A Distant Face: Inside Beirut's Postcard City

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the various semblances of the postcard in Beirut. It traces the path of the postcard in order to arrive at the paradox of its enduring colonial legacy. Taking Barthes' notion of the photograph as 'a certificate of presence', the paper explores the boundaries between photograph and postcard in representations of Beirut. It focuses on the exchange between the 'postcard city' and the city itself that takes place in the evolution of the postcard from black and white photograph (old postcards of Beirut) to iconic colour landscapes (classic tourist postcards) The text is staged as a set of postcards: the practice of writing is spatialised and the paper is inflected with the iconography and the vernacular of the postcard. By spatialising the textual and textualising the visual, the paper attempts to negotiate the boundaries between critical theory and cultural practice and to raise questions about representation, memory and history.

Keywords: Representation, Memory, Postcard, Photograph, Distance

Postcard I: 'Beirut – Ancient Street Architecture, Demolished 1915'

ALL MY POSTCARDS of Beirut have been bought – I did not inherit any from my family and no-one has ever sent me a postcard of Beirut in the mail, although I have sent many. My photographs on the other hand, have been passed on to me, some old photographs among them, photographs from a time when photography was still new and when people stood still in the street to have their photo taken. In the Middle East in the 1940s and 1950s this was a practice known as 'Photo Surprise' – a photographer with his camera set up on a street corner would *surprise* passers-by[1]. They would then be invited to the studio were they would be shown their images and encouraged to purchase them. I have a photograph of my grandparents with my mother as a baby outside the *Café Automatique* in Beirut (a very popular café back in those days and no doubt an intersection that would have been a popular photographer's haunt). It looks like one of these *surprise* photos, at least, it looks like the ones I have seen in books. I cannot know for sure but it was rare for ordinary citizens in Beirut to own a camera in 1953. Across the front, the photo is inscribed with cursive handwriting, my grandfather's, *'Beyrouth'*. Another photograph of my father taken sometime in the 1940s shows him standing outside his small-goods shop. No indication of time, place or photographer survives on this image. I am told by my mother that it was taken by a local photographer, a friend of my father's, whose name escapes her. Despite the absence of these details and my inability to piece together its past, the photograph endures.

The photograph always endures. If we are to believe Roland Barthes, it is the 'this-has-been' that remains (Barthes 1982, pp.76-77). It tells us nothing except that somewhere, sometime, *this was* (Barthes 1993, p.106-107). A postcard on the other hand is not the remainder of a place or a person: it is a proper noun, a proper face. The postcard is an official document that does not pretend to *present* something – to be its trace, only to represent it – to be its essence[2]. At least this is true of postcards today. From a random, albeit limited, survey of postcards from various global destinations, I am drawn to conclude that the focal points of contemporary postcards can be divided into three central types of representations: the iconic (the Eiffel Tower, the Opera House), sites of historical and/or religious significance (mosques, churches, houses of parliament) and cultural stereotypes (usually expressed through humour). One does not normally find postcards of the ordinary or the eccentric (except when it has become an icon or a stereotype).

Insisting on a distinction between the photograph and the postcard may seem unnecessary, since both are images and despite their subtle differences, both could be lumped together as 'representations.' Yet the sharpness of this distinction today (between the official and the unofficial, the public and the private)

[1] The practice of 'photo-surprise' is described in *Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography* 2005, Karl Bassil, Zeina Maasri, Akram Zaatari with Walid Raad, eds. (Mind the Gap, Arab Image Foundation, Beirut). This book was first printed to coincide with the exhibition *Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography*, curated by Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari, Arab Image Foundation.

[2] Barthes' insistence on the photograph as 'a certificate of presence' privileges the photograph as a mode of presentation over its function as a representation (Barthes 1993, p.87). On the differentiation between 'presentation' and 'representation' in Barthes' *Camera Lucida* see Adrian Kear 2007, 'The Anxiety of the Image'.

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markedly fades if we venture back into the narrow streets and winding alleyways of Beirut's past. There, we will find that authenticity was not marked by iconicity, and *official views* were usually constructed from the material of the ordinary. A delivery boy stands in one of Beirut's old alleyways, demolished during the Ottoman reforms of 1915. There is a tray of hot flat-bread on his head and one in his hand (Figure 1). Another man is visible in the background under the alley's arches. This scene of ordinary poverty travelled from Beirut to Paris on the 16 March 1922. It is rare now, if not extinct, this postcard of the everyday.

