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”المستجدات الحديثة في التعليم العالي في ظل التعليم الالكتروني“

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## *The Consciousness of Place and its Reflection on the Creative Experience*

### *A Comparative Analytical Study*

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### Abstract

Poets from different cultures, origins, races and even religion are unified in their creative poetical experience. The world becomes a place either for incorporations or for conflicts of cultures. So, this paper concentrates and analyzes the human experience of three major poets in the arena of literature. These poets see in the Civil War in Lebanon and the city of Beirut the core of their writings. They reflect the human experience in all its perspectives and its awareness that the fate of man is decided by certain human behaviours not by the Divine Will.

The study is divided into three sections. Each section deals with a certain poet who has certain views and ideologies. First section studies "The Praise of High Shadow", a poem by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008). He transforms the city of Beirut into an individual self-experience to reflect the dilemma of Palestinian people. Second Section deals with "Like Beirut", a poem by the Israeli poet Haim Gouri (1923-2018). He uses the image of Beirut to show the ruins and wars that storm inside him. He turns the poem into an elegy for humanity. The third section examines "Beirut", a poem by the American poet, Katie Ford (1975- ). Beirut is no



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more an Arab city but it is a symbol of the ruins that are left by wars all over the world.

The three poets use the language with all its figures of speech to reconnect the human experience to the creative experience in poetry. The study ends up with a conclusion that sums up the most significant findings.

**Key Words:** Beirut, creative experience, subjective experience.

### وعي المكان وانعكاسه على التجربة الابداعية

**المخلص:** ان ما يوحد ويقارب الشعراء على اختلاف ثقافتهم واصولهم واعراقهم هي التجربة الشعرية الابداعية. حيث اصبح العالم فضاءا تشترك فيه الثقافات اندماجا او صراعا. لهذا ينصب اهتمامنا في هذا البحث على تحليل التجربة الانسانية لثلاث من ابرز الشعراء على الساحة الادبية. لقد وجد الشعراء في الحرب الاهلية في لبنان مصدرا لقصائدهم حيث عكسوا التجربة الانسانية ببعدها الذاتي ووعيها بان مصير الانسان بدأت تشكله وتتحكم فيه سلوكيات بشرية وليست الهية. قسم هذا البحث الى ثلاث مباحث ومقدمة. وقد خصص المبحث الاول لدراسة قصيدة مديح الظل العالي للشاعر الفلسطيني محمود درويش، حيث حول مدينة بيروت الى تجربة ذاتية ليعكس مأساة الشعب الفلسطيني. اما المبحث الثاني فقد سلط الضوء على قصيدة مثل بيروت للشاعر اليهودي هيلم خوري حيث استخدم صورة بيروت ليكشف عن الدمار والصراع الذي بداخله فقد حول قصيدته الى مرثاة للإنسانية جمعاء. اما المبحث الثالث فقد درس الباحث فيه قصيدة بيروت للشاعرة الاميركية كيتي فورد. فقد كانت بيروت بالنسبة لفورد ليست المدينة العربية بل انها رمزا للدمار والخراب الذي تخلفه الحروب في كل ارجاء العالم. لقد ربط الشعراء التجربة الذاتية ببعدها الانساني بالتجربة الابداعية في الشعر من خلال اللغة الشعرية وبت رؤاهم فيما يخص الفضاء المكاني النصي.

الكلمة المفتاح: بيروت , التجربة الابداعية, التجربة الذاتية.

## Introduction

Research in the field of literature needs a comprehensive understanding of the textual experience. This can be achieved through living its interior world without neglecting the exterior effects that support and moulded the experience. It means revealing the textual indicative webs of the experience without imposing any



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speculations that consume the reading energy without illuminating the real meaning of the experience.

