

Lebanon's Greening Imagination

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Abstract

This paper examines the narratives of a group of Lebanese authors and artists on nature in Lebanon, collected in an anthology entitled *The Lost Space: The Views of Lebanese Authors and Artists on Nature* (2009) published by the cultural association of George Yammine, the deceased Lebanese poet media officer and critic of literature and art (1955-2000). The essays of Etel Adnan, Antoine al-Daouihy, Hassan Daoud, Fifi Kallab and Claudia Marchelian, among some others, will form the core of the study. I will deal with their objective description and/or subjective experience and perception of Beirut, nature and the environment in Lebanon as a separate entity, and in its relation to their creative work, whence the symbiosis of the natural, the aesthetic and the creative. I will undertake to analyze in the artists' discourses the residues of forms and frame of minds of what may be regarded as Mediterranean orientalism, namely the subjective romantic experience of nature, the nostalgia for the green Lebanon of the past, as well as the focus on the beauty of the Lebanese landscape. I hope to show that these elements are paralleled and often dialectically intertwined with a more objective image of a degraded environment, one that is moving towards greater entropy. I will conclude with a sample of variegated reactions and solutions some of the authors put forward: paradoxical expressions of love and pride for this degenerated environment, philosophical arguments that inculcate ecocentric values to public consciousness, and pragmatic solutions that consist of a reconfiguration of landscape in sound ecological manner.

Keywords: ecocriticism, creativity, Lebanon, The Lost Space

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza la obra de un grupo de autores y artistas libaneses sobre la naturaleza en el Líbano, recogida en la antología titulada *The Lost Space: The Views of Lebanese Authors and Artists on Nature* (2009), publicada por la asociación cultural de George Yammime, el fallecido poeta y crítico literario y de arte (1955-2000). Los ensayos de Etel Adnan, Antoine al-Daouihy, Hassan Daoud, Fifi Kallab y Claudia Marchelian, entre otros, formarán el núcleo del estudio. Exploraré su descripción objetiva y/o experiencia subjetiva y su percepción de Beirut, la naturaleza y el medio ambiente del Líbano como una entidad separada, y la relación con su obra creativa, razón de la simbiosis de lo natural, lo estético y lo creativo. Comenzaré analizando en los discursos de los artistas las formas y estados de ánimo de lo que puede considerarse orientalismo mediterráneo, concretamente la experiencia subjetiva y romántica de la naturaleza, la nostalgia por el Líbano verde del pasado, así como la atención a la belleza del paisaje libanés. Espero demostrar que estos elementos son paralelos a, y a menudo están dialécticamente entrelazados con, una imagen más objetiva de un medio ambiente degradado, que se mueve hacia una mayor entropía. Concluiré con una muestra multicolor de reacciones y soluciones propuestas por algunos de los autores: expresiones paradójicas de amor y orgullo por este medio ambiente degenerado, argumentos filosóficos que inculcan valores ecocéntricos a la conciencia pública, y soluciones pragmáticas que consisten en una reconfiguración profundamente ecológica del paisaje.

Palabras clave: ecocrítica, creatividad, Líbano, The Lost Space

“Once upon a time there was a country called green Lebanon.”
Claudia Marchelian

These are the opening words of one of the creative essays written in Arabic by a group of Lebanese artists on the nature/environment of Lebanon, collected in an anthology entitled *The Lost Space: The Views of Lebanese Authors and Artists on Nature* (2009).¹ This collection is published by the cultural association of George Yammine, the deceased Lebanese poet, media officer, and critic of literature and art (1955-2000).

One cannot but stop and ponder on such an opening sentence as it is one that usually characterizes the opening of fairy tales where the events take place in bygone days and imaginary lands. Nonetheless, all the magic enchantment “Once upon a time” promulgates is lost with the juxtaposition of “green” and “Lebanon.” This loss intensifies as soon as one finds out that the quote at hand is extracted from an essay entitled “The Deceased Nature,” written by Claudia Marchelian, the TV writer and actress. One cannot but ask: “Was Lebanon green and no longer is?” One would hope that that the author of the discourse is referring to an imaginary land and /or to a remote past, and not to the actual contemporary Lebanon.

Lebanon comprises a territory of 10,452 square kilometers, extending about 200 kilometers along the Eastern Mediterranean coast and bordered from the north and East by Syria, and from the South by Israel. Other than the coastal plain (which comprises the capital Beirut), the physiographical geography of Lebanon consists of the Lebanon mountain, the Beqaa valley and the Anti-Lebanon mountains.

One cannot overlook the Mediterranean nature of Lebanon. Lebanon meets the biogeographic criterion of the Mediterranean vegetation and climate, with its mild rainy winters and hot dry summers. More so, Lebanon meets one of the indisputable criteria: it is a country bordering the Mediterranean sea, with much of its socio-economic activities past and present dependent on the sea; historically, the Phoenician ports of Tyre, Sidon and Byblos were dominant centers of trade and culture in the 3rd millennium BCE.

