

2021

A few things we learned about Art, Ecology & The Commons



foreword

Art, Ecology and the Commons took place between August 27 and September 5, 2021 in Beirut, yet its pertinence and necessity continue to resonate in the unrelenting volatility of our current situation.

An agonizing community came together to seek refuge in the foliage of our young urban forest, protected by the shade of its trees, equally as inspired by their interdependence and resilience despite a broken environment along the bank of a waterless river. For ten days, we gathered for walks, talks, films, meals, planting and care, breathing life into our forest and the minds of those who joined us, citizens and artists alike. Inspired by our reading of 'The Undercommons' by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, it is what we have been calling a collective Study.

"We are committed to the idea that study is what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice. The notion of a rehearsal—being in a kind of workshop, playing in a band, in a jam session, or old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory—there are these various modes of activity. The point of calling it "study" is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present."

— Harney, S., & Moten, F.

Art, Ecology and the Commons' program sought to harness the forest's togetherness and collective practice to inspire new methodologies. In a time of extreme crisis, it brought to light people's overwhelming engagement and desire for resistance. This, however, was a not singular pursuit, conceived in search of resolution. It was instead designed to build curiosity and open-ended inquiry, prompting the unexpected and emergent to manifest, in the hope of affecting long-term change.

This digital publication embraces an experimental format of spontaneous gathering, and furthers the curatorial methodology of the Study. Multiple voices, contexts, and perspectives are juxtaposed, different forms of narratives featured, and various knowledges woven together. What does a small urban afforestation site neighboring a highroad in Lebanon have in common with the threatened rainforest of the Amazon? Jumping between local and international scales, the transborder character of **Art, Ecology, and the Commons** unfolds throughout the following pages.

This e-publication stems as much from the research references, conversations, and sister initiatives having guided us through the project, as from the takeaways, propositions, and new questionings prompted by artists, participants and community members we engaged with during the program in August 2021. Can relating our own bodies to growing shrubs foster greater empathy and care? Can looking at forests' complex modes of organizations inspire us greater solidarity? If a polluted river makes us realize the suffering we cause and endure, a traveling seed can whisper its own tale to make us hope, and cope.

As such **A Few Things we Learned about Art, Ecology, and the Commons** plants the seeds for urgent reflections on our ecological relations and modes of collaboration.

Approach this editorial compilation as a curated playlist: play, scroll, skip, pause, replay, and find those recurring motifs intertwined throughout its five chapters, following the threads of mycelial networks.

foreword

What have we learned from AEC?

Sarah: I've learned that there's a lot that you can gain when you make time to be attentive to the smallest of things, be that a small ecological detail, a sound in my daily landscape, or a word choice in a written text; and that against all odds people can come together in small and big ways to make something meaningful happen.

Danielle: That even the best laid plans, no matter how carefully curated, will be transformed with every encounter, their goals and reach altered by the community, individuals and collectives who engage with them; and that is magical.

Amanda: That our resources, including the energy and drive to make things happen come from the people we work with (our team and collaborators) and work for (participants and audiences). Micro-scale matters and not only in times of distress !

Alexia : Don't limit yourself by thinking something is impossible to do. Even transforming a billboard into a stage can be done. Solidarity and care do cross borders, even virtually.

Jad: To take one step and look around before taking another.

Abraham: That the "smallest of gestures" can nurture the right conditions for the most fruitful forms of togetherness.

special thanks

A massive thank you to our allies on the ground, who kept us going in every way: our wonderfully committed volunteers, our technical director Zico, [Advanced Car Rental](#) for the rides, [Bossa Nova Hotel](#) for our second base, [Metropolis Cinema](#) for our forest screenings, [Light for Lebanon](#) for lighting our forest; [Bread Republic](#), [Jai Kitchen](#), [Nation Station](#) and [Bim Water](#) for giving us much-needed energy, and of course, the [Municipality of Sin El Fil](#) for the continuous support. To our Study participants and commissioned artists, none of this would have been possible without your trust, passion and open minds; thank you 200Grs. (Rana Haddad and Pascal Hachem), Ashraf Hamdan, Charbel Samuel Aoun, Christian Sleiman, Christian Zahr, Franziska Pierwoss, Mirna Bamieh, Nadim Mishlawi, Nasri Sayegh, Omar Fakhoury, Petra Serhal and Raafat Majzoub. To our Study guests who imparted so much knowledge and care; thank you Sakiya (Sahar Qawasmi and Nida Sinnokrot), Samar Kanafani, Sarah Lily Yassine, Marwan Rechmaoui, Khaled Sleem and Sandy Boutros.

○ TAP (Temporary Art Platform)

<https://togetherwetap.art/>

○ Browse through the AEC Brochure

<https://temporaryartplatform.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/AEC-brochure.pdf>

○ Beirut's RiverLESS Forest+theOtherDada

<https://theotherdada.com/en/theotherforest/412/beirut-riverless-forest?nid=402>

Art, Ecology and the Commons: Together in Agony we Persist is a project by TAP in collaboration with [theOtherDada](#) and in partnership with [SUGi](#). It was supported by the [Arab Fund for Arts and Culture \(AFAO\)](#), the [French Institute, Culture Resource \(Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafi\)](#) and the [Goethe-Institut Lebanon](#).



our contributors

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You can click on this button at any time
to be redirected to the Index.

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons

reading key

A Few Things we Learned about Art, Ecology, and the Commons is a tool guide for you to navigate freely, intended to be used as a pool of references and a research aid.

Throughout its five sections you will encounter:

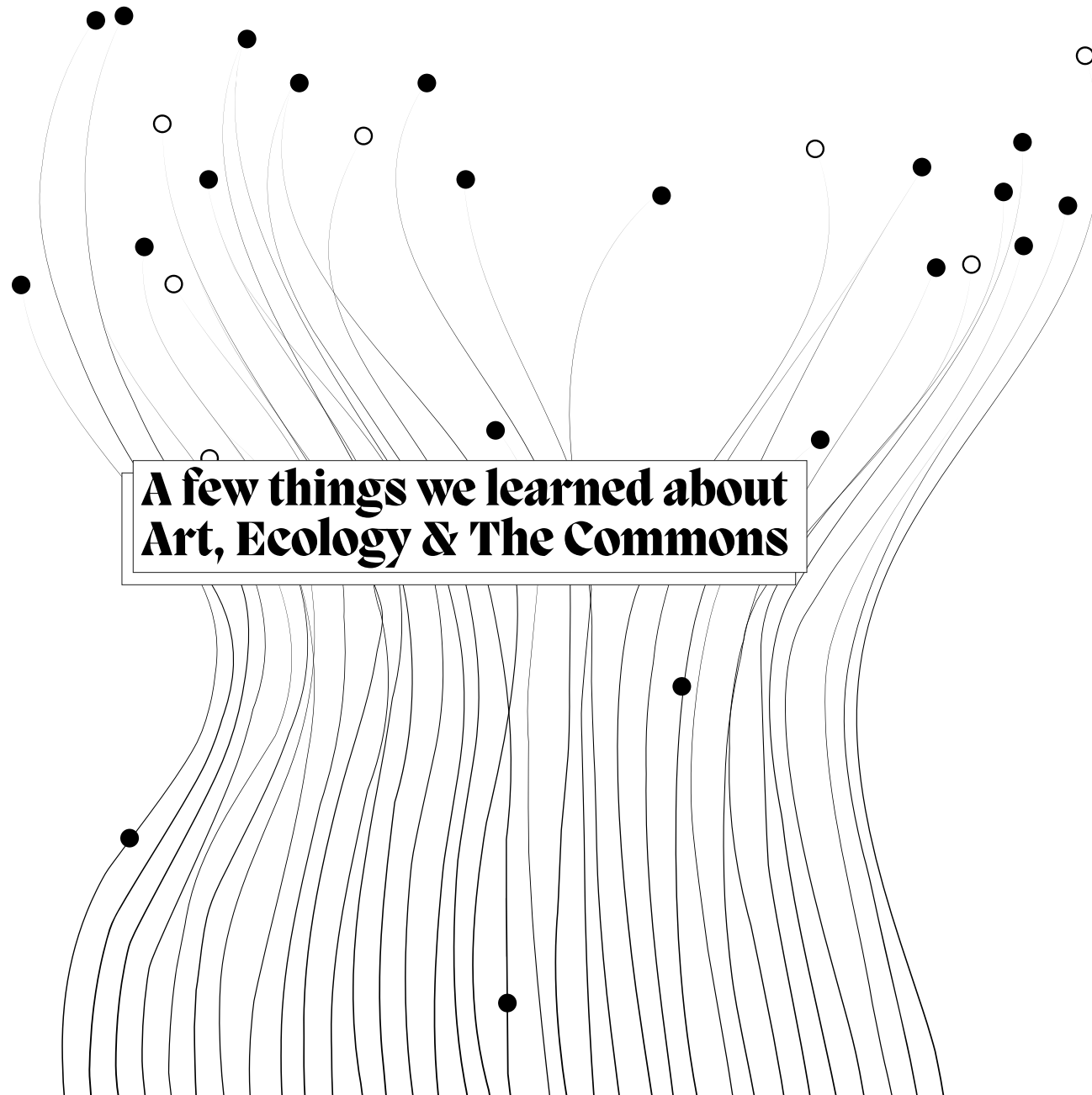
- * Writings (from essays to poems and project prompts)
- * Visuals (from artwork (re)productions to film stills and photographic recordings)
- * Special Focus on AEC (from pictures of the events to participants' propositions)
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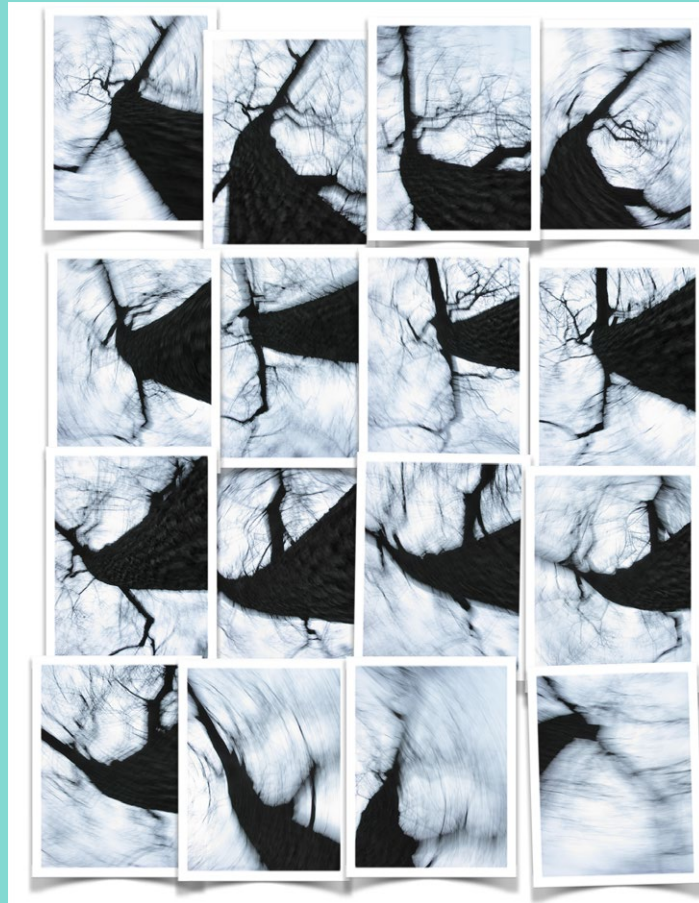
A few things we learned about
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**How to heal ? How to
reconnect our bodies
to vegetal beings?**

An abstract graphic on the right side of the slide. It features several thin, wavy, vertical lines in a light teal color. Two small black dots are placed on these lines: one on the leftmost line and one on the rightmost line.

natasha myers

A Kriya for Cultivating Your Inner Plant



Natasha Myers.

"Dances with Oak, Winter," Kinesthetic images by Natasha Myers @becoming sensor

Never forget this: your body does not end at the skin.¹ Your contours are not constrained by physical appearance. Your morphological imaginary is fluid and changeable.² Indeed, your tissues can absorb all kinds of fantasies.³ Your imagination generates more than mere mental images; its reach extends through your entire sensorium. Simultaneously visual and kinesthetic, imaginings carry an affective charge. They can excite your muscles, tissues, and fascia, heighten or alter your senses. You can fold semiosis into sensation.⁴ Perceptual experiments can rearticulate your sensorium.⁵ And by imagining otherwise, and telling different stories, you can open up new sensible worlds.

Consider tying on the habits, comportments, and sensitivities of other bodies. Becoming with and alongside others, you might begin to see with new eyes, smell with a new nose, and taste with a new tongue.

¹ Donna Haraway (1987) "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Australian Feminist Studies* 2 (4): 1–42.

² Judith Butler (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* New York: Routledge.

³ See for example, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary" in Butler's *Bodies that Matter*.

⁴ On the kinesthetic imagination see Natasha Myers (2015) *Rendering Life Molecular: Models, Modelers, and Excitable Matter*.

⁵ On articulation see Bruno Latour (2004) "How to Talk about the Body? The Normative Dimensions of Science Studies," *Body and Society* 10 (2-3): 205–29.

[6] ⁶Indeed, we have opportunities to do this every day in our entangled mimetic dances with others — human, more than human, and machine. These encounters can incite other ways of seeing, feeling, and knowing. Altered perceptions can destabilize entrenched sensory regimes and bring otherwise imperceptible phenomena within grasp. What you once thought were stable boundaries between bodies may begin to break down. The very order of things may come undone.

Consider this as an invitation to deepen your already multispecies Yoga practice. Cat, Cow, Dog, Crow, Scorpion and Fish Poses torque your body into mimetic affinities with animal forms. Here I invite you to cultivate your inner plant. This is not an exercise in anthropomorphism — a rendering of plants on the model of the human. Rather, it is an opportunity to *vegetalize* your already more than human body. In order to awaken the latent plant in you, you will need to get interested and involved in the things that plants care about. Follow the plants.⁷ Let yourself be lured by their tropic turns and you will acquire freshly vegetalized sensory dexterities. Try this Kriya.⁸ Tree Pose will never be the same again.

⁶ Donna Haraway (2008) *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

⁷ You could make yourself over into a body without organs. Or you could, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, "follow the plants." See Deleuze and Guattari (1980) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. For resonant discussions of plant phenomenology see Michael Marder (2013) *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, New York: Columbia University Press; Craig Holdrege (2014) *Thinking Like a Plant: A Living Science for Life*, Lindisfarne Books; and Natasha Myers (2005) "Visions for Embodiment in Technoscience," In *Teaching as Activism: Equity Meets Environmentalism*, edited by Peggy Tripp and Linda Muzzin, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 255–67.

⁸ A Kriya is the Sanskrit word for action, deed, or effort. In various Yogic traditions, it refers to a technique or the set of actions to be practiced.

○ visit natasha myer's website for more

**http://
natashamyers.org**

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Find a patch of sunlight. Stand tall, let your feet sink into the ground below you, and close your eyes. Reach your bare arms outward and feel the sun warm your skin. Drink it in. Now, let go of your bodily contours. The skin and flesh of your arms thins and fans outward, becoming membrane thin. Your bones dissolve, and your muscles melt away. Begin to pump water through your veins until they elongate and branch into turgid vessels. Draw water up your growing stem into your leaves. Play with this new buoyancy, feel the lift and lilt as your leaves and stems reach for more sunlight. You are becoming *phototropic*. Lap up the sunlight through your greening leaves. Feel a cool pocket of air forming on the underside of your leaves as you release atmospheric vapours. You are photosynthesizing: eating sunlight, inhaling gaseous carbon, exhaling oxygen and releasing water.

Now drop down into your roots. Extend yourself into the cool, moist earth. Feel your strength as a downward thrust that inspires an upward lift. Experiment with *gravitropism*. Feel the rush as you redistribute your awareness through this thin, filigreed tangle of roots and that branch and branch until they reach the width of just a single cell. Find one of your root tips. Taste the wet, metallic soil; smell that musty gradient of decaying matter flush with nitrogen and phosphorus. Propel yourself towards the source. Experiment with your strength. Push yourself up against the soil; grow through minute crevices between crumbling pieces of earth. Wherever the soil resists, just release your chemical stores to dissolve whatever is in your path.

Now multiply this sensation. Feel two searching root tips. Then four. Can you extend your awareness to five? What would it like to feel one thousand root tips extending through the soil? Feel the rush as you expand your awareness to millions of sensitive root tips. Dive downwards and run outwards, drawing water and nutrients in and up through all of them simultaneously. Feel your whole root system humming with an electric charge. You have become one giant nerve

cell merging with soil.<sup>9</sup> Now hook yourself into a thickening mycelial network of fungi, microbes, and other roots all around you.<sup>10</sup> Feel the energetic thrill of connection. How far can you extend your awareness? Run with it, in every direction.<sup>11</sup>

Without letting go of this excitement, draw your awareness back up your stem and into your leaves. You no longer have eyes, a nose, ears, a tongue, or nerves, but that doesn't mean you can't see, smell, hear, speak, taste or feel. Can you feel the play of light and shadow across your leaves? The surface of each one of your leaves is a visual organ registering and remembering minute shifts light intensity. And you can see in colour, indeed, a wider range of colours than your human eyes have ever beheld. You don't need a central nervous system to process this "information" into images. Your leaves are filmic media, recording colour movies of the lush, shifting light patterns around you. You can "see" the dancing shadows other plants cast as they list and play in the wind; and you can tell that the person standing over you about to prune your limbs is wearing a red shirt.<sup>12</sup>

Experiment with light at dawn and dusk. Can you feel the energetic shift when the far-red light of the rising and setting sun clues your body in to the earth's rotational rhythms? In time you will be able to remember precisely when those long rays last excited your tissues. You will not only acquire a bodily memory of the play of light and colour as they change over the seasons, you will learn to anticipate and prepare for future events.

<sup>9</sup> Today the field of "plant neurobiology" is burgeoning. See for example, Anthony Trewavas (2005) "Green Plants as Intelligent Organisms," *Trends in Plant Science* 10 (9): 413–19.

<sup>10</sup> On the intimate association of plants and soil microbes and fungi, see Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan (1997) *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Evolution from Our Microbial Ancestors*, Univ of California Pr.

<sup>11</sup> At what point do you lose track of "you"? When does "I" dissipate? Plants are not autonomous individuals with clear-cut boundaries. Plants are porous to the very atmospheres they make, and they ingather a multispecies ecology around them, catching all kinds in their whorl.

<sup>12</sup> On the sensory dexterities of plants see Daniel Chamovitz (2012) *What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses*, Scientific American.

Natasha Myers, "Sensing Botanical Sensoria: A Kriya for Cultivating Your Inner Plant", Centre for Imaginative Ethnography, Imaginings Series (2014).

Continue this practice daily and you will no longer need a nose to smell or a mouth to speak. Your entire body will become an olfactory organ sniffing out the richly fragrant world around you. Indeed, the atmosphere is a collaborative ecology of volatile chemical signals to which you actively and volubly contribute.<sup>13</sup> Take pleasure in the art of synthesizing and releasing complex bouquets of fragrance from your tissues. This is your way of telling the world what you are up to, moment to moment. You can talk to other plants and animals, reporting on the condition of your leaves, flowers and fruits. You will be able to lure pollinators and complain audibly about the damage done by feeding insects. Indeed, you not only feel insects crawling up your stem and slicing into your tissues, you can discern the distinct species eating your leaves by tasting the specific chemistry of its saliva. If you are quick you can synthesize volatile compounds to warn your neighbours so that they can prepare their tissues with toxins to keep the offending insects at bay. Or you could call out for help from other insects who will prey on these herbivores. Soon you will discover that you are an effusive catalyst at the centre of an affectively-charged chemical ecology.

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Now, it's time to let go. Draw in your roots until your rhizome remembers its feet. Let your leaves thicken into arms. Feel your turgid vessels soften. Drop your arms back down to your sides. Come back to your breath. Come back to your body. But remember to ask yourself: Is this really the same body? What has changed?

¹³ On chemical ecology see for example Gary Felton and James H Tumlinson (2008) "Plant-Insect Dialogs: Complex Interactions at the Plant-Insect Interface," *Current Opinion in Plant Biology* 11 (4): 457–63; Baluška (2010) *Plant Communication from an Ecological Perspective*, Berlin: Springer; and for an "involutionary" reading that works athwart the evolutionary imperatives that underwrite chemical ecology narratives see, Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers (2012) "Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters," *differences* 23 (3): 74–118.

marwan rechmaoui

Poplus 1-2-3

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons



3 Marwan Rechmaoui, "Poplus 3", pastel on paper, 77 x 145 cm, 2019.
Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg



Marwan Rechmaoui, "Poplus 2", pastel on paper, 75.5 x 145 cm, 2019.
Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg

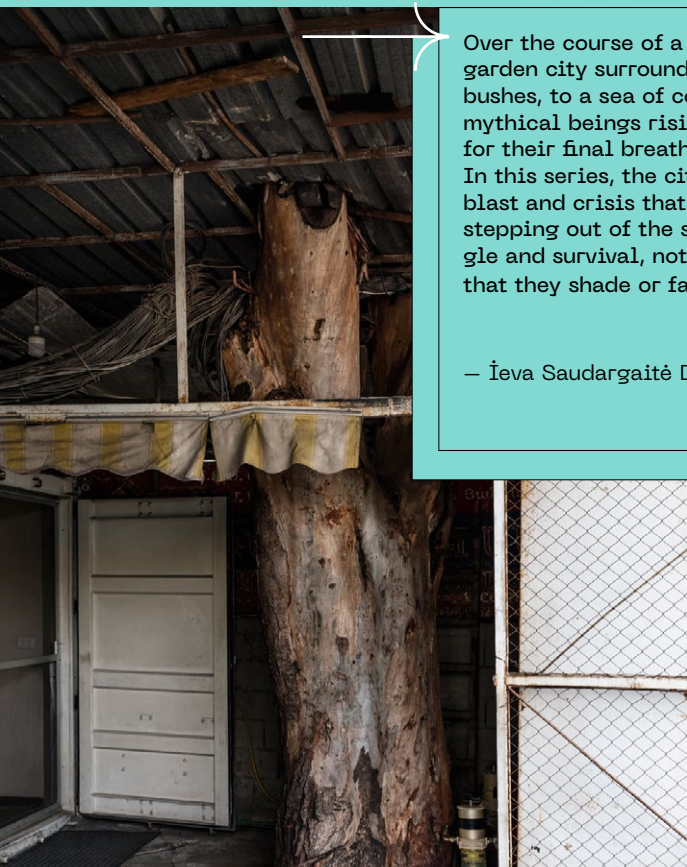
ieva saudargaitė douaihi

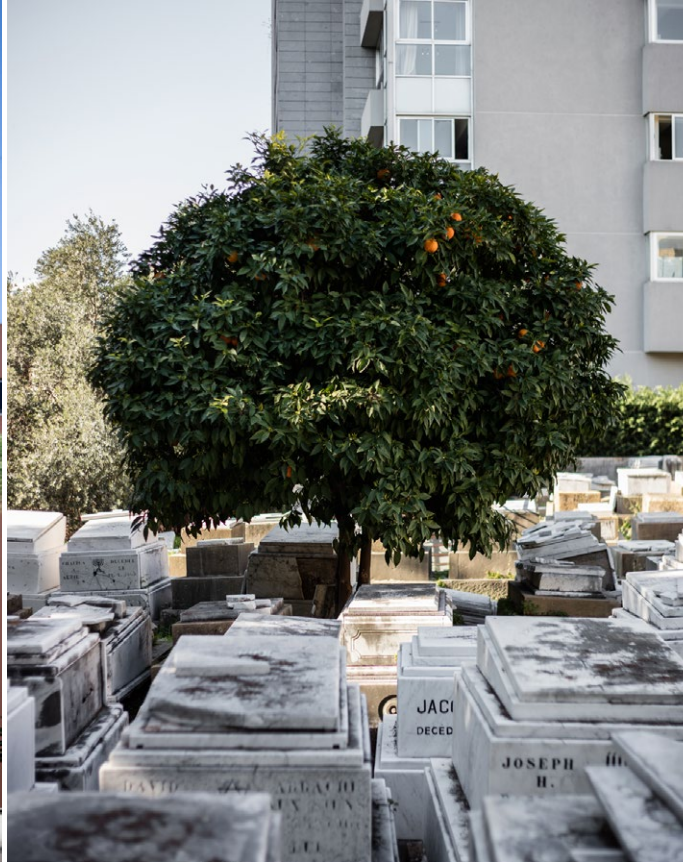
The trees before last 2021

Over the course of a century, Beirut changed from a garden city surrounded by woods, orchards, groves and bushes, to a sea of concrete where lone trees appear like mythical beings rising from the dark depths, reaching up for their final breath.

In this series, the city recedes to deal with the disastrous blast and crisis that it has witnessed, its gentle giants stepping out of the shade to share their stories of struggle and survival, not so different from those of the people that they shade or fall for.

