

RACHID AL DAIF'S *DEAR MR. KAWABATA*: AN ALLEGORY OF THE RECONSTRUCTION OF POST-WAR BEIRUT

Daisy Waked

Head of the English Section of the Language Center
Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon

Abstract

The reconstruction of postwar Beirut projects the image of a modern city, oblivious of its past. Yet, the remnants of war are in constant struggle with this new identity of Beirut. Parallel to this dilemma, Rachid Al Daif's narrator in *Dear Mr. Kawabata* witnesses a struggle between tradition and modernity. This article discusses the sources of both dilemmas and their manifestations: the narrator's dilemma is an allegory of the reconstructed Beirut due to the driving forces that constitute their struggles. Amnesia and the ghost-like presence of memory are the two opposing forces that result in the schizophrenic identity of Beirut and in the narrator's struggle. Both Beirut and the narrator experience a loss of memory at times and its haunting shadowy presence at others. Hence the inevitable need to explore the remnants of the memory of war to bring about the conscious awareness and acceptance of the past.

Keywords: Beirut, Al Daif, dilemma, memory, war, amnesia

Introduction

The schizophrenic reality of post-war Beirut is exemplified in Rachid Al Daif's *Dear Mr. Kawabata* (1999). Garish Beirut stands today in all majesty, after a long history of wars and destruction. A prisoner in symmetry, a victim of amnesia activists, Beirut is the two-faced city. In one embrace, the re-born city adopts the modernized future and in the other, clings to a past too painful to be forgotten. The re-constructed Beirut is writing itself through its colorful, impersonal facades and wide, lifeless streets. Between these lines, can be read suffocated wails of the war's memory and ever-present shadows of death. Echoing Gibran Kahlil Gibran's words, Beirut utters its dilemma: "It is not a garment I cast off this day, but a skin that I tear with my own hands."

A witness of the Lebanese war, Rachid Al Daif was born in 1945 in Northern Lebanon into a Maronite family. He is a lecturer in Arabic language and literature at the Lebanese University in Beirut, as well as a novelist and poet. In *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, he attempts to express the dilemma between modernity and tradition; the future and the past, taking Kawabata's *The Master of Go* (1951) as his model. Al Daif addresses Kawabata who tasted death and rebirth. Beirut too, hasn't fully recovered from war and its ghosts. It has to go through death in order to live again and have a future.

Al Daif's *Dear Mr. Kawabata* begins with his encounter with "an uncannily image of himself." But that person "walked in a different direction, with a different gait, wearing different clothes" (D, 1). This was the narrator's friend who left the party before the war started. He hasn't killed a soul. He is neat and well-attired, and sleeps easily at night, with a clear conscience. The narrator hates him. He is himself, but a polished, smiling, healthy image of himself. We hear the narrator's laments and recollections of war, and we sense his struggle with the man's haunting image. If we examine the binary opposition that engages both the

reconstructed Beirut and Al Daif's narrator, we would find a set of driving forces. On one hand, there is death/ war/ past and on the other, rebirth/ peace/ future.

This article discusses this tearing dilemma in all its aspects based on Al Daif's *Dear Mr. Kawabata* and specific examples of the reconstruction of postwar Beirut. Not much has been written about this dilemma that is veiled by the modernized image of Beirut-as-commodity. The purpose of this study is to bring to the surface Beirut's consciousness as a city with a past, with recollections, thoughts and desires. Beirut is not a mere stone-city, a festooned, symmetrical work of bricolage waiting to be consumed. In fact, Jade Tabet, architect, author of "La cité aux deux places" and editor of *Beyrouth: La Brûlure Des Rêves*, questions the perfected image of Beirut: "Why, then, this feeling of unease that emerges from the rehabilitated façades, the strange impression of strolling in a décor de théâtre?"

This article refuses the modern passive consuming of Beirut as an *objet d'art*. Instead, it provides a microscopic gaze on Beirut's identity and spies on the hidden corners of the city. Nasser Rabbat in "The Interplay of History and Archeology in Beirut" admits his concern for the loss of Beirut's identity as a "realm of memory":

"In the not –so-distant future, when the new downtown with its tall buildings and wide, tree-lined boulevards is completed and the face of postwar Beirut is totally remade... the city as a whole in its new garb will cease to be a *milieu de mémoire*, or an environment for memory."