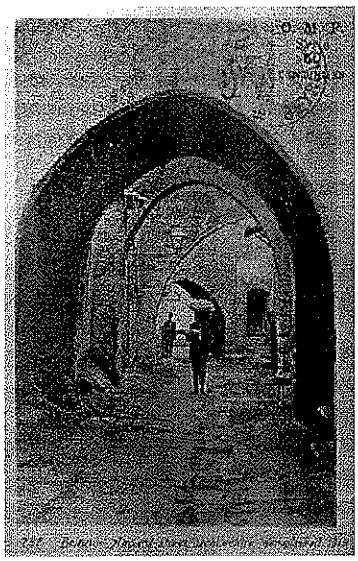

Figure 1: 'Beirut – Ancient Street Architecture, Demolished 1915' Reproduced from Fouad Debbas, *Beirut: Our Memory* (p.47)

Postcard II: 'Beyrouth – La Poste Francaise'

Since I have not inherited any postcards of Beirut, those of them that I possess have come to me by accident, like those that I encountered through Fouad Debbas' indispensable *Beirut: Our Memory* (1986). Yet even Debbas *found* his old postcards of Beirut in Paris. One day in May 1974, as he was walking along the banks of the Seine, his eyes fell upon some old postcards of France displayed by one of the many bookstalls that line the bank of the river. He asked the owner if he had any other postcards of foreign destinations and 'returned home enraptured with some fifty cards, bought for the sum of twenty five francs' (Debbas 1984, p.5). Debbas writes:

> When I was at school I had often regretted the fact that there were no adequate illustrations in our Lebanese history books; indeed, I had concluded that none existed. Now I found myself in Paris with old views of Beirut and Lebanese villages in my hands. These were tangible proof that a certain aspect of Lebanon had been concealed from me, if not outright stolen; and that, if I chose, I could easily conjure it up again and give it new life. I felt that I had stumbled on a way to rediscover the living landscapes and the street scenes of the cities of my country as they had once been (Debbas 1984, p.5).

Give it a new life is exactly what he did, recreating old Beirut in the black and white of early last century over some 300 pages. Even the very place where these images would have been disseminated and sent out to other destinations across the Mediterranean is there in Debbas' book. The entrance to 'La Poste Française' is crowded – ordinary people loiter in the street and a horse-drawn carriage is parked at the door (Figure 2). Had they specifically posed for this photograph or did the photographer surprise them? Why this destination in particular – 'La Poste Française'? And who chose this postcard and sent it from Beirut on 28 January in 1907 at a cost of only 1 piastre? It is interesting to note that not only did the cost of sending postcards rise sharply between 1907 and 1922, but the regulation of the postal industry meant that the majority of postal activity was later regulated by the French Mandate in the Levant (see stamps on Figure 1). We should remember that in 1907, the French Post Office was not the only establishment in the city from where postcards could be sent – there were also the Ottoman Post Office and the Austrian Post Office – although by 1922, the postage date on Figure 1, the postal industry had undergone a number of changes in this respect as Lebanon was brought under the mandate.

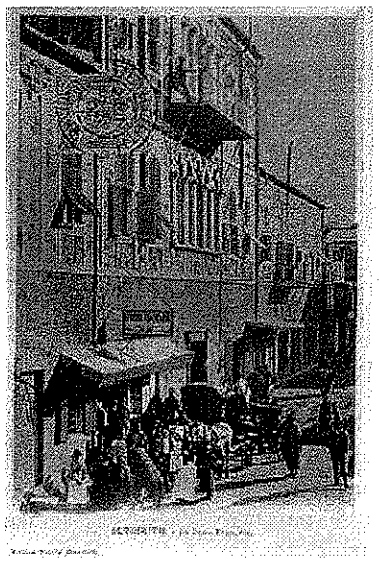

Figure 2: 'Beyrouth – La Poste Francaise' Reproduced from Fouad Debbas, *Beirut: Our Memory* (p.102)

We know that our postcard of 'La Poste Francaise' sent from Beirut in 1907 was taken by the Bonfils Family – the name is stamped at the bottom of the card. The pictorial documentation of the Levant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth by the Bonfils family has left us with some of the most detailed surviving images of everyday life at that time. The Bonfils were one of the leading publishers during the first golden age of the postcard in the Levant – the period before the Great War (Debbas 1986, p.12). It is their seemingly ordinary scenes of the city, its people and its streets, that foreigners in Beirut posted to their family and friends abroad.