— Īeva Saudargaitė Douaihi





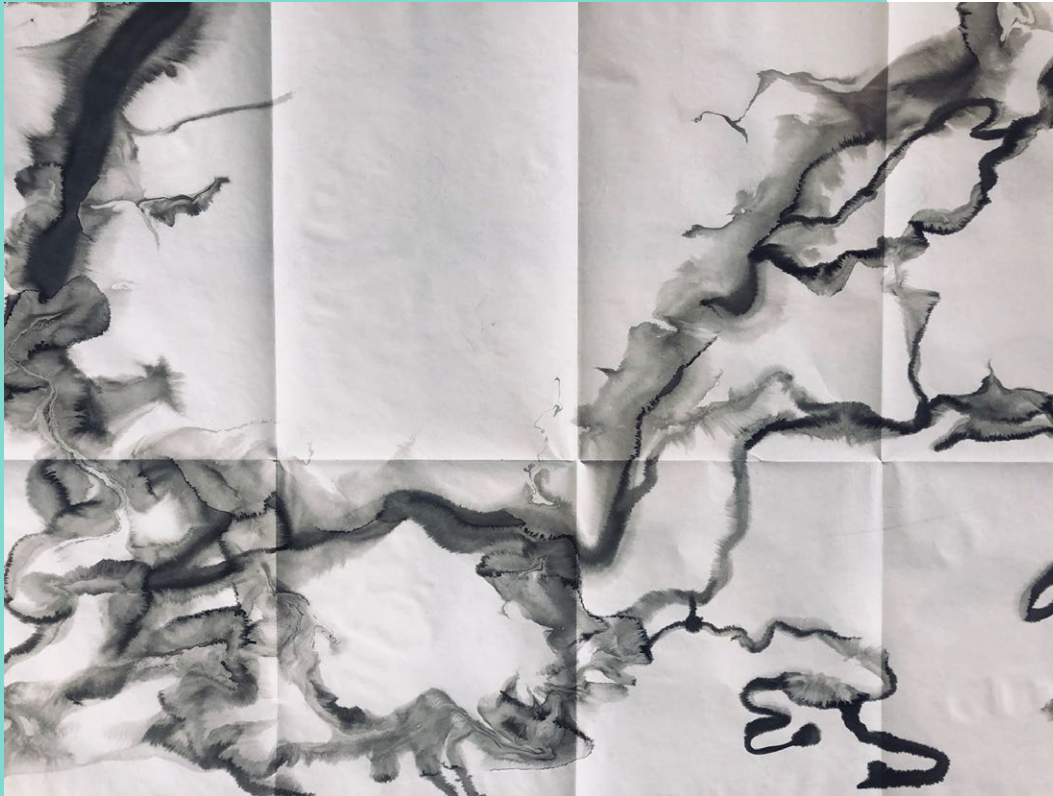
Īeva Saudargaitė Douaihi, *The trees before last*, 2021. Photography series, Beirut, Lebanon. Courtesy of the artist

evgenia emets

Eternal Forest 2018

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons

Eternal Forest folded map from the artist's book fragment, 2018
In the collection of the British Library and the Gulbenkian Art Library



Single tree where sacred forest no more
Só, a árvore, sagrada floresta que já não é
Barren vein once a myriad strata
Seca a veia, já foi inumeráveis estratos
Rare voice a relic of obsolete song
Rara voz, relíquia de canção perdida
Idle seeds race perpetual cycle
Sementes vãs nos seus ciclos perpétuos
Roots once severed grow forever apart
Cortadas as raízes para sempre separadas crescem
Vacant dream amidst human desert
Deserto humano onde sonhos vazios moram
Instant past of the future all we can plant
O instante passado do futuro é tudo o que resta a plantar
Every word spoken here is present
Falada a palavra é verbo presente
Living memory dire cry for emergence
A memória viva por emergir anseia

Build
Your house
Around
The tree

Planta
A tua casa
Em torno
Da árvore

toolkit

© All rights reserved – Becoming Sensor

The Mind of Plants

- TAP recommends, a collection of essays, narratives, poetry to approach anew interactions between humans and plants.

<https://www.themindofplants.com/>



Becoming Sensor

- "Becoming Sensor aims to make strange the ways that the conventional ecological sciences have not only been deployed to colonize land, but also to colonize our imaginations" and "invites you to explore how non-Indigenous people can become allies to Indigenous resurgence by experimenting with ways to detune the settler common sense that informs conventional ideas about the living world."

<https://www.instagram.com/becomingsensor/>



Sara Hamdy, Margins for Madness, Undesirable Monuments (2020)

- How is madness embodied in public space? Can the seclusion of urban gardens stand as a metaphor for madness and unreason. Listen to Sara Hamdy's broadcast and sonically learn more about this research.

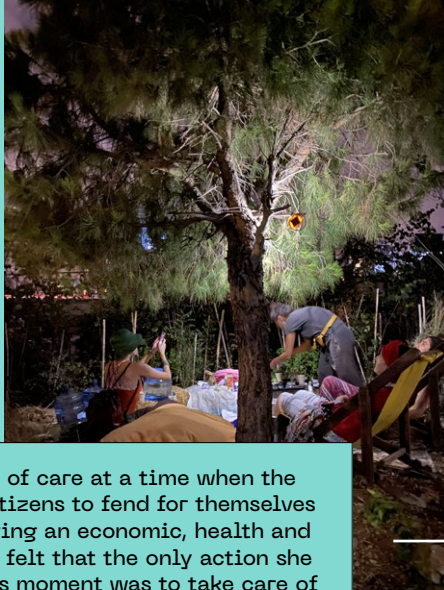
<https://radioart-residency.net/en/rueckblick-margins-for-madness-installation-fuer-radio/>



AEC focus

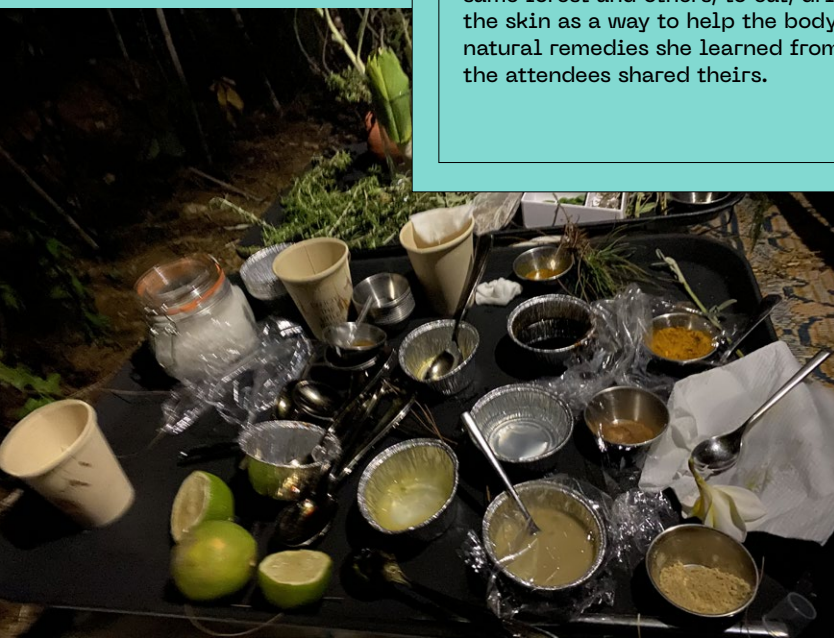
Petra Serhal, GESTURE I Intervention of care

5 September, 2021 / 7:30 – 9:30 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest



GESTURE I is an intervention of care at a time when the Lebanese state has left its citizens to fend for themselves and deal with each other during an economic, health and political crisis. Petra Serhal felt that the only action she could take as an artist in this moment was to take care of people's bodies.

In the forest, she invited people to sit under a tree, where she used natural herbs and flowers gathered from this same forest and others, to eat, drink, smell and apply on the skin as a way to help the body relax. She shared some natural remedies she learned from her grandmother, as the attendees shared theirs.



A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons

Forest-making

We planted an additional corner of our young native forest: 50 square meters made up of 300 trees and 100 shrubs, together with theOtherDada forest makers and children from the Horshna Forest School.

© Léa Cremona



AEC focus

Christian Sleiman, Seed-Kebbeh Participatory planting intervention

5 September, 2021 / 8:00 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

Gathered around a banquet of fruits, participants stood barefoot on the soil encircling the spread. Following a silent moment of grounding, all were invited to consume the fruit. The seeds that remained were placed in clay seed bombs handcrafted by Christian Sleiman, to be returned to the earth.

Participants are encouraged to log the location of their capsule by filling the following form, allowing the artist to track the growth of the seedlings.

Fill in the form here.



© Léa Cremona

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons

Care

Collective Hatha yoga and meditation session in the forest with Koun, a local nonprofit organization making yoga accessible to those who need it.



How to encounter a forest ? How to learn from its teachings?



evgenia emets

Eternal Forest 2019

It started when we came out of sacred space and time. Outside of it. Exited it. Broke through. We separated from it.

We partitioned sacred space, cut it into many parts. Some parts we considered no longer sacred. We could do things in these parts that we could not do in the sacred space, because we were together with it, within it, one with it.

We found out we could treat elements of space as separate. We also found out we could reconstruct, re-synthesise, remake these elements into structures and create new spaces for ourselves.

We still attend our sacred space outside of our new spaces, we give it special meaning and we give it a special time. We adorn it, we treasure it, we guard it, while it holds the memory of wholeness for us.

We enjoy our new spaces more and more and we make new, more complex, more exquisite, new spaces. We need more space for our experimentation, we cut off more space from the sacred space.

Those of us who see where it is going conceal the sacred space within structures that can be within the new spaces we create so that we feel sacred space is always there, in our domestic realm, within reach. Sacred space is caged in structures we have elaborately created. These structures become more sacred than sacred space itself.

Our sacred time, our continuity of sacred space, is divided meticulously into new chunks of time and then we start to watch time: sell time, buy time and value new times more than sacred time. Those of us who see where it is going give sacred time a special place so we can live it together or alone - in an organised manner. One day a week, on a Sunday.

Our new structures, however, increasingly demand our attention and as we give them more and more time and space as we run out of time to attend to sacred space in sacred time.

Sacred space shrinks to the smallest point and we do not remember any more where it is. We cannot find it. That point still guards our memory, but we have no way of accessing it, no capacity, no will. What was visible became invisible. What was invisible we made tangible. We are inside time outside of sacred time. We are inside space outside of sacred space. If only we could unfold sacred space out of one point in space. But where is this point? And where do we start?

I start where I begin. I cut back my time and space and leave it to be, to rest, recover, and dream. I leave it on, recording, remembering, resetting. I leave it on. I leave it to be. Release it. Release it.

One day it takes me in and lets me be - to rest, recover, and dream. I leave myself remembering, responding, recreating. Sacred space is restored through sacred time.

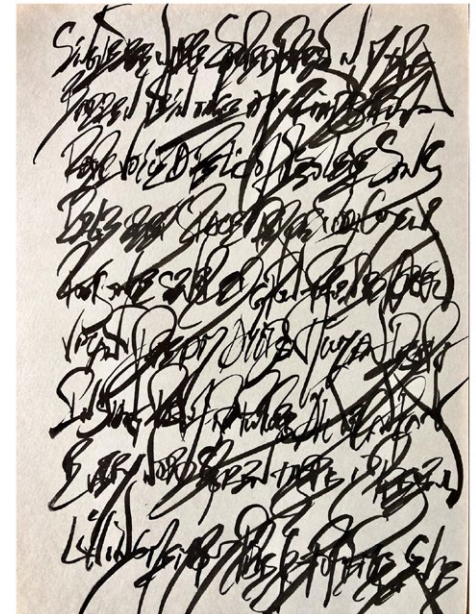
It asks me to find a structure so that I can also bring you here. A simple, uncomplicated structure so that we can enter it once again. The structure becomes sacred work. My sacred work is the sacred structure of the forest. Within it, sacred space and time can emerge.

Forests are outside of our time and space. They are the last structures standing left open with a trace of memory, which allows us to do sacred work. They are simple, yet complex, self-organising, yet requiring our attention, imagination, surrender, and patience.

I go to the forest and see, hear, smell, and feel nothing. I can see one tree, I see another tree and one more in the distance. I lie down. It takes me in, inside an open - vaulted rotten trunk, one I have often passed by.

In emptiness, I stay, outside of any time, outside of any space. Between sacred space and space and between sacred time and time. I witness everything that cannot be named. There, where it cannot be named.

As the sacred time expands its pores, sacred space is released. There is a point in the human heart - it has always been there. From that point memory recovery and reopening of the sacred space is possible.

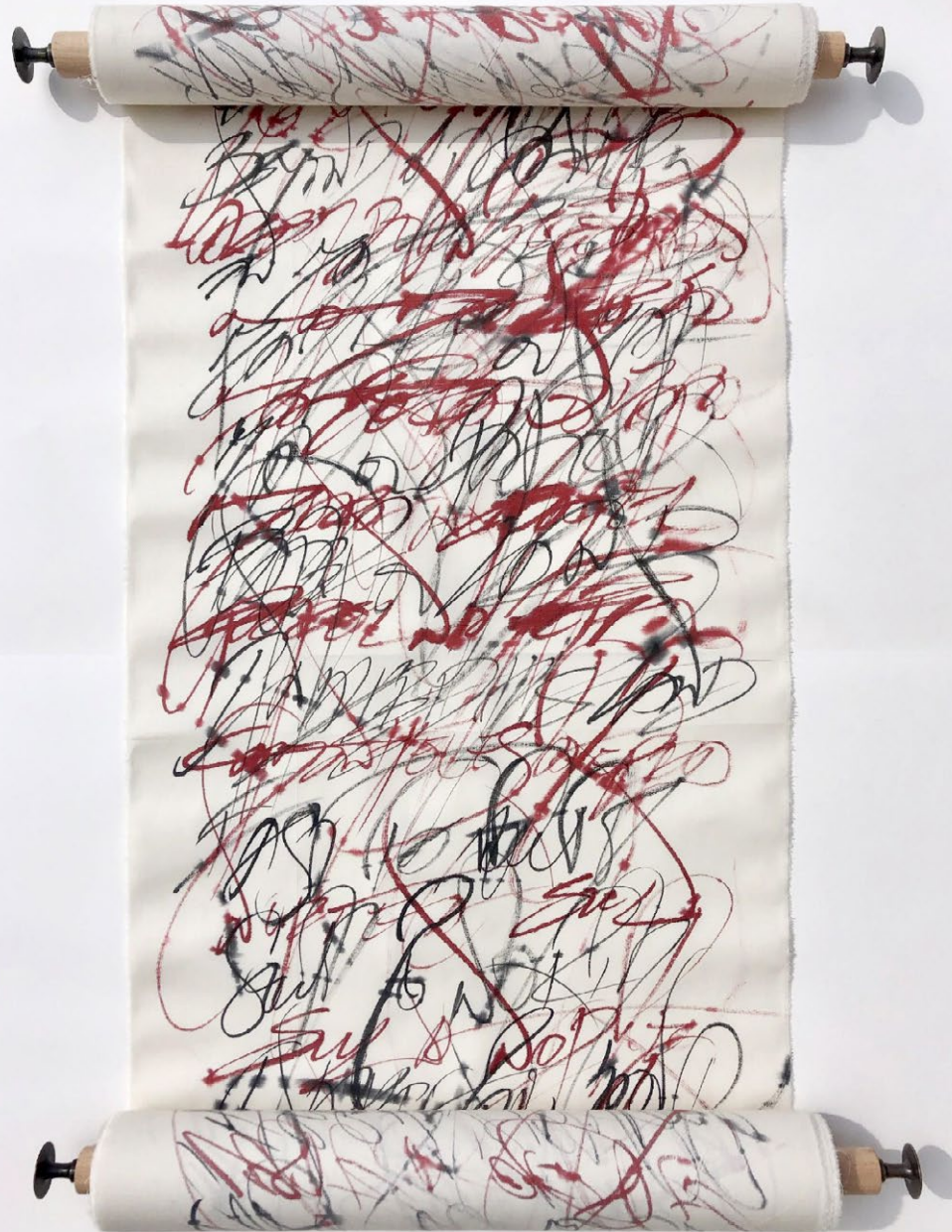


"Eternal Forest artist's book", 2018
Ink, vintage paper, hand binding, 6 handwritten copies
In the collection of the British Library and the Gulbenkian Art Library.

○ Eternal Forest Manifesto
in English + Portuguese

[https://
youtu.be/
G4ZxuLwPZBY](https://youtu.be/G4ZxuLwPZBY)

[https://
youtu.be/
d77wM2ftc-A](https://youtu.be/d77wM2ftc-A)



"Eternal Forest Manifesto", scroll, fabric, ink, 22m.
Bienal de Coruche, 2019

nasri sayegh

Paysages Exquis
Billboard commission

12 June, 2021 – 27 August, 2021
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons



مسلاذ
27/08—
05/09 2021



tap. OtherDada

نصري السايغ

"When invited to intervene on this billboard, I spontaneously thought about using it to "write a message". Using letters. Words. But no word could fathom the extent of the catastrophe we are currently witnessing and living. I then decided to take refuge in my forest of images. To choose the solitude of bare landscapes. The nudity of images as opposed to the mundane aspect of words and messages. Granting a billboard the status of receptacle of landscapes, I chose to juxtapose two images. It is not so much the origin of these images that interests me, but rather their belonging to what I would call a world-geography (géographie-monde). My fascination with landscapes transcends borders and geographies and times. This diptych is taken from my research project entitled Paysages Exquis."

* The commission was inaugurated on June 12, for the second anniversary of Beirut's RiverLESS Forest.

○ Read the full interview with Nasri Sayegh
on TAP's website

[https://
temporaryartplatform.
com/wp-content/
uploads/2021/07/
Nasri-Sayegh-
Interview_Billboard-
Commission_AEC.pdf](https://temporaryartplatform.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Nasri-Sayegh-Interview_Billboard-Commission_AEC.pdf)



Nasri Sayegh, Paysages Exoquis, 2021.
Billboard Commission, Beirut, Lebanon.

yasmine ostendorf

Learning from the Forest

○ More about the LABVERDE's
immersion program in the Amazon

[https://
www.labverde.com/](https://www.labverde.com/)

Forests have always had a soothing effect on me and without given it much further thought, I assumed that it had something to do with the multiple shades of green, the tranquility of leaves wafting and cheerfully chirping birds. Having spent time in the Amazonian rainforest as part of the LABVERDE: Artistic Immersion Program, I had to leave this idea behind for good. I had to detach myself from a preconceived idea to carve up a space to unlearn. Rather than a paradisiacal and serene space, the forest revealed herself as a place buzzing with active ambiguity, teeming with energy as multiple species are battling for survival or a space in the sunlight.

When I was asked to write about what I had learnt from the forest, it seemed a hard question to answer straight away, even though I did undergo a transformation after the intense research trip that felt like a visit to the source of all life. Amongst many other things I had learned about the carbon cycle of the forest, dendrochronology, the different landscapes and the domestication of the rainforest. But factually these were all things I had learned from the amazing scientists, from The National Institute of Amazonian Research, that were part of the research expedition - not from the forest itself. For a truthful answer, I had to dig deeper. For me the question turned into an exercise in realizing that it is not only our mind that learns, but that many other parts of our body understand and store experiences too. What we learn from the forest we learn in a bodily way, engaging all the senses, translating different vibrations and communications in different languages.

One of the senses the forest trains is the eye. It taught me to look, and to look again, calibrating, tuning into details. After every hike I started to see more co-dependencies, complexities and layers between all the non-human actors. Distracted by the heat and moist of the forest, what first looked like trees, became intricate webs of relationships. Everything came alive, nothing was identical anymore. Every leaf had a different structure, some bark was gnawed on and everywhere I now saw bugs, fungi, small (and occasionally big!) mammals in all colours and shapes. It is mind-boggling to realize that only a very small percentage of these complexities and interrelations are visible to the human eye. A lot of it happens on a microscopic level, or changes will only be visible over the course of a decade.

The Amazonian rainforest accommodates species of trees that host up to more than 2000 creatures and critters, all feeding off each other. The forest presents herself as a place of hyperspecificity and entanglements to those who open their eyes. Smells and sounds also seem to be amplified by the forest. Whether it is the lack of air pollution and fumes we have become so accustomed to, or the constant buzzing of traffic and other noise pollution of the city, both my ears and nose experienced a feeling of relief in the forest. But don't be mistaken: not because of peaceful tranquility; the opposite was true! You hear and smell an abundance of life. The various sound artists that were part of the Labverde Artistic Immersion Program were in for a phonic treat in the Amazonian rainforest that allowed for incredible recordings, like sap running through trees, mysterious underwater activity, the haunting calls of the howler monkeys and an overwhelmingly loud dawn chorus. Might it be the leaf-cutter ants on the move or the wind rustling a pile of leaves, the forest is the place par excellence to investigate soundscapes and biophonies.

Another lesson the forest makes available to us is to recognise the possibility of a different sense of time; deep time. The history of the forest goes far beyond human history. Stored in the multitude that is the forest is knowledge that goes far beyond the natural sciences, beyond the arts, and mostly, that goes back much further in time than we can imagine. We are risking to lose access to an understanding and sense of that rhythm that revolves not around clock-time, but is driven by other forces. However, the decisions we make in the here and now regarding our forests are decisive for a deep future. Though this sounds alarming, it is not necessarily a bad thing if you consider the history of land-use domestication and the sustainable modes of co-existence that were developed in the Amazon for thousands of years. Of course, there is no such thing as the 'untouched forest'. Humans construct environments, just like all other species, like beavers building dams. In many cases this can be mutually beneficial. Think for instance of Anthropogenic Dark Earth and how indigenous people produce compost heaps for the creation of a highly fertile soil. They have always known how to turn a dump heap into a garden, making good use of ash and charcoal as fertilizers.

Not only are humans changing the forest, it goes both ways: the forest is changing humans, too. The history of humans and the forest has been a process of true interdependence, in which plants are key when it comes to our nutritional and medicinal choices. What is problematic is that we have come to think of ourselves as a superior species that rules over others. The forest has become a resource to support our way of life, be at our service. Hence we have come to desire our landscapes controlled and we are transforming our food using all the pesticides needed in order to dominate the earth. We may even ask: how does the consumption of artificial or genetically modified food can influence us as humans?

It's not just the biophysical assets of the forest that matter to how we can be in this world, natural biodiversity is also influencing our way of communicating. The forest speaks to us in a language that is not based on words. Languages are local and specific to their time and space. For many populations, the languages Portuguese, Dutch or English remain languages of colonizers. The concepts they introduce to global culture stem from the school of thought of colonial times. The etymology of the word "florestas" is likely derived from the Latin old world *foris*, meaning "outside, out there, out of sight". For an indigenous community this concept of a forest would not make sense. When our mother-tongue is taken away, the diversity of language, and thereby of concept, specificity and complexity, diminishes. Simplification of language equals a loss of plurality of concepts.

The physicist, philosopher and eco-feminist Vandana Shiva, claims that the monoculture of the language leads to the monoculture of the mind. Our words haven't kept up with the ever-expanding complexity of our world. If anything, it has become more simplified due to it becoming more mono-cultural: think of the dominance of the English language. We bash against the walls of the restrictions of our capability to translate concepts; after all, language is not just representation, it shapes our understanding of the world surrounding us. Meanwhile, we still cannot grasp what the collapse of biodiversity means and entails, or fully understand the concept of 'climate change', both on a human and environmental level. To which extent is the language, or rather, the translation of concepts, responsible for this inability to see and react to the present profound environmental crisis? It's a complex web of interrelationships that needs a holistic, multisensorial and multidimensional approach, including new images, concepts and other languages that can adequately address these issues with more chances to do environmental justice.

We need to diversify our language like the Forest is multiple as a condition of survival. The Amazon Forest teaches us that plurality is a strategy of resilience and we can't forget about this characteristic as a vital and existential capability also for human nature. A lack of plurality, both in language and landscape, turns us less resilient and less able to cope with the inevitable changes that lay ahead of us and the climatic changes we are already experiencing. In the autumn of 2018 there was a big fire in National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, where the archives of the (some extinct) indigenous languages were stored. This loss of language is a loss of wealth and multiplicity and forces us to become even more dependent on (over) simplified terms and concepts. What does this mean for our understanding of the forest as a place of hyperspecificity?