Beirut needs to be conscious of the duplicity that modernism forces upon its existence today. Just as Marx admits in his *Communist Manifesto* (1848) that the way beyond the contradictions would have to lead through modernity, not out of it, this article delineates the importance of the conscious awareness of Beirut's struggle. In fact, the pathological remnants of the war's memory have to be explored and most importantly, exposed. This is the act of losing the old halo and finding a new one. This article re-writes a modern city in the Barthean way: "jouir d'une défiguration." To deflate the pompous image of Beirut and re-weave its fine threads, are the main concerns of this study. Dismissing the Beirutan fallacy of "les jeux sont faits", this article announces: "qu'il y ait un jeu"!

The game of re-writing Beirut begins with Rachid's narrator who wonders why his life hasn't flashed before his eyes when he died: "No memories of any sort whatever passed in front of my eyes" (D, 2). Near-death experience, which usually changes the whole existence of the dying, is not effective in the narrator's case. He suffers the burden of those memories that lie deep in him but cannot see the light. Pain is the only manifestation of this strange experience:

"Nothing, not even the world after death, could distract me from the pain I was feeling. My pain was the only thing to occupy my senses when I returned to life from the vastness of death" (D, 2).

The absence of memory may be the deliberate subconscious dismissal of the past and its burdens. The narrator's attempt to erase the wounds of his past and cancel all its traces results in this expressive pain. His desire to display his life's events and his fear to live them again are the two driving forces that constitute his pain.

Fear and desire are the two expressions one can see today on the disfigured face of Barakat Building that still stands on the green line. This building was shared by both the western and eastern parts of Beirut as an eternal witness of their atrocities. It shares the pain of Al Daif's narrator: the suffocating pain of a fragmented, almost extinct memory. Barakat building-halfway between Monot, the street of restaurants and nightclubs and the new commercial central district- stands alone on the shattered fragments of memory. Deserted and sad, its empty windows and broken walls echo the distant howls of the war. This monument once baptized by the unholy fires no longer recalls what it once looked like. A symbol of the still surviving, but quickly fading memory of Beirut, this building is the last monument of war that can be found in Beirut today. In 1997, a decree was issued to demolish it. The

International press adopted the situation, especially when a young architect Mona Al Hallak opposed the project: “This building *is* Lebanon. It symbolizes the beauty of pre-war. During the war, it was a spot for shooters. Now, they want to erase it to become a parking lot.”

An old scar on the face of Beirut, this building suffers the pain of forgetfulness. It neither belongs to the glorious pre-war Beirut nor to the years of painful war and it definitely can't feel at home in the city's millennium framework. In his article “Shadows of a Past Life amidst Beirut's Ruins: How do we deal with a threatened memory?” Wael Abdel Fattah argues that Barakat Building:

“...remains a bridge between a hypothetical city, and another present in its noise, fear, mute violence and growing contrasts...The yellow building encompasses all of Beirut and its indefinite future.”

The fate of this building was left on hold until the Municipality of Beirut prepared an ambitious project to transform the forsaken building into ‘Beit Beirut Museum and Cultural Center’ which is projected to be a museum, a cultural and artistic meeting place, a facility for archiving research and studies on the city of Beirut throughout history and an urban planning office for the city of Beirut. The only obvious reality is that Barakat Building, due to the weight of its crashed wall, will never restore its past existence, just like Al Daif's narrator will never be able to see his life flashing before his eyes. The truth that near death experience promises is the awakening that neither of them went through. The narrator failed to grasp the truth that he could only know through revelation in a moment of mixed fear and desire. Beirut too, holds the moment of revelation in suspense. Isn't it after all, Italo Calvino's city *par excellence*: the city that is drawn by its whims and fears?