Postcard III: 'The Port at Genoa'

Despite having inherited no postcards of Beirut, I have inherited 'old' postcards of Genoa. My postcards are not the kind taken by the Bonfils family, they are not scenes of the ordinary. They emerged after the Second World War, when the trajectory of photography and colonialism had moved well away from the quotidian. *Ricordo di Genova* – a selection of postcards contained in a little book (about 12cm by16cm) – is a remnant of my grandfather's travels in the early 1950s. It is probably incorrect to call this little treasure a book, since despite its hardcover and book-like appearance it is really a collection of postcards posing as photos of the city. The dichotomy between postcard and photograph finds its aesthetic expression in these images. While the Bonfils' photos of everyday Beirut travelled the world as 'postcards', these images of Genoa are far removed from the ordinary yet claim to be *a record of Genoa*.

The images in *Ricordo di Genova* are portraits and panoramas – a photographic account of squares (piazzas), roads and monuments, including the *Monumento a Cristoforo Colombo*, Genoa's native son. The imposing facades of the buildings are offset with Genoa's winding sea roads, and its port, the place where my grandfather arrived on a ship called the *Corriente* (Figure 3). (My grandfather ended up in Genoa by accident on his way back to Lebanon from Brazil. He tells me that an earthquake in Lebanon forced his ship to dock temporarily in the city's old port in the Italian Mediterranean). His images of Genoa are tinted, golden in colour – they have a sense of the ethereal about them. Where one sees the city at a distance, as in the panorama of the port, one sees a *distant* city, however close it may be. This is not the city itself, but its postcard, its official face.

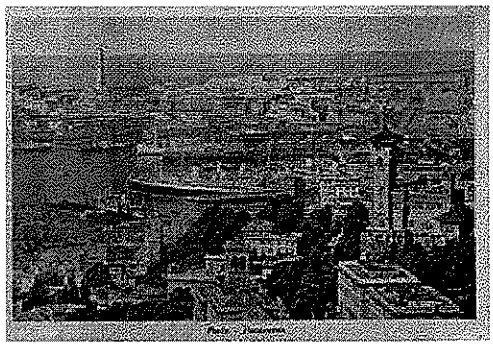

Figure 3: The Port at Genoa (Porto – Panorama) Reproduced from *Ricordo di Genova* (No Publication Details Available)

Seeing this city, like seeing Italo Calvino's 'invisible cities,' requires a perceptual shift. In the city of *Maurilia,* Calvino's Marco Polo tells us, 'the traveller is invited to visit the city, and at the same time, to examine some old postcards that show it as it used to be...' (Calvino 1997, p.30). The postcards of Maurilia evoke a type of nostalgia that arises from a hazy incongruity between the postcard and the city leading Calvino to maintain that these postcards 'do not depict Maurilia as it was, but a different city which, by chance, was called Maurilia, like this one' (Calvino 1997, p.31). What Calvino broaches is that sense of distance that the postcard maintains between the city and its representation. The postcard city is an 'eternal', it may be posed as a historical record but it also has an ahistorical existence – one that is attached neither to past nor present but to the imagination of an *elsewhere* that is always beyond the city. It is not surprising then, that in Calvino's story the city of the postcards bears no resemblance to the city but recalls another place that by chance, happens to have the same name. My postcards of Genoa are like those postcards of Maurilia. They appeal to the realm of dreams, making believe that it is possible to hold, if only for a moment – 'the city', not as an everyday place but as a vision.

Postcard IV: 'Illustrated Beirut'

In the idealisation of the postcard city, there is an element of nostalgia that does not coincide with the temporality of the past. It is nostalgia for a vision, unrealised and unseen, captured only in the image. In a paragraph in Debbas' book about the distinction between the postcard and the photograph, he considers a similar idea:

> The postcard modestly recalls what Beirut was; nostalgically, but without pretence. It is born of the photograph, yet it has its own distinct quality of innocence...Perhaps, finally, the postcard reflects the image of an ideal which need not be lost to us forever (Debbas 1986, p.13).