The reason why I believe it's still of great importance to guide artists to the Amazonian rainforest is that no other field allows quite as much freedom for speculation and appropriation as the arts and design. We tap into, jump, and -in the case of appropriation-, legitimately steal/borrow from all disciplines. Just like in nature, collaboration prevails. Without collaboration there is no complexity, and I believe complexity is the essence of our existence. In the arts we negotiate and create tools and skills (question, advance, reflect, confuse and catalyse) to allow complexity. Or, as Ailton Krenak formulated it in his book 'Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo': *'The field of art is where visions and dreams are possible. A place we can inhabit beyond this hard land: the dream place. The dream as a transcendent experience in which the cocoon of the human implodes, opening to other visions of unrestricted life. The artistic field as a place where people are initiated into a tradition of dreaming.'*

Though as artists we might not be able or willing to offer directly implementable solutions, we offer reflections, images and language that diversify, stretch and deepen the knowledge about the world we live in. I hope, through the Labverde program, artists will find a way to weave the complexity of the forest into the plurality of artistic language in order to better disseminate environmental and ancestral concepts. If we recognize the history of our landscapes, perhaps we recognize that to overcome complete ecosystemic collapse, we need to look to our ancestrality and understand the importance of complexity and plurality of animals, plants, humans, atmosphere and biosphere. Only then we will be able to see the inseparability of nature's past, resilience and rights from our own.

louise botkay

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons



Louise Botkay, "Siri Oorção", Marajó (Brazil), 2003. Photograph.
Courtesy of the artist



Louise Botkay, "Perfume, Watorik – Romaima", 2017. Photograph.
Courtesy of the artist



Louise Botkay, "Política da gente, Watorik Romaima", 2017. Photograph.
Courtesy of the artist, Bienal de Coruche, 2019

nadim mishlawi

Voices of a Forgotten Network: Mushrooms Podpoem commission (2021)

Romy Azar

(biologist):

A mushroom is the reproductive structure of fungi. So people tend to intertwine the definition between fungi and mushrooms. And this fruiting body or fruit, the mushroom, will produce millions of spores, not seeds as fruit does. Ok, and those spores are present in gills or pores in an undercap or inside the mushroom. When those spores land on a certain substrate like wood or soil, they will germinate and they will form an underground network of microscopic roots that we call hyphae in the scientific world, but we mostly call it mycelium. We can see the mushroom above the ground, this is the only entity that we can actually see, but underground we have a huge web that we call the mycelium, which is the bigger body that we cannot actually see. So we might be walking everywhere not seeing anything, but we have a whole world under our feet without even knowing. But we know that they exist, just by seeing the fruiting of it, which is the mushroom.

Rana Eid

(sound designer), translated from Arabic:

There is an expression in Arabic I really like which is, “Why are you digging up graves?” For example, if you and I are arguing and I say, “Remember a year ago...” You would say, “Why are you digging? What’s wrong? It’s in the past.” So today people are asking, “Why are you digging?” It’s taboo. It’s forbidden. But I say, “Yes we need to dig up the graves in order to understand and to solve our problems.” You have to exhume the dead and rebury them justly and correctly. We now have the “culture of the underground.” People want to hide things. And if you go underground it’s taboo. Because the dignity of the dead is in their burial. You’re digging because the martyrs are underground. But you have to dig in order to solve the problem.

Muriel Kahwagi

(writer), translated from Arabic:

I remember that day very well because there was an exhibit opening at the Sursouk Museum, where I worked at the time. I remember we were working late. My friend and I, and a lot of other people. And then we heard that something was going on but we didn’t understand what. Then we heard that people were closing the roads and that we should probably leave because we didn’t know exactly what was going to happen. I had parked my car close by, but we couldn’t find a taxi to drop us off. There was an atmosphere of tension. Eventually we found a taxi to drop everyone home.

Then the next day we woke up and found the country in chaos. They sent us a message from work telling us to stay home because the roads were closed and we wouldn’t be able to get to work. I didn’t end up going to Beirut for several days. The first four or five days, I didn’t take part in any protests because I was home due to the roads being closed, and I was scared of going without knowing how or if I could get back. And then, one day, I finally decided that I wanted to take part. We weren’t the ones closing the roads. We weren’t at “The Ring Road.” This was during the first week. At the beginning people were protesting against corruption and the system. We knew what was happening but not the details. We just wanted to be part of it. We didn’t really know too much and that’s why we were able to take part. If we knew from the beginning that there was going to be so much violence from the army and security forces, or that no one was going to listen to us, we might not have protested. But because we didn’t know, there was such motivation and everyone wanted to be there to protest.

Greg Burris

(writer):

I don’t know that we can give a sociological definition to revolution. We pretend that we can, like it’s some scientific thing. But every revolution is so radically different that I think it’s unfair to say “this is a revolution, this is not a revolution”. I mean, even the Arab Spring or whatever you wanna call it, at this point we’ve critiqued it to death, but there, even if you disagreed with some of the class element or disagreed with some of the paths they took and some of the strategies, there was something underground that mushroomed, this revolutionary kind of consciousness that “hey, we’ve spent our life, and parents’ lives and our grandparents’ lives being told that the status quo is the only option; and out of nowhere, people are saying “no, it’s not the only option, we’re gonna fight it”. Now did it go in different directions that we criticize? Sure. But there is a revolutionary impulse there that I don’t think we should throw out. And that’s true across the board. That’s true whether we’re talking about Haitian revolution, or whether we’re talking about Beirut’s attempt at a revolution in 2019.

Romy Azar

(biologist):

Fungi are usually associated with negative emotions or a certain negativity because they are associated to decay and death, and that’s why people, when we say fungi or when we say there is mould growing [mould is a kind of fungi] in my house, it has a bad connotation.

Rana Eid

(sound designer), translated from Arabic:

In my view, what's happening in the Arab World today is not a revolution or protest or anything like that. I consider it as part of the system which needs a good cop and bad cop. It's the same system that decides when and where to create uprisings. This is no longer the 1960s. And I was one of the people who thought that revolutions can change things in the world. Of course I don't want to delegitimize revolutions around the world. But I'm talking about the Arab World today in which the greater system needs to change, a system that they are all part of. This is a repositioning of the things they do. So let the people protest and then we will change things the way we want to later. It's like brainwashing by keeping people in a state of euphoria. You let people believe that they are doing something useful by using social media which lets people feel like they are succeeding. You think you've liberated the world by pressing "like." This is the stupidity of today. And this is why we can't create new regimes. If you accept that this is the situation, you might be able to change things.

Greg Burris

(writer):

My experience in going down and watching the Beirut protests in 2019, it was the closest thing I ever felt to an acid trip or a mushroom trip, while not being on psychedelics; I was completely sober. But you just look around and just this collective enthusiasm is a revolution in the air, and that jubilation, that experiment, that free thinking it just kind of bleeds into everything, that everything is possible. Old forms of what is acceptable, what's polite, what kind of behaviour you should have in certain circumstances falls apart, just as we overthrow the authority of our dictators, we also overthrow the authority of daily behaviour.

Muriel Kahwagi

(writer), translated from Arabic:

These things take time and it's important for us to remain defiant. The problem is you can't continue being defiant if nothing is improving or changing, or if our perception isn't changing. I think what affected people was how much violence there was from the army and security forces. I know a lot of people who were injured because of the rubber bullets. It was no joke. It didn't bother us at the beginning, but then we find our bodies themselves in danger. If you want a public movement you need a lot of bodies to be present. But our bodies were in danger. I too was injured. Everyone I know was affected. When you know that it's dangerous, you think twice before joining the protests. When you know there will be shooting and fighting. There were reports from MSF about the kinds of bullets being used. And these things should not have been used. They were trying to kill us.

Romy Azar

(biologist):

Everyone knows that we have bacteria living on our skin, but we also have fungi that live in our body, on our skin, etc, in our lungs. Mostly those species that live on us, they come from species that were present before or are still present in our environment, but they just developed more genetically so that they can actually live on us. They need to feed on something, so they will feed on something that we secrete or that we have.



Podpoem 01: Mushrooms

Featuring voices by George Tohme (botanist), Adib Dada (architect, forest-maker and environmental activist), Vatche Boulghourian (filmmaker reading an excerpt from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness), including sound recordings in the Beirut River.

Mushrooms are spawned from a diverse network of mycelia growing underground, and it is only when the conditions are perfect that mushrooms stem from this network, often defying the expected. Taking this very rudimentary idea, the second piece reflects on the notion of defiance as an act which may or may not similarly stem from unseen, and often unexpected networks. The piece presents the existence of mushrooms, as ordinary fungi to mind altering hallucinogens, to reconsider that which inspires defiance.

So when we ingest those psychedelics those compounds enter our body and they interact without our body in a certain way that makes us, you know, feel the air and see things that we don't usually see or feel things that we don't usually feel. Those compounds that are contained in such mushrooms, they're exactly like when we take a certain drug. Some species are used to heal you or to make you feel things, like psychedelics, or see things differently. And lately, in America for example, they're using psychedelics in medical research to heal certain people, heal anxiety, reduce stuttering, etc. So it's really interesting to discover and not fear any subject that we don't know.

Greg Burris

(writer):

What psychedelics do is that they allow you to see the world with fresh eyes. And so all the structures and institutions and just, habit, social habits that we have been taught and that we've come to accept as truth, they dissipate. You look at the world with fresh eyes when you're on psychedelics, mushrooms or acid. You look at the stars and they're beautiful like never before, but you also look at institutions, nationalism, the family, the church, the universe, everything, as a result of this kind of eye-opening, inner eye-opening of psychedelics. It can lead, quite naturally I think or quite easily, to things like the countercultural revolution, overthrowing the military, rethinking gender conformity and gender roles, rethinking race relations, rethinking imperialism. It's not an automatic link nor do you have to be on psychedelics to make those connections, but there is a way in which they can exist hand in hand.

Muriel Kahwagi

(writer), translated from Arabic:

You don't have authorities dealing with anything. All the efforts are bottom-up, in reverse. They all start with the people trying to improve things. Like after the explosion. It was the people themselves. There was no help. It's like we are a society that knows how to keep things moving. We've gotten used to it because there was never another option. If you want to live, you have to be self-reliant, find solutions, and find people to collaborate with. And then things work.

Rana Eid

(sound designer), translated from Arabic:

With a successful revolution, you have to consider years ahead. What did we do? The problem is we don't know how to progress. I don't want to sound like a Marxist, but the only thing that is progressing is capitalism. You went home and changed your clothes. But did you really change the way you present yourself to society? No. Where did the Bolshevik Revolution end up?

Greg Burris

(writer):

Revolution is just people rejecting the script that's been written for them, and acting in ways other than they've been told to act. An act of defiance or an act of imagination, you know showing that there are different ways of conceiving the world and different ways of behaving in the world. And that's true of political revolution, that's true for the revolution of language and revolutions of consciousness, in which we learn to act, behave and imagine in ways that previously had never been allowed or even, you know, thought possible.


○ Tune in to the episode online

[https://open.
spotify.com/
episode/0Vh1lasnks6Y
So1dLta05d](https://open.spotify.com/episode/0Vh1lasnks6YSo1dLta05d)

ursula biemann

Devenir Universidad

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons



Art, Ecology, and the Commons brought together a community in a young Lebanese forest and sought to foster solidarity as a modus operandi while getting inspired by the trees' resilience and learning interdependence from their diverse networks. Forests remain a source of knowledge and ongoing instruction. Stretching beyond the Mediterranean, crossing oceans and penetrating the depths of Amazonia, through words, we encounter Ursula Biemann as she recounts the premises of her collaborative project with the Inga People of Colombia. With its online platform launching imminently this year, **Devenir Universidad** echoes as much as expands the very core of AEC.

[https://
deveniruniversidad.org/](https://deveniruniversidad.org/)

[https://www.geobodies.
org/curatorial-projects/
devenir-universidad](https://www.geobodies.org/curatorial-projects/devenir-universidad)

Devenir Universidad

Extraordinary circumstances have propelled me into a collaborative project with the indigenous Inga people of Colombia. *Devenir Universidad* emerges from this encounter and sustained collaboration which started with a field trip in 2018. *Devenir Universidad* is an art project, an online publication, a living collaborative organism, a multispecies research in the Amazonian rainforest, a collaborative network of different human and other-than-human people thinking and acting together with the territory. It is many things, but above all, it is the collective effort to co-create an indigenous University in the South of Colombia involving the leadership of the indigenous Inga community: the *iachas*, elders, *taitas*, *mamas*, and community leaders represented by Hernando Chindoy. Inspired by a biocultural paradigm that drives discourse from an extractive to a more generative and imaginative relationship with the territory, *Devenir Universidad* supports several dimensions in the materialization of this new institution of higher education and research—the Biocultural Indigenous University. In many ways, *Devenir Universidad* is a parallel endeavor of creating the Biocultural Indigenous University, they mutually interpret and fertilize each other. *Devenir Universidad* is a repository of the visual and intellectual memory of this process of collaboration.

In 2017, when I was approached by curator Maria Belén Saez de Ibarra from the Art Museum at UNAL in Bogota to visit the region, it had just emerged from several decades of armed conflict. I was sent to do recognizance for a new work and start making contact with various indigenous communities who inhabit the region. The leader of the Inga people, Hernando Chindoy Chindoy, took me through the territories in his bullet proof car for several weeks. In return, on the last day, he asked me to help him establish an indigenous University. This struck me as a compelling idea since I have been interested in indigenous cosmology and knowledge systems for quite some time. Approaching ETH Zurich, Anne Lacaton agreed to run a year-long studio. In her gentle manner, it was never her intention to build an infrastructure in this foreign country, rather the studio generated cartographies and proposals that would help the Inga take decisions about their project.

With Nature Rights legal researcher, Ivan Vargas Roncancio and Inga thinkers Waira Jacanamijoy, Flora Macas, Hernando Chindoy, among others, we are elaborating together a theoretical foundation for the project. This new University holds a vision

for a future founded on ecological concepts of mind, knowledge, and the inherent intelligence of life. Indigenous people in the Amazon view knowledge as embedded in the environment. Knowing something means becoming part of a field of meaningful relations with all species and with the social and historical relations connected to that space. This complex field of relations is what indigenous people in Amazonia call territory, it is intimately connected to knowledge, wisdom, perceiving and caring. In this sense, it is a real territorial university, collectively processing the ever-changing interactions between the different entities involved in meaning and world-making. This is the reason why the University will be a decentralized network of various sites and paths across the entire territory, that allows for river-learning, forest-learning, chagra-learning in their research gardens. What is becoming University is not primarily the Inga people but the territory itself. Currently we are planning a vast biocultural corridor that will connect the town of Piamonte with the forested natural park through the creation of the new University reserve where large forest restoration and the collective building of a first bamboo structure can be the initial education projects.

With a group of Inga social leaders and educators, we also began a broad discussion on the contents and pedagogies of this new institution. Its main purpose is to protect the ancestral knowledge but it shall bring them into a contemporary dialogue with western science as well. A group of academics, artists, architects and nature rights lawyers are now committed to bring this project ahead. My role over the last few years has been primarily to forge partnerships and conceptualize the project through a substantial online platform, exhibitions and publications on this process of intercultural co-creation. I see myself as a catalyst and aesthetic companion to the project. Audiovisual productions are important tools not only in mediating the project to an international audience but also as an excellent means of communication within a dispersed community where the pandemic, dramatic weather events and inaccessible terrains have hampered communication. Along those lines, we are creating a video archive with the elders speaking about the territorial history of the Piamonte, parts of Caqueta and Putumayo, a history that has never been told since the missionary arrived in the early 20th century.

toolkit

Green Art Lab Alliance

- GALA is a mycelium-like network of art organizations contributing to environmental sustainability through their creative practice.

<https://greenartlaballiance.com/>

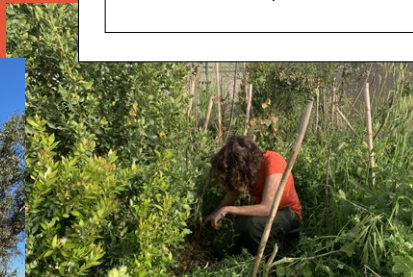


Yasmine Ostendorf x Fundación Mar Adentro

- Read up an interview between Yasmine Ostendorf, founder of the Green Art Lab Alliance, and Maya Errazuriz, Fundación Mar Adentro.

<https://www.transartists.org/sites/default/files/station2station/3/>

[Fundación Mar Adentro](#) is a chilean residency program allowing artists and scientists to gain a deep understanding of the natural reserve Bosque Pehuén.



Eternal Forest



- Further your familiarization with Eternal Forest

<https://eternalforest.earth/>

- Some great conversations to stream through

<https://eternalforest.earth/index.php/vision/>

Guardians of the Forest

- Platform for Learning Forest Guardianship and a course we followed for months

<https://www.forestguardians.co/>



AEC focus

Raafat Majzoub Forest Fictions Collaborative live writing piece

5 September, 2021 / 8:00 – 10:00 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest



Throughout the period of the study, Raafat Majzoub invited the participants to take part in The Khan Collection, a mutually owned art collection that aims to subvert economic practices in the art market for social, cultural and financial gains for its participants. This process is ongoing, and will hopefully keep the study group in close conversation beyond the program.

For the closing event, Raafat also performed Forest Fictions, a collaborative live writing piece projected in the forest showing forest-related personal narratives being written on an open Google Doc by himself, the crowd in Sin el Fil and remotely.

Contribute your forest fictions or edit ours [here](#).

In a wild forest, in a man-made garden, I hugged a 370 year old tree and it hugged me back.

"Forest" stays a mystery, in such a tiny small country as Lebanon. Forest has an inherent problem of scale and borders. "Forest" is the untamed, uncontrolled, wild side of nature, but not pushing it as far as "jungle" which would add a layer of deeper fear and insecurity.

Can one forest be a model of propagation? A model of generation and learning from which, human communities, can live with land?

AEC focus

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons

Beirut's RiverLESS Forest



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Hike in Abadiyeh



**How to become solidary,
interdependent, and resilient
beings —like trees? How to
live in the Commons?**

An abstract graphic on the right side of the page, consisting of several thin, black, wavy lines that flow vertically. Three small black dots are placed at various points along these lines: one on the leftmost line, one on the middle line, and one on the rightmost line.

legal agenda

The social and solidarity economy in Tunisia: a phenomenon with deep historical and social roots

الاقتصاد الاجتماعي والتضامني في تونس:

ظاهرة ذات جذور تاريخية واجتماعية عميقة

صفوان الطرابلسي

رغم ما عرفه مفهوم الاقتصاد الاجتماعي والتضامني من جدل على ساحة السياسي والاجتماعي في الفترة الأخيرة، إلا أن النقاشات العامة في شأنه بقيت محدودة إلى حد بعيد. ومن أبرز نقاط ضعف هذه النقاشات، كان غياب التأطير التاريخي والحفر في الجذور الثقافية لهذه الظاهرة. فللاقتصاد الاجتماعي والتضامني في تونس جذور تاريخية عميقة مرتبطة بالممارسات التضامنية لنمط عيش القبائل البدوية والجماعات الريفية وساكني الأحياء الحضرية الشعبية.

هذه الإشكالية تمثل هاجسا محوريا. إذ لا تواجه العامة والمهتمين العرضيين فقط وإنما حتى المختصين والباحثين في المجال. لذلك سنحاول خلال هذا المقال تقديم نبذة عن الجذور التاريخية للاقتصاد الاجتماعي والتضامني في تونس وذلك من خلال عرض جملة من الممارسات التضامنية التقليدية معرّجين على مدى قدرة الدولة التونسية في حقبة ما بعد الاستعمار، على إدماجها ضمن سياساتها التضامنية الحديثة. وحتى يكون وصفا للظاهرة وتحليلنا لها منهجيا، سنقّص هذه الممارسات إلى ثلاثة أصناف كبرى وهي الممارسات التضامنية التقليدية في الفضاء الخاص والممارسات التضامنية التقليدية في الفضاء العام والممارسات التضامنية الحديثة "المدولة" أو ذات البعد الربحي.

الممارسات التضامنية التقليدية في الفضاء الخاص

قد لا يتطابق هذا النوع من الممارسات التقليدية العفوية والنماذج الحديثة للنشاط الاقتصادي الاجتماعي والتضامني. ومع ذلك نحن نعرضها هنا للتركيز على وجود أنشطة تضامنية تقليدية هدفها الأساسي معاضدة فئة هشّة أو تتعرض للهشاشة أو تجابه مصاريف ضخمة غير منتظرة أو تتجاوز طاقة المنفق، من خلال تنظيم "إعادة توزيع للثروة والممتلكات والموارد" بين مجموعة من الأفراد تربط بينهم صلات اجتماعية مختلفة هي أساسا علاقات قرابة و/أو جيرة يتم تعهدها وصيانتها وترسيخها عن طريق التضامن وشّد الإزر.

ولعل من أبرز الأمثلة وأشهرها في هذا السياق "الرّغاطة" أو "التوزيع" أو ما يتعارف على تسميته أيضا "بالشّرخة الجماعية". والجدير بالإشارة أن "التوزيع" نوعان إذ يتم التمييز بين "التوزيع" الجماعية التي يتعاون خلالها أبناء القبيلة الواحدة من أجل قضاء شأن يندرج ضمن المصلحة العامة لكل الجماعة، و"التوزيع" الخاصة التي يستدعي خلالها فرد باقي أعضاء المجموعة التي ينتمي إليها من أجل مساعدته على قضاء شأن خاص. من أبرز المناسبات التي نجد فيها "التوزيع" مواسم جني المحاصيل الفلاحية، الغولة، عصر الزيتون، بناء المساكن، تنظيم الأفراح أو إقامة الزّردة وغيرها من الممارسات الأخرى. تقوم "التوزيع" بالأساس على مبدأ التبادل غير المباشر وغير المشروط للخدمات، بمعنى أن العنصر الذي ينتمي للقبيلة يتلقى المساعدة ليا وليس مجبرا على ردّها بشكل اني ولكنه، بشكل من الأشكال، مجبر على المشاركة في "التوزيعات" اللاحقة وذلك بحكم انتمائه إلى الكل القبلي [1].

إن السمة التي نريد التأكيد عليها في الممارسات التضامنية التي ذكرنا منها مثالا في الفقرة السابقة، هي أن أغلبها يندرج في إطار الممارسات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية التقليدية التي تُمارس داخل الفضاء الخاص، مثل البيوت والحقول والبيادر والمكيات الخاصة الأخرى، وفي نطاق دوائر التنشئة الأولية، أي العائلة سواء أكانت في شكلها الأسري الحديث أم في شكلها التقليدي الممتد. كما نلاحظ ألا وجود لأي تدخل من قبل هيكل الدولة لدعم هذه الممارسات، وألا علاقة لهذه الممارسات بسوق البضائع والخيرات التي تقوم على التوزيع وإعادة التوزيع ذوي الطّبيعية الرّبحية.

الممارسات التضامنية التقليدية في الفضاء العام

أما على صعيد النشاط في الفضاء العام، فنجد أيضا مجموعة من الممارسات القديمة المترسّخة في البنية العامة لثقافة المجتمع التونسي وذات علاقة بالخيال الجماعي ومن بينها الممارسات التضامنية "الإسلامية". ومن أبرز المؤسسات التي تهيكل هذه الممارسات التي عرفتها تونس تاريخيا، نجد الأوقاف والأحباس الجارية التي تكون في غالب الأحيان في شكل أراض أو عقارات يتم تخصيص مداخيلها لقضاء مصلحة عامة غالبا ما تكون في مجالات الصحة والتعليم والثقافة والأعمال الخيرية وصيانة المنشآت الدينية [2].

ورغم طابعها التضامني، تمّ منع الأوقاف سنة 1957، وهو منع جاء في سياق سياسي وتاريخي كانت دولة ما بعد الاستعمار تحاول خلاله تثبيت نموذج اقتصادي واجتماعي جديد، صارت فيه لمنظومة الأوقاف "عديد الانحرافات المحتملة". إذ مثّلت رافعة مادية مهمة لتنفيذ النخب الدينية التقليدية وخاصة منها الزيتونية التي حاولت التشبث بموقعها والحفاظ على تأثيرها، خاصة في ظل تصور سياسي جديد يعتبر الشأن الديني من مشمولات الدولة وبما في ذلك إدارة المؤسسات الدينية وتمويلها بحيث تشرف عليه عبر مؤسساتها العمومية [3].

من ناحية ثانية، فإنّ لمؤسسات الأوقاف عديد الانعكاسات على النموذج المجتمعي وخصوصا فيما يتعلق بوضع النساء والذي كان يمثل ركيزة من ركائز النموذج المجتمعي الجديد الذي تسعى الدولة المستقلة حديثا حينها إلى تركيزه. فكثيرا ما كانت مؤسسة الوقف العائلي وسيلة لحرمان النساء من الميراث خصوصا عند وفاة الأب أو الزوج وهو ما يحرم النساء الأرامل واليتيمات من حق التصرف واستغلال منابتهن مع ضمان تمتع الأحفاد بغنائض إنتاج الوقف. أما على الصعيد الاقتصادي، فإن للوقف "انحرافاته الممكنة" حسب التصور السياسي الجديد الذي كان أخذا بالسيادة آنذاك، إذ يساهم في تعطيل سيرورة التنمية من خلال تعطيل حركة رأس المال والحدّ من النفاذ إلى الملكية الخاصة بالإضافة إلى تعطيل حركية الثروة وهو ما يحط من القيمة التداولية للعقارات في السوق [4].