Caught in a situation that requires reconciliation with the past, Rachid (Al Daif's narrator) and Beirut (exemplified in Barakat building) show the first manifestations of an evident dilemma. The narrator, in an attempt to give voice to his inner-struggle writes his long letter to Kawabata. As for Beirut, it manifests its own dilemma in its post war reconstruction. At times mute and shy, violent and provocative at others, these two struggles are discussed in this part of the article. Al Daif's narrator appoints Kawabata as king and regards him as “The arbitrator obeyed because of his sincerity” (D, 8). Kawabata is the king and the arbitrator in the narrator's dilemma because he wrote about an intense struggle in *The Master of Go*. This struggle takes the form of the Go game in which the old master is challenged to a marathon by a younger player. The opposition is thus clearly between the old and the new generations, between a master and a young player. They only make a few moves a day. The pressure and tension of the game destroy the health of the master. He dies shortly after the game ends. In *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, Al Daif's narrator expresses his great sympathy with the old master. The latter suffers silently with dignity and extreme pain. Rachid sees in this game many similarities with the struggle he wants to write about.

“I also wanted, like you, to write a story in which I would speak, through an ordinary event, about the clash between the climate of the age (I mean modernity with its threats and challenges) and local people, I mean tradition” (D, 9).

This clash between the past and the future, tradition and modernity is the result of his inner conflict. The narrator is unable to tame his memory and reconcile it with his present. This clash is the subject matter of his letter. It is a clearly great opposition between powerful forces. The generation of the past (tradition) wouldn't accept the scientific discoveries and the world's evolution. In fact, the narrator had to insist to his parents that the world was round, not flat. In the same sense, Joseph Bourke emphasizes the intensity of the struggle in “Tragic Vision in Kawabata's *The Master of go*”.

“The most fundamental level of that conflict is the confrontation of two completely different ways of understanding the nature of human existence at the moment when one is giving way to the other and while both are still vital enough to sustain the conflicts intensity.”

The two conflicting forces in the narrator's struggle are both powerful, each in its own way. Each of them has a different conception of human nature: tradition refuses all attempts of change and evolution, while modernity believes only in its own science and its only faith is in itself.

The clash between tradition and modernity is mirrored by a parallel struggle: that of Beirut's past and future. In fact, Beirut that embraces both its whims and fears is in constant search for an identity. Barakat building on one hand represents the fragmented past and Fosh Street, on the other, the modernized part of the city. Barakat building, an empty and still non-recovered monument of the past war is the force that drives the city back while Fosh Street, with all its modern attractions and lively noise, promises Beirut an appealing vision of a modern future. It is quite similar to the opposition between the narrator's belief in the roundness of the earth and the disbelief of his parents who don't believe in the continuity of life due to their static, limited existence.

Rachid's narrator admits that only Kawabata can understand him: "Is it, I wonder, that you have set me free, through the act you undertook in the last moment of your life?" (D, 17)

In fact, Kawabata committed suicide in 1972. Al Daif may see in Kawabata's act a conscious and brave confrontation with one's fear. Kawabata was the master of his own driving forces and had control over his existence. This ultimate mastery over the self is a manifestation of power. Self-realization preceded self-destruction in Kawabata's case. Kawabata confronted his fears and realized his existence before he ended his life. Rachid envies this decision and hopes to reach the same ending after writing about his own conflict. Kawabata tasted a conscious death. This conscious death or "closure" is what Beirut needs. The open, undecided fate of Beirut has to be determined. Beirut still stands in shame and helplessness. Unaware of its own reality, past and future, it hangs in the open winds. Is it doomed to have Barakat Building's fate or participate in the virtual laughs of Fosh's exotic nights?

Whatever the way the narrator and Beirut chose, one thing is certain: the new life has to pass through a conscious death. The narrator, in order to overcome his inner struggle and reconcile tradition with modernity, has to be consciously aware of those two. And in order to find its belonging between a fragmented past and an unreal future, Beirut has to be conscious of its own reality. Dag Hammarskjöld insists upon this conscious realization: "Committed to the future_/ Even if that only means 'se préparer à bien mourir.'"

Now that the source of the struggle is located, it is time to delve into some of its manifestations. The narrator's encounter with "the uncannily sharp image of [himself]" (D, 1) is displeasing to him. The friend appears to the narrator as a haunting shadow. He is described as a handsome, well attired man. "His bearing was upright ... his authentic, Semitic nose was raised a little, arrogantly, like his head" (D, 3). There was no wrinkle on his face or neck. "Smooth-faced as a child, with a neck that filled the collar of his shirt, without bursting out of it. A face brimming with purity; a virginal smile" (D, 105). The narrator describes his friend's appearance with minute details. He is amazed by his perfect looks. Yet, he is irritated by this overwhelmingly neat phantom. He can even see that his friend's face was that "of a man who sleeps as soon as his head hits the pillow, with an easy conscience, pure white snow" (D, 109).

