A Cross Section of a History

Muhammad Hammoud: I was born in 1944. My first job was as an operator at the Cinema Salwa in Batroun. I loved the cinema for as long as I can remember. When I was young, I always played with my brothers and our neighbors. My favorite games were those inspired by movies and that made my love for cinema grow even more. When playing, I enjoyed standing behind a curtain and using cardboard, lights, shadow puppets, and other tools in order to make shows for my friends. Those were the only movies that I produced personally. So, it was only logical for me to enter the professional cinema business, and to remain there until today.

In Search of Lost Cinemas

Ibrahim Moudallal was a famous producer and distributor in Beirut. He always screened his movies at the cinemas in the Al-Bouj Square. His cousin, Ali Moudallal, also loved this business and wanted to open a movie theater. You could say that between the 60s and 70s, movie theaters started to sprout up in Lebanon like mushrooms. Even in the working-class areas, such as Bouj Al-Banjanah, a number of cinemas were constructed, like Cinema Radio, Cinema Palace, and Cinema Dunno, which were in line from Ain al-Sikkeh Square to Ghobeiry. Then, Cinema Al-Ahram opened in Ghobeiry near the quarter of the Al-Khansa family, along with the Hilton and Cinderella in Bir al-Abed.

There is a thousand reasons that cause places to continuously transform. The residents, landscape, and urban culture can change to such an extent that all that remains are narratives, traces, and scars. At any rate, no place could presume to be immune to one day becoming obsolete or reinvented. However, all places, even if they are this constant mutability, and not the same in terms of their speed with which these changes materialize. No comparison is possible between a place changing so slowly and one that is accelerated, transformation, but it is an especially telling example of what Lebanon is moving towards: the martyrdom of pluralism.

Today, in the "Dahiyeh," thousands of square meters of the dense urban landscape have returned to dust. These voids in our midst, created by Israeli bombs, are NOT helpful in drawing its borders, except its western "Dahiyeh." Obviously, we are referring to an actual location, however historically-loaded this place could be. The history of this neighborhood is not really helpful in drawing its borders, except its western "Dahiyeh," which created a new historical possibility could seem nothing more than a face-value. In hindsight, this barely-missed "Dahiyeh?" was created by Israeli bombs, and other items documenting the transformation of Haret Hreik inhabitants and the layers yet to come.

I remember one of the tough guys from the neighborhood, close, he would shoot at them. I remember that exact statement vividly. I spent my childhood in Chiah - "Dahiyeh," others, among them those who fled during the 1958 War when the region was called as "Dahiyeh," and otherwise. The project was suspended for months, and the residents, landscape, and other items documenting the transformation of Haret Hreik inhabitants and the layers yet to come.

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A Lebanese Curriculum in "Dahiyeh"

Faysal Jalloul: I'm actually from Antelias, but I know nothing about it because my parents fled during the 1958 War when I was still very young. I remember my mother telling me that we had to leave because the Christians were threatening to rob through the heads of Muslims...in one ear and out the other. I remember that exact statement vividly. Before "Dahiyeh" was flooded with these voids, Ummi initiated a project to collect oral narratives, photographs, and other items documenting the transformation of Haret Hreik from a diverse neighborhood to an exclusive playing field. The war broke out, affecting Ummi physically and otherwise. The project was suspended for months, and when we restarted contemplating it in 2004, we had to answer the question: Should we keep the project in its initial format, neglecting the last war and the reinforcement of the de facto grouping of multiple neighborhoods, including Haret Hreik, under the name "Dahiyeh"? Or should we consider that this reality has produced a project uniquely about Haret Hreik less relevant than a wider investigation of the "Dahiyeh"? We have chosen the second option, knowing that such a project could never be an exhaustive one, but rather a collage, and the beginning of a process of conscious remembering versus continual forgetting which we wish to see undertaken in "Dahiyeh," its suburbs, and beyond.
As you know, this region was called the Coastal Southern Metn. However, contrary to most of the “native” locals, I don’t consider anyone to be an outsider. I always discuss this topic with the residents of Bourj al-Barajneh. I say, “So what? If what Palestinians came and settled here! You benefited from their money, which helped you to build houses, buy and rent others, and launch new businesses. Why do you people only choose to see this matter from a negative perspective?” Personally, I was never traumatized by seeing the Southerners settling in the city. In fact, if you want to go back to the roots of each one of us, you’ll find that all of us came from somewhere.

A Suburb by Any Other Name?

Albert Farhat: As you know, this region was called the Coastal Southern Metn, and changing the name of our area to “Dahiyeh” was rejected. But actually, considering the massive construction that took place, and the influx of people, the new name was not totally illogical. Personally, I don’t know what. Even within the Communist party, they don’t consider anyone to be an outsider. I always discuss this topic with the residents of Bourj al-Barajneh. I say, “So what? If what Palestinians came and settled here! You benefited from their money, which helped you to build houses, buy and rent others, and launch new businesses. Why do you people only choose to see this matter from a negative perspective?” Personally, I was never traumatized by seeing the Southerners settling in the city. In fact, if you want to go back to the roots of each one of us, you’ll find that all of us came from somewhere.