ممارسات تضامنية حديثة... لكنها مدوّلةٌ و/ أو رُبُحيةٌ:

خلال الفترة الاستعمارية من تاريخ تونس الحديث، برزت أول الوداديات والجمعيات التعاونيّة وكان ذلك في بدايات القرن العشرين^[9]. ومن المهم أن نشير إلى أن ميلاد تلك الوداديات والتعاونيات كان في سياق بحث الكثير من المنظمات والجمعيات ذات الصبغة الوطنية والمقاومة والمناضلة ذات الطبيعة الاجتماعية والنقابية والثقافية وحتى الرياضية. من أبرز هذه المنظمات ومن أولها نجد جمعية "الاتفاق الودادي" والتي تم تأسيسها أثناء الحرب العالميّة الأولى (1914-1918) من قبل عمّال السكك الحديدية المسلمين. لم تكن هذه الجمعية هي الودادية الوحيدة إذ سريعا ما التحق عمّال معمل التبغ برفاقهم. هذا التوجه نحو الوداديات كان نتاجا للنقاشات التي خاضها محمد علي الحامي والطاهر الحداد ورفاقهما والتي توصلوا من خلالها إلى أنه من الضروري أن يتنظّم الشعب التونسي في اتحادات وجمعيات تدافع على مصالحهم وتعاوض مسار التحرير الوطني.^[10]

ومن أهم الأفكار التي توصل إليها هذا المخاض الفكري كان تكوين فروع شركات تعاونية إنتاجية في جميع أنحاء البلاد يتم توحيدها فيما بعد تحت قيادة مشتركة تحقق ما سماه المنظرون بـ "أمة المشاركين" التي تهدف إلى إحداث تغير اجتماعي عبر إنشاء جمعيات إنتاجية. إلا أن المبادرين اصطدموا بمجموعة من الصعوبات العملية جعلتهم يتوجهون نحو تأسيس جمعيات استهلاكية أمام استحالة إقامة جمعيات صناعية أو زراعية. وقد تمكّنوا من صياغة مشروع قانون لجمعية سمّوها: "جمعية التعاون الاقتصادي التونسي" تمّ تكوينها فعليًا بقاعة الخلدونية يوم 29 جوان 1924 وكان من بين أهدافها التخفيف من وطأة الأزمة الاقتصادية للعشرينات (ارتفاع الأسعار وغلاء المعيشة) وذلك عبر توفير مواد استهلاكية دون أسعار السوق^[11].

ومن أبرز الأنشطة التضامنية التقليدية الأخرى التي تندرج ضمن الممارسات التضامنية القائمة في الفضاء العام تسيير ما يعرف بـ "الأراضي الاشتراكية". الأراضي الاشتراكية هي التسمية الحديثة لما يعرف بأراضي القبائل في البلاد التونسية وهي أراض يملكها مشاعا أهل القبائل المنتسبة عليها وفقا للتوارث^[5]. وبذلك فليست ملكية هذه الأراضي خاصة بالمعنى الفردي للكلمة ولكن ومن جهة أخرى، وفي الكثير من الأحيان، لا حيابة "للمّلاك" لوثائق تثبت حدود ممتلكاتهم ولا مسار انتقال ملكيتها تاريخيا بين الأجيال المتعاقبة^[6].

وبالنظر إلى كل هذه الأسباب، يتم استغلال هذه الأراضي جماعيا من قبل الأهالي المنتسبين فوقها بحيث يتم تسييرها بشكل تشاركي. في القديم كان الإشراف على استغلال هذه الأراضي يتم في إطار ما يعرف "بالجماعة" (تاجمايث) وهي عبارة عن برلمان يضم أعيان القبائل ويتم فيه اتخاذ القرارات المهمة والحكم في مختلف النزاعات بما في ذلك النزاعات المتعلقة بالأرض وكيفية تقسيمها واستغلالها خصوصا فيما يتعلق بالأنشطة الفلاحية ونشاط الرّعي^[7].

أما حديثا فيشرف على هذه الأراضي مجلسان. مجلس التصرّف الذي يضم ممثلين منتخبين من قبل الفاعلين المحليين الذين ينشطون على الأرض الاشتراكية. ومهمة هذا المجلس تنظيم الأنشطة القائمة وذلك من خلال "إسناد الأراضي الاشتراكية على وجه الملكية الخاصة لفائدة الأفراد من بين أعضاء المجموعة ذكورا وإناثا وذلك طبقا للشروط المنصوص عليها قانونيا". المجلس الثاني هو مجلس الوصاية الجهوي ويضم ممثلين عن الإدارات المعنية وهو يمارس حق إشراف الدولة على الأراضي الاشتراكية رقة والى الجهة ومن بين مهامه مراقبة نشاط الفاعلين المحليين ورفع تقارير في الغرض بالإضافة إلى فض النزاعات المتعلقة بالأراضي الاشتراكية في حالة عجز مجلس التصرف على فضّها^[8].

إن أهمية هذا المثال تتمثل في أنه يبين أن الممارسات التضامنية التقليدية قابلة للإدراج ضمن هيكلّة قانونية حديثة تشرف عليها الدولة وإن كانت بشكل استيعابي واستوادي. وهو كذلك مثال يسمح بأن ننقل إلى الممارسات التضامنية التي ترعاها الدولة.

وفي نفس الاتجاه، صدر التقرير الاقتصادي عن مؤتمر الحزب الحر الدستوري بصفافس سنة 1955. وقد برز التأثير النقابي في ذلك التقرير من خلال العديد من النقاط الأساسية التي طرحها وعلى رأسها التأميم والتعاوض، وهما العنوانان اللذان طبعها التجربة الاقتصادية للدولة التونسية خلال بدايات دولة الاستقلال. فضلا عن الاسم الذي أطلق على هذه الممارسة والذي يدلّ بحدّ ذاته على التعاون والتضامن، فقد عملت هذه السياسة الرسمية على توحيد مساحات كبيرة من الأراضي الفلاحية لإنشاء تعااضديات خدمات فلاحية بالتوازي مع إنشاء صناديق ضمان تبادلية محلية. وعلى أثر الانطلاق من القطاع الفلاحي، تم إنشاء العديد من التعااضديات والتعاونيات الأخرى في مجال الخدمات والتجارة والصناعة^[12].

ومن سمات هذه التجربة، أنها تميزت بسيطرة هياكل الدولة على أغلب الأنشطة الاقتصادية التضامنية وتحويلها إلى مؤسسات رسمية ذات تبعية مزدوجة تجاه الحزب الذي غيّر اسمه منذ مؤتمر بنزرت إلى "الحزب الاشتراكي الدستوري"^[13] وتجاه الدولة عن طريق الإدارات الجهوية للفلاحة. لقد كانت هذه التجربة تقوم على توجه سياسي اعتبر نفسه ذا بعد اشتراكي وتبناه الحزب الأوحد الحاكم تحت شعار "الاشتراكية الدستورية" وهي عبارة عن سياسة اقتصادية تعتمد ما سمي "التكامل بين القطاع الحكومي والقطاع الخاص والقطاع التعااضدي" وذلك بعد تعصيب أحمد بن صالح الأمين العام السابق للاتحاد العام التونسي للشغل أمينا عاما مساعدا للحزب (محمد الصباح هو الأمين العام) ووزيرا متعدد الصلاحيات احتكر خمس وزارات بأكملها^[14].

ولكن هذا الاتجاه الرسمي توقف خصوصا مع التحولات الاقتصادية التي عرفتها تونس بمرورها نحو نظام اقتصادي متدرج نحو الليبرالية منذ بداية سبعينات القرن العشرين ضمن التوجه الذي تزعّمه الوزير الأول الهادي نويرة^[15]. وعلى الرغم من هذا التوقف، ظلت سيطرة الدولة التونسية على الممارسات والأنشطة التضامنية في المجال الاقتصادي تمارس بطرق أخرى وذلك من خلال توجيه تلك الأنشطة نحو غايات ربحية. وقد اتصلت تلك السياسات عقودا، حيث وبالإضافة إلى إنشاء البنك التونسي للتضامن الذي تأسس بموجب القرار الرئاسي المؤرخ في 21 ماي 1997، عدت السلطات العمومية التونسية إلى تأطير قطاع

القروض الصغرى من خلال القانون عدد 67-99 المؤرخ في 15 جويلية 1999 والمتعلق بالقروض الصغرى الممنوحة من قبل الجمعيات^[16].

وفي نفس سياق السنوات التسعين من القرن العشرين، تمّ أيضا إنشاء مجامع التنمية في قطاع الفلاحة والصيد البحري وذلك بموجب القانون عدد 43 المؤرخ في 10 ماي 1999. كما نجد مجموعة من الإجراءات الأخرى من قبيل إنشاء مجامع المصالح الاقتصادية التي تخضع لمجلة الشركات التجارية والتي تم إصدارها بموجب القانون عدد 93 المؤرخ في 3 نوفمبر 2000 والمتعلّق بإصدار مجلة الشركات التجارية. أما خلال العقد الأول من الألفية الثانية فقد تم إنشاء الشركات التعاونية للخدمات الفلاحية.

من خلال الجرد الذي قدمناه لمختلف الأشكال القانونية للنشاط الاقتصادي الاجتماعي والتضامني في تونس، نلاحظ أن أغلب المجهود التشريعي الذي قامت به الدولة انطلاقا من التسعينيات كان موجها بالأساس لدعم الفلاحين والمنتجين في القطاع الفلاحي وفي الصيد البحري. وعلى الرغم من وجود أرضية تعاونية وتضامنية ضمن مختلف هذه القوانين وما أطرته من ممارسات فإن الغايات الربحية موجودة والعمل على إدماج هذه الأنشطة ضمن سياسات الدولة الاقتصادية الإنتاجية والتوزيعية والتسويقية المرتبطة بالسوق الحكومية وبالسوق الرأسمالية كانت موجودة هي الأخرى. وعليه يمكن القول إن التوجه التشريعي الذي أخذته الدولة التونسية ونشطت فيه على الأخص خلال تسعينيات القرن العشرين لم يكن موجها بشكل مباشر لدعم قطاع اقتصادي اجتماعي وتضامني وإنما موجها بالأساس إلى دعم القطاع الفلاحي وهو ما عكس عدم وجود استراتيجية تركز على اهتمام مباشر بالقطاع. هذا الاهتمام الذي تجدد وفرض نفسه في الساحة الاجتماعية في إثر انفتاح النشاط الجمعياتي بعد سنة 2011 بالأخص، وهو ما مثّل فرصة للنشطين والمبادرين في قطاع الاقتصاد الاجتماعي والتضامني لتوسيع مجالات عملهم ولتجميع مواردهم وتطوير قدرتهم في إطار أنشطة المجتمع المدني. هذه السبورة من التطوير والتمكين تمكنت فيما بعد من خلق حركة واعية بهيوية القطاع والدفاع عن مصالح الناشطين صلبه وهو ما زاد في توسيع مجاله النقاش الذي تاجج مع ما بات يعرف بأزمة جمعية حماية واحات جمنة وما رافقها من سلسلة مفاوضات صعبة مع أجهزة الدولة. حراك توج لاحقا بتوحيد الصفوف للمطالبة بقانون أساسي ينظّم القطاع والذي تم المصادقة عليه في

17 جوان 2020 أي بعدو أكثر من أربع سنوات من تقديمه كمقترح للحكومة من قبل الاتحاد العام التونسي للشغل.

quotes

في بدايات القرن العشرين، تم إنشاء عديد الوداديات والتعاونيات اندرج معظمها ضمن مسار التحرير الوطني.

من أبرز الأنشطة التضامنية التقليدية الأخرى تسيير "الأراضي الاشتراكية" وهي أراض يملكها مشاعا أهل القبائل المنتسبة عليها وفقا للتوارث

^[1] CRESS PACA. (2014). *Diagnostic de l'économie sociale et solidaire dans les gouvernorats d'intervention du projet IESS, Jendouba, Kasserine, Mahdia, Sidi Bouzid*. Retrieved from: https://www.cresspaca.org/images/files/Etude1_ProjetIESS.pdf

^[2] Elachhab, F. (2018). « *L'économie sociale et solidaire en Tunisie, un potentiel troisième secteur ?* ». op.cit

^[3] مجموعة من الباحثين، (2018). الحالة الدينية في تونس 2011-2015. دراسة ميدانية تحليلية. إشراف منير السعيداني واحميدة النيفر ونادر الحمامي، الإشراف العام ورناسة التحرير منير السعيداني. بيروت: مؤمنون بلا حدود للنشر والتوزيع..

^[4] Nablia, S., & Rico, C. (2011). *La conceptualisation de la société civile islamiste selon Ibn Khaldūn*. Université du Québec à Montréal

^[5] تمكن مقارنة هذا بما هو موجود في المغرب مثلا، أنظر، محمد طوذي، " في القبيلة: واقع متعدد الأبعاد"، ترجمة منير السعيداني، عمران للدراسات الاجتماعية والإنسانية، المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات، بيروت، العدد 15، السنة 2016، صص 23-40.

^[6] بن ترديات نضال، " النظام القانوني للأراضي الاشتراكية في تونس"، قضاء نيوز، تونس، 2017.

^[7] حنفي بن عيسى، "الأمازيغ (البربر)"، الموسوعة العربية، الرابط: <http://www.arab-ency.com/detail/1040/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B1>

^[8] JORT. (2016). *Loi n° 2016-69 du 10 août 2016, modifiant et complétant la loi n° 64-28 du 4 juin 1964, fixant le régime des terres collectives*. Tunis

^[9] BELAÏD, H. (2002). « Le mouvement associatif en Tunisie à l'époque coloniale : quelques réflexions », in, *Cahier Du Crasc*, Volume 5, pp.93-104

^[10] منير السعيداني، "رهانات الاقتصاد الاجتماعي والتضامني في تونس". نص مرفون من 13 صفحة، سمح لنا كاتبه مشكوراً بالاطلاع عليه والأخذ منه.

^[11] نفس المصدر.

^[12] JORT. (1954). *Décret sur les sociétés mutualistes (18 février 1954)*. Tunis

^[13] خلال مؤتمر الحزب السابع الذي سمي "مؤتمر المصير" وانعقد بين 19 و22 أكتوبر سنة 1964 بمدينة بنزرت.

^[14] بن صالح أحمد، *مسيرة الانطلاق 1961-1969*، ترجمة محمد قوبعة، مراجعة أحمد العايد، دار الجنوب، تونس، 2012.

^[15] Moudoud, E. (1985). « L'impossible régionalisation « jacobine » et le dilemme des disparités régionales en Tunisie ». in, *La Revue Canadienne Des Sciences Régionales*, Volume 8, n° 3, pp.413-438

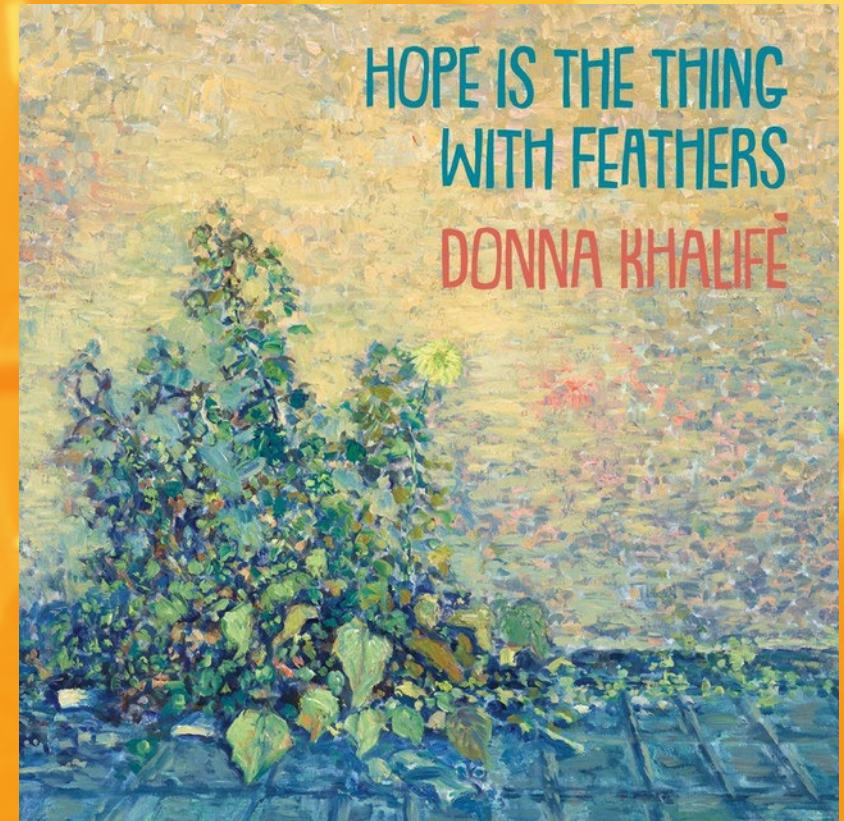
^[16] JORT. (2009). *Loi organique n° 99-67 du 15 juillet 1999, relative aux micro-crédits accordés par les associations*. Tunisie

donna khalifé

Hope is the thing with feathers

○ Listen to the full album,
Hope is the thing with feathers (2019)

<https://open.spotify.com/album/1SpA0EYYBsJMziSbb24c88>



Donna Khalifé, Hope is the thing with Feathers [Album], 2019.
Cover Painting : City Blossom** by Oussama Baalbaki

samar kanafani

...public space in Lebanon has been described as under threat...

Hanna Baumann & Samar Kanafani, "Vulnerability and Public Services in the Lebanese Context of Mass Displacement: a Literature Review", RELIEF Centre (UCL Centre for Global Prosperity: London, 2020), 21. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10116036/>

“Under what circumstances would dwellers in decay - or in precarious conditions generally - contribute to forms of resistance against and change of the conditions of their own precarity?”

Samar Kanafani, "Made to Fall Apart: an Ethnography of Old Houses and Urban Renewal in Beirut" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2016), 221.

Mansion is the present-day name of an old once-abandoned three-story late 19th century villa on Abdel Kader Street, in the neighbourhood of Zoqaq el-Blat, a neighbourhood just southwest of the part of Beirut's city centre, which Solidere reconstructed. A cultural collective took charge of the house in 2012 gradually growing in reputation, number of occupants and activities. One of its event announcements described it as an abandoned 800m2 villa that was transformed into a multipurpose collective space with studios and offices for artists, researchers, designers, architects and cultural NGOs.

Samar Kanafani, "Made to Fall Apart: an Ethnography of Old Houses and Urban Renewal in Beirut" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2016), 181.

ANATOMY OF A HOUSE COLLECTIVE

There are over twenty people working in Mansion in the nine or so rooms available as personal studio spaces, constituting what they and I have called a collective. Ghassan collects monetary contributions, allocating some for running costs. He insists that this contribution is not “rent,” and while urging late-payers after the start of the month to pay, he has often felt frustrated for “being made to feel like a landlord” pursuing his tenants every month. He says this with some displeasure both with people’s lack of punctuality and with the category of “landlord,” whose stereotypical calculation and miserliness he dissociates from his way of doing things. A treasury committee of four Mansioners restocks on vitals and pays the electric generator and telephone bills. Mansioners with studios work in architecture, graphic design, furniture design, film and print illustration, video editing, film conservation, performance arts, curating, industrial design, painting, silk-screening, social anthropology, and bicycle courier service. In addition to this, activist associations and coalitions use Mansion’s garden and common hall to meet and store campaign materials, while private NGOs and cultural events- organisers occasionally use the space for their private or public events. The rule of such use is if the organisation has money it pays a contribution for its use; but if it has no budget and if the content of the activities aligns itself with Mansion’s rights-based social ethos then it can use the space for free. As such, the diverse activities and personal commitments of both Mansioners and other Mansion users (those without studios) impose various rhythms of work and leisure in the house, producing distinct atmospheres and degrees of animation at various times of the day, various days in the week and various moments in the year. It also renders the house somewhat organic in its spatial configuration. A house proper, with kitchen, bathrooms, shared living area, passageways, mezzanines, cellar and yards, Mansion gets dirty, cluttered, and broken. Parts of it get neglected and gradually collect dust until they are derelict and virtually useless. Then suddenly the cellar, which has stood stuffed to bursting with old furniture and stocks of magazines for years, will be cleared, cleaned, and readied for public and in- house use as a “recording studio.” For these drastic changes to happen Ghassan receives a small grant or another Mansioner finds the time and a burst of enthusiasm to transform a dilapidated nook of the house for new and improved dwelling. All the while, a half lemon might sit decomposing in the fridge for weeks without anyone removing it, but someone taking the time to attach a funny note on the fruit like “who’s science experiment is this?” telling whoever left it to throw it away.

Thus, it would seem that Mansion’s objects and people alike inhabit the house at different tempos of activity and idleness, change and stagnation, optimism and indifference. This anatomy becomes all the more justifiable in a space such as Mansion where things have been left for years to fall apart and erode, to accumulate and over- grow, to stain – in a word to take on the materiality of decay. Though Ghassan and the first Mansioners stepped in to redress these material transformations to a modicum at the start of the project in 2012, and though they continue to do so on a need-to basis, the process of decay continues in parallel with repair. Meanwhile, some material substances have decayed beyond (affordable) repair. In other cases, Mansioners (or Ghassan, or Sandra or whoever) prioritised the repair of one thing over another. The indeterminacy of the agent of such prioritisation is also part of Mansion’s somewhat spontaneous mode of dwelling, such that while the central voices and actors are known to be Ghassan and Sandra, unannounced collaborations with other Mansioners constantly produce unexpected changes in the space. In all cases, however, Mansioners have favoured using recycled materials and in-house knowledge and labour, particularly of people with architectural or crafting abilities, to maintain the house. Saving costs, this method is also part of an ethos of self-sufficiency, ingenuity, frugality, sustainability and collaboration that finds resonance with other communal type models that Mansion resembles. Mansioners are, however, too divergent in their views and practices to be understood as an “intentional community,” defined as a group of people with shared beliefs and practices who decide to live together in some level of estrangement from the rest of society (Sargisson 2007: 397, 401). Yet a significant number of Mansioners share enough social and political ideals to entertain aspirations of a common mission with its efficient implementation, distinct from normative trends in building, dwelling and communing with other people.

daniele genadry



Greenlake I, graphite on mylar, 22 x 30cm, 2018.
Courtesy of the artist



Jirid, graphite on mylar, 22 x 30cm, 2016.
Courtesy of the artist

barakunan

Ethostopia: Rituals of an internationalist society!

Barakunan Publishing, ETHOSTOPIA: Rituals of an internationalist society! (July 2020). Barakunan.
Produced by Barakunan, composed by Zahreddine, designed by Ghiya Haidar

STEP 1: PATH TO ETHOSTOPIA

HEALING THROUGH THE COLLECTIVE BODY

Day of Healing Through the Collective Body

Throughout this day, focus will be given to matters of experience. How have our experiences affected our wellbeing- personal, collective? Individual? Organizational? Spiritual? Oftentimes it is our personal wounds which prevent us from finding solace in the experience of collectivity alone, seeking out fringe personal geo-cartographies, mapping subconscious activity as an urban sprawl.

Hour of Adoration and Praise

Gather in groups of 10. In rotating cycles, every member of the group stands as the Guest, who stands at the center of the circle of their elected tribe, to be praised by the community. Petitions can be made in times of great distress for an individual to host an Hour of Adoration and Praise outside of regular schedule hours.

The Master of Ceremony leads. The Guest, hosted by the MC, stands with both hands upward, palms outward, raised in adoration. Offerings are left at the foot of the MC.

○ Read the full Path to Ethostopia

<https://barakunan.com/blogs/news/ethostopia-fix-title>

Lessons in empathy and listening

It is nearly impossible to speak whilst simultaneously listening. Thus it is one of the most important traits of a Complete Revolutionary Self who has adopted the Way of Coming Forth into the Future and excelling at the requirements and expectations of Ethostopia to be able to listen, to choose listening over speaking, to prefer to hear the ideas of others over presenting their own.