The narrator, far from appreciating such a perfect picture, is in fact repulsed by it. The excessive neatness and grandiose walk are somehow superficial to him. The narrator is annoyed by his friend's fake smile. Later on, this white phantom slips back again into the narrative, confirming his influence on the narrator. "The smartest thing about him was his suit. A gray suit with a carefully knotted tie, and a white shirt" (D, 137).

In *Unreal City*, Tony Hanania displays a character very similar to Al Daif's. Hanania's narrator, a taxi driver, has to pick up a client from the cemetery. The man appears inside the car before the driver even pulls up the lock to let him in. There is no moisture on the glass

beside his face. He doesn't seem cold. He is dressed in a café-crème Safari summer suit although it is wintertime. He suddenly disappears like an unfinished, fragmented dream. The two over-dressed, strange looking characters seem to belong to another place and time.

Till now, I have discussed the physical description of the friend and its effect on the narrator. A likely embellished, almost pathetic image, Nejme Square is the item I'd like to discuss next. Home of the parliament, Nejme Square is busy during the day and noisy by night with its crowded cafés and clubs. Nejme Square, a symmetrical, crafted area attracts hundred of tourists as well as Lebanese people every day. Yet, something peculiar in its over crafted *décor* seems to repulse the careful viewer. Neat and spotless, its streets are carefully lined up and its buildings displayed with exaction. Tabet in "La cité aux deux places" sees Nejme square as a place *toilette* and over cleaned: a hyperspace.

"Emptied from all their occupants, its imposing buildings are transformed into spaces of representation where the picturesque only serves consuming purposes, as if in this *mise en valeur* of the place, lies its *mise en mort*." Projecting ideal impressions and images, Nejme Square brings the same feeling of "fake" appearances that I have already discussed in the friend's case. This spectacle, very similar to Guy Debord's, demands a "passive acceptance" and says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears." Nejme Square stands in majestic firmness. The passersby cannot but be attracted by its magic. No traces of fatigue or decay can be depicted in its provocative façades. A perfect simulation of a modern environment Nejme Square is a virtual scene that promises what Berman calls "rhapsodies of Utopian yearning." Just like Nevsky Prospect, Nejme Square displays a set of wide and straight streets. It is planned and designed so well that it serves now as a vortex of consumer economy and exchange.

Returning to the friend, he walked along the Hamra street pavement

"...as if nothing had happened. It was as if the horrors that had taken place all over Lebanon, and in Beirut in particular, for the last fifteen years were an artificial flood, specially constructed for a short-term purpose – an open air play, perhaps, or to shoot a film" (D, 2).

The narrator finds it strange that his friend walks in complete absence and denial of Beirut's past. He wonders how such recollections of war and destruction can be easily wiped off from his memory. Beirut today aches too at the sight of Nejme Square which was once a stage for many battles and bloodshed. Here lies the schizophrenic nature of Beirut that I alluded to at the outset of this article. Beirut is torn between a past that cannot see the light again and a future that grew pre-maturely. Nejme square among many other places in Beirut saw the light in a hurried, active impulse to overcome its wounds before they were completely healed. The outcome of this rushed reconstruction is a nondescript land. Nejme square witnesses the passing of the days fluently, yearning to a promising future. The friend too is seen "holding a *misbaha* (worry beads) in both hands...For us, Arabs, time does not pass without a *misbaha*" (D, 3).

Leaving the past behind, Nejme square and the friend unconsciously give time a push. Beirut and the narrator wonder at such behavior but they know quite well that they created them.

"I had invented him! I had assembled his component parts from similar features common to many other people I know, features that also link them with myself. I had pulled them together to make him! (D, 3)

Beirut too, driven by the desire to become a modern city borrowed its 'material' from all over the world in order to create a city that encompasses all the attractions and modern attributes of the world. In one of its summer 2002 TV ads, the Ministry of Tourism displays a set of consequent pictures from famous cities of the world with their names in form of questions: "London?" "Paris?" "Hollywood?" "Rio?" "Tokyo?" The ad concludes with the line: "It's all in Lebanon!" with all the previous pictures flashing quickly again. In this sense, Beirut wants to encompass all the world's hallmark capitals and "features" as Al Daif calls

them. Beirut appears thus as a patchwork and a commodity ready to be consumed. Citing Debord's words,

“Tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities, is fundamentally nothing more than the leisure of going to see what has become banal.”