Nonetheless, one should not be oblivious to the fact that any attempt to define the Mediterranean is fraught with difficulties. Controversy stalks its definition. In “Introduction: An Essay on Mediterraneanism,” Russell King goes as far as saying that any attempt at a definition is “a pointless exercise for there is no single criterion which enables one to draw a line on a map which separates the Mediterranean from the non-Mediterranean” (2). In his view, “[m]editerranean identity is a more nebulous, but powerful concept that derives from environmental characteristics, cultural features, and, above all, from the spatial interaction between the two. The Mediterranean is a sea, a climate, a way of life,-all of these and much more” (2).

¹ I would like to thank Hassan Daoud, the Lebanese author and journalist, for introducing me to this collection of essays and for providing me with a copy of the book. The essays are written in Arabic. I have chosen to translate some passages and interpret and paraphrase some others.

In *Les représentations de la Méditerranée*, Thierry Fabre and Robert Ilbert endorse the view that the Mediterranean cannot be restricted to a geographic locus and transcends it to incorporate a symbolic realm that has prompted multifarious representations. These representations are molded to a certain degree by the history, culture and politics of each country. Hence, in their view, to speak of the Mediterranean does not have the same meaning if addressed from Beirut, or Marseille or Tunis or Athena or Cairo or Barcelona or Istanbul [...] (5).

In light of the above it would be best to deal with the essence of the Mediterranean, what King refers to as *Mediterraneanism*. It is the experience of the Mediterranean, its appreciation, rather than an objectified reality to be portrayed on a map (4-5). Hence, in this study, the focal point of my analysis will be on the experience of the Mediterranean as perceived, lived, and described by a number of Lebanese artists. I will focus on their objective description and /or subjective perception of nature and the scenery in Lebanon as a separate entity and in its relation to their creative work, whence the symbiosis of the natural, the aesthetic and the creative. I will undertake to analyse in the artists' discourses the residues of forms and frame of minds of what may be regarded as Mediterranean orientalism, namely the subjective romantic experience of nature, the nostalgia for the green Lebanon of the past, as well as the focus on the beauty of the Lebanese landscape. I hope to show that these elements are paralleled and often dialectically intertwined with a more objective image of a degraded environment, one that is moving towards greater entropy. I will conclude with a sample of variegated reactions and solutions some of the authors put forward: paradoxical expressions of love and pride for this degenerated environment, philosophical arguments that inculcate ecocentric values to public consciousness, and pragmatic solutions that consist of a reconfiguration of landscape in sound ecological manner.

The green Lebanon of the past

It is a fact that Lebanon was green. Taking a look at a number of sources about Lebanon, such as geography books and encyclopedias, one would read about green Lebanon. In ancient and medieval times, Lebanon was heavily forested with cypress, pine, oak trees and cedar, which was exported for building and shipbuilding. Up to now the cedar remains the national symbol and is pictured on Lebanon's flag.

Moving forward in time, another look at the narratives of the French authors who travelled to the Orient in the 19th century attest to the fact that Lebanon was green. Of course one may retort that they had an idealized vision of the Orient. It is a fact that they invented the Orient of their dreams in their literature and art. Yamina Mouhoub in "Un 'parfum d'Orient' dans la littérature française du XIX^e siècle" refers to a mythical romantic, exotic and often dreamlike Orient they represented in their works. She says:

L'Orient est à la fois un espace géographique et un lieu mythique dont les contours flous et mouvants englobent des pays aussi divers et différent que L' Égypte, la Turquie, Le Liban, la Grèce ou l' Algérie... En Littérature, le goût romantique pour la nature, la couleur locale, l'exotisme, l'évasion, trouvera un exutoire idéal dans la variété des paysages, les mœurs d'un Orient raffiné et barbare si proche et si lointain que des peintres

Orientalistes ont représenté sur leurs toiles. Les écrivains voyageurs auront à cœur d'aller vivre en temps et lieux « le rêve d'Orient » seul susceptible de répondre à cette soif d'infini... (104)

Despite such representation one cannot disregard the objective ecological description those same authors concomitantly put forth, be it with their references to certain kinds of plants and trees, among other elements such as sand, water, light, and so forth. Maurice Barrès is one of these authors who, in his description of his travel to Lebanon, refers to the rich vegetation of the coastal area, one that is populated with several kinds of trees: “Le petit chemin de fer que nous prenons, un matin, court le long du ravage phénicien, au milieu des chênes verts, des caroubiers, des tamaris, des pins et des pierrailles” (*La traversée de la Méditerranée* 63). Alphonse de Lamartine also concurs with Barrès when he refers to the rich vegetation of the hills that surround Beirut:

[...] La ville occupe une gracieuse colline qui descend en pente douce vers la mer; quelques bras de terre ou de rochers s'avancent dans les flots---; la rade est fermée par une langue de terre qui défend la mer des vents d'est : toute une langue de terre, ainsi que les collines environnantes, sont couvertes de la plus riche végétation... (712)

Moving again forward in time, and to music, one cannot ignore the song of the Lebanese singer Fairuz who, in the summer of 1957, in the Roman temple of Jupiter in Baalbek sang about green Lebanon, “O Green, Sweet Lebanon” with a couplets stating that “the world looks more beautiful because of green Lebanon.”