Creative experience, self-experience, and place are the three main issues in this paper. They interact and produce the first circle and the core in which the poem is formed, extended its visions, and illuminated its inner hidden meanings. The importance of subjective experience lies in how to transform it into an art. This depends on a clear comprehensive understanding of using textual techniques to produce an artistic impact on the reader. Subjective experience needs an intelligible consciousness to grasp the factors that formed it. Such factors are called impulses or motives. They become the central point in the formation of consciousness. Recalling the experience and transforming it into a creative vision will not be achieved unless it recalls the emotions and the feelings that accompanied the consciousness. For the researcher, a subjective experience is a group of thoughts, perspectives, and feelings. They are evoked by specific motives as an external influence. Such influences can find and make the experience a psychological impulse that directs it either to take steps or to give birth to a new thought. Therefore, this experience is not related to the person of the poet but to his subjective vision that has deep roots in the reality. The study deals with the poet's vision of the place, being the point that forms and is formed in it. Personal experience is surrounded by several factors since it is a comprehensive sensational existence, a perspective of space-time dimensions, and has a psychological and mental depth. This view can be obtained by a recalled vision of the creative formation of the experience. In other words, subjective experience is transformed into a linguistic structure. Thus, this paper deals only with the accomplished experience in the text. In this respect, subjective experience achieves its end, vision, and effect. Here appears the first relation between subjective and creative experience. The importance of the subject lies in emphasizing on the process of transforming what is personal into creativity. The creative experience is not a shadowy reflection of the personal experience but it is a production of the latter. The



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poet lives in his poem and writes his conceptions, feelings, and passions. The poet is fully aware of his views concerning his experience as well as his predictions.

One of the most serious aspects of the relationship between the two experiences is the adequacy between the actual time of the self-experience and the time of writing it as a creative text. Time in the self-experience has one dimension. It is a sensational perplexed dimension. While in the creative experience, the time has two dimensions. It is visionary in the first place and textual in the second place. But this relationship between the two times of experience is in harmony and it is not a crossed one. The creative experience is not fully represented by the artistic structure of the subjective experience though it is its final textual outcome. The creative experience is the concluded vision that stands on two times, the past and the future. Therefore; the creative process is an overlapping process between two experiences.

The last scope is about the relation between the experience and place. The consciousness of the place in the creative experience is individual, but it has collective sensory in the subjective experience. Thus the innovator writes the culture of a place through his perceptions. He transforms the place from the collective comprehension to an indicative center. It refers to an individual sense and an individual vision on which a poem is based on its linguistic framing, allegories, and visionary indications. Therefore, the place becomes a tangible factor even when it seems to be absent, it still directs the experience and enables to group all its faces in one central meaning. It is also necessary to mention that place plays two important roles in its relation to the experience. First, it represents an organic part in the activation of the experience. Second, in some poems, the place is transformed into what can be called textual geography. As a consequence, the place appears as a mirror that stands beyond the poem and forms the third dimension in addition to the lingual and thematic dimensions. This is the reason why this paper deals with the image of Beirut as the consciousness of place that reveals the visions of the creative experience.





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Beirut, whether forms the poem or is formed in the poem, is not the city where the poet existed or saw. It is the vision of a place for the Resurrection that can determine the destiny of man. It is an indicative place, despite the loss of its limited geography, which expands the boundaries of the self and the world, as well. Place/Beirut is transformed into a creative experience that is confined neither by time nor by the visions of the personal experience.

### **Beirut: The Geography of the city... The Geography of the Self**

This study focuses on the boundaries of the city of Beirut as it appears in the selected poems. It is a clarification of the boundaries between the geography of the text of the city and that of the text of the self. In other words, it is the vision that is presented by the poetical self for the city and the relation in revealing its limits, connotations, and ideological dimensions.

### **Mahmoud Darwish: "Praise of the High Shadow"**

An eminent poet of resistance and a caller for a free Arab homeland was born in 1941 in Palestine. He was regarded as "present-absent aliens". He lived in exile for many years. He had many books of poetry and prose. His works reveal his protest and sadness with the occupiers of his people's land. His works are part of his life. They are his life biography.

"Praise of the High shadow" a long poem he wrote on a deck of a ship when he was forced to leave Beirut because of the invasion in 1982. Beirut means a lot for Darwish. He keeps asking "Is it a city or a mask? A place of exile or a song?". There is a sense of existence in this poem. He died in 2008.