Beirut sees itself in a bright future that Barakat Building couldn't even visualize. The friend foretells a beautiful future in the distance:

“What did he see now in the distance, when almost everyone was agreed that the war had probably ended...? Was he trying to catch a glimpse of the peace that was coming?” (D, 109)

The narrator's friend, in his hauteur and impertinent walk has a vision that no one else can see. Nejme square as well projects an economic and touristic vision of Beirut. It is absorbed in this vision that it cast away all the past, like the friend walked “as if nothing had happened.” Indeed, his face was that: “of a man who sleeps as soon as his head hits the pillow ... and who enjoys a clear conscience” (D, 111). The narrator and his friend belonged to the same political party. They planned demonstrations, were trained to use weapons. The narrator cannot believe how his friend's conscience is so clear after all they have been through, and all that they did and witnessed. He adds:

“I was surprised by the fact that his neck had not a single trace of a drop of blood on it. It was absolutely straight, as if totally innocent...with the confidence of an upright man, and the unself-consciousness of an inanimate being” (D, 139).

“Smooth as the neck of a virgin and unblemished” was his neck. It was commonly known, the narrator claims that during his time a murderer's neck is always bent. But his friend's neck was not even slightly bent and had not a drop of blood on it. He seemed totally innocent from all crime, with a clear conscience. Totally innocent from all recollection of the war, Nejme square is a newborn city. It seems to be above all possible recollection of a dreadful past. It stands with a free or maybe a whitened conscience. Its memory made blank, it is a memory for forgetfulness as Mahmud Darwish calls it.

The narrator and Beirut are both “banalized” (to use Debord's word). They are both forced to accept and believe in a simulated reality. The narrator is haunted by his friend's attractive, angel-like shadow while Beirut is not allowed to unveil the secrets of the perfect crafted stucco of its modern areas. “The image has become the final form of commodity reification.” (Using Debord's famous words again). The narrator and Beirut are obliged to be silent consumers of the images they are in struggle with.

Beirut city and the narrator, as I already argued, are caught in a dilemma in which many changes and currents take them back to the past, while at times, carry them in a leap to the future. Fighting amnesia, the narrator and Beirut confronted the future in its dual manifestation. They will take the opposite direction in the following part of this article, asserting thus the twofold dimension of the struggle.

As the narrator unfolds a new layer of his inner struggle, the reader goes a step further in the realization of the driving forces that roar in his unsettled mind. We see him now talking about the generation of the past or tradition. Having dwelled on modernity and the future, he goes back in his narrative to discuss his father's reliance on weapons.

“My father would constantly insist that after his death we should put his revolver under the pillow he rested his head on, because that was the only thing he had faith in, even in his final agony. ‘Otherwise, it will be like burying me naked’” (D, 38).

The narrator's father believes in weapons and their ends. He trusts the gun that could protect him and defend him. This same gun can also kill him. The gun is “clothing” to him, a protection and a shield from the outside. In fact, the idea of war becomes a shield to protect them. They hide behind it to justify their behavior, way of thinking or even lack of hope. Makdissi argues in *Beirut Fragments* that:

“... no matter how hard we try, we cannot shut out the war, even at the moments of relative quiet. We are locked into the situation, penetrated by it. We carry it in us and around with us.”

“Hope of Peace” is a monument built in 1995 near the Ministry of Defense in Beirut. Tanks, VTTs, guns and jeeps are cast in tons of concrete, symbolizing the burial of the war instruments. The monument calls to forget past wounds and look towards the future with hope. If we look critically at this monument, we would see the cannons of the tanks still facing the outside. The risk of shooting fire is always there as long as the cannon is still intact and aiming. In the same sense, the Lebanese people rushed to cover the exposed parts of their memory with patches of forgetfulness in an attempt to counter the psychological effects of ruin and devastation. Such an attempt is unsuccessful. The narrator’s father believes in war and its ways just as the Lebanese people nowadays leave the cannons of their memory aiming at the future. In *The Little Mountain*, Elias Khoury, in an attempt to change the destructive nature and use of the tank tells his friends: “ ‘I want a tank made of all colors....’ The guys brought over lots of colors and began to paint the tank.”