In the essays anthologized in the book at hand, many of the Lebanese artists, as we shall see, also refer to the green Lebanon of the past, mind you not a distant past. The time frame Marchelian delimits for a green resplendent Lebanon is during the Lebanese civil war, unto around 1985 (74). The Lebanese civil war broke up in 1975 and ended in 1990.

Nostalgia for green Lebanon and the subjective experience of nature

Nostalgia for the green Lebanon of the past is a prominent theme in the essays at hand. This said, the intensity of this nostalgia and the way the authors express it is quite variegated. Whereas some of the authors dwell on the botanical description of the green Lebanon of the past, many intertwine it with their lived experience of nature, one that is tinged with subjectivity.

One facet of this subjectivity is a look at nature filtered through childhood memories. Such is the case of Marchelian's essay. She refers to the time she spent in the mountains as a child. She states:

I also remember that as a little child I used to run among the trees close to our home in Bsalim, climb the high branches, and pick the red roses and the multicolored flowers that used to give me a feeling of freedom the day I would blow on them and they would fly in the sky, and go far away to other locations carrying on their white wings my wishes, my love, my longing for all the memories I left behind, there, in my home in Beirut. (74)

She recalls that she used to sit there in nature, close her eyes so to hear the reverberating silence, to hear the sounds of the birds that used to and continue to provide her with romantic exciting thoughts unto adulthood. At a subsequent period of her life, nature would compensate for the void that used to invade her unsettled and displaced childhood. Nature was the shield that protected her from the feeling of devastation that the Lebanese civil war provoked, a war that would deprive her of her dreams and steal away her thoughts (74). Clearly, her experience of nature brings to mind that of the romantic poets of the 19th century as well as the French orientalist who also looked at nature as a source of solace, and inspiration.

Marchelian's experience of nature is at an interstice between the subjective and the objective, the personal and the universal. She recalls the time she spent in the woods collecting the fruits of the pine trees and going to school the next day with the scent of plants such as wild thyme sticking to her hands, and making her classmates wonder about the nature of that smell that emanates from her. Except for the pine tree which is a typically a Mediterranean tree, the elements of nature Marchelian pinpoints to are not restricted to any location, and her experience so far, could be that of any child in any time and place, despite her reference to Bsalim in Mount Lebanon.

At the core of Etel Adnan's essay "The Lebanese Landscape through My Writing" is remembrance and nostalgia as well. Adnan is a Lebanese-American poet, essayist, and visual artist who brings to the fore the image of Beirut she was brought up in as a garden city. It is an image that concurs with that of Gerard de Nerval in "La Sieste":

Beyrouth, à ne considérer que l'espace compris dans ses remparts et sa population intérieure, répondrait mal à l'idée que s'en fait l'Europe, qui reconnaît en elle la capitale du Liban. Il faut tenir compte aussi de quelques centaines de maisons entourées de jardins qui occupent le vaste amphithéâtre dont ce port est le centre... (746)

Adnan explains that in Beirut, there were a few building of three floors and the rest consisted of stones houses with red bricks, each having a garden. As she remembers it, walking in the street she would breathe the jasmine and lemon blossom scents, and hear the first radios that reached Beirut. She clearly recalls that she used to live facing a huge garden, the neighbor's garden, planted with palm trees. It was on the highest hill of Ain Mreisseh, close to the tramway station called Deek station (10).

Etel's childhood experience is undoubtedly a Mediterranean one. One facet of it consists of experiencing the pleasure of swimming in the Mediterranean Sea. Etel proudly states that she was one of the first girls who used to go swimming. Further, Etel asserts that as much as she can retrogress in her memory, she can recall two preponderant images that affected her early in life: a round empty ornamented stone pond and the sea-- of course the Mediterranean Sea. Her description of the sea intertwines the subjective and the objective. She focuses on the color of the sea, its relation to the horizon, and mingles her description with her feelings towards the sea. She explains that from everywhere one could see the sea and that its blue color used to delineate for her the horizon (10). It is hard not to comment on this last description that connotes open space, especially when the title of the book at hand refers to the lost space, thus highlighting the difference between Beirut then and Beirut now.