STEP 3: PATH TO ETHOSTOPIA

SOWING
THE
SEEDS
OF
THE FUTURE

EVERY DAY, EVERY WEEK, EVERY MOMENT IN TIME REQUIRES ITS OWN SET OF PRIORITIES. WE STRIVE TO FACE EACH MOMENT ACCORDING TO ITS OWN PARTICULAR NEED, CALLING ON A SPECIFIC PRESENCE OF MIND - A NEWNESS EVERY TIME. EVERY DAY, WE ARE SOWING THE SEEDS OF THE FUTURE FOR GENERATIONS WHO ARE FATED TO LIVE BY BOTH THE BOUNTIES WE HAVE PLANTED AND THE DESTRUCTION WE HAVE CAUSED. KILL YOUR DARLINGS AND POCKET THEIR REMAINS.

evgenia emets

Forest Codex

I soar between
Ridges of mountains
Vast expanse
Valley after valley
Streams come down
From all directions
Unstoppable flow
Meandering
Eternal Forest
Everything is motion
My gaze connects all
My ears hear
Continuity of sound
Life is never quiet
Beyond time
I see no borders
Every living being
Is essential
The future is mutual
We must imagine
1000 years
It is a slow turning

Eu voo entre
Cristas das montanhas
Vastidão imensa
Vale após vale
Regueiros descem
De todos os pontos
Fluxo imparável
Serpenteando
Eterna Floresta
Tudo é movimento
Meu olhar tudo une
Contínuo som
Oiço
Desassossego
Para lá do tempo
Não vejo fronteiras
Cada sêr
É essencial
O futuro é mútuo
Imaginemos
1000 anos
É lenta a viragem

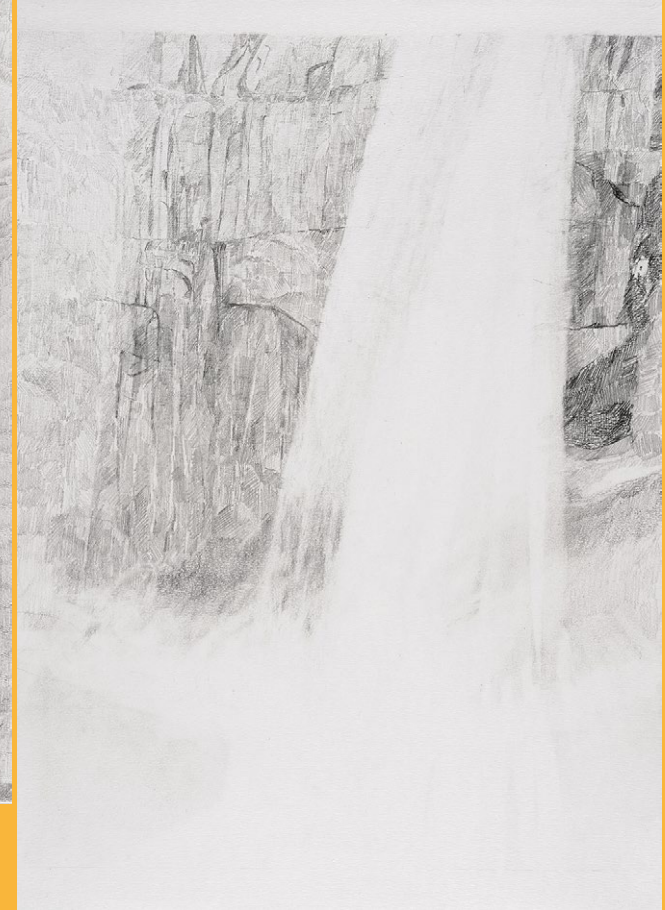
From the series 'Forest Codex', 68x62cm
Ink, water on paper, 2018



A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons



Daniele Genadry, *Falling Light I,II,III*, graphite on paper, 30 x 42cm, 2017.
Courtesy of the artist



toolkit

On our digital bookshelves you can find:

Natasha Myers: How to grow liveable worlds?

- Read this step-by-step guide, and incantation, to getting out of the Anthropocene and imagine a more integrated world: Natasha Myers, "How to grow liveable worlds: Ten (not-so-easy) steps for life in the Planthropocene", ABC, January 7, 2021:

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/natasha-myers-how-to-grow-liveable-worlds-ten-not-so-easy-step/11906548>



Bojana Piškur: Trees, More-Than-Human Collectives

- From Slovenia to India, we are invited to read forests as complex communities where trees are only one of the many species populating them. "How do we become better at recognizing "more-than-human" modes of life without anthropomorphizing nonhuman life? How do we practice care, freedom, justice, and equality with nonhumans?" Bojana Piškur, 'Trees, More-Than-Human Collectives' e-flux, Issue 119 (June 2021).

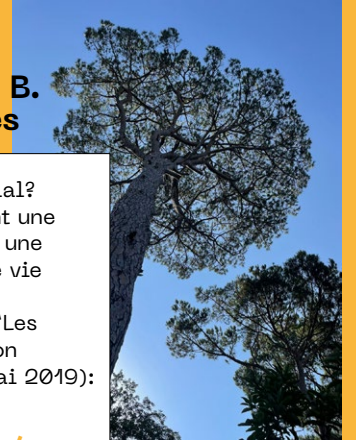
<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/119/402976/trees-more-than-human-collectives/>

Baptiste Morizot et Paul B. Preciado : Les Diplomates

- S'inspirer du loup comme animal social? Plongez dans cette lecture envisageant une autre politique de la diplomatie pour une nouvelle cohabitation entre formes de vie plurielles. Baptiste Morizot et Paul B. Preciado, "Les Diplomates", Ensemble, une Déclaration d'Interdépendance, Luma Days #3 (Mai 2019): 64 - 79.

https://lumadays.org/luma_img/Revue-Luma-Days-3.pdf

Ou bien, visionnez l'échange en Replay [ici](#).



Head to MASSIA residency, Estonia (www.massia.ee) and join the co-conspiracy with FO.R.E.ST (Forum For Radical Ecology Studies)

<http://forest-forest.org/>

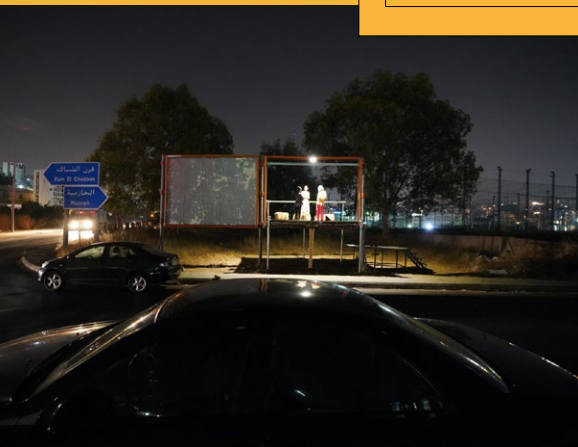
AEC focus

Omar Fakhoury & Christian Zahr Terrace / صطيحة Billboard intervention

27 August, 2021 – 5 September / 6:00 – 9:00 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

Two solitary billboards stand along the high road overlooking Beirut's RiverLESS Forest. Omar Fakhoury & Christian Zahr flipped the vertical surface of one of the billboards to convert it to a terrace, a place of gathering overlooking the forest.

Inspired by Antony Gormley's Fourth Plinth commission, the artists called on the public to activate Terrace / صطيحة as an open stage, inviting anyone to intervene throughout **Art, Ecology and the Commons'** ten-day program.



© Léa Cremona

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons



A talk with Samar Kanafani

Samar Kanafani is a social anthropologist based in Beirut, whose research stems from an investigation of ruins, public spaces, and urban regeneration, to tackle questions such as the migrant housing crisis or the sense of place in a city. She has recently been pursuing research on the practice of commoning, based on the case-study of Mansion, an abandoned twentieth-century villa, transformed into a shared initiative and community.

"How do people behave in the Commons?"

How to repair? Learning from our anthropocentric mistakes.



estado de minas

O modo de funcionamento da humanidade entrou em crise by Bertha Maakaroun

BERTHA MAAKAROUN

O mundo está em suspensão. O momento é de recolhimento, de silêncio. A experiência do isolamento social, para enfrentar o horror do novo coronavírus, pode trazer lições valiosas à humanidade. “Se essa tragédia serve para alguma coisa é mostrar quem nós somos. E para nós refletirmos e prestar atenção ao sentido do que venha mesmo ser humano. E não sei se vamos sair dessa experiência da mesma maneira que entramos. Tomara que não”, afirma o escritor Ailton Krenak, de 66 anos, um dos mais destacados ativistas do movimento socioambiental e de defesa dos direitos indígenas e doutor honoris causa pela Universidade de Iuz de Fora.

Recolhido em sua aldeia no Rio Doce, o autor de *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo* (Companhia das Letras) observa que o ser humano descolou-se da natureza e da sintonia com a terra, “devorada” por grandes corporações que controlam os recursos financeiros do planeta e persistem na concepção europeia colonizadora de que exista uma ‘humanidade’, enclausurada na maior parte de sua vida em ambientes artificiais. “Essa chamada humanidade, na verdade, constitui um grupo seleto que exclui uma variedade de sub-humanidades, caiçaras, índios, quilombolas, aborígenes, que vivem agarrados à terra, aos seus lugares de origem, que são coletivos vinculados à sua memória ancestral e identidade. Esse grupo exclui também 70% das populações arrancadas do campo e das florestas, que estão nas favelas e periferias, alienadas do mínimo exercício do ser, sem referências que sustentam a sua identidade. São lançadas nesse liquidificador chamado humanidade”, acredita.

Para Ailton Krenak, os seres humanos têm neste isolamento social pelo qual passa a maior parte do planeta uma oportunidade de pausa e correção de rumos. “Todos precisam despertar. Se, durante um tempo, éramos nós, os povos indígenas, que estávamos ameaçados de ruptura ou da extinção dos sentidos das nossas vidas, hoje estamos todos diante da iminência de a terra não suportar a nossa demanda. Tomara que, depois de tudo isso, não voltemos à chamada ‘normalidade’, pois se voltarmos é porque não valeu nada a morte de milhares de pessoas no mundo inteiro. Aí, sim, teremos provado o que é a humanidade e uma mentira”. A seguir, mais trechos da entrevista exclusiva com o escritor.

No início da obra *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo*, o senhor introduz uma discussão que parte da indagação: ‘Somos mesmo uma humanidade?’. O senhor poderia responder à este provocação, particularmente mais intrigante nestes tempos de pandemia: somos uma humanidade?

Eu penso que essa pergunta fica em suspensão. Vivemos esta experiência de isolamento social, como está sendo definida a experiência do confinamento, em que o mundo inteiro tem de se recolher. Ao mesmo tempo, assistimos a uma tragédia de gente morrendo em diferentes lugares do mundo, ao ponto de na Itália os corpos serem colocados em carniêiras para incinerar, sem sequer ser identificados. Essa dor, talvez ajude a responder a essa pergunta. Nós nos acostumamos com a ideia de que somos uma humanidade. Embora a ideia tenha sido naturalizada, ninguém mais presta atenção ao sentido do que venha mesmo ser humano. É como se tivéssemos várias crianças brincando que, por imaginar essa fantasia da infância, continuassem a brincar por tempo indeterminado. Viramos adultos, estamos devastando o planeta, criando um fosso gigantesco de desigualdades entre povos e as sociedades. De modo que há uma sub-humanidade que vive uma grande miséria, sem chance de sair dela. Isso também foi naturalizado. O presidente da República disse outro dia que brasileiros vivem em esgoto. Esse tipo de mentalidade doente está dominando o planeta. E veja agora esse vírus, um organismo do planeta, responder a essa alienação dos humanos com um ataque à forma de vida insustentável que adotamos por livre escolha, essa fantástica liberdade que todos adoram reivindicar, mas ninguém se pergunta sobre seu preço. Veja que esse vírus está discriminando essa humanidade: ele não mata pássaros, urso, nenhum outro ser, apenas humanos. Apenas a humanidade está sendo discriminada. Quem está em pânico são os povos humanos, o modo de funcionamento deles entrou em crise. Consolidaram esse pacto que é chamado de humanidade, que vai sendo descolada de uma maneira absoluta



Ailton Krenak: “A Terra está falando para a humanidade: ‘Silêncio’. Esse é também o significado do recolhimento”

desse organismo que é a Terra, vivendo numa abstração civilizatória que suprime a diversidade, nega a pluralidade das formas de vida, de existência e de hábitos. Os únicos núcleos que ainda consideram que precisam ficar agarrados nessa terra são aqueles que ficaram meio esquecidos pelas bordas do planeta, nas margens dos rios, nas beiras dos oceanos, na África, na Ásia ou na América Latina. Esta é a sub-humanidade: caiçaras, índios, quilombolas, aborígenes. Existe, então, uma humanidade que integra um clube seleto, vamos dizer, bacana. E tem uma cantada mais rústica e orgânica, uma sintonia com a natureza, que fica agarrada na terra. Eu não me sinto parte dessa humanidade. Eu me sinto excluído dela. Por isso digo, no livro, que é um clube seleto, que não aceita novos sócios.

Filosoficamente, como interpreta a pandemia que o ameaça o mundo?

Estamos há muito divorciados desse organismo vivo que é a Terra. Do nosso divorcio das integrações e interações com a nossa mãe, a Terra, resulta que ela está nos deixando órfãos, não só os que em diferente graduação são chamados de índios, indígenas ou povos indígenas, mas todos. Inquieto a humanidade de está se distanciando do seu lugar, um monte de corporações espertalhanças tomam conta e submete o planeta: acabam com florestas, montanhas, transformam tudo em mercados. Fomos, durante muito tempo, embalados com a história de que somos a humanidade e nos alienando desse organismo de que somos parte, a Terra, e passamos a pensar que ele é uma coisa e nós, outra, a Terra e a humanidade. Eu não percebo onde tem alguma coisa que não seja natureza. Tudo é natureza. O cosmos é natureza. Tudo em que eu consigo pensar é natureza. Nós, a humanidade, vamos viver em ambientes artificiais produzidos pelas mesmas corporações que são os donos da grana. Agora, já imaginou que esse organismo o vírus, possa também ter se cansado da gente e nos ‘desligado’? Sabe como faz isso? Tirando o nosso oxigênio. Dizem que a COVID-19, quando evolui para os pulmões, se não tiver bomba, aparelho para alimentar de oxigênio, a pessoa morre. Quantas máquinas dessa vamos ter de fazer? Para bilhões de pessoas na terra? A nossa mãe, a Terra, dá de graça o oxigênio, põe a gente para dormir, desperta de manhã com sol, dá oxigênio, deixa pássaros cantar, as correntezas, as brisas, cria esse mundo maravilhoso para compartilhar, e o que a gente faz com ele? Isso pode significar uma mãe amorosa, que decidiu fazer o filho calar a boca pelo menos por um instante. Não é porque não goste dele, mas quer ensinar alguma coisa para ele. Filho, silêncio. A Terra está falando isso para a humanidade. E lá ele, tão maravilhoso que não é ordem imperativa, lá simplesmente está dizendo para a gente: silêncio. Esse é também o significado do recolhimento.

Os idosos, chamados de grupo de risco, em algumas abordagens são lembrados como algo descartável – do tipo, “alguns vão morrer”, como algo inevitável. Como avalia esta abordagem que parece arrancar tudo e qual que humanidade do indivíduo, tornando-o uma estelita?

Esse tipo de abordagem cria uma insegurança dela,



IDEIAS PARA ADIAR O FIM DO MUNDO

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as pessoas que amam os idosos, que são avós, pais, filhos, irmãos de outras pessoas, que estão na idade útil de trabalho. É uma palavra insensata, não tem sentido que alguém em tão consciência faça comunicação pública dizendo alguns vão morrer. É uma banalização da vida, mas também é uma banalização do poder da palavra. Pois alguém que faz uma emissão dessa está pronunciando a condenação. Se já diretamente dirigida a alguém em idade avançada, com 80, 90, 100 anos. Sejam os filhos, netos, todas as pessoas que têm afeto uns com outros. Imagine se vou ficar em paz pensando que minha mãe ou meu pai podem ser descartados. Eles são o sentido de eu estar vivo. Se eles podem ser descartados eu também posso. Olhando para além do Brasil, mirando o mundo, Foucault tem uma obra fantástica: *Vigiar e punir*. Nesse livro, diz que essa sociedade de mercado que vivemos, essa coisa mercantil, só considera o ser humano útil quando está produzindo. Com o avanço do capitalismo, foi criado um instrumento que é o de deixar viver e de fazer morrer: quando deixa de produzir, passa a ser um custo. Ou você produz as condições para você viver, então produz as condições para você morrer. Essa coisa que conhecemos como a Previdência, que existe em todos os países com economia de mercado, ela tem um custo. Os governos estão achando que, se morrem todas as pessoas que representam custo, seria ótimo. Isso significa dizer: pode deixar morrer os que integram os grupos de risco. Não é ato falho de quem fala, a pessoa não é doída, é lúcida, sabe o que está falando.

Como está a sua rotina, agora com o isolamento social? Parei de andar mundo afóra, suspendi compromissos. Estou com a minha família na aldeia Krenak, no Médio Rio Doce. Já estávamos aqui de luto com o nosso Rio Doce. Não imaginava que o mundo faria

A few things we learned about Art, Ecology & The Commons

esse luto conosco. Está todo mundo parado. Todo mundo. Quando os engenheiros me disseram que iriam usar a engenharia, a tecnologia para recuperar o Rio Doce, perguntaram a minha opinião. Eu disse: a minha sugestão é impossível de colocar em prática. Pois teríamos de parar todas as atividades humanas que incidem sobre o corpo do rio, a 100 quilômetros na margem direita e esquerda do rio, até que voltasse a ter vida. O engenheiro me disse: ‘Mas isso é impossível’. O mundo não pode parar. E o mundo parou. Desde muito tempo a minha comunidade com tudo o que chamam de natureza experiência que não vejo muita gente que vive na vida de valorizando lá vivessos ridicularizando, ele conversa com árvore, abraça árvore, conversa com o rio, contempla a montanha, como se isso fosse uma espécie de alienação. Essa é a minha experiência de vida. Se é alienação, sou alienado no sentido comum que as pessoas. Há muito tempo não programo atividades para depois. Temos de parar de ser convencidos. Não sabemos se estaremos vivos amanhã. Temos de parar de vender o amanhã.

Agora o prognóstico, ou algo do tipo: se continuarmos ao ritmo de sempre, em fins avaliação, que fim nos aguarda?

O ritmo de hoje não é o da semana passada nem o do ano novo, do verão, de janeiro ou fevereiro. O mundo está agora numa suspensão. E não sei se vamos sair dessa experiência da mesma maneira que entramos. Desconfio que não vai ser a mesma coisa depois. Se tiver depois. Tem muita gente que suspende projetos, atividades que estavam fazendo. As pessoas acham que basta mudar o calendário. Estão enganadas. Pode não haver o ano que vem. Em artigo que li sobre a pandemia, o sociólogo italiano Domenico de Masi cita a obra profética *A peste*, de Albert Camus, a peste pode vir e ir embora sem que o coração do homem seja modificado. Ele cita trecho inteiro do romance em que o personagem diz, aquele bacilo que trouxe aquela mortandade, que parece que tinha sido dominado, podia continuar oculto em alguma dobra, algum cortinão, janela, poltrona, só oportando o dia em que, infelizmente ou não, a peste acordaria seus ratos para mandá-los morrer numa cidade feliz. Este vírus que nos ameaça não é o mesmo na China, na Itália, nos Estados e no Brasil. Ele muda. E se muda, não sabemos o que é. Então seria muito bom parar de fazer projetos para amanhã, para o ano que vem e nos ater ao aqui e agora. Não tenho certeza nenhuma se no ano que vem tudo vai continuar a acontecer como se nada tivesse mudado. E tomara que não voltarmos à normalidade, pois se voltarmos é porque não valeu nada a morte de milhares de pessoas no mundo inteiro. Aí, sim, teremos provado que a humanidade é uma mentira. Se essa tragédia serve para alguma coisa, é nos mostrar quem nós somos. Estamos em suspensão. Vamos ver o que vai acontecer.

Quais são os seus ideais e inspirações para adiar o fim do mundo?

Precisamos ser críticos a essa ideia plasmada de humanidade homogênea em que o consumo tomou o lugar daquilo que antes era cidadania. Para que a cidadania, alteridade, estar no mundo de uma maneira crítica e consiente, se você pode ser um consumidor? Essa ideia sempre a experiência de viver numa terra cheia de sentido, numa plataforma para diferentes conspensões. Boaventura de Sousa Santos nos ensina que a ecologia dos saberes deveria também integrar nossa experiência cotidiana, inspirar nossas escolhas sobre o lugar em que queremos viver, nossa experiência como comunidade. Nosso tempo é especialista em criar ausências: do sentido de viver em sociedade, do propósito da experiência da vida. Isso gera uma intolerância muito grande com relação a quem ainda é capaz de experimentar o prazer de estar vivo, de dançar, de cantar. E está cheio de pequenas constelações de gente espalhada pelo mundo que dança, canta, faz chover. O tipo de humanidade zumbi que estamos experimentando a integrar não tolera tanto prazer, tanta fruição de vida. Então, pregar o fim do mundo como uma possibilidade de fazer a gente desistir dos nossos próprios sonhos. É a minha provocação sobre adiar o fim do mundo e especialmente sempre poder contar mais uma história. Se pudermos fazer isso, adiaríamos o fim. Como os povos originários do Brasil lidaram com a colonização, que queria acabar com os seus povos. Quais estratégias esses povos utilizaram para cruzar esse pesadelo e chegar ao século 21 ainda esperando, reivindicando e desafiando o coro dos conselheiros? Vi as diferentes manobras que os nossos antepassados fizeram e me alimentei delas, da criatividade e da poesia que inspirou a resistência desses povos.

“O modo de funcionamento da humanidade entrou em crise”

Em entrevista exclusiva, o líder indígena Ailton Krenak reflete sobre o significado da pandemia e faz um alerta: “Se voltarmos à chamada ‘normalidade’, não valerem de nada as mortes de milhares de pessoas”

Bertha Maakaroun, “O modo de funcionamento da humanidade entrou em crise”, opina Ailton Krenak (November 2020). Originally published in Estado de Minas

carolina caycedo

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Art, Ecology & The Commons

Carolina Caycedo, "Land of Friends" (Still), 2014. 1 channel HD video. 38 min.
Film stills courtesy of the artist



as a raw material

lamia joreige

Under-Writing Beirut — Nahr

Under-Writing Beirut – Nahr (the Arabic word for river)¹ investigates the urban areas adjacent to Beirut’s river particularly the area named *Jisr el Wati* (the low bridge in English)². In this project I look back, from the present, at the sociological, political and economic history of this area in order to understand and produce narratives that are meaningful today and insightful into the past. What kind of narratives can emerge from and be triggered by such places, rather than represent them? It is a question I have raised in my feature film *And the living is easy* (2014). How has political decision-making or lack thereof transformed the area and how does it translate into its everyday life, making this area the space where Lebanon’s most crucial problems converge? How does such a place affect and inform the production of art?

My initial involvement in this landscape started in 2004 when searching for a space to establish Beirut Art Center (BAC),³ which I cofounded with Sandra Dagher, and which opened in this area in January 2009. Our final choice of this area was led by both the necessity to find a large space and the financial restrictions related to the project. Indeed, the place was mostly filled with factories and warehouses, originally built in the 40’s, 50’s and 60’s. Today the neighborhood is a largely diversified area on the edge of Beirut city, both in terms of its populace and their economic activities. Such diversification spans many nationalities and ethnic groups of refugees and migrant workers. Economically, the diversification reflects the activities of the populace ranging from craftsmen, art practitioners, and prostitutes to construction workers, architects, engineers and real estate development companies. Although administratively part of Ashrafieh in Beirut, the place is perceived as the periphery of the city.

The recent and rapid transformation of this area invites a reflection on several intertwined aspects that engage the river and its surroundings. The first one revolves around the location of Nahr Beirut in relation to the city and engages with the idea of ‘borderscape’⁴. While defining the eastern edge of the city, the river acts both as a connector and a separator between Beirut and its suburbs.⁵ The second aspect takes up the diverse migrant population that has historically been located at the periphery of the city, absorbing the surplus of incomers to the urban center, which led to the creation of settlements by the river, and constituted later what was named the

“belt of misery.”⁶ One last aspect involves the potential for gentrification of this area, one of the few remaining underexploited spaces in the capital, starting with the fast development of what has been a non-residential neighborhood of poor and derelict character as it is manifested in its rundown factories, train station, as well as in illegal practices such as prostitution and criminality, into a place of interest for art practitioners and soon a high rise residential area.

“Nearer to the coast, again to the east, overlooking the modern port and bordered by a river that bears the city’s name, Nahr Beirut (known to the ancient Romans as Magoras), the hill of Ashrafiyeh rises to a height of more than three hundred feet.”⁷

Nahr Beirut defines the eastern border of Beirut since the official decree of 1956.⁸ It springs from the Western slopes of Mount Lebanon and runs westwards then northwards separating Beirut from its eastern suburbs. It flows into Beirut’s northern Mediterranean coast, to the east of the port. The Romans had built a dam to diverge the water under the Daychounieh source to convey water to the city through the aqueduct of Zubayda. The system supplied water to the city until it fell in ruins during early Ottoman times. Since then, Nahr Beirut contributes only partially to irrigating the city. Later, under the French mandate, a concrete division dam was built (1934) to irrigate agricultural lands around the river.⁹ The built infrastructure only lasted a year. The canalization of Nahr Beirut from the waterfront to Sin El Fil was achieved in 1968. It was triggered by the damaging Nahr Beirut flood of 1942 which resulted from the migrants’ gradual and informal urbanization and encroachment on the river flood zone¹⁰ but also and especially by the 100 years flood of Nahr Abou Ali in the Northern city of Tripoli in 1955, which claimed human lives and destroyed thousands of houses and agrarian lands.¹¹ Interrupted by the civil war, the canalization of the area between Sin el Fil and Jisr el Basha was only completed in 1998. There are currently six bridges that connect Beirut to its suburbs across the river which were built in the period 1940s-1970s: the Dora bridge, the Borj Hammoud bridge (on the old remnants of the Ottoman bridge), *Jisr el Wati* at Sin el Fil, and *Jisr el Basha* situated meters away from the Ottoman bridge remains.¹² The bridge right by Beirut Art Center is *Jisr el Wati*, mentioned earlier, which is now rapidly transforming.