I was initially struck by his description of the postcard as a form of innocent nostalgia, only to recoil at his assertion that this ideal image need not be lost forever. Perhaps Debbas, in cataloguing these postcards of Beirut, wanted to hold on to an idealized past that could only have existed in the memory of images. It is this memory – the memory of images – that fools us, that blurs the distinction between the romanticized postcard and the quotidian photograph. If we look carefully, we will see that the postcards of Genoa are not a memory but a vision. The photograph, Barthes tells us, is a hallucination, it is ecmnesic – it belongs to a temporality that always exceeds our own (Barthes 1993, 115-117). By contrast films are oneiric, Barthes argues, they belong to the field of dreams (Barthes 1993, 117). Barthes' distinction between still and moving images emerges again in the divide between postcard and photograph. The photograph approaches memory, the postcard approaches dream.

Figure 4: Illustrated Beirut Reproduced from Fouad Debbas, *Beirut: Our Memory* (p.12)

In older postcards, before the advent of photography, one broaches the postcard as vision in another form. Edward Said had talked about it as the creation and circulation of a discourse about the Orient that was self-propagating and self-sustaining (Said 1978). One sees it here, in Figure 4, in the illustration of the typical Oriental man, the Arab on horseback, the palm fronds around the edges of the panorama. The message on the card seems to confirm that sense of the exotic that the illustrations nurture: 'A Constantinople, j'étais gelé, ici on est cuit'[3]. A typical traveller, writing home to complain about the weather, yet boasting of a kind of vision which perhaps even he had not seen. Does one really send postcards of things they have seen, or does the postcard offer the sender the same enchanted distance that it offers the receiver?

In his reading of Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, Foucault offers us distance as pure representation. Classical representation, Foucault suggests, constructs a system of visibilities in which everything is ordered and disclosed, yet at its heart, there is an essential void (Foucault 2002, p.17-18). This void is:

> ...the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject – which is the same – has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form (Foucault 2002, p.18).

In arriving at an empty centre, representation, Foucault suggests, is not that which seeks to *represent* an outside reality, but a process in which such a referent must be elided. It is the construction of an empty shell, in Deleuzian terms, *a fold (un pli)* of the *outside* that creates the semblance of an *inside* (Deleuze 1999, pp.90-93). The distance of pure representation re-emerges elsewhere as the distance of language, since there, as in painting, it is in the blind spot that things converge (Foucault 1964, pp.407-408). Enunciation is mediated by an inverted proximity, one which language alone endows, retains or reclaims (Foucault 1964, p.408). Yet, Foucault tells us, the unmeasured distance that guards the place where language speaks is also what makes writing available, allowing it neither to recede into absolute distance nor to encumber with its full possibility (Foucault 1964, p.408). It recalls Sarah Wood's observation, 'The distance the words must cross begins by not existing' (Wood 2007, p.140). The illustrated postcard of Beirut is an appropriate counter-image to those taken by the Bonfils, since here, the card as a whole – in image and text – makes explicit the distance of postcards from everything with which they intersect.

Postcards V & VI: 'Il Nuovo Lido' and 'Corniche Al-Rawsha'

My other postcards of Beirut, iconic images from the 1950s and 1960s, or more recent images following the restoration of the city in the 1990s, also enforce the distance of postcards not found in some of the older images of Beirut. Yet it was discovering the images of Genoa that reframed the encounter with Beirut's iconicity. A nebulous similarity between my postcards of Beirut and the images of Genoa prompted me to ask my grandfather if Genoa reminded him of Beirut. Without realising it, my question transgressed the line between photo and postcard. My grandfather's reply was vague, Genoa reminded him of Beirut, but he couldn't say how exactly. An uncanny resemblance washed over the postcards and every time I came back to them I saw Beirut. I felt that I too had visited that Genoa, the sepia-toned Genoa of old photographs, of grand squares, and grand boulevards and grand monuments. It was almost as though the postcards, simply by virtue of their family history, had become old postcards of Beirut, or old family photographs. In appropriating the postcards as family photographs, there is a desire to exceed their capacity as a vision. To construct them as a past, as the residue of things kept

[3] Literally, 'In Constantinople I froze, here we're baking.'

and discarded, as memories attached to places attached to objects, imposes an intimacy that the images do not possess. This is slippery terrain between object and image. But even here, this is not a memory I can convincingly claim as my own. Like the postcards, it is an inherited past, an inherited memory[4].