Adnan's experience of nature, like that of Marchelian, and that of the French 19th century orientalist authors, is tinged with subjective romantic overtones. The sea, Adnan explains, was her reference or guiding point, both geographical and psychological. Looking at the sea would lead her to experience feelings of bewilderment, and happiness, hence justifying why her eyes would continuously search for the sea. What she experiences towards the sea is somehow comparable to what her fellow artists and authors feel toward nature. As such, the sea seems to become a synecdoche for nature. Adnan states: "I often asked myself if the sea was not the only thing I loved all my life, more than any other thing in this world. Oftenwise, this love was a secret because it was difficult to circumscribe" (10).

Nature and creativity

What singles out this collection of essays from many others written on Lebanon and its environment is the link that many of the artists/authors establish between the natural and the creative realm. In fact, when the cultural association of George Yammine commissioned the Lebanese authors and artists to write these creative essays, they were asked to address the following: first, how they perceive nature and the landscape that surround them in Lebanon and second, what role this perception plays in their creative work. It is stated in the introduction to this anthology that these two questions have engendered these essays and a book which in the editor's view, brings back to the fore echoes of the problems of nature and the environment that has been raised for decades. Each author has expressed in his/her own way, his/her relation and that of his/her writing to nature, hence this unprecedented document that paves the way for the understanding one of the fundamental and unknown facet pertaining to contemporary Lebanese creativity (9).

Marchelian is one of the writers who dwell on the link between the natural and the creative. At first, she begins by positing a general relation between these two realms whereby she depicts Lebanon as a source of attraction to many artists. She says: "Lebanon used to have a breathtaking nature that used to enchant its own people, and attract all tourists, especially the creative ones—the writers, poets, the musicians and the artists" (74). This statement might not seem significant as it is common practice that creative people are attracted to nature. Nonetheless, in this instance, this statement serves as a smooth transition for the relation Marchelian posits between nature and her creativity on a personal level, thus fulfilling the function of this anthology. Marchelian states that nature instigated in her dream project of becoming a writer and an actress, and is still instrumental to her writing, even after the lapse of many years away from nature. She writes:

When I wake up early to write, I firmly close the big windows of my home to block the lights, the buildings, and the sounds of the cars, and the deadly noise, I close my eyes and recapture this source of inspiration, the deceased nature, the one who granted me the dream and the truth, and I draw from her beauty in its totality and all the breathtaking images and I write, write and write. (76)

As for Adnan, the title of her essay itself “The Lebanese Landscape through my Writing” puts to the fore the relation between her writing and nature. What is unique about Adnan’s approach is a multi-natural experience of Lebanon and California that shapes her perspective. In the concluding paragraph of her essay, she states that nature occupies an important place in her writing, be it prose or poetry. Contrary to expectation, she clarifies that she specifically means American nature or landscape where she spent most of her life. Still, in another unexpected twist, she asserts that Lebanese nature is always with her; she constantly goes back to it in body and mind (12).

Adnan moves on to clarify the role of Lebanese nature in her writing even when she writes about any place. Her subjective experience of nature in Lebanon is clearly the seed of her writing. It is a paradoxical relation between the particular and the universal, the local and the foreign. She explains:

Even when I do not directly describe the Beqaa mountains that are burned in yellow that tends towards red or brown, or the sky of Ajaltoun submerged in the moonlight, or the colors of the sea as they are between Beirut and Sidon, or the sunrise in Deir el Kamar, I would be referring to these elements in any place in the world, I would be referring to them through my initial experience of them in Lebanon ... every tree is the pine forest in old Broumana, every mountain is the mountain of Sanine or the Cedar. (12)

What characterizes some discourses of the Lebanese authors and artists herein is their singling out a few natural elements that had and continue to have a great influence on their creativity and life, hence the infusion of the autobiographical element—as also seen with Marchelion. In addition, some of the authors, in an unconventional move refer to their literary works, be it prose or poetry and their titles. This ascribes a bibliographical value to their essays; one would know which literary works to read if one is interested in reading about Lebanese nature through a literary lens. Such is the case of Adnan. She is specific about the natural elements that continue to inspire her writing. The prominent elements she refers to are the moon and the sea. Adnan who lives in California now, highlights how much she was influenced by the moon. She states that she entitled the first collection of poems she published in California *Moonshots*. This first publication was also issued in Beirut in 1966 and was illustrated with the drawing of artist Jean Khalifeh (11). Adnan clarifies that her weakness for the moon and the impact it has on her is related to parental influence: “I was also very affected by the moon, because my father used to view it as the embodiment of the unreachable. He often used to tell her while pointing to it: ‘look we can never go there’” (10). The moon was also present in her mother’s imagination. It dawned upon Adnan one day that she reiterated in one of her poems her mother’s belief that sleeping naked under the moonlight brings bad luck. Her mother was Greek. she explains, and was influenced by some customs that she found in the writings of Homer (10). Hence, it is clear that the elements of nature that inspired Adnan are intertwined with parental influence and with a lived experience.