But a tank remains a tank whether it is colored or half buried. The tank becomes useless only when its cannon is broken. War in fact becomes the nightmare reality of everyday life. The sounds of bombs, cannons and aerial bombardments (manifested in the “Hope of Peace” monument) are far from being hushed nowadays. The echoes of these sounds still hover around in the Lebanese’ ears, whenever thunder strikes or lightening lights up the sky. We are, as Lebanese individuals, at home in this sometimes shocking, painful and peculiar tyranny of war. Emily Nasrallah handles the issue of memory in *A House Not Her Own: Stories from Beirut*:

“I was cooped up inside my house, walking through rooms empty save for the holes in the walls made by the flying sharpnels of continuous war. They were like slap marks on the face of memory.”

Fighting a struggle between war and peace, haunting memory and forgetfulness, the narrator and Beirut are caught in the dilemma. Ghada Samman portrays this clash in *Beirut Nightmares*: In one of her nightmares, a father brings his son a present on his birthday. The present is in a colorful box tied with a golden ribbon. The child opens it with joy. He finds inside a rifle. He is silent. His father asks him: ‘Don’t you like the rifle?’ ‘I wanted a bicycle so I could ride it on the rainbow’s highway, and discover the multicolored lanes, one color at a time.’

The roots of Beirut’s struggle were discussed in the first part. In the second, Nejme Square was used as an allegory for the total absence of memory. In the third part, the “Hope of Peace” monument reveals the other side of Beirut’s schizophrenic identity. Now, it is time to bring our discussion to the final stage: that of the conscious awareness of the above mentioned forces in Beirut’s struggle. The introduction laid great emphasis on the fact that the pathological remnants of the war’s memory must be explored and exposed.

As already argued in the first part, the old generation wouldn’t admit the scientific fact that the earth is round and that it revolves around itself. The narrator tries to persuade them, but in vain: “But our ancestors were tied to the earth’s surface, shackled by its gravity, untroubled by any questions, with hearts that took no pleasure in reality” (D, 45). The narrator uses later a metaphor in which the struggle reaches its peak. He says:

“Take the pearls of the sea- the man that risks all to dive for them, can reach them and bring them back to land; but the man that stays on the surface of the water by the shore, comes back with only a hidden longing” (D, 46).

The narrator’s ancestors stayed at the surface of the water and suffered a “hidden longing”. The narrator here realizes his inner struggle, which reaches its climax with this metaphor. The old generation has to delve deeper in its beliefs and values. It has to reach the

pearls of knowledge to bring them to the shore. The narrator attains the nirvana of his dilemma with this image. He knows now what has to be done and how to do it.

On another level, Beirut needs to experience such an awakening in order to be conscious of its struggle. B018 is an underground nightclub known for its unusual music and strange atmosphere. Near the port of Beirut, it was the quarantine zone for the port. Later on, it became home to war refugees and then, it was all destroyed. The site witnessed atrocious scenes of persecution and massacre. During this time the only architectural element visible from the road was a wall with a long, narrow hole through which militia snipers could shoot the passersby. To respect the memory of the place, especially the void that ruled over the site behind the wall, Bernard Khoury, the B018 architect developed an underground structure in 1998. This underground nightclub has sliding roof panels at ground level. When opening, the B018 roof releases sounds and light and extends its atmosphere to the outside. The distortion of the reflected images is exaggerated by the fragmentation of the mirror panels. Its closing is a voluntary gesture of disappearance, a strategy of recess. The gothic, sepulchral entry is a vertical murky stair. The seats, specially designed for the B018 nightclub, are made of steel and covered with dark-stained solid mahogany. They open to reveal velvet upholstery. Near the entrance is a long narrow window, positioned slightly lower than eye level to commemorate the snipers' hole that once existed in the wall.

Khoury's architectural concept and execution of B018 constitute homage to the past. He admits that: "The danger in architecture here (in Lebanon) is that everyone acts as if nothing happened. History is simplified." B018 refuses to participate in the amnesia that governs other Lebanese postwar reconstruction efforts. B018 is an invitation to dive deep into the wounded memory of war and bring about awareness. A part of Beirut, just like the old generation, acts as if nothing happened. In order to achieve reconciliation with its internal forces, Beirut needs to reach into its unconscious, go beneath the surface in order to be aware of its past and heal the scars it caused. Buried in the memory of forgetfulness, Beirut is still on the surface of its conscience and suffers a "hidden longing" for survival.