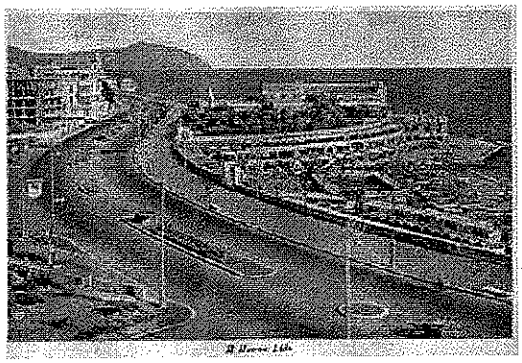

Figure 5: 'Il Nuovo Lido' Reproduced from *Ricordo di Genova* (no Publication Details Available)

I return the postcards to their mythical realm, and search instead, for tangible evidence. Did Beirut really look anything like Genoa in those days? Is the resemblance I see really owing to their being Mediterranean port cities, or, is it more to do with the sepia tones of that era and the almost identical placement of objects in the photo-postcard? Looking at the postcard of Genoa's *Nuovo Lido* (Figure 5), I cannot help but recall Beirut's *Corniche al-Rawsha* (Figure 6) – the road which kinks in the same place, the median strip, the streetlamps, the sea, and the mountains in the distance. Yet, it is not Beirut's Corniche that I am really remembering here, but postcards of it, postcards where the elements of the landscape appear to mimic Genoa's Nuovo Lido – the road which kinks in the same place, the median strip, the streetlamps, the sea, and the mountains in the distance.

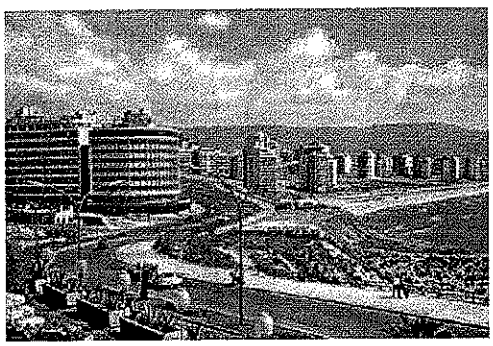

Figure 6: 'Corniche Al-Rawsha' Reproduced from Beirut postcards by Telko Sport

If the function of the postcard is to encapsulate the eternal city, it is not surprising that Genoa's *Nuovo Lido* is almost completely devoid of cars and people. Whatever the reality of urban planning, architectural views do not need people to capture the city's *timelessness*. The resemblance that the *Nuovo Lido* image bears to a 1960s postcard of Beirut's winding searoute, the Corniche at Rawsha, despite the obvious differences, is remarkable. There are a number of important variations though, the most apparent being the use of colour which had become standard by the end of the 1960s. The other element worth noting is that the Genoa photo-postcard is posed from far higher up so that it appears as though the lens of the camera is almost parallel to the road. There are a number of reasons that could potentially explain why the view of Beirut, while maintaining an almost identical placement of elements, is positioned more like a view of the road at a distance and not a view of the road from above. Nonetheless, both angles maintain a distance that produces an image of a perfect city, a timeless city that can be encapsulated in a single photograph.

Postcard VII: 'Beyrouth – La rue Maarad'

In the aesthetic parallel between Beirut and Genoa, the intersection of the technologies of reproduction

[4] Victor Burgin writes that 'In the memory of the teletopologically fashioned subject, actual events mingle indiscriminately not only with fantasies but with memories of events in photographs, films and television broadcasts' (1996, p.226). What Burgin broaches here, and what I detect in my 'inherited past', is now increasingly called 'media memory.'

and colonialism begin to emerge[5]. Even today, certain elements of postcard composition continue to be derived from the iconography of colonialism. Introduced by the Austrian post office official Emanuel Herrmann in 1869, the practice of sending postcards was initially a means of reducing the financial burden of correspondence from the colonies (Mathur 1999, p.97; Debbas 1986). With the advent of photography in 1888, photographs gradually came to replace illustrations as preferred postcard images. While the intersection of photography and colonialism far exceeds the story of the postcard, the travelling photograph nonetheless maintained a means through which colonial imagery could move between places with even more transparency than the photograph alone.