Besides the moon, the sea is very much present in Adnan’s writings. She states that she entitled the first poem she wrote when she was 22 or 23 years old, “The Book of

the Sea.” It is a fifteen-pages long poem that she has not published; it is still in her drawers. One cannot be oblivious to the fact that as Adnan notes, that after the passage of half a century she entitles the last book of poetry she published in English “Sea.” In her view the circle has been closed. In is interesting to note that despite her living far from the Mediterranean Sea, the sea she wrote about is a sea she has appropriated, whence the subjective, personal experience of nature. She clarifies:

When I wrote it in California, I meant my own sea and not only that of the Canaanites- the Phoenicians and the Greeks, but that of Beirut’s Corniche, the sea of the fisherman of Ain Mreisseh, the sea of Tyr and Batroun, the reappropriated sea that I used to see from there with greater clarity, the one that has become, more and more, the concrete embodiment of the perfect creature, the womb from which life has sprung and thought has emanated. (10)

Clearly, the sea for Adnan, in this instance, transcends the natural and acquires holy significance.

Moving on to Antoine al-Douaihy’s essay “The Fall of the Angel,” we also encounter the link between nature and creativity. Al-Douaihy states that nature occupies an important place in his world. He cannot possibly conceive of a hiatus between his literary and aesthetic world and that of nature, in contrast to some other writers and poets who do not feel the need to incorporate the natural realm as it is rarely seen in their writings (18). Elsewhere al-Douaihy reveals his concern about nature. He states that there are two issues that constantly preoccupy him: the issue of defending nature and that of defending freedom. In his view, Lebanon has a rich unique and varied nature and a culture of freedom, unlike other Middle Eastern countries. Nevertheless he wonders about the means to protect these two characteristics that are in danger of annihilation. He also wonders what would their fate be in light of all the upheaval outside and inside Lebanon (*al- Mustaqbal*).

In his writings, Al-Douaihy reveals another facet of the link between the nature and the creative. This facet stands for the other side of the coin. It is not simply celebratory in tone, expounding the beauty of Lebanese nature, objectively or subjectively. Quite to the contrary, as we shall see, it is one that is imbued with sadness due to the destruction that Lebanese nature has been going thorough recently and still is. This facet, al-Douaihy states is at the core of his last book, *Crossing the Rubble*, a novel he wrote in Arabic (20).

Anthropomorphism of nature

A number of authors/artists in this collection attribute to nature anthropomorphic characteristics. Anthropomorphism is quite common around the world. Nonetheless one cannot turn a blind eye to it as it is a strong element in some of the discourses at hand. One would not do justice to the texts if one ignores it. In my view, this anthropomorphism, highlights the emotional nature of Mediterranean people. There might also be other multiple more important purposes behind its use. One of the aims is to teach and to please, involving the *dulce* and *utile* as Horace puts it. Ostensibly, one

cannot disregard the poetic and artistic facet illustrated by the craftiness of the authors. After all, one should not forget that the authors of this anthology are all artists. This anthropomorphic image of nature they draw has an artistic valor that brings pleasure and enjoyment to the readers. The primary purpose is, in my view, didactic, and minatory, seeking to warn us about the dangers of destroying nature.

Marchelian is one of the authors who personify nature when she describes her relationship with nature as an adult in contrast to her experience with nature as a child. Perhaps she wants to reveal that ecological awareness comes only with maturity, or to powerfully and a dramatically highlight the contrast between the green Lebanon of the past and Lebanon today. She describes her relationship with nature as that of an intimate friend she left behind for a number of years as an adult when she went to pursue her studies at the university. She goes on to express her guilt when she says that she neglected her faithful friend and did not ask about her (nature in Arabic is a feminine word, hence the reference to nature in the feminine). Marchelian goes on to divulge that upon her return, after a long absence she did not find her friend. She asked about her and found out that no one could answer the question. She searched for her everywhere but to no avail. It took her a while to realize that nature in Lebanon was dead, hence the title of the essay "The Deceased Nature." She wept and mourned nature in one of her articles and preserved her memory. (76).

Fifi Kallab the Lebanese activist and consultant, the founder and president of "Byblos Ecologia for Development and Environment" and the founder of "Lebanese Heritage Days Festival," like Marchelian, personifies nature as clearly seen in the title of her essay: "God Always Forgives, The Human Being Often, As to Nature Never." This dramatic title draws the reader's attention to the ecological disaster of contemporary Lebanon.

Lebanon now

The experience of Lebanon can neither be reduced to happy childhood memories nor romantic musings.

Kallab sets forth a grim picture of what Lebanon has become now ecologically and environmentally. Whereas Marchelian simply refers to the death of nature without any elaboration, Kallab enumerates the manifestations of this grim picture. Her writing is characterized by a quick tempo which points to the arrow of time moving fast towards irreversible destruction; it also connotes the urgency of taking remedial action. She states:

It breaks my heart to see that Lebanon is going through a process of desertification, and that its green areas are shrinking, in contrast to its idescription in the Biblical texts. Fires are destroying its green and dry areas. Our mountains are gnawed and mined and replaced by mountains of trash, cities are expanding and following their own rules. Our beaches have lost their sand, their fish and their beauty.