“A finer situation cannot be imagined; it is a green sod, and ends on the east side with a hanging ground over a beautiful valley, through which the river Bayreut runs; the north end commands a view of the sea, and a prospect of the fine gardens of Bayreut to the north-west. [...] set forward on my journey from Bayreut on the first of June, and went to the east along the side of the bay; after having travelled about a league, we came to the place where they say St. George killed the dragon”¹³ which was about to devour the king of Bayreut’s daughter:

there is a mosque on the spot, which was formerly a Greek church; near it as well, and they say, that the dragon usually came out of the hole, which is now the mouth of it. The writers of the middle age say this place was called Cappadocia. [...] About a mile to the East of this place we crossed over the river of Bayreut, on a bridge of seven arches, some of which are of ancient workmanship. This river runs to the north along the plain, which is east of the grove of pines; it may be river Magoras, of Pliny, and agrees with his order in speaking of places; though some think it is the same as the Tamyras.”¹⁴

Until 1850, the Nahr had been an agricultural plain. Accounts by inhabitants describe the areas around the river in the first half of the twentieth century as abounding with “nature”: banana trees, orange and lemon trees, tomatoes, and gardens. Back then, the river was used by its residents for domestic and daily activities: mothers used to do laundry in the river on Saturdays and use the river water for cooking, children used to bathe there too and some would even fish in it or play at catching frogs and snakes. People regularly crossed the river to visit their relatives living across or to shop in specialized markets in Achrafieh or Sin el Fil. In other cases, the river was a safety valve separating rival Armenian political communities from each other who even turned the bridge dating from the French mandate into a battlefield at some point in time.¹⁵

The development of the port as a major asset for the capital city’s rise in the nineteenth century propagated the infrastructural development of the areas extending behind the port.¹⁶ In 1834, the lazaretto was built as part of the port development and as a result of the Egyptian concern for public hygiene in confining epidemics. It was chosen to “lay outside the city, but not too far” in the area which kept the name, Quarantina, until today.¹⁷ The establishment of the quarantine further promoted the economic development of Beirut by upgrading and expanding the harbor to an international port of call.¹⁸ Starting in the 1920s the Nahr got populated and urbanized at a rapid pace.¹⁹ Because of its location, Nahr Beirut developed into a major infrastructural hub connecting the port to the hinterlands.²⁰ Specifically, warehouses and shipping services developed in the waterfront zone of the river. Indeed, increase in maritime commercial traffic led to the development of warehouses for storage and recycling of bulky merchandise. All in all, it was a “hasty and unplanned urban development” which resulted in a display of symptoms of blight and degeneration in the port region.²¹

“All description of Beirut prior to the 1860’s attests to this. Until then, it was no more than a small fortified medieval town with seven main gates and about one

¹ Under-Writing Beirut is an ongoing project in which I look at historically and personally significant locations within Beirut’s present. Like a palimpsest, the project incorporates various layers of time and existence, creating links between the traces that record such places’ previous realities and the fictions that reinvent them. *Mathaf*, the Arabic word for museum, was the first chapter of this project, and was commissioned for the *Shajiah Biennial 11*, in 2013.

² According to Halim Fayad, whose family established a warehouse in 1956 in the area of *Jisr el Wati*, the bridge was built by the British in the 40’s. The naming of the bridge refers to its height which was low. Because the low bridge flooded every time the river level rose, it was further elevated later on and paved to prevent this problem from occurring. Based on an interview with Halim Fayad, January 20, 2015.

³ Beirut Art Center (BAC) is a non-profit association, space and platform dedicated to contemporary art in Lebanon. The aim of the center is to produce, present and promote local and international contemporary art and cultural practice in a structure that is open to the public and active throughout the year. www.beirutartcenter.org

⁴ Rajaram, Prem Kumar, and Grundy-Warr, Carl, eds. *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory’s Edge*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 18 January 2015.

⁵ Frem, Sandra. *Nahr Beirut: Projections on an Infrastructural Landscape*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, Department of Architecture, 2009.

⁶ Kassir, Samir. *Beirut*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Frem, Sandra. *Nahr Beirut*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Based on a conversation with urbanist Habib Debs, December 10, 2015.

¹² Frem, Sandra. *Nahr Beirut*.

¹³ According to the Christians, in the old times a huge dragon appeared in Beirut. The inhabitants of Beirut chose each year a young girl and offered her as a tribute to the dragon and his fierceness. One year, by a stroke of fate the daughter of the city’s

king was chosen. He led his daughter, at night, to the place designated by the dragon. The princess implored God and St George appeared to her. When the dragon arrived, St George attacked it and killed it. The king of Beirut built a church in that very place, near the river. The Christians represent this event in all the churches of their country and it’s rare to find one without an image of the saint” according to Saleh Bin Yahya, (*History of Beirut*, Dar el Machreq, 1969)

¹⁴ Pococke, Richard. *A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries*. Vol. 2 Part 1 London: Printed for the author, 1743.

¹⁵ Testimonials collected by Haig Papazian in Frem, Sandra. *Nahr Beirut: Projections on an Infrastructural Landscape*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, Department of Architecture, 2009.

¹⁶ Khalaf, Samir. *Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj*. London : Saqi, 2006.

¹⁷ Kassir, Samir. *Beirut*.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Frem, Sandra. *Nahr Beirut*.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Khalaf, Samir. *Heart of Beirut*.

quarter of a square mile surrounded by gardens. The central core of the city was built around its historic port and mole with defenses on the landward side and two towers at the entrance of the port. As in most European towns before industrialization, people in Beirut lived and worked within the same area and carried on nearly all their daily routines within the same urban quarter.²²

Around the same time, a wave of migrants established their home around Beirut's river. In World War One after the Genocide of the Armenians by the Turks, tens of thousands fled their home and settled in a camp in Quarantina and most later moved to Borj Hammoud. Syrian communities arrived in this area following deportation campaigns by the Ottoman Empire in the early 1920s.²³ Several waves of incoming Kurds fleeing the Turkification policy under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and its associated violence also settled in the Quarantina. In 1948, an influx of Palestinian refugees settled in these camps and others around the city. Reports on slums often mention Arab workers—especially Syrian—in the slums prior to the war.²⁴ Demographic pressures on the periphery of Beirut manifested in poorly constructed and nondescript buildings: “[i]mmigrants crowded together instead in old, hastily adapted rural cottages or in new concrete structures, ill-equipped and devoid of elegance, along mostly unpaved roads.”²⁵ The shortage of municipal and public services in the periphery of Beirut facilitated the emergence of poverty and disease.

*“Not only was the spread of urbanization the result of a lack of systematic planning; it occurred at a pace that outstripped the city’s ability to provide basic services, with the result that Beirut could not rapidly assimilate so many newcomers without itself being deformed.”*²⁶

The economic boom in the late 1940s triggered the growth of the industry sector along the river.²⁷ Furthermore, the building boom of the 1950s-60s and the pressure from private developers contributed to the unregulated patterns of growth around the river. The ring of slums abruptly grew in 1965-1970 extending from Quarantina/Nahr Beirut to the edge of the airport.²⁸ Indeed the growing industrial sector of the 1960s was attracted by the cheap labor and located its new factories around slums inhabited by rural migrants, migrant workers and refugees, revealing the other side of this “growing affluence.”²⁹ “Slum dwellers and industrial developments fed on each other.”³⁰ In the 1970s, Beirut was already experiencing “overurbanization” as the degree of urbanization was beyond what would be expected from the level of industrialization.³¹

²² Ibid.

²³ Fawaz, Mona & Isabelle Peillen. “The Case of Beirut, Lebanon” part of “Understanding Slums: Case Studies for the Global Report on Human Settlements,” University College, London, & United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2003. New York: UN-HABITAT.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kassir, Samir. *Beirut*.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Frem, Sandra. *Nahr Beirut*.

²⁸ Kassir, Samir. *Beirut*.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Fawaz, Mona & Isabelle Peillen. “The Case of Beirut.”

³¹ Khalaf, Samir. *Heart of Beirut*.



*“Suffice it to note that this is one of the most critical problems Lebanon continues to face, a problem with serious social, psychological, economic, and political implications. Urban congestion, blight, depletion of open spaces, disparities in income distribution, rising levels of unemployment and underemployment, housing shortages, exorbitant rents, problems generated by slums and shantytowns, and, to a considerable extent, the urban violence of the war years were all by-products of overurbanization. In short, the scale and scope of urbanization had outstripped the city’s resources to cope effectively with continuously mounting demand for urban space and public amenities.”*³²

At the edge of the city, Nahr Beirut acted both as the “natural” boundary of the growing capital city and as a shifting area hosting a diversity of refugees over time. Today there are little noticeable traces of the war in the area. During the Lebanese war this area, as part of eastern Beirut, was under the control of Christian Militias and was the site of a few bloody battles. In 1975-76, early rounds of fighting started in the city center and extended outwards to the hotel districts and the south-eastern suburbs creating the “Green Line” dividing Beirut into two (Muslim West Beirut and Christian East Beirut). This affected the social geography of Beirut in creating “exclusive and closed communities.”³³ Entire groups were evicted from the western and eastern zones of the city depending on their religion and they moved collectively towards safer areas.³⁴ Indeed, Muslim enclaves in East Beirut (Quarantina, Nabaa, Tal el Zaatar) were destroyed.³⁵ Much of the urbanization of the city’s peripheries activated by the fleeing populations happened illegally in violation of construction codes and property rights regulations.³⁶

In 1985 other battles involving rivalry within the Lebanese Forces occurred in the area.³⁷ Later shootings between the Lebanese army under the command of army commander Michel Aoun and the Lebanese Forces divided and affected the eastern area of Beirut and its suburbs.³⁸ In one instance, accusations by the Lebanese Forces claimed that the army shelled *Jisr el Wati* that connects Sin el Fil to Ashrafieh to cut them off from supplies.³⁹

Today, the eastern suburbs witness an ageing and informal urbanization with abandoned factories and cheap and unhealthy living quarters. In addition to the older waves of migrants who settled around the river, the eastern suburbs host immigrants from East and West Africa as well as from Asia (Filipinos, Indians, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshi and Nepalis).⁴⁰ A large number of

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fawaz, Mona & Isabelle Peillen. “The Case of Beirut.”

³⁵ Khalaf, Samir. *Heart of Beirut*.

³⁶ Fawaz, Mona & Isabelle Peillen. “The Case of Beirut.”

³⁷ An Nahar. March 16-17, 1985.

³⁸ After the failure to elect a new president at the end of Gemayel’s term (September 1988) army commander Michel Aoun was appointed at the head of an interim cabinet. This presidential decision was controversial to West Beirut and other regions, who recognized the cabinet of the acting cabinet Minister Salim al-Hoss. On March 14, 1989 Aoun launched a self-declared “war of liberation” against all foreign forces in the country. Indeed, his statement came after Aoun’s drive to unify arm possession in the sole hands of the army resulted in the “war of elimination” in East Beirut between the army and the Lebanese Forces (January 30, 1990). Aoun restricted the possession of arms and weapons to the army.

³⁹ An Nahar. March 3, 1990.

⁴⁰ Dahdah, Assaf. *L’Art du Faible: Les migrantes non arabes dans le Grand Beyrouth (Liban)*. Beirut: Presses de l’IFPO, 2012. <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/2838>



Lamia Joreige, *After the River* (film still), 2016.
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Lamia Joreige, "Under-Writing Beirut – Nahr" (Text), 2016. Essay originally published on the Kamel Lazaar Foundation's website. <https://www.kamellazaarfoundation.org/>

non-Lebanese workers moved to the suburbs in the 1990s, notably among them Syrian male workers.⁴¹ Recently, the tragic situation in Syria triggered new waves of unfortunate Syrian refugees among which a large population is actively participating as labor force in the construction sector including projects in the Nahr/*Jisr el Wati* area. Syrian migrant workers have historically provided the labor force for the construction industry taking up hard work with mediocre pay.

Two important public and popular markets, *Souq el Ahad* which opens every Saturday and Sunday where lower-income and migrant workers can find inexpensive products such as clothes, shoes, fabrics, cosmetics and general domestic items, and the vegetable market, *Souq el Khodra*, were created. They are both located around *Jisr el Wati*, right by the river. The neighborhood is also characterized by highways along the riverbanks almost drowning the dry river under the eyes of the passersby and the drivers. Mostly inhabited during the day and buzzing with construction noises and fast cars, the area drowns in hollowness and dark spaces at nightfall. Sights and stories of sex workers and criminal incidents convey the derelict attribute of this place.

The river has for a long time been abandoned as a site of dumping not only by passers-by but also by the surrounding factories dumping all sorts of dyes and polluted material, by *Souq el Ahad* and *Souq el Khodra*, the slaughterhouse also had its share of dumping some remains in the channels, and the government as some of the sanitary sewage systems end in the river. Nahr Beirut made it to the headlines when it "mysteriously ran blood red"⁴² because of red dye discharged by a factory along its banks. First fears and speculations were that the red-colored river had blood running through it but tests on the water showed that this is only one of the many times the river has changed colors because of the draining of all sorts of pollutants and sewage into it. Cattle herds, as well as some wild animals such as crocodiles and an endangered species turtle were also spotted along the river. While pictures and television footage of a "lurking crocodile"⁴³ scared people and sparked their imagination, the story turned out to be that the crocodile was abandoned by his owner in the river.

The overall neglect contributes to the flooding of the river in the winter and its drying out in the summer with all sorts of repugnant and toxic odors, and the sprawling of rodents and insects. Furthermore, the current canalization of the river cannot contain the maximum flood limit of Nahr Beirut. The canalization of the river, which was completed in 1998 could not prevent the breaking of the bridge at the tip of the river and the flooding of the slaughterhouse and the port in the hundred years flood in 2005.⁴⁴ The possibility of a 1000 years flood is contingent on the laws of nature and given the population density around the river and the inadequate preparation of the river canal to the average winter flow, the flood remains a potential disaster especially when added to the threat of an earthquake predicted within the next ten decades, as Lebanon stands on a fault.

Neither the catastrophic scenario, nor the terrible consequences of the overurbanisation seem to prevent the remaining land from being exploited and developed in a speculative manner.

One question that arises is the interplay of private and public interests in the future of this area. The "Lebanese way" has almost always served and facilitated the interests of the private sector against the common public interest. Indeed when the French urbanist Michel Ecohard, upon request of the Lebanese government, proposed his urban plans in the 1940s-60s, which aimed at preserving large green areas, improving circulation and providing decent social housing for the poorest, little of his planning seems to have been implemented as nothing then stopped the interests of real estate developers of the private sector⁴⁵.

The industrial area of *Jisr el Wati* area around the river is today one of the few remaining underexploited spaces in Beirut. As stated earlier, it has recently attracted cultural practitioners such as Beirut Art Center, Ashkal Alwan Home Workspace and more recently The Station as well as Nabil Gholam's architectural firm. It witnesses now mushrooming construction sites which range from radical architectural projects for residential living such as Bernard khoury's Plot # 4371 (Artist Lofts) to massive skyscrapers designed by the architectural firm Erga, in which developers Achrafieh 4748 propose to create gated community complexes. The notion of gated community is not yet common in Beirut and could be questioned here as it could contribute to further emphasizing social inequalities and to separating coexisting communities.

The residential projects under construction are only one side of this gentrification, which involves also bigger and more ambitious development plans to rehabilitate the river. These proposed or speculated projects are born out of the pressure for urban land within Beirut and are motivated by a combination of ecological and welfare concerns but also by capitalist and commercial interests. There exist today a variety of projects centered around the Beirut river ranging from *Beirut Green River* (a project of at the initiative of the Lebanon's Green Party and envisioned by the architectural firm ERGA to transform 8.5km of the river through a "challenging development that will propagate environmentally sound practices while simultaneously redefining the real estate sector"),⁴⁶ to urban projects such as Habib Debs' work within a master plan to create a "green network" in the city by creating green paths around the river and connecting them to other public spaces,⁴⁷ Sandra Frem's stimulating work on "ecological continuity" of the river and the surrounding landscape in an environmentally friendly and socially responsible way, and the Beirut River Watershed Masterplan (a self-initiated project by the OtherDada (tOD)), which "aims to promote the move from the existing deficient grey infrastructure to an environmentally friendly blue and green infrastructure"⁴⁸ to students' projects for rehabilitating the river in university academic projects, and finally the Beirut Solar Snake project which is an initiative led by the Ministry of Energy and Water and the Lebanese Center for Energy Conservation to create a solar farm over the river.

The potential of the river and its surroundings for renewable and environmentally-safe energy (solar energy, water purification and redistribution), green public spaces and transportations, bike-paths and sports centers for people to enjoy, is promising for a balanced and organized development of an area long in neglect and its transformation into a source of energy, development and good living. In other words, the river's potential is re-locating the river at the center of Beirut in the current projects. The possibility of a better and greener living space is much needed today but perhaps the utopist and grandiose aspects of some projects is not merely driven by ecological ideas and civic responsibility as much as by the potential for benefits from the economical growth of this large area.

The future of the river is unknown, so is the coexistence of all the communities living in the area. What is known is the irreversible character of overurbanization around it, which could have been prevented with serious political action in dealing with urban planning and ecological matters that are crucial for our survival.

Today the river is dry most of the time and the border that was once defined is no longer a real border. The eastern limit of the city is indeterminate and keeps extending. Although this place is perceived as insalubrious, dirty and saturated with concrete, it inspires in me a certain melancholy and triggers many questions that stimulate my imagination.

○ Read online at

<https://www.kamellazaarfoundation.org/fellowship/under-writing-beirut>

⁴¹ Fawaz, Mona & Isabelle Peillen. "The Case of Beirut."

⁴² Meguerditchian, Van. "Beirut River Mysteriously Runs Blood Red." *The Daily Star*. 16 February 2012.

⁴³ Abou Jacoud, Rayane & Jana el Hassan. "Crocodile Lurking in Beirut River." *The Daily Star*. 25 July 2103

⁴⁴ Frem, Sandra. *Nahr Beirut*.

⁴⁵ Kassir, Samir. *Beirut*.

⁴⁶ The Green River Project. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5uOol7EkK>

⁴⁷ Kullab, Samya. "Green Initiatives Boosted in 'Libnatiyy' Beirut." *The Daily Star*. 22 April 2013

⁴⁸ Personal communication with Adib Dada, January 20, 2015.

mirna bamieh

The Water Feast

Moving water and river thoughts,
next to Beirut's waterless river.

5 September, 2021 / 6:00 pm

Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

When the river's skin, that of earth,
was cast in concrete,
It took the burden of water that left our insides to the
city.
The river's water left, yet there it is,
in every herb, shrub, forest and tree.
Outside grief and celebration, let the river flow within.
In every us, magic in water,
Everflow
Evergreen

تقول الغيلان: سأشرب المياه كلها
فلا أبقى لأشجار البلوط
ولا لشجرة القيقب
ولا لأشجار الجوز
ولا لشجرة العُتّاب
ولا للكلاب الكنعانية
ولا لغزلان الجبل
ما يبيل ريقها
....

ماذا لو كنا الآن
نسبح في كل هذا الماء
فلا يرانا أحد
سوى هذه السماء
وشجرة البلوط
وشجرة الجوز
وشجرة العُتّاب
والجنية الشغوفة
وهي تباركنا بهذا الجنون
فتصب علينا من عينيها
مزيدا من اللهفة؟!

شعر احلام بشارات
بتكليف من ساقية — فلسطين



nadim mishlawi

Voices of a Forgotten network: The River

Vatche Boulghourian

(filmmaker reading an excerpt from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness):

"Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings."

George Tohme

(botanist), translated from Arabic:

Are plants intelligent? I gave a lecture with that title. A lot of newspapers wrote about it. It was December 2013. They used to grow olive trees and apple trees in our village. Apple trees were cheaper. We then had to vaccinate them. But before that we noticed a kind of worm infecting the trees which stunted their growth. There were about ten apple trees, two of which had these worms in them. We got a specific tool to extract the worms. The other trees continued growing. But the two infected trees produced apples in three years instead of four years like the rest. This is a kind of self-defense. The weaker trees couldn't grow but they needed to bear fruit before they died. I gave different examples with images I had taken myself...

Vatche Boulghourian

(filmmaker reading an excerpt from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness):

"An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sand-banks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once—somewhere—far away—in another existence perhaps."

Adib Dada

(architect, forest-maker & environmental activist), translated from Arabic:

In 1962 the river of Beirut was encased in concrete. According to my research, in the 60's the Abu Ali river in Tripoli would flood and there were more than a hundred casualties as a result. They encased the river in concrete and then did the same thing to the Beirut River, based on the studies of the Abu Ali River in Tripoli.

In my personal view, these projects of infrastructure generate a lot of profit. They make the projects bigger even if it's unnecessary. It's like the dam project which is known to be ineffective. In the end, the river was encased in concrete, but the problem wasn't solved. I don't know if I'm right, but it's like all the projects here, the construction of new roads for example. They are never studied well.

Podpoem 02: The River

Featuring voices by Romy Azar (biologist), Rana Eid (sound designer), Muriel Kahwagi (writer) and Greg Burris (writer).

Using only sounds recorded on location in the concrete shaft that is the Beirut River with conventional microphones and less conventional hydrophones and electromagnetic sensors, this first piece merges the bleak soundscape of the river today with a synthesized, imaginary sonic world created from those same sounds. As the sonic terrain transforms, the grim story of the river, and the lost opportunities in presents, is told by different voices from Beirut.

They now dump garbage and toxic industrial waste into the river. There is also the Beit Meri dump which is now going into the river. We have around 30 municipalities dumping their garbage. Even in the natural parts of the river. At some point you hear the sound of a water-fall. The closer you get, the stronger the smell. And then you see a black waterfall pouring into the river, untreated sewage which reaches the river.

The mouth of the river is usually very fertile because the ecological systems of the river and the sea meet. The sea water and fresh water meet and create a very fertile area with its own plants and animals. This has obviously disappeared. There is another problem. Some years ago, the river flooded above the concrete because of the bottleneck that the concrete causes at the bottom.

George Tohme

(botanist), translated from Arabic:

The planting of Eucalyptus trees was popular in the 19th century to prevent malaria. Specifically in areas near water. They said the trees would absorb the water preventing the mosquitoes from laying eggs and becoming dangerous. They started calling the Eucalyptus Keena, which is a kind of medicine used to treat malaria. In 1961, there was not one case of malaria in Lebanon.

Vatche Boulghourian

(filmmaker reading an excerpt from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness):

"There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare for yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect."

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons



○ Listen to Podpoem 02 online

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1iL2IWI0tY5omoIwdsJVH>

On site at Beirut's RiverLESS Forest



A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons

panos aprahamian

This Haunting Memory That is Not My Own



Panos Aprahamian, This Haunting Memory That Is Not My Own, 2021.
Digital video (still), 29 min, Film Poster. Courtesy of the artist

○ Watch the teaser trailer here

<https://vimeo.com/474709212>

fadi mansour

Dreamland

The video documents the aftermath of the yearlong 2015 trash crisis of Greater Beirut. At the time when streets were finally garbage-free, before and after images of cleared up trash deposits circulated by the media fed the illusion that the problem was solved. Under the guise of a coastal regeneration, trash was in fact being used as land fill material in the reclamation of new real estate territory along the northern coast of Beirut. In addition to absorbing one year of municipal waste, forty-year-old mounds and formations of garbage were dismantled; their stratified history of toxicity unearthed into the biosphere, and their rotten innards compacted along the seafloor. By countering what will undoubtedly become a polished architectural product, in a similar way to its predecessor, the Normandy landfill known as the Beirut New Waterfront District, the video reveals this ecological transformation by investigating the extent of this impact on marine biomass. As the scale of the toxic spread abounds the visible and sensorial impact of the landfill site, the vulnerability of affected bodies - human or nonhuman - stretches toward uncertain futures.

In this time of crisis, as we witness the disfiguration of the landscape with piles of trash dumped in valleys, rivers, forests, the sea, and in urban empty plots, the resulting contamination of air, soil, and water affects both the human psyche and the materiality of the earth. While potential health threats induce fear and paranoia, leachates effectively infiltrate the earth. It can be said that the traumatic experience is met with an already established defence mechanism, one of denial, retreat, and amnesia. Perhaps a mechanism inherited from successive waves of trauma due to perpetual conflict and to the continuous wrecking of one's habitat. Whether we look at the long-term effects of armed conflict or ecological catastrophe, a paradigmatic hostility towards the city's collective space is mirrored by a retreat in domesticity. To counter the chaos outside, the domestic space is seemingly controlled through obsessive measures of cleanliness and order and the space of one's own body takes on different levels of self-care through its intensified commodification. The self becomes the preferred territory of investment and capital intake. This territory, the body, reads as an absorption machine of labour and technology, oscillates between delusional content and sadistic promiscuity.

