

The Litani Basin in Lebanon A Metabolic Conversion of Politics into Cancer

Mohamad Nahleh
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
School of Architecture and Planning

Abstract

The Litani River in Lebanon has long been subject to industrial pollutants and solid wastes discharged by state-backed industries seeking quick remedies and domestic households detached from the wastewater network. It has, in the last few years, witnessed a resurgence of territorial pressures. In the absence of penal regulations, operational infrastructure and treatment plants, and amid a massive influx of displaced Syrian families who lack access to proper networks, the river's fatal decay has acquired a geo-environmental status. Intangible political negotiations within and outside the borders of Lebanon have materialized in the Litani River as anthropogenic substances at macro and micro scales. The increased density of such substances is aggravated by both the river's open outfalls, which established it as an easy target for

discharge of undesirable substances and its long span, which made it vulnerable to incremental sources of pollution. From its infamous surface water to its groundwater below the Bekaa Valley, and from its poisoned aquatic animals and crops to the microorganisms breeding within them, the following drawings spatialize the river's agency across various scales and conditions. For the river, contamination, whether administered by corrupt states, a refugee family surviving the lack of infrastructure, or a farmer who has no access to irrigation water, is indistinguishable. The river does not point fingers; rather, it continues to assimilate the ramifications of a political system frozen in evasions of responsibility. It is within this context that the project asks: what are the rights of the river? How can we see the world through its lens?



Figure 1. (Left) The most vulnerable localities along the Litani Basin. (Right) The most polluted areas along the Litani Basin. Images produced by Mohamad Nahleh. Data collected from: (1) USAID, Litani River Basin Management Support Program, Hydrologic Reference Report April 2012. (2) USAID, Litani River Basin Management Support Program, Water Quality Survey, Dry Season Summer 2010, Volume 1 Main Report. (3) MoE, Lebanon Environmental Assessment of the Syrian Conflict and Priority Interventions (2014). (4) Shaban and Hamze, The Litani River, Lebanon: An Assessment and Current Challenges (Springer, 2018)

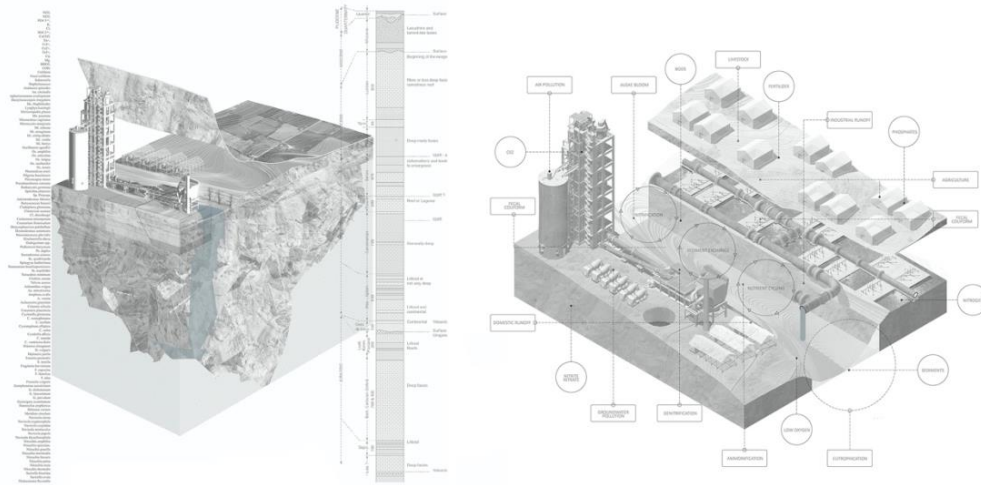


Figure 2. Surface to groundwater pollution. Images produced by Mohamad Nahleh. Data Collected from: (1) Shaban and Hamze, The Litani River, Lebanon: An Assessment and Current Challenges (Springer, 2018). (2) UNDP, The National Geothermal Assessment of Lebanon 2014.

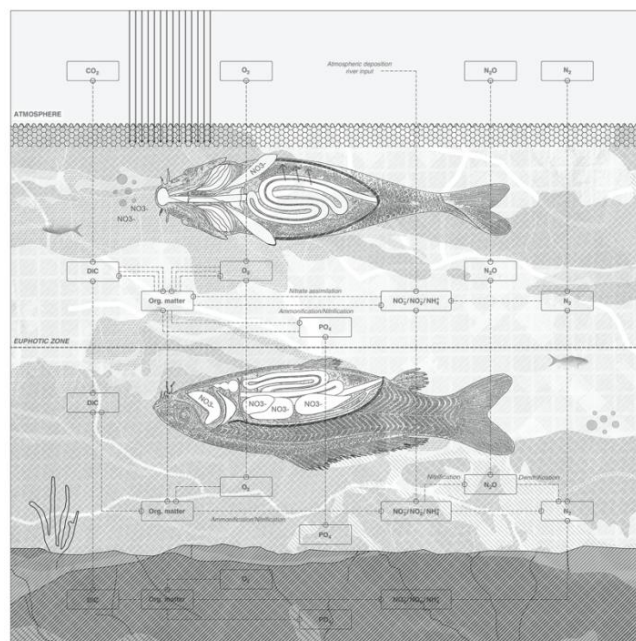


Figure 3. Contamination of aquatic animals. Mohamad Nahleh