Our exploitation of nature has no boundaries and does not take into consideration nature's potential for the regeneration of its bounties. Means of production are not

concerned with pollution and its detrimental consequences. All of this is in the name of civilization (66).

Many authors in this collection cannot but be vehemently critical of those who are responsible for the death of nature in Lebanon as well as of those who are indifferent to it. Kallab lists the arguments of a section of Lebanese who ignore the high price one pays for the so called civilization/progress. The advocates of progress put forth only a rosy picture and hide the truth:

Progress is possible the technicians say, it increases public revenue the economists say, it is easy to accomplish the engineers say, it creates job openings for all the politicians say.

They did not point to the difficulty of controlling fast progress.

They did not talk about the disappearance of birds who sing the beauty of the world.

They do not say that it creates job openings to policemen and psychiatrists.

They did not say that the smoke emanating from the industries would infiltrate every lung and leave its fingerprint in it.

They did not mention that the increasing amount of trash would cause a problem of getting rid of it. They did not tell us that our fertile soil would ten years from now be exposed to toxic substances and that the quality of our life would deteriorate. (68)

Kallab does not deem it sufficient to enumerate the manifest dangers stemming from progress and civilization. She moves on with the same minatory and dramatic style to warn against hidden dangers, such as air, water, and soil pollution that infiltrates the human body and prevents people from having a good life and from enjoying it. These hidden dangers consist of cancer caused by toxic substances, lung disease spread in cities and industrial areas, the use of pesticides in agriculture the pollution of agricultural products and groundwater (68). Clearly, some of the hidden dangers overlap with the manifest ones. Such reiteration cannot but be for persuasive purposes, to instigate people to inculcate ecocentric values to public consciousness, and to push for redemptive and restorative action.

Al-Douaihy, like Kallab, chooses to highlight the current grim situation of Lebanon nature- wise. What is unique and interesting in his approach, is a powerful rhetorical move whereby he chooses to contrast the damage done to the environment to that of the Lebanese civil war. He states that for more than a third of a century Lebanon has lived and still is living the tragedies of war and strife one after the other which led to hundred thousand deaths, injured, disfigured, missing and tortured people, physically and mentally, in addition to hundred thousands of displaced people internally, and immigrants to all over the world (21). Contrary to expectation, al-Douaihy adds that the biggest tragedy is not the failure of Lebanese society in its modern constitution and geography to preserve its unity, peace, and stability for reasons that are internal or external, nor the subjection of freedom to harsh tests. There is another greater and more alarming tragedy, that of construction and the damage that has emanated from it. In his view, this biggest tragedy started before the beginning of war and is still going on exponentially. Its damage is irreversible and ubiquitous except for the high and barren mountains where it is impossible to live. He evinces that Lebanese society has failed in making use of new construction material in an aesthetic manner, namely in constructing

the beautiful, in preserving the scenery, and blending in it, without endangering the ecosystem. Architectural designs were implemented, no matter how ugly they were, how incongruent with the surroundings and how void of any cultural identity (21).

Hassan Daoud, the Lebanese novelist and journalist, in an essay entitled "We Have Friends who Help us 'Describe Lebanon,'" like al-Douaihy, comments on the hideous sights one encounters in Lebanon and its capital Beirut. He states that one rarely finds in Beirut an untarnished view. He gives the example of the buildings that are rising higher and higher. He imagines himself standing on top commenting that these high rise buildings are blocking the view of the sea, as if he were a citizen in San Francisco who complains about disfiguring his/her own city (50). Daoud's comment brings to mind and highlights the title of this collection of essays *The Lost Space*.

Daoud brings to the fore the image of Lebanon as a wasteland- a hideous image. He gives the example of the juxtaposition of a new elegant building next to a waste land used as a graveyard for dismantled bulldozers. Though he also remarks that in some places houses are clean and beautiful, here too their neighboring areas are often ugly and in ruins. In some villages they dump old cars in the fields and keep them there thinking that they might use some of their parts. Some purchase these cars for their spare parts thus explaining the duplication of cars having one parked in front of the house and one thrown in the fields. Another hideous sight is that of a street that could have been ideal for a promenade had not a mechanic spread his tools and soiled it with grease and oil. One more hideous sight is that of the sea he would have found beautiful had not a lady thrown from behind the balustrade of the seaside a big bag of trash hitting the surface of the sea and then sinking or floating. This image of a soiled city, Daoud points out, brings to mind the one he and his friend Hazem had preserved before his departure in 1988. This image consists of an unlit street, a heap of trash so high that it would reach the second floor of the building next door to his, and the shrieks of a tortured man in the building opposite his (48).