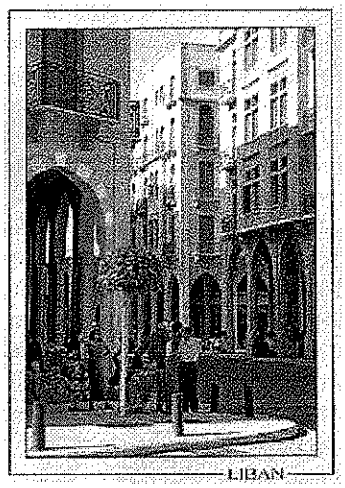

Figure 7: 'Beyrouth - La rue Maarad' Reproduced from Postcard by Les Editions V & F Khouzami

The reproduction of colonial power through the image was preceded by its manifestation on the ground. Not only aesthetics, but planning and public infrastructure were reorganized along the lines of the metropolitan paradigm. The exportation of 'imperial architecture' to the colonies, at least in the case of Beirut, was not without modification and nuance. While some of the ancient 'Arab' quarters of the city were demolished to make way for the planned new city following the declaration of the French Mandate in the Levant, the architectural language of many buildings was Ottoman influenced and often the result of an eclectic melange of art nouveau and local detail (Tabet 2001, p.13). The organisation of Beirut's most important streets and squares, however, fell almost entirely within the project of colonial urbanism, producing a cluster of conspicuous Haussmannien triangle isles that would radiate from the centre to form the shape of a star (Tabet 2001, p.14). The project of colonial urbanism under the French mandate did not necessarily re-organise all the spaces of the city, but as Jade Tabet notes, it superimposed a primary network of streets that masked the old quarters which remained conveniently out of sight since they did not posses the same representative function as the streets of the colonial façade (Tabet 2001, p.14-15). The cluster of streets radiating from the centre were never as perfectly uniform as the urbanisation project demanded, at least not until this part of the city was rehabilitated in the late 1990s (Figure 7). As the project of colonial urbanism in the early twentieth century imposed a super-structure of architectural design onto the city, it also blurred the lines between politics, aesthetics and space by adapting the spatial language of the Parisian metropolis for use in the creation of a modern Levantine city.

As architectural language readapted to the colonial presence, distorting the distinction between centre and periphery, the practice of photographing public buildings, squares and monuments at a time when the old colonial city was being transformed along the lines of the European metropolis also accentuated the aesthetic confusion between the language of metropolitan progress and colonial urban renewal. This is particularly so since spatial and architectural photographs of the colonies, along with photographs of 'native types', had long since contributed to the exchanges of colonial imagery instigated by the phenomenon of the postcard. The chronicles of postcards and photographs of Beirut from the mid eighteenth century reveal that the interest in recording and exhibiting extended beyond images of local people and included the documentation of the landscape, the urban environment, landmarks, public buildings and monuments (Debbas 1986 and 2001).

Considering the historical trajectory of the postcard, the similarity in composition between the postcard of Genoa's Nuovo Lido and Beirut's Corniche is no doubt partially a product of the intersection of colonialism and photography and the creation

[5] This is broached in Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.

of a language of composition that could move almost transparently between places through the medium of the image. By the 1960s, when the photo in the Beirut Corniche postcard was taken, the colonial imaginary of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had succeeded not only in reproducing images of the colonies, but of producing colonies in its image that could unconsciously reproduce images mimicking the iconography of colonialism.

No doubt the different conditions of production did not yield identical copies, but like the splitting of colonial discourse through the transmission of language, they produced nuanced reproductions (Bhabha 1994, p.85-86).[6] The concealment of an interior local architectural and social layer behind the colonial edifice for example, suggests that the transfer of colonial urbanity in Beirut was always incomplete. This duality is maintained today, particularly since the reconstruction of the city-centre as the incarnation of French colonial style conceals a periphery composed of divergent layers of architectural styles and periods, not to mention the enduring effects of the civil war. Similarly, the lower angle of composition in the Corniche postcard is suggestive of a differential reproduction of colonial aesthetics. The same lower angle of composition is discernable throughout the body of collected and documented images of Beirut before, during and after the French mandate. With the obvious exception of aerial photographs, the perspective from high-above the city visible in many of the postcards in *Ricordo di Genova* is almost completely absent in postcards of Beirut. While this variation could be suggestive of an aesthetic differentiation between the European and the colonial landscape through the utilisation of a different angle of composition, this argument is certainly not conclusive. It is possible that the variation in the angle of composition in the Genoa and Beirut postcards discussed here is related to a difference in intra-continental aesthetics. That is to say that many of the documented postcards and photographs around the turn of last century of Paris, the metropolis that played the most important role in the eventual reconstruction of the city of Beirut, are also composed at a lower angle, many at eye level.