The visual representation of the ecological catastrophe, which is an inescapable consideration in the making of Dreamland, posits on a critical approach to the proliferation of catastrophe images. While spectacular images of ecological disaster are important to create a public environmental consciousness, they also have to be met with a critical understanding of the complex web of interconnected systems at play. The multitude of spectacular images circulating during the event of the crisis have all succeeded in creating the beginning of a political action against one of the structural problems of the crisis: an attack on government failure and the Lebanese political system in its totality. But one thing the spectacle fails to convey is the slow violence unfolding for years to come, which can be characterized by the destructive metabolism of toxic matter. Toxicity, for the most part invisible, infiltrates the earth systems and has transformative effects on species, both human and nonhuman. Perhaps the failure to reach a sustained reaction against the trash problem is related to the difficulty of representing slow violence. TJ Demos asks, when writing about the aftermath of the PB oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico: "How can we mobilize politically around a catastrophe's invisibility, given our culture's fixation on the spectacular production of images framed with happy Hollywood ending?" He later explains that mainstream media images often contribute to an ideological mechanism of reassurance such as in the case of the media fiction that circulated after the events where before and after images are juxtaposed to reassure us that clean-up efforts were effective. Dreamland, in response to that question, proposes a post-spectacle production that investigates this slow violence.



Fadi Mansour, Dreamland (Still), 2017. 1 channel video. 13 min. 13 sec.
Film still courtesy of the artist

○ Watch Dreamland (2017)

<https://vimeo.com/236059670>

shaha raphael

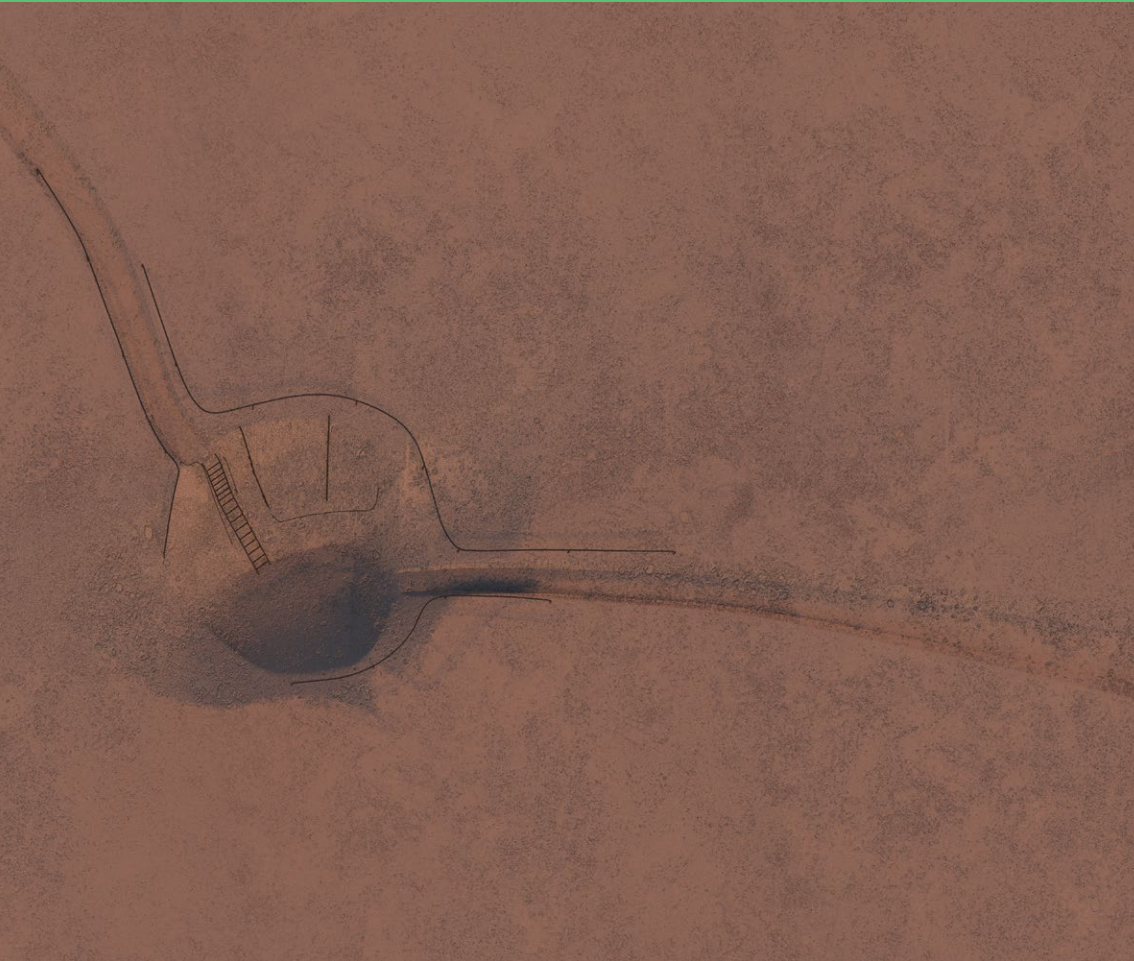
أصلي أرضي Earthbound



'I've found that the only thing that brings me peace is working with my hands, Remaining in motion, not only to preserve, but to process. You are at once reminiscing and looking forward.' Kneading, digging, cutting, mixing, compressing, raking, the dough, the earth.

The proposal is a collective ground, accessible to all inhabitants, binding them through programme and materiality.

Using geologically aware construction methods, The project suggests a hyperlocal approach to material providence by using a cut fill operation in order to move and transform the earth on site, inhabiting the ground and making bricks and mixes to construct vaults and surface finishes.



○ Visit the project page

<https://pr2021.aaschool.ac.uk/students/shaha-maria-raphael>



It is an attempt at blurring the boundary between the urban and geological fabric, suggesting that the people might be able to rethink their place within the country at a time of turmoil by understanding their place in the landscape.

Trying to reconnect the people of the area of the Bekaa through secular means, by identifying the fabric of the land itself as the unifying feature to be rediscovered. Instead of falling back on corrupted sectarian value-structures, we can focus on that which physically comprises the territory

Regaining understanding of local resources and construction processes may help remind people what they have in common.

Shaha Raphael, أملي أرضي, Earthbound, 2021.
Courtesy of the artist

marwa arsanios

Falling is not collapsing,
falling is extending



- After a peek into the sight of Beirut in ruins, this article allows to dive further into Marwa Arsanios' research and investigates the Lebanese neoliberal project's impact on the country's environmental and sociopolitical collapse. Dima Hamadeh and Marwa Arsanios, "Falling Is Not Collapsing, Falling Is Extending", ArteEast (Spring 2017).

[http://arteeast.org/
quarterly/falling-is-
not-collapsing-falling-
is-extending/](http://arteeast.org/quarterly/falling-is-not-collapsing-falling-is-extending/)

Marwa Arsanios, "Falling is not collapsing, falling is extending" (Stills), 2016.
Digital video, color, sound.
Courtesy of the artist and mor charpentier, Paris



Real estate oligarchs strategically
placed garbage dumps by the seashore

toolkit



Recommended on our bookshelves

- Ailton Krenak, *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019).

English translation available : Ailton Krenak., *Ideas to postpone the end of the world*, trans. by Anthony Doyle (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc., 2020).

Youtube channel to subscribe to: Ecological Reparation

- "How can ecological thinking and practice enable reparation? How can reparation for damages done be ecological?"

<https://www.youtube.com/c/EcologicalReparation/videos>

The online art platform to binge watch: Take Me to the River

- "The climate crisis can no longer be ignored. Increasingly alarming events chart the ecocide wreaked by humankind. Take Me to the River is an online journey into the landscapes and experiences of the climate emergency."

Curated by Maya El Khalil

<https://takemetotheriver.net/>



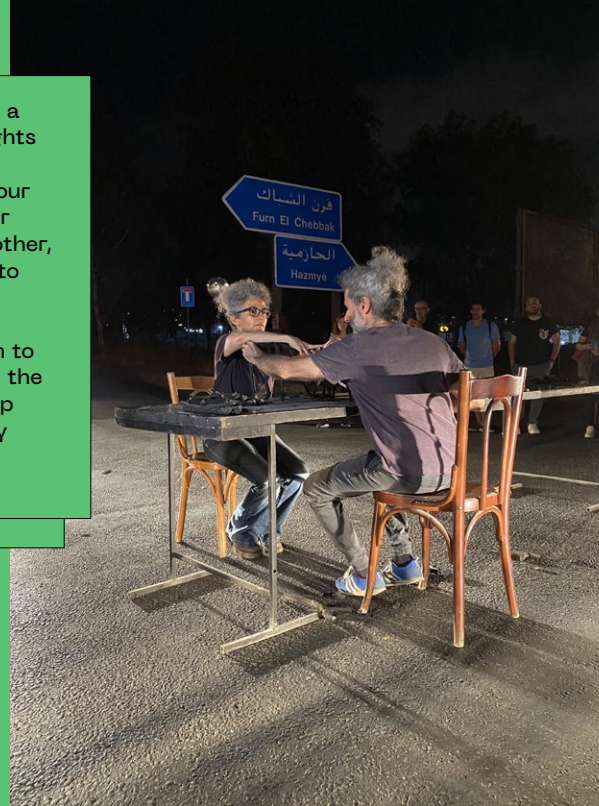
AEC focus

200Grs. (Rana Haddad and Pascal Hachem)
Pitch-Black
 15-min performance at a road intersection

5 September, 2021 / 8:30 pm
 Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

Pitch-black is a silent cry, expressing our collective agony at the intersection of two roads. As the headlights of our cars shine a light on these dark streets in the absence of electricity, we highlight the fragility of our ecosystem, our own fragility. As we block yet another road together, we feel frail and yet in need of each other, so we carry one-another, and we fall together; only to rise and try again, and again.

Pieces of charcoal serve as the only support we seem to have to carry our limbs, only they also break against the asphalt like broken glass. As our arms and hands drop against the black wooden table... all we can do is try again.



© Léa Cremona



AEC focus

Nadim Mishlawi

'Voices of a Forgotten Network'

Behind the scenes: recording of Podpoems



A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons

Mirna Bamieh
The Water Feast
Ten moments in two hours

5 September, 2021 / 6:00 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

Charbel Samuel Aoun
Le Salut
Site-specific intervention

27 August, 2021 / 6 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest



A funeral of a missed flow, buried 50 years ago and still, a natural morphology of a river transformed into a sewer, a physical reality of a social malfunction, we mourn, today, the river, the land, the city.


Memorial ribbons mark what once were the river contour lines on this particular site, leading to an engraving on the concrete wall it has now been reduced to:

هنا يرقد ذاك الذي نحت بالماء
[Here lies the one that water carved]

© Ghina Abboud

section 05

**How to listen to their stories?
The political narratives
that trees and their seeds
share with us.**

An abstract graphic on the right side of the slide, consisting of several thin, curved black lines that sweep from the top right towards the bottom right. Three small black dots are placed along these lines: one near the top, one in the middle, and one near the bottom.

vivien sansour

Ethno-Botany

A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons



Photo: Vivien Sansour

ETHNO- BOTANICS

THE EVIDENCE OF AN UNPERFECTED CRIME

By Vivien Sansour

Originally published in This Week in Palestine

Daoud was a young man in 1967 when he came back to look for his aunt in his destroyed village of Imwas. Implying the help of a local priest, Daoud was, in reality, looking for his aunt's corpse. She and the other elderly people in the village who could not flee were buried under the rubble when Israeli forces demolished their homes. But unlike Daoud's aunt, many who survived that year are still alive and able to remember in graphic detail the place where they once lived and the land they once cultivated. In fact, the plants and trees of their village now serve as some of the most compelling evidence of the crime that rendered the people of Imwas refugees in their own homeland.

Since the destruction of Imwas more than 46 years ago, the village has been "planted over" with non-native pine trees that have covered up the ruins of the homes and made the land uncultivable. Today Imwas is known as an Israeli national park: Canada-Ayalon Park, which stretches over more than 7,000 dunams of land that belong to the people of the village. Bernard Bloomfield, then president of the Canadian Jewish National Fund (JNF), led a campaign to raise millions of dollars to plant trees that would hide all evidence of Palestinian presence in the area. Today Israeli and international hikers and nature lovers come to camp and picnic in the "park," and every year the JNF sponsors tree-planting days for Jewish youth in Canada-Ayalon. In this devious power dynamic, the case of Imwas, as in most other destroyed Palestinian villages, trees end up playing quite an interesting dual role as both culprits and subversives represented by the dichotomy of non-native pine and indigenous varieties of fig, pomegranate, carob, and almond trees.

My first visit to Imwas was in April of last year. As I walked around the "park" with my friends, our guide shared a map that was drawn from survivors' memories. Dots and lines marked the homes of the families of the village. But while our guide was pointing out all the locations where houses once stood, my eyes wandered to where some native trees had survived. These indigenous almond and pomegranate shoots, which can go easily unnoticed in a sea of pine trees,

were making their way to life. The more we walked the more trees I found. And very soon it became evident that these trees were serving as evidence of an unperfected crime: although the people had been successfully uprooted, the seeds of their trees had survived and now provided a trail to uncover the story of a sophisticated agrarian society that had once subsisted in this very same landscape.

During my walk through the village, I was able to identify sixteen kinds of native flora that are still present. From cacti to carob and sumac to the identification of an aqueduct system of irrigation that is distinctly Palestinian, it became clear to me that while a colonizing power could eliminate houses and stones, they could not change the “ethno-botanics” of a once thriving community—one of the many reasons we cannot speak about rural Palestine without paying close attention to the details of these landscape politics. Yes, Palestinian farmers are still cultivating their lands, what is left of them anyway; and yes, we can continue to sell various versions of Zeit ou Za’atar logos everywhere, but the truth is that our survival depends on more than a marketing scheme for symbolic foods. Our understanding of our current food consumption trends and food production practices goes deeper than recipes and traditional dishes. It has a lot to do with our health, of course, but most importantly it has everything to do with our position in a capital-driven political economy that includes Palestine and its military occupation.



Photos: Vivien Sansour

○ For the full Zine by Daleen Saah,
Sofra Daymeh (2019)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/17zK1yNvK8WAUUTqug3Tb_EMKmYOR6hod/view



Photos: Vivien Sansour

Whether it is by physically destroying the natural terrain, such as the case of Imwas, or by weakening the producer base so that people become dependent consumers, political hegemony can only be achieved by unthreading people's ties to their sources of power: their land and their ability to live from it.

Daoud's relatives, who planted pomegranate trees in their village, were probably not thinking about producing evidence for when their village would be taken over by foreign trees. It is more likely that they were intelligently selecting native varieties that they knew would live beyond their days and feed their great grandchildren. Sadly, as we get swept away by the global loyalty to commodities, we seem to be drifting farther away from the very basic things that have kept us rooted in our land, even as we buy into the lie that we "need" more things in order to survive and that the land alone is not enough. And maybe right now it is not. But the land will never be enough if we choose to abandon it while claiming to fight for it at the same time. My fear is that, unlike the people of Imwas, future generations may not have living things to remind them of us. Instead they will only find concrete buildings and old car parts.

Whatever organic evidence of our existence will be worn on a silver, olive-shaped pendant that displays the word Palestine. Perhaps this is a very pessimistic outlook that I cannot justify in the few words of this article, but it is clear to me that the only reason Imwas is still alive today is that someone years ago decided to plant a seed instead of building another shopping centre. It is because of this seemingly insignificant gesture that we and Imwas are still alive and well today.

“...these trees were serving as evidence of an unperfected crime: although the people had been successfully uprooted, the seeds of their trees had survived...”

Vivien Sansour is an artist and conservationist who uses image, sketch, film, soil, seeds, and plants to enliven old cultural tales in contemporary presentations and advocate for the protection of biodiversity as a cultural and political act. As the founder of Palestine Heirloom Seed Library and the Traveling Kitchen project, she works with farmers to promote seed conservation and crop diversity. She is codirector with Riad Bahour of the feature film *El Bizreh Um El Fay*, which was awarded best project at RamallahDoc 2015 and will be released in 2020. She has presented her work as an artist at the Jerusalem Fund Gallery, Washington, DC; SALT Art Center, Istanbul; and the 2019 Venice Biennale.

Born Jerusalem, she lives between Bethlehem, Palestine and Los Angeles, USA.

Vivien Sansour, "Ethno-Botany: The Evidence of an Unperfected Crime", 2014.
Originally published in This Week in Palestine and in the Sofra Daymeh zine, 2019.
Designed and curated by Daleen Saah.

omar khouri

Eucalyptus

Omar Khouri, Eucalyptus, 2021. Pixel painting.
Courtesy of the artist



omar fakhoury

Corn Plant



Omar Fakhoury, 'Corn Plant,' 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 137 x 57 cm.
Courtesy of the artist

nadim mishlawi

Voices of a Forgotten Network: Bourj Hammoud

Vatche Boulghourian

(filmmaker):

I heard this story from my eldest uncle, accidentally, while he was telling another story. This was the part that stood out for me. It involved my grandfather and his mother. They were the only survivors of their family after the Armenian Genocide of 1915. They’d marched from their home in central Anatolia to Aleppo, Syria. After spending a few years there, they were told to board a crowded train operated by the French Army transporting Armenians to Beirut. Nearly half a day later they finally arrived at this nondescript location by the coast and were told to pile out in what seemed like the middle of nowhere, with not a soul in sight, no one to greet them or tell them where to go or what to do. And in a place where they didn’t speak the language. They were all from a mountainous region in Anatolia and spoke Turkish or a dialect of Armenian. Some, including my grandfather, had never seen the sea until then. So this group of people stood there, completely bewildered, by the train tracks, hour upon hour, not knowing what to do, unable to decide what step to take next, and terrified of what fate may yet have in store for them. Beyond the tracks there was a vast swamp land. And in the other direction, between them and the sea, a few structures, what looked like barracks. It was actually the quarantine area, primarily for livestock, sometimes for people. In this case no one was telling them to go there either. It was from there that this group of refugees slowly began moving to that swamp land across from the train tracks. Apparently at the time, that area was called Jisr Mourad, or “Mourad’s Bridge,” after the old bridge that linked the two banks of the Beirut River. But later it was later to be called Borj Hammoud, where most Armenians ended up in the early 20th century.

Huddled there by the train tracks, quietly waiting for a sign or instructions, too afraid to venture anywhere themselves, they finally see something. A Model-T Ford, puttering down the road parallel to the trains tracks. The distinguished looking driver, upon seeing this group of people, stops his car and gets out. He asks them a few questions, but switches to Turkish when he realizes they don’t understand a word of Arabic. Of course he spoke Turkish because it was the lingua franca in the Middle East at the time. Realizing that they were refugees and genocide survivors, he takes pity. He gives them directions to a location where he could help and tells them not to be afraid. So my grandfather and his mother marched with hundreds of other people to this location in Beirut – an open field with a few large hangars. It turned out that this man was the representative of the newly established Ford company office in the region. He had instructed his employees to empty one of the hangars so that he could offer it to the refugees. He told the refugees that that they could stay there, on his property, until they could find their footing in the new land.

Podpoem 03: Bourj Hammoud

eaturing voices by Nadim Mishlawi (composer and filmmaker), Vatche Boulghourian (filmmaker) and Edward Said (writer).

In this piece, filmmaker Vatche Boulghourian recounts the story of his grandparents’ exile from Anatolia after the Armenian Genocide, and their resettling along the Beirut River in the area of what later became known as Borj Hammoud.

Edward Said

(writer):

Well you know, I think what was implied was that there really aren’t any conditions for laying down one’s spear. One goes on till it’s no longer possible. But I’m an aficionado of lost causes. And I think no cause is lost until one loses consciousness. And I really believe that, that it’s all in the mind. I think a lot of it, if not all, is in the mind. And that the conditions for struggle are always right and always there so long as one can think. And thinking itself is an act of resistance, properly speaking. So that’s what I take out of that, the final passage of Moby Dick. And in a way it seems to me to be symbolic of these relictuals’ vocation, not to rest when you reach the promised land, because there isn’t a promised land really, there’s just another phase in the struggle.

Vatche Boulghourian

(filmmaker):

My grandparents from the other side of my family, from my father’s side, had travelled all across cities in the Middle East trying to find a place to settle until they finally arrived to Borj Hammoud. But with the rise of Malaria in the swamps, my grandmother lost three children. So they decided to move to the mountains nearby and that’s where they lived for the rest of their lives. The French Army later planted Eucalyptus trees all around the area to absorb the swamp water, and therefore the reduce the number of illnesses. It actually worked. Many of those towering trees still stand to this day, but they’re invisible to most inhabitants of the city. They’ve grown accustomed to seeing these trees as part of their urban jungle. Usually no matter how tragic the circumstances, my family, my extended family of aunts and uncles would tell and retell stories in a way that would make them laugh. By laugh, I mean loud bouts of collective laughter that made you feel like the walls were trembling. So it;s no wonder that I’d never heard this story. There was nothing particularly eventful about it, nothing funny or that could be made funny. It was just a transitional incident. Nothing spectacular. Nothing they could weave into a tale of endless entertainment for themselves. But somehow it struck me. But my grandfather and his mother stayed in Borj Hammoud, eventually built a home there, and started a family. The very same family of boisterous storytellers. My mother was born there. After having lost their family, their land, and years of wandering, they were content to have made a new home in a community where they felt safe, safe enough to settle and build a future. My grandfather remained indebted to the man in the Model-T Ford, who, in a moment of pure compassion, responded with an act of kindness that saved hundreds of lives. He didn’t have to do anything. I doubt he expected any recognition. But a few survivors never forgot, and three generations later this “unspectacular” story can still be told.

A few things we learned about Art, Ecology & The Commons

○ Tune in to Podpoem 03 here

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/7kK6Mnwk8hYQZsQRLHj212>

franziska pierwoss

Mad3oum – value in a state of economic crisis

27 August, 2021 – 5 September / 6:00 – 9:00 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

Mad3oum - value in a state of economic crisis is a collaborative artistic research project between visual artist Franziska Pierwoss [visual artist, Germany], Temporary Art Platform [institution, Lebanon] and Sakiya [institution, Palestine]. The project is centered around the notion of value in a failing economy, focusing on questions of agricultural food production in Lebanon and Palestine today. Which forms of farming can adequately meet an economic, political and social crisis? Can small permaculture initiatives be upscaled to feed people heavily dependent on food imports in an economic crisis?

The idea for the project emerged in the aftermath of the Beirut port explosion in August 2020 and the subsequent worsening of the economic crisis in Lebanon. The project partners will conduct joint research that will result in artist-led workshops with the employees of local supermarkets as well as public discussions bringing together small producers and large food vendors with the general public to explore concepts of community-led food networks.

Introduction:

In March 2021, the Lebanese local currency once again reached a new record low on the black market losing more than 85% of its initial pre-crisis and official rate value. Going to the local supermarket today holds surreal moments when prices are uncertain, products no longer carry price tags, and the general unease feels as if a rug is being pulled under one's feet. Beggars no longer take cash currency, but demand food instead. The general public awaits the moment when subsidised food prices will also no longer be guaranteed. A country ever so proud of its food heritage is now worrying about food security. Private people have been turning gardens into self-sufficient vegetable beds. Around 90% of imported wheat is sourced from Ukraine and Russia.

Lebanon's food economy is dependent on foreign imports and currently forced to re-discover its potential as an agricultural actor; but what forms of agriculture and vending models will prove sustainable in this crisis? Is trusting permaculture and organic farming a romantic utopia? How do you guarantee widespread access to local food products for all parts of society? Who are the companies that get subsidised by the state to secure coffee and bread? Is a country suffering from extreme pollution due to an ongoing waste crisis, lack of discharge networks and wastewater treatment plants, and high levels of air pollutants suited for large-scale food farming?

Palestine, simultaneously so very far and geographically so close to the Lebanese context, has been historically dependent on food supplies: 'Palestine is dependent on imports for all its supplies of sugar and rice, half its bread cereals, about half its oils and fats and more than half its meat,' states a UN report in 1948. In partnership with experts from Sakiya, the Lebanese discussion of food sovereignty will be extended beyond national borders. Both countries have had higher numbers in local food production in the early 2000s than now - what has led to that change?

These questions will mark the starting point of a collaborative research by the project partners on current forms of agriculture and commercial models. 'Mad3oum - value in a state of economic crisis' will use methods of artistic research and collective knowledge production to organize a series of workshops and discussion on questions of agricultural production in Lebanon and Palestine.

franziska pierwoss

Mad3oum – value in a state of economic crisis

Project components:

- Workshop on the notion of value in an economic crisis: discussing financial, social and political values with the employees of a local supermarket and the wholesale fruit market during a 2-week workshop (September 2021)
- Public events by TAP and Franziska Pierwoss in Beirut's Riverless Forest; the outdoor location will serve as a hub for open public discussions of a value system in a failing economy.
- Public Exchange online and in person with Sakiya (Palestine) on questions of feasibility of permaculture in a politically demanding context.