B018, the shrine of the past contains holy recollections of history. The seats and tables are in the shape of coffins. When panels open up late at night the phantoms of the past reach the city along with the requiem tunes and distorted images of the past. The delirious dancers close the seats, which become flat, wooden-like surfaces to dance on. Dancing on the grave of the past; thus begins the demystification of the authority of war memory. Beirut's memory has to emerge from the underground in order to assert its right to be a modern city. Elias Khoury in *The Little Mountain* emphasizes the importance of consciousness: "Consciousness is the opposite of death. We can abolish death only with consciousness. Then, we'll be over with dying and start into real death."

In our journey through the streets of Beirut and Al Daif's *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, we met the constituents of their colliding forces. Consciousness was the key term in this study and the target towards which it aims. Being a *flâneur* was essential to achieve this end. Only the *flâneur* can read the city's true contents behind the motley façades. Walter Benjamin defines the *flâneur* as "industrious" and "productive". "His eyes open, his ears ready, searching for something entirely different from what the crowd gathers to see."

Escaping what Debord calls the "monopoly of appearance" we re-discovered Beirut, dismissing thus the colored spots and fixed legend of its definite map. The postwar reading and re-writing of Beirut was only achieved through our stopping, questioning and remembering Beirut's past and possible future. Beirut becomes thus a writerly, open-ended space. *Flâneurs* in the elegant streets of Beirut, we can see now that the rehabilitated buildings are based on the ruins of decayed columns. The remnants of the war are therefore used as pillars for the future. This article is an attempt to bring this *faux pas* into light. Beirut needs to recuperate its emotional power and impose itself in the world as a city rich in its long, varied memory.

References:

- Gibran, Kahlil.1998. *The Prophet*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 4.
- Al Daif, Rachid. 1999. *Dear Mr. Kawabata*. London: Quartet Books,1. All subsequent quotations from Al Daif's novel will have 'D', followed by the page number in-text, not in notes.
- Tabet, Jade. 2001. "La cité aux deux places." *Beyrouth: la brûlure des rêves*. Paris: Autrement, 56. All quotations from *Beyrouth: la brûlure des rêves* are my own free translation.
- Rabbat, Nasser.1998. "The Interplay of History and Archeology in Beirut." *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of Beirut City*. Ed. Rowe, Peter and Hashim Sarkis. London: Prestel, 21.
- Barthes, Roland. 1973. *Le Plaisir du Texte*. Paris: Editions du seuil, 61.
- Abdel Fattah, Wael. 2002. "Shadows of a Past Life amidst Beirut's Ruins: how do we deal with a threatened memory?" *Zawayya*. March 2002. 1st, 4-5. All quotations from the newspaper article, originally in Arabic, are my own free translation.
- Abdel Fattah, 5.
- Bourke, Joseph. 1982. "Tragic Vision in Kawabata's The Master of Go." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*. No. 2.vol36.
- Al Daif does not name this person since "among us, people do not mention the names of their enemies when speaking about them." (D, 2) To avoid confusion, I will refer to this person by the name 'friend'.
- Hanania,Tony. 2000. *Unreal City*. London: Bloomsbury.Tabet, 56.
- Debord, Guy. 1998.*The Society of The Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Canada: Zone Books, entry 12
- Berman, Marshall. 1999. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*. New York: Verso, 224.
- Debord, Guy. 1998.*The Society of The Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Canada: Zone Books, entry 168.
- Makdissi, Jean Said. 1990. *Beirut Fragments: a war memoir*. New York: Persea Books, 213
- Khoury, Elias. 1989. *Little Mountain*. Trans. Maria Tabet. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 62.
- Nasralla, Emily. 1994. *A House Not Her Own: stories from Beirut*. New York: Gynergy Books, 102.
- Samman, Ghada. 1997. *Beirut Nightmares*. Trans. Nancy Roberts. London: Quartet Books. The Official B018 website available online at: www.b018.com Khoury, 62.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *The Arcades Project*. U.S.A.: Harvard University Press, 453.