Postcard VIII: 'Une Execution Capitale'

When one moves beyond their encapsulation of the city as a vision, the postcards of Genoa become opaque. They appear to give little away about the conditions of their production. Their perfect facades, blunt architectural edifices, and perfectly aligned squares and buildings place them firmly inside the empire of postcards. Genoa was not alone in amassing such a photographic repertoire that reflected the metropolis as a paradigmatic and enduring work of art. As the rise of the nineteenth century European metropolis was partially propelled by the colonial experience, the intersection of colonialism and photography, far from being restricted to the colonies, produced its own emblematic picture-postcards of this metropolis. The role of the Parisian postcard culture in amassing an empire of postcards is discussed by Naomi Schor. Through architectural language, photographic reproduction and intertextuality, this culture created a discourse of the metropolis that was embodied in the image of the French capital (Schor 1992, p.195).

The fusion of politics and space in the nineteenth century European metropolis, as is evident in the reconstruction of Paris by the emperor Napoleon III and his architect Baron Haussman, was also inadvertently a fusion of politics and aesthetics. In constructing an Opera House for Paris that would become the symbol of the Second Empire, '...the urban landscape of Second Empire Paris was intentionally charged with carefully considered and skilfully articulated social meaning' that '...buildings, bridges, roads and open spaces in the city conveyed a distinct sense of social order and a confident belief in historical destiny' (Woolf 1988, p.216). The grand façade of the Paris Opera, planned 'in such a way as to embody, and pass on, political messages' (Woolf 1988, p.217), was seen as representative of an 'imperial architecture' (Woolf 1988, p.214).

Looking at postcards of the Paris Opera today, it is possible to detect elements of this imperial architecture passing into the present, particularly as most of the postcard images are night shots. The grand façade of the Opera is brightly illuminated and only dark spectres of the modern city encircle it. These postcards foreground the structure as a timeless object in the Parisian cityscape, creating an image charged with the desires of colonial ambitions that continue to linger beyond the immaculate postcard surface.

Something of the vision of power evident in the postcard of the execution at Saigon (Figure 8) also circulates in postcards of architectural monuments. Yet it is a vague correlation. The image of the execution, clearly postmarked and signed with a message, overturns all distinctions between postcards and photographs. It does not circulate in the realm of the vision, of the eternal, yet neither is it an eclectic gathering of the everyday. The violence embodied in this image, reproduced in its use as a greeting card, permit it only to exist as an image of power. Perhaps only here, in an image that does belong to Beirut, is the duality of vision and memory completely dis-

[6] I am using this concept in a manner similar to the notion of 'mimicry' as expounded by Homi Bhabha although without the same connotations of productivity and 'disavowal' that Bhabha associated with colonial discourse.

turbed to reveal the circulation of the image along a less accommodating, less visible path. The hidden face in this image does not impose a gap between execution and representation, its distance is imposed, mediated by the officiary face of the postcard that circulates as an emblem of power.

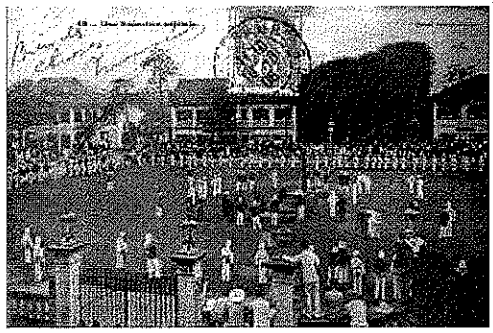

Figure 8: 'Une Execution Capitale' Reproduced from Charles-Henri Favrod, *Le Temps des Colonies*, (p.117)

By tracing the continuity in colonial architecture and colonial record at its intersection with postcards and photographs, the visual remainders of empire begin to emerge in the present. Perhaps it is the rupture in the mythology of empire today that undermines the ability of the Genoa postcards to operate as architectural monuments, infusing them instead with an oneiric vision closer to Calvino's description of Maurilia. Yet the execution at Saigon maintains a different kind of distance, a reminder of a neglected coupling between the technologies of production and those of empire. In between the quotidian legacy of the Bonfils family in the Levant, the inheritance of a mythical memory of Genoa, and the execution at Saigon, the face of Beirut's postcard city appears as a fragmented image that resists definitive distinctions between postcard and photograph, past and present, public and private, here and there.

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