The political context of Lebanon

Whereas this theoretical and sociological interest in community-building in times of crises was sparked by the October revolution, Lebanon exists at the center of a far greater unrelenting storm of tribulations: an unresolved waste management crisis, a sharp and on-going depreciation of the local currency, a complex political deadlock, a rampant pandemic, and a plummeting economy exacerbated by strict Covid-19 lockdowns, were all met with the devastating Beirut Port explosion on August 4th. Catastrophe has only since ensued, with an inevitable economic collapse pushing the country to the brink and corruption still coursing through its every vein, leaving it ill-prepared to face the global calamities also raging on; from economic uncertainty, sociological and demographic unrest, to the climate and environmental emergency.

As we face these drastic changes and impending disasters as a local and global community, the solidarity witnessed during the October revolution resurfaces and one thought comes to mind: Can togetherness be harnessed as a practice?



○ Watch Mad3oum the video
by Franziska Pierwoss online

[https://vimeo.
com/645670026](https://vimeo.com/645670026)



Marwa Arsanios, *Resilient Weeds*, 2016. Series of 60 drawings, ink on paper.
Exhibition view, *Falling is not collapsing, falling is extending*, mor charpentier, Paris, 2018.
Photographer : Takeshi Sugiura
Courtesy the artist and mor charpentier, Paris



edwin nasr

Syria and/as the Planetary
in Jumana Manna's
Wild Relatives

A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry

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A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons

A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry



Jumana Manna
Edwin Nasr

Jumana Manna, *Wild Relatives*, 2018,
HD video, colour, sound, 64min, stills.
Courtesy the artist

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AFTERALL

SYRIA AND/AS THE PLANETARY IN JUMANA MANNA'S WILD RELATIVES Edwin Nasr

It has almost become self-evident to approach Syria or, rather, what could be called the Syrian condition as a metaphor for and a diagnosis of our planetary predicament. Exiled political dissident and writer Yassin al-Haj Saleh frames it the other way around, recognising a contagion of 'criminality at the heart of the current international order', a process he refers to as a 'Syrianization of the world', through which a state's systematic *extermination of life* avails itself of the imperatives of international human rights treaties and intergovernmental organisations.¹ It might be deemed unhelpful, at this point in time, to assess whether it was the Syrian war that wrought forth conditions of impunity now being reproduced across continents, or whether the ontological violence of the world had undiscerningly submerged Syria along its way in the first place. And yet, both affirmations can hold true. The Assad regime and its regional allies' sheer barbarity and the unprecedented scale of destruction the country continues to suffer from were hyper-mediatized at the beginning of this past decade. The first wave of war-crime documentations that had emanated from Dara'a, the Rif Dimashq Governorate, al-Qusayr and Aleppo altered our collective understanding of what it meant to witness the unfolding of an historic atrocity. A couple of decades back, Jean Baudrillard contentiously declared that the Gulf War (1990–91) was the first video game war.² It would follow, logically, that the Syrian war is the first social media war, whereby abstracted aerial imagery of expendable peoples and territories comes to be replaced by amateur footage of state crimes being enacted in real time, the veracity of which remains debatable and is predicated on the online feedback loop one is exposed to.³

Over time, the impulse to denounce – or, within more sinister political formations, to apologise for – the Assad regime's ceaseless suppression of entire dissident populations waned, a mute complicity of the world in which, as al-Haj claims, 'the Syrian exception has become a basis upon which new boundaries of power can be explored, in these countries and globally', adding that, 'after Syria, extermination has become a sovereign possibility in the world of states'.⁴ While bombings of hospital and schools and state abductions by the thousands continue to routinely take place on a weekly basis, the majority of geopolitical operations being conceived and implemented on Syrian soil has recently shifted from strategies of counterinsurgency,

to engagements with its post-war landscapes as sites of optimal *extractability*. 'The dirty business of extraction,' as political theorists Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson call it, '[refers to] historical and contemporary processes of forced removal of raw materials and life forms from the earth's surface, depths, and biosphere'.⁵ But what is there left to extract from Syria, when substantial processes of extermination have seemingly condemned all of its life forms to premature death? One might argue that it is precisely within the nothingness of post-war landscapes – where infrastructural ruination encloses possibility and necropolitical forces stifle human and nonhuman life alike – that local, regional and international state and non-state actors produce value and accumulate capital. Transnational consultancies have joined the Assad regime in inviting architectural and environmental firms as well as public and private think tanks to submit proposals for the 'reconstruction' of Syria. At the time of writing, cities worn-out from battles, such as Aleppo, are already being entirely redesigned to host real estate interventions and market maximisation schemes. This, in itself, can be attributed to what decolonial theorist Macarena Gómez-Barris has labelled an all-pervasive 'extractive view', i.e. that which, since the colonial project, 'sees territories as commodities, rendering land as for the taking', and 'facilitates the re-organization of territories, populations, and plant and animal life into extractible data and natural resources for material and immaterial accumulation'.⁶ It is such a view that allows us to engage with the Syrian condition as a localised manifestation of an undeniably planetary predicament, whereby implications of the Anthropocene and the entrenchment of the permanent war economy give rise to entwined realities.

Wild Relatives (2018) is a documentary essay on Syria by Palestinian visual artist Jumana Manna. Although the video wasn't filmed there, it weaves disparate geographies as well as various forms of human-nonhuman associations that manifest the Syrian condition in relation to the matrixes of power and extractive processes that structure it. The film's ominous opening sequence reveals a loud and dirty coal mining operation in the Arctic Archipelago of Svalbard, a territory under Norwegian sovereignty and which has long been exploited by the European coal industry and whale hunters. The archipelago's only populated island, Spitsbergen, houses the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, a secure seed bank that develops cryopreservation protocols to preserve a wide variety of plant seeds that are duplicate samples of seeds held in gene banks worldwide. The bank, which formally opened in 2008, was conceived in order to prevent the potential loss of seeds in other gene repositories that could result from future natural or man-made disasters. Manna's inquiry into the Syrian condition begins at the point where, on September 2015, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas

(ICARDA), a non-profit agricultural research institute and a member of the CGIAR (formerly Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research Centres) located in Aleppo, decides to temporarily relocate to the Bekaa Valley, in eastern Lebanon, due to ongoing military conflict.⁷ Though first established in Lebanon in 1976, due to the Lebanese civil wars a year later, ICARDA permanently headquartered in Aleppo, at the invitation of Hafez al-Assad, former Syrian president and father of Bashar al-Assad, who'd been on a quest to modernise his country's agriculture in an effort to subordinate peasant classes. The cruel irony of these successive relocations have not escaped Manna; they are but a mere testament to the region's avowedly interminable torments. ICARDA's urgent evacuation to Lebanon had disallowed it to move its gene bank of biodiverse seed samples, alongside the research centre's staff and equipment.⁸ To this end, it decided to 'reconstruct', through the arduous labour of female Syrian refugees, its collection of 40,000 regional seeds in the fertile Bekaa Valley and, in order to do so, withdrew safety duplicates from the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. To this day, ICARDA remains the only centre to have formally requested the withdrawal of its seeds from Svalbard.⁹ This process of reconstruction – the hidden narratives of dislocation it foregrounds as well as the geographical and material interdependencies it exposes – is at the nucleus of the documentary and aesthetic unfolding of *Wild Relatives*. It also brings attention to articulations of violence that evolve over vast, and therefore impalpable, temporalities that have long informed artistic and cinematic endeavours questioned the crises of their representation.

This recalls Rob Nixon's conceptualisation of 'slow violence' by which the author means 'violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, and attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all'.¹⁰ Referring to '[C]limate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of war, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes', Nixon goes on to urge engaged practitioners across different sectors to refigure dominant modes of representation so as to produce an alternative grammar of *representability* able to capture these processes' spatio-temporal occurrence.¹¹

The past decade or so has witnessed a growing commitment among artists towards 'resolving' these representational shortcomings. Engaging with the practices of film-maker Francisco Huichaqueo and artist Carolina Caycedo, Gómez-Barris has argued that their work proposes a counter-visibility to the regime of extractivist capitalism and its invisibilisation of slow violence.¹² In his film *Mencer: Ni Pevna* (2011), Huichaqueo addresses, the generational displacement of Indigenous peoples in the southern territories of Chile as a result of pine and eucalyptus

export production by decentring the human gaze from the cinematic apparatus, resituating, instead, ancestral natural landscape at the heart of what the film attempts to represent.¹³ As for Caycedo, in her video *YUMA, or the Land of Friends* (2014), she adopts a 'fish-eye perspective', a literal view from below, in order to represent the Magdalena River in the Colombian Andes as a site of contestation between the material interests of Indigenous communities and those of multinationals aspiring to convert the river into a source of hydroelectric power.¹⁴ Similarly, art historian T.J. Demos has recently attested to aesthetic digressions aiming to render visible that which extractive operations consciously concealed and dispersed across space and time.¹⁵ Referencing Ursula Biemann's 8 minute video *Deep Weather* (2013), Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla's sculptural project *Blackout* (2017), and Angela Melitopoulos's four-channel video installation *Crossings* (2017), Demos identifies in these works a willingness to record seemingly disparate phenomena in remote geographies and subsequently outline an aesthetics of transnational solidarity, which he situates within intersectional investigations of global extractivist processes and their geopolitical consequences. Demos locates a site for potential emancipatory politics within said practices, which, in his view, perform a 'cultural politics of opposition', i.e. 'ones suggesting and building toward a politico-ecological paradigm shift, a self-governing movement overcoming privations and manipulations of disaster capitalism'.¹⁶ For both Gómez-Barris and Demos, then, the illegibility of slow violence and its unfolding within our present moment invite art historians and visual culture scholars to theorise the manifold aesthetic digressions devised by artists and film-makers in a politicised attempt to challenge visualities kept at the thresholds of visibility.

Where, then, could Manna's practice be situated in relation to other emerging aesthetic propositions that work towards refiguring the representational impediments of planetary processes of extraction of natural resources and labour exploitation? *Wild Relatives* journeys between Svalbard and the Bekaa Valley and traces a transnational process of seed preservation, traversing discrete spatio-temporalities as it simultaneously examines and lends voice to rural rituals, people in situations of mass displacement, discourses of reconstruction, and the political economy of catastrophism and peace-making. However, any attempts to inscribe Manna's film within a ubiquitous body of artistic and cinematic works tending to ecological urgencies, might prove unwarranted.

The artist herself asserts that, through *Wild Relatives*, she is 'making a claim that the colonial freezing of time also extends to life at large'.¹⁷ This affirmation is most manifest in the film's durational sequences that embalm its subject within a *slow motion*, itself



Jumana Manna, "Wild relatives" (film stills), 2018. HD video, colour, sound, 64min.
Courtesy of the artist

attuned with the chronopolitics of slow violence. This is exemplified, for instance, in its deployment of freeze frames and wide-open shots where human actions slowly reveal themselves amidst domineering natural landscapes. Working against the 'urgency' of ICARDA's reconstruction of its seed archive, but also, in opposition to the high-speed visual regimes of war and catastrophe, *Wild Relatives* instead navigates a field of representation where time is out of joint, pacing slowly across various historical moments. This, in turn, allows Manna to inscribe her film and her field of investigation within a continuum that also finds her grappling with sculpture that allows her to uncover the cracks and fissures of history through its object-like quality and stillness. In *Post Herbarium* (2016), an installation at the Liverpool Biennial, the artist proposes a still life composition of cut-out flower stencils, landscape collages and the overbearing bust of George E. Post.¹⁸ Post, an American missionary and botanist, travelled extensively throughout the Levant at the end of the nineteenth century, collecting over 20,000 plant specimens from Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and the Sinai region. Today, his collection is meticulously kept at the American University of Beirut, acting as an archival repository of flora that has gradually gone extinct due to the various environmental developments the region had experienced. Through Post's scientific endeavours and attempts to archive Syria's biodiversity – a sort of orientalist precursor to preservationist schemes later wrought forth by institutions such as ICARDA – Manna encourages a critical reading of the ways in which biodiversity in and of itself operates via colonial logics of producing difference and otherness, which, as history has taught us time and time again, often lies in rendering territories conquerable and/or expendable. *Post Herbarium* positions early practices of cryopreservation and their impulse to freeze and archive what the colonial gaze deems preservable in continuation with present-day outbursts of violence and subsequent reconstructive enterprises that *Wild Relatives* aims to record.

While *Wild Relatives* could be engaged with as a work that exposes processes that govern precarities and morph living territories into zones of sacrifice, it does not, throughout its one-hour duration, express a willingness to manufacture political consensus. In other words, Manna does not concern herself with aesthetic and formal limitations in representing that which is rendered illegible, nor does she seek to confront the viewer with any frontal ethico-political framework. The reparative futures and past injustices the artist alludes to are fraught with extractivist manoeuvres and authoritarian underpinnings, but no ideological grammar of contestation is being constructed or proposed anywhere. Rather, Manna unearths – both literally and figuratively – the ability of seemingly conventional modes of documentary film-making, with its staging of processes and people working towards a coherent narrative, to activate epiphanic encounters

and spatio-temporal junctures wherein a localised 'condition' and a planetary predicament can converge.

In 2003, veteran Syrian cinéaste Omar Amiralay directed his final feature documentary, *Tufan Fi Bilad el-Ba'ith* (*A Flood in Baath Country*). A year earlier, the Zeyzoun embankment dam, originally built in the Hama Governorate in 1996 with the aim of impounding water pumped from the Orontes River, suddenly collapsed and flooded adjoining villages, causing widespread material damage as well as killing dozens and displacing more than 10,000.¹⁹ Amiralay's film is the closing chapter of his trilogy on the Assad regime, which also includes two documentaries he had directed in the seventies – *Film Essay on the Euphrates Dam* (1970) and *Everyday Life in a Syrian Village* (1974), both of which championed the regime's construction of the Tabqa Dam in the Euphrates valley and its wider implementation of agrarian reforms as part of the Green Revolution, which, consequently, also led to the implementation of ICARDA. What separates this last chapter from the two earlier ones, however, are decades of state repression and a growingly tangible collective disillusionment with the early promises of Ba'athism. Triggered by the ultimate failure of the Zeyzoun Dam, Amiralay decides to revisit a village in the Euphrates valley where Lake Assad, a reservoir created when the Tabqa Dam was closed, passes through. There, he encounters a crumbling public school system that still firmly enforces a politics of public dissimulation as well as a cult of leadership towards Hafez al-Assad among its young students; as well as impoverished village-goers who claim the lake had engulfed thousands of hectares of traditional crops.²⁰ *A Flood in Baath Country*, unlike its sympathetic counterparts, is a staggering confession of regret and a militant takedown of the Assad regime. 'Our condition now lies in the depth of history, but there is no way we can forget it,' a fisherman tells Amiralay in the film's closing sequence. They're both sitting on a boat at Lake Assad; by the end of the monologue, the fisherman points towards a seemingly indistinct parcel of water, where he says his ancestral home once lied. Amiralay never got to witness the Syrian war; he died a couple of months before the first recorded anti-regime demonstrations occurred in Dar'aa. Manna picks up the task of excavating Syria's well-dug histories of slow violence right where Amiralay had left them off. Many pundits attribute the outbreak of the Syrian revolution to the supra-seasonal droughts that affected the country for more than five years, from 2006–11, and which led to 'countless instances of crop and livestock devastation and the dislocation of Syrians'.²¹ The devastating consequences of these droughts are inextricably intertwined with the Assad regime's implementation of extractivist and neoliberal policies throughout the decades, further consolidating ecological injustices.²² At the time of writing, the Idlib province is traversing the worst humanitarian crisis in Syria's nine-year war, as Assad's forces, through Russian military support,

attempt to take back the country's last opposition-held bastion.²³ There's no answer to how we can even begin to grapple and reconcile with the impossibility of extending a hand and voice in solidarity with the extermination of the life environments of Syrian and Kurdish communities. But, as Manna shows, there are, perhaps, ways to understand how it is that these atrocities come to be in the first place, why seemingly disparate events and phenomena in space and time can inform the way our shared present unfolds, and what their often-ambivalent resonances and afterlives can teach us about our planetary predicament.

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- 7 CGIAR is a global partnership that unites international organisations engaged in research for a food-secured future. CGIAR research is dedicated to reducing rural poverty, increasing food security, improving human health and nutrition, and ensuring sustainable management of natural resources. See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130901213833/http://www.cgiar.org/who-we-are/>.
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- 11 *Ibid.*, p.3.
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- 13 M. Gómez-Barris, *Ibid.*
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- 18 Ana Maria Bresciani, 'Pulsing Sounds Resonate, Loudly', in A. M. Brosicani (ed.), *Jumana Manna: A Small Big Thing*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019, pp.23–24.
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nesrine khodr

Suspended Stilllife (2006)

A nomadic tree. Her sump extracted, displaced, only to then be discarded on a construction site. Collected and suspended for less than a day, on a carpark in Ras Beirut, her bark and roots are hanging in the air, yearning for a place to re-home. Where she hung, a building now stands. Juxtaposed to the story of Beirut's RiverLESS Forest, growing in a non-place yet standing its ground, **Suspended Stilllife** (2006) speaks to the ongoing crisis in Lebanon.



Nesrine Khodr, *Suspended Stilllife*, 2006. Ephemeral installation, Beirut, Lebanon.
Courtesy of the artist

toolkit

Learn more about our partner from Palestine, Sakiya

- This progressive and experimental academy, rooted on the land of a natural reserve of multiple sedimented histories located on a hill in Ein Qiniya on the outskirts of Ramallah, "derives its spirit from the ancient Greek conception of a garden and olive grove, dedicated to the goddess of wisdom, a place of knowledge gathering and sharing."

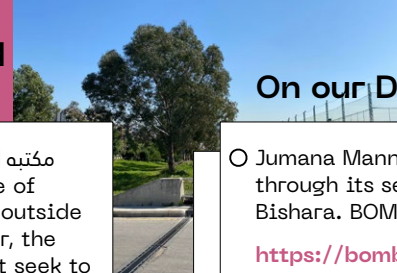
<https://sakiya.org/>



Palestine Heirloom Seed Library

- Palestine Heirloom Seed Library مكتبة البذور is based in the village of Battir, a UNESCO World Heritage site outside Bethlehem. Founded by Vivien Sansour, the PHSL and its Traveling Kitchen project seek to preserve and promote heritage and threatened seed varieties, traditional Palestinian farming practices, and the cultural stories and identities associated with them.

<https://viviensansour.com/Palestine-Heirloom>



On our Digital Bookshelves

- Jumana Manna, "Tracing the history of a region through its seeds", interviewed by Hakim Bishara. BOMB Magazine, January 25, 2019.

<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/wild-relatives-jumana-manna-interviewed/>

- Jumana Manna, "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin", e-flux, Issue 113 (November 2020).

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006>

- Abir Saksouk, "To Pit Agriculture Against Tourism: The Case of the Zahrani Coast", The Legal Agenda, October 15, 2018.

<https://english.legal-agenda.com/to-pit-agriculture-against-tourism-the-case-of-the-zahrani-coast/>



AEC focus

Franziska Pierwoss
 Mad3oum – value in a state
 of economic crisis
 Participatory research installation



Sarah Lily Yassine
 Walk Karantina as a Landscape Architect

4 September, 2021 / 5:30 pm
 Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

Karantina/Medawar is a historic urban landscape. Most of its landmarks are hidden behind militarized gardens between centennial Ficus and Eucalyptus trees. The walk narrated stories of humans and seeds, movement and mobility, and invited the participants to imagine the correlation between street names connoting migration and the presence of mature 'exotic' fruit trees such as Lychee, Jackfruit, Mango and Ficus Benjamina. The memory of this area's landscape was recorded and disseminated through walking.



AEC focus

Amani Beainy Conversation in the forest

4 September, 2021 / 9:00 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

Conversation in the forest with political and human rights activist, and co-founder of the Save Bisri Valley Campaign Amani Beainy with architect, forest-maker and environmental activist Adib Dada, moderated by TAP founder and curator Amanda Abi Khalil.

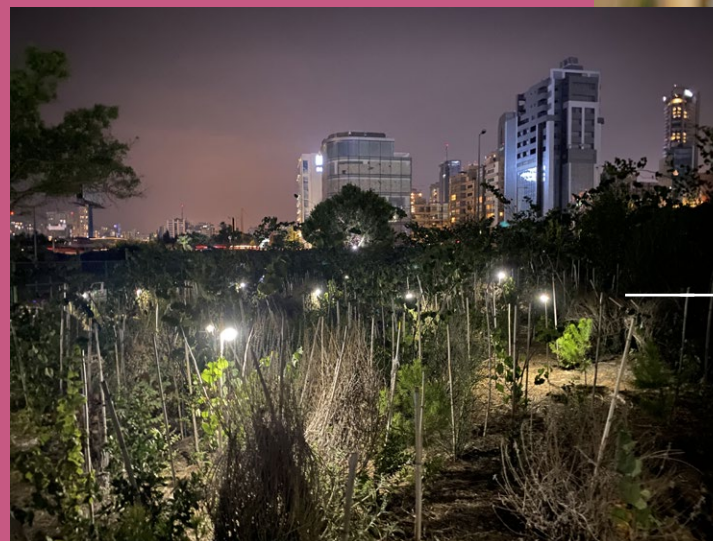


Light for Lebanon

4 September, 2021 / 9:00 pm
Beirut's RiverLESS Forest

It is thanks to Light for Lebanon that 'Art, Ecology, and the Commons' and Beirut's RiverLESS Forest came to dazzling life at night. Born from a partnership between Light Reach and Manale Kahale, an architectural lighting designer and activist based in Beirut, they work to sustainably illuminate Lebanon through the provision of solar-powered streetlights, stationary lights, and portable lanterns.

This initiative emerged after the blast having devastated Beirut in August 2020, in the context of Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis. "For too many people, generators, fuel and utility bills are simply not affordable, and **they live in the dark.**"



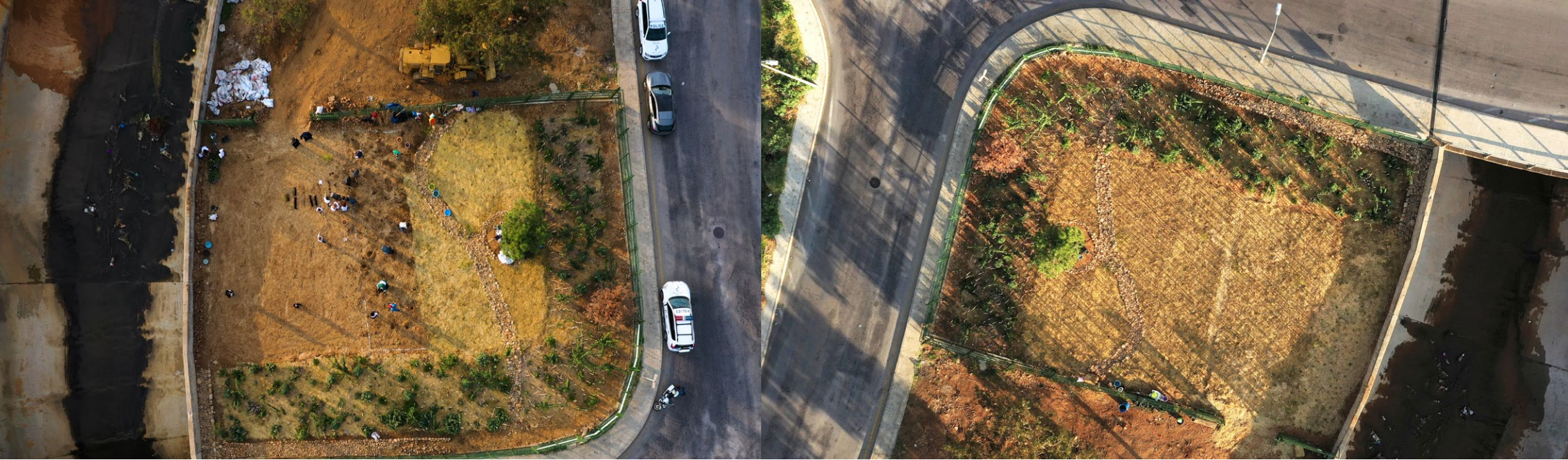
Saw
Cut
Or
Chop
Anyway
Anyhow
All will
Overgrow
Knit

Grin
Heal
Forget
Beyond recall
Remember
Truth
Behind being

Evgenia Emets, "Eternal Forest", 2019



Evgenia Emets, "Cut off an Edge of Time", watercolor and ink on paper, 2020.
Courtesy of the artist



Beirut's RiverLESS Forest, All rights reserved @theOtherDada

**A few things we learned about
Art, Ecology & The Commons**