Many of the authors in their essays state that the damage done to Lebanon on all levels has seeped into their souls. Adnan states that it hurts her to see that the Lebanese went on massacring the nature of beautiful Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war. In her view, "they are murdering one of the most beautiful places on earth" (13). Al-Douaihy expresses the same feelings of Adnan. He asserts that the actual state of nature in Lebanon has wounded him deeply. He lives the state of destruction, disfigurement, and pollution that hammers the Lebanese scene, daily as a personal tragedy, one that he cannot withstand. He states that despite the fact that fifteen years have elapsed since his return to Lebanon, he still cannot adapt to this damage done to nature. His initial shock remains as is (20).

Further, al-Douaihy, like Adnan, cannot but mingle the natural with the aesthetic. The arguments he provides are also reminiscent of those of Kallab as both bring in the issue of civilization in their essays. He states that when we compare the image of Lebanon of the past to that of Lebanon now, we see "the fall of the angel": "The angel of Mount Lebanon has fallen, it is the indicator of what modern civilization could have led

to; it is perhaps the early symptom of the crumbling of the beauty of the world. It is the beauty the Roman emperor Hadrian considered himself responsible for" (22).

It is worthy to note that, in his essay, Daoud calls attention to a dialectic vision of Lebanon and of Beirut its capital. It is a vision that encompasses multifarious perspectives and one that depends on the eyes of the beholder. Daoud does so by describing the experience of a number of his friends who came to Lebanon for a visit or returned after a long absence. Clearly as we shall see, one may choose to look at the beautiful or the ugly, or the symbiosis of the two. One may choose to look at the remnants of the beautiful or to recall a glorious and beautiful past. This is proven with what happens with Daoud's friend, the British publisher when he visits Lebanon.

Daoud narrates that his British friend and publisher, did not like the plan he made for him for his visit to Beirut. He got bored looking at the streets that were destroyed by the war, this year and in the past years. Daoud interjects that Beirut was shrinking, disappearing after each round of fighting; the experience of roaming in its streets was like that of the employees who makes note of the contents of homes following their owners' bankruptcy (48). Hence, Daoud had to cancel his initial plan and to quickly adapt to the new plan his friend requested, which consisted of visiting the Palestinians camps and their surroundings. As a result, Daoud had to prepare his friend about what he was going to see from poverty and chaos instead of what was left from the beautiful Beirut. Daoud deemed it a difficult task, as it required of him not simply to change the words that he was prepared to utter but also his feeling towards what they were going to see. Daoud evinces that in such cases it would be preferable to just simply describe what they would come across, or provide a historical perspective of what this space used to represent. He realizes that his friend was oblivious to what he was telling him and was focusing on what he was seeing, with his eyes wide open at each sight (48).

Surely, it is necessary to project a positive image of Lebanon. Nevertheless, Daoud comes to the realization that his friend would not hear a word about the old Beirut before the war, Beirut the city with a good reputation, the luxurious and affluent Beirut, the one we struggled to keep alive during the war. In this instance, the image of the old Beirut is sinking into oblivion, being turned off in the same manner one turns the pages of a book (48). The image of Beirut that Daoud would have liked to transmit is imbued with remembrance and nostalgia and is tinged with romantic overtones. It dwells on the beautiful and meaningful that characterized the past rather than the ugly and nonsensical of the here and now. It brings to mind the same mechanism of musing over the green Lebanon of the past expressed by Marchelion and Adnan. Contrary to desires Daoud notes that his British man classified Beirut as a city characterized by the strangeness of it chaos.

The beautiful: Lebanon through various lenses

It is hard not to pay heed to the beauty of Lebanon despite the ecological and environmental degradation and the negative experience of many, past and present. The image of beautiful Lebanon proliferates in ancient or modern texts as well as in the

comments of people. Many of the authors in the essays at hand choose to dwell on the image of beautiful Lebanon, a residue of one of the components of Mediterranean orientalism. Some support their arguments with historical examples, others with testimonies of people. Clearly, they attempt to trigger a sense of guilt that will incite the Lebanese to recapture a lost beauty, or engender a sense of pride that will push them to preserve its remnants.

Al-Douaihy asserts that rarely does one find a place as highly regarded as Mount Lebanon in human imagination and representation, be it Eastern, Mediterranean or European. To support his argument, he refers to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Sumerian Babylonian epic, Maurice Barrès early in the 20th century, the Torah, the texts of the traveling Arabs, the prophetic tradition, and the texts of thousands of European travelers. Al-Douaihy expounds that Mount Lebanon was the symbol of earthly beauty in old and modern Middle Eastern cultures as well as in modern European ones. The same image, he adds is found in pagan mythologies, likewise in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim heritage (22).

