant in the valley of “Nahr El-Kalb”. The Zouk region is historically known for its

fertile plains and heights planted with almonds, lemons and olives, and it was also a destination for people from neighboring and remote areas for work, education and even shopping, thanks to its thriving commercial market. And Zouk Mikael lies 14 kilometers from Beirut, and stretches between the sea and the hills, the highest of which reaches an altitude of 285 meters.

However, the legacy that the Zouk region worked to build and retain as its identity was threatened by war and is nearly wiped out by the smokestacks of death, so the identity of the region inevitably became tied to the death towers. And today, 35,000 people are paying the price of the quotas system and the neglect, and so far there is no solution for the dangerous power station, which spews its toxins into the air, soil and sea, and into the bodies of the population. So far, there is no solution on the ground, despite the numerous proposals over the years. The result was that the plant remained unexpanded, undeveloped, and without the construction of a substitute factory in another area to reduce the damage to the region's inhabitants, in return of a rise in cancer and chest diseases, damage to the quality of crops and the fish revolution, as well as air and water pollution.

Bisri Valley: Understanding the Wealth of Bisri and its National Discourse

Joey Ayoub

Researcher

This article is an invitation to explore the links between the movement to stop the Bisri Dam project, a proposed project in the Bisri Valley located in Mount Lebanon, and the wider importance of integrating an environmental and social justice perspective to our understanding of modern Lebanese politics.

The Bisri Valley lies on a green fertile bed, southwest of Beirut, and includes an expansive land of pine and citrus trees as well as ancient ruins. The Bisri Dam project threatens it all as it requires much of the valley to be flooded.

In addition to its obvious environmental costs, it is worth noting that the Bisri Dam project, despite being so controversial among the wider population, remains highly symbolic for the Lebanese political class. It is but the latest of post-independence Lebanese policy that goes back decades. Many academics have since argued against the “long-term national strategy for the creation of dams spanning the entirety of the country”¹ on account of its environmental and social costs, but that has yet to stop members of the Lebanese political class from recycling these outdated ideas.

Indeed, one thing that surprises most people is how old the Bisri Dam project is, dating back to 1953, just ten years after independence. It was only revived in 2014 with the support of the World Bank, and has been met ever since with staunch opposition by academics and activists. As of the time of writing, the World Bank has canceled its funding of the project “due to non-completion of the tasks that are preconditions to the commencement of construction of the Bisri Dam”.² We don't yet know what its final status would be, with the risk of it being relaunched in the near future remaining real.

The fact that such projects have survived the multiple phases of Lebanese history speaks to a much deeper problem that, like so many things in Lebanon, relates to the clientelism and corruption that governs the Lebanese government. As Joude Mabsout has argued in her thesis on the Bisri Dam project, these projects are conceived by Lebanon's ruling class as political maneuvers that “entrench existing powers and exacerbate societal rifts”.³ This is done through specific capital allocations based on clientelist calculations (for example, a politician or political party may back a 'development' project based on the connections that it could bring, the profit they may make out of it, and so on). It is also coupled with the usual sectarian calculations that make certain political parties more interested in certain regions and their 'development' than others.

As the various parties that were invested in the Bisri Dam project regularly appealed to existing sectarian rhetoric, an environmental justice approach to tackling the Bisri Valley is only appropriate. This reality is but the latest example of why environmental and health concerns have always been at the forefront of protest movements in Lebanon, including the 2015 'You Stink!' protests which were the largest independent protests until the October 2019 uprising. The 'Save Bisri' campaign came into being between these two protests.

The 'You Stink!' protests explicitly linked the waste crisis affecting Beirut and Mount Lebanon with clientelism and sectarianism perceived to be deeply entrenched in the Lebanese political establishment. The imagery of trash bags piling up on the streets of both regions evoked comparisons to a decaying political system, thus allowing many people to see the direct links between politics and the environment. The 2015 'You Stink!' movement, however, was unable to formulate demands based on an environmental justice framework, a lesson which I believe 'Save Bisri' activists have learned from. Since the October



2019 uprising, 'Save Bisri' activists have routinely linked their campaign with the wider protests, even borrowing chants that were being chanted on the streets of Beirut, Tripoli and elsewhere.

Quoting Mabsout again: “The process of endless ecological and cultural destruction paralleled with a continuous state of protest, can be seen as a two sided fight with the landscape in between; a battle for different worlds of the landscape”.⁴ In other words, the Bisri Valley is at the forefront of a long and ongoing struggle between the public and common spaces and pro-privatization interests within the political establishment. We have been seeing these more frequently in recent years, with activists in Mount Lebanon, Beirut and beyond making explicit demands that could be argued to be on an environmental justice nature, if indirectly.

For example, protesters in Beirut during and since the October 2019 uprising have been attempting to reclaim the privatized spaces of downtown Beirut⁵, still viewed as 'al-balad', literally 'the country' by many Lebanese - a public space where people of all sects and backgrounds could mingle. These could pave the way towards the greening of these spaces in the coming years, and reverse a trend that goes back to the early days of post-independence Lebanon where large infrastructure and mass privatization projects have severely restricted the spaces once seen as public or common.

For that reason, one can conclude that

environmental and health concerns will become an increasing part of political demands, particularly since the August 4 explosion in Beirut and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, not to mention the effects of global warming. This is likely inevitable given the scale of these interrelated problems. Time will tell.

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A Tale of Time



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The UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project works since 2007 on enhancing mutual understanding and promoting social cohesion by addressing root causes of conflict in Lebanon. The project has been also lately working on addressing the impact of the Syrian crisis on social stability in Lebanon. The project supports different groups from local leaders and local actors, to educators, journalists, youth and civil society activists, in developing medium and long-term strategies for peace building, crisis management and conflict prevention.

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