Albert Farhat: In Search of Lost Cinemas

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Farhat: That debate was the result of some contention between the older inhabitants and the newcomers. For some, changing the name of the area to correspond with demographic shifts was unacceptable... but this is like someone trying to reject a reality by refusing to name it.

Hani Hajj: We are from the Coastal Southern Metn, not Dahiyeh. The hell with them and the person who started referring to us as “Dahiyeh!” We are not Dahiyeh! Anyway, you’ll notice that whenever anyone of us wants to make a public announcement, such as an obituary, we make sure to use “All residents of Coastal Southern Metn” and not “All residents of Dahiyeh.” Tala Salama was the first one to refer to our area as Dahiyeh in 1982 or 1983. I hate him... really I never liked him.

Muhammad Hamdan: It started becoming a suburb in the full sense of the word when the chaotic construction began, after investors bought up huge lots of land. Then, people from the Bekaa and the South started buying apartments. It became Dahiyeh in 1984-85. When people started using “Dahiyeh Joubieh.” Within the Communist Party, we were referred to as the Coastal Southern Metn branch. People started calling us the Dahiyeh branch beginning in the 80s, and we tried to correct them. It took on a certain connotation after As-Safe newspaper published a report in 1983 about “the dahiyeh” and “its 800,000 inhabitants,” and I don’t know what. Even within the Communist party, they started calling us the Dahiyeh branch. In the 90s we rejected this identification. Why should we be referred to as the Dahiyeh section? No, we wanted to be called the Coastal Southern Metn branch and try to re-establish relationships with Communists in places like Al-Hadad, Ain al-Roumani, and Fum as-Shebak (predominantly Christian areas).
New Lebanon

The negotiations held between the entrepreneurial businessmen, its Excellency Nabih Baha Chakhour, and landowners of an area adjacent to Ouzal and Bah Hassan culminated in a final agreement. The agreement states that these landowners, the heirs of Mr. Moustafa Ramadan and Mr. Ibrahim Tabet, will hand over 3 million square yards to the village, which is more than enough to build a large village of thousands of inhabitants.

Within Smoking Distance

Salmi Boureik: I’m Salmi, Edward Boureik’s son. We have lived in the Dahiyeh since 1950. When my father and mother came to buy a piece of land in Haret Hreik, my mother asked my father, “Why on earth do you want to move here? It’s so far!” She had a lot of reservations. However, as they were leaving she lit up a cigarette, and before she had finished it, they had reached downtown. That’s how they concluded that Haret Hreik is within smoking distance from downtown.

Before my father was one of the rare people who came from outside this area and bought a piece of land in Haret Hreik. We still own it. My mother breaks her heart every time someone asks me, “Why don’t you just sell it?” I tell myself, “I suffered what I suffered, I was beaten… but I never blamed this place.”

The Return of Bourj Camp to “Dahiyeh”

Abu Yousef: Our war with Amal established clear boundaries. There was Bourj camp, and outside, there was the enemy. I have a brother who was martyred. God rest his soul, in a battle, that burned his blood, your blood, your blood. My brother had the sand of Palestine imbedded in his boots. He carried out dangerous cross-border operations and even reached our village, Tarshiha, but ironically it was there that he was martyred. We were sickened by this bitter twist of fate. My uncle is a Shiah from my mother’s side, so we fought them. He danced to come pay his condolences! I absolutely refused!... even threatened to shoot him!

The Camp War that was triggered by the extended efforts exerted by his Excellency, the General Manager...

Abu Youssef: Touché! I mean.”

Abu Youssef: This village will be another “New Egypt”! An upscale housing development outside Cairo... will be constructed according to the highest standards of perfection, while respecting hygienic concerns and boasting the best safety and comfort. A wide, paved road full of squares and parks will service the village. Each house will also have a private garden in order to allow each family to enjoy fresh air and sunshine.

Finally, the company is also hoping to make an agreement with the tramway company in order to create a line that will reach the village. The project is expected to succeed, thanks first to God, and then to the great efforts exerted by his Excellency, the General Manager...
The "Dahiyeh" Went to Cool Off

Sahat Harakeh: During the summer, we used to go to the beach on foot and set up tents on the shore. There were so many fish that I could smell them as we swam to feel the swaying between our feet. The beach was beautiful, and the water was truly full of fish. Above all else, I liked fishing. At night, I used to prepare my fishing rod and sit facing the moon. My fishing was always good.

During the summer, we used to go to the beach resorts. During the night, we used to go fishing. I liked fishing at night. I used to prepare my fishing rod and sit facing the moon. My fishing was always good. Above all else, I liked fishing. At night, I used to prepare my fishing rod and sit facing the moon. My fishing was always good.

O.A.: Before the beach resorts were built, the road from our house to the sea was sandy. We used to go to the beach for walks. I clearly remember that Joseph, my soul resting in peace, was the first person to build a beach resort, the St. O.A.:

Q: We're talking about Joseph Semioun?

O.A.: Yes, exactly. He started this project alone. He was so clever he didn't even need to hire a professional engineer. Every year he just expanded more and more. Eventually, the elites of Beirut became regular clients. Deputies, ambassadors, diplomats, and businessmen all came to work there. In addition, he built a separate building for presidents.

He received almost every president who visited the country. That was the situation until the war broke out.