This image of Lebanon as a symbol of beauty also proliferates in the writing many of the French orientalist who traveled to Lebanon in the 19th century. In "De Tripoli à Beyrouth" Barrès writes:

De Tripoli, nous avons regagné Beyrouth par mer, en longeant le rivage. C'était un spectacle sublime. Pendant cinq heures, notre bateau a glissé à quelques cents mètres de montagnes, dont les sommets étincelaient au-dessus de nos têtes. Quelle multitude de motifs ! Des golfs infinis, des champs d'oliviers et de vignes, Le sable rouge, les pins parasols, les monastères, les précipices, les villages, les lignes crénelées de rochers, de forêts et de neiges, les nuages, l'azur: je n'avais jamais rêvé de cette plénitude de beautés. C'est un Olympe vivant, l'exposition des dieux : j'admire leurs demeures, et je perçois leur présence éternelle. (138)

Adnan concurs to the beauty of Lebanon. To support her point of view, she brings to the fore what a sailor who traveled all around the world on a cargo ship said to her about reaching Beirut by sea. He asserted that reaching Beirut by sea is one of the three nicest views one can see in the world getting close to the land. The others two views in his opinion, are those of Istanbul and Hong Kong. Adnan would constantly reiterate in her memory the words of the sailor until she came up with the same conclusion. She did so after her first trip outside Lebanon, to Italy where her aunt used to live, and specifically upon her return to Beirut by boat. On the way back she saw the wide scenery that encompasses Beirut. Subsequently, she agreed with the one who longed the sea back and forth (12).

In addition to beauty, one comes across other attributes of Lebanon. In al-Douaihy's view, these attributes are so numerous that they cannot be narrowed down. He mentions a few such as holiness, loftiness, glory, majesty, purity, strength, and eternity (22). As a matter of fact, Adnan, describes Lebanon as "hallowed with all this beauty and all this history, and is inhabited by a holy spirit, not a religious one--a case of utmost importance" (12).

I cannot but conclude this section with the experience of Hani, Daoud's Egyptian friend, during his visit to Lebanon as Daoud narrates it and interprets it in "We Have Friends who Help us 'Describe Lebanon.'" Daoud explains that, upon his arrival, Hani did not cease to praise Lebanon. He liked it, or rather was enchanted by it, or rather, as it is said in colloquial Arabic, it "took him out of his senses," as Daoud narrates. Hani began to write his article on Lebanon, starting with the first scene his eyes lay upon, the airport road. Daoud explains that Hani loved Lebanon to such an extent that he went on to convince them that Lebanon's area exceeds by far the 10450 square meters. When they asked him how he came to that conclusion, he retorted that we should flatten Lebanon and straighten its areas in the same manner we flatten a distorted paper before we measure it (50-51). Daoud does not clarify who the "they" stands for. It probably stands for the Lebanese.

Daoud sheds some light on the significance of Hani's experience and its impact on them. He states that his friend Hani pushed forward their understanding of Lebanon and effaced the confusion that hits them every time their guests express their enchantment of Lebanon. Daoud states that they do not understand clearly what the guests mean when they express their admiration. Or perhaps the guests do not help them form a final picture of Lebanon, a clear-cut picture that immediately comes to mind every time one utters the word "Lebanon" (51). Daoud concludes:

Without exaggeration, Hani was able to add something to what we imagine about Lebanon, something, hidden, ephemeral, quick to dissipate, and nonetheless true. Or, perhaps, he has shown us how the remnants of our pride, one that we sometimes say is one of our delusions about themselves, is also present in the minds of others. (51)

Hopefully, the pride Daoud refers to would serve as an incentive for the Lebanese to put a halt to the arrow of time moving towards greater and irreversible entropic environmental degradation.

Glimmers of hope

Some of the authors and artists who contributed to this anthology put forth solutions to the environmental problems at hand. Some call for pragmatic solutions such as the reconfiguration of landscape in sound ecological manner. Such is the case of Rahif Fayyad, the Lebanese architect. In "The Architectural Perspective and Nature," he asserts that the architectural vision of greater Beirut needs to be congruent with its nature. He recommends preserving Greater Beirut close historical relations with the sea, and restricting the city to its natural boundaries (54-55).

In contrast to Fayyad, others are more philosophical in their approach. Some try to inculcate ecocentric values to public consciousness by appealing to the civic and patriotic sense of the Lebanese. In "Nature and The Artistic Vision," Bahig Hojeij the Lebanese film-maker, fictional and documentary director states:

My work as a film maker, like that of any other person who is aware of the dangers of what is happening to the nature and the environment in Lebanon, consists of contributing by all available means to the protection of what is left of this beautiful and unique nature.

This would occur is we prove that we are truly Lebanese citizens worthy of that name.
(32)

Still some others, like Issa Makhoulf the Lebanese writer and poet and the photographer Joseph el-Hajj, chose to put forward humanistic arguments. El Hajj concludes his essay "Nature and the Metamorphosis of Place" by stating: "Nature and place are part and parcel of human identity" (46). In the same spirit, Makhoulf in "Fearing for Beauty" states that "The fear for beauty is in a way, the fear of losing human essence"(65). That being said, all efforts combined, hopefully, not before long, we would be able to proudly say: "There is a country called green Lebanon."

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