Firstly, I argue that the subtitle of the poem shows an attempt to document events and to document the image of the city of Beirut. This documentary sense participates in making the poet follow and gather a variety of images whether exterior or interior images. This depends on following the reality or what the mind has



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preserved. Moreover, the poet uses more than one focal point to portray scenes and uses an organic overlapping of time and place. Hypothetically speaking, changing the documentary term from visual art to a written art clarifies the intention of the poet in producing a series of images. This change adds two essential dimensions to the poem:

- 1- Achieving a new poetical function of documentation and spread.
- 2- It is an attempt to produce a kind of long poems.

For this purpose, the poet makes use of the cinematic technique in addition to the structure of the epic poem (Dokhi 44). For us, the poem is a mixture of the two besides it keeps its subjective lyrical vision. This conception leads us to diagnose three basic images that differ from each other due to the perspective of the poet in producing them.

### 1- The Image of Scattering

"Praise of the High Shadow" stands on three scopes; the self, the other whether an Arab or a foreigner and presenting a biography of place. Each part presents an image or images of Beirut that are either in harmony or be parted to reflect a new meaningful theme of the city. The image that presents a subjective impression of the city seems to be united with its collective perception as stated by Afnan al-Qasim

"[He] speaks of all in a plural way but never does this of himself. He does not mean to be humble or to deny the experience but to be proof that his subjective experience is the collective. In this respect, he strengthens the first and does not deny the mono characteristic of the second. The poet uses plural expressions but they refer to the singular" (18).

From this, we can understand that Darwish uses Beirut to be an image of scattering, pain, and death



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"Beirut, the city, is not my woman

Beirut, the place, is my only gun

Beirut, the time, is the identity of now" (Darwish, *Complete Poetical Works* 358).

The poet refers to the city, the place, and history as well. These signs interlock with the concluded conceptions of the poem. The poet is part of the city and its components. He speaks of himself while the acts of participation, incorporation, and interaction are revealed between him and the city. From the early beginning of the poem, Darwish says, "we prepared for Beirut the whole poem", which means that the poem is Beirut itself. This sentence will be repeated throughout the poem. It refers to the dynamic exchange of actions between the poet and the city as if Beirut speaks itself or the poet does. This collaboration and sharing roles produce a group of images, visions, and even situations that reflect the collective dimension of the poet's insight. It is the Palestinian target. These three roles of the personal, collective Palestinian, and the collective Lebanese are embodied or played by the poet himself.

The poet also uses the image of the sea to refer to the scattering of the Arab people since Beirut is the fort, the tear, and the key:

"Beirut our fort

Beirut our tears

And the key to this sea. We were the drop of creation

We were the flower of the long fence, and what remains from a wall

The sea hears or distributes its voice among the hands" (Ibid 349).

The sea that saved their lives in the past becomes dark and an image for the Palestinian diaspora. The sea bullets the windows and takes the poet to his new exile.

## 2- The Biography of the Place



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It is an objective image that exploits the imaginative energy of photographic art and is united with it in time. The poet presents an external image of the city/place. He describes the city at dawn, at noon, in the afternoon, in the evening, and at night. He cares for these details and presents them as he saw in reality. It is observable that a series of successive images integrate with the time sequence of the day. There is a continuity of the action throughout the day. But the night of Beirut overcomes all the images and is repeated more than eleven times in the poem. From this one can conclude that there is no rest neither during the day nor during the night. Only death and its smell overcome the scenes.

### 3- The Ideological Image of Beirut

In the poem, Beirut is presented according to the national Arab ideology and according to the ideology of the other/the Western. This portrayal depends on the excessive direct emotionality of the poet in addition to grief, pain, and agony. For this reason, the poet adopts the collective discourse to show the unity of Palestinian and Lebanese people in facing the invasion, when the other Arab surrendered to their enemy:

"You've no brothers, my brother,

No friends, no forts, my friend.

You've no water and no cure

No sky, no blood, and no sails.

No front, and no rear.

Block your blockade then. No escape!" (*Memory for Forgetfulness* 11).

This emotionality tries to give an existential flow to the confrontation, and at the same time shows the false slogans of the Arab politicians and leaders. Such emotionality in the discourse helps in gaining the sympathy of Arab peoples and ends to an equal act with the other (the enemy). Beirut means only a gambling paper for those politicians.





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The Arabs themselves play a part in producing such an image of defeat and scattering. It is the betrayal of the Arab world that produces the devastation of man and land.

"The mask has fallen.

Arabs who obeyed their franks

Arabs who sold their souls

Arabs who are lost" ( Ibid ).

The poet succeeds in expressing his inner world and the world from inside as well. He believes that America is the bad seed causes pain, agony, and scattering in the Arab homeland and the world in general. "America is the plague and the plague is America", thus there is no place to escape because even behind the door there is America.

### Haim Gouri: Like Beirut

An Israeli poet, who was born in 1923 in Tel Aviv, got his education at Israeli agriculture school. He joined in the European Mission of the Haganah and participated in the Flow of the Jewish survivors at the end of the Second World War. This matter affected him and was reflected in his literary works. He was under the influence of the French literature since he had had his education at the Sorbonne. His first novel *Chocolate Dead* was in 1965. It deals with the absurdity of life in Berlin after the war. His work in journalism guided him to produce the Holocaust film *The 81<sup>st</sup> Bow* in the 1970s in addition to a documentary film entitled *The Last Sea* that deals with the illegal immigration of Jews to Palestine (Warren Bargad & Stanley Chyet 58). His verse exposes his fear of loss, sadness, and the infinite pain that was felt by him and by the other, and the uselessness of life. He believed that as an Israeli, had no choice but to fight. He "lives in a set of contradictions". His poetry shows the uselessness of war (Drukker 252). He read for Mahmoud Darwish and felt the pain



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others had lived. He wrote "Like Beirut," to show that his war is within him. His life had ended in 2018.

The title of the poem shows the overlapping of expressions with the poem of Darwish especially the interaction of the person of the poet and place. Haim Gouri connects himself with the city of Beirut. In this respect, he is close to Mahmoud Darwish in presenting the image of the city from a personal self point of view. In tracing the partial images of the city, one senses the documentary details as in:

"I've been like Beirut,  
constructed of the unlike in the like  
and of the exact opposite" (Gouri 221).

This opening extract leads to understanding the segments of images that make the poem and give the indicative meaning of juxtaposed structure. The relation among images as, "diseased streets are more enlivening", " rival militias/ blood /joy" shows not only the contradiction but also produces the depth of complexity and interaction in the city, and displays the death and life of the city itself at the same time. This paradoxical portrayal of the city is the natural state of everyday life during war or what we called a documentary.

"There the rival militias, from Hay- A-sulum to Ahrafiya,  
Gain in me to the last drop of my blood  
For I was the combat in the built up zones,  
looking out, furtively, from the upper stories" (Ibid).

Unlike Mahmoud Darwish, This scene indicates that the poet's experience of the civil war in Beirut was in his imagination through what he read in newspapers, heard, or even saw on television. Here he differs from Mahmoud Darwish and he puts himself in the scene and imagines he was there in the place. His images are external ones that are given an interior feature. It is true that "looking out, furtively, from the



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upper stories" is a repeated daily scene in any civil war but "looking out, furtively" is a clear reference to not staying in the battle, not living with the idea of war and embodying its images, or sensing all its details as had happened with Darwish. The gap between peering and careful consideration is not of place or time distance. It is a distance of vision, comprehension, and perception. Thus, such images make the scene seems to be external unlike that of Darwish. Furthermore, the image of looking from the above has a connection with the perceptions of the "god" and the ability to observe what happens without interfering.

As with Darwish, the image of scattering and destruction is used by Gouri to reflect its human sense not the ideological one as in "Look, another lovely woman in black, her hands on her head"

What distinguishes "Like Beirut" is the subjective vision that is repeated in the poem:

"I'm like Beirut worshipper of other gods,

Half-ruined.

Ever more furrowed, ever more graying

And within me there's no sign of ceasefire" (Ibid).

The poet here cares for the human meaning of Beirut. He does not search for the causes or results. He does not care for the history of political or religious conflict. His misery, pain, and conflict are of all humanity wherever man lives.

### **Katie Ford: Beirut**

A contemporary American poet was born in 1975 in Portland, Oregon. She started writing poetry at the age of 19 when she was studying at Whitman's college. Tess Gallagher has the attribution for the formation of Katie Ford's growth as a poet, especially her ideas about lyricism and figuration. Her first collection of poetry,



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*Deposition* appeared in 2002. In this collection, she confronts God, violence, and in an ecstatic language as a divine encounter. This is due to her studies of divinity at Harvard University. In 2008, her book *Colosseum* was "the best book of poetry". It deals with the theme of ruin which she pulls from her own experience as a resident of New Orleans. The opening poem of this collection was "Beirut". Beirut becomes the core of ruination. The poet desires to equate loss for loss. She wants the new generations to rebuild the ruins and to renovate the broken cities. She has a desire to teach how to "inhabit difficulties" and how to write from the darkest personal places and to tell truths.

In "Beirut", Katie Ford chooses a sensitive point to start and to end up with it without any partial images or other details as seen in the poems of Mahmoud Darwish and Haim Gouri. She chooses Beirut to be the title for her poem, though there is another city in the poem, 'Vietnamese, Saigon' which shares the same vision. The image of Beirut represents not only the city itself but also the icon of destruction, ruin, and chaos, "Ruin is a promise / we make to each other". This sentence sets as a criterion of balance between the action and the reaction. It is a condition of the human act as if the ruin is a birth that is similar to or even equal to the birth of a human being. That is why Ford accompanies her birth to the birth of any ruin,

"I am born the day Saigon falls

and Lebanon takes to its own throat a club" ( Ford, *Colosseum* 4).

This line of poetry makes us conclude two things: first, is the identification with the external act. The fall of Saigon was caused by the northern after the American troops had left. This means its fall was at the hands of the Vietnamese themselves and the same thing had happened to Beirut. Second, the poet intends to make the outer influencing factor absent. It is the American act in both cities. Moreover, there is the emotional participation that connects the American man with the Vietnamese and with the Lebanese. The poet here tries to hide an ideological dimension which is





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represented here by the American attacks even though she refers to America in "Saigon, Phuket, Beirut, your gulls / flew over America and lent her your name".

What is noticeable here is what we can call the association of the central image. The image of the ruin at the beginning of the poem is the base from which the poet generates other images to strengthen the meaning of the ruin and destruction and to deepen its impact on the reader as in:

"Their papers burnt into red locusts of no detail,  
a swarm of no birth, no party, in flight, in fall  
back toward the river of garments  
drenched of each frantic gesture  
that pointed to the cryptic sea" (Ibid 7).

although the poet depicts and portrays what had happened in Vietnam, but the situation is the same in another city/ Beirut. Thus the image of the ruin is the same since Beirut is the city that

"an ancient city begin to break itself in half –  
and half again –  
and once more –  
until the halves are dust" (Ibid).

With all these details the vision of the poet still external in describing events or emotional reacts. In doing this she is close to Haim Gouri's poem and both poets are different from the vision of Mahmoud Darwish. Since Darwish was in the country at the time of the invasion. He represents the case of both Palestinian and Lebanese people and a defender of the will of life in freedom.

## Conclusion



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The life of an ordinary man does not differ from that of a man of the pen. The only difference is the way one can express his experience in life. Three immanent poets lived, saw, or even read the collapse of Lebanon in the civil war. Each one of them reflects his thoughts and visions in creative poetic work. Despite being from different worlds and cultures, they share the same human experience. Everything in life is inevitable especially fate, death, and even ruin and destruction.

Mahmoud Darwish, the poet as well as the man, defends the Palestinian cause. He was regarded as the Sisyphus of the Arabs since he lived the eternal struggle. But in "Praise oh the High Shadow" he transformed Beirut to a subjective experience and reconnected it with his Palestinian experience and the experience of humanity.

Haim Gouri's subjective experience permits to identify himself with the victims of wars. He becomes "the voice of all of humanity, of all of us" (Kennedy 252). He uses Beirut as a symbol of the conflict within him. It is the pain and the struggle of all people.

Katie Ford in "Like Beirut" shows that the conflict of man wherever he exists is a kind of pain. This pain deserves a language to be